Applying Developmental Science to UNICEF Programming for Young Children: Scenarios from Sierra Leone

Lang Ma, UNICEF Sierra Leone
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Key Concepts in Applied Developmental Science Used For Early Childhood Development (ECD) Programming

- Development is shaped by dynamic individual \( \leftrightarrow \rightarrow \) context interactions/relations
  (Interdependent and interacting systems across multiple levels)
- Plasticity \( \rightarrow \) window of opportunity (fast brain development in the first few years)
- Promoting positive development through boosting positive assets
- Preventive AND promotive approach
Applying the Developmental Systems Theory

1. Integrate cross-sectoral Interventions to promote ECD to address multiple deprivations and challenges in ECD

2. Focus on relations that explain variation in ECD and potentially malleable to interventions

3. Person-focused study to inform programming and policy advocacy
7 million people

Per capita income
US$684

60% living on less than
US$1.25 a day

70% youth unemployed
or underemployed

Data sources:
http://www.slundp.org/content/sierraleone/en/home/countryinfo.html
https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/history/2014-2016-outbreak/case-counts.html
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5515564/
1.2 million 0-5 year olds in Sierra Leone, most living in poor rural communities (2014 population estimation based on 2004 census)
Two teenage mothers with their young children at a community learning centre where they try to catch up on their studies ©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2017/Ma
Lacking adequate care, early stimulation and early learning opportunities
Status of ECD in Sierra Leone

- **Nutrition:**
  - Stunting: 26.4%

- **Violent disciplining:** 86.5%

- **0-2 year olds:** 8%

- **3-5 year olds:** 10%

- **U5MR:** 94 per 1,000 live births

- **Use of improved sanitation facilities:** 48%

- **Early Learning (Pre-primary):** GER 11.5%

- **Early stimulation barely exists**

Community-based ECD Pilot

- Build a holistic ECD model to be scaled up
- Focus on poor communities
- Intensive community engagement
- Two-generation approach
- Community ECD centre + home visits
- Early stimulation (0-2) + early learning (3-5)
- Support parents to improve child rearing
- Support parents to access existing services
- Cross-sectoral collaboration
Community-based ECD Pilot

At community ECD Centre

Child and caregiver at community ECD centre ©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2017/Ma

At community ECD Centre

Children at community ECD centre ©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2017/Ma
Home visit

Community ECD worker provides counselling support to young mother to interact with her baby during home visit ©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2017/Ma
Community ECD workers introduce homemade toy for early learning to mother and girl during home visit
©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2017/Ma
Community ECD workers and grandmother celebrate after girl sorts out cards by colour during home visit ©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2017/Ma
Emerging Results

- Overall, less than 10% young children have access to early childhood education in the target districts (MICS 6 report (2018)), while in the pilot communities more than 70% young children participating in early learning activities at ECD centre (reports from NGO implementation partners and field monitoring)

- Included children with special needs
- Improved child rearing practices among parents
- Capacity enhanced for cross-sectoral district partners, incl. district health team, Community Health Workers, and Christian and Muslim religious leaders
- Potential to be scaled up
- Baseline study set the basis for randomized control trial summative evaluation
Beyond Building Community-based ECD Model

Integrated ECD into

- ECD policy, National Community Health Worker Policy, and National Every Newborn Action Plan
- Training in Health, WASH, and Child Protection sectors, and for religious leaders
- Programming in Nutrition, Health, and WASH sectors
ECD integrated into National Community Health Worker Policy through advocacy of UNICEF
Sample page from the first set of picture books for young children in Sierra Leone – Mother supports boy to learn how to regulate emotions and behaviours.
Sample pages from the first set of picture books for young children in Sierra Leone – Breastfeeding and adding complementary food for a 6-month old
Promote Fathers’ Involvement in Caring for Young Children through

- Male advocates and role models: NGO staff members, religious leaders, and community leaders
- Engaging them in making toys for young children and playing with young children
- Transforming food distribution at home from father-centered to child- and woman-centered
- Picture books to promote child-caregiver (mother and father) interactions and good child raising behaviours among caregivers
NGO ECD coordinator and boy with disability in a community meeting ©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2017/Ma

UNICEF staff interacts with boy with disability in a community meeting ©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2017/Ma
Fathers and youth make wood and bamboo building blocks for children at community ECD centre
©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2017/Ma
Chair of Community ECD Management Committee plays homemade building blocks with girl at community ECD centre to model that caring children is not just women’s business ©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2017/Ma
Sample page from the first set of picture books for young children in Sierra Leone – Father holds baby to allow breastfeeding mother to take a break, and children have their own plates and cups (good behaviours promoted in the picture books)
Sample page from the first set of picture books for young children in Sierra Leone – Father and mother play with baby together (good behaviour promoted in the picture books)
Sample page from the first set of picture books for young children in Sierra Leone – Father makes toys for children and talks with children (good behaviours promoted in the picture books)
Questions for Discussion

- How to better apply theories and research findings in developmental science to improve the ECD Programme in Sierra Leone?

- What are some of the ways to better bridge research with programming in the field, particularly for low-income countries such as Sierra Leone?
Tenki
Thank You

Preschool children ©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2015/Ma