

# Positioning ECCD in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## INTRODUCTION

As advocates for young children, we have seen and rejoiced in an increased interest in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) around the world, amongst international organizations and within national contexts and governments as well. Over the last decade we have also seen an increase in investment in ECCD, including larger-scale projects, such as the World Bank lending of over \$1.2 billion for ECCD projects.

However, despite such optimistic signs of success, ECCD is still struggling to obtain the levels of financial or other types of support needed to guarantee every child a good start in life. To those of us working within ECCD the arguments are irrefutable. ECCD is an investment that offers outstanding returns – both in human and financial terms. However, in most parts of the globe, the political will to put children at the centre, to provide adequate supports for young children living in poverty, and to make sure that all children are ensured their rights from the start is nowhere near adequate as yet.

A quick review of young children's access to early childhood care and development programmes in the world's most impoverished areas tells the story<sup>1</sup>. In most Majority World countries less than 1% of the total education budget is allocated to early childhood programmes and even when health expenditures are included, the allocation is small. In most African countries the allocation for ECCD is even lower - less than 0.01% of the Ministry of Education budget.”(Kabiru and Hyde, 2003)<sup>2</sup> As Myers (2000) points out in his review of progress within the Education for All initiative, in the main, enrolment increases can be characterized as “small and marginal [representing] a kind of inertia and a failure to give priority to ECCD in often difficult economic conditions.”<sup>3</sup> For the poorest African countries (per capita gross domestic product –GDP- below \$775) the gross enrolment gains amounted to only 1.4% over the whole decade ending in 2000. Even if enrolments everywhere increased by 2% a year from now until 2015, in the poorest countries more than 60% of children would have no opportunity to participate in an ECCD programme (Jaramillo and Mingat, 2003)<sup>4</sup>.

The story is similar in the reports of successes in the other dimensions of early childhood care and development: health, nutrition, birth registration, caregiver support, social and gender equity, family economics, etc. The inspiring efforts of individual programmes and initiatives are offset by the sheer magnitude of child poverty, inequitable social conditions, and violence depriving the majority of the world's children of the chance to develop adequate physical, emotional, intellectual, and social foundations.

Therefore, in this issue of the Coordinators' Notebook, we want to re-visit ways that we can **position** ECCD, to make a stronger push to put young children at the centre of all development efforts and investment. In particular we want to pull together the arguments,

research and experiences that show that ECCD does indeed make a difference and that suggest how to work more effectively toward our goal of helping young children to fulfil their rights to become healthy, competent individuals, able to participate in their social and cultural contexts.

In this article, we will explore a three-pronged set of arguments and efforts in support of ECCD that may be effective in diverse contexts:

- 1) Promoting ECCD as key to achieving children's rights and key to individual governments fulfilling the legal obligations to which they committed in ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 2) Advocating for ECCD as a good investment, and in particular as an instrumental, frontline strategy for achieving poverty reduction goals.
- 3) Arguing for ECCD as a significant entry point within, and foundation for, diverse broad educational, social and health movements.

Taken together, these three types of activity help us to get beyond the specifics of curriculum development, or service delivery, or parenting education, to a view of ECCD as *the work required to re-position young children and their families within particular settings and contexts, so they are able to participate, thrive, and obtain their human rights.*

Why is this shift in how we position ECCD necessary? Because we need to shift the perception of ECCD from being viewed as a luxury item, an unaffordable add-on to the education or health system, to its rightful place as the first and perhaps most necessary phase of all efforts to ensure the healthy growth, education and development of a nation.

If we want to end the 21<sup>st</sup> century seeing poverty reduced or eradicated, and children and adults participating productively and effectively in their societies, then we need to be successful in convincing the nations and decisionmakers and investors in this world that attending appropriately to children from the beginning, and strengthening the contexts within which they spend their crucial early years, is a necessary pre-requisite to any and all further social re-structuring success.

We hope this issue will prove useful in

- i) summarizing some important information which we should all have at our fingertips
- ii) sharing case studies of effective examples
- iii) helping us think through what we may need to be doing differently – how we may need to hone and adapt our arguments so that there is a tighter fit with specific conventions, declarations, formal international goals, or individual government policies and plans
- iv) acting as a catalyst for us to develop new and potent arguments that will help ensure increasing commitments from governments and donors.

## **The Reality of Children's Lives**

Before going into the various different approaches to and arguments for early childhood programmes let us start by taking a brief look at the situation for young children.

Within every country there is a massive imbalance between rich and poor. A child born today in the Majority World has a 4 out of 10 chance of living in extreme poverty<sup>5</sup>. International economic and political trends, such as migration for work, the move away from extended families and toward nuclear families, the increasingly heavy workloads of girls and women, globalization, transition from planned to market economies, armed conflicts, and HIV/AIDS affect every aspect of young children's lives. Even positive trends like the increasing enrolment of girls in school can have serious impacts for young children in countries where adequate family supports are not in place.

Too many young children are growing up without the basic nutrition, health care, stimulation and interaction needed to promote healthy growth and development. Many poor children are either denied the opportunity to go to school at all or enter unready to learn. These children do poorly, repeat and drop-out at high rates. They are at a disadvantage when they enter the labour force, earning little, and as parents they pass their poverty on to their children.

Especially during peak agricultural seasons or busy production periods, small children may be left unattended for many hours a day, or may depend for their care on older siblings, themselves still young enough to need supervision. In a life of grinding poverty, adults feel little sense of agency or control, and it is not surprising that the most disadvantaged families feel powerless to promote their children's best interests. Families surviving in poverty tend to focus on keeping children fed.

There are many factors that determine children's futures. The development of language and a sense of self-worth are just two examples – and ones that often receive inadequate attention. Language is the basic tool for thought, communication, reasoning and making sense of a rapidly changing world. A sense of self worth enables a child to learn and participate more effectively. The first few years, long before the child goes to school, are absolutely critical for developing both these capacities. Too often, families underestimate their ability to support their young children's learning, language and sense of themselves. They lack the understanding that simply talking more with children while involved in everyday activities can help in developing children's understanding of their world, and in supporting the confidence and communication skills they need to interact effectively with the world. Yet these are the very capacities that have the greatest significance in enabling children to thrive at school and break the cycle of poverty.<sup>6</sup> A family's poverty, overwork, fatigue, and general frustration impact negatively on all of these factors.

Hart and Todd's 2003 study provides a timely reminder that these issues are not confined to developing countries. "Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children"<sup>7</sup> is one of the most thorough studies ever conducted. Three groups of children were tape-recorded throughout their first years – welfare families, working class

families and professional families. The differences in the experiences of the three groups are startling.

By the age of four, 50 million words will have been addressed to a professional's child, 30 million to a working class child and just 12 million to a welfare child. At the age of three the professional's child had a bigger vocabulary than the parent of the welfare child. At three years old the professional's child has had 700,000 encouragements, more than eleven times as many as the 60,000 experienced by the welfare child. The professional's child has had only 80,000 discouragements, whereas the welfare child has experienced 120,000 (double the number of encouragements s/he has received). When the children in the study were measured at ages nine to ten, the authors, with an uncharacteristic slip from their stern academic terminology, conclude: "We were awestruck at how well our measures of accomplishments at 3 predicted language skill at 9 to 10." In other words, school had added little value after the age of three; it was already too late. This statement also applies in other areas of children's development. If the child is malnourished for the first three years of life later attempts to make up for this have limited impact.

Young (2002) puts it this way: "For children who are malnourished and have never had a book read to them, the playing field is certainly not level when they enter primary school at age 6, and they have little chance to succeed."<sup>8</sup>

Fortunately, well conceived early childhood programmes can be a highly effective way to address these issues and we will now look at just how they do this – from a variety of perspectives.

## **THE RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE**

### **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

A right may be defined as *that which a person is entitled to have, to do, or to receive from others, and which is enforceable by law*. Rights are widely characterized as legitimate claims that give rise to corresponding obligations or duties.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) addresses all aspects of a child's life, covering human rights for children in the civil, political, social, economic and cultural realms. It establishes a set of legal norms for the protection and well-being of children and is an integral part of the broader human rights system. A separate Convention was needed for children because they often lack a voice in public fora, fall through the cracks of government and development planning, and need additional attention and protection.

All the countries of the world except two (the USA and Somalia) – have now ratified the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (more than any other International Convention). Signatories are legally bound by its provisions and make regular reports to a special commission<sup>9</sup> on their progress toward making the rights of children, detailed within the CRC, a reality.

The CRC builds on 4 general principles:

- Best interests of the child (Article 3) – all actions concerning the child shall be in his or her best interests.
- Survival and development (Article 6) – children have the right to survive and to develop and fulfil their human potential.
- Non-discrimination (Article 2) – all rights apply to all children without exception. It is the State's obligation to protect children from any form of discrimination (whether based on race, gender, culture, religion, abilities, political affiliation of their parents etc.) and to take positive action to promote their rights.
- Participation (various articles) – children have the right to participate in their society and in the creation of the shared social fabric, and have their opinions respected in decisions affecting them.

The CRC has more signatories than any other international convention, and it is important for us to recognize the legal implications of this achievement in how we position our work. Countries are legally bound to honour children's rights and this gives us a strong basis for initiating public dialogue and action on behalf of young children. It also provides the basis to demand that governments be more accountable to young children and their families. On the other hand, in many signatory nations, there is still a long way to go before political will, local laws and practices conform in both spirit and fact to the tenets of the CRC.

There has been much discussion about the difference between a child's needs and a child's rights. In reality, though, there is an overlap between these, since the articulation of children's rights was based on recognition of certain needs of all children no matter what the conditions or context. Needs are broader than rights, but rights are more powerful as they are linked to obligations. The rights dimension adds to our understanding of children's needs a clear expression of what legal and ethical obligations the State and the child's caregivers carry to address and respond to the child's needs. Put very simplistically: Rights = Need + Obligations.

*Children's Rights detail fundamental needs (for good health, for learning opportunities, for care, for protection from harm etc.), and the obligations of adults to meet these. This includes the obligations of the State and of all adults to both protect the individual child and create the conditions in which all children can develop their potential.*

## **Rights from the Start**

Early childhood needs to be seen as an important time in its own right, not just as preparation for school or citizenship. As de los Angeles Bautista (2003) says, early childhood programmes are "about addressing the child's rights now and not for some future time."<sup>10</sup> Yet too often implementing agencies, governments, and monitoring groups simply ignore the younger age group or give attention only to survival rights and focus primarily on older children. This effectively excludes nearly one third of all children, at a time when they are most vulnerable, most in need of adult support, and when the payoff for meeting their needs

and rights is greatest in both economic and developmental terms. One critical contribution of early childhood programmes to child rights work is quite simply the fact that they push for adequate attention to all the issues affecting young children.

*The CRC covers all children. Young children have inherent rights – and the younger the child the more dependent they are on adults to ensure those rights.*

We need to keep this message in the public eye: **children's rights start at birth**, with a child's right to grow and develop appropriately within a context that is supportive of that development. Without this foundation, a child's later participation and inclusion in her/his society is severely hampered.

