

**Wolfensohn Center for Development and Partners Host International
Early Child Development Conference at The Hague, Netherlands**

Business Champions for Early Child Development

April 22 & 23, 2008

On April 23, 2008, the Wolfensohn Center for Development, in cooperation with the Committee for Economic Development, held an International Early Child Development Conference in The Hague, The Netherlands.

This is the first conference in a series of international events within the framework of the Early Child Development Initiative at the Wolfensohn Center for Development aimed at promoting private sector investment in Early Child Development (ECD) in developing countries.

The goal of the conference was to bring the importance of early child development to the forefront of international economic debates and to develop strategies to increase private sector support for ECD in developing countries. The conference highlighted the positive impact of ECD on local communities, national economies, international markets, and long term global poverty reduction. Specifically, it focused on fostering support from the European business community for ECD in emerging markets and developing countries.

The conference was attended by European business leaders, leading international early child development experts, and special guests including Her Majesty, Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands and Her Royal Highness, Princess Laurentien of The Netherlands.

Key participants of the event included:

- Antony Burgmans, Former Chair, Unilever NV and PLC
- Tony Ruys, Former Chairman & CEO, Heineken NV
- Dennis Jönsson, President & CEO, TetraPak Group
- Gary Knell, CEO, Sesame Workshop
- James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences
- Henrik Lorenson, Vice President, LEGO Group
- Ambassador Mkhize of South Africa to the Netherlands
- Jack P. Shonkoff, Director, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University
- James D. Wolfensohn, Former President, World Bank

The conference was opened by the Founder of the Wolfensohn Center for Development James D. Wolfensohn, former President of World Bank. Applying his personal experience with ECD project implementation at the World Bank, James Wolfensohn presented the benefits of investments in ECD and reviewed the relevance of ECD to the global business community. He concluded that ECD is the most effective strategy for improving the health and education of young children, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainable economic development and growth in emerging markets and specifically noted its effectiveness for both public and private sector actors.

James Wolfensohn's remarks were followed by the presentations of two leading experts on early child development, who explored the link between the health and developmental benefits and the economic benefits of investing in ECD. The keynote speaker Dr. James J. Heckman explored the productivity argument for investing in young children and Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff explained the science of ECD.

During the first panel session, leading CEOs and ECD experts shared their experience on the strategies and outcomes of supporting ECD and reviewed the processes for private sector investment in early childhood initiatives in developing countries. The panel was followed by a keynote address by Ruud Treffers, Director-General of International Cooperation at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who spoke about Dutch governmental support for ECD and illuminated the long-term economic and social benefits of supporting ECD in the developing world. The final panel session focused on strategies to increase public and private support for ECD in emerging markets through greater private investment and stronger public-private partnerships.

The participating business leaders recognized the need to invest in the next generation and expressed great interest in supporting ECD through the partnership between the Wolfensohn Center and the Committee for Economic Development. They acknowledged that ECD is a wise investment with high rates of return because it dramatically improves the long-term educational attainment of children in the developing world. This improvement in educational attainment improves human capital formation which in turn improves business performance, creates more competitive local markets, and provides for long term poverty reduction and economic growth.

Building on the success of the first conference, the Wolfensohn Center for Development and Committee for Economic Development will hold their second event, focused on North American business leaders, in Washington, DC in December 2008. The third event will take place in Cape Town, South Africa in April 2009 and will focus on global business leaders with interests in Southern Africa.

Conference Agenda > [Learn More](#)

Multimedia Interview with James Wolfensohn, Former President, World Bank; Dennis Jonsson, CEO TetraPak; and Mrs. Trude Maas, Chair, Bernard Van Leer Foundation > [Learn More](#)