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Early Childhood Development on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

A response to the report of the High-Level Panel (HLP) of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development



THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP
ON EARLY CHILDHOOD
CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

The global early childhood development (ECD) community proposes a global goal and urgent call to action **to ensure that all children under the age of 5 reach their developmental potential through access to quality ECD programs and policies. In addition, it calls for increased investment in and attention to the early primary grades (1 to 3) as key to ensuring and improving learning outcomes and efficiency at every level of the education system.**

While considerable progress has been made towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) many goals remain far off. While the numbers of children surviving has increased, has the global community done enough to ensure that the surviving children have an equal chance to develop to their full potential, not only as a human right but also for equitable prosperity and sustainable progress of societies?

While the HLP report includes goals and targets that reduce risks to young children including addressing stunting from malnutrition and early education, THERE IS NO DIRECT REFERENCE TO THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT.

Current and future global goals will only be met with a recognition that increased attention to and investment in the overall development of young children, the caregivers responsible for them, and the context in which families are living in are inextricably linked to sustainable development.

Over 200 million children under 5 years of age in low-income and middle-income countries and increasing numbers in OECD countries and emerging economies will not reach their full developmental potential because they grow up facing a broad range of risk factors, most notably poverty; poor health including HIV/AIDS and malnutrition; high levels of family and environmental stress and exposure to violence, abuse, neglect, 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.

We know through a growing body of research¹:

- inequalities in child development begin before a child is born and continue and often widen in the early years through poverty-related risks that impact children's developing brains
- 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
- 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
- increasing preschool enrolment rates to 25% could yield an estimated US\$10.6 billion through higher educational achievement, while a 50% increase could generate \$33.7 billion. Such investments in centre-based early childhood development yield even greater dividends when they are coupled with community-based nutrition and parenting programmes

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 laws.²

In addition, 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.

A measurable³ and actionable Early Childhood Development (ECD) goal will not only strengthen efforts towards the survival, health, development and well-being of young children but also work to reduce the inter-generational transmission of poverty and inequality. In addition, ensuring that children's learning outcomes are the metric of success for ECD investment, whether preschool or early primary, there is 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 learning.

Ensuring that all children under age five reach their developmental potential targets not only children, but also their parents. Caregiver well-being has implications for childhood health outcomes. Moreover, caregivers are responsible for children's access to health care; proper nutrition; cognitive, social, and emotional stimulation; and protection from violence and trauma.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following illustrative goals and targets were included in the May 2013 Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Targets highlighted in **BOLD GREEN** support a post-2015 agenda for children. Comments in *ITALIC RED* indicate suggested revisions and additions to further promote a comprehensive and effective agenda for children:

1. End poverty
 - a. **Bring the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day to zero and reduce by x% the share of people living below their country's 2015 national poverty line**
 - b. Increase by x% the share of women and men, communities and businesses with secure rights to land, property, and other assets
 - c. Cover x% of people who are poor and vulnerable with social protection systems
 - d. Build resilience *in families for improved child care* and
 2. Empower girls and women and achieve gender equality
 - a. **Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against girls and women**
 - b. **End child marriage**
 - c. Ensure equal right of women to own and inherit property, sign a contract
 - d. Register a business and open a bank account
 - e. Eliminate discrimination against women in political, economic, and public life
 - f. *Increase access to affordable quality child care, especially for poor working families*
 3. Provide quality education and lifelong learning
 - a. **Increase by x% the proportion of children able to access and complete preprimary education** (*Restate as: All children able to access and complete at least one year of preprimary education*)
 - b. *Ensure universal and equitable access to safe, quality primary education and every child, regardless of circumstance, completes primary education able to read, write and count well enough to meet minimum learning standards*
 - c. **Ensure every child, regardless of circumstance, has access to lower secondary education and increase the proportion of adolescents who achieve recognised and measurable learning outcomes to x%**
 - d. **Increase the number of young and adult women and men with the skills, including technical and vocational, needed for work by x%**
 - e. *Decrease by x% the proportion of illiterate adults, particularly women*
 4. Ensure healthy lives
 - a. **End preventable infant and under-5 deaths**
 - b. **Increase by x% the proportion of children, adolescents, at-risk adults and older people that are fully vaccinated**
- reduce deaths from natural disasters by x%

The world's post-2015 development efforts will have the greatest impact on the world's youngest children and those yet unborn. As advocates for children and for sustainable human development broadly, now is the time to turn up the volume and unite across sectors to demand—and deliver—justice and rights from the start.