The CRC is a major framework central to the way many agencies and governments address children's issues. Therefore, we must also make sure that we are a vital part of the CRC dialogue and thinking that takes place within our agencies, so that the youngest children do not remain invisible in planning.

## **Early Childhood Programmes and Children's Rights**

*Quality early childhood programmes aim to ensure the conditions in which children's rights are honoured and met*

The CRC states that ensuring children's rights includes the provision of support programmes for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, enabling children to grow to their fullest potential. The upbringing and development of the child is viewed as primarily the responsibility of the family, with appropriate assistance by governments to parents and legal guardians, including the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children. (see Preamble and Articles 5, 6 and 18).

We will look at the contribution of early childhood programmes to ensuring children's rights in three sections – corresponding to three of the most fundamental features of a child rights approach:

- Attention to the whole child
- Working at multiple levels to meet our obligations to children
- Addressing discrimination and exclusion

### ***Attention to the Whole Child: a Holistic Approach***

Quality Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programmes aim to ensure that children grow up healthy, well nourished and protected from harm, with a sense of self-worth and identity, enthusiasm and opportunities for learning. They make sure children have opportunities to explore, discover, communicate effectively, get on with others, and play an active role in their environment. In short they provide good supports for children's overall development.

This holistic view of children's well-being, while by no means new, has been validated and encouraged by the CRC. With the impetus of the Convention, this interpretation of the role of ECCD is being increasingly taken on board by many agencies and governments including the Philippines, Vietnam, Nepal, Jamaica, Kenya, the UK, and France.

This contrasts with the unfortunately still prevalent approach to addressing the needs of early childhood populations with limited problem-fixing programmes: nutrition projects aimed exclusively at remediating Vitamin A deficiency or delivering food to children without addressing the "care" component; preschools provided with the limited goal of jump-starting children's academic skills (but which fail to address a child's holistic developmental needs); child care programmes that do not really have curricular components; birth registration efforts that are focussed more on numbers than on the opportunity to make sure that the conditions into which the infants are born are adequately supported.

If we wish to address the rights of young children, we must (collectively) do three things:

- 1) make sure we are present and in dialogue with all the sectors and divisions responsible for these topics, rather than being perceived as a separate sector or an issue apart;
- 2) keep building people's appreciation of how these efforts contribute to the larger goal of ensuring children's rights; and
- 3) encourage the use of more holistic planning frameworks.

### ***Working at Multiple Levels to Meet our Obligations to Young Children***

*The CRC is legally binding for state parties and, as such, is an immensely powerful tool.*

A rights approach emphasizes the necessity to be working at multiple levels if we are to achieve the sort of fundamental value changes and shift in social mores which we are seeking. A rights framework ensures not only that we pay attention to young children, but that we also place increased emphasis on influencing government policy as a key to sustained change (whether through delivery of services or the protection of children through the legal system). However, the moral obligations to children long precede any treaty and extend throughout society. This means that civil society's role is central. It also means that the government's role is not always to provide for all rights, but to ensure that rights are realized.

As ECCD proponents, we need to be concerned with influencing the contexts in which children are growing up so that they are supportive of childrens' overall development. When we say 'contexts' we mean all the different environments that impact on young children – families, communities, health centres, ECCD centres, schools, district bodies, national policymaking bodies, and donor policymaking meetings. ECCD programmes need to influence these contexts if they wish to effectively address the issues which impede and damage childrens' development.

A wide range of initiatives are included under the ECCD umbrella, from working directly with families to changing systems that marginalize or exclude some children. They have modelled a variety of supports for families and communities to strengthen their abilities to support their children's overall development and ensure their rights. Building capacity at all levels is central.

Early Childhood development programmes are concerned with:

- **Interactions within the family**, promoting the understanding that learning begins at birth; the home is the most important influence on the child, and parents and other family members are the child's first and most important caregivers and teachers.
- **Provision of services in ECCD centres**, whether these be daycare centres, home-based childcare, pre-schools, workplace childcare. These focus on providing safe, healthy and stimulating environments for young children.
- **Community planning**, working with communities to make the environment safer for young children, ensure ECCD provision, provide health services, etc.
- **Influencing the early years of primary education** to provide consistent sustained support for young children's development, so that the child-centred, active learning methods characteristic of ECCD programmes are taken up by schools.
- **Strengthening national resources and building capacity** to enable countries to provide good supports for young children's overall development.
- **Advocacy**, promoting legal, policy and systemic change, or increased social and economic allocations for programmes for young children.

These six types of ECCD activity, taken together, provide vehicles through which the goals of the CRC can be realized for children 0-8, and provide models for integrative CRC work for all children.

### **Dialogue and joint planning with parents as a path to realizing rights**

Families are the frontline for ensuring that their children will get the love and protection, food, healthcare, and learning opportunities to which they are entitled. ECCD provides a natural platform for participatory discussion and dialogue with parents on key children's issues. This is what assists in making sure the Convention's core principles are enacted at the family level, even if the discussions are not focussed on rights or the Convention.

The effort to help parents internalize core child rights principles was integral to the dialogue phase of the childrearing study undertaken in Nepal.<sup>11</sup> The study developed, and has adapted for widespread use, methods to facilitate collaborative discussion with families and communities around children's overall development<sup>12</sup>. Such discussions form the basis for practical joint planning for interventions, ensuring better gains for children. Such dialogue also helps programmes to root themselves in the culture and to consider how to ensure children's rights within the context of local childrearing practices and strengths.

Societies vary greatly in their understanding of the importance of the early years, and indeed of childhood in general. While no one group has a monopoly on understanding how to raise children, there are some basic principles that need to be understood if we are to meet our

obligations to children and provide effective support for their development. In reality these principles are sometimes in potential collision with dominant local ideas, either because of cultural beliefs or because communities are under pressure. We have to recognize that some cultural beliefs can be damaging and in direct contradiction to the rights of the child (e.g., beliefs that girls should not be educated or that children should be beaten). Programmes have to find ways to challenge such beliefs, but from within the culture or community. It is important to remember that culture is neither static nor homogenous and there are always many different beliefs within a given culture.

***Examples:***

- Parenting programmes such as those developed by the Bangladesh Child Development Unit<sup>13</sup> or Seto Gurans National Child Development Services and Save the Children in Nepal<sup>14</sup> or the Community of Learners Foundation's Pinatubo project in the Philippines<sup>15</sup> take as their starting point the existing knowledge, skills and beliefs of the caregivers and the cultural context in which children live. The whole approach is based on the premise that mothers and other caregivers know and achieve a great deal. Programme interactions focus on drawing this out from them, building their confidence, and providing important additional information and opportunities for discussion and debate. This type of approach is perhaps especially important in societies where girls and women are made to feel of little value from birth and where their opinions are not sought. As one participant from a remote village in Bangladesh said: "I never knew I was doing so much to help my daughter grow up strong and clever. Now I know I can really help her have chances I never had."
- The importance of programme approach and mothers' empowerment was also emphasized by the renowned Turkish study (Kagiticbasi **et al**). The study demonstrated the dramatic effects of a mother training programme on school attainment and retention for children from a poor urban area. Seven years after the programme 86% of the children whose mothers had participated in the Mother Training Program were still in school compared to 67% of those who had not. The study concluded that "Mother training has had long-term effects because it focussed on the overall development of the child as well as the well-being of the mother and the family through empowering the key person, the mother, for multiple positive outcomes." The process, which involved not only home visits but bi-weekly group discussions, changes not only the child but the context as well through the changes that are taking place in the mother (her confidence, communication skills, improved family relations and status within the family). "Thus at the end of the intervention children are not left in the same old context, but rather continue in a context which has changed with them and thus can provide them with continued support."<sup>16</sup>
- Colombia's PROMESA project provided a powerful example of a programme whose approach ensured that it was really owned by the parents and community. It began by encouraging groups of mothers to stimulate the development of their pre-school children by playing games with them. Gradually the mothers started identifying other issues such as nutrition, environmental sanitation, income generation and cultural

activities. Over time PROMESA expanded into an integrated community development project.<sup>17</sup>

The degree of parental involvement and empowerment, both in supporting their children's development and managing programmes, appears to be strongly correlated with programme success.<sup>18</sup> In studies worldwide that look at home and centre-based programmes, the greater the level of parental involvement the better the outcomes tend to be for children.

### **Changing parents or changing systems?**

For many years parenting or parent education programmes tended to focus in essence on changing the parent. Programmes were developed to assist families to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in their abilities to support their children's overall development. And indeed they are centrally concerned with this. However a rights analysis makes it clear that changing practices within families is not enough. As Evans (2000) points out, systems are set up in ways that exclude or marginalize certain children. Health services are inaccessible or unaffordable. Education and employment opportunities are closed to certain groups. In such situations parenting programmes may also need to help to change the systems.<sup>19</sup>

What does this mean in practice? If a parenting programme provides information regarding what provisions are supposed to be available locally and provides adequate supports, parents can take action accordingly. For example, if they know there is budget at the district level for one full-time and one part-time health worker at the local health post, they are in a much better position to organize and put pressure on the appropriate authorities to recruit if the health post has been operated only part time for the last 6 months. If the parenting programme gives them opportunities to evaluate local options for their children, they are in a better position to articulate their needs for services for their children and to press local government and NGOs to provide these.

In sum then we are beginning to see a shift in the approaches used in parenting programmes. They not only seek to enhance parents' direct efforts to provide for, protect and support their children's overall development, but also emphasize helping them to hold other duty-bearers accountable. Such programmes ensure that parents have critical information regarding locally available provision for children, and build parents' confidence and ability to press for supports and services.

### ***Addressing Discrimination and Exclusion***

Looking at the reality of children's lives on page XX we touched on the often disastrous effects of poverty and discrimination that are linked to exclusion, affecting both children's development and the development of nations. Fortunately, well conceived early childhood programmes can be a highly effective way to work against deep-rooted patterns of disadvantage and marginalization:

- Parenting programmes strengthen families' abilities to support their children's overall development from a young age. They also encourage parents to have a sense of their children's entitlements and work to obtain whatever is available.
- Centre-based programmes can be critical for hard-pressed families. They provide a range of immediate benefits (safe, healthy, stimulating environments for children and childcare for parents). They often also serve as bridges for children and families, enabling the children to do better in school and families to improve their economic status.

There is plentiful worldwide evidence that the most disadvantaged children – whether because of poverty, ethnicity, gender, rural isolation, or disability – experience the most dramatic developmental gains from ECCD. Those who need it most get the most out of it.<sup>20</sup> Thus, ECCD becomes a major tool in achieving several key CRC and Human Rights goals.

