

Small Asks for Big Impact: Investing in the early years for sustainable development and peaceful societies

17 July 2019, 1:15-2:45 PM
Danny Kaye Visitor's Centre, UNICEF House

Speaker Biographies



Dr. Anita Asiiimwe

Coordinator, National Early Childhood Development Program, Rwanda

Dr. Anita Asiiimwe is currently the National Coordinator for the Government of Rwanda's Early Childhood Development Program. Previously, she served as Minister of State in charge of Public Health and Primary Health care in the Rwandan Ministry of Health. She also served as the Global Fund board member representing the Eastern and Southern Africa Constituency, and as the Vice Chair of Strategy, Investment and Impact Committee (SIIC) of the Global Fund. Prior to this Dr. Asiiimwe also served as the Executive Secretary of the National Commission to fight against AIDS and as the Director General for the Treatment and Research AIDS Center for the Government of Rwanda. She holds Master's degree in Public Health and a degree in Human Medicine and Surgery.



Md. Sherajul Islam

Vice Minister, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Bangladesh

Mr. Md. Sherajul Islam is a senior official in the Government of Bangladesh. He is presently working in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare as the Additional Secretary (Vice Minister equivalent). He began his career in civil service in 1989 and served as Manager of the Government Food Management System for over two decades. Mr. Islam later joined the Administration Services and has since worked in multiple Ministries. He is the focal point for SDG implementation for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Mr. Islam has a Bachelor's Degree in Agricultural Sciences and Master's in Horticulture.



Omar Abdi, Ph.D.

Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

Omar Abdi is the Deputy Executive Director for programmes at UNICEF.

In this capacity, Mr. Abdi oversees UNICEF's global humanitarian and development programmes. With over 30 years of experience in international development, Mr. Abdi has held several leadership positions in UNICEF, including serving as the Country Representative in Pakistan, Ghana and Liberia; Regional Director in the Middle East and North Africa; Comptroller and CFO; and Deputy Executive Director for Management, and Field Results. Mr. Abdi has a Ph.D. in Development Economics.



Nargis Bigzad

Direct Response Associate, International Rescue Committee

Nargis Bigzad was born in Afghanistan but lived in Russia and Pakistan during the Russian invasion and the Taliban years respectively. She completed schooling but could not pursue higher education, as she returned to Afghanistan for an arranged marriage. The marriage became abusive and culminated in her husband kicking her and her 6-day-old son out. Ms. Bigzad fought for 2 years for custody of her son, which was finally granted. Through working as an interpreter for the US military, she eventually obtained a US visa, but the move proved difficult. After years of struggling with finances, homelessness and mental health, Ms. Bigzad is now working full-time with the IRC as a Direct Response Associate. Her goal is to establish a happy life in the USA, a successful life for her son, and to support people in need.

Joan Lombardi, Ph.D.
Director, Early Opportunities LLC



Over the past 45 years, Joan has made significant contributions in the areas of child and family policy as an innovative leader, a policy advisor and a public servant. She previously served as the first Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development in the US Department of Health and Human Services (2009-11); Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and External Affairs; and the first Director of the Child Care Bureau, among other positions in USDHHS (1993-98).

She currently directs Early Opportunities LLC, a strategic advisement service focused on the development of young children, families and communities. For the past 2 years she has also served as a Visiting Scholar at the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at the TH Chan School of Public Health, Harvard University.

Charles A. Nelson III, Ph.D.
Professor, Harvard University; Director of Research, Boston Children's Hospital



Dr. Nelson is currently a Professor of Pediatrics and Neuroscience and Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, and Professor of Education in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He also holds the Richard David Scott Chair in Pediatric Developmental Medicine Research at Boston Children's Hospital.

He chaired the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Early Experiences and Brain Development and served on the National Academy of Sciences panels that wrote *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, and more recently, *New Directions in Child Abuse and Neglect Research*.

Rima Salah, Ph.D.
Chair, Early Childhood Peace Consortium; former Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF



Dr. Salah has served as a Member of the United Nations High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (2014-15), and as the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the U.N. Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT). She has had a distinguished career with UNICEF.

In October 2015, she was elected to Chair the newly formed Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC). The ECPC brings together leaders from international organizations, academia, practice, philanthropy, networks media and development institutions to address the causes and consequences of violence in society, and to empower children and families to be agents of change for peace.

Spread the word



[#ECD4SDGs](#)

[#HLPF2019](#)

[#EarlyMomentsMatter](#)

[#SDGs](#)



**OPEN SOCIETY
FOUNDATIONS**



This event is supported in part by a grant from the Foundation Open Society Institute in cooperation with the Early Childhood Program of the Open Society Foundations.