Today, global crises including war and natural disaster have displaced an estimated 42 million people, 40% of whom are children. 1.5 billion children, over two-thirds of the world’s child population, have faced some type of emergency situation.

Research has shown that childhood is a vital period for brain development and has validated the crucial importance of quality early interaction between young children and their immediate environment. Early experiences are critical and lay the foundation for human development, lifelong learning, and productivity. These experience are also greatly influenced by a child’s nutritional and health status, exposure to stimulation and interaction with people and objects in his or her surroundings. Interventions to promote physical, intellectual and emotional development in early childhood, particularly in times of stress, make a difference for young children and their caregivers, both immediately and over the long-term. Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes that focus on parenting, community-based care centers, preschools and early learning spaces in emergency situations, can both support caregivers and ensure the quality care needed for children to survive and develop to their full potential.

Mitigating the Adverse Effects of Emergency Situations for Young Children

ECD refers to the processes through which a young child under eight years old develops his/her optimal physical health, mental alertness, emotional confidence, social competence and readiness to learn. Through the process of development, the young child gains the abilities to move from ‘less to more’ and acquires mastery of complex skills. Experience has shown that critical preconditions must co-exist to ensure that young children get the best start in life.
Natural disasters and war have ravaged numerous countries leaving populations in desperate and seemingly hopeless situations. Children especially, are extremely vulnerable to the stresses brought on by disaster and conflict and are at increased risk of separation from primary caregivers, sexual and gender-based violence, physical harm and long-term negative emotional and psychological effects.

Early Childhood Development interventions in emergencies are specific actions which are taken to safeguard and uphold the rights of all young children under eight years of age. Owing to their developing capacities and increased dependence on caregivers to meet their needs, young children are already a vulnerable group. In the context of emergencies, young children face several visible and invisible challenges. Children who experience extreme and adverse stress in their early years are at greater risk for developing cognitive, behavioural and emotional difficulties, which also reduces and delays their overall developmental processes. Their parents and caregivers are more likely to be stressed and depressed, and thus less able to provide young children with positive and emotionally nurturing environments.

Creating a Stimulating Environment for Families and Young Children in Emergency Settings

ECD interventions should always work within the target population's cultural constructs of childhood, address the varying needs of young children based on their stage of development and attempt to return children to a normal routine as quickly as possible. Interventions should also take into account the effects of war on the caregivers on whom children depend and use a variety of approaches including: parenting classes, community-based centers, preschool programmes, psychosocial support and early stimulation and play activities.

UNICEF’s ECD Kits, which were first widely introduced in 2009 for use by children under the age of six living in emergency or post-emergency environments, are a treasure trove of materials and ideas. Complete with dominos, coloring pencils, construction blocks, hand puppets, puzzle blocks and memory games, the Kits are designed to stimulate and engage the minds of young children by involving them in creative play and learning. Each element in the Kit is carefully selected to support the work of school instructors, and can be used in various ways depending on the age and interests of the child.

### ECD Principles and Actions in Emergencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Principles of ECD</th>
<th>Related Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take a coordinated, inter agency, and multi sectoral approach</td>
<td>Integrate ECD into rapid need assessments, and explore possible integration with nutrition, health, education and child protection interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote community participation in ECD interventions</td>
<td>Use early childhood development centres as a means of mobilizing the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make ECD centres highly inclusive and non discriminatory</td>
<td>Make sure that all children between 0-8 years are included regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status or religion. Focus particular attention on children from the most marginalized and deprived communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure that ECD centres are safe and secure</td>
<td>Involve the community to identify safe and secure spaces to initiate ECD interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make ECD stimulating, participatory, and available in supportive environments</td>
<td>Provide ongoing training and follow up support for animators, volunteers and caregivers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 1: Suggested sector entries for early childhood development interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of intervention</th>
<th>Education entry points</th>
<th>Health &amp; Nutrition entry points</th>
<th>Child Protection entry points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interventions in specific physical spaces</td>
<td>• Parenting  • Community-based care centres</td>
<td>• Parenting  • Baby clinics and medical facilities</td>
<td>• Parenting  • Child Friendly Spaces (CFS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pre-schools/lower primary schools/non-formal early learning spaces</td>
<td>• Baby tents for feeding</td>
<td>• Interventions in institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community spaces (e.g. religious spaces)</td>
<td>• Therapeutic feeding centres</td>
<td>• Interventions in child care centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector service providers</td>
<td>• Teachers</td>
<td>• Community-based health workers</td>
<td>• Social workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Caregivers in child care centres</td>
<td>• Birth attendants and trained medical professionals</td>
<td>• Child protection specialists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An estimated 5.4 million people have perished in the latest conflict that has devastated the DRC over the last 10 years. A large majority has died from disease and famine and it is believed that over half of the human casualties of the war, have been children. Approximately 1 million Congolese children were displaced after the signing of the 2009 peace accords and are now living in camps for displaced persons facing insecurity, illnesses, poverty and in some cases, continued violence. Bringing Early Childhood Development (ECD) services to children living in conflict is a tremendous challenge but vital to the emotional development and protection of children who are victims to the traumas of war.

