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EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. ATINC: Good morning, good afternoon everyone. May I please ask you to take your seats? Thank you. My name is Tamar Manuelyan Atinc and I'm a Visiting Fellow here at the Brookings Institution. And is it my pleasure to moderate this interesting event that we're going to be having today. So thank you very much for joining us.

So today, we're going to be talking about the West Bank and Gaza and we're going to be talking about the West Bank and Gaza not from the perspective of the political turmoil or the security situation in the country which is usually how the country appears in the news but we're going to talk about the children of World Bank (sic) -- of West Bank and Gaza. And we're going to talk about what it takes to really have policies and programs that enable these children to realize their full potential and really become the future population, the future citizens and workforce of the West Bank and Gaza.

I think we all know that West Bank and Gaza is situated in a rather inhospitable neighborhood generally and that is also the case from the perspective of the children. Because in fact, if you take a look at the indicators of development for children across the Middle East and North Africa region, the region does rather poorly in many of them. Just to take one, enrollment in preschools in the Middle East is the lowest next to the Africa region. So there's clearly significant room for improvement and West Bank and Gaza is no exception to the difficult circumstances in which children find themselves.

I just want to take a few moments to talk about the importance of early childhood development and I know our presenters are going to speak about that as well. Here at the Brookings Institution, we have just started; we have launched a new program that looks at global early childhood and development. We've had a longstanding center that looks at these issues from the domestic perspective but we're also looking at it

globally at the Center for Universal Education.

And I think from my perspective as silver bullets go for development, this is one of them I would say next to gender empowerment. What can be done in the early years of life for children, usually in the first 1,000 days has a determining influence on their capacities going forward as adults, as citizens and as workers. So I certainly am convinced about the huge benefits of early childhood development, that this is indeed an enormously powerful investment that any country, any society and indeed globally we can make.

Yet we find that it is not a priority in many countries around the world. So the issue that we're struggling with here at Brookings is why is that the case? And what would it take to see broadly more scaled up interventions that lead to good outcomes in terms of early childhood. So we're going to get into this topic from the perspective of a particular location and in the context of a particular region, Middle East and North Africa. And to do that, we have two fantastic speakers with us and I will introduce both of them at the same time.

So we have with us Sulieman Mleahat. He is with us today and he comes from Ramallah. Mr. Mleahat has been ANERA's education program manager since 2010 and for those of you who do not know ANERA, ANERA is a non-profit organization. It stands for America Near East Refugee Aid. He manages in that capacity multiple projects in the West Bank and Gaza, projects that train teachers, renovate preschools, promote community involvement, foster good health practices and establish national standards for ECD.

As a child, Mr. Mleahat was educated in schools with other refugee children in the West Bank. And at the age of 10 he was awarded a scholarship to attend school in the UK. He then went on to complete college and obtain a Master's Degree in

International Development specializing in early childhood development and quality basic education. He has 20 years of experience in the international development sector, 15 of which have been in the field of international education. And as I mentioned he lives in Ramallah with his wife and two sons.

Our next speaker and I am delighted to introduce Safaa El-Tayeb El-Kogali a colleague of mine from the World Bank. I think we met almost about 20 years ago when she first joined the World Bank as a professional. Safaa is a leading education expert with over 18 years in development work. She's currently the sector leader for human development covering education, health, social protection and employment for 14 Caribbean countries and Haiti in the Latin American/Caribbean region of the World Bank.

She was also a senior economist previously in the World Bank's Middle East and North Africa region. And while in MENA, Safaa has brought early childhood development to the forefront in the Bank's dialogue with countries in the region. She pioneered some analytical work on ECD and there are some copies of this regional report outside. I know there aren't many so we may have run out of them but so the report is of early childhood practices with a view to informing policymakers in 12 MENA countries.

In addition to the 10 years of experience in the World Bank, Safaa has also been the regional director for West Asia and North Africa at the Population Council which is an international research organization. And she has also previously worked with the regional research organizations as well as NGOs.

Safaa is a Sudanese national and has an advanced degree in development studies from the Institution of Development Studies and the University of Sussex in the UK. I neglected to mention that there are also copies of the ANERA report outside as well as blog post of ours that lays out our views about some of the constraints to scale up early childhood development and sketches out the program of work that we

want to undertake here.

So what we're going to do now is we're going to start with just a two-minute video. Yes. Okay, then I'm going to ask Sulieman to come to the podium first and then we're going to watch a two-minute video. He'll make his presentation talking about the state of early childhood development in West Bank and Gaza. Once he finishes his presentation, I will ask Safaa to come to the podium, both comment on what she heard from Sulieman but also present some of the highlights of her own work in West Bank and Gaza and actually place West Bank and Gaza in the regional context.

When that is all done, then we will all come up here and sit down and have a conversation, a moderated discussion for about 15, 20 minutes and then I'll open it up to the floor for your comments and questions. So, Sulieman.

MR. MLEAHAT: Thank you, Tamar. Good afternoon, everyone. I wanted to just speak briefly before the video because it's important to introduce it. I'm absolutely thrilled to be here today. I'm absolutely delighted to be at this very esteemed institution. I came across Brookings a few years back but more seriously about four years ago. In Oman when I met with World Bank and UNICEF colleagues and other from Brookings who were promoting a number of pieces of research in Morocco, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen but much to my disappointment, Palestine was not included.

So I'm absolutely thrilled that four years on we have -- I'm here with Safaa and I'm here with ANERA and other colleagues to promote the plight of Palestinian children especially during early years. We have, at the back, two pieces of excellent research desktop and others promoting the plight of young Palestinians.

When -- I want to apologize to colleagues from ANERA because they've heard some of my presentations at least three times this week so apologies for if I do repeat any of those anecdotes. In sitting down with colleagues earlier this week, I think I

sounded a bit somber because Palestine tends to get to you, this reality. And I said, folks, tell me, what should I do? So the first they said, Sulieman, tell a story. The second thing, Sulieman, be positive and thirdly, make sure that you say three things in terms of ECD in Palestine.

