MAY 6–8, 2026

INVESTING IN THE EARLY YEARS

A Global Technical Financing Forum

KIGALI, RWANDA

#ECDFinancingForum

In support of Act For Early Years

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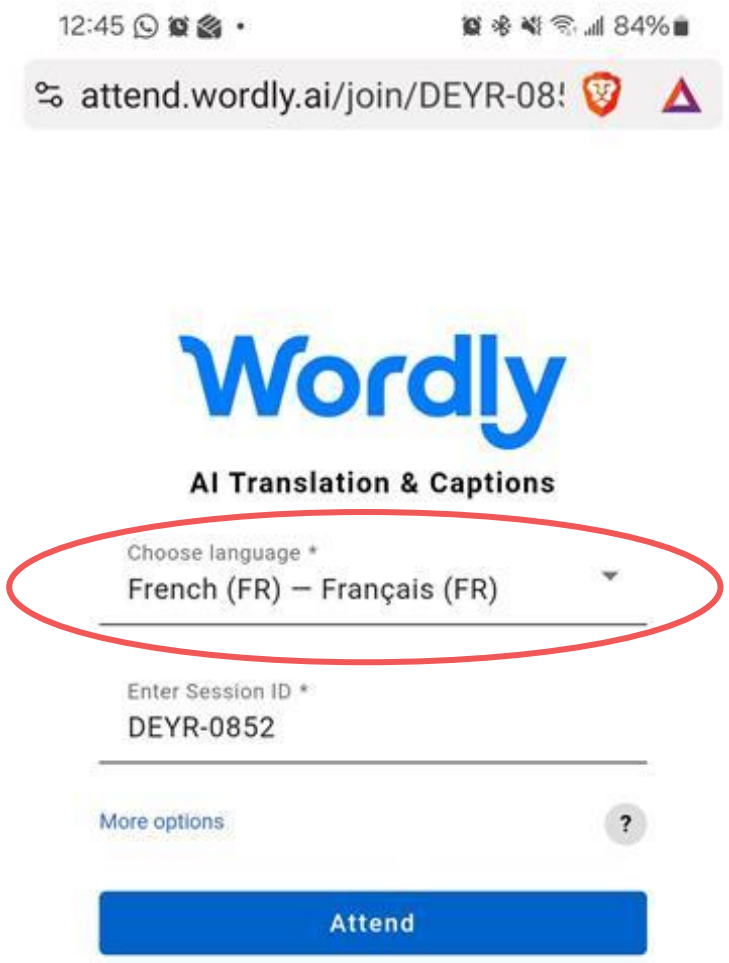

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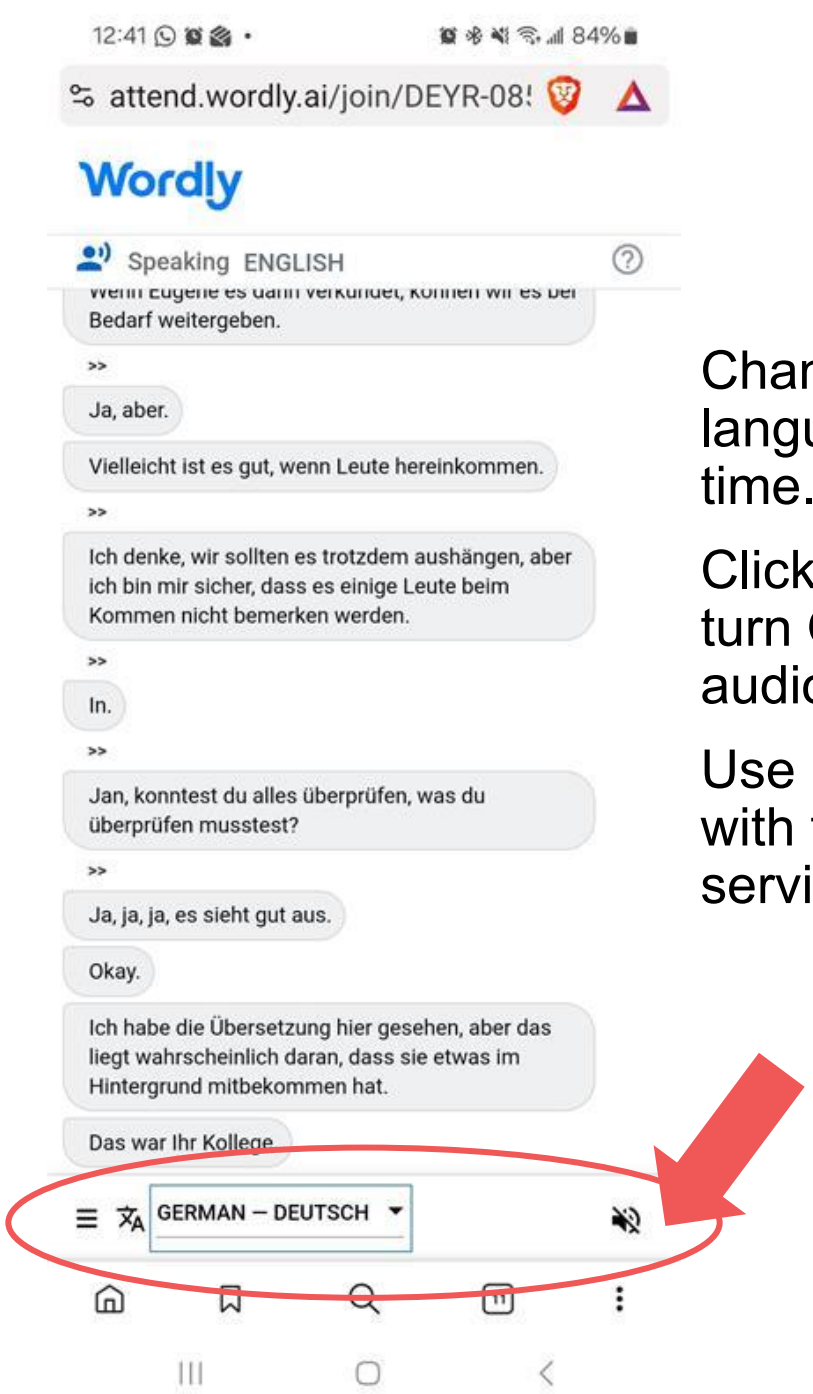

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Forum Framing Question:

How do we establish sustainable financing ecosystems for all young children at scale?

Borhene Chakroun

Director, Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO

ECDAN Executive Leadership Council Co-Chair

Consolée Uwimana

Honourable Minister of Gender and Family Promotion

Setting the Scene: Forum Overview

- Elizabeth Lule, Executive Director, ECDAN
- Gilbert Munyemana, Deputy Director General, National Child Development Agency
- Chemba Raghavan, Global Lead, Early Childhood Development, UNICEF
- Rokhaya Diawara, Education Programme Specialist, ECCE Lead, UNESCO
- Nuhu Yaqub Jr, Adviser Child Health Services, WHO
- Rosemary Mwaisaka, Technical Advisor, Africa Early Childhood Network

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Sanjana Janardhanan
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Pre-Forum Financing Workshop with NCDA and Ministry of Finance, Rwanda

Forum Framing Question:

How do we establish sustainable financing ecosystems for all young children at scale?

Biniam Bedasso

Research Fellow, Education Team - Europe, Center for Global Development

The Global Financing Landscape Has Shifted: What Does It Mean for Young Children?

Biniam Badasso, Center for Global Development
May 6, 2026

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THE MACRO SCENE

A much tighter financing world

The SDG era began in a more forgiving financing environment. That world is gone.

–23.1%

ODA, 2025 (real terms)

Largest annual drop on record. Bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa fell 26.3%.

OECD · preliminary 2025 data

$741bn

Net debt outflow, 2022–24

Developing countries paid out more in debt service than they received in new external financing: the largest gap in 50+ years.

World Bank · IDR 2025

$415bn

Interest paid in 2024 alone

A record sum for developing countries — resources that could have gone to schooling, primary healthcare, and essential infrastructure.

World Bank · IDR 2025

Aid is retreating. Debt burden has grown significantly. Capital costs more. Fiscal space for social investment narrows across the board.

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF TRIAGE

When fiscal space tightens, ECD faces larger risk

Long-horizon, cross-sector, institutionally fragmented, no single owner. In a crisis, that's exactly the budget that loses.

Tighter fiscal space
Debt, aid, borrowing cost

→

Crisis triage
Protect what's visible

→

Long-horizon sectors suffer
Human capital loses framing

→

ECD doubly vulnerable
Fragmented + long-horizon

Evidence: how African governments responded to the 2025 aid shock

Across 442 government-involved events tracked in 54 African countries, health dominated the direct response. Education barely registered, in rhetoric or action. Crisis politics protects the immediate and visible; ECD, which sits across ministries with long-horizon returns, falls out of frame.

Source: CGD aid-shock tracker, 2025

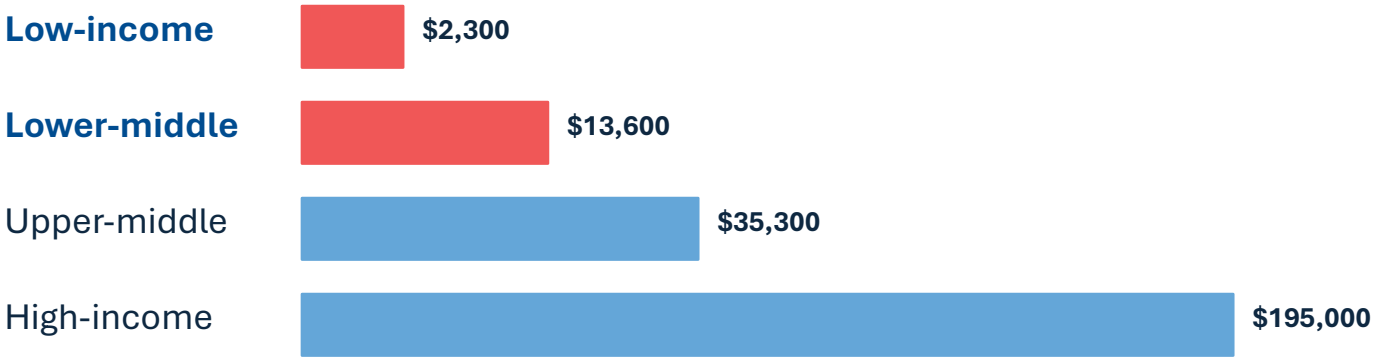
Too little. Too late. Too fragmented.

ECD enters the harder financing world from an already weak base. The gap between rich and poor widens at the very stage when spending matters most.

A · HOW MUCH

Cumulative public spending per child, birth to 18

PPP US$, 84-country study

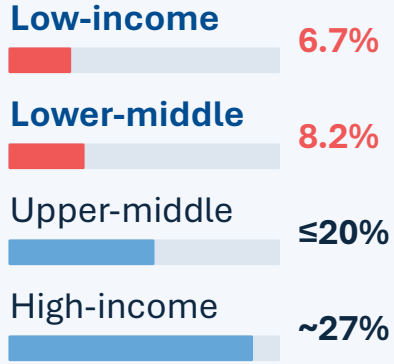


Bars use square-root scaling so smaller groups remain visible; values shown at right.

B · HOW EARLY

Share reaching ages 0–5

of the cumulative child envelope



The gap compounds: poorer countries spend less per child, and less of it arrives early. Global median parity score: 0.5.

Low spending is compounded by fragmented institutional responsibility.

Sources: UNICEF/Columbia/York, Too Little, Too Late (Richardson et al., 2023; 84 countries). Africa context: pre-primary <0.2% of GDP, <2% of education aid to ECE (Ajayi et al., 2024).

DOMESTIC FISCAL LEVERS

New openings in a tighter world

Even under pressure, countries still have levers to raise, protect, and redirect fiscal space, with ECD positioned as a priority within them.

