Dear ECD Community,

We are pleased to release the latest issue of the ECD newsletter on the theme of **Peacebuilding in Early Childhood**. Promoting peace through early childhood is a fast emerging theme in programmatic initiatives. Just as early learning programmes prepare young children for the challenges of school and set the foundation of lifelong learning, starting with peace-building in early childhood is of paramount importance, because it promotes the skills that enable children to become agents of change in promoting socially cohesive, less violent, and more tolerant societies. In the formative years of life, a child’s brain architecture is developing most rapidly, habits are formed, differences are recognized and emotional ties are built through social relationships and day-to-day interactions in homes and neighborhoods. Through this newsletter we wish to share with you the conceptual framework of UNICEF’s approach to peacebuilding in early childhood and also update you on the related upcoming consortium launch.

This Newsletter also contains a story from UNICEF Cambodia on their innovative pilot home-visiting programme. As always, we have included highlights of recent events and updates on ECD in New York. The most notable update is the new leadership of ECD Unit with Dr. Pia Rebello Britto, who joined us in May 2013. ECD Unit conducted a large Care for Child Development Workshop in Ankara, Turkey and published a joint Working Paper with ILO, “Supporting Workers with Family Responsibilities: Connecting Child Development and the Decent Work Agenda”.

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**The best start in life for every child**

**EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**
**NEWSLETTER—AUGUST 2013**

**EDITORIAL**

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**PEACEBUILDING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD**

The paper was launched by Deputy Executive Director, Geeta Rao Gupta, during the coordination segment of the ECOSOC in Geneva in July 2013. The 2013 State of the World’s Children (SOWC) Report launched on 30 May 2013. It included ECD indicators for the first time. Among other news, today we launched the newly revamped ECD pages on UNICEF’s public website. We also recently updated the ECD Intranet pages.

There is one more team transition we would like to mention. Maryam Rashid, our ECD Specialist (Knowledge Management) is leaving UNICEF in August 2013 and this is her last newsletter with us. Maryam has steadfastly grown our ability to communicate the latest developments in ECD through this informative newsletter. Please join us in wishing Maryam the very best in her future endeavors; we know that she will keep the ECD flag flying high! In the future, newsletter related stories should be sent to Pia Britto and Maimuna Gaye, ECD Consultant, who recently joined our team. We welcome your input for the next newsletter on any topic of interest. If you have recently completed an evaluation of an ECD programme, conducted a comprehensive workshop, or identified best practices in an ECD related topic, please do write us and share your stories/examples by 13 September 2013 so we can share them with rest of the ECD community within UNICEF.

Warm Regards, ECD Team in NYHQ
What is Peacebuilding, and how does it relate to ECD?
Peacebuilding refers to the processes associated with reducing direct and indirect violence in a society. Direct violence can be understood as physical or psychological harm caused by individuals. Indirect violence is the systematic social injustices, oppression and discrimination through existing legal, political, cultural, social and economic structures. However peace is not just the absence of violence, it is also the active creation of promoting harmony and tolerance with an emphasis on the development of an effective infrastructure to sustain social justice, healthcare and economic development. A combination of poverty, economic and gender inequality as well as a lack of strong governance are recognized as factors often associated with the onset of conflict. For this reason, any efforts at promoting peace must encompass not just the absence of violence but account for its structural drivers. Building and sustaining peace becomes not only about peace treaties and accords between nations, but about the preservation of justice, harmony, social cohesion and trust among individuals - a role taken on by communities, educators and families, which needs to start in the early years of life.

Yale University Child Study Center and the Mother Child Education Foundation (ACEV) have partnered to produce a conceptual framework on “The Ecology of Peace: Formative Childhoods and Peacebuilding”, which provides a model for exploring the multiple relationships between early childhood development and peacebuilding. A related presentation can be accessed here and the full report here.

Rationale for including early childhood development in peacebuilding
Research indicates that the nature and quality of early childhood development is one of the strongest predictors of later human development. Mounting evidence from the fields of neurobiology, economics and developmental psychology, point to early childhood development programmes as promising approaches to alleviating poverty and bridging socioeconomic inequities. If indeed the structural drivers of violence such as discrimination, systematic oppression, inequity in opportunity and multi-generational poverty are to be overcome, early childhood development has a key role to play in the long-term. In the short-term, in times of violence, early childhood development presents a window of opportunity for peacebuilding. While generations of ethnic tensions, divides and strife might be difficult to overcome in the short to medium-term; few would disagree on the importance of creating stable, nurturing and stimulating environments for the young children in their homes, their communities, ethnic groups and countries.