***The Evidence:***

- The Padeco/ AED analysis for the World Bank for a large-scale project in Egypt compared the benefits according to socio-economic status. As the authors put it “The benefits for children from the poorest families with the least educated parents can be extremely high. In contrast children from middle income or richer families usually enjoy a home environment which is relatively conducive to healthy child development. This is not to say that ECCD programs will not support all children, whether rich or poor. However, it does mean that the impact will be more impressive for the poorest.”<sup>21</sup>
- The North Carolina Abecedarian study demonstrated that an intensive intervention can compensate for the disadvantages of poverty and undereducated parents. Many of the parents in the Abecedarian study had very low IQ levels and these high risk children were able to achieve at the same level as their more affluent peers.(Campbell, Helms et al, 1998)<sup>22</sup>
- The Harayana study in India found that participation in the ICDS programme did not have an impact on drop-out for high-caste children, but the lowest castes showed a subsequent reduction in drop-out of 46%. (Chaturvedi et al, 1987)<sup>23</sup>.
- South African children from low-income families who attended an intensive early learning programme obtained scores equal to their middle-class peers attending a traditional pre-school programme. (Short and Biersteker, 1984)<sup>24</sup>.
- A study in Guinea and Cape Verde had similar findings. Preschool compensated disadvantaged children for the lack of supports available in the home environment. (Jaramillo and Tiejn, 2001)<sup>25</sup>
- Grantham-McGregor's 1991 Jamaica study, as described in Young<sup>26</sup>, demonstrates that nutritional supplementation combined with stimulation for stunted children from a poor population brought them up to the level of a normal control group within 2 years.

- The Nepal study <sup>27</sup> demonstrated dramatic gains for *dalit* (untouchable) children who are still socially ostracized despite discrimination on the basis of caste being illegal. In a district that has some of the worst education indicators in the country and where the District Education Office estimates only 30% of *dalit* children are in school more than 95% of the *dalit* children with ECCD programme experience enter school. Their drop-out and repetition rates were extremely low – e.g. Drop-out in Grade One was half the national average and continued low through Grade Five. (See case study on page XX for details.)

As Kabiru and Hyde wrote, “The opportunity for additional nutritional, health and educational inputs at an early age can address the developmental delays that are more likely to affect poorer children...ECCD programmes can promote equity, for not only can the children benefit when they are young, but the benefits continue throughout their school careers”<sup>28</sup>. Giving children a good start not only attacks the worst effects of poverty, it may also be the most effective way of breaking the relentless cycle of poverty transmitted across generations.

Indeed for the poorest, or for families or societies in crisis, or for marginalized groups, programmes supporting their youngest children’s development are of critical importance. Evaluations of strong parenting programmes emphasize how parents improve their feeding and hygiene practices and also talk more with their children, see the value of their questions and play, and use everyday activities and materials to support their children’s learning. Children with a good start in the early years develop a sense of self-worth, the capacity to take responsibility, and retain a flexible, enhanced ability to learn - even more necessary for children denied access to adequate formal schooling than for those able to get it. Far from being “luxuries” these are survival skills.

*The bottom line is quite simply this: where resources to provide positive learning experiences are limited, children will benefit most from having those experiences early.*

### **Promoting gender equity**

ECCD interventions can promote gender equity by compensating for gender biases in nutrition, healthcare or stimulation that may occur in the home. When young girls participate in ECCD programmes, the parents’ attitudes toward their girls shift: they see that their girls are active individuals, capable of learning, of participating in their early childhood settings, and of developing a wider variety of social and intellectual capacities. In addition, older girls who have been the traditional childminders while their mothers and fathers worked outside the home are freed by ECCD programmes to pursue their own educations.

#### ***The Evidence:***

- A number of studies, including the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study and a large Irish study have indicated that the benefits of early childhood programmes tend to be greatest for girls.<sup>29</sup>

- Myers (1995) points out that in both India and Guatemala girls who participate in ECCD programmes are much more likely to join school at the appropriate age.<sup>30</sup>
- The Nepal study repeated this finding and also found that the ECCD programme was extremely effective at getting and keeping girls in school and dramatically improved boy-girl ratios in the early Grades (see case study for data details).

In sum, whatever the factors underlying exclusion or marginalization – gender, poverty, ethnicity, caste, and religion – early childhood programmes are remarkably effective in countering disadvantage.

## THE INVESTMENT PERSPECTIVE

We will now turn to look at ECCD from an investment perspective. The rights and investment perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Often goals are shared. Indeed, as Unicef emphasizes, the rights of children and the cause of human development are unassailable reasons for investing in ECCD<sup>31</sup>.

*The importance of the early years in the formation of a person's intelligence, personality, social behaviour, and physical development is well understood, but does this recognition lead to investment?*

Numerous studies have demonstrated that investments in the early years bring high returns in terms of children's educational gains, health status, and future economic productivity.

This has implications at different levels.

- At the individual level, children who get a good start do better in school, are healthier, and do better as adults in terms of their income, social adjustment, and ability to participate socially.
- At the local institutional level, such as the school, it means increased enrolment, decreased repetition and drop-out and better achievement and completion levels by children who have ECCD experiences.
- At a national level it means a better "Human Development Index" – as measured by education, health (including nutrition), social development and growth indicators<sup>32</sup>.

In other words, ECCD programming leads to a better educated, healthier populace, increased productivity and higher Gross National Product (GNP), reduced gender and class inequalities, and reduction in poverty and related effects such as violence and crime.

Economic arguments, like child rights arguments, can help to frame people's understandings of why ECCD is essential to achieving both economic and humanistic goals. An investment perspective is not narrowly concerned with only with the "future productivity" of the child, but also with broader social savings, such as potential savings to formal education, health and penal systems, higher earnings for parents able to enter the labour force, and higher GNPs. Economist Robert G. Myers describes the breadth an economic model can embrace as follows: "a discussion about investing must, of necessity, be a discussion about what kind of world we want to live in. That discussion must include, in addition to a world with greater

material benefits and higher GNPs, a world that is more open, just, equitable and caring. A better world, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child is one in which children have a right to survival and integral development, broadly defined to include physical, mental, social and emotional development. They should be treated equitably. They should have a right to be heard and to participate, to the extent of their capabilities.”<sup>33</sup>

As Cleveland and Krashinsky say “Since the objections to child care programs are often phrased using economic principles, it seems appropriate to meet these objections on the same ground”<sup>34</sup>. We need to learn to frame economic arguments as part of our push for ECCD. Economic arguments bolster our advocacy for children’s rights. After all, in a financially constrained environment, we need to show how ECCD interventions can compete favorably with other programmes and projects such as secondary education, irrigation works, or feeder roads.

## **Benefit-to-Cost Analysis**

*Research shows that well-targeted, high-quality early childhood interventions can yield very high economic returns.*

The well-known High-Scope Perry Preschool Study<sup>35</sup> included a benefit-to-cost analysis and found a return on investment of 7 to 1. (7:1) This means that for every dollar spent, there were seven dollars of savings or benefit to society. The study tracked a group of children who had participated in an ECCD programme and a carefully matched control group living in a greatly disadvantaged community in the United States.

Information was collected over a 27-year period. It included information on children’s IQ (Intelligence Quotient) scores, school performance, employment and earnings, home ownership, criminal behaviour, dependency on welfare programmes, and other aspects of well-being and social behaviour.

- The programme children outscored the control group in reading, math, language and total school achievement.
- 84% of the programme girls finished high school (versus 35% of the controls)

At age 27 the programme children

- were better informed on health issues
- were better at problem-solving
- had earnings markedly higher
- were more likely to be homeowners
- had formed more stable relationships and marriages

The control group

- was twice as likely to be on welfare
- was twice as likely to have been arrested
- was five times more likely to have been arrested more than five times.

The benefit-to-cost analysis of 7:1 has drawn perhaps the most attention of all these findings. Calculating the monetary value of the benefits in any project analysis is complicated and involves many judgement calls, as World Bank economist van der Gaag emphasizes<sup>36</sup>. It is

necessary to decide which outcomes of the programme should be included and how to “monetize” these. The specific circumstances of the programme need to be taken into account every time. In the High/Scope Perry Preschool study, authors Schweinhart, Barnes, and Weikart included a range of items such as the savings for the criminal justice system, as well as savings through fewer welfare payments and lower need for special education programmes. They also calculated in the difference in earnings between the two groups and childcare benefits (what families would have spent on childcare if their children had not been in the programme).

Most benefit-to-cost analyses have not had the advantage of such a rich and reliable database and have looked at a much narrower range of benefits specifically related to children’s years in school and their projected future earnings. ECCD programme participation has a significant effect on future income, because a child who attends an ECCD centre or preschool is more likely to enter and to complete primary school, to go on to secondary education, and to achieve higher performance levels, than children who do not attend preschool. This better educational performance is associated subsequently with higher incomes. We have sufficient research evidence to affirm that every year of added education improves a person’s later income.

The economic literature on education estimates that one extra year of primary education will increase a person’s future productivity by 10-30%, varying country to country.<sup>37</sup> This is done by estimating a wage equation that relates differences in wages to differences in years or levels of education. The researchers then use an age-to-earnings profile to estimate the increase in productivity. Data are used that document the increases in primary enrolment, related to participation in ECCD programmes. Data are also used that document the impact of ECCD participation on the total number of classes completed in school. The models factor in the improved retention and promotion, progression by more students to post-primary education, and sometimes even include data on the reduction in under-5 mortality, fertility rates, and other social indicators.

In situations where data are not available (as is often the case) assumptions are sometimes made. For example, taking into account the costs of the education system, the ‘net present value’ is calculated. This is an approximation of what the value of a year of education is worth monetarily. In this way society’s profits from the investment are calculated and economists can then quantify the benefits of increased lifetime productivity as a result of ECCD.

There are disadvantages and advantages in this approach. On the one hand, in a model that turns life factors into numbers, how can we ever know which factors really influence the growth of something as complex as children in a social context? On the other hand, we live in a world that bases much of our social decision making and spending on statistics and numbers, and so it is important for us to make sure that we understand and can explain the economic models that are used to calculate the “return on investment” in ECCD.

Van der Gaag and Tan (1998) compared the quantifiable benefits of the Bolivia PIDI ECCD programme with its costs, and obtained benefit- to-cost ratios between 2.4 to 1 and 3.1 to 1. The benefit-to-cost ratios are greatest for the group with the worst social indicators (high

infant mortality, high malnutrition, low school enrolment). Studies by the World Bank and other agencies in Colombia and Egypt have tended to estimate returns on ECCD programming of around 3:1 (three dollars or euros or pesos return for every one spent). The returns become as high as 5.8: 1 in Egypt if programmes are targeted to children most at risk. This is because the most disadvantaged children benefit the most from ECCD. The impact in terms of reducing school drop-out and repetition is much greater for children from poor families than it is for children from better off families. This is a powerful economic argument for investment in ECCD that is targeted to children most at risk.

Economists who have undertaken these types of analyses are clear that ECCD programmes result in a large increase in the accumulation of human capital.<sup>38</sup> ECCD programmes, as an investment, compare favourably in terms of economic rate of return with investments in the so-called “hard” sectors such as road and infrastructure projects. Benefit:cost ratios for most industrial and agricultural projects, for example, are often less than 2 to1. For example the Hill Forest development project in Nepal estimated a benefit-to-cost ratio of 1.18 to 1.

