



The Indicators Framework ultimately will facilitate the realization of children's rights and maximize early childhood developmental outcomes.

a place of mind



Research Brief | 2012

Early Childhood Rights Indicators

A Guide for Monitoring the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Working with representatives from UNICEF, the World Health Organization and other international partners, HELP has developed an Indicators Framework for monitoring rights in early childhood. This Framework is intended to assist the 193 signatory countries to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in meeting their obligations.¹

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

In 1989, after ten years of negotiation world leaders agreed on the provisions embodied in the Convention, building on statements made in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924) and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), among other instruments, that children need special protection. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a compilation of and clarification on the instruments that preceded it, became legally binding on September 2, 1990. The CRC is the most widely agreed upon international human rights document in the world, with 193 signatory countries including Canada.

The CRC ensures the rights of all children "without discrimination of any kind"², and is organized into three overarching themes or rights, with the child's best interests as the primary consideration:

The right to...

provision... such as provision of health and educational services

protection... such as right for protection against violence

participation... such as participation in decisions affecting the child

The Convention requires that countries act in compliance with all of the articles. In addition,

after submitting an initial report within two years of the Convention entering into force for a particular country, signatory countries then must submit a report every five years that describes both the state of child rights in their nation and actions taken to address any concerns previously noted by the Committee.

RIGHTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND GENERAL COMMENT NO. 7 (GC7)

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines child as any individual between the age of 0-18. In 2004, the Committee devoted a Day of General Discussion to implementing rights in early childhood due to the observation that many countries were not reporting consistently about children in their early years, 0-8. In 2005, as a result of that discussion, the UNCRC issued *General Comment No. 7: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood (GC7)*.³ In short, GC7 outlines how the Convention should be interpreted for children between the ages of 0 and 8 years.

In 2006, the UNCRC invited HELP and other international development agencies and NGOs active in the field of early child development and/or human rights to form an ad hoc group to develop a framework of indicators to operationalize GC7. This group became the GC7 Indicators Group.

WHY ARE THE EARLY YEARS IMPORTANT IN A CHILD RIGHTS CONTEXT?

Securing the rights articulated in the Convention is an effective approach to improving the quality of early experiences. An important foundation for securing rights – and thus improving the lives of the world’s children – is a robust child rights monitoring system. The international monitoring system developed by the GC7 Indicators Group can shine a light on the status and sufficiency of policies and programs aimed at improving young children’s environments. This is essential if we are to be able to identify gaps that need to be filled so that all child rights are respected and fulfilled.

Evidence suggests that merely signing the Convention does not necessarily result in improvement in the lives of children.⁴ In the short term, HELP’s monitoring system could not only serve as an internationally-sanctioned mechanism for increasing awareness and understanding of child development, but also could encourage governments and civil society sectors to act. We expect that this would be more likely to improve the quality of the environments in which children are born, grow and learn.⁵

Over the longer term, HELP’s vision is that the Indicators Framework becomes the internationally-sanctioned mechanism for meeting obligations to submit periodic reports to the CRC. More importantly, it could also serve as a self-assessment tool for countries to identify existing gaps in policies and services that impact on the lives of children. This could inform and encourage all 193 signatory countries to invest in the implementation of broad-based early child development policies and to monitor their effectiveness, at the population level, over time.

THE GC7 INDICATORS FRAMEWORK

While GC7 represents authoritative guidance to States parties in fulfilling their CRC obligations to young children, without a corresponding operationalized framework of indicators, GC7 has limited practical usefulness and remains underutilized. The GC7 Indicators Framework is designed as an efficient self-assessment and

reporting tool, able to promote both better data collection and more comprehensive reporting.

The GC7 Indicators Framework is organized into 15 child rights themes, based on the rights enshrined in the Convention. In each theme area, countries are asked a series of questions about their early childhood policies and programs as well as child development outcomes. When countries indicate there are policies or programs in place, they are asked to upload relevant reports and documentation to support their responses.

With the approval and guidance of the UNCRC, agreement was reached that the Indicators Framework should be piloted in a low, middle and high-income country to ensure its effectiveness, viability and universality.

Following pilot testing of the Indicators Framework in the United Republic of Tanzania (September 2009 - April 2010), an electronic version of the Framework was developed to increase the efficiency of the data collection and reporting process. The electronic version (E-version) of the Framework (translated into Spanish) was pilot tested in Chile (May - Dec 2011).

