

INVESTING TODAY, TRANSFORMING TOMORROW

Unlocking **Human Capital** as
the engine for growth in Suriname



A Turning Point for Suriname's
Development

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Executive Summary

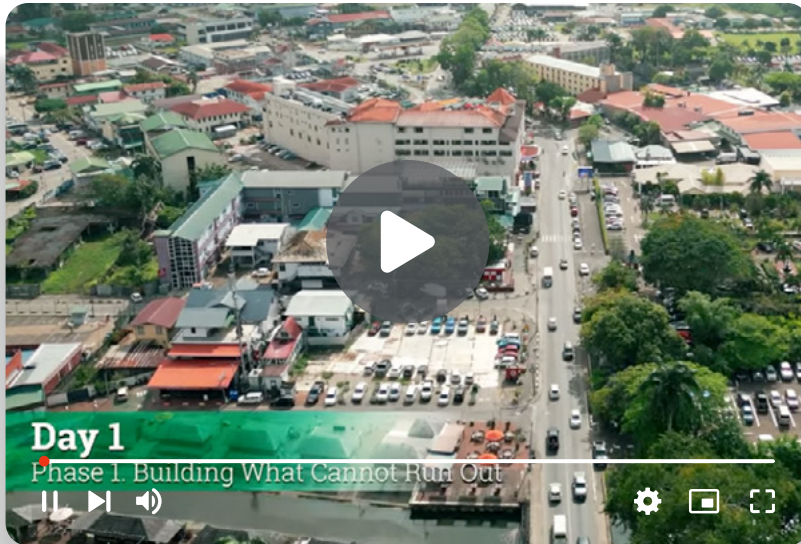
Suriname is at a turning point in its development trajectory, with education and skills positioned at the center of a more sustainable and equitable path to growth. In this context, and under the leadership of Her Excellency President Jennifer Geerlings-Simons, the *Investing Today, Transforming Tomorrow* conference marked an important milestone, reaffirming human capital as a key driver of long-term prosperity, resilience, and economic diversification.

On April 8-9, 2026, in Paramaribo, the first phase of the conference brought together approximately 300 participants, including government leaders, educators, private sector representatives, youth leaders, development partners, and international experts, reflecting broad national and international engagement. Co-hosted by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth and supported by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the first phase reinforced a shared commitment to advancing education and skills development as a foundation for Suriname's future. This publication captures the main insights, perspectives, and achievements of the the conference's first phase and aims to support continued dialogue during the second phase and in the years ahead.

The discussions and presentations during the first phase can be summarized around ten foundational insights drawn from international experience and youth perspectives:

- 1.** Investing in human capital is a deliberate national choice—not a byproduct of growth.
- 2.** The quality of learning foundational skills—not schooling—is the real driver of long-term economic growth.
- 3.** Teachers are the most powerful lever for improving learning outcomes.
- 4.** Rapid Improvements in learning outcomes require coherent systemic reform.
- 5.** Relevant education is a strategic driver of economic diversification and can improve student retention.
- 6.** Cultural diversity and inclusion are strategic assets for learning and innovation.
- 7.** Education systems must ensure that students not only have access to school, but also progress, learn, and successfully complete their education by combining quality education with coordinated support to address academic, economic, and social barriers.
- 8.** Technology and artificial intelligence can strengthen education systems when they expand inclusion, support teachers, develop human skills, and promote student well-being.
- 9.** Partnerships and institutional capacity are essential to sustaining and scaling education reform.
- 10.** Education reform must remain grounded in national context, be implemented progressively, and be inclusive and participatory.

These insights reinforced the need to build an education system that is more equitable, future-ready, and responsive to the aspirations of young people. They will also inform the second phase “Education: The Path Out of Poverty, Toward Growth and Progress”, planned for June 8, 9, and 10, 2026, in Paramaribo, Suriname. This next phase will convene key national stakeholders to build on these insights to define a national vision and an action plan with concrete reform areas that will improve human capital and support long-term growth and social inclusion. Organized by the Government of Suriname with the support of the IDB, the second phase will bring together national voices and international experience, with strong representation from local stakeholders.



If you would like to learn more about the first phase of the conference, please watch this four-minute recap [video](#).



I. Introduction: background, objectives and achievements of the national conference



Suriname is entering a pivotal moment in its development trajectory. Under the leadership of Her Excellency Dr. Jennifer Geerlings-Simons—the country’s first female President—the government is advancing an ambitious vision for a more diversified, inclusive, and knowledge-driven economy.

At the center of this transition lies a defining question: How can Suriname translate its natural resource wealth into long-term, inclusive prosperity through human capital development? The conference created a space to connect global evidence with Suriname’s national priorities while shaping a forward-looking vision for sustainable growth.

It marked an important milestone in positioning education and skills at the center of economic transformation, social cohesion, and national identity. Over the two days of the first phase, the conference brought together approximately three hundred in-person participants, including an international delegation of more than twenty-six representatives, over eighteen international speakers, and IDB co-organizers, representing sixteen countries¹. Participants included senior government authorities, Members of Parliament, education leaders, teachers’ representatives, TVET providers, private sector actors, youth and civil society representatives, development partners, and regional organizations.

The conference also attracted more than one thousand online viewers through livestreaming over the two-day period. This broad participation reflected a strong national and international commitment to advancing education reform and human capital development in Suriname.

The first day focused on international experiences and the factors behind successful development transitions, highlighting how investments in human capital can boost productivity, competitiveness, innovation, and social mobility. The second day turned toward practical application, exploring how Suriname could adapt these lessons into concrete, systemic reforms aligned with its national context.