01

Raise

Expand fiscal space

- Digital tax systems and compliance
- Reduce illicit financial flows
- Health (sin) taxes and earmarks

02

Protect

Make ECD visible and durable

- Spending floors for basic services
- Credible accountability mechanisms
- Resilience against shocks and cuts

03

Recycle

Redirect debt and risk

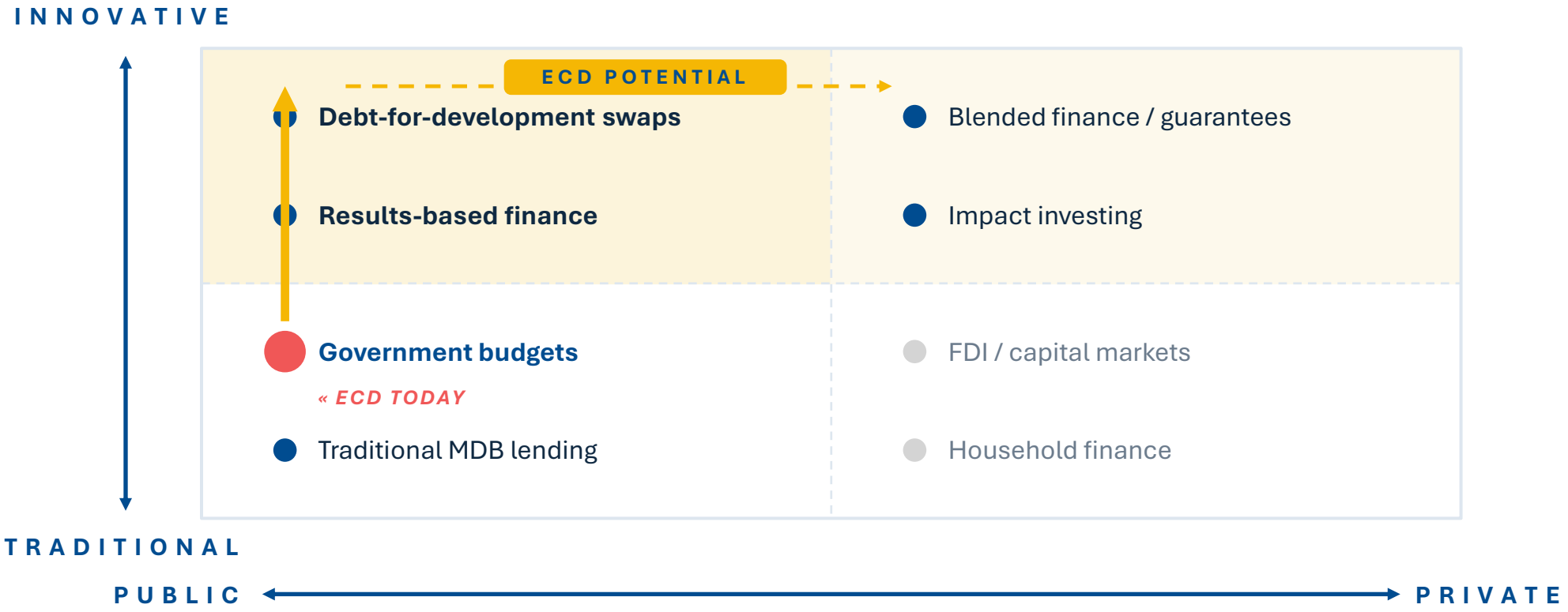
- Debt-for-development swaps
- Climate-resilient debt swaps
- Result-based instruments for ECD

Some low-income countries already prioritize ECD beyond what their income predicts — evidence that policy choice, not GDP, drives early-years allocation.

STRUCTURAL SHIFT IN FINANCING ARCHITECTURE

ECD can tap a broader set of capital sources & financing instruments

As ODA retreats, the question is not only what is shrinking, but what forms of capital are growing, and what is connectable to ECD.



ECD's growth path runs UP through innovative public instruments first — and laterally into innovative private cautiously.

CONCESSIONAL FINANCE · EVIDENCE

Where MDB reform meets ECD demand

MDB reform unlocks new headroom, and ECE is already where country demand and Bank delivery capacity converge.

MDB REFORM · A WIDER OPENING

$650bn in additional MDB lending headroom from capital adequacy reforms, hybrid capital, and risk transfers over the next decade.

WB ECE PORTFOLIO · A LIVING EXAMPLE

25% of the World Bank's education portfolio is now focused on early childhood education.

DEMAND SIDE

Countries climb the ladder, then pivot to ECE

As countries near universal primary, demand pivots to ECE. A policy learning curve in motion.

SUPPLY SIDE

ECE outperforms every other education subsector

Relative success rating. CGD analysis of WB projects, 1998–2022.

Concessional finance can build the core where commitment exists, and catalyze it where it doesn't.

RESPONSE STRATEGY

A tougher baseline requires a stronger response

Aid stays tight	Borrowing costs run high	Competition intensifies
no rebound through 2028	*rates near multi-decade highs*	*climate, conflict, humanitarian*

01

Protect

Put ECD inside core fiscal frameworks, visible budget lines, and protected expenditure floors.

02

Integrate

One financing conversation across health, education, nutrition, childcare, and social protection.

03

Leverage

Use concessional and results-based finance to strengthen systems and institutions, not parallel islands.

04

Connect

Position ECD inside growing capital flows — care economy, human capital, FfD4 platforms.

The challenge is not just mobilizing more funds. It is building institutions and systems, strengthening PFM for ECD, and making early childhood finance more resilient and sustainable.

THE WINDOW

Why this moment matters

The next 2–3 years are a window to shape where ECD sits in the next development-finance architecture.

- **Debt, tax, and blended-finance platforms are moving now**
- **MDB reform is reshaping what concessional finance can do**
- **ECD needs to be in these conversations before the architecture hardens**

Thank you

Together, we can unlock financing that will translate evidence into budgets and budgets into services for young children and their families!

Borhene Chakroun

Director, Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO

The Financing Gap and Opportunity: What Is the Scale of the Challenge?

Borhene Chakroun, UNESCO
May 6, 2026

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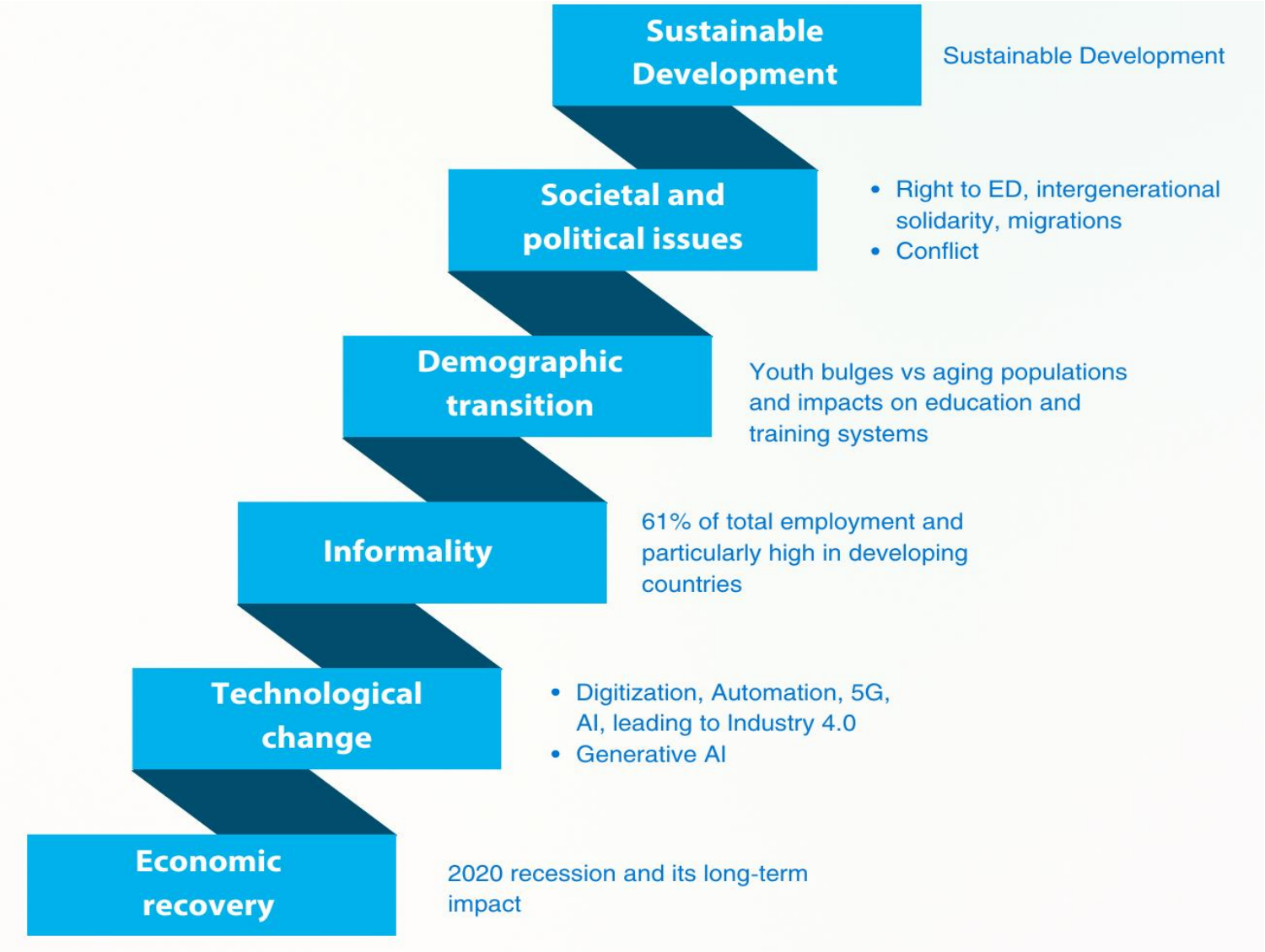
The Global Financing Gap and opportunity
What is the Scale of the Challenge?

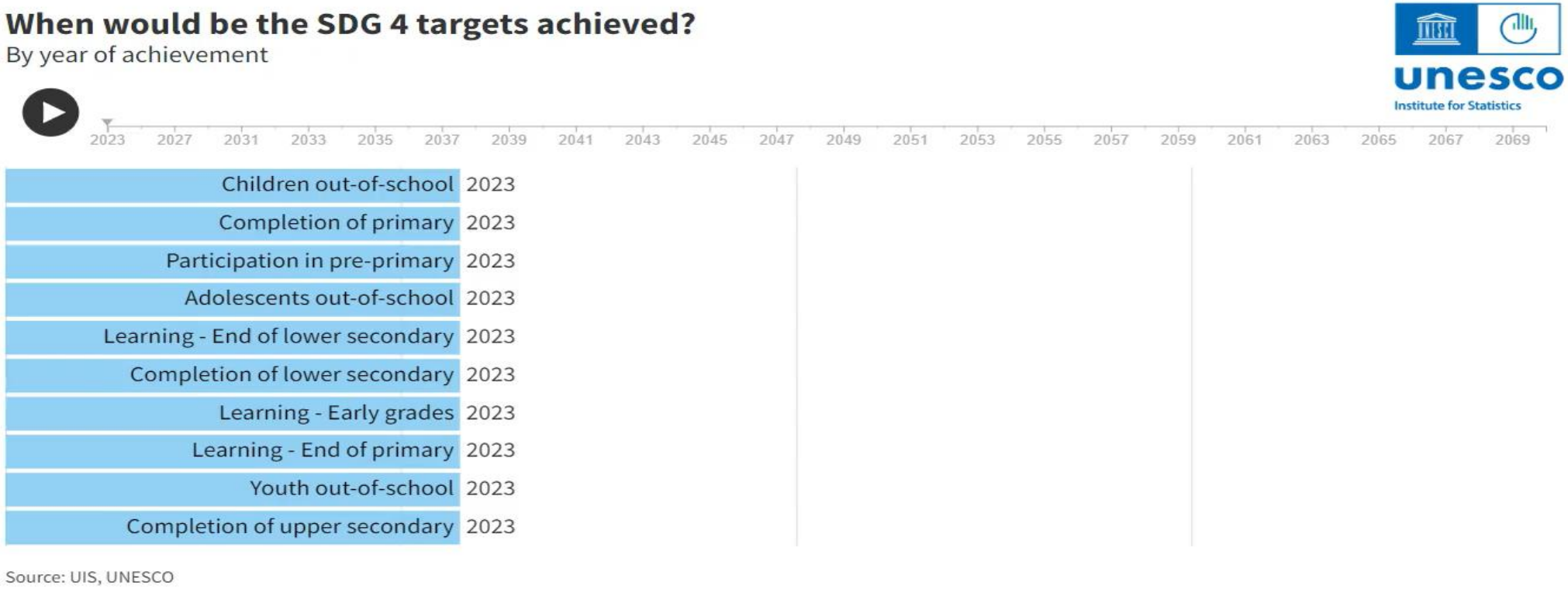
Headlines

- Understand the broad trends shaping the current spending
- Examine UNESCO and Partners work on financing ECCE
- Returns and costs of inaction in the early years Perspective
- Current spending trends and investment patterns
- Remaining financing gap and scale of action required

