

Submitted Testimony to the United States House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

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Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the Subcommittee,

I am pleased to testify on behalf of the Basic Education Coalition, a group of leading U.S.-based organizations and academic institutions working together to promote expanded, equitable access to quality education so that all children have the chance to learn. My name is Helen Boyle, and I am a long-standing member of the Basic Education Coalition as well as the Vice President of International Development at the Education Development Center. To enhance U.S. foreign assistance efforts and improve educational opportunities for children in need, **we urge Congress to provide \$925 million for Basic Education in the Fiscal Year 2021 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs bill, with at least \$800 million provided as bilateral U.S. Government assistance.**

Since joining EDC in 1991, I've helped expand our work in the Middle East and North Africa and managed several multimillion-dollar USAID-funded programs. As EDC's senior literacy advisor, I also led the development process for Read Right Now, EDC's signature approach to early grade reading and writing in resource-lean environments. Based on my deep experience in international education, I can confidently attest that the valuable resources provided by this Subcommittee help identify field-driven solutions to development challenges and yield positive results in the lives of beneficiaries.

Our Coalition is extremely grateful for the Subcommittee's steadfast commitment to fighting extreme poverty and providing education for children around the world, and we thank you for increasing the funding for Basic Education in the Fiscal Year 2020 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill. Funding for Basic Education enables USAID and implementing partner organizations to work in collaboration in some of the most challenging contexts around the world, and the increase in Fiscal Year 2020 resources will allow us to expand Basic Education programs to vulnerable populations and address gaps in education service delivery, thereby strengthening international education systems and yielding additional societal benefits for our partner countries.

Our Coalition would especially like to take this opportunity to thank Chairwoman Lowey for her lifelong dedication and support for international education. From passage of the Reinforcing Education Accountability in Development (READ) Act to securing the first increase in funding for Basic Education in nine years, it is clear that your legacy of improving access to quality education for those in need is unparalleled.

U.S. Basic Education programs increase equitable access to education, provide early learners with foundational reading, math, social and emotional skills, and prepare youth for successful careers. In 2019, USAID's investments in education reached more than 42 million children and youth in over 50 countries. In addition to providing children and youth with valuable life skills, education programs serve as a force multiplier in the pursuit of comprehensive, sustainable development outcomes and bolster broader U.S. foreign assistance efforts to improve health, strengthen economic growth, alleviate poverty, and enhance participatory democracy.

The world has made remarkable progress toward the goal of education for all. Since 2000, the total number of out-of-school children and youth has dropped by over 117 million and global primary school enrollment has grown to 92 percent.¹

In addition to the gains we've made in enrolling out-of-school children and youth, USAID has also played a critical role in highlighting the need to address the global learning crisis. We now know that the impact of education cannot solely be measured by the number of students enrolled or the number of hours spent in a classroom. Rather, we must strive to ensure that our interventions are effective, deliver results, and lead to measurable improvements in student learning.

USAID-funded reading assessments and measurement tools have helped focus the global community on learning. Other bilateral, multilateral, and private sector donors have followed the U.S. Government's lead and are now prioritizing measuring and achieving positive learning outcomes. Furthermore, we know children learn both inside and outside of the classroom and we applaud USAID's recognition of the power of community engagement to improve learning.

Since Chairwoman Lowey led the effort to pass the READ Act in the fall of 2017, our community has been striving to build on the tremendous progress that has been made to date and expand the scope and scale of our work in order to better serve those in need of education assistance. Gains in access to education and reading skills need to be expanded to reach the children who have been left behind, especially those affected by crisis and conflict. We also need to ensure that children receive support to develop the skills needed for the 21st-century workforce, including numeracy, resilience, and critical thinking. Great strides have been made to improve gender equality, but we cannot rest until all girls receive an equitable, quality education. Finally, our programs must start earlier, so children enter primary school ready to learn. To achieve these ambitious and vital goals, it is imperative that Congress fully resource the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education and equip staff at USAID with the tools needed to achieve success.

The need to continue and renew our commitment to this important work is paramount. 258 million children and youth are still out of school globally and more than half of all children are not acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills.² In conflict and crisis-affected areas, nearly one in four children are missing out on their education.³ Far too often, hardships such as poverty, displacement, disability, and discrimination inhibit children's ability to access a quality education.

