Early childhood is a phase in the life course that stretches from conception to the age of eight. During this period, a young child will undergo rapid development, acquiring physical, cognitive, motor, psycho-emotional and social skills. Extensive research indicates that the time in early childhood offers significant opportunities for human development and growth. Thus, investments in early childhood development (ECD) are essential to maximize human capital development and realize core child rights.

Childhood development (ECD) is essential to maximize human capital development and realize core child rights. Therefore, investing in early childhood has been found to have diverse impacts – including cognitive, motor, psycho-emotional and social skills. Extensive research indicates that this is the moment in the life course when early childhood development opportunities for human development are greatest. Investing in early childhood is therefore a strategic investment.

ECD is consistently under-funded, including within Burundi. In 2019, the total funding gap for ECD health and education services reached a catastrophic 90%, on average across Eastern and Southern Africa, and COVID-19 is only set to exacerbate this pre-existing resourcing crisis (UNICEF, 2021). Clearly, there is a pressing need to refinance ECD as an investment rather than a cost.

A comprehensive financing strategy for scaling up the interventions in these ECD packages must be developed. This includes creating an overarching ECD budget and ensuring strong governance structures and improved monitoring of financial flows to the sector.

The ECD financing strategy must capitalize on all available funding sources. Burundi’s high debt levels, coupled with pre-existing constraints related to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, mean that donor funding should be considered in the short term. Donor collaboration will be important to ensure sufficient resources are mobilized to finance these ECD packages; however, in the long term, it is important that the ECD financing strategy transition towards domestic funding sources.

Implementation of these packages should be sequenced, to increase feasibility. In the short term, we recommend that efforts focus on scaling up Package 1. Evidence from this study suggests that scaling up Package 1 will both be less expensive and have a greater immediate return on investment. The government should have a long-term plan to integrate these interventions into Package 2. These include pre-primary education, child protection and social protection measures, which are fundamental to a holistic ECD programme. Financial and social protection measures, which are fundamental to a holistic ECD programme. Financial and social protection measures, which are fundamental to a holistic ECD programme. Financial and social protection measures, which are fundamental to a holistic ECD programme.

Planning for expanded ECD service delivery must go beyond financing. The government should provide the feasibility and implementation of these ECD packages. While financing is an essential part of service delivery, funding alone is not enough. The enabling environment for high-quality and effective ECD service delivery needs to be developed. This will include undertaking capacity development assessments and strengthening governance and institutional structures, as well as developing a monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Scaling up multisectoral ECD interventions must be a top priority for the Government of Burundi. Without the right building blocks in place – including funding for ECD services, those rights and development will be put at risk. It is not a case of whether Burundi should invest in ECD, but how.

2. The ECD financing strategy must capitalize on all available funding sources. Burundi’s high debt levels, coupled with pre-existing constraints related to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, mean that donor funding should be considered in the short term. Donor collaboration will be important to ensure sufficient resources are mobilized to finance these ECD packages; however, in the long term, it is important that the ECD financing strategy transition towards domestic funding sources.

3. The ECD financing strategy must capitalize on all available funding sources. Burundi’s high debt levels, coupled with pre-existing constraints related to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, mean that donor funding should be considered in the short term. Donor collaboration will be important to ensure sufficient resources are mobilized to finance these ECD packages; however, in the long term, it is important that the ECD financing strategy transition towards domestic funding sources.

4. Implementation of these packages should be sequenced, to increase feasibility. In the short term, we recommend that efforts focus on scaling up Package 1. Evidence from this study suggests that scaling up Package 1 will both be less expensive and have a greater immediate return on investment. The government should have a long-term plan to integrate these interventions into Package 2. These include pre-primary education, child protection and social protection measures, which are fundamental to a holistic ECD programme. Financial and social protection measures, which are fundamental to a holistic ECD programme. Financial and social protection measures, which are fundamental to a holistic ECD programme. Financial and social protection measures, which are fundamental to a holistic ECD programme.

5. Planning for expanded ECD service delivery must go beyond financing. The government should provide the feasibility and implementation of these ECD packages. While financing is an essential part of service delivery, funding alone is not enough. The enabling environment for high-quality and effective ECD service delivery needs to be developed. This will include undertaking capacity development assessments and strengthening governance and institutional structures, as well as developing a monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

This policy brief provides a summary of research findings and the evidence base on the cost–benefit of investments in early childhood development. It outlines a comprehensive financing strategy for scaling up the interventions in these ECD packages, while highlighting the role of donor collaboration in ensuring the successful implementation of these packages. The evidence is intended to be used to inform discussions with stakeholders and policymakers, and to support advocacy efforts and decision-making in an effort to expand the coverage of ECD services, these rights and development will be put at risk. It is not a case of whether Burundi should invest in ECD, but how.

The ECD financing strategy must capitalize on all available funding sources. Burundi’s high debt levels, coupled with pre-existing constraints related to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, mean that donor funding should be considered in the short term. Donor collaboration will be important to ensure sufficient resources are mobilized to finance these ECD packages; however, in the long term, it is important that the ECD financing strategy transition towards domestic funding sources.
This research takes the form of an investment case. It provides critical evidence on the benefits and cost-effectiveness of investing in ECD services in Burundi, as well as guidance on potential financing options. It was designed to support efforts to improve ECD by UNICEF, the Government of Burundi and other stakeholders by providing an evidence-based model for investment.

