



INVESTING FOR IMPACT



INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
PROGRAMS GLOBALLY



Investing for Impact

INVITATION TO INVEST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS GLOBALLY

The best investment we can make is in early childhood. It's an investment that yields remarkable results – not only in the lives of children living in developing countries, but for the future we all share. Early learning opportunities can have profound effects on lifetime educational achievement and disrupt intergenerational cycles of poverty. The earlier we invest in a child's life, the higher the return on that investment for us all.¹

WHAT IS EARLY CHILDHOOD?

Early childhood is the period between birth and age 8. During these early years, there are four critical areas of development: physical, cognitive, linguistic and socio-emotional. These developmental areas represent the foundation that shapes a child's future health, development and achievement at school and throughout life. This investment prospectus focuses on the important window of opportunity in the early years of a child's life, and the work Save the Children is doing to maximize children's potential in developing and emerging economies.

PROVEN BENEFITS OF EARLY LEARNING

Why are early learning opportunities so important? During the first few years of a child's life, approximately 700 neural connections are formed every second. These connections are dictated by the interplay of a baby's genetics, environment and experiences, especially the child's interactions with adults. These are the connections that build brain architecture – the foundation upon which all later learning and behavior depend.

There are several well-known studies in the developing world that underscore the impact of early learning opportunities. For example, a Pakistan study demonstrated the importance of "responsive environments."² Oral language skills develop in the context of responsive environments and consistent language interactions between children and caregivers. The study compared two types of interventions provided by

home-visiting programs: nutrition education / supplementation and parental play / responsive interactions with babies. Children who experienced parental play and responsive interactions had significantly higher development scores on the cognitive, language and motor scales at age 2 than the control group. In comparison, children who received the nutrition education and supplementation intervention outperformed the control group on the language scale but not on cognitive and motor scales.

The sheer quantity of parental talk is highly associated with vocabulary size in the early years of a child's life.³ Global research shows that, by age 3, children of parents with higher-level incomes have vocabularies two to three times larger than their disadvantaged peers. This vocabulary gap may be due to the ability of high-income households to access and afford quality early learning opportunities.⁴

Nationally representative studies from other countries have demonstrated links between household income and increased school enrollment, decreased early dropout, and higher grade and academic achievement. While there are fewer studies focusing on preschool children, correlations between income and development are present in studies of children as young as 6 months in Egypt, a year old in Brazil and 18 months old in Bangladesh.⁵ *(More information on the linkage between income strata and educational outcomes is included in the section on Unequal Access to Early Childhood Programs.)*





“The results of Save the Children’s preschool study led to a national investment in early childhood.”

– Adriano Afonso Maleiane, Minister of Economy and Finance, Mozambique

PROVEN BENEFITS OF EARLY LEARNING (CONTINUED)

Save the Children’s research in this area, conducted in collaboration with the World Bank, showed a link between early education and child development. In Mozambique, we found that age-appropriate enrollment in primary school was 24 percent higher for children who had attended preschool than for children in the control group. Enrolled children also experienced a 14 percent increase in overall development, with an increase of 87 percent in cognitive development.⁶

Longitudinal research from the United States has shown that language development before age 3 predicts differences in school achievement in terms of vocabulary size and reading comprehension scores at age 9, even after controlling for other factors.⁷ A five-year longitudinal study looking at children’s reading achievement in Canada underscores the finding that emergent literacy skills at the end of preschool directly predict word reading at the end of first grade, which in turn predicts reading in third grade.⁸ It is at this point in schooling that children transition from learning to read to reading to learn.

If children can’t read by third or fourth grade, they may never catch up. Studies demonstrate that children with access to early learning opportunities are more likely to be enrolled and perform better in primary school, progress to secondary school, plan their families, have higher household incomes, become productive adults and educate their own children than children who never had access to these programs.⁹

There are limited longitudinal studies conducted in developing countries that demonstrate the impact of Early Childhood Development (ECD) on later school outcomes. Research both in Guatemala – where preschool cognitive ability predicted children’s enrollment, even in secondary school – and in South Africa – where cognitive ability and achievement at the end of first grade predicted later school progress – underscore the importance of early learning.^{10,11}

Correlations between preschool enrollment, grade repetition and dropout rates are confirmed by studies from Brazil, Colombia, India and Peru, among others, including Save the Children’s study from Nepal.

