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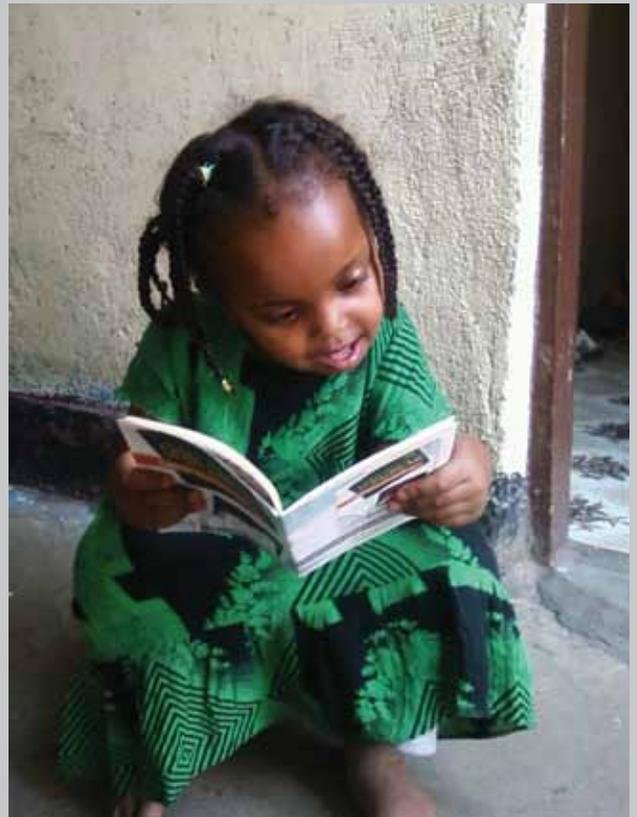


Educational Quality Improvement Program
Classrooms • Schools • Communities

FIRST PRINCIPLES:

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

COMPENDIUM



Credit: Ali Ahmed/EDC

Early childhood development (ECD) is an area in which increased evidence of impact and increased interest at the policy level have not yet been matched by increased funding for and implementation of high-quality programming. This *First Principles: Designing Effective Education Program for Early Childhood Development Compendium* responds to USAID's request for a strategy that can help alter that trend and support the expansion of ECD programming in countries where counterpart governments request it. The principles, steps, and indicators are primarily meant to guide program designs, including the development of requests for and subsequent review of proposals, the implementation of program activities, and the development of performance management plans, evaluations, and research studies. The First Principles are intended to help USAID education officers specifically, as well as other stakeholders— including staff in donor agencies, government officials, and staff working for international and national non-governmental organizations—who may be tasked with promoting, developing, and implementing ECD programs funded through education streams. The guidance provided in this document is meant to be used and adapted for a variety of settings to help educators overcome the numerous challenges in supporting this youngest population. The last section provides references and resources for those who would like to learn more about issues and methods for supporting early childhood programming. This *Compendium* version provides greater depth for those who are interested in knowing more about quality early childhood programming. There is shorter companion piece called a *Digest*, which provides basic information on this topic.



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EQUIPI: Building Educational Quality through Classrooms, Schools, and Communities is a multifaceted program designed to raise the quality of classroom teaching and the level of student learning by effecting school-level changes. EQUIPI serves all levels of education, from early childhood development for school readiness to primary and secondary education, adult basic education, prevocational training, and the provision of life-skills. Activities range from teacher support in course content and instructional practices to principal support for teacher performance and community involvement for school management and infrastructure, including in crisis and post-crisis environments.

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------|--|
| ECD | Early Childhood Development |
| EQUIPI | Education Quality Improvement Program I |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| ICT | Information Communication Technology |
| IRI | Interactive Radio Instruction |
| ISCED | International Standard Classification of Education |
| MRC | Madrassa Resource Centers |
| NECDP | Nutrition and Early Childhood Development Project |
| NFP | Nurse-Family Partnership |
| RCC | Releasing Confidence and Creativity |
| USAID | U.S. Agency for International Development |
| USG | United States Government |

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INTRODUCTION

Definition and Importance of Early Childhood

The early childhood period is a critical foundational moment in human development. Brain development is at its fastest and most complex during this time, and the neural pathways that support and facilitate later learning and growth are largely defined in these early years (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Shore, 1997). Indeed, the identification of points of construction, consolidation, and pruning in recent brain research provides a sobering visual representation of how early the narrowing of opportunities for children really begins (Bailey, 2002; Center for Early Education and Development, 2002; Luthar, 2003). Current emphases on getting all children into primary school, as reflected in the Education for All agenda and the Millennium Development Goals, are in fact missing the moments of greatest potential and leverage for change in the well-being of individuals and their societies. Although the reluctance of governments and funders to dedicate large sums to supporting children below the age of 8 is understandable, given the sensitivity of outside intervention in what has traditionally been seen as the private domain of the family, support for early childhood programs can significantly reduce the need to invest in closing the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged later in life.

Indeed, research indicates that early childhood experiences notably influence life chances for individuals, including success in education, lifetime employment and income, overall health and welfare, and social integration (Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005; Heckman, 2006). Social returns from these programs are also high in terms of reduced reliance on publicly funded safety nets, increased economic activity, reduced levels of overall incarceration and rehabilitation, and positive health. U.S.-based studies with up to 40 years of longitudinal data show that returns for early childhood development (ECD) are higher than those for virtually any other form of social investment (Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005; Karoly et al., 2005; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001). The 40-year follow-up cost-benefit analysis of the high-quality Perry Preschool intervention, for instance, indicated a benefit-cost ratio of 17.07; that is, a net benefit of \$17.07 for every dollar invested in the program. Net benefits also significantly increase for higher-risk populations, as in the case of the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program, where net benefits for the high-risk sample were 18 times as great as those for the low-risk sample (Karoly et al., 2005). Although rigorous research of that duration has not yet been conducted in the developing world, those high-quality studies

Credit: American Institutes for Research



that do examine impact in developing contexts indicate similar patterns of benefit and return (e.g., Kagitcibasi, Sunar, & Bekman 2001; Kagitcibasi, Sunar, Bekman, Baydar, & Cemalcilar, 2009; Montie, Xiang, & Schweinhart, 2007; Nores & Barnett, 2010). High-quality interventions in the early years can significantly enhance the lives of individuals—particularly those who are least advantaged—and the well-being of societies.

Early childhood is defined developmentally as ages 0–8 (Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development [Consultative Group], 2001)¹ and can be subdivided into ages 0–3 (infants and toddlers), 4–5 (preschoolers), and 6–8 (early elementary schoolers). The needs and capacity of these groups and the stakeholders who most directly affect them (parents/caregivers, health care providers, teachers) are notably different, and services provided to them must speak to their unique challenges and opportunities. Development also occurs simultaneously in multiple domains (physical, cognitive/intellectual, psychosocial/emotional, creative), and these domains interact with and affect one another. The

¹ Although USAID and other funders typically separate pre-primary programming from early elementary and focus within pre-primary work streams on ages 3–6, the operative definition of the early childhood period as 0–8 leaves room for a wider variety of efforts to bridge the foundational home and school experiences of the very young.

best early childhood programming is therefore integrative to address as many domains of development as possible. Health, nutrition, education, sanitation, community mobilization, and livelihoods development programs all have an impact on child development, and efforts that cut across these sectors have the greatest impact.

