



Transcript
Mr. Wolfowitz Speech at Education Conference
Brussels, May 2, 2007

Paul Wolfowitz: Thank you Mr. Chairman, thanks to Gordon Brown and Louis Michel for co-organizing this event. I am very proud to stand in the company of world leaders, representatives of Civil Society and so many impressive young children committed to a common purpose, committed to ensuring that every child can step into a classroom and get an education, indeed get a good education. The U.K. and the EC, the Netherlands, Norway have been leading the way. We're grateful to them for that leadership - we know in the development community that education doesn't just transform the lives and futures of individual children, it transforms entire nations. South Korea is one powerful example of that. Just 50 years ago, Korea was a small war shattered country with no natural resources, it had been poor for centuries. Today it's the world's 11th largest economy and much of that progress of course is due to the vibrant private sector in Korea, but let's not forget that the private sector didn't do it by itself, it did it with incredible government investment and investment particularly in the most valuable resource that any country has: its people.

Today 90% of college age Koreans are enrolled in tertiary education, the highest rate in the world, the product of 50 years of sustained investment by the government in that most valuable resource. Many of the leaders in our developing country partners share that commitment to education and that's why we have seen some impressive progress in recent years. Just a few years ago, at the turn of the century, only 37 countries had achieved universal primary education, 15 more countries have joined them by the year 2005. Today, a fairly impressive 85% of children worldwide finish primary school. Even in Sub-Saharan Africa, where a staggering 40% of children are not yet in school, some countries have been able to increase their primary school completion rates by as much as 10% each year and much of that progress was achieved by support from international organizations, multilateral and bilateral donors, Civil Society and the World Bank's own concessional lending arm, the International Development Association or IDA.

Many leaders are taking the subject of girls education particularly seriously. I was impressed in a visit to Pakistan and talking with Governor of Sindh who told me that educating girls is key to Pakistan's development, indeed key to its political stability. I visited schools in the Muslim world, including in Pakistan and Bangladesh that are working to reach more girls; the enthusiasm on the faces of those girls was unmistakable. In Bangladesh, girls showed me their skills, reassembling television sets, when I asked them what they wanted to be in the future, they all dreamed of being electrical engineers. That's the good news but there are still 77 million children around the world who don't get any education at all. Just ponder that number for a moment - that's more than an entire population of the United Kingdom, it's more than the entire population of France or Italy, it's nearly as much as the population of Germany. It is potentially a whole lost generation

Children who grow up without an education are stunted for the rest of their lives and even when they manage to overcome it. And I had the very emotional experience in Brazil, in North-eastern

Brazil, of witnessing a ceremony where previously illiterate Brazilians were burning their old identification cards - it had an 'x' on them - because now they could write their name and there were tears in their eyes. But think of the lost years, think of the difficulty of learning to read when you are in your 40's or 50's. It's an opportunity that educating children when they are young - is a terrible opportunity to miss. So our work can't be done when those 77 millions boys and girls reach the classroom door! We need to ensure that inside every classroom, they also have trained teachers and the resources to learn new skills so they can move past primary school to the next level of education and training. So what this requires is four things: more, better, faster, and longer term aid for education.

Let me just say a few words about each of those four pillars. More than a year ago in Davos Gordon Brown, challenged us to step up to the plate and give more aid to education and we have done so. The World Bank is a big player in education financing and we are getting bigger. Last September at the ministerial round table on education in Singapore, I committed the World Bank to expand support to countries working toward Education For All. It was a promise not just to our share holders but to the children who were awaiting access to hope and opportunity, and at the World Bank we are keeping that promise with more funding. IDA will commit at least 1.5 billion dollars to education in the poorest countries in this fiscal year, which ends at the end of June. That's nearly doubles the average annual IDA commitment for education over the last 12 years and it's more than a 50% increase over 2006. We intend to sustain that level through 2008 and hopefully increase it in the years beyond, through the IDA 15 replenishment.

Our programs for this year also extend to post conflict countries where after much suffering, the population is desperate for the chance to start a new life. Indeed, in many places in the world and most notably in Africa, we're seeing hope, where for decades there was none, thanks to the end of war in Liberia, the end of war in Sierra Leone, the hopeful end of war in Democratic Republic of Congo. The list is longer. It's an opportunity, but it's also a challenge. A challenge for new resources, for new programs. I visited Kisangani in the DRC just two months ago, visited some schools that had been built, thanks to World Bank support. The enthusiasm from the children was really incredible. They greeted me saying, "He has come," it wasn't about me, it was about the World Bank, it was about the opportunity to go to school for the first time and yet with the joy on those children's faces nevertheless, you go to classrooms that have almost no books, no materials. Two shifts of these children, 1500 in each shift, I could barely imagine being the principal of that school. Every new opportunity I guess creates new challenges. I saw it in Liberia, in a classroom jammed with enthusiastic children, not a single desk and it appeared there was about one chair for every three students. So the enthusiasm is there but the challenge is enormous and that brings me to the second pillar which is quality.