In this study conducted in the Siraha district of Nepal, ECD centers offered half-day sessions to children of disadvantaged families five days per week.^{12, 13, 14, 15} Program evaluations indicated that of the ECD participants, more than 95 percent continued on to primary school, compared to 75 percent of non-ECD children. In addition, first graders who did not participate in ECD were seven times as likely to repeat a grade than seventh graders who did participate in ECD program. Continued tracking of these children has demonstrated that the annual dropout rate has been only 1.2 percent, compared to the national rate of 12 percent.¹⁶

While children from low-income households who receive high-quality early learning opportunities benefit from increased educational attainment, our society also accrues benefits. Governments receive increased tax revenues from higher incomes, and accrue savings from having to allocate fewer public resources to the areas of special education, welfare and criminal justice.¹⁷ In Kingston, Jamaica, health workers visited families living in poverty with children under age 2 on a weekly basis to show mothers how to stimulate their babies’ psychosocial development through positive play. Twenty years later, the subjects’ earnings were 25 percent higher than those of the control group. Subjects were also less likely to have been involved in criminal activity, according to the same longitudinal study.¹⁸

Participating children are not the only ones who benefit from investments in early childhood programs. Evidence suggests that affordable child care for young children can increase the school enrollment rates of their older sisters.¹⁹

THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

In 2011, *Lancet* researchers developed a comprehensive simulation model on the long-term economic effects of increasing preschool enrollment.²⁰ This model estimated the effects of increasing preschool enrollment rates in 73 low-and middle-income countries, with a total population of 2.69 billion people. Researchers found that increasing enrollment to 25 percent or 50 percent in every low - and middle - income country showed a benefit-to-cost ratio ranging from 6.4 to 17.6, depending on the enrollment rate and discount rate used.²¹

According to *The Lancet* model, the economic benefits of investing in early child development are clear – a projected 25 percent per country uplift in preschool enrollment in a single year would yield a return of \$10.6 billion per country (on average), in terms of increased lifetime earnings for this new group of preschoolers.

And the impact on poverty is compelling. According to UNESCO, if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty, which would be equivalent to a 12 percent decrease in world poverty.²²

In 2016, the *Lancet*, released its third journal dedicated to early childhood development. “A staggering 43 percent of children under five years of age—an estimated 250 million—living in low - and middle - income countries are at risk of suboptimal development due to poverty and stunting. A poor start in life can lead to poor health, nutrition, and inadequate learning, resulting in low adult earnings as well as social tensions. Negative consequences impact not only present but also future generations. Because of this poor start, affected individuals are estimated to suffer a loss of about a quarter of average adult income per year while countries may forfeit up to twice their current GDP expenditures on health and education.”²³

The recent 2016 *Lancet*, states we must deliver multi-sector interventions, with health as a starting point for reaching the youngest children. “Interventions—including support for families to provide nurturing care and solving difficulties when they occur—target multiple risks to development, and can be integrated into existing maternal and child health services. Services should be two-pronged, considering the needs of the child as well as the primary caregiver, and include both care for child development as well as maternal and family health and wellbeing. This affordable approach is an important entry point for multi-sectoral collaborations that support families and reach very young children.”²⁴

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

25%

per country
uplift in preschool
enrollment in one
year would yield
a return of \$10.6
billion.

12%

decrease in
world poverty if
all students in low-
income countries
leave school with
basic reading skills.

AN INVESTMENT WORTH MAKING

Every dollar invested in a quality ECD program yields a return of between

\$6 – \$17

in direct wage productivity. Further benefits would accrue from decreased public spending on remedial education, welfare and criminal justice.

\$1

“We have hard evidence
that ECD matters —
it can change a single
child’s life and lift up
whole economies.”

– Helle Thorning-Schmidt, CEO
Save the Children International



“Investing in young children through ECD programs – ensuring they have the right stimulation, nurturing and nutrition – is one of the smartest investments a country can make to address inequality, break the cycle of poverty and improve outcomes later in life.”