Extending ECD Services to Children in a Divided Nation
Following the 2009 peace accords, families and communities attempted to help children return to normalcy as soon as possible. The prolonged conflict greatly debilitated the economy as well as services for young children, further exacerbating already existing social ills. With no prior ECD legislation and depleted resources after 10 years of conflict, the government was tasked with building and launching its ECD programming from the ground up. Within just one year, and as a result of government commitment, an approximate 60,000 young children were attending early childhood centres in non-conflict areas in 2009 – an impressive 17% increase from the previous year. However, the challenge remained to extend ECD services to the DRC’s most vulnerable children - the thousands now living in IDP camps.

Recognizing the long lasting effect of such adversities on a young child’s cognitive, social and emotional development, UNICEF, together with its partners, began promoting ECD programmes for healing and protecting young children in emergencies.

Bringing Hope to Children Living in IDP Camps
In order to support efforts to bring recovery and healing to children in crisis, UNICEF developed an Early Childhood Development
Development Kit and Facilitators’ Guide which targeted children living in conflict and emergencies around the world. These Kits were designed to help caregivers including parents and service providers, to meet the special needs of young children during humanitarian and conflict-related emergencies. They consist of 37 items including brightly coloured paper and pencils, dominoes, construction blocks, hand puppets, puzzle blocks and memory games to stimulate cognitive learning, social and emotional competency, creativity and problem-solving skills. These Kits enable caregivers to re-focus their attention on young children and their development, but also provide the children with materials for learning and play, as well as hope in an extremely difficult environment.

Not all young children in the camps have the chance to find support and protection. Many remain out of reach and UNICEF is making efforts to organize partners and local authorities to put safe and supportive spaces for young children in place. Supplying camps with the Kits is just one part of the story. Efforts have been made to train local volunteers and parents on how best to use them, and on how best to support young children in these extraordinary situations. The success of those efforts can often times have a tremendous influence and make a major difference in the future of young children involved, by helping to restore their resilience, diminish the effects of experienced trauma and distress and provide them with a returned sense of normalcy. There is a tremendous need for materials and financial support to scale-up ECD programming to ensure that all young children in the DRC, whether living in post-conflict areas or camps, have access to quality pre-primary opportunities for a better, conflict free and peaceful future to come.

These Kits enable caregivers to re-focus their attention on young children and their development, but also provide the children with materials for learning and play, as well as hope in an extremely difficult environment.
In Haiti, Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions were integrated with health and nutrition, child protection and education initiatives. UNICEF’s ECD Kits are playing an important role in helping to restore normalcy and stability into the lives of Haitian children still coming to terms with the devastating effects of the January 2010 earthquake.

Students at St. Benedict and Paradis des Petits schools who have received these Kits are clear examples of the beneficial impact that ECD materials and learning can have on children who have suffered through the trauma of an emergency situation.

Since March 2010, over 1,495 Kits have been distributed by UNICEF throughout the country to support the efforts of the Haitian Ministry of Education and NGO partners. The goal is to maintain ECD programmes for children living in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) and earthquake affected areas. To date, more than 60,000 children have benefited from these interventions.