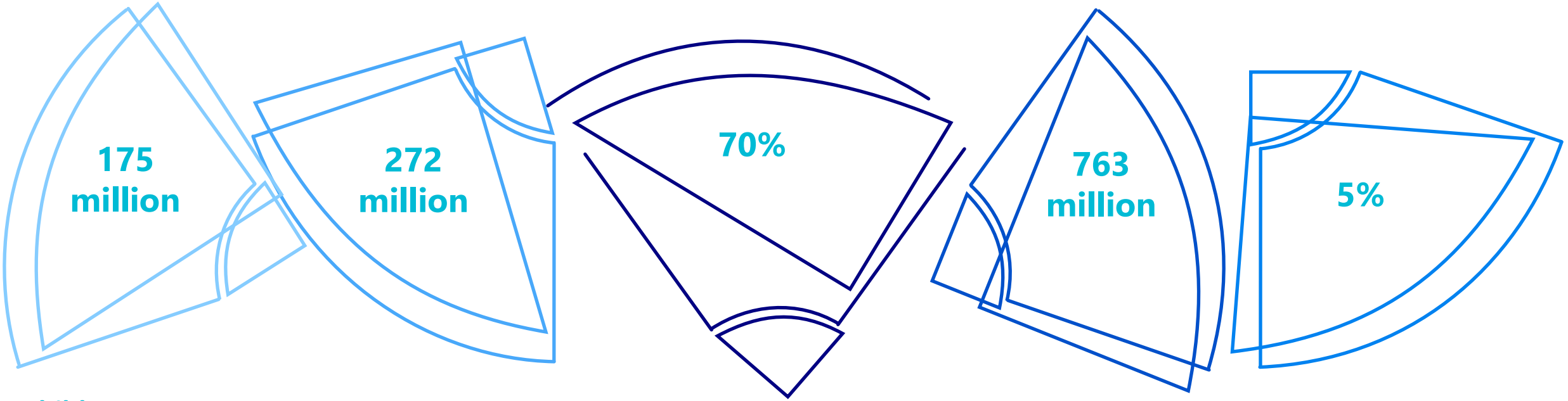
World in transition and poly-crisis



Learning Crisis: The World is Off-Track in Achieving SDG4



A Continuum of Challenges
A Leaky Pipeline – A Lifelong Learning Failure



Children are not enrolled in pre-primary education

Children out of school

of 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries cannot read a simple text

Adults cannot read and write

Less than 5% of adults have access to Adult Learning and Education

Key numbers about the debt burdens

A snapshot of growing financial pressures on developing countries in 2024

$31 trillion

Developing countries' public debt in 2024

$921 billion

Developing countries' net interest payments on public debt in 2024

3.4 bn people

Live in countries that spend more on interest payments than on either health or education

Source: UNCTAD (2025). A World of Debt Report: 2025
Note: UNCTAD Secretariat calculations based on IMF World Economic Outlook (April 2025). "Developing countries" refer to countries which are classified as "emerging market and developing economies" in IMF's World Economic Outlook. For a detailed methodology, please refer to *International Monetary Fund*. "World Economic Outlook: Statistical Appendix", Washington, D.C.

Shrinking Fiscal Space

0,4%

Is the global median spending on pre-primary education

Global Education Finance Context

- Global SDG4 **funding shortage**: Low- and lower-income countries face the largest funding gap with **US$ 97 billion per year to reach national SDG4 targets** *(and this need is continuing to grow)*
- ODA share to education has **declined to 8.4%** (2023), total USD 12.69 billion
- **ODA under immense pressure** due to current global political shifts and crises, with negative consequences for support to education

Domestic funding under pressure

- Domestic (tax) revenues most important source of funding education policies (more than 90% of education budget).
- **Domestic budgets inadequate and under pressure**: from 178 countries with data for 2017–2022, 34% did not meet either of the established benchmarks of at least 4-6% of GDP and 15-20% of total public expenditure.
- ***2022 Tashkent Declaration*** *call for 10% education budget to Preprimary*

What do we know globally about the returns of investment in young children and the costs of inaction?

The Global Human Capital Imperative

Investing in the early years is not a discretionary policy choice; it is a legally binding human rights obligation

The smartest investment available to modern states

Governments hold the primary legal obligation to fulfill children's rights; public funding is the non-negotiable backbone of a resilient system

Shifting from "remedial" fiscal policy (fixing problems later) to "preventative" investment in foundational human capital

We are at a decisive moment where the realization of children's rights depends entirely on adequate and equitable financing

The Economic Calculus (Multi-Sectoral ROI)

The Heckman Equation demonstrates that returns are highest (up to $17 for every $1 invested) during the first five years, when 90% of brain development occurs.

According to the 2024 *Lancet* Series, providing one year of ECCE in LMICs can generate potential benefits 8 to 19 times larger than the cost.

In a study cited by Mississippi State University, universal pre-K enrollment increased parental revenues by 21.7% and maternal labor force participation by 15% for low-income families

The Staggering Price of Inaction

- UNESCO, OECD and the Commonwealth Secretariat report (June 202) entitled "*The price of inaction: The global private, fiscal and social costs of children and youth not learning*" puts the cost to the global economy of children lacking basic skills at US$10 trillion a year by 2030

- The **World Bank HCI+ (2025)**, a 10-unit increase in a country's human capital score corresponds to a **10% increase in future earnings**

- Inaction on stunting and anemia results in **$761 billion in annual economic costs** (roughly 1% of global GNI)

Missed early investment deepens the learning crisis and future inequalities

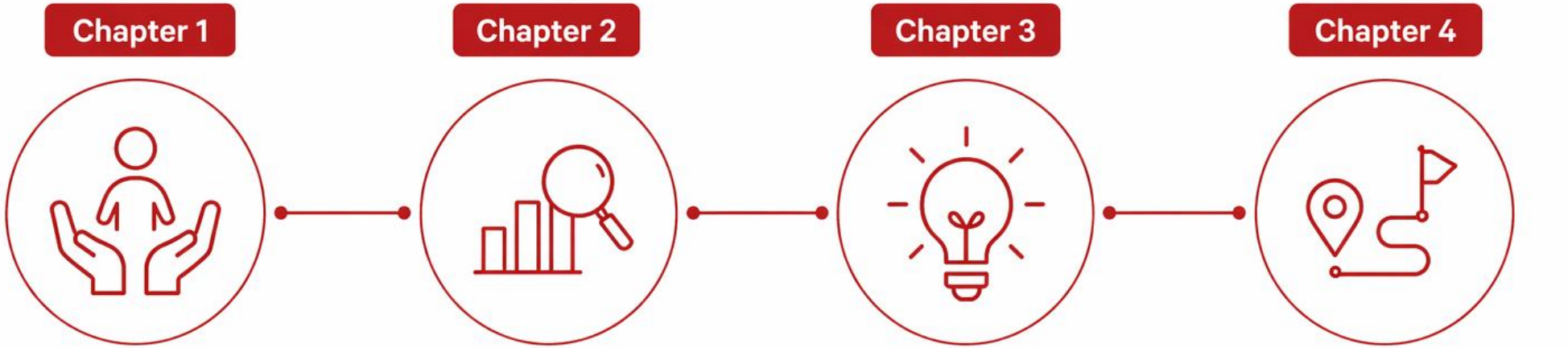
Delayed action increases later costs for education, health, social protection and productivity

The question is no longer whether to invest, but how fast and how equitably

What is the current spending trends and investment patterns?

Invest early, reap big returns
Interventions in the earliest years yields the highest returns

Step change from Point A to Point B (First Things First)



WHY?

Why a sequenced and stacked child policy portfolio is crucial

WHERE ARE WE NOW? (Point A)

The current state of early childhood care and education policy, investment, and how it is managed

WHAT WORKS WHERE?

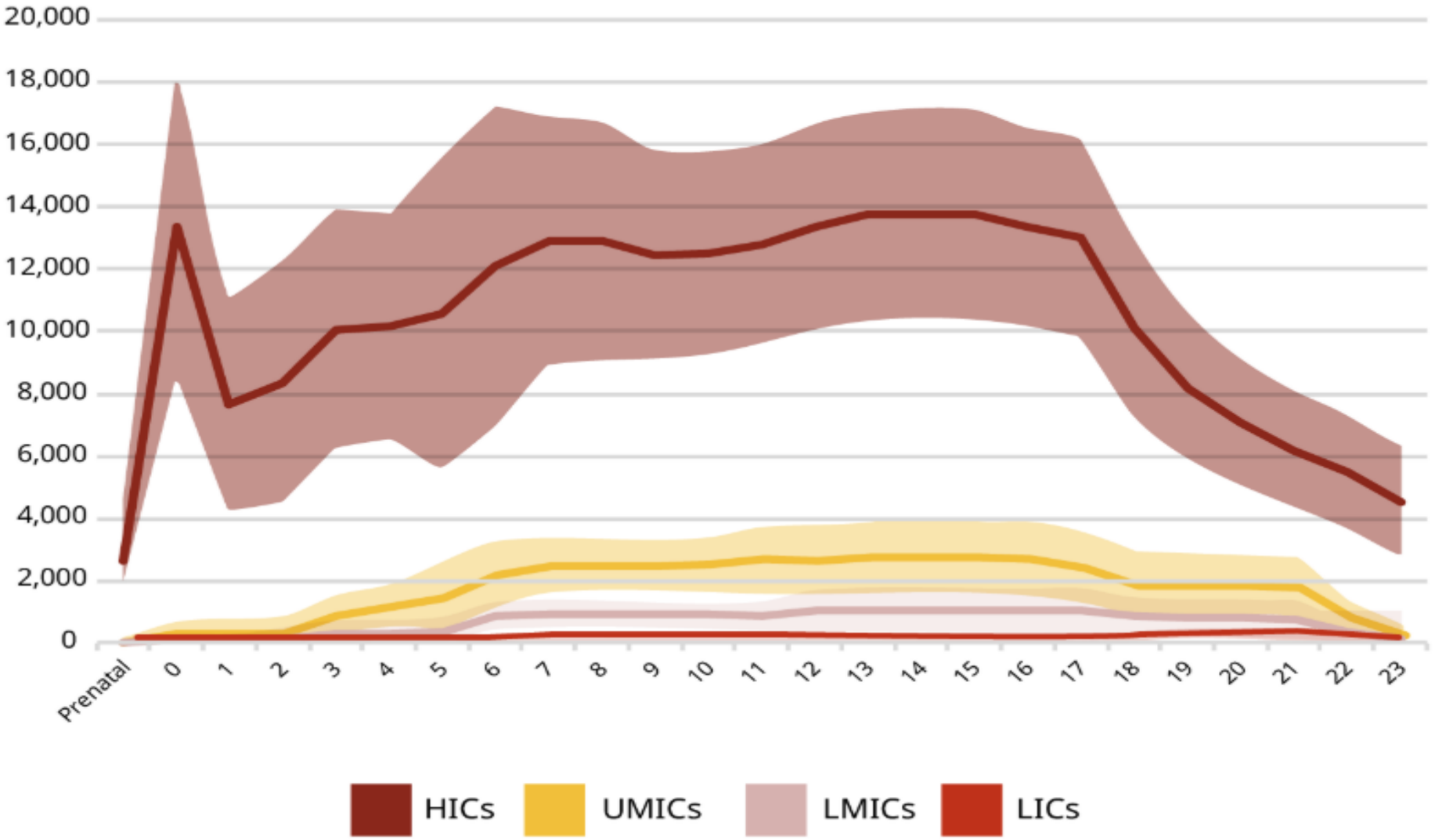
Evidence on what works, when, and for whom in building a child policy portfolio (prenatal to age 8)

HOW DO WE GET TO POINT B?