Early childhood provides that window for creating opportunities for positive interactions and facilitating a synergistic intention to promote young children’s development. The opportunity to identify multiple pathways in shaping a just and equal society that upholds the rights of the young child at its very core, serves as a call to action to previously divided communities. In short, early childhood development provides a unique entry point to communities and societies in “transcending existing divides and refocusing attention and priorities on their own children and their future.”

Theories of change:
Three theories of change form the basis of the links between early childhood development and peacebuilding:

1. Human development change theory: According to this theory, transformative societal changes in attitudes, behaviors and skills can occur if the seeds towards building and sustaining peace are sown from the very early stages of the life-cycle. Research demonstrates that the foundations of healthy social interactions – empathy, acceptance, friendliness and perspective-taking abilities, as well as the abilities to regulate emotion, manage and use information logically and inhibit impulsive behaviors are built in the very early years. Peacebuilding theorists argue that these are skills that are at the very core of peacebuilding and that any attempts in transforming existing or potentially divisive mindsets and violent impulsive actions must start early and with young children and their caregivers.

2. Psychological/Emotional change theory: This theory asserts that in constructively addressing the emotional needs of children and their caregivers, the psychosocial causes of conflict and violence such as stress, insecurity, and victimization can be affected positively. Simply put, when caregivers feel more connected, responsible to, and invested in the development of their young children, they are less likely to channel their energies in socially destabilizing activities.

3. Root cause and justice theory: This theory suggests that violence is a cause of social and economic inequities, systematic oppression and injustice. If these factors, or the structural drivers of violence are addressed, then more equitable, peaceful and social-justice oriented societies can develop. By providing learning and skill development opportunities for previously marginalized and excluded groups, ECD programmes can promote the creation of more inclusive, just societies where communities believe they have a stake in shaping the development of their future generations.

Programmatic implications:
The ECD Unit at UNICEF HQ is currently developing a Global Guidance Note on Peacebuilding and Early Childhood Development, to provide suggestive actions for Country Offices to form a framework for designing effective peacebuilding programmes in the early years. The Global Guidance Note will further serve as a strong advocacy tool for prioritizing ECD in peacebuilding programmes, to ensure that peacebuilding efforts at national levels leverage the critical window of opportunity available in the early years. For more information please contact Vijaya Singh or Eva Lotta Schiermeyer.
**ECD and Peacebuilding: Moving the Agenda Forward**

On Friday 20th September, 2013 ECD Unit at UNICEF headquarters in New York will organize a global event to launch the Early Childhood Peace Consortium. The Global Consortium aims to bring together sectors that are actively engaged in improving the lives of young children and families, and/or peacebuilding and social cohesion with the aim of creating a movement for sustained peace through early childhood development.

Increased violence in homes, schools, neighborhoods and countries, and the lasting negative impact of violence on children, families and communities, are matters of grave concern around the world. Several organizations and alliances are working hard to address this great risk to individuals and society. Among these is a noteworthy consortium of new, non-traditional and diverse partners, at the vanguard of science, practice and policy, who offer the potential for sustained peace.

Evidence has demonstrated that the early years of development are the strongest predictors of health, later life skills, competencies, attitudes and beliefs. Influencing neurobiology early in life can have a positive, trans-generational impact in promoting health, development and peace. Developmental neurobiology clearly demonstrates that it is during the earliest years of life when individuals make the most significant strides in all domains of development and that the complex bio-behavioral system is developmentally sensitive. Programmatic evidence from the Mother-Child Education Foundation (ACEV), has provided the inspiration for the idea. Through decades of early childhood programming experience they have noted a shift towards peace in the communities where the programs are being implemented. From a socio-ecological perspective, early interventions with parents and early learning programmes for young children positively influence harmonious relationships and pro-social behaviors that have a transformative influence on communities.

Although there is a significant, and growing, body of literature to support these matters, much of this science is not reaching practitioners or policy makers. Therefore, a consortium is required, which will ensure that the latest knowledge is being used to influence peacebuilding discourse and to create sustainable peace. This ECD and Peacebuilding consortium is a response to that call to action.

The vision is to create a legacy of sustained peace drawing on the transformative power of early child development. The Consortium aims to:

- Contribute to the debate on peace building by focusing on early childhood development, engaging families, communities, civil society and governments, and philanthropists through science and practice.

