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DISEASE CONTROL PRIORITIES • THIRD EDITION

## Child and Adolescent Health and Development

# Re-Imagining School Feeding: A High-Return Investment in Human Capital and Local Economies

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# Contents

The following chapters present *DCP3*'s messages for the school feeding community. They are numbered as they originally appeared in *DCP3* Volume 8, *Child and Adolescent Health and Development*. The complete table contents for volume 8 may be found at the end of this edition.

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Foreword by Gordon Brown   | vii  |
| Preface by David Beasley and Jim Yong Kim  | ix   |
| Prologue by Carmen Burbano, David Ryckembusch,<br>Meena Fernandes, Arlene Mitchell, and Lesley Drake | xiii |
| Abbreviations  | xxv  |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>1. Child and Adolescent Health and Development: Realizing Neglected Potential</b>                                     | <b>1</b>  |
| <i>Donald A. P. Bundy, Nilanthi de Silva, Susan Horton, George C. Patton, Linda Schultz,<br/>and Dean T. Jamison</i>     |           |
| <b>3. Global Nutrition Outcomes at Ages 5 to 19</b>  | <b>25</b> |
| <i>Rae Galloway</i>  |           |
| <b>4. Global Variation in Education Outcomes at Ages 5 to 19</b>   | <b>35</b> |
| <i>Kin Bing Wu</i>   |           |
| <b>5. Global Measures of Health Risks and Disease Burden in Adolescents</b>  | <b>45</b> |
| <i>George C. Patton, Peter Azzopardi, Elissa Kennedy, Carolyn Coffey, and Ali Mokdad</i>                                 |           |
| <b>6. Impact of Interventions on Health and Development during Childhood and Adolescence:<br/>A Conceptual Framework</b> | <b>61</b> |
| <i>Donald A. P. Bundy and Susan Horton</i>   |           |
| <b>7. Evidence of Impact of Interventions on Growth and Development during<br/>Early and Middle Childhood</b>            | <b>67</b> |
| <i>Harold Alderman, Jere R. Behrman, Paul Glewwe, Lia Fernald, and Susan Walker</i>                                      |           |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>8. Evidence of Impact of Interventions on Health and Development during Middle Childhood and School Age</b>  | <b>87</b>  |
| <i>Kristie L. Watkins, Donald A. P. Bundy, Dean T. Jamison, Günther Fink, and Andreas Georgiadis</i>  |            |
| <b>9. Puberty, Developmental Processes, and Health Interventions</b>  | <b>95</b>  |
| <i>Russell M. Viner, Nicholas B. Allen, and George C. Patton</i>  |            |
| <b>10. Brain Development: The Effect of Interventions on Children and Adolescents</b>   | <b>107</b> |
| <i>Elena L. Grigorenko</i>  |            |
| <b>11. Nutrition in Middle Childhood and Adolescence</b>  | <b>121</b> |
| <i>Zohra Lassi, Anoosh Moin, and Zulfiqar Bhutta</i>  |            |
| <b>12. School Feeding Programs in Middle Childhood and Adolescence</b>  | <b>135</b> |
| <i>Lesley Drake, Meena Fernandes, Elisabetta Aurino, Josephine Kiamba, Boitshepo Giyose, Carmen Burbano, Harold Alderman, Lu Mai, Arlene Mitchell, and Aulo Gelli</i> |            |
| <b>13. Mass Deworming Programs in Middle Childhood and Adolescence</b>  | <b>153</b> |
| <i>Donald A. P. Bundy, Laura J. Appleby, Mark Bradley, Kevin Croke, T. Deirdre Hollingsworth, Rachel Pullan, Hugo C. Turner, and Nilanthi de Silva</i>                |            |
| <b>17. Disability in Middle Childhood and Adolescence</b>   | <b>171</b> |
| <i>Natasha Graham, Linda Schultz, Sophie Mitra, and Daniel Mont</i>   |            |
| <b>19. Platforms to Reach Children in Early Childhood</b>   | <b>189</b> |
| <i>Maureen M. Black, Amber Gove, and Katherine A. Merseth</i>   |            |
| <b>20. The School as a Platform for Addressing Health in Middle Childhood and Adolescence</b>   | <b>205</b> |
| <i>Donald A. P. Bundy, Linda Schultz, Bachir Sarr, Louise Banham, Peter Colenso, and Lesley Drake</i>   |            |
| <b>22. Getting to Education Outcomes: Reviewing Evidence from Health and Education Interventions</b>  | <b>223</b> |
| <i>Daniel Plaut, Milan Thomas, Tara Hill, Jordan Worthington, Meena Fernandes, and Nicholas Burnett</i>   |            |
| <b>23. Cash Transfers and Child and Adolescent Development</b>  | <b>241</b> |
| <i>Damien de Walque, Lia Fernald, Paul Gertler, and Melissa Hidrobo</i>   |            |

**24. Identifying an Essential Package for Early Child Development:  
Economic Analysis      259**

*Susan Horton and Maureen M. Black*

**25. Identifying an Essential Package for School-Age Child Health:  
Economic Analysis      271**

*Meena Fernandes and Elisabetta Aurino*

**27. The Human Capital and Productivity Benefits of Early Childhood Nutritional  
Interventions      285**

*Arindam Nandi, Jere R. Behrman, Sonia Bhalotra, Anil B. Deolalikar, and  
Ramanan Laxminarayan*

