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*Appeal to the Member States of the United Nations*

# Early Childhood Development: The Foundation of Sustainable Human Development for 2015 and Beyond



THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP  
ON EARLY CHILDHOOD  
CARE AND DEVELOPMENT  
30 YEARS | 1984–2014



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
SOLUTIONS NETWORK  
A GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is an essential component of the new global development framework. Without the best start in life for all children, there is no foundation for sustainable societies. Young children have the right beyond survival to thrive and contribute to sustainable communities and the workforce.

Over one-third of the world's children under 5 years fail to develop to their full potential due to poverty, poor health including HIV/AIDS and malnutrition, high levels of family and environmental stress and exposure to violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, disability, developmental delays and lack of learning opportunities. This has serious human, social and economic consequences for our societies and our goal to achieve prosperity, inclusive social and economic development and sustainability.

While significant progress has been made to increase child survival, more needs to be done urgently to address this developmental and learning gap for children aged 0-8 years. School drop out is the highest in first grade, and most children in poor countries and communities are not able to read by age 9.

The Sustainable Development Goals provide a unique opportunity to address this gap, building on decades of research showing the lifelong benefits of quality early childhood programs and policies to ensure that a specific focus is placed on the physical, mental and emotional development of young children, their families and environment.

## WHAT DO WE WANT THE OPEN WORKING GROUP TO DO?

1. **Continue to speak out about young children and ECD during OWG sessions** – Reference to young children is missing from discussion around the post-2015 goals. Young children have also largely been absent from stakeholder consultation. It is up to us to ensure that children's rights and well-being are represented beyond simply child survival, growth-nutrition and access to pre-primary education.
2. **Call for targets that cut across the framework** – ECD is not a single intervention. It is a comprehensive package of interventions covering health, education, social protection, women's empowerment, nutrition and security which contributes not only to the well-being of children but their families, communities and countries. Further, ECD programs offer an opportunity to bring a holistic and integrated approach to sustainable development. It will also be important to ensure that targets and indicators are disaggregated by age 0-2 and 3-5 years.
3. **Highlight good practice in your country** – Use this opportunity to champion examples of good practice, cost-effective ECD interventions from your country and explain the benefits of investing early in children's development.
4. **Public advocacy** – Encourage stakeholder groups and the public in your country to get behind international efforts to draw attention to the benefits of ECD and sign the [online Global Early Years petition](#).

## INTRODUCTION

The UN's Post-2015 / Sustainable Development Goals process aims to build on the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to eradicate poverty, promote inclusive social and economic development, and achieve equitable and sustainable access to wealth by all.

Whilst these achievements have been significant across a variety of areas, including child survival, new developmental challenges have emerged – particularly, the need to tackle inequality explicitly, to eliminate poverty and to achieve sustainable development.

The evidence across multiple disciplines is clear and compelling – investing in young children is the foundation of human and sustainable development. Current and future development goals will only be met if the global community pays attention to the overall development of our youngest members, children 0-8 years, their families and caregivers. It is during the prenatal period and in the earliest years of life that a child's brain and body develops most rapidly and lifelong patterns of behaviour evolve.

Not only are ECD programs and interventions one of the most cost-effective ways of improving health, nutrition and educational outcomes, they also empower women, reduce violence, promote environmental sensitivity and can break the inter-generational cycle of poverty and inequality, creating more prosperous societies.

ECD encompasses a number of evidence-based strategies including parenting support, early detection and intervention to address developmental delays and disabilities, child care, support and learning, targeted health, nutrition, sanitation and social protection services, good quality pre-school and transition to good quality primary school.

Crucially, ECD interventions are not limited to one government department or ministry. They are implemented in partnership with multiple sectors and multiple partners and require government to work across departments for a range of social and economic benefits. Governments should be encouraged to continue to develop comprehensive policies and programmes and commit budgets to early childhood care and education.

Our global commitment to young children is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and reaffirmed in the 2010 UN Secretary General's Report on the Status of the CRC and ECD and the Third Committee Resolution. It is an essential part of a rights-based approach to human development that promotes equitable and sustainable development.

Creating an environment in which young children and their families can grow up and thrive will help achieve key health outcomes, improve learning and earning outcomes, promote social justice, advance women's rights and gender equality.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles should be applied to guide the future early childhood development agenda: why is it important?

#### **Link Child Survival and Child Development**

The international community has made incredible strides in tackling preventable child mortality. While this focus should not be lost, an effective focus on ECD must ensure children reach their full physical, cognitive, social and emotional development potential. This will enable all children to fulfil their fundamental human rights.

#### **Invest Early for Greatest Returns**

The evidence is indisputable across a number of disciplines including nutrition, health and education. Investing in the well-being of young children has the greatest long-term social and economic benefits to countries and communities. Integrated parenting programs in the 0-3 years, for example, have increased earnings and reduced depression and violence. Raising pre-primary enrolment to 100% in low- and middle-income countries shows benefit-cost ratios, based on school attainment and earnings benefits alone, of between 7 and 15.

#### **Prioritise the Most Marginalised**

ECD benefits all children, but a focus on reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised, including indigenous people, migrants, refugees, minorities, children without parental care/in alternative care and children with disabilities is essential to securing the greatest development gains. Disadvantaged children and their families gain the most from quality ECD programs, but are the least likely to gain access.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND THE OPEN WORKING GROUP PRIORITY AREAS

FOCUS AREA	EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT
<b>POVERTY ERADICATION, BUILDING SHARED PROSPERITY PROMOTING EQUALITY</b>	Any goal on poverty reduction must consider its impact on children and their families. ECD policies and programs are one of the most cost-effective ways to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty and inequality, by giving all children, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalised access to opportunities, such as social protection, basic services and thus the best start in life and learning. Good ECD also includes quality childcare which allows families to pursue decent work.
<b>SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION,</b>	Malnutrition in all its forms, notably stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, significantly affects children's ability to fulfill their potential. Access to good quality, combined nutrition and child development programs is key to ensuring the full physical and mental development of children.
<b>HEALTH POPULATION DYNAMICS &amp; WATER AND SANITATION</b>	ECD includes action to tackle preventable infant and maternal deaths but also must include consideration of child and mother mental health, universal access to reproductive health care, good water and sanitation, and comprehensive treatment of HIV/AIDS. Mothers who are physically and mentally healthy are better able to care for their children.
<b>EDUCATION AND LIFE LONG LEARNING</b>	Children's caregivers and their families need to be supported to create an environment in which children survive and thrive. Access to quality comprehensive early childhood care, early learning opportunities and pre-primary provision for all children, particularly the most marginalised and disadvantaged, is essential for preparing children for school, minimising school drop out rates and maximising their future earnings and economic potential. Adult literacy and lifelong learning opportunities are also important for adults with young children.
<b>GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT</b>	Women's health and development is inextricably linked to the health and development of young children. Empowering women and educating girls is key to saving children's lives, and providing access to early health and care interventions for all children also enables women to access services and re-enter the workplace.
<b>SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS</b>	Creating safe and protective neighbourhoods to prevent child abuse and neglect and increasing access to areas for play for young children in cities and urban settlements are essential to the development of children.
<b>CLIMATE CHANGE</b>	Promoting ECD programs can help young children develop awareness about, and build skills to protecting and sustaining the environment.
<b>PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES, RULE OF LAW AND CAPABLE INSTITUTIONS</b>	A focus on programmes to promote quality ECD and support for caregivers reduces violence against women and children and promotes positive approaches to managing children's behaviour.



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