- Partner with and complement the goals of other networks and organizations working to advance proven and sustainable ECD interventions and peacebuilding.

- Link emerging knowledge from bio-behavioral and environmental sciences with existing evidence to increase investment, advocate for and create local and sustainable programmes for peacebuilding through ECD.

- Generate new evidence for policies and practices that promote sustained peace for young children, families and communities in an ever-changing world.

- Advocate for and disseminate information for both academia and policy makers, educators, parents and children to build a global movement that values the role of young children and families as agents of change in peace building.

- Draft a UN Resolution on ECD and peacebuilding.

The launch event on 20th September will feature renowned speakers, such as Dr. Michael Meaney, Dr. Cigdem Kagitcibasi, and representatives from UN agencies, media and international networks. For more information please contact Vijaya Singh or Eva Lotta Schiermeyer.

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**How Can Early Childhood Development Contribute to Peacebuilding?**

ECD can contribute to peacebuilding in a number of critical ways, as summarized below:

- *Children as young as 2 years can demonstrate stigma.* Attempts to change violent and discriminatory attitudes need to begin early and ECD provides this window of opportunity when behaviors and attitudes can be shaped, and when the ability for affiliative bonding can be strengthened.

- *ECD programmes build a shared vision for children among previously divided communities.* This allows for collaboration, deliberation and the development of social networks across different groups, thereby promoting social cohesion.

- *ECD programmes not only support young children but also their caregivers, and build their capacities and skills to support young children’s development.* Leaving caregivers out of the equation can result in psycho-social distress, isolation, and marginalization – all of which are drivers of violence.

- *There is strong evidence that the long-term return on investment in ECD is high.* Quality home and community-based learning environments enable young children to be better prepared for school and later on the labor market, thereby providing equitable access to resources to previously marginalized groups; this decreases the potential for social unrest and conflict.
EARLY CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY ASSISTANTS IN CAMBODIA

Today, Chet Sary has been visiting a young mother and her baby to check that both are doing well after the delivery and to provide some useful advice on the mother and newborn care, especially on post natal care and exclusive breastfeeding. Thereafter, she pays a visit to a grandmother to check that her nine months old grand-son has been brought to the measles immunization. Sary is working as ECD community assistant in her village since September 2012 as part of an experimental programme initiated by the Ministry of Interior and UNICEF in 3 rural communes in Cambodia.

The tasks of this 51 year old woman and her peers are not limited to ensuring that children in the villages are receiving appropriate health care and nutrition but are also covering a wide range of children’s issues such as birth registration, parenting for early stimulation and education, hygiene and sanitation, making the village registration book of children under six years of age for ECD data monitoring and reporting and conducting home visits to follow up on the poorest or most vulnerable children (children living with disability, orphans or children separated from their parents in the longer term). Those children are more at risk of not receiving adequate nutrition and stimulation, or missing the essential services like immunization, vitamin A supplementation and deworming, or are not attending the community preschool.

The high infant mortality rate and the low level of literacy in rural Cambodia require a multi-sectoral and integrated approach to ECD at the community level.

This pilot programme comes at the right time as the National Committee for ECD has been created recently to implement the ECD National Policy. The Government of Cambodia is pursuing a long-term public sector decentralization process to give more responsibility and resources to local government institutions for achieving local development and social actions.

The aim of the pilot is to demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of the above approach in the context of the decentralization, administrative and public finances reforms in Cambodia. It is hoped that the results and lessons learnt of this pilot will inform policy change, financing and human resources decisions that would allow a better operationalization of the National ECCD Policy and Plan of Action.

In the context of Cambodia, the pilot programme is innovative in many aspects: testing a new and scalable model of local authorities’ function by contracting the commune council and the community workers (called here Early Child Care and Development Commune Assistants) with a monthly incentive of USD 15.

This stipend is intended to increase the community workers’ motivation and long term sustainability. Promoting ECD related interventions through community workers in an integrated manner and along the continuum of life cycle approach is intended to address the gaps in existing programmes that have a fragmented and vertical approach and not well-coordinated.

However the main challenges for the pilot programme are to recruit community assistants with sufficient education background to fulfill the tasks; to build capacity of the community assistants in multiple topics within a limited time and to build the capacity of the commune council to implement all the steps of programme implementation including the selection and recruitment of candidates, contract management, field monitoring and supervision, planning and budgeting; and to get a good collaboration from different concerned line ministries, provincial and district authorities.

