

# **Early Childhood Development: The Skills and Programmes Essential for the 21st Century**

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# Core Messages

- **Good quality, comprehensive, and integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programmes are essential** for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, for ensuring the well-being of young children, and for helping them face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- **ECCD programmes must be genuinely inclusive**, available to all young children, with a special focus on the most disadvantaged.
- **ECCD programmes help get both “children ready for school” and “schools ready for children”.**



# What is Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)?

- “**Early childhood**” encompasses the period from conception to eight years of age.
- As an **outcome**, ECCD defines a child as being “physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally sound, socially competent and ready to learn”. (UNICEF)
- As a **process**, ECCD covers the period from pregnancy through the transition from home or pre-school programmes into the early grades of primary school and a strong foundation for future learning.



# Why Invest in ECCD?

- Based on evidence from neuroscience, genetics, and population studies, **early childhood is the most important developmental phase in the human lifespan.**
- **Inadequate ECCD leads later to serious individual and social costs:**
  - poorer health and nutrition
  - lower levels of educational achievement
  - greater unemployment
  - less resilience, empathy, and self-control
- **Preventive early interventions yield higher returns** compared to later remedial services.



# The **Brain Development** Argument

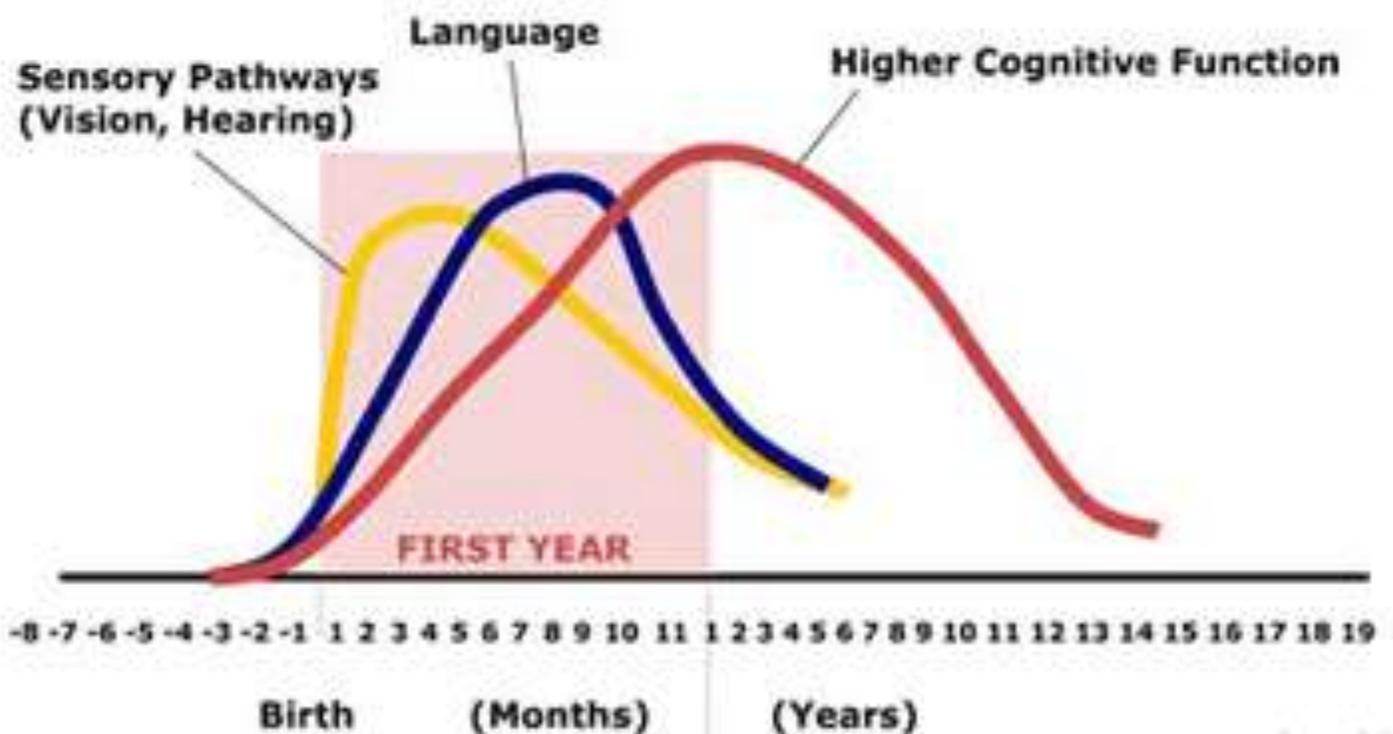
- **The most rapid brain development occurs in the first few years of life.**
- The influence of a child's early environment and of its brain development is long lasting.
- A nurturing and stimulating environment and the quality of early life experience increase:
  - the number of a child's brain cells
  - the number of connections among them
  - the way these connections are "wired"
  - **and thus the potential for future learning and for facing the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**



