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A Transformative Solution:

Reducing Poverty and Inequality through a Post-2015 Early Childhood Development Goal



THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP
ON EARLY CHILDHOOD
CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

A Global Goal and Call to Action: Reduce by half the number of children under age five who fail to reach their developmental potential

CURRENT AND FUTURE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS WILL ONLY BE MET WITH ATTENTION TO THE OVERALL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN.

A measurable and actionable Early Childhood Development (ECD)¹ goal will not only strengthen efforts towards the health, development and well-being of young children but also work to reduce the inter-generational transmission of poverty and inequality. Such a goal should be part of a human development and rights-based framework² that promotes equitable and sustainable development and is implemented in partnership with multiple sectors and multiple partners.

When opportunities for a good start to life are so profoundly unevenly distributed, both across and within countries, other fundamental global goals are dramatically more difficult to attain. The proposed goal will help advance other important development goals, in particular improving birth and achieving key health outcomes³, improving access to quality basic education and learning outcomes, promoting social justice, advancing women's rights and gender equality and ultimately reducing inequality and poverty.

BACKGROUND MESSAGES

Over 200 million children under 5 years of age in low-income and middle-income countries³ – and increasing numbers in OECD countries and emerging economies⁴ – will not reach their full developmental potential⁵ because they grow up facing a broad range of risk factors, most notably poverty; poor health including HIV/AIDS⁶ and malnutrition; high levels of family and environmental stress and exposure to violence, abuse, neglect,⁷ exploitation, and inadequate levels of care and learning opportunities. This includes risks that result from emergencies related to conflict, climate change and global demographic shifts through migration and urbanisation.⁸

a The CG supports the WHO call to expand the child survival agenda to include child development for health, equity and sustainable development (*The Lancet*, Volume 381, Issue 9877, pp. 1514-1515, 4 May 2013)

KEY MESSAGES

- A growing body of scientific research clearly indicates that these risks and adverse experiences, particularly in the first five years of life, have a profound negative impact on a child's future well-being, especially in regard to health, education and academic outcomes and earning potential.
- Research clearly demonstrates that the impact of these risk factors and adverse experiences can be mitigated by strengthening the environments in which young children grow and thrive through evidence-based strategies including: parenting interventions; early detection and intervention for developmental delays and disabilities; early childhood programs of care, support and learning, where possible integrated into home visiting programs; targeted health, nutrition, sanitation and social protection services; and good quality preschools.⁹

While progress has been made, most governments still do not prioritise early childhood in their health, education, poverty reduction or other national plans, and many countries still lack early childhood development policies, strategic plans and laws¹⁰:

- Globally, 171 million children under 5 were affected by moderate or severe stunting in 2010 – a clear sign of malnutrition which impacts children's physical and cognitive development and capacity to learn. Based on current trends, by 2015, one in four children under the age 5 will suffer from stunting¹¹
- 57% of young children in developing countries have NO ACCESS to preschool – 83% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 78% in the Arab region¹²
- Children living in the poorest households are up to 10 times less likely to attend early childhood education programmes than those in the richest¹³



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One-year-old Luis plays with the braids of his grandmother in a field in Llacuash, a farming community in the district of Huallanca, Peru.

WAYS FORWARD

Indicators¹⁴ that employ a multi-generation perspective are necessary to achieve an early childhood development goal. Besides children, caregivers – particularly parents and especially mothers need support. Caregiver well-being has implications for childhood outcomes. Maternal depression, for example, can increase the likelihood of pre-term birth, low birth weight and developmental delays in children.¹⁵ In addition, caregivers are responsible for children’s access to health care; proper nutrition; responsive cognitive, social, and emotional stimulation; and protection from abuse, neglect, violence, stress, and trauma. Below is a comprehensive list of indicators that are integral to the goal of reducing the number of children who fail to reach their developmental potential.