One of the main achievements of these two days was the establishment of a strong national consensus that human capital development must become a central pillar of Suriname’s long-term economic diversification strategy, helping to move the national conversation beyond dependence on extractive sectors. The conference also successfully aligned political leaders, technical experts, educators, private sector representatives, youth leaders, and development partners around a shared vision for comprehensive education system reform anchored in quality, inclusion, productivity, and future readiness.

¹ United States, Finland, Australia, Brazil, South Korea, Mexico, Singapore, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, Colombia, Spain, France, Argentina, and Costa Rica.

Through the conference, leaders emphasized the urgency of aligning education systems with national priorities while preparing learners for a rapidly changing world. The overall tone was both aspirational and action-oriented: the conference represented not only a moment of reflection but also the beginning of a broader national reform process that will continue through the development of a long-term education and skills plan during the second phase.



H.E. President Jennifer Geerlings-Simons opened the conference by stating, “This is the beginning of a long-term transformation,” anchoring the event within Suriname’s broader development vision. She emphasized education as a pillar of economic diversification and social progress, highlighting that sustained investment in people is essential to building a resilient and productive economy. The President framed the conference as the first phase of a wider national effort—one that would draw on international experience to inform a second phase focused on dialogue, prioritization, and implementation, with strong attention to coordination, quality, and measurable results.



H.E. Minister of Education, Science and Culture Dirk Currie highlighted the implications of today’s policy decisions: “When we invest in people, we invest in our future.” He reinforced the transformative role of education by outlining a vision for an inclusive and forward-looking system that equips learners with both technical and socio-emotional skills. He also emphasized the importance of strengthening the teaching profession and aligning education more closely with evolving labor market demands.



Building on this foundation, **H.E. Minister of Youth Lalinie Gopal** placed youth at the center of the national agenda, emphasizing the role of youth policies and programs—including sports and leadership initiatives—in developing critical skills such as discipline, resilience, and collaboration. Her remarks underscored the importance of inclusion and active participation in shaping the country’s future: “Human capital drives sustainable growth.”



IDB Group Representative for Suriname, Ms Adriana La Valley highlighted Suriname’s diversity, talent, and cultural richness as foundations for inclusive growth, affirming that “the true wealth of Suriname lies in its people.” She emphasized the importance of partnerships in advancing this agenda and expressed the Inter-American Development Bank’s commitment to supporting the Government of Suriname. She stressed that sustained collaboration will be essential to translate this shared vision into concrete actions and lasting impact.

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II. From Global Experience to Local Action: ten insights for Suriname



1. Investing in human capital is a deliberate national choice—not a byproduct of growth.

Suriname stands at a defining moment in which it can actively shape its development trajectory by prioritizing human capital as the foundation of sustainable growth and social cohesion. International experience shows that countries that rely primarily on natural resources without sustained investment in human capital often face economic volatility and limited diversification. In contrast, countries that invested strategically in people achieved more inclusive and sustained growth, as the example of Singapore illustrates below.



The case of Singapore

Singapore exemplifies how aligning education, skills development, and economic policy can drive economic transformation and long-term competitiveness. Michael Fung, Executive Director of the Institute for the Future of Education (IFE) presented, after independence in 1965, the country recognized that its main asset was its people and intentionally linked workforce development to its economic diversification strategy. It identified priority sectors for growth and built strong coordination between government, employers, unions, and education institutions to continuously adapt training and education programs to evolving labor market needs. Those policies not only responded to existing industries, but they also actively developed the human capital needed to attract and expand future sectors. As the economy evolved, the country strengthened its focus on lifelong learning, digital skills, innovation, and workforce adaptability to prepare for technological change and artificial intelligence. Today, Singapore is recognized as one of the world's most prosperous and competitive economies.

These experiences highlight that development outcomes are not automatic; they are the result of deliberate policy choices. The next step is therefore to place human capital at the center of a national development strategy supported by political commitment, sustainable financing, and strong institutional coordination, as the case of South Korea further illustrates below.



The case of South Korea

South Korea's transformation shows how sustained investment in education and human capital can drive national development, even during periods of crisis. After the war, widespread poverty, political instability, and an illiteracy rate of 80%, the country made bold decisions to prioritize education. This included investing in science and technology in the 1970s despite severe economic constraints and increasing education spending during the 1997 Asian financial crisis. As Peck Cho, Distinguished Professor at Korea University, South Korea, emphasized, "Korea's growth was built on sustained investment in education and human capital." Universal access to quality foundational learning supported industrialization, innovation, and economic growth, helping transform Korea into one of the world's leading economies. An additional factor behind Korea's success was the elevation of the teaching profession, making teaching one of the most respected careers in the country.

This shift in societal values helped attract and retain high-quality educators and strengthened learning outcomes across the system. The key message for Suriname is that foundational learning, investment in education, and strengthening the status of the teaching profession are strategic tools for accelerating development and future prosperity.