At St. Benedict School, children ages 2-6 gather under a large UNICEF tent and engage in playful activities. Guided by several school instructors, the children use crayons, modeling clay, building blocks, and other materials to build houses, cars, dolls, and other common childhood toys and playthings. In addition to helping develop physical and mental skills, the Kit also encourages sharing and socializing skills with other children.

Alleviating Anxieties and Stress for Young Children

All of the children at St. Benedict School live in a nearby IDP camp, where living conditions are precarious and security and a nurturing environment are often wanting. “The ECD Kit gives children a sense of security and fun that they often do not find at home,” says Emanuela Itacy, the Head Instructor of the kindergarten. She adds, “Sometimes the children are so engaged that they do not want to go home late in the day. They find certain affection for the school that is not always mirrored in their homes.”
Luckson John lost his father and mother during the earthquake. Fraelity and anxiety accompany his trembling voice as he talks of now living with an aunt who cannot afford to meet his needs. At the same time, there is hope as he describes the positive impact that the materials provided in the ECD Kits have on his life. “When I play with toys it removes the sadness inside me and I forget the sorrow and I feel better,” he says.

Fleurant Miguelson, Director of the school and one of the leaders of the Organization of Youth for the Future and Re-forestation (OJA), says that even children above six years of age benefit from playing with the ECD Kit.

“The Kits were so popular that we had to book a party for other children,” he says. With support from UNICEF, OJA members have transformed the school’s classroom into a child-friendly space in order to meet the needs of parents in the camp who cannot afford to send their children to school. As many as 300 children come to the centre each day, and at least one-third attend the centre’s kindergarten classes.

UNICEF has also distributed ECD Kits to rural area schools such as Paradis des Petits at Gressier, a small city south of the nation’s capital. Evelyne Mercure, the school’s Director, warmly welcomes this initiative and the assistance provided by UNICEF.

“We lost everything after the earthquake. But with the arrival of the Kits, life has returned to the children,” says Mercure. “This initiative should be carried out every year. For without such equipment, there is no pre-school.”

“We see these benefits taking place in each of the schools that have received the UNICEF ECD Kit. Now, with the Kits distributed throughout Haiti, the next step is for us to focus on instructor’s training on how to use them.”

– Galia Ngamy, UNICEF Education Specialist, Port-Au-Prince, Haiti
Myanmar

The remote villages of the Ayeyarwaddy Delta in Myanmar experienced several devastating natural disasters between 2008 and 2010, leaving many families displaced and forced to grapple with tremendous loss. Many young children were also affected and left to cope with emotional stress and insecurity while trying to find normalcy and safety amidst crisis.

Children who experience natural disasters and emergency situations are extremely vulnerable and at-risk for negative effects on their cognitive, behavioral and emotional health. Therefore, it is critical to provide them with a protective and nurturing environment that helps them return to their routine as soon as possible. Therefore, when Cyclones Nargis and Giri struck the Delta in 2008 and 2010 respectively, the Centre served as a place where children could continue to learn, play and find a safe place that offered emotional shelter and a sense of routine and security.

Originally established by the Kayin Baptist Church in 2005, the pre-school was transformed into a centre supported by UNICEF in 2007. Following Cyclones Nargis and Giri, over 500 Emergency Childhood Development (ECD) Kits were distributed to about 450 communities in five townships that benefited over 9,000 children, mainly under the age of five. The Centre was also provided with ECD Emergency Kits, a handbook on how to use the Kit, play materials and illustrated children’s books as one-time support. Trainings on how to make toys were also held in order to equip the community with the skills to initiate and create developmentally appropriate playthings for children by using local materials.

Despite the devastations endured by the village as a result of these natural disasters, life has slowly came back to normal and the workers at the ECD Centre are unrelenting in their efforts to give children the best start in their lives despite limited resources.
Community Commitment to ECD: Providing Children with the Best Start in Life

Mary Myint, a six year old girl with a big and infectious smile, warmly greets her friends, teachers and visitors at the Zalet Kone Village’s ECD Centre in Daedayae Township, Ayeyarwaddy Division. At present, about 36 children from this and other nearby villages attend the ECD Centre on a regular basis.

