

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

CITY SOLUTIONS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES:
LESSONS FROM DETROIT AND ADDIS ABABA

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WELCOMING REMARKS:

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PANEL DISCUSSION:

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Director of Programs and Strategic Partnerships, Africa Centre for Early Childhood Development

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SHAH: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening. I'm Sweta Shah, a fellow at the Center for Universal Education here at the Brookings Institution. Thank you so much for joining us today for our webinar called "City Solutions for Young Children and Families, Lessons from Detroit and Addis Ababa." Cities are now home to more than half the world's population, that means that if we want to make meaningful progress for young children and families, cities are the one of the most important places to act. National policies of course matter enormously, but they often take years to move from idea to implementation. Cities by contrast, can be more nimble with smaller populations and closer relationships to residents.

City governments are well positioned to understand local priorities, respond to community needs, and mobilize resources through municipal budgets. At Brookings, we have been partnering with cities since 2019 beginning with our Playful Learning Landscapes initiative, which helps integrate playful learning into everyday spaces, whether they be bus stops, streets, parks, supermarkets, and more. But we know from science that young children need far more than engaging public spaces in order to thrive. For children to thrive, they need health and nutrition. They need safety and protection. They need loving and supportive parents and caregivers, and their families need stable housing and economic opportunities.

Supporting a young child ultimately means supporting the whole family. So today, I'm so thrilled to be joined by two extraordinary leaders from Detroit and Addis Ababa. These cities are taking innovative, holistic approaches to strengthening early childhood systems, and they offer important lessons for urban areas around the world. I'm excited for us to learn from their experiences, what they're doing, how they're doing it, and what other cities can take away from their journeys. So, I'm pleased to welcome first Benita Miller. Benita recently joined the city of Detroit as the Director of the newly formed Department of Human Homeless and Family Services under the leadership of Mayor Mary Sheffield. She has enjoyed over a 25-plus year career as an innovative and visionary leader, focus on the upliftment and success of vulnerable families and communities. Prior to her current role, she has held numerous senior positions in the New York City government as the founding director of the Children's Cabinet in the office of the mayor, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, and multiple nonprofits focused on children and families.

Benita has a JD from Syracuse University College of Law, where she serves on the board of advisors. She has a BFA in print journalism from Wayne State University. She's held several board positions, including the Rosa Parks Scholarship Foundation, the Alexa House Project, Strategies for Youth, and Michigan's Central Campaign for Children, as well as being an active member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and Jack and Jill of America. So welcome, Benita. I'm also so excited to have Dr. Natnael Asres Yamnew, a Pediatrician from Ethiopia. He's the Director of Program and Strategic Partnerships at the African Center for Early Childhood Development, a quasi-governmental organization that reports to the Mayor of Addis Ababa. Denni Abbe. At the center, Dr. Natnael is part of a team supporting the Mayor to fulfill her vision, to make Addis the best place in Africa to raise children. He leads international partnerships, program design and implementation to advance equitable early childhood development outcomes.

Before joining the Africa Center, Dr. Natnael held numerous positions at the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, Kings College, London, and Big Wind Philanthropy. He obtained his medical degree from GMA University, a Master's in Public Health from Unity University, and a master's in Global Health and Surgery. From King's College London, a Ching Scholar and ISQUA Fellow, he's recognized for his contributions to healthcare quality improvement. With a strong passion for early childhood development, Dr. Natnael leverages his expertise to strengthen government policies, foster partnerships, and drive impactful programs, ensure every child has the best start in life. So, I'm so excited to welcome you both today.

MILLER: I am sorry. Oh, there we are. Sorry about that. Yeah, there we are.

SHAH: Great to see you both, and thanks again for joining us. So, I'm gonna start this conversation with a set of questions for both of you and then we're gonna open it up to the audience members for your questions. We have a chat box at the bottom of the screen of the Zoom, so please do add any questions that you have. And then during the Q and A portion, we will look out for your questions. So why don't we get started Benita and Dr. Natnael with the first question. I'll start with you Benita. I, and to same question for you Dr. Natnael. So firstly, what is the city's vision and how does supporting young children and families fit within that? Tell us about your key initiatives that support young children and families.

MILLER: Wonderful. Thank you for that question. So, I recently joined Mayor Sheffield's administration in Detroit after having worked in New York City for New York City and New Jersey for a number of years. And one key initiative that we recently launched was RX Kids, which is a cash transfer program to support pregnant people during their, during pregnancy and the six months following the birth of their child. So, parents get a one-time payment of \$1,500 during pregnancy and following the birth of their child. For up to six months, they get \$500 per month. And that's a real important initiative because Mayor Sheffield's vision is to reduce childhood poverty in Detroit. And that is an amazing opportunity for us to think about ways in which we tie our programmatic initiatives to that vision and ensuring that we are measuring how our programs are delivering on her mandate that we reduce childhood poverty in Detroit.

