



Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development



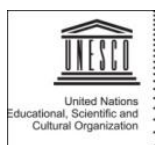
South Asian Regional Conference

Early Childhood Care and Education –

Policies and Practices: Towards 2015 & Beyond

27 – 29 August 2012

New Delhi, India



South Asian Regional Conference

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Introduction

The Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED), which is a part of Ambedkar University, Delhi (AUD), aims at promoting systemic understanding of Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) with focus on early learning. Its mandate is to expand the landscape of indigenous knowledge on ECED, narrow the gap between theory, research, policy and practice and provide evidence based, policy related advice and feedback on existing programmes and provisions for children, across public, private and voluntary sectors.

As a part of its advocacy initiative, the CECED in collaboration with The World Bank organized the South Asian Regional Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education stretched over three days 27-29 August 2012 at Oberoi's New Delhi. The event was planned in close association and consultation with other Development partners in the region including UNICEF, UNESCO, CARE India, Government of India, Aga Khan Foundation, Save the Children, and Sesame Street.

Advisory Committee was set up to advice on the organisation and design of the SARCON 2012. The list of Advisory Committee Members for SARCON 2012 included:

1. Dr. Shreeranjana, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt. of India
2. Dr. Deepa Sankar, Senior Economist, The World Bank
3. Ms. Natalia Mufel, Education Specialist, UNICEF
4. Mr. Alisher Umarov, Programme Specialist-Education, UNESCO
5. Mr. Venkata Ramana, Senior Programme Officer-Education, Aga Khan Development Network
6. Dr. Ivelina Borisova, Asia ECD Advisor, Save The Children Regional
7. Mr. Sanjeev Rai, National Manager - Education, Save the Children, India
8. Ms. Dharitri Patnaik, India Representative, Bernard Van Leer Foundation
9. Dr. Suman Verma, Child Development Expert, Government Home Science College, Chandigarh, India
10. Dr. Suman Sachdeva, Technical Director, CARE India
11. Ms. Varna Sri Raman, Manager, Research & Digital Initiatives, Sesame Workshop India trust

Almost a quarter of the world population resides in the South Asian region which includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Each of these countries has initiated some steps in terms of their respective commitments with regard to policies, programs, research and institutional capacity to work towards the EFA goal 1: "expansion and improvement of comprehensive ECCE – particularly, though not exclusively, for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children" .

However, according to the EFA Global Monitoring Report (2007):

- *There are large disparities within countries. With a few notable exceptions, children from poorer and rural households and those socially excluded (e.g. lacking birth certificates) have significantly less access to ECCE than those from richer and urban households."*

- *The children most likely to benefit from ECCE programmes - those most exposed to malnutrition and preventable diseases- are the least likely to be enrolled.*
- *ECCE staff in developing countries typically has minimal education and pre-service training, and are often relatively poorly remunerated.*
- *Governments accord relatively low priority to pre-primary education in their spending. The broad mix of public and private providers and a lack of data make it difficult to calculate total national expenditure on ECCE. Countries can estimate the cost of reaching the goal by developing scenarios that differ in terms of coverage, quality and nature of provision.*

Given that these countries have on the whole several socio-economic and cultural similarities, albeit with as many differences, these provide ample scope for drawing inspiration from each others' efforts and developing collaborative efforts and cross -country learnings for promoting ECCE in the respective countries and thereby in the region. It is to this end that there was a compelling need to take stock of the concerns and possibilities in the context of ECCE within the region and arrive at some common understandings and recommendations related to various policy related issues, towards enabling the respective governments formulate a multi-dimensional strategy for the South Asian region for this sector. The rationale behind organizing the conference was to bring Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the centre stage to initiate and deliberate on varied policy level discussions within and among the eight South Asian countries viz. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the regional level, but unfortunately Maldives did not have any participation in the Conference.

The Conference was organised with the aim to support governments to formulate a Regional Strategy for South Asia for ECCE. Towards that goal, it provided a platform for dialogue and sharing of experiences on ECCE among policy makers, practitioners, civil society representatives and researchers in the South Asian Region. Eminent professionals and experts from world over including especially from South Asia, and other international agencies shared reports, studies and field experiences that added richness to the discussion and knowledge on ECCE. A total of 232 (of which 62 were speakers and 170 were participants) experts, bureaucrats and professionals from India and SAR nations and world over participated in the event.

