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# Foreign Assistance and the Education Sector: Programs and Priorities

Updated July 1, 2021

**Congressional Research Service**

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R44676

## Summary

Education has long been a key focus sector within U.S. foreign assistance. Policymakers generally agree that education is crucial to bettering livelihoods and improving economic stability in developing countries. Researchers have found that investments in education lead to higher incomes, economic stability, and better health, among other development outcomes.

While education access and quality in developing countries has generally improved in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, challenges remain. Globally, approximately 257 million children and youth do not attend school, and approximately 99 million people aged 15-24 are illiterate. The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has affected learners worldwide, with many analysts projecting significant setbacks in the education sector for years to come.

Congress sets policy and priorities for the U.S. foreign assistance education sector through authorization legislation and directs funding in annual appropriations measures. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (P.L. 87-195, as amended) includes provisions on education assistance, and the Reinforcing Education Accountability in Development Act (READ Act, P.L. 115-56) and Global Child Thrive Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-283, Div. A, Title XII) have set policy for basic education and early childhood development, respectively. Annually, Congress also directs specific amounts of foreign assistance funds for basic and higher education purposes. For FY2021, Congress designated at least a combined \$1.235 billion in State Department, Foreign Operations and Related Programs (SFOPS) appropriations for education programming—\$950 million for basic education and \$285 million for higher education—representing 2.8% of the total foreign operations appropriation (P.L. 116-260, Div. K).

Multiple U.S. government departments and agencies administer education assistance to developing countries. The provision of basic education assistance is guided by the *U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, Fiscal Years 2019-2023*, which articulates two principal priorities: (1) improving learning outcomes and (2) expanding access to quality basic education for all, particularly marginalized and vulnerable populations. Higher education assistance is often guided by individual agency guidance and priorities.

Three agencies—the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)—accounted for 96% of reported education assistance in FY2019 (the most recent year for which comprehensive data are available). Geographically, more than 40% of education assistance in FY2019 went to countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The remaining assistance was dedicated to global programs (19%), the Middle East and North Africa (11%), and other regions (each representing <10% of assistance). Assistance projects vary in scope, but interventions may include activities related to access, enrollment, and retention; curriculum development; teacher support; the development and distribution of textbooks and other learning materials; workforce development; education management and policy reform; and school construction.

Congress has generally demonstrated bipartisan support for U.S. foreign assistance in the education sector. Congress has also demonstrated interest in a number of associated issues, including those related to program oversight, the funding and legislative emphasis on basic education compared with higher education, and the use of technology and innovation in the sector.

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## Introduction

Successive U.S. Administrations and Congresses have considered the education sector an important component of U.S. foreign assistance programming. As noted in a 1980 Government Accountability Office report on U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) education programs, “Education is a vital element in the successful socio-economic development of a country. Ignorance and illiteracy hinder developing-country economic development and block the poor from participating in and benefiting from economic development.”<sup>4</sup>

Many organizations have found statistical support for the claim that education is crucial to bettering livelihoods and improving economic stability in developing countries. Research supports the claim that the benefits of education extend beyond individuals, with ripple effects on the greater community. The World Bank’s education strategy, for example, cites studies that suggest the benefits of education, including the following:<sup>5</sup>

- **Economic stability.** Households with more education, particularly those in rural communities, cope with economic shocks and exploit new economic opportunities better than less-educated households.<sup>6</sup>

- **Decrease in infant and child mortality rates.** Women’s educational attainment has been connected to decreases in infant and child mortality. According to one study that compared recorded infant and child deaths with their counterfactual estimates, one half of the 8.2 million fewer deaths of

### Defining Education Assistance

This report encompasses all foreign assistance activities funded by the U.S. government that aim to improve education in developing countries. These programs are largely authorized by Section 105 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (FAA), as amended, and can be divided into two categories:

**Basic education** includes “(i) measurable improvements in literacy, numeracy, and other basic skills development that prepare an individual to be an active, productive member of society and the workforce; (ii) workforce development, vocational training, and digital literacy informed by real market needs and opportunities and that results in measurable improvements in employment; (iii) programs and activities designed to demonstrably improve—(I) early childhood, preprimary education, primary education, and secondary education, which can be delivered in formal or nonformal education settings; and (II) learning for out-of-school youth and adults; and (iv) capacity building for teachers, administrators, counselors, and youth workers that results in measurable improvements in student literacy, numeracy, or employment.”<sup>1</sup>

**Higher education** includes activities conducted in an effort to provide for “advanced education and training of people of developing countries in such disciplines as are required for planning and implementation of public and private development activities.”<sup>2</sup> Higher education assistance may also include that provided under Section 214 of the FAA, American Schools and Hospitals Abroad, which provides assistance “to schools and libraries outside the United States founded or sponsored by United States citizens and serving as study and demonstration centers for ideas and practices of the United States.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Section 105(c)(1)(A) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (22 U.S.C. §2151c(c)(1)(A)). Section 3 of P.L. 115-56 (131 Stat. 1130) added subsection (c).

<sup>2</sup> Section 105(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (22 U.S.C. §2151c(b)).

<sup>3</sup> Section 214(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (22 U.S.C. §2174(a)).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *U.S. Efforts To Educate and Train The Poor In Developing Countries*, ID-80-18, May 5, 1980, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Examples shared in World Bank Group, *Learning for All: Investing in People’s Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development*, World Bank Group Education Strategy 2020, Washington, DC, 2011, pp. 12-13.

<sup>6</sup> Frankenberg, E., J. Smith, and D. Thomas. 2003, “Economic Shocks, Wealth, and Welfare.” *The Journal of Human Resources* 38 (2): 280–321.

children age 5 and younger between 1970 and 2009 can be attributed to more education among women of reproductive age.<sup>7</sup>

- **Adaptation to environmental change.** Countries with better-educated female populations are more capable of coping with and preventing loss of life as a result of extreme weather events than countries with low levels of female education.<sup>8</sup>

The international community has widely accepted the importance of education in international development. In 2000, U.N. member states made achieving universal primary education one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a development roadmap meant to prioritize both donor and developing country development efforts from 2000 to 2015. In 2015, they included quality education as one of the 17 follow-on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an analogous framework for 2015 through 2030. According to the U.N. resolution establishing the SDGs, the goal for 2030 is to provide “inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels.”<sup>9</sup>

Today, a number of stakeholders—including Members of Congress, executive branch agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), multilateral organizations, private sector companies, and recipient country governments—continue to advocate for U.S. education assistance to developing countries. In 2017, Congress passed the Reinforcing Education Accountability in Development (READ) Act (P.L. 115-56, Div. A). Among other provisions, the act articulated U.S. policy for education assistance, required a whole-of-government strategy for administering basic education assistance, and established oversight mechanisms through which progress could be measured. In response to the act, the Trump Administration released the *U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education* in September 2018. The holistic strategy aims to “achieve a world where education systems in partner countries enable all individuals to acquire the education and skills to be productive members of society.”<sup>10</sup>

U.S. agencies also have incorporated education assistance into their respective plans and policies. The State Department and USAID’s *Joint Strategic Plan*, released in February 2018, cites education as one of the tools by which the United States can help lift developing countries out of poverty, “drive inclusive and sustainable development, open new markets and support U.S. prosperity and security objectives.”<sup>11</sup> In its 2018 *Education Policy*, USAID further elaborates on this sentiment by noting that access to quality education “leads to greater economic growth, improved health outcomes, sustained democratic governance, and more peaceful and resilient societies.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Emannuela Gakidou et al., 2010, “Increased Educational Attainment and its Effect on Child Mortality in 175 Countries between 1970 and 2009: A Systematic Analysis.” *The Lancet* 376 (9745): 959–74.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Blankespoor et al., 2010, “Adaptation to Climate Extremes in Developing Countries: The Role of Education.” Policy Research Working Paper 5342, World Bank, Washington, DC. Others suggest broadly that more educated populations, regardless of gender, are better equipped to respond to and mitigate the effects of climate change. See, for example, UNESCO, *Climate Change Education and Awareness*, at <https://en.unesco.org/themes/addressing-climate-change/climate-change-education-and-awareness>.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/70/1, New York, NY, September 25, 2015, p. 7, at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, Fiscal Years 2019-2023, September 14, 2018, at <https://www.usaid.gov/education/usg-strategy>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of State and USAID, *Joint Strategic Plan 2018-2022*, February 2018, p. 38, at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Joint-Strategic-Plan-FY-2018-2022.pdf>.