Most of the existing benefit-to-cost analyses require some rather strong assumptions that weaken their usefulness as advocacy tools. It will be invaluable over time to undertake similar analyses in countries where more complete data are available and fewer assumptions have to be made. Unfortunately, in the poorest countries that need programmes the most, data are still inadequate and detailed benefit-to-cost analyses are fraught with difficulties.

Despite the fact that detailed benefit:cost analyses are challenging, the conclusion from existing research is clear. As van der Gaag and Tan put it, “Societies cannot prosper if their children suffer. ECCD programmes are a sound investment in the well-being of children and the future of societies. By breaking the intergenerational cycle of deprivation, ECCD programmes are a powerful tool for obtaining the ultimate objective of development to give all people a chance to live productive and fulfilling lives.”

### **ECCD as a Preventive Measure to Save Society Money: the importance of using analysis and commonsense**

Often the economic analyses address the concept of “efficiencies”, such as those of the school system. Are schools cost efficient? Are monies being spent with the greatest ‘bang for the buck’? However, a look at efficiencies sometimes focuses narrowly on limited variables, such as the numbers of children being educated relative to costs. But this narrow view can miss the larger truths that commonsense and a broader type of analysis make clear. Providing low quality or no services to those most in need and most in danger of failing to thrive is inefficient. Building prisons to house troubled youth and adults because society saved money through cuts to health and education is inefficient. Doryan, Gautam and Foege refer to this kind of social myopia as “Inefficient and with heart-rending and society-rending effects”.<sup>39</sup>

We need to be able to cite the research, but also serve as the voice for common sense.

*We need to keep common sense at the forefront of any discussion on ECCD, and remember that the numbers can bolster but also limit the discourse about how to ensure young children their rights.*

Economists analysing ECCD programmes acknowledge that although programmes are indeed concerned with broader social dimensions such as equity, justice, conflict resolution and a caring society, it is difficult to assign a numerical value or put a price on many of these critical benefits of ECCD. As Myers points out, “Common sense suggests that the early years – when the brain matures, when we first learn to walk and talk, when self-control begins and when the first social relationships are formed – must be regarded as important. Common sense suggests that children whose basic health, nutritional and psycho-social needs are being met will develop and perform better than those who are not so fortunate. Common sense also suggests that a child who develops well physically, mentally, socially and emotionally during the early years will be more likely to be a good and productive member of society than one who does not.”<sup>40</sup> While research on ECCD confirms common sense in both specific and generalized ways, we need to re-frame the discussions on investment in children, getting beyond topics such as grade retention or annual cost per child of preschool to also encompass broader (and sometimes not-yet-measured) outcomes of integrated inputs.

It is possible, and possibly morally imperative, to draw commonsense conclusions about sensible investments before doing detailed benefit-to-cost analyses, as Brazil’s government has done. Brazil’s “Atencao a Crianca” programme is focussed on overcoming poverty and social exclusion and includes a major early childhood component. The project will look closely at the economic gains from inclusion. As they point out, a child in preschool costs no more than \$100, a child on the street \$200, and a child in the penal system \$1000. “The costs of exclusion are high.”<sup>41</sup>

Initial investments in young children are far less costly than programmes that seek to remedy deficits incurred in the early years. Much of the savings represented in the High/Scope Perry Preschool study support the idea of investing in ECCD as a preventive measure. Indeed the largest percentage of their 7:1 returns come from savings to the penal system. The Economics Nobel Laureate Heckman (1999) argues that investments in disadvantaged young children are superior to investments in low-skill adults.<sup>42</sup>

When results from low-cost community-based programmes are as dramatic as they often are in the poorest countries, it doesn’t take complex economic analysis for policy-makers to see that the ECCD investment makes sense. In Nepal they saw the halving of the drop-out rate, and grade repetitions reduced to less than one fifth of the former rate. In Brazil, there were dramatic increases in the grade completion rate, from 2% to 40%, as a result of a community-based ECCD programme. In many developing countries it may take an average of 1.4 years for a child to complete a grade. It does not take complex analysis to see that reduced repetition – a benefit of ECCD programmes that is easy to demonstrate – increases the efficiency and decreases the costs of schooling.

## INFLUENCE WITHIN ONGOING MOVEMENTS

In a recent meeting of representatives of diverse sectors within an international agency, who were all trying to integrate their efforts on behalf of young children, a long discussion revolved around what to call the new integrated early childhood approach. Early Childhood Development was not considered acceptable by health proponents because it evoked in their minds a more psycho-social focus. Integrated Early Childhood Care for Development was rejected as too vague. Early Childhood Care for Survival, Growth, and Development was rejected as too clunky. In the end, the group settled on simply using the term “early childhood”.

The fact is that under each name ECCD is known there are associations that pigeonhole our work, and cause people in young-child-relevant sectors to dismiss us or compete with us as a separate sector. As one old timer put it, “ECCD has nothing to do with nutrition.” From his point of view, that was correct. His department was focussed on vitamin supplementation programmes, and ECCD, as he understood it – an integrated care approach for young children – did not particularly relate to his work. The fact that nutrition is a crucial issue in the early years of a child’s life got lost in the realities of the organizationally-entrenched approaches to nutrition and ECCD.

Clearly, in addition to winning people’s support of ECCD as we conceive it, we also need to find ways to awaken our colleagues to look at how their work impacts upon young children, how our work can be supportive of their work, and how their field or sector might more effectively address the issues relating to young children in the context of larger goals they are pursuing.

For many of us our goal is to put children at the centre of the social agenda and ensure that all children grow up with supports for their overall development. While we will continue to work to persuade everyone to embrace this goal, we need at times to draw out very specific linkages between different groups’ interests and the way ECCD contributes to these.

For example, the gender equity implications of ECCD may seem self-evident to us. However, many of the gender relations specialists are barely even aware of ECCD. We need to identify specific interest groups – e.g. education specialists, gender specialists, health specialists, UN groups, the development banks, business associations – and become more strategic in our advocacy. This may involve drawing on relevant portions of International Conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and collective commitments such as the Dakar Education For All (EFA) goals and the Millenium Development Goals (MDG), and spelling out how ECCD contributes to the achievement of these.

It is not within the scope of this paper to address all the international movements and contexts that impact upon young children’s lives. We have already addressed how to work within the CRC movement. Related to the investment discussion above, there are groups working on Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Millenium Development Goals, which can and should be linked to ECCD. In addition, we will look a movement in which ECCD has

been identified as one of four key pillars: the Education for All initiative, and we will discuss the fit of ECCD within Education planning and thinking.

## **Working within a Global Investment Context**

As we have emphasized throughout this article, ECCD does not exist in a bubble. In very real terms, programmes for young children are often set up to compete for funding with primary education, health or nutrition efforts, and other community development priorities. We need to regularly reach out to people working in these sectors and emphasize the far-reaching benefits of using ECCD programming as a tool within their work, and the benefits not only for disadvantaged young children, but also for families, communities and society as a whole. We need to be able to articulate how a fair start for all children will have an impact on a wide range of poverty, social equity, health, nutrition, and education indicators.

All over the world poverty interferes with the realization of children's rights. Within families and communities and countries, a lack of resources undermines the capacity to provide adequately for children and to afford them opportunities. Economic pressures are a fundamental obstacle that families face in raising their children. Health care, education, even their day-to-day interactions are constrained by the lack of resources. ECCD programmes need to work with broad-based poverty reduction programmes to ensure that more account is taken of the impact of such programmes on young children. Children can too easily get lost in the face of more immediate, crisis-oriented adult-focussed solutions. A classic example is the way that achieving increased food production (or delivery) does not automatically translate into better fed, better nourished children.

## ***Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and Millenium Development Goals***

In 1999, The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) launched the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) framework for national poverty reduction planning. PRSPs are prepared by governments through a participatory process involving civil society and development partners. They are supposed to be:

- Country-driven – involving broad-based participation
- Results-oriented – focused on outcomes benefiting the poor
- Comprehensive and addressing the multi-dimensional nature of poverty
- Partnership oriented- multi-lateral, bi-lateral, NGO
- Based on a long-term perspective

PRSPs avoid a purely economic view of poverty and stress the need to address social and political disempowerment on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion, and age as well. Critical work is being done on key aspects of poverty such as lack of access to health and education services. This is an important development for us as advocates for young children. For many years the social aspects of under-development were seen by some as merely a by-product of poverty rather than as part of the cause as well. Now that there is openness to a broader view, we need to bring home the fact that ECCD helps reduce the social and economic disparities and gender inequalities that divide societies and perpetuate poverty. Therefore, we

need to find ways to participate in our National PRSP dialogues, and communicate all the evidence that shows a successful programme for young children can be an entry point for responding effectively to many of the factors underlying poverty.

How can we do this? We may start by using the traditional economic analyses of ECCD that have focussed on the potential of ECCD programmes to enable the children themselves to break out of poverty through improved school achievement and future earnings. However, we also need to focus attention on other important impacts of ECCD, directly relevant to poverty reduction, that have yet to receive adequate attention. We need to document and convey the ways that effective ECCD programmes in the region have been particularly effective in giving parents and caregivers an increased sense of control over their lives – providing them with information, building their confidence and sense of agency to act on their own behalf and on behalf of their children. We also need to document the ways that ECCD programming, in all its diverse forms, has strengthened the abilities of families and communities to cope with difficult situations that both lead to and emerge from poverty.

*ECCD has a multiplier effect that has not been adequately assessed.*

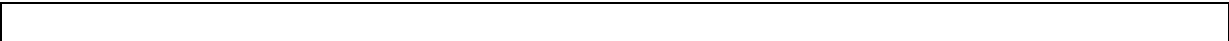
Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers are seen as the main instrument for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the poorest countries and are usually well-aligned with these. The Millennium Development Goals summarize the development goals agreed on at international conferences and world summits during the 1990s. At the end of the decade, world leaders synthesized the key goals and targets into the Millennium Declaration (September 2000), which all 191 UN Member states have committed to achieving by 2015<sup>43</sup>.

Five of the eight Millennium Development Goals in the UN Millennium Declaration relate to the health, nutrition and education of young children, as Mingat and Jaramillo point out in their assessment of what it would take to meet the ECCD related MDGs. These include:

- halving the percentage of children who suffer hunger
- reducing by two-thirds the rate at which children under five are dying
- cutting the maternal mortality rate by three quarters
- ensuring all children have the chance to complete primary school
- eliminating gender disparities in schooling opportunities

*ECCD is a first and essential step towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals for the world's poorest countries. Our job is to make sure people working on the MDGs understand and embrace this.*

As the World Bank economists Van der Gaag and Tan state, “Providing ECCD programs is a powerful way to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.”<sup>44</sup> Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers are a major driving force for individual countries as they create development policies. Therefore we need to undertake analysis of these documents for our own settings in order to make explicit and communicate to decision-makers the key contributions that ECCD can make.



