LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND
Invest in the early years

The United States (US) is the **largest bilateral donor** in the world, making it a very important player within the development assistance community globally. USAID's global health strategy **prioritises preventing child and maternal deaths**.

A review across 10 donors showed that in 2017 the US was the:

2nd largest contributor to **early childhood development (ECD)**, relative to the overall overseas development assistance (ODA) portfolio. (i.e. 5.8% of ODA is spent on ECD) [A]

8th largest contributor in terms of the **proportion of education aid disbursed to early childhood education/ pre-primary**.[B]
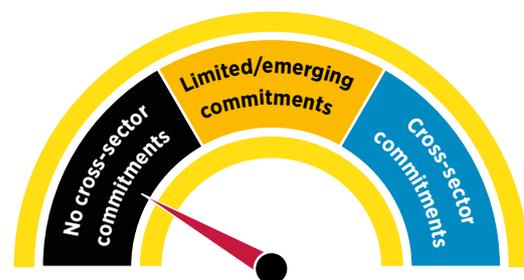
? USAID **disbursed no aid to pre-primary education** and as a result received the lowest ranking in this subsector.[B]

Strategic commitment to early childhood development

Disability-inclusive early education investment commitments

[A] The table looking at the comparative levels of spending on ECD for the donors in this report can be found in the corresponding global report.

[B] In this report, two aspects were looked at in order to draw a comparison between the aid given to early education by various donors. Firstly, the total (quantitative amount) amount spent on aid to early education, and secondly, in an attempt to measure donor 'effort', the authors of this report compared the ratio of aid disbursed to the early education subsector to overall aid to the education sector. The comparative table can be found in the corresponding global report.

Investment in early childhood development services

In 2017, the United States (US) disbursed the largest amount of aid (gross disbursements) to the early childhood domains investigated in this report, namely the health, education, nutrition and sanitation sectors. The US also achieved the second highest ranking (2nd) for its 'effort' in allocating aid spending to areas offering support for ECD, as compared to other donors surveyed.

However, traditionally there has been little focus on ECD as a coherent cross-sector initiative. The US Agency for International Development's (USAID) new policy framework published in April 2019[1] does not specifically mention anywhere in the document, that a cross-cutting, multi-sectoral approach to ECD should be used. There are also no USAID country-level projects on ECD: a search of USAID- funded projects within the government's current aid portfolio found that ECD was not listed as a core objective for any of the projects.[2]

Supporting early childhood development through investments in health, nutrition and sanitation

The vast majority (90%) of the US's aid investment across the four ECD domains was concentrated within the health sector (see Figure 1). This reflects the importance of health as a priority for USAID.

It is also clear from USAID's global health investments that ECD was being supported as a standalone health effort. Preventing child and maternal deaths, which is one of three global strategic health areas prioritised by USAID, explicitly focused on the early years (goal 1).The other two strategic areas, controlling the HIV/ Aids epidemic and combating infectious diseases, also had programming that was largely beneficial to ECD.[3] Therefore, a large and significant proportion of the US government's ECD aid was aligned with supporting ECD, even if this was not stated as a direct outcome.

However, there is very little evidence that spending in health is linked to an overall and explicit ECD multi-sectoral approach. Early childhood development is not referred to in the government's strategic documents or USAID's policy framework on health, even though ensuring that children do not merely survive, but also thrive, should be a natural progression. There are three USAID country initiatives[c] where ECD is mentioned in the project commitments; it is a central objective

FIGURE 1 **Breakdown of early childhood development ODA across different ECD domains. 2017 constant US$ disbursements, based on DAC figures**

