Address
As Prepared for Delivery
by
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to the
World Conference On Education For All
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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We meet at a time of unprecedented change in the world. Events and trends that had not seemed remotely possible even a year ago already have become accomplished fact. New forms of cooperation are being explored; new partnerships formed.

We, too, can influence the direction of global change. We can lay the foundation for a new and effective alliance, committed to ensuring that the people of this world, irrespective of their circumstances, will not be deprived of their fundamental right to education.

As Our Common Future, the report of the Brundtland Commission, reminded us, "People are the ultimate resource." Sustaining that resource is the all-encompassing goal of development, and education is the wellspring of development.

In that spirit, the principle of "education for all" should be our own jomtien, as our hosts would say in their language -- the "brightest light" that guides our thoughts and illuminates our actions.

PRECEPT AND PRACTICE

The ennobling influence of education is not a new discovery. Plato argued in The Allegory of The Cave that only those who came out of the darkness of ignorance into the brightness of knowledge would be whole, and could lead others to that same state of completeness. Knowledge, he said, gave people a "special power" to create what was "beautiful and right." Such knowledge-based power "is the power upon which he who would act rationally in public or private life must have his eyes fixed," Plato advised his contemporaries.

Our ancestors idealized education. Kings and the nobility bestowed their patronage on educators. Rulers were considered enlightened when they built schools and other educational institutions. Centers of learning flourished at Nalanda in India and Taxila in Pakistan, in Egypt and in Mauritania, many years before colonial empires and colonial systems of education were established.

Religious leaders stressed the importance of education. Buddhism, which lies at the heart of spiritual life in Thailand, was particularly emphatic on this point. Indeed, the founder of Buddhism was so convinced of the impact education could have on society that he explored the subject at some length, and on numerous occasions. He even described what he considered the best possible relationship between teachers and students.

"A pupil," he said, "should respect and be obedient to his teacher; should attend to his needs if any; should study earnestly. And the teacher, in his turn, should train and shape his pupil properly; should teach him well; should introduce him to his friends; and should try to procure for him security or employment when his education is over." In today's world, such a relationship might seem unattainable, but its formulation in years gone by indicates the esteem in which education was held.
Through the years, however, precept and practice have grown apart. Ideals remain intact, but they have not always been transformed into reality. Despite the lessons and admonitions handed down from the past, all developing regions of the world today confront the perils and problems of educational under-development.

The bulk of the world's poor are malnourished, are inadequately housed, and have only limited access to basic health care. They also lack schooling. Over 900 million men and women are illiterate, almost 98 percent of them in developing countries.

Those countries confront the overwhelming task of achieving growth and development with a labor force that, on average, has less than three years of education.

Education is not a matter of concern to just developing countries. The role of education, its content, and its future course, are at the center of attention in countries that form the vanguard of the "age of technology." The affluent have long realized that unless they constantly upgrade the quality of their "ultimate resource", they will lose their competitive advantage.

Seven major reports on education were commissioned and completed in the U.S. over the past five years. Their central theme was that mediocrity in education could imperil national prosperity. In the U.K., the content of secondary education is under close and continuing scrutiny. Countries such as Costa Rica, Jordan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Turkey, which have moved toward economic growth and industrialization, also constantly review and refurbish their systems of education. As the "Economist" recently pointed out, "without an adequate pool of skilled labor, today's super-growers...could turn into tomorrow's stumblers."

These various approaches and interests, diverse in origin but complementary in intent, coalesce in the desire of our conference to lay foundations for progress by providing children, youth and adults -- irrespective of their sex -- with basic education.

These are critically important objectives, and the Bank appreciates the opportunity to share in the search for their fulfillment. I thank my fellow organizers for their role in initiating this conference, the many co-sponsors who have joined to make it happen, and the participants both in the regional consultations which took place around the world and the conference itself. I also thank our hosts in Thailand for the impressive facilities they have afforded us, and the courtesies they are so graciously extending to us.