- c. **Decrease the maternal mortality ratio to no more than x per 100,000**
 - d. **Ensure universal sexual and reproductive health and rights**
 - e. **Reduce the burden of disease from HIV/AIDS (*achieve an AIDS-free generation*), tuberculosis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases and priority non-communicable diseases**
 - f. *Increase by x% the number of children reaching age-appropriate growth and developmental milestones.*
 - g. *Increase by x% the number of children growing up within protective and responsive family care.*
 - h. *Ensure that all children grow up in healthy environments, free from exposure to environmental and occupational toxicants and hazardous materials.*
5. **Ensure food security and good nutrition**
- a. **End hunger and protect the right of everyone to have access to sufficient, safe, affordable, and nutritious food**
 - b. **Reduce by x% stunting, wasting by y% and anemia by z% for all children under 5**
 - c. Increase agricultural productivity by x%, with a focus on sustainably increasing smallholder yields and access to irrigation
 - d. Adopt sustainable agricultural, ocean, and freshwater fishery practices and rebuild designated fish stocks to sustainable levels
 - e. Reduce postharvest loss and food waste by x%
6. **Achieve universal access to water and sanitation**
- a. **Provide universal access to safe drinking water at home and in schools, health centres and refugee camps**

- b. **End open defecation and ensure universal access to sanitation at school and work, and increase access to sanitation at home by x%**
 - c. Bring freshwater withdrawals in line with supply and increase water efficiency in agriculture by x%, industry by y% and urban areas by z%
 - d. Recycle or treat all municipal and industrial wastewater prior to discharge
7. Secure sustainable energy
- a. Double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix
 - b. Ensure universal access to modern energy services
 - c. Double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency in buildings, industry, agriculture and transport
 - d. Phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption
8. Create jobs, sustainable livelihoods, and equitable growth
- a. Increase the number of *good, decent, and safe* jobs and livelihoods by x
 - b. **Decrease the number of young people not in education, employment or training by x%**
 - c. Strengthen productive capacity by providing universal access to financial services and infrastructure such as transportation and ICT
 - d. Increase new start-ups by x and value added from new products by y through creating an enabling business environment and boosting entrepreneurship
9. Manage natural resource assets sustainably
- a. Publish and use economic, social and environmental accounts in all governments and major companies
 - b. Increase consideration of sustainability in x% of government procurements
 - c. Safeguard ecosystems, species and genetic diversity
 - d. Reduce deforestation by x% and increase reforestation by y%
- e. Improve soil quality, reduce soil erosion by x tonnes and combat desertification
10. Ensure good governance and effective institutions
- a. **Provide free and universal legal identity, such as birth registrations**
 - b. Ensure that people enjoy freedom of speech, association, peaceful protest and access to independent media and information
 - c. Increase public participation in political processes and civic engagement at all levels
 - d. Guarantee the public's right to information and access to government data
 - e. Reduce bribery and corruption and ensure officials can be held accountable
11. Ensure stable and peaceful societies
- a. **Reduce violent deaths per 100,000 by x and eliminate all forms of violence against, and exploitation and abuse of children**
 - b. Ensure justice institutions are accessible, independent, well-resourced and respect due-process rights
 - c. Stem the external stressors that lead to conflict, including those related to organised crime
 - d. Enhance the capacity, professionalism and accountability of the security forces, police and judiciary
12. Create a global enabling environment and catalyze long-term finance
- a. Support an open, fair and development-friendly trading system, substantially reducing trade-distorting measures, including agricultural subsidies, while improving market access of developing country products
 - b. Implement reforms to ensure stability of the global financial system and encourage stable, long-term private foreign investment
 - c. Hold the increase in global average temperature below 2° C above preindustrial levels, in line with

- international agreements
- d. Developed countries that have not done so to make concrete efforts towards the target of 0.7% of gross national product (GNP) as official development assistance to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20% of GNP of developed countries to least developed countries; other countries should move toward voluntary targets for complementary financial assistance
 - e. Reduce illicit flows and tax evasion and increase stolen-asset recovery by \$x

- f. Promote collaboration on and access to science, technology, innovation, and development data

The world's post-2015 development efforts will have the greatest impact on the world's youngest children and those yet unborn. For many, the current global dialogue will largely determine the quality of their lives. Yet, these children remain voiceless in the current debates. As advocates for children and for sustainable human development broadly, now is the time to turn up the volume and unite across sectors to demand—and deliver—justice and rights from the start.

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ENDNOTES

1 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; Walker, S.P., Wachs, T.D., Grantham-McGregor, S., Black, M.M., Nelson, C.A., Huffman, S.L., Baker-Henningham, H., Chang, S.M., Hamadani, J.D., Lozoff, B., Meeks Gardner, J.M., Powell, C.A., Rahman, A. & Richter, L. (2011). Inequality in early childhood: risk and protective factors for early child development. *The Lancet*, 378, 1325-1338; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2011). *Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising*. Paris: OECD.

2 Vargas-Baron, E and Schipper, J (2012). *Review of Policy and Planning Indicators in Early Childhood*. RISE Institute (commissioned by UNESCO, Paris).

3 The Global ECD community proposes a list of indicators across sectors to benchmark progress towards reducing the numbers of children not developing to their potential including 2 used by the Lancet series on ECD on poverty and stunting. Other indicators proposed (see CGECCD (2013), *A Transformative Solution: Post 2015 and ECD*) are currently measurable, but some targets require more progress in early childhood data systems; Using Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, UNICEF, N-60 countries), 10 items measure child outcomes (early literacy/numeracy skills, socio-emotional skills, physical skills and approaches to learning) and/or 7 items context (family level support for learning, attendance in programs, %allocated to early education in education budget and social grants) to create one composite score.



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The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (CGECCD) convenes, mobilises, 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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