

Dear ladies and gentleman,

It is my privilege to welcome you to the 5th International Annual Conference of Educaid.be. I am very happy to see that, once more, so many practitioners, government officials and researchers have gathered to talk about what is so dear to us all: education.

This year's edition of the conference is dedicated to "Inclusive and equitable quality education for all – implementing a universal agenda". Indeed, we will be talking about a universal, a global agenda. About a year ago the 'Sustainable Development Goals', the SDGs in development-slang, were adopted by the United Nations. In contrast to the MDG's, the SDGs consider education as a global issue that entails challenges and opportunities for *all* children, regardless of where they were born or where they live today.

The Belgian national platform for education, Educaid.be, shares the vision of SDG4 on quality education specifically. Education is a fundamental human right that is enshrined in many international agreements, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It is the basic individual right to quality education that has the most notable multiplier effects in terms of sustainable societal development: economic development, development with regard to health, citizenship, promotion of peace, etc.

But quality education does not only form a pillar for sustainable development. It also constitutes the cradle of active citizenship, inclusive growth and the fight against gender inequality, among other things.

As stated in the SDGs, the concept of education includes the entire cycle, from the young child's early pre-school years right up to higher levels of education and access to employment.

Educaid.be emphasises the importance of taking an integrated approach to education and training, meaning a mutual strengthening of all the levels of education and a smooth transition between them. This implies a multi-sector and multi-stakeholder approach, that can be built up further in the long term, and that can also include local civil society and public authorities, as well as the private sector where relevant, in the context of Technical and Vocational Training (TVT) partnerships for example.

Education cannot be an isolated player within a society in which it aims to be the backbone of development. Educaid.be therefore also insists on the importance of the **link between education and other sectors** (such as, for example, health, employment, agriculture or the environment) and the retention of the specific perspective of each of these sectors.

As a starting point to achieving SDG 4 by 2030, Educaid.be formulated various specific policy recommendations to the Belgian development cooperation. The full text of these recommendations is available in your folder. Nevertheless, I want to share some of these with you at the start of today's conference.

Educaid.be recommends, among other things, that the Belgian development cooperation improves the efficiency of its interventions by doing two things. One, it should target more active participation from the local civil society in national debates on the supply of vital social services, and in operations funded by the Belgian government. Two, it should better align the education sector with other sectors in order to ensure its contribution to the sustainable development challenges of the partner country.

Educaid.be also insists on the importance of guaranteeing **policy coherence** with regard to education and development cooperation between the different levels of power as well as between the various departments.

Furthermore, Educaid.be recommends that the Belgian development cooperation respects its commitments and increases its budget of Official Development Aid to 0.7% of the Gross National Income and dedicates at least 10% of its development budget to the education sector (compared to 7.2% in 2015). In 2015 Belgium only spent 0.42% of its GNI to development cooperation, an historic low. The current and the former cabinet alone have cut Belgium's development budget by more than 1.2 billion euros. For us, it's been enough. It is time to invest again in a qualitative development cooperation. The current crisis cannot be an excuse to forget those people who need our support the most.

Looking at the programme of today, Educaid.be can be nothing other than proud of the line-up of experts that will share their expertise and experience with all of us. This provides me the opportunity to thank our Educaid.be Coordinator, Maartje Houbrechts, for her excellent work in coordinating and facilitating the Educaid.be platform. Without her Educaid.be would not be the same.

I am convinced that the discussions after the presentations, in this room and in the hallway, will be enriching, and will allow us to improve our interventions to promote 'inclusive and equitable quality education for all'.

To kick off this year's conference we have two excellent presentations for you. First of all, I want to introduce Dr Katarzyna Kubacka. She is a research officer with the Global Education Report team at UNESCO, and has vast experience in the field of education. Dr Kubacka will provide a first update on the progress being made towards the realisation of SDG4. Her presentation marks the official launch of the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report in Belgium.

Today's second keynote speaker is Bridget Crumpton. She is a specialist in education with over 20 years of experience in international programming and policy. She is currently on secondment to the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, more commonly known as the Education Commission, working as a Senior Education Specialist Adviser on Strategic Initiatives. She will present us the main findings of the 'Learning Generation' report.