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

The World Conference on Education for All offers us both an indictment and an opportunity. It offers an indictment, because we should have harmonized our policies and combined our efforts on the themes of this conference long ago. It offers an opportunity to act collectively now to bring about needed changes.
This is the first time that so many groups have come together to address these concerns from a truly global perspective, even though education impinges on all the great issues -- women in society, population, food, and the environment, to name a few -- which continue to challenge the international community.

Perhaps the combining of forces was delayed because we did not feel the need to defend the cause of education against detractors. We can argue about family planning methods. We can disagree about levels of global warming. We can even differ over whether the world can feed itself.

But who can question the over-arching relevance of education? Who can argue that without education, human beings are incomplete? An educated mind is an independent mind. Education, lest we forget, is enshrined as a fundamental human right in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights adopted at the United Nations over four decades ago. So we have taken the importance of education for granted. But we must not be complacent any longer. We must seize this opportunity to improve the quality and access of education for all.

As we attempt to grasp this opportunity, we must be accurately informed about the dimensions of educational development and underdevelopment. In the process, however, we should not be obsessed or overwhelmed by the purely negative.

As the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, has pointed out, "so often do the poor hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing, and are incapable of learning anything that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness...they distrust themselves." Planners and managers of development, whether at a national or international level, run a similar risk. Hearing ceaseless litanies of failure, they can easily settle into a mood of despair from which no creative impulse can emerge. To avoid that trap, we must acknowledge our successes, as well as identify our failures.

Let's consider the facts. During the post-colonial period, many developing countries have made progress in spreading the benefits of education among the people. This was noted, for example, by the Brandt Commission on International Development. The Commission's report, which was pessimistic about many aspects of development, was upbeat about education. It said that "in education, which is the key to much achievement in other fields, there has been comparatively consistent progress."

A symbol of that progress was the increase in school enrollment at all levels in developing countries from 1960 to 1985. What some commentators called an "education explosion" brought developing countries a harvest of benefits, from increased literacy through the expanded use of modern agricultural technology to the development of national capacities to undertake industrial manufacturing.

The record is undeniable. All those who contributed in any way to its creation must feel a justifiable sense of pride in what was achieved. It is this very sense of accomplishment which stirs us to realize that our odyssey of effort is not complete. What has been achieved, though substantial, is inadequate and, moreover, there have been gaps in the process of educational progress.
Consider, for instance, the area of literacy, the starting point from which populations are able to draw on the benefits of education. Adult literacy in low income countries stood at 34.7 percent in 1960. It rose to 51.8 percent in 1985, a growth of some 17 percentage points in 15 years. Still, a large number of adults remain illiterate. During the same time that the literacy rate was 51.8 percent in low income countries, it was close to 70 percent in middle income countries, and over 98 percent in the industrialized countries. These comparisons give us with some idea of how much remains to be done.

Other telling comparisons are common. At primary school in industrialized countries, students are likely to attend classes in well-appointed buildings for 900 hours each year, and be taught by teachers with 16 years or more of education. Their counterparts in developing countries attend classes in decrepit buildings or out in the open for 500 hours per year, and are taught by teachers with less than 10 years of education.

In recent years, the education gap between industrialized and developing countries has been widening. Between 1970 and 1980, public expenditure on education in developing countries fell by 25 percent. During this same period, in high income countries public expenditure on education doubled. Investment in education in developing countries declined sharply long before some of them had to re-order expenditures as part of their structural adjustment efforts. How much more would developing countries have achieved in the field of education if this slippage had not occurred?

The losses of the 1970s have not been restored. Furthermore, population growth has increased the pressure on scarce resources, making the task of providing basic education for all even more difficult.

Today, over 100 million school-age children in developing countries are not in school at all; and those that are in school often do not acquire the core skills specified in the national curriculum.

A profoundly disturbing aspect of this situation is the slow progress in expanding access to basic education for females. Some 60 percent of the children not attending school are girls. In 20 of the Bank's developing member countries, less than 40 percent of the 6 to 11 year old girls are enrolled in primary schools. This perpetuates the disadvantages endured by girls and women in society, and limits the options available to them. It also constrains progress in health and nutritional improvements and in fertility reduction, and has a negative impact on the education of their children.

