

Eradicating Poverty through Education

Submitted by: IDP Foundation Inc.
NGO in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC of the United Nations

As of January 1, 2016, the United Nations and its 193 Member States officially ushered in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a global agenda to end poverty by the year 2030. Made up of 17 goals that focus on a variety of initiatives like gender equality, health, and education, these goals recognize that social and environmental issues are interconnected and affect everyone in our global community.

For the IDP Foundation, an organization dedicated to supporting the development of innovative and sustainable solutions to complex global issues, many of the SDGs have found their way to the epicenter of the education work we implement. Through our keystone IDP Rising Schools Program – developed in Ghana as a model for improving educational infrastructure in existing low-fee private schools that serve the poor – we have set out to eradicate poverty through education by assisting in the development of improved learning environments. As outlined in UNESCO’s 2014 report “Sustainable Development Begins with Education”, accessible quality education is essential to achieving all of the Goals, including poverty: by increasing income, offering better livelihoods, and reducing chronic poverty.

When it comes to education reform, success is impossible without government cooperation. Governments must understand the benefits of a well-educated populace and commit to making improvements to systems already in place. This is an understandably daunting task. The Rising Schools Program serves as a reminder that, instead of building new infrastructure, governments can leverage the cost-savings that comes with identifying policies needed to support and improve existing schools. In 2016, the IDP Foundation signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ghana Education Service (GES) to train teachers that have participated in the Rising Schools Program training, while using GES structures, such as in-service education and training, to do so. An agreement such as this infuses new teaching techniques within an already-functioning system. A stronger education system is good for a country’s bottom line, as it produces industrious talent that will improve the national economy.

Beyond government partnerships, public-private partnerships and partnerships with other non-governmental organizations allow for a merging of institutional knowledge and resources, leading to catalytic change. Our partnership with Sesame Workshop in Ghana has yielded teacher training videos and resources that help teachers feel more confident with a curriculum that encourages structured play over rote memorization. Again, new methods are introduced to existing structure, strengthening them as a result. Furthermore, collaboration between organizations allows for a leveraging of knowledge; in this case, Sesame Workshop contributes their understanding of how children learn best, and we contribute our understanding of the Ghanaian school system. No one organization is large enough to address the shortcomings of the education system, or ultimately end poverty, for that matter. Working as a team magnifies impact.

The Education Commission’s latest report “The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World” highlights the need for education reform. The urgency to enact changes to

education systems becomes clear when considering their estimation that only one out of 10 young people will be on track to gain basic secondary-level skills in low-income countries in 2030. However, the report asserts that within one generation, all young people could be in school if global development partners rally to transform academic performance, classroom innovation, inclusion, and smart financing.

We know these transformations to be spot-on, given the fact that the IDP Foundation's work aligns with the recommendations espoused in the report. The Foundation, along with the Foreign Policy Association, recently co-hosted The Irene D. Pritzker/IDP Foundation Distinguished Lecture on Social and Economic Development in the ECOSOC chamber, where the Right Honorable Gordon Brown, the chair of the International Commission of Financing Global Education Opportunity, spoke on the report's findings, suggestions and potential solutions. He remarked that "what destroys hope amongst children is their inability... to have hope about the future, because they are denied the very human right that is so important, and that is the right to education."

Education begets hopeful, empowered individuals, who go on to empower and change their communities, innovate, and impact the world. In order to tackle the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals, the global community needs enterprising minds at work, across every sector. With widespread cooperation to ensure that quality education is accessible to all, the number of impoverished people can be lessened, and the cycle broken.