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The Transformative Power of ECD: The importance of holistic interventions
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Structural Challenges to Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Holistic ECD

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Angelina Jolie and Luong Ung at the premiere of *First they killed my father*. An estimated 1.7 million people, one-third children, died during the Khmer Rouge's disastrous campaign in the 1970s to turn the country into an agrarian utopia.

1.5 billion *people*, one-fifth of humanity, are *affected* by armed conflict, *violence* and insecurity, affecting development of children- *Armed Conflict Survey 2015*



Key Messages

- Young children's growth and development are subject to two kinds of structural imitations – social institutional.
- Prevailing socio-economic inequities prevent children and families in situations of disadvantage from enjoying full benefit of services for children that exist.
- Young children's developmental needs fall between stools in the prevailing organisational patterns of public services.
- Policy and strategy discourse reflects increasing recognition of the challenges, but effective actions with results fall short.
- Past success in the 1980s and 1990s under the banner of Child Survival and Development Revolution (CSDR) promoted by UNICEF and partners can be revisited profitably.



Social Inequities for Children

The accident of birth is a principal source of inequality.

(Heckman, 2013).

In every society differences in socioeconomic status (SES) translate into inequalities in child development . These development gaps are seen across cognitive, social, behavioural and health outcomes.

Three kinds of determinants of inequities --

- 1.Socioeconomic, political and cultural context**, encompassing governance, policy, and dominant cultural and societal norms and values;
- 2. Daily living conditions**, which are the circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work and age; and
- 3. Individual health and wellbeing-related factors**, i.e., knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of individuals that result from, and are responses to, their socioeconomic, political and cultural context, social position and daily living conditions.

[“Evidence review: Early childhood development and the social determinants of health inequities.” Dr. Tim Moore, Dr. Myfanwy McDonald and Harriet McHugh-Dillon, Melbourne Children’s Hospital, Victoria Health Promotion Foundation, 2015.]

How early years impact later developmental outcomes

Three ways early childhood experiences have long-term effects :

- Biological embedding
- A process of accumulation
- Developmental escalations of risk over time

These pathways are not mutually exclusive.

- Biological embedding is a developmental process of prenatal and early childhood experiences influencing **physiological and neurological development** with long-term consequences.
- There is **prenatal embedding** when the foetus makes adaptations to nutritional and hormonal signals that cross the placenta; it also occurs after birth, with the youngest children being most susceptible;
- **Early stress** becomes deeply embedded in the child's neurobiology, with a wide range of long-term effects on cognition, emotion and behaviour.
- **Cumulative effect** of adverse experiences and stress influence every aspect of health and well being in childhood and beyond across all areas of developmental functioning.
- **Developmental escalations in risk over time** -- An exposure or experience at one stage of the life course influences later life, through chains of risks -- one bad exposure increasing the probability of another and then another.

Exclusion and Deficient Children's Services

Evidence from Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey Round 3 (MICS3) shows overall young children in some 40 countries (surveyed on selected indicators including 5 in Asia-Pacific) live in households not conducive to optimal early childhood development.

Few or no children's books in the home - More than half of children lack books at home in two thirds of countries.

Lack of early learning support by caregivers – Over half of children denied early learning support in a third of countries.

Limited access to ECCE programmes - Attendance is 10 per cent or less in a third of countries.

Violent discipline is widespread - Over half of children 2–4 years suffer violent forms of discipline in all countries surveyed

Young children left alone or in care of another child - One in six in over a third of countries.

Children growing up without at least one biological parent - One in four children live without biological fathers in a third of countries.