So I'm going to tell you about the context in which Palestinian children live. I'm going to talk a little about the ECD reality in Palestine and the third thing; I'm going to tell you a little about the wonderful work that we are doing in making ECD a reality for many Palestinian children.

So in terms of telling a story, I'll be very brief. I was parachuted from Beersheba to battle at the age of 10 in Sussex without being able to speak much English, et cetera. It was then really I began valuing the importance of education because I attended Pestalozzi and many of you know Pestalozzi, who was a Swiss educationist, and even back in 1982 I began to understand the importance of holistic and integrated approaches to early childhood development. I was 10 and not 8 because 8 is the cutoff point for ECD, conception to 8.

Holistic learning, the head, the heart and the hand and really it was ever since then that I was really -- I became determined to pursue the advancement of education for refugee children, even from a very young age. And I'm absolutely thrilled that, you know, 20, 25 years later I'm here doing that with ANERA. So that's my little story but it makes a great deal of sense and I fully appreciate what we're doing and ANERA's and (inaudible) role.

So being positive, look. After you spend 20 years in development, especially in a place like Palestine, you become a little jaded and a little cynical, dare I say, because it's often very difficult. You know, I spent five years studying development and you talk about EFAs, MDGs and so on and so forth and it becomes really difficult

when you can't see it truly translated on the ground. And it's lovely to be able to do that. So I want to show you this two-minute video because it's very, very inspiring and it comes from a context that's extremely difficult for Palestinian children. Excuse me.

(Video Played)

MR. MLEAHAT: Thank you. Lovely, thank you. We chose those two because those KGs were the first two we started working on in the West Bank last year. The sad thing is that actually Bey-tij-sa looks about 10 times better than most of KGs we work in in Gaza and some of the remote areas in the West Bank. So those actually -- the before shots were actually very good in comparison to some of the others.

But that's -- this is EFA one. That's what we should be doing. This is the translation of education for all goal one which is really important. Right, the context in which Palestinian children live, most live in poverty and the majority of families are food insecure and food dependent.

In a survey last year 94 percent of households in Gaza faced difficulties accessing food even, you know, this is to people can't afford food even when it's available but actually many foodstuffs aren't available in Gaza. Poverty rates fluctuate, anything from 33.2 percent in one recent survey to the mid-sixties in some cases. In certain communities things are particularly difficult especially in Gaza and some parts of the West Bank. Families can't access, you know, their unemployment rates, again, we're talking about 30 plus in terms of unemployment rates.

You know, because there are very few economic opportunities, people aren't able to freely move between Israel and the West Bank, of course or within Palestinian territories. You know, what's -- I was reading yesterday that an Israeli Institute, a brilliant Israeli Institute the Association for the Study of Civic Rights in Israel, ACRI, put poverty rates in Jerusalem amongst children at 82.2 percent. And we're talking

about a modern city here.

Poverty rates amongst children are at 80 plus percent that we're talking about 100,000 children in Jerusalem, East Jerusalem alone who are poor. That's nowhere to be a child and hence the title of this childhood is denied for many Palestinian children. I could list a number of other statistics. I shan't. I'm tempted to but I shan't. How does that manifest itself in terms of health and nutrition and so on and so forth?

You know, what's pretty striking and the lancet has done some brilliant work, WHA have done excellent work and others, Save the Children or ourselves and so on and so forth, ODI in London have done recent work on Gaza. You know, anemia rates is really, really important in preschool children. It's 50 percent plus and certainly in not just preschool children but in school-age children, 50 percent, 58 percent of those children are anemic. 36 percent of mothers in Gaza are anemic. And now that doesn't bode well for, you know, when we talk about ECD, we talk about conception to 8. We don't even talk about 0 to 8.

We talk about the child in the womb and low birth rate promises a life of morbidity and absolute hell for many Palestinian children really. What's pretty sad, what's really, really affects me is the statistics around stunting and wasting. And I've looked at many studies, one of which was from the Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal, which puts stunting at anything between 15 and 34 percent and it's not just Gaza. Some communities which we visit in the West Bank, stunting is prevalent in 34 percent of children.

This is irreversible, physical damage that you can't, no matter what nutritional support you give children, that's irreversible damage. You know, 10 percent of children there is instances of wasting as well as stunting. You know, Gaza, I was looking at a recent report in terms of access to water. Nitrate and chloride levels are 10 times

higher in Gaza water than WHO standards. I mean 10 times higher, 90 percent of water from the Gaza aquifer is not fit for consumption and I read recently, it's actually not fit for agriculture. How bad is that?

I mean this is the reality in which Palestinians face, you know, trauma, 350,000 children in Gaza will develop symptoms, post-traumatic stress disorders. Half of Gaza's children will have mental health issues and that's according to the Gaza Community Mental Health program. That's reality. And, you know, Gaza, of course, Palestine is fairly unique. It suffers from diseases of affluence and diseases of poverty.

We're talking about respiratory problem. We've got, you know, 27 percent of children in Gaza we've found this through our parasite program, 27 percent of preschool children in Gaza suffer from parasite infestations, infections and so on and so forth. So that's the reality of the Palestinian children face.

Of course, very few have access to ECD services and programs, you know, the right to play, the space, opportunities for stimulation, for cognitive development, social, emotional, physical development are limited to Palestinian children. And I've just referenced a few figures here. I was speaking to Safaa just earlier. You know, the Ministry of Education put enrollment rates at 42.1 percent. We find that very hard to believe because we look at various, you know, we visit some of these preschools.

At best, I think, we're hovering around the 30, 35 percent mark and we're talking about only one round of KG class or preschool in Palestine. So very few people access ECD services, preschools, et cetera.

The sad thing for us because we are engaged, we would love to increase access, help the Palestinian authority, Ministry of Education increase access and that's really critical. And we are working with the Ministry in that sense. But what we see on the ground and we've worked in a third of Gaza's preschools. I mean, it's a massive

program for a small organization. We're absolutely thrilled to have done that in two years.

The quality of ECD is woefully inadequate. It's poor at best. It's dangerous because we visited preschools that are not fit for the education, care and development of children. There is no ventilation, there is very little lighting, there is nothing to be stimulated with and of course, pedagogical approaches are ancient, you know. We know that from a survey. There is a summary of one of our surveys that actually -- this is the sad thing, you know, 31 children per classroom. But what our statistics don't tell you is how large a classroom it is.

