

SECTION A: Early Childhood Care and Education Policy Brief

'By investing in early childhood development programmes, we have an opportunity to break the cycle of inequities that has dominated the lives of millions of children and families Lancet, vol 378, Oct 8 2011

Purpose

- The purpose of this paper is to provide education coalitions and other early childhood development actors with a general ECCE framework as well as arguments and facts to inform advocacy aimed at raising awareness of the importance of
 - Early childhood as a critical period in human development
 - ECCE as both central to ensuring young children's rights and as a good investment in terms of individual and national development.

Interventions in early childhood lead to a lifetime of gains and break the cycle of inequality that prevails in the lives of so many children and their families. ECCE is important in its own right, having not only the purpose of preparing children for school, but for life in the same way as any other levels and forms of education contribute to this process. The early childhood years set the foundation for life, ensuring that children have positive experiences and that their needs for health, nutrition, stimulation and support are met, and that they learn to interact with their surroundings.

- The paper summarizes the rights framework and the benefits of ECCE programmes and explains what can be done to overcome challenges.

The context

- The world' population was declared to have passed the 7 billion mark on November 1st 2011, up from about 6.5 billion people in 2005. Out of this population, there are almost 1 billion children under 8 years worldwide.¹
- There is now an enormous body of evidence (brain research, economic analysis, longitudinal studies) that reinforces the importance of the early years in human development².
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) reminds us that children, whilst retaining their entitlement to the full range of human rights, are often marginalised or excluded and represent a special case requiring additional safeguards.
 - The CRC committee, in reviewing States Party reports, highlights that in many cases, very little information is offered about early childhood, with

¹ Global Poverty Project: <http://www.globalpovertyproject.com/infobank/children>

²See GCE Planning Pack, GAW 2012

comments limited mainly to child mortality, birth registration, and health care.³

→ General Comment 7 (GC7) on Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood and the 2010 UN Secretary General's Report on Early Childhood provide recommendations and strategies for implementing child rights in Early Childhood while the [Third Committee Omnibus Resolution \(A/65/452\)](#) at the UNGA 65th Session in December 2010 reaffirms the commitment of State Parties to the promotion and protection of the rights of children⁴.

- The Jomtien Declaration makes clear that "learning begins at birth" and highlights the importance of the first years of a child's life in determining future educational achievement and broader developmental outcomes.
- In its resolution on ECCE, Education International reiterates provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child to receive education and that ECCE should be part of this right.⁵
- Expansion and improvement of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is the first goal in the Dakar Framework for the achievement of Education for All. While progress has been made, more needs to be done in terms of policy and resources to achieve the goal⁶. Most governments still do not prioritise ECCE in their education, poverty reduction or other national plans.
- The failure of governments to support investment in ECCE is a failure of political commitment. Increased demand from civil society is crucial if governments are to fulfil their obligations to young children and their families.
- In order to make progress on the current MDGs, including a post 2015 framework, ECCE needs to be included as a major strategy -- indeed a global development goal itself⁷.

The situation of young children: The right to survival and development

It is estimated that over 200 million children from low- and middle-income countries under the age of five years are not attaining their developmental potential because of poverty, nutritional deficiencies and limited

³ GC7 para.1

⁴ Provide links for the three documents

⁵ Education International, Resolution on Early Childhood Education, Second World Congress, Washington DC, 25-29 July, 1998

⁶ 2011 EFA summary report on ECCE

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED_new/pdf/Summary%20of%20program%20towards%20EFA-colors.pdf

⁷ James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, The Guardian, September 2011

opportunities for learning.⁸

Research in neuroscience demonstrates how exposure, even from before birth, to poor nutrition, limited access to good health care and maternal depression, amongst other external risk factors, affects the architecture of the brain and thereby compromises children's development.

The well-being and development of a young child is undeniably linked with the mother. Even today, more than 500,000 women, one every minute, die in pregnancy and childbirth every year⁹. Moreover, maternal malnourishment leads to low birth weight and possible developmental delays.

Maternal education is strongly correlated with improved health outcomes for children. What enables educated women to achieve higher levels of nutrition for their children is the fact that they are able to use their general knowledge and skills to acquire health specific knowledge.

