

# A POST-2015 WORLD FIT FOR CHILDREN

## ISSUE BRIEF: Early Childhood Development – The Foundation for Sustainable Development



### Why Early Childhood Development is a critical component of the Post-2015 Development Agenda

In the first years of life, neurons in human brains form new connections at the astounding rate of 700-1000 per second, a pace that is not repeated again.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a child's first few years are an unprecedented opportunity in life to ensure early childhood development (ECD) practices and programs set the foundation for life-long thriving. Investing in early childhood development is one of the most critical and cost-effective ways to improve adult health, education and productivity. It also empowers women, reduces violence, promotes environmental sensitivity, and can break the cycle of poverty to create a more sustainable and prosperous world.

Disadvantage and lack of opportunity in this foundational period early in life are accentuated over the lifecycle, and persist throughout adulthood, with serious human, social and economic consequences for both individuals and their societies.

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 face inequalities and not reach their full developmental potential<sup>2</sup> 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.

Therefore, effective ECD requires multidimensional governmental, societal, and familial resources and attention. Due to the role families and particularly mothers have in ECD, the Post-2015 Development Agenda must not ignore the need for there to be an increase in the proportion of children experiencing positive, responsive, sensitive and nurturing childrearing practices in safe and peaceful home environments. Families need to know about the importance of early nutrition, care and stimulation, when to bring a child to a doctor; to not physically punish a child; to recognize the significance of quality early learning programmes, and more.

### Suggested Targets

1. Ensure free and universal birth registration of children under 5
2. Increase exclusive breastfeeding rates in the first 6 months of life up to at least 50% by 2025
3. By 2030 end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving by 2025 the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons
4. By 2030 end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases, and other communicable diseases
5. By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys are ready for primary school through participation in quality early childhood development, care and education, including at least one year of pre-primary education

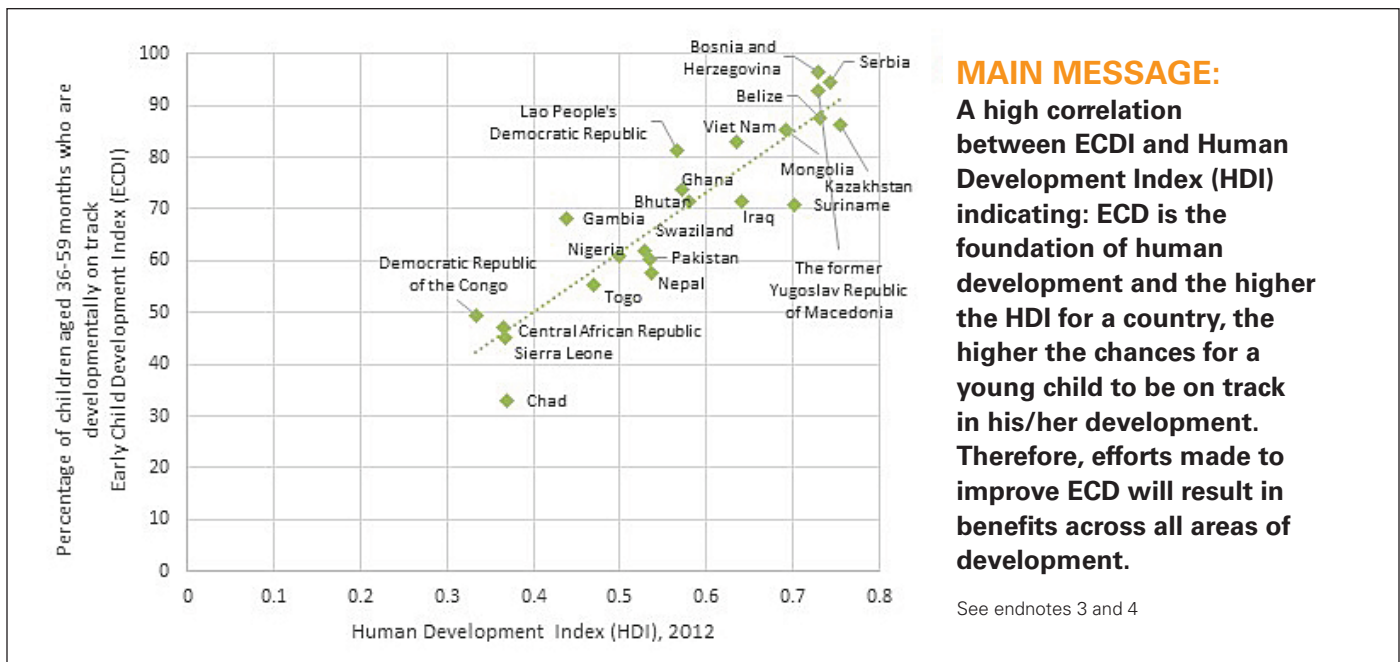
- By 2030, achieve universal access to basic drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene for households, schools and health facilities
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of

shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

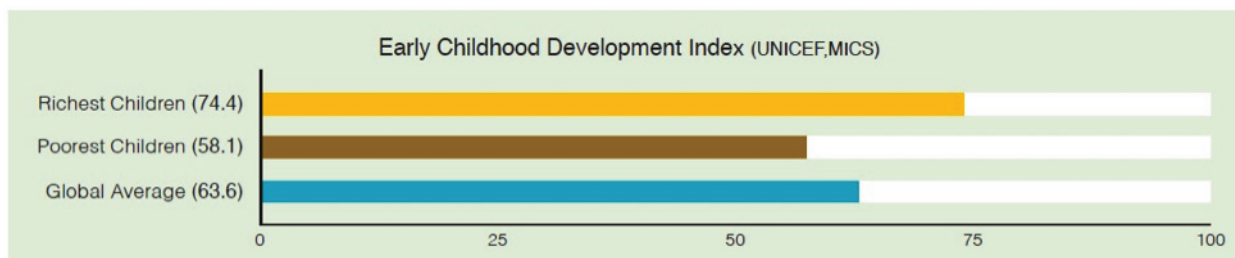
- Reduce rate of violent injuries and related deaths of boys and girls by x%
- By 2030 build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations, and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters

## ECD SNAPSHOT

**Figure 1: Measuring ECD through the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) – in particular the Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI) reveals inequalities between wealth quintiles.**



**Figure 2: Early Childhood Development Index**



### For more information on Post-2015

Please see UNICEF's webpage on Children and the Post-2015 Development Agenda: <http://www.unicef.org/post2015/>

### For more information on programmatic work in ECD

Please Email: [championsforecd@unicef.org](mailto:championsforecd@unicef.org) or visit [www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/](http://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/)

<sup>1</sup> Britto, P.; *Brain development in children: the impact of adversity*; UNICEF Connect Blog; 15 April 2014 <http://blogs.unicef.org/2014/04/15/brain-development-in-children-the-impact-of-adversity/>

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, *Inequities in Early Childhood Development: What the Data Say, 2012* [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Inequities\\_in\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_Development\\_LoRes\\_PDF\\_EN\\_02082012.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Inequities_in_Early_Childhood_Development_LoRes_PDF_EN_02082012.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> **Notes:** Data for Nepal are not nationally representative but refer only to the mid- and far Western regions of the country. Data for Pakistan are not nationally representative but refer only to Balochistan province. The Early Child Development Index (ECDI) refers to the percentage of children aged 36 to 59 months who are developmentally on track in at least three of the following domains: literacy-numeracy, physical, social-emotional and learning. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: 1) a long and healthy life; 2) knowledge and; 3) a decent standard of living. The cut-off points are HDI of less than 0.550 for low human development, 0.550–0.699 for medium human development, 0.700–0.799 for high human development and 0.800 or greater for very high human development.

<sup>4</sup> **Source:** Estimates for the HDI are from: Human Development Report Office calculations, based on data from UNDESA, Barro and Lee, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, United Nations Statistics Division, World Bank and IMF, as cited in: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2014*, UNDP, New York, 2014. Estimates for the ECDI are from: UNICEF global databases, 2014, based on MICS, 2010–2012.