So that was an exciting launch of her mural tenure, which happened in January of this year. And previously in New York we did work around Grub NYC, which focused on those early years of making sure that. Children growing up in New York City, much like what we have happening in Detroit, have the best chance at, with their city's investment early on in their lives to grow up in a nurturing, supportive environment. So that's what we're doing here in Detroit right now. Thank you.

SHAH: Great. Thanks Benita. Dr. Natnael, tell us a little bit about Addis vision and what some of your key initiatives are to support children and families.

YAMNEW: Thank you Sweta, and lovely to hear about Detroit as well. And thank you for having us. In short I could say the goal or the vision that the mayor has is to make Addis the best city to raise children by 2030. So, we're trying to do multiple things to achieve that. She's put that as her legacy goal to achieve that through early childhood development. Addis was broader City Vision is centered on inclusive urban development, building a city that's livable, productive, equitable for its residents within that vision. Investing in young children and families is increasingly understood as a foundation. Not only sectoral, so it's also seen as a very multi-sectoral approach.

So, what we are doing in at this is more holistic early childhood development. Not only focusing on education, health or social care, but looking at the child holistically from the city's perspective. Early childhood is where inequities first emerge, especially in the fast-growing urban context.

Children access to safe care, nurturing environments. Early learning opportunities is shaped by where families live, work, and access services. So, supporting young children is directly linked to the city's long-term human capital, social cohesion, and economic productivity. So, making it more human centered in our approach. This has meant that we are doing this through multiple key initiatives such as pre-primary where we are transforming schools to be more efficient, more play centered, more comfortable for children, especially focusing on pre-primary. So, focusing on the four to six, also looking at health facilities.

All health centers within Addis Ababa, which are 94 number and 12 hospitals, have integrated early childhood development into their existing work. Another is creating different type of daycares. Daycares were not that big of a thing because social has, is there in, at this and across the country. So, creating different type of daycares for mothers and families to get the support that they need was also another key initiative. And last but not least, is creating spaces for families. Play spaces. And I'll go into detail later on. Creating multiple spaces and playgrounds and including closing down streets to make sure that families get the access they need.

SHAH: Thanks to both of you for getting us started. And please I mentioned earlier that you can put your questions in the chat, but actually if you could send your questions to events@brookings.edu that would be really helpful. Thanks. So that's events@brookings.edu. So, thanks so much, Benita and Dr. Natnael. I think both of you your mayors are really viewing this issue from different lenses and, utilizing like what works in your city to bring about, some change positive change for children, young children and families. So, my second question of course, in doing all this, there are always challenges. So, my second question is what political commitments and alignments were needed to be in place to bring this vision to fruition? Yeah, go ahead, Benita.

MILLER: Thank you. I, the thing that what is emerging as critical in all contexts, right? Both in New York City and here, is alignment across state and local partners, right? So, to launch RX Kids, there was a bipartisan effort to make sure that the state was all in for Detroit and to have to mobilize the local political climate or politician or elected officials. And when I say the political climate, more broadly speaking, the blocking and tackling around people that may be a, may be contrary to the idea of providing cash payments to families.

So, a lot of work ramped up to making sure over the nu over a number of years to get us to this point where we were able to launch. But the big thing was to have the state's commitment to providing these resources. And then also a mayor that was willing to make this, her first signature announcement to say that she's all in for families living in Detroit. And to your point it the earlier point that was mentioned, the multi-sector approach to making sure that investments are not only real, but sustainable and meaningful for families. So, I think that the blocking and tackling that happens both in the political climate and in the social climate around the political. Things that you have to manage and the communication and the messaging to deliver for families was very critical. So, I think that's how we're getting it done here in Detroit. And that was the same way we work in New York as well.

SHAH: Dr. Natnael, what about you? What political commitments and alignments were needed to be in place to bring this vision for the mayor to fruition?

YAMNEW: I think some of it actually aligns with what Benita said, so I'll try not to repeat, but share our experience. First, there was a need to line between national and city priorities, and I think Benita put a perfectly as well of having that city and national integration for us, because our structure is a bit different to regional let's a national, regional state overall as a country that we follow and that this is the capital. So as a capital city with a lot of resources, revenues, but we still wanted to align with the national aspect. So, the first thing that was done was. Making sure a baseline study was done. And that baseline study pushed political commitment a lot, seeing how many kids were off track in their developmental milestones.

