



ALAS AND THE EARTH INSTITUTE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY TO ESTABLISH EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SECRETARIAT

ALAS and the Earth Institute at Columbia University have partnered to establish a High Level Early Childhood Development Secretariat with the purpose of developing research and policy to help implement effective Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs in Latin America. The official announcement was made by Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute and Alejandro Santo Domingo, President of ALAS Board of directors on June 1st 2009 at Columbia University.

“At ALAS, we believe that by focusing on ECD we are providing a platform for sustainable socio-economic development throughout the region,” expressed Santo Domingo. “We are thrilled to partner with Jeffrey Sachs and the Earth Institute at Colombia University. The Earth Institute will provide Alas with the research, information and know-how necessary to make ECD the top priority for governments of the region.”

"Early Childhood Development (ECD) has proven to be among the best investments that a society can make," said Sachs. "From antenatal care to ensure the health of mother and child, through a safe infancy, to early years with proper nutrition and protection from disease, and to intellectual stimulation through pre-school programs, ECD offers the best chance for children to get a healthy start that will give them a boost for a lifetime. ALAS has been leading the way throughout Latin America to make sure that ECD reaches all of Latin America's children. The region has pioneered many innovative programs, but millions of children still are left out. ALAS's efforts with the governments in the region, and the leading international agencies - including the Inter-American Development Bank, World Bank, Pan-American Health Organization, UNICEF, and others - will bring ECD to millions of children in the years ahead and help pave the way for a Latin America without extreme poverty. The Earth Institute is honored and excited to join ALAS in this effort. We are committed to bringing the best of science, research, and policy analysis to this critical effort."

In Latin America and the Caribbean chronic malnutrition affects 9 million children under the age of five, another 32 million children under the age of six are not enrolled in pre-school or school. As a result, a child dies of hunger nearly every minute in the region and millions of the surviving children never have access to a proper health care nor education. They are stuck in a recurring cycle of illiteracy, poverty, social inequality and marginalization. Under this context ALAS, the Earth Institute with the region's presidents and leaders of regional organizations have decided to play a coordinating role in fomenting discussion and action in the area of Early Childhood Development which targets children from zero to six in Latin America. This work culminated in the development of a 'Plan to Action on ECD', which was formally presented to the governments assembled at the XVIII Iberoamerican Summit last November in San Salvador. The plan received special support from the governments of Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Spain, Honduras, and El Salvador, who have pledge to become strong partners in the development of a new Early Childhood Development agenda.

Today, with the establishment of the Early Childhood Development Secretariat, ALAS and the Earth Institute, in cooperation with the Iberoamerican General Secretariat, the Organization of Iberoamerican States, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, other international and regional agencies,



and the member governments of the Iberoamerican Summit, will identify and promote best ECD practices, create monitoring procedures for the region, initiate pilot projects, and report back to the Summit at their next meeting in Portugal in November. The purpose is to play a critical role in designing a broader government policy agenda in this domain.

The newly launched Early Childhood Development Secretariat at the Earth Institute at Columbia University aims to analyze and identify the health, educational, and social interventions and policies that will most successfully support early childhood development in Latin America. The Secretariat will be led by an advisory board constituted by the top researchers and experts in early childhood education, health, nutrition and Latin American program development. The Board will support the Program Manager / Technical Advisor to effectively link resources within Columbia University, The Earth Institute, ALAS and, more generally, Latin America, to ensure the successful development of the Secretariat.

ALAS is a nonprofit organization founded by prominent Latin American artists, businessmen and intellectuals, with the purpose of mobilizing the region towards the implementation of integrated early childhood development public policies, so that every child from zero to six years old has access to education, health plans and nutrition. Through cross sector work at a regional level by promoting awareness in society using the penetration of its artists; by developing contents in agreements with experts and universities; by working with the public sector as part as the Early Childhood Iberoamerican Program; and by committing the private sector on investing in programs that favor early childhood, ALAS seeks to accomplish the implementation of integral early childhood development public policies for the 40% of Latin American children that live without coverage.

The Earth Institute at Columbia University mobilizes the sciences, education and public policy to achieve a sustainable earth. Through interdisciplinary research among more than 500 scientists in diverse fields, the Institute is adding to the knowledge necessary for addressing the challenges of the 21st century and beyond. With over two dozen associated degree curricula and a vibrant fellowship program, the Earth Institute is educating new leaders to become professionals and scholars in the growing field of sustainable development. We work alongside governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations and individuals to devise innovative strategies to protect the future of our planet. www.earth.columbia.edu