

The Moral Imperative

Annual Meetings of the World Bank and IMF- Bali Indonesia

“Results for Children: High-Level Advocacy Forum on Investing in Early Childhood Development”

Draft Concept Note

About the Moral Imperative to End Child Poverty

First convened in 2015, the Moral Imperative to End Extreme Poverty brings together religious and faith-based organizations and the World Bank Group into a broad forum to advance a faith-based action framework to end Extreme Poverty and Realize Sustainable Development Goals. The work of the Moral Imperative is organized around three pillars: Evidence, Advocacy and Collaboration, each with a Corresponding Working Group.

The Action Framework focuses on: strengthening the evidence-base around the role and impact of faith-inspired organizations in advancing the SDGs; enhancing FBO and religious advocacy in SDG implementation and accountability; and fostering more effective collaboration between faith-inspired actors and the World Bank, UN system, and bilateral development partners.

Rationale

“The capacities developed during childhood are the building blocks of a well-functioning, prosperous and sustainable society, from positive school achievement and economic self-sufficiency to responsible adult behavior and lifelong health. When we give children today what they need to learn, develop, and thrive, they give back to society in the future through a lifetime of productive citizenship.” (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). From Best Practice to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>)

Early childhood, - the years between 0-8 - hold perhaps the greatest promise and vulnerability for individual human wellbeing. The promise and vulnerability is more steeply marked at the ages of conception to three years, which is the time of the greatest and most rapid transformation for the child. This period is the most critical for the physical and mental development of the child. At this stage, the entire child’s major functioning-marked by the development of critical organs like the brain, bones, muscle etc., are in critical and accelerated development.

Of the world’s more than 7 billion people, 2.2 billion are children. Three quarters of these children, and growing, live in Asia and Africa. Hundreds of millions of these children face the grimmest of life situations and are at risk of unbearable harm with immediate, intermediate or longer term consequences for their life outcomes or wellbeing.

A child’s early experiences are therefore formative for life outcomes and it is during this time that the individual is most vulnerable to external shocks. Significant handicap during this time can have life impairing consequences for the rest of childhood and adult life. A few examples will suffice: Prospect or actual lack of parental care (151 million children worldwide have lost one or both parent); Transmitting of HIV from mother to child, the lack of adequate and nutritious food, smoking, drugs or too much alcohol when pregnant are factors that can greatly impair the wellbeing and life outcomes of the child. Similarly, severe malnutrition, abuse, neglect, or

abandonment, and family violence can singly and working together have debilitating consequences for the wellbeing and lifelong outcomes for a child under three.

These negative consequences in turn impose severe costs on family, community and society with grave consequences for the productivity of human capital, community and civic life. As a consequence, families, communities and society have to **later** expend considerably higher resources and effort to counter crime, and to provide the income and other livelihood demands for the unemployed, sick etc.

Investing in early childhood can therefore have remarkable outcomes for the child, community and society. These outcomes are critical for the achievement of many of the national and international commitments to human development including global covenants on human rights and the rights of the child and sustainable development goals. Within the ambit of the SDG framework, it will be important that actors urgently map critical pathways to alleviate children's vulnerability. This forum seeks to explore, among others, how best to reflect the reality of children at risk within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals and within the individual and collective agency of government, faith leaders, and actors in international development. Effective childhood services (including enabling parenting) can have especially rich rewards for children at risk of adversity and thus vulnerable to violence, civil strife, famine, family breakdown, negative internal and external economic developments, and negative developments in climate etc.

Investing to scale in terms of innovation, the scope and reach of ECD service offerings, inclusion and national coverage, and going for the long haul are all critical prerequisites for achieving the best return from Early Childhood Development. Much innovation is needed in the quality and extent of programming and services to children- to better target at-risk children and to locate interventions at several levels – the child, family, community, state and sub-state. There is also a clear need to quantify gaps in services by working from evidence and to redesign and commission services to fill in these gaps. This also calls for recognition of immediate and strategic needs of the service users as well as differentiation by age cohort and gender. This scale of investment is also needed in order to overcome poverty, secure optimal outcomes for education, grow productivity and competitiveness.

States, societies and communities have failed to grasp the opportunity to make the needed investments in early childhood. With all the regions of the world witnessing increased attention and progress in eliminating core poverty and advancing human well being, there is little evidence that this attention or progress has been directed or made in the field of early childhood development.