We know, too, that many developing countries experience high dropout and repetition rates, at considerable cost to education budgets. This is inevitable when schools are inaccessible or located in substandard facilities, the content of education is poorly designed, and teachers are less than motivated. Non-educational factors -- such as the use of children by poor families to increase family income -- also impact the repetition and drop-out rate.
As calculated in 1984, it took an average of nine years to produce one fifth grade "completer" in low income countries. The funds used to maintain repeaters in school would otherwise be spent on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, improvements are delayed, which leads to more dropping out and repetition, creating a continuing downward cycle of cause and effect.

THE BANK'S EXPERIENCE

The challenge, then, is to stop this cycle. For the World Bank, this is a matter of recommitment. The Bank is the world's largest single source of external funding for education in developing countries. Our first education loan was made to Tunisia in September 1963, to build secondary schools. Since then, the Bank has supported more than 375 education projects in 100 countries with loans and credits amounting to about $10 billion. More than $2 billion of this amount was for basic education.

Plato, who wrote about the ennobling influence of education in broad terms, believed that education was vital to the economic well-being of society because education made the people "reasonable," and reasonable people were capable of making the right economic decisions. Education thus had "economic value." For this reason, Plato said, "a considerable part of the community's wealth must be invested in education." The conceptual underpinning of the Bank's approach to lending for education is similarly based.

Adam Smith wrote that "education is an investment that repays itself with a profit." Much more recently, T.W. Schultz made the point in his 1979 Nobel Lecture that: "The decisive factors of production in improving the welfare of poor people...are the improvement in population quality and advances in knowledge." Alfred Marshall said, "the most valuable of all capital is that invested in human beings."

As you know, however, I am not an academic economist. I came to the Bank from national politics, where what is desirable and possible in practical terms is more attractive than what is plausible in the realm of theory, however well founded and reputed. Without detracting from the importance of development theory which connects investment in education to economic growth, let me state this position in different terms.

Reducing poverty is at the heart of the development process and central to the World Bank's mission. The poor cannot join in the struggle against poverty unless they are equipped to identify opportunities, and seize them. Education, therefore, is an indispensable segment of the bridge over which the poor can cross the gulf from misery to hope. It is crucial to the empowerment of people.

Simply put, literate people can follow instructions on how to run machines and, therefore, can run machines when given the opportunity to do so. In agriculture, farmers with basic education will recognize the potential impact on their own income of innovative agricultural practices. They will be willing to take the risk of trying them out, as they did in South Asia during the 1960s and thereafter, producing the large harvests of rice and wheat collectively described as the "green revolution."
The Bank has accumulated a great deal of empirical evidence, derived from the tests of experience, which re-affirms the validity of this argument under many different circumstances.

For instance, differences in the quality of human resources partly explain the differential economic growth rates between countries. This point was made as well by Gunnar Myrdal when he compared the fast pace of the Marshall Plan's success in Western Europe with the relatively slow pace at which the impact of economic assistance to developing countries was felt in Asia. "It seemed reasonable to suppose," said Myrdal, "that the accumulated 'educational capital' of the Western European countries was a factor in the result."

World Bank studies have shown that education contributes to economic growth in developing countries. Investment in education produces high rates of return. Ministers of Finance, as well as the staffs of development banks, should be pleased to note that education produces substantial value for money. This is reflected both in national accounts and in individual earnings. As people are educated, earnings grow, so do savings, so does investment and, in turn, so does the well-being of society overall.

Education contributes to improving a community's quality of life through better health, better food consumption and sanitary practices, fertility control, improved child health and nutrition, and an openness toward innovation and acceptance of new ideas. The need to bring about improvements in each of these areas again underscores the importance of better access to education for girls. Education provides girls and women with options, either within or outside the household, to control and improve their own lives.

As I said earlier, education is the key to development. A nation simply cannot hope to sustain economic growth and alleviate poverty without a literate and numerate population. Seen from that perspective, a principal development failure of the past 20 years has been the world community's inability to provide all children with a good basic education. We must correct that failure.

