

Results for Children: The Moral Imperative's Core Message for Action to Secure Wellbeing Outcomes for Early Childhood

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Investing in early childhood development can deliver dramatic outcomes for the wellbeing of children and adults throughout the life cycle. Advances in the science of early childhood development have also made graphic the devastating consequences of adversity and deprivation in these critical years for development goals. There is now a global consensus that it is possible to achieve wellbeing for children and society by redressing the drivers of childhood deprivation and trauma.

Early Childhood is the foundation for human capital development. Investing in Early Childhood Development is now recognized to have the best returns for health and human capital with immense consequence for economic wellbeing and society. Despite this promise of a high return on investment, and notwithstanding the ambitious goals and commitments for sustainable development, it seems that states, governments and communities are yet to marshal the level of effort, reform, innovation and investments needed to achieve a productive childhood.

Of the world's more than 7 billion people, 2.2 billion are children. Three quarters of these children, and growing, live in Asia and Africa. Close to 700 million of these children experience multiple life altering deprivations and face significant relational disharmony and are at risk of life-long harm. 200 Million children under the age of 5 fail to reach their cognitive development potential.

These realities and the prospect of failing children calls for resolution and action by state and non-state actors and persons of conscience and faith with a view to assuring the wellbeing of all children in our time.

A Focus on Wellbeing – the Whole Child

The desire for our life to go well is a fundamental human goal and ought to be the central aim of state policy and action. This is especially pronounced when the life in question is that of our children. In order for the lives of our children and the whole society to flourish, it is necessary that we set this as the key goal of state policy, law and services. It is also necessary that states and society set specific performance floors and targets for improvement in wellbeing over time for each child and member of the community.

Investing in Early Childhood

A child's early experiences and environment are formative for life. The years between 0-8 hold the greatest promise and vulnerability for the child. This promise and vulnerability is more steeply marked at the ages of conception to three, the first 1000 days, which is the time of the greatest and most rapid physical, social and mental development of the child.

It is during this first 1000 days that the child is most vulnerable to external shocks as the child's major functioning-marked by the development of critical organs like the brain, bones, muscle etc., are in critical and accelerated development. It is also a critical time for relational bonding, security and nurture which lays a foundation for healthy social relationships throughout life. Significant deprivations during this time can have health-impairing consequences for the rest of childhood and adult life and have significant impact on societal well-being.

A Poorly Developed Child is an Embodiment of Injustice

Poverty results from and is a manifestation of capability deprivation. For children hunger, malnutrition, violence, neglect, etc. represent systematic and sustained failure in the system of entitlements and protection- at family, community, society and economic institutions. The collapse of this system of entitlement and protections for children is an intolerable moral and legal failure. All persons of conscience and more so faith actors and their agencies should actively hold and bring states to account for their redress.

A Focus on Making Institutions Work for Children

Children are dependent on the actions of others for their wellbeing. The child's dependency on external agency for their wellbeing begs the question how to locate interventions to ensure that this vulnerability is a positive one. Achieving wellbeing will thus require that institutional arrangements align at the various levels of society and economy to secure an environment that enables the child to acquire the capabilities needed to achieve wellbeing.

Putting Children First in State Policy Blueprints and Law

Children are hardly ever a primary focus of national blueprints and visions of society. The wellbeing outcomes of children are therefore hardly the explicit goals overarching policy and state action. It is important that the core state policy and statute specifically commit to the wellbeing of children, to naming and eliminating key risks to the wellbeing of children and verifiably increasing the stock of capital for key drivers of childhood and child wellbeing.

A bold policy and legal environment would require rethink of existing sector institutions and their arrangements and may involve new mandates and powers of core state and government sector agencies and any range of measures as may be instrumental for purposes of mainstreaming and achieving wellbeing outcomes for children in the economy and society.

An Overarching National Vision and Leadership on Well-being Outcomes for Children

Ultimately, the grim situation of children may be attributable less to the lack of policy, legal or institutional arrangements and more to the lack of a clear overarching vision and leadership to achieve wellbeing for each child. Without a compelling vision and the leadership to drive it at all levels of society, it is unlikely that the systematic and long acting reforms that are needed in the key sectors of society and economy can be made and sustained.

The Role of Family and Parenting

Family and parenting provide the primary set of institutions and site for the nurturing of children. The status of family and parenting thus constitute the single most important predictor and space for evaluating the wellbeing outcomes for children.

State policy and action should focus on the family and positive parenting as primary sites in interventions to secure wellbeing outcomes for children.