Because they are -- I've visited preschools in Gaza and the West Bank where 30 children are probably crammed in 16 square meters which is pretty horrific. So the quality is desperately poor. It is most preschools that I visit, you know, I know are unfit for purpose, really are, you know. 11 percent of the head teachers we interviewed in Gaza over the past couple of years said that they had no -- only 11 percent said they had enough materials for children to manipulate.

This is desperate for cognitive development because the brain starts shutting down if you're not adequately providing, of course, health, nutrition and adequate stimulation. So when we talk about future prospects for Palestinian society and peace and prosperity, we really need to be looking at supporting these children because that's the only way you are going to get a healthy, vibrant society and a peaceful society. And I'm absolutely thrilled to be playing a small part in that.

And what's particularly sad, because, you know, there are Palestinians communities suffer a tremendous amount of stress, mental health issues and so on and so forth. You know, in one survey recently we found out that actually something like 68 percent of children suffer abuse in the home. And I'm not surprised when you're living in

under severe conditions, you know, you're likely to be physically and verbally abused. So children suffer that.

And evidence from our work suggests that very few parents have the tools and the capacities to be able to provide adequate play and stimulation for children. And of course, there are broader sectorial issues. You know, there is no malice. Most -- we often blame duty bearers, ministries and governments for not, you know, providing children with, you know, or rights holder with adequate support and enabling their rights as it were. My experience in the Palestinian territories is that actually there's a tremendous amount of good will. There's just a tremendous amount of ignorance, lack of knowledge and awareness about early childhood and the importance of education for all (inaudible).

Of course, there are huge issues in terms of budgetary issues, planning, capacity and so forth. So we've been working with the ministry to support them in that sense. So what have we done? And often, you know, small NGOs say, you know, what have you done? You have a loud voice and what have you really done on the ground?

Well, we've done remarkable things even as a small international not-for-profit. We have worked with over 30 percent of Gaza's preschools. We've renovated and equipped 120 preschools and one really good development in recent months has been our work with Ministry of Education in the West Bank because they turned round and said, with a tremendous amount of advocacy from like-minded organizations and ANERA, we've wanted to expand this. There are only two governmental KGs in the West Bank. So in terms of operation, of course, Palestine, like many other countries in the Middle East will not realize education for all goal one. They won't by 2015.

Obviously, I'll be very happy if they did it by 2050 but we'll talk about that later. So this is a brilliant example. This is the small village school in Beit Mirsim. Beit

Mirsim is an ancient Palestinian village that date back 5,000 years before Christ. The Pharaohs used to go up to Damascus through this little village I'm told.

So this is a small village school which was disused because the Ministry built a primary school behind and this was disused. They asked us if we could set up a preschool and this is what we've done. This is received photos today and I'll update my presentation because there are -- the photos have playground equipment, the new ones, which were installed yesterday. So we are doing that.

We're supporting the Ministry to establish 30 new KG classes. I won't stay too long. We provide superb training, mentorship. This is the translation of EFA on the ground. We provide -- we've trained over 500 teachers in two years. We provide superb pedagogical guidance and support for teachers and we follow up in the field and this is the most difficult thing. Is actually it's all well and good to be sitting in a classroom but really it's okay, it's about -- sorry, this is, okay, sorry.

We promote active learning, not chalk and talk and we don't like people sitting in front of a huge audience telling them about things for more than 10 minutes. So apologies. So and so, we've done this. The challenge for us really is to make this stick. Mentorship is really important. People who are often paid less than \$100 a month, often not paid more than two months in a row, are demoralized. And if we're talking about active learning, we need to talk really active strategies to promote the delivery of ECD in these remote areas to support teachers' professional development and we have done that.

And this is just so enchanting this picture. These were the -- from the children, these are children from Bey-tij-sa that you saw on the film. When we went in it was fairly miserable. Children were just literally cooped up in this classroom, shivering, it's cold 'cause it's just west of Jerusalem, south of Ramallah. Sitting in rows, huddled

together with very, very basic -- there's very little there. And this is what teachers do now. They're translating ECD policies and approaches on the ground.

Children sit on tables and cooperatively learn together and sing and dance and jump and have access to clean toilets. This is what I do. I visit the -- when we do our assessment, I make sure to visit toilets and as -- that's my first port of call, really. It's a good indication of pedagogy if there are toilets, if there are clean toilets.

The wonderful thing about working for ANERA is that I'm given a tremendous amount of freedom to do lots of things. I was here three years ago and they dragged me to Reading is Fundamental. And on the way back I stopped and went met a remarkable woman called Wendy Cooling in London who set up Bookstart. And we've set up Reading is Fundamental in Palestine under this program.

We've dished out 14,000 learning packs for children. We know that at least three children in each household are being read to. And Eric Carle's Caterpillar book is very big in Gaza folks. It's lovely which is really lovely. So this is what we've done.

We've, you know, when we want to make ECD a success in the community, you need to talk to the first educators and parents. And we've done this. We've supported mothers essentially, unfortunately just mothers not fathers, in Gaza and this is a picture that I took on a spot check in one of the KGs where mothers are in the preschool making putty out of flour, crayons and such and working with the children.

This is really important because you need to look at issues of abuse and neglect and active learning and health and nutrition and change parental behavior within the home. And of course we're working very, very closely with the Ministry of Education on policies, standards and the soon to be launched ECD strategy. The key thing for most of us who are involved in development is that when you go in, you make sure when you

leave out something stays.

And we want to institutionalize the learning. We want to set up, firm up the accreditation and the institutionalization of teacher development. There's only one opportunity in a refugee training center in Ramallah that provide only refugee girls with two years, two-year diploma and ECD does nothing else in Palestine, undergraduate or post-graduate. So our diploma is really critical in that sense.

This is what we want to do. I thank you very much for your attention. And thank you for your support. And I hope this is, yeah, the start of something very special in Palestine and elsewhere in the Middle East.