So, the first thing that the leadership recognized that cities are where standards are operational, monitored and experienced by families. So, the first thing that the mayor actually did was set up a steering committee chaired by the mayor, and that brought about that multi-sectoral approach. So that steering committee was members were the bureau, like head of the Bureau of Health, the Bureau of Education, the Bureau of Women and Social Affairs, Urban Development, Green Spaces and whatnot. Under the direct leadership of the Mayor, that was one of the key things that happened. I'm following that. A technical, more technical council was also established below the steering committee where we had the deputy Bureau heads part of it. And one key office was also established called the Strategic Program Management Office.

Initially started off by doing ECD, but now also hands a lot of strategic programs across the city to actually lead the day-to-day work of ECD at the Mayor's office. So those were the initial things that were done by the Mirror to have that political commitment and then went on to doing a lot of investment, a lot of buy-in, and making it her own legacy goal, I think was the key to me as o overall political commitment from at this point of view and short.

SHAH: Thanks to both of you. I wanna ask a follow-up question to both of you. 'cause of course the, there's always going to be challenges when you're trying to align the politics to make this work. And both of you really mentioned that it took time to get those political commitments. Benita, you mentioned like the bipartisan support. Initially people, some people weren't really open to cash transfer as an approach. Maybe they're not they're not for that type of, service or support. And Dr. Natnael, you also mentioned bringing all the other, the multi-sectoral stakeholders together. So perhaps I'd love to hear like, how did your cities really handle those politics? Like how did you bring, maybe for Beit, how did you, how did the city get to that bipartisanship agreement? And Dr. Natnael, like, how did the city Addis like really convince the other sectors to come together? So maybe let's start with Benita and then go to Dr. Natnael.

MILLER: So, I didn't do that work because I recently joined the administration, but I could tell you it more broadly. Just having worked in this space in human services for, as you said, a few decades now the big thing that you need to do is educate the public, right? You educate the public, and you also if you do it effectively, you rely on data and storytelling. So, you wanna lift up the ways in which your, the data is aligned with the experiences of people who are the end users, or the ways in which it makes the community better and thrive, right? When I look back at the work that I did in New York City, we created a framework called Growing Up NYC, that actually went through a whole child approach to look at what's good for children,

Pre-natal through the age of 26. And that's some of the work that we're starting to seed here in Detroit. Looking at ways in which we can say, with our mandate to reduce childhood poverty, what are the things, the initiatives that are already underway that are effective? What do we need to bring to bear to this new environment? And also, what programmatic initiatives that are already happening

within our nonprofit ecosystem to make sure that we're supporting it, strengthening it. And uplifting it and bringing others along to bring greater alignment.

One of the things I talked to Mayor Sheffield about is a no wrong door approach to services because I think that when you think about the efficiencies, the need to be baked into a large system, you need to think about how you can improve collaboration and talk, and the talking among both the elected officials, the community, and the people who are relying on these services. And when I say relying on the services, I mean across social and economic strata's. With, without regard to class and social status what services do you need to think about to deliver for a community? So, I think it's a mix of both, but it's a dynamic process, is what I'm getting at. It's not a one-shot deal. You have to think about it. What are the changing conditions that will require you to respond in a different way, particularly in, in the political climate? Yeah.

SHAH: Yeah. I love how you mentioned, the skills of talking to each other. Yeah. It seems really simple, but increasingly we're seeing polarization in many places and people not willing to talk to each other. So, I think that's a really good reminder that, something really simple is actually really critical and powerful. And then just the use of data and storytelling. Everyone loves stories, so I love, that insight that if you can tell a good story you're gonna capture the attention of the public and convince them. So, thanks so much for that. Dr. Natnael, what about from your perspective?

YAMNEW: Thank you, Sweta. I think for us it was, initially, the baseline study was something that created that shock and awe moment that a lot of our leaders needed looking at this, at that point, we had about 12.9% kids off track which was a significant number. So, by the, like now currently we I think the last study we did was in June and by we managed to decrease it by 10% in three years. That was one of the things that got people saying, okay, we need to invest on this. School enrollment was almost 50, less than 50%. So, a lot of the, like the data drove leadership to invest on this.

That was one for us. Another, I think I would say. It was the buy-in by the leadership, especially the mayor actually brought everybody, because the bureau heads for health education, the different sectors actually report back to the mayor. So, seeing their leader actually being very invested and seeing, taking it as her legacy goal actually drove a lot of supports within the different bureaus. And

help them to act on it. So, it was not, I wouldn't say it was forced, but it was created a passion across the different sectors to actually come and invest. So institutional alignment was very critical.

Education, strategic offices, technical partners, needed to work from assured understanding of different roles.

This reduced fragmentation as you usually have and ensured that quality standards were not treated as external requirements, but as part of rooting governance. So, I think that was really important.