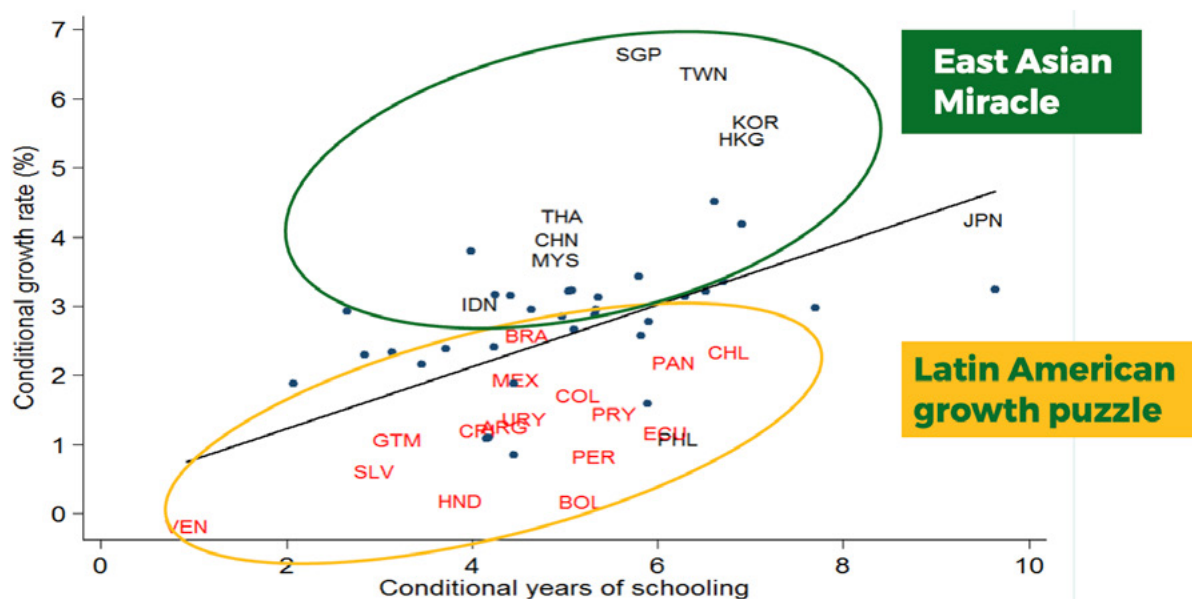
If you would like to watch the full speech delivered by Professor Peck Cho during the conference, please click [here](#). To watch the short message he prepared for Suriname, click here to view the video in [English](#).



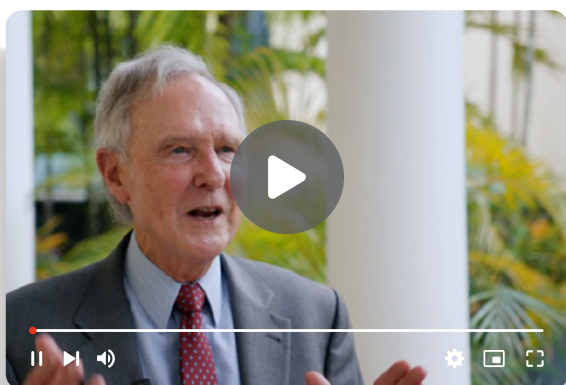
2. The quality of learning foundational skills— not schooling—is the real driver of long-term economic growth

Prioritizing human capital, however, also requires clarity on what drives economic growth. Eric Hanushek, Senior Fellow at Stanford University, USA, and a leading authority on the economics of education, presented global evidence demonstrating that years of schooling alone do not guarantee economic growth; what matters is whether students acquire strong foundational skills, among other factors. Countries with similar enrollment rates often experience quite different development outcomes depending on the quality of learning achieved, foundational skills are therefore essential for economic transformation.

Two Puzzles: East Asia and Latin America



Source: Eric Hanushek and Ludger Woessmann, *The Knowledge Capital of Nations*, 2015.



If you would like to learn more about Eric Hanushek's message for Suriname, please watch this video in [English](#).

The key message is that education systems must move beyond a focus on access and place greater emphasis on learning quality and measurable outcomes, while also reinforcing national assessment systems and ensuring that education policies are guided by evidence on student learning. The case of Sobral illustrated in page (12) is an inspiring example of how student learning outcomes can improve significantly through a strong focus on measuring learning, monitoring results, and implementing targeted reforms. Click here to read more about this example.

3. Teachers are the most powerful lever for improving learning outcomes

If foundational learning is the cornerstone of long-term development, then teachers become central to achieving it. As South Korea exemplifies, high-performing education systems consistently recognize teaching quality as the most influential school-based factor affecting student performance, making teacher policy central to education reform. During the conference, Gregory Elacqua, Principal Education Economist at the IDB, showed that high-performing systems consistently invest in teacher quality through two approaches: improving flow through attraction, preparation, selection, and allocation and distribution, and strengthening stock through professional development and retention.



This graph was elaborated by Gregory Elacqua (2026). For more information, please see his full presentation on the [webpage](#).

At the same time, successful teacher reform requires systemic changes rather than isolated interventions. Improving teaching quality depends not only on expanding training opportunities, but also on creating balanced systems that combine accountability, professional support, evaluation, and long-term career pathways. Teaching must therefore be treated as a respected and structured profession, supported by continuous professional development and recognition.



The case of Canada

The experience of Ontario, Canada, illustrated how these principles can be implemented at scale. Facing the challenge of improving educational quality and equity in a highly diverse system serving 2.1 million students across 72 districts, Ontario introduced phased reforms focused on improving teaching quality, investing in teacher and school leader development, promoting collaboration across schools, and strengthening equitable and wellbeing-centered policies. As presented by Mary Jean Gallagher, former Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Student Achievement Officer at the Ministry of Education of Ontario, Canada, the reforms also connected secondary education more directly to employment, college, university, and apprenticeship pathways, increasing the relevance of learning for students. As a result, Ontario became internationally recognized as one of the world's most improved education systems, demonstrating that strong learning outcomes and equity can advance together when reforms prioritize teachers, collaboration, inclusion, and continuous improvement.