We need to become adept at using economic analysis regarding the very considerable returns on investment in ECCD, such as that done by Mingat and Jaramillo, when making the case for ECCD with regard to achieving Millenium Development Goals (and EFA goals) within our own settings. Using data from 24 African countries Mingat and Jaramillo estimate that the impact of ECCD on student flow (the number of years it takes for a child to complete the primary cycle) would result in a gain of 20% in the efficiency in resource use. 20% of a six- year cycle amounts to a gain equivalent to 1.2 years of schooling. This means that if a year of preschool costs anything up to 1.2 times what a year of school costs, there would still be a net saving just within the education system (let alone looking at the broader and longer-term benefits as the other economic analyses we have looked at have done).

Using these kinds of figures helps policy-makers to see the implications of ECCD for

- i) realizing primary completion objectives
- ii) increased efficiency of resource use.

The authors looked at the African unit cost figures they are able to obtain from more formal preschools. These indicate that preschool costs 1.37 times the cost of a year of primary schooling. Even in such a case, the cost of preschool is still offset by 87%. However, the authors emphasize that the costs of ECCD programmes vary greatly and community-based services are a highly efficient option – costing much less than the more formal approaches, while producing results that are as good or better. The authors estimate that the community-based programmes would pay for themselves three times over. These sorts of calculations are very persuasive – and all the more so when done locally using data from within the country.

A good example of effective economic advocacy is how the Christian Children’s Fund (CCF) (see case study on page XX) presented its ECCD model at an April 2003 World Bank-NGO consultation. ECCD was presented as a poverty reduction programme approach. It was later included in the World Bank’s World Development Report 2004 and the presentation was also shared among development agencies in Washington through Interaction, an NGO umbrella organization.

Countries attempting to ensure poverty reduction in the context of all-pervasive market reforms face particular challenges. Assets such as land, physical capital, information, and, most of all, education become more valuable. As Young points out, individuals who already have these assets come to the game equipped to play. But some players, including all too often the children of those who are poor, arrive at the game without any assets to play well. “They may not have the proper tools or even the uniform for taking the field.”<sup>45</sup> The conclusion is simple. The more poor families there are, and the more unequal a society is, the greater the need is for a country to channel public resources to early childhood intervention programmes in order to set effective Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper goals and achieve Millenium Development Goals.

## **Education for All (EFA)**

The Framework for Action adopted at the Jomtien Conference in 1990 stated “The preconditions for educational quality, equity and efficiency are set in the early childhood years, making attention to early childhood care and development essential to the achievement of basic educational goals.” This commitment was re-affirmed at Dakar in 2000 with an emphasis on ensuring early childhood programmes reach disadvantaged and vulnerable children. But have we done enough to really drive home the connection between EFA’s 1<sup>st</sup> goal and the attainment of other goals – especially those concerned with completion of basic education and addressing gender and quality issues?

### ***Making the Connections to Core Education Indicators***

Sometimes our emphasis on a holistic approach may work against us. When we home in on the education aspects we may feel under pressure to bring in all the other aspects and by doing that we may lose the interest of formal education decision-makers. We need to be comfortable with being focused in our advocacy – especially initially – and the opportunity to bring in the other aspects (which are indeed relevant to formal education) will emerge later. Ministries of Education worldwide have to make hard choices about where to allocate resources. More are recognizing that investment in ECCD programmes is crucial in increasing primary school completion rates and especially in improving retention and achievement for girls and disadvantaged groups.

We would do well to remember that it is this connection which will influence them. It is enrolment and completion rates to which they are held most accountable. It is calculations like those done by Mingat and Jaramillo (2003) using data from 133 countries that are directly relevant for them. All the more so where these are combined with related data from their own countries. Mingat and Jaramillo looked at the correlation between preschool Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) and survival rates to Grade five, and also correlation with repetition rates in primary school (data from 133 countries). The figures are impressive. They found completion rates of 50% in the absence of preschool, and a figure of around 80% completion where half the population has access to some sort of preschool or ECCD centre. Absence of preschool experience correlated with 25% repetition; preschool GER of 45% correlated with a reduction of repetition to 12%. It might be thought that these findings simply reflected the fact that richer countries are more likely to have both higher ECCD enrolment rates and better completion rates. This is not the case. Controlling for per capita Gross Domestic Product makes very little difference.<sup>46</sup>

#### ***Governance of the first goal of EFA***

The 1<sup>st</sup> goal : “Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children”

Within the Consultative Group 2003 annual meeting participants emphasized the importance of doing more to address the “governance” issue of the first goal of EFA. The Consultative Group Secretariat agreed to approach the EFA steering committee within UNESCO to raise

the profile of ECCD on the EFA agenda. The Consultative Group committed to take a lead in promoting the first EFA goal (ECCD) as an essential core of the basic educational goals. We committed to ensuring that within five years the influence and impact of ECCD efforts on achieving EFA goals is more clearly understood and articulated by helping people see the connections and providing the evidence. The Coordinators' Notebook for 2005 will focus on this effort and we welcome correspondence on any work or thinking readers might have done in this realm.

### ***Focussing on School Readiness and Children's Transitions from ECCD to School***

For many working in ECCD there has been perhaps an historical wariness of making too much of the connections of ECCD to the formal system. There is a fear that ECCD programmes can become hijacked by the system and become essentially a downward extension of uninspiring primary schools. We fear that active learning methods in which children learn by doing, manipulating concrete objects, talking with others, discovering things for themselves in an atmosphere of encouragement and success, might be replaced by an emphasis on rote learning where the child is seen as a passive recipient.

There are plenty of examples where such fears have been well-founded. For example, we see many preschool centres in countries worldwide using developmentally inappropriate methods in a misguided attempt to give their children an academic edge when they enter school. This is done through pushing reading, writing and maths activities for which children are not yet ready rather than laying firm language, learning and interaction foundations. However, understanding of what "school readiness" means has increased greatly in recent years. As Young (2003) says, "The child who is ready for school has a combination of positive characteristics: He or she is socially and emotionally healthy, confident, and friendly; has good peer relationships; tackles challenging tasks and persists with them; has good language skills and communicates well; and listens to instructions and is attentive."<sup>47</sup>

Indeed initiatives that have deliberately linked ECCD and primary school (such as the preparatory year established in the Solomon Islands) have often been able to ensure that rather than creating a "push down" of primary methods, good ECCD practice "pushes up" into the formal system.

The transition from ECCD programmes into the formal education system may be an effective way to strengthen the connections between ECCD and other EFA goals. Transition initiatives respond to the fact that the major crisis in primary schools (at least in Asia and many parts of Latin America) is in Grade One. Across Asia the worst drop-out and repetition rates are in Grade One. In Nepal and Pakistan more than half of Grade One children either drop out altogether or repeat Grade One. Transition initiatives consist of deliberately linking ECCD and early primary components, so that children are ready for school, and equally important, schools are ready for children. What this means in practice is an emphasis on making the school a more child-friendly, welcoming, and appreciative environment and introducing the more active learning so characteristic of ECCD programmes into Grades One

and Two – and as the efficacy of these methods is demonstrated adapting them for higher grades also. (See Coordinators Notebook #21, Transitions and Linkages).

This is now a key emphasis for a number of Save the Children and Aga Khan Foundation programmes in Asia. Initial results are promising and generating government interest. Where successful early childhood development programmes are linked to primary schools they can have a powerful positive influence on the opportunities for learning, discovery and participation that children are offered in primary schools. Work with the neglected lower grades of primary school, taken together with support to children's development as confident, capable, and responsible people before they ever enter school may be an invaluable entry point for pulling in more interest from the education sector.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Lifelong Learning***

Another entry point for advocacy work with educators in the context of the EFA is to help build understanding of the concepts of lifelong learning and non-institutional learning as a central strategy for building human capital. Non-institutional or non-formal learning is learning which is flexible and can take place in diverse settings. It can be organized to fit specific learners, and can be adapted to diverse learning styles. The phrase lifelong learning implies that people continue to learn and grow throughout their lives. The traditional paradigm of learning is based on formal educational institutions, which assume the central role as the main producer of human capital. The movement for lifelong learning emphasizes also the informal, non-institutional sources, beginning in early childhood. Non-formal learning is important from an ECCD perspective because the determinants of lifelong success, which begin in early childhood, are found in the many environments where children grow, live, and learn within their families and in their homes and communities. Therefore, nonformal educational opportunities for parents, caregivers and children themselves are more likely to promote the contextual learning that promotes success.

### ***Impact of ECCD in relation to Education: Some Key Findings from Studies***

Learning occurs faster in the early years than at any other time and patterns are established at this time that have far-reaching implications. Education is the great equalizer, but only if all children have had the opportunity to develop the attitudes and skills to make the most of whatever learning opportunities are available in school. Even more so than previously in history, education will determine future job options and earnings.

*There is now no doubt. Young children who participate in early childhood programmes do better in school than those who have no such opportunity.*

Originally, longitudinal studies in the US and Europe were focused on narrow cognitive measures, which were often seen to fade out. By the mid 1980s evaluations that had followed children through to adolescence showed mounting evidence of significant and sustained differences between groups. ECCD programmes are associated with higher levels of achievement, lower rates of grade repetition, and better adjustment in school.<sup>49</sup> Studies in

India across 5 states indicate a sustained and cumulative impact right through primary school.<sup>50</sup>

Studies have attributed these differences mainly to differences in attitude and motivation. Significant reductions in school failure, repetition, absenteeism and drop out rates were found in the vast majority of the studies looking at the effects of ECCD in USA and Europe. ECCD programme children had greater interest and motivation, were more committed to doing homework, able to work independently, and participated more in extra-curricular activities. They had greater confidence in themselves and higher aspirations for their futures.<sup>51</sup> As Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart (1993) put it, ECCD programmes seem to produce their long-term effects through “engendering the dispositions in children that enable them to achieve greater success as they begin school. This early success breeds higher motivation, better performance, and higher regard from teachers and classmates.”

Interestingly the Nepal study (2003) – within a very different context – has some key similarities in findings to those of the western studies. It attributes the children’s success to the impact on the children themselves, and the effects that this has on both their parents and their teachers when they go to school. The children are identified by their parents, teachers and other children as being self-assured, capable, articulate and highly motivated as well as respectful and helpful. The children’s enthusiasm for life and learning somehow rubs off on both their parents and teachers. The parents describe the increased interest they take in their children, and their teachers appreciate them as eager learners and sometimes get them to assist other children in the class.

What are all the many studies really saying? These children are growing up as capable, confident and caring people with an optimistic sense of future possibilities. They are enthusiastic and resourceful learners, have a sense of self-worth, have good communication skills, and get on well with others.