MS. ATINC: I'm not doing my job in terms of keeping time but you can see why. You can certainly hear the passion in his voice so if that's your jaded self, I don't know what your enthusiastic self would have been. So I want to invite Safaa to come up but I want to check and see if we have the option of extending the session. Yeah, okay, 'cause we also started late. Safaa?

MS. EL-KOGALI: Good afternoon, everybody. I was very moved, I have to say. As a Sudanese, I grew up seeing the plight of Palestinians everywhere; on television, on radio and as a child I wrote a poem about refugees referring to the Palestinian refugees and at this point the only line that I can remember which sort of came up to me as I listened to you Sulieman is "The tearful eyes look up to the sky demanding when not asking why."

And I think it's the when that I am interested in now that I've done a lot of years of experience in all sorts of areas, coming to early childhood development is really the essence of any development. I just came back from a conference where John Romer was a speaker and in 1998 as some you may know, he introduced the concept of the inequality of opportunity. And he was saying that economic development or all that we

do for growth really comes to down to ensuring that we give equal opportunities to those who are disadvantaged by their circumstances.

And I think early childhood is the stage where we need to focus on that. So I just wanted to congratulate Sulieman for the work they're doing. I think the areas you have focused in and the comprehensive approach is absolutely essential. Given the circumstances and the context in West Bank and Gaza, it's even more difficult than in other countries. And I think you've done a tremendous job, ANERA has done a tremendous job. And you're focusing on all the right areas based on what I have read and our research, I think the situation that you have painted very bleak but that's the reality. And our research has also shown that.

What I'm going to do is just quickly tell you a little bit about our research and the findings but also put, as Tamar had mentioned, West Bank and Gaza in a global context or in a regional context I mean. And you will not feel as bad. In fact, you're doing a lot better than many countries.

So as I said the whole idea about inequality and focusing on early childhood came to with this work from John Romer and I felt that there's a lot of talk about shared prosperity now in the World Bank and poverty. And I think it's at that early stage when cycles of poverty begin and are perpetuated later on in life. And so, if we are to ensure that to reverse the inequality, we need to focus at that stage.

So we try to look for information that can give evidence to policymakers about early childhood development. And a lot of studies that are global that looks at various regions of the world; we couldn't find much on the Middle East and North Africa. And so, we came up with an initiative a couple of years ago called Early Childhood Development for a Better Chance or ECD for ABC. And the idea is to try and look, take household surveys, the latest available, look at the status of early childhood development

focusing on a number of indicators based on the data that's available. Look at what determines the status of early childhood development and then try and measure the inequality in these indicators.

So we -- to take on the comprehensive approach we tried to look at health indicators, nutrition, psycho-social development and early learning and early work. Then we looked at the circumstances that could be linked to early childhood development and inequality. So we looked at the child's gender, at the household wealth which we divided using an asset index and looking at quintiles, we looked at parents' education, rural and urban residence and the region or the governorate.

And this is what we found. So what you see here is the different indicators that we use to measure early childhood development. When you look at prenatal care and let me say for early childhood development we focus from in utero, from conception till age 5. And so, the prenatal care for the mother and the delivery by a trained attendant are critical to ensure the health, safety, survival of the child. And West Bank, Gaza is not doing bad in that sense where you have 99 percent of mothers having at least one visit and 98 percent deliver their babies with a trained attendant.

Infant and child mortality are at 2 and 3 per thousand. Stunting as Sulieman had mentioned is very high. You have 12 percent of children ages 0-5 stunted. This will affect their growth as adults. This has severe implications. It's not reversible.

We look at iodized salt because that has an effect on the children's brain development and we find that 87 percent of children have access to iodized salt, which as I will show you compared to other countries is fairly good. Early childhood care and education, again, the numbers vary. This is 2006 data the Palestinian family and health survey. I understand there's a later data set but this is what was available for us.

So 34 percent only of children have access to early childhood care and

education. And 47 percent of them have access to four out of six development activities. These include playing, reading books, some activity that stimulates their development. But look at the last one. 96 percent of children between the ages of 1 and 5 have experienced violent discipline. This is really concerning and as you will see this is, in all of the MENA countries, a problem that needs to be addressed.

So just to give you a sense of West Bank and Gaza in a regional context, I tried to look -- we -- so this D index measures the inequality. And I don't want to get into the technicality of it. But I tried to look at to what extent is our services unequal for children.

And you will see that in West Bank and Gaza it's better off than many countries in terms of skill delivery. But look at stunting. So you have Yemen which has much higher stunting rates but the inequality is less. Whereas Jordan you have much lower stunting rates but the inequality is very high. And West Bank, Gaza is closer to the high side. The gray bars show that the results were insignificant but we just put them there as well.

Similarly, with development activities you will see inequality much higher in other countries than it is in West Bank/Gaza. But look at early childhood care and education. Again, I will show you later on but here it gives you a sense that the inequality is not as high as in other countries.

However, what we then tried to do is take a child who we call is most advantaged child. That child comes from educated parents whose secondary degrees are higher, lives in an urban setting and comes from the 20 percent richest households versus a child who comes from rural areas and has parents who were not educated and lives in rural areas and also governorates or regions that are considered poor.

And this chart shows you the degree of inequality between given the

different indicators. As you'll see, violent discipline occurs regardless of where you're born. So this is really across the board but look at early childhood education, care and education. The inequality is just tremendous at that level.

Now, when you try and compare it with other countries as I mentioned showing the most advantaged child and the least advantaged child, again, the inequality is not as bad in West Bank and Gaza when we look at prenatal care. With stunting the rates for least advantaged child are lower than in any of the other countries we have data for. And the gap is also not as big in terms of least and most advantaged child.

But look at early childhood care and education. Again, in West Bank/Gaza the least advantaged child -- the gap between the least advantaged child and the most advantaged child is huge as I had shown earlier. But when you look at other countries it's around the same level to some and better than others.

So just wanted to set that stage for you and to come back and say, so what does all of this mean? I think the question of highlighting the evidence for policymakers and showing them it's not just a question of overall early childhood development is poor but rather you have extreme inequalities. Some people just will not have a chance or an opportunity in life because from the day they're born they are experiencing circumstances beyond their control as children.