From what works to how it can be done: principles and actionable pathways for effective ECCE policy portfolios

Despite making up one-third of the world's children, those under 6 receive only 15.7% of child-related public spending. First Things First calls for a sequenced mix of universal and targeted policies to close this gap from the start

Comparing spending by age by income groups



The Financing and Data Gaps and Scale of Action Required

The Data Gap Problem
Why We Cannot Estimate the True ECCE Financing Gap

- **The $21B financing gap only covers *one year of pre-primary education* — not the full Nurturing Care Framework**
  - Existing estimates (UNESCO GEM Report) are limited to organized learning (SDG 4.2.2) and exclude health, nutrition & caregiving dimensions entirely
  - Health & nutrition represent more than 70% of international ECCE/ECD donor funding yet remain untraceable at domestic level; no country-disaggregated data Critical gap

- **No common framework exists to track domestic financing across the 5 Nutring Care Framework domains**
  - Health systems budget for *maternal & child health* broadly; nutrition is tracked via food systems neither disaggregates for 0–8 age range
  - OECD-CRS coding and sector markers are inconsistent, keyword searching yields wide upper/lower bound gaps with no agreed methodology No standard
  - Domestic & out-of-pocket ECCE/ECD expenditure data largely absent or non-comparable across LMIC

- **Multi-sectoral data fragmentation makes cross-sector financing analysis structurally impossible**
  - Education, health & social protection ministries operate separate budget lines with no cross-sector ECD coding at national level Siloed systems
  - Only $2.3 per child/year tracked for non-health ECCE/ECD activities globally, actual investment far higher but invisible to measurement

Global Report on ECCE (Edition 2024): Key Takeaways

The financing gap in pre-primary education is much more serious than in other levels of education.

Table 8

Average annual total budget, cost and financing gap for one year of pre-primary education (2023–2030) (in USD billion)

	Low-income			Lower-middle-income			Total		
	Budget	Cost	Gap	Budget	Cost	Gap	Budget	Cost	Gap
In USD billion	2	5	3	21	39	17	23	44	21
As share of GDP	0.4%	0.9%	0.5%	0.3%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%

Note: Reported estimates are unweighted country averages. All figures are expressed in constant 2019 USD.

Source: UNESCO (2023a), p. 333.

The costing exercise revealed that achieving the national targets for one year of pre-primary education in low-income and lower-middle-income countries will cost a cumulative **USD 354 billion** between 2023 and 2030, or **USD 44 billion per year** on average.

The annual average financing gap between 2023 and 2030 is estimated to be **USD 21 billion or 47% of the total cost of achieving the national targets** for one year of pre-primary education.

Implications for Governments and International Community

Contribute to producing good quality data on education finance

Support countries to spend more equitably and more efficiently

Be a voice of reason in education finance discussions

- hold partners to account
- recommend realistic solutions
- keep big picture in focus: tax, long-term, aid for development

Thinking ahead: The Roadmap to post-2030 Agenda

Global Report on ECCE (Edition 2026): Report Framing

Data Embargo: Please note that while early background papers suggest a transformative shift in how we value the early years, all specific new data remains **under embargo** until the official global launch date

- **Positions ECCE** within a broader human rights, macro-developmental and educational context
- Aligns with global commitments and creates opportunities to **position ECCE at a higher priority level in a global debate**
- **Focuses on Financing** for equitable and inclusive access to quality ECCE as a priority theme
- **Provides progress assessment** on the realisation of SDG 4 and key regional commitments
- **Offers innovative financing solutions,** particularly for reaching the most marginalised young children and underserved age groups

A joint effort by UNESCO, UNICEF, the OECD, global and regional ECD networks and other development partners

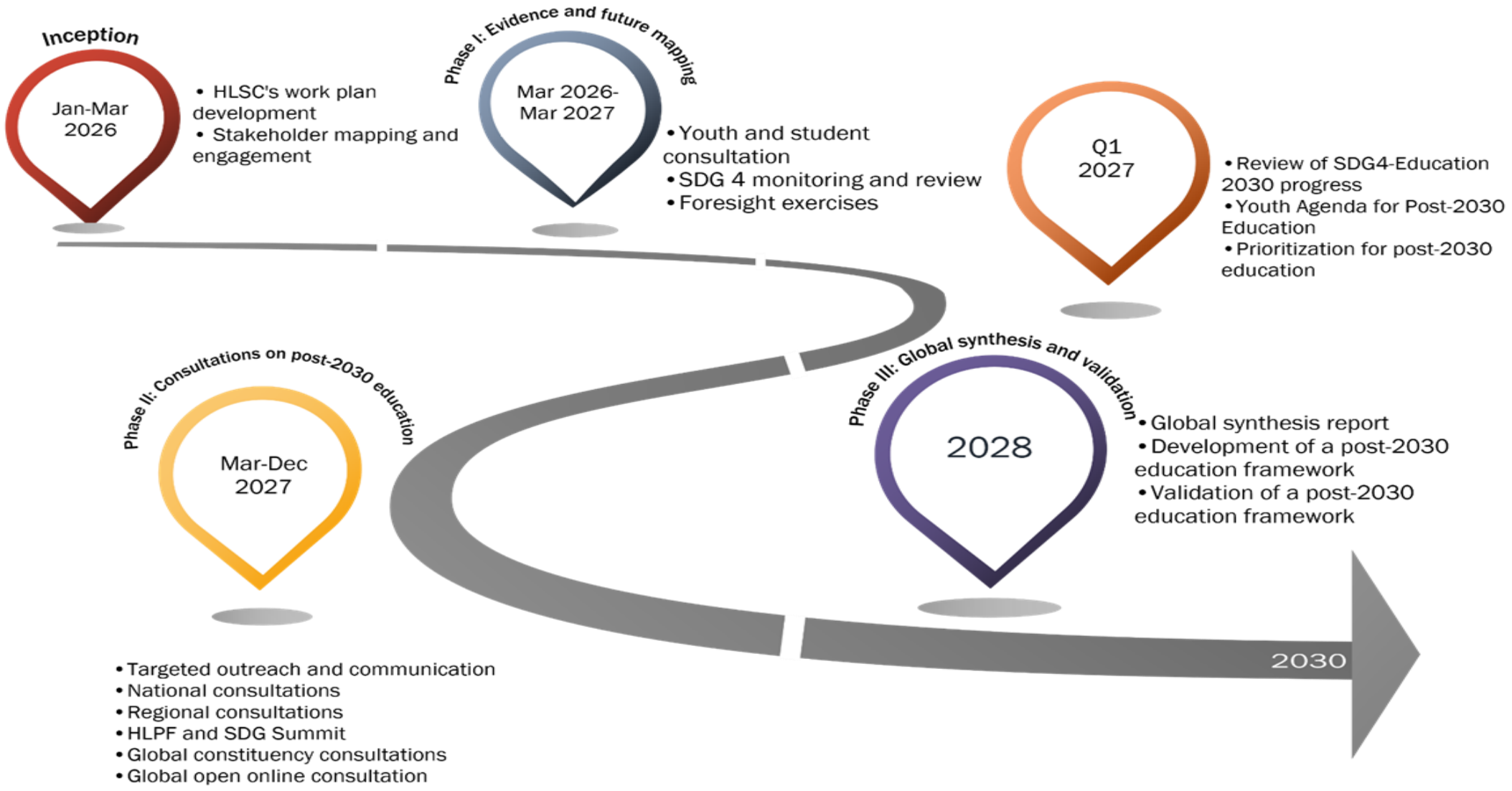
Dual structure

Part I: Progress on SDG 4.2 and ECCE system development

Part II: Financing as a lever for inclusion, equity and quality

Part III: Strategic recommendations for governments and development partners on effective ECCE policies for accelerating ECCE progress to 2030 and beyond

Shaping the post-2030 global education agenda: A Roadmap



Thank you

Together, we can unlock financing that will translate evidence into budgets and budgets into services for young children and their families!

Georgina Bonet Arroyo

Technical Officer - Health Financing, WHO

Financing Health Systems for Sustainable Early Child Development

Georgina Bonet, WHO – Africa Region
May 6, 2026

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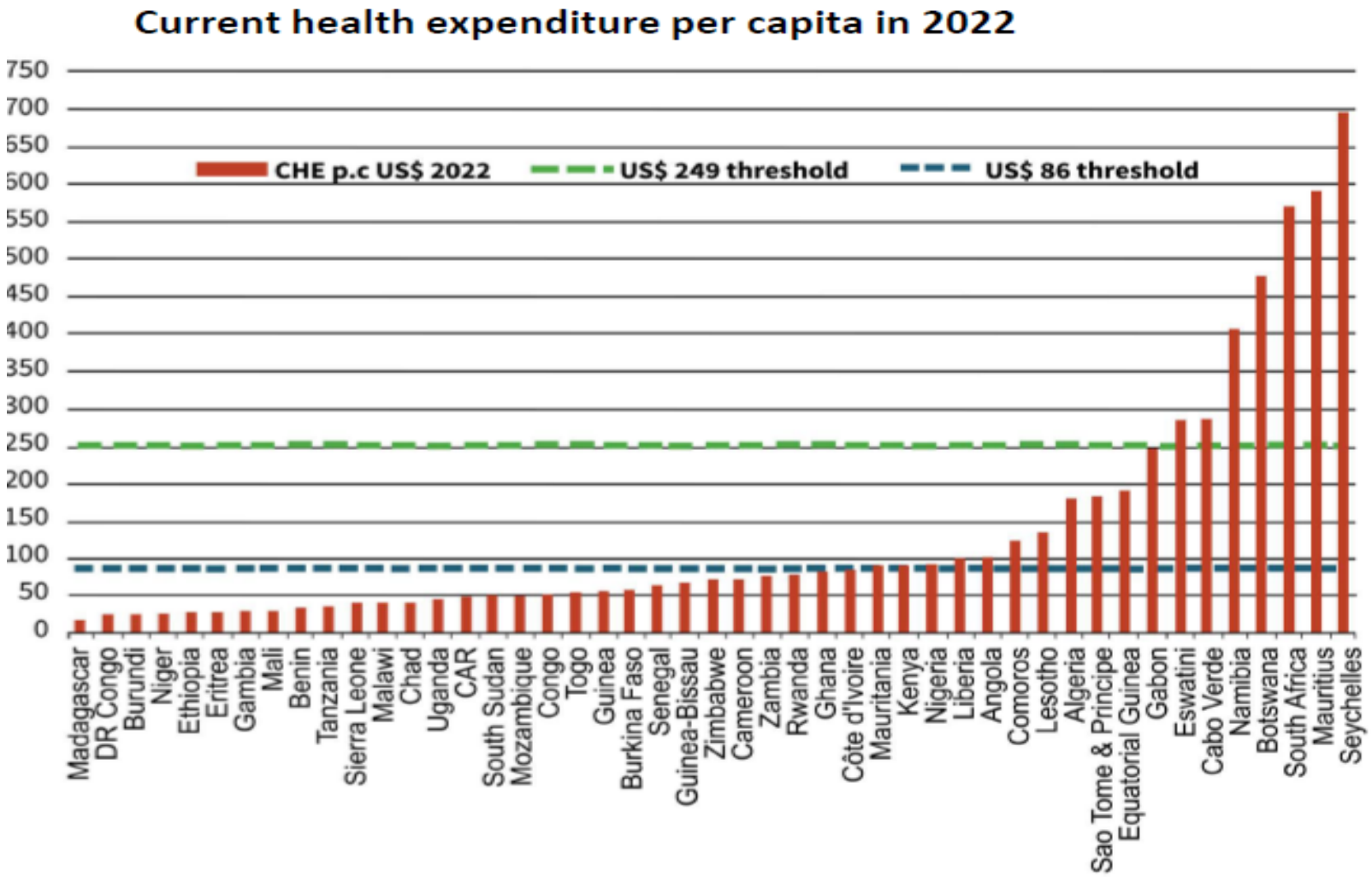
Health Financing landscape