Then there was a shift in how early childhood was framed politically as well, from being seen as a social welfare issue to being. Recognized as a strategic investment. That framing helped build a sustained commitment, even in the context where cities face many competing priorities. And Abdi also faced many competing priorities. But it was more, the framing also changed to have a better at this, to have a better Ethiopian investing and early childhood development was one of the key. So, I think what Benita said also made sense is data storytelling and shifting the narrative, but to bring all this together and to avoid the fragmentation. Having that one leader that said, I wanna do this and I want to see this achieved, helped in making, bring all this together.

SHAH: Yeah. And I thank you for that. And I love what you said also about sometimes you just need to reframe the message. If someone is, doesn't understand the message from, one perspective or one framing, that frame can always be changed. So, I think that's really important and powerful as well. And then you pointed out also the political will that you know. The mayor wanted this. So, with her strong commitment to this, it enabled all the other actors to get in line and support as well, and for them to understand how investing in young children actually help them meet other goals for, health or economic development. So, I think that's really great. The next question that I have for you both is really around financing. So of course, every city has limited budgets. Every city has competing priorities. How have your cities managed to finance the initiatives that you have? Benita, can we start with you?

MILLER: Yeah. I think that it's always a mix of city dollars public dollars and philanthropy, and I would add a third, financing opportunity, if you will. And it's also building out efficiencies. Figuring out where they're surfacing, resolving gaps. Because sometimes, even when I was in the New York context, people think unlimited budgets. And while budgets may be fluid in terms of like size and

scope, you still need to figure out how to, we used to, I always joke scrape the plates, figure out how you might bring together these efficiencies that matter more than new dollars.

So, it is a mix of public, private and opportunities to look at what you're already in investing in and shifting policies to make those dollars and those opportunities stretch and matter for families or the folks that are being impacted or the people you're trying to serve. So, I think it's I'm trying to get at the mix should consider. For the public dollars the philanthropic investments, but opportunities to surface and resolve policy gaps that lead to greater efficiencies in the, leveraging the dollars that have already been invested. I think that's really critical, particularly as budgets in the United States context may be impacted by various federal and state policies. It really matters that cities step up and think about ways that they can continue to do their work with their local partners, including their nonprofit providers, their philanthropic landscape, as well as the dollars that they are able to invest from this. City budgets.

SHAH: No, I think the issue of efficiencies I think is really interesting and not something that people always think about. That sometimes, as you said, scrape the existing budget. You can't always rely on new money. So, thank you for that. Yeah, Dr. Natnael, What about you guys and Addis?

YAMNEW: I think for us it wasn't easy, but it's, it was more about prioritization and reprioritization and then reprioritization again, and then again reprioritization and making sure that everybody is aligned and saying early childhood development is something that we're doing for the future. And as I said earlier, is it was all about the reframing as well. So, a lot of the money for early childhood development work across the city came from the city. A lot of it was public money. So currently we have universal school feeding for all public pre-primary schools. You have school transformation, open spaces, transformation even in pre-primary schools. It's not only school feeding, but they receive, they, there's no payment that's free.

And they also receive learning materials and uniforms are free as well. So, it was a slow approach, but we have gotten there as well. When we started school feeding, previously I was not involved at all. It was a previous mayor that started it, but I started in a few schools, but the change actually drove everybody to invest on it and to continue to do that. So, the city's approach has been to embed early

childhood priorities with existing programs. So, with an education held and service delivery budget. So, you're already paying a teacher, you're already paying a health worker, but they're not, there was no nuance to drive them to work towards ECD.

They're not trained and they didn't have it at the back of their head. So, you already had schools. It was all about transforming those schools as well. So rather than creating a parallel. Financing mechanism. This includes allocating resource for supervision, professional development, and systems stringing activities Linked to quality or whatnot, was reprioritization within the existing budget lines and making sure the investment grew. By time we also had community involvement as well. Like getting the community on board was also very important. And philanthropic support was there, even though a lot of the philanthropic support was vastly technical. But that also takes a lot of money to get technical support as well. But I think to this day there is a huge investment in early childhood development, and our center was also created as part of the investment that the mayor and the city was putting into early childhood development, not only to grow the quality in ATIs, but to expand the scale across the country and beyond as well. I would say it was reprioritization and prioritization for me. In a couple of words.

SHAH: Yeah, I think that's really important, the iterative process. Dr. Natnael, could you share with us like approximately what percentage of the investments in Addis right now are from public funds, from city funds? I recall it's a pretty large amount, just to give the audience a sense of, if you remember putting you on the spot.

YAMNEW: Yeah. Don't put me on this and I know this will be recorded, but I would say above 90%.

SHAH: Wow. Okay. That's great. And can you share with us as a follow up you mentioned that the scaling that you are in the process of doing. What does that look like? What are your ambitions, like, how is the mayor influencing? You mentioned like the city is influencing or has the aim to influence national. Tell us a little bit about that.