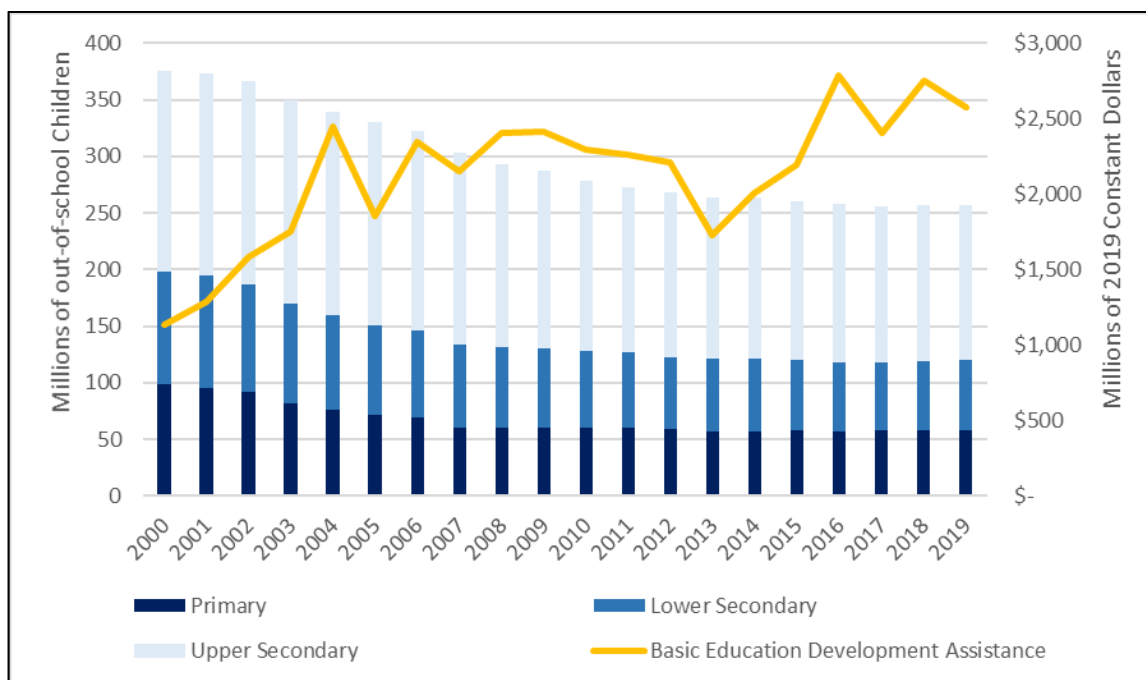
<sup>12</sup> USAID, *USAID Education Policy*, November 2018, p. 4, at <https://www.usaid.gov/education/policy>.

This report provides an overview of the current global education landscape, Congress’s role in education assistance funding and policy, the U.S. agencies responsible for administering education assistance, the various types of education assistance activities, and issues of interest to Congress. This report does not encompass the international education exchange programs managed by the Department of State, which are chiefly designed to enhance U.S. public diplomacy rather than facilitate developing countries’ economic development.

## The Global Education Landscape

Development assistance for education is usually intended to either increase access to education or improve the quality of education. There have been significant improvements in global education access in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The overall number of out-of-school children and youth, for example, declined by nearly 32% (from approximately 375 million to 257 million) between 2000 and 2019 (**Figure 1**). The greatest decline was among primary school-aged children (41%), with lower-secondary and upper-secondary youths experiencing smaller declines (38% and 22% respectively). Further, in the context of the growing global population, the proportion of out-of-school children compared with the population has shrunk over time.

**Figure 1. Global Out-of-School Children and Youth and Official Basic Education Development Assistance**

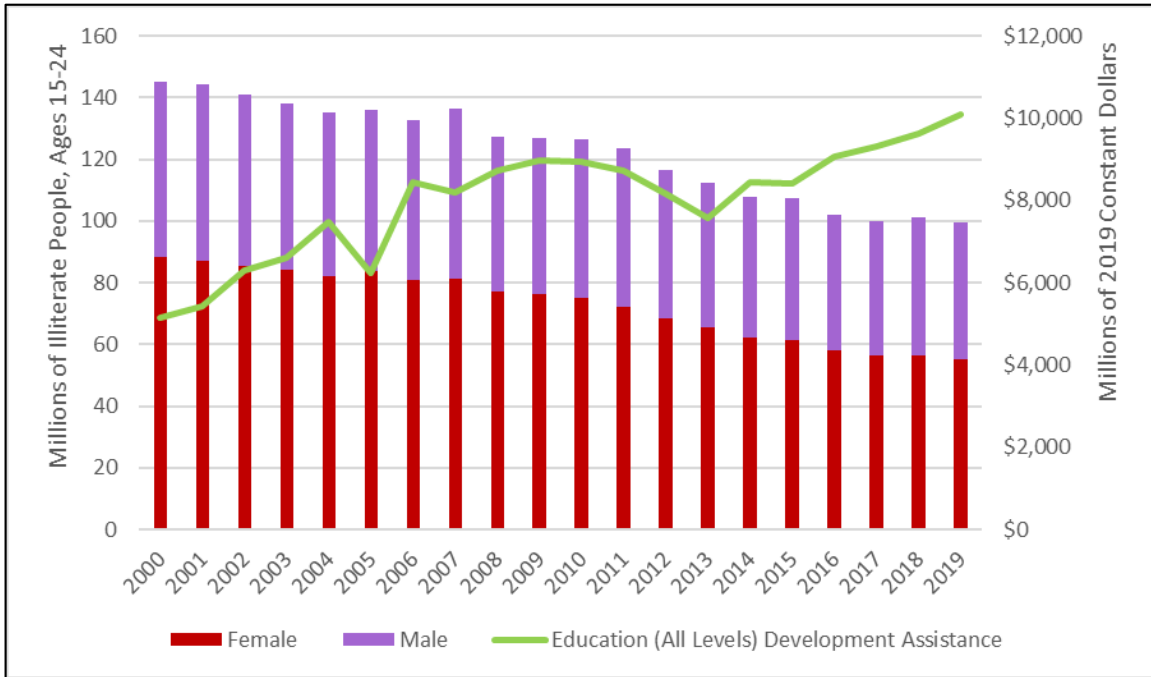


**Source:** Graphic created by CRS using UNESCO and OECD DAC Data (2019 is the most recent year for which complete data are available).

Literacy, which is considered a common indicator for education quality, has also improved in recent decades by some measures. The global illiterate population aged 15-24 declined by 31% (**Figure 2**) between 2000 and 2019 (from approximately 145 million to 99 million), with women and girls accounting for the steepest decline (38%). Notably, the literacy gap between women and men in that age group also narrowed: women accounted for 61% of the global illiterate population in 2000 and 55% of that population in 2019. As indicated in both figures, these declines also coincide with general increased investment in official development assistance for

international basic education programs and overall international education programs, respectively, as reported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and adjusted for inflation. In many instances, developing countries have achieved improved education outcomes as local governments have increased their investment in education systems. For example, between 2002 and 2017 (years for which data are available), Senegal’s government expenditure on education, when adjusted for inflation, grew from \$291 million to \$1.01 billion. In that same time period, the country’s illiterate population shrunk from 1.09 million to 922,531.

**Figure 2. Global Illiterate Population and Official Education (All Levels) Development Assistance**



**Source:** Graphic created by CRS using UNESCO and OECD DAC Data (2019 is the most recent year for which complete data are available).

Despite such gains, the challenges in international education remain great. The number of out-of-school children and youth hit a historic low of nearly 256 million in 2017, but has since risen. According to 2019 estimates, more than 257 million children and youth—nearly one in five—were out-of-school.<sup>13</sup> Literacy rates have also lagged behind improvements in access; for instance, the level of illiterate men and boys aged 15-24 has appeared to stagnate or rise each year since 2014. Education access and quality improvements have also not been experienced equitably, and many regions or countries have experienced increases in out-of-school and illiteracy rates even as the global rates have declined. For example, between 2000 and 2019, the number of out-of-school children in sub-Saharan Africa grew by 6%. In that same period, the number of illiterate

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO data accessed on March 31, 2021, available at <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>. Out-of-school accounts for children and youth who are not enrolled in formal education. Data do not account for children who may be home-schooled. For more, see UNESCO, *New Methodology Shows 258 Million Children, Adolescents and Youth Are Out of School*, UIS/2019/ED/FS/56, September 13, 2019.

men aged 15-24 in Arab states grew by more than 19%.<sup>14</sup> Further, in some cases, education systems may not be equipped to keep pace with the number of new learners. For example, UNICEF in 2017 asserted that the number of primary school teachers in Africa would need to double by 2030 just to maintain then-current primary school enrollment rates.<sup>15</sup> With growing global economic inequality, some in the international community have argued for focusing international development in the education sector on inclusivity in education, rather than on overall education gains.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, education programming does not exist in a vacuum; the social and economic environments in which education programs take place can present severe challenges to their long-term success. Conditions such as teacher shortages and absences, school fees, learner absenteeism and lateness, classroom overcrowding, food insecurity, and lack of electricity all may contribute to poor educational outcomes.<sup>17</sup> Recurring conflict and fragility have also been shown to negatively affect educational attainment, particularly by deepening existing inequalities in education, reducing the average number of years of education, and lessening overall educational attainment.<sup>18</sup> Further complicating the operating environment is the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which has already affected global education access. According to the United Nations, the pandemic has affected nearly 1.6 billion learners, with more than 99% of students in low- and lower-middle-income countries affected.<sup>19</sup>

## The Role of Congress: Funding and Policy

Congress first made education a distinctive policy objective of foreign assistance in 1973, when it added sector-specific objectives to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (FAA, P.L. 87-195, as amended). This effort was part of its “New Directions” policy, which sought to target assistance on satisfying the basic human needs of the poor in developing countries. Section 105 of the FAA seeks “to reduce illiteracy, to extend basic education, and to increase manpower training in skills related to development.”