Data collected from these two pilots (in low- and middle-income countries, respectively) demonstrate that the process of implementing the Indicators Framework more widely could have a significant impact on social awareness and in building child rights capacity as a precondition to improving early child development outcomes.

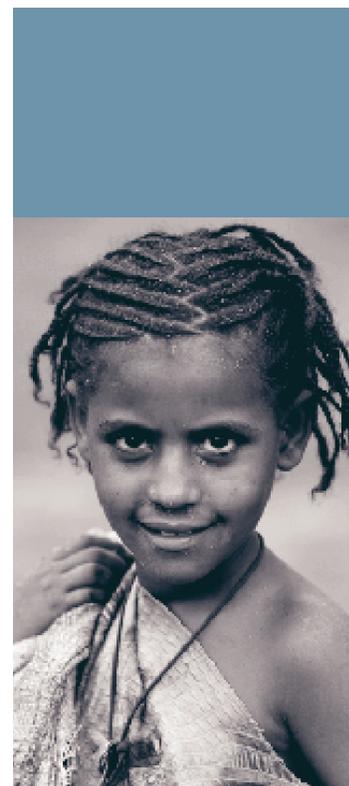
WHICH ENVIRONMENTS MATTER?

The environments in which children spend their early years have a profound influence on their development and well-being. Environments from the most proximal, such as family, to the most distal, such as the social and political, all matter a great deal. Early experiences shape our development as humans. Positive and negative experiences become ‘embedded’ in the biology of brains and bodies during the early years, persisting far into adult life and influencing our health and well-being. Genes and environments interact to determine how early experiences affect our development.



TABLE 1 : THE GC7 INDICATORS

GC7 INDICATORS	key questions
1 Dissemination of GC7	What measures have been taken by your government to disseminate and promote a rights-based understanding with respect to young children and to assess the impact on knowledge and practice of such “dissemination” processes?
2 A Positive Agenda	What resources have been allocated to develop, implement, assess and report on the impact of an approach with a Positive Agenda on the realisation of child rights for all young children and particularly those from vulnerable or otherwise excluded groups?
3 Human Rights Training	What resources have been allocated to the development, delivery and impact assessment of specifically targeted good-quality human rights training through professional organisations, educational institutions, parenting information, or other organisations and media?
4 Data Collection Systems	What resources and measures are in place to ensure that your government develops and implements suitable data collection systems that can provide disaggregated analysis on the impact of services on the development of all young children across social groups? What resources and measures are in place to promote and support good-quality multidisciplinary research on issues affecting the development of these young children?
5 Birth Registration	What measures are in place or what progress has been made towards implementing or analysing the success of a free-of-charge, non-discriminatory and accessible birth registration system intended to encourage the maximum levels of child registration as soon as possible after birth?
6 Participation in Family Decision-Making	What measures are in place to provide parents and caregivers with information which supports child participation in household decision making, promotes respect for evolving capacities as an enabling principle, and assesses the impact of such programmes?
7 Violence Against Young Children	What measures are in place to support parents and other caregivers in preventing violence or abuse towards young children, to hold perpetrators accountable, to facilitate the recovery of affected young children, and to ensure adequate recording of the prevalence of violence or abuse and the impact on prevalence of any preventive measures?
8 Basic Material Needs	What measures are in place to assess the basic material needs of young children? Further, what measures are in place to provide for those needs and to assess the effectiveness of these measures in meeting the needs of both the general population of young children and those in excluded or vulnerable categories?
9a Breastfeeding and Complementary Feeding	What measures are in place to support both the understanding and capacity of parents, particularly mothers, to promote the beneficial practice of breastfeeding and the appropriate use of complementary feeding?
9b Access To and Use of Health Services	What steps have been taken to ensure equitable access to health services of equal and sufficient quality that ensure both the young child’s right to life and health and support to parents and caregivers in their primary responsibilities?
10 Age-Appropriate Health Education	What programmes are in place to ensure that young children have access to age-appropriate health education and to assess the preventative impact of such programmes on health-related behaviours and specific health outcomes?
11 Provision of Early Childhood Education and Care Services	What services are available to further the educational rights of young children and what measures are in place to ensure quality standards in materials and service delivery?
12 Educational Provision for Vulnerable Young Children	What measures or initiatives, specifically targeted at vulnerable or excluded populations, are in place to ensure equality of access to quality educational services in early childhood, and what impact have they had?
13 Knowledge of Rights and Capacity to Support Their Realization	What measures, initiatives and resources are in place to ensure the provision of human rights education for young children in formal and non-formal settings, particularly to support the capacity of parents and/or caregivers in their role as first educators, and to assess the impact of such initiatives?
14 Play, Leisure and Rest Opportunities for Young Children	What measures are in place to provide for the young child’s right to play through access to adequate and appropriate play opportunities and spaces, to participate in the design of such spaces, and to challenge discrimination against excluded populations?
15 Inclusive Policy and Provisions for Vulnerable Groups	What measures are in place to investigate and challenge the root causes of discrimination against young children and to ensure that young children from vulnerable populations are given equality of access to services of equal quality?