General Characteristics of ECD in Developing Countries

Although integrated programming provides the most notable returns, this compendium focuses on programming funded solely or primarily through education appropriations, which is typically reflected in international and national data sets as “pre-primary education,” or International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Level 0. Even within this narrower framework, notable gaps and inequities exist in the kinds of programs for young children that are available in developing-country contexts. Exceptions to the trends do exist, and lessons that may be learned from some of those exceptions are highlighted throughout this compendium.

In general, levels of access to and participation in early childhood programs in the developing world are low to very low. The overall rate of participation across the developing world is only about 33% of the relevant age group (World Bank, 2010), with Latin America and the Caribbean generally at the higher end

of the range and Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States at the lower end (fewer than 1% of the eligible age group are in pre-primary programs in Yemen, for instance; UNESCO, 2007). For those children who do participate, programming tends to serve elite, often urban, communities. Gender disparity is lower in pre-primary programs than in higher levels of schooling, but this situation likely results from the predominance of higher-income children served (UNESCO, 2007).

Although increasing numbers of countries now mandate pre-primary schooling, government capacity to provide such services is limited, and the programs are often offered by nongovernmental (in many case private, for-profit) providers. Many programs are of poor quality, and those with an explicit educational focus often offer excessively academic content that is developmentally inappropriate for the children enrolled in the programs. Even where programs are of good quality, trained teachers and administrators are notably lacking, and turnover among those who have been trained and prepared to run programs is very high.

Government oversight of programming is patchy and inconsistent. In some cases, states structure, oversee, and provide programming, but in many others, the government’s role is limited at most to licensing the operation of centers offering programs for children. The Ministry of Education is



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usually the lead agency in this field, but Ministries of Health, Social Welfare, and Women's Affairs are also often involved, resulting in scattershot provision and oversight. Coherent national strategies for serving young children are unusual, at best. Although funding for early childhood programs flows through multiple sectors, overall it accounts for only tiny percentages of government investments in social and educational programming (and for only tiny percentages of donor investments in education and social welfare relative to other streams).

Enabling Factors

Although early childhood programming in the developing world faces significant challenges, a number of enabling factors can make opportunities ripe for introducing or expanding ECD efforts.

Shifting patterns in the workforce have increased the demand for early childhood options.

Child care and early education have traditionally been assumed by mothers or other female family members of young children. However, as more and more women enter the workforce, in both the formal and informal economies, their ability to provide full-time care and support to young children is challenged. Increased migration has also affected the availability of traditional child care and education structures as community patterns and options have broken down. Trends in women's employment continue to increase, as do levels of rural-to-urban migration and internal and international displacement. The need for services provided outside the family is growing.

Research on the benefits of early childhood programming and the long-term effect of poor early educational experiences is resonating at the policy level.

A critical mass of research on the individual and social benefits of investments in early childhood programming appears to be building, and the filtering of that research into the policy discussions of countries, agencies, and international organizations builds a common base of agreement about the importance of investments in programs for young children. Opportunities for making policy meaningful and implementable can be leveraged by a focus on data that makes compelling connections between early childhood experiences and later life chances and national development.

Global commitments provide leverage.

International agreements and charters also provide high-level leverage for increased investment in quality early childhood programming. The Education for All Framework, Millennium Development Goals, and Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, bind signatories and participants in principle to support ECD that both meets children's and communities' needs and helps them achieve their rights. These high-visibility, internationally referenced, and internationally tracked commitments provide a basis for both stronger ECD policies and high-quality program implementation at the national level.

How It Works: Case Studies

What can external agents do to support the spread of better programs for young children in the developing world? The rest of this compendium refers to or offers brief examples from the research and technical literature on ECD in developing-country contexts that represent success in applying one or more basic principles for ECD program development or a creative, insightful, or potentially replicable strategy for implementation. Basic principles that should inform and guide ECD programming efforts, steps for implementing successful ECD programs, and challenges to that implementation are presented. Appendices provide resources for more-detailed explorations of the cited cases and others, along with further reading on ECD in general and an outline of possible indicators of performance in early childhood development programming. Suggestions are intended to meet the needs of a nonexpert audience with technical and financial responsibility for rolling out high-quality ECD programming.

USAID Perspective

USAID has historically engaged in early childhood development (ECD) primarily through the Maternal Child Health Programs in the health sector. Primarily, USAID has worked with children 0 to 5 years old and mothers on issues of child survival. Often a formal education system does not exist for the early childhood years in developing countries. It is frequently not a main priority by host government and as such USAID's education sector has worked in a limited way in this subsector. However, where ECD is a priority, USAID has successfully supported early education programs and started these youngest learners on a path for lifelong learning.

7 KEY PRINCIPLES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING

For many people, references to “early childhood programming” evoke images of preschool or kindergarten classrooms designed to prepare young children for school entry. As noted above, the audience for this compendium limits its scope to those efforts funded solely or primarily by education appropriations. Even within the education sector, however, early childhood programs can be remarkably diverse. They encompass such activities as parent and caregiver support and education programs for prenatal to school-age children, direct services to children from birth through the age of 8 (including in early elementary school), support for administrators and teachers, advocacy and outreach work in communities on children’s rights, and efforts to develop or change policies to meet the needs of the early childhood age group. Moving beyond early childhood education to early childhood development necessitates even greater diversity as programs incorporate health, economic development, or other elements. A core principle, then, of efforts to develop and implement programs that benefit young children is to realize that no single “best” approach or point of intervention exists.

However, research does indicate that the quality of an early childhood intervention is highly correlated with its impact on children’s development (Karoly et al., 2005; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). This is particularly true for children who start from positions of significant disadvantage: higher-quality programs promote greater gains and a significant closing of the opportunity gap. With resources for ECD programming limited in donor-sponsored contexts, the cost-effectiveness and level of impact relative to investment become particularly important. Therefore, quality must be central to the development and implementation of ECD programs operating in the education sector.

Given these core assumptions about diversity and quality, the following principles apply.

Principle 1: Set standards for ECD quality, and train and support stakeholders to meet them.

The international trend to increase the focus on indicators of quality and impact in programming is positive, and it applies to ECD no less than to other development sectors. Although reporting has often focused on inputs and numerical outputs, a range of indicators for assessing ECD quality in

Credit: Education Development Center



areas such as teacher/caregiver preparation and support, curricula, environments, learning resources, policy, and system performance is available (see Carr-Hill, 2006; Consultative Group, 2001; Kagan & Britto, 2005; and the Essential Reading section of this compendium) and should be considered when planning a program. Standards for quality should be determined and appropriate indicators for measuring achievement of goals developed to align with those standards and serve both formative and summative purposes.