– World Bank



LITERACY CHALLENGE

250 million



children at the primary and secondary level cannot read or write today, though they have been to school. Early childhood development is one way to level the playing field.

184 million

children **were enrolled** in pre-primary education in 2013 (an increase of 57% since 2000).

159 million

children are **still deprived of access** to pre-primary education worldwide.

Photo: Shailendra Yashwant, 2014

UNEQUAL ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

In line with the growth in scientific evidence, governments have finally prioritized early childhood development in the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015.

Given these developments, governments, nonprofit organizations and the private sector have worked to grow enrollment in early learning programs around the world. Progress is being made:

- The global pre-primary education gross enrollment ratio increased from 33 percent in 1999 to 50 percent in 2011.
- In 2013, nearly 184 million children were enrolled in pre-primary education, up 57 percent since 2000.

Despite these increasing investments, the World Bank estimates that nearly half of all 3- to 6-year-olds (159 million children) remain deprived of access to pre-primary education worldwide. Further, the progress that has been made is uneven, with disparities in enrollment between urban and rural areas, the wealthy and the poor, and marginalized religious and ethnic groups within nations.

While nearly half of all children are not enrolled in preschool, that number soars to over 88 percent in the world's poorest and least-developed countries.²⁵ According to UNICEF, 98 percent of Korea's 4-year-olds attend preschool, while in sub-Saharan Africa, enrollment is 26 percent on average. Also, not all programs are created equal – huge disparities in quality exist. And while the world's poorest children have the most obstacles to overcome to access early learning programs, they also have the most to gain from participation.

All told, 219 million children under age 5 will fail to reach their potential in cognitive development because of poverty, lack of early stimulation, and poor health and nutrition, thereby limiting their future ability to succeed in school, obtain gainful employment and contribute to their communities.²⁶ Most of these children – 89 million – live in South Asia, and 10 countries account for 145 million of the 219 million disadvantaged children in the developing world.²⁷ These disadvantaged children are likely to do poorly in school and subsequently have low incomes, high fertility rates and provide poor care for their children, thus contributing to the intergenerational transmission of poverty.²⁸

INADEQUATE GLOBAL SPENDING ON EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

At present, very few developing countries prioritize early education in public spending. According to estimates from the World Bank, less than 10 percent of total public education expenditure is allocated to preschool education globally – over half of all countries earmark less than 5 percent of their education budget to ECD, and most low- and middle-income countries spend only 0.1 to 0.2 percent of their gross national product on preschool education. This is significantly less than the 2.36 percent spent on average in the most developed countries.

In general, few countries have established national frameworks to finance, coordinate and supervise preschool programs for infants and toddlers. More resources are needed to analyze programs, expand the effective ones and make greater strides for children.

GLOBAL GOALS FOR EARLY LEARNING

The tide is beginning to turn. In 2015, the United Nations unveiled its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among these goals are ending poverty (SDG 1) and providing all girls and boys with access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education (SDG 4.2) by 2030. The debut of pre-primary education on the development agenda, combined with the increase in research and compelling evidence for early learning, have brought ECD into the spotlight.

Within the broader framework of the 2030 development agenda, UNICEF and the World Bank will collaborate to advance progress on SDG 4.2 and catalyze efforts to bring together governments and partners with complementary assets and a common commitment to scaling up early childhood programs. Save the Children is proud to be a part of these efforts.

Education for All has always been an integral part of the sustainable development agenda. The Sustainable Development Goals are a new universal set of goals, targets and indicators that UN member states will be expected to use to frame their agendas and political policies by 2030. These goals follow and expand on the Millennium Development Goals, which were agreed upon by participating governments in 2001 and expired in 2015.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” and includes a set of targets. Target 4.2 states: “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.” The indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals will measure child development outcomes as well as access to preschool.



WHY SHOULD THE PRIVATE SECTOR INVEST IN EARLY EDUCATION?