What we hope to do is use this evidence, work with partners and NGOs to present a strong case to policymakers that this is not just a human case. This is an economic case. And you need to invest at that level. You need to really address the inequalities at that level if you want to have any form of development. Thank you.

MS. ATINC: Well, thank you very much. Can you hear me okay?
Thank you very much for those, both of those excellent presentations. I really appreciate the picture from the ground that Sulieman presented and the work that ANERA does in

(inaudible) Palestinian children. And it was great to get the overview of the many dimensions of children's development for Palestinian children and placing them also in the regional context.

I actually thought the data were very interesting and I had looked at the regional report that Safaa has produced and seen some of the really rather grim indicators for children's development in the MENA region. So I thought initially going in that West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian children were going to feature among the worst in the lot. But it's interesting to see that that is not the case and certainly not the case uniformly across the different indicators of development.

Certainly the one that jumps out is the one around violence at home. And maybe we'll come -- I'm sure there'll be questions about that from the audience. Having said that, there's still gaps and there's still some disparities in some dimensions, early childhood education and stunting are the two that emerge. And we also know globally the importance of early childhood education and what it takes to put together successful programs and indeed ANERA is doing some of that.

So I guess my question to both of you will be what is it going to take to make early childhood development a high priority for the government?

MR. MLEAHAT: Okay, do you want to start?

MS. ATINC: Let's start with Sulieman.

MR. MLEAHAT: My experience or our experience with the Ministry of Education has been quite positive and it's actually there's no and I said in my presentation we often blame governments and ministries for not investing. Our experience has been quite positive in the three years or four years we've worked with the Ministry we helped set up an ECD taskforce to ensure that we coordinate our efforts with the likes of UNICEF, SAVE and others and welfare association and so on and so forth.

And the Ministry has been very positive. And I think the first thing we've seen is that actually with some advocacy they're beginning to speak the same language as us in terms of holistic, integrating services. So that's been really positive. Often, of course, there aren't the budgets, et cetera. But that's -- it's been great.

So advocacy has worked well and the really positive thing is that ECD is an integral part of the Ministry of Education's education sector development plan 2014 to 2019. So that's a really, really positive development. And the other positive development is that they've come to us and have asked us to help them increase access in terms of opening up KG classes and primary schools. And they've done -- they've undertaken 30 so far. We will open the first two next week in the West Bank and Gaza.

What will it take? More knowledge, more advocacy, more support and of course more international assistance and that's critical I think in the Palestine context.

MS. ATINC: Safaa. One of the ways to get government to move on things is demand from the citizens. And I'm just wondering what your thoughts are. Are Palestinian families demanding better services for their children or is there a knowledge information gap which I think Sulieman seems to be implying which I suppose is also evidence in the survey results of that violence at home. So your thoughts on that.

MS. EL-KOGALI: So, thank you, Tamar. I actually think it's at different levels. So a demand at, you know, parents demand or community demand is essential but you need awareness among communities and families to demand better services. So if a family doesn't really value a preschool or a center and this just see it as somewhere to put their kids for a few hours and don't see the developmental importance of it, they will not demand certain quality of services.

And so, I think the work that you're doing in terms of raising awareness is important but I think also it's important to have awareness among policymakers. And

that's what we're aiming with the work that we're doing is providing the evidence that it's not just another area that you need to focus on among youth and employment and among the, you know, the competing demands of the government but rather centering it by providing the evidence of why this is important and how you can actually address it.

MS. ATINC: Thank you. Sulieman, when you talked about the situation of children in West Bank and Gaza and the various challenges of poor quality infrastructure, poor quality teaching, lack of availability of materials and supplies, I thought to myself this could be anywhere in the world. Yet of course, the World Bank and Gaza have -- West Bank and Gaza is not anywhere in the world. It's a particular location with a history and a lot of challenges.

So what are some of the particular challenges that in particular the political and security situation poses for the children in the region? Is there an added disadvantage that needs to be overcome to provide good quality programs for these children?

MR. MLEAHAT: That's a very interesting question. Of course, we're critically focusing on improving the plight of and the lot of young children. And as an international humanitarian organization, our priority is the humanitarian issues. But look, many of the issues facing Palestinian children whether it's poverty, ill health, nutrition and so on and so forth are avoidable. And I'm sure they're avoidable elsewhere. But they're more avoidable in that context.

It's interesting to see Safaa's more positive statistics. That was a household survey in 2006-2007 and what we've seen in Gaza certainly is a six, seven year old siege in Gaza. And only yesterday there is a specific reference and there's some research in Gaza in three communities in Northern Gaza, stunting in Northern Gaza is at 34 percent in some of those communities.

Now, that is on par with the West Africa region. Now, we're amongst a group of highly knowledge individuals who and colleagues who are aware of the political situation in the Middle East. I don't need to tell you the complexities of that really. Gaza has been under siege, very few opportunities to access employment, you know, most of the families are dependent on food aid and we know that sugar, rice, salt and oil does not have the young child in mind, the preschool child in mind.

So I say it's avoidable and I think the political quagmire doesn't help because it constrains the Palestinians' ability to realize their rights, economic rights and so on, access to labor markets and so on and so forth. I think that's what distinguishes it. Of course, it's more avoidable than other areas unfortunately.

MS. ATINC: Okay.

MS. EL-KOGALI: Can I actually just comment on this?

MS. ATINC: Yes.

MS. EL-KOGALI: Because I think it's interesting that despite the situation they're in, they're doing better than Yemen, for example, right? And so, to me that's the positive aspect because it means there's a lot of effort somehow to address some of these issues. Maybe there's more awareness, maybe there's more support but I actually thought it's fascinating that despite the political and economic situation in these areas that the indicators are better.

MR. MLEAHAT: The indicators are better certainly in urban areas but in my experience with the Ministry and the Deputy, I work very closely with the Deputy Minister and the Foreign Minister, they've been very, very supportive. And it's just, that's really heartening when they come in and they say, right, we would like your assistance in developing standards for playgrounds, for KGs, we want you to develop the competencies checklist for practitioners. We want you to come in and help us set up a

formal training diploma and in service and a pre --

So my experience, certainly with the duty bearers in Palestine, has been positive. And that's great actually.

