**Suggested edits for CRC General Comment 26**

Adrián Cerezo, University of Maine February 15, 2023 and the Early Childhood Development Action Network

**Recommend that the General Comment #26 references General Comment #7[[1]](#footnote-1) to acknowledge the specific needs and opportunities of early childhood.**

General Comment 7 describes "the specific features of **early childhood** that impact on the realization of rights"[[2]](#footnote-2). It underscores the exceptional characteristics of this period in childhood and underscores the vulnerabilities inherent in the earliest years of life[[3]](#footnote-3). But perhaps more importantly, underscores how policies, interventions and practices that nurture the youngest children and support their circle of care are fundamental building blocks of lives where each person can reach their potential[[4]](#footnote-4). As the extensive and ever-growing literature on early childhood development shows, this is the moment where the highest return is obtained from fiscal policies and investments[[5]](#footnote-5).

In the context of environmental challenges, sustainable development and the challenge of climate change, elevating and underscoring the importance of early childhood is fundamental because, the nurturing care of the youngest children yields returns in three relevant ways: 1) the known benefits for individual and human development[[6]](#footnote-6); 2) the immediate support and lifelong promotion of resilience and the capacity effectively confront disasters and emergencies[[7]](#footnote-7), and; 3) boosting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[[8]](#footnote-8).

**Climate change highlights the importance of the nurturing care agenda:** It is very important to underscore that the highest return on investment result from nurturing care policies and interventions[[9]](#footnote-9). While it is necessary and important to develop ECD programs specifically focused on climate change, interventions focused on climate loss, damage, disasters, and emergencies tend to be reactive and remedial rather than proactive and opportunity driven. The challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradations highlight the urgency of providing adequate resources to support existing interventions to support the potential of each young child and their families. This is particularly true for families experiencing crisis and conflict, who face compounded adversities.

Decades of research and program evaluations in the field of ECD show that policies and interventions focused on ECD provide a most cost-effective, comprehensive, immediate, and enduring path to boosting human development, as well as achieving climate resilience and sustainable development[[10]](#footnote-10).

**Early childhood policies and programs yield the highest returns**: It is also important to underscore that, as has been shown by the work by James Heckman[[11]](#footnote-11) and expanded upon by many others, these returns on investment are obtained in the earliest years in life. Not attending to the nurturing care needs of young children at the right time in life can lead to cascading negative impacts and the need for costly remedial actions. Just as the positive impacts of attending to the nurturing care needs of young children project in a positive way to the family, community, and nations[[12]](#footnote-12), the negative impacts of not attending to young children compound the risk and vulnerability of communities and nations.

General Comment #26 would be well served by citing the considerations outlined in General Comment #7 about the realization of the rights of children and acknowledging that they are also fundamental building blocks of realizing the rights of children and nature and attending to the risks that climate change presents.[[13]](#footnote-13) Additionally, ‘emergency’ is only referenced twice in the Draft General Comment (para. 51 and para. 106), without explicit recognition of climate change being an urgent emergency. ECDAN recommends specific reference to the importance of prioritizing early childhood development in emergencies, and the identification of the climate crises as an emergency.

While the evidence overwhelmingly supports prioritizing investments in early childhood, this is an issue that has been chronically underfunded, especially in vulnerable communities, and in vulnerable countries. The literature on ECD policy clearly shows that to realize the promise of ECD for individuals and communities, these interventions must be adequately funded, of high quality, equitably distributed, and at the right moment in life[[14]](#footnote-14).

**Environmental risks are undermining children’s rights to healthy development:** Young children are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environment degradation, and as such, both urgency and a child-centered approach that places the specific needs of children, their parents, and caregivers at the foundation of strategies focused on adaptation and mitigation are required[[15]](#footnote-15). Environmental risks to children, compounded by climate change, will continue to impede child development, preventing them from reaching their full potential. Future climate change policies and action plans must ensure ECD programs and services are adequately financed and embedded, through the lens of nurturing care, into climate change responses.