According to ReadyNation, “Businesses must understand that education is not only a key piece of the puzzle for poverty eradication. It also is crucial to develop the future workforce, foster innovation, and generate stable and more prosperous societies. [Businesses] need to take proactive roles in education, using their expert skills and interest in innovation to create shared value. In practice this means raising educational performance levels, shaping aspirations and creating a productive workforce!”^{29,30}



HOW WE HELP THE YOUNGEST LEARNERS

Globally, Save the Children invests over \$30 million in our early childhood development portfolio, which covers 75 countries and reaches more than 2.1 million children from birth to age 6 every year (see map).

Our community-based programs in many disadvantaged communities benefit children directly and reach parents and community members indirectly through programs that promote the importance of early childhood development.

Our programs play a crucial role in helping children from low-literacy homes gain school readiness skills and catch up to their peers who come from homes where parents read, sing and tell stories.

In some of the world's poorest, most remote places, we bridge this gap by working with parents to support their children's development, beginning at birth. We know that the earlier we start, the more involved parents become, and that the more prepared a child is to start school, the better the child's chance for success in school and life.

We also know that one of the most effective, efficient ways to scale up quality interventions is to address ECD in the home, at preschool centers, at health facilities and in community settings and empower parents, caregivers, teachers and health workers. This integrated approach is also followed by the World Bank and is a perspective that is reflected in the key tenets of our early childhood programs around the world.³¹

Key tenets of our early childhood programs:

- **We start early** – reaching children ages 0 to 3 by working closely with community health workers and caregivers to integrate stimulation and responsive care into health and nutrition services to strengthen childrearing practices.
- **We support parents** – through home visits and parent groups. We coach parents on how to play with their young children, discuss their children's development, health and hygiene, and teach them to become responsive caregivers.
- **We foster play and exploration** – for children ages 3 to 5, to ensure their intellectual and social potential is fully realized. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts that it is a child's right "to engage in play" as an essential part of their well-being.³² Different types of play allow children to learn new skills that build a strong foundation for their education and their future. Play develops abilities such as cognitive function, motor and social skills, and conflict resolution.³³
- **We focus on emerging math and literacy skills** – based on evidence underscoring the crucial links between emergent literacy skills and school-age math outcomes.³⁴ Our Emergent Literacy and Math initiative focuses on print-rich learning environments and play-based interactive exposure to early literacy and math skills.
- **We improve transitions to primary school** – for children ages 6 to 8, because we recognize that the transition from home to preschool or from preschool to primary school can be especially difficult for vulnerable children. This is clearly demonstrated by the high dropout rates that occur in the first two years of primary school in many developing nations.
- **We reach very vulnerable children** – who are likely to have the lowest developmental and school readiness outcomes. Beyond preschools, Save the Children creates innovative approaches to help reach the most marginalized children.

Our international partnerships in this arena include:

- **Asia Regional Network for Early Childhood** – aims to advance the agenda on investment in early childhood. Save the Children is a member of the executive committee and is among the region's thought leaders.
- **Forum on Investing in Young Children Globally** – is a collaboration of experts established to inform evidence-based, strategic investments in children. We participate in regional meetings to share evidence from the field.
- **Early Years Regional Alliance** – works toward improved coordination among development partners in Europe and Central Asia with the common goals of eliminating inequalities in investments in early childhood globally. Our partners in this alliance include the International Step by Step Association, Open Society Foundations and UNICEF.
- **Basic Education Coalition** – unites policymakers, partner organizations and the public in increasing funding for quality basic education around the world. Save the Children co-leads the coalition's work on early childhood.
- **Early Childhood Development Action Network** – convenes global ECD actors to generate and disseminate knowledge on early childhood care and development for use in policy, capacity building, programming and evaluation research, aimed at improving outcomes in low- and middle-income countries.
- **African ECD Network** - connects actors to advocate for increased provisions for children and share knowledge and practice.



Photo: Simine Alam

IDELA

In 2014, Save the Children launched IDELA (International Development Early Learning Assessment), a groundbreaking tool to measure child development and early learning outcomes within the 3- to 6-year-old age group. IDELA covers four developmental domains: motor development, early language and literacy, early numeracy / problem-solving, and socio-emotional skills (see graphic).