Chronic malnutrition during infancy leads to growth retardation, with evidence revealing that there are lasting benefits for adult education and income when nutritional strategies are put into place for young children at risk of chronic malnutrition.¹⁰

Cumulative risks expose children to negative outcomes in terms of cognitive and psychological health and success in education and thus contribute to continuing inequalities in subsequent generations.

Young children will thrive and achieve healthy brain development and their full developmental potential when their care-givers can provide strong socio-emotional support, adequate nutrition and cognitive stimulation.

Comprehensive ECCE services from the ante-natal period onwards 'are a good investment for reducing inequalities in the development of children's potential perpetuated by poverty, poor health, poor nutrition, and restricted learning opportunities.'¹¹

Comprehensive and quality ECCE programmes can make a significant contribution to the physical, psychomotor, cognitive, social and emotional development of the child, including the acquisition of languages and early literacy. Children are active learners from birth, and the early years are vital

⁸ Child Development 1. Inequality in early childhood: risk and protective factors for early child development. Lancet, vol 378, Oct 8 2011

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http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Resources/Static/Products/Progress2010/MDG_Report_2010_En.pdf

¹⁰ Lancet, vol 378, Oct 8 2011

¹¹ Child Development 2. Lancet, vol 378, Oct 8 2011

to their success in school and later in life.¹²

What is Early Childhood Care and Education?

There are varying definitions of Early Childhood Care and Education¹³, but generally the term is used to describe the time from the prenatal stage, throughout infancy to the age when children are expected to start school, including the early years of schooling.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child proposes a working definition of early childhood as below the age of 8 years and expects governments to create a positive environment to realise their obligations to children of this age. Thus, states parties are expected to support comprehensive services for young children and their families that are regularly monitored to ensure access to services of good quality.

Early childhood Care and Education programmes, which include health, care and education cover a vast range of possible activities which can involve parents, childcare workers, trainers, teachers, health workers, government officials and policy makers – as well as the children themselves.

Parents, legal guardians and members of the extended family have the primary responsibility for the protection, upbringing and development of children.¹⁴ States should provide appropriate support and assistance in this regard.

Services include:

Parenting support programmes. The younger the child, the more fundamental is the role of the family in ensuring their children's rights. Strengthening family and community abilities to support their children's development is a fundamental role of ECCE programmes, and parenting and care giving programmes are now understood as key components of ECCE programmes, particularly when they build on parents' beliefs, knowledge and resourcefulness in raising their children. When interventions to promote better child interaction and attachment between care-giver and child are integrated with nutrition and health, they are likely to have positive effects.

Daycare/crèche provision/supportive, flexible care. It is rare that children of working mothers are provided for, and in many places

¹² See Education International study, "Early Childhood Education: A Global Scenario" and "EI's Commitment to Quality Early Childhood Education" available at: http://www.ei-ie.org/en/websections/content_detail/3265#intro3

¹³ Reference from planning pack

¹⁴ UN General Assembly "Promotion and protection of the rights of children: Statutsof the Convention on the Rights of the Child", Report of the Secretary General 2/08/2010

young babies accompany mothers to the workplace. Many early childhood development services focus on those aged 3 – 5 years. However, 1 – 3 year olds are vulnerable and are more dependent on others to ensure their environments offer adequate stimulation, regular chances to eat and stay clean, healthy and safe. Governments should therefore support flexible services for children of this age.

Pre-schools - Good pre-schooling has been shown to have a positive effect on child development. According to the recent Lancet studies, pre-school enrollees demonstrate higher scores on literacy, vocabulary, mathematics, and/or quantitative reasoning than non-attendees. Appropriately structured classes, with a strong component of learning through play can provide a much needed head start and significantly improve enrolment and retention rates in the future.

Early years of primary school¹⁵- Most children in developing countries have no access to ECCE programmes with 86% in Sub-Saharan Africa not having access to a pre-primary programme. The first years of primary school are often a child's first experience of formal learning and are therefore crucial. It can be argued that the real crisis in education is in early primary school - yet it receives no attention. Most children who do not complete primary school drop out in the first year or two: grade 1 drop out: Uganda 32%, Madagascar 25% , Pakistan 15%¹⁶. Many more repeat grade 1 (Burundi 37%, Nepal 37%¹⁷), and in some countries around half the grade 1 children repeat or drop out. Even if children stay in school, millions become set in persistent patterns of under-achievement, which is costly in both human and financial terms. Early primary teachers' understanding of how young children learn must be strengthened in order to ensure the overall quality of the first years of primary school.

