

ARNEC CONNECTIONS

Working Together for Early Childhood

No. 8, 2014



THEME:
ECD on the global agenda:
Building partnerships for sustainability
and harmony



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Asia-Pacific Regional Network
for Early Childhood

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This is a publication for ECD professionals by ECD professionals. All articles are contributed by individuals who are ARNEC members and/or are working within the field of early childhood.

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Editorial Note

By Kishor Shrestha, Editor, ARNEC Connections

It is a great pleasure for us to present the eighth annual signature publication of ARNEC Connections: Working Together for ECD. This year, our focus is in line with ARNEC's annual theme "ECD on the global agenda: Building partnerships for sustainability and harmony". This year's publication includes articles on four broad topics: (1) Contributing to sustainable development through ECD, (2) Building partnerships for ECD, (3) Building social cohesion through ECD, and (4) Promoting diversity and inclusion through ECD. The major highlights of the articles included in this issue are presented below.

Contributing to sustainable development through ECD

In the present day world sustainable development has been a major concern of all the governments of both the developed and developing countries. For many years, mostly in developing countries ECD programmes used to be considered a welfare programme. However, in the recent years, many studies have proved that investment in ECD is not a liability but an investment for human resource development. In this context, the first article included in this issue presents neuro-scientific and economic evidence on the importance of quality ECD services for human resource development of a country. The author argues that a large number of the world's children starting life at severe risk and experiencing toxic stress not only threatens all other national level sustainable development goals, but also violates the right of every child. In this sense, therefore, children must be at the centre of sustainable development.

The article from Bhutan describes ECCD programme management system in the country and critically analyzes the key issues related to management of early childhood programmes. The paper further explores the measures for improved governance for the sustainability of ECCD programme. It identifies the need for decentralization of the management of ECCD programme, change in existing organizational setup and development of human resources at different levels for the sustainability of ECCD programme in Bhutan.

Another article from Mumbai, India, describes Mumbai Mobile Crèche's efforts in providing early childhood care and development services to the children of urban migrant construction workers living on the construction sites in Mumbai. The article in detail describes the curriculum and delivery system of Bal Palika Training Programme (BPT), a specially designed course to suit the needs of the children of migrant construction workers. The article also highlights the key features that make it a truly sustainable programme.

Building partnerships for ECD

In most of the countries in the Asia Pacific region the responsibility for young children of 0-8 years rests with different agencies and ministries at the central level, and it becomes the responsibility of the parents, teachers, caregivers and school authorities at the local level. In this regard, the article from Indonesia describes the ChildFund Indonesia's efforts in building partnership with the relevant ministries and other agencies at the central level to align Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Child Protection principles at the central level, and collaborating with parents, teachers and caregivers at the local level to prepare in the event of a disaster and build resilience from early age. The project in partnership with multi-stakeholders organized mass awareness and training programmes on DRR management, transformed unsafe ECD centres and schools into safe ECD centres and schools, and developed a standardized early warning system. The system was introduced to the community and children by integrating it into teachers' lesson plans.

The article from the Philippines describes a partnership among Consuelo Foundation, the Philippine Government's ECCD Council, and the Local Government Units in the implementation of "Healthy Start Programme" targeted to the families from low economic strata, low educational level and experiencing domestic violence and abuse in the Philippines. The programme adopted community-based approaches to build healthier and safer communities.

Building social cohesion through ECD

Building social cohesion through early childhood initiative is an ambitious aim. However, it is not unattainable. In fact, the best time for laying the foundation for social cohesion is at early childhood. Early childhood development programme is a concern of various stakeholders including parents, caregivers, teachers, community people and different organizations. A successful partnership among these stakeholders, if properly managed, can lead to social cohesion. One of the deep rooted discriminations evident in most countries in the Asia Pacific region is gender-based discrimination. The article from Plan International gives an account of its gender dimensions included in ECCD programmes in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Pakistan, Uganda, Kenya and Bolivia. The article presents some common themes found in all six countries, and highlights some of the important successes made through its efforts basically in raising awareness on gender equality, building capacity of parents and caregivers, fostering the involvement of men in care-giving, increasing attendance of girls in ECCD centres and promoting girls' education at large.

Another article from Bangladesh shows that the provision of school playground and play materials not only helped to increase children's learning and development in schools, but also turned school playground into a community 'play centre'. The facilities are not only used by school children but also by children from the community who are not enrolled in school. As a result of it the out-of school children's school readiness is enhanced. This article indicates the possibility of promoting social cohesion through the use of school playground and necessary play materials both by school children and out-of-school children.

Promoting diversity and inclusion through ECD

One of the important lessons that a child should learn from early age is to respect the differences and diversity among the people in terms of their physical appearance, abilities and disabilities, colour, language, religion, opinions and ideals. The authors

have argued on the significance of making early childhood programmes inclusive so that the children at young age learn to adjust to various circumstances and get along with other children coming from diverse backgrounds. A case study on “Age Appropriate Inclusive Education” from the Philippines presents examples of how inclusive education programme has helped to change the lives of children with disabilities. The article presents some of the strategies, interventions and programmes for children with disabilities in pre-school classes. The authors identify the need for changing the mindset of the persons closest to the children with disabilities such as parents, caregivers, school authorities, and medical team. They highlight the importance of close connections among various stakeholders and suggest showing strong commitments in taking actions and practising new knowledge, skill and information in everyday life.

Another research-based article from India looks at the factors influencing interaction between children with special needs and their peers in an inclusive classroom. The article discusses the importance of beginning inclusion early in life and for extended period of contact so as to enhance more natural and spontaneous relation with the peers. It also stresses that students’ own motivation to participate and the praise they receive from the teachers and peers play a big role in their progress. Another study from India presents a comprehensive review of ECCE in India and discusses the inclusion of most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in ECCE programmes. It emphasizes the need for promoting inclusion in education system, modifications in general school curriculum, and encouraging parental involvement and home school partnership for the inclusion of marginalized and disabled children in ECCE programmes.

The article from Lao PDR shares the experiences and efforts made in providing

equitable quality early childhood services to the children from non-Lao ethno-linguistic communities. The article unveils the importance of community involvement, teachers’ perception and training and supplementary learning materials in the ethnic languages as essential factors for positive outcomes.

Another article from Hong Kong, China, discusses the challenges that the ethnic minority children, especially the South Asian ethnic minorities, are facing in terms of ensuring equitable education in Hong Kong. Requirement for the non-Chinese speaking children to follow the same curriculum as the children of native Chinese speakers, lack of adequate knowledge among the teachers about the cultural background of the ethnic minority children and shortage of teaching and learning materials appropriate for non-Chinese speaking children are highlighted as the major problems. The article argues that there is a need for developing a “Chinese as a Second Language Curriculum” for those children instead of a standardized Chinese curriculum for all.

The article from Bangladesh presents a case of BRAC Nobodhara School being run in Dhaka city. The uniqueness of this initiative is that it provides equal opportunity for all. Its inclusiveness includes gender, religion, diverse socio-economic class, varied ability and children with special needs. This new trend was started with the assumption that “One-Size-Fits-All” theory does not work in education. Hence, the school focuses on quality of facilities, quality of teaching-learning approaches and a wide range of resource materials. Its strategies also include home visits, parent counseling and remedial support to individual child.

We believe that the articles included in this issue will be interesting and useful to all readers. We, the editorial team, would like to extend our appreciations to all the authors whose articles appear in this publication.

Young children as the basis for sustainable development

By Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Professor, New York University, USA

Dr. Yoshikawa is also a Professor of Globalization and Education, and Co-Chair of the ECD and education workgroup of the U.N. Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Keynote Speaker at the Asia-Pacific Regional ECD Conference, 3-5 December 2014 in Manila, Philippines.

Children are a common basis for all dimensions of sustainable development. No advances in sustainable development will occur in coming decades without multiple generations contributing to societal improvement. Moreover, beyond sheer survival, children have a right to thrive, develop to their full potential, and live in a sustainable world.¹

Many have argued that the challenges presented by sustainable development are integrated. Goals in the areas of poverty reduction, health, education, sustainable agriculture and energy, gender equality and social inclusion, and development within planetary boundaries must be tackled together, not separately. An inter-generational vision of societal development must underlie these goals; without this vision for the next generation, there will be no capacity for nations to actually bring about sustainable development.

The link between early childhood development and sustainable development

Children's health, learning and behaviour during the early years are the foundation not only for later school success and completion, but also for their capacity to participate in community, workplace and society. Young children's growth and development, in addition, is profoundly shaped by the opportunities for learning, education, economic resources and interactions provided by adults – whether they encounter these adults in home, care, service or community contexts.

A powerful set of neuro-scientific and economic evidence over the last 20 years now shows that early childhood is a critical stage of human development. The foundations of brain architecture and functioning, and subsequent lifelong developmental potential are laid down in the early years in a process that is exquisitely sensitive to external influence. Early experiences in the home, in other care settings, and in communities interact with genes to shape the developing nature and quality of the brain's architecture.

The growth and then environmentally-based pruning of neuronal systems in the first years support a range of early skills, including cognitive (early language, literacy, math), social (empathy, pro-social behaviours), persistence, attention, self-regulation and executive function skills (the voluntary control of attention and behaviour).² Each of these skills, measured in early childhood, are predictive of school success and completion; higher earnings; active participation in communities and society; and reduced odds of delinquency, crime, and chronic and non-communicable disease.³

Later skills – in schooling; in employment; in family life – build cumulatively upon these early skills. Therefore, as the Nobel-prize-winning economist James Heckman has shown, investment in early learning and development results in greater cost savings than investment later in the life cycle.⁴

The state of the world's young children

Despite the well-established importance of the early years, each year 7 million children worldwide do not survive to their fifth birthday, and over 200 million children who do survive do not reach their developmental potential in early childhood, as indexed by risks such as stunting or exposure to absolute poverty.⁵ Indeed, a range of powerful risk factors such as maternal undernutrition; lack of recommended breastfeeding; lack of access to clean water and sanitation; lack of stimulation in the home; and lack of learning opportunities in many low- and middle-income countries lead to this loss of human potential.⁶ Such experiences can get "under the skin," overwhelming the young body's stress mechanisms and immune functions. These 200 million children thus face high odds of early mortality; school failure; early pregnancy; joblessness; and chronic and costly diseases across the lifespan.⁷ This represents an enormous and perhaps the primary challenge to global sustainable development.

The evidence on essential early childhood development programmes and policies

To address the growing challenges of environmental crises, poverty and inequality, and domestic and armed conflict, a transformative approach to early childhood development is required. In low-, middle-, and high-income countries alike, ECD services encompassing proven approaches to health, education, social protection and child protection are some of the most cost-effective interventions for a range of long-term outcomes important to society, including completed schooling, higher lifelong earnings, and reduced crime.⁸ These programmes begin before birth and include comprehensive family planning, complete birth registration, and a package of proven health services encompassing preventive and curative care.⁹ They include nutrition programmes that integrate an emphasis on supporting stimulating and responsive parenting, a combination of services with powerful effects on both health and learning.¹⁰ By pre-primary age, they include quality learning and education programmes, whether implemented in home-based or centre-based settings, with continued attention to health and social and emotional development. These solutions to maximize children's future contributions for sustainable development are available and known: we refer the reader to recent reviews of this strong and extensive evaluation science base.¹¹

The economic benefits of investing in young children globally are well-established. Quality pre-primary education has been shown to produce substantial economic benefits, including higher rates of primary and secondary completion, higher earnings in adulthood, and lower crime.¹² Raising pre-school enrollment to 50% in low- and middle-income countries has been estimated to result in benefits of over \$33 billion US, with a benefit-cost ratio of between 7.8 and 17.6, depending on the discount rate.¹³ A nutrition and parenting stimulation intervention for infants and toddlers resulted in impacts 20 years later in raising IQ; reducing anxiety, depression and violence; and increasing earnings by 50%.¹⁴ Such services contribute substantially to a broader development agenda to fight poverty and inequality.¹⁵ Not acting on these

proven solutions – not integrating them into progress on global targets and indicators – will thus have substantial costs to societies.

The Open Working Group of the United Nations put forward proposed Sustainable Development Goals and targets in August, 2014.¹⁶ They include the following: “4.2. by 2030 ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.” In addition, over 30 other indicators, in areas of poverty reduction, health, child protection, gender equity, reduction of violence, urban development, environmental sustainability and biodiversity, and water and sanitation are relevant to young children. As a global community for early childhood development we must protect this language and build on it to achieve a coordinated set of indicators for post-2015 ECD in the context of sustainable development. Governance and implementation approaches must also be developed to guide nations to ensure maximum results on their investments in young children.¹⁷

It is critically important that indicators tracking the entire range of sustainable development goals be disaggregated by age (early childhood; primary school age; secondary school age; the transition to adulthood; child-bearing age and beyond). Without this disaggregation, progress towards sustainable development for the most vulnerable cannot be measured. For example, stunting is well-established and difficult to reverse by age 2. Rates of household poverty are the highest for families with young children, and harmful effects of poverty are also largest when experienced in the early years.¹⁸ Without disaggregation of poverty indicators by age, the impact of social protection on the most vulnerable will be unknown. Similarly, efforts to increase gender equality; reduce population burdens on the planet; provide improved water sources and sanitation; and prevent HIV infection all have particularly powerful and long-lasting influences on children’s life between birth and school entry. Disaggregating indicators by age must therefore distinguish the birth to 2 period from later ECD, in addition to primary- and secondary-school ages.

The large number of the world’s children starting life at severe risk and experiencing toxic stress threatens all other goals of sustainable development.¹⁹ The capacity

of a nation to build sustainable systems and infrastructure, innovate and invest in technology, and grow while reducing impact on the earth’s resources all depend on a workforce with the skills that are foundational to productivity, civic engagement, and innovation. Not pursuing an early childhood development goal, moreover, would not only compromise achievement of all other sustainable development goals, but also violate the right of every child to develop to his or her potential. It is for these reasons that children must be at the very centre of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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Governance for sustainability: A case study of ECCD programme management in Bhutan

By Karma Gayleg, Senior Programme Coordinator,
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Background

Bhutan's ECCD policy is driven by its philosophy of gross national happiness which emphasizes the need to "maximize the happiness of all Bhutanese and to enable them to achieve their full and innate potential as human being" (RGOB 1999; p. 47). The ECCD policy is therefore directed towards providing quality early childhood care and development services to families and children from conception to the age of eight years with a three-pronged strategy of parenting education, centre based programmes and transition to school programme. The district education offices play an important role in the implementation of the programmes with the mandate of coordinating and supporting the establishment of ECCD centres, monitoring the centres and providing professional support to the ECCD facilitators.

As the number of ECCD centres increase in the districts, the human resource of the district offices becomes insufficient, apart from the lack of adequate orientation and capacity building in this particular field, affecting effective supervision and ability to address quality issues. Therefore, this study explores the question of whether

the district education offices are organized and equipped enough to address the needs of quality ECCD provision and if there is capable human resource in the district to run the programme effectively. The study examines the challenges of the district education office, highlights the key issues related to the management of early childhood programme, and explores measures for improved governance for the sustainability of ECCD programme.

Findings

The broad aim of the study is to understand the governance of early childhood programme in Bhutan from the perspective of the role played by the district education offices, and to explore how the system could be improved. In doing so, I examined and analyzed the ECCD programme management practice in one district. The findings of the study have been drawn after the analysis of the data and information collected through review of relevant literature, administration of interviews, and organization of focus group discussions with the District Education Officers, local government leaders, ECCD practitioners and officials of the Ministry of Education.

ECCD programme management system in the district

The ECCD programme in the District Education Office is a programme that has been assigned by the Ministry of Education since 2009 and the district office works closely with the ministry. At the District Education Office, one of the three officers is identified as the focal person for ECCD, and is responsible for all matters pertaining to ECCD programme. However, ECCD is not the only responsibility of the officer. The functions related to ECCD include planning, establishment and implementation of ECCD centres in collaboration with the ministry. The officer's functions also include, monitoring ECCD centres, recruiting ECCD facilitators, promoting parenting education, and any other tasks assigned by the ministry. The relevance and the continued existence of the present system of ECCD management at the district level is subject to the continued flow of funds from the ministry, as the office itself has no regular source of financial resources in case the support from the ministry is ceased.