However, setting standards is not sufficient to ensure that the standards are achieved: stakeholders must understand and be committed to indicators of performance. ECD program development should have a particular focus on ensuring that appropriate training and support are provided to caregivers, teachers, community outreach workers, and other key stakeholders to help them move toward and maintain quality. Training on high-quality practices should be specific to the needs and capabilities of the children targeted by ECD programming, rather than a simple extension of the training for primary or secondary school teachers to those working with younger students. Training on accountability and measurement should also be provided. Stakeholders need to know both what

Credit: Karl Grobl



to do and how they will be assessed (and can be assessing themselves) as they do the work (Myers, 2006).

Principle 2: Understand the true costs of ECD interventions, and design programs to maximize cost-effectiveness and encourage sustainability.

The costs of ECD programming vary dramatically with the kind of service provided. ECD programs that incorporate out-of-home care or education components (such as center-based care and formal preschool) can be among the most expensive because of their high recurring salary costs for teachers or caregivers. At scale, these costs can be prohibitive for governments to assume once a donor-funded project has ended.

Nevertheless, even typically high-cost programs can be developed and sustained relatively inexpensively with the judicious use of technology. Innovative approaches such as using radio, television, and other information and communications technology (ICT) can effectively deliver quality programming to marginalized populations at low cost, and these methods provide a strong support for the sustainability of efforts (Crespo, forthcoming; Education Development Center, 2009; Menjivar, 2010; Sanchez & Evans, 2005).

Principle 3: Start with services for the most marginalized.

ECD programs can contribute to leveling the playing field for children who are socio-economically and otherwise disadvantaged (including orphans and vulnerable children). Indeed, research indicates that the benefits from quality early childhood experiences are greatest for those who are most marginalized (Barnett et al., 2005; Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Heckman, 2006). To maximize this effect, programs should focus first on the neediest and build to scale by gradually expanding to serve families and communities who have more resources.

Principle 4: Involve community stakeholders in designing, implementing, and assessing ECD programs to increase demand and foster accountability.

Beginning with participatory assessment and moving through the design and implementation of programs, stakeholder inclusion develops the livelihoods of community members by providing work in areas that also directly benefit children, improves the parenting and care of those children not directly served by raising awareness, maximizes resources by leveraging social and material assets in support of programming,

incentivizes participation, and creates demand (Lucas, Jitta, Jones, & Wilczynska-Ketende, 2008).

It is particularly important to identify and work with key local community members who will be able to advocate for programming because interventions by entities outside the family in the earliest years of a child's life can be politically and socially sensitive. These local advocates may be educators, religious or political leaders, prominent businesspeople, existing nongovernmental organization actors, or members of influential families who can use their positions and leverage to engage and motivate their peers and others in their home communities (Cabanero-Versoza & Elaheebocus, 2008). Within the various government agencies responsible for ECD, parallel efforts to raise awareness of the importance of work with young children and to leverage political support for local and national efforts are also crucial to success and sustainability.

Principle 5: Assess the community's strengths relative to the needs of young children, and build on those strengths in developing and implementing programming to meet those needs.

Programs that assume that some basis for strong child development exists within communities are more sustainable and effective than those that operate from a deficit perspective. Even when significant challenges or threats to child welfare and development are present, ECD approaches that explore, expand on, and integrate local languages, cultural resources, traditions, structures, and systems are more likely to be able to address those challenges successfully (Evans, 2000). Adopting what the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (2001) refers to as a "constructive, not compensatory" approach can significantly increase the chances that programs will be adopted and sustained.

Principle 6: Focus on critical early years' transition points, and ensure that programs contribute to smoothing them.

Movements from the home to out-of-home care or preschool, from preschool to early elementary school, and from early elementary school to upper grades are key transitions in young children's lives (Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani, & Merali, 2006; Kagan, Karnati, Friedlander, & Tarrant, 2010). These points of change create new expectations for skills and behaviors, demand new routines, and change relationships with family and community members in significant ways. They are also key moments influencing loss (both drop out and push out) in the education

system: children's success at managing these transitions affects both their ability and their desire to continue in school. ECD programs in the education sector should incorporate an awareness of the transitional challenges that their target populations face and address them specifically wherever possible.

Principle 7: Seek out opportunities to link education-sponsored ECD programs with efforts in other sectors.

Research shows that integrated ECD programs provide the best results. Child health supports encourage long-term retention in school (Alderman, Behrman, Lavy, & Menon, 2001). Feeding combined with early stimulation dramatically increases children's outcomes (Alderman & Engle, 2008). Center-based programs that include an element of parent outreach stimulate broader support for good child development practices (Moran, Ghate, & Van der Merwe, 2004; Rich-Orloff, Khan, & Juma, 2007). Meals offered through child care centers address the physical needs of children that may affect their performance in cognitive and other domains (Attanasio & Vera-Hernandez, 2004; Karoly et al., 2005; Watanabe, Flores, Fujiawara, & Lien, 2005). Programs that train young people to provide high-quality ECD as small businesses stimulate the local economy and engage youth while supporting children's development. Education programming for ECD should acknowledge and, wherever possible, link to efforts in health, nutrition, and economic development to increase impact (Evans, 2000; Vegas & Santibanez, 2010).



Credit: Cassandra Jessee/AIR

7 STEPS IN DEVELOPING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The principles outlined previously, and the overarching framework of diversity and quality within which they are articulated, build a strong conceptual and practical basis for ECD programming. A summary of concrete steps needed to ensure that programs are of good quality, achieve their goals, and have a lasting impact is provided below.²

Step 1: Conduct a participatory assessment of children's needs, community assets, and stakeholder priorities.

As noted, community engagement significantly increases the likelihood of a program's success and sustainability. This engagement should begin with participatory assessment processes that allow both communities and other representative stakeholder groups to have their say in analyzing needs and prioritizing responses. An assessment should also begin a dialogue around the value of ECD programming and the existing cultural, structural, material, and other assets on which programs can draw. An appreciation for the resources already available to support a better quality of life for children, along with a transparent discussion of the barriers to that quality of life, lays a foundation for practical, relevant solutions in a given context. As with any data collection activities, attention should be paid to ensuring that traditionally marginalized voices are included, risk is minimized, and cost-effective, transparent processes are used. Particular attention should be paid to identifying opportunities to enhance education programs with links to other sectors to provide more-integrated child development services.

Credit: Education Development Center



Questions to ask:

- Can data be collected to represent children's needs from a variety of perspectives? Can data be cross-checked to ensure that the final findings are accurate?
- Whose voices are represented? Are marginalized populations present in the conversation?
- What young children's needs can each stakeholder group identify?
- What assets for meeting children's needs can each stakeholder group identify?
- What integrative opportunities for linking health, nutrition, income generation, and services to vulnerable populations can be identified?