After eight months of implementation, there are positive observations: most of the Early Child Care and Development Commune Assistants are motivated and active especially in encouraging birth registration, antenatal care and skilled delivery, exclusive breastfeeding, and immunization, and assisting the health center staff to conduct outreach activities. The drop-out rate is low. Their work is much appreciated by the parents as well as by the village chief. The good collaboration with key ministries such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women Affairs, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Rural Development at the central and provincial levels, especially in the training of the ECD commune assistants is very encouraging. The good collaboration among the different sections of UNICEF country office either directly or via the ECD working group is a key supporting element for the design and implementation of the pilot.

The minimum duration of the pilot is 2 years. The impact on the ECD situation of the pilot sites will be evaluated after one year and again after two years of implementation. Improvements in caregivers’ knowledge, family care practices and utilization of essential ECD services will be measured through 24 indicators using 3 sources of data:

1. Selected data from the administrative Commune Database and Health Information System (data are cumulative during a year).
2. ECD village data collected 2 times per year by the community workers through the systematic registration of children aged under six (reflecting the specific situation at the time of the data collection).
3. Information from the ECD household surveys done before and after two years of project implementation (qualitative and semi-quantitative).

For more information please contact Ek Thinavuth or Rasoka Thor in UNICEF Cambodia Office.
STATE OF THE WORLD’S CHILDREN REPORT WITH ECD INDICATORS

The State of the World’s Children (SOWC) Report for 2013 on the theme of Children with Disabilities was launched on 30 May 2013. This report also marked a milestone for ECD, because for the first time, ECD indicators have been included in the SOWC. Please see Table 14, pages 152 and 153 in the report.

A soft copy of the current SOWC report and related documents can be accessed here. You can also access here a short thematic brief from the SOWC on Early Childhood Development and Children with Disabilities.

ANALYSIS OF MICS4 ECD INDICATORS ON ECD INTRANET

ECD Unit recently updated the structure, layout and content of the ECD Intranet pages to reflect the richness of ECD community’s collective knowledge and resources, and to make the site more user-friendly. In the same vein, analysis of MICS4 indicators was conducted, which has been now posted on the ECD Monitoring page. Data are available at both the global level and the regional level for CEE/CIS, TACR, EAPR, ROSA, ESAR, WCAR, and MENA. For more information, contact Oliver Petrovic.

UNICEF WCARO JOINT MEETING ON ACSD AND ECD

During 17-21 June 2013, Western and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) hosted the first-ever joint Accelerated Child Survival and Development (ACSD) and ECD Network meeting in Dakar, Senegal, with the aim to strengthen inter-sectorality around child survival and development. This was done by sharing updates on the regional prototype for ECD national strategies, and sharing interesting implementation experiences from countries. Acknowledging the importance of research-based programming, UNICEF WCARO is developing a prototype for ECD national strategies which includes a parental behavior survey, an assessment of young child competencies to shape quality preschool programs and a costing model for ECD policy. A total of 135 participants attended the joint ACSD-ECD meeting on 19 June and the two-day ECD-only meeting had a total of 36 participants who came from 23 of the 24 countries in the region.

Among shared country experiences, Afanou, Health Specialist, Togo CO presented an effective decentralized monitoring framework for implementation of health interventions, which has helped inform local stakeholders as well as the development of the Togo National Health Sector Plan. Another initiative presented by Thiam Haleinta Traore, ECD Specialist, Mali CO outlined a project which included creation of a playground with games, songs and massages to stimulate malnourished children. The project showed that children and mothers stay longer at nutritional centers because they received food for the day and Non-Food Items (NFI) kits by the WASH programme. It was observed that health workers also were much more committed to providing stimulation activities for children because it facilitated contact with them and made delivery of healthcare easier.

For the vast majority of countries in WCAR, a large scale national parenting program which includes support to parents for health, development, education and protection of young children is not viable. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss current challenges and future developments in this regard. Moreover, despite UNICEF’s intensive efforts to mobilize stakeholders around multisectoral national ECD policies, no country in the region has a budgeted ECD policy implemented at the national level. This regional meeting highlighted the importance of working across sectors, which remains a main challenge of the region and within UNICEF.

One of the key takeaways of the meeting was, that the life cycle approach to programming needs to be strengthened through generation of evidence and research based data as well as through the implementation of concrete actions identified in UNICEF country programmes. Click here for a related icon story. For more information, please contact Mariavittoria Ballotta or Haleinta Thiam.