The format of the Conference was a blend of technical lectures and plenary discussion sessions on broader themes, with parallel sessions on related sub themes for more intensive and focused discourses. In addition, poster exhibition on their innovative practices in ECCE across countries contributed towards better understanding of the grassroots. Poster exhibition included innovative practices in ECCE across South Asian Region countries with a dedicated panel discussion on 'From Practice to Policy' to identify field level learnings which could inform policy.

Inaugural session

Inauguration of poster exhibition

The Chief Guest, **Mr. Prem Narain**, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt Of India inaugurated poster exhibition of best practices from the region. The posters were put up based on four themes: early learning and child development initiatives; early literacy; children at risk; and quality assessment of programmes in operation.

Introduction to the Inaugural Session

Welcome Address

Prof. Shyam Menon, Vice-Chancellor, Ambedkar University, Delhi (AUD) welcomed all the panellists, speakers, practitioners and participants to the Conference. He introduced the 'young' University of 4 years old by highlighting its one of the major focus area on research and higher education across various disciplines in humanities and social sciences with equity and social justice as its underlying principle. The University has Schools that have subjects which are unique and interdisciplinary in nature, and Centres specifically to undertake pioneering research in the field which has received least space in the popular imagination and policies at large. Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED) is one of the centres among many which since its inception around 3 years back have a body of research studies that is trying to make a difference in the access and quality of provisions for young children. He added South Asian Region is characterised by poverty; malnutrition; illiteracy; inequalities in terms of rural and urban; and gender. Children from rural areas and socially excluded backgrounds are more prone to be left out from Early Childhood Care and Education services; school education and higher education; and successful livelihood. This Conference is a platform to discuss, deliberate to develop strategy for South Asian Region on Early Childhood Care and Education.

Introduction to the Conference

Prof. Venita Kaul, Director, CECED, Ambedkar University, Delhi welcomed Chairperson, speakers, guests and participants. She expressed that the conference would provide ample opportunities for bureaucrats, practitioners, experts and researchers to share their experiences and bridge the gap between research and policy. She strongly suggested the need to bring ECCE to the centre stage and through this conference bring out recommendations and strategies which can then help governments in formulating policies.

She then explained the design of the sessions covered over the three days— to cover broader themes in plenary sessions coupled with specific issues as parallel sessions. The poster sessions draws attention to innovative initiatives to foster evidence based policy formulations. It would present sufficient opportunity to begin a dialogue between practitioners and policy makers. She concluded by stating that this conference would be a platform to share experiences, research, and also promote collaboration within South Asian Region.

Opening Remarks

Mr. Michael Haney, Acting Country Director, The World Bank, started by saying that the first six years of a child lasts for a lifetime and rapid transitions in all the domains of a child's development is seen. He talked about the World Bank 20-20 program and the key agenda 'Invest early, Invest smartly, Invest for all'. He gave a few reasons for the need to invest heavily in ECD in South Asian countries. One of the reasons he pointed out was that in most of the South Asian Region nations ECD is driven by private sector and NGOs, and the financing is either ad-hoc or negligible. He also mentioned that there is a lack of legal framework on ECD in the South Asian countries. He suggested a holistic approach towards ECD and a better dialogue between governments and private sector. The objective of this conference is to bring ECCE to centre stage in policy within and among South Asian Region nations and support governments to develop policies with the help of civil society and researchers.

Mr. Shigeru Aoyagi, Director of UNESCO, New Delhi, emphasized the development of consensus on strategies to develop Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). After Moscow on ECCE in 2010 this is the first follow up Conference in the sub region. According to UNESCO SAR nations have showed 100% increase in ecce. But challenges are many in the South Asian Region—diversity in terms of race, religion, linguistic and culture.

Mr David Mcloughlin, Deputy Representative Programme, UNICEF, laid stress on the bottlenecks and the way ahead by working within the framework of rights of children. He also pointed out that the quality of services needs to be improved and support systems need to be set up for working women. He suggested an integrated approach to early childhood.

Keynote Addresses

Dr. Lawrence Schweinhart in his keynote address presented on 'Financing Early Childhood Care and Education: A Critical Investment'. He quoted three studies — HighScope Perry Preschool Study; Abecedarian Enhanced Child Care Study; and Chicago Child-Parent Centres Study— which was conducted in Michigan, North Carolina, and Chicago respectively. The general findings from these studies were that high quality early childhood education has long-term benefits and produce strong return on investment. He argued that children benefit from high quality ECE in terms of cognitive skills; social skills; high school graduation; employment; and crime reduction. He also quoted few studies which show negligible long-term benefits of early childhood education. But he stressed that only quality ecce programmes give better results, so he added, "**To get what we got, do what we did**".