² A particularly comprehensive and useful recent resource on developing ECD programs for the developing world is Judith Evans, Robert G. Myers, and Ellen M. Ilfeld's 2000 multimedia guide, *Early Childhood Counts: A Programming Guide on Early Childhood Care for Development*, published for the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development by the World Bank Institute. Readers are encouraged to explore this package for step-by-step support as they consider and implement program options.

Case: Madrasa Early Childhood Development Program

Begun in 1986 with support from the Aga Khan Foundation to address the needs of disadvantaged Muslim children in the Coast Province of Kenya, the Madrasa Early Childhood Development Program supports communities as they develop sustainable, locally relevant preschools to serve the needs of the young children in their midst. Through a process of intensive communication and awareness raising, capacity building, technical support, evaluation, and reflection, communities are guided through an implementation cycle and eventually “graduate” to sustainable, self-managing status. Madrasa Resource Centers (MRCs) in Kenya, Zanzibar, and Uganda serve as support and technical assistance providers to communities throughout this process. The program has provided more than 20,000 children with access to a meaningful, high-quality, low-cost early childhood experience. Research indicates notable impacts on participants’ academic achievement and persistence in schooling compared with those of their peers in non-MRC schools.

The Madrasa Early Childhood Development Program refers to the first stage (the assessment element) of its implementation cycle as “contact.” The contact stage is an intensive process of asset and need exploration with community representatives and an opportunity to more broadly raise awareness of the importance of ECD programming. It is a moment for establishing community ownership of efforts moving forward. The conversation and assessment can take up to a year to complete, but they set the tone and clarify common understandings and commitments, which smoothes later implementation (Aga Khan Development Network, 2008; Kagan et al., 2010; Mwaura & Mohamed, 2006).

Step 2: Define the problem and set concrete objectives.

Assessment data should support prioritizing the problems to be addressed and setting program goals. The selection of target groups (e.g., children ages 0–3, 4–5, or 6–8; parents and/or caregivers; teachers or other educators; communities at large; decision makers) and target issues should flow from the findings of the assessment and match community priorities, bearing in mind the availability of resources and the potential for sustainability.

Questions to ask:

- Is the problem manageable?
- Are the proposed objectives reasonable for the life span of the program?
- Are there longer-term impact objectives that can be supported by this program?
- How do the program’s objectives link to those of efforts in other sectors related to the development of young children?

Case: Madrasa Early Childhood Development Program

The Madrasa Early Childhood Development Program’s “contact” stage is followed by a “contract” stage, in which clear problem statements, terms and conditions for interaction, specific goals for the implementation period, and a plan for “graduation” are outlined and agreed to between the community and the national MRC. This contracting process ensures that all stakeholders understand the parameters of the program and their specific responsibilities within them. The steering role of the MRCs and their information-sharing facilities allow the management of intervention change and the development of new strategies in response to emerging needs.

Step 3: Select strategies and modes of intervention.

The selection of strategies and modes of intervention should respond directly to the goals set in step 2, bearing in mind the multiplier effect on the impact of integrated, cross-cutting programming. Evans (2000) suggests a framework of complementary programming strategies:

- Delivering services to children
- Supporting/educating caregivers
- Promoting child-centered community development
- Strengthening national resources and capability
- Strengthening demand and awareness
- Developing national child and family policies
- Developing supportive legal and regulatory frameworks
- Strengthening international collaboration

The first three strategies are those most typically included in education programming and are the most directly child focused. Their modes of service include developing home day care, center-based ECD programming, formal and nonformal pre-primary and early elementary schooling, distance education (such as interactive radio instruction), parent education, home visiting, family life education, literacy programming for adults, child-to-child programming, and supportive networks for caregivers. The remaining strategies offer important technical and organizational support for services to young children, increasing the likelihood that they will be sustained. They also promote a culture of awareness and commitment to meeting the needs of young children.

Questions to ask:

- What priorities has the counterpart identified through the assessment?
- How do locally identified ECD priorities fit within USAID's country plan?
- Can multiple strategies be addressed within a single program?

- What additional funding and program streams can be tapped to enhance the impact of programs on child development?

Case: Turkey's Mother Child Education Foundation: Mother Child Education Program and Summer Preschool Program

Since 1991, Turkey's Mother Child Education Foundation has been providing a program of parent support that is intended to smooth the transition from home to school and ensure strong support at home for children's cognitive and psychosocial development. The three strands of the mother's program (parenting support, reproductive health education, and support for stimulating children's cognitive development) have been complemented since 2003 by a 9-week preschool program for extremely disadvantaged children about to enter school who have never participated in an organized preschool. Both programs are implemented by the Ministry of National Education, with support from the Mother Child Education Foundation, the Open Society Institute, Spunk Foundation International, and the Vodafone Turkey Foundation. This multiple-strategy effort, administered through the education sector, has had significant positive effects on children's learning, retention in school, social integration, workforce participation, and income, as well as on their parents' child-rearing practices and self-confidence and home environments. Demographic priorities and a broad range of developmental factors are addressed through the integrated ecological approach of the programs, and the coalition of public and private partners involved in supporting the program has ensured a broad base for its acceptance and sustainability (Bekman & Kocak, 2010; Kagitcibasi et al., 2001; Kagitcibasi et al., 2009). The program has since been adapted and adopted in countries as diverse as Switzerland and Saudi Arabia.

Step 4: Develop an appropriate, inclusive accountability framework linked to a staged and manageable implementation plan.

Managing expectations and ensuring that program implementation includes and learns from data collection and analysis are essential. Accountability frameworks should be transparent and responsive to stakeholder concerns, allow stakeholders to participate in the learning process, and include capacity development that will enable the sustained use of data for decision making once external support has ended. Monitoring indicators should be clear and concise, fully aligned with meaningful standards, tied to the implementation plan, and indicative both of progress (or lack thereof) by specific subgroups and of overall outcomes.

Questions to ask:

- Do standards for performance reflect both the broad science base in early childhood development *and* local differences and priorities?
- Do stakeholders understand the standards and their related performance indicators?
- Are the indicators meaningful, discrete, and measurable? Do they reflect what the program proposes to do?
- Does the program include a feedback structure for using monitoring data to support improvements?
- Does the program include a plan for helping stakeholders understand and respond to findings from the data?



Credit: Education Development Center

Case: Going Global

The Going Global project, a partnership between UNICEF and Columbia and Yale Universities, has helped countries including Brazil, Ghana, Jordan, Paraguay, the Philippines, and South Africa develop research-based, locally meaningful standards for early learning and development that inform preschool curricula, teacher training, and monitoring and evaluation efforts for individual programs and national efforts. A highly participatory standards development process ensures that stakeholders across the spectrum (including parents and children) are involved in discussing accountability and in setting expectations for meaningful performance (Kagan & Britto, 2005). Essentially, the early learning and development standards process allows each country to define its own framework, terminology, and dimensions such that national perspectives can be reflected while ensuring holistic child development.

