
AIR

Financing ECD IS Climate Action:

The Nurturing Care of Early Childhood Development as the Foundation of a Sustainable, Climate-Resilient World

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1. Problem statement: Addressing the global poly-crisis

2. The Climate Crisis: State of the Emergency

- 2025: 1.44°C above the pre-industrial average — the 2nd or 3rd warmest year on record; the 2023–2025 three-year average reached 1.48°C (WMO, 2026)
- Every one of the last 11 years (2015–2025) ranks among the warmest ever recorded (WMO, 2026)
- Current policies: warming of up to 2.8°C by 2100; full NDC pledges: 2.3–2.5°C — both far above the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C goal (UNEP, 2025)
- A temporary overshoot of 1.5°C is now “inevitable,” beginning as early as the early 2030s (UNEP, 2025)
- The number of people affected by climate-related disasters has more than doubled since 2015 (UN, 2026)

3. The SDGs: Stalled Progress

- Only 36% of measurable SDG targets are on track for 2030; nearly 50% are stalling; 15% have regressed (UN, 2026)
- 1 in 10 people still lives in extreme poverty; 2.3 billion face moderate or severe food insecurity (UN, 2026)
- Over 150 million children remain stunted; maternal mortality remains nearly triple the 2030 target (UN, 2026)
- Real gains exist — nearly 1 billion more people with access to safe drinking water; new HIV infections down ~30% since 2015 (UN, 2026)
- At the current pace, the 2030 Agenda will not be met on schedule

4. One Investment, Three Dividends

- Nurturing care: health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, early learning, and safety/security for every child — above all in the first 1,000 days
- Transformative only when it is: adequately financed; high-quality; delivered at the right time, for the right duration; equitably distributed; and conceived multidimensionally — as part of a dynamic developmental network, not a single child in isolation
- That network runs outward from the child and family to the surrounding socio-cultural and ecological systems
- Done this way, nurturing care is a transformative solution — for the individual, and for the whole network, across the full human lifespan

5. Exceptional ROI: The Evidence

Source	Finding
Lancet Nurturing Care series (Britto et al., 2017)	Returns of up to $13 for every $1 invested
Engle et al. (2011), The Lancet	$4–$13 return per $1 invested, across LMIC evidence
Perry Preschool (Heckman et al., 2010)	7–13% annual rate of return
Abecedarian/CARE reanalysis (García et al., 2020)	~13%/yr internal rate of return; 6.3:1 benefit-cost ratio
Jamaica stimulation trial (Gertler et al., 2014)	25% higher adult earnings, 20 years later

6. Value Added for Sustainable Dimensions

- Because nurturing care operates on the whole developmental network, its value is not confined to the childhood or family sector. It is a demonstrated added-value tool for:

Example Constituencies	Some value nurturing care adds
Gender equality	Redistributes unpaid care work; enables women's employment and leadership
Education	Builds the cognitive/socio-emotional foundation all later learning depends on
Poverty reduction	Interrupts intergenerational poverty at its root
Health	Prevents disease burden and reduces demand on health systems for life
Innovation	Builds the executive-function and creativity base of future innovators
Employment	Raises lifetime earnings, productivity, and labor-force participation
Water & sanitation	A proven delivery platform for safe water and hygiene practices
Cities	Child-centered urban design (Urban95) improves livability for everyone
Wildlife & biodiversity conservation	The developmental window in which lifelong conservation values form
Climate change	Mitigation and adaptation returns — detailed next

- These constituencies would benefit from investing in ECD as part of their strategy for success

7. The Opportunity: ECD in the Climate Arena

- Climate policy is the highest-leverage policy arena to show the fundamental value of ECD:
- The evidence linking nurturing care to community-wide wellbeing, mitigation, and adaptation is substantial and mounting
- Climate finance is the largest, fastest-growing pool of sustainable-development-aligned resources — over $2 trillion mobilized in 2024 alone (CPI, 2025)
- Success in climate policy will provide a template for the sector-by-sector case to be made with every sustainable development constituency
- This requires an important narrative shift: from children as a population vulnerable to climate change, to nurturing care programs as a tested, cost-effective, high return, climate action solution

8. ECD as Climate Action: Climate Mitigation

Channel	Mechanism	Evidence
Infant & young child feeding	Breastfeeding avoids formula-production emissions	11–14 kg CO_2e per kg of formula powder (Karlsson et al., 2019)
Health-system prevention	Lower lifetime disease burden avoids high-emission acute care	Healthcare delivery generates ~4.4% of global emissions (Lenzen et al., 2020)
Caregiver-centered household energy	Clean-cooking transitions via antenatal/infant-care platforms	Cuts household black-carbon emissions 50–95%+