Today, Congress continues to shape education assistance largely through annual appropriations and policymaking. The majority of funding for international education assistance is designated in annual Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) appropriations measures. Congress has also implemented many policy measures related to international education assistance through that legislation. Other policy related to international education assistance has been enacted as amendments to the FAA.

## Annual Appropriations

Congress supports U.S. foreign assistance for education activities primarily through the annual SFOPS appropriation. For many decades, Congress has directed in legislative language that at

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, *Generation 2030 Africa 2.0: Prioritizing investment in children to reap the demographic dividend*, October 2017, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all* (Paris: UNESCO, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Challenges drawn in part from Education Development Center, Inc. for USAID, *Literacy, Language and Learning Initiative (L3) National Fluency Assessment of Rwandan Schools Midline Report*, January 2016, p. 67.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *The Quantitative Impact of Conflict on Education*, Technical Paper No. 7, 2011.

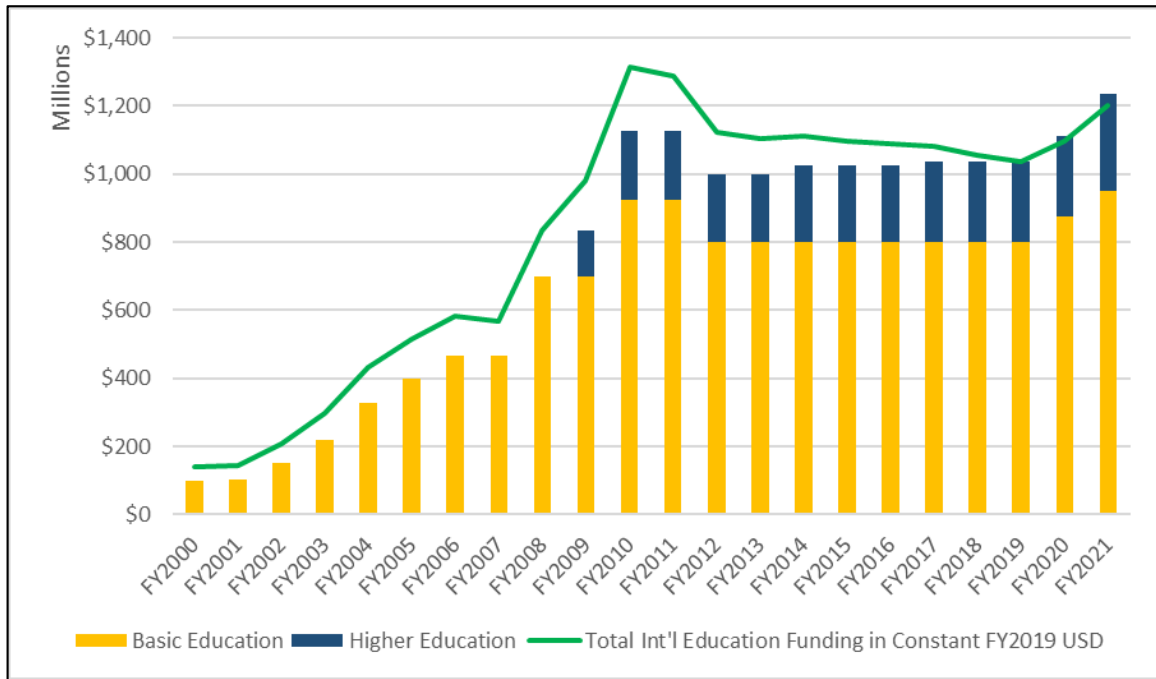
<sup>19</sup> United Nations, *Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond*, August 2020.



least a certain amount be spent for basic education purposes and, since FY2009, also for higher education.

Appropriations for U.S. international education programs have grown considerably since FY2000 in current U.S. dollars (**Figure 3**). However, when adjusted for inflation, funding for international education programs peaked in FY2010. The FY2021 appropriation is the highest in inflation-adjusted terms since FY2011.

**Figure 3. Education Assistance Appropriations, FY2000-FY2021**



**Source:** Graphic created by CRS using Annual Foreign Operations Appropriations (FY2000-2007); Annual Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations (FY2008-FY2021); Constant Dollar amounts calculated using GDP Price Index from the U.S. Bureau for Economic Analysis and Congressional Budget Office, compiled by CRS Analyst D. Andrew Austin.

**Notes:** FY2020 and FY2021 Constant Dollar amounts calculated using projected GDP Price Index for each year.

In both current (i.e., not adjusted for inflation) and constant dollars, Congress provided the largest funding increases to international education funding between FY2000 and FY2010, with the largest percentage increase in funding over the previous year in FY2008 (a 51% increase over the FY2007 funding level in current dollars). Congress expressed a number of justifications and set various conditions for education funding between FY2000 and FY2010. For example:

- In FY2002, Congress increased basic education funding for USAID by 46% over the previous year to address “urgent” basic education activities. According to Congress, “Widespread anti-American sentiment in predominately Muslim countries has exposed a deficiency in basic education within countries that have received large amounts of U.S. assistance through [Economic Support Fund (ESF)] programs.” As such, Congress urged that USAID initiate “cooperative efforts ... with ESF-recipient countries to develop and implement creative basic

education programs that strengthen the capacity and accessibility of public education systems.”<sup>20</sup>

- In FY2004, Congress increased basic education funding for USAID by 50% over the previous year and required USAID to submit to Congress a strategy for “the use of basic education funds in Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, the Near East, South Asia, and the Western Hemisphere” that included country strategies, USAID’s administrative and interagency coordination structure, and “actions being taken to expand the administrative capacity of both USAID and the State Department to deliver effective expanded basic education programs.”<sup>21</sup>
- In FY2008, Congress increased basic education funding for USAID by 51% over the previous year. The appropriation included \$190 million for countries that had an approved national education plan, as well as “an increase above the budget request for basic education programs in Ethiopia.” As noted above, the FY2008 bill also included the creation of “a Coordinator of United States Government activities to provide basic education assistance in developing countries” within the Department of State.<sup>22</sup>

Between FY2010 and FY2021, U.S. education assistance largely leveled off, hovering between \$1.00 and \$1.13 billion annually. In FY2021, Congress designated a combined \$1.24 billion in SFOPS appropriations for education programming, representing 2.8% of the total foreign operations appropriation that year.<sup>23</sup> This is an increase of 11% over FY2020 funding, representing the largest year-on-year percentage increase since FY2010. The final appropriation included \$950 million for basic education and \$285 million for higher education programs, and included two designations within the education sector that were not included in previous fiscal years:

- Of the \$950 million designated for basic education programs, \$150 million for the education of girls in areas of conflict.
- In addition to \$235 million designated for broad higher education programs, Congress specified \$50 million for higher education institutions in countries “whose economies are adversely affected by political instability, conflict (including in neighboring countries), or catastrophic manmade disasters, such as the port explosion in Lebanon on August 4, 2020.”<sup>24</sup>

**Annual obligations.** Appropriations directives for education assistance establish a spending floor (using “not less than” language), not a final funding level. Executive branch agencies have consistently obligated more funds for education assistance than the appropriated minimum, with the exception of FY2011 (**Figure 4**). On average, obligations for international education assistance exceeded the designated appropriation by 38%. In the context of broader foreign

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<sup>20</sup> H.Rept. 107-345.

<sup>21</sup> H.Rept. 108-401.

