Implementing the Sustainable Developmental Goals

Is Early Childhood Development a Pathway to Peace?

Report on the Event - October 2015
Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals

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October 6, 2015
Danny Kaye Center, UNICEF Headquarters, New York
Event Sponsors

UNICEF, Yale University and the Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC)

Acknowledgements

At this event we also took the opportunity to recognize the leadership and vision of Ayşen Özyeğin, founder of the Mother & Child Education Foundation (AÇEV). We also acknowledge the contributions of L. Angelica Ponguta, PhD, MPH, and Anna L. Zonderman, MPH, and Chanel Marin, MA from Yale University in the preparation of this report.

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ECPC logo graphic design: Adrian Cerezo, PhD, from Yale University
I. Rationale for the Event

Early Childhood Development (ECD) has been included in the 2030 Development Agenda in recognition of its foundational role in building peaceful sustainable societies. Taking the opportunity of this global recognition, the Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC) hosted a panel discussion on the role ECD could play in promoting peace and reducing violence. The evidence is clear: Investments in ECD have a multiplier effect with benefits not only for later health, learning and well-being of the individual, but also resulting in more productive, peaceful and equal societies. The panel discussion was also very timely given the recent refugee and migrant crisis and the potential of ECD programs in the resettlement of families by providing secure, safe spaces for learning and play, and parenting support. The main objectives of the panel discussion was to explore how the ECD evidence could be applied to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

The event was chaired by, Rima Salah, Ph.D., Assistant Clinical Professor, Yale Child Study Center and Former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF. The distinguished panelists included:

- Ambassador H.E. Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury, Former Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of the United Nations
- Professor James F. Leckman, M.D., Ph.D., Yale University
- Ted Chaiban, UNICEF Program Director
- H.E. Mr. Per Thöresson, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations
- Hanifa Mezoui, Ph.D., Senior Advisor, Humanitarian Affairs and Civil Society United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

At this event we also recognized the leadership and vision of Ayşen Özyeğin, founder of the Mother and Child Education Foundation (AÇEV). For additional information on resources related to the Early Childhood and Peacebuilding go to:

- UNICEF Learning for Peace: http://learningforpeace.unicef.org/
- Yale Formative Childhood and Peace Building: http://childstudycenter.yale.edu/fcpb/
II. Highlights of Panelist Contributions

How Can Early Childhood Development (ECD) Serve as a Means of Implementation for Building Peaceful Societies and Reducing Violence?

Rima Salah, Ph.D.

Dr. Salah opened the panel discussion by remarking that early childhood development is strongly represented in the recently adopted 2030 agenda for sustainable development because of its recognized role in facilitating peaceful and sustainable societies. The importance of early childhood development is specifically reflected in Global Goal #16, which focuses on building more peaceful societies and ending violence against children. Dr. Salah agreed with the Secretary General’s sentiment that early childhood development is the link between the development agenda and the peace and security agenda. However, Dr. Salah indicated that there are significant challenges to the full realization of young children as agents of peaceful change within their families and communities. Although the goal of the 2030 agenda is to promote dignity, justice, and stability for all people, Dr. Salah reminded the audience that we are currently experiencing unprecedented levels of displacement and human insecurity across the world. Dr. Salah concluded by thanking and encouraging those who work to alleviate the suffering of communities affected by violence. She also thanked those working to understand the underlying causes of conflict so as to best inform local, national and international efforts supporting children and families.

Key Messages/Implications

- The development, peace and security agenda are linked in the al 16. This is a crucial window of opportunity to lever children in the peacebuilding agenda.
- Today the majority of displaced people are women and children. These groups warrant attention and targets efforts. We have the opportunity to transform the policy landscape and elevate children, families and communities in the peacebuilding dialogue.
- Innovation and transformative approaches are needed to link ECD and peace.

Changing Tides: ECD as a Foundation for the Culture of Peace

His Excellency Anwarul Chowdhury

Ambassador Chowdhury discussed UNICEF’s historical engagement with child rights and promotion of the culture of peace. Amb. Chowdhury suggested that the Ernst Strüngmann Foundation’s initiative to promote early childhood development as a “pathway to peace” was the catalyst for UNICEF’s integration of early childhood development within the culture of peace agenda. He remarked that the central focus of the United Nation’s Program of Action on the culture of peace is to make peace and nonviolence a part of our own existence on an individual level. Amb. Chowdhury explained that in order to make peaceful communities and societies—and ultimately a peaceful global community—we must raise our children to address the challenges in their lives without violence or aggression. Amb. Chowdhury emphasized that the culture of peace should be a goal for both sustainable development and education. Furthermore, global citizenship should be the framework within which education is delivered. Linking early childhood development, global citizenship, and the culture of peace within the context of education has the potential to reshape the trajectory of societies around the world and
produce more peaceful families and communities. Finally, Mr. Chowdhury took the opportunity to encourage the United States to join all of the other nations in the world in ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Key Messages/Implications**

- There are important global instruments and strategies to interlink ECD and peacebuilding. These include the Convention on the Rights of the Child and enhancing communication and strategies to frame the links between ECD and peacebuilding.
- Under the current sustainable development goal of education (Goal 4), we have made an effort to put the goal in the education curricula – and an opportunity to level global citizenship as an objective of early education.