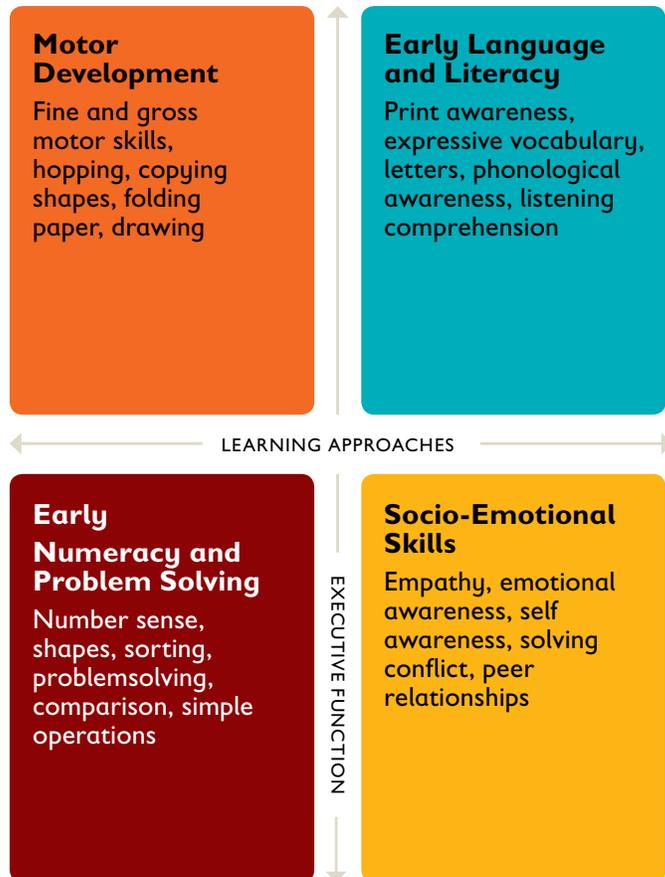
The data from IDELA are helping early childhood development stakeholders identify which strategies improve results for children. In fact, the IDELA tool has already been successfully used and validated in nearly 35 countries to evaluate early childhood programs and provide reliable data for advocacy and policy decisions (See footnote for a sample of current IDELA partners).³⁵

The IDELA website hosts the growing body of IDELA ECE evidence from around the world.

It includes reports, data analysis and case studies from Save the Children and global partners as well as an online community of practice for questions and discussion around use of the IDELA. These resources and the open-source IDELA tool are free and available to the public.

Please visit www.ideal-network.org and join the global conversation around IDELA and ECE.

IDELA DOMAINS & SKILLS



Our Ambitious Plan for the Future

Save the Children is committed to refining and expanding our delivery approaches to double our investment in young children.

Our areas of focus going forward include:

- **Quality preschool packages** – to improve the quality of early childhood development programs reaching 3- to 6-year-old children, as well as to support 6- to 8-year-old children as they transition into primary classes. The package, or toolbox, will draw on our experiences for simple “go-to” adaptable tools that can be used to support quality early education in multiple contexts and through different delivery mechanisms.
- **Alternative early learning approaches** – to reach children outside of preschools, because we recognize that many children don’t have access to quality preschools. For example, Emergent Literacy and Math at Home integrates fun activities into daily routines to increase children’s school readiness and social-emotional development. Summer camps prepare children who missed out on preschool to get ready for primary school. Home-based ECD programs bring children and caregivers together to share toys, read together and learn.
- **Early stimulation and early learning** – to support brain development in the first 1,000 days of life. In more than 20 countries, Save the Children integrates positive brain development into health and nutrition programs that work with families who have children under three. When mothers, fathers and other caregivers include talk, play and responsive caregiving into their daily routines, children make great progress. A recent randomized control trial in Bangladesh shows that even a 5-minute addition to a home visit can improve how parents engage with their children. With increased support, we hope to scale up this work in other countries like Bhutan, El Salvador, Nepal, India and Rwanda.
- **Interventions for children in times of crisis** – to dull the shocks and stress that affect children in the most difficult contexts, while building the resilience of children and families in emergency and fragile contexts.
- **The IDELA knowledge portal** – to create an open community of practice between ECD researchers and practitioners and allow for the exchange of knowledge to reinforce evidence-based advocacy for scaling ECD at the national level.