This experience provides relevant insights for Suriname's next phase as it works to build a professionalized teaching system that combines support, accountability, career development, and sustained investment in educators as the foundation for long-term educational transformation.

If you would like to learn more about Mary Jean Gallagher's message for Suriname, please watch this video in [English](#).

4. Fast improvements in learning outcomes require coherent systemic reform

Yet improving teacher quality alone is insufficient when reforms remain fragmented. International experience demonstrated that lasting improvements in learning outcomes require coherent systemic change across the entire education sector as the case of Sobral in Brazil exemplifies.

International evidence shows that meaningful education reform can be achieved in a short period when systemic action is coordinated. Systemic change requires alignment of curriculum, political commitment, a clear national vision, accountability, incentives, monitoring, equity-focused policies, and allocation of resources around a shared objective: ensuring that all students learn.



The case of Sobral in Ceará, Brazil

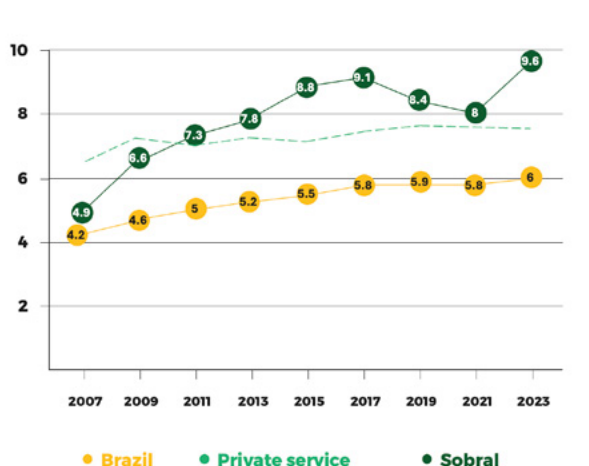
Sobral in Ceará, Brazil is an inspiring example of how student learning outcomes can improve significantly through a strong focus on measuring learning outcomes, monitoring results, and implementing targeted reforms. Sobral faced the challenge that many children were attending school without achieving basic literacy skills. In response, the municipality established the goal of ensuring that all children learn to read and write at the appropriate age through coordinated reforms, including:

- Clear learning goals focused on literacy.
- Curriculum reforms aligned with learning objectives.
- Strengthened teacher policies and continuous teacher support.
- Stronger accountability mechanisms across the education system.
- Continuous assessments to systematically measure student progress and school performance.
- Systematic use of data to identify learning gaps and guide decision-making.
- Targeted interventions and support for struggling schools and students.
- Structured implementation plans with clearly defined priorities and responsibilities.
- Incentive structures and recognition mechanisms that reward performance and strengthen collaboration across the education system.
- Improved school management and technical leadership.
- Sustained support for teachers, school principals, and technical education teams.

According to Izolda Cela, former Secretary of Education of Ceará and later Governor of Ceará, Brazil, these reforms were supported by strong political commitment, clear goals, technical leadership, and continuous monitoring and evaluation of results to ensure that no group of students was left behind.

As a result, Sobral transformed learning outcomes and rose from 1,336th place to first in Brazil's Basic Education Development Index (IDEB), becoming a leading example of how systemic reforms can improve educational quality and equity.

Evolution of the results in the early years



These graphs were shared by Izolda Cela during her presentation. For more information, please see the presentation available on the [webpage](#).

Rather than relying on isolated initiatives, sustainable progress depends on coordinated reforms across institutions, schools, and stakeholders so that the entire system works together to improve learning outcomes at scale. Experiences from countries such as South Korea and Sobral demonstrate that successful transformation is possible when targeted reforms—particularly those focused on improving education quality and strengthening the teaching workforce—are aligned across the broader education system.

The key message is that coherence and coordination are essential for a lasting reform. These experiences could help guide Suriname in the development of its five-ten-year vision and education plan.

5. Relevant education is a strategic driver of economic diversification and can improve student retention

International experience has highlighted that countries that successfully transitioned toward more diversified and innovation-driven economies used education strategically to support national development goals. Aligning education and skills systems with national development priorities can support economic diversification. In other words, linking technical education, higher education, and workforce development policies with priority productive sectors can help create new economic opportunities, boost productivity, and support long-term growth and resilience.

To make this happen, skills systems must anticipate future labor market needs. Education and workforce development systems should use labor market information, employer engagement, and long-term economic forecasting to identify skills gaps and prepare workers for emerging industries that do not yet fully exist.

Additionally, strong public-private collaboration through skills ecosystems in which education policies, training programs, and labor market needs remain closely aligned is also key. This can help ensure that training remains relevant, reduce skills mismatches, and create clearer pathways from education to employment.

These ecosystems also position countries to adapt more effectively to changing economic conditions and technological transformation while supporting long-term national development goals. An example presented was the experience of SOFOFA in Chile, where collaboration between the private sector and educational institutions has helped align workforce development with productive sector needs.



