

FAQS:

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

ECCD, ECD, ECE.... What's the difference?

Early childhood care and development (ECCD) and early childhood development (ECD) are largely the same however by incorporating the term 'care' ECCD highlights the importance of care and protection of children, in addition to support for their development. ECCD and ECD encompass early childhood education (ECE) and also early childhood care and education (ECCE), which focuses more specifically on the education and learning aspects of childhood development. Plan International uses the phrase ECCD as it provides the most holistic, comprehensive approach to early childhood.

What is ECCD?

Early childhood care and development is as comprehensive as it sounds - integrating all aspects of the care and development of children, not just to prepare children for school but to enable them to reach their full human potential. ECCD covers the period 0-8 and involves different activities at different ages tailored to the stages of child development. Fundamental to ECCD programs is engagement with parents, through direct parenting programs as well as parents' participation in ECCD activities with their children. Quality ECCD programs are tailored to the particular cultural and local contexts, and therefore there are different models ECCD can take. Programs can be based within pre-schools, kindergartens or other centers, however they need not be and often community based programs are more effective as they allow greater participation by children and their parents, and can be more cost-effective. Importantly, evidence shows that ECCD programs that employ formal classroom methods similar to primary schools are less effective than those that focus on learning through play, involve parents and caregivers, and integrate social interaction and emotional support. ECCD also involves working with communities and primary schools to ensure that schools are ready for children, including ensuring early grade teachers are able to support young children, particularly girls and children with disabilities, in their classrooms.

Where does ECCD fit – the health or education sector?

One of the strengths of ECCD is its holistic approach, addressing all aspects of child wellbeing. As a result, ECCD does straddle different sectors and in different countries different Ministries have responsibility for ECCD. An integrated, cross-sectoral approach is the preferred way for managing ECCD, with all sectors cooperating together to ensure comprehensive early childhood policy and services. However, often this can be challenging and it can be more effective for the education sector to take a leading role, while working to coordinate with other sectors where-ever possible.

Families are responsible for looking after children. Why should states and donors get involved?

Increasingly today families and parents, particularly those living in poverty, do not have the time to sufficiently care for their children nor do they have extended family networks to provide support. In many communities, there is also a lack of awareness of the importance of early stimulation for infants and of critical health issues such as immunisation, nutrition and hygiene. There is an important role for governments and donor agencies to support programs that strengthen the ability of families and parents to provide adequate cognitive and social stimulation, health, nutrition and protection for children in their early years. Ensuring appropriate and effective social and legal protection mechanisms for children, particularly in environments of conflict or abject poverty is also a critical role for Governments, working with communities and civil society organisations. Governments also have a role to play in strengthening the quality of ECCD programs, through training, regulations and monitoring.



Children play with water at Plan supported daycare centre in Udaipur, India



Children learn through play with locally sourced flaxes at a Plan supported pre-school in Cambodia

Transform the world for children.





Children playing with educational toys at Plan supported daycare centre in Udaipur, India

Shouldn't low income countries just focus on getting kids into primary school first, before worrying about ECCD?

Primary schooling is ineffective if children come to school without the necessary stimulation, nutrition and support required in their earliest years. The first five years of a child's life is when the most development happens - and if children are neglected in this period they are unlikely to ever be able to catch up. Research from across high and low income countries shows that children who have suffered lack of social and cognitive stimulation, and/or a lack of nutrition in their first 5 years achieve significantly lower in primary school, and score lower on cognitive indicators. Investing in ECCD ensures later investments in primary school can be effective, by ensuring children are ready and able to learn. Extensive evidence shows that ECCD increases retention rates, decreases repetition rates and improves learning outcomes at primary school - thereby increasing the efficiency of funding for primary education. Calculations are that ECCD largely 'pays for itself' through these efficiency gains in primary education.

There are only limited funds – why should ECCD be a priority?

ECCD is a fundamental right of all children, as enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child and recognized in multiple international commitments including the 2000 Education For All framework signed by 164 countries. Neglecting children in the early years directly decreases the likelihood they will grow up to be healthy, productive citizens. As such, ECCD is one of the most powerful investments a country can make in its future, and an investment that more than pays for itself in terms of increasing the future learning, earning and ability of individuals. ECCD can contribute to a wide range of development outcomes including: lower child morbidity rates; higher school enrolment; lower grade repetition rates; fewer school drop outs; freeing mothers to participate in the workforce; and freeing older sisters to attend school rather than caring for young siblings. ECCD is thus a key strategy for breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality that is increasingly hard to break when intervening at later ages once inequalities are entrenched.

What does ECCD have to do with gender equality?

Gender discrimination begins at birth, and the inequalities that serve to constrain the opportunities of girls and women are largely entrenched by the time a girl reaches primary school. ECCD programs can work with mothers and fathers to combat gender stereotypes, as well as demonstrating that girls are as capable of learning and succeeding as boys. Through ECCD programs, girls develop greater resilience and a sense of competence that can help them succeed in later schooling. Health and nutrition activities within ECCD programs can help to combat the higher rates of malnutrition of girls. ECCD can also free up the time of women (and girls) from their full-time childcare responsibilities enabling them more time to engage in other important activities alongside childcare. This is particularly important for adolescent girls who are often forced to look after their younger siblings, thereby losing their opportunity to stay in school.

“More than 200 million children younger than 5 years from low and middle income countries are not attaining their developmental potential, primarily because of poverty, nutritional deficiencies and inadequate learning opportunities.”¹

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¹ Grantham-McGregor S, Cheung YB, Cueto S, Glewwe P, Richter L., Strupp D. (2007) *Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries.* Lancet 369: 60-70