

Business Champions for Early Child Development Conference

December 3 and 4, 2008

On December 4, 2008 the Wolfensohn Center for Development and the Committee for Economic Development held a conference in Washington, D.C. to promote private sector support for global Early Child Development (ECD).

This was the second conference in a series of international events in support of ECD in the developing world. Building on the momentum from the first ECD conference targeting European business leaders in The Hague, The Netherlands earlier this year, this event focused on fostering support from North American business leaders for ECD in the developing world.

The goal of this series is to bring the importance of early child development to the forefront of international economic debate 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.

Attendees included North American business leaders, international early child development experts, and public policy stakeholders including Ambassador Danilovich, CEO of the Millennium Challenge Corporation and Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The conference was organized into keynotes and panel discussions which presented concrete evidence that early child development is a critical component of successful human development and poverty reduction.

Jack P. Shonkoff, Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, provided a presentation on the science of the developing brain, highlighting the crucial development that takes place in the first three years of life. Immediately following his presentation, a panel of ECD experts shared their experience regarding effective strategies and outcomes of ECD initiatives as well as key points at which policy and partnerships are falling short.

Jacques van der Gaag, from the Brookings Institution, explained the economics of early child development, emphasizing the high return on investment and significant societal benefits that result from quality ECD programs and policies.

The second panel session showcased North American business leaders' success in supporting global early child development. The panelists described how support of ECD programs is not only a moral responsibility, but a necessity for the long-term strength of their businesses in an increasingly global society. Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, CEO of LEGO, further stressed the significance of ECD for the business community during his keynote presentation at the event luncheon.

The final panel of the day included Ruth Levine, Vice President of the Center for Global Development; Gene Sperling, Director of the Center on Universal Education at the Council on Foreign Relations; and Joan Lombardi, Research Professor at Georgetown Public Policy Institute at Georgetown University, who voiced a [call to action for global early child development](#). More specifically, panelists called for the creation of a global business alliance for early child development to collectively voice the importance of ECD as a critical development strategy. Closing remarks were made by James Wolfensohn, former President of the World Bank. Mr. Wolfensohn reminded event participants that ECD is no longer a fringe issue, but one that has a massive impact on how our world develops; and that to ensure future economic growth for an ever increasing population, early child development must move to the forefront of international development.

The Wolfensohn Center for Development and the Committee for Economic Development will host their third event in Cape Town, South Africa in June 2009. The focus of this event will be to promote global and African business leadership for ECD in Southern Africa.

[Conference Agenda>](#)