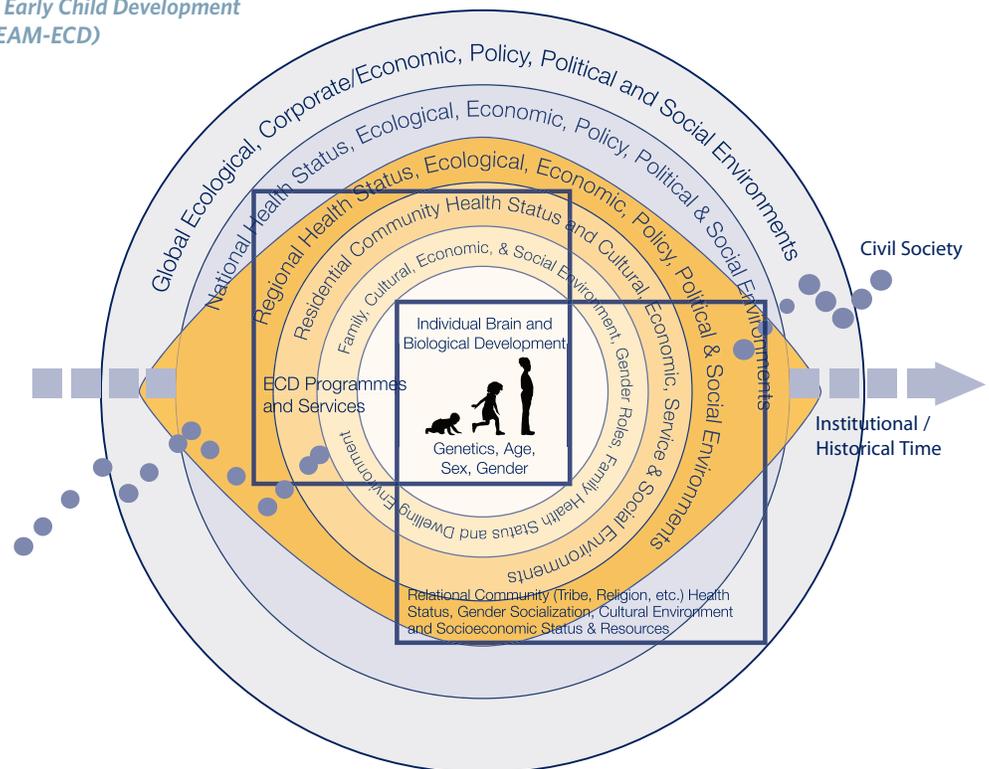




Raising physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually healthy children requires that we provide them with environments that stimulate their physical, language and cognitive, and social and emotional development.⁶ Every child has a right to a safe and nurturing childhood in which she or he can develop and grow to their full potential—free from violence, neglect and exploitation. Every child has the right to good health, to learn and to play.⁷ The Convention

on the Rights of the Child, and specifically General Comment No. 7, enshrines these rights. When fully implemented, these internationally sanctioned instruments assist States parties to institute policies and programs aimed at young children that will maximize developmental outcomes of the early years. But how do you do that without a corresponding operationalized framework?

**Total Environment Assessment Model
for Early Child Development
(TEAM-ECD)**



1. UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b38f0.html>
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3. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), *CRC General Comment No. 7 (2005): Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood*, 20 September 2006, CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/460bc5a62.html>
4. Palmer, A., et al. "Does ratification of human rights treaties have effects on population health?" *The Lancet* (2009) 373(6): 1987-92.
5. WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health. Final Report. *Closing the Gap in a Generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2008.
6. Siddiqi, Irwin and Hertzman. Total Environment Assessment Model for Early Child Development: Evidence Report, 2007. Available at: http://www.who.int/social_determinants/resources/ecd_kn_evidence_report_2007.pdf
7. Articles 24, 28 and 31, respectively, of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.