Moreover, the local government or the Gewog office does not have much role to play in the governance of ECCD programmes in the district. As stated by one of the local government leaders, their role does not go beyond providing logistic support such as labour contribution in the construction of community-based ECCD centres and mobilizing children for enrolment in the centre. Hence, there is little involvement of the local government and the communities in terms of planning and decision making with regard to ECCD programmes in their own jurisdiction.

Human Resources

The human resources in the district include the district focal person and the ECCD facilitators. The facilitators of the ECCD centres are selected and recruited by the district education office. As the facilitators of community-based ECCD centres are positions that are not formally approved by the Royal Civil Service Commission, the existing personnel working in the centres are drawn from the district's pool of Non-Formal Education Instructors on ad hoc basis until the position is created and formally approved. The Non-Formal Education instructors converted into ECCD facilitators are paid for twelve to fifteen hours of work per week while they are required to work at least twenty hours a week as ECCD

facilitators. The capacity building of the ECCD facilitators is also carried out by the ministry and as such the District Education Office has no role in the training of personnel. However, the focal persons are expected to provide professional support to the facilitators during monitoring visits.

District Education Office (DEO) faces a shortage of human resource given that there are only three officers looking after a range of programmes and services, as a result of which there is some compromise in the quality of the programmes in terms of carrying out effective monitoring and support to the ECCD centres.

Material Resources

District Education Office has the responsibility of providing the materials to the ECCD centres, including learning materials and stationery required in the centres. The materials are provided with funding support from the ministry, as the DEO has no budget provision for supplies and materials for ECCD centres in its local budget and plans. Therefore, the supply of funds and materials to ECCD centres is dependent on the funds from the ministry which also depends on external donors such as UNICEF and Save the Children. District Education Officers feel that such a provision of materials is not sustainable as the DEO is not in a position to plan and ensure regular supply of materials to the centres.

ECCD centre practitioners feel that the materials provided to the centres are not sufficient as they require a variety of play and learning materials as well as stationery that need to be replenished frequently. Another concern that the practitioners have is regarding the quality of the materials supplied to the centres. According to them, most of the toys and play materials supplied to the centres are of very poor quality. District Education Officers state that as the fund provided by the ministry is limited and the quantity of materials have to be procured as prescribed in the operational guidelines, they have to resort to acquiring the materials that can be afforded with the limited fund available.

Professional development

ECCD facilitators are trained through a ten-day basic course in ECCD by the Ministry of Education as identified by the DEO and placed in the ECCD centre. However, the DEO has no responsibility related to training

even though the focal person is expected to provide professional support to the centres. The operational guideline for community-based ECCD centres also does not specify how that should be done.

Another area where professional development is required is for the focal person who coordinates and oversees all ECCD programmes. There is no proper orientation or training for the focal person. But the official is expected to have sound knowledge in ECCD principles and practices to be able to plan, implement, monitor and support ECCD programmes in the field. However, as the Chief of ECCD programme at the Ministry of Education agrees, "the district education officers and focal persons lack the professional capacity to properly execute and monitor the ECCD programme as they have not undergone any formal training in ECCD".

Monitoring and Evaluation System

The ministry has developed a monitoring tool in 2011 and it expects the district focal persons and parental schools to monitor ECCD centres in absence of formal mandate and proper mechanism. Ministry of Education agrees that 'a systematic monitoring mechanism' is yet to be in place. There is also a lack of capacity to monitor at all levels.

Analysis of the findings

The system of early childhood programme management and governance in Bhutan is a recent phenomenon and as such not built in the national or local system as a mainstream agenda of the government. In the light of the three models of governance propounded by Regenstein & Lipper (2013), the ECCD governance approach in Bhutan clearly is the 'consolidated' governance model as the authority and accountability for early childhood programmes and services are entrusted to the Ministry of Education, while the districts are only assisting the ministry without any concrete mandate or power.

While the approach could be effective and efficient, the determining factors as highlighted by UNESCO (2007) (cited in Vitiello and Kools, 2010; p3) are critical to achieving quality in ECCD programmes. The issues observed in the study are analyzed in the light of the five factors enunciated by UNESCO (2007) as follows:

Involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders to ensure holistic ECCD

In the governance of ECCD programme in Bhutan, while the policy mandates a multi-sectoral approach involving key sectors such as the ministries of health, agriculture, labour and human resources, finance, and national commission for women and children etc., these are not visible in practice both at the centre and in the district, except for the involvement of the Ministry of Health in activities such as meetings and one joint programme called early parenting and stimulation through health services. Even at the district level, involvement exists as symbolic gestures. Most critically, engagement of the local government in the ECCD programme at the district level is yet to be optimized. Unless the key agencies and sectors are engaged in decision making processes with specific mandates, the multi-sectoral approach to ECCD programming as enshrined in the national policy is not likely to be translated into practice.

Delineation of specific responsibilities for each of the sectors or stakeholders with proper accountability system:

One reason why multi-sectoral involvement is not working may be because of the lack of specific responsibilities related to ECCD spelt in their job responsibilities or terms of reference. The fact that involvement in ECCD is taken only as an act of courtesy also points to the absence of specific mandates and accountability.

Consideration of the risks and opportunities of integrating ECCD into the education system:

The challenges of a consolidated approach are clearly visible in the difficulty being faced in engaging the other sectors in the management of ECCD. In contrast, a coordinated governance model where authority and accountability are placed across a number of sectors and agencies would have been effective as the other sectors would also have seriously worked towards achieving goals. The involvement of many sectors would also have eased the problem of human resource shortage that the DEO is facing.

Allocation of adequate fund for capacity building and orientation, and need for decentralization:

Given the constraints that the ECCD centres and the districts face with regard to the shortage of material and financial resources, decentralization in the context of ECCD programme appears to exist only in function. The absolute dependence of the district on the Ministry of Education for everything from funds to capacity building and planning reflects the absence of effective decentralization. This system appears to impact programme implementation, affecting the quality of interventions at the ECCD centre. In the present arrangement, there is little scope for the district to plan and budget funds as per the diverse needs of different centres as there is not even a budget head for ECCD in the district. Yet, the ministry sees the need for decentralization. The chief of ECCD&SEND of the ministry of Education states that the whole programme needs to be decentralized to the districts so that they decide, plan, and execute. MoE can help monitor and provide necessary support to build their capacity and help mobilize funds.

The capacity building of ECCD focal persons in the district is also an unattended area. Due to the lack of capacity of the focal persons in the DEO, they are not able to implement programmes effectively and provide professional support to the ECCD facilitators in the field, resulting in the failure to recognize and remedy quality issues in the ECCD centres. The ministry, as stated by the Chief of ECCD&SEND, also acknowledges the weakness and emphasizes the importance of providing comprehensive trainings and orientation for the district focal points.

Putting in place a strong and effective monitoring and evaluation system that can be used across diverse situations:

Monitoring is an important aspect of any programme or activity, which is carried out to improve practices and to enhance accountability for resource use and programme outcomes. In the context of the ECCD programme in Chhukha district, there is monitoring being carried out by the district officials. They do visit ECCD centres, however, it is evident that monitoring tools are not used, and as such there is a question about the quality of monitoring. Although the monitoring tool has been recently developed by the ministry, it is yet to be put into use. The absence of effective monitoring system, mechanism and tools suggest the lack of assessment and feedback practices.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the ECCD programme is relatively new, Bhutan has been successful at the national level in launching various interventions and introducing them in all parts of the country. The Ministry of Education has also been successful in mobilizing funds consistently for many years from external sources and getting the districts to make good use of them. The number of families and children benefitted by the programme within a short period of time is significant. Even at the district level, the efforts made in reaching out to the most in-need and the success in mobilizing the local governments and communities to participate in the programme, in spite of the lack of capacity and local resources, is remarkable. In whatever has been achieved thus far, the DEO and MoE together have set the stage from where the existing programmes could be scaled up and expanded. The only question lies in the sustainability of the programme in the future as systemic arrangements are yet to be established to ensure the continuity and stability of the programme. While the ECCD programme has so far progressed at the behest of MoE under its direct coordination and support, the expansion and implementation of the programme, particularly the community-based ECCD programme, should be devolved and diversified with more active involvement of the local governments and civil society organizations.

There is also a lack of ownership at the district and the local government level as most of the stakeholders view the ECCD programme as being owned and driven by MoE. This may be because of a lack of clear understanding of the concept of ECCD and also the lack of specific responsibilities in their mandate and accountability system in place.

The lack of capacity of DEOs is another challenge to effective management of the ECCD programme at district level, as the officials may be failing in communicating the essence of the programme to the stakeholders and in planning, implementing and monitoring the programme effectively. The governance issues at district level could have consequences on the practices at ECCD centre level and could result in the community losing confidence in the programme, dissuading them from cooperating and participating in the programme.

Another impediment to the ECCD programme is the lack of designated professionals to run the ECCD centres. The interim arrangement of deploying non-formal education instructors as ECCD facilitators cannot sustain very long as it is only a temporary internal arrangement between the MoE and DEOs. As the community-based ECCD programme grows and the number of such practitioners increase, such an arrangement may not be effective and sustainable.

Recommendations

For the programme to sustain and continue in the future, decentralization of many aspects of the ECCD programme is crucial. Firstly, district officials and local government leaders need to be educated and enthused farther so as to enable them to understand and value the ECCD programme as a critical intervention for human development, and acquire knowledge and skills to plan, implement and monitor the programme effectively. Another critical step towards integrating the programme is to channelize the funding support to the district budget system by creating budget heads for the ECCD programme in the district plans, allocating the budget accordingly; and releasing the funds through the national budget system of the Ministry of Finance. This would not only make the fund flow systematic but also give some sense of ownership to the Ministry of Finance and the local governments.

Another step in the process of decentralization of the ECCD programme would be to devolve the planning process for - ECCD programmes at district level to the District Assembly and the District Education Office so that they are empowered to make decisions based on the specific needs of their own context. This would imply the decentralization of the fiscal, administrative and political aspects of ECCD governance to the district. In such a scenario, the primary function of the ministry would only be to ensure sound policy and guidelines and to monitor and evaluate the programmes planned and implemented by the districts.

The DEO presently functions under the direct supervision of the *Dzongdag* (district governor). Although the system is expected to continue as it is, the DEO needs to have more autonomy in the deployment of staff

for professional support and effective implementation of programmes. In this sense, the DEO needs to be strengthened with additional staff to designate officials for specific programmes and have them specialized in the respective areas of concern. Such an arrangement would enable the DEO to be more effective in the governance and management of different programmes, particularly ECCD.

Human resource development is crucial for the success of an organization. While there have been efforts to prepare human resource in terms of preparing personnel for the ECCD centres, the need for more comprehensive professional development programmes for the facilitators and capacity building of the programme leaders at district level are critical. Capacity building of the focal persons as well as providing certified professional training to the practitioners in the field need to be viewed as a critical consideration in the effective governance of

the whole programme, and these need to be addressed accordingly .

In conclusion, while the programme has potentials to grow further given the demand and support for it, sustainability will largely depend on how effectively the programme is integrated at all levels of governance and how human resource development needs are addressed.

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Sustainable development for the children of migrant construction workers through teacher training programme

**By Vrishali Pispati, Chief Executive Officer
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Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes work towards ensuring children's rights to survival, full development, protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation. However, a large majority of children especially living in difficult circumstances do not have access to quality care and learning environment. There is growing awareness on the need to scale up innovative ECCE programmes that reach and foster development of vulnerable children (UNESCO, 2013). One such vulnerable group comprises children of migrant construction workers living on the construction sites of the mega city of Mumbai and its surrounding areas.

In urban India, construction industry is the single largest employer of migrant workers. These workers move from one

construction site to another, wherever they can earn a living. Conditions of living on the construction sites can be appalling with makeshift shanties and limited availability of drinking water, sanitation, and health care. The children grow up playing in the rubble of the construction work, and are in constant danger of the falling debris, deep pits, drains, trucks and bulldozers. These children frequently suffer from accidents, malnutrition and numerous other health problems. An urban migrant child living on construction sites remains largely excluded from any public social security or safety net.

Mumbai Mobile Creches (MMC) is a non-profit organisation working with the children living on construction sites in Mumbai and surrounding areas. MMC provides holistic early childhood care and education by

operating day care centres on construction sites in rooms allotted by the builder. The child care professionals delivering services to the children at these centres and to the community are trained professionals many of whom have graduated from our year-long Bal Palika Training programme.

Bal Palika Training (BPT) programme

The demand for a specially designed course to suit the needs of the children of migrant construction workers was the impetus to the inception of Bal Palika Training (BPT) course in 1982 which now has over 1000 graduates. MMC has supported the capacity building of the teachers from other organizations in India; and in 2007 the construction workers' community began participating in the course. MMC's recent affiliation with the renowned Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey (SNDT) University allows BPT teacher trainees to take the university examination in Hindi – the medium of instruction of the BPT, to obtain a diploma in Nursery/ Crèche Teacher's Training.

This article describes the curriculum and delivery of the BPT, unfolds unique features of the BPT that makes it a truly sustainable programme, and shares a supporting case study of a Bal Palika (trainee).

Course curriculum

The BPT course curriculum includes:

a) Theory courses

- Child Growth and Development
- Curriculum and Methods
- Child Health and Nutrition
- Child Welfare Services
- Balwadi Administration and Crèche Management

b) Practicum

- Teaching Aids Journal
- Working with Children
- Language Activities in Classroom
- Lessons in School
- Observations of Children (1-6 years) and its Interpretation

The BPT builds capacities of the Bal Palikas in:

- planning, organization, and management of crèche (0-3 years), balwadi or pre-school (3 – 6 years)

- creating cost effective customized teaching aids for the children aged 0 – 6 years

- using interactive approaches like role plays, street theatre and puppetry for community outreach and boosting parental involvement in day care programme

Further, trainees are exposed to After School Support programme to orient them to working with older children (6-14 years).

The BPT programme which has been in operation for the last 31 years has many features which make it unique and effective:

Contextually relevant customized training programme

The context specific features of the BPT include:

Promotion of diversity:

MMC centres have always been a melting pot of various cultures. In 2013-14, MMC served children from 21 states of India with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds when parents had migrated to construction sites. The BPT programme is specially designed to ensure that Bal Palikas are equipped to appreciate the diverse cultural, linguistic, and traditional influences on the young children and their families whom we cater to. These core values are inherent in many practices of the day care centres like granting eligibility to all the children living on construction site to enrol at day care centres irrespective of their language or background, celebrating varying cultural festivals and many more.

Specially designed curriculum:

Bal Palikas are trained in planning and executing a specially designed 15 week curriculum that reflects the transitory nature of construction work. Nearly 80% of the children we cater to live with us for less than 6 months. Bal Palikas are therefore trained to capitalize on the time they have with the children using the thematic approach to provide children with concrete skills and knowledge to

take away from their time at the centre even if it is very limited. In the *thematic approach*, each month a new theme relevant to the lives of children which interests them is introduced and many of the activities, games, and lessons revolve around the chosen theme. This ensures that, despite their short stay at the centre, children will leave the centre having gained some knowledge and understanding of a specific topic. In addition, activities are planned in such a way that along with the conceptual development children get opportunities to refine their gross and fine motor skills, and socio-emotional development. This lays foundation for the schooling of the children by promoting their pre-reading and pre-writing skills. Further, great emphasis is laid on training Bal Palikas to deliver health and nutritional services to our children as well as linking them with public welfare services considering their vulnerability.

ECCE on the go:

The transient nature of the construction work also brings to the fore operational challenges in running day care centres on the sites which our Bal Palikas must learn to overcome. MMC is constantly opening and closing day care centres based on the number of children living on construction site at any particular time and the availability of resources which can vary over the life of a construction project. The process of opening and closing a centre is a complex one and Bal Palikas are trained to adapt to these ever changing, unstable conditions on the construction sites.

Transforming theory into practice:

The delivery of the BPT course is especially adapted to suit the educational background of our trainees. Most of our trainees have attained limited formal schooling and have minimum exposure to diverse learning experiences. The course therefore heavily relies on practicum experiences for the trainees with the ratio of 35:65 theoretical and practical instruction. Full day theory classes are held in workshop model for two days a week and the remaining four days are for practicum. The use of the MMC day care centres as 'Demonstration Centres' for best practices in ECCE allow Bal Palikas to observe and hone their skills under the supervision and guidance of Programme

Officers (POs) at these centres. POs started their career as MMC teachers and were promoted to supervisory posts based on their expertise and years of experience. They are ideal mentors for BPT trainees embarking on centre organization, planning and execution. Over the period of one year Bal Palikas are placed in all the three sections of MMC day care centres – crèche, pre-school, and after school support to give them experience of working with varying age groups. They also visit other child and community welfare organizations as part of their field visits which makes them aware of the basic rights of children and facilitates to transform their theoretical learning into practice.