_Early Developmental Neurobiology: Evidence that Paves the Pathway between ECD and Peace_

*James F. Leckman, M.D., Ph.D.*

Dr. Leckman echoed Amb. Chowdhury’s vision of a movement toward integrating the concept of global citizenship into international education and child-rearing practices, stating that finding ways to facilitate children’s focus on “us” rather than “me” is a critical step toward more peaceful societies. Dr. Leckman gave an overview of the neurobiology that supports the link between early childhood development and peace. He specifically discussed how humans are biologically inclined to view others as a threat when under stress because the affiliative response system in the brain is located next to the stress-response circuit. He highlighted the need to work with the media to mediate this biological effect and limit stereotyping of others in times of fear. He also emphasized the importance of inter-sectoral partnerships in disseminating this research, and of using the increasing body of scientific evidence to inform policies and programs that support families. Dr. Leckman remarked that the greatest consequence of violence is its self-perpetuating nature and the intergenerational impact that can follow. Given the millions of children exposed to violence in their homes and communities, it is imperative to address the effects of violence in early childhood. Dr. Leckman referenced Dr. James Heckman’s, “Heckman Equation,” indicating that investments in the early years of life yield the greatest returns. He noted two areas of inquiry that show particular promise in furthering the agenda of the culture of peace: the understanding of the human stress response system and the emerging field of epigenetics. Dr. Leckman concluded by reiterating that we are all connected and that, just as no individual neuron in the brain is truly functional on its own, we must all work together to build a more peaceful world, starting with the youngest of our global citizens.

**Key Messages/Implications**

- The neurobiological argument is unequivocal in substantiating the role of ECD in attachment, resilience, and psychosocial and socioemotional development that influence behaviors into adulthood.
- There are important exemplars (like the AÇEV model) that substantiate how ECD interventions impact outcomes longitudinally.
- Intersectoral partnerships are key in driving sustainable programs of proven value.
The Nexus between Development and Humanitarian Programming: The Role of ECD

Ted Chaiban

Mr. Chaiban applauded the work that has led to the inclusion of early childhood development in the sustainable development agenda, but suggested that it is equally crucial to secure early childhood development as a priority in the humanitarian agenda. Mr. Chaiban emphasized the importance of working with, not against, existing infrastructure within communities to systematically create capacity and reduce vulnerability in fragile contexts. Furthermore, he noted that early childhood education can be a powerful platform for promoting social cohesion. Mr. Chaiban remarked that there is clear evidence showing the effectiveness of early childhood development initiatives in communities of all types. These findings not only support the notion that it is possible to successfully implement early childhood development programming in volatile settings, but also suggest that such programs have a measurable impact on children, their families, and their communities. Mr. Chaiban discussed several examples of the use of early childhood service provision to stabilize the day-to-day experiences of families in areas of both acute and chronic violence. He stated that early childhood development has been the impetus for creating safe spaces in conflicts from Northern Ireland to Darfur. From these experiences, we have learned that stimulation and learning in an environment where children feel safe and protected yields both short- and long-term benefits for children and their families.

Key Messages/Implications

- We need to work with existing infrastructure within communities to systematically create capacity and reduce vulnerability in fragile contexts.
- There are several examples of the use of early childhood service provision to stabilize the day-to-day experiences of families in areas of both acute and chronic violence. We need to address and utilize those examples.

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations: Early Childhood Development and Peacebuilding

Hanifa Mezoui, Ph.D.

Dr. Mezoui remarked that the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals was a landmark event in the ongoing effort for a future based on sustainability, partnership and hope. She noted a need for the SDGs to be inclusive of all people (particularly youth) and to incorporate religious and political differences. Dr. Mezoui emphasized the critical role that investment in young children plays in this agenda; it tackles the roots of conflict from an early age, when the environments in which children develop define who they become as adults. She discussed the impact environments can have on behavior toward, and empathy for, others throughout life. Dr. Mezoui pointed to marginalization, exclusion, conflict, and war as the sources of aggression in children and suggested that these phenomena must be targeted in order to achieve peace within families, throughout communities, and among nations. Dr. Mezoui subsequently spoke about the vital role of parents in promoting peace and teaching cooperation. Peace, nonviolence, and love must be taught in the home so children internalize these values. Dr. Mezoui noted that hatred is a generationally ingrained emotion, implying a need for a generational investment in peace to change cycles of hatred that promote violence. Given the current international refugee crisis, she suggested that we consider how to integrate new families into our existing communities to protect and honor the value of childhood, and to help families heal and children to grow.
Key Messages/Implications

- There are many synergistic efforts between the Early Childhood Peacebuilding Consortium and the UN Alliance of Civilizations. The joint vision focuses on working towards the promotion of peaceful societies.
- There are also key links between sustainability and peace: Sustainable development is not possible where conflict prevails.
- The promotion of peaceful societies depends on how much we invest in the root-cause of violence. ECD prepares young adults for a culture of peacebuilding.