Photo: Susan Warner

Successful Case Study in Mozambique

We conducted a two-year impact evaluation of our early childhood program in Mozambique – the first of its kind in Africa – in collaboration with the World Bank.

Program evaluation results revealed that participating children significantly outperformed their peers in problem-solving skills, comparing objects and counting. Interviews with parents and caregivers demonstrated that the program activities helped build their children’s social and emotional skills.

Mozambique’s Ministry of Education was successful in negotiating a \$40 million loan from the World Bank to develop a national preschool program based on the Save the Children model.

The Case for Investment

In recent years, the world has made enormous progress for children. A future where every child learns from a quality education is within our grasp. While disadvantaged children and families in developing countries will benefit directly from investments in early childhood programs, these interventions are also powerful tools that address poverty and inequality, and create a better world. Your investment in Save the Children's global early childhood programs could transform the future for all of us.



Photo: Jonathan Hyams

IMPACT OPPORTUNITY

Advocate for greater access to early learning for children in poverty using IDELA:

- **\$1 million** – will help expand the IDELA Knowledge Hub to improve ECD programs by producing an annual knowledge map on the status of child development across countries. Additionally, this funding will help showcase global advocacy briefs to support dialogue on improved practice and policy and create a global master course to train researchers and stakeholders across the world on IDELA.
- **\$100,000** – will fund a large-scale ECD effectiveness study in one country similar to our work in Mozambique, using the IDELA tool to identify the kinds of early interventions that would work best for that context.
- **\$10,000** – will enable us to support IDELA training for a new country or partner organization.

IMPACT OPPORTUNITY

Improve play-based Emergent Literacy and Math and school readiness:

- **\$1 million** – will provide Save the Children with the resources to bring our Emergent Literacy and Math initiative to national scale in one country by funding the training of preschool teachers, development of localized activities, and creation of play materials to support language and math educational games.
- **\$100,000** – will allow us to introduce a home version of Emergent Literacy and Math in one country to reach children not enrolled in preschool and to improve home learning environments.

IMPACT OPPORTUNITY

Promote early learning on the national agenda:

- **\$10 million** – will enable Save the Children to expand early learning approaches in countries where we have made great progress such as Bhutan, El Salvador, Mali and Mozambique. Your investment will allow us to scale ECD approaches with governments as part of national policy. In Bhutan, Save the Children has worked with the Ministry of Education to train preschool teachers on Emergent Literacy and Math and integrate content in the national curriculum. Expanding the scope of this project could help support interventions to reach children beyond preschools through Emergent Literacy and Math at Home. In Mali, Save the Children has been nominated as the ECD lead among donors who fund the national education sector plan. Expanding the program's scope could help us anchor ECD as part of the education sector plan and ensure that it is rolled out among all ECD implementers in the country. In El Salvador and Mozambique, additional funding would help scale up quality early learning programs on a national level.

IMPACT OPPORTUNITY

Ensure early learning opportunities for children ages 0 to 3 at a critical time in brain development:

- **\$1 million** – will enable Save the Children to scale our work with children ages 0 to 3 nationally in one country or facilitate regional trainers for delivering 0 to 3 programming in at least five new countries.
- **\$100,000** – will facilitate parenting groups to increase play and learning opportunities for children ages 0 to 3 in one country for a year.



Photo: Victoria Zegler

Conclusion: Invest in Early Childhood

An investment in Save the Children's early childhood development programs and advocacy activities yields powerful returns. Your investment can ensure children are better educated, strengthen the future workforce, grow economies, reduce reliance on aid and bring about better outcomes for those who are the most disadvantaged. These benefits can be leveraged to improve maternal health, increase female labor participation and reduce expenditures on social assistance programs.

Your investment will play a vital role in achieving change for the world's youngest and most marginalized girls and boys. This is an investment with the power and potential to yield transformative results for children – changing the course of their futures and ours.



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INVESTING FOR IMPACT



Save the Children®

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future.

In the United States and around the world, we work every day to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. When crisis strikes, and children are most vulnerable, we are always among the first to respond and the last to leave. We ensure children's unique needs are met and their voices are heard. We deliver lasting results for millions of children, including those hardest to reach.

We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

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