The case of SOFOFA in Chile

The Industrial Development Society, or Society for Industrial Promotion (SOFOFA in Spanish), the leading business association representing the industrial sector in Chile, demonstrated how strong public-private coordination can help align education and training systems with evolving labor market demands. Facing the challenge that individual firms often lacked the capacity to anticipate broader technological and workforce trends on their own, SOFOFA assumed a coordinating role between companies and the government to identify shared industry constraints and future skill needs across sectors. To address this, SOFOFA aggregated data from companies within the same industries, analyzed workforce composition and investment trends, and developed mechanisms to translate employer needs into actionable training pathways. According to Juan Eduardo Carmach, Director of Future of Work, Human Capital at SOFOFA, the organization also created incentives for private sector participation through tax benefits and partnered with the Inter-American Development Bank to develop Relink, a digital platform where workers could map their competencies against industry demand and identify targeted training opportunities. As a result, the model established by SOFOFA improved collaboration between the private sector, the government, and training institutions, increased the alignment between skills supply and labor market demand, and created a more structured, scalable, and responsive workforce development ecosystem capable of adapting to economic and technological change. To learn more about Relink, please click [here](#) and refer to pages 38–42.

Relevance is key to keeping students engaged, motivated, and increasing retention.

Discussions highlighted that relevant and meaningful learning experiences that connect students to their future opportunities and aspirations can improve motivation, participation, and retention. For example, project-based learning, experiential education, career exposure, and hands-on learning can help students see the practical value of education.

In this context, high-quality and modernized Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays a key role in connecting students with practical skills, employment pathways, entrepreneurship opportunities, and productive sectors. Strengthening TVET requires updated curricula, practical training, modern equipment, and stronger links between training systems and labor market needs. As noted by Chevavo Breeveld, a technical and vocational education student representing secondary education students, “A strong society is supported by the expertise of competent technicians. Without them, the country will lack the means and infrastructure to effectively grow.”

Overall, the discussions reinforced that relevance should be understood as a central condition for student retention, creating an opportunity for Suriname to modernize curricula and expand learning experiences that better connect education with employment, entrepreneurship, and national development priorities. Finally, education systems are stronger when they connect learning to both national development priorities and students’ future pathways.

6. Cultural diversity and inclusion are strategic assets for Learning and Innovation

Educational and economic success depends not only on aligning education systems with labor market needs, but also on recognizing and valuing cultural and linguistic diversity. Doris Sommer, Professor at Harvard University, in the USA, emphasized that diversity should be treated as an asset rather than a challenge. Dina Castro, Professor at Boston University, in the USA, highlighted that children who feel seen and valued are more likely to remain in school and later contribute positively to society, while Margarita Calderón, PhD in Linguistics and Lecturer at the University of Chile, reinforced that students learn best when instruction builds on their language strengths. As Zereene Struiken, representing primary education students, reflected, “Every child deserves to be seen.”

Learning improves when students see their identities, languages, and cultures reflected in schools, teaching practices, and learning materials. These reflections reinforced two key ideas: diversity should be understood as a strength that enriches learning and social cohesion, and education should be viewed as a long-term investment in national prosperity and inclusion.



For more information on the reflections shared by Doris Sommer, Dina Castro, and Margarita Calderón regarding cultural diversity and inclusion, please watch this [video](#).

Advancing this vision requires investments in bilingual and culturally relevant materials, stronger teacher preparation, more educators who speak local languages, and closer connections between schools and communities. This requires moving beyond translation toward culturally responsive approaches that integrate local knowledge, active learning, and community participation. Technology can also support access to culturally relevant learning in contexts where teachers, materials, and services are limited. This may include digital platforms, multilingual content, radio instruction, or other appropriate contextual solutions, as demonstrated in the JADENKÄ program presented below.



The case of the JADENKÄ program in Panama

The JADENKÄ program in Panama is a strong example of how culturally responsive and technology-enabled education can strengthen both learning outcomes and cultural identity in remote and multilingual communities. Designed for Ngäbe preschool students, the intercultural bilingual early mathematics program combined prerecorded interactive radio instruction, culturally grounded mathematics content, contextualized learning materials, and teacher support to deliver high-quality instruction adapted to local realities. According to Näslund-Hadley et al. (2022) rather than treating technology as an isolated intervention, the program integrated evidence-based pedagogy with indigenous language, local knowledge, and active learning approaches. Results showed that the program improved students' mathematics skills by 0.12 to 0.18 standard deviations, increased ethnomathematics skills by approximately 0.23 standard deviations, and generated positive impacts on students' cultural identity. The experience demonstrated that education systems can simultaneously strengthen foundational learning and reinforce students' connections to their language, culture, and community. It also illustrated that even relatively simple technologies, when combined with strong pedagogy and community-centered design, can help expand equitable access to meaningful learning opportunities in underserved areas.

