



Early Childhood Development

Photo by Karen Demauski for CRS

Early childhood is the period of life that begins prenatally and extends to eight years of age.^(UNICEF, 2007) The most rapid and critical brain development processes occur from pre-natal development until a child is three years old.^(CGECCD) The effects of a poor start on a child's well-being are long-lasting and can have profound impacts on all areas of life.

NOURISHING CHANGE

250 MILLION CHILDREN AT RISK

50¢ COST PER CHILD PER YEAR TO INTEGRATE ECD INTO PROGRAMMING

\$7.30 ESTIMATED BENEFIT PER \$1 SPENT ON ECD ANNUALLY (HECKMAN, 2017)

CONGRESS SHOULD PASS LEGISLATION THAT WOULD DIRECT THE U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO COORDINATE THE INTEGRATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES INTO GLOBAL CHILD-FOCUSED PROGRAMMING AND SUBMIT AN ANNUAL REPORT ON PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES AND PROGRESS.

PATHWAYS TO OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT
HEALTH • AGRICULTURE • MICROFINANCE • SOCIAL SERVICES • NUTRITION • SHELTER • WATER & SANITATION • LIVELIHOODS • PEACEBUILDING • EDUCATION • PROTECTION • FAMILY STRENGTHENING

THE CHALLENGE

Poor health and nutrition, inadequate learning, and exposure to conflict and displacement impair children's optimal development.^(WHO) Not only do these conditions deprive children of their right to thrive, but children's failure to meet developmental milestones has significant repercussions on a country's economic growth, peace, and prosperity. For example, adults who received suboptimal care during early childhood years will earn 26% less than the average adult income in their country. This lost income traps families in poverty and lowers GDP and tax revenues so countries have less to spend on health and education, creating a vicious cycle.^(Lancet Series)

THE SOLUTION

Cost-effective strategic investments made during children's early years can mitigate - and often overcome - the deleterious effects of poverty, social inequality, and discrimination, ultimately resulting in long-lasting gains that reap benefits for children and youth, families, communities, and nations. Early Childhood Development interventions pair appropriate nutrition and health care with age-appropriate mental stimulation and nurturing care such as singing and reading, playing with colorful objects and shapes and interactive care-giving.

Current child-focused U.S. Government programming is fractured and silo-ed. It does not provide integrated ECD across sectors to support children to reach developmental milestones.

THE ROLE OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

Integrating Early Childhood Development into U.S. international child-focused programs (such as Food for Peace, Feed the Future and McGovern-Dole as well as programs focused on maternal and child health, nutrition, water and sanitation, HIV and protection) would ensure the best outcomes possible for young children's brains and bodies and make more efficient use of precious foreign assistance resources.

faith. action. results.

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