

5-8	
1. NIZUNZABA	PELAGIE
2. NIBITANGA	VOLETTE
3. NINTERETSE	THOMAS
4. MANIRAKIZA	J. BEREMANS
9-12	
1. SIKITU J.	MARIE
2. NZAMBIMANA	SOPHIE
3. CYRIAGUE	NI'NGERE
13-17	
1. KUNDA	TENIFA
2. INNOCENT	KASSIM

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Giving the youngest girls and boys
a good and fair start in life

Plan International wants to ensure that vulnerable and excluded young girls and boys in development and humanitarian settings get the care, supports and services needed to survive, grow up healthy and develop to their full potential – free from limiting gender norms and attitudes.

THE ISSUES

Early childhood – the period below the age of eight¹ – is the most important developmental phase in a person's life. In these early years – especially the first 1,000 days when a child's brain development is at its most rapid – foundations are laid that are critical for future wellbeing and resilience, mental and physical health, intellectual progress and social interaction.

Despite all the scientific evidence for this, millions of young children worldwide are denied rights that are essential for their survival, healthy growth and development. Children from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, those affected by poverty, conflict and disaster, or living with disability are all less likely to survive and thrive in early childhood.



Every year 43 per cent of all under-fives in low- and middle-income countries – around 250 million children – may not reach their developmental potential² due to poor health, malnutrition, exposure to violence and lack of nurturing care, among other factors.³

Why does all this matter?

- Because it affects future generations and wider societies. Children who fail to achieve their potential in early childhood are less likely to enter and complete school on time, learn essential life skills and enjoy life-long good health. It's more likely their own children will be born into disadvantage, perpetuating a cycle of inequality.
- Because governments, donors and societies are still failing to prioritise Early Childhood Development (ECD), despite the fact that ECD is the foundation for achieving many Sustainable Development Goals.

ROOT CAUSES OF INEQUALITIES IN EARLY YEARS DEVELOPMENT

A child's early years' nutrition, health and development are largely determined by the quality of home and community environments and the extent to which parents and primary caregivers can provide nurturing care.⁴ Inequalities in ECD can arise from:

- **Insufficient resources amongst families for nurturing care** – parents and primary caregivers may not know what care and supports are needed, and/or lack time or resources to provide these. Poverty can force them to prioritise a child's physical needs over other aspects of nurturing care; or to migrate for work, leaving children with relatives.
- **Gender discrimination and son preference** – girls may often receive poorer quality care, nutrition and learning opportunities from birth. From early on, boys and girls are socialised to meet gendered expectations about how they should behave and be. Social norms may underpin negative practices like violent discipline or inadequate infant feeding.
- **Women's poor mental and physical health, lack of decision-making power and heavy burden of care** – all negatively affect young children's care and development.

- **Limited access to essential ECD supports and services** – government approaches to ECD are often fragmented with little coordination between sectors. Only one-fifth of existing national ECD policies are budgeted and one-third have action plans.⁵ Access to maternal, neonatal and child health and nutrition (MNCHN), and WASH services is inequitable. Fewer than one half of children globally – one in ten in many low-income countries (LICs) – have access to early childhood education. Few governments in LICs guarantee access to social protection mechanisms for parents in need that support them in their caregiver role.

Nurturing care includes:

- responsive caregiving;
- early stimulation, play and early learning opportunities;
- health and nutrition, including hygiene and sanitation practices;
- protection from violence, abuse and accidents.

OUR IMPACT GROUP

Plan International will target children most often denied their rights and with the most to gain from ECD programmes and services. These are children living in extreme poverty; affected by emergencies, conflict and displacement or separated from parents/caregivers; that have a disability; or come from minority ethno-linguistic groups.

Within each group, we will prioritise:

- girls where son preference and gender discrimination negatively affect the care and services girls receive, as well as children under three;
- vulnerable parents – especially adolescent mothers and female heads of households.