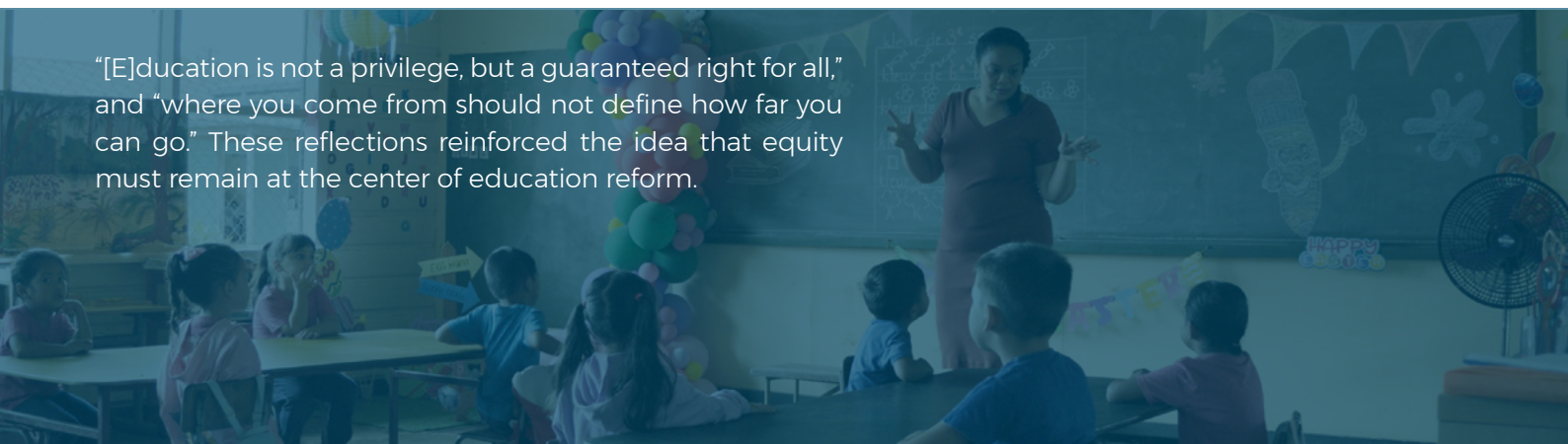
To learn more about this program, please click [here](#).



7. Education systems must ensure that students not only have access to school, but also progress, learn, and successfully complete their education by combining quality education with coordinated support to address academic, economic, and social barriers

Students are more likely to remain in school, learn, and complete their education when systems combine strong learning opportunities with coordinated support mechanisms that address the academic, economic, and social barriers affecting students throughout their educational journey. “As Amrish Lalsa, a university student, emphasized during the conference”:

“[E]ducation is not a privilege, but a guaranteed right for all,” and “where you come from should not define how far you can go.” These reflections reinforced the idea that equity must remain at the center of education reform.



Evidence presented throughout the first phase has shown that educational inequalities often begin long before children enter formal schooling. Experiences from multiple countries demonstrated that children from disadvantaged households frequently start school with weaker language and cognitive skills, limiting their opportunities from the outset. In this context, investments in early childhood development—including parenting support programs, cash transfers, and quality childcare services—emerged as highly effective tools for improving long-term educational and social outcomes.



The case of a parenting program in Jamaica

Jamaica’s parenting program, based on home visits that supported parents in stimulating children’s physical and cognitive development, has demonstrated the powerful long-term impact of early childhood investments. Participants later achieved adult earnings 30% higher than non-participants, illustrating the extraordinary returns on investing early in children and families. According to David Evans, Director, Global Education and Child Well-Being Program at the Center for Global Development, evidence from multiple countries also showed that parenting programs consistently improve child development outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable populations. Click [here](#) to read the full study



For more information about early childhood education and parenting programs, please watch this [video](#) from David Evans.

Discussions also highlighted the importance of targeted policies to support vulnerable students and reduce dropout rates across the education system. Scholarships and school feeding programs, among other equity-focused interventions, were presented as effective mechanisms for improving retention and supporting learning continuity. In particular, school feeding programs were recognized not only for their positive effects on nutrition and academic performance, but also for their broader contribution to human capital development and local economic growth.



The case of Pé de Meia, Brazil

Brazil's Pé-de-Meia program was designed to reduce secondary school dropout by addressing the financial pressures that often force low-income students to leave school. According to Marisa De Santana Da Costa, Director of Incentives for Basic Education Students at the National Ministry of Education of Brazil, the program targets vulnerable students in public secondary education and combines immediate financial support with long-term incentives tied to enrollment, attendance, progression, graduation, and participation in the national secondary exam. By linking payments to educational participation and reserving part of the benefit as savings accessible upon graduation, the policy encourages both retention and completion. Within two years, the program reached 5.6 million students—around half of Brazil's secondary school population—and strengthened educational governance through improved data systems that monitor attendance, performance, and dropout risks more effectively.



The School Meals Coalition, a global initiative

The School Meals Coalition emerged as a global response to the growing recognition that millions of children depended on schools not only for learning but also for daily nutrition, particularly following crises such as the 2008 Financial Crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. These disruptions exposed the vulnerability of children and the urgent need to strengthen school meal systems as essential education, health, and social protection policies worldwide.

According to Donald Bundy, Professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine—, to address this challenge, governments and international partners mobilized through the coalition with the objective of ensuring that every child has access to a healthy school meal by 2030. The initiative strengthened international collaboration, political commitment, and knowledge-sharing to help countries expand and improve school meal programs at scale.

As a result, nearly half a billion children now receive school meals daily worldwide, while evidence continues to show that these programs improve nutrition and academic performance, strengthen retention, reduce future healthcare costs, and support long-term human capital development. School meal programs also stimulate local economies through job creation, particularly in agriculture, with estimates suggesting that for every 100,000 children fed, approximately 2,000 jobs can be generated. Overall, these programs generate returns ranging from \$7 to \$35 for every dollar invested, reinforcing their value as integrated education, health, social protection, and economic development policies.



If you would like to learn more about Donald Bundy's message for Suriname, please watch this [video](#).

At the same time, improving retention and completion also requires strengthening the overall quality of education systems. Successful reforms across countries have strengthened school quality through safe and well-managed learning environments, coherent curricula, strong accountability systems, and evidence-based

policymaking. Successful reforms align curriculum, teaching, assessment, and policy around clear learning trajectories while embedding monitoring and evaluation mechanisms from the beginning of implementation. These approaches support continuous improvement, strengthen instructional coherence, and generate evidence that helps governments scale reforms more effectively over time.

