Jonathan Pryke Interview with Alice Albright  
CEO of the Global Partnership for Education

**Jonathan:** If you'd just please introduce yourself and give us a background of your CV.

**Alice:** My name is Alice Albright. And I'm currently the Chief Executive Officer of the Global Partnership for Education. I've been there for about a year and a quarter. It's been a great pleasure and an honor to work there so far. Before that, I've had a number of different jobs in and around the development space. I worked for the first term of the Obama Administration as the Chief Operating Officer of our Export Accrediting Agency called ExIm Bank, Export-Import Bank for long. Before that I worked at GAVI for 8 years from nearly its beginning to well into 2009 and saw many changes there in the global health space and its role that it performed. And before that I was a banker.

**Jonathan:** That's a great pedigree to be running the GPE. If you would like to move on from that and just provide more background about the goals of the Global Partnership for Education, and how you work to achieve them.

**Alice:** Sure. GPE is a unique organization. We are the only global partnership that is of this magnitude in the basic education space. And we work with the 59 poorest countries in the world. That number is likely to go up to 66 in the coming years. And we do basically 3 things.

First of all, we help the governments in those countries deliver education better. And we help them put in place the policy frameworks and all the different pieces around that necessary to help them deliver education better. And we're talking about basic education, which is primary and lower secondary school.

We also help them finance it. This is the second thing that we do. We provide grant funding that is significant to many of these countries. And we also help them better align the other resources that they have, the other aid resources from other bilateral and other players, and also their own domestic budgets. And in aligning all of the funding, we think that it makes all of it more effective, it reduces transaction costs.

And the third thing we do is advocacy. We do a significant amount of advocacy at the global level, which at the moment is very important as we try to make sure that the education goals are front and center heading into post-2015. We also do a lot of advocacy at the local level in countries working with civil society organizations to help put up a mirror and add transparency to how education is going in these countries, which we think is a very valuable source of feedback for the governments.

**Jonathan:** Other global funds and partnerships and other vertical funds have tended to be formed to address more trans-boundary problems. The Global Environment Facility is an obvious example of that type of fund. What's the rationale for establishing a global fund for education, which appears to be addressing a development problem which is purely national in scope?

**Alice:** It's an interesting question when you compare them. I can't say I know that much about the Global Environment Fund even though they're our neighbors and they sit downstairs from us and they've got lots of very nice people there.
But I don’t - I can’t say that I know a ton about their business. I know much more about GAVI and I know a little about the Fund for Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Alice:

But here’s the way I think about it. First of all comparing them all is very interesting, and someone should write a very interesting book (maybe I’ll do this at some point) about what led to the creation of all of these funds relative to some of the traditional aid organizations, dating back now in some cases 10-15 years ago. GAVI was created in - it started out in bits and pieces from ’99 to 2000, the global fund, around the same thing. And I think the Global Environment Facility perhaps a few years earlier. We were created in 2002.

So I think that would be a very - that’s the first question - why are all these things being started? And I think that the broad answer is that the communities felt as if a specific focus on these key areas was something that would be valuable working alongside of the traditional players.

Now going down a level in terms of what differentiates them. It’s important to understand that the problems they’re all solving are different types of problems. So in order to understand why they’re all structured in different ways, you’ve got to ask yourself, what’s the nature of the problem, and how does that differentiate? And then that should inform why the funds are different.

So I would not go about it and say, that’s a vertical fund, that’s a vertical fund, and they’re different for these reasons. Understand the problem. So the one I know best is GAVI because I worked there for 8 years. So GAVI is focused toward encouraging the faster availability of a global good, which is called a vaccine. And then the production of that good faster, getting through the R&D part of that process faster, which is a huge challenge there, because the diseases in the developing world are different and require specific strands of the vaccine to address specific strands of the disease. And that’s a long conversation which we could have separately.

And then having that product being made on a global basis in large quantities such that it can be sold at very low prices effectively over years to come. And so it’s basically driven by the better creation and delivery of a global good, with emphasis on the word good.

