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Early childhood rights indicators (ECRI): A rights-based approach to enhancing young children's health and development.

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2014

This publication of conference proceedings was originally published at:

<https://doi.org/10.17226/18845>

Citation for this paper:

Vaghri, Z. (2014). Early childhood rights indicators (ECRI): A rights-based approach to enhancing young children's health and development. In, *The cost of inaction: For young children globally* (pp. 44-46). Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences. doi:10.17226/18845.

global tracking of children's learning and development. However, currently national-level measures do not contain the same items to be able to compare globally. National-level measurements have very high value, given they are longer in duration, more frequent, and adapted to the local environment. Raikes introduced the Readiness to Learn Assessment Project as an effort to develop prototype learning and development measurements for children ages 4 to 6, with an emphasis on low-income countries.

The Readiness to Learn Assessment Project was mandated by the UNESCO Learning Metrics Task Force, and partners include the World Bank, Brookings Institution, and UNICEF. The project is in its early stages, and completion is expected by early 2016. The priority for this project is a national-level measure that identifies the quality of the learning environment. Raikes explained that the core assumption to the Readiness to Learn Assessment Project is that measurement contributes to improvement. By understanding the current quality of the learning environment, improvements can be made to policies, teacher support, and parent knowledge accordingly. Also, measurement results can encourage citizens to increase their focus on and advocacy for ECD to create both national and international pressure to improve conditions.

Raikes stated that, to build a useful measurement system, two ideas must be addressed. First, related to the content, one must ensure that items are reliable, relevant, and technically sound, with an emphasis on actionable items. Second, on issues of usability, it is important to identify how measurement systems will be designed and how data will be collected and shared. Third, field testing and validation are critical. Raikes mentioned that countries have dedicated few resources to validation. Finally, information sharing has been minimal because of data privacy concerns and technical obstacles.

Raikes concluded by stating that national measurements of education readiness can complement global efforts, while recognizing the challenges associated with item comparability and proper use. Specifically, she noted potential challenges in identifying a common core of indicators, while still adjusting to the local context.

EARLY CHILDHOOD RIGHTS INDICATORS (ECRI): A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO ENHANCING EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT⁹

Ziba Vaghri focused on a rights-based approach to early childhood development. She began by noting that life expectancy in Burundi is 50,

⁹ This section summarizes information presented by Ziba Vaghri, University of British Columbia.

while life expectancy in Sweden is 81, and she presented data that indicate a correlation between average income and life expectancy. She argued that health should be a more equitable commodity.

Vaghri highlighted an effort by WHO to study the social determinants of health from 2005 to 2008, called the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (CSDH). During this time, another effort was launched, called the Total Environment Assessment Model of ECD (TEAM-ECD). TEAM-ECD is a framework developed by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), which was acting as the ECD knowledge hub for CSDH.

A specific effort to promote children's development and health at the country level entered into force in 1990—namely the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which is an international human rights treaty, and to this day 194 nations have ratified it (United Nations, 2014). Vaghri pointed out that by virtue of ratification the governments have the obligation of submitting a report on the state of the rights of their children to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (the monitoring body of CRC) every 5 years (OHCHR, 2014).

Vaghri described several articles of the convention. For example, Article 6 states the right of a child to health. Article 26 states that the government must support a child if his or her family cannot. Article 31 guarantees a child safety and security. Articles 43 to 54 discuss how to respect and protect the rights of the child internationally. She then drew the attention of the audience to the alignment between TEAM-ECD and the articles of the convention, both designed to promote children's development through improving their experiences within many layers of environments surrounding them. After more than a decade of reviewing the reports from different governments, the committee observed that the majority of government reports focused primarily on the older cohorts, and that younger children were often overlooked. The reports on young children were limited to a number of health indicators (such as under-5 mortality rate) and civil rights indicators (such as birth registration), said Vaghri. In response to this discovery, *General Comment 7 (GC7): Implementing CRC for Young Children* was released as a comprehensive guide meant to aid governments with their reports. However, it remained underused.

In 2007, subsequent to a discussion of an international team of experts, the committee wrote a letter of invitation to HELP asking it to act as the secretariat of an ad hoc group of international experts to work on operationalizing GC7 in an attempt to make it a user-friendly guide for the governments to facilitate implementation. The result of this 7-year collaboration was a tool titled Early Childhood Rights Indicators (ECRI), which monitors the rights of young children in an integrated way, using 17 indicators. ECRI contains three categories of questions: structure related

(such as policies and laws), process related (programs and initiatives), and outcome related (how children have changed and what progress has been made over time). The 17 indicators are shown below¹⁰:

1. Dissemination of GC7
2. Constructing and implementing a positive agenda
3. Human rights training
4. Data collection system
5. Early child development
6. Birth registration
7. Participation in family decision making
8. Violence against young children
9. Basic material needs
10. Breastfeeding and complementary feeding
11. Access to and use of health services
12. Age-appropriate health education
13. Provision of early childhood education and care services
14. Educational provision for vulnerable young children
15. Knowledge of right and capacity to support their realization
16. Play, leisure, and rest opportunities
17. Inclusive policy and provisions for marginalized groups

Two ECRI pilot programs were launched in Chile and Tanzania. Both pilot programs demonstrated the efficacy of ECRI as a monitoring tool. The purpose of this tool is to track progress within a country, and not to develop comparisons across countries. Vaghri explained that ECRI is a tool that monitors and enhances early childhood development through (1) taking an inventory of existing capacities in early childhood development and child rights; (2) advocacy, by drawing the attention of policy makers to gaps; and (3) planning and capacity building by serving as a blueprint for action. Vaghri concluded by saying that such carefully designed and methodically validated tools can facilitate data collection and action plans on ECD, as well as promote good governance.

¹⁰ Adapted from Early Childhood Rights Indicators (ECRI). See <http://crc-indicators.earlylearning.ubc.ca/index.php/content/overview> (accessed September 2013).