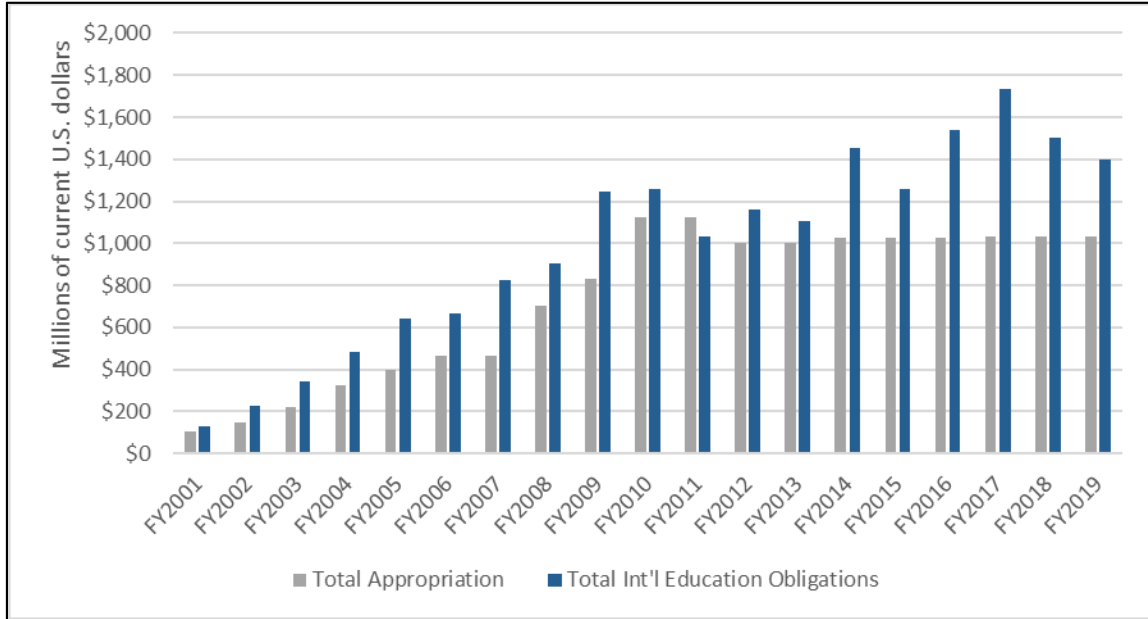
<sup>22</sup> House Appropriations Committee Print (1/30/08) Book 2, Division J, available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CPRT-110HPRT39564/pdf/CPRT-110HPRT39564-DivisionJ.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> The total foreign operations funding level includes funds designated as Overseas Contingency Operations and emergency funds designated for COVID-19 and Sudan-related assistance. For more on FY2021 SFOPS appropriations, see CRS Report R46367, *Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs: FY2021 Budget and Appropriations*.

<sup>24</sup> House Appropriations Committee Print (03/21) Book 2, Division K, p. 2117, available at <https://www.congress.gov/committee-print/117th-congress/house-committee-print/43750>.

assistance efforts, funding for international education assistance has slowly grown as a proportion of overall foreign assistance; in FY2001, education assistance represented slightly under 1% of total U.S. foreign assistance obligations. In FY2019, international education assistance funding represented approximately 3% of annual U.S. foreign assistance obligations.<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 4. Education Assistance Appropriations vs. Obligations, FY2001 -FY2019**



**Source:** Graphic created by CRS using Annual Foreign Operations Appropriations (FY2001 -2007); Annual Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations (FY2008-FY2019); USAID’s Foreign Aid Explorer.

**Notes:** FY2019 is the most recent year for which comprehensive data are available; FY2000 data were not included due to potential incompleteness.

## Education Assistance Policy

Some policy measures related to U.S. education assistance have been enacted in annual SFOPS measures. In the FY2008 SFOPS appropriation (P.L. 110-161), for example, Congress mandated the establishment of a position within the State Department to oversee and coordinate all U.S. basic education assistance and to provide a strategy for such assistance. The Basic Education Coordinator was appointed in 2007 and served in that position for one year, after which no other individual occupied the post. Although the FY2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 112-74) shifted the post to USAID, the agency divided responsibilities for basic education between a Senior Advisor for International Education appointed in March 2013 and other officials in USAID’s former Bureau for Economic Growth, Education, and the Environment.

Separately, Congress has set policy for U.S. education assistance in standalone bills, some of which have amended the FAA. In 2017, Congress enacted the Reinforcing Education Accountability in Development Act (READ Act, P.L. 115-56). The bill amended Section 105 of the FAA to further define key concepts such as “basic education,” “communities of learning,” and “sustainability” and to set U.S. policy and principles regarding international education programs. The legislation also required the President to develop and submit to Congress a comprehensive

<sup>25</sup> CRS calculations based on Foreign Aid Explorer data.

U.S. strategy for international basic education and establish a Senior Coordinator of United States International Basic Education Assistance within USAID.

In 2021, Congress enacted the Global Child Thrive Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-283, Div. A, Title XII). The bill amended the FAA to support early childhood (i.e., children under eight years old) development through a coordinated combination of health, protection, and education interventions. The legislation aimed to not only spur new programming for early childhood development but also connect existing programs related to these efforts. Basic education, including early learning for children three years old and younger, features in the Global Child Thrive Act as a critical component to “allow a child to reach his or her full developmental potential.”

Congress has considered numerous other bills related to foreign education assistance. Recent legislation has focused largely on three cross-cutting issues within the sector:

- **Girls’ education.** Some Members have proposed legislation that would specifically address girls’ educational attainment, either at the country or global level. For example, the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress enacted the Malala Yousafzai Scholarship Act (P.L. 116-338), which requires USAID to award at least 50% of scholarships under its Merit and Needs-Based Scholarship Program (MNBSB) to women.<sup>26</sup> Also in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, some Members introduced the Keeping Girls in School Act (H.R. 2153/S. 1071), which asserted the importance of girls’ education and would have authorized USAID to finance activities to increase girls’ access to a quality secondary action. (The House version of the bill passed the chamber but did not pass the Senate.)
- **COVID-19.** The COVID-19 pandemic spurred interest among some Members about how the disease might affect global educational attainment and U.S. international education programs. For example, the Global Learning Loss Assessment Act (H.R. 8220/S. 4548, and reintroduced in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress as H.R. 1500/S. 552), would require USAID to submit a report to Congress detailing the impact of the pandemic on global basic education programs.
- **Educational content.** Some Members have shown particular interest in what is being taught in U.S.-funded international education programs. For example, the Peace and Tolerance in Palestinian Education Act (H.R. 2343, and reintroduced in the 117<sup>th</sup> as H.R. 2374), asserts that educational materials used by the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the West Bank and Gaza “demonize Israel, encourage war, and teach children that Palestinian statehood can be achieved through violence.”<sup>27</sup> To address such concerns, the measure would require the Secretary of State to submit to Congress (in addition to any

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<sup>26</sup> USAID’s Merit and Needs-Based Scholarship Program was established in partnership with the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan and provides full-tuition scholarships and stipends “for talented yet economically disadvantaged Pakistani youth to earn a bachelor’s or master’s degree at any of 30 partner universities across Pakistan.” USAID, *Merit and Need Based Scholarship Program (MNBSB)*, December 19, 2019, at <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/merit-and-need-based-scholarship-program-mnbsb>.

<sup>27</sup> For some background information on PA textbooks used in the West Bank and Gaza, see Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, *Report on Palestinian Textbooks*, September 2019-June 2021. For background on how UNRWA uses and adapts curricula from the PA and other host countries, see UNRWA, “What We Do – Education” and “UNRWA Launches Innovative Centralized Digital Learning Platform for Half a Million Palestine Refugee Students,” April 19, 2021.

reports required in annual appropriations legislation) an annual report that reviews materials and related curricula and assesses whether U.S. foreign assistance is being used, either directly or indirectly, to support such materials and curricula.<sup>28</sup>

## U.S. Agencies Implementing Education Programs

Multiple U.S. agencies administer and implement international education programs. All U.S. basic education programming, regardless of implementing agency, is guided by the *U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education*, a whole-of-government document with two principal priorities: (1) improving learning outcomes and (2) expanding access to quality basic education for all, particularly marginalized and vulnerable populations.<sup>29</sup> Higher education programming, which represents a smaller proportion of U.S. international education programming, is often guided by individual agency guidance and priorities.

In FY2019 (the most recent year for which data are available for all agencies), agencies implementing international education programs included USAID; Peace Corps; the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC); the Departments of State, the Interior, and the Army; the U.S. African Development Foundation; and the Inter-American Foundation.<sup>30</sup> Together, USAID, Peace Corps, and MCC were responsible for 96% of all education assistance funding (**Figure 5**).