Evidence shows that enrolling and keeping girls in school can positively impact their health and economic prosperity.⁴ Unfortunately, barriers such as child marriage, harassment and violence in schools, and social discrimination frequently keep girls from benefitting from long-term, quality education. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 90 percent of girls are failing to meet minimum proficiency standards in reading. When compared to high-income countries where 88 percent of children are on track to meet the minimum proficiency standard for reading and math, it is clear that more needs to be done to ensure that access to quality education is equitable at all levels.⁵ All children, regardless of gender or place of birth, deserve the opportunity to learn and make a life for themselves.

A great challenge we face is reaching children living in conflict-torn and fragile states. With protracted conflicts lasting years and internally displaced people and refugees displaced for over a decade on

¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019)

² UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2017)

³ UNICEF (2016)

⁴ Sperling & Winthrop (2016)

⁵ *Ibid.* 2

average, generations of young people are at risk of missing out on an education and the opportunity to fulfill their potential.⁶ Increased resources for education and learning opportunities in conflicts and crises will ensure that at-risk children and adolescents have access to a quality education. Through formal and non-formal education programs, we can provide children and youth in conflict areas with a sense of hope and normalcy when their lives have been disrupted while simultaneously promoting their psychosocial well-being and cognitive development.

U.S. programs must also reach poor, marginalized, and often forgotten children. Over the years, we've identified new ways to reach these groups with meaningful, effective education interventions. Through innovative, low-cost technologies, such as interactive and long-distance radio instruction, cell phones, computers, and the internet, we can now reach more children who would have otherwise been left behind. With relatively modest additional investments in these innovative, low-cost measures, we will greatly expand our reach.

Over the years, there has been strong bipartisan recognition that improving global education is vital to our American values and interests. Education attainment slows the rate of population growth, helps stem the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, and promotes equality between men and women.⁷ In countries wracked by crisis and conflict, introduction of fair and inclusive education provides stability and imparts skills and attitudes supportive of conflict prevention and peace building. Higher levels of education are also correlated with lower maternal and child mortality rates and girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to marry as children.⁸

A dollar invested in an additional year of schooling for these children generates up to ten dollars in benefits to low-income countries and provides young people the opportunity to lift themselves and their families out of the intergenerational cycle of poverty.⁹ With education, these children will be more financially self-sufficient and will also be exposed to democratic norms. According to a study of 18 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, people of voting age with a primary education were 1.5 times more likely to support democracy than those with no education, and twice as likely to do so if they had completed secondary education.¹⁰

In addition to the benefits that children themselves receive from access to a quality education, strong national education sectors and programs are also essential for global economic growth. As populations around the world continue to grow, education programs will help ensure stability and expand access to global markets in the developing world. Today, the fastest-growing markets for America's goods are in developing countries, representing over half of U.S. exports and millions of American jobs.¹¹ Research shows that if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty – a 12 percent drop in global poverty.¹² Therefore, it is clear that educating the world's children is essential to building the stable trading partners that growing U.S. export markets require.

Successful cross-sector efforts, such as the McGovern-Dole program, have proven that integrated health, nutrition, and education interventions enable children to reach their full potential. Stronger coordination across sectors will ensure that we approach development challenges and opportunities holistically and

⁶ World Bank (2019).

⁷ Murray (2015); Mondal & Shitan (2013)

⁸ *Ibid.* 4

⁹ The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (2016)

¹⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (2014)

¹¹ U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (2017)

¹² UNESCO (2012)

empower local communities to thrive through evidence-based interventions. For instance, multi-sectoral early childhood development programs increase the effectiveness and efficiency of subsequent interventions by ensuring that all children are developmentally on track. As work continues under the new U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, cross-sector interventions should be prioritized so that all needs are met and children arrive at school safe, healthy, and ready to learn.

Ensuring that children are enrolled in school and learning requires continued interventions and a strong commitment by the United States. Support for Basic Education is essential to help USAID reach its goals and to move partner countries along the path to sustainability and economic prosperity. With the U.S. Government's continued leadership in this area, the global education community will be positioned to succeed.

A quality education for all is the bedrock of societal progress, and the benefits of our investments now will be reaped by generations to come. A fully resourced USAID will develop innovative solutions to global challenges and will have the capacity to directly address country needs. Now is the time to make a deeper, more sustainable impact on the lives and hopes of the world's impoverished children. The Basic Education Coalition looks forward to working with Congress to successfully implement the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education and to ensure that quality education remains a pillar of our foreign assistance. Together, we can help alleviate poverty, strengthen societies, foster stability and security, and spur economic growth, both abroad and here at home.

Thank you for your continued support and for your consideration of our request.