

El Comments on the World Development Report

Remarks by Dennis Sinyolo, Senior Coordinator, Education and Employment, shared at the launch of the WDR in Brussels, Belgium, on 18 January 2018

The World Development Report (WDR) has helped draw attention to, and stimulate further debate on quality education. There are some notable recommendations in the report:

1. Teachers must be far better prepared, motivated to teach, and compensated as professionals.
2. The critical role of early childhood education.
3. The admission that private schools do not necessarily deliver better results than public schools.

However, overall the WDR's recommendations fall far too short to realize the global commitment to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all, as articulated in UN's sustainable development goal 4.

1. *The education financing crisis has not been addressed in the report*

According to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report, we face an education financing crisis, with the education share of total aid falling from 10% in 2009 to 6.9% in 2015. One in four countries spend less than 4% of GDP and 15% of public expenditure on education, against the internationally agreed benchmarks of at least 6 and 20 percent respectively(GEM Report 2017/18).

The exclusion of education financing comes as a surprise, given the number of civil society organizations and other partners that raised the issue during the consultations. It would appear their recommendations were ignored, thus raising questions about the validity of the process. This report belongs to the World Bank. Surely, a bank cannot release a report talking about everything else except money.

Financing and strengthening public education systems is crucial in ensuring full access to education, equity and inclusion. While the report acknowledges the challenges associated with private provision of education, it falls short of advising governments to invest in **public** education systems.

2. *Access has not been given due attention*

While the report acknowledges that more than 260 million children and youth remain out of school, it brushes over this crisis by focusing almost entirely on those who are already in school. The access crisis must be addressed: we need to get all children and youth into school and support them to achieve their fullest potential.

3. *Narrow focus on learning assessment detrimental to inclusive quality education*

The report advises governments to "set learning as a clearly articulated goal and measure it" and goes on to assert that there is too little testing, not too much". But nothing could be further from the truth. As we all know, too much emphasis on standardized assessments narrows the curriculum by forcing schools and teachers to teach to the test. We should also remember that higher order skills and values such as problem-solving, creativity and tolerance cannot be measured merely through pencil and paper tests. That is why Albert Einstein cautioned: **"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."**

Our countries' vision of quality education should be bold, broad and ambitious, and go beyond a narrow focus on testing. It should include quality inputs, quality teaching and learning and quality outcomes. A wide range of outcomes, including literacy and numeracy, problem solving skills, innovation and creativity are essential in preparing young people for life. Rather than place over-emphasis on standardized tests and international comparisons, governments should strengthen diagnostic and formative assessments and support measures that lead to the improvement of teaching and learning.

I remind you of the landmark UNESCO Report, "Learning: the Treasure Within", where we are given that broader vision of education through the four pillars of learning, which are: Learning to know; Learning to do; Learning to be; and Learning to live together.

4. *The report's double speak on teachers sends conflicting signals to governments*

While on one hand, the report appears to value educators by acknowledging the critical role of trained and motivated teachers in improving learning, it devalues them by calling for the recruitment of contract teachers and by blaming them for absenteeism. Blaming teachers for absenteeism without analyzing the structural and root causes of absence such as poor and delayed pay and incidences where teachers have to travel to collect their pay check at the nearest town or city, will do very little to solve the challenge. In the Gambia, the teachers union had to step in to help the government address this problem by paying teachers at school level or through the banking system using their cooperative credit union. This intervention by teachers through their union resulted in a significant drop in the so-called teacher absenteeism.

The report also promotes a carrot-and-stick approach as a panacea for improving teacher motivation, teaching and learning. The report also incorrectly implies that professionalism and teachers' working conditions, salary, and job security are irreconcilable dichotomies. It fails to acknowledge the need to listen to teachers and their unions in order to understand the complex challenges facing education systems and institutions and come up with working solutions to address them. OECD evidence shows that high performing education systems have strong education unions. Instead of blaming education unions, the report should have encouraged governments to engage in genuine and institutionalized social dialogue with them in order to improve teacher welfare, motivation and educational quality. As stipulated in the collective position of the education community found in the Incheon Declaration and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, we believe that all students should be taught by well-trained, highly qualified, trusted, supported and motivated teachers, and learn in healthy, safe and well-resourced institutions.