Provision of stimulating environments - A child's development is largely determined by the quality of the care provided by care givers during those early stages of life. Therefore, positive experiences in early childhood have a positive long term impact on children's development because warm and consistent care provided by parents or care givers helps prevent future adjustment problems.¹⁸ A stimulating environment will be one which responds sensitively and appropriately to children's individual needs, stimulates their curiosity and recognises their particular interests.¹⁹

Provision of nutrition and health care. ECCE programs work as a shield as well as early warning system for detection of problems in children's health and see to it that they receive health care.

¹⁵ Is Everybody Ready...reference

¹⁶ GMR 2009

¹⁷ GMR 2009

¹⁸ For more on care and stimulating environment see "Key Messages" by the Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Development, <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/en-ca/key-messages-list.html>

¹⁹ As above

Programmes can monitor growth and provide food supplements and micronutrients.²⁰ In Colombia, children participating in the Community Care and Nutrition Project are required to complete their immunizations within six months of entering the programme.

Why Early Childhood Care and Education?

Several arguments exist for strengthening and investing in early childhood care and education services:

Young children are rights holders. They are entitled under the Convention on the Rights of the Child to special protection and appropriate services. The right of young children to education is not respected where children face over-crowded classrooms, with teaching ill suited to their needs, combined with inappropriate disciplinary approaches.

Equity is enhanced. The greatest returns from the provision of ECCE come from focusing on the most disadvantaged, particularly if those children receive good quality services. The provision of high quality early childhood services targeted to disadvantaged children and families can be a powerful equaliser, fulfilling rights, promoting social justice and positively affecting society.²¹

Access to and retention in formal schooling increase. Access to ECCE supports implementation of the right to education by preparing children to make the most of their educational opportunities if and when they enter school. For example, evidence exists for ECCE interventions reducing repetition and increasing retention.

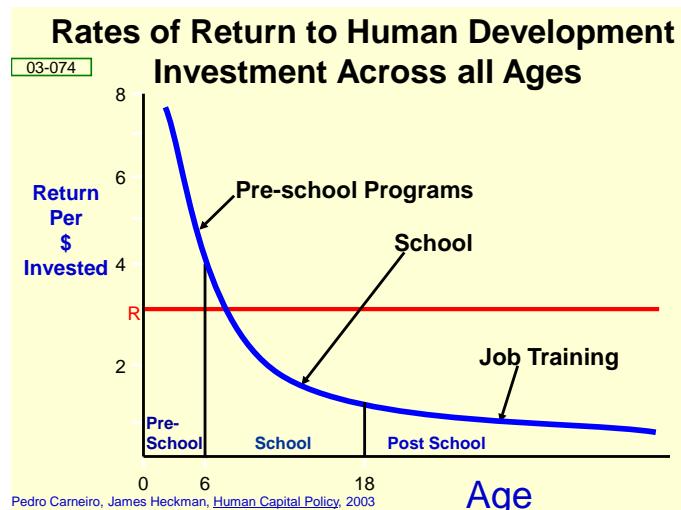
In Nepal, a study found that 95% of children who attended ECCE centres made the transition to primary school compared with 75% who had not attended ECCE centres. Similarly, in Turkey, 86% of children whose mothers had participated in a programme that combined ECCE with training for mothers in poor areas were still in school seven years after the programmes, compared with those who had not participated.²²

The rate of return on investment increases. Investment in services in the early years, according to Nobel Laureate James Heckman, produces remarkable benefits and savings which are diminished each year investment is delayed. (See the figure below.)

²⁰ India's Integrated Child Development Services

²¹ See note 12 above

²² GTZ: Getting the Basics Right: Contribution of Early Childhood Development to quality, equity and efficiency in education, 2009.



Early childhood is a social mobiliser. Communities which may be economically or socially marginalised may respond actively in terms of trying to change things for their children and, in so doing, bring about changes for themselves.

In Colombia, an ECCE programme established more than 30 years ago has led to adults becoming more involved in a constantly widening set of self-help activities which has changes national government policy.²³

Targeting services for marginalised children

Despite robust international and national legal frameworks in support of human rights, the enjoyment of these rights is most at risk where systems are configured around segregation of and discrimination against children. For example children with disabilities often face increased discrimination and stigmatisation. Overall inequities remain prevalent and the combination of growth in private provision and weaknesses in public programs means that the ECCE sector is rarely pro-poor²⁴.

