



The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development: A Retrospective

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About the Consultative Group on ECCD

Founded in 1984, the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (CGECCD or CG) emerged from a shared concern among international agencies, foundations, researchers, and early childhood regional leaders that young children were receiving insufficient attention within global development agendas. Recognizing that no single organization could address this challenge alone, they came together to create a collaborative network dedicated to advancing the well-being, learning, and development of young children worldwide. Robert G. Myers, one of the principal architects and early leaders of the Consultative Group, played a central role in shaping its early vision and development.¹

At a time when early childhood programs were often fragmented across education, health, nutrition, and social welfare sectors, the CG championed a holistic approach that viewed children's development as interconnected and shaped by families, communities, and broader social contexts.

Through influential publications such as the *Coordinators' Notebook*, international consultations, regional networks, working groups, and collaborative partnerships, the CG helped build a global knowledge network, informed major policy initiatives including Education for All and children's rights frameworks, supported the inclusion of ECD within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), strengthened the evidence for investment in early childhood, and promoted culturally responsive approaches to policy and practice.

Many concepts that are now central to contemporary early childhood policy—including the whole-child approach, integrated services, family and community engagement, cross-sector collaboration, equity and inclusion, early intervention, and children ready to learn and schools ready for children—were advanced and amplified through the work of the CG continue to influence international frameworks today.

More than an organization, the CG was a community of practice grounded in collaboration, shared learning, and collective action. Its legacy continues through the ideas, relationships, networks, and leaders it helped nurture across the global early childhood community.

¹ CG Directors/Co-Directors: Robert Myers, Cassie Landers, Judith Evans, Kathy Bartlett, Louise Zimanyi; early key Regional Advisors: Alejandro Acosta, Feny De Bautista, Janet Brown, Youssef Hajjar, Ghanem Bibi

Building a Global Movement for Young Children

The formation of the Consultative Group in 1984 marked the beginning of a coordinated international effort to place young children at the centre of development discussions. Bringing together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, governments, foundations, United Nations agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and regional organizations, the CG helped build a shared global commitment to children's well-being, learning, and development. Recognizing that improving outcomes for young children required collaboration across health, nutrition, education, protection, family support, and community development, the CG championed an integrated approach that became a hallmark of the movement and helped shape international understanding of ECCD for decades to come.

Global Monitoring and International Advocacy

The CG played an important role in advancing rights-based, evidence-informed approaches to ECCD. Several key milestones reflected broader shifts in understanding young children's development. The Jomtien declaration that "Learning Begins at Birth" and [*Eight is Too Late \(2001\)*](#) helped place early childhood on the global education agenda and aligned with growing evidence from child development, health, nutrition, and neuroscience demonstrating the importance of the earliest years of life.

Following the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the CG helped translate children's rights principles into policy and practice, contributing to and critiquing [*A World Fit for Children*](#), a [*Coordinators' Notebook No. 28 on Positioning ECCD in the 21st Century \(2004\)*](#), and [*General Comment No. 7 on Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood \(2005\)*](#).

The CG also strengthened global monitoring and advocacy for young children through influencing initiatives including UNESCO's [*Global Monitoring Report on Early Childhood \(2007\)*](#), UNESCO's [*Global Conference on ECCE \(2010\)*](#), and the Global Campaign for Education's Global Action Week on Early Childhood: [*Rights from the Start*](#) (2012).

The inclusion of SDG Target 4.2 in 2015– including through the efforts of a CG Working Group on SDGs– marked the first time that ECD was explicitly recognized on the sustainable development agenda calling for all children to have access to quality ECCD and pre-primary education. This achievement reflected decades of advocacy and collaboration across the ECCD field. The CG contributed to this milestone through partnerships, consultations, UN side events, and multiple publications: [*The Importance of Early Childhood Development to Education*](#), [*A Transformative Solution: Reducing Poverty and Inequality through a Post-2015 Early Childhood Development Goal*](#), and [*Early Childhood Development on the Post-2015 Agenda*](#).

Growing Regional Networks

The CG created one of the first truly international ECCD communities, connecting researchers, practitioners, policymakers, governments, foundations, regional organizations, and international

agencies around a shared concern for young children.

Beginning in the early 2000s, the CG increasingly focused on supporting and strengthening regional networks and regional leadership in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and Asia, including through CINDE, the Arab Resource Collective and ANECD, ADEA Working Group on ECCD, Cari Child, ISSA, and ARNEC. Through consultations, partnerships, capacity-building initiatives, and targeted support, the CG fostered locally grounded approaches to policy, advocacy, and program development while supporting the sustainability of regional networks.

Over time, the CG evolved from a single global collaborative into a network of networks, supporting the strengthening and emergence of regional ECCD platforms that were increasingly able to identify priorities, generate knowledge, and lead advocacy efforts within their own contexts.

Knowledge Generation and Networking

The CG became a global knowledge exchange platform through publications, consultations, working groups, and partnerships that translated emerging knowledge into practical action. It promoted knowledge exchange across countries, sectors, and disciplines, recognizing that expertise existed not only within academic institutions and international organizations but also within communities, programmes, and regional networks. Through South–South and North–South learning, the CG fostered the exchange of ideas, experiences, and innovations across diverse contexts.

Long before digital communication became commonplace, the CG connected researchers, practitioners, policymakers, donors, and advocates through publications, consultations, correspondence networks, and partnerships. An early adopter of digital technologies, the CG also used its website to disseminate publications, consultation reports, resources, and information on emerging issues affecting young children.

Through these exchanges, the CG helped strengthen leadership, advocacy, professional networks, and the capacity of individuals and organizations to advance ECCD within their own contexts.