Bal Palikas Creating Puppets with Low Cost Materials

Trained and experienced faculty:

The course is conducted by our trained and experienced senior staffs who have years of training and experience in working with children of migrant construction workers and thus understand the nuances of delivering child care services. Internal resource persons in MMC have specialized in puppetry and art, songs and stories and conduct workshops on these skills for the trainees. Invited speakers enrich BPT curriculum by conducting sessions on relevant themes like nutrition, childhood diseases, and child protection etc.

Sustainable development of the migrant community

Women from the construction workers' communities who have studied at least up to the 7th grade are encouraged to join the BPT programme. However, for many of these women, participation in this intensive year-long programme means loss of the wages for a prolonged period. MMC therefore gives regular monthly stipends to the trainees for the duration of the training. In the last 4 years, 70% of the total number of BPT graduates hailed from the construction workers' community. Apart from meeting MMC's need for trained child caregivers, Bal Palikas are also regularly absorbed in the local programmes that cater to the needs of young children in environments other than construction sites. Further, the training also equips Bal Palikas to raise their own children in the best way. These empowered women engage larger community using interactive methods through regular monthly meetings, becoming the 'agents of change'. The meetings provide a common platform for

the community to voice their concerns and for Bal Palikas to communicate important health and well-being messages to the community.

In essence, the BPT helps women from the construction workers' community to plan and provide better environment for their children. The training facilitates multifaceted development of the children, taking care of their health, nutritional and educational needs in challenging environment. The year-long course transforms our trainees into confident, empowered women with a strong professional identity. In the years to come, the BPT aims to boost English language training introduced this year and initiate computer training to enhance skills for efficient use of technology for all the trainees. MMC hopes that, equipped with quality skills in ECCE, our Bal Palikas will continue to bring about positive change in the lives of all the children for whom they provide care.

A successful case of teacher training programme

Born on a construction site in the suburbs of Mumbai, Shaheen Shaikh (25 years) had to drop out of school after completing grade 7 to assume household responsibilities, following the death of her father. Shaheen wanted to help her family monetarily but the only option she had was working on the construction site. She accepted that this was how her life would be, but the day she heard of MMC's teacher training programme for women living on the construction sites, she saw a glimmer of hope. She immediately signed up for the course and convinced her family that the training would not hinder

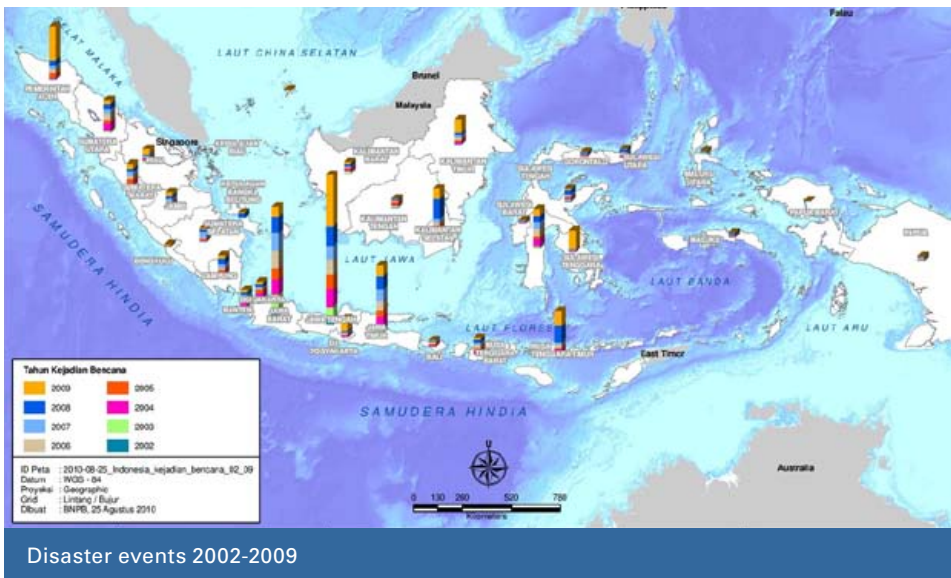
her daily household duties. Waking up early she would cook, clean and complete all her daily chores before leaving for the classes. Shaheen's challenges did not end here. Educated only to use the Urdu script, Shaheen had to learn under the supportive mentorship of BPT trainers, a new script, Hindi – the language used for BPT course. With a patient temperament and a natural flair for interacting with children, she became an instant hit with the children at the centre. After completing her training four years ago, Shaheen began working at an MMC centre as a pre-school teacher. In this period, Shaheen also completed her education till 12th grade with the support of her mentors and is now pursuing graduation from Mumbai University. Today, Shaheen is learning to be a trainer and hopes one day to conduct training sessions similar to the ones she attended during her own training. Shaheen was one of MMC's first batch of community trainees and has set an example for many young girls who are eager to experience life outside the construction site. She contributes towards the family income today and feels empowered to assist young girls in the neighbourhood seeking her advice on various issues.

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Multistakeholder efforts in building resilience from an early age

By Ivan Tagor, Emergency and Preparedness Manager, ChildFund Indonesia



Introduction

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago comprising 17,508 islands with a population of over 238 million¹. Indonesia is also one of the world's most natural disaster-prone countries, ranking fourth in the world for the number of reported disasters and sixth in the world for total disaster mortality in 2007². Being a disaster prone country, it is critical to ensure that the most vulnerable group within the country, namely the 30 million + young children³, are prepared for, and protected during and after an emergency.

As a society, we assume parents will 'naturally' look after their children, particularly during an emergency. Parents, however, can get separated from their children and when they are themselves unaware about disaster preparedness, children are placed at further risk. Thus, the objective of this pilot project funded by Australian Aid, was to ensure that children aged 3-6 years in the 6 targeted villages in Sumba, Eastern Indonesia, were less vulnerable during disasters, through the support from a better prepared government and community.

Project area

The province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) is ranked as the 4th most disaster

prone province in the entire country. There are currently 33 provinces in Indonesia. East and Southwest Sumba are ranked as the 102nd and 123th most disaster prone districts among the 494 districts in Indonesia.⁴ Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana also considers the island of Sumba to be a multi-disaster risk, with drought, famine, earthquake, cyclone and landslides frequently taking place. One of the main causes of disaster is climate change. During the rainy season many areas suffer from floods and landslides. This is primarily due to deforestation. During the dry season, there is little water available so women and children have to walk long distances in search of water.

The island of Sumba is one of the three main islands comprising the province of NTT. The island of Sumba is divided into 2 main districts namely Sumba Timur (East Sumba) and Sumba Barat Daya (Southwest Sumba). Here, ChildFund Indonesia works with its project partner, Sumba Integrated Development (SID). According to SID⁵ in East Sumba, there are 24,942 children aged 0-6 years; however, only 4,274 (or 16.29%) of these children have access to early education services. The situation is similar in Southwest Sumba where only 13,019 children (or 18.1%) aged 0-6 years have access to early childhood services. Concerned about this number, SID has been working tirelessly to increase young

children's participation rates in ECD in 20 villages. Currently, 1335 children participate in our ECD centres in Sumba.

- 1 Central Bureau of Statistics; Census 2010.
- 2 Human Development Index 2010-2011. UNDP.
- 3 Human Development Index 2010-2011. UNDP.
- 4 Indonesia Disaster Risk Index 2011.
- 5 SID Education survey 2012.

ChildFund Indonesia

ChildFund has been implementing ECD programmes in Indonesia since 1973. Here, we work in eight provinces and 31 districts, comprising 174 villages. Through our community-based, participatory programme approach, we mobilize and facilitate local communities through 16 local partners to improve the lives of their children, and empower communities to coordinate stakeholder inputs to achieve ECD programmes that are culturally grounded, responsive, and resource-efficient. In Fiscal Year 2014, our ECD programmes supported 14,000 young children aged 0-6 years, 18,000 care providers and 9,000 caregivers with an operating budget close to USD 800,000.

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is an important aspect of ChildFund International's strategic plan. It is also a key component within ChildFund Indonesia's Country Strategic Paper (CSP). For this reason, ChildFund mainstreams DRR throughout its programming so children in Life Stage 1 (0-5 years), Life Stage 2 (6-14 years) and Life Stage 3 (15-24 years) have access to the knowledge and information needed to keep themselves and their families safe when a disaster strikes.

Background

DRR is not just a concern of ChildFund and other NGOs working in Indonesia. It is also an issue for local communities. In a series of consultations held to identify their concerns for the future, parents and local leaders indicated a need for greater capacity in DRR for themselves and their children. They were concerned about possible health risks, lack of opportunities for schooling after a

disaster and the need for reunification plans in case of separation. In order to support the implementation of the Hyogo Framework⁶, especially in the area of increasing public awareness on disaster preparedness, ChildFund also felt the need to reach out to children in ECD centres especially on the island of Sumba as it is located in an area prone to disaster. A study conducted by SID also found that in addition to parents'/ caregivers' poor understanding of DRR, their level of literacy was also found either poor or very poor⁷.

ECD in DRR project in Sumba, Eastern Indonesia

The project goal was to ensure that children aged 3-6 years in 6 targeted villages were less vulnerable during disasters, through support from a better prepared government and community. To this end, ChildFund trained parents/caregivers and ECD teachers/cadres on Disaster Risk Reduction Management (DRRM) and Child Protection (CP). For ECD teachers/cadres, the training focused on the integration of these principles into their daily teaching and learning plans, which are based on the national curriculum, while for parents/caregivers the focus was on applying these principles to young child's daily life at home. As a result of this complementary system of collaboration between parents/caregivers and ECD teachers/cadres, young children were better prepared in the event of a disaster at the ECD centre/Posyandu⁸ as well as at home. Given the low level of literacy of parents/caregivers and ECD teachers/cadres, the project developed visually/culturally appropriate materials to cater to their needs. With greater preparedness of ECD staff, it was anticipated that the ECD centre would be running quicker after an emergency, thus freeing parents to rebuild their homes and reducing the stress on child and parent. In the consultations that were held, it was discovered that parents often did not send their children to ECD centres as they felt that they were not 'safe and secure'. For this reason, in addition to training teachers, tutors, supervisors and cadres on DRRM and Child Protection, the project included a 'hard ware' component, whereby 8 'unsafe' ECD centres and Posyandu were improved based on a risk analysis, using an adaptation of the 'Safe Schools' framework. To secure 'buy-in' and reaffirm the partnership between the project and community, the project provided building materials while parents/caregivers and the community



Simulation at ECD centre

made available their labour and monitored the progress. Through this participatory construction approach, parents/caregivers and their young children became aware of the importance of creating safer places to learn and play. This reconstruction process also helped reassure parents that their child would be safe when they attend the ECD centre, thereby encouraging regular attendance at these centres overall.

The project was implemented in 6 villages in the district of East Sumba and 3 villages in the district of South West Sumba. The villages in East Sumba were Matawai Lapau, Patawang, Wanga, Prehamboli, Manga Mengit and Tana Tukuare. They are close to each other and most of the farmers living there rear cattle for their livelihood. The 3 villages in South West Sumba were Maliha, Hombakaripit and Hohawungo. These villages are also located close to each other, thereby enabling the sharing of resources. However, in addition to planting tobacco, families here also rear cattle, enabling the project to garner an amount of synergy from parents' (mostly fathers) joint livelihood activities, particularly during the *pasola* festival, which is a horse race (with 'spears') that takes place in the month of February every year.

In addition to the works of renovating the ECD centres/Posyandu and training the ECD teachers/cadres and parents/caregivers using ChildFund's training materials, the project also implemented a mass awareness campaign on the importance of integrating the training programme into the village contingency plan. The programme of mass awareness, which was participated by provincial, district and sub-district government officials, provided the opportunity to reaffirm and highlight

the importance of partnerships in making certain that young children's interests are being looked after before, during and after an emergency. For example, the project collaborated with the Ministry of Education particularly the Directorate of Non Formal and Informal ECD at the national, province and district level and with the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection to align DRR and Child Protection principles with the existing curricula and build staff capacity. Collaboration with these government agencies is critical in providing inputs and comments on the development of training materials. Another important partnership was with the IGTKI (ECD teachers' association) as the trainings aimed at strengthening ECD teachers' skills in developing daily plans using local resources as educational tools and increasing their skills using the curricula to support children prepare for disaster. Informal relationships established through an extensive training process which included civil servants, midwives at the sub-district level as well as ECD/Posyandu representatives from other districts also contributed to establish a protective environment for young children in our project areas, and beyond. ChildFund actively involved these stakeholders in all events so that they can advocate local government to allocate resources in order to integrate DRR and Child Protection into a greater number of ECD centres.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- The prevailing community people's perception is that disaster comes from 'God' and therefore cannot be mitigated. Thus, training materials needed to be well-defined so that they do not offend. Because of the low literacy rates of the community, training materials also needed to be more visual in nature.
- The prevailing community people's belief is that ECD is preparation of 'school' and therefore parental input is unnecessary. Thus, it was critical to hold community awareness campaigns as well as to schedule training programmes at times that do not contradict with the agricultural calendar, so that fathers could be involved particularly in the renovation of the ECD centres/Posyandu.
- The prevailing belief is that there is insufficient fund/resource to mitigate disaster for all. Thus, it was necessary to highlight the importance of capacity

building in reducing risk within the community.

- The prevailing belief is that there is 'gold on the tip of rattan'. It is, therefore, not uncommon for harsh discipline measures to be carried out against young children. Thus, in addition to training on Child Protection for ECD teachers/cadres and parents, it was necessary to ensure that community leaders were also aware of these values so that they can monitor incidents in their village.
- At every administrative level, the *Bunda PAUD*, the wife of village leader, plays a strategic role. She can be a 'key motivator' for mothers.

An example of a partnership exercise between parents/caregivers and ECD teachers

ECD teachers/cadres and parents/caregivers were required to develop a standardized early warning system that can be easily understood by everyone. After the training was completed, both groups agreed that they would socialize this system within the community:

- Alert status > Fly the green flag. For example, after 2 weeks of continuous rain and/or when the sky is dark and a heavy downpour is impending.
- Standby status > Fly the yellow flag. For example, after 2-3 weeks of continuous rain and/or when it is dark and a heavy downpour is impending AND, water is rising.
- Emergency status > Fly the red flag. For example, after the water level has started to rise.

After the agreement was made, ECD teachers developed lesson plans to introduce young children to the importance of this system using play and song. Young children were also instructed on drills. So teachers and the young children are familiar with these drills, they are held every Saturday in the community providing teachers with the opportunity to build-up their repertoire of songs and stories about disasters.

Some examples

Yana (Tutor at Mutiara, Sumba):

"Now the children are familiar with different types of disaster. They know how to evacuate when an earthquake happens. They are now more interested in watching TV when a disaster is reported and tell their parents about what they know. A day after watching TV, a child told me that the volcano on Bima had erupted".

Rita (SID staff, Sumba):

"Before the integration of DRR in ECD project, tutors didn't know much about the different types of disaster. Teachers only saw the Tsunami in Aceh and the Merapi Volcano as disasters. The hole in the road was not seen as a risk to children. After being trained on DRR and Child Protection, teachers and parents are now more aware and want to improve the school environment. A day after the volcano erupted on the island of Bima, children came to school and requested face masks. The children reminded the teacher that they had to wear face masks to avoid dust."

Yuli (Kanatang sub-district government staff, Sumba):

"I am more aware of the need to protect children, how to provide safe environment for children and the importance of an early warning system. I want to share this knowledge to the village level and ask them to contribute. We need commitment from the village head to allocate the budget to support ECD".



Students practising evacuation from school building to a safe place

⁶ The Hyogo Framework Action (HFA) is a 10-year plan to make the world safer from natural hazards; <http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/hfa>

⁷ SID Education survey 2012.

