CONCEPT NOTE

Annual Conference of the Center for Child Well-Being and Development at UZH
Child Health – Children’s Life Journeys and Critical Inflection Points
March 16th 2018 - Zurich, Switzerland

Introduction
Evidence shows that the world’s most marginalized children are being left behind in the development process. There is a growing need to do more at the country, regional, and global levels. The Center for Child Well-being and Development (CCWD) supports these children by conducting high-quality research to inform policymakers and multilateral organizations in designing policies and programs to improve child well-being and development.

Theme of the 2018 edition
The theme of the 2018 CCWD Annual Conference is child health. A dimension of investments in children’s human capital, health status is highly correlated with children’s cognitive and non-cognitive development, and with other dimensions of human capital formation, such as school attendance. Healthy children arise from the combination of adequate supply of and demand for preventive health care and treatment. This conference will emphasize both supply and demand aspects, always through the lenses of human behavior, exploring informational constraints, incentive constraints, and psychological biases that affect decision-making within health in developing countries.

Pneumonia and diarrhea still kill 1.4 million children each year. Most of those negative shocks could be ameliorated through preventive health care, from handwashing to malaria bed nets. However, while households in developing countries spend a high share of their budget in remedial care, take-up of preventive health care is typically very low, even when it is available at low cost. Why is that the case? What could be done to change this?

The supply of health care also faces challenges. Home visiting programs have shown promise in decreasing malnutrition, and boosting children’s cognitive development in some settings, but it has failed to promote significant effects in others. Several successful small program face scaling challenges, a combination of incentive and behavioral problems. Treatment is often misallocated - with those who are sick sometimes being equally likely to be treated as those who are not. Doctors confront information problems with the need to signal quality, while health staff is often absent, in some countries over 30% of the time. What could be done to change this?

Understanding human behavior is often times an intricate exercise; this conference attempts to shed light on these issues.
The Conference
The main goal of the conference is to convene world-class researchers conducting cutting edge research on topics related to child health, and have them present their findings in an accessible way, that tries to articulate how evidence could be useful for policy making and programming.

Speakers will start by tackling the stylized facts on short- and long-term health outcomes. They will focus their presentations on cutting-edge research on early childhood health, and in particular on what we know and don’t know about interventions aimed at improving it.

James Leckman (Yale) will talk about the biological foundations for investing in children over the first 1,000 days, as well as about his work on bio-markers, measuring stress in children through cortisol in hair samples. Next, Drew Bailey (University of California, Irvine) will share his findings about the nature, timing, and targeting of early childhood interventions that are key to generating long-lasting impacts.

The second part of the conference will tackle the subject of prevention and mitigation of child health shocks. Speakers will present a scientific perspective on the supply of and demand for preventive health care, with a focus on concrete interventions that have the potential to support poor households take-up prevention to a greater extent.

Michael Callen (UC San Diego) will share the results of his work on the impacts of incentives customized for behavioral biases of polio vaccinators in Pakistan. Next, Gunter Fink (Swiss TPH) will present results of his research on the demand for preventive healthcare and treatment in African countries.

To guarantee interaction with the audience, this year’s conference will open the debate with the help of an international journalist. This will animate a round table aimed at challenging speakers coming from different areas. The goal of this Davos-style round table is to explore pathways from research findings to child health programming. The discussion will focus on successes and failures in creating pathways from research to programming and policy design. Confirmed panelists are Charles Nelson (Harvard University), Jose Cuesta (UNICEF Innocenti) and Johannes Wedenig (UNICEF Malawi).

Finally, the conference will host a keynote speech from one of the most distinguished researchers in Development Economics. We are thrilled to announce that Michael Kremer, Gates Professor of Developing Societies at Harvard University, has accepted our invitation to deliver a lecture on child health at this year’s conference.

Kremer’s recent research examines education, health, water, and agriculture in developing countries. He has been named as one of Scientific American’s 50 researchers of the year, and has won awards for his work on health economics, agricultural economics, and on Latin America. He helped develop the advance market commitment (AMC) for vaccines to stimulate pri-
vate investment in vaccine research and the distribution of vaccines for diseases in the developing world. In the fall of 2010 he became the founding Scientific Director of Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) at USAID.

The participants
Conference participants are drawn from a diversity of stakeholders who are involved in research, evaluation, and program implementation. Participants include:

- Government representatives (mainly from Switzerland)
- Private sector organizations/companies
- Research organizations (national and International)
- Development agencies and donors
- Representatives from tertiary learning institutions and universities
- Development think tanks
- Civil society

Zurich, December 2017