***The Evidence:***

- Myers’ review (1992) of 14 longitudinal studies – from countries in Africa, Middle East, Asia and Latin America – found lowered primary school repetition rates amongst the children who had participated in ECCD centre-based programmes in 10 of the studies. One of the cases in which there was no difference found followed an automatic promotion system so no child repeated a year.<sup>52</sup>
- The India Village Preschool study (Zaveri 1994) looked at the impacts of the Gujarat Day Care Centres and included both a programme group and matched control group. By the end of the second year programme children showed significant gains in cognitive ability, confidence and ability to relate to others as well as sustained weight gain. The programme children were twice as likely to enrol in school and scored significantly higher than the control group on language, maths and environment tests conducted during the first and second year of primary school.<sup>53</sup>

- In Peru a recent study found that nearly 60% more poor children who participated in pre-school completed primary school as compared with poor children who did not access preschool. (Aldaz-Carroll 1999)<sup>54</sup>
- A 1999 study in Brazil found that poor girls who had attended pre-school were twice as likely to reach Grade 5 and three times as likely to reach Grade 8 as girls who did not. The benefits for boys were even more dramatic. Forty percent finished primary school compared to only 2% of those who had not participated in an early childhood programme.<sup>55</sup>
- Cuba's early childhood programme reaches more than 98% of children in the 0-6 age group. The system has had measurable success in increasing the educational achievements of Cuba's children. Cuban third graders score significantly higher in maths and Spanish than their counterparts in 11 Latin American countries, many of them far wealthier than Cuba. (Casassus et al 1998)<sup>56</sup>
- A new study from Myanmar<sup>57</sup> using matched pairs to compare children with and without ECCD opportunities found high levels of significance in the gains for the ECCD children when they went to school. These included: higher enrolment rates, enrolment at the appropriate age, better scores on both regular school tests and independently administered individual assessments (first three Grades of school).

(See also the examples from the Addressing Discrimination and Exclusion section above (p.XX) which demonstrate the profound effects of ECCD programmes on education indicators for disadvantaged children.) These findings are of critical importance to countries in their attempts to achieve the EFA goals because it is the traditional failure of children from disadvantaged groups (ethnic minorities, girls, poor children) to stay in the system that makes it difficult to attain universal completion goals.

### ***What about Quality?***

It seems bizarre in many ways that we would ask if quality makes a difference because the whole of the early childhood movement is based on the fact that we know it does. This applies whether we are talking about what is happening in the home or in an ECCD centre. The positive relation between childcare quality and virtually every facet of children's development is the basis of advocating for increased attention to the early years. It is also "one of the most consistent findings in developmental science."<sup>58</sup>

Quality has probably become a hot topic because the fear is that high quality = expensive. The very high costs of some of the American programmes that have been studied so carefully have probably added to these fears – even though these programmes have also demonstrated excellent benefit-to-cost ratios. For those in developing countries who bear first-hand witness to the remarkable triumphs that very low-cost programmes are able to achieve this is less of a concern. That does not mean that we are not concerned with quality or with the continuing struggle to access adequate resources to ensure quality. There is probably a minimum level of investment (different for each context) below which quality is hard to achieve.

*Ensuring quality experiences for children is a challenge in rich and poor countries alike. However, we know that low-cost programmes can provide quality learning and development opportunities for children.*

A recent review of US research is very interesting in this context. It indicates that programme quality correlates strongly with children's development and well-being.<sup>59</sup> However, the research shows that the interaction between the facilitator and the children is associated more strongly with enhanced well-being of children than are structural features such as class size, staff-child ratio and staff training. In other words, it is the dynamics which really count. This is heartening for those of us working in situations where many of the structural features are hard to address. Similarly a study of preschool education in Chile shows that good lesson planning, appropriate learning materials, clear learning objectives, and parental participation have a greater effect than factors such as a teacher's background or teacher-child ratios.<sup>60</sup>

It is important also to remember that concepts of quality vary, reflecting values promoted by the different cultures. For example, Boocock's 1995 comparison of a U.S. programme with programmes in Japan and China indicates a distinct difference in the importance that Asians place on group life. In Japan, "Parents send their children to preschool not just for child care and not just so the children can learn to conform to the demands of society, but more to facilitate the development of a group-oriented, outward-facing sense of self".<sup>61</sup>

There is a great need for more studies from the Majority World, which collect the hard data that speaks so loudly but which also undertake more qualitative analysis of what dynamics underpin the data. What is it that is really making the difference?

Interestingly, some studies suggest that ECCD programmes yield long-term benefits regardless of the level of support in school, and even when the quality of schooling is low.<sup>62</sup> The highly regarded Abecedarian study (1999) mentioned earlier in this article, using a two by two crossover design, looked at not only programme children and a control group, but also at the effects of intensive supports during the first three years of school. Researchers concluded at the 15 year point that the ECCD programme had been almost as effective alone (in terms of children's achievement) as combining it with the enhanced primary school experience, and was definitely more effective than the primary school enhancement alone. This is an interesting finding which has not received adequate attention. From a pure investment point of view, it argues for greatly increased resources to be allocated to ECCD programmes.

Barnett (1998) points out that the persistence of effects even when the quality of schooling is poor is consistent with our understanding of the active role children play in their own learning. A child who enters school better prepared is likely to do better even without subsequent support. It is interesting that those studies that have compared more formal didactic instruction and active learning approaches have tended to find high achievement in the early primary years amongst the didactic programme children, while the children involved in programmes emphasizing more active learning continue to show a wider range of gains over a long period.<sup>63</sup>

*Van der Gaag and Tan (1998) conclude from analysis of their data that well-targeted ECCD programmes cost less – and produce more dramatic and lasting results – than education investments at any other level.*

Many of the studies that have looked at this – the Turkey study cited above being a notable exception – have focused more on centre-based programmes, albeit emphasizing the importance of parental involvement in predicting success. However as Carneiro and Heckman (2003) point out, “families are just as important, if not more important, than schools in promoting human capital.”<sup>64</sup>

## **THE CHALLENGES WE FACE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

### **Why Isn't More Happening?**

This section will provide an overview of just some of the challenges, influential factors, and reasons why we have not managed to pull in more recognition and investment for ECCD. It also touches on some of the issues programmes face as they expand. It looks, therefore, at a hierarchy of challenges:

- Macro-economic realities
- Failure to understand the significance of attention to young children for human development and poverty reduction
- Failure to reach the most disadvantaged children
- Difficulty of delivering integrated services: practical problems
- Difficulty in getting the balance right – building on the strengths of families and communities, and at the same time addressing issues or providing services.

It is followed by a section that examines some strategies, in addition to the ones already described in earlier sections, which might help us to more successfully position young children and families within the international agenda.

### ***1) Macro-economic Realities***

Many of the answers to why more isn't happening for young children are enmeshed in global macro-economic trends that together conspire to marginalize social services. Despite the potential that globalisation offers for the dispersion of knowledge and wealth, it appears in fact to be increasing the gap between rich and poor. Economic growth has failed to reduce poverty in most nations.<sup>65</sup> More and more children are being born into poverty. Structural adjustment programmes have resulted in tremendous spending constraints. These have had dire consequences for the poor, especially poor children, because of the cuts in social spending. Loans that were meant to lift countries out of poverty have instead dragged them further into debt. In the poorest nations money that is needed for education and health is spent on debt repayment. Many countries spend more on debt servicing than on basic social

services. For example, in Tanzania nearly 50% of the budget goes to external debt and 10% to social services. Debt relief (the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative) has progressed slowly.

According to UNICEF, little attention is given to the aspects of poverty that most affect children (e.g. lack of access to basic social services), although these are essential for poverty reduction.<sup>66</sup> International development aid continues to decline in real terms<sup>67</sup>. The share given to social services remains small. Within that, how well are children's priorities taken into account? For ECCD programmes to go anywhere requires the commitment of governments to allocate sufficient resources to fund basic social services, and it requires donor agencies to do the same. There is much critical work being done to better understand the multi-dimensional nature of poverty (and its many non-monetary aspects, including lack of access to education and health services, social exclusion etc.). While there is increasing recognition of the central importance of basic social services in the fight against poverty, this has often not translated into increased budgets.<sup>68</sup> The 20/20 initiative is an agreement between donors and recipient countries that both will allocate 20% to social services. In reality, few countries invest the amounts needed in social services and few donors direct more than 10% of their aid budget to these services.

The macro-economic factors account for a great deal of the failure to provide adequate supports to young children. But within existing government and donor social services budgets why is the percentage allocated to services benefitting young children so small?

## ***2) Failure to Understand the Significance of Attention to Young Children for Human Development and Poverty Reduction***

In many parts of the Majority World care and education during the early years continue to be viewed almost exclusively as the responsibility of the family, with little support from government beyond a strictly limited health service. A large proportion of formal and informal ECCD programmes are operated by NGOs. In most countries governments are not concerned legally with education support at the pre-school level.<sup>69</sup> The fact is that many governments and major donors pay little attention to young children. While "poverty reduction" may be repeated like a mantra in policy discussions, there is often lack of attention to the aspects of poverty that most affect children – and this is at its most extreme when it comes to young children. There is little understanding of the significance of attention to the early years from an economic and social development perspective. The significance of ECCD as a key strategy in, for example, achieving Education for All or the Millennium Development Goals does not receive adequate recognition and investment.

Some of the most commonly cited benefits of early childhood development programmes relate to children's ability to participate successfully within the formal education system: lower drop-out and repetition rates, higher levels of overall achievement, etc. These are clearly benefits not only to the individual child but also in terms of reducing education system costs by increasing efficiency. It is ironic therefore that a commonly encountered view is that early childhood provision is somehow a luxury, a bit frivolous in view of the 'more pressing need' for primary education services. Basically, where resources are limited,

young children are the first to lose out. And yet all the evidence should point us the other way. Ignoring the needs of young children is short-sighted and is guaranteed to result in problems later on. Conversely, positive early experiences and opportunities provide lasting benefits to both children and their society as a whole.

### **3) Failure to reach the most disadvantaged children**

Those programmes that do exist are, in the main part, failing to reach the very children who they should be targeting. As Myers (2000) points out in his thematic study prepared for the Dakar Education for All Conference, “Children that are better off economically and socially are more likely to be enrolled than children from families with few resources and/or that are part of groups discriminated against socially.”<sup>70</sup>

Sample surveys conducted with UNICEF support in 48 countries using Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS2) found marked inequities according to parents’ income levels, maternal education and whether or not parents lived in a town.<sup>71</sup> The ECCD figures are a reflection of wider disparities in access to social services. In many instances the richest fifth of the population receives, on average, twice as much support in health and education as the poorest fifth.

In Chile ECCD enrolment was found to be more than double for children in the wealthiest fifth of the population than enrolment for children from the poorest fifth. (Chile was the only country to disaggregate EFA report ECCD enrolment figures by income levels). Household data from Brazil found that enrolment amongst the richest 10% is 56%. For children from the poorest 40% it is less than half that – 24%. As Young says, “‘Rich’ children receive a disproportionate share of public expenditures” despite the fact that all Brazilian children have the same constitutionally mandated access to free preschool education.<sup>72</sup>

UNESCO’s Dec 2003 policy brief<sup>73</sup> examines the issue of equal access to early childhood care and education. It looks at information from Mexico, Botswana, Vietnam, and Brazil. Children from families where parental education is lower are less likely to access ECCD programmes for 3-5 year-olds. Low income has the same effect. For example in Mexico 22% of low-income families interviewed in Mexico City and Chiapas were able to send their children to formal ECCD programmes as opposed to 58% of higher income families. In Botswana the comparable figures were 10% and 35%.