- Estimated contribution: rising from ~0.05–0.12 $GtCO_2e$/yr today to 0.5–1.0 $GtCO_2e$/yr by 2050 — comparable to global commercial aviation

9. ECD as Climate Action: Adaptation

- Adaptive capacity is built from human and social assets — exactly what nurturing care produces:
- A first-food system (breastfeeding) that needs no refrigeration, fuel, or intact supply chain
- Lower baseline disease burden going into a climate emergency or displacement situation
- The caregiving stability determines whether a family absorbs a disaster and can then thrive — or is set back a generation
- Nurturing care prevents maladaptation — it lowers emissions, protects those at highest risk, and builds future adaptive capacity

10. A Financing Opportunity: Closing the Gap

- Global nurturing-care financing gap: US$50–70 billion/year, against a full comprehensive-package cost of ~US$80–90 billion/year (Nores et al., 2024; Cerezo, 2026)
- Global climate finance: over US$2 trillion mobilized in 2024 (CPI, 2025)
- NCQG floor: US$300 billion/year in public climate finance; Baku to Belém Roadmap aspiration: US$1.3 trillion/year (UNCTAD, 2024–25)
- Closing the entire global ECD financing gap would require on the order of 3–5% of the NCQG floor alone
- This is not a request for new money — it is a request to redirect a minimal share of resources already in motion

11. Why 2026: A Convergence Year

- RMI's NDC 3.0 (2025): the first national climate policy anywhere to commit to prioritize ECD
- RMI's Finance Minister confirmed to chair the inaugural Council of the Pacific Resilience Facility (June 2026)
- Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, Koror, Palau (Aug–Sep 2026) — climate change a central theme
- UN General Assembly 81st session & Climate Week NYC (Sept 2026) — national leaders and climate financiers, same weeks
- Pacific Pre-COP31, Fiji and Tuvalu (Oct 2026): negotiators travel to the region
- COP31, Antalya, Türkiye (Nov 2026): Presidency names climate education, resilient cities, and climate finance — including a dedicated Pacific/SIDS resilience-finance session — among its priorities
- Pathways to COP32 in Addis Ababa to make ECD a featured priority/theme (for the first time in history)
- Builds on G20 Johannesburg (Nov 2025): the first-ever G20 Leaders' commitment to early childhood care and education policy

12. The Pacific: Commitment and Action

- 15 Pacific governments endorsed Action Point 10 of the Pasifika Call to Action on ECD
- Pacific Regional Council for ECD (PRC4ECD): the world's first regional political structure dedicated to early childhood to make ECD as climate action a stated and implementable priority
- Pacific Resilience Facility, Pillar 2 (Social and Community Resilience): grant-based, non-debt-creating, open to non-infrastructure programming — and now Pacific-chaired from its first meeting
- Ongoing leadership and championship for ECD as part of the global climate change negotiation process.

- Recommendation: finance a costed, comparative Pacific ECD-climate proof-of-concept, and submit it to the PRF's first call

13. Zooming out: ECD as SDGs Action

- The climate case is a proving ground for the broader claim: ECD as a fundamental, cross-cutting building block of sustainable development
- UNESCO's SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee has opened a formal consultation on the post-2030 education and development agenda (2026–2028)
- SDG Target 4.2 places ECD inside education alone — this undersells its demonstrated reach across at least 10 of the 17 SDGs
- Climate is showing that it is possible to translate ECD's value into another sector's own operational language — and it serves as a template for the case still to be made, sector by sector, with every constituency named earlier

14. Time to Shift Our Narrative

- Success depends on a narrative shift, coupled with effectively communicating our evidence base
- From: The polycrisis dooming children to ever increasing vulnerability and risk
- To: nurturing care as a tested, evidence-based, highly cost-effective climate action solution, with decades of implementation success behind it
- The question changes from “how do we protect children from climate change risk?” to “how does investing in the youngest children drive climate action?”

15. Call to Action

- Global ECD financing researchers, funding institutions, policy makers and advocates: formally evaluate potential of climate finance mechanisms (GCF, GFF, Article 6.4, PRF, NCQG-aligned funds) alongside traditional sources
- Climate finance institutions: pilot a nurturing-care investment case now, while the NCQG and PRF are still being designed
- Pacific governments and partners: submit a costed proof-of-concept to the PRF's first call
- ECD leadership: build relationships beyond the traditional allies of ECD and make the case for ECD as a driver of other sustainable development agendas. (Continue growing the recognition of ECD as a driver for climate action)
- Every constituency named today — gender, education, poverty, health, employment, water, cities, conservation: evaluate what integrating ECD adds to your own agenda.
- ECD leadership: lead with the value and benefits of ECD programs.


Thank you!

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