⁸ Posyandu: Community based integrated health clinic (IHC). Health volunteers who have received training from the local health department provide advice and support to pregnant women as well as vaccinations and food supplements to infants and toddlers. Posyandu juga menjadi media deteksi dini kasus-kasus malnutrisi dan kekurangan gizi pada bayi dan balita. IHC also are a medium for early detection of cases of malnutrition and malnutrition in infants and toddlers. The service is implemented by the Puskesmas (government health clinics).

Strengthened ties lead to stronger ECD services: Implementation of Healthy Start Programme in the Philippines

By Abigail B. Belza, Programme Officer, Consuelo Z. Alger Foundation

In pursuit of its mission of preventing child abuse, neglect and exploitation, Consuelo Z. Alger Foundation (CF) adapted the State of Hawaii's Healthy Start Programme (HSP) in the Philippines in 1996. For 17 years, the HSP underwent contextualization and enhancement, making it unique from its original US model.

The HSP is a community-based approach to building healthier and safer communities. Targeting the children of 0-3 years from disadvantaged communities, HSP teaches parents to strengthen their bond with their children to improve their physical, intellectual and emotional development. The overall goal of preventing child abuse and neglect is achieved through four programme components: (a) parenting education using the Growing Great Kids (GGK) curriculum, (b) monitoring of child and family progress, (c) referral and linkages to community resources, and (d) capacity building of community-based workers.

Over 4,000 very young children have benefited from this programme since its inception in the Philippines. The evaluation report has revealed that there has been increase in the parents' ability to learn and make changes in their own family life. They have started to value education for their children, to think and act critically with regard to life situations, and increased their

power to change negative circumstances that impact their families. HSP was able to heighten among the parents the awareness of community services and problems regarding child abuse and violence, and the importance of participation in the community.

The general impression of the programme is highly positive. Several evaluation reports have pointed out that HSP was able to improve child care practices basically related to breastfeeding, establishing routines for children, and understanding what is needed to enhance the early brain development process of children. These findings are most inspiring given the characteristics of enrolled Filipino families, including conditions of extreme poverty, displacement from extended family, and squatter housing. Targetted families come from the lowest economic strata, with very low educational level, large family size, and with some experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

These results have encouraged the Foundation to scale-up the programme in order to reach more children, more families, and more communities, but the expansion rate was slow. The Foundation's partners are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Local Government Units (LGUs). For most of the HSP sites that were

implemented in partnership with NGOs, the HSP closed down after Consuelo Foundations pulled out of the area after eight years of implementation.

This trend prompted the Foundation to be more strategic in choosing its partners for implementing the programme. The HSP's history showed that the longest running project sites in the Philippines are those that received support from the Local Government Units (LGUs). Consuelo Foundation believes that the long-term sustainability of this programme will rely largely on the integration of the programme components with the government's (both national and local) own ECD and health services. It also believes that the strong support of the LGUs, manifested by their willingness to invest their own resources, provides a higher chance for the programme to be sustainable after the termination of support from the Foundation.

In 2014, CF has pursued a partnership with the Philippine Government's ECCD Council for a nationwide expansion of HSP. The partnership is timely as the council is implementing a plan to build and transfer to LGUs Child Development Centers throughout the Philippines based on the Early Years Act passed in 2013. The council recognizes the need to strengthen the role of parents and families as primary caregivers and educators of their children and expressed its willingness to partner with CF to promote the adoption of HSP among the LGUs in the Philippines.

Three municipalities were chosen to pilot this new partnership. They were identified based on their geographic location, - with one project site in each of the major islands in the country. The readiness of the local executives to absorb the operating costs of HSP was also a major criterion for selecting the site. The municipalities of Mankayan in Benguet Province, San Jose de Buenavista in Antique, and Alabel in Sarangani joined the partnership through the intercession of the ECCD Council.

In the tripartite agreement, roles of each organization were clearly spelled out. The Consuelo Foundation takes care of



Through Healthy Start, parents are taught to become the child's first teacher



To prevent child abuse and neglect,
every child must be a wanted child

the capacity building activities and social technology transfer. Its support consists of providing training to the Family Support Workers (FSWs) on the use of the Growing Great Kids curriculum as well as guiding supervisors in setting up a competency-based supervision to sustain transfer of learning from training to actual practice. The CF will continue its support after the initial training phase by assisting the LGUs in setting up quality management system to ensure adherence to standards in service delivery.

The ECCD Council ensures, through its Child Development Centres (CDS), a convergence point for ECD service as parents and children seamlessly transfer from the home-based/community based parenting education services provided by the FSWs to the centre-based services offered by Child Development Teachers.

The LGUs provide service delivery mechanism for parenting education and child monitoring services. The Barangay Health Workers (BHWs) and Barangay Nutrition Scholars (BNSs) are tapped in delivering ECD services in conjunction with their other functions in the community health set-up. Since BHWs and the BNS also hold parenting sessions on health and nutrition and conduct home visits, tapping this service delivery structure makes the most sense. This scheme does not burden the LGUs to create another structure for the project.

To achieve a certain level of competence in their new role as FSWs, the BHWs and BNS receive formal training to develop the set of skills and knowledge required for achieving the HSP goal. The initial training for workers runs for 14 days and covers topics such as child abuse and neglect, family systems, cultural competency, characteristics of infant and toddler's development, basic

care, health and nutrition, facilitation skills, and the use of the GGK curriculum.

There is a plan to enroll 600 families in the next three years in Mankayan, San Jose de Buenavista and Alabel project sites.

With joint investments from the LGUs, CF and ECCD Council, there will be an increase in coverage of the programme. It is expected that this will change outcomes for children who are at risk of growing up to a life more deprived than that of their parents. With Healthy Start and with other ECD programs and interventions, Filipino children from high-risk families will no longer fall behind because their parents, caregivers and communities are working together to provide a compassionate and nurturing environment where they can grow, thrive, and learn.

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School playground: Its impact on children's learning and development

By Shahidullah Sharif, Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University

Introduction

Play is the key to physical, mental, intellectual and social wellbeing of children. It impacts hugely on almost every developmental aspect of children's lives holistically and with multi-faceted ways. As per UNCRC article 31, children have also right to play. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children spend at least sixty minutes each day in open-ended play (Ginsburg et al., 2007), but literature reviews (Gleave, 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009) revealed the opposing scenario that play has been ignored for many areas. Play is rapidly disappearing from schools and early education as a whole because homework from school even from pre-school is increasing; recess

scopes are decreasing and even running is getting excluded on the school yard. Cities are building new schools in housing apartment without playgrounds and any play scopes. Consequently, most kids are not getting essential space and time to play during the school days even in the weekend and holidays. It is because of many people who believe that play is a waste of time in school. School, they say, should be a place for learning.

The decline of play is closely linked to so much trouble in behavioural challenges and passing tests, childhood obesity, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), behavioural problems, and stunted social, cognitive, and creative

development. Worst of all, the stifling of play has dire consequences—not only for children but also for our future nation. So, certified occupational therapists suggest that addressing the reasons we should allow movement with play item and fun in learning.

We know that young children spend a reasonable amount of time in school. Besides, for many children, school play time is the most active part of their day. Therefore, school playground and school playtime are vitally important to children for their fun and relaxation as well as for their good health and wellbeing. School playgrounds play important role in their daily life for fulfilling their interest, development

and learning needs. For that reason, “child psychologists and educators have considered the school playground as an important venue for children’s social and cognitive development” (Pellegrini, Davis, & Jones, 1995, p. 846).

Literatures also show the same evidence and echo that children who have more time for recess (that means active play) in school are better behaved and learn more (Barros, Silver and Stein, 2009). Another study suggests that time spent playing outdoors significantly reduces the severity of symptoms of children with attention disorders (Kuo & Taylor, 2004). The approaches directly support and measurably improve child development, and learning outcomes across the age continuum. More studies suggest that school playground facilitates physical activity and active play that supports learning (Etnier et al., 1997). So, our schools need to equip and design playground and should allow play-time and play-space for children.

School playgrounds in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, generally, schools have basic facilities like playground, where about 86% schools hold play-ground like open fields for children’s outdoor play (IED-NAPE Joint Study, 2014) in front of the schools. Of those, 39% schools have playgrounds that are not safe and appropriately furnished. The situation of playgrounds which are safe and appropriate for pre-primary students (12.5%) was more likely to be the best in rural areas. However, it is very unlikely and unfortunate for children of new generation urban schools which have been established during the last decades. These schools do not have open field in front of school premise and do not have any alternatives for children’s outdoor play.

A study on Children’s Opinion Poll (GOB, 2013) shows that open play spaces were demanded by children. Building playgrounds/parks (37%), and gymnasiums (26%) in the community received the highest importance to children who took part in the online survey. But, the shrinking of open space is continuing as people are capturing those and building infrastructure for different purposes, which is the dire reality of the country nowadays—especially in the urban areas.

In the above context, we explored and studied a case on an exemplary initiative to set up school playgrounds in Bangladesh.



Background of the case

The case initiative started as a project in January 2010 in a corner of Bangladesh far from the capital and near the Bay of Bengal. It was undertaken by ‘Baufal’ upazila Parishad (sub-district council), a local government institution of ‘Patuakhali’ district in Bangladesh, with instructions and active support from local lawmakers and in collaboration with government primary education office.

The vision of the project was to improve the state of primary education by ensuring an entertainment-based and student-friendly education system by setting up school playgrounds with essential rides. Specific objectives were to provide leisure facilities for children and make primary education joyful, livelier and student-friendly. It was also an experiment to encourage the students to go to school, help increase attendance rate, reduce dropouts from primary education and make positive impacts on pre-primary level children’s school readiness. In the long run, the initiators also had a dream to turn all the *upazila* (sub-district) schools into exemplary role model ones in the field of primary education. As per planning, the project installed facilities like swings, seesaws, slides etc. and accomplished the playground in all primary schools of the *upazila* within the timeframe (2010-12).

4. Impact of school playground

School playgrounds in the project area put positive impact on children’s learning and development, in particular, school readiness of pre-school children, attendance rate of primary school, decreasing drop out etc.

which was found as evidence in schools’ enrollment, observation of teacher, guardians, community people and others. Its impacts on children’s physical and mental health affecting learning were found as observed evidence in students’ happiness, positive remarks, and finally in school results.

Increased attendance rate

According to the statements of the head teachers of the government primary schools, there is significant and inspiring evidence that the initiative helped increase attendance rate in their schools. Attendance rate was increased by more than 10% after initiating this intervention. A head teacher of a school expressed her satisfaction— “We are witnessing cent percent attendance which is really unbelievable.”

Some students shared their attraction to school playground for which they come to school regularly. They come to school earlier and stay longer after the school hours to play on school playground, said the students, adding that they do not even go outside during the leisure period.

Similarly, *upazila* Education Officer (UEO) said – “We are getting good results from these steps.” He also added, “Now most students go to school that has become a more interesting place for them.”

Improvement in physical and mental health of children

Improvement in the physical and mental health of children has occurred as a result of play facilities in the school premises,



which also affected their learning. It is found in observational evidence and from the perceptions of teachers, students, and others stakeholders.

According to the teachers, children come to school before class time to participate actively in outdoor plays and when class starts they go to the classroom and attend happily in the learning activity. They observed that play before class helps them develop their mental acuity and become stress free and peaceful. During the break between classes they use it again to play. Whenever the break time starts, they rush to the playground and spend time joyfully with friends. They said, "We think, playing again during leisure time reduces their stress or tiredness resulted from the academic activities done in the classroom and develops their mental calmness and acuity, and refreshes them for the next classes." In this way, the playground impacts on their mental health and learning positively. We can consider it as a supporting tool for learning as it keeps them fit, stress-free, happy, and healthy during school time. Besides, teachers also informed us that "as they reside in the community, they can use the playground in any free time if they want." Students also expressed that "the renovations of the school playground with essential rides make us happy and refreshed."

A journalist of a national daily noted in a feature, "While visiting some schools in the *upazila*, we found the existence of different establishments on the school premises where students were seen playing with delight." (The Daily Star, 2011).

Achieving expected pass rate in PSC examination

It was found after one year that the schools which installed playgrounds with some necessary rides achieved cent percent pass rate in the following year's Primary School Certificate (PSC) examinations in the *upazila* in Patuakhali. It was indeed encouraging for the project initiators. This trend continues through the following years' results of PSC examination.

School readiness of pre-school children

According to a teacher's observation, the school playground along with its rides is frequently used by different early age children from the community. These children are not the students of the school but they come to play in the school playground as their community institution. It is like a 'play centre' for them and it fulfills their need of playing and healthy entertainment. While using the school playground regularly, they find and explore the school as an interesting place for them. In this way, their school readiness is enhanced day by day.

Concluding remarks

The school playground is an important facility for children to play every day on their own initiative. It puts enormous positive impacts on children's development and learning. This initiative provides students with the leisure facilities to make primary education livelier and student-friendly. It is also noted that pre-primary education has been included with government primary school system since last year in Bangladesh. So, the school playgrounds are fulfilling the huge demand of children's play and supporting the education in the project area. Meanwhile, it has become an exemplary initiative for all concerned, and it fulfills the objectives aimed by the initiators. Now the *Baufal upazila* school playground project has turned into a role model in the field of primary education. It is a lesson for local government, legislators and government education officials who can play significant role in their local educational quality improvement through proper partnership. If they act accordingly, the goals of 'Education for All' can be achieved both quantitatively and qualitatively. We know every school is located in the community. If the playground can be established in all schools, it can be a 'community play centre' for children too.

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Gender in early childhood care and development: Challenges and opportunities for gender responsive and gender transformative ECCD programming

By Nicole Rodger, Program Manager, Early Childhood Care and Development, Di Kilsby, Consultant, Gender Equality and Research, and Mari Luosujarvi, Program Manager, Eastern and Southern Africa Programs, Plan International

Plan International recognizes that the foundations of gender equality or inequality are laid in early childhood and that home, pre-school and primary school environments are key sites for exploring, challenging and ultimately transforming gender norms. Without consciously gender-transformative Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programmes, learning outcomes and opportunities particularly for girls, but also for boys, will continue to be constrained by gender inequality which in turn will inhibit progress towards poverty reduction and equality in the post-2015 global development agenda.

Between 2012 and 2014, Plan International conducted six studies on the gender dimensions of its ECCD programmes in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Pakistan, Uganda, Kenya and Bolivia as part of Plan's commitment to gender equality. Drawing from these separate studies, a synthesis report was produced identifying common themes, including good practices, gaps and challenges as well as key recommendations for Plan's ECCD programming to move towards becoming gender transformative. These studies help Plan to better understand and address the dynamics of gender equality in ECCD programmes and demonstrate the need for applying a rigorous gender lens throughout the programme cycle.

About the six country studies

With the support of Plan International offices in Finland and Australia, and with strong commitment from programme countries to learn more about the gender dimensions of ECCD, the six studies were undertaken to investigate the extent to which Plan's ECCD programmes address gender inequality. The research primarily used a case study approach, with small samples of locations and informants, using mixed research methods, and with an emphasis on qualitative data. Each study used a different set of research tools and

different analytical frameworks. Although the research process, methodologies and analysis varied, and the context across countries is very different, it has still been possible to draw out common themes across the reports.

Key findings

During early childhood, in all the research settings, girls were prepared for being women and boys for being men within narrow, culturally prescribed gender roles. These stereotyped gender roles were reinforced, consciously or otherwise, by influential adults in the lives of girls and boys during early childhood.

For the most part, women were defined as mothers and wives and expected to focus on 'reproductive' roles of caring for their families and homes. They carried a disproportionate share of this responsibility, starting early in life and continuing to old age. Their roles were characterized by hard work and long hours, and lack of time for engaging in activities such as income generation, decision-making or leisure. Women also had limited control

or ownership over household resources. In contrary, men were defined as leaders and fathers, responsible for deciding, providing and protecting the family. Men had more free time and greater mobility and opportunities for engagement in public life. They generally only made a periodic contribution to family care-giving.

The close association of women with care-giving roles was reflected in the dominance of women in ECCD caregiver positions whereas management committees tended to be male dominated. These imbalances led to unequal role-modeling, where men as leaders and women as subordinates is seen as normal.

Very clear, stereotyped differences were evident in terms of traits associated with, and expected of, girls and boys. For example, girls were associated with and valued for showing respect and deference, being kind, cooperative, polite and obedient and being ('naturally') attracted to singing and dancing, and playing dolls and games associated with domestic roles. In comparison, boys were associated with and valued for being action-oriented, outgoing, practical and



Male caregiver playing with children in Mozambique

strong and being ('naturally') attracted to things like blocks and football. Differences in gendered behavioural expectations were more marked as children became older.