When I came into this job, my early visit to Pakistan, I learned a new word, familiar probably to most of you, *ghost teachers*. Teachers who were supposed to be there teaching and perhaps drawing some kind of meager salary, but don't do their job. I visited schools in Ethiopia, where the teachers were there, they were working hard and ingenious, teaching children with maps that the teachers had to draw by hand themselves, anatomy charts, the teachers had to draw by hand themselves. So we not only need more dollars, we need better aid. When we distribute aid we need to ensure that it helps children achieve good learning outcomes. We need to ask, "Can they read? Can they express even simple thoughts to writing? Can they do basic arithmetic?" And with too many children who do go to school today, unfortunately, the answer is no. One survey in a developing country showed that more than half of primary schools students surveyed could not read a simple paragraph and more than half could not solve a simple two-digit mathematics problem. There is mounting evidence, for example, that children even after completing grade 6 can't read a simple sentence.

So, simply getting them to school is not enough. Through IDA programs, we are addressing the challenge of quality education with our economic and educational analysis, and we are providing technical support and operational tools. We are helping our partner countries integrate education plans into their poverty reduction strategy papers. With our support, partner countries are strengthening their systems, improving accountability and focusing on results and then enhancing the strong links they already have to the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness. But quality doesn't take a college degree to measure; I was really struck in Pakistan when representative NGO's told me you can tell the good schools because the parents keep their children in school. When the quality is bad, they take them out and they put them to work. Poor parents know when their kids are getting an education. We need to know, we need to track, and we need to make sure that we're delivering quality.

The third pillar is faster aid for education. Children waiting for an education need faster aid. We have many new players in the development landscape which presents great opportunities but also brings with it great challenges. Many donors are here marking aid for specific priorities and assuming that there is a functioning system to deliver new resources or services to those who need it. But in many poor countries that is not necessarily the case. Through IDA we are trying to help countries with increased education funding to use more effectively so that they can absorb aid more quickly. The key is helping countries build the knowledge base to design good practice policies and programs. Programs that are based on local conditions and needs and based on lessons learned from other countries. Our education and technical staff are based in 64 of the 82 IDA eligible countries, they work closely with government staff, Civil Society and donors to ensure that education funding is used quickly and effectively. And that's a particular challenge in countries just emerging from conflict, where often the very dedicated staff at the top levels of ministries have almost no one underneath them to support them. Those people have a great difficulty even using the money that when the money is made available we need to help.

As you know, the World Bank is a committed sponsor and partner in the Education for All Fast Track Initiative that supports 29 countries through the endorsement process and we're working with many more countries to accelerate progress for universal primary completion by 2015. One of them is the Democratic Republic of Congo which is expected to have an endorsed plan by 2008. I had the privilege of visiting the DRC with Louis Michel just two months ago. It's a country after many years of being shattered by war, now faces the opportunity and the challenge of rebuilding people's lives. Today as many as five million children in the DRC are denied the chance to go to school, in many cases, because their parents simply can't afford user fees. So, to remove that obstacle, we have allocated 60% of IDA's \$150 million grant to Congo for covering user fees. Our goal is to increase school enrollment by about 40% in five years and ensure these children do step into a brighter future.

The fourth pillar is longer termed sustained assistance because developing countries cannot make long-term investments to deliver results without long-term stable financing. Without it, countries won't be able to hire and train new teachers or build schools, they can't improve the quality of their education, or bring the hardest to reach children into the classroom. Donald Kaberuka, former Finance Minister of Rwanda and now the President of the African Development Bank put it very clearly during our round table in Singapore. Children, he said, cannot go to school and then be withdrawn from school because resources have been withdrawn. This is an issue that we have to deal with he said, the importance of long-term, predictable, stable financing. IDA is central to the long-term education planning of developing countries because it assures them a flexible and sustainable finance. It helps to ensure that education aid, as part of a broader assistance program, is less fragmented steadier, more predictable and more results oriented.

Moving forward, the World Bank will continue to expand our support for countries with good policies and help them build capacity. We'll introduce new mechanisms for supporting education in fragile states and we'll work with partner countries to develop the know-how and the tools that they need to achieve tangible results. We need to continue to work together as partners to assure better results from financing. Good results help guarantee more aid, faster aid and sustainable aid.

On my first trip to Africa as World Bank President, I visited a school, visited with parents in a small village just outside Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. These parents were scraping up a \$100 a year to send their children to school. A small sum for anyone in this room I am sure, but in a country where the per capita annual income is \$400, it's staggering. It's an enormous sacrifice. Those parents were doing it with joy on their faces because they knew... they know that a good education can bring jobs, opportunities, and a better quality of life for their children.

I believe there is almost nothing more powerful than the desire of parents to see their future, their children do better in the future, and when poor parents in poor countries are willing to make those kinds of sacrifices to give their children a better future, those of us who live in comfort in rich countries have an obligation to do our part. It's not only a moral obligation though it is that, but it is also a matter of self interest. After all, those poor children are part of our future also because we all live together on this small planet. Thank you.

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