Identifying Emerging Issues

The CG was widely recognized for identifying emerging issues affecting young children before they became more mainstream concerns. For example, the CG elevated the importance of [child survival](#), [home-based programs](#), [child-rearing practices](#), [men in the lives of children](#), birth-to-three development, family support, [home-to-preschool and preschool-to-primary transitions](#), supportive [policy](#) decisions, measurement [indicators](#), mechanisms to measure the [effectiveness of programs](#). Annual consultations—including in Jordan, Chile, Antigua, Hungary, Senegal, Zanzibar, and Singapore—provided opportunities for members, regional networks, researchers, practitioners, and partner organizations to examine emerging challenges affecting young children and families. These discussions informed working groups, publications, advocacy initiatives, and collaborative actions at all levels.

The CG was among the first international ECCD networks to draw attention to the impact of HIV/AIDS on young children, highlighting the developmental, psychosocial, caregiving, and rights-based implications of the epidemic. This work informed consultations, advocacy, publications (including [Coordinators' Notebook No. 26, HIV/AIDS and Early Childhood](#)), and [toolkits](#) and contributed to broader international HIV/AIDS initiatives and partnerships, including the Coalition on Children Affected by AIDS (CCABA) and symposia at global HIV/AIDS conferences.

The CG also highlighted the needs of young children in emergencies and humanitarian crises, including conflict, displacement, armed violence, and natural disasters. Publications such as [Coordinators' Notebook No. 19, Children as Zones of Peace](#) and the work of the CG's Working Group on Emergencies were instrumental in furthering issues related to [ECCE in Emergencies](#), providing input into [toolkits](#), and helping to strengthen recognition across organizations that emergency responses must address children's development, learning, and psychosocial well-being alongside their immediate survival needs.

The CG was also an early voice in drawing attention to the implications of climate change for young children. Through consultations, publications, and engagement with UN climate change processes, the CG helped ensure that young children's needs and rights were represented within broader climate change discussions. By highlighting links between climate change, health, displacement, and child development, the CG helped position climate change as both an environmental and an early childhood development issue.

The Four Cornerstones: A Framework for Action

A key advocacy initiative was the launch of the Four Cornerstones to Secure a Strong Foundation for Young Children (2007) introduced through [Coordinators' Notebook No. 28](#) as a global call to action. Developed through consultations with partners around the world, the framework distilled more than two decades of learning, research, programming, and advocacy into a practical agenda for policy and action [reference [Programming for Improved Early Childhood Development and Learning \(1993\)](#) and [Early Childhood Counts: A Programming Guide on Early Childhood Care and Development \(2000\)](#)].

Reflecting the CG's holistic vision of child development, the Four Cornerstones called for:

- **Start at the Beginning** – supporting children and families from pregnancy through the earliest years.
- **Provide New Opportunities for Discovery and Learning** – ensuring access to quality early childhood programmes.
- **Schools Ready for Children** – strengthening transitions and learning environments in the early grades.
- **Include Early Childhood in Policies** – embedding early childhood within planning, financing, and cross-sector coordination frameworks.

Used by regional networks and partner organizations worldwide, the Four Cornerstones provided a shared framework for advocacy, consensus-building, and advancing integrated approaches to early childhood development.

Financing and Investment in Early Childhood

The CG played an important role in strengthening understanding of the benefits of [investing in young children](#) and providing a [fair start for children](#). Through publications, consultations, policy briefs, and advocacy efforts, the CG helped build the case that early childhood investments generate significant educational, social, health, and economic returns.

By translating emerging research into accessible and compelling messages for policymakers, practitioners, and donors, the CG helped advance ECD as both a development priority and an investment strategy. This growing body of evidence reinforced the view that supporting young children was not only a matter of upholding child rights and well-being, but also a sound investment in human development, equity, and long-term social and economic prosperity.

This work included a publication on [costing](#) and the *Coordinators' Notebook #30: Financing Early Childhood Development*, which explored sustainable financing approaches and equitable access to quality services for young children and families.

The Consultative Group Model: A Network for Collective Learning and Action

More than an organization, the CG functioned as a global network and community of practice. Annual consultations, hosted with regional networks and local partners, became the heart of the network, bringing people together to exchange ideas, build relationships, and identify priorities for action.

Between consultations, a small Secretariat, active advisory board, working groups, task forces, expert consultants, and collaborative initiatives sustained the CG's work through communications, publications, partnerships, advocacy, and representation at global, regional, and UN forums. Financial and in-kind contributions from foundations, governments, universities, NGOs, international agencies, regional networks, and partner organizations supported these efforts.

A distinguishing feature of the CG was that priorities and activities were determined collectively rather than by any single donor or organization. Through consultation and consensus-building, members and partners shaped the CG's agenda that catalyzed regional leadership, strengthened capacity, facilitated knowledge exchange, and conducted advocacy.

Legacy

Through publications, consultations, regional networks, partnerships, and advocacy, the CG helped establish ECCD as a global priority. As an agenda-setting and convening force, the CG connected diverse stakeholders and translated research, experience, and emerging evidence into policy, advocacy, and action.

Equally important was the relational and collaborative ethos that characterized the CG throughout its thirty-year history. Through partnership, dialogue, collective leadership, and mutual learning, the CG fostered trust, strengthened professional and institutional relationships, and demonstrated the power of working across sectors, regions, cultures, and disciplines to address complex challenges facing young children and families.

The CG's influence extended far beyond its formal activities. Participants carried ideas, evidence, relationships, and shared priorities back into their own organizations and networks, creating a multiplier effect that amplified the impact of the network worldwide. Its legacy is found not only in its publications, policies, and achievements, but also in the collaborative model it created—one that continues to inspire efforts to advance the rights, well-being, learning, and development of young children globally.