

International Conference on Education as a Driver for Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 4.2 - Early Childhood Development, Care and Pre-primary Education: Cornerstone to achieving SDGs

Recommendations

Preamble

Every child has a right to survival, protection, growth, development and participation. This requires recognizing the synergistic and interdependent relationship between health, nutrition, intellectual and emotional needs of the child in a caring and enabling environment (Article 6, Convention on Rights of the Child).

Learning begins at birth and we recognize that the period from 0-8 years is critical for the optimal and holistic development of a child laying the foundation for lifelong learning. Early childhood development, care and pre-primary education set the tone for this process so that all boys and girls, including those born with special needs, are ready for primary education.

‘Child care’ and ‘early education’ are recognized as the building blocks of early childhood development and endorsed in several global declarations and ratifications. Care and education require strategies that are holistic and give significance to access, welfare, protection, safety, nutrition, hygiene as well as quality pre-school experience which includes interaction, communication and stimulation. This calls for putting a range of enabling factors in place for all children, including those with disabilities.

Further, pre-primary education should be considered as Right to Education. Early childhood development, care and pre-primary education process must also foster values and skills needed to promote sustainable lifestyles. Supporting young children’s exploration of the world around them through formal and informal settings enables the development of a broad understanding of sustainable lifestyles and development.

Appropriate attention in terms of development, care and pre-primary education lays the foundation for productive progression through the process of learning towards becoming productive adults capable of contributing to a nation’s growth and development, as well as playing their role as global citizens.

This further requires creating and implementing mechanisms for sustained convergence among stakeholders and systems for synergetic action for children's health, well being and appropriate development. This process requires an unambiguous political commitment and adequate financial resources.

A critical step to achieving Target 4.2 of Goal 4 and other SDGs is giving all children access to early childhood development, care and pre-primary education. Primarily, it has to reach out to every child, its family and the community. However, much still needs to be done to make these a reality.

Some continuing concerns and issues particularly with respect to capacities and political will to universalize care, development and pre-primary education for all children were discussed in the International Conference on Education as a Driver for SDGs in Ahmedabad, India, during January 11-13, 2016. They are covered in the recommendations below:

1. Recognize that early childhood development, care and pre-primary education involves a variety of stakeholders, including fathers and father figures. It is vital to improve capacities of all the stakeholders through strengths and capabilities approach that includes academic and professional development.
2. Recognize that communities, parents, grandparents and care givers play an important role in developing age-relevant understanding of sustainable development. Therefore one's community (family and society) as well as local environment become facilitators and valuable resources for early childhood development and learning as well as empowerment.
3. Support and create enabling conditions for rich and positive early childhood experiences. This as a prerequisite needs a safe, secure and encouraging learning environment, physically as well as emotionally.
4. Secure provision, protection and participation through enabling environments and pathways for young children's' for smooth transition from care and early learning at home to pre-primary and on to primary education level.
5. Place emphasis on curriculum in order to address inter-related domains of child development i.e. physical and motor; language, cognitive, socio-personal, and emotional stimulation. There is a need for special emphasis on experiences that focus on 'learning to live together' and 'learning to be', which are essential to create individuals with attitudes that promote harmony, equity and sustainability. Learning and the learning environment must be age and developmentally appropriate.

6. Use pedagogy which is play-based, experiential and child-centric, thus providing freedom and space for exploration, experimentation and expression of varied abilities of the child, without the fear of performance. Learning must be embedded in cultural context including the use of local language.
7. Provide access to environmental education including outdoor experiential learning as a pre-requisite for children to learn about environment and sustainable development.
8. Establish and implement at least minimum quality standards through adequate legal and regulatory mechanisms for all aspects of care, development and pre-primary education drawing from various successful experiments, and lessons from across the globe.
9. Promote strong partnerships and strengthen capabilities of communities and families in order to improve the quality of care and education of young children through institutional and programmatic means.
10. Recognize the importance of holistic cross-sectoral collaborations in addressing the scale and breadth of the skills needed for nutritional, health and social-emotional stimulation in early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education. Likewise, make provisions for adequate nutrition for the age group below six.
11. Recognize, articulate and strive to achieve early detection of special needs among young children in the age group of zero to six years with the help of trained professionals. Means and methods should be evolved to identify, provide health care and address developmentally appropriate needs of such children.
12. Focus on securing resources to address the needs of children impacted by natural and human-made calamities (including conflict, war and migration, informal labour) to achieve Education for All goals.
13. Use technology appropriately and effectively for sharing experiences, good practices and resources especially for capacity building of the different stakeholders.
14. Harness the power and reach of mass media to raise awareness and advocate for the criticality of appropriate early childhood care and learning.

15. Stress the need for caution in using technology as a means of learning and keeping young children engaged does not replace multiple sensory experiences and human interaction.
16. Establish a UN facilitated multi-lateral mechanism or a dedicated body under the UN to tackle issues related to access and inequity, policy formulation and implementation, financial allocation, cross-sectoral collaboration, formulation of national policies for early childhood development, care and pre-primary education. The proposed multi-lateral mechanism must develop and disseminate technical guidelines for data collection, analysis and monitoring of SDG 4.2.