Step 5: Measure progress and share results.

Once standards are in place and expectations are clear, regular monitoring of and reporting on program progress are essential for building confidence in the intervention and for increasing demand for successful programming. Sharing results can also encourage the development of related supportive programming, ensure the best use of resources across the many players typically involved in ECD programming, and allow mid-course corrections and adjustments to programming to improve outcomes.

Questions to ask:

- What are the target audiences for sharing data on program results?
- Do the target audiences understand the information that is being shared with them?
- Are the audiences motivated to change behavior or practices on the basis of data?
- How can data sharing leverage more-diverse, cross-sectoral resources to support program goals?

Case: Uganda Nutrition and Early Childhood Development Project

The World Bank–funded Uganda Nutrition and Early Childhood Development Project (NECDP) was an integrated effort to improve the nutritional status and cognitive and psychosocial development of preschool children in 8,000 Ugandan communities. The program included a very strong, targeted communications effort linked to regular, comprehensive monitoring of project outcomes, with a focus on ensuring that stakeholders were understanding program goals, adopting attitudes promoted by the program, and changing behavior in line with the program’s desired outcomes. Better child care practices at the family level and the development of networks of ECD champions at the policy level were supported by the strategic communication of data-linked messages to the various stakeholders affected by the program (Cabanero-Verzosa & Elaheebocus, 2006).

Step 6: Devolve responsibility to sustain programming.

Counterpart capacity development and community investment in ECD are essential to program sustainability. Where a program’s strategy and service mode do not focus on stakeholders’ capacity from the start, work plans should build in explicit strategies for sustainability that include the transition of responsibility and direction to local counterparts and participants over time. Assessments of the possible channels for continuing programming past the end of external funding need to focus on positions, rather than people. Individual will and commitment can carry a program only so far; structural change that gives programming a valued place in the education system is more effective. Something as simple as moving the counterpart relationship for a program from a minor to a major division within a Ministry of Education (e.g., ensuring that ICT-based programs are in well-resourced curriculum departments rather than impoverished distance education or educational media departments) can make a significant difference in the perceived value and sustainability of an intervention. Building a base of demand at the beneficiary level is also essential to leveraging sustainability—programs that have a deep community anchor are better able to withstand the winds of political change at the government level.

Questions to ask:

- Where in the human resource framework are the potential roadblocks to sustainability?
- What institutional capacity needs to be built to ensure that programs continue to operate once funding has ended?
- What systemic actions (e.g., policy and regulatory supports; institutional location) are necessary to promote sustainability?
- How do stakeholders demonstrate ownership?
- What kind of demand is there for services to continue?



Credit: Cassandra Jessee/AIR

**Case: Releasing Confidence and Creativity (RCC):
Building Sound Foundations for Early Learning in
Pakistan**

Releasing Confidence and Creativity (RCC), funded by USAID, the Aga Khan Foundation, and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, has operated since 2002 in nearly 300 schools in the provinces of Sindh, Balochistan, Northern Areas, and Chitral. The program has a double focus: improving classroom quality in preschool classes in public schools and mobilizing community and policy support for improved ECD. Efforts to address the issues of health, sanitation, and nutrition that affect students' early learning were also built into the program (which was framed as an ECD program rather than an education program).

A midstream evaluation of RCC (Rich-Orloff et al., 2007) indicates that student learning and retention are positively affected by the program and that teacher performance and classroom quality in targeted schools have improved. Community engagement and mobilization in support of ECD have been positive, and high-quality training and advocacy materials have been developed and disseminated, supporting the program's goals of mobilizing a diverse set of resources to support young children's transitions to school. However, long-term integration with government programming through the recognition of community teachers and the establishment of formal institutional support for program-sponsored classes has been weak. Administrative and bureaucratic barriers to institutionalization include the transfer of teachers and administrators from participating schools and districts and a reliance on community support and partner funding. RCC will need to develop stronger planning for the transition away from program support in participating schools and work more effectively with higher levels of government if the strong positive impact of the program is to be sustained.

Credit: Education Development Center

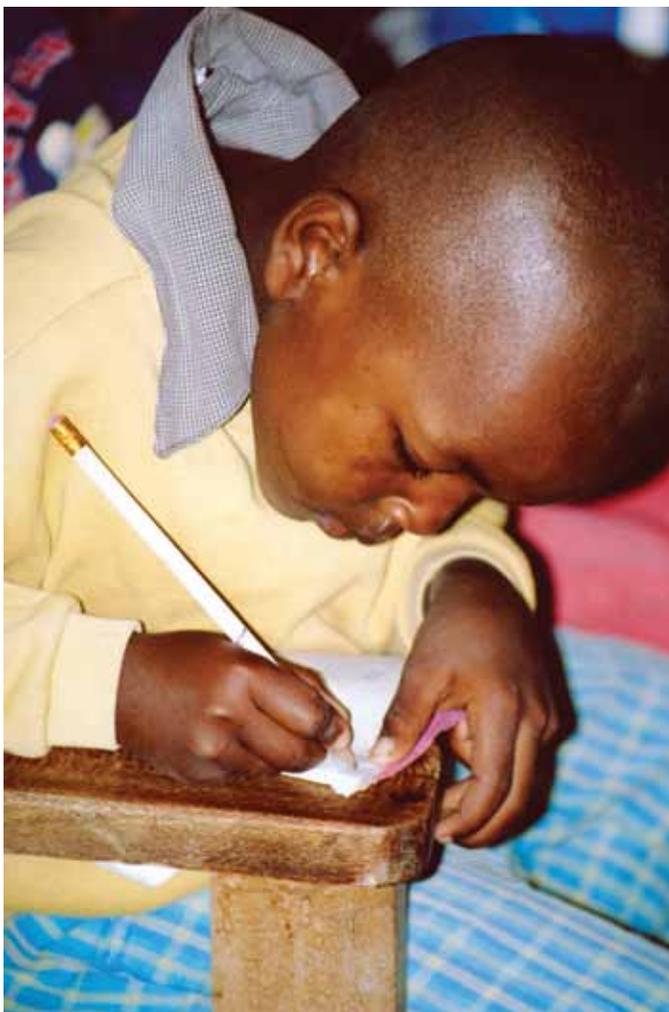


Step 7: Scale where scalable and appropriate.