It is important that the state has an explicit policy on family and parenting that seeks to secure the economic, social and health dimensions of the family institution and that expressly tasks family and parental care as the primary sites and thus regulation and incentives for nurturing of children.

Reshaping Children's Services and Child Protection

Child protection constitutes a key institution for children and is a critical component in enabling wellbeing outcomes especially for children at risk of adversity. Effective child protection is often the last line of defense in preventing and remedying adversity in childhood for the population of at risk children.

In many instances, public sector and public services lack capacity (reach and effectiveness) of to deliver to the urgent demands of highly targeted child protection. It is important to critically reevaluate and modernize child protection and children services.

Revitalizing the Role of Data and Official Statistics on Children

In much of the developing world, almost no data exists on childhood adversity, and the quality, or effectiveness, of various child policies, approaches and services.

This lack of reliable data and statistics on children constitutes a big obstacle and can be severely limiting when designing services or making the case for allocation of resources in an environment of scarcity. Policies, laws, programmes and services to promote child wellbeing ought to be built on sound evidence and not merely good intentions.

It is also imperative to ensure that such data and statistics, once available, is actually used in the design and evaluation of policies, programmes and services.

A Strategic Role for Faith, its Institutions and Agency

The resourcefulness of faith, and the assets and services of faith institutions are critical to the wellbeing outcomes of millions of children, and especially those at risk and thus vulnerable to adversity. Faced with adversity, millions of children, families and communities have come to rely on this resourcefulness to grow their resilience.

States and governments should be encouraged to pursue deliberate and long acting strategic partnerships with faith communities and their agencies in the design, production, provision and evaluation of policy and services to children.

Faith actors, their institutions, communities and leadership should also take up an appropriate role in shaping global, national and community level actions to secure wellbeing outcomes for children.

About the Moral Imperative to End Extreme Poverty

First convened in 2015, the Moral Imperative to End Extreme Poverty brings together religious and faith-based organizations and the World Bank Group into a broad forum to advance a faith-based action framework to end Extreme Poverty and Realize Sustainable Development Goals. The work of the Moral Imperative is organized around three pillars: Evidence, Advocacy and Collaboration, each with a Corresponding Working Group.

The Action Framework focuses on: strengthening the evidence-base around the role and impact of faith-inspired organizations in advancing the SDGs; enhancing FBO and religious advocacy in SDG implementation and accountability; and fostering more effective collaboration between faith-inspired actors and the World Bank, UN system, and bilateral development partners.

Endorsers

The Moral Imperative to End Extreme Poverty is endorsed by and brings together diverse faith actors including:

- American Jewish Committee,
- American Jewish World Service,
- Anglican Alliance,
- Arigatou International,
- Auburn Seminary,
- Baha'i International Community,
- Bibliotheca Alexandria,
- Bread for the World,
- Buddhist Global Relief,
- Caritas Internationalis,
- Catholic Relief Services,
- Christian Aid,
- Christian Connections for International Health
- Christian Health Association of Kenya,
- Christian Journal for Global Health,
- Church World Service,
- Community of Protestant Churches of Europe,
- Congregation Agudas Achim,
- Congregation Netivot Shalom in Berkeley,
- Danmission,
- D. Min.Congregation B'nai Israel,
- EcoSikh,
- Episcopal Relief & Development,
- Food for the Hungry,
- Forum for Peace in Islamic Societies,
- General Board of Church and Society—The United Methodist Church,
- Global Interfaith WASH Alliance,
- IMA World Health,
- Indigenous People Ancestral Spiritual Council,
- Integrated Research Ltd,
- Institute for Economics and Peace,
- Islamic Relief USA,
- Islamic Relief Worldwide, Society of North America,
- Jewish Community Chaplaincy & Rafael Spiritual Healing Center of Jewish Family Service of Colorado,
- Joint Distribution Committee,
- Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities,
- Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue,
- Muhammadiyah,
- Organization of African Instituted Churches,
- Orthodox Social Justice,
- Parliament of the World's Religions,
- Rabbinical Assembly,
- Religions For Peace,
- Religious Action Center,
- Rissho Kosei-Kai,
- Salvation Army,
- Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement,
- Sojourners,
- Swedish Mission Council,
- Temple Kol Emeth,
- The Charitable Foundation,
- The Institute for Economics and Peace,
- The Norwegian Mission Society,
- Uganda Muslim Supreme Council,
- Union for Reform Judaism,
- United Methodist Church—General Board of Church and Society,
- Universal Peace Federation,
- World Association for Christian Communication,
- World Council of Churches,
- World Evangelical Alliance,
- World Relief,
- World Vision International,
- Youth with a Mission Norway.

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