Gender roles were not widely understood as socially prescribed, but rather thought to be 'natural' and directly related to biological differences between male and female. These beliefs were translated into differential treatment of girls and boys, through reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles, including in ECCD centres i.e. during corner play, through tasks assigned to girls and boys. Materials available in ECCD centres also tended to largely reinforce traditional gender roles of women and men, girls and boys.

There was some awareness amongst girls and boys that gender exists, understood mostly in terms of biology, behaviour and different clothing. However, children showed strong awareness of prohibitions regarding girls' and boys' behaviour. For example, girls identified that they were not allowed to do farming, climb trees, build houses or wear trousers and that their movement was more restricted than boys. Boys said they were not allowed to wear dresses, do domestic tasks like cooking, washing clothes or dressing babies.

The studies also identified ways in which boys and men were valued differently from girls and women, leading to an unequal status between women and men with a lower status and value being attached to girls and women. This could manifest in prevalent social attitudes such as pressure on women to give birth to boys, expressions of male superiority over women and girls and childcare activities done by women and girls not considered as 'serious' work. Notably, men's roles were valued more highly and of higher power and status than women's roles, even though in relation to responsibility for children, men in reality often failed to fulfill their role.

Barriers to women's' and girls' participation in community life, and to girls' participation in education were common across the studies. In some countries, gender parity in pre-school was found, but in others, boys outnumbered girls. As girls got older, their retention in school was compromised by a range of factors including puberty and menstruation, unplanned pregnancy, lack of commitment to girls' continuing education and high domestic labour demands. Boys were also disadvantaged at certain times

of year due to seasonal tasks. The degree to which adults valued and invested in education was influenced by attitudes towards girls and boys, generally resulting in education of boys being favoured and considered a safer investment (boys stay within the family and have a higher likelihood of finding jobs to support themselves and their families).

The level of awareness of gender inequality and commitment to gender equality varied greatly between countries, but was generally limited. Even where awareness existed and where conscious efforts were made to ensure equal opportunities for girls and boys, gender-stereotyped perceptions on differences between girls' and boys' behaviour and preferences still existed. It was also evident across the studies that adults (caregivers and parents) reproduce the gender-based socialization practices they themselves experienced as children.

Gender-based violence and other rights violations were common experiences amongst adult women. It was clear from the studies that men learnt from an early age to associate masculinity with violence, and they had the notion that men have an entitlement to be violent against women. These perceptions had strong association with other gender-based expectations. Thus, girls' bodies were subjected to scrutiny and control in ways that boys' bodies were not. Whilst boys from an early age were being shaped for independence, freedom for girls was considered risky, so girls' behaviour was regulated and monitored. For example, responsibility for avoiding unplanned pregnancy, and the weight of its consequences, was placed on women and girls, not boys and men. Constraints upon girls' behaviour and restrictions on their freedom, frequently explained as intending to protect girls, often set them up for dependence and vulnerability, rather than for protecting them. Fears of early pregnancy, HIV and the shame of girls' sexual activity were all used by adults as justifications for limiting girls' freedom. Further, the measures that built independence and control over their own lives, such as education, information and freedom of movement and choice, were not prioritized, but rather, ironically, were consciously or indirectly curtailed in the interests of 'protecting' girls. The focus was on regulating girls' and women's bodies and behaviour, not on socializing boys or working with men towards more just behaviour. Rights of boys were also

denied in particular ways. One of these was a perception that boys were not at risk of being sexually abused. Rigid gender norms also cost boys and men the right to enjoy the full range of emotions and potential roles in life.

Good practices and recommendations

The studies identified some emerging positive trends and ways in which particular stakeholders could, and in some cases have already done, act as agents for change. Plan's programmes were making a difference in some key concerns related to the promotion of ECCD, including: awareness of gender equality, building capacity of parents and caregivers, more involvement of men in care giving, increased attendance of girls in ECCD centres and primary school, and increased value of girls' education. Across the studies, some ECCD staff and caregivers were aware that gender roles were changing, for example, women were thought now to be more independent, and it was recognized that girls and boys should be encouraged and made free to choose what they want to do in the future. In some countries, a few caregivers reported intentionally encouraging gender compensatory activities, though sometimes in limited ways—such as girls being encouraged to play football or to play with puzzles, which were assumed to be of more interest for boys than girls. Encouraging caregivers to role-model gender equality and using tools of self-reflection to think differently about gender socialization were other entry points for change.

The studies made a wide range of recommendations. These include:

- Engaging men and boys as positive change agents through increased male participation in parenting, including the mobilization of fathers' groups. This will help to redefine concepts of fatherhood and masculinity, attract men to volunteer in ECCD centres and to become ECCD centre caregivers.

- Addressing traditional and cultural gender stereotypes and beliefs by identifying and promoting positive role models, using parenting sessions to discuss gender equality.

- Supporting gender equitable and inclusive care-giving in ECCD centres and schools, including identifying gender focal points and providing gender training for caregivers and teachers.

Developing gender-transformative pedagogy, materials and curricula including the elimination of content that reinforces narrow and negative gender stereotypes.

Encouraging greater participation of women in ECCD centre and school management.

Encouraging girls and boys to 'boundary-cross' into play areas usually considered gender-specific e.g. dolls for boys, football for girls.

Encouraging interaction between girls and boys rather than their segregation .

Strengthening sex-disaggregated monitoring and evaluation and data.

The journey towards gender transformative ECCD

The research in six countries has provided a firm basis towards the development of strategies, activities, tools and training that put gender at the centre of Plan's ECCD

programming. Plan's regional offices in Asia and Eastern and Southern Africa, supported by Plan International Australia and Plan Finland, have developed a gender in ECCD self-assessment tool which is currently being piloted in more than 15 countries. The tool enables Plan's Country Offices to undertake a self-assessment process, generating a baseline snapshot of gender issues in sampled location/s. The process not only seeks to strengthen gender transformative dimensions in ECCD programmes, but will also be adapted for ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning. Piloting and reporting from the tool will be complete by the end of 2014, and findings and follow up will be shared from 2015.

Changing deeply-held beliefs around gender takes time, can be extremely challenging, and is intimately interlinked with notions of 'culture' and 'power'. However, ECCD offers a powerful entry point for gender responsive and gender transformative programming that aims to take action to address and overcome gender-based

inequalities. Plan's ECCD programmes include the key components of parenting education, formal and non-formal early learning programmes and transitions to primary school supports. All these activities are critical for exploring, challenging and ultimately transforming gender norms.

Children themselves are agents of change. Younger children have more fluid understandings of appropriate behaviour and more open ideas of possibilities. Working with girls and boys at the early childhood age is important for building social change. Plan will also continue to work with communities, parents, caregivers and teachers who shape what is and is not possible in children's lives to support empowerment of women and girls and to overcome stereotyping, discrimination and inequality. Plan has begun an exciting journey to address and explore the issue of gender equality in early childhood development; even though it is a journey that has many challenges and is far from complete, it promises to be a truly transformative endeavour.



Parents and elders in Altiplano_Micaya community

Age-appropriate inclusive pre-school programme: Tales of feat and wonder

By Frank S. Emboltura, R.N., M. Ed.-SPED, University of San Agustin, Iloilo City and Nilda B. Delgado, RSW, MindHaven School, Roxas City

Introduction

Inclusion is a basic right of every Filipino child with special needs to education, rehabilitation, support services, work training and employment opportunities, community participation and independent living. In the Philippines, the provision of inclusive education is anchored on the philosophy that all children and youths with special needs must receive every support including appropriate education within the system (DECS, 1999 & Camara, 2002).

The introduction of the policy of inclusion in the Philippine educational system, with the implementation of Philippine EFA 2015 and Republic Act 10533, categorically require a number of extensive changes as the focus shifts from the learners having to adjust to the demands of the system, to the system's being capable of accommodating the diverse needs of all learners as inclusively as possible even in the pre-school area. A system change of this nature requires significant reform and restructuring of all school operations, making this issue one of the fundamental aspects of school reform, as the inclusion of children with disabilities aged birth to six years old in community-based childcare and pre-school settings is a legal mandate and civil right articulated by natural and least restrictive environment provisions in the statutes mentioned above. However, from the theory of educational change it is well known that at the centre of transforming the process in education is the need to change the values, understanding, and actions of individual people (Fullan & Stiegelhauer, 1991). Over the last few years in our country, many schools have taken up the challenge of confronting and managing the demands of diversity, as the community's needs evolved and changed and a single education system put in place.

In order to better understand the dynamics of early childhood inclusive programmes and to cultivate a context of inclusive education and care in a Filipino context, the researchers chose ethnographic case study approach which is gaining increased attention as a preferred method to study community-based practices in various



disciplines including early intervention, education and care (Sandall, Smith, McLean, & Ramsey, 2002). An ethnographic case study is defined as prolonged observations over time in a natural setting within a bounded system. The observational method is the chosen method to understand another culture, whereas case study is used to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena (Yin, 2003).

Research problem

This study specifically explores:

- To what extent is this school providing age-appropriate inclusive pre-school programme for children with disabilities?
- What strategies, interventions and programmes do the schools utilize to create meaningful age-appropriate inclusive education?
- How do parents of children with and without disabilities perceive their child's classroom environment to be an inclusive milieu?
- How do parents of children with and without disabilities distinguish age-appropriate inclusion to be a crucial goal in their child's development during pre-school years?
- How do stakeholders involve in the process of the inclusive education

programme of children with disabilities in pre-school classes support age-appropriate inclusion?

Participants

Teachers, Parents / Guardians and Paraprofessionals / Caregivers: Altogether 37 adults participated in the study –18 parents/guardians (with and without a child with special needs), 13 teachers and six para-professionals/caregivers. All the 37 participating adults represented a broad range of capabilities. Of the 13 teachers, four are teaching in the pre-school area and the rest in the elementary level, and 11 of them were female. Four of the para-professionals/caregivers were male, and most of them have a high school diploma. Most of the parents/guardians were mothers, aunts and grandmothers.

Cases

Max: Child with Autism. Max (5 years old) began to attend the pre-school at 3 years and 8 months because of language and cognitive delays. He was placed in PLC 2 class (nursery) with one-on-one pull-out session. When he made the transition to Kindergarten, he was re-evaluated by the school's IEP team with goals focused on: increasing functional use of language; lengthening his attention span; improving his compliance in school and at home; addressing his cognitive delays especially in

numeracy and literacy; and interacting with his peers in meaningful way.

Mat: Child with Autism. Four-year-old Mat lives with his parents and his younger brother. When he made the transition to PLC2 (nursery level), Mat is put to inclusion programme PLC2 with pull out. Mat's pre-school education goals focused on: behaviour modification; lengthening his attention span; following 2 step commands with minimal promptings; expressing his wants and needs in 1-2 words; and stimulation of pre-academic skills.

Nel: Child with Language Disorder. Nel (3 years and 11 months) started attending the pre-school at the age of 2 years and 6 months. Nel is on inclusive programme with pull-out to address his language/communication needs. The goal for Nel's pre-school education was mainly focused on: lessening his fleeting eye contact; making him able to respond to conversations; enabling him to follow 1-2 step commands with minimal promptings; enhancing his expressive language; and enabling him to use language properly.

Setting

This study took place in an inclusive school in Roxas City, Philippines and has been continuously permitted to function since 1997, and nationally recognized in 2003. The school provides services to 111 children aged 1.5 years old through 6th grade. There are 13 teachers, and the school is adhering play-based curriculum and inclusive education.

Data collection procedures and analysis

In-depth and semi-structured interviews with study participants, on-site observations, focus group discussions, document and archival exploration were used to craft communal and substantive accounts grounded on the stories of those who are deeply involved in the school's inclusive education programme. The researchers analysed the data using Creswell's (2007) analysis in an ethnographic case study and were engaged in the process of moving in analytic circles that go spirally upward, in a process that allows one to produce a continually more detailed analysis.

Findings

Age-appropriate inclusive pre-school programme: The very essence of the school

["In other schools, lessons are conducted inside the classroom only, while in this school children with special needs are exposed to the real life situations. They are included in the whole programme of the school. This helps them deal or cope with the real life situations."]

Participants are aware that children with special needs are placed in age-appropriate inclusive education programme and these children are active participants in the school's indoor and outdoor activities. These group activities create an active and inclusive environment for all children; and the participants appreciated it.

Parents see that the school is implementing inclusive programme with them as vital partners. From pre-enrolment to culmination phase, an orientation is conducted to give them a framework of the process and expectations from them. They are aware that their child, apart from being in a general class activities, receives specialized instructions based on the IEPs with the context of the required Philippine DepEd core curriculum.

Well-placed inclusive education programme

The school maintains these crucial and salient points in its provision of age-appropriate inclusive programmes for children with disability:

- Teachers identify their baseline level by function (pre-vocational) or cognitive (academic) and make programmes for one-on-one/dyad/small group class and facilitate the accommodations if needed. This data is the basis to create a programme to lessen the gap not only through individual one-on-one programme but also for pull-outs of 30 minutes to 1 hour three times a week.
- All children have IEPs and have full participation in all school activities, indoor and outdoor, in-school or community activities.
- All children in this programme are included in their own age-level group but the lessons delivered are differentiated in their own cognitive/ academic skill level.
- The family, caregivers and guardians of the children are engaged and encouraged to help out in the application of programme especially the home programme.



Multi-strategic delivery of instruction

The school employs a lot of strategies, interventions and programmes, after the identification of need/mastery level/ basic skill level and using it as a baseline or reference point for the following: Tiering and Differentiated instruction; Collaborative Teaching; Task Analysis; Behaviour Management; Functional Curriculum; Project-based Programmes; and Parent/caregiver Education Programme (PEP). Through PEP sessions, parents of children with special needs build a great support system – a great community- which has an atmosphere of open conversation. Here, they realized that they have more in common than differences; here they learned how to ask for help and how to give it; fight for their rights of their child, for themselves and for other; accept others with all their strengths but with awareness of their limitations and weaknesses rather than expecting them to be what they are not. They feel that their feelings of disappointment, fears, confusions, guilt and anger are all normal and universal; and learn to understand that their child's disability is not the result of parenting mistakes.

In this way, parents of children with and without disabilities perceive their child's classroom environment to be an inclusive milieu.

A culture of diversity, equity and acceptance

["My child is not labelled as "abnormal". I don't feel that my child is different from others. He is behaving properly on special occasions like birthday parties because he knows how to wait or fall in line."]

The overwhelming response of parents of children with disabilities can be summarized

in one word: “acceptance”. They expressed their appreciation of being treated equally as parents. They also commented on the strong support and understanding that they experienced amongst other parents. With regard to their children, parents expressed that their children did not experience bullying and were socially accepted and treated as regular children.

Age-appropriate inclusion as a key element in their child’s development

“As of now, many people say that Max can behave appropriately with other children in his same age level which doesn’t have a need. Even if you bring him anywhere, he knows how to deal with other people with confidence especially when I bring him to the mall, restaurants or even we do shopping. He doesn’t exhibit tantrums in public places. When we are at home, he can do household chores, he even knows how to protect himself. He knows that he shouldn’t let the stranger enter the house if he is alone.”

Parents identified that inclusive learning environment is a crucial element required for their child’s development. It is viewed as an appropriate educational approach to helping a child develop to his/her full potential. Parents also identified inclusive environment as a vehicle in the holistic development of their children.

Inclusive education as a school culture and advocacy

“Parents, teachers and other disciplines support the inclusion programme and they collaborate it with their programme. They do have communication between the school and the parents. The parents give their feedbacks to the teachers. Again, the culture or the climate of acceptance of their children with special needs shown by them has a great impact for them to feel that their children are accepted in this school. Even for that alone –it’s a big evidence that they support the programme.”

Parents and professionals expressed their belief in the importance of having and supporting an inclusive educational programme for their children. Both parents and professionals work together to support the programme. Parents are involved internally through attending regular meetings and attending continuous education sessions.

In the community, parents have become advocates who inform other parents of children with disabilities about the programme. They also lobby for support, social acceptance, and inclusive programmes for persons with disabilities.