1. <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/GeneralComment7Rev1.pdf>  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development: National Research Council (US) and Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, Jack P. Shonkoff, [Deborah A. Phillips](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=Phillips+DA%5BEditor%5D), editors. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. e.g.: The Perry Preschoolers at Late Midlife: A Study in Design-Specific Inference: James J. Heckman  & Ganesh Karapakula, May 2019, National Bureau of Economic Research WORKING PAPER 25888. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w25888> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For example: A landmark study in Jamaica showed that stunted children children who participated in a psychosocial stimulation and nutrition program, which involved parental education, had higher earnings after participating (Gertler, et al., 2013) and lower rates of violent behavior in adulthood compared to the control group (Walker, et al., 2011). Participating in the program also led to reduced mental health symptoms (depression, anxiety, externalizing behaviors) and reduced physical diseases, disabilities, and fatalities later in life (Walker et al., 2006).

Gertler P, Heckman J, Pinto R, Zanolini A, Vermeersch C, Walker S, Chang SM, Grantham-McGregor S. Labor market returns to an early childhood stimulation intervention in Jamaica. Science. 2014 May 30;344(6187):998-1001. doi: 10.1126/science.1251178. PMID: 24876490; PMCID: PMC4574862.

Walker SP, Chang SM, Vera-Hernández M, Grantham-McGregor S. Early childhood stimulation benefits adult competence and reduces violent behavior. Pediatrics. 2011 May;127(5):849-57. doi: 10.1542/peds.2010-2231. Epub 2011 Apr 25. PMID: 21518715.

Walker SP, Chang SM, Powell CA, Simonoff E, Grantham-McGregor SM. Effects of psychosocial stimulation and dietary supplementation in early childhood on psychosocial functioning in late adolescence: follow-up of randomised controlled trial. BMJ. 2006 Sep 2;333(7566):472. doi: 10.1136/bmj.38897.555208.2F. Epub 2006 Jul 28. PMID: 16877454; PMCID: PMC1557928. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/12801/file/UNICEF%20EAPRO%20ECD%20and%20Climate%20Change%20Advocacy%20Brief%20doc.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See: Early Childhood Development in the SDGs (2016) Young Lives Policy Brief No.28, Oxford Department of International Development (ODID)

<https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-PB28_Early%20Childhood%20Development%20in%20the%20SDGs.pdf>

Barros, A. J., & Ewerling, F. (2016). Early childhood development: a new challenge for the SDG era. *The Lancet Global Health*, *4*(12), e873-e874.

Black, M. M., Walker, S. P., Fernald, L. C., Andersen, C. T., DiGirolamo, A. M., Lu, C., ... & Grantham-McGregor, S. (2017). Early childhood development coming of age: science through the life course. *The Lancet*, *389*(10064), 77-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. e.g.: Nurturing care for early childhood development: a framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential (2018) World Health Organization, ISBN 978-92-4-151406-4 <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272603/9789241514064-eng.pdf>

Pia R Britto, Stephen J Lye, Kerrie Proulx, Aisha K Yousafzai, Stephen G Matthews, Tyler Vaivada, Rafael Perez-Escamilla, Nirmala Rao, Patrick Ip, Lia C H Fernald, Harriet MacMillan, Mark Hanson, Theodore D Wachs, Haogen Yao, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Adrian Cerezo, James F Leckman, Zulfiqar A Bhutta,

Nurturing care: promoting early childhood development, The Lancet, Volume 389, Issue 10064, 2017, Pages 91-102, ISSN 0140-6736, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31390-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The connection between ECD and the SDGs is explored in the article: *How Investing in Early Childhood Contributes to the Global Goals*, [https://medium.com/@maribelullmann/https-medium-com-how-investing-in-early-childhood-contributes-to-the-global-goals-228cfb4e216e](https://medium.com/%40maribelullmann/https-medium-com-how-investing-in-early-childhood-contributes-to-the-global-goals-228cfb4e216e) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://heckmanequation.org/the-heckman-equation/>  [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. e.g.: From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development: National Research Council (US) and Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, Jack P. Shonkoff, [Deborah A. Phillips](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=Phillips+DA%5BEditor%5D), editors. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Most Vulnerable to Most Valuable: A Scoping Study to Put Young Children at the Heart of Climate Actions and Environmental Protection*, ARNEC,* [*https://arnec.net/sites/default/files/2022-12/ARNEC-scoping%20study-web%202022-12-29.pdf*](https://arnec.net/sites/default/files/2022-12/ARNEC-scoping%20study-web%202022-12-29.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://arnec.net/sites/default/files/2022-12/ARNEC-scoping%20study-web%202022-12-29.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)