- **Nutrition target***¹⁶

- * Reduce by at least 40% the number of children under age five who are likely to suffer from stunted growth¹⁷

- **Health targets**

- * Reduce maternal mortality rates by three quarters
- * Reduce rates of low birth weight, pre-term births and delivery without trained medical attendants
- * Reduce rates of maternal depression
- * Assure universal access to reproductive health care, including comprehensive prenatal screening,

education and health care visits that include preparation for delivery, parenting education and support and family planning options

- * Assure universal access to parenting support through health care and other services
- * Provide universal, regular immunisations, screening and treatment, and hygiene and sanitation interventions
- * Prevent/treat paediatric HIV, provide stimulation activities for young children with HIV, and treat parents with HIV

- **Social Protection targets***

- * Halve the number of young children who live in households with per capita incomes below national poverty lines through strategies that provide social and income supports, such as cash transfers, daycare provision and employment
- * Eradicate exposure to neglect, violence and trauma in children’s homes, schools, and communities
- * Implement evidence-based child protection programs that promote responsive, nurturing and positive early interactions between caregivers and young children living in impoverished, harsh and/or violent environments

- * Assure safe, responsive and quality caregiving arrangements for children under 3
- **Learning and Education targets**¹⁸
 - * Reduce the rate of developmental delays in children from birth to 5 years
 - * Halve the number of illiterate adults, particularly women
 - * Provide for all children at least one year of a quality pre-primary program as part of the formal education system^{19 20}
 - * Provide all children living below national poverty lines at least one additional year of quality early childhood programming

Early childhood encompasses the period of human development from prenatal through the transition from home or preschool into the early primary grades. Despite commitments and progress in improving access to education at the global level, including Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 on universal primary education and the Education for All (EFA) Goals, levels of learning are still too low. At least 250 million primary-school-age children around the world are not able to read, write or count well enough to meet minimum learning standards, including those who have spent at least four years in school.²¹ As such, we also propose the following:²²

- Increase investment in the early primary grades (1 to 3) to ensure children have well-trained and effective teachers and a teacher-pupil ratio of no more than 1:30. Early grade investments will improve learning outcomes and efficiency

at every level of education systems. Primary education budgets, teacher qualifications, and pupil-teacher ratios should be reported by grade so that allocations to early grades can be tracked.

- Invest at least 15% of international education aid into pre-primary and early childhood education programs
- Allocate at least 7% of annual Ministry of Education budgets to the pre-primary grade(s)
- Reduce the learning gap by the age of 8 between the richest and poorest 10%:
 - * Ensure *all* children start school on time, ready to learn and acquire basic learning competencies by age 8²³
 - * Reduce by half the number of children unable to read with fluency and comprehension by age 8²⁴
 - * Make children's learning outcomes the metric of success for ECD investment. Whether preschool or early primary, we have ample evidence that "quality" is typically (and only) defined by inputs – infrastructure, teacher qualifications, and other features -- that are not consistently predictive of children's learning. We need to ensure equity in both access and learning²⁵

Achieving these goals and targets requires improvement in the global collection of quality data on early childhood indicators, cross-sectoral collaboration in developing effective implementation plans and strategies, and increased public and private sector investments.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Early Childhood Development (ECD) is also known as Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and encompasses early childhood education (ECE), early childhood care and education (ECCE), and other designations. Early Childhood includes the period of human development from prenatal through the transition from home or ECD centre into the early primary grades, 0 – 8 years of age.
- 2 UN Secretary General Report and Resolution on Implementing Rights in Early Childhood (2010); Education for All Global Monitoring Report, (2007). UNESCO. *Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education*, (2007). UNESCO; WHO Commission Report on the Social Determinants of Health (2008); Duger, R., Durlauf, and Heckman, (2012). *The Role of Human Capability in Reframing the Global Development Agenda*. Institute for New Economic Thinking.
- 3 Grantham-McGregor, S., Cheung, Y., Cueto, S. Glewwe, P., Richter, L., & Strupp, B. (2007). Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries. *The Lancet*, 369 (9555) 60-70.
- 4 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2011). *Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising*. Paris: OECD, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264119536-en>. Accessed March 19, 2013.
- 5 Defined as children who are stunted (Height for Age less than -2SD) or living in absolute poverty (<\$1 per day adjusted for purchasing power parity