PRIORITIES FOR CHANGE

The educational needs of developing countries are complex. They cannot be met by an unplanned, helter-skelter assault on vaguely perceived problems. Needs must be meticulously identified, and priorities carefully assigned by common agreement among all those concerned, both nationally and internationally.

I propose to you 10 priorities for change, as follows:

First, education -- especially primary education -- must be made accessible to all. As I stated previously, over 100 million children in developing countries are not enrolled at school. All children should have access, in the first instance, to a good primary school where they will acquire the basic knowledge with which to lead fuller lives and proceed to other levels of education. Youth and adults who have been deprived access
to learning opportunities must be provided with basic education which will help them improve the quality of their lives. These efforts must first be concentrated in rural areas where most of the world's poor live.

Second, education must be made available to all, girls and boys alike. In many societies, there is an ingrained bias against education for girls. They are kept away from school, or compelled to leave school before finishing their education. Even textbooks have been found to contain a bias against girls. These practices are individually demeaning and socially stultifying. The contribution that girls with education make to their families and to society in general is substantial and, indeed, calculable. The need for special programs to remove the bias, and to give girls the fullest possible benefits of education, should be examined.

Third, the quality of education must be enhanced. School attendance without learning makes no sense. We must ensure that children who attend school actually master the primary curriculum and complete the full course. Other levels of education can be achieved only when that foundation is in place. For the quality of learning to improve, principals must be able to function as leaders and teachers must be capable of inspiring their students. Textbooks and other learning materials should be effective, and obtainable at reasonable prices. Experience in bilingual education needs to be reviewed and, where appropriate, shared, so that students whose home language is different from the language of instruction will receive assistance in acquiring the second language. Initial instruction should be provided in the home language whenever possible.

Fourth, the quality of teaching must be improved. There is no substitute for good teachers. They need to be well motivated from the start -- to have chosen teaching as a profession because they want to teach, not because they have to -- and they should be helped to upgrade their professionalism throughout their careers. They must also be adequately remunerated. Teachers who are poorly paid and are compelled to work under trying conditions, rarely make good teachers.

Fifth, individual schools will not fulfill their purpose, unless a nation's education system is strongly managed to provide needed support. This requires management training, and the availability of accurate information which enables managers to take rational decisions. Responsibilities for managing education should be appropriately shared, and not excessively centralized.

Sixth, additional educational facilities will be needed, if the needs of the 100 million children currently not attending schools are to be met. Given the high cost of building, continued research into low cost construction technology and the innovative use of under-utilized space from other sectors will be necessary. The development of simple teaching modules which could be used in non-conventional locations, as they have already been used experimentally in parts of Africa and Asia, could help reduce the pressure on classroom space.

Seventh, experience has shown that technological change occurs faster than any planner can anticipate and faster than any school can produce graduates. Rapid changes in technology make it imperative for developing countries to design training programs which are flexible and
responsive to fluctuating market conditions and needs. Vocational programs have often been based on the projected manpower needs of the economy. Private enterprises can contribute to training that increases technical skills, in close collaboration with the public sector through national training authorities and apprenticeship programs.

Eighth, a scientifically literate population is an essential prerequisite for economic development in this decade. Without a capacity to select and adapt modern technology, developing countries will find it increasingly difficult to compete internationally. At the same time, developing countries need to strengthen their systems of higher education to train the scientists and the engineers, the managers and other professionals who will lead the national development effort into the next century.

Ninth, this conference should inspire national authorities, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and international agencies to share each other's experience and expertise. Education is an area in which both North-South and South-South cooperation can be practically and effectively manifested.

Tenth, developing countries need to mobilize resources, national and international, for educational development. Governments must be willing to shift resources from socially less productive uses -- such as defense and subsidies for public enterprises -- to human resource development. The mobilization of additional resources may involve relying increasingly on private sources of funding, especially at the higher education levels.

Developing countries will have to allocate available resources to the most cost-effective inputs. For increased emphasis on primary education, most middle income countries can realize significant improvements in educational effectiveness through reallocations within the existing primary education budgets. In most low income countries, however, the scope for such reallocation is limited and additional resources, national and international, are essential.