UNICEF REPORT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND REVISED UNICEF KEY MESSAGES ON POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT

In this Report titled “Sustainable Development Starts and Ends with Safe, Healthy, and Well-Educated Children”, UNICEF explores the dynamic and dramatic interplay between the realization of children’s rights and sustainable development. The evidence presented makes a powerful case for why and how these issues must be directly addressed in the discussions towards a Post-2015 Development Agenda and the eventual framework that will emerge.

This paper complements UNICEF’s 10 Key Messages on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Among other evidence-based arguments, this paper highlights the need to invest in nutrition, education, water and sanitation in early childhood, stating: “Sustainable development starts in early childhood.” Click here for the Spanish version of this report. Click here to sign up for the Sustainable Development Goals and Post-2015 Community of Practice. For more information please contact Shannon O’Shea.
Dr. Pia Rebello Britto recently joined the ECD Unit NYHQ as Senior Advisor and Unit Chief. She joins us from Yale University where she was an Assistant Professor for International Early Childhood Development and Global Policy. Pia has worked with over 40 countries providing technical assistance and guidance to national governments, development partners and NGOs on designing, implementing and evaluating evidence-based programmes and policies for ECD. For the past decade she has worked closely with UNICEF at Headquarters, regional and country offices on ECD. Pia obtained her doctoral degree in developmental psychology from Columbia University and is a national of the USA. She is the recipient of several US-based and international grants and awards in recognition for her work. She has published numerous books, articles, chapters and reports, and has presented extensively at conferences, meetings and workshops around the world. Her latest publications include: Handbook of Early Child Development Research and Its Impact on Global Policy; School Readiness and Transitions: A Companion to the Child Friendly Schools Manual; Child development in developing countries: Child rights and policy implications; and Child development in developing countries: Introduction and methods.

Given her intimate familiarity with programming at country level and technical expertise in ECD, Pia is looking forward to working closely with all sectors in country and regional offices to ensure that all young children around the world can fulfill their right to achieve their developmental potential and that UNICEF is the global leader in early childhood. You can contact Pia at pbritto@unicef.org.

**CONNECTING CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND DECENT WORK**

On 8 July 2013, ECD Unit, UNICEF and ILO jointly published a high-level Working Paper titled: “Supporting Workers with Family Responsibilities: Connecting Child Development and the Decent Work Agenda” during an Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Panel discussion on “Using Human Rights instruments and ILO standards and recommendations to achieve decent work for all”. Opening remarks to the Panel Discussion were delivered by H. E. Ambassador Daffa-Alla Ellag Ali Osman (Sudan), Vice-President of ECOSOC. Panelists included Mr. Guy Ryder, Director-General, ILO, and Ms. Geeta Rao Gupta, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF.

The panelists noted that providing decent work for all has become a prominent issue in the global dialogues on the post-2015 agenda and of the Rio+20 Sustainable Goals. The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda has proposed that “create jobs, sustainable livelihoods and equitable growth,” be incorporated as a new goal. The challenge is to ensure work is “decent”, which implies it will promote quality of work and a human rights approach. The Human Rights Based Approach to programming calls on the importance of accountability of duty bearers, going beyond the concept of social responsibility.

In her remarks, Ms. Geeta Rao Gupta appreciated the close cooperation with ILO in preparing the joint working paper. She emphasized the importance of this topic to UNICEF’s equity agenda, which is also a key strategy to achieve growth. She also highlighted issues of gender discrimination and the limited opportunities for decent work provided to women, which has implications for Early Childhood Development, particularly in the poorest families.

For poor women in particular, the necessity to earn for survival is a major factor in the serious neglect and danger many children face during early childhood. Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months after childbirth is recommended as a critical component of early childcare. However working mothers without decent work options may not be able to exercise this right. Lack of adequate care from working parents can have strong implications on the physical and cognitive development of young children. Child care for younger siblings in households where all adults work, is a major factor in girls not attending school. To address the issue of adequate childcare and decent work opportunities for working families, ILO and UNICEF are working on two levels. At the policy level we are advocating for social policies to be fully integrated into macroeconomic frameworks that prioritize strong support for working families along the life cycle continuum. At the programme and implementation level, we recommend a holistic and integrated set of social sector investments that target the critical stages of early childhood, from pregnancy through care and development in the early years and later childhood as they provide families the support needed to balance the competing demands of the labor market and child care.