Overall, the sessions underscored that improving retention and reducing dropout rates requires integrated and sustained strategies that strengthen learning quality, expand equity, and support students throughout their entire educational journey. This creates an opportunity for Suriname to combine strong school quality with coordinated interventions that address the academic, economic, and social barriers that continue to limit educational opportunities and long-term development.

8. Technology and artificial intelligence can strengthen education systems when they expand inclusion, support teachers, develop human skills, and promote student well-being.

As education systems work to improve inclusion, retention, and learning outcomes, technology and artificial intelligence are increasingly shaping how countries expand access and prepare learners for future labor market demands.

Technology can expand opportunities for diverse learners and local contexts only when equity, access, and inclusion are prioritized.

Digital transformation can broaden access to quality education, particularly for remote and underserved communities, but unequal access to connectivity, devices, and digital skills risks widening existing gaps. Building inclusive digital education systems therefore requires deliberate investments in infrastructure, connectivity, devices, and digital literacy so that all learners can benefit from technological innovation.

Technology is most effective when it empowers teaching and educators.

Evidence has shown that technology alone does not improve learning outcomes unless it is integrated into pedagogy and classroom practice. Teachers remain central to the learning process, and digital tools are most impactful when they enhance instruction rather than replace them. This highlights the importance of investing in teacher training, pedagogical support, and effective digital integration strategies.

Experiences such as the Manaus Educational Media Center in the Brazilian Amazon demonstrated how technology, combined with culturally relevant content and teacher support, can democratize learning and strengthen resilience in remote communities.



The Manaus Educational Media Center in Brazil

In the Brazilian Amazon, where many communities near Manaus are only accessible after long boat journeys, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and intensified existing barriers to education. In response, the Manaus Educational Media Center was launched in 2021 to deliver learning through television, internet, and multimedia platforms. As presented by Luiz Oliveira, Director of the Department of Support for School Management at the Municipal Secretariat of Education (SEMED) in Manaus, the initiative combined technology with strong pedagogy, culturally relevant content, teacher support, and inclusive strategies for vulnerable and migrant populations. Originally created as an emergency solution, it evolved into a long-term innovation strategy that expanded access to education, strengthened teaching, and demonstrated how technology can democratize learning in remote regions when paired with equity-focused policies and community engagement.

Artificial Intelligence requires strong human skills and lifelong learning.

Artificial intelligence has the potential to transform education, not simply by improving efficiency, but by developing unique human skills such as creativity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, and innovation. Preparing learners for a rapidly evolving economic and technological reality requires education systems to focus less on teaching the technical aspects of AI in isolation and more on developing adaptable, reflective, and continuously learning individuals who can use technology responsibly and creatively. Agility, flexibility, and lifelong learning are therefore essential to ensure that both students and workers can continuously improve and respond to changing labor market demands.



For more information about education technology and artificial intelligence, please watch this [video](#) by Richard Culatta, CEO of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), USA.

Student well-being and mental health are central to educational success in the era of social media.

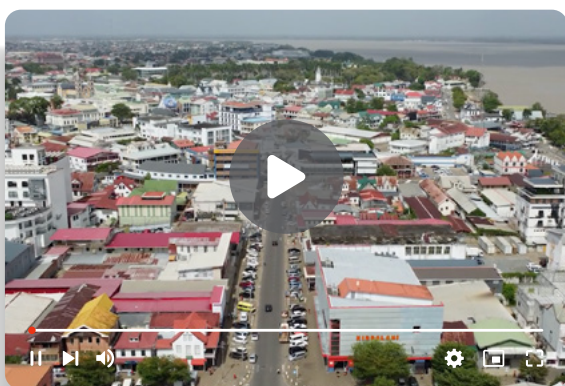
Education systems must support not only academic achievement but also students' emotional development, resilience, confidence, and sense of belonging, especially at a time when social media plays an increasingly significant role in young people's daily lives. The growing influence of digital platforms on students' identities, relationships, mental health, and learning experiences reinforces the importance of guiding children and adolescents to use technology in healthy, safe, and positive ways. Schools therefore play an essential role in creating supportive and engaging environments where students feel connected, valued, and supported emotionally. Future-ready education systems must prepare learners not only academically, but also socially, emotionally, ethically, and culturally to navigate an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

For Suriname, this represents an opportunity to build an inclusive and future-ready education system that expands digital access, strengthens teacher capacity, promotes student well-being, and prepares learners with the human and technical skills needed for an increasingly digital economy.



9. Partnerships and institutional capacity are essential to sustain and scale education reform

Transforming education systems at a scale requires strong partnerships, effective coordination, and capable institutions. Sustainable reform depends on collaboration among governments, development partners, the private sector, academia, and civil society to mobilize resources, exchange knowledge, and align efforts around shared national priorities. However, partnerships only generate impact when they are supported by clear governance structures, defined responsibilities, and shared accountability mechanisms that ensure coherence and avoid fragmented implementation. At the same time, successfully scaling promising initiatives requires more than funding—they demand strong institutional capacity, effective management systems, continuous training, and the ability to adapt to reforms over time. In this context, strengthening institutions becomes central to turning long-term vision into concrete and sustainable results.



The IDB has worked for almost two decades in Suriname to support the education sector. To see more of the impact of the partnership between the Inter-American Development Bank and Government of Suriname, watch [this video](#).