Education is different. It is the better delivery of a local service, which is quite local. And it’s not just the 59 federal levels of these countries that we work with. There are many states within big federal environments. So if you look at Nigeria, Pakistan, for example, those are enormous countries that have many states. And actually education in those countries is the responsibility of the state, not so much the federal government.

And then in the states you have provincial level, district level, village level - I mean there’s almost an infinite number of organizations that we have to work with. And we talk about the delivery of a local service. So because that is so different, we structure ourselves differently than the others do.
Now our work is not just about the money. The money is a part of it. And we deploy at the moment call it $350-$400M a year. That number is going to go up in 2014 and will go up from there. But if you look at the needs in education that have been articulated in for some example the Global Monitoring Report that was just recently issued by UNESCO, the needs in education are between $26-$35B a year. So our money, we’re looking to raise $3.5B now, is a percentage of the problem, but not all of the problem.

So we are not just about the money. What we are really about is helping governments put in place a good education sector plan, which is sort of a more technical term for a good education game plan. When I’m talking to people on general terms, I say the governments need a good education game plan, which includes good policy, good focus on all the things that are really key drivers, a good way of really getting girls into schools, a good approach on curriculum development, on teacher training, on getting the right answers to the questions about language of instruction, a good approach on how do you finance it in a way that’s sustainable, a good sense of answers about the best way to work with the private sector.

They need a good game plan. That’s the first thing they need. And these are game plans that last 5-10 years. So these are substantial planning documents in their progress forward.

The second thing we help them working on is funding. We provide our own funding. We’re very happy to be able to do that. It’s now moving in a much more results-based way than it perhaps had been in the past. We also get all the other players together to endorse the government’s game plan. And endorse means fund it. So what you’re doing is you’re getting all the money to march in the same direction. And - and this is absolutely critical - we get the government to increase the amount of money that they’re putting into their own education plan. One of the biggest indicators about whether or not a government is really prioritizing education is what percentage of their domestic resources they’re putting into it. And once a country joins GPE, the amount of money they put in goes up. And we’ve measured that.

And on average, once a country joins GPE, the amount of money that they put in goes up by 10 percentage point as measured against a percentage of GDP. And so that’s a big number.

Jonathan: That’s a great multiplier.

Alice: That’s a great number. Right. The reason we think all of this is so important, and we’ll talk why education is important in a second. But the reason why our whole process is very compelling is our goal is to help all the money that’s being deployed by taxpayers, whether that’s taxpayers in the developing countries who put money into their governments through their own domestic budgets, or ODA money, we want taxpayer money to be spent better. That’s our goal - through education.
So that's our process. And that's, so if you understand it's all about local delivery, then you can get a better understanding about the GPE model. We spend probably a larger percentage of our time working on asking the question ‘does the whole sector work well?’ than perhaps what GAVI and the Global Fund do. GAVI and the Global Fund are great organizations and they do terrific work, and I know a lot of the people there really well.

They have to work on whether or not a part of the health sector works well. So GAVI for example works a lot on whether or not the cold chain and the clinic infrastructure is good enough to make sure the vaccine is delivered to all the places they need to get to cold. And that the right national agency architectures are in place and so forth. But it's a part of the health sector.

For us, it's about the whole education sector. That's why this whole policy dialogue piece is so critical. And then we fund as much of it as we can.

Now let's talk about education for a second. Why is it so important to talk about education? Education transforms societies. That's the bottom line. Whether or not you're talking about basic education, tertiary education, secondary education, vocational education, university, teacher training, it transforms societies. And there are all kinds of numbers you can look at to try and get a better handle on that. And you all being a think tank will have good access to all of that.

But we think if all the children who aren't getting basic skills out of basic education levels, if you develop those schools, you can estimate that poverty will go down by 12%. That's a huge increase. People will be far better prepared for jobs. They'll be far better able to contend with all the different challenges in their countries. Health indicators will go up.