YAMNEW: Thank you Sweta. So, the Mayor, I think was in in one of her speeches in May 2025 when we were able to host the governor of Umba and his team to add this said, the center, the African

Center for Early Childhood Development is not only for Adi, but only also for Ethiopia and all of the continent. And one of the reasons the center was created was one, to make sure that the work and at this had quality in it. So, there's a lot of investment, there's a lot of political will, as I mentioned earlier. We need to make sure that when you have vast investment and commitment in a very short time.

Then quality needs to be there, new innovation needs to be there, continuous research of the program, implementation needs to be there. So, we are doing that as a center and we're taking that information and the knowledge that's being created there to scale up across the country. So currently we're scaling up to across five, five regions. So, what you'd call states in the us we call them regions in Ethiopia. And that's close to about 75% of the country, or close to 85 million in overall population. So, we're scaling up across those regions by the support of the mayor and also our other partners as well. And currently we've started working with the government of Mombasa in Kenya as well, taking the same approach that ADIs did, but also understanding local approaches to that as well. Learning from Addis, understanding the local context and doing a lot of learning as we go along has helped us to start scaling and we've managed to get there so far.

SHAH: Thank you. Benita, I wanna turn back to you. Yeah. Dr. Natnael mentioned that an Addis, involvement of the community and is really important. And I know in Detroit that's also something that the city is engaged in, like with community partnerships. Can you tell us a little bit more about some of those partnerships? I know obviously a lot of this was happening even before you started. You started in January, but you also worked in New York and New Jersey. So maybe share with us a little bit about how cities can work with community.

MILLER: Yeah, no, I would say that one thing that Mayor Sheffield did as part of her tenure is to continue to engage community through her transition process. So, she plans community forums and listening to community is very critical to not only to the success of this administration, but the success of communities. So, working in partnership with them to co-create solutions. And here policy recommendations are very key.

We did that work in New York, so we did a lot of co-creation work where we worked with communities to design what are the solutions that are best serve your C community needs, and that creates a very

diverse landscape, but also some clear through lines in understanding what metrics we need to think about to measure community success in the effectiveness of programs. For instance, we, through growing up NYC, we were able to go into communities and say, okay, here in Brownsville we know that what's effective for you is that you wanna make sure that every family living in public housing has access to early childhood resources. Or you wanna make sure that every family in public housing has access to a family service coordinator. That might be very different from what we did in West Village, where the families might be more affluent, but they wanted more public space. They wanted access to more of the public space where you see tourism shows showing up more.

Often in New Jersey, we looked at the 21 counties across the state and thought about. What do we need to do to co-create solutions in that context? To make sure we, where we were work, we were doing work around reducing the interactions between the child welfare system and mothers who were impacted by substance misuse. So in that context, we wanted to figure out what was the data telling us about the entries into the foster care system in those communities for children zero to three years old, and work in those communities to develop solutions that often didn't cost money, but required the state to step in and to cultivate relationships between community partners and stakeholders.

So that was more. If you wanna, if to say that we were in communities co-creating solutions, but then we wouldn't have to adjust. And I think that's the work that I'm very interested in doing in Detroit is going deep in community, understanding their needs, and also looking at zip code level data to help inform. Where we should show up in terms of prioritizing communities that are most impacted by poverty. Some pockets of Detroit. We see that there are children living with upwards of 70% of childhood poverty. And in those community, what solutions do we need to start to think about in bringing the appropriate stakeholders and.

Players to the table to co-create. I think that throughout my experience, one thing that what's effective is government, working with community as opposed to imposing solutions on community. To make it more sticky, you need to bring everyone to the table so that there's a shared investment, while government could show up with financial resources, philanthropy, and also the policy and the convenient power of cities to bring everyone to the table also allows for to build trust, to identify strong actors in those very local communities and to come up with new solutions that really matter. And it's

also opportunity for cities to learn what works and what doesn't work in terms of the policies that we think about from our purchase in both city halls and. And in those municipal spaces to deliver new solutions and community.

SHAH: Yeah. Thank you. I think the co-creation piece is so critical and that's, I think something that's easier done at a city level versus national level. Yes. And I think you both highlighted how cities have that advantage where, because there's a smaller population and it's a little bit easier, not easy. 'cause I know that co-creation is time consuming and not easy at all. But I think it's really interesting to hear both of you also mentioned how critical the role of community is. And I know in Detroit there's already so many community-based initiatives all around. And I love how you mentioned that like your role in the mayor's role is gonna be to look at what's already there and to build on those assets that are already in Detroit, rather than just imposing new things, like starting from a point of what's already there. And I think that's where, Dr. Nut now also mentioned that the baseline studies that you did in Addis were really critical because it, it provided what's actually happening now and how do we build from what's already there. So, I think those were really important. And then I wanted to ask you both. What are some key takeaways from your experience for other city teams to consider. Benita?