“No child is born with hatred. Hatred against others who are culturally or religiously different … is taught, and often times it is taught through generations. It may therefore take a generation of early childhood investment and a culture of peace to build new, inclusive, and respectful communities and societies” - Hanifa Mezoui

Peace, Security, Child Rights: Addressing the Refugee Crisis

His Excellency Per Thöresson

Ambassador Thöresson discussed ongoing efforts in Sweden to support refugee children and families arriving from Syria and other countries in conflict. He noted that policies for child protection have been extended to the growing refugee community in Sweden, indicative of the Swedish government’s belief in the importance of childhood. Amb. Thöresson noted that this approach stems from the understanding that there is no second chance when it comes to childhood. Children are only children once and we must do everything we can to support happy, healthy families. With this in mind, the Swedish government is undertaking an effort to integrate the full Convention on the Rights of the Child into its legal structure. Amb. Thöresson emphasized that the current refugee crisis is a global crisis, and that we must all share the humanitarian responsibility. Currently, one percent of Sweden’s population is made up of Syrian refugees. Amb. Thöresson shared Sweden’s system for processing refugee applications and making determinations about the care and support needed for families and children traveling alone. He stated that the mandate of the organizing body, the Swedish Migration Board, is to act in the best interest of the child regardless of immigration status; the board’s staff receives specialized training in child development to analyze all potential consequences for a child before making determinations. From this, Sweden has developed a standardized Child Impact Assessment. Additionally, all children are entitled to healthcare and an appointed guardian to protect their rights. The Swedish government has collaborated with the Swedish Red Cross and Save the Children to support children and families, with an emphasis on helping parents so they can be in the best physical, mental and emotional state to care for their children.

Key Messages/Implications

- Key areas of investment should consider skills for service providers in emergency settings to communicate and manage children’s needs.
- It is crucial that policy makers and providers hold the best interest of the child at the heart of all processes, policies, services and initiatives.
- The promotion of the culture of peace at all advocacy levels is crucial.
Concluding Remarks

The panel concluded with a series of questions from audience members. The panelists primarily oriented their responses towards the question “Understanding that peace and conflict is over-politicized, how can UNICEF change the narrative moving forward to focus on holistic, long-term, and social and economic dimensions of war?” Amb. Chowdhury responded first, agreeing that state-induced security concerns do not account for the human dimension of conflict, and that he would suggest that the United Nations Security Council account for the human component when making decisions. Dr. Salah echoed Amb. Chowdhury, noting that UNICEF has submitted recommendations to the U.N. Security Council to shift to “people centered peace operations.” Dr. Leckman emphasized the importance of seeking sustainable evidence-based programs that do not “other” the opposing side in conflict situations. Mr. Chaiban used the example of the international response to Ebola to demonstrate how fear-based responses led to difficulties in controlling the disease, and inferred that there must be a focus on positively addressing issues of conflict to avoid propagating more conflict. Finally, Dr. Mezoui echoed that fear-based ideology, exemplified in the terminology used to describe refugees, hinders the international response to the refugee crisis, and should be eliminated.
INVITATION

The Early Childhood Peace Consortium cordially invites you to a panel discussion:

Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: Is Early Childhood Development a Pathway to Peace?

When: Tuesday 6 October, 2015
Time: 1.00 – 2.30pm,
Where: Danny Kaye Visitors Centre

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“How can ECD serve as a means of implementation for building peaceful societies and reducing violence?”
Chair, Rima Salah, PhD, Assistant Clinical Professor, Yale Child Study Centre and Former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF

“Changing tides: ECD as a foundation for the culture of peace”
Remarks from Ambassador H.E. Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury, Former Under-Secretary-General and High Representative UN

“Early developmental neurobiology: Evidence that paves the pathway between ECD and peace”
Remarks from Professor James Leckman, Yale University

“The nexus between development and humanitarian programming: Role for ECD”
Remarks from Ted Chaiban, UNICEF Programme Director

“United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC): Early childhood development & peace building”
Remarks from Hanifa Mezouid, Senior Advisor, Humanitarian Affairs and Civil Society

“Peace, security, child rights: Addressing the refugee crises”
Remarks from H.E. Mr Per Thöresson, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations
L-R: James Leckman, Ayşen Özyeğin, Ted Chaiban, Rima Salah (Photo: William Ge)