So there's all kinds of very positive knock-on effects from educating people.

Jonathan: So my next question is bringing us back to the Australian context. Australia is a major contributor to the GPE, having committed $270M to your last replenishment round, the second largest contribution to that replenishment.

As we discussed before, we're now in a considerably different fiscal and government environment particularly with regards to the aid program. And I understand you're here for the next round of replenishment to take place in July. How are you making the case to the Australian government for an equally generous contribution this time around?

Alice: Well first of all the replenishment's in June, just to get that correct.

Jonathan: Excuse me.

Alice: That's okay. I just want to get that date corrected. I mean, first of all I want to warmly thank the Australian government for their generosity to us over the years. They've been one of our best and strongest partners, not only in terms of their financial contributions to us, which are considerable, but also their engagement.
We work very, very closely with DFAT. We work very closely with Chris Tinning, who is the Minister Counselor based in Washington, and he gets engaged in all kinds of aspects of our work. He’s always available to us. He knows an enormous amount, and we’re very grateful. So we’re just very pleased with the relationship.

And we are here to talk to them now about our replenishment. We are very eager to hear, to learn more about what foreign minister and others here at DFAT think about aid. I think we have a reasonably good handle on that, but I think after our meetings tomorrow we’ll have a good sense of that.

We will absolutely be talking to them about how they can continue to work with us during the next replenishment. And we’re optimistic about all of that. And we think that the way the GPE works I think continues to have resonance with how this government is thinking forward about its own development policy and particular to some of the countries in the Indo-Pacific area.

We are very, very committed to the Indo-Pacific area. We think that in particular will continue to make GPE a strong partner for this government.

Jonathan: On the topic of replenishment, in your last replenishment round, you aimed - and this was before your tenure - You aimed for between $1.75 and $2.5B. And this is just from information I’m gaining from your website, so you might want to correct me. And I remember reading you received close to $2B from that replenishment.

Why do you think you achieved towards the lower end of the target that you had set in that replenishment?

Alice: I wasn’t [at GPE at the time], so I can’t comment on it. From what I understand I think they did a super job trying to reach the targets they reached. It was the first replenishment the GPE had. And I think they did a great job.

We will, with this replenishment we have - you know, each replenishment, just to understand what the process is, it’s sort of it’s own little world unto itself, replenishments. And even the word replenishment, what it really means is a re-capitalization.

It is a terrific opportunity for organizations like ours, and GAVI and the global find may share the same view, to take a really hard look at the way that you work. Are you doing it in the best possible way? How does it need to be changed? Are you messaging it well? Are you being relevant to the overall aid ambitions, policies, approaches of all of your underlying donors? And is the way that you work relevant and value-added for your developing country partners?

And because we are so, our work is so intimately tied to local delivery, working with our developing country partner governments - I cannot emphasize enough how important that is. They are in the driver’s seat. They are delivering education every day. So we have to help them and really pursue the policies that they think are important.
But I think this replenishment opportunity for us has been a remarkable opportunity. Not easy. Every five seconds, I mean we’ve had a lot of all nighters. A lot of long airplane rides. A lot of anguish about, oh my gosh! Are we getting this right?

But it has been a remarkable opportunity. I mean, the feedback that I was getting early on when I got here was that we needed to try to sharpen up the results track record of GPE. One of the challenges in education is that you don’t see results within an 18-month or 2-year period of time. The typical parliamentary, legislative, congressional cycle in the world is 2’ish years. And some endeavors, like GAVI and the Global Fund (particularly GAVI) are able to show results in a short period of time like that, because once you deliver the vaccines, and you know that the vaccine is cold and has been administered properly and all that, you know that the job’s done.

In education, it’s longer. So we have a particular challenge in education to not let that longer results cycle become a deterrent to supporting it. So we have to be ever more clever about how do we understand that, how do we communicate that, etc.