**28. Postponing Adolescent Parity in Developing Countries through Education:  
An Extended Cost-Effectiveness Analysis      303**

*Stéphane Verguet, Arindam Nandi, Véronique Filippi, and Donald A. P. Bundy*

DCP3 Series Acknowledgments      313

Volume and Series Editors      315

Contributors      319

Contents of Volume 8, *Child and  
Adolescent Health and Development*      323



## Foreword

### HEALTH AND EDUCATION DURING THE 8,000 DAYS OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

Today, there is comfort to be found in returning to the inspired words of others. Until H. G. Wells' time machine is made, words are our emotional anchor to the past and, one hopes, our window to a brighter future. Speaking before the 18th General Assembly of the United Nations in 1963, it was President John F. Kennedy who noted that the "effort to improve the conditions of man, however, is not a task for the few." Development is a shared, cross-cutting mission I know well. For the breakthroughs we witness—from Borlaug's wheat to a vaccine for polio—are the products of cooperation, a clean break from siloed thinking, and a courage to work at the sharp edges of disciplines.

Working as a lecturer for five years in the 1970s and early 1980s, I came to see—in a way I never had as a student—that education unlocks talent and unleashes potential. And as Chancellor, Prime Minister, and most importantly a parent, education has remained a centerpiece in my life because of the hope it delivers. For when we ask ourselves what breaks the weak, it is not the Mediterranean wave that submerges the life vest, nor the food convoy that does not make it to the besieged Syrian town. Rather, it is the absence of hope, the soul-crushing certainty that there is nothing ahead to plan or prepare for—not even a place in school.

Two years ago, the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, composed of two dozen global leaders and convened by the Prime Minister of Norway and the Presidents of Chile, Indonesia, and Malawi, as well as the Director-General

of UNESCO, set out to make a new investment case for global education. What resulted was a credible yet ambitious plan capable of ensuring that the Sustainable Development Goal of an inclusive and quality education for all is met by the 2030 deadline. While we continue to work today to ensure our messages become action—from increased domestic spending on schooling to an International Finance Facility for Education—we sought to produce an authoritative, technically strong report that would spend more time being open on desks than collecting dust on a shelf.

The *Disease Control Priorities (DCP)* series established in 1993 shares this philosophy and acts as a key resource for Ministers of Health and Finance, guiding them toward informed decisions about investing in health. The third edition of *DCP* rightly recognizes that good health is but one facet of human development and that health and education outcomes are forever intertwined. The Commission report makes clear that more education equates with better health outcomes. And approaching this reality from the other direction, this year's volume of *DCP* shows that children who are in good health and appropriately nourished are more likely to participate in school and to learn while there. The Commission report raises the concept of progressive universalism or giving greatest priority to those children most at risk of being excluded from learning. Here, too, the alignment with *DCP* is clear as health strides are most apparent when directed to the poorest and sickest children, as well as girls.

It is fitting that one of the Commission's background papers appears as a chapter in this volume. The Commission showed that education spending, particularly for adolescent girls, is a moral imperative and an economic necessity. Indeed, girls are the least likely to

go to primary school, the least likely to enter or complete secondary school, highly unlikely to matriculate to college, and the most likely to be married at a young age, to be forced into domestic service or trafficked. And with uneducated girls bearing five children against two children for educated girls, the vicious cycle of illiterate girls, high birth rates, low national incomes per head, and migration in search of opportunity will only worsen so long as we fail to deliver that most fundamental right to an education.

Here is a projection to remember. If current education funding trends hold, by 2030, 800 million children—half a generation—will lack the basic secondary skills necessary to thrive in an unknowable future. In calling for more and better results-based education spending, the Commission estimated that current total annual education expenditure is US\$1.3 trillion across low- and middle-income countries, an anemic sum that must steadily rise to US\$3 trillion by 2030. A rising tide must lift all ships, and so as education spending at the domestic and international levels sees an uptick, the same must be witnessed for health. The numbers may seem large, but the reality is that this relatively inexpensive effort would do more than unlock better health and education outcomes; it would bring us closer to achieving all 17

Sustainable Development Goals and unlocking the next stage of global growth.

A key message of this volume is that human development is a slow process; it takes two decades—8,000 days—for a human to develop physically and mentally. We also know a proper education requires time. So the world needs to invest widely, deeply, and effectively—across education, health, and all development sectors—during childhood and adolescence. And while individuals may have 8,000 days to develop, we must mobilize our resources today to secure their tomorrow. Let us not forget that the current generation of young people will transition to adulthood in 2030, and it will be their contribution that will determine whether the world achieves the Sustainable Development Goals.

We have, to again draw on Kennedy's words, "the capacity to control [our] environment, to end thirst and hunger, to conquer poverty and disease, to banish illiteracy and massive human misery." We have this capacity, but only when we work together. Both the Commission report and this latest *Disease Control Priorities* volume seek to elevate cross-sector initiatives on the global agenda. In human development, health and education are two sides of the same coin: only when we speak as one will this call be heard.

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