While national resource mobilization efforts are at the root of successful educational development, international support will be needed to complement the efforts of many, especially the poorest, developing countries. Special priority in international support should be given to those countries which are faced with the need to implement the often painful measures necessary to make their education systems vibrant. Donor resources are limited also, and should not be applied to perpetuate inefficient management and untenable education policy.

THE BANK'S COMMITMENT

Translating a vision of education for all into reality throughout the world cannot be done overnight. As urgent as the tasks ahead might seem, their realization requires patience and care. Investment in human capital is not a quick-fire enterprise. Such investments take a long time to put in place and rarely yield immediate results.
The boy or girl whose primary education began in 1990 will be able to capitalize fully on the value that education adds to his own innate capacities in about 30 years. Strengthening the human resource base of developing economies will require a sustained effort over several decades.

Most low-income countries will need access to expertise which complements their own, as well as stable financial support. This calls for the evolution of new and expanded partnerships, in which we must all be prepared to participate.

Currently, less than one-half of one percent of all international development assistance is channeled to primary education. Clearly, the donor community cannot expect to be an effective partner in the efforts which flow from this conference unless there is a dramatic change in aid flows to basic education. Both the amount of assistance and the areas of concentration must be reassessed.

The Bank renews its commitment first made in 1963 to support education as an instrument of human development. We are committed to working toward achievement of the stated goals of this World Conference on Education for All.

The character of the Bank's support for education has changed considerably over time. Initially, education lending was for buildings and equipment -- as with the Tunisian project in 1963 -- so that countries might increase the number of schools. Later, activities which enhanced the quality of learning, such as textbooks and curriculum development, were added to our education projects. Lending patterns have also changed between levels of education: our emphasis has broadened from technical and vocational education at secondary and post-secondary levels towards primary education and general skills.

We will continue to support the various levels of education as justified by national priorities. But, helping countries meet basic learning needs is a key priority in the Bank's current lending program.

As you know, the World Bank is the largest single donor of financial support for educational development. In an effort to improve its own performance and effectiveness, the Bank will double its educational lending over the next three years to an annual figure of more than $1.5 billion.

Our dominant goal will be to help countries put in place the educational policy framework and investment programs necessary to move toward education for all. Support for basic primary education will be the dominant priority.

We will pay particular attention to developing the national institutions necessary to improve the quality of learning. As part of this emphasis, special care will be taken to ensure that projects and programs funded by the Bank directly improve education for girls.
In addition, we will strengthen our support for science and technology programs covering both agriculture and industry in secondary and higher education. We will also emphasize assistance for non-school based programs of skilled worker training.

We will reinforce our own "in house" capacities and will strengthen our related policy and research work, so that we can respond expeditiously to these needs. The results of our research will be widely shared. In all aspects of our "education for all" programs, we will move toward a style of lending which is increasingly collaborative, and relies on national capabilities to the maximum extent possible.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen --

Even before we congregated here, the value of education was clear to all of us. Education is an instrument of development. It is a vehicle for human self-improvement.

Education is not "value neutral." To quote a minister of a developing country: "Education touches men and women at the center of their souls, activating concealed currents of understanding." A man or woman, girl or boy, touched by education is no longer the same person. Predictably, therefore, questioning, skepticism, protests, and the flowering of change, often begin at places of learning. The first generation of African national leaders, Tom Mboya once said, "all graduated from two institutions -- a mission school and a jail for political activists."

But a commitment to the "status quo" is no reason to deprive our "ultimate resource" with opportunities for self-improvement. With education, people will bring about the changes that revitalize communities.

Nelson Mandela, on his return home from prison had a special message for the young: "stay with your schooling, and equip yourselves for the future."

The future beckons us all, and human development cannot be deferred. The poor will be liberated from their poverty only when they are supplied with the instruments of their own self-fulfillment.

The convergence of effort by a broad range of national and international agencies at this conference is an important first step on the long road ahead toward the goal of education for all. The first step is sometimes the most difficult. Having taken that step, let us move forward steadfastly, toward our goal which will benefit the entire human family.

Thank you.