Two ECD packages were developed. The first includes interventions related to child health, nutrition and care (WASH), and the second includes social protection and child protection initiatives. Interventions were included on the basis of international best practice and their potential to improve ECD by UNICEF, the Government of Burundi and other stakeholders by providing an evidence-based model for investment.

The costs and benefits of scaling up these packages from their current coverage rates to a specified target level were modelled. Three-scale-up scenarios were run for each package. Table 1 presents the additional cost associated with the scale-up of these three scenarios. The results of this analysis revealed that Package 1 is more affordable than Package 2. Given the high return in relation to cost which could be achieved through scaling up the new fiscal space to the scale-up. However, depending on the growth trajectory and the speed of scale-up, in some years in adolescence high project cost of the new scale-up would need to be allocated to ECD to the funding gap to be covered. Analysis of Package 1 found that this additional funding gap would average in more cases, especially under a slow-growth trajectory.

Package 1 is another promising alternative. Public resources within key sectors budget reprioritization investments in ECD. According to latest budget data, for every US$1 invested in Package 1, we estimate the number of children not completing high school could be reduced by 480,000 as a result of the scale-up of these two interventions. Two ECD packages were developed. The first includes interventions related to child health, nutrition and care (WASH), and the second includes social protection and child protection initiatives. Interventions were included on the basis of international best practice and their potential to improve ECD by UNICEF, the Government of Burundi and other stakeholders by providing an evidence-based model for investment.

The costs and benefits of scaling up these packages from their current coverage rates to a specified target level were modelled. Three-scale-up scenarios were run for each package. Table 1 presents the additional cost associated with the scale-up of these three scenarios. The results of this analysis revealed that Package 1 is more affordable than Package 2. Given the high return in relation to cost which could be achieved through scaling up the new fiscal space to the scale-up. However, depending on the growth trajectory and the speed of scale-up, in some years in adolescence high project cost of the new scale-up would need to be allocated to ECD to the funding gap to be covered. Analysis of Package 1 found that this additional funding gap would average in more cases, especially under a slow-growth trajectory.

Table 2: Costs of scaling up ECD packages (US$ million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Package</th>
<th>Average annual additional cost</th>
<th>Total cumulative additional cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Package 1</td>
<td>30,547</td>
<td>314,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Package 2</td>
<td>76,171</td>
<td>1,142,270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A fiscal space analysis was conducted to provide an insight into potential funding sources for the scale-up of ECD packages. The ability of the Government of Burundi to implement and finance an ECD initiative is inextricably linked to the broader socio-economic environment. As the economy expands in coming years, the government’s fiscal space is expected to increase. This is driven by the new fiscal space was modelled annually up to 2050, based on a number of macroeconomic assumptions taken from 2018-2022. This projected new fiscal space was compared with the annual costs of scaling up the ECD packages. This research takes the form of an investment case. It provides critical evidence on the benefits and cost-effectiveness of investing in ECD services in Burundi, as well as guidance on potential financing options. It was designed to support efforts to improve ECD by UNICEF, the Government of Burundi and other stakeholders by providing an evidence-based model for investment.

The costs and benefits of scaling up these packages from their current coverage rates to a specified target level were modelled. Three-scale-up scenarios were run for each package. Table 1 presents the additional cost associated with the scale-up of these three scenarios. The results of this analysis revealed that Package 1 is more affordable than Package 2. Given the high return in relation to cost which could be achieved through scaling up the new fiscal space to the scale-up. However, depending on the growth trajectory and the speed of scale-up, in some years in adolescence high project cost of the new scale-up would need to be allocated to ECD to the funding gap to be covered. Analysis of Package 1 found that this additional funding gap would average in more cases, especially under a slow-growth trajectory.

Table 2: Benefit-cost ratios from scaling up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Package</th>
<th>2022-2025</th>
<th>2022-2030</th>
<th>2022-2050</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Package 1</td>
<td>9.62</td>
<td>6.85</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Package 2</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This means that other financing sources will also need to be mobilized if either Package 1 or Package 2 is to be implemented. In the context of the current budget-oriented Government of Burundi’s requirement to prioritize other important development needs, this poses a challenge as to how potential financing options can be allocated to key sectors could be used to expand public investments in ECD. While this is true in economic terms – potentially leading to revenue improvements in human capital productivity – this also stands in the upholding of rights and pursuit of equality within the country. The existing landscape in Burundi is ripe for such development into the early childhood sector. The government has already put in place strong policies in support of children, such as the provision of free primary education and under-five health care, and has recently adopted a new ECD Strategy. Optimizing this political interest is key to ensure that ECD interventions are successfully implemented and scaled.

CONCLUSION

Scaling up investment in ECD is not only a strong moral and social proposition but also a sound financial and economic one, with real returns on investment. InBurundi, where coverage of interventions essential to early childhood is currently overwhelmingly low and the sector is chronically under-funded, the potential gains to be made are extensive. While this is true in economic terms – potentially leading to revenue improvements in human capital productivity – this also stands in the upholding of rights and pursuit of equality within the country. The existing landscape in Burundi is ripe for such development into the early childhood sector. The government has already put in place strong policies in support of children, such as the provision of free primary education and under-five health care, and has recently adopted a new ECD Strategy. Optimizing this political interest is key to ensure that ECD interventions are successfully implemented and scaled.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of all the individuals and organizations who have supported this work, including the Government of Burundi, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the World Health Organization (WHO). This research was supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to UNICEF. The authors are grateful to the individuals who provided feedback and guidance on the development of this report. This work was also supported by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).