So we were getting feedback that we needed to sharpen up the results track record and the work of GPE. And we took - I brought my team together in late November. And I said, you guys, are we going to be in a position to step up here and really change how we do our funding model? And we all said, alright. We’re going to go for it.

And within literally a less than 100-day period of time, we worked like, I mean my colleagues worked incredible hours, with all of our partners on our Board of countries and so forth, to put together a whole new funding model. And they did it. And they got far farther than anybody expected. And what they did was put in place our version of a results-based model that we think is well-tailored to the education space. And it takes many of the aspects of results-based finance models and other areas in the aid world and it tries to tailor it to what we think makes sense.

Our Board approved it in February. So that’s a huge thing to accomplish in a very short period of time. It has now become sort of the underpinning of our replenishment. And our whole investment case is built around what we hope this new model will do for us. I can give you - I have it in my bag, just a little pamphlet that summarizes the investment case, the funding model, the results framework, etc. I’ll show that to you.

So the replenishment has been a remarkable opportunity for us to really ask ourselves are we doing our work in the most effective way, and what can we do to change it so that we can make sure that what the resources that we are hoping to garner from the international community over the next 4 years plus all the money that will be put in by the development country partners, that we are using all of those resources in the most effective way.

**Jonathan:** And this year you are aiming for $3.5B. That’s a significant increase - from last time around. I think you’ve addressed a lot of the points of my follow up question of what is different about GPO from the last replenishment. What makes you expect to get $3.5B over $2.5B?
Alice: Well let’s talk about that. First of all, it is a mistake to sort of do an apples to apples type of comparison between where we were with the last replenishment and where we are now. With the last replenishment there had been a number of terrific advancements put in place. Namely there was, I think if I’m not mistaken in my understanding of the history, there was a rebranding of GPE, there was a construction of the Board to make it more of a constituency type approach.

So I think there was some great work that had been done in the run up to that replenishment. We are now in a different place building on all of that good work. First of all, one thing to understand in terms of the numbers is that when GPE was started in 2002, we had 7 developing country partners with whom we work; we now have 59. So the trajectory upward has been huge, and the demand on GPE money has just been grow-grow-grow. And part of that reflects the fact that many countries like the way that we work with them, which we've already talked about.

So the footprint is not the same. We’re funding a larger footprint. The model that we’re funding is a different type of funding model, so that’s another reason why the footprint is not the same. The centrality of education to development outcomes is also not the same. People are really beginning to realize that education is not just one of many services that a government has to deliver alongside a bunch of other ones. It’s absolutely core to the efficacy of every other thing that governments need to do, because having an educated population is a night and day difference when thinking about how to best service a population and a society.

So people have come to realize that education is special in terms of the role that it plays in helping build society, build prosperity, eradicate poverty, and so forth. And yes, is $3.5B a reach? Of course, it's a reach. But why would we not want to reach? The issue is so urgent, and the other thing we haven’t even talked about is what’s happening in terms of education funding globally within ODA. ODA has been going down, although for the first time in recent years, last year started tailing up again, thank goodness. But the trend beforehand was not so good.

Now, ODA for education has fallen precipitously. It has gone down 5% a year, on average, since 2010, I believe it is. Either 2009 or 2010. And within ODA education as a percentage of overall ODA is not very high to begin with. I think it's like 7-8%. And we haven’t even talked about this at all - we haven’t talked about fragile states - but within humanitarian funding, education only gets 1.4% of total humanitarian funding. 1.4 - it’s like practically nothing.

And 40% of our work is in fragile state. 40%. So we work in places like the Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the DRC, South Sudan. Since I’ve been at GPE, I’ve been in South Sudan, the DRC, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. And I’ve seen the role that education can play in terms of really stabilizing those countries. And we're increasingly focusing on - with all the - unfortunately there's a long and growing list of emergency humanitarian conflict situations to work on, unfortunately. But another reason why our footprint is growing is needing to serve those types of environments and the realization that education has an enormous role to play in settling down those situations.
Jonathan: Okay, just on education, in the Pacific in particular, there is a huge role that the civil society plays, particularly the church-based groups play in the delivery of basic services, particularly education. How does GPE work with partner recipient governments to include these other out of government service providers of education?