Early childhood services are proven to be the most beneficial for the most disadvantaged. General Comment 7 on Early Childhood, of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, calls for attention to be paid to the most vulnerable groups of children and those at risk of discrimination. This includes the poorest; girls; children with disabilities; those from indigenous, religious, ethnic or linguistic minorities; children who are orphaned or affected or infected by HIV; and others.

²³ Promesa

²⁴ EFA 2010 Global Monitoring Report: Reaching the Marginalised(UNESCO 2009)

Evidence shows that girls enrolled in early childhood programmes are better prepared for school and frequently stay in school longer. ECCE services also release older sisters from looking after younger children and enable them to return to and remain in school.

Similarly, early childhood is a period when disabilities can be identified and appropriate support and intervention provided to ensure that a child reaches his or her potential. Young disabled children are sometimes at risk of institutionalisation but it is essential they have opportunities to take part in community life with specialist assistance as required, which should also include support to parents.

In many countries, the language of instruction in schools is different from the home language of families. Early childhood provision that both reinforces children's grasp of their home language by using it as the language of instruction and to gain initial literacy and introduces the language of schooling will be of benefit to children who otherwise will start formal education at a disadvantage.

- **Data collected between 1999-2003 for 56 developing countries showed that children from the poorest households and with the least educated mothers were consistently much less likely to attend a preschool programme than their more advantaged peers. Children in rural areas were also less likely to attend than those from urban areas.²⁵**
- **Living in one of the poorest households in Zambia cut the chance of participating in ECCE by a factor of 12 compared with children in the wealthiest households, while the fact rose to 25 in Uganda and 28 in Egypt.²⁶**

There are several good examples of ECCE programmes targeting marginalised children:

ECCE programmes such as Wawa Wasi Centres in Peru, parenting programmes in Jordan and Turkey, Step by Step preschool programmes in Central and Eastern Europe, community based child care centres in Burkina Faso, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, the Philippines, Swaziland and Tanzania and mobile kindergartens in Mongolia have provided the visionary, creative and high quality learning opportunities. These are rated among the most inspiring models of promoting cost effective and sustainable ECCE as they are tailored to local needs of families and communities, making them accessible to those who are most at risk.

²⁵ As in note 24 above

²⁶ As above

Obstacles

Although the provision of ECCE services has almost tripled in the past 30 years across the world, because of factors such as urbanisation and women's participation in the labour market, current rates for the provision of services for 3 – 5 year olds stand at around 73% in high-income countries and 32% in low- and middle-income countries.²⁷

Responsibility for services is often spread between different ministries with the majority of services in some cases being provided by the private sector or NGOs with insufficient support and regulation.

Services for 0 – 3s are still not widespread. This is important because poor nutrition leads to stunting (poor height for age) and mostly occurs in the first three years of life. Stunting leads to low educational outcomes as stunted children are more likely to drop out of school. Services for 0 - 3 year olds combining nutrition and stimulation are essential.

Guatemala

In a project carried out by the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama, children and young adults in Guatemala who had received nutritional supplements in infancy were studied to assess the influence of early diet and poverty on later intellectual development. The performance of those who had two years of the nutrition supplement Atole was better than those who had take a less nutritious supplement called Fresco – an indication that poor nutrition in infancy can subsequently undermine the benefits of schooling.²⁸

Few countries have developed national frameworks for financing and co-ordinating early childhood services, meaning that expansion of services such as providing a kindergarten class in every primary school often fail because of the lack of resources, training, and guidance. Although the private sector has taken a rapidly expanding role in many countries, it is not always well regulated and can place burdens on the child.