While most children usually leave the Centre at the age of five, Mary Myint is an exception. As a result of poor nutrition and lack of proper care as a newborn, she suffered developmental delay increasing her need for extra educational and emotional support beyond the customary five years. Since she began participating in the Centre’s ECD activities, Mary Myint has been coming everyday with her mother, Daw Than Nwet, by boat from their home across the river. Her mother admits that taking Mary Myint to the Centre everyday is not an easy job. However, she has been doing it for a year now and is determined to continue doing whatever it takes until she sees major changes in Mary’s growth.

Daw Naw Le Htoo Whar, a teacher at the village ECD Centre, agrees with Daw Than Nwet on the progress Mary Myint has made since joining the Centre. With patience and persistence, she along with other ECD teachers at the Centre, worked with all determination and the belief in the possibility of positive growth and outcomes for Mary Myint. Their perseverance paid off and she is now an example to the community of children participating in ECD programmes who have shown marked improvements in health, cognitive abilities and social and personal skills.

Children who experience natural disasters and emergency situations are extremely vulnerable and at-risk for negative effects on their cognitive, behavioral and emotional health.
Pakistan

In August 2010, devastating floods hit the Punjab province in Pakistan leaving over 2,000 schools damaged or destroyed and thousands of students and teachers displaced. In response to this emergency, UNICEF provided immediate educational support and established Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs) in various relief camps in the affected areas to provide students with some sense of normalcy by continuing school activities in the camps.

The “Welcome to School Initiative” was launched by UNICEF as soon as returnees were able to return home, many discovering that their houses had either been washed away or heavily damaged by flood water. Not only were homes lost, schools had also been destroyed and were unable to accommodate local children, placing previously enrolled students at risk of not being able to continue their education and also lessening any opportunity for new entrants.

Through the “Welcome to School Initiative”, UNICEF established 626 TLCs for previously enrolled students at sites where schools had been completely devastated. One hundred and fifty ECE classes were introduced in selected TLCs complete with Emergency Childhood Development (ECD) Kits and ECE caregivers and attendants who received intensive training prior to residing over each class. The TLCs provided a “unique learning opportunity” for new entrants and the use of ECD Kits in these centres also proved to be a “great motivational factor” for new students.

“In the ECE class, multi-coloured toys attract the children’s attention the most. They learn basic principles of socialising, sharing and patience when they play and learn in the form of groups. Their learning is quick through the use of the ECD Kit”, says Asiya Bibi, an ECE caregiver at Government Primary School Qadirabad, District Rajanpur.

Field observations revealed that the introduction of ECE classes has proven to be a very successful intervention especially in terms of female enrolment, as most of the new entrants in the ECE classes are girls. ECE caregiver, Saira

ECD in Emergencies: Thriving through Crisis by Playing and Learning
Gul at Government Elementary School Asifabad, District Rajan Pur, states, “There was no school for girls in the near vicinity. With the introduction of Early Childhood Education (ECE) classes, girls in particular have benefitted. There are 65 girls and 20 boys in my class, who had never gone to school before. ... I make full use of the ECD Kit to manage all of these children at one time. The children take interest in doing activities, making use of their cognitive and imaginative skills and creativity, and thus learning the concepts of matching, building and relating very easily.”

The ECD Kit has also helped caregivers to clarify some difficult concepts for new entrants. Project Coordinator of the Hayat Foundation, Shahzad Mughal, says that: “Ideas the children generate on their own, after manipulating the Kit, are quite amazing. The ECE classes are attracting students in such great numbers, that we are finding difficulty in accommodating them in one class.”

District Education Officer in Rajanpur, Malik Irshar Ahmad Shad, adds: “The ECD Kit is a very fine learning tool, which encompasses all the concepts advocated in the National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education. They should be provided to all the schools irrespective of the fact that they are flood affected or not.”

“I love to come to school and play with the toys given to us from the ECD Kit. I have learned the names of colours and shapes. We make shaped with mud at school and the teacher gives us paints. At home I make the same shapes and my mother feels happy. We enjoy it. We love our teacher also.”
– Khalida Habib, ECE student at GPS Qadirabad, Rajanpur, Pakistan
The achievement of a more just and humane world calls for a change – a conscious turning away from violence and exploitation toward a culture of peace and co-operation in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Recognizing the critical issues of young children, in 2010, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) requested a special report addressing the implementation of the CRC into Early Childhood Development (ECD) programming. The recognition that young children should enjoy all rights afforded by the CRC, underpins efforts in peace building aimed at protecting and improving their lives. Building the defence of peace requires educating communities and constructing new ways of thinking and behaving among these communities.