WHO African Region



UNEVEN AND UNDERFINANCED HEALTH SYSTEMS

- **Uneven current health spending** pc ranging from $16 to $700
- **80% countries remain below $86 pc ($132)** threshold for essential services
- **About 90% below 249$ pc** (361$) to make progress towards SDG3
- **Out-of-Pocket averages about 35–36%** of current health expenditure (CHE)

Shifts in the Global Financing Landscape

Towards Self-Financed and Efficient Health Systems

From aid-dominant for LIC/LMIC to constrained mixed financing	• **External financing remains pivotal but volatile** – 40% in some countries, raising sustainability and alignment concerns. • Domestic government spending on health has increased, but progress is slow . In Africa, only a few countries implement 15% Abuja commitment; 5% GDP benchmark
Governments' ability to invest in health depends on macro-fiscal conditions	• Limited capacity to tax policy implementation (collection, tax evasion, admin capacity) • Debt pressures further constrain fiscal space - Debt limits ability to prioritize and expand health budgets
Persistent reliance on out-of-pocket spending, instead of prepaid public financing	•*In Africa, medicines and pharmaceuticals are the main driver of OOP.* •*56% of OOP spending is on medicines (median) and* •*60% among the poorest quintile – It is the biggest financial protection challenge* •*Exclusion of essential early child development interventions in benefit package contributes to OOPS*
Chronic fragmentation	• Fragmentation in financing streams – financing different benefit packages • Within and cross health programs, leading to inefficiencies in the system due to misalignment and/or duplications.

Domestic and Sustainable Financing for Health

Countries' approaches

REVENUE-RAISING REFORMS

- Health Taxes – channel to health
- General Tax policy & Admin reforms (tax-to-GDP ratio)
- Debt conversion and innovative fiscal instruments
- MDB Investments and Opportunities for Countries

BUDGET PRIORITIZATION and POOLING REFORMS

- Earmarked or rule-based budget
- Pooling and contributory reforms (expand mandatory contributions and consolidation of pools – reduce fragmentation)

PFM Reforms / Efficiency

- Program performance-based budgeting
- Credible MTPF and execution
- Strategic Purchasing – PFM rules and budget reforms
- Direct Facility Financing and cash management

Key Messages

The health sector is well poised to support ECD; however, it is underfunded (LIC/LMICS) to deliver comprehensive essential RMNCAH and nutrition services at high levels of coverage and with quality.

Reliance on domestic and public financing to sustain RMNCAH services is key to transition from external financing dependency and reduce OOP spending.

Accelerating investments to strengthen PHC systems is key to deliver holistic, cost-effective RMNCAH interventions.

It is key to integrate priority interventions for ECD in essential RMNCAH service package, as part of the wider health essential package (or benefit package).

A 2% annual increase above current RMNCAH spending could prevent needless deaths of 147 million children globally, 32 million stillbirths, and 5 million women by 2035

Donor funding for RMNCAH and nutrition services can be effectively leveraged to enhance governments' support for child survival, health and development interventions in a more holistic way.

Thank you

Together, we can unlock financing that will translate evidence into budgets and budgets into services for young children and their families!

Dominic Richardson

Managing Director,
Learning For Well-being Institute

First Things First: A Hierarchy of Child Policies to Optimize Education and Well-being

Dominic Richardson, Learning For Well-being Institute
May 6, 2026

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— THE SCALE OF THE CRISIS

~290M

Children aged 0–5 in low-income countries are at risk of never reaching their potential. The window to act is now, and it is closing.

The **aim** of this report is to provide contextually-relevant recommendations of how to move from ***'Point A'*** to ***'Point B'*** to enable every child reach their full developmental potential (UNICEF, 2024).

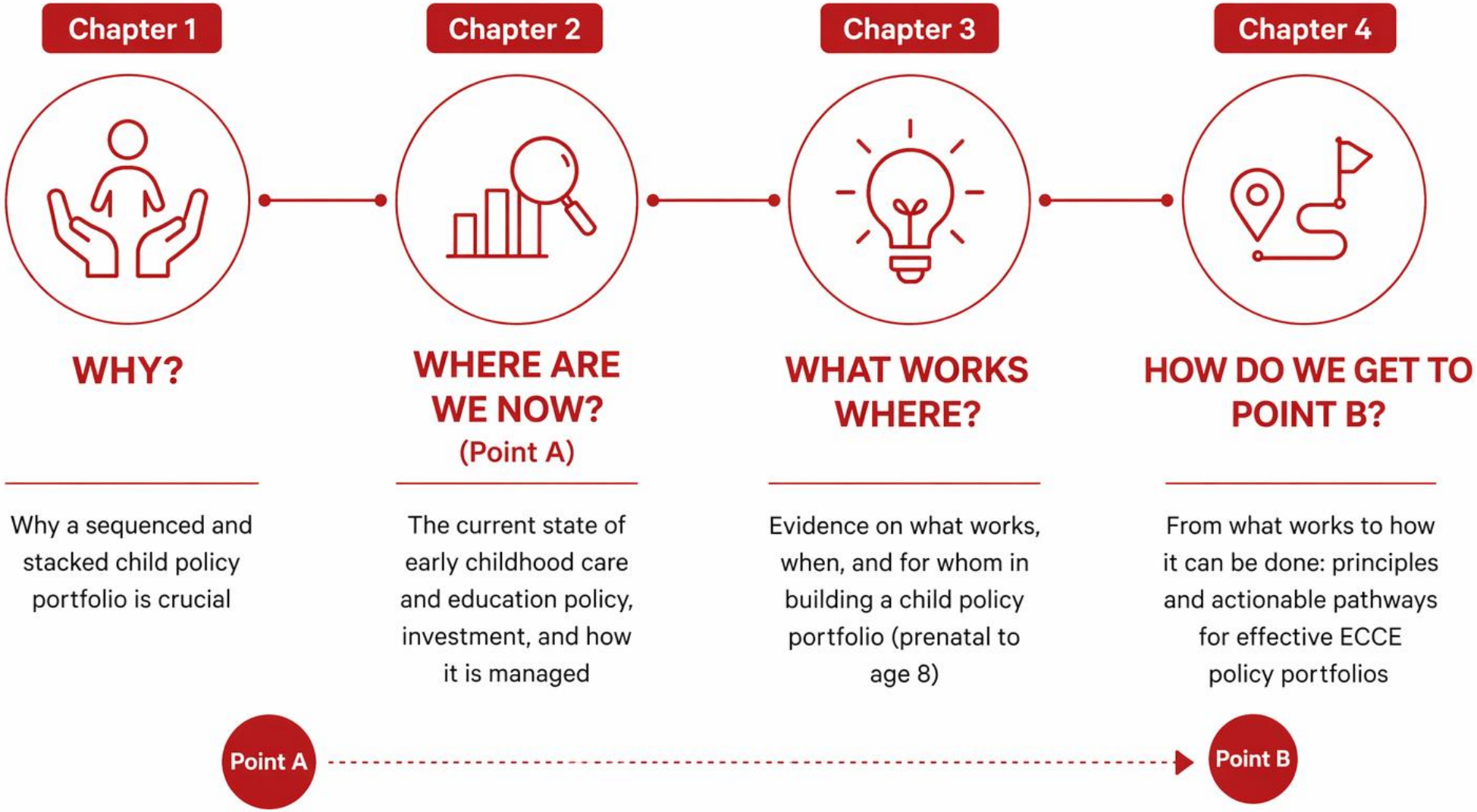
Point A

Conditions of existing public policies for children, specifically in ECCE

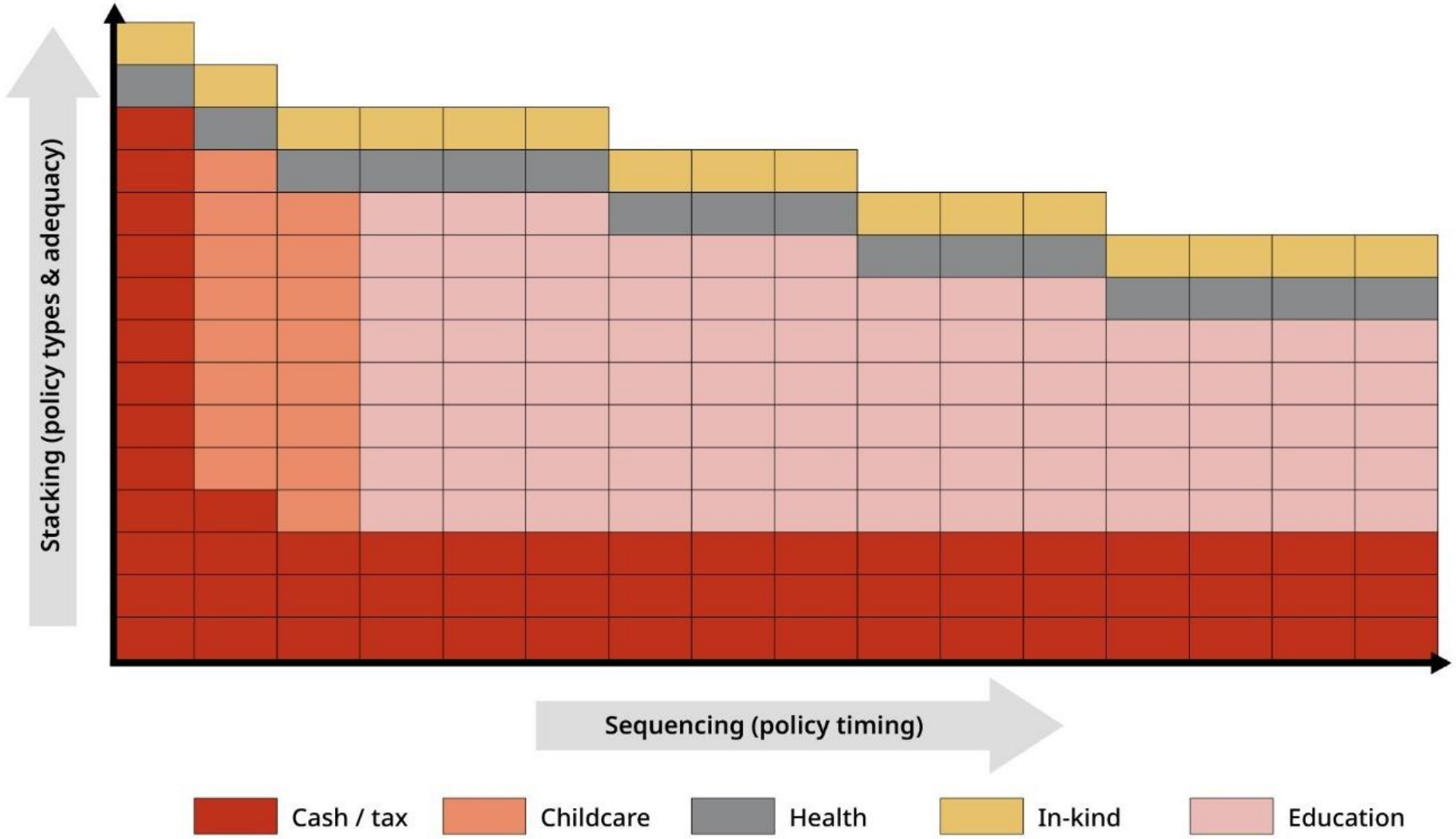
Point B

Evidence-informed portfolio of child policies that facilitates optimal child well-being and development

