

Candace Debnam Outside Witness Testimony

House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations

State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee

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Basic Education



Coalition

Thank you Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the Subcommittee for inviting me here today. I am honored 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. My name is Candace Debnam, and I am the Co-Chair of the Coalition's Executive Board of Directors as well as the Executive Director of School-to-School International.

We are extremely grateful for the Subcommittee's continued support for international education. In addition to providing children with literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills, basic education lays the foundation for sustainable economic growth, poverty alleviation, social stability, and participatory democracy. To enhance U.S. foreign assistance efforts and improve educational opportunities for children in need, **we respectfully request that the Subcommittee provide \$925 million for Basic Education in Fiscal Year 2020, with at least \$800 million provided as bilateral development assistance.**

U.S. bilateral basic education programs focus on increasing equitable access to education, providing early learners with foundational skills, and preparing youth for successful careers. Thanks to the support of this Subcommittee, USAID's programs reached over 109 million learners in more than 50 countries from 2011-2017, including 22.6 million children living in conflict or crisis settings. From my experience in this sector, this work has the power to dramatically shift the trajectory of individual lives, as well as communities and countries more broadly.

We've made great progress to date towards the goal of education for all. However, the need to continue and renew our commitment to this important work is paramount. 262 million children and youth are still out of school and millions more are not learning basic skills. By expanding access to quality education, we will provide these young people with the opportunity to lift themselves and their families out of the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

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, U.S.-funded education programs will promote stability and expand access to global markets.

Far too often, hardships such as poverty, displacement, disability, and discrimination inhibit children's ability to access a quality education. More needs to be done to ensure that access to education is equitable at all levels. All children, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or place of birth, deserve the opportunity to learn and make a life for themselves.

With protracted conflicts lasting years and internally displaced people and refugees displaced for over a decade on average, generations of young people are at risk of missing out on the opportunity to fulfill their potential. Through formal and non-formal education programs, we can provide children and youth with a sense of hope and normalcy when their lives have been disrupted while simultaneously promoting their psychosocial well-being and cognitive development.

Congressional support for international education is vital if we want to truly achieve sustainable development in the countries where we work. Thanks to the leadership of Congress and passage of the READ Act, we are positioned take our education development work to the next level. A quality education for all is the bedrock for societal progress, and the benefits of our investments now will be reaped by generations to come. The Basic Education Coalition looks forward to working with Congress to ensure that education remains a pillar of our foreign assistance and that the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education is a success. Together, we can help alleviate poverty, strengthen societies, foster stability, and spur economic growth, both abroad and here at home.

Thank you for again for inviting me to testify before the Subcommittee and for your continued support for international basic education.