Conclusions and recommendations

In the process of the study, stakeholders of children with disabilities in the pre-school programme have appreciated that their children are treated without discrimination. However, some parents of regular kids have certain extent of worry or fear that some kids with disabilities might exhibit aggressive behaviour. Some also worry that the teacher might not be able to deliver the appropriate pedagogy because the teacher has to deal with some issues of these children. However, after undergoing Parent/Caregiver Education Programme they were enlightened that their children (regular) can draw out lessons in an inclusive classroom. Moreover, parents always want a friendly school where their child can freely express their ideas and opinions without any discrimination; a school that is also safe and free from danger not only physically but socially and emotionally. Participants also commended that inclusion establishes self-awareness, creates respect in a diverse environment and community; and the classrooms cater individual’s needs.

The data in this study reveal the importance of “human connections”: the connections between and among parents and school personnel, parents and caregivers, parents and the medical team, parents and other disciplines, and parents and the surrounding community interwoven in the school’s age-appropriate inclusive education programme.

This study also reflects the invaluable insights, the incredible wisdom, and strengths that evolved within these families and the human ecology that surrounds them. They were able to transform from a perception of helplessness and difficulty in reaching out to feeling validated and strengthened after realizing that those feelings are typical. As a result, these parents have not only survived, but even thrived after accepting the realization that having a child with a special need is just like having an open wound that needs time to heal. Moreover, the shattered dreams and expectations can be superseded by words of substantiation, affirmation, support, and encouragement and that their lives have become more meaningful despite all the fears of the unknown. Equipped with this

new perspective, parents discover their own gifts which help them take giant steps forward so that in return they can go on maximizing their child’s full potential.

This is a continuing journey, a journey of weeping and laughing together, a journey of searching for answers to spoken and unspoken enquiries. But, it is also a journey of renewed strength and faith of changed values followed by stirrings of hope that even children with disabilities in the pre-school programme can change the world in a positive way by changing first the persons closest to them—the parents and other stakeholders. Most of all, it is a journey of ACTIONS and of practising in everyday life the newly gained information, newly acquired attitudes and skills, learned values, perspective and deep commitment. For without actions, all these will just remain as desires thus we fail to restore the dignity and integrity of each child.

In line with the ECD in the post-2015 global development agenda vis-à-vis the findings of this study; the researchers have the following recommendations:

1. If quality early child education is inseparable from social justice philosophy, it is essential to intensify awareness on the value of quality inclusive early education. This is a manifestation of our belief that our children are our most important natural resource.
2. There is a need to shift educational context from achievement oriented to evidenced-based approach which will eventually lead to holistic child education and care.
3. Parents’ engagement and collaboration need to be intensified with the support of government and non- government services.

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When is the right time for inclusion: Experiences from inclusive schools of Delhi

By Reema Lamba, Associate Professor, University of Delhi, India

Introduction

The rights and entitlements of children have received increased attention in the recent years, in the Western as well as Indian contexts. The old system of conceptualizing and categorizing children in terms of medical, diagnostic model has been challenged as the social and educational models unfolded. The emphasis shifted from assessment and factors within the child to educational contexts in which the child was situated. The concerns have no longer been whether to provide inclusive education, but how to implement in ways that are both feasible and effective. Structure of the schools as organizations has therefore become the focal point to understand inclusion or exclusion within the system, than differences between individual pupils that create special educational needs. In working towards the promotion of inclusive schools, one of the important steps hence emerged was, identification of barriers to learning and participation currently being experienced by students in the schools and has been the focus of the present study.

The study

A study of inclusive set up was envisaged to provide insights into the interactional patterns among the children with special needs and their peers. Capturing the voices of the students, their experiences and concerns seemed to be beneficial to understand the different constraints in the Indian context. The objectives were therefore:

To explore the interaction patterns among children with special needs and peers in an inclusive classroom.

To gain insights into the factors that influence these interaction patterns.

Method

The different integrated and inclusive schools of Delhi were identified and surveyed. A classification and categorization of these schools was done based on the different services being provided. Three schools with inclusive orientation were purposively selected for the in-depth study. There were two regular schools that had opened doors for children with disabilities and one special-integrated school for children with a

specific disability that began experimenting inclusion for students with other types of disabilities in their system. The schools varied in terms of funding and management as one was a trust based school, the other a private school and the third a government school. The only common thread among all the three schools was that they had opened doors to children with a special need. In all the three schools, children with disability were part of the curricular and co-curricular activities throughout the day.

The schools, however, varied as mentioned earlier in terms of their funding and management besides the type of adaptations and provisions made for the children. To summarize, the three schools were experimenting inclusion in their own set ups, in their own ways. The age group of children focused was elementary years as researches had pointed these years as an important period in the development of self-concept and social competitiveness. Hence for the present research classes from I to IV in the junior school were focused. The number and nature of special needs of the students in the selected inclusive classes are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Nature of special needs of children in classes observed (N=63+12*)

School	Sex	Nature of Special Needs								TOTAL	
		Loco-motor	Specific - Learning	Multiple	Intellectual	Visual	Hearing	Behavioural	Speech		
I	M	27	–	2	1+1*	1	1	2*	–	32+3*	44+3*
	F	11	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	12	
II	M	2+1*	1+1*	1	2*	1	–	1+2*	–	6+6*	10+7*
	F	1	–	3	–	–	–	–	1*	4+1*	
III	M	2	1*	1	–	2	1	1*	–	6+2*	9+2*
	F	–	–	–	–	3	–	–	–	3	

Note: * Refers to children who were identified by class teachers as needing special attention but not mentioned in school records as 'children with a special need'.

The interactions among the students with special needs and peers gave insights into friendship patterns and class grouping in an inclusive set up. The sample of peers included a combination of student aide to children with disability or those who were not actively interacting with the child to get a comprehensive view, which has been summed in Table 2.

Development and description of tools

The schools, once identified for detailed study, were visited frequently to form rapport with the staff and children, while developing and finalizing the tools for data collection. Qualitative tools were preferred over more structured and standardized measures. The experiences of children with a special need were drawn upon from the **observations** in the inclusive classes and **semi-structured theme oriented discussions** of children and their peers identified from the different schools during the study.

Results and discussion

Profile of the students with special needs

The children with a special need in a number of the classes (ten) were older than their peers. A closer probe of these classes revealed that children with a special need who had been a part of the regular class from the beginning were the same age as peers. On the other hand, children with a special need placed through the special institute or from a special or non-formal section within the school were older than peers. The type and severity of special needs of the students varied within and across the schools. In School III, the special needs were largely sensory-motor while in School I, there was a pre-dominance of loco-motor disabilities besides other cases from special sections. The students in School II had mild-moderate learning needs, sensory-motor or multiple special needs (also refer Table 1).

Friendship patterns among peers and children with special needs in an inclusive classroom

Observations on 'peer relations shared in the classes' have been analyzed as **spontaneous** natural behaviour without adult intervention and **structured relations** where adults maneuver student behaviour. The peers were observed to be taking different roles as 'mothering', 'over-protecting the student', 'teaching' or 'appreciating the student for his / her

Table 2: Distribution of peers in the sample (N=70)

School	Sex	Age group (in years)				TOTAL	
		6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10		
I	M	–	3	7	4	14	24
	F	–	1	5	4	10	
II	M	3	2	3	3	11	25
	F	5	6	2	1	14	
III	M	1	–	4	7	12	21
	F	4	–	–	5	9	

skills'. Sometimes a few peers were also observed to 'tease' or 'provoke clownish behaviour'. 'Playing on an equal level' was also observed, though less frequently. Sometimes the children with a special need were observed to outsmart their peers and in a few cases were also left out from the group.

Theme based conversations revealed that peers discussed more in terms of physical appearance or class behaviour than disability. In most cases where peers had been together since early years, they talked more about special talents of children with disabilities than their limitations. Awareness and usage of such medical labels in the children's repertoire of words as "*rollator, braces, braille book, numero board, O.T class*" was quite uncommon to be seen in the children of their age. This enhancement of knowledge in the area of disability while being sensitive to the skills and limitations of the students can be viewed as fringe effects/ benefits of inclusion.

Insights from the students

Students' views on various aspects related to school, teachers, peers or self have been collated below. Most of the children in all the schools praised the system and expressed happiness in attending the programme. The students interactions with the teachers were also observed to vary across schools. The students in School I and III were mostly observed to sit passively and do work, as instructed with little or no interaction in the class. While in School II most of the time the students were observed to be overfriendly with the teacher trying to seek her attention, interrupting her lecture a number of times.

Interactions with peers seemed to depend on the nature of special needs, years of togetherness and mediation of adults

around. Conversation with children also supported these observations. There was variation of response between the children in regular class and those from special sections to regular class. A careful analysis revealed that students that had been in the regular class spoke more positively about their peers than the students who had been placed in the regular class from the special section on an experimental basis. The children placed from the special sections in School I did not report a sense of belonging. Instead they shared how they were left out. Children with intellectual challenge reported that peers in the regular sections teased students from the special sections as 'immature and less capable than themselves', as '*bachcha*' (a child) or '*budhu*' (a simpleton). These children sat in an inclusive class for studying but had lunch in the special section with those friends or stood in the corridors and moved around with them only. However, children with sensory disabilities as hearing impairment or visual impairment although reported as having many friends in class.

A discussion on **help received from peers** or **help given to peers** also got numerous responses. The students with disability reported peers' assistance in mobility, copying down of homework, getting mid-day meal from the canteen and correction of mistakes in School I. The student with special needs as visual impairment reported helping peers with correction in Mathematics or English homework. When asked to elaborate, it was stated that the peers read aloud their work and the student would point at mistakes in between. Children with the special needs in School III, on the other hand, reported helping peers more often than seeking their help. One student with visual impairment commented, "*I am the gate pass of my friends.*" The explanation was that the teacher did not allow non-

disabled students to go out during the class, but would send one as an aide for a student with disability if requested so. The students reported offering similar advantage to peers during morning prayers or even at the time of school dispersal on the pretext of lifting the student's bag. At School II, peers were reported to be helpful and caring by most students. The help was described as assistance in copying homework, playing games with them and even calling them up when they are unwell.

Conclusion

It is important to note that the behaviour and response patterns of the children with a special need in a few cases changed over the span of the study. This was largely based on their experiences of inclusion or exclusion within their individual school systems. The different factors that seemed to be influencing student participation and self concept that can be concluded from above have been enumerated below.

Timings of inclusion: Beginning inclusion early in school life leads to more natural and spontaneous relation with peers. The peers not only did accept the child but also assisted the teacher in guiding what worked best for the student.

Number of years in the school: The extended period of contact/number of years in a system could be considered as one of the factors in child's response patterns and the responses the student elicited from the people around. A long time span in the school seemed to have a positive influence on both student behaviour and interactions with peers.

Nature of special need: The students' special needs and personality characteristics also emerged as important factors in their acceptance and participation in the system. In a number of cases in each of the three schools it emerged that students' motivation and enthusiasm to participate lead to their active engagement and academic progress in the system.

Mediation of the school, teachers or peers: Students' participation and views towards self seemed to be mediated by the initiatives for involvement undertaken by individuals around them. The students who were praised by their teachers and peers or were delegated roles in class had better involvement and self-concept.

Inclusive ECD for ethnic communities in Lao PDR

By Kitty Williams, Education Programme Development Officer, Aide et Action Laos



Ready for Racing- Children Enjoying the Monthly Activities Organised at Aide et Action's Programme Schools

Introduction

Both the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have provided great impetus for countries around the world to address long standing issues within their education system (UNESCO, 2008). Globally, access to basic education has significantly improved, but issues of 'quality' and 'equity' are still remaining. Recent research reports from UNESCO (2005; 2013), and empirical research by Burger (2010) have highlighted the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in facilitating more equitable access to, and greater retention rates in primary education. Arguments for this are founded in neuroscience, which have conclusively demonstrated the critical impact early childhood experiences can have on the architecture of the brain (UNESCO, 2013).

ECD was established as a global concern for education at the Dakar Framework for Education for All in 2000, being the first of the six education goals, calling for the expansion and improvement of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and focusing specific attention on reaching the most marginalized (UNESCO, 2000). EFA's focus on marginalization in ECD is extremely important from a variety of conceptual standpoints. From a Human Rights or

Capability perspective ECD programme, as a form of school readiness, is an important mechanism to mitigate against the spread of marginalization in wider society. From a Human Capital perspective, including a larger number and range of children in ECD would greatly benefit the economic development of a country (UNESCO, 2013).

The importance of ECD programme for the most marginalized has been articulated globally through social policy. Inclusive Education (IE) has become the most prominent of these, and is defined by UNESCO (2009) as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children through more participation in mainstream education. Although IE has been taken up globally to address equity in schooling, it has faced criticism in recent years. A fully inclusive education system is argued to be difficult to achieve as the complete re-design of the school demands not only substantial amount of financial investment but also investment in human capacity and time, which is often ill-afforded in the context of developing countries. Additionally, IE is frequently used to fill the gap left by EFA policies, and in doing so marginalized communities addressed by the policy are separated from the EFA agenda, supported through an almost parallel policy and can be further marginalized in society (Miles & Singal, 2010).

The Inclusion of ethnic communities in Lao PDR

Many ethnic communities in Lao PDR are significantly marginalized in education (MoE, 2005). Root causes have been attributed to the language of instruction, because in many ethnic communities the Lao language is not widely spoken or understood; to cultural and economic conditions, which encourage children to take part in predominantly agricultural livelihood activities; and mountainous environments, where infrastructure, resources and teachers are limited. UNICEF (2011) has highlighted that Net Enrolment Rates (NERs) at primary level are significantly lower in non-Lao ethnic communities than in the majority Lao. In addition, dropout rates are disproportionately high for non-Lao ethnic children, particularly in the early primary grades. Overall, it is apparent that many ethnic children are not ready for schooling at the official primary school entry age.

In recent years, social policy in Lao PDR has started to prioritize ECD. Both the EFA National Plan of Action (2003-2015) (MOE, 2005) and the National Strategy and Plan of Action on Inclusive Education (2011-2015) (MOES, 2011) have addressed and prioritized ECD specifically focusing on reaching non-Lao ethnic groups, girls, and the poor.

With about 35% of the population belonging to non-Lao ethno-linguistic groups (Government of Lao PDR, 2006), access to inclusive and equitable quality ECD programme must be secured for ethnic children if Lao PDR is to meet their international commitment to EFA and the MDG 2.

Aide et Action's response

Aide et Action, in successful partnership with the Lao Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), has been addressing the inclusion of non-Lao ethnic communities in ECD. A 3-year Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme has pursued a balanced focus on both soft and hard components of ECD. Its key activities include: (a) ECCE teacher training on positive discipline, material development and communicative mathematics; (b) Collaboration with the health sector to monitor and assess the healthy growth of ECCE students; (c) Encouraging community involvement on nutritional awareness and provision of school meals; and (d) Amelioration of the school environment with play structures

and water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. The programme has been implemented in 33 schools in communities with a high proportion of non-Lao ethno-linguistic population in Bolikhamxay, Hauphan and Vientiane provinces.

Methodology

The present study provides descriptive findings on the concerns related to 'what' and 'how' of inclusion of ethnic children in Aide et Action's programme schools. The study was guided by two main questions given below.

To what extent has the implementation of Aide et Action's ECCE programme provided equitable quality education to the ECD students from non-Lao ethnic-linguistic communities?

What are the implications of these findings for the future of Aide et Action's ECCE programmes in Lao PDR?

A flexible research design was followed, using a case study approach (Yin, 2013). The unit of analysis for the case was the implementation of Aide et Action's ECCE programme; and respondents were purposively sampled from more non-Lao ethnic and rural communities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the parents of ethnic children enrolled in the programme schools and with teachers of the ECCE classes. Ten interviews were conducted in total, five with teachers and five with parents in Bolikhamxay and Hauphan provinces. Data analysis was qualitative and thematic aiming to organize, account for, and describe the data.

Findings

Findings were extensive and demanded a greater explanation than can be afforded within the confines of this article, in which only the findings concerning learning outcomes are discussed. Nonetheless, it is worth noting briefly the overall success of Aide et Action's support in ECCE. All teachers and parents perceived the schools to be inclusive, well-resourced with excellent play and WASH facilities, and adequately trained teachers, an extremely positive outcome for such study.