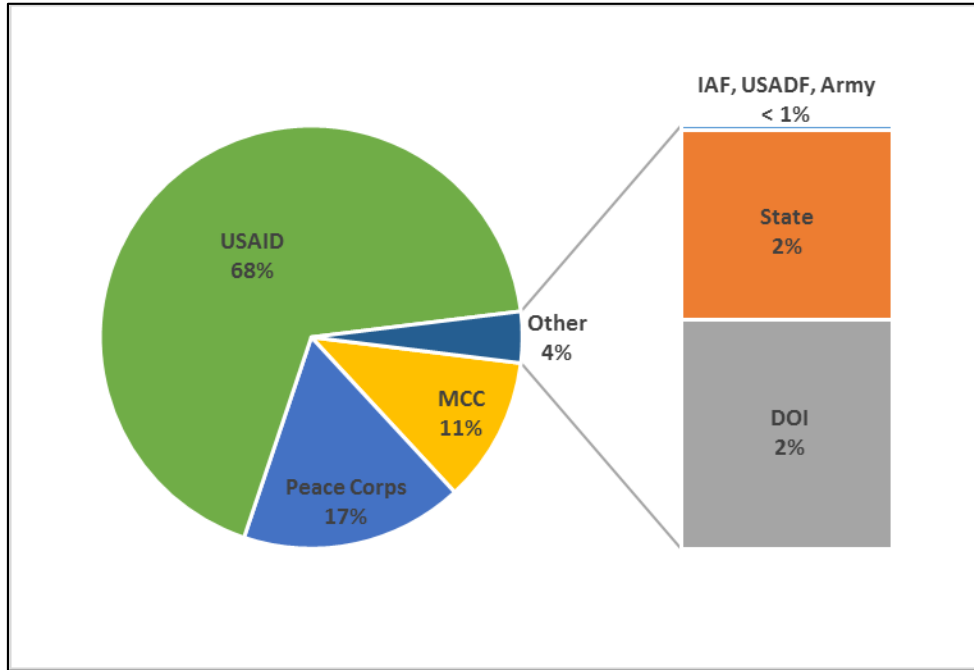
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<sup>28</sup> Existing annual appropriations legislation (see Section 7048(d)(5) of P.L. 116-260) requires a written report from the Secretary of State to the Committees on Appropriations, before the obligation of funds to UNRWA, on whether UNRWA is “taking steps to ensure the content of all educational materials currently taught in UNRWA-administered schools and summer camps is consistent with the values of human rights, dignity, and tolerance and does not induce incitement.”

<sup>29</sup> *U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, Fiscal Years 2019-2023*, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Some agencies support education indirectly. By providing food aid to school children, the Department of Agriculture’s McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition program directly addresses nutritional needs of children while at the same time indirectly encouraging school attendance. Such indirect assistance is not counted in total education funding data.

**Figure 5. Agencies Implementing Education Assistance, FY2019**  
(percentage of obligations by implementing agency)



**Source:** Graphic created by CRS using Foreign Aid Explorer Data; DAC Category = Education.

**Notes:** USAID = U.S. Agency for International Development; MCC = Millennium Challenge Corporation; IAF = Inter-American Foundation; USADF = U.S.-African Development Foundation; DOI = Department of the Interior.

## USAID

USAID plays the largest role in U.S. government education assistance programs.<sup>31</sup> The agency’s 2018 *Education Policy*, which applies to education programming at all levels (from preprimary through higher education), defines four priorities for education programming:

Children and youth, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable, have increased access to quality education that is safe, relevant, and promotes social well-being.

Children and youth gain literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills that are foundational to future learning and success.

Youth gain the skills they need to lead productive lives, gain employment, and positively contribute to society.

Higher education institutions have the capacity to be central actors in development by conducting and applying research, delivering quality education, and engaging with communities.<sup>32</sup>

USAID’s Center for Education, within the new Bureau for Development, Democracy and Innovation (DDI), leads the agency’s education work and is meant to serve as a resource to

<sup>31</sup> For a brief background on USAID, see CRS In Focus IF10261, *U.S. Agency for International Development: An Overview*.

<sup>32</sup> *USAID Education Policy*, p. 8.

overseas missions in need of education-related technical assistance.<sup>33</sup> In 2020, in an effort to support the agency's *Education Policy*, the Center for Education issued *USAID Education Policy: Program Cycle Implementation and Operational Guidance*, which seeks to inform implementing partners about education assistance best practices and what is expected of them at each level of program planning and execution.<sup>34</sup> The center also runs *EducationLinks*, a web portal aimed at helping education practitioners "learn and share knowledge to create and implement successful, effective education and skills development programs."<sup>35</sup> In 2020, for example, the Center for Education, using the *EducationLinks* platform, ran a six-month *Global Education Learning Series* that covered various topics, including education interventions in the context of COVID-19, incorporating the private sector in education programming, and the importance of social and emotional learning in school curricula, among others.<sup>36</sup>

According to USAID, the agency reached more than 32 million children and youth in 51 countries with education interventions in FY2019.<sup>37</sup> For illustrative examples of USAID education programs, see "Selected Types of Education Activities" below.

## Peace Corps

The Peace Corps's education sector focuses on three project areas: (1) Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), (2) literacy, and (3) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). It also seeks to improve the community and school learning environment by establishing libraries, managing tutoring and/or mentorship programs, developing extracurricular activities, and incorporating gender- and disability-equitable teaching practices.<sup>38</sup>

In FY2019, 84% of Peace Corps posts had education components, and 44% (2,949) of Peace Corps Volunteers were Education Volunteers.<sup>39</sup> As with other sectors, Education Volunteers generally live and work in rural, underserved, or marginalized communities that may be less likely to receive trained teachers and school resources. All volunteers work with local counterparts; volunteer assignments often include teacher training.

## Millennium Challenge Corporation

MCC seeks to address partner countries' constraints to economic growth through projects developed in coordination with host governments.<sup>40</sup> In the education sector, MCC programs largely address education infrastructure as well as policy reforms and school operating environments.<sup>41</sup> For example, programs may rehabilitate educational facilities, establish or

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<sup>33</sup> DDI was established as part of former Administrator Mark Green's *Transformation* initiative. For a brief overview of *Transformation*, see the relevant section in CRS Report R46656, *Selected Trump Administration Foreign Aid Priorities: A Wrap-Up*.

<sup>34</sup> USAID, *USAID Education Policy: Program Cycle Implementation and Operational Guidance*, April 2020.

<sup>35</sup> For more on *EducationLinks*, see <https://www.edu-links.org/>.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the *Global Education Learning Series*, including to access learning modules and view recorded webinar sessions, see <https://www.edu-links.org/LearningSeries>.

<sup>37</sup> According to <https://www.usaid.gov/education>, accessed April 12, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Peace Corps, *The Peace Corps' Congressional Budget Justification Fiscal Year 2021*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> For more on MCC, see CRS Report RL32427, *Millennium Challenge Corporation: Overview and Issues*, by Nick M. Brown.

<sup>41</sup> *U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, Fiscal Years 2019-2023*, pp. 74-75.

strengthen schools' data management systems, or help local partners introduce new laws pertaining to education systems.

In FY2019, 13% of MCC compact funding was allocated to the Health, Education, and Community Services sector.<sup>42</sup> As of March 2020, MCC had reported over 291,000 student participants in its programs, nearly 63,000 graduates from MCC-supported education activities, and 844 completed education facilities since the agency's establishment in 2004. Two current MCC Compacts, with Côte D'Ivoire and Morocco, have education sector components.<sup>43</sup> Others in development may include education components, depending on the partner countries' identified constraints to economic growth.

## Other Agencies

Other U.S. government agencies also contribute to international education foreign assistance. Some directly contribute through program administration (as illustrated in **Figure 5**), such as the Department of State's administration of some education assistance for refugees and displaced persons through the Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. However, other agencies administer activities that are closely linked to education outcomes but are not categorized as education activities in foreign assistance reporting. For example, the Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs works to combat child labor and forced labor abroad and reestablish pipelines for children to attend school.<sup>44</sup> The Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service administers the McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, which provides school meals and maternal and child nutrition projects with the aim of both reducing hunger and improving literacy.<sup>45</sup> As these programs are not categorized as education in foreign assistance reporting, their funding is not counted toward basic or higher education allocations and their overall budgetary impact is challenging to capture.

## Selected Types of Education Activities

The U.S. government implements different types of education assistance activities, including programs focused on access, enrollment, and retention; curriculum development; teacher support; textbook and learning material development and distribution; workforce development; education management and policy; and school construction. Most education projects combine two or more of these elements to address a particular set of educational concerns in a developing country.

This section provides detail on each type of assistance activity, along with an illustrative example project administered by one of the U.S. agencies active in the education sector. The examples have been selected from different countries to demonstrate the broad geographic scope of activities, which is also illustrated in **Figure 6**.

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<sup>42</sup> MCC, *Congressional Budget Justification, FY2021*, pp. 35-36.