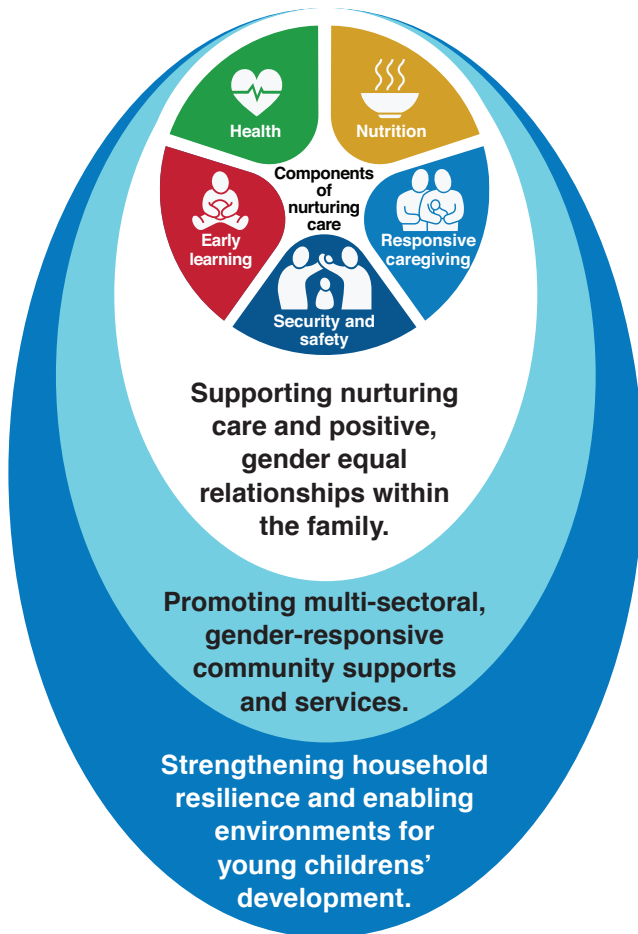
KEY AREAS FOR INVESTMENT IN COUNTRIES

- **Support for nurturing care and positive family relationships.** Our strengths-based, culturally sensitive parenting programmes will aim to enhance parents'/caregivers' skills and confidence to provide nurturing care equally to all young children. These will be enriched to promote equality within couples and families, maternal wellbeing and empowerment, and men's engagement in care work and childrearing.
- **Promoting multi-sectoral community services and support for ECD.** We will work with community leaders, volunteers and workers to help implement and manage gender responsive community-based early learning, health, nutrition and WASH interventions. We will enrich these with social supports for families, mental health promotion and early interventions for children with a disability. We will work with traditional/religious leaders and community networks on social and gender norm change, and facilitate their engagement in the planning, monitoring and governance of local public ECD services.
- **Strengthening household resilience for ECD, including in conflict and emergencies.** Focusing on the poorest families, we will test and expand efforts to strengthen family resilience and influence governments to implement and fund comprehensive ECD policy, essential services and social protection mechanisms – such as paternity leave, childcare, family benefits/cash transfers - that support families to provide nurturing care.

ECD in Emergencies (ECDiE) – In humanitarian contexts, Plan International will:

- prioritise programmes that support parents and caregivers to provide nurturing care;
- support communities to meet young children's survival needs (health, nutrition, WASH) and to offer safe play and early learning opportunities and psychosocial support to children and caregivers;
- influence for the inclusion of ECD in Humanitarian Response Plans, alongside inter-cluster coordination for ECDiE interventions.

Three priority areas of work



- Ensure that interventions across investment areas include men and actively promote men's shared responsibility for care work, alongside specific interventions for men such as men's groups.
- Make women's wellbeing and empowerment an objective of interventions, building on existing parenting programmes to engage couples and other adult family members in reflecting on intra-household relationships, inequalities and domestic violence; and supporting maternal mental health interventions.
- Leverage community WASH and health programmes as an opportunity to reflect on gender roles and promote women's participation in decision-making.
- Influence for gender responsive social protection policy, including redistribution of care work.

Tapping into multiple opportunities for gender transformation

- Adapting parenting education for positive gender socialization and equal care
- Promoting men's engagement across all aspects ECD programming (e.g. MNCHN, early learning)
- Engaging adult family members to reflect on intra-household relationships, inequalities and domestic violence
- Supporting communities to implement and manage gender responsive early learning programmes
- Working with healthcare and WASH providers to expand access to gender-responsive MNCHN and WASH services

Cross-cutting considerations for all projects:

- Ensure the programme and influence approaches and materials do not reinforce negative gender stereotypes/norms
- Promote changes in those gender norms that underpin "negative" parenting and childcare practices
- Keep messaging consistent on equal value, needs and rights of girls and implications of son preference

OUR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

ECD programmes offer huge potential to challenge and transform discriminatory gender norms and socialisation processes. To capture this potential, we will:

- Identify where there are gaps and differences in the care, supports and services provided for girls and boys.
- Adapt our parenting and early learning programmes to encourage reflection on the negative impact of treating girls and boys differently, and promote positive gender socialisation and equal care.
- Identify where gender norms drive negative childcare practices, men's limited engagement in caregiving and women's restricted autonomy and decision-making power.
- Work on norm change together with communities, promoting critical reflection and dialogue, engaging religious/traditional leaders, supporting norm "trendsetters" and social and behaviour change communication.

Endnotes

1. See United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment N° 7 (2005) Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood
2. Black, M. et al. (2016) "Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale 1. Early childhood development coming of age: science through the life course", The Lancet, 4 October: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31389-7](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31389-7)
3. UNICEF (2014) Early Childhood Development: A Statistical Snapshot – Building Better Brains and Sustainable Outcomes for Children [online] www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/files/ECD_Brochure_FINAL_LR.pdf (Accessed January 2016)
4. WHO, UNICEF, WBG 2018 Nurturing care for early childhood development. A framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential. Geneva: World Health Organization.
5. Vargas Baron, E. (2015) "Policies on Early Childhood Care and Education: their evolution and some impacts". Background paper prepared for UNESCO (2015) EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015.



Plan International Headquarters
Dukes Court, Block A, Duke Street, Woking, Surrey GU21 5BH
United Kingdom
Tel: (+44)1483 755 155
To learn more about our actions for children, visit www.plan-international.org