- **0%** Education
- **1%** Sanitation
- **8%** Nutrition
- **91%** Health
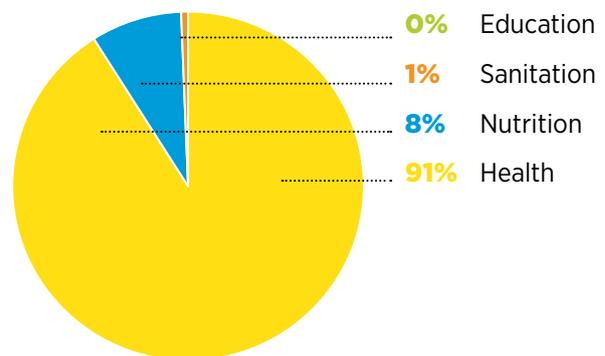
Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System. Accessed May 2019

for one of the three projects. These three initiatives were identified from a survey of more than 5,000 project commitments categorised in the "health and population" sector, which is where health and most basic nutrition is coded by USAID in 2018.[4] Only one water and sanitation project of a similar total had any ECD reference.[D]

Health, nutrition and sanitation

Beyond the health sector, the three remaining domains (education, nutrition and sanitation) were allocated only 9% of aid investments. The USAID reported no spending on early childhood care and education over the entire 2012 to 2017 period. This finding is based on USAID's own reporting into the Organisation for

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[C] The first of these is in Rwanda through the Turengere Abana Program supports an integrated approach to improve the well-being of orphans and vulnerable children, which includes ECD among other sector investments. The second – the only standalone ECD programme – is the "Sisimpur" Early Childhood Development Mass Media Activity in Bangladesh. The third project is through Mothers2mothers (m2m), which has a component of multisector ECD.

[D] This is the Rwandan project named above.

[E] Based on their reporting into the OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System (see https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=CRS1). However, contrary to the OECD DAC database reporting, USAID has confirmed that there were three programmes which contributed aid to this subsector in recent years. In 2017, approximately 20 million US dollars was spent in this area as a result of these three programmes. This confirmation is based on information sent to Light for the World from USAID. The reason why this is not being reflected in OECD DAC CRS is likely due to a database's rule for reporting projects operating across multiple sectors. The rule states that a donor should report its disbursements against the sector to which the majority of the project's funding is allocated.

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Creditor Reporting System (CRS) database that tracks ODA of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries.[E]

Due to its low commitment to early education, USAID was listed last among donors surveyed for this study. This means that it demonstrated the least 'effort' towards early education of any donor surveyed.

The gap in early education spending highlights the need for investments into early learning, and further demonstrates that a multi-sectoral approach to ECD has not been prioritised.

It is hoped that these dire spending levels are set to change. The US Government Strategy on International Basic Education 2019 to 2023[4] has opened up the country's approach to include early education, by committing to education programming. The policy document states that the purpose of USAID programming in education is to achieve sustained improvements in learning and skills development and that: "This occurs from early childhood to primary and secondary education to workforce development and vocational training, in both formal and non-formal settings."[4] This is the first time that US government has committed to supporting early education in their education plan.

The strategy has two principal objectives: to improve learning outcomes and to expand access to quality basic education for all and, in particular, for marginalised and vulnerable populations. The two strategic objectives mention the following:

- **Objective one:** Commits new programming in support of boosting early learning to "focus on two areas in early childhood: child nutrition and health programmes, and preschool programmes, which foster the physical, cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional development of young children."[4] The strategy commits to "building the evidence base on early learning non-academic outcomes".[4]

- **Objective two:** Disability is clearly named as a barrier. The strategy's focus, however, is based on using Peace Corps assistance in empowering "learners with disabilities." Peace Corps volunteers are trained to help accommodate students with special needs.

USAID has since launched the How-To Note on Inclusive Education, which aims to give additional design and implementation suggestions for programme staff of USAID not covered in the existing USAID education policy document.[5] However, at present there are no specific policies and strategies addressing the intersectionality between disability, inclusive education, and early childhood education.