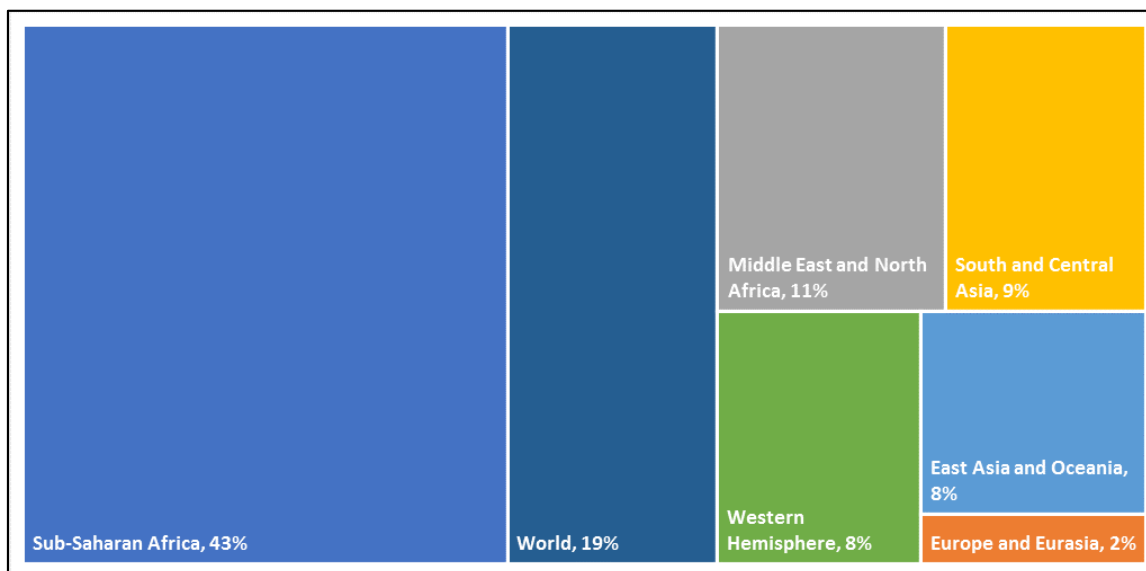
<sup>43</sup> As of June 4, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> For more, see <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab>.

<sup>45</sup> For more, see <https://www.fas.usda.gov/programs/mcgovern-dole-food-education-program>.



**Figure 6. FY2019 Regional Distribution of Education Assistance**  
(percentage of obligations)



**Source:** Graphic created by CRS using Foreign Aid Explorer Data.

**Notes:** World = assistance that may span regions or is not attributed to a specific region.

## Access, Enrollment, and Retention

As explained above (see “The Global Education Landscape” section), access, enrollment, and retention remain persistent challenges to international education outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated these challenges, leading many learners to shift to distance learning and others to lose access to education entirely—with a proportion of those expected to never return to school. Access to education, in particular, features prominently in the *U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education*, as well as in individual agency strategies and policies.

Development interventions to improve access to education and enrollment and retention levels depend on the country context. In some countries experiencing conflict, for example, consistent access to education may require additional investments in protection for children and youth attending school. This may be particularly applicable in low- and lower-middle-income countries. In low-income contexts, high school fees and other costs may prevent children from attending school. In such resource-constrained environments, parents may feel as though they must choose which of their children may attend school (if any), and often prioritize boys’ learning over that of girls.<sup>46</sup> As children advance in school and reach working age, in some countries, households may choose to send their children to work to contribute income to the household instead of attend school.

One example of a project that seeks to improve access to education, enrollment, and retention is USAID’s Accelerating Access and Learning (ACCELERE!1) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The program, funded in partnership with the United Kingdom aid agency and

<sup>46</sup> Prioritizing boys’ education over girls’ may also relate to a country’s social or cultural norms. However, it is challenging to quantitatively measure the potential effect of such norms on girls’ education.

implemented by Chemonics International, was launched in 2015 to reach 450,000 out-of-school children and improve student retention, among other goals.<sup>47</sup> The project in its planning identified a number of barriers to entry for DRC students, including expensive school fees, unsafe schools (particularly high levels of violence against girls), and large class sizes.<sup>48</sup> To address these barriers, the ACCELERE!1 project included a Back-to-School Campaign (in partnership with UNICEF) to encourage school attendance, trainings for school administrators and teachers on how to foster safe school environments, establishing Gender and Violence Monitoring Committees in schools, and launching a grants program to help households pay school fees, among others.<sup>49</sup>

## Curriculum Development

Curriculum development, along with teacher support and the development and distribution of textbooks and other learning materials (see the “Textbooks and Learning Materials Development and Distribution” section), aims to address the concern that even when children are in school, they may not be learning.<sup>50</sup> Curriculum development also often coincides with education management and policy development (see the “Education Management and Policy Reform” section), as curricula may be structured to meet nationally established education goals. Curriculum development activities may include technical assistance at the national or community level, as well as classroom and lesson planning with teachers, among other activities.

One example of a USAID-run project that included curriculum development was Afghan Children Read.<sup>51</sup> The project, which ran from FY2016 to FY2021, was developed in partnership with the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) to improve reading and writing outcomes for primary school children. Among other interventions, such as teacher training and community mobilization, the project developed an early grade reading (EGR) curriculum to support children in grades 1-3. The project developed a standardized syllabus to help guide teachers through instruction, provided translated materials to ensure students could learn in Pashto and Dari (the country’s two official languages), and created mechanisms such as assessments and review lessons to help teachers track students’ progress on a weekly basis. USAID and the MoE also sought ways to align the EGR curriculum with international standards for education by incorporating lessons learned from research conducted on reading and reading competencies in other countries.<sup>52</sup>

## Teacher Support

Teacher support is also an internationally recognized priority in the education sector; the *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action* states that signatories will “ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained,

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<sup>47</sup> USAID, *Education*, accessed April 13, 2021 at <https://www.usaid.gov/democratic-republic-congo/education>.

<sup>48</sup> Chemonics International Inc. and SIL LEAD Inc., *Report on Operations Research for ACCELERE! IL Rethinking the Partnership Model – A way to alleviate the school fee burden in DRC*, February 2018, pp. 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> USAID/Education Office, *Improving Reading, Access, and Accountability in the DRC (ACCELERE!) Activity 1, FY19 Annual Work Plan October 2018-September 2019*, December 3, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Nicholas Burnett, “International Education Policies, Issues, and Challenges,” in *Education, Learning, Training: Critical Issues for Development*, ed. Gilles Carbonnier, Michael Carton, Kenneth King (Brill, 2014), p. 30.

<sup>51</sup> Creative Associates International, Inc., *Afghan Children Read, Final Report*, USAID, Kabul, Afghanistan, March 5, 2021.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

professionally qualified, motivated and supported.”<sup>53</sup> Teacher support activities may include co-teaching to build classroom skills, providing social and emotional support for teachers through counseling and group workshops, offering pay incentives to reduce teacher absenteeism, and funding professional development and other training opportunities.

Many Peace Corps Volunteers, for example, work to build capacity among local educators. In Liberia, instead of being classroom-based, Peace Corps Response Volunteers<sup>54</sup> work with teachers outside the classroom to help teachers develop and hone various teaching skills (often referred to as a training of trainers approach).<sup>55</sup> One such volunteer worked with Liberian science teachers to incorporate more hands-on activities in the classroom through creating experiments that used local supplies (e.g., empty bottles and cans, baking soda packets, rubber sandals, toothpicks).<sup>56</sup> In Albania, volunteers focus education efforts on helping English teachers and instructors “improve their English language proficiency, teaching methods and resource development.”<sup>57</sup>

## Textbooks and Learning Materials Development and Distribution

In many developing countries, the cost of textbooks and other learning materials is high relative to local incomes, and the process for ordering and distributing books within countries and school systems may be inefficient or vulnerable to corruption. Even when books reach the classroom, they may be not be appropriate for the student population (e.g., not in the native language or at an unsuitable skill level). Activities to develop, print, and distribute textbooks and other learning materials range from translation efforts to ensure titles are in learners’ native languages to developing supply chains for secure, undamaged book deliveries.

One example of an effort to address challenges in textbook and learning materials development and distribution is USAID’s Global Book Alliance. The alliance was launched in 2016 with other international donors, including the United Kingdom, Norway, and the World Bank, to address the “global book gap,” or the “lack of level-appropriate books in languages children use and understand.”<sup>58</sup> The alliance has grown to include other international donors, nongovernmental organizations, and private sector partners. It has five primary initiatives:

- **The Book Chain**, which seeks to identify and resolve current obstacles in the book supply chain related to planning, development, publishing, distribution, and eventual use of books.
- **Global Digital Library**, an open-source library accessible to schools, donor agencies, implementing partners, publishers, distributors, parents, and children.
- **Results for All Children (REACH) Trust Fund**, a “results-based financing” grant program aimed at addressing deficiencies in the book chain.
- **Begin with Books Prize**, a competition in partnership with USAID’s *All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development* that incentivizes innovators to improve accessibility for those learning in underserved spoken and

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<sup>53</sup> UNESCO, *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4*, ED-2016/WS/28, Incheon, Republic of Korea, May 21, 2015, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> Unlike traditional two-year volunteers, Peace Corps Response Volunteer positions range from 3-12 month placements. Positions are identified based on a host country’s articulated needs.

<sup>55</sup> Peace Corps, *Projects in Liberia*, accessed April 14, 2021 at <https://www.peacecorps.gov/liberia/projects/>.

<sup>56</sup> Kristen Grauer-Gray, *Teaching teachers amplifies impact*, Peace Corps, April 9, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> Peace Corps, *Projects in Albania*, accessed April 14, 2021 at <https://www.peacecorps.gov/albania/projects/>.

<sup>58</sup> Global Book Alliance, *The Book Gap*, accessed April 14, 2021 at <https://www.globalbookalliance.org/the-book-gap>.

signed languages. Resources developed through Begin with Books Prizes are uploaded to the Global Digital Library to ensure broad distribution.