Although a desire to serve as many beneficiaries as possible is admirable, not all high-quality ECD programs are necessarily scalable. Cost and quality remain significant challenges, particularly for programs serving older children in more-traditional center-based or classroom-based formats, which require large numbers of well-trained teachers/caregivers yet command nearly negligible percentages of government budgets. Alternative delivery methods, such as radio or other ICTs, when used to support such interventions offer one means of taking programs to scale at a reasonable cost. Any decision about moving to scale should consider the evidence of a program's success and the relative costs and benefits of ramping up and consider the start-up as well as sustainability costs of operating large-scale programs. Coordination among implementers (local, national, and international) working within the field should be managed to maximize resources and support start-up, with appropriate disengagement by external funders under a manageable and affordable sustainability plan. Priority should be on serving the neediest first because they benefit most from ECD interventions.

Questions to ask:

- How costly will it be to scale this program as it currently exists?
- Can the program maintain a high-quality impact if expanded?
- Does it provide a benefit that will serve all children equally if expanded, or does a focus on a targeted group produce the greatest results?
- What adaptation strategies can be considered (and tested) to scale (or sustain at scale) at lower cost?



Credit: Education Development Center

Case: Interactive Radio Instruction for Early Childhood Development

USAID has sponsored several efforts that have used interactive radio instruction (IRI) to improve the reach and quality of early childhood programming. The dot-EDU Honduras Interactive Radio Instruction Project established 53 early learning centers, using community teachers and an audio training and support program in remote Honduran communities. Within 7 years, the program had been expanded with support from other funders to more than 5,000 centers, and it demonstrated a significant impact on participants' development (Sanchez & Evans, 2005), enrollment, and success in primary school (Crespo, forthcoming). The Radio Instruction to Support Education (RISE) program in Zanzibar has allowed the government of Zanzibar to reach children and communities in the remotest of locations with programming that supports a national policy mandating preschool experiences for children and produces learning gains that surpass those of comparison peers (Education Development Center, 2009). The EQUIPI EDIFAM program in El Salvador provided an integrated child development and early education model that included a classroom-based IRI pilot that produced significant gains for participating children when compared with nonparticipating peers (American Institutes for Research, 2005). This model included activities for the teachers to implement in the classroom with students as well as student activities led by the radio facilitator. Teachers in targeted schools continue to use the IRI materials on their own initiative 5 years after USAID funding and Salvadoran government support ended (Cisneros, 2005; Menjivar, 2010). IRI provides developmentally appropriate instruction for students and intensive coaching for teachers and caregivers at very low recurring cost, and its use of technology³ overcomes barriers to reach posed by geography and conflict (Ho & Thukral, 2009). IRI magnifies the effect of caregiver-led group programming by providing the continuous professional development for teachers and appropriate curriculum and activities that are so hard and expensive to deliver and maintain in hard-to-reach contexts.

3 Crank and solar-powered radios increase reach to areas without electricity or a reliable supply of batteries.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

A number of factors contribute to the overall low participation in and poor quality of ECD services. Here, we highlight three of the most common challenges to ECD program development and suggest some possible general responses, based on the literature on positive practices in the developing world.

Governments are reluctant to commit large sums to ECD, seeing it as a luxury or a task to be addressed after achieving universal primary education.

With local and international pressure to ensure that all children enroll in primary school and with limited budgets for achieving that goal, governments in many countries have delegated the task of providing ECD to the private and nongovernmental sectors. The relatively higher proportion of middle- and upper-income children who enroll in these typically small-scale, fee-based ECD programs makes them seem like a luxury, and efforts to expand them to broader populations are met with resistance.

Response: Educate and advocate on the basis of data. Primary education improvement efforts will not succeed if schools, children, families, and communities are not ready for one another, and ECD programs foster that mutual readiness.

Awareness-raising around the evidence for the importance of strong ECD programs is an important element of any program serving young children. Data indicate the strong positive impact of ECD programs on learning outcomes (including clear links between early literacy and later school success and between ECD programming and more broadly defined school readiness) and on broader individual and social benefits, including a very high return on investments for economic growth and social stability and security (Karoly et al., 2005; Committee for Economic Development, 2006). This evidence can provide powerful leverage for change. Documenting results from efforts similar to those proposed may open doors to start-up. Demonstrating success in the early stages of a new effort can also increase its chances of being scaled up and/or sustained.

Families and communities may resist ECD programming as “foreign” or imposed—something that interferes with traditional parenting.

The limited role of governments in providing ECD programming in many contexts has raised the profile of the international funders and actors who do support efforts. Observers not directly involved in or affected by programming may question whether efforts with significant international input and support are compatible with local traditions and norms, and they challenge program expansion on those grounds.



Credit: American Institutes for Research

Responses:

- Tailor programs to build on community strengths and resources (e.g., child-to-child/peer learning; apprenticeship; multigenerational caregiving) rather than negate or replace traditional caregiving and early learning structures.
- Ensure that key figures at the local and the national level understand the links between the new program and the most positive traditional practices, are supportive, and are willing to provide both public and private advocacy.
- Incentivize programming by creating opportunities for the broadest range of stakeholders possible. Consider ways for ECD programs to also serve other, positive roles in the community (e.g., ECD centers that serve as meeting places and periodic clinics; parenting programs that also address the health and welfare of mothers and older children).

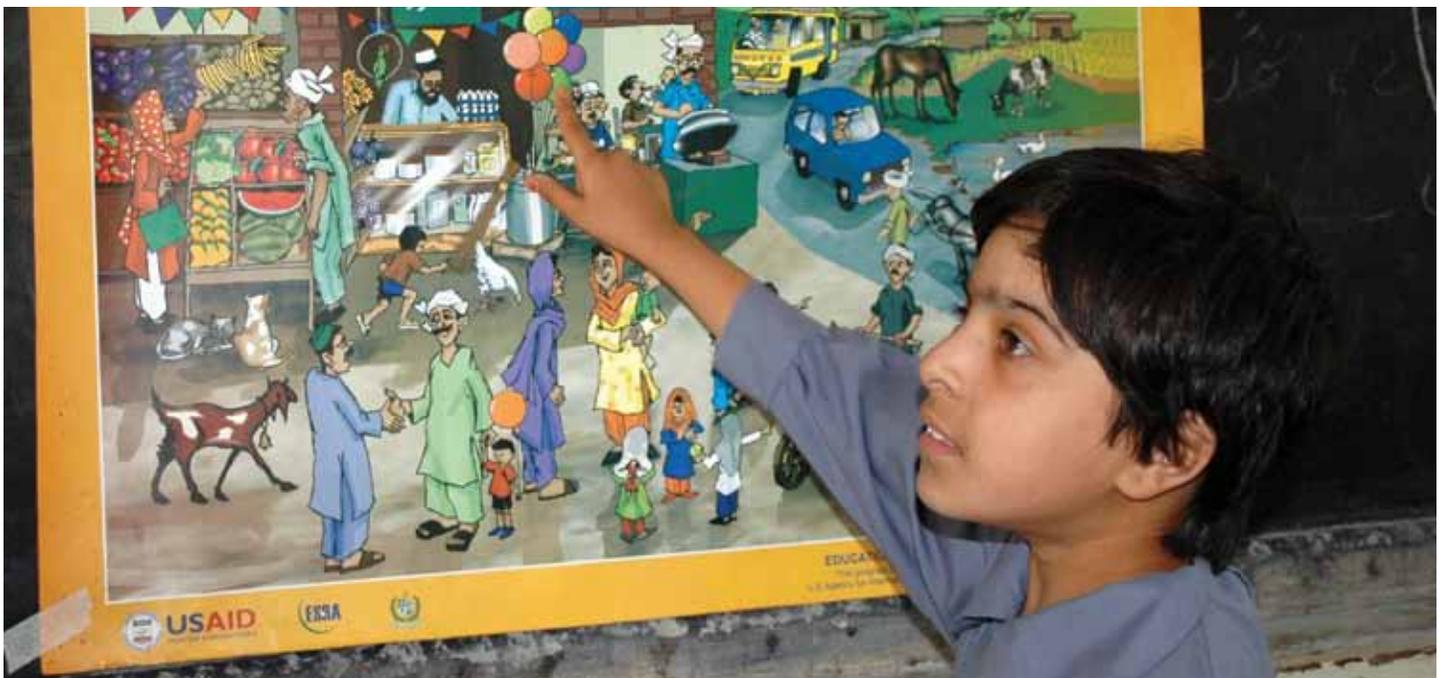
ECD traditionally engages and serves those who are among the least powerful in communities (children and women), so traction for spending in this area may be hard to generate.

