

Early Child Development From Measurement to Action

A Priority for Growth and Equity



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Preface

This publication began with an international symposium held at the World Bank on September 28–29, 2005, in Washington, D.C. The symposium was the third in a series of conferences hosted by the World Bank to focus attention on the importance of investing in early child development (ECD) as “the natural starting point” for human development programs and policies. The third symposium emphasized, in particular, early child development as a priority for sustained economic growth and equity.

This publication captures and expands on the presentations and discussions at the symposium. It consists of 15 chapters authored by ECD experts and leaders in the field. The chapters are grouped into five main parts relating to the:

- Business imperative and societal benefits of ECD investments
- Lessons from evaluation of longitudinal ECD interventions
- Countries’ experiences in monitoring ECD interventions
- Innovative approaches to countries’ financing of ECD initiatives
- Next steps on the ECD agenda for the next 5 years.

A theme highlighted at the symposium and enlarged upon here is the urgent need for evidence- and population-based instruments and measures to monitor, evaluate, and compare ECD interventions over time and across settings. The leveraging of enhanced policies and investments in early child development depends on being able to assess and document, consistently and rigorously, the need for ECD programs across communities and the outcomes for children and families participating in these programs.

The scientific evidence already exists to support broad and intense interventions to improve young children’s developmental outcomes *before* they enter school—and thereby enhance their performance and achievement while in school and beyond. The next step is to measure, monitor, and assure the efficacy of all ECD programs and to use these research data to strengthen local and national support for ECD policies and programs.

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Acknowledgments

This publication stems from the World Bank symposium, “Early Child Development — A Priority for Sustained Economic Growth and Equity,” held at the World Bank, Washington, D.C., September 28–29, 2005. The symposium and publication drew on the collective knowledge of 180 participants and presenters who came from 42 countries in all regions of the world and are experts across a range of disciplines relating to early child development. Many thanks to all who participated in the symposium, including those who contributed to the discussions via satellite connections in five Latin American countries—Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela.

This symposium was the third in a series of international gatherings that the World Bank has convened since 1996 to focus attention on early child development. The symposium represented a collaborative effort of many—multilateral agencies [the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), and Organization of American States (OAS)]; development banks (Inter-American Development Bank and Asian Development Bank); government officials; and international and local nongovernmental organizations. Thanks to these organizations and their representatives who helped to make the symposium possible. From diverse disciplines, the global community continues to close the gap between what we know about early child development and what we do to improve the lives of young children around the world.

At the World Bank, early child development (ECD) activities continue to receive high-level support, starting with senior managers and including colleagues in each region. Strong supporters are Jean Luis Sarbib, Vice President (retired), and Nicholas Krafft, from the Bank’s Human Development Network, and Tawhid Nawaz, in the Bank’s Operations Department. Heartfelt thanks to Elaine Wolfensohn, who championed ECD efforts during the past decade and continued her support during and after James Wolfensohn’s tenure at the World Bank.

The planning for the symposium drew on the insights and guidance of many. Special thanks to Joan Lombardi, Director of The Children’s Project, and Paul Gertler, Chief Economist of the World Bank’s Human Development Network. Thanks to Marie Madeleine Ndaw and Erika Dunkelberg, of the Bank’s ECD team, who efficiently managed the registration and logistics for the symposium and, together with our colleagues from the Children and Youth team (Viviana Mangiaterra, Juan Felipe Sanchez, Gerold Vollmer, Minna Mattero, Amina Semlali, Peter Holland, and Liisa Hietala), ensured that the event ran smoothly and efficiently. The symposium benefited from Ashkan Niknia’s information technology support. The conference presentations were posted timely on the Bank’s ECD website <www.worldbank.org/children> to reach a wider audience globally.

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