- **Support for Publishers**, or investments in local partners in an effort to ensure an effective supply of books, including those in neglected languages. By working closely with local partners, the Global Book Alliance aims to spur the creation of culturally appropriate titles and address current obstacles to local publishing.<sup>59</sup>

## Workforce Development

Some education programs seek to prepare graduates to enter the workforce and contribute economically to their households and communities.<sup>60</sup> While workforce development efforts have largely focused on helping students develop technical skills, many programs today also integrate soft skills (e.g., self-confidence, impulse control, critical thinking, respect for others). USAID notes that these integrated programs can equip young people with a set of skills that can be applied across a number of sectors and job types.<sup>61</sup>

One such example is found within MCC's Côte d'Ivoire compact, which entered into force on August 5, 2019. The compact identified "low levels of basic and technical and vocational skills" as one of four constraints to economic growth in the country and established the Skills for Employability and Productivity Project to address that constraint.<sup>62</sup> Among other interventions, such as teacher support and investment in school construction, the project includes the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Activity. The TVET Activity relies on training centers that are developed in partnership with private sector actors to help participants develop marketable skills, such as those related to STEM. To ensure the TVET Activity is achieving its intended results, the compact includes systems to track graduates' job placements as well as training center accreditations to ensure consistent quality in education.

## Education Management and Policy Reform

Educational systems are usually managed by national ministries of education or regional equivalents; accordingly, U.S. assistance may seek to help national and/or subnational governments to formulate education policies and strategies and build institutional capacity for effective implementation.

The USAID-funded Pakistan Reading Project has a number of interventions aiming to improve management of the country's educational system.<sup>63</sup> Primarily, these interventions focus on setting learning benchmarks and performance standards at the country- and provincial-levels, developing new (or supporting preexisting) assessment methods, and strengthening teacher support and accreditation systems. For example, one arm of the project aims to help provinces develop and

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<sup>59</sup> Information on all lines of effort accessed April 14, 2021 at <https://www.globalbookalliance.org/>.

<sup>60</sup> Workforce development programs may span sectors (e.g., private sector development and economic growth). This report approaches workforce development from the education perspective but this is but one approach to broader workforce development efforts in U.S. foreign assistance.

<sup>61</sup> USAID, *Exploring the Development of Cross-Sectoral Skills for Youth: Reflections from the Cross-Sectoral Skills Community of Practice*, March 2020.

<sup>62</sup> MCC, *Millennium Challenge Compact between the United States acting through the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire acting through the Ministry of Economy and Finances*, November 7, 2017, Annex I.

<sup>63</sup> USAID, *USAID-funded Pakistan Reading Project*, accessed April 15, 2021 at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200911001552/https://www.pakreading.org.pk/en/Reading%20Assessment%20Systems>.

implement reading improvement strategies to track local reading outcomes. Another seeks to train local policymakers and educators to utilize the National Education Assessment and Provincial Education Assessment Systems. These early grade reading assessments have been managed by USAID implementing partners, but the project aims to build local capacity in assessment management and data analysis so that policymakers and educators may use assessment results to inform teacher trainings, measure student progress, and improve reading outcomes without USAID's assistance.

## School Construction

School construction has been a component of U.S. education assistance for decades, supported by the notion that investment in school construction increases student enrollment and achievement.<sup>64</sup> The long history of school construction has also involved agencies outside the traditional foreign assistance providers, such as the Department of Defense (DOD).<sup>65</sup> Recent discussions surrounding school construction and/or rehabilitation projects have incorporated issues related to accessibility and inclusion. For example, the SDGs include “build[ing] and upgrad[ing] education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provid[ing] safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.”<sup>66</sup>

USAID's school construction project in Nepal helped rebuild facilities after a 2015 earthquake, with a particular focus on improving access for disabled learners. According to the agency, in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, USAID helped build 1,045 temporary learning centers for more than 93,000 students.<sup>67</sup> In 2017, USAID launched the Nepal Community Reconstruction Program, which included investment in disability-accessible reconstruction. In FY2019, the agency reported that it supported the Asian Development Bank in reconstructing 15 schools in earthquake-affected areas and provided 29 additional earthquake-affected schools with disability-accessible reconstruction support.<sup>68</sup>

### Education Activities as Means to Further Other Development Goals

Education activities, such as curriculum development and learning materials distribution, are not used only to achieve education outcomes; such activities may be used in a range of non-education sector projects to further other development goals. USAID, for example, uses education activities in the agriculture, food security, and health sectors, among many others. Often these activities are intended to achieve social and/or behavior change. For instance, a project may incorporate into a school's curriculum lessons on handwashing and latrine use to help

<sup>64</sup> For example, a USAID-proposed school construction program in Portugal in 1976 stated that “the construction program ... will enable a greater number of school-age children to have access to quality education and will enable the communities in which the schools are located to grow both socially and economically.” Department of State Agency for International Development, *Proposal and Recommendations for the Review of the Development Loan Committee*, Portugal - School Construction, AID-DLC/P-2160, May 18, 1976, p. 24.

A 1983 USAID school construction project in Oman cited similar justifications, noting that the construction of new schools would meet the increased demand for education in the country and would help further the country's rapid progress in the education sector. This was insinuated as particularly important as Oman offered English as a second language starting in the fourth grade, which was “the earliest level of introducing English within the Arab World.” USAID, *Oman School Construction Project*, 272-0103 Project Paper, July 13, 1983, pp. 2-7.

<sup>65</sup> For example, Sgt. Ian Leones, *U.S. Marines complete school projects in Honduras*, Marine Corps Forces South, October 16, 2017, at <https://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/1343690/us-marines-complete-school-projects-in-honduras/>.

<sup>66</sup> SDG 4.a at <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>.

<sup>67</sup> USAID, *Nepal Fact Sheet Education Program*, 2017.

<sup>68</sup> USAID, *Disability-Inclusive Programming 2019 Snapshot of USAID Activities in Education*, January 2021.

eradicate open defecation and adopt stronger hygiene practices in a community.<sup>69</sup> Another project may seek to address child marriage and adolescent pregnancy through school-based interventions that address the societal norms that drive child marriage and teach girls about the health benefits of delaying the first pregnancy,<sup>70</sup> while a third project may organize school-based cleanups and establish student environmental committees to reduce the spread of disease.<sup>71</sup>

In instances such as the examples above, a project is not considered to be in the education sector and its funding is not counted toward basic education or higher education allocations. It is therefore challenging to quantify how many non-education sector projects might include education interventions and how budgetary and other resources might be used to administer and support such activities.

## Issues for Congress

Education sector foreign assistance programming has received broad bipartisan congressional support, as evidenced by consistent funding for such programs in annual appropriations measures during successive Congresses. The following issues related to oversight, funding, and project implementation may be of particular interest to some Members of Congress as they consider education assistance policies and appropriations.

### Congressional Oversight of Education Sector Programming

As with other foreign assistance sectors, Members of Congress remain interested in ensuring that education sector programming is achieving intended development goals, and Congress has set a number of reporting requirements for education assistance. Assessing the sector as a whole may raise difficulties, however, as none of these reports offers a comprehensive view of all U.S. education programming.

At a broad level, agencies that administer U.S. foreign assistance in the education sector are required to produce the following two overarching reports:

- Annual Report on the Implementation of the *U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education*: Required by the READ Act (P.L. 115-56) 180 days after the end of each fiscal year of the strategy (currently through FY2023).
- Annual Report on the Implementation of the Global Child Thrive Act Strategy: Required by the Global Child Thrive Act (P.L. 116-283) to be incorporated into the annual report required under section 5 of the Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries Act of 2005 (22 U.S.C. §2152g).

Notably, neither report captures comprehensive information about higher education programming—which, while constituting a smaller share of U.S. education programming relative to basic education activities, has been a congressionally directed component of U.S. education assistance since FY2009. Higher education constitutes an average of 21% of annual U.S. education assistance appropriations.

Separate from the above annual reports, annual appropriations measures often include provisions that outline consultation and/or reporting requirements that pertain to specific aspects of

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, USAID, *Initiative for Hygiene, Sanitation, and Nutrition (IHSAN) Afghanistan – Project Final Report*, August 11, 2020.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, USAID, *The NGO Health Service Delivery Project 2012-2018 Final Report*, May 2018.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, USAID, *Zika Community Response Project (ZICORE) Final Activity Report USAID Zika Program, September 30, 2016 to September 29, 2019*, March 5, 2020.

education sector programming. The final FY2021 appropriation (P.L. 116-260, Div. K), for example, included a number of consultation and reporting requirements in the education sector:

- The act provides not less than \$35 million for new and ongoing partnerships between U.S. higher education institutions and those in developing countries and requires that the USAID Administrator consult with the appropriations committees on the proposed uses of funds for such partnerships within 45 days of the bill's enactment.
- The bill directs the establishment of an endowment for higher education institutions in Afghanistan and directs the USAID Administrator to produce an annual report on the endowment's expenditure of funds. The Joint Explanatory Statement (JES) also directs that the Administrator consult with the Appropriations Committees on the endowment's establishment.
- The JES directs the USAID Administrator to consult with the appropriations committees on basic education programs for South Sudan within 90 days of enactment.
- The JES directs the USAID Administrator to consult with the appropriations committees on contributions to the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait to "ensure adequate monitoring, evaluation, effectiveness, and sustainability of programs."