MS. ATINC: Actually, that was a perfect segue to the last question that I wanted to ask to Safaa which is it seems that it's primarily non-governmental organizations that are active in the field of early childhood development in West Bank and Gaza. And given the severe, I assume, financing constraints for the government, how do you see the roles of government versus non-government? What is -- it has to be a partnership. What does that partnership look like?

MS. EL-KOGALI: So sometimes it's actually a blessing that you have these initiatives come out of the private sector, the non-governmental sector. Because the government has financial constraints, because the government has a lot to do in all other areas, that if the initiative is started by non-government, governmental organizations, that actually allows the government to play the role it needs to play in terms of focusing on the poorest, setting standards in terms of quality, accrediting institutions, providing incentives, training teachers.

So I think the role of government is absolutely critical but it doesn't have to be a financing role. And so, the initiative is there. The interest is there from non-governmental organizations so I think that helps a lot the government to play a role that can help move this forward. They can take the leadership in terms of putting it as a priority area, focusing, coordinating, bringing in assistance to the extent possible but not necessarily having to finance all of it because I don't think this is a sustainable option.

NGOs have the role and I think they're reaching households and parents. And I think that's an important role but then parents themselves really have to play a role. To monitor the service provider but also to hold them accountable and hold governments

accountable to ensure that everybody has access to these services.

MS. ATINC: Anything you want to add, Sulieman?

MR. MLEAHAT: Absolutely. It's really, you know, I'm working very closely with the Ministry in the West Bank. And they have over probably 1,300 preschools, KGs in the West Bank. The Ministry has only 16 supervisors many of whom would have not been trained in ECD. They most have something like 70-80 KGs to supervise and I often joke what do they do with their spare time?

So they need support and we've seen certainly positive feedback in terms of policy, standards, you know, a mapping of services with the Ministry. We've -- I would like them to see much more of a supportive role in terms of those poor providing the private sector and the charitable institutions. ECD provision is problematic everywhere in the world.

It's not -- you know, I remember growing up when children were -- when my children were born in London, Tony Blair came in of course and provided -- set up Sure Start. And you know, nearly half of my salary went into supporting young Ali access that. And that was -- there was very little governmental support in the UK and I'm sure the same is here in the US in terms of interim.

So in Palestine like anywhere else, like Sure Start in the UK, government should target its service provision to those areas that and people who are most marginalized. There isn't a private institution. There's not even a tin shack providing the most rudimentary of services in some of the areas in Southern -- the West Bank or the Jordan Valley or Northern Gaza. So I think it's -- the government's role is to provide services in disadvantages but strength -- we need to support them too in their supervisory role and support their policy development and strategies, et cetera.

MS. ATINC: Okay, thank you. Well, I'd like to open it up to all of you.

We have a good 15 minutes for discussion. Okay, I have one, two and three. Let's start with the back. Please, do introduce yourself briefly.

MS. ROSA: I'm Rahanna Rosa and I'm also from the World Bank.

MS. ATINC: I think there's a mic right there for you.

MS. ROSA: Sorry. I'm Rahanna Rosa and I'm also from the World Bank. My question is that, I mean, I'm absolutely moved by your passion and but one of the things that kept on coming in my mind while you were talking was that when I think of West Bank and Gaza I just think of conflict. And I'm wondering how early childhood development plays a role in dealing with that particularly in the non-cognitive sense. So I'm assuming most of these children maybe not directly but indirectly are in a situation which is extremely tense where there is potential for conflict.

And that must have underlying consequences for these children. And what do we know from Palestine or anywhere else in the world on how early childhood development can make a difference for these children who are in these very conflict driven situations. So that was my big thought that kept on coming and I am very impressed with your work, thank you.

MR. MLEAHAT: Thank you, bless thank.

MS. ATINC: Thank you. Why don't we take the three as a batch? And then we'll come to the speakers.

MS. AGÜERO: I'm Katherine Agüero. I'm with Salzburg Global Seminar. My question was mostly for Safaa. So I was surprised by the country lineup and Yemen kept coming up as one of the -- in the bottom. And so, I was wondering if you think that because, you know, Palestine was in most cases doing better than Yemen, is it do you think because foreign aid is prioritizing places like Palestine as opposed to Yemen or does it have more to do with government support?

MS. ATINC: Okay, thank you. And Emily?

MS. GUSTAFSSON: I'm Emily Gustafsson here from Brookings. Thank you both for your presentations. I think the heart pulling the heartstrings but also showing the data are both important in this work. My question is to Safaa. I know that you're working in Latin America and Caribbean and the Caribbean is an area where violent discipline is also a problem and I wonder if you might comment on any parallels between MENA and the Caribbean and potentially lessons learned in either for the other. Thanks.

MS. ATINC: Why don't we take those and I think we'll have time for another round. Sulieman, let's start with you on conflict and its --

MR. MLEAHAT: ECD literature stipulates that actually ECD programs, you look at UNESCO's work, the global monitoring group called VFA, it tells us that ECD is profoundly more important in disadvantaged areas. And the evidence suggests that programs are more effective in poorer communities. So you get more for your dollar in those areas.

Now, I'll give you one example. I mentioned 350,000, 50 percent of Palestinian children, are likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorders. That's a fact. Halfway through one of our projects just over a year ago there was a conflict between Gaza and Israel and Gaza was bombarded. Because we were on the ground we were able to actually rejig with a donor our program and provide immediate support for nearly 5,000 children. And we worked closely with another international organization to provide basic interventions which meant that children and their families were able to utilize the centers just to distract them from the bombardment and the trauma that they were experiencing.

And the feedback and adult (inaudible) style feedback we've received was very, very positive. And that's, you know, WHO refers to ECD as the great leveler.

And it's just much more important in those contexts than anywhere else. So that's, you know, we should be advocating for that not because it's a luxury. It's essential where poverty, violence is ever present.

MS. ATINC: Safaa?

MS. EL-KOGALI: Okay, I actually wanted to also respond to this, this comment. A few years ago we did research in the Darfur region of Sudan to look at the impact of schooling for displaced children. And it was really fascinating because the -- at the community level, community leaders, parents but also the children themselves thought that going to school helps them deal with conflict.