- 6 Sherr L, Mueller J, Varrall R. (2009). A systematic review of cognitive development and child human immunodeficiency virus infection. *Psychol Health Med.* 14, 387-404.
- 7 UN Secretary General's Report on Violence Against Children A/61/299 (2006) http://www.unicef.org/violencestudy/reports/SG_violencestudy_en.pdf
- 8 Engle, P.L., Black, M.M., Behrman, J.R., Cabral de Mello, M., Gertler, P.J., Kapiriri, L., Martorell, R., Young, M.E., & the International Child Development Steering Group. (2007). Strategies to avoid the loss of developmental potential in more than 200 million children in the developing world. *The Lancet*, 369(9557), 229-242;
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- 9 Engle, P.L., Black, M.M., Behrman, J.R., Cabral de Mello, M., Gertler, P.J., Kapiriri, L., Martorell, R., Young, M.E., & the International Child Development Steering Group. (2007). Strategies to avoid the loss of developmental potential in more than 200 million children in the developing world. *The Lancet*, 369(9557), 229-242;
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Woodhead, M., Dornan, P., & Murray, H. (2013). *What Inequality Means for Children: Evidence from Young Lives*, Oxford: Young Lives.
- 10 Vargas-Baron, E and Schipper, J. (2012). *Review of Policy and Planning Indicators in Early Childhood*. RISE Institute (commissioned by UNESCO, Paris).
- 11 de Onis, M., Blössner, M. and Borghi, E. 2012. Prevalence and trends of stunting among pre-school children, 1990–2020. *Public Health Nutrition*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 142–8.
- 12 UNESCO (2012). EFA Global Monitoring Report: Youth and Skills – Putting Education to Work.
- 13 UNICEF (2012). Inequities in Early Childhood Development: What the data say. Evidence from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys.
- 14 The outlined set of indicators include those that are presently available and need to be further developed – see [UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys](#), [UNESCO Holistic ECD Index \(HECDI\)](#), [Early Childhood Rights Indicators etc.](#)
- 15 Surkan PJ, Kennedy CE, Hurley KM, Black MM (2011). Maternal depression and early childhood growth in developing countries: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 287: 607 – 615D.
- 16 The Consultative Group on ECCD endorses the indicators promoted in the Expert Consultation, February 2013, and outlined in the paper: World Bank, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Bread for the World, the 1000 Days Partnership, IFPRI and CIDA (2013). Summary Report: Nutrition in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. <https://www.securenutritionplatform.org/Pages/DisplayResources.aspx?RID=174>
- 17 World Health Assembly-endorsed global nutrition target for 2025
- 18 The Consultative Group on ECCD endorses the goal of 'equitable quality lifelong education and learning for all' proposed at the Global Meeting of the Thematic Consultation on Education in the post-2015 development agenda, Dakar, March 18-19, 2013.
- 19 Quality programs are operated by trained educators, use child-centered approaches, engage families and communities in children's learning, are delivered in the children's mother tongue, use culturally-relevant materials and offer young children opportunities to play and explore.
- 20 Education First: An initiative of the Un Secretary-General (2012). See page 25 under 10 Key Actions: Strategy 1 under Action 8 – Instill lifelong learning includes increasing from 15-45%, participation in quality ECD programs for marginalized children in low-income countries.
- 21 UNESCO (2012). EFA Global Monitoring Report: Youth and Skills – Putting Education to Work.
- 22 The Importance of Early Childhood Development, statement prepared by the Consultative Group on ECCD for the Global Meeting of the Thematic Consultation on Education in the post-2015 development agenda, Dakar, March 18-19, 2013
- 23 Bartlett, S. (2013). Learning about Learning: Reflections on Studies from 10 Countries. Aga Khan Foundation; UNESCO Institute of Statistics & the Center for Universal Education at Brookings (2013). Toward Universal Learning: What Every Child Should Learn, Report No. 1 of 3, Learning Metrics Task Force.
- 24 In line with Global Partnership for Education Strategic Plan 2012-2015; UNESCO Institute of Statistics & the Center for Universal Education at Brookings (2013).



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The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (CGECCD) convenes, mobilizes, and engages global ECCD actors in order to generate and disseminate knowledge on ECCD for use in advocacy, policy, planning, capacity building, programming and evaluation research, aimed at improving the development of children, families and communities, especially those living in disadvantaged circumstances in low-income and middle-income countries.

The CG's post-2015 task team is working to ensure that early childhood development is an essential part of the global development agenda.

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