# Human Brain Development

## Synapse Formation Dependent on Early Experiences (700 per second in the early years)

Center on the Developing Child  HARVARD UNIVERSITY



Source: C. Nelson (2000) \*



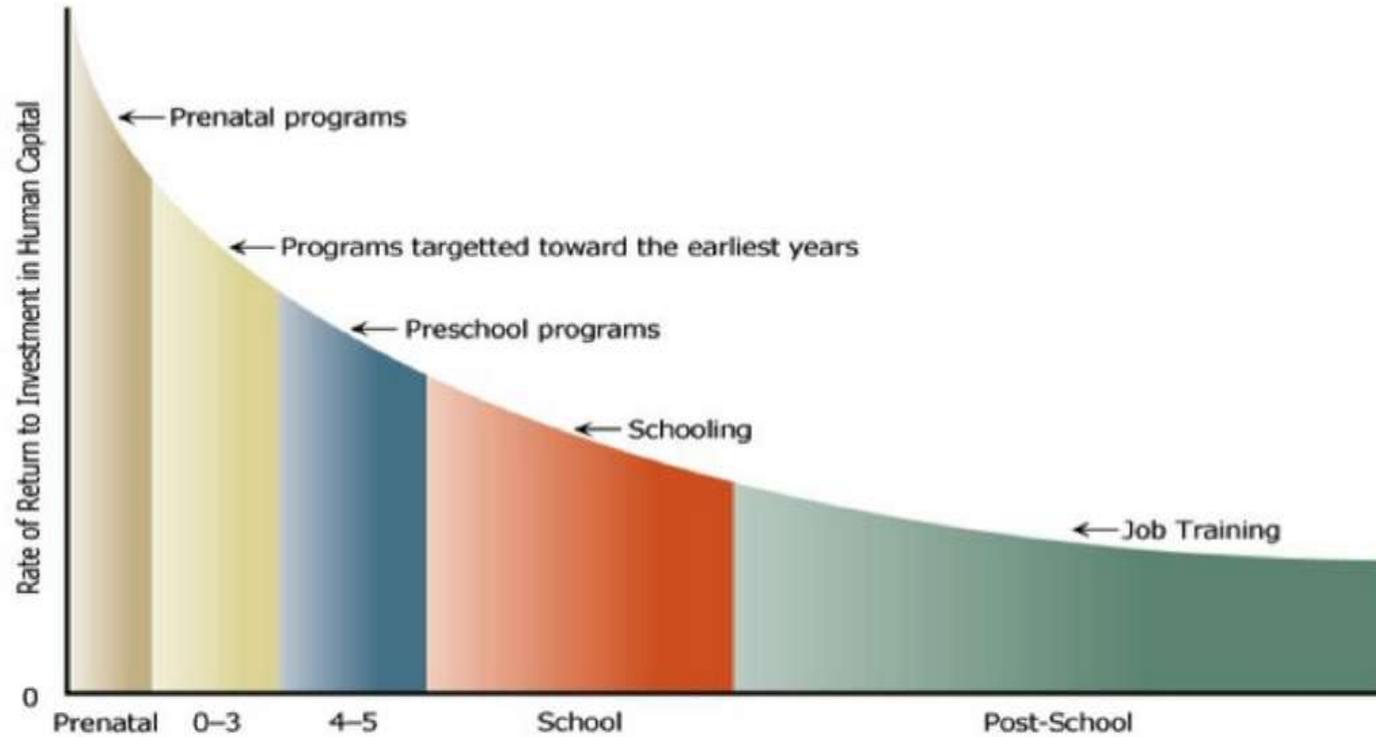
# The **Economic** Argument

- **Returns on investment in ECCD accumulate and help offset inequality.**
- A long-term, cost-benefit analysis of preschools showed that:
  - by age 27, \$1 invested in ECCD resulted in a return of \$7
  - by age 40, the return increased to \$17.
- Providing quality care and education opportunities for young children and their families, especially those most at risk, is **the most powerful strategy for breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty.**



# Early childhood development is a smart investment

The earlier the investment, the greater the return



Source: James Heckman, Nobel laureate in economics



# The **Health** Argument

## Investments in ECCD programmes save money:

- lower health costs for young children and their mothers
- decrease expensive emergency and hospital services
- reduce costs of nutrition services for children 0-3
- lead to fewer developmental delays and disabilities



# The **Cultural** Argument

**ECCD programmes embedded in local culture and delivered in mother tongue** can have a strong impact on:

- cultural identity and self-esteem
- the preservation of threatened languages and cultures
- the inter-generational transmission of knowledge
- future participation in national development.



# Finally -- The **Education** Argument

- **Successful early learning leads to successful later learning**, and early failure creates later failure.
- **Good quality ECCD results in cost-savings and increased efficiency in primary education:**
  - higher attendance and lower repetition and drop-out rates
  - less remedial and special education
  - higher educational attainment and more successful learning of 21st century skills



# ECCD for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**Quality ECCD is essential to achieve a truly inclusive and high quality education system needed for a sustainable future:**

- **start early** by promoting adequate nutrition and health care, psycho-social support, and cognitive stimulation
- **seek out those most subject to exclusion** (girls and children with disabilities, living in remote places, in poor families or from ethnic/linguistic minorities)
- **prepare them for school, for later learning, and for the new skills and values needed for the future labour market**



# **ECCD Increases the Sustainability and Equity of Development**

- **Interventions in ECCD have sustainable, long-term effects:**
  - **on educational achievement**
  - **on economic success**
  - **on the development of human capital, now and for the future**
  - **on social cohesion**
- **The most disadvantaged children experience the most dramatic gains from ECCD programmes – but are least likely to be enrolled; they will suffer most in the face of the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**



# **Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC)**

**[www.arnec.net](http://www.arnec.net)**