At a psycho-social level, the kids would say things like, when I'm at school I don't think about what happened to me. And when I'm at home I'm focusing on my homework so I don't think about what happened to me. Parents felt their children were safe, that they're in a space that was a safe space and they're not just playing somewhere where they could step on a landmine. So this is schooling in general, wasn't focusing on sort of preschool but I think it is a very important intervention in conflict situations.

So Katherine, your question about Yemen. I worked a little bit on Yemen before and I think there are a number of issues at play there. The geography, the topography is very, very harsh in Yemen. It's very mountainous. It's hard to access services, that's one. But then the capacity of the government to deliver basic services is very limited.

MS. ATINC: Country's poorer, too.

MS. EL-KOGALI: The country is very poor and there's a lot of foreign aid to Yemen but not sufficient to really spread the services especially in remote areas. Capacity in terms of not just the finances but in terms of manpower or human resources

is also an issue. And so, a lot of our programs focus on training, medical workers or teachers. But it's really a problem and when you do train them you can't get them to go to the remote areas. So it's access, it's capacity and it's the topography.

Emily, MENA and the Caribbean, I think so, I don't focus on ECD as much in the Caribbean as I am doing or as I did in MENA. But what I have seen is a lot more interest and focus at early childhood in the Caribbean. In Jamaica, very interesting results in terms of establishing standards, accrediting institutions to ensure the quality is good. So and you see it in different Caribbean islands which is a lot more focus at that level from the government side and also from NGOs.

And I think there might be lessons from South-South for the Middle East and North Africa or for West Bank/Gaza from for example, the Jamaican experience and then other Latin American experiences.

MS. ATINC: Great, let's take a few more. Okay, suddenly I got many hands showing up. Let's have one over there, let's see, let's take them all. Can we? Okay, nobody says no so we'll do it. Yeah, go ahead.

MS. BERLIN: Hi, my name is Chelsey Berlin. I'm from B'Tselem. I'm formerly with Tomorrow's Youth Organization in the Northwest, sorry the Northern West Bank city of Nablus. My question is how does this research break down in Area C?

MS. ATINC: Sorry, in what?

MS. BERLIN: Sorry, in Area C. It's a section of the West Bank where Israel has full military and civil control and prevents policy and development and infrastructure.

MS. ATINC: I think, yes, right there. Thank you.

MS. SIMKA: Hi, my name is Michelle Simka. I'm a retired early childhood educator and I'm wondering whether there's any push either from the Ministry

of Education in Ramallah or from private donors for an increased teacher training programs at the universities or freestanding.

MS. ATINC: Three, right, one after another.

MS. KLEIN: Hello, my name is Hannah and I am with the Society for Research in Child Development. You briefly discussed ANERA's work to train mothers and proper plan care. And I was wondering if there was any concern that not including fathers might create tension in the home especially concerning the statistics and violent discipline.

MS. ATINC: Right behind you.

MS. BASSETT: Hi, I'm Lucy Bassett from the World Bank. I work with Safaa and I would love to hear a little bit more about your engagement with your parents and you talked about the importance of stunting and so, what kind of work you do on the first two years of life and also if you're addressing it, all maternal depression as we know that affects both nutritional and cognitive outcomes.

MS. ATINC: And behind you as well.

MS. ORDU: Hi, my name is Alyssa Ordu and I'm over at the LSC. I'm doing a Masters. My question is to Safaa. Well, first of all, I was moved by both of your incorporations of scholarship and activism. So I commend you. You discussed the, in terms of your data, class and equalities. And I was wondering if you could expand on that in terms of gender and equalities with early childhood development and education.

MS. ATINC: And I think we have one more person up here and that'll do it. Yes.

MS. SIEGEL: Thank you. Ellen Siegel, I'm a nurse. Sulieman, I want to ask you about stunting. Exactly what causes stunting? Is there any correlation between whether or not infants are breastfeed or not breastfeed? And what nutrients or

multivitamins can a child take to avoid the stunting?

MS. ATINC: I think we've got a good set of questions. Sulieman, do you want to start us off again?

MR. MLEAHAT: Was it Area C?

MS. ATINC: Area C, questions are on teachers' training and the engagement with parents generally and fathers more specifically and then the question on stunting if you have an answer.

MR. MLEAHAT: Yes. Okay. In terms of Area C, this is a question addressed to you, I think, certainly we didn't disaggregate the figures in terms of Area C. We looked at disadvantaged communities in Northern Gaza, Southern West Bank and others. So we didn't take that into account. Anecdotally, Area C tends to be more disadvantaged because the poverty is higher and access to services is limited. But we didn't disaggregate our figures in relation to specific figures. But there's something worth taking on board certainly.

You know, we've really struggled. I was inspired by Brookings and James Wolfensohn, UNICEF and the World Bank four years ago to undertake quality primary research. We have two major issues in ECD in my opinion. Evidence based, we've really struggled to look, to get funding necessary to do -- undertake good primary research. You will probably have experienced some of that. That's a real issue and investment.

You know, we're struggling to get the pennies to deliver services and programs to teachers, parents and -- you know, we've really struggled to access the major donors, you know, individuals, foundations. That's a major, major issue for us. But research where you're able to desegregate regionally and so on and so forth is very much needed. Our research did not cover that unfortunately. But anecdotally, the

situation is worse. And the World Bank, in terms of poverty have looked at Area C and promoted economic enterprise in those areas as in integral part of the peace process, the peace strategy in the Middle East.

MS. ATINC: Teacher training?

MR. MLEAHAT: We specifically made a decision not to work with academic institutions because they had really struggled to get the bounds on seats. Not many people want to go into a sector that's poorly paid, poorly remunerated and so on and so forth. So what we did, we focused on the 4,000, 3 to 4,000 practitioners who are doing -- who are delivering. And we thought let's do that. Let's do that well and then focus, maybe work with the UN's Women's Training Center in Ramallah, possibly Bethlehem University.

