

as well as alliances such as the Early Learning Partnership, the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, Scaling Up Nutrition, and the Power of Nutrition.

Ultimately, no matter what platforms or partnerships we use to get there, reaching children in the early years is a prerequisite for sustainable development. This *Lancet* Series shows why that is true, and points the way towards giving all young children the care and support they need to reach their potential. It is up to all of us to bring that aspiration closer to reality.

\*Margaret Chan, Anthony Lake, Keith Hansen

World Health Organization, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland (MC); United Nations Children's Fund, New York, NY, USA (AL); and The World Bank, Washington, DC, USA (KH) [chanm@who.int](mailto:chanm@who.int)

MC is Director-General of the World Health Organization. AL is Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund. KH is Vice President of Human Development, World Bank Group. We declare no other competing interests.

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For the **Early Learning Partnership** see <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/early-learning-partnership>  
 For the **Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children** see <http://www.end-violence.org>  
 For **Scaling Up Nutrition** see <http://scalingupnutrition.org>  
 For the **Power of Nutrition** see <http://www.powerofnutrition.org>

## Good early development—the right of every child

Data from the past decade show that millions of women, children, and adolescents have been left behind due to underlying social, economic, and cultural inequities. To address these issues, in September, 2015, the international community adopted the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health, a bold roadmap to end preventable maternal, newborn, and child deaths, including stillbirths, by 2030. The Global Strategy aims to ensure that women, children, and adolescents survive, thrive, and lead lives that are transformative and prosperous.<sup>1</sup> It proposes that at least US\$100 billion in demographic dividends can be realised from investments in early childhood and adolescent health and development. Enabling children to develop their full potential, particularly in the first 3 years of life, has high rates of return across the life course. These facts can no longer be ignored.

Only in the past few years have the development and health communities recognised that early childhood development is a solid foundation for human capital development. And now the *Lancet* Series, *Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale*,<sup>2–4</sup> further advances our knowledge of this important issue.

As reported in the first Series paper, about 250 million (43%) children younger than 5 years in low-income and middle-income countries are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential because of extreme poverty and stunting.<sup>2</sup> Knowing this number is important to increase political commitment to, and investment in, early childhood development programmes and to inform implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensure no one is left behind.

Examples of research and policy development in some countries are a promising indication that the global community is waking up to the importance of good early childhood development as a fundamental right of every child. Supporting early childhood development services and programmes allows children to achieve their full potential, including optimum education which is a gateway to their social inclusion and a foundation for sustainable development for all nations. But despite evidence of what works to support early childhood development, and the setting of global and national goals, domestic and global human and financial resource allocation for early childhood development remains insufficient. The



Published Online  
 October 4, 2016  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31700-7](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31700-7)  
 See *Series* pages 77, 91, and 103

evidence presented in this Series makes it clear that this situation must change.

This Series adds new insights about the importance of early childhood development at every stage of a child's life from before conception throughout the life course. When early childhood development stalls, there are critical mitigation interventions across health, nutrition, education, child protection, and social protection sectors that should be accessible to all families and young children. And yet we continue to see an overemphasis on policies and programmes for school readiness at the expense of holistic interventions through the life course, particularly in the first 1000 days of a child's life. If we are to make progress in turning science into practice, policies and programmes need to take a life-course approach and resource allocation must follow suit.

The delivery of early childhood development services cannot be fragmented across different sectors, but should be provided as integrated, multisectoral evidence-based interventions. This Series highlights the importance of a life-course approach and greater integration of the health sector with other sectors, such as nutrition, education, child protection, social protection, and water and sanitation, bringing together multistakeholder partners and combining innovative financing and accountability mechanisms to help achieve the SDGs.

Political will is essential to advance early childhood development in this way. Investing in early childhood development, integrated with basic family and child health and nutrition, and doing so early, will see individuals and nations overcome poverty and

exclusion and progress towards their development goals. All stakeholders must reflect on how seriously they take the cost of inaction. Through the Global Strategy and its accountability framework, all partners are urged to improve early childhood development and be accountable in their national plans. It is up to all stakeholders to make sure we reach the goals of the Global Strategy and the SDGs. This entails careful planning, execution, and monitoring so that no one is left behind, and it requires unprecedented human and financial resources for implementation. We can mobilise these resources by adopting a partnership model that is country led and co-opts the expertise and resources of stakeholders from across multiple sectors.

*Graça Machel*

The Graça Machel Trust, Hyde Park 2196, Johannesburg, South Africa  
 fortunet@gracamacheltrust.org

I declare no competing interests.

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## Expanding the evidence base to drive more productive early childhood investment

Published Online  
 October 4, 2016  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31702-0](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31702-0)

See *Series* pages 77, 91, and 103

For the third time in a decade, after Series in 2007 and 2011, *The Lancet* has published a Series on the global status of early childhood development.<sup>1–3</sup> Building on the explicit attention to the early years of life included in the Sustainable Development Goals, the time is ripe to take stock of how much has been accomplished in the past 10 years and identify priorities for accelerated progress in the decades to come.

This new *Lancet* Series, *Advancing Early Childhood Development Series: from Science to Scale*,<sup>1–3</sup> reflects the

power and future possibilities of a growing knowledge base. The science of early childhood development and its underlying neurobiology are increasingly invoked in the global discourse on education, health, social and child protection, and human capital formation.<sup>4</sup> This science provides a powerful framework for understanding how development happens, how it can be derailed, and how to get it back on track when it is disrupted.

Advances in the biology of adversity have also helped make a strong case for directing more resources towards