[Inequities in Early Childhood Development: What the data say Evidence from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys © United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

February 2012]

Coordination for Comprehensive and Holistic ECD - Bangladesh Policy

The Policy adopted in 2013 declares that the issues of health, nutrition, protection, education and development are equally important in the comprehensive and holistic development of the child. The Policy proclaims:

- The Government of Bangladesh is committed to ensure maximum benefits of child care and development initiatives undertaken by all relevant organizations through **intensive coordination, partnership and collaboration**.
- Though particular services may remain within the auspices of a specific ministry or agency, a concerted effort is required to ensure that these services **reach the same target group and that there is synergy between different programs**.
- It is also important to ensure **coordination and a continuity of existing activities** which might be already in operation within the community.
- The **Ministry of Women and Children Affairs will play the lead role** in this initiative with collaboration among various ministries, non-government organizations and international agencies.
- After a series of consultations at different levels, a set of early childhood development **roles and responsibilities of the ministries and various organizations** have been identified.
- The **list of roles and responsibilities maybe revised** and amended in the light of experiences and requirements subject to the approval of National ECCD Coordination Committee.

Some Policy Implementation Steps --Bangladesh

- A **Strategic Operation and Implementation Plan** for the Comprehensive ECCD Policy has been prepared through consultation with government and other stakeholders which guides implementation steps, with Ministry of Women and Children Affairs as the focal point.
- **Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS)**. The content validation of the draft ELDS prepared on the basis of international experience and research has been completed. Age appropriate validation is the next step.
- A **nationwide 4-day orientation of ECCD policy** for government personnel of concerned ministries and agency and local government bodies has been underway.
- **Dialogue on ECD in SDG**. Consultation and dialogue is under way as part of national adaptation and refining SDG targets and indicators; ECCD issue are highlighted with every opportunity that arises.
- **Bangladesh ECD Network**, with a membership of some 200 small and large organizations and agencies involved in ECD remains engaged in advocacy, policy and strategy development, awareness raising, technical support and capacity building in the areas mentioned above in collaboration with member organisations which contributed to resource persons' pool

Revisiting the Child Survival and Development Revolution



- ✓ James Grant , the visionary head of UNICEF (1980- 95) believed 40,000 children dying each day was unconscionable when low-cost, readily available interventions could prevent such deaths. He argued ***regular child Growth monitoring, Oral rehydration therapy, Breastfeeding, and Immunization, as the cutting edge interventions, supported by female education, family planning, and food supplements*** — known as GOBI-FFF would radically reduce child death.
- ✓ Grant persuaded world leaders to raise immunization rates from single digits to 80 percent in less than a decade. He convinced the United Nations to convene the largest gathering of world leaders — the **World Summit for Children in 1990** — which adopted a Plan of Action for Survival, Development and Protection of Children.
- ✓ Child immunization and other interventions saved lives of 10,000 children every day by 1990, and another 10,000 daily two decades later. Moreover, **advocacy of CSDR elevated the well-being of children on the world’s development and political agenda.**

[Drawn from Huffington Post Blog, “UNICEF and USAID- A Winning partnership for Child Survival and Development,” by Kul Chandra Gautam, June 22, 2012 | Updated Aug 22, 2012.]

Can the Success Story be Replayed?

CSDR succeeded spectacularly on the survival front , but less so on development of children.

Can the feat repeated for child development?

➤ Most developing **countries lacked resources and political clout** for a grand revolution; Grant's strategy was to persuade top national political leaders to invest heavily in life-saving services which yielded **political dividends at minimal financial cost.**

He also motivated religious leaders, the mass media, cultural icons, and non-governmental organizations to promote child survival and development.

➤ In an era before the advent of mobile phones, internet and today's social media, **social mobilization** led to large-scale action for child survival. Can more not be done now for child development?

➤ **Creating success stories** with a small number of highly “doable” interventions, helped the overall goal of combating poverty, promoting democracy, slowing down population growth and accelerating economic development. Can we do any less?

*To complete the unfinished CSDR agenda, the priority now has to be on equity and make a deliberate effort **to reach the most deprived and marginalized children.** Such focus on reaching the “bottom quintile” would be very timely and appropriate for advancing SDG2030.*