Parents' Perceptions

Although all parents saw value in ECCE programme for their children, this value was confined to the development of academic knowledge. There was stark separation

between play and learning. By asking what their children were learning, it became apparent that activities such as songs, painting and play conflicted with what parents had expected from their children in learning, such as reading and writing. For example, one respondent with a child of three years commented that they would like to see their child learn to read and write. This suggests that the programme, moving forward, should do more in sensitizing the community and especially the parents to the purpose of ECCE and the importance of play as a component of this.

Three of the five respondents also stated that their decision to send their child to Aide et Action's ECCE programme school was one of convenience, noting that if their child was not in ECCE then there would be no one to care for the child. This finding illustrates the importance of ECCE coverage to mitigate the incidences of neglect and negative early childhood experiences, detrimental to all aspects of a child's development.

Finally, the findings highlighted the importance for Aide et Action to further strengthen their community engagement, a key mechanism to achieve inclusion. Many activities of Aide et Action have been designed to include the community and especially the parents in ECCE activities at the school level as a form of parenting. Four out of five parents reported that they had not attended these activities. One of the respondents who had attended was able to recall the activities and display the key learning outcomes designed to support children in their home environment.

Teachers' perceptions

Although the findings were generally positive, one significant barrier to inclusion did arise from the interviews—the difficulty teachers faced with the language of instruction. Respondents pointed out the need for supplementary materials in the ethnic languages, teacher training on ethnic languages, and provision of bi-lingual teaching. These points are difficult to fulfil in the context of Lao PDR, but what was important in the findings was that teachers were taking up innovative strategies to include ethnic children. Two teachers discussed using other students to assist them if a child did not understand a word in the Lao language, and another discussed making picture flashcards of the Lao words that ethnic children were struggling to learn.



Ready for Study- Children Learn in a Well Resourced and Comfortable Environment

One surprising and positive finding was that teachers felt empowered to pass on learning from Aide et Action trainings to parents. Two of the five teachers noted that if a child was having difficulty the situation significantly improved after discussions with parents when Aide et Action training was passed on to them. With such findings, further support to parent-teacher discussions and collaboration will be prioritized in the future activities of Aide et Action's ECCE programme.

Discussion and Recommendations

A review of relevant literature suggested that root causes of exclusion for non-Lao ethnic communities were language of instruction, cultural norms, and geography. The findings clearly illustrated the importance of Aide et Action's ECCE programme in: (a) Overcoming limited access to ECD programme, renovating and providing school supplies; and (b) Working within cultural norms, by parenting and the innovative relationship between teacher and parents. The article further argues that the positive inclusion of non-Lao ethnic communities may have been encouraged by the careful addition of inclusion of ethnic communities as a cross-cutting issue in the Lao PDR EFA agenda and not solely the one addressed by an inclusive education policy.

The positive finding refuting cultural bias was not equally matched when respondents discussed the language of instruction. Indeed, language was seen as a key barrier to the inclusion of ethnic communities in ECD programme in Lao

PDR. Although recommendations could be made to implement activities focused on teacher training and material development in ethnic languages. The curriculum in Lao PDR is developed in line with government policy, which currently only recognizes the Lao language as the appropriate language of instruction. Indeed, this phenomenon is not confined to Laos but occurs across the globe, and, although UNESCO has been advocating for mother tongue instruction in ECD since 1953, monolingualism has remained the norm (UNESCO, 2005).

Inclusion of non-Lao ethnic communities in ECD therefore needs to overcome the barrier of language in a restricted context. The findings of the study have highlighted how flashcards and reciprocal learning between student and student, and teacher and student have supported the inclusion of ethnic children in the attainment of the Lao language and therefore provided ethnic children with the means for further learning and development. It is recommended that Aide et Action's future works on ECCE focus on developing training and materials in ethnic language, and support and train ECCE teachers on reciprocal language learning. Reciprocal learning or a more communicative approach to teaching is also advocated by UNESCO (2009) as an important strategy for achieving a more inclusive schooling. This approach should therefore be adopted in future, not only for Aide et Action, but for all concerned with ECD in Lao PDR.

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Inclusion in early childhood care and education in India: Progress and pauses

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Introduction

In India, early childhood care has grown from a long tradition of care and education for young children through Grandmother's caring practices, stories and infant games. With developmental and social changes the shared responsibility of child rearing shifted into sole responsibility of the young parents and consequently over the years these changes laid the seeds for the introduction of the concept of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the country. The Early Childhood Care and Education in India is broadly provided through pre-primary classes attached to government and private schools, the *Aganwadi*-Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, *Balwadi* and ECCE centres run by voluntary agencies.

The Early Childhood Scheme (ECS) was started in 1982 as a strategy to reduce the dropout rate and to improve the rate of retention of children in primary schools which was discontinued with effect from 2001 in view of universalization of ICDS. As a sequel of the adoption of the national policy for children, Government of India initiated ICDS on pilot basis in 1975. Now including all the 35 States and Union Territories (UTs) in the country there are 7015 sanctioned projects and 6719 operational projects with 12, 41,749 operational 'Aganwadi' centres. At present, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme is the most widespread ECCE provision, as the beneficiaries in pre-school education have grown more than two times in 2010 (35.5 million) as compared to 2002 (16.7 million). There is lack of latest data on the enrolment of children in pre-primary classes in private schools, *Balwadis* and ECCE centres. *Aganwadi* is covering the major part (69.4%) of the ECCE, whereby 21.2% of the children were enrolled in pre-primary classes attached to recognised schools. The share of enrolment in *Balwadis* was 4.3%. In privately run pre-primary schools the share was 1.9% while the percentage covered by ECCE centres was 1.8% and 1.3 % children were enrolled in pre-primary classes attached to unrecognized schools. NCERT(2007)

There is ample evidence to show that ECCE contributes to the successful completion of primary education (NIPCCD, 1992; 1994; 2004; NCAER, 2001, NCERT, 2003). Hence a quality ECCE programme will help in achieving universalization of primary education in true sense. Early childhood has been on the international agenda for some time now. Education for All (EFA) reports [Jomtien, Delhi, Amman, Daker], Neuroscience Research, Longitudinal Studies, Global Mandates of Child Rights, the Millennium Development Goals and a 2007 GMR devoted to ECCE all serve to demonstrate the view that the topic has 'in a

early years, as they comprise majority of the out of school children (UNESCO, 2006).

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) in 2010 has also addressed the issue of ECCE under section 11 of the Act. which states, "with a view to prepare children above the age of three years for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years, the appropriate government may make necessary arrangement for providing free pre-school education for such children". pp11



sense, arrived' (Myers, 2010). These young children who need to get benefit most from the inclusive nature and function of ECCE are usually benefitted the least. The new discourse suggested in the 2007 GMR (UNESCO, 2006) based on the idea about the scope of ECCE lies beyond the confines of schooling and pre-schooling since young children have multiple needs. As such, it opens up possibilities of influencing wider educational context – such as home, family and community – to facilitate the best start in life for children. Hence it is suggested that quality ECCE can contribute to the first five MDGs, which concern poverty reduction, nutrition, education, gender equality and health (EdQual 2010). To achieve universalization of primary education in real sense, EFA initiatives must urgently address the inclusion of children from the

Inclusion and ECCE

Indeed, early childhood programmes that are responsive to individual needs and respectful of diversity benefit all children and contribute to building the foundations of an inclusive society (UNESCO, 2009). It is now globally recognized that systematic provision of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) can help in socialization, inculcation of healthy habits, stimulation of creative learning processes, and enhanced scope for overall personality development. ECCE is a support for universalization of primary education, and it indirectly influences enrolment and retention of girls in primary schools by providing substitute care facilities for younger siblings. To ensure this goal, the Government of India has passed the Persons with Disability Act,

1995. The Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 also prioritises early childhood, by stating, “expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children as its first goal. (UNESCO, 2000).

According to Bartlett (2008) there are three interlocking pieces of ECCE to ensure inclusion, which include:

- Children “ready” for school
- Schools “ready” for young children
- Families’ active involvement



Bartlett further argued that there is clear evidence from different contexts and countries indicates that the strongest gains are seen for marginalised groups who participate in ECD programmes; and return on investment in ECD is 3:1 based on studies in Egypt, Colombia, Bolivia.

The most important benefit for young children in inclusive set up is an authentic learning environment. These children will someday be part of society; they will work and be part of a community. In their communities, they will eventually encounter individuals with diverse backgrounds and disabilities. To foster understanding instead of fear, it is crucial that children be exposed to persons of all races, genders, religions and abilities. The learning environment should be a microcosm of society, with all types of individuals being represented.

The quality of the structure, organization and processes in programmes has an effect on outcomes for children from all backgrounds but particularly for the least advantaged. Further, the quality of the early childhood workforce is a critical factor and may be

of overriding importance in determining whether early education and intervention is of high or poor quality. But majority of the ECCE is provided by Aganwadi, private pre-primary schools, Balwadi and pre-primary sections attached to unrecognized schools where teachers are untrained and especially not trained in managing special needs in classroom.

There are many barriers to full inclusion. One of the most significant is the attitude of administrators, parents, teachers and students. There are other barriers to inclusion, which include:

lack of policy and uniformity in policy implementation, lack of financial support from the government, lack of adequate information at policy level, and policy splits along administrative lines, e.g. education versus social welfare departments.

Social barriers such as: segregation; lack of physical access for all to buildings; lack of community acceptance; pressure to conform (socio-culturally).

Lack of experience or lack of capability, cultural barriers and geographical barriers.

The Progress: Policy, programmes and practices

The unique feature of the Indian Constitution is that while it upholds the principle of equality before law, it provides for affirmative discriminatory actions to uplift the social, economic and educational well-being of the disadvantaged groups. Article 46 of the Constitution clearly states that the States shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and shall protect them from social injustice and from all forms of exploitation. The 86th Amendment to the Constitution inserting Article 21A, in 2002, making elementary education a fundamental right, is going to make positive impact on the education of SCs, STs, Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and women.

The National Policy of Education 1986 has given a great deal of importance to ECCE and emphasized on the removal of disparities by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far. It views ECCE as crucial input in the strategy of human resource development,

as a feeder and support programme for primary education and as a support service for working women of the disadvantaged sections of the society.

There are legislations specifically directed towards the protection, welfare, rehabilitation and development of people with disabilities, which include—the Mental Health Act, 1987; the Rehabilitation Council Act, 1992; Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995; the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability Act, 1992. The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2006) has a comprehensive framework for the welfare of Persons with disabilities. The National Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD) emphasises the inclusion of children and young persons with disability in all general educational settings from early childhood to higher education.

The Early Childhood Care and Education has been an international agenda. In 1990, the World Conference on Education For All (EFA), held in Jomtien, Thailand recommended that “the preconditions for educational quality, equity and efficiency are set in the early childhood years”. Another significant policy development in India took place following the ESCAP Proclamation on Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asia and Pacific Region in 1992. In addition, the World Education Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000, reiterated the importance of ECCE as “Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.”

A remarkable step towards recognizable people with disabilities as equal and active members of society has been made through the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which came into force in May 2008. This policy argues that Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is a powerful means of nurturing diverse abilities and overcoming inequalities, and discuss main approaches to responding to developmental needs of young children with disabilities. The 2008 UNESCO International Conference on Education sent a strong message to the international community, calling for greater investment in early assessment and

intervention, inclusive ECCE programmes and for equipping teachers with appropriate skills and materials to teach diverse student populations. In essence, promotion of comprehensive inclusive ECCE must become a priority for global development (UNESCO, 2009). India is a signatory to all these conventions.

The para 5.1.5 of Draft National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, 2012 states: “*Young children with different abilities would also be reached. Measures would require to be undertaken to ensure early detection and appropriate referral with linkages for children at risk of developmental delays and disabilities.*”

Various NGOs as well as government implemented innovative ECCE programmes such as community managed Balwadis by Deccan Development Society, Mobile Creches that provide ECCE services to children of mothers engaged in construction activities .

Pauses: Access, equity, quality, parent’s involvement and investment

The challenge before the country in terms of child population in the age group 3-5 years to be served in years 2011 and 2016 would be 70.024 million and 72.498 million respectively. The Aganwadi is the widespread means of pre-primary education and in 2010 there were 35.5 million children were enrolled in pre-primary component and there is a considerable proportion of children attending private schools. In ICDS 49 % girls and 51% boys are enrolled in pre-primary education. In states such as Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karantaka and Delhi girls are more than boys and in case of Delhi only 9.5% of the enrolled children are boys. There may be chances that boys may be enjoying private pre-primary education and the same is also found in a household survey in Chhattisgarh (Govinda and Bandopadhaya (2010). NSSO Report (2007-08) revealed that the disadvantaged group like SC/ST and OBC are having lower attendance rate than others at pre-primary level and this gap is wider in urban area. Only 12.49 percent schools are having pre-primary section in India and in States it varies from 4.5% (in Andhra Pradesh) to 93.2% in Sikkim (NUEPA, 2010).

It is well known that Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes can compensate for disadvantage, regardless of underlying factors such as poverty, gender and ethnicity. While there is no information on the percentage of children entering primary education with pre-school experience in India 38.5 % of children aged 5 years are never enrolled and in case of girls it is even worse (39.3 %). The proportion of never enrolled children aged 5 years is more in rural area (42.4%) (NSSO, 2007-08). Further, as we know that attendance in formal pre-school increases with age and therefore may say that the proportion of children aged 3 and 4 years who were never enrolled in pre-primary education tends to be higher.

For ECCE to deliver the benefits and be effective, accessible and equitable, a society must invest in it (Penn, 2004). ECCE in India is primarily the responsibility of the national government, with funding for supplemental services paid for at the local level.

There are many pre-school institutions in the country run by private sector and they are catering a major share in urban areas. The private initiative has remained unrecognized by government and has not become an integral part of the educational system of the country and this unrecognized nature and status of ECCE has serious concerns. The first consequence is the sharp contrast in quality between the services available to different segments of the population, divided along the lines of Urban-Rural and Rich-Poor, and discriminating against various groups such as Dalits, the Tribals, isolated communities, socially marginalized groups, the disabled etc. The second consequence is the polarization between public and private services (NCERT, 2006).

Conclusion

The ECCE must be made to work on the basic principle of people’s participation in their own development. The goal should be to reach all children in the disadvantaged groups and to enable every child, especially the girl child, realize its full potential. Parents’ involvement is thought to be a major component in bridging the home-school partnership as well as spreading inclusion to a wider society. Issues to address include the extra support necessary for marginalized children and their families and some resistance to inclusion from parents of the non-marginalized.

Based on the recommendations in the Dakar Framework for Action and the Convention on the Right of the Child as well as a number of other international conventions and recommendations, it can be concluded that everyone has the right not only to receive education, but also to receive education of a high quality. Early Childhood Care and Education in India has been a rapidly growing part of the education sector and until very recently, generated limited discussion in mainstream educational policy. To be inclusive, educational systems must offer differentiation, accommodations and modifications within the general curriculum and include early training in orientation, mobility skills and alternative communication. India lacks well-developed outcome data on the effects of early education, therefore, there is the need for expansion of data collection; and broad indicators for early childhood system should be developed, which would help in measuring the effectiveness of early childhood interventions.

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Chinese language framework and inclusion of South Asian ethnic minority in Hong Kong

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Introduction

Ethnic minorities in the context of Hong Kong refers to population of 'non-Chinese ethnicity' (Census and Statistics Department, 2012) and as per the census of 2011 they account for nearly 6.4% (451,183). Among the diverse ethnicities that constitute the ethnic minorities of Hong Kong, the South Asians (Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalese) belong to the lowest economic strata. Even though the South Asians constitute nearly 11-12% of the ethnic minorities who have lived in Hong Kong for several generations, yet they remain the least accepted ethnic population by the majority Chinese and face discrimination in education and jobs (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2012).

Equitable education remains a major challenge for the ethnic minority children. Acquiring Chinese language skills remains a key for their successful inclusion and equitable participation in Hong Kong society, yet this has ironically become a reason for their exclusion. Education Bureau (EDB), in Hong Kong clubs them under a broad category of Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS). In the 2013/14 school year, there were about 15,900 NCS students attending different public schools (primary and secondary) and

Direct Subsidy Schools (DSS) in Hong Kong and 64% of these NCS students are of South Asian origin (EDB, 2014).

