

Presentation World Development Report:  
“Learning to realize Education’s Promise”  
Donderdag, 18/01, 10.15u  
Egmontpaleis

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased and honored to be here this morning to open this presentation of the very interesting and comprehensive World Development Report of the World Bank, dedicated to Education.

Welcome to you all and in particular:

- Devco Director-General, Mister Manservisi, our co-host
- Mister Filmer and Mister Rogers, co-directors of the report, who will be sharing their knowledge and expertise on the topic
- Mister Sinyolo, our respondents

Director-General van der Pluijm, I thank you for taking up the role of moderator of the debate (too bad though, I see only men in this panel, let’s strive for more gender balance next time!)

Each year, the World Development Report features a **topic of central importance to global development**. For the 40th edition and **for the first time**, the report is entirely devoted to **education**. Time has come to **take stock of what we have learned on education** during this century.

In every society, education brings **positive effects**. **For the individual**, a good education gives access to employment, increases the standards of living and even improves health. **For societies**, education is necessary to reach long term economic growth, to reduce poverty and to build social cohesion.

Since many years now, the International Community is making efforts to give more and more children, youth and adults **access to education**. Globally the situation has improved. In 1990 104 million primary-school-aged children were out of school. By 2012 that number had decreased by 44% to 58 million. So the numbers may make us feel optimistic, but numbers don’t show us the whole picture.

Because what we are facing right now is a **learning crisis**. The World Bank report demonstrates clearly that **schooling is not the same as learning**. You could even say that schooling without learning is a wasted opportunity and this is exactly what happens nowadays in many developing countries: **In many education systems around the world, children learn very little**. Even after several years in school, millions of students lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. Too many of them are leaving school unequipped, without the essential skills they need for life. This situation creates a great injustice as it amplifies inequality.

This report makes a very good analysis of all the factors that influence what students actually learn at school. To name a few that I find particularly important:

- The socio-economic circumstances: are the pupils who come to school **ready to learn?** Poverty, chronic malnutrition, illness, low parental support all have a huge influence.
- The importance of the children's **pre-school skills**: here early childhood development and maternal education are crucial. I am personally convinced that children should start going to school as early as possible. For Belgium, I plead to make it compulsory from the age of two and a half.
- Another crucial element that I want to highlight: **the skills of the teachers**. I think we all remember from our time in school how important the student-teacher interaction was for our motivation and interest for a particular subject. I really believe we have to **invest in teachers' training** if we want to make teaching more effective and make sure that students actually learn something.
- And, as the report points out, **teachers' skills have to be complemented by technology**. Those who know my interests and policies will not be surprised that I was glad to read that technology in school can also promote **digital skills**. As more jobs require digital literacy, the opportunity to acquire those skills is an end in itself. Rapid technological change has led to major shifts in the nature of work. That is also why I am a strong promotor of **life-long learning**.
- I also agree with the report stating the importance of **linking skills training to jobs** and workplace training.

And finally, and this will not come as a surprise either, I was reassured to see the report address the **gender gap**: only by giving girls the same education opportunities as boys will we achieve gender equality. And without gender equality, we will never be able to reach the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the Agenda 2030.

To conclude, on the one hand, I am convinced that we need to **continue our efforts to increase access to school** for all, especially girls. Because since 2007 progress has stagnated and if we continue at the current pace it will take another 200 years to get all primary-school aged children to school! This is why Belgium is a strong supporter of the Global Partnership for Education, UNICEF and also UNRWA.

On the other hand, the time has come to find the best way to **equip children and youth for the future by improving the quality of learning**. The time has come to realize education's promise. We know what to do.