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-imparing 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.
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 Alexandrina,
- 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,
- M'klein Center for Interreligous 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.