While investments in promotive and curative health and in effective and affordable services are needed to deliver critical returns for key population's health, among them pregnant women and children, investments in these sectors are far below the levels needed to make the difference for child outcomes. Progress in reducing maternal and child mortality is still slow among least-developed, low and medium income countries. Investments in maternal health, immunization, exclusive breastfeeding and child nutrition, child nurture and enabling care, clean water and affordable clean energy are all critical to breaking the back of maternal and child mortality.

It is acknowledged that even mild forms of food or nutrition deficiency can have devastating consequences for the wellbeing outcomes of a child. Investments in agriculture, livestock and fisher folk livelihoods can therefore yield critical returns for Early Childhood Development. Yet far too many countries are still lagging in its investments in these core sectors.

Advances in our understating of Early Childhood Development have opened up numerous spaces of what is possible for the wellbeing outcomes for children. Significant challenges, and thus opportunities, however exist in

embracing the concept of child vulnerability and “at risk” children within the context of Sustainable Development Goals. The challenges include: Identifying the appropriate measures for risk, vulnerability and their drivers; Determining the interdependence of base conditions/risk drivers; Identifying “at risk” and vulnerable populations – including the sourcing of reliable population data; Retooling on-going and future children services, policy and legislative mandates to respond to vulnerability and risk.

How can investments in ECD aid and accelerate the achievement of SDGs? What are the experiences of faith actors in building assets and services for at risk children and what implications would this have on policy, service innovation and resource allocation by states in ECD? What are the best ways to synergize assets programming, and services of faith actors, state parties and development agencies for child development and human capital formation?

It is improbable to meet the core expectations of our time, to ensure sustainable development by 2030, unless we can find and prioritize breakthrough services for children, especially those most vulnerable to adversity.

Role of faith

Faith communities bear an enduring commitment to developing the whole person. Faith institutions have a long tradition of services, interventions and investments in family, parenting, health, education, economic support and poverty. Faith Institutions will therefore, often, command the largest and most proximate infrastructure and programming for delivery of services to children and families often with a bias to those vulnerable to poverty. Faith institutions are often the first and remaining institutions offering critical services in situations of conflict, humanitarian and natural disaster.

The resourcefulness of faith, and the assets and services of faith institutions are critical to the wellbeing outcomes of millions of children, and especially those at risk and thus vulnerable to adversity. In the face of adversity, the availability of one constant positive factor such as a caring grandparent, a devoted relative, a regular meal, or enforcement of a prohibition against abuse or violence may be what sets apart children who succumb to vulnerability and those who develop resilience and thrive. Faced with adversity, millions of children, families and communities have come to rely on this resourcefulness to grow their resilience by building supportive parenting, care, strong and uplifting relationships, care for expectant and breastfeeding mothers, find adequate meals etc.

It is the MI’s belief that investing early in children can deliver dramatic outcomes for the wellbeing of children and results in positive lifelong outcomes for learning, health and individual competency for engaging relations and economic opportunity, all of which are critical to prosperous, inclusive and sustainable communities and societies.

Advances in our understating of childhood and Early Childhood Development has opened up numerous spaces and notions of what is possible and is attainable for the wellbeing of children, families, their communities and societies. In this context, a poorly developed child or negative life outcomes resulting from a traumatic childhood is an embodiment of great injustice. Assuming that poverty results from and is a manifestation of capability deprivation, for children, hunger, malnutrition, violence, neglect represent systematic and sustained failure in the system of entitlements at the family, community, para-community and state levels. The collapse of this system of entitlement for children is an intolerable moral and legal monstrosity.

It is important to generate support at political and higher echelons of state decision-making for a vision of a community and society grounded on securing first the very best outcomes for all children, but especially those at the greatest risk of adversity.

This high level advocacy consultation poses the critical questions regarding how best to improve the reach and quality of services for children aged between 0-3, including how to get the policy right by investing in data and evidence, how to shape programmes and services from this data, and how to find and ensure the right kind of investments are made in both direct and indirect enablers of wellbeing such as housing, job and income support for parents, affordable and universal health care and support for non-state intermediary institutions in the social and private sectors.