As the UNESCO 2003 brief points out, inequalities in access to care are not confined to formal provision. There were critical social class differences in access to informal care also. Higher income families were much more likely to have paid adults assisting them with childcare while the parents worked. Parents with lower incomes and less education were the most likely to have to leave their children in the care of other children (33% in Botswana) or bring them to work (53% in Mexico) in what were frequently unsafe settings.

Given the rapid increase in many countries of private, for-profit ECCD provision, usually serving the better off, the lack of targeted public provision can widen the gap between rich

and poor, “situating children from poorer families at a major disadvantage for success in school compared to children from higher income levels”.<sup>74</sup>

This is not just a children’s issue and not just a developing country issue. Toynbee’s June 6, 2003 article in the UK’s Guardian newspaper draws on new research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which captures the frantic struggle and endless journeys of British mothers trying to combine work and childcare. She speaks of women’s “right to survive while working and bringing up children at the same time.” She also points out that “if men had to do this every day there would be a sudden shift in priorities.”

#### ***4) Difficulty Delivering Integrated Services: Practical Problems***

Early childhood services do not fall neatly into any one sector. The needs and indivisible rights of young children span the areas of health, nutrition, a safe environment, psychosocial development and learning. Even when the will is there, the very inclusivity of ECCD can make it confusing. As the responsibility of many, providing services can too easily become the responsibility of no one. Governments and donor agencies alike tend to be oriented sectorally, and government departments or ministries tend to be organized vertically. Comprehensive development frameworks are needed to integrate the vision of policy makers and to co-ordinate action on the ground.

There is now a good deal of pressure on governments to take a holistic approach. And while the overall frameworks should indeed be looking at the whole child, international agencies might do better to acknowledge that ministries ARE sectoral. There has perhaps been too much pressure for ECCD projects at the level of implementation (and especially the ECCD centres) to do everything.

#### ***5) Difficulty in Getting the Balance Right – Building on the strengths of Families and Communities, as well as Addressing Issues or Providing Services***

When countries start to really expand ECCD programmes, they often tend to equate ECCD with formal programmes (especially preschools), instead of valuing and encouraging non-formal, family and community-based, and community-owned initiatives. An important point, stressed by Myers and others, is that we don’t expect or want ECCD to be “delivered” primarily in formal settings. It occurs through natural interactions in homes and should continue to do so. Many child development programmes around the world fail to recognize and respect families’ and communities’ achievements and resourcefulness in raising their children, often against extraordinary odds. They use a deficit model emphasizing a professional’s view of what people lack and stressing the need for educating parents.

It is not helpful to romanticize the way families and communities operate. There are issues to be addressed and we recognize that families face very real constraints. However, we want to ensure that a flexible range of supports are available to families and communities that will strengthen their abilities to support their children’s overall development. In working toward

this, there is a need to build more on the positive and for more planning to be done collaboratively with families and communities.

## **Meeting the Challenges**

How can we effectively respond to these challenges in getting adequate attention to young children? What does it make the most sense for us to focus on? These are big questions and we will be very selective in looking at only a few areas, endeavouring to be very practical in making suggestions. We will start with the larger more systemic issues and then move into a few comments and immediate, concrete suggestions.

### ***Use Holistic Policy and Planning Frameworks***

As a country seeks to identify ways to expand ECCD programmes it is entering into a process of i) assessing the situation of young children and what is already done to support families and young children, and ii) looking at ways to strengthen and supplement these supports.

A child rights framework offers an integrated way of conceptualising responses to young children. It keeps the whole child firmly at the centre – but of necessity is concerned with all levels of society.

A child rights framework is also an important tool for guiding the development of ECCD policy, planning, and the establishment of monitoring frameworks to assess progress in meeting obligations to young children at different levels (family, community, local institutions, district, provincial, and national). Many of the indicators are the same as those used for example in PRSPs and it is helpful to delineate this linkage for decision-makers who may not understand the relevance of ECCD to broad-based development issues. Such frameworks are used in a number of countries and the framework that was developed in Nepal is one of a number of country case studies conducted under the auspices of the Consultative Group.<sup>75</sup>

For such frameworks to be effective a strong central co-ordinating body should include senior government representatives. Representatives of NGOs, who play such a key role in many countries, should also be part of the group. The Ministry officials have responsibility for mainstreaming young child rights in their own ministries as part of a co-ordinated whole.

### ***Target Provision to Make Sure that the Disadvantaged are Included***

One aspect of making effective use of limited resources is targeting, making sure that the children who will benefit most (i.e. the disadvantaged) are reached. While we may wish to see free early childhood services for every child, where resources are constrained this commitment should initially be targeted.

***Reaching ALL children means working to ensure that the most disadvantaged are included.***

We need to use evidence, both local and international, such as Boocock and Lerner's 1998 review of longterm outcomes of ECCD programmes, which cites the growing body of evidence from developing nations showing the effectiveness of cost-effective interventions targeted at disadvantaged groups in addressing some of the adverse effects of poverty and discrimination.<sup>76</sup> As Birdsall (1999) says "The poorer the families are, and the more unequal the society is, the greater the need there is for governments to channel public resources to ECCD interventions that can stop the intergenerational transmission of poverty which undermines the development of any nation."<sup>77</sup>

We must persuade people of the costly consequences for children's health, development and education in situations where we do not reach the disadvantaged. The UNESCO brief cited above suggests establishing partnerships with and mandates on the private sector through social security systems. It also emphasizes the importance of direct public provision and public subsidies which can reach children whose parents work in both the formal and informal sectors.

Countries' policies make a big difference. In Vietnam active public sector efforts have both increased the number of families being served and decreased disparities. In Ho Chi Minh City 57% of low income families had access to ECCD programmes, only 5 percentage points less than the higher-income families. Cuba's programmes reach 98% of the population with dramatic positive results for children's academic performance. "Whatever mechanisms are chosen, public support –both from country policy makers and global ones is urgently needed to decrease inequities."<sup>78</sup>

It is important to remember that targeting the most disadvantaged takes a really focused effort. For example even though Save the Children's Siraha programme was for poor villagers, and even though there were financial concessions available for the poorest, they (the dalits) remained under-represented until very focused efforts were made to increase their numbers. It doesn't just happen by making a programme available.

***Encourage Flexible Implementation, Recognizing Sector Realities***

As mentioned above, there is pressure on governments to take a holistic approach. And while the overall frameworks should indeed be looking at the whole child, international agencies might do better to acknowledge that ministries ARE sectoral and that what matters is that children have access to services and supports. Rather than always pushing for multi-sectoral integrated projects we need to also recognize that it is fine if, for example, a child:

- participates in an ECCD centre operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. The centre may have an educational orientation and may offer a range of learning opportunities for children. Attention is paid to children's hygiene and health awareness.
- is referred both for preventative health care and when unwell to the Ministry of Health's local health post

- is linked to local nutrition interventions where they exist.

The point is that all these services do not need to be delivered under one roof. Services need to converge at the level of the child, not necessarily at the institutional level. If it works to have a fully integrated service, great. If it doesn't, and it doesn't in most developing countries because it is complicated to organize, that is fine too. What is crucial is that the diverse sectors have ways to communicate and support each other's work, rather than competing for resources and control over what happens for young children.

For example, in many countries ECCD centres for 3-5 year-olds have their closest connection to the primary schools. Often if they are operated as a partnership between the government's education department, NGOs and local communities there is a tremendous effort to keep costs low so that government can continue expanding provision as part of the Basic Education system. To insist on a feeding component (which often accounts for approximately 40% of the operating costs) as part of the budget would be likely to decrease the Ministry of Education's interest, unless complementary support from (for example) the World Food Programme or the Ministry responsible for nutrition could also be tapped.

### ***Foster Approaches which Build on Strengths and Work in Genuine Partnerships***

A key role for ECCD programmes is to re-inforce existing positive child-rearing practices and the self-esteem of parents and caregivers as effective providers and supporters for their children. Tapping into the family and cultural stream in which children are nurtured supports and builds on parental strengths. One of the Consultative Group's contributions over the years has been an emphasis on approaches that acknowledge the subtle processes of child development and that build on families' achievements. As the drive for "services" and state involvement gains momentum these subtle and contextual processes of children's development and learning in the natural environment of the home must not be forgotten. These natural, informal supports for children's development are a crucial resource.

More contextual knowledge of children's realities will allow us to inform and encourage the development of broader-based ECCD approaches that take account of both cultural values and the need to equip children for a rapidly changing world. All children have the same rights but there is no one right way to support early childhood development. Policy and programme decisions need to be made in collaboration with families and communities in order to be relevant, affordable and jointly owned. The good intentions of government as they expand services are laudable and should be acknowledged. However, government cannot do it all. Family and community members are also duty bearers and offer indispensable and complementary contributions towards realizing a government's desire to ensure a good start for all children.

## **Make our Advocacy More Effective**

Within all of the strategies for addressing challenges a connecting thread comes down to making our advocacy more effective. We we will therefore now look, in a little more depth, at some of the ways we may be able to do this. (See also CN No. 27 on Advocacy)

Advocacy is the deliberate process of influencing those who make decisions. It is action aimed at changing policies, positions and practices, often aimed at governments, institutions and organizations. We hope and believe that the evidence in support of ECCD's effectiveness cited throughout this article will be helpful to many of us. We hope too that the effort to deliberately link the evidence to EFA, PRSPs, MDGs or Human Rights discussions is useful.

As de los Angeles-Bautista (2003) says, our overarching advocacy goal is getting young children on the social agenda and making sure they receive the care they are entitled to.<sup>79</sup> To help reach this goal within all our countries, there are a myriad of different objectives which need to be achieved from community to national level – from getting the health post staffed, to getting remuneration increased for ECCD personnel, to getting government support for expanded or more targeted ECCD provision, to getting a national ECCD policy in place and then ensuring its implementation in reality. There is also much to be done to influence international development agencies. We need to be selective and choose a reasonable number of change objectives to work on at any one time.

### ***Provide Local Hard Evidence and More Accessible Studies***

While one might say that the evidence is overwhelming in its support of ECCD interventions, the fact is that there are plenty of people who need convincing. Being able to use different arguments is key to our success. For some, the returns on economic investment provide the most convincing arguments. It is the local hard evidence that convinces politicians and bureaucrats to embrace ECCD.

We need to:

- make better use of existing studies, presenting them (both globally and locally) in more easily comprehensible formats that relate specifically to the interest of the particular group we are trying to influence
- conduct more local studies which present the findings in everyday language that is immediately compelling. Indeed we need to become much better at producing different versions of the same study, such as:
  - the full study where the detailed findings are presented, as well as the methods used so that findings can be scrutinized for reliability and validity;
  - the short version for policy-makers highlighting the key aspects that will be of interest to them;
  - targeted versions aimed at specific interest groups. For example, if a report is for a Ministry of Education, it should include the impact on education indicators, the fit with existing priorities and commitments, implications for future policy and programmes, and ways in which these can be affordable;
  - a version for local government officials.