He concluded by saying that South Asia needs: public/third-party funded preschool programmes for the poorest children; and foster quality standards in terms of qualified teachers; validated curriculum; parent involvement; and feedback from assessment.

Dr. Hirokazu Yoshikawa presented his keynote address on 'Investing in Quality in Global Early Childhood Development: Parent-focused, Centre-based and Systems-Levels'. He said that healthy development of all young children benefits all of society by providing a solid foundation for

responsible citizenship, strong communities, and a productive nation. He gave rationale in terms of neuroscientific, biological and evaluation sciences for investing in quality ECD.

“We tend to think...nature... as something that cannot be changed by experience. But recent evidences are telling us that gene expression is actually affected by early enrichment experiences”

In the first few years of life, our brains are creating 700 new synapses every second! This is why the environment of relationships in which a child develops in the early years is so important – the interaction of a child’s experiences with his or her genetic predisposition is what determines which synapses are used and which are not. The more they are used, the stronger the architecture of the developing brain.

Then he presented examples from quality ECD programmes—parent focused programmes, centre based programmes, and systems level. At the level of parent or center-based programmes focus is on responsiveness of interactions between trainer and community mother; community mother and parent as well as didactic content; educational process quality in centres as well as developmentally focused curricula. At the level of ECD governance and finance strategic investments in capacity building at state and local levels; results-based budgeting; data system development; and community involvement. At the end he suggested:

“Curricula need to be developmentally focused and involve activities that children and teachers enjoy..(and) Process quality can be increased through in-service training provided on-site classrooms”

The Guest of Honour, **Prof. Shantha Sinha**, Chairperson, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights inaugurated the CECED policy brief series—Unpacking Care: Protecting Early Childhood; and Early Childhood Education in India: A Snapshot. In her inaugural address, Prof. Shantha Sinha, she argued that we need to take an uncompromising stand for children to ensure their entitlements. She took the example of Peru where breastfeeding of babies under six months is mandatory but along with other facilities is ensured such as maternity benefits, paternal leaves. Safe drinking water, sanitation, crèches, nutrition, health of the mother and babies, immunization and so on facilities has to be made available to young children. India runs 1.4 million public Early Childhood Care and Education centres, the largest government funded network in the world. She argued that a visible ECCE centre in a village is a progressive village. Everybody in the village has to take responsibility and pride in nurturing an ECCE centre. If a child is not doing well it should be moral imperative of the community to take care of him or her. She expressed that strong effective programme needs to be in place to identify any disability in children below 2 ½ years old with special needs so that parents know where they need to be referred to; how to take care of; and what facilities are needed for their proper development.

Suggestion

- Professional training of care givers
- Decentralisation of schemes and programmes
- Preventive care with a sense of urgency
- All sectors integrate and converge
- Whole-hearted investment

She concluded her talk by stating that a society where childhood is protected and nurtured has huge impact on ways and means of production, supply, and distribution, how we think and do things. It creates new cultures and radicalises democracy.

Mr Prem Narain, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, launched the web portal www.eceportal.in on early childhood developed by Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED), AUD. He began his speech by pointing out that our society is undergoing tremendous socio-cultural changes, hence notion of family is also undergoing drastic change there is growing need of and importance to understand Early Childhood Development (ECD). He strongly expressed the need for investing in ECD starting from Pre-natal stages to post-natal care and subsequent development of a child in the early years.

UNICEF, UNESCO & ARNEC representatives launched the 'Asia-Pacific End of Decade Notes on Education for All: EFA Goal 1 - Early Childhood Care and Education'. This book is the first in a series of six Asia-Pacific End of Decade Notes on Education for All (EDN) which focuses on the first goal of EFA: expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Cultural Programme

Ms. Marie Elangovan, renowned Indian classical Bharatanatyam dancer and her group performed as part of the cultural programme. Marie began her recital with swaranjali. Through the song "Chinnanchirukiliye", she depicted caring and playful relationship between a mother and her young child. She along with three of her young disciples performed a dance piece titled, "odivilayada papa" which talked about the importance of playing, singing, dancing besides studying. She with her troupe concluded the evening programme with an enthralling Tillana.

Day 2

Session I – Status on ECCE in South Asian Region

The Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) is a professional network established to build strong partnerships in early childhood across sectors and different disciplines in the Asia-Pacific region. This presentation seeks to summarize policies and programmes regarding early years in the South Asian Region. Based on analysis of mapping surveys undertaken by ARNEC and available secondary data from the eight SAR countries, it will highlight the key challenges and opportunities before ECCE in South Asia