Tackling these issues would require multi-sectorial interventions and collaborations between several actors. In this regard, religious communities can engage in formal advocacy, but perhaps their most powerful role is in facilitating dialogue, reflection and action on ECD.

Aims and objectives

Make the case for greater investment in effective early childhood services for the 0-3 age group with a special focus on protection of children at risk of violence, poverty, abuse, premature death, stunting, malnutrition/hunger.

Identify innovative partnerships with the UN, World Bank and other development actors to scale up faith inspired pathways for protection of children at risk,

Revitalize protection for at risk children through evidence based on faith-inspired services and programming to achieve the SDGs.

Methodology

The forum will take the form of a consultation broken into three constituent parts:

Making the Case: Key note status briefing with high level speakers, from WB, faith/religious actors, and perhaps UNICEF.

Faith and Public-Sector Consultation: Themed presentations and discussions by High Level Panel from the MI constituency and public sector and agency personalities.

Main focus-

- How to drive innovation, new resources and partnerships into early childhood development programmes and services
- Achieving Critical Outcomes for select key risk factors- Nutrition; Violence Against Children, Child Poverty and Gender: (Perspectives from the faith Sector)
- Turning the curve (Experiences and challenges from Nigeria, Senegal Indonesia)

MI/Faith Leaders consultation (semi closed) with the following core deliberations:

- Ramping up Faith Inspired/sector leadership for ECD advocacy
- How best to shore up innovation, evidence, best practice in faith inspired/sector programming and services

- How best to promote a culture of strategic and evidence led commissioning of children's services
- How best to mainstream prioritization of services for the age group of the 0-3 at risk children.
- Promoting/exploring scope for faith-led Public Social Partnerships in the ECD field.

Additionally, there will be a themed exhibition by participating organizations.

Key Outputs and Outcomes

1. Advocacy for ECD at high levels of policy and decision-making (ministers of finance and planning)
2. Commitment by participating delegations for the revitalization, modernization and greater investment in ECD programmes, services and institutional arrangements.
3. Co-locating innovation, evidence-building and continuous service improvement as the basis for planning and evaluating policy , planning, interventions and investments in ECD.
4. Commitment to a shared ECD Institutional architecture built on partnerships between state and social sectors (especially faith inspired actors).
5. Heightened understanding and appreciation by governments and non-state actors on the need to target resources and programming for children's services, especially for children below the age of 3 (three) through elaborate national and regional strategies that identify and respond to the entitlement demands for children and the internal and external sources shocks and vulnerability including core risk factors.
6. Establishing linkages and platforms for ECD enthusiasts, advocates and practitioners from across multiple institutional settings.

MI whole group:

We list below the current subscribers of the Moral Imperative. The AWG plans to set time in Bali to consider how to take forward advocacy work on children- especially given that there are several other global high level events forthcoming.

The Moral Imperative to End Extreme Poverty is endorsed by and brings together diverse faith actors including: Act Alliance, American Jewish Committee, American Jewish World Service, Anglican Alliance, Arigatou International, Bibliotheca Alexandria, Baha'i International Community, Buddhist Global Relief, Bread for the World, Caritas Internationalis, Catholic Relief Services, Church World Service, Community of Protestant Churches of Europe, Forum for Peace in Islamic Societies, Indigenous People Ancestral Spiritual Council, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Islamic Society of North America, Global Interfaith WASH Alliance, Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue, Muhammadiyah, Organization of African Instituted Churches, Religions For Peace,Kai, Religious Action Center, Sojourners, Salvation Army, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, World Council of Churches, World Evangelical Alliance, World Relief, World Vision International, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, Parliament of the World's Religions, The Charitable Foundation; and the Institute for Economics and Peace ,Congregation Netivot Shalom in Berkeley, CA, United Methodist Church—General Board of Church and Society;Union for Reform Judaism, Rabbinical Assembly, Islamic Relief USA, Temple Kol Emeth, Congregation Agudas Achim, Auburn Seminary, Jewish Community Chaplaincy & Rafael Spiritual Healing Center of Jewish Family Service of Colorado, D. Min.Congregation B'nai Israel, Orthodox Social Justice, Youth with a Mission

Norway, Christian Aid, Danmission, The Norwegian Mission Society, World Association for Christian Communication, Swedish Mission Council, Universal Peace Federation.