- a donors' version, making it clear how our work fits with donors' concerns and priorities;

The reaction of government and donors to the Nepal study (and its various summaries), which is described in the case study on page XX, is proof of the power of local data for advocacy. The Ministry of Education has committed to supporting a tenfold increase in the number of ECCD centres to 45,000 reaching over 1 million disadvantaged young children by 2009. Indeed it is powerful motivation for us also to have such dramatic proof of the impact of such programmes in addressing entrenched education and social justice issues.

In addition to studies demonstrating programme impact policy-makers need information that will allow them to judge which interventions are most beneficial and still affordable. They need to know how various factors influence a programme's effectiveness. This on-going research and evaluation is essential both to improving programming and to making the most effective use of limited resources. (See case study on the Effectiveness Initiative, p. XX).

### ***Plan Our Advocacy – Taking into Account Who We Need to Influence and What They Care About***

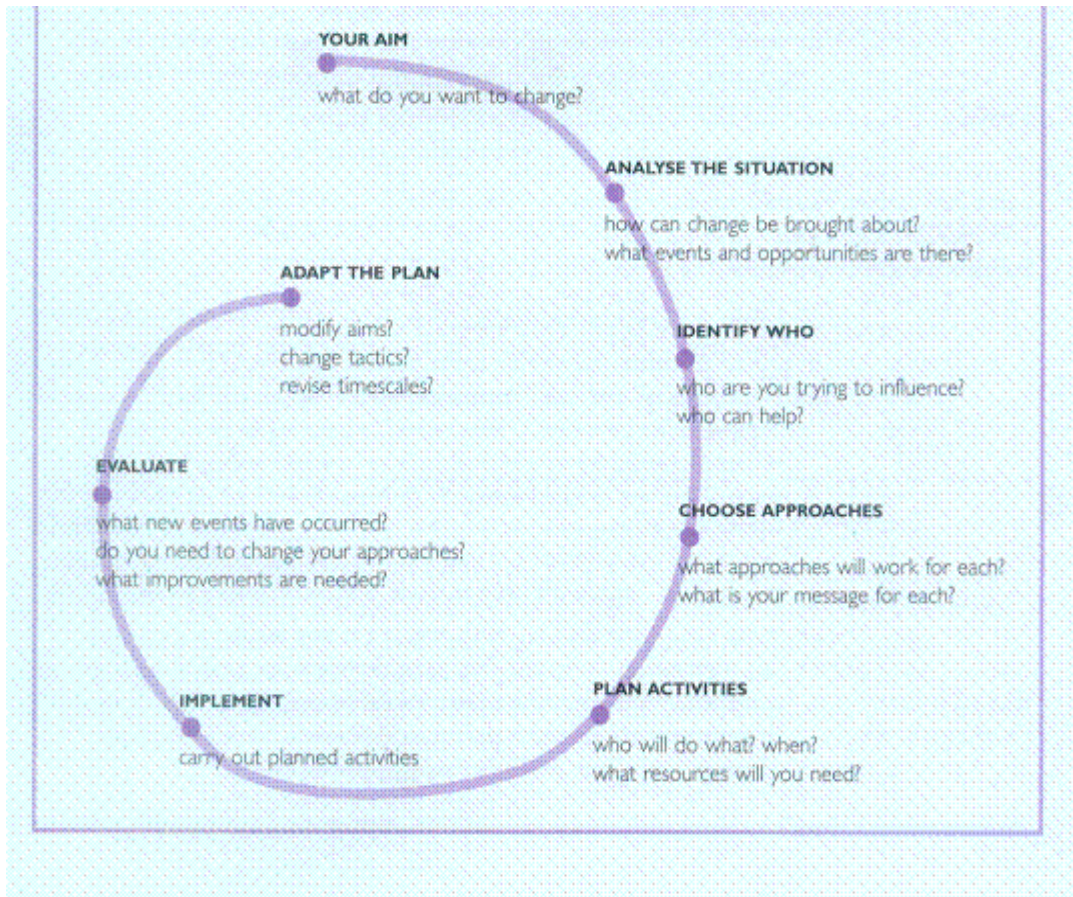
The *advocacy spiral* below<sup>80</sup> charts a step-by-step process for effective advocacy, taking it from the aim (what we are trying to change) through analysis, planning, implementation, assessment of progress and adjustments. While effective advocacy needs to be planned it is also a highly responsive process – requiring an ability to adapt to changes in the situation and to create or seize opportunities.

#### **Charting the advocacy cycle**

Much of the advocacy process spiral is reminiscent of general project planning. The difference is the key emphasis on “who”. Government is perhaps the most common target for advocacy work, but before it is possible to embark on serious advocacy with government it is necessary to analyze how and where decisions are made throughout various systems.

*Critical to success is identifying the people who have the power to make change happen, and who and what influences them*

We need to understand the agendas of the key players (both the key decision-makers and those who influence them). If they have no direct interest in the issue what are they interested in? How might it be possible to utilize that to encourage them to pay attention?



### *Influencing policy decisions – a practical example*

Let's say your organization has been supporting a very effective ECCD programme for remote, under-served populations in Tillinewa (an imaginary country which many of you will be familiar with!). You have, in a deliberate collaboration with the Ministry, conducted a study that demonstrates improvements over a multi-year period in a whole host of child and family level indicators. In Tillinewa most government supported ECCD programmes tend to serve urban children, and especially those urban children who aren't particularly disadvantaged. You want to influence the Minister of Education to take 2 key decisions. You want him to increase the ECCD budget and target disadvantaged communities in rural areas.

- The Minister does not know much about ECCD and he regards it as unimportant and unconnected to primary education. Like most politicians he wants immediate recognition for his achievements. His main concerns are re-election and getting the next World Bank loan for basic education. He has come in for criticism as primary education indicators are very poor and have barely improved over the last 3 years and this is getting a lot of attention. He is influenced by media coverage and what the World Bank says.
- The media also do not know or care much about ECCD. They are interested in circulation rates.
- The World Bank personnel in Tillinewa are concerned about poverty reduction, primary education indicators, benefit-to-cost analyses, and timely disbursements.

What are some of the key advocacy opportunities?

You know your objectives. But your explanation of why these objectives are important may be presented differently for different audiences reflecting their concerns and interests.

Perhaps you do not have immediate access to the Minister so you start with the media and the World Bank. Below are just a handful of the possibilities.

- Media work is one of the best ways of influencing public opinion. Provide the media with good human interest stories combined with easy-to-read research results emphasizing the impact on disadvantaged children's enrolment and achievement levels when they enter primary school.
- Be familiar with the details of the policies and priorities of the Bank in-country and globally and adapt your message to highlight its relevance to poverty reduction and primary education. Identify key individuals who can convey and advocate for your message within the organization.
- As work progresses it may suggest other opportunities. For example the position of the World Bank might be influenced by a key think-tank on education which also feeds key policy documents to the media. It may be helpful to work with this group – part of broadening the coalition.
- Co-host (if possible with the Ministry of Education) a national seminar bringing together many different groups including government representatives, NGOs, UN, academics and the development banks exploring the links between good quality early childhood experiences and primary school outcomes. Release the study (formal release is made by a senior Ministry representative with a commentary from a prestigious academic or the World Bank) at the seminar and hold a press conference at which a short clear summary is provided. (Remember: your organization's main

interest might, for example, be the dramatic effects the ECCD programme has had on children's confidence, communication skills and enthusiasm for learning, and how parents are now engaged with their children's overall development. You know this will stand them in good stead throughout life. By relating these to achievements in the more traditional education agenda it will be possible to engage people with broader ideas also).

- By now the Minister should be interested in meeting! Ahead of the meeting be sure he has a short summary which catches the attention and quickly communicates key points regarding public demand, impact on primary education indicators, addressing poverty issues, and affordability. A useful rule of thumb suggested in Working for Change in Education is that the reader should be able to register these messages in the five minutes before a meeting!

Note: often we won't be targeting the most powerful people or the policy-makers. In many contexts a change in what young children actually experience is not necessarily achieved through influencing policy. Supportive policies may be in place but what happens in practice may be almost completely unconnected with policy. The problem becomes one of working to ensure implementation. In that case, it is necessary to identify who the key decision-makers are at different levels that influence implementation.

Whoever we are trying to influence it is important to be able to speak with authority. To gain authority requires having both legitimacy and credibility. We enhance our legitimacy by representing a broad or important section of people and groups. It is important to create alliances and build broad collaboration with others with similar objectives. Credibility comes from being able to demonstrate that we know what we are talking about: having information about the current situation, speaking from both direct practical experience and sharing findings of research studies or evaluations – i.e. providing evidence that the solutions being proposed have a good chance of succeeding. Different audiences respond to different kinds of evidence. Some people want statistics, others are more influenced by personal testimonies and stories. This is a critical factor in how we present our message. Whatever we present, we need to be inspirational and articulate.

## CONCLUSION

*There will always be something more immediate, there will never be anything more important*

We have to convince society that the well-being of people, starting with the youngest people, is a central concern to all, including both government and civil society. Focusing on young children is at the centre of strengthening the circles that make up a society.<sup>81</sup>

We began this article by pointing out the massive nature of our task. Getting the youngest children on the international agenda as a starting point will take a sustained effort in many

arenas. A powerful argument that makes sense to most audiences is that you don't build a house starting with the second floor. Similarly, the world cannot begin its attention to children once they reach school, cannot ensure health without working with the age group in which the foundations of health are laid, can't hope for peace if its youngest children experience daily conflict and violence, and can't have liveable cities unless we start by considering what it means to create a world fit for young children.

From both a rights and investment perspective ECCD's positive influences resonate throughout a society and often re-inforce each other. Investments are often made to address social justice issues and attention to addressing exclusion ensures the highest return on investment, as emphasized by all the economic analyses. We are increasingly aware of the benefits of early childhood development programmes, not only in terms of responding to the immediate needs of children and their families, but also, over time, in terms of the child's ability to contribute to the community and participate in the society. The reasons for investing in early childhood development are many and are reflected throughout this article. Perhaps the most important is ethical when so many children lack the care needed to ensure their rights and enable them to develop their full human potential. "Gross underinvestment in children and their mothers, especially those in the poorest households and with the least education, is one of the most potent "engines" driving the growing inequality within and between nations."<sup>82</sup>

As people ask us: "What does ECCD have to do with literacy, or poverty reduction or economic reconstruction?" we have to be prepared to reply and also to reverse that question. What do the concerns of adults in the various sectors have to do with young children? What needs to happen *early* if they wish for an educated, democratic, participatory populace to fulfil their particular objectives? Rights, education, peace, social infrastructure, and sane governance of nations all rest on the foundation of the youngest human beings, who will need to achieve their full positive human potentials if a world fit for children (and adults) is to be achieved.

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