In order to most effectively impact and encourage communities to foster and maintain peace, education must begin in early childhood, which is the period when the brain architecture is developing most rapidly. It is a critical time of life when habits are formed, differences are recognized and emotional ties are built through social relationships and day-to-day interactions in homes and neighbourhoods. Young children who grow up in unstable environments, exposed to abuse, neglect, and other stress, are less likely to build trusting and loving relationships which can often lead to low self-esteem and long-term psycho-social and behavioural problems (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine). ECD programmes can contribute, in the long-term, to peaceful societal interactions as it teaches young children critical emotional skills that will impact their future behaviour and foster more peaceful communities.

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding encompasses the rebuilding of societies fol-

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1 Declaration of the World Conference on Peace Education in early childhood, 24 April, 2007 Albacete-Spain
2 From Neurons to Neighbourhood : The Science of Early Childhood. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, Editors; Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000
Building Peace in Early Childhood

following a crisis and preventing future armed conflicts. Equally as important, it is also about creating conditions that are conducive to lasting peaceful relations among individuals, communities and society at large. Where violent conflicts are the norm, the lives of young children are greatly disrupted and their families find it far more difficult to provide the sensitive and predictable care that young children need in order to thrive. According to UNICEF's latest report, approximately 13 million children are displaced by armed conflicts and violence.

Early Childhood Development Programmes and Peacebuilding

ECD programmes can be instrumental in building peace in several ways, at the individual, community and societal levels: At the individual level, programmes may target children, parents or the interaction of parent/child pairs during early childhood. Parenting programmes may empower families to help their young children develop socially and emotionally and promote values and skills for future active democratic citizenship and pro-social behaviour. The early years lay the foundation for the development of social-emotional skills such as cooperation, empathy, the capacity to see other perspectives, and the ability to relate to others in a peaceful manner.

Community-based programmes have significant potential to promote peace and strengthen intra and inter community relations. ECD programmes can reach across communal divides and encourage communities in conflict “to develop alternative visions of the future based around the needs of children” (Connolly and Hayden 2007). During active conflict, safe spaces should be provided for young (and older) children to play, to provide parents with critical information and support to improve child care practices, to provide integrated services, and to encourage positive and supportive parent/child interaction. If they are functioning during conflict and certainly during transition, child care centres, kindergartens, and nursery schools can provide these safe spaces. ECD programmes where parents actively participate in the management of ECD Centres and are involved in daily activities with a strong parent education component, can have a particularly powerful impact by bringing together parents in ways that build trust across divided groups. By reaching the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups, they can also help reduce actual and perceived inequities and potential sources of conflict.

On the societal level, ECD in social policies works to reduce inequities. Inequity violates children’s rights and becomes a serious barrier to peace. Support for children and their families during the early childhood years is imperative for peacebuilding. ECD programmes reduce economic inequalities by promoting holistic development for all children – especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. For children growing up in poverty, quality early education improves school readiness and chances for school success, financial independence, and social stability. ECD can mitigate the factors that trigger armed conflicts or widespread violence. National policies, laws and legislation concerning the welfare, care and education of the young child should also be in line with international agreements.

Resources that enhance understanding and implementation of such programmes can be found among many partners including: UNICEF, the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (CGECCD) and the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) (that jointly sponsored the development of an annotated bibliography of relevant research), the International Network on Peace Building with Young Children, Save the Children, ChildFund International, and the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

UNICEF, the CGECCD, INEE and their many partners call on all citizens to:

- ensure that the needs of young children receive equal emphasis during all emergency situations from preparation to stabilization in order to allow children to develop their full potential; and
- assure that programmes addressing peacebuilding recognize the critical period of early childhood in promoting the skills that enable children to become agents of change in building peace in their societies and around the world.


Note: To access user-friendly tools on ECD in the INEE ToolKit, please visit: www.ineesite.org/toolKit Development, Chapter 9