

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

G20 Japan 

Early childhood development education and care: the future is what we build today

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Early Childhood Development, Education and Care (ECD/ECEC) has become a priority for governments and international bodies. ECD/ECEC is explicitly included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4, 4.2), underlining the global consensus. In 2018, G20 acknowledged the key role of ECD and, in their Leaders' Declaration, announced a G20 ECD initiative. Access to high quality early childhood development, education and care programmes is unequal between and within countries, which remains a major cause for concern. However, in the context of local and global sustainability a new focus on the purpose of ECD/ECEC should become a complementing priority of the G20 process.

Challenge

Early Childhood Development, Education and Care (ECD/ECEC) has become a policy priority for governments and international bodies. There is a Broad consensus between policy makers, ECD/ECEC professionals, scholars, and advocates on the importance of ECD/ECEC as effective means to ensure

individual and collective well-being and achievement, and to addressing wider societal issues including social cohesion, equality and inclusion, and persistent inter-generational cycles of poverty. Having ECD/ECEC explicitly included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4, target 4.2)¹ underlines the global consensus. Moreover, the G20 acknowledges the key role of ECD and in their 2018 Leaders' Declaration announce a G20 ECD initiative. ²

At global and local levels, an emerging 'systemic turn' (Urban) has brought about broad consensus that policy frameworks should address early childhood from a holistic perspective. Examples include the integrated Policy framework 'De Cero a Siempre' in Colombia and the Irish 'whole-of-government strategy for babies, young children and their families'. Adopting whole-systems approaches to developing ECD/ECEC policy and practice ('Competent Systems') is key to providing quality ECD/ECEC for all Children (Okengo, 2011; Urban, Vandenbroeck, Van Laere, Lazzari, & Peeters, 2011, 2012).

The ECD/ECEC policy brief adopted by T20 in 2018, It Takes More Than a Village. Effective Early Childhood Development, Education and Care Services Require Competent Systems (Urban, Cardini, & Flórez Romero, 2018), outlines concrete policy recommendations that should be taken by G20 governments collectively and individually. However, there has been little attention to questions of purpose and Content of ECD/ECEC in the context of sustainability. 'Yesterday's solutions' continue to be supported by policy makers and donors alike:

- Focus on deficiencies rather than capabilities of children, families and communities

- Focus on (externally) predetermined models and outcomes, rather than culturally and locally appropriate approaches
- Focus on decontextualized and 'borrowed' education practices and approaches (e.g. Reggio, Montessori, HighScope, Project Zero etc.) rather than culturally appropriate and locally developed sustainable solutions
- Focus on narrowly defined 'early learning' curricula (literacy / numeracy), extending from countries in the global north to the global south; backed up and promoted by the democratically unaccountable 'soft power' of international organisations including OECD, and increasingly extended to and imposed on countries in the global south, e.g. Africa
- Focus on narrow and unsustainable notions of 'development' – at individual, collective, country and global levels – that originate in supremacist and colonialist thinking
- Naïve extrapolation of today's socio-economic contexts into the future, including the taken for granted assumption that, for instance, 'digital', and AI, are both the main challenges and the solution to development and education.

1 ECD/ECEC is included in Goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"; specifically mentioned in target 4.2: "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education."

2 The T20 Communique handed to former G20 leaders includes ECD/ECEC as a priority in its proposal 4, based on the promotion of equal opportunities for quality education.

Proposal

Existing Initiatives & Analysis

Existing Policies and Monitoring (1)

G20 Japan: Initiative on Human Capital Investment for Sustainable Development

Based on the G20's past achievements in education and in close coordination with other G20 working groups and workstreams in areas such as health, food security and nutrition, human resource development, employment, women's empowerment and digital economy, the G20 supports concrete actions to invest in quality education, with a particular emphasis on developing and low and middle-income countries, focusing on the following three pillars; (1) quality education for achieving sustainable development and inclusive growth, (2) education for creating innovation, and (3) education for a resilient and inclusive future. [G20 Initiative on Human Capital Investment for Sustainable Development](#)