MILLER: Be patient with yourself. Be open to I saw someone say yesterday a friend of mine say I have thick skin in an open heart. Because you will hear very hard truths about how people experience, services and supports that you might have thought were like, this is my moonshot, this is the, this is gonna problem solve everything that keeps me up at night. And to hear that maybe you fell short, right? Short. So, you really have to think about, the ways in which you have to show up in community. Another thing is I think that having worked in New York where the, there, the city budget in and of itself was over 126 billion. I could look and see that we invested about 10 billion in children.

And I think that and that doesn't it seems significant, but it was always not enough in our minds. But I think that don't let money be a barrier to the conversation. That's another key takeaway because I think that the scale of cities and location matters, but what's more critical is that if you, if money is the thing that keeps you from coming to the table, you'll never get to some creative problem solving. And in conversation with community. So, I don't think that money should be the barrier to getting started. And oftentimes people try to wait for the money to come to show up, to start these conversations. So

don't let money be the barrier to change that. Just plow ahead with what your values are and the money will follow. The money will follow.

SHAH: Yeah, I love that. Dr. Natnael, what are your key takeaways and what can other city teams learn from your experience?

YAMNEW: I would say, and building what Benita has said, if you have the money and if you have the right leaders, it's very easy. So just do that if you can, but that's impossible a lot of times. But in all seriousness, I think starting so starting at any point is very important and understanding that. A year that we spend is a year that we lose kids because the stage that we have is very important. We all know, and I hope every, a lot of people in the audience also would know because they're interested in early childhood development.

But the first three years and then the first five years is better. 80% of your brain develops, and then by the time they're five, it's 90% of their brains that are developed. So, if we're actually investing in those years. It's very important. Another year we don't invest another kid that might be developmentally off track because of our lack of investment. So, one thing that I wanna say is also to start somewhere is very important. Not everything will be there, but to start somewhere. Two is to look at a child holistically. So, a child does not care. If you have a kid at home, they don't care if you have money or not, if you can afford it or not.

They want to eat, they want to, they want safety and security. They want to go to school, they want to be healthy as well. So, we can't only say this is the part that I want to invest on. So, looking at the kids holistically and children holistically and trying to design our programs holistically, I think is very, is another thing that I want to say. And I truly believe is very important. Another is learning. Something that we're continuing to do is learn from others, because there is, there's a lot of things out there across the world where even today listening to Benita, I was like, oh, this could be useful for us. So learning is very important.

Be it in person or virtually, if you can, in person is amazing. Going to Fields, going to see different interventions, it's very important, but sessions like this as well and learning from others experience is

something that we will continue to help us in shaping not only at this, but the scale up work we do, because culture is very important in some aspects. Religion is also important. Social context is also very important. So, the more we learn, the more we could design affordable early childhood programs for our children.

SHAH: Great. So, I'm gonna open it up now to our Q and A and we have a few questions that have already come in, so I'll start from there. So again, if you have a question, please send it to events@brookings.edu and we'll try to tackle as many of them as we can. So first, you both started mentioning this but one question came, if another city wanted to begin tomorrow, what's the first concrete step you'd recommend? What trade-offs, if any, did you face when aligning early childhood investments with broader city goals like job creation or affordability? Who would like to tackle that one first?

MILLER: I can. You wanna go?

YAMNEW: Go ahead.

MILLER: I, and I'll use the New York context. I think that the one thing that I tackled first was getting a handle on the data and getting the handle on the North Star. What were we re because it's such a broad we're going to do something in early childhood. What is the thing that we're trying to do? Because then you can articulate that goal to everyone that you're bringing to the table. I think that one of the cha and I say that because I think that people don't always have shared definitions of the thing, of the goal. Like the words become the goal as opposed to actually getting very granular. Like quality is not a, an objective measure. What does quality look like in actually articulating those standards?

SHAH: Great. You we lost you for a second there, but I think we got your main point.

MILLER: Thank you.

SHAH: Yeah, so Dr. Natnael, I'm gonna repeat the question for you. If another city wanted to begin tomorrow, what first concrete step would you recommend? What trade-offs, if any, did you face or City

of Addis Ababa, when aligning early childhood investments with broader city goals like job creation or affordability?

YAMNEW: I would say I would do a baseline study again. It's not cheap, but those baseline studies helped everybody understand where the city is in regard to across the spectrum of education, health, social sectors, play, whatever you wanted to say. They helped everybody put be on the same place and data to back everything that people that were advocates of early childhood development were talking about. So, I would say get the actual data. Understand where your kids are how many of your kids are out of school, understand how many kids are developmentally of track or whatnot.

