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MEET THE MENTOR—Teachers as Role Models for SDG 4

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Speaker: **Julia Gillard**, Chair, Global Partnership for Education

Facilitated by: **Nivine Afioni**, Chief Sub Editor, SkyNews Arabia, UAE

Summary Paragraph

How is GPE partnering with teachers to meet the objectives set in SDG4? What information do teachers need the most to improve the quality of learning in the classrooms? In 2015, the Global Partnership for Education adopted SDG4 on education as its vision, and used it as the building block for its 5-year strategy to build stronger education systems in developing countries. As a global fund, GPE partners with teacher organizations to improve the quality of learning in their classrooms and to share best practice. Based on the work done so far, how optimistic is GPE that the objectives set in SDG4 will be met? Is implementation on track, and is it having real social impact?

Keywords: SDG4

Key Points

Ms. Gillard began by advocating for education being a central, if not *the* central, pillar of the Sustainable Development Goals, saying that if the world continues on its current path, “half of the youth generation of 2030 will not have the capacities of year 10 education. It’s a staggering waste of human potential. Beyond that, we know that low education levels are correlated with joblessness, low economic growth, high conflict levels, civil disruption, migration, and lower health outcomes. For example, a girl with no secondary education is more likely to have HIV, marry younger and have more children. If we are prepared to accept that world, we will accept a world where people are poorer, less healthy, conflict is more widespread, and people movement is bigger. If we look at today’s world and how perspectives are being reshaped by migration and





conflict, imagine the world of 2030. Education is a shared agenda if we want to live in a peaceful, prosperous, stable world.”

She then articulated the philosophy behind her dedication to education throughout her political career: “I always said education cannot wait because every child only gets one opportunity to be a child. 260 million children are not receiving an education currently. Every day that goes by is a day lost. It’s incumbent on all of us to bring a sense of urgency to this problem.”

During her time in office, she stated that she tried to hold government to account, making funding transparent, taking into account differences in socio economic status, and trying to find reasons for underperformance.

As Minister of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, she was able to bring what she called the ‘human capital agenda’ together, from early childhood education to post-secondary and labour conditions, which enabled her to visualize education as a life-long process.

After leaving her post as Australian Prime Minister, Ms. Gillard realized that an interest in the politics of opportunity and particularly education was a life-long interest for her, and took on the position of Chair of the Global Partnership for Education, the only organization solely devoted to improving school education in developing countries. GPE awards funding on a leverage model, where countries increase their own education expenditure to be able to access funds. Needs are high, and they aim to raise 3.1 billion dollars at their next funding conference.

Ms. Gillard said that she was impressed by the thoughtfulness of the UAE schooling agenda, characterized by its ‘restlessness’ to keep looking for improvements. “The system has kept up with massive changes, population growth, as well as external pressures and technological growth,” she said.

Asked where the starting point for transformation in education can be found, Ms. Gillard stated, “you do need governments involved if you are going to take innovations to scale. Often you see innovations at the edge, around individual teachers, or individual schools where magic happens. But to create change for children in the hundreds of millions, we have to find the right way of looking how to upscale that. And government has to be a partner.”

“Leaders should see themselves as responsible for the education of every child in your geographical area,” she said, in response to a question about the right ratio of public and private schooling. “Different nations have always made different decisions about for-profit or non-profit schooling, but governments have a responsibility for oversight, regulation and ensuring adherence.”





“Ultimately, government budgets are about choices. Spending on education is doable, because you do create a virtuous cycle where a more educated population means more economic growth, which allows for more money for education.”

In less developed countries, populations are overwhelmingly skewed toward youth, which has been called the ‘demographic dividend.’ Ms. Gillard cautioned against undue optimism, saying, “demographic dividends could pay off, but only if the younger generation is educated properly.” The good news, however, is that “for a country that is still building secondary school systems, such as Malawi, it is possible to leapfrog over stages of development of Western countries.”

As for what teachers need the most, Ms. Gillard said that “teachers need each other. Collaboration is key. While technology matters, teaching is about relationships and human beings. We need to bolster the dialogue about the status of teaching, how important it is, and how to augment pay to retain the brightest in the profession.”

Julia Gillard: Access to education for all the world's children is the central, defining issue of our time, and will impact the world for decades to come.

