

A SEVEN-FOLD RETURN ON INVESTMENT: THE BEST START IN LIFE FOR EVERY CHILD

WHAT IT TAKES

Giving a child the best start in life means ensuring them good health, proper nutrition and early learning. It means safe water and basic sanitation. It means protection from violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination.

All these are imperatives – and work best together.

THE BEST START IN LIFE FOR CHILDREN:

Ensures that they will survive and thrive

Lays the foundation for learning and achieving in school

Is critical to fulfilling all other child rights

Breaks intergenerational cycles of poverty, disease, gender inequity and violence

Develops human capital and catalyzes economic growth

Saves public funds in health, education and welfare

Numerous studies have shown that every dollar invested in ensuring children the best start yields \$4 – \$7 return in the long run to children, their families and taxpayers.

SQUANDERED POTENTIAL

Yet, a majority of children born today will not be able to fulfil their potential – for many overlapping reasons.

Out of 100 children, 8 will most likely die before their fifth birthday, 30 suffer from malnutrition, 26 fail to be immunized against basic childhood diseases, 19 lack access to safe drinking water and 40 to adequate sanitation, more than 10 suffer from some physical or mental disability or developmental delay, and 17 never go to school.

None of this need happen.

UNICEF URGES LEADERS TO ADOPT THE INTEGRATED APPROACH TO EARLY CHILDHOOD

Based on successful large-scale experiences worldwide, UNICEF's approach to early childhood judiciously integrates a number of core interventions – suited to the local context – to create a foundation of support for children, their caregivers, and the community.

All children, their caregivers and communities must be ensured:

Primary health care

Adequate nutrition

Safe water and basic sanitation

All children must be:

Registered at birth

Protected from violence, abuse and neglect

Provided with love and psychosocial care and support for their early learning

All girls and women must be:

Ensured good nutrition and health care, education, family support and the fulfilment of all other rights

Across these interventions, policies and programmes must converge; delivery systems for services and commodities be closely coordinated; and real integration of services and support achieved at the family and community levels.

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Widespread adoption of the integrated approach to early childhood is a precondition to meeting six of the eight Millennium Development Goals, including lowering child mortality, promoting gender equality, achieving universal primary education and eradicating extreme poverty.

www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/

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