How this report takes us from Point A to Point B



Sequencing and stacking pathways leads to stronger ECCE systems

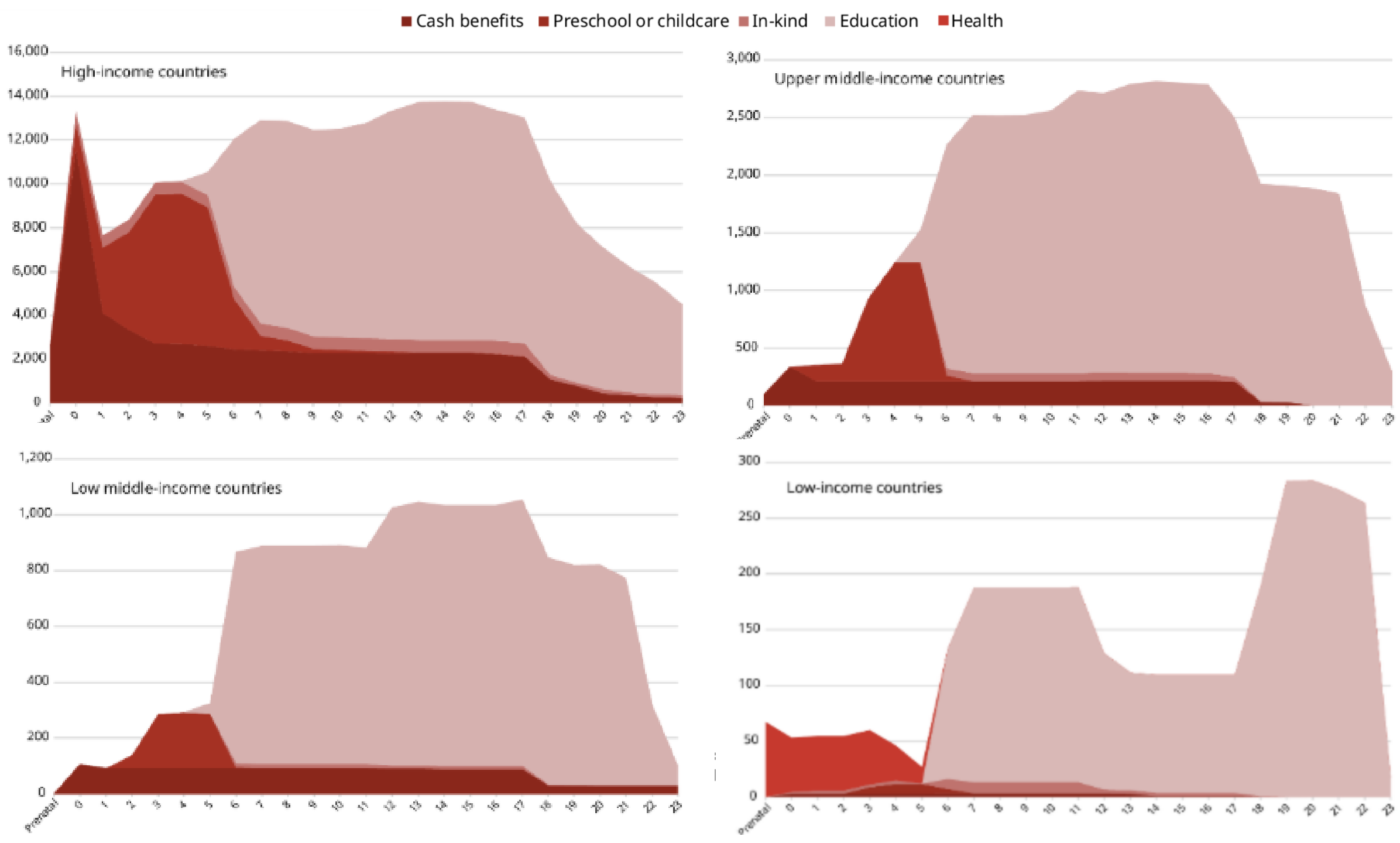


— THE WORLD SPENDS AT THE WRONG TIME

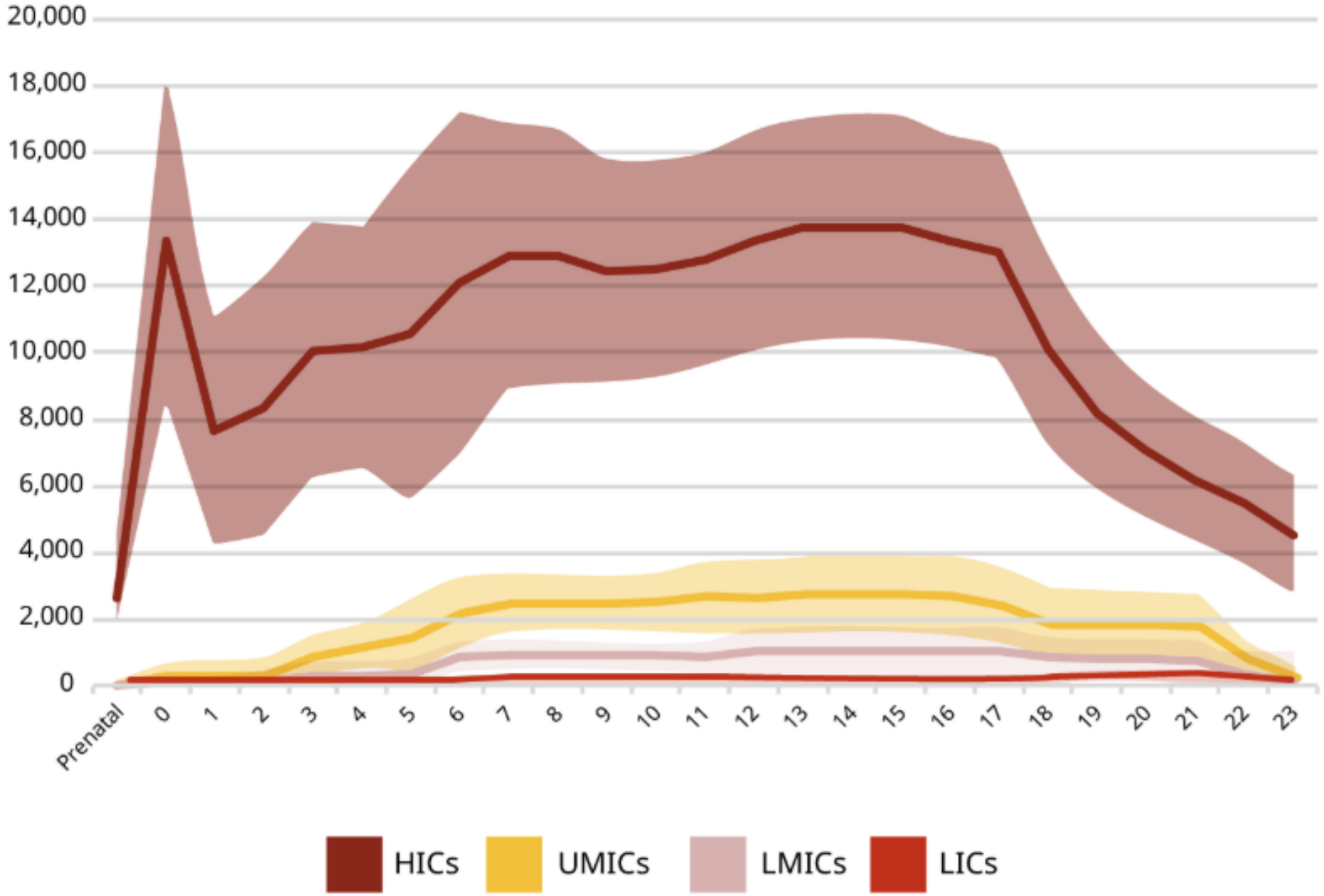
Children under 6 make up 1 in 3 of all children. Yet, this age group only receives

16%

of all child-related spending globally. The years with the highest developmental impact are the most underfunded.


Cash benefits
Preschool or childcare
In-kind
Education
Health
High-income countries
16,000
14,000
12,000
10,000
8,000
6,000
4,000
2,000
0
Upper middle-income countries
3,000
2,500
2,000
1,500
1,000
500
0
Low middle-income countries
1,200
1,000
800
600
400
200
0
Low-income countries
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
Prenatal
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23

Comparing spending by age by income groups



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— RICH VS. POOR: A 121X SPENDING GAP

HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES

$219,000

vs.

LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES

$1,800

121x gap per child over childhood

The children who need investment the most receive the least.

If over-concentrated in **education, outcomes decline**

A **balanced portfolio is needed** to sustain outcomes

Associations between spending and child outcomes (After 2 years)

All spending categories refer to ages 0–17

	Net secondary enrol (%)	Net primary enrol (%)	Stunting (%)	Under-5 mortality (per 1,000)	Poverty rate ($8.30/day, 2017 PPP)
Cash	0.596***	0.473***	-0.676***	-0.759***	-0.782***
Preschool/Childcare	0.449***	0.447***	-0.521***	-0.682***	-0.612***
In-kind	-0.012	0.033	-0.048	-0.177*	-0.237*
Education	-0.521***	-0.433***	0.593***	0.737***	0.722***

Spearman ρ: 1.0, 0.5, 0.0, -0.5, -1.0

Associations between spending and child outcomes (After 6 years)

All spending categories refer to ages 0–17

	Net secondary enrol (%)	Net primary enrol (%)	Stunting (%)	Under-5 mortality (per 1,000)	Poverty rate ($8.30/day, 2017 PPP)
Cash	0.593***	0.443***	-0.594***	-0.751***	-0.797***
Preschool/Childcare	0.429***	0.239	-0.391**	-0.576***	-0.472***
In-kind	-0.069	-0.219	0.138	0.010	0.040
Education	-0.476***	-0.232	0.448***	0.660**	0.651***

Spearman ρ: 1.0, 0.5, 0.0, -0.5, -1.0

LEARNING FOR WELL-BEING INSTITUTE

Notes and sources: Poverty rates are measured using the proportions of households where incomes are lower than 8.30 USD PPP per household member per day. Series have been filled using estimation based on observed values. Author's calculations.