They set something up then they closed it because they weren't getting enough interest. They've just started that again. It's very expensive to train 20 teachers in a university unfortunately and we didn't have the funding for that. It's much easier doing that in the community whilst people are practicing. And it's really much more effective. So that's what we did.

MS. ATINC: Engaging with parents in particular with fathers and also maternal depression which I don't know, again, if you have any data about the incidents of maternal depression.

MR. MLEAHAT: I'm not going to be able to answer that but what I will talk about is engaging fathers right across the globe is a real major issue. I worked with the Children's Society in London and we set up a project in Elephant and Castle. And my colleague from LCS will know this.

It was impossible engaging with fathers. And you know, in London let alone Pa -- and we've really struggled. We had something like less than 100 fathers in

Gaza joining. We need to work. Our program is called Positive Parenting. We deliver four sessions, one looking at violence and child protection and we've had some real heartening issues in some of the workshops because they don't know the physical, the psychological damage that they're doing to young children.

We look at health, changing health behaviors. Most children in Gaza drink tea immediately or with breakfast. Reduces the capacity for the body to absorb minerals and vitamins and so forth. We're beginning to change that. So there are things that you can do in terms of engaging with parents.

It's really difficult. We haven't found a solution, we'll keep you posted but we're looking, we're providing brochures in some (inaudible) so the fathers can read that at home but more work needs to be done with father critically.

MS. ATINC: Determinants of stunting?

MR. MLEAHAT: I'm not in a position to answer that.

MS. ATINC: Maternal nutrition, low birth weight?

MR. MLEAHAT: It's intrinsic. Really stunting is, you know, it's as a result of poor nutrition and poor -- you know this better than I do. It's intrinsically linked to what is available to the child and good parental practices and so forth. And access to nutritional supplements or food, good quality food is critical.

And in discussions with our health colleagues, what's -- it's heartbreaking that actually stunting is so prevalent and so on and so forth because it's irreversible. But sorry, I'm not a medical person or health person in that sense to be able to provide you with that inadequate answer there.

MS. ATINC: Safaa maybe you can talk about the Jamaica Program, the famous, very well evaluated Jamaica Program that work with stunted children.

MS. EL-KOGALI: Actually, before that I just on the fathers --

MS. ATINC: Yes, no you can touch --

MS. EL-KOGALI: -- involved with -- two things. One is as long as they're not involved it will be a problem. In terms of the research we saw that, for example, father's education didn't contribute much to the status of the child as the mother's education. So that's one result we found.

But then many years ago, again, in my life with the Population Counsel, we had a very interesting program in Ethiopia where fathers were very violent domestically with their spouses. And the program brought together the men in the community and educated them about the importance of their role. But emphasizing the culture of a man and his role in the home and, you know, as a leader of that home.

So it wasn't sort of telling them off but rather empowering them and giving them the information and in less than a year they saw changes in behavior at home and they were supporting their wives in fetching water and firewood. And so, there are approaches of involving men by empowering them rather than making them feel that they are the problem.

MS. ATINC: Question on gender and equalities.

MS. EL-KOGALI: Yes, the question on gender, a quick response. The only gender differential we found was in mortality which is due to natural causes. Girls, the chances of infant girls surviving are higher than of infant boys. And this is sort of a medical or a scientific reason but nothing else, we found gender to really be a significant differential.

So coming back to stunting, I think it's definitely what kind of nutrition children have from the mother when she's pregnant up to age 2 that determines that. And I'm sorry Tamar but I can't even recall right now the actual interventions in the Jamaica one. But by encouraging breastfeeding, by encouraging food supplements, I

think are ways to address the nutrition issue early on in life.

I come back to the awareness factor. I think a lot of these mothers or a lot of households are not -- do not understand the importance of breastfeeding, for example. In, you know, in a lot of communities moving to bottled milk seems to be a modern way of living or an expression of wealth. And so, a lot of awareness-raising is important, I think and so, a lot of reach for the Ministries of Health but also Ministries of Education to work together to ensure that kind of knowledge in the household would be critical.

MR. MLEAHAT: It's critical and we've seen the statistics in terms of anemia for pregnant women, something like 36.6 percent. That's not good. That leads to low birth rate and so on and so forth which leads to stunting and other health complexities.

MS. ATINC: Just, I guess, a comment since I raised the Jamaica Program. So the Jamaica Program worked with children from very poor urban neighborhoods that were stunted and worked with them from the ages of I believe 6 months to 24 months. Rather intensive program that had both nutritional supplementation but more importantly, in terms of parental care. So lots of structured interactions with the parents to stimulate the development of the brain.

So ultimately, we worry about stunting because of its effects on cognitive development. And so, it was the most effective way of getting the stunted children to almost catch up with their non-stunted peers was that parental stimulation, interaction, structured sessions. So the effects of actually the nutritional supplements were felt in the short term but they dissipated over time. But in particular, the cognitive stimulation arm has lasting effects on the children's ability to do well in school and into the labor market.

In fact, 20 years later a follow-up study was done showing 28 to 60

percent higher earnings in the labor market for the children that had participated in the program compared to their peers. So very effective but somewhat costly program.

MR. MLEAHAT: Can I just touch on the issues of father and there's a real issue in terms of ECD provision in the developed and the developing world and that's male role models. I worked for the Children's Society. It was a major issue of enticing young men or men of all ages into primary education. That's a real major issue. And I think you have more -- you know, I read something yesterday where a journal referred to preschool teachers as nursemaids.

You know, even the language is so wrong. It's just so archaic. And that's a reflection on why we need to invest and the importance of actually working with policymakers, educationists and the community to make it more attractive for men and women to participate in early years.

MS. EL-KOGALI: Can I make a remark on cognitive development and a less costly approach that will have a much lasting impact is salt iodization. It is very cheap to iodize salt and it has a major, I think some research shows that iodine deficiencies equate to 10 IQ points lower in children. And it costs very little to have a public campaign of iodizing salt. And these are some of the recommendations we make because the impacts is just long-lasting.

MS. ATINC: Well, clearly a lot to do, an area extremely compelling for families and for governments to invest in. So I want to end with thanking all of you for participating and please help me give a hand to our fantastic panelists as well. Thank you.

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