Through regular notification requirements outlined in annual appropriations, Congress also can gain insight into education programming at the project level. Per the requirements, administering agencies must notify the Appropriations and Foreign Affairs/Relations Committees 15 days prior to obligating funds for "programs, projects, activities, type[s] of materiel assistance, countries, or other operations not justified or in excess of the amount justified."<sup>72</sup> This notification structure offers Congress the opportunity to review and shape particular decisions in the sector as administering agencies consider potential projects. After obligation, Members of Congress and their staff are able to access project-specific funding levels using [foreignassistance.gov](http://foreignassistance.gov) or USAID's Foreign Aid Explorer, and project reports through individual agencies (USAID, for example, maintains the Development Experience Clearinghouse [DEC] as a repository for project documents). Congress may also request audits and investigations from the Government Accountability Office and respective agency Inspectors General.

Congress receives various reports from the broad strategy level down to project-level obligations. However, while USAID's *Education Policy* includes higher education, there is no comprehensive report on higher education programming, nor one report that captures the entirety of education sector programming, as exists in some foreign assistance sectors.<sup>73</sup> Congress may consider whether or not the current reporting and notification structure meets its oversight needs and what changes, if any, may be necessary.

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<sup>72</sup> Congress receives some sector-specific information in annual Congressional Budget Justifications (CBJ) and country-specific allocations information in annual 653(a) reports (for more on the 653(a) report, see CRS In Focus IF11515, *U.S. Foreign Assistance: Budget Development and Execution*, by Nick M. Brown). Congressional notifications may therefore reference justification provided in the CBJ or allocations detailed in the 653(a) report.

<sup>73</sup> For example, USAID produces an annual report on Biodiversity Conservation and Forestry Programs Results and Funding. As another example, Congress receives two annual reports that together cover all U.S.-provided international food assistance: the International Food Assistance Report (IFAR) and the Emergency Food Security Program report.

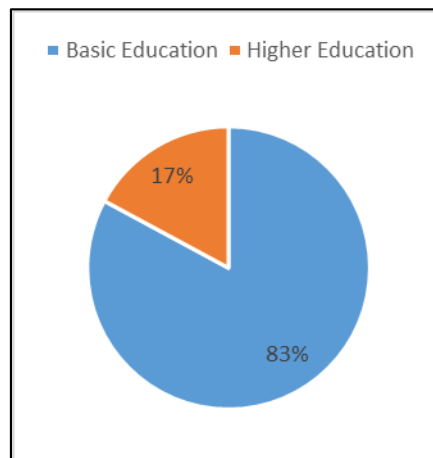
## Historical Focus on Basic Education

Congress may consider how it balances basic education and higher education priorities in both authorizing legislation and annual appropriations. The majority of recent legislation focused on the foreign assistance education sector has centered on basic education, which has accounted for 83% of appropriated funds for U.S. education sector assistance since FY2000 (**Figure 7**).

Development practitioners have long debated the merits to investing in basic versus higher education. One regularly cited argument from the 1980s, for example, was that in a majority of development contexts, basic education offered a greater return on investment when compared with higher education.<sup>74</sup> In countries with low primary school enrollments, the analysts argued, “expanding primary education or possibly raising its quality would yield the highest social payoff.”<sup>75</sup> Based on that analysis, some experts recommended reallocating government spending from higher education to basic education. The focus on basic education continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with universal primary education comprising one of eight goals under the U.N. MDGs.<sup>76</sup>

Others have increasingly advocated for investment in higher education. In 1998, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) convened the first World Conference on Higher Education, which stated that “the solution of the problems faced on the eve of the twenty-first century will be determined by the vision of the future society and by the role that is assigned to education in general and to higher education in particular.”<sup>77</sup> The conference also set a Framework for Priority Action for Change and Development in Higher Education, which emphasized equitable access to higher education, ensuring linkages between primary, secondary, and higher education; international cooperation among higher education institutions; and incorporating new technologies, among others. Today, the World Bank argues that the benefits to investing in higher education include “higher employment levels (lower levels of underemployment), higher wages, greater social stability, increased civil engagement, better health outcomes, and more.” It further argues that “brain drain and talent loss,” as well as “limitation to economic growth due to low levels of skills in the workforce,” may be a result of underinvestment in higher education systems.<sup>78</sup>

**Figure 7. Total Basic Education and Higher Education Appropriations, FY2000-FY2021**



**Source:** Graphic created by CRS using Annual Foreign Operations Appropriations (FY2000-FY2007); Annual Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations (FY2008-FY2021).

<sup>74</sup> George Psacharopoulos et al., *Financing Education in Developing Countries: An Exploration of Policy Options*, World Bank, Washington, DC, July 1986.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>76</sup> For more on the Millennium Development Goals, see <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/education.shtml>.

<sup>77</sup> UNESCO, UNESCO, *World Conference on Higher Education: Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century Vision and Action*, Volume 1: Final Report, Paris, October 9, 1998.

<sup>78</sup> World Bank, *Higher Education*, March 10, 2021, at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation>.



Congress has increased investment in higher education, more than doubling the amount appropriated for higher education assistance between FY2009 and FY2021. During that same period the investment in basic education assistance rose by 21%. However, the amount of funding for basic education continues to dwarf that of higher education: in FY2021, Congress appropriated \$950 million for basic education and \$285 million for higher education. Congress may consider whether this balance of resources is sufficient to address its priorities and developing countries' needs, or if the levels should be reexamined in future appropriations cycles.<sup>79</sup>

## Technology and Innovation in Education Assistance

Some Members of Congress have shown interest in the types of interventions employed in the education sector, with some arguing for greater use of technology and innovation. As Congress considers legislation on the sector and conducts related oversight, Members may seek more information on where new technology and innovations have been used in the sector; how, if at all, they have affected project outcomes; and whether or not they may have application in additional country or regional contexts.

The adoption of new technologies and innovations is widely supported by the development community, with some development experts having criticized the education sector for “largely doing things the way they have always been done, with insufficient innovation and adaptation to modern economies and societies.”<sup>80</sup> However, some practitioners warn that technology and innovation cannot be treated as a silver bullet or employed without support. Rather, they argue that new interventions should be used judiciously to solve specific “micro-problems” within the sector and that any technology should be tested prior to deployment and then be accompanied by training, monitoring, and maintenance as needed.<sup>81</sup> Others warn that relying on new technologies such as those employed for distance learning may inadvertently increase inequality in educational achievement, as the poorest of the poor may not have access to reliable (or any) electricity, internet, learning materials, and learning support.<sup>82</sup> As observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, complete reliance on distance learning, even for those with complete access to reliable resources, can result in poorer outcomes as both students and teachers benefit greatly from in-person interaction.<sup>83</sup>

The incorporation of new technology and innovation into the education sector has been of particular interest in the COVID-19 pandemic context. As discussed earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant setbacks in the education sector. However, some analysts argue that project adaptations made in response to the pandemic may offer opportunities for implementing partners to incorporate lessons learned into future programming. There are some indications that the expanded distance learning interventions required in the pandemic may

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<sup>79</sup> For example, some countries that deliver higher education may not need U.S. funds to expand such services, while other countries may need to further build basic and secondary education achievement before setting sights on higher education outcomes. USAID maintains that foreign assistance must be context specific; some may argue that higher education interventions do not suit all country contexts.

<sup>80</sup> See, for example, Nicholas Burnett, “International Education Policies, Issues, and Challenges,” p. 31.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, David K. Evans, *Education Technology for Effective Teachers*, Center for Global Development, Teachers Thematic Group, World Bank, February 2021, February 16, 2021.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, UNICEF, “Unequal access to remote schooling amid COVID-19 threatens to deepen global learning crisis,” press release, June 4, 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Tim Walker, *How ‘Zoom Fatigue’ Impacts Communication With Students*, National Education Association, October 16, 2020.

continue to see broad application in the post-pandemic context: USAID, for example, has launched an Audio and Radio Instruction Online Library<sup>84</sup> for implementing partners and has indicated that it is currently working on a Toolkit for Designing and Planning a Distance Learning Strategy that is meant to inform long-term distance learning projects.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> For more, see <https://www.edu-links.org/distance-learning-interactive-audio-and-radio-online-library>.

<sup>85</sup> USAID, *A Roadmap for Measuring Distance Learning: A Review of Evidence and Emerging Practices*, January 2021, p. v.