The problem is not only a lack of investment – it's when and how countries are investing

Spending comes

- Too late
- Too fragmented
- Too concentrated on later-stage education

To protect and optimize all children's development, spending needs to shift earlier through phased reforms

7 Principles for Point B: Inclusive and comprehensive reform of ECD systems

Point A

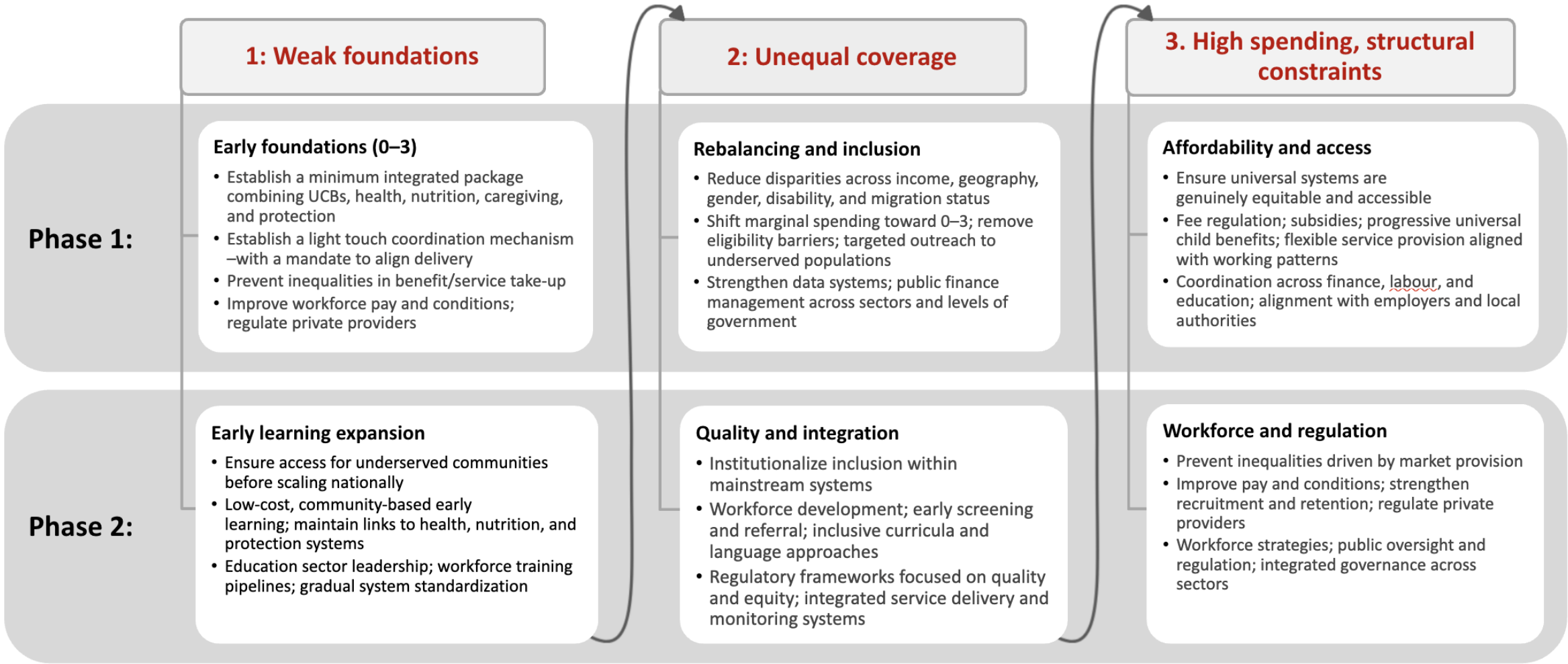
Conditions of existing public policies for children, specifically in ECCE

Point B

Evidence-informed portfolio of child policies that facilitates optimal child well-being and development

- Start early
- Invest efficiently
- Invest in the whole child
- Prioritise equitable outcomes
- Build continuity
- Make governance an enabling condition
- Monitor what matters

Which pathway is suitable for my country given my context?



An integrated ECCE system that starts child policy early, reduces exclusion before scaling, aligns across sectors and governance levels, and then consolidates quality and system-wide integration.

Thank you

dominic@L4WB-i.org

www.l4wb-i.org

LEARNING FOR WELL-BEING INSTITUTE

Video Presentation from UNESCO

Manos Antoninis

Director of the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report

Ivelina Borisova

Senior Early Childhood Expert, UNICEF

Financing the Systems That Shape the First Years

Ivelina Borisova, UNICEF
May 6, 2026

In support of ACT FOR Early Years

Republic of Rwanda | ECDAN Early Childhood Development Action Network | AfECN Africa Early Childhood Network | unesco | unicef | World Health Organization | NCDA National Child Development Agency

The investment case is clear - and increasingly fiscal

The early years are a high-return human capital investment, not a soft social add-on.

<7%

of child-related public spending in Africa benefits children under five, despite the strongest returns occurring earliest.

UNICEF ESA, 2026

>3.5% GDP

average foregone economic potential in low-income countries from underinvestment in young children.

Big Wins, 2026

Year 1

Some returns begin within a political term when universal systems are expanded.

Big Wins, 2026

Allocative efficiency = putting public money where it generates the greatest long-term return and leverages additional finance.

STRATEGIC FRAME

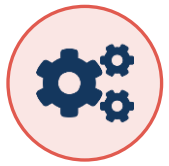
From “How Much?” to “What For?”

From the financing gap to the financing architecture.

It is not only about finding more money — it is about making the early years core services visible, costed, budgeted, financed, and delivered across the systems that families actually use.

Evidence

What works, what it costs, and what inaction costs.



Systems

The sectors, service platforms, workforce and governance required to reach families.

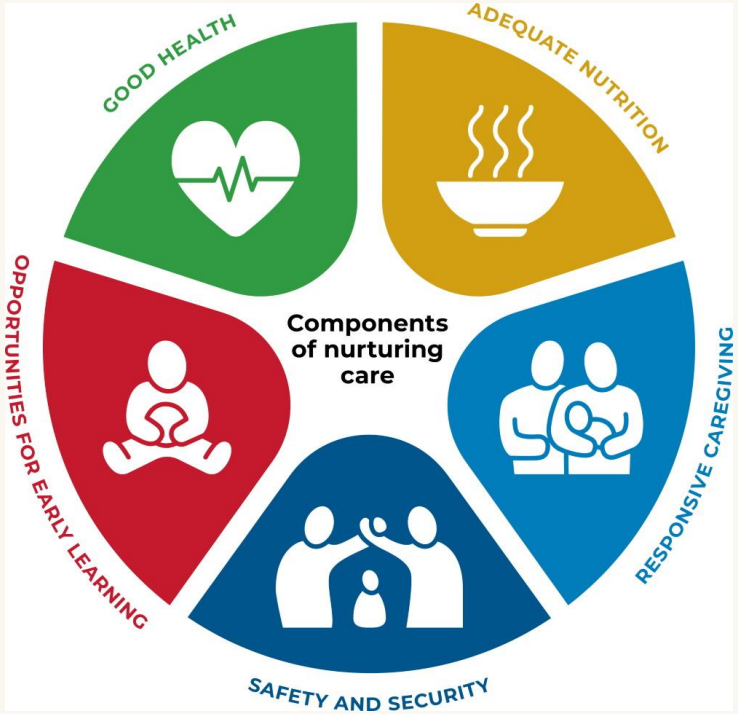
Financing

The budget and finance architecture that makes services sustainable and accountable.

Financing must strengthen systems, not just expand services.
The “what” drives the choice of potential financing solutions, instruments and partners.

The Nurturing Care Framework

A child does not experience sectors; families and children experience services, relationships, and continuity.



Across the region, governments are adopting integrated ECD strategies aligned with the NCF framework:

Rwanda

NECDP (2018–2024) integrates health, nutrition, education, sanitation and social protection.

Tanzania

NM-ECDP (2021/22–2025/26) unites multiple sectors via national coordination.

Ethiopia

ECD framework links health, education, nutrition and social protection interventions.

Kenya

2024 draft integrated ECD policy reinforces inter-ministerial collaboration.

The financing challenge is to make budgets and funds follow this lived reality and ensure continuity and scale of servces.

From sectors to investable services

ECD is not a sector — it is a shared outcome.
Delivered across health, education and social welfare sectors.
Experienced by families as one system; But financed separately.

Health Sector *Healthy Start*	Immunisations · Breastfeeding & nutritional support · Pre and post-natal care · Developmental monitoring · Parental mental health	
Education Sector *ECEC and Childcare*	Quality preschool · Affordable childcare · Inclusive services	
Social Welfare *Capable and supported families*	Child benefits · Cash transfers · Parental leave	
Parenting Support *Across all sectors*	Parental mental health · Parenting support and coaching · Early childhood intervention	

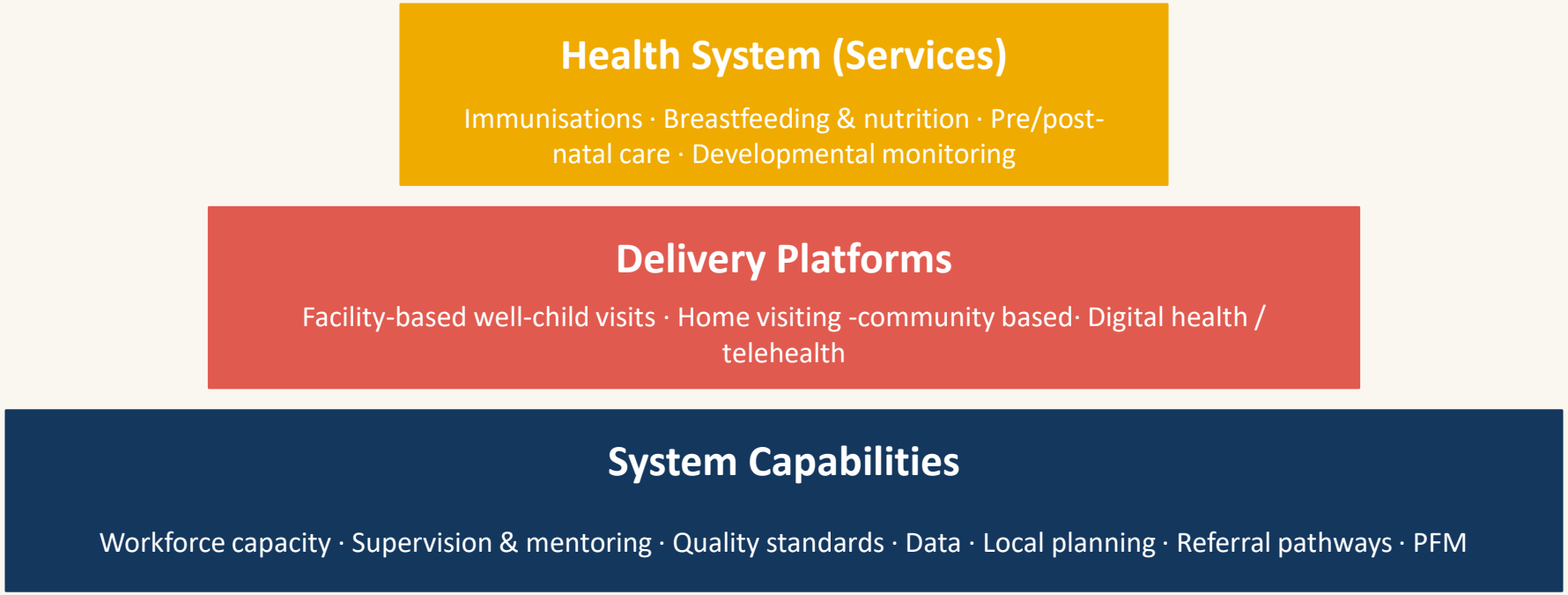
Delivery Platforms

The strongest results *come when these are financed together.*

FROM SERVICE TO SYSTEM

Sectoral Services → Delivery Platforms → Strong Systems

Health Sector illustrative example



Financing services without financing delivery platforms and systems will not produce quality nor scale.

Three gaps must be solved together

The ECD agenda is underfunded at multiple levels — and the coordination layer is the weakest.

1. Service Gap

Core services are still not widely available, affordable or high-quality enough across health, ECEC and social welfare.

2. System Gap

Workforce, quality assurance, supervision, local planning, data and referral pathways remain weak or invisible in budgets or financing instruments.

3. Cross sectoral Gap

Parenting support and inter-ministerial coordination are often expected to happen without dedicated financing.

Solving only one gap will not deliver scale. Financing must cover services + systems + cross sectoral accelerators.

Today, most countries are financing pieces of the ECD service package — heavily in health, partially in education, minimally in caregiving — and almost not at all in the systems that connect them.

FINANCING DIAGNOSIS

FINANCING REALITY

Ambition & reform goals are ahead of budgets & available finance

Recent UNICEF analysis shows that ECD spending is low, fragmented, volatile and often invisible.

Invisible

Most budgets lack dedicated ECD coding or age/service-level disaggregation.
Global databases & budget books tell different stories.