Alice: It's an interesting question. You're right to frame it in terms of our work with governments. Governments are in the driver's seat. And you're also right to point out that in many countries the faith-based organizations have a huge role to play. If you look at some key countries - the DRC for example, which is obviously not in the Pacific, but it's an example that comes to mind - faith-based organizations provide as much as 70% of the school activities there. The same thing is true in Haiti.

So what we hear from governments is that governments want the flexibility to be able to work with faith-based organizations. And we think that the countries that are thinking about this in the most progressive way realize that the faith-based schools provide a real capacity advantage where they might be lacking capacity. But the governments also realize that over time it would be terrific if the faith-based schools could begin to adhere to the local curriculum so that at the end of the day, particularly in countries that have laws that say it's compulsory to go to school, they can be sure that at the end of the day the children that are coming out of the faith-based schools have the same type, they've learned the same things as the kids coming out of the state schools.

so some of the countries we've worked with have done actually a very good job of putting in place a framework around that where they will support the non-state actor faith-based schools provided that they adhere to the government's curriculum over time.

So we are agnostic about that. If governments would like to work with faith-based schools as one of the providers alongside the government, I don't think we have a problem with that.

Jonathan: You said recipients are in the driver's seat when you talk about forming policy and working with governments to create their curriculum and their education policy. But I note that GPE also has a particular focus on primary and early secondary education. So when you’re dealing with recipient countries and their education policies, how do you engage with them? Do you at all engage with them about tertiary education or higher upper secondary education? And how does that incorporate into their broader education policy that you deal with?

Alice: Well we want to talk to them about their policy for basic education. And if they would like to talk to us about that sort of layers into the upper areas of education from a policy perspective, we’re happy to provide guidance if they're interested in our opinion. But our real focus for them is basic education. And the reason why that's so important in the overall education sector is because it creates a foundational set of skills in order to enable the children to advance through the upper parts of the education system.
Now one of the things we notice quite regularly is that while the enrollment rates at the primary education levels are healthy - I mean, the vice minister from Lao mentioned this. They've reached virtually 100% enrollment at primary school. But then they have a lot of drop outs and repeaters, such that the level of kids that are going into secondary and there above drops dramatically.

We see for example that girls start going to school when they're sort of at the primary level. But then the drop off is significant when they get to secondary school. So we think that focusing on basic education is critical. The only goal of partnership is doing it, by the way. And there's a really important knock on effect for the kind of efficacy and reach about the other areas of the education system.

Now because we don't want our funds to get spread too thin - and that's a real challenge; you have to understand your niche - we will fund basic education. We will not - at the moment, and this is our mandate. Our Board may make a different decision at some point - but our mandate is to fund basic education. And that's why we orient our grant-making activity to basic education.

Jonathan: Okay. That makes sense. You don't want the funding to creep out too far.

Alice: No. Even though $3.5B is a lot of money, if we were to say that we will invest that money in areas of the education system beyond basic education, we would get spread thin awfully-awfully-awfully quickly.

Jonathan: In 59 partner countries.

Alice: Yeah. So we need to be careful about that strategically.

Jonathan: So we'll just wrap up with a final question. Julia Gillard, former Prime Minister of Australia, has just been appointed as the Chair of your Board. Could you just give a little insight as to the rationale behind the appointment and what expectations are for Ms. Gillard in that position?

Alice: Sure. She joined us. Her appointment was effective March 1. She brings great enthusiasm and passion and policy background in education, given that she was the minister of education of Australia beforehand. She's very interested in the subject, and we're very, very happy to have her. She will be the Chair of our Board. That will include a set of activities related to guiding the Board in its work and also helping us to advocate at a global level for not only our replenishment but beyond.