

2009 Ronald H. Brown African Affairs Series

Working Title: Challenges Are Opportunities for Change: Summit on Investing in Education in Africa

Wednesday, September 23, 2009, 9 a.m. – 12 noon

Dr. Sarah Moten, Director, Africa Education Initiative, USAID: *To present an overview of U.S. policy towards improving education outcomes in Africa.*

What is the root cause of inferior educational outcomes...Poverty! Those outcomes in turn play a major role in determining the future extent and incidence of poverty.

We must begin to identify the policies needed to ensure that educational outcomes properly benefit the disadvantaged. It is clear that a simple expansion of education systems does not always benefit the poor, particularly where the quality of education is very low.

Africa has witnessed a degradation of learning outcomes over the past decade. Teachers and their performance in the classroom is one of the most critical factors in improving students' learning. In rural African schools, there are generally three main challenges: poverty, instability and the lack of qualified teaching staff

The area in which change is most difficult, but also most decisive, is in the daily interactions between teachers and students. This is why the kind of reform most likely to succeed will begin in the classroom. The content and the methods recommended by the curricula must make good use of all cultural experiences which encourage learning.

There are very critical shortages of teachers in Africa.

We need to focus on improving learning outcomes in conjunction with increasing access.

We must also promote synergies between the education sector and other development sectors

Children are going to school hungry!

USAID will focus on:

1. Potential drops out marginalized children, especially girls
2. Children who've recently dropped out and can be caught up and returned to school
3. Youth who've dropped out and require additional skills to join the economy.

In our bilateral education programs we will begin focusing on foundational learning skills. Those skills that we need to begin the journey into life long learning.

New cost effective ways of measuring mid-primary cycle to ensure that children are learning will be necessary; appropriate assessment tools to evaluate foundation skills of literacy, numeracy, etc. to fit the African context.