Summary Record of Development Issues Committee Meeting
The Challenges of Transforming Education in Developing
Countries through the Pandemic and Beyond
May 19, 2021

Committee Co-chair Steve Giddings opened the meeting, welcomed participants, and introduced the discussion leaders (bios attached):
- Charles North, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and
- Susannah Hares, Co-Director of Educational Policy and Senior Policy Fellow, Center for Global Development (CGD).

Susannah began with a presentation on CGD's analysis of the impact of the pandemic on education (slides attached). The pandemic has caused millions of children to lose many weeks of education, with a significant negative impact on the total extent of their expected schooling in many countries. She presented slides on six potential impacts:

- **Financial**: Economic projections show a shrinking share for education in national budgets. There was a big dip in education spending in low-income countries after the financial crisis of 2007-08,

- **Access**: Income shocks and lengthy school closures could lead to a reversal in the gains of recent years. However, there is new evidence of more encouraging news in several countries where children are returning to classrooms.

- **Educational Tech**: Tech is not yet living up to its hype. Low household access to internet, radio, or tv contributed to low usage of remote schooling.

- **Inequality**: Many governments have launched distance learning programs, most by mid-2020. Country studies have shown that lost learning during school closure will exacerbate inequality.

- **Exams**: Standardized exams already disadvantage poor children.

- **Private schools**: Many children in developing countries must depend on private schools. Many private schools have were hit hard by the 2008 crisis and the same is expected after the pandemic.

Charles reminded us that there was a crisis in education even before the pandemic. Girls were especially at risk of early marriage of child labor that ended their educational opportunities. His presentation took note of the possibility that the

crisis might present an opportunity for transforming education. GPE is committed to working in partnership with a wide range of actors: developing country governments, donors, CSOs, educational bodies and associations, and others. GPE focuses on educational systems. Its strategy is aimed at system transformation. It has three country objectives:

- Strengthen gender-responsive planning, policy development for system-wide impact;

- Mobilize coordinated action and financing to enable transformative change;

- Strengthen capacity, adapt and learn, to implement and drive results at scale.

GPE has diverse funding mechanisms to meet diverse needs. It provides grants for system capacity, system transformation, acceleration of girls' education, and other priorities. Donors include USAID along with other major bilateral donors. Sub-Saharan Africa is the primary area of concentration.

GPE has been able to work with a wide variety of national approaches to local challenges, involving a wide array of technological and other characteristics.

GPE is hoping for a $5 billion replenishment over the next five years. A Global Educational Summit will be held in London July 28-29, hosted by the UK and Kenya governments. Both Prime Minister Johnson and President Kenyetta have issued positive statements about this event.

Susannah added an observation that the UK, while hosting the educational summit, was also cutting its own educational assistance budget, which had been a cause for criticism. (See, *e.g.,* DEVEX reprint of an article entitled "UK aid cuts will mean 700,000 fewer girls get an education, NGOs say," https://www.devex.com/news/uk-aid-cuts-will-mean-700-000-fewer-girls-get-an-education-ngos-say-99942.)

Co-chair Steve Haykin fielded questions from meeting participants, which addressed a wide range of issues. These included:

Do we now have an opportunity to transform education to expand its moral and ethical values content? Charles responded that countries are reexamining the content of their curricula, for example, to address civic education. However, the sensitivity of which values to teach could inhibit consensus in many countries.

Might greater efficiency now be obtained by escaping from "brick and mortar" traditions? Charles responded that the limitations about access to technology and questions about how to use technology effectively are important obstacles. Susannah added that we have learned some ways to use technology more

effectively during the past year, including for communication with parents, educational experts, and others in addition to classroom instruction.

Does USAID practice in structuring its contribution to GPE facilitate or inhibit efficient and effective programming? Charles responded that, generally, USAID was very flexible in what it requires, although specific policies can present obstacles (such as the now-terminated prohibition on spending for West Bank/Gaza recipients). Also, USAID is often a good in-country coordinator, providing added value. In this regard, GPE has no field staff and relies on grant agents to manage funds in accordance with their own procedures. The country government decides which organization will be the grant agent – often a UN or development bank entity.

There was a question about how GPE's $5 billion goal for the next five years was determined. Charles noted that the GPE economists took into account many factors, including estimates of grade repetition rates.

In response to a question about donor coordination, Charles cited the example of Kenya, where the Kenyan government took the lead and persuaded all the involved donors to follow a locally designed central procurement system which enabled greater efficiency and cost saving.

Regarding the large role of private schools in many developing countries and how their inability to function during the pandemic, as described in Susannah's slide presentation, it appeared that there has been an increased burden on already weak public schools. This raised the question of whether private schools could benefit from GPE's grant program. Susannah noted that private schools often were major employers of women in developing countries. Charles added that GPE does not support for-profit schools, but otherwise included in its programs private schools that were part of the local education system.

As to support for education in fragile situations, Charles responded that GPE supported education for temporary systems for refugees and displaced persons, including in Syria and Yemen. But it did so with the aim of seeing those systems eventually integrated into sustainable national school systems.

Concerning CGD's views about its future work. Susannah responded that the continuing focus was on reducing inequalities within and between societies, in particular, on girls' education and expanding access to secondary education. CGD carries out a wide array of interviews and surveys in an effort to be aware of evolving trends in thinking and priority concerns.

Charles expressed appreciation for Samantha Power's recognition of education as a development priority. He observed that from his own experience in USAID, often education had not been a priority of donors and the new Administrator's statement

is most welcome. Susannah added that USAID has been a positive influence on fundamentals, but also welcomed USAID's increased attention to broader issues such as school safety.

Responding to a question about an urban-rural aspect to education, Susannah responded that it was more difficult to find teachers for rural schools and there tended to be fewer educational options and less access to technology in rural communities. Charles added that GPE's focus was on the most marginalized populations. This often meant a focus on rural areas where school attendance and performance were below national averages.

In conclusion, the Co-Chairs thanked the two discussion leaders for what had been a very informative and thought-provoking program.

Attachments:
1. Discussion leaders' biographies.
2. Slide presentations.