EDB has maintained that the ethnic minorities' children should be exposed to complete Chinese language local schools as early as possible allowing them to mingle with the local community. On the contrary, the critics of this policy that include many civil society organizations and academics, disagree with this policy stating that it puts the ethnic minority children at disadvantage as they are required to develop skills as native Chinese children and pass same the exams. This, they believe, has held them back academically and there is a growing argument for change. Besides, it is noted that there is little or no support for Chinese language acquisition at the pre-primary level for the ethnic minorities leaving them ill-prepared for primary schooling in terms of learning the Chinese language.

Invisibility and marginalization of the South Asian community

"Equity for minority students is a marginalized discourse in Hong Kong" (Connelly, 2012).

The South Asian community has been predominantly marginalized, despite having the history of living in Hong Kong for many generations. There was no mention of ethnic minorities as a sub-group until 2001 (Kennedy & Bhowmik, 2012) and the data on ethnic minority children has been made available only since the census of 2006 (Keneddy, 2012) and even the available the data is not complete. Thus, providing equitable education for 'marginalized' group was not a priority. It has been only for past few years due to concerted efforts of civil society organizations like the Hong Kong Unison the issue has become a matter of concern and debate (Hong Kong Unison, 2011, 2013). Nonetheless, the debate continues only at the level of providing appropriate curriculum at the Primary and Secondary levels. There is almost no debate or discourse on providing language support to South Asian children at the pre-primary or kindergarten level (Lisenby, 2011)

'Immersion Policy' of the Education Bureau (EDB)

It would be important to analyze the position of the EDB. In colonial period, English attained a 'diglossic' status with Cantonese often seen as an inferior language (Gao, 2011). Coming out of colonial era, the Education Bureau faced a tough task of delivering linguistic equity by elevating the status of Chinese (both Cantonese and Mandarin) to similar level if not higher than that of English. Evidently, schooling system in Hong Kong underwent a great transformation after 1997, with a major language shift in the public and secondary schools from English to Cantonese. However, post-colonial Hong Kong also aimed to be a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society and government has been responsive to provide enabling environment for all sections of society.

In the present context, EDB continues to pursue the 'mother tongue' education policy. At the same time, it also promotes students' bi-literate and trilingual capabilities which has been aimed to balance Cantonese, English and Mandarin (EDB, 2014; Gao, 2011). On one hand the policy of EDB has enhanced the learning environment for majority of children in Hong Kong since they can learn in their mother tongue. Yet at the same time it has put the South Asian ethnic minorities in a difficult position.

EDB has maintained that the ethnic minorities' children should be exposed

to complete Chinese language in local schools as early as possible allowing them to mingle with the local community. Thus NCS children should study in the local kindergartens and schools (taught in Chinese) as early as possible and follow the local curriculum, to enable their integration in the society. NCS children are expected to follow the same curriculum as the children of native Chinese speakers and are also assessed in similar manner. EDB has differed on providing a separate 'second language curriculum' for the NCS students, with separate assessment methods, believing this would 'dilute' the standards and would put the minority students at disadvantage as the employers would not accept such qualifications. Instead, the EDB has insisted on providing additional resources to enhance the Chinese language skills of the NCS students that would allow

children especially in terms of acquiring Chinese language skills. A majority of the ethnic minority children are concentrated in about 30 what were previously 'designated schools' where they learn in English as medium of instruction with Chinese as a language (Zhang; Tsung; Cruickshank; Ki; Shum, 2011) quite different from the 'immersion' policy of the government (Keneddy, 2012). Equal Opportunities Commission (2011) views it as 'discriminatory as it segregates the ethnic minority children rather than integrating them, a view also expressed by the United Nations Committee on Rights of Child. Segregation of Hong Kong's ethnic-minority students in specific schools is "de facto discrimination" and should stop (South China Morning Post, October 15, 2013). In response, Hong Kong government has abolished the 'designated school' system



them to catch up with the majority. In this regard, EDB has increased funding to HK\$ 200 million, as announced in the policy address (of HKSAR government) of 2014. EDB believes this would provide equitable level and playing field for all.

Problems with acquisition of second language

"Despite having equal right to education, the number of ethnic minority students attaining higher level of education is disproportionately low compared with the majority local ethnic Chinese" (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2011). In its paper submitted to EDB in 2011, the Equal Opportunities Commission listed the problems faced by the ethnic minority

at policy level, however at the ground level the ethnic minority children still study in the 'select' schools due to lack of holistic support in other schools.

Lack of enabling supportive environment for second language acquisition

Second language acquisition in the Early Childhood cannot happen only by 'immersion' in the environment. It also requires a strong supportive framework and enabling environment that facilitates learning for children (Lisenby, 2011). Despite the claims by the government, many scholars and civil society organizations feel that there is lack of such enabling environment (Gao, 2011; Hong

Kong Unison, 2012, 2013). The Chinese language is taught to ethnic minorities considering them as native speakers; there is lack of training and sensitivities for the teachers teaching ethnic minority children (Connelly, 2012). It is also argued that there is a need for developing a 'Chinese as a Second Language Curriculum' rather than a standardized Chinese curriculum for all. Most importantly the supporting and enabling framework that helps to acquire Chinese as a second language has to start at the pre-primary level, which does not exist at all.

Removing the cultural barriers at early childhood level

Chinese language acquisition remains a contentious issue for the ethnic minority in Hong Kong. However, language acquisition does not happen in vacuum and as per Gao (2012), it happens by face-to-face interaction. The problem seems to be low acceptance of the South Asian community (Hong Kong Unison, 2011; Equal Opportunities Commission, 2011; Gao, 2012), leading to lesser interaction at the social and cultural level that form the backbone for language acquisition. Language teachers have little or no information about the cultural background of the ethnic minority children. Learning is a culturally sensitive process and second language teacher should possess the information about the cultural sensitivities so that appropriate teaching materials can be developed. As Kennedy (2012) puts it, the defining of ethnic minority children by government as the 'non-Chinese speaking' (NCS) students assumes that 'not speaking Chinese' is their only identity. There is a great deal of cultural bias, among the teachers, who though accepting ethnic minorities as the integral part of Hong Kong, yet believe they have limited capabilities to master the Chinese language and even label them as 'illegitimate Chinese language users' (Gao, 2012). There is lack of holistic communication between the teacher and students and also teacher and the parents giving a notion of 'perceptive reality' for the teachers. Dealing with the perceptions and pre conceived notions are prerequisite deliver any linguistic justice in Hong Kong and early childhood is the best place to build such an environment where multicultural values are seen as integral part of teaching and learning process (Gunn et al., 2004).

The way ahead

"Only five studies relate to ethnic minority students and their educational needs in the Hong Kong context and none of them include pre-primary students or teachers" (Lisenby, 2011, p.71). The process of inclusion for the ethnic minorities has to start from the pre-primary level, thus more investigations and detailed studies are needed to understand the requirements at the kindergarten level. Pre-primary education has to be the starting point of intervention, and measures need to be taken to develop linguistic curriculum that not only address but also embrace multiculturalism. This would also require sustained professional training for the kindergarten teachers. The kindergarten education in Hong Kong is still not included fully in the education system and it has to go a long way to make it responsive to multicultural needs, however, recent policy changes at primary and secondary level have to reciprocate at the pre-primary level to make it complete and reflect its status of 'Asia's World City'.

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BRAC Nobodhara School: Creating scope through changing mindset

By Syeda Fareha Shaheed Islam, Bangladesh

Introduction

Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC) Nobodhara School is the latest endeavour of BRAC which has delegated the implementation work to the Institute of Educational Development – BRAC University. The school started its journey in January 2014, providing Early Learning Class to Secondary level education for 3 to 16 years old students with the mission to design replicable, scalable, sustainable and inclusive models of future schools with interactive, stimulating, safe and quality learning environment. Nobodhara is a unique approach to education in Bangladesh because it not only provides meticulous academic programmes, but also addresses the holistic development of the students. This is a private fee paying school. Presently its two campuses are located in Dhaka city.

BRAC Nobodhara School has created equal opportunity for all learners irrespective of socio-economic class, religion, and individual differences. This is in line with the aims and objectives of education as mentioned in the National Education Policy of Bangladesh, 2010 where it is clearly stated that education in Bangladesh aims “to create unhindered and equal opportunities of education for all as per learners’ talents and aptitudes, irrespective of geographical, social and economical situations to establish a society that is free from discrimination; to resist use of education as a commodity to reap profits.” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 1)

Key features

“Nobodhara”, which means “a new trend” follows the National Curriculum and textbooks, is unique in the quality of facilities, the wide range of resource materials and above all the quality of teaching-learning approaches it offers to the students.

Teaching-Learning:

- For languages, the school follows thematic approach in pre-primary and two track approach in primary grades focusing accuracy and creativity
- Extended activities

- Emphasis on the skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking, critical thinking and problem solving
- Activity based rhymes book is developed
- Library corner in each classroom
- In teaching Math, teaching-learning strategies follow from concrete to semi concrete to abstract
 - Relating prior knowledge and linking with real life application
 - Different methods and processes are mentioned to solve a problem
 - Math teaching through rhymes, role play and story-telling
 - Students create their own math problems
- Co-curricular activities
- Ethics and values: respect for people and the environment
- Health Promoting and Green School
- Science and ICT Lab
- After school programmes for the community
- More contact hours for students
- Extended learning materials: e.g. posters, board games, flash cards, story books, workbooks, etc.
- Design for Change – Project initiated in Ahmadabad, India – Teaching Principal
- Trained and qualified teachers, with ongoing training
- Researchers and material developers working on the project for over a year
- Portfolio and individual folders
- Formative and summative assessment through reports, presentations, portfolios, project work, investigation, quizzes and tests
- Teachers’ Guide for each subject

Inclusiveness and diversity

Nobodhara School believes that each child has their right to education. Inclusiveness here connotes a wide range of differentiation which includes gender, religion, diverse socio-economic class, varied ability, and children with special needs.

The National Children Policy of Bangladesh, 2011 affirms that “initiatives shall be taken to extend facilities to the female child, disabled child and child with special needs.” (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, 2011, p. 4)

A study conducted by UNESCO revealed that a more just society requires that all learners have a right to education. And right to education for all means that ordinary schools are able to address the needs of children with all children including children with special needs. (Ahuja & Ibrahim, n.d.).

Students from diverse socio-economic class

In view of the mission of the school and the government policy, BRAC Nobodhara School has been accommodating students of diversified socio-economic background. Financial support is provided to the students on the basis of parents’ profession, source of income, family expenditure and parents’ financial capability. Concession is also provided to the siblings studying in Nobodhara School. In this case, the second child gets 50% discount on admission fee. In total, 73 students out of 252 are availing concession on admission fee and monthly tuition fee.

Students with Special Needs

Nobodhara School caters for students with mixed ability and also their individual needs. This ideology is reflected in every aspect of the school’s operation. The term “special needs” encompass a wide range which incorporates physical impairment such as hearing impairment, visual impairment, developmental delay, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Strategies

Various strategies including observation, home visit, individual parent counselling, parenting sessions, counselling on home management, counselling on classroom management, remedial support to the individual child etc. have been adopted to support and meet the challenges.



Class observation by the counselor



One on one meeting with the parents

Challenges

Inclusion of students with special needs and socio-economic background has initially sparked repercussion from almost all the concerned stakeholders of the school, i.e. teachers, parents and students.

From teachers:

- Teachers in the beginning expressed anxiety in admitting so many students with special needs in the Early Learning Class through primary classes.
- They faced problem in identifying the needs of the students and misinterpreted the stage of settling down of the students in a new environment as delayed development or hyperactivity.
- They had to struggle to manage the class and follow the lesson plan in class.
- Teachers found it difficult to plan need-based activities and keep them engaged in class along with other students.
- They were confused in assessing these students.

From peers:

- Other students got scared of the aggressive behaviour of some of these special needs students.
- Acceptance from peers was in question.

From parents:

- Parents complained about some students and suggested to get them admitted to a school for special needs.
- Parents of the students with special needs were initially in denial.
- Some parents were eager to know the background of other students. They had a tendency to look down upon the parents from low income bracket.
- Parents feared negligence in class as the teachers will be more attentive and

caring towards the students with special needs.

Mitigating the challenges

- The parents of low income group were invited to attend an orientation programme in the beginning of the session where they were briefed by the school management team about the school's mission and the procedure they need to follow as parents.
- The school management team members paid home visit to build a rapport and make them aware of their right as parents.
- Gradually, all the parents are being invited to attend the programmes like Orientation, Educational Fair, Open Day, and Report Card Day where they get a chance to be introduced with each other. In programmes like these, parents are briefed about the mission and vision of the school, they observe their children's presentation and academic achievement which help them to appreciate the children irrespective of their socio-economic class difference and physical impairments.
- A courtesy call from school makes them feel important.
- Students are encouraged by their teachers to ensure that each of their parents attend the programmes.
- Ongoing counseling sessions are conducted by the psycho-social counselors and ECD specialists of Institute of Educational Development of BRAC University (IED-BRAC U). These sessions are being held in school premises.

Monthly parenting sessions

- These sessions are held for all the parents to create awareness about inclusive education and sensitize them to moderate neurological and behavioural

problems of the children. These sessions are conducted by the ECD specialists of IED-BRAC U and the teacher of special education from the USA. These sessions have created a positive impact on the parents and helped them to change their traditional mind set. Now they acknowledge the fact that even a small child has a lot to contribute in another child's life.

- Ongoing teacher training provided by the Nobodhara Teachers Training Team is of great help in order to build teachers' confidence and plan the lessons with differentiation.
- Flexible routine for the children with special needs and support from the assistant teachers in class help the children to settle down in class and get used to the formal classroom setting.
- Group work, peer coaching, pretend play and associative play help a lot to create empathy, develop social skills, and follow instructions in children.
- The assessment system of BRAC Nobodhara School encompasses both, formative and summative assessment. The children who are taking time to attain the required class competencies are assessed on the basis of their level of attainment.

The way forward

Nobodhara School believes that One-Size-Fits-All Education does not work. This is reflected in the teaching-learning process of the school which provides scope for all children in a classroom. This also ensures that children learn in school and dependency on private tuition is alleviated. However, Nobodhara School is at its very early stage and has a long way to go. The process of inclusion has to be more constructive which requires capacity building of the teachers and management. Specialized teacher training sessions on various aspects of special needs in the children need to be organized.

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Working Together for Early Childhood

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Building partnerships for sustainability
and harmony

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UNDERSTANDING OUR NETWORK

“ARNEC works towards a vision in which the developmental potential of the young child is realised with support from families, communities and states in all member countries in the Asia-Pacific region.”

The Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) is established to build strong partnerships across sectors and different disciplines, organisations, agencies and institutions in the Asia-Pacific region to advance the priority on and investment in early childhood.

MISSION AND ACTION PILLARS

ARNEC works to ensure the rights of every child to optimal holistic development. To achieve this aim, ARNEC implements programmes in the following activity areas (Action Pillars):

Advocacy for Policy Change:

Support national partners and members in their assessment and review of national early childhood policies, frameworks and implementation, and facilitate the exchange of models and tools from other contexts.

Knowledge Generation:

Facilitate the continuous analysis and synthesis of regional ECD evidence and research, identify priority areas for further learning, and support strategic research activities.

Information Management and Dissemination:

Provide a platform for ECD professionals to share information and resources, ensuring these are easily accessible to all.

Capacity Building:

Provide opportunities for professional development and learning related to ECD through strategic ARNEC events, external outlets, and strengthen national networks through targeted technical support.

Partnership Building:

Build external partnerships and coalitions to create a supportive environment to leverage resources for ECD and ARNEC's capacity to fulfil its mission.

ARNEC is guided by 15 Steering Committee members made up of early childhood experts from the Asia-Pacific region who provides direction for the planning and development of the Network and its activities.

The Network is supported by the following organisations: UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Office for Education, UNICEF, Plan International, Open Society Foundation, Save the Children and ChildFund International.

WHO ARE OUR MEMBERS?

Our members are individuals in the field of early childhood who are concerned with young children and families of Asia and the Pacific. The Network's strengths draws upon the support of our members who are experts in health, education, nutrition, social welfare, human development, social research or policy, sociology, or anthropology. Becoming an active ARNEC member means you are able to contribute your knowledge and share with others your experiences.

Friends of ARNEC, or institutional memberships, are also available and receive additional benefits such as the eligibility to enter into joint activities with ARNEC and be featured on our website.

Interested individuals or organisations may find out more information about the ARNEC membership categories on www.arnec.net <http://community.arnec.net>



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