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## Remarks by World Bank Group President David Malpass at the Transforming Education Summit during UNGA 77

September 19, 2022

### ***Session on the Global Challenge of Addressing the Learning Crisis***

**NEW YORK, Sept. 19, 2022**—Thank you, Priyanka, President Bio, and Director Russell,

Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen,

I'm pleased to co-host this Transforming Education Summit with the focus on foundational learning. Basic literacy, numeracy, and foundational skills are critical to face the unprecedented losses in global learning caused by prolonged school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Already before the pandemic, over half of children in low-and middle-income countries were living in learning poverty, which is the share of children unable to read and understand a basic text by the age of 10.

**Unfortunately, that share has increased to an estimated 70 percent in 2022. Combined with the plunge in growth and investment, this learning crisis means the world is facing a full-blown crisis in development.**

Recent data from the pandemic shows that while schools were closed, students, on average, made none of the usual learning gains, despite attempts to reach them with remote learning. In other words, each month out of in-person schooling led to a full month of lost learning. With school closures reaching one to two years in many countries, this adds up to massive learning losses globally and affects countries regardless of income level. Additionally, the complete shutdown of preschools means that hundreds of millions of children face inadequate nutrition and a lack of early stimulation. And in some countries, dropouts have increased, especially among adolescents from low-income families. Girls living in conflict-affected countries are two and a half times more likely to be out of school.

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**Without decisive action, today's students could lose 10 percent of their future average annual earnings, with inequality likely to worsen.** Data from Mexico and Bangladesh, for example, show that poorer children are significantly harder hit.

**These sobering statistics underscore the need to secure foundational learning for all children today.**

We know that digital training, scientific knowledge, critical thinking, and communication skills are essential, yet hundreds of millions of children are losing ground at a critical time.

Four steps are needed to recover these losses and accelerate learning. First, countries need to keep schools open and increase the hours per week of instruction. Second, it is important to correctly match instruction to a student's level of learning and instructional needs, not to what is dictated by the pre-COVID curriculum. Third, a strong focus on foundational learning is critical – focusing on literacy, numeracy, and core learning skills would help teachers and students target their efforts more effectively. And fourth, recovering from this learning crisis requires funding to support it.

We know that governments and communities are struggling to raise resources and prioritize their use in the face of severe overlapping crises. Governments face energy and food price shocks, high debt burdens, currency depreciation, sharp declines in international reserves, climate change, and the reversals in development caused by COVID-19. Yet one of the best chances for a better future is to invest in education today and make sure each dollar of education spending is put toward improved learning.

Unfortunately, the latest data indicate that education spending in low- and lower-middle-income countries in 2022 will be below 2019 levels.

The World Bank Group's support to countries covers the entire learning cycle. We have **an active portfolio of \$24 billion in education in over 95 countries** and are **the largest external financier of education for the developing world.**

The World Bank is very pleased for the opportunity to deepen our partnership on education with other development institutions including UNICEF, UNESCO, the UK's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), USAID, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. We are all committed to action – to continue strongly supporting countries in addressing education challenges through financing and technical assistance.

A silent learning crisis is unfolding that has become a devastating shock to human capital. We need to work to prevent further damage and build more effective systems. We urge you, the world's leaders, to meet this crisis head-on and act to improve learning outcomes for all children, everywhere.

Thank you.