There is limited investment in early childhood services by governments and donors. Currently, neither international donors nor governments invest substantive sums in ECCE services. Some ECCE experts recommend that governments should aim to invest 0.5 - 0.1% of GDP in parent and early education with a goal of at least 10% from education budgets and similar amounts from health budgets for maternal and child health care. Similarly, international donors should be investing 15% of their current aid budgets in

²⁷ GTZ as before

²⁸ As above

education, health, nutrition and social protection programmes for young children and their families

~~There is limited investment in early childhood services by governments and donors. Currently, neither international donors nor governments invest substantive sums in ECCE services. In Sub-Saharan Africa less than 1% of education ministry budgets are allocated to ECCE compared with xx% in OECD countries. Some ECCE recommend that governments should aim to invest 0.5–0.1% of GDP in parent and early education with a goal of at least 10% from education budgets and similar amounts from health budgets for maternal and child health care. Similarly, international donors should be investing 15% of their current aid budgets in education, health, nutrition and social protection programmes for young children and their families.~~

Key messages

The 4 cornerstones of the Consultative Group on ECCD provide clear messages about ECCE for activists to use when campaigning²⁹.

Cornerstone 1: Start at the beginning (age 0-3)

- integrate, coordinate, and improve services to all young children and their families
- promote more positive caregiver/child interaction, stimulating environments, good health and nutrition, and better child care
- provide universal access to family support programmes that address holistic child development

Cornerstone 2: Provide new opportunities for discovery and learning (age 3-6)

- ensure access to at least two years of quality early childhood prior to formal school entry
- focus on the development of children's sense of self, their interactions with peers and adults, their confidence as learners, their language competence, and their critical thinking and problem solving skills
- provide information and support to parents and caregivers

Cornerstone 3: Make schools ready for children (age 6-8)

- ensure a welcoming, appreciative, and inclusive school environment which facilitates the transition from the family or pre-school environment

²⁹ Ecdgroup.com for expanded set of briefs

- train and appoint capable teachers to lower primary grades who understand the development needs and learning styles of young children
- ensure smaller class sizes and a manageable teacher-child ratio in the early years of primary school

Cornerstone 4: Address the development of policies on early childhood (across all age ranges)

- develop, implement, and evaluate policies and action plans in the context of a national vision and strategies for young children, expanded investment in their development, and stronger intersectoral coordination
- guarantee adequate resources by ensuring that early childhood is integral to national development policies and macroeconomic planning and budgeting
- address early childhood, across sectors, in all national and sub-national policies and plans
- invest now in ECCD policies and programmes which will bring large future returns to individuals, families, communities, and nations

Recommendations for Governments

- Use a rights based approach for all ECCE programmes
- Allocate greater resources to early childhood services and pre-primary education from education budgets (at least 10%) and strengthen budget analysis and monitoring for ECCE
- Target the most disadvantaged populations while aiming for universal access to early childhood services and ensuring that all services are inclusive.
- Ensure there is an early childhood policy in place with one entity responsible for young children's services bringing together and mobilising different technical services such as education, health, finance and planning, social welfare and protection, agriculture and rural development.
- Broaden maternal/child health programmes to include children's overall development and rights with an easy transition to later learning and support services for young children and their families. Parenting programmes need to be included as essential components of ECD programmes, rather than as stand-alone activities.
- Develop holistic framework/curriculum designed to meet the educational, developmental, nutritional, health and individual needs of children. Such a

curriculum should be flexible and put the child at the centre of the learning and developmental process, valuing all kinds of activities that contribute to physical, psychomotor, cognitive, social and affective development.

- Invest in training, skills/professional development, and accreditation of all early childhood courses that focus on active and child-centred approaches to children's learning.
- Ensure that communities receive support to provide flexible child care arrangements for 0 – 3 year olds with training provided for care-givers.
- Support pre-schools to focus on play-based, child-centred approached; rigid, formal preschools with poorly supported staff can be damaging to children's learning and development.
- Children with special needs should be given special education and be integrated into suitable ECCE programs.
- Support teachers in the early grades of primary school to provide opportunities for active learning. Good quality early primary education leads to improved internal efficiency by lowering repetition and drop-out rates. Otherwise children will continue to leave school unable to read or do basic arithmetic.
- Expand public provision of ECCE and to remove physical, socio-economic and other barriers that might hinder access to services for young children.
- Provide adequate, suitable and relevant facilities and equipment for young children, including well-equipped play grounds and indoor spaces, suitable toilets, toys, books and other teaching-learning resources
- Offer/undertake upgrading programmes for unqualified and under qualified teachers and caregivers
- Provide continuous professional development and support for teachers, caregivers leaders and other ECCE professionals
- Improve conditions of service for ECCE teachers, caregivers and other professionals