10. Education reform must remain grounded in national context, progressively implemented, and inclusive and participatory

Sustainable education transformation requires a shared national vision grounded in Suriname's social, cultural, linguistic, and economic realities, while aligning education and skills development with the country's broader development aspirations. Lasting reform depends not only on strong technical proposals, but also on national ownership, implementation capacity, sustainable financing, institutional coordination, effective governance mechanisms, clear implementation priorities, sequencing strategies, monitoring frameworks, and sustained political commitment. International experiences have shown that countries that have made significant progress in education did so through long-term strategies that remained nationally driven, adaptable over time, and responsive to changing social and economic realities. Reform processes must therefore be implemented progressively, allowing space for continuous learning, adaptation, and long-term sustainability.

The reflections and consensus emerging from the first phase highlighted that sustainable reform must also remain inclusive and participatory. Broad stakeholder engagement—including students, teachers, communities, private sector actors, civil society, and development partners—is essential to build social consensus, strengthen public trust and maintain continuity across political cycles. The process should also help define financing approaches, institutional responsibilities, cross-sector coordination, and mechanisms for long-term ownership to ensure that reforms can be translated into actionable, measurable, and sustainable results. As Suriname advances toward the development of a long-term education and human capital strategy, reforms will need to remain ambitious, evidence-based, and deeply grounded in the realities, priorities, and aspirations of the Surinamese people.





III. Conclusion: Towards a Unified vision and a National Plan

The first phase of the conference brought together international experiences from world-class experts, as well as the perspectives and aspirations shared by youth and national stakeholders. These inputs helped shape a shared national vision and identify priority reforms for the development of a long-term education and skills development plan.

The Government of Suriname and the Inter-American Development Bank express their sincere appreciation to all participants for contributing to the success of the conference. The event reaffirmed a shared commitment to advancing Suriname’s education transformation agenda through international knowledge exchange, technical cooperation, and potential financing support. Special recognition is extended to the speakers whose insights, experiences, and contributions enriched the dialogue, strengthened the exchange of ideas, and helped shape the future of education and skills development in the country. Beyond knowledge exchange, the conference also strengthened collaboration among government institutions, educators, youth representatives, private sector actors, development partners, and international experts committed to advancing human capital development in Suriname.

Building on this momentum, the Government of Suriname will convene a second phase on June 8-10 focused on translating dialogue into concrete policy directions, implementation strategies, institutional responsibilities, and measurable goals. This nationally led process will combine international lessons, national expertise, and broad stakeholder consultations to support the development of a long-term education and skills development plan to guide Suriname’s human capital agenda over the next five to ten years.

Guided by the reflections and consensus emerging from the first phase, Suriname now has a unique opportunity to translate national consensus into concrete action and position education and skills development at the center of its long-term development strategy.

If you would like to learn more about the conference, [click here to visit the webpage.](#)



A National Forum on
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Skills, and
Suriname’s Long-Term
Transformation**

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Annex I: Keynotes and Speakers

The keynote speakers, moderators, and panelists are listed according to the sequence of their participation during the conference:

H.E. Dr. Jennifer Geerlings-Simons — President of the Republic of Suriname

H.E. Dirk Currie — Minister of Education, Science and Culture of Suriname

H.E. Lalinie Gopal — Minister of Youth Development and Sports of Suriname

Adriana La Valley — Representative in Suriname, IDB

Eric Hanushek — Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and leading authority on the economics of education.

Ferdinando Regalia — Manager of the Social Sector, IDB

Izolda Cela — Former Secretary of Education of Ceará and later Governor of Ceará, Brazil

Peck Cho — Distinguished Professor at Korea University, South Korea

Mercedes Mateo — Education Division Chief, IDB

Zereene Struiken — Primary Education Student

Chevavo Breeveld — Secondary Education Student

Amrish Lalsa — University Student, SDG Youth Ambassador of Suriname

Shreshtha Chotelal — Private Sector Development Consultant, IDB in Suriname

Michael Fung — Executive Director of the Institute for the Future of Education (IFE), Mexico

Frank Cörvers — Program Director Human Capital in the Region at the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA), Maastricht University School of Business and Economics.

Jason Menso — Deputy Director at Ministry of Youth Development and Sport, Suriname

Juan Eduardo Carmach — Director of Future of Work, Human Capital at SOFOFA, Chile

María Fernanda Prada — Senior Education Specialist, IDB

Frank Doris Sommer — Ira and Jewell Williams Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures and of African and African American Studies, Harvard University, USA

Margarita Calderón — PhD in Linguistics Lecturer at University of Chile

Dina C. Castro — Inaugural Bahamdan Endowed Professor in Early Childhood Well-Being & Director, Institute for Early, Childhood Well-Being. Wheelock College of Education and Human Development, Boston University, USA

Gregory Elacqua — Principal Education Economist, IDB

Mary Jean Gallagher — Former Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Student Achievement Office, Ministry of Education of Ontario, Canada

David Evans — Director, Global Education and Child Well-Being Program, Center for Global Development, USA (virtual participation).

Marisa De Santana Da Costa — Director of Incentives for Basic Education Students, National Ministry of Education, Brazil

Donald Bundy — Professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK

Gilbert Valverde — Associate Professor at the University, Albany, USA

Marie Evane Tamagnan — Senior Operations Advisor, IDB

Richard Culatta — CEO of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), USA

Luiz Oliveira — Director of the Department of Support for School Management, Municipal Secretariat of Education (SEMED) in Manaus, Brazil

Elena Arias — Lead Education Specialist, IDB

Marco Mantovanelli — Regional Manager, Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

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