So, I think data will be very important for me. In regard to tradeoffs, I don't think I could say much because, when the program started, I was also not there. And our center works on mostly on the technical aspect, so that would be more of a mess office kind of an answer. But I would say there, there was definitely a lot of tradeoffs because a lot of investment went into early childhood development. But again, it's also, it's all about prioritization and saying these are the things that my administration wants to prioritize on. But it's not, it goes beyond administration because early childhood development's actually building a future for the city. And also, for the country. So, it's not, it's a quick win for an administration, but a more of a goal for a long-term approach to uplift the city. So, I would say that.

SHAH: Yeah. Thank you. I think it's really interesting that you both pointed to starting from data and that's probably Dr. Natnael, you mentioned that, is not necessarily cheap always, but the investment that you make in collecting that initial data about the state of the city is really critical. So, it was interesting to hear that you both mentioned that and that could be a great place for any other city who's interested in exploring this. To start with just a little study to find out where your children and families are at. Another question that came up is around sustainability. Mayors are gonna change.

The process both in Detroit and Addis did not just start. For Detroit didn't start in January when Mayor Sheffield started. Even the process in Addis didn't start when Mayor Abebe started. The process actually for both cities has been ongoing for a long time. From your perspective, how can a city ensure sustainability, so the things that are now that you both are supporting in the current

administrations of your mayors, what do you think could be done to ensure that they can last beyond the mayor? If you have any thoughts on that.

MILLER: Yeah. I always go first. Do you wanna go first this time? I can.

YAMNEW: Sure. Whatever works for you.

SHAH: Let's go with Dr. Natnael.

YAMNEW: Okay. I can go first. I think first this sustainability, it's not money, it's not anything, it's systems for me. It's making sure that whatever you're creating now is embedded in the system. So, systems don't change overnight. So, for example, our center, was established about two years ago, once the early childhood development works got started and the mayor looked at it and said, oh, we need a center that looks at the data that does a lot of research, and hopefully in the future can scale it up across the country and across the continent as well. So, to create that center. Could have been easy to have to hire two or three people that work very closely to her as advisors that do a lot of data work and whatnot. But when you create an entity, then you have to do it by doing a proclamation, going into all the legal processes that you need to, even though that's hard. At the end of the day, if the mayor changes tomorrow, the center still will exist.

And also, the early childhood development work across the multi-sectoral approach. Even though the steering committee chair by the mayor currently the, like a new mayor could come in and dissolve the steering committee, but the work within the sectors has been systemized and has been in place now. So, it's hard to dis rate now. So, I think for me, sustainability happens when you integrate the work into systems. And if you might have a billion dollars invested this year and like a hundred thousand next year you might go far with a billion, but still, if you don't have it in systems, this is going to be very difficult. So, for me that if I had to choose one thing for sustainability, it would be that.

SHAH: Yeah. Can you share, just to add on Benita before I get to you? Just to add on for Dr. Natnael. Can you clarify, when you say embed into systems, can you give one example of that? I can think of some, 'cause I know your contexts well, but what do you, what's one example that you would give to other city teams that are thinking about this?

YAMNEW: So, one as I mentioned earlier is the center that I worked for. That is already like a legal entity within the city created another, could be there's what I mentioned earlier, their day-to-day implementation is done by strategic program management office also embedded in the system. But other things could also be schools are transformed, playgrounds are made. So those are the things that you would not be able to change and they're there for the good. So, some of the examples I would give are those, but also the systems have started talking to each other. For example, in our closed streets initiatives we close and add this, we closed streets on Sundays, every Sundays from six to 12 in the morning so that kids can have more availability of playground.

There are a lot of playgrounds in the city, especially now, but still, it's very urban. Lots of traffic, lots of apartments, so a lot of kids don't have that spaces. And those are closed by three different bureaus. So, traffic management handles this traffic bureau of Women and Social Affairs have insurers play happens and the strategic program management office oversees it at the mayor's office, making sure streets are painted to allow kids to use it as a playground. So, streets are painted and like on Sun, on other days, cars just pass by them. But on Sundays mornings they're closed. Those are some of the examples I would give where bureaus and systems are working together.

SHAH: Great. Benita, how about you?

MILLER: Yeah, no, I would build on the notion of systems having to work together and that becomes the thing that survives you. I also think that cultural change in terms of messaging, like once an elected official. Articulates their vision, and you really start to think about how you infuse that vision into the culture of the organization, which is often in the city workforce. So how do you start to motivate civil service workforce to align with the mayor's vision? And those are where you could start to plant the seeds of change. And so, I think about not only at the systems level that you, you support the system level change by changing the messaging and the tone through cultural shifts. So that's also critical to me. But yeah I absolutely agree. Systems and policy changes are consequential to the initiative surviving in any mayoral term.