In many developing country contexts, women have limited decision-making power and economic leverage, relative to men.

Women and children also constitute the majority of the poorest of the poor. When policy is set and funding priorities are determined by governments and other groups that have much stronger advocates and points of leverage, it can be difficult to generate support for programs that benefit mostly children and women.

Responses:

- Highlight the particular benefits to girls and women of ECD programs (e.g., improved health, education outcomes, and lifetime earnings; decreased reliance on social safety nets) and their links to long-term social and economic development (e.g., better maternal health, education, and employment, which notably increase individual, family, and national outcomes; see Lokshin, Glinskaya, & Garcia, 2008).
- Find champions among prominent local figures, in government, and in an expatriate community with which local populations and decision makers retain links. The credibility and influence of these mediating figures, used appropriately, can do much to support efforts.



Credit: Education Development Center

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

High-quality early childhood programs have a notable impact on both individual well-being and achievement and on the development of societies more broadly. Although resistance to the implementation of ECD programs at scale remains, increased evidence of their effectiveness in a range of cultural contexts and increased demand posed by shifting labor and migration patterns create openings for greater investment in this sector by funders and counterparts alike.

Where USAID and its counterparts do determine that an ECD intervention is desired, attention must be paid to ensuring the quality of programming, rather than simply focusing on coverage. In addition, the best ECD programming is integrative. Cross-sectoral linkages enhance its impact and promote the sustainability of programming. USAID has made efforts to ensure that children's development is addressed broadly in the pre-primary and early childhood programming that is supported through education allocations, but more can be done within education programming and across the agency as a whole.

A recent survey conducted by the office of HIV/AIDS at USAID (Kingshott, 2010) indicates that the agency funds more than 80 initiatives to promote young children's health, education, welfare, and development, but most are limited to only one factor, and at best two, for intervention. These foci tend to fall within the areas of health, education, and nutrition, with lesser attention in the areas of psychological/social support and child care and minimal investment in the areas of sanitation, legal rights and opportunities, and economic opportunity. Education program personnel interested in supporting early childhood programming can benefit from communication with their counterparts in other sector offices and common planning around broader objectives that can be achieved by ECD programming.

The cases referred to and summarized in this compendium provide a starting point for exploring potential ECD interventions in new contexts. They outline ways individual programs have addressed the key principles and made choices within an implementation cycle, which increase positive outcomes for children and communities. Readers are encouraged to consult the Essential Reading section for

Credit: Cassandra Jessee/AIR



additional examples of high-impact programs and lessons learned from over 60 years of ECD implementation by a range of agencies and actors. This information, considered in the context of thoughtful needs assessments and negotiations with counterparts at the country level, can help move programming forward in the best interests of children.

SUGGESTED INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Indicators of success in ECD programs vary widely with the nature and focus of programs, their size and scope, and their intended outcomes. As yet, no international consensus on a common master framework for monitoring and evaluating ECD efforts exists (Consultative Group, 2001). However, the following general categories of data address principles of diversity and quality and offer a starting point for determining the specific tracking and evaluation mechanisms for particular programs.

Data sources for many of these indicators already exist in many countries and include household surveys, census data, and existing management information system data from the Ministry of Education and other bodies that are concerned with young children's development (e.g., ministries of social welfare, women's affairs, and health). Other instrumentation will need to be developed or adapted from other tools to capture the specifics of localized programs in meaningful ways. Data should always be disaggregated by gender, location, ability, and other categories of advantage as appropriate to program design.

Generally Accepted Indicators for ECD Programming

Access Indicators:

- Number of children served (including increase over time)
- Number of caregivers served (including increase over time)
- Number of communities served (including increase over time)
- Prominence of least-advantaged among those served
- Materials developed and distributed (using measures of both quantity and reach, with a focus on the neediest populations)

Quality Indicators:

- Positive changes in learning environments (on environmental scales such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), tailored to local contexts and program design)



Credit: Digital Development Communications

- Improvements in teacher/caregiver qualifications (relative to local standards and project goals)
- Improvements in teacher/caregiver performance (measured by project-specific observational instruments)
- Materials developed and distributed (quality measures, relative to an initial assessment)
- Improvements in parenting/caregiving scores on tailored instruments
- Improvements in policy environment as reflected in legislative and regulatory frameworks promoting and supporting children's well-being
- Increase in national investment in ECD, as reflected in average expenditure per child in ECD programs as a percentage of GDP/inhabitant

It is worth noting an increasing movement within the development community toward setting a proxy indicator for quality that reflects early reading achievement, on the argument that levels of early reading proficiency in a population are indicators of the summative quality of the programs through which young students have passed. Because ECD programs serve the 0–8 age range, it is likely that any general agreements on such a standard indicator within USAID (or more broadly within Millennium Development Goals realignment and/or the World Bank–sponsored Fast Track Initiative) will both affect measurement in early primary ECD programs and have a strong tangential impact on the pre-primary, education-sponsored ECD programs that feed into them.

Outcome Indicators:

- Children's progress against developmental benchmarks for their age and/or stage (as appropriate to the program, these developmental indicators should include basic survival and health indicators, especially for the 0–5 age range, where morbidity and mortality are highest)
- Children's progress against learning benchmarks (for ages 4–8)
- Improvements in caregiver/teacher performance (measured by project-specific observational instruments)
- Improvements in parenting/caregiving scores on tailored instruments

Credit: Education Development Center



- Number of livelihoods generated and sustained (for a set period)
- Number of children participating in ECD programs who then enroll in primary school (increase over time)
- Number of children participating in ECD programs who succeed in primary school (using reduction in dropout and increase in retention and pass rates as proxies for success, along with student achievement measures as noted above)

These indicators should be customized to reflect locally relevant and useful definitions, as described by the Consultative Group (2001).