Future strategic commitments from USAID

In May 2019, the US government launched the new, whole-of-government strategy on international assistance, namely the Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity.[6] This was published by USAID in co-ordination with five US government departments and agencies. The document sets out steps for change in development assistance targeted towards ECD, and notably for ECD that includes children with disabilities.

The strategy promotes efficiencies in the government's approach to development by reducing fragmentation, fostering collaboration and co-ordination, and maximising results across departments and agencies. One of the three objectives is specifically linked to investments in early childhood. The first objective 'build strong beginnings' commits the government to "promote nurturing care for the most-vulnerable newborns and young children, starting before birth, by funding and supporting comprehensive and integrated programming in early-childhood development to provide for children's health, nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving for social and emotional well-being, and opportunities for early learning."[6]

Furthermore, it states that the promotion of the principles and practices of equity, dignity, and equality between girls and boys, by addressing their different vulnerabilities, protection needs, and opportunities is a cross-cutting theme. It also notes that the government will pay careful attention to disability-inclusive development, and is committed to inclusive interventions, sensitive to the needs of girls and boys, that build on the strengths of individuals and communities.

Conclusions

There is very little evidence of any overall approach to ECD in USAID's work, and there is no spending on early childhood education over the past five years. That said, the new developments regarding the USAID Education Policy[4] and the How-to Note on Disability Inclusive Education[5] offer more hope for the future. While this is a promising step towards greater disability inclusion, there is still more that needs to be done. Moreover, the new commitments made in the Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity[6] government strategy set out a clear new vision to support ECD with 'building strong beginnings' as one of their objectives, and to support disability-inclusive approaches.

COMPENDIUM OF ADVOCACY TOOLS

This Donor Profile is one of 10 advocacy briefs for ODA advocacy. There are also four recipient country profiles for national advocacy, as well as a Global Report and a user-friendly checklist to support the design of inclusive ECD programmes which seek to support the most marginalised children.

A Methodology Note providing more information on the process of analysis along with all the tools may be accessed at: **www.light-for-the-world.org/ inclusive-ecd-investment**

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REPORT AND DONOR PROFILES

Light for the World and their partners conducted a detailed analysis of the aid disbursements, which 10 donors have committed to support early childhood development. Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, UK and USA are the six bilateral donors reviewed for this report together with four multilateral donors namely, the European Union, World Bank, UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education. Particular attention is paid in the research to donors' commitments towards children who are vulnerable or at risk of being marginalised or delayed in learning due to a disability. For this reason, donors' strategic frameworks were also analysed, in addition to their aid spend.

Light for the World and their partners have provided input to the donor profiles.

Recommendations

USAID should:

- Implement the Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity commitments by scaling up spending on inclusive ECD.
- Commit to an urgent scale-up of early childhood care and education funding, including scaling-up of financing to 10% of USAID's basic education funding.
- Use pre-existing financing in health, WASH and nutrition to support greater embedding of ECD approaches into pre-existing systems and platforms, with a greater focus on increased spending done in a multi-sectoral way.
- Ensure all USAID international basic education (including pre-primary) and ECD funding is disability-inclusive.
- Include the How-To Note on Disability-Inclusive Education within contract, grant, and implementation requirements.
- Provide funding to the Inclusive Education Initiative to support initiatives to inclusive early childhood development.

REFERENCES: 1. US Agency for International Development (USAID). *USAID Policy Framework.* Washington DC; 2019. **2.** US Agency for International Development (USAID). Foreign Aid Explorer. https://explorer.usaid.gov/ Published 2019. Accessed July, 2019. **3.** What We Do. Strategic Priorities. US Agency for International Development (USAID). https://www.usaid.gov/global-health/about-us/strategic-priorities. Accessed August, 2019. **4.** US Agency for International Development (USAID). *U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education for Fiscal Years 2019–2023.* USAID;2018. **5.** US Agency for International Development (USAID). *How-To Note Disability Inclusive Education.* 2018. **6.** Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity https://www.childreninadversity. gov. Accessed July 2019.