SHAH: Great. And then we have yeah, I think that's the cultural change and embedding into systems to a point where it's very hard then for a new mayor or a new administration to significantly wipe it out.

So, I think those are great points. The last question we're gonna take today is that also comes from the audiences around faith leaders. So, the question is, faith leaders have been complicit in polarization. Do you have faith in their ability to address the current discourse? Maybe how do you handle, how do you work with faith leaders and how would you handle that?

MILLER: Yeah. So, I, it's very critical. In the context in which I've worked it, I've always invited or included faith leaders in conversations because they are often, for lack of a better word, pillars in their community. They understand the cultural context of their community. They're often delivering services, and oftentimes, particularly in the social justice context, they are also very concerned about addressing issues related to poverty and things of that nature is there is an important opportunity to bring them along when the issues become increasingly more sensitive and to get their buy-in around ways in which they, their perspectives and their ability to mobilize community becomes consequential to delivering services in those communities.

We both in New York and here mayor Sheffield has an office of faith-based leaders and engaging them. And I think what I'm learning too, and I learned this in New York, engage in the diversity of faith-based leaders. 'cause oftentimes you think both around race and religion, right? So, it's the Black Baptist preacher is the person you go to. But then also, diversify or looking at the diversity of the religious and faith-based community to engage them around their concerns and their constituencies is also critical.

SHAH: Yeah. Great. Dr. Natnael, do you wanna come in on this question?

YAMNEW: Sure. I could tell you a bit about that. I think that we have a community that's highly religious. So, it's very important. And for me, I think it's dividing it with people have cultural, like indigenous practices of childbearing, which is important. And most of the time it's really good and useful, but at the same time, you have cultural learned childbearing practices that come throughout time, and some of the time they're not the best. So, making sure that you have like religious leaders to help you guide those beliefs and practices, I think is very important. Especially when introducing new things. If an if a society believes, a kid still start drinking water at four months, then a cultural leader or like a religious leader is the best person to address them.

But compared to a physician they have their nuances and I think they're very important. You just have to make sure the messaging is right for them. So, from your end, it's helping them to find the right messaging to align with their preaching or their teaching of religious discourse and making sure that it's aligned and not trying to do too much at once as well. Usually when we try to work with religious leaders, we want to give them everything and for them to deliver everything but trying to find those quick wins and making sure that we have people on our side. Because after a while, once those religious leaders understand the importance of the program as well I could say in all religions, they care about their community that they're serving. So, once they understand it, then they will be the champions, and you don't need to do anything about it. So just making sure they understand the importance.

SHAH: No, thank you. Really critical points. I can't even, there's so many things that you both have mentioned today that I'm gonna keep reflecting on and thinking about. So, as we close our webinar today, I just wanna thank you all. You both have a very difficult job, but I think a really important and critical role to play in your cities. And I thank you for being champions yourselves in this. So today, we heard from two cities, from Detroit and Addis Ababa, both that are taking distinct but equally powerful approaches to supporting young children and families each shaped by its own vision and priorities.

In Addis Ababa, Mayor Ave has placed children and families at the center of her agenda, and in doing so, is also expanding opportunities, economic opportunities for city's female workforce. In Detroit, mayor Sheffield is tackling interconnected priorities, most notably reducing child poverty. And as Benita shared is using targeted city investments to advance that role and more, and at Brookings we're really committed to understanding what enables cities like Detroit and Addis Ababa act boldly the political will, the financing, the partnerships, and the local leadership that make these investments possible, even amid competing priorities. As we heard, the process is not smooth.

It's not easy, it's not a straight line, it zigzags. It takes a long time, but it is possible. So, this will not be our last conversation around this topic. We plan to continue engaging with cities, learning from them, and sharing their strategies so other cities can adapt these ideas to their own context. I was really thrilled, Dr. Natnael, when you mentioned, oh, this is really great, what Benetta said, and I'm gonna think about what Detroit's doing for Addis. And I hope, vice versa. Other cities can look at these

examples and think and have a spark and just think maybe that's something we can consider for our city. I love what you both said about, just start something. Don't worry about money, just. Start something and don't be afraid. You both mentioned how critical it is to listen and to talk to each other, and I think in this day and age there's a lot less listening and a lot less talking, especially with people who may be different or have a different perspective than you. So, I think those are really important points. And again, I just wanna thank both Benita and Dr. Natnael for your thoughtful contributions today. And thanks to all of you audience members for spending an hour with us. So have a wonderful rest of your day and evening. Bye.