Imbalanced

About 85% of ECD-related spending is captured under health — mostly immunisation and maternal/child health.

Misaligned

Pre-primary averages only 0.11% of education budgets in the ESA analysis.

Volatile

Allocations can be volatile; in Botswana up to 85% of planned ECD funds went unspent in some years.

Implication the gap is not just a financing gap — it is a visibility, planning and accountability gap.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Who finances what?

Different actors should finance different layers — but around one coordinated investment plan.

Government

Core recurrent financing, workforce, equity, scale.

Donors

Catalytic funding, evidence, system design, transition plans.

IFIs

Infrastructure, fiscal reforms, human capital platforms.

Private Sector

Responsible innovation, service models, employer childcare.

Philanthropy

Risk capital, field-building, accountability.

Households

Should not carry inequitable costs; subsidies protect access for the poorest.

Alignment matters as much as volume — the wrong money in the wrong place can keep systems fragmented.
The discipline: use catalytic finance to build systems that domestic budgets can sustain.

Use it strategically

It should de-risk and accelerate domestic system financing — not replace it.

01

Design

Costed packages. Delivery models. Quality standards.

02

De-risk

Pilots that test financing and implementation.

03

Demonstrate

Proof of concept. Data on cost, reach and quality.

04

Transition

Domestic budget lines and recurrent financing.

Rule of thumb if a catalytic finance pilot has no fiscal transition path, it is not catalytic — it is temporary.

DISCUSSION

Questions to carry into the financing discussion

Use the forum to move from principle to design choices.

01 Are core services within each sector adequately financed?

02 Are delivery systems funded — workforce, quality, data, referral and local capacity?

03 Are cross-sector accelerators financed explicitly, or left as unfunded coordination ambitions?

04 How will catalytic /innovate finance unlock public funds without creating unsustainable project islands, and transition into recurrent domestic financing?

05 What budget markers, execution data and outcome indicators will tell us whether money is reaching children?

The aim is not to finance more activities — it is to finance a system capable of delivering results at scale.

T H A N K Y O U

Financing the systems that shape the first years

May 2026 · Kigali, Rwanda

Tea Break

Dialogue 1: Why are young children not prioritized in public expenditure?

Moving from political commitment to sustainable public financing.

A Dialogue with Governments

- **Chair:** Maniza Ntekim, Senior Program Officer, Global ECD, East and Southern Africa, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- **Tanzania:** Juma Mfaume Salum, Principal Finance Management Officer, Ministry of Finance
- **Bangladesh:** Mohammad Iftekhar Hossain, Joint Secretary-Budget and Audit, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
- **Malawi:** Oliver Kumbambe, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare
- **Egypt:** Hana Ismail, Girl's Health Program Manager, National Council for Childhood and Motherhood
- **Nigeria:** Amina Mohammed, Head Child Health Division, Ministry of Health
- **Reflections:** Sadashiv Nayanpally, Senior ECD Finance Expert, Thrive OPM

Reflections on Dialogue 1

Sadashiv Nayanpally, Thrive Research Program
May 6, 2026

In support of act FOR Early Years

Republic of Rwanda | ECDAN Early Childhood Development Action Network | AfECN Africa Early Childhood Network | unesco | unicef | World Health Organization | NCDA National Child Development Agency

Budgeting and Financing ECD

- **Policy Commitment**
  - Strong policy with an integrated framework of services, and responsible actors
  - But *for whom, by whom, and at what standards* not consistent
  - Mostly remain unfunded i.e. policy – commitment gap

- **Services Prioritization -** some services funded consistently while others get missed

- **Local government authorities are critical**
  - Responsibility to deliver unfunded central mandates
  - Varying budgeting, financing, and monitoring capacities

Broader PFM constraints

- **PFM constraints**
  - Cash flow issues affect budget execution
  - Limited linkages between finances and outputs

- **Visibility constraints**
  - Services funded but hard to get a comprehensive picture
  - Data sharing limits 'whole child' approach
  - Definition of early childhood also varies

- **Top-down financing meets bottom-up requirements**
  - Siloed budget preparation process
  - Downward cascading budget ceilings incentivizes competition over collaboration
  - Annual financial cycle constraints with weak medium term expenditure commitment

Political Economy & Institutional Barriers

Constraints

- **Macro-fiscal constraints on ECD spending**
  - Economic Growth & Defence gaining priority over social spending
  - Wages and 'hard' commitments > 'Soft' complementary services

- **Structural bias against youngest children within social spending**
  - Legal commitments for primary and secondary education
  - Youth unemployment mean TVET/Higher Education also prioritized

- **Donor dependency**
  - Mostly off-budget interventions which are invisible
  - Vulnerable to project cycles
  - Follow a different funding cycle than financial year

Reforms & Strategies That Work

What works and what could work?

- **Putting the commitment in policy commitment**
  - Legal commitment to early years – Latin American inspiration
  - Centre of government ownership – from highest offices in the country

- **PFM Reform = ECD Reform**
  - Better Treasury Management incl. Potential direct facility financing
  - MoF ownership on costing and accountability of medium-term expenditure
  - Credible Program-based budgeting

Further insights

- **Making ECD visible in budgets builds financial accountability**
  - Most budgeting systems have cross-sectoral 'objective' or 'purpose' tags – e.g. Tanzania currently classifies cross-sectoral nutrition and HIV-relevant spending using such tags
  - Systematic public expenditure reviews in ECD can provide credible evidence to advocate for budget reforms – recently done in South Africa, and ongoing in Mozambique and Tanzania
- **Legal commitment towards early childhood development**
  - Brazil's constitution acknowledges early childhood education (0 – 6 years) as a government responsibility and guarantees universal pre-school education from age 4.
  - Colombia enacted a law in 2016 guaranteeing rights for children aged 0 – 6 years towards comprehensive ECD services (*De Cero a Siempre*) which brought highest level legal commitment towards coordinated services delivery
- **Credible and centrally-owned medium-term expenditure reform**
  - Rwanda's ECD programme-based budgeting was explicitly linked to national development targets with Ministry of Finance taking ownership of medium-term cost projections and holding ministries accountable for it

Further insights

- **Improved treasury management and cash release mechanisms**
  - Direct Facility Financing by MoF to schools and health facilities have reduced number of nodes that could introduce delays (e.g. in Kenya, Tanzania, and other countries)
  - Program-based budget release scheduling – quarterly cash transfers linked to programme based budget outputs and outcomes. Subsequent quarterly spending issued when ~60 – 80% of previous release has been spent against program outputs
- **Transition off-budget to on-budget**
  - Sector-wide Approaches (SWAp) and direct budget support mechanisms align multiple donor resources with government budget processes, strengthen PFM capacity and avoid parallel delivery systems (e.g. multi-donor trust funds in Education and Health have pooled resources across donors and create adequate PFM reform incentives across multiple countries)
  - Budget line creation and financing prior to services ending can improve program sustainability (e.g. *Chile Crece Contigo,* an integrated ECD services programme for 0 – 4 year-olds that was launched in 2006 was successfully integrated into the national budget by 2009 as a statutory social protection system for young children)

Thank you

Together, we can unlock financing that will translate evidence into budgets and budgets into services for young children and their families!

Lunch Break

Please return at 13:45.

Dialogue 2: How can we expand resources, improve efficiency, and ensure equity and quality services?

Securing sustainable public finance for young children.

Country Dialogue: Rwanda

- **Chair:** Gilbert Munyemana, Deputy Director General, National Child Development Agency, Rwanda
- Fred Mukombozi, Director General of National Budget, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Rwanda
- Flora Mutezigaju, Deputy Director General, Rwanda Education Board
- Samson Desie, Chief of Health and Nutrition, UNICEF Rwanda
- Alexis Muhire, Head of Programs, Director, Research Program on Children and Adversity, Imbuto Foundation
- Gasarabwe Jean Damascene, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, Rwanda Mountain Tea
- Theresa Betancourt, Boston College, Director, Research Program on Children and Adversity

Dialogue 2 Track 1: Expansion (Simba ballroom)

- **Focus:** Expanding the financing envelope to support key early years policy priorities: How can we responsibly diversify public financing sources?
  - What additional public financing sources could governments draw on to increase investment in young children?
  - Which public financing options are most realistic, meaningful, and worth prioritizing in practice?
  - What policy or institutional changes are needed to unlock and use these public financing sources more effectively?
- **Chair:** Boniface Kakhobwe, Early Childhood Development Specialist, UNICEF
- **Framing:** Robert Simiyu, Social Policy and Economic Specialist, UNICEF
- **Discussants:**
  - Jean Claude Ndabananiye, Senior Programme Specialist, UNESCO-IIEP
  - Ibrahima Samba, Education Specialist, World Bank Group
  - Jacqueline Muthura, Coordinator, Africa Working Group, Local Public Sector Alliance
- **Rapporteur:** Sara Dang, Lead Advisor, Early Childhood Care and Development, Save the Children

Dialogue 2 Track 2: Efficiency (Kinigi 1st floor)

- **Focus:** Strengthening domestic finance to support early years policy priorities: How do we improve value for money within sectors and across sectors?
  - Where are the biggest losses in value for money in current spending for young children?
  - What reforms can help governments protect and strengthen fiscal space for young children despite tight budgets?
  - How can costing, budgeting, and transfer systems be improved so that financing is more credible, efficient, and sustainable?
- **Chair & Framing:** Matthew Townshend, Economist
- **Discussants:**
  - Kennedy Tegeret, Director of Planning, Ministry of Education, Kenya
  - Grace Leach, Public Finance Technical Analyst: Early Childhood Development, National Treasury, South Africa
  - Tom Wagstaff, Principal Consultant – Data Science, Data Innovation team, Oxford Policy Management
  - Regina Ndakidemi, National Professional Health Financing, WHO
- **Rapporteur:** Ezinne Anyanwu, Head of Partnerships, Africa, Instiglio

Dialogue 2 Track 3: Equity (Gasabo 1st floor)

- **Focus:** Improving equity and quality: How do we ensure financing expands high-quality access to early years services equitably?
  - How do we budget and plan for quality and equity?
  - How can public financing reduce out-of-pocket burdens and expand access more equitably?
  - What safeguards are needed to ensure that financing expansion improves inclusion, quality, and fairness at the same time?
- **Chair:** Michelle Neuman, Senior Fellow, Results for Development
- **Framing:** Dominic Richardson, Managing Director, Learning for Well-being Institute & David Harris, Executive Director, Children's Research and Education Institute, Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy
- **Discussants:**
  - Martha Odundo, Head of Directorate – ECDE, Ministry of Education, Kenya
  - Daniel McLaren, Public Finance Economist Ilifa Labantwana
  - Sarah Ul Haq, Knowledge, Evidence and Learning Lead, Moving Minds Alliance
  - Nang'andu (Nana) Chizyuka, Senior Program Manager, Clinton Health Access Initiative
- **Rapporteur:** Sumitra Mishra, Executive Director, Mobile Creches

Transition to Tracks

Reflections on Dialogue 2

How can we expand resources, improve efficiency, and ensure equity and quality services? Securing sustainable public finance for young children.

Track 1. Expansion	Track 2. Efficiency	Track 3. Equity
Expanding the financing envelope to support key early years policy priorities: How can we responsibly diversify public financing sources?	Strengthening domestic finance to support early years policy priorities: How do we improve value for money within sectors and across sectors?	Improving equity and quality: How do we ensure financing expands high-quality access to early years services equitably?
Chair: Boniface Kakhobwe, Early Childhood Development Specialist, UNICEF	Matthew Townshend, Economist	Michelle Neuman, Senior Fellow, Results for Development
Rapporteur: Sara Dang, Lead Advisor, Early Childhood Care and Development, Save the Children	Ezinne Anyanwu, Head of Partnerships, Africa, Instiglio	Sumitra Mishra, Executive Director, Mobile Creches

Closing & Wrap Up

Networking dinner at 19:00 in the Simba ballroom.

Thank you

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