The panel concluded with the remarks that although progress has been made on some issues, such as child soldiers and child labour, implementation of conventions on decent work remains a challenge.

This working paper builds on the conclusions of “Investing in Child Development and Learning: Ensuring Equity in Decent Work and Sustainable Development,” a forum convened by UNICEF and ILO on 28 February 2012. A draft of this paper was also used to stimulate dialogue and guide discussion during an ECOSOC Ministerial Roundtable in New York on 3 July 2012. Access the working paper on ILO website, UNICEF website or Intranet. For more information please contact Maryam Rashid or Pia Britto.
During the week of 24 June 2013 UNICEF (ECD Unit), WHO and the World Bank organized a week-long Interagency workshop in Ankara, Turkey, to build global, regional, and country capacities to implement the Care for Child Development Intervention (CCDI). Facilitation of the workshop addressed the need to scale up CCDI globally by forming an expert team of trainers who will take the lead in implementing CCD at the regional and country levels. The workshop was held in two parts. The first part comprised of three and a half days of basic coursework on CCDI, and the second part comprised of two and a half days of an interagency planning and implementation workshop.

The first part of the workshop facilitated by Jane E Lucas, focused on family counseling skills to support a child’s healthy growth and development; and the evidence, theory, and operational research for the benefits of the intervention. Training was a generic course designed to orient participants with the concepts of the CCD package. Twenty trainees participated in the basic course with cross-sectoral representation from UNICEF New York HQ, WCA and CEE/CIS Regional Offices and China County Office; WHO HQ, Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), Plan International, World Vision International, Save the Children, the International Step by Step Association, University of Liverpool, Monash University in Australia, the American University of Beirut, Hacettepe University in Turkey and a number of independent consultants.

The learning activities included classroom sessions reviewing the CCD package, group work and video demonstrations of clinical sessions, technical seminars, as well as hands-on clinical practice of counseling families with young children in the outpatient setting at Ankara University School of Medicine. As an outcome, the participants gained basic counseling skills. It is expected that with additional training, practice and supervision during the rollout of planned activities, participants will be able to support in-country capacity to implement the intervention.

The second part of the workshop focused on planning for the wider systematic implementation of CCD within existing health, nutrition, and other family support systems. A total of 35 participants attended this portion of the workshop. The Bernard van Leer Foundation also joined this portion of the workshop in addition to the organizations that joined the first part of this workshop.

Participants and implementing partners expressed overwhelming enthusiasm on the great need and usefulness of the CCD package in the field. An overarching outcome of the meeting was reaching an interagency consensus on the main activities to roll-out the intervention. The next step following the workshop is organizing participants into interagency working groups to lead the implementation and roll out plans. Work has already begun on this front with almost all participants having registered for the working groups formed to support in-country implementation of the intervention. These working groups include monitoring and evaluation, adaptation of the package to the national context, and package accreditation / quality. The momentum has been built and efforts are bound to only increase from this point. CCD Package and related presentations from the workshop can be accessed here. For more information please contact Oliver Petrovic.
Key Points

- Child development is largely dependent on the quality of early experiences. Early intervention can enhance the brain’s potential through cerebral plasticity (Cerebral plasticity refers to the brain’s ability to learn, remember, forget, reorganize, and recover from injury).

- Emerging clinical data, using functional magnetic resonance imaging and clinical evaluations, also support the hypothesis that clinical interventions can increase the developmental potential of children by enhancing the underlying brain’s potential, rather than merely allowing the child to achieve an already predetermined potential. Such interventions include early developmental enrichment programs, which have improved cognitive function; high-energy and high-protein diets, which have increased brain growth in infants with perinatal brain damage; constraint-induced movement therapy, which has improved motor function in patients with stroke, cerebral palsy, and cerebral hemispherectomy; and trans-cranial magnetic stimulation, which has improved motor function in stroke patients.

- Heightened plasticity in the developing brain leads to critical periods during infancy and childhood when environmental stimuli can create adaptive or maladaptive changes in the brain’s structure. An early postnatal burst in synaptogenesis is followed by an activity-dependent pruning of synapses throughout childhood. Critical periods for synaptogenesis and pruning vary by brain region (Synaptogenesis refers to the formation of new synapses. Neurons transmit information to other neurons through structures in the nervous system called synapses).