Standard Indicators for Foreign Assistance (Framework) Elements and Indicators Relevant to ECD Programs

For policy development for ECD, direct services to children, in-service training of educators and administrators, and infrastructure development and improvement:

IIP 2.1: Basic Education

- Number of administrators and officials trained
- Number of learners enrolled in USG-supported pre-primary schools or equivalent non-school-based settings
- Number of learners enrolled in USG-supported primary schools or equivalent non-school-based settings
- Number of teachers/educators trained with USG support
- Number of parent-teacher association or similar “school” governance structures supported
- Number of classrooms repaired with USG assistance

- Number of classrooms constructed with USG assistance
- Number of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials provided with USG assistance
- Number of laws, policies, regulations, or guidelines developed or modified to improve equitable access to or the quality of education services

For programs that involve the development of tertiary programs to support the quality of ECD teaching and administration and contribute to policy and research agendas in the sector:

IIP 2.2: Higher Education

- Number of host-country individuals receiving USG-funded scholarships to attend higher-education institutions
- Number of host-country individuals trained as a result of USG investments involving higher-education institutions
- Number of USG-supported organizational improvements that strengthen the institutional capacity of host-country higher-education institutions
- Number of host-country institutions with increased management or institutional capacity as a result of USG investments involving higher-education institutions
- Number of USG-assisted host-country policy development and reform activities utilizing host-country higher-education institutions
- Number of USG-assisted higher education institutions' activities that address regional, national, and local development needs

IIP 3 Indicators (for Social Service and Protection for Vulnerable Populations) may also be relevant when ECD programs include targeted assistance to vulnerable households and communities, including the HIV affected, the food insecure, and female-headed households.

IIP 1 Indicators (for Health) may also be relevant when programs include content aimed at maternal and child health (including reduction in maternal and under-5 mortality).

EG 6 Indicators (Workforce Development) may be relevant when programs include specific components focusing on livelihoods development for early childhood care and education providers.

ESSENTIAL READING

Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development. (2001). *In search of early childhood indicators. Coordinators notebook, #25*. Available at <http://www.ecdgroup.com/pdfs/cn25indicators.pdf>

Evans, J. L. (with Myers, R. G., & Ilfeld, E. M. (2000). *Early childhood counts: A programming guide on early childhood care for development*. Washington, DC: World Bank Institute.

Heckman, J. (2006, January 10). *Investing in disadvantaged young children is an economically efficient policy*. Paper prepared for the Committee for Economic Development/Pew Charitable Trusts/PNC Financial Services Group Forum on "Building the Economic Case for Investments in Preschool." http://www.ced.org/images/library/reports/education/early_education/report_2006prek_heckman.pdf

Nores, M., & Barnett, W. S. (2010). Benefits of early childhood interventions across the world: (Under) investing in the very young. *Economics of Education Review, 29*(2), 271–282.

Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Online Resources

Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (<http://www.ecdgroup.com/>)

Interagency, multipartner consultative and advocacy group that functions as a convener of international efforts to improve ECD and an information clearinghouse for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and implementers. Provides extensive background materials on the nature and importance of ECD, examples of successful programs implemented in a wide range of countries, program development guides and resources, and links to regional networks of ECD-focused organizations.

National Institute for Early Education Research (<http://nieer.org/>)

Leading U.S. institution for research and evaluation of early education interventions, with a focus on pre-primary programming. Provides a strong research base for promoting and advocating for high-quality ECD programming.

Credit: Jose Sool/EDC



Bernard Van Leer Foundation (www.bernardvanleer.org)
BVL ECD Resources (http://www.asksource.info/res_library/ecd_bvl.htm)

Research and information clearinghouse supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, which has more than 60 years of experience in addressing and supporting ECD in the developing world.

The National Center for Children and Families Transitions Project (<http://blogs.tc.columbia.edu/transitions/>)

Provides an analytical framework for assessing programs to support young children's transitions across care and learning environments and a compendium of exemplary programs for reference by developers and implementers. Includes international and U.S.-based cases and resources.

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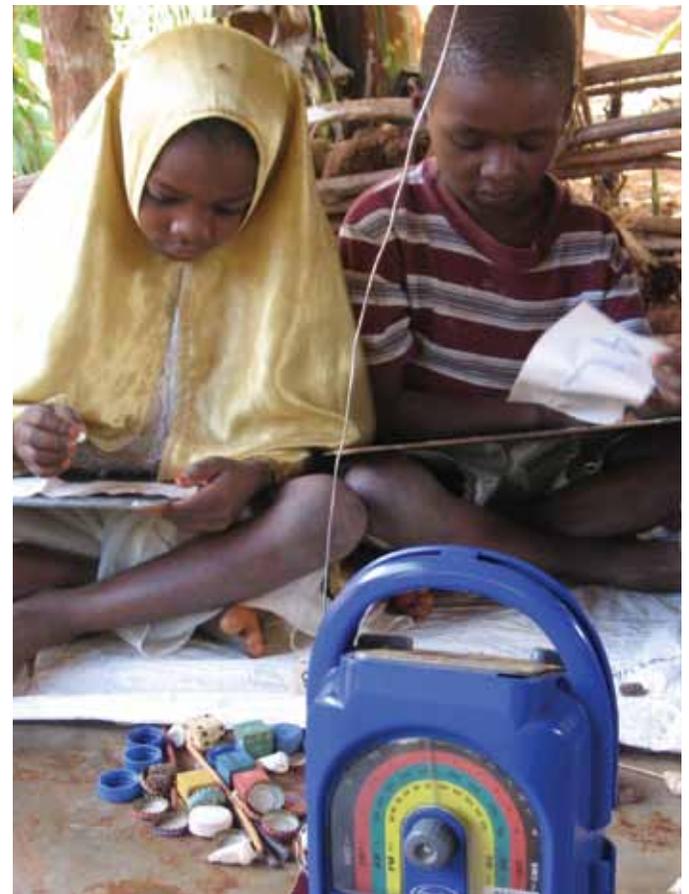
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First Principles: Designing Effective Education Program for Early Childhood Development is part of a series called *First Principles*, which provides guidance for programming in a range of topics in education and development. Topics in the series include:

- Community Engagement
- Early Childhood Development
- Gender
- In-Service Teacher Professional Development
- School Health
- Standards and Assessment
- Curriculum and Instructional Materials Development
- Education for Underserved Populations
- Designing Effective Education Programs Using Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- Pre-service Teacher Education
- School Management and Leadership Development