- The failure to receive exposure to appropriate stimuli during a critical period is difficult or impossible to remedy subsequently. A threshold level of stimulation may be required for the brain to develop normally during these critical periods. Moreover, exposure to early stress in humans is associated with neurobiologic consequences.

- Experimental data strongly support the clinical impression that the physical, cognitive, and psychologic development of children depends on the quality of early relationships and experiences, and that early intervention can enhance early childhood development and the brain’s ability to recover from injury.

- Evidence from neurobiology indicates that early intervention is capable of changing the structure and function of the brain. The biologic mechanisms of neurogenesis, synaptogenesis, and rewiring underlie cerebral plasticity and the brain’s ability to adapt and recover from injury. Environmental enrichment alone was demonstrated to increase neurogenesis and synaptogenesis in the brain (pointing to the importance of having books and playthings for young children).

- The authors mention WHO/UNICEF Care for Child Development (CCD) intervention as an example of an early intervention programme which provides health workers with techniques for working with families to improve the growth, health, and development of children in a community. (CCD was evaluated through the Pakistan Early Child Development Scale-up (PEDS) clinical trial which has demonstrated evidence regarding effectiveness of this intervention).
Updated ECD Intranet Pages

Today we launched the newly revamped ECD pages on the UNICEF public website. Please encourage your partners to visit us on the web. We also recently updated the structure, layout and content of the ECD Intranet pages to reflect the richness of our collective knowledge and resources. We encourage you to visit the new ECD pages on the Intranet to check out the new content. Some of the useful resources include the ECD Document Library, new ECD Monitoring Page (which includes links to latest MICS4 data slides), Latest Updates box on the ECD Home Page, ECD Events and Meetings Page (which include links to presentations and webinar recordings), the updated page on Disability in Early Childhood, Peacebuilding in Early Childhood and the ECD Evaluation Page. We value your feedback as we continue to update our content. Please send any comments to Maryam Rashid, ECD Specialist (Knowledge Management), or Pia Britto, ECD Unit Chief.

KEY RESOURCES ON PEACEBUILDING AND ECD

The Ecology of Peace: Formative Childhoods and Peacebuilding by Yale-ACEV Partnership (Link)

Yale University Child Study Center Webpage on The Ecology of Peace (Link)

From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Power of Early Childhood Initiatives, Lessons from Around the World (Link)

From Conflict to Peace Building the Power of Early Childhood Care and Education in Northern Ireland (Link)

The Peace Education Project Website (Link)

OTHER ECD RESOURCES

Care for Child Development: Basic Science Rationale and Effects of Interventions (Link)

Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction: Project Evaluation and Learning (Plan International) (Link)

Investing in the youngest: Early childhood care and development in emergencies (Plan International) (Link)

Early childhood care and development in emergencies: A programme guide (Plan International) (Link)

Noteworthy Practices: Early Childhood Development in Emergencies (Link)

UNICEF Mali Education in Emergencies Videos (Link)

Report to the UN Secretary-General on Corporate Sustainability and the UN Post-2015 Development Agenda (Link)


ILO/UNICEF Joint Working Paper: Supporting Workers with Family Responsibilities: Connecting Child Development and the Decent Work Agenda (UNICEF Website Link; Intranet Link; ILO Website Link)

A Transformative Solution: Reducing Poverty and Inequality through a Post-2015 Early Childhood Development Goal (The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development—CG-ECCD) (Link)

ECD Pages on ChildInfo Website (Link)

WHO/UNICEF Care for Child Development Training Package (UNICEF Website Link; Intranet Link; WHO Website Link)
News and Stories from the Field

We would like to hear from our colleagues in the field on any topic pertinent to their ECD work in the field. Please email your stories along with pictures and any other important news of recent evaluations and best practices in ECD to Pia Britto and Maimuna Gaye by 13 September 2013 for inclusion into the next newsletter.

COMMENTS

Please send any feedback about the content or format of this newsletter to Pia Britto or Maimuna Gaye.

SUBSCRIPTION

Please send an e-mail to Maimuna Gaye if you would like to be added or removed from the distribution list of this newsletter.

UPCOMING ECD GLOBAL EVENTS AND CALLS FOR PAPERS

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Annual Conference and Expo; 20-23 November 2013; Washington, D.C.

21st International Re-conceptualizing Early Childhood Education Conference - Reclaiming the Indigenous Child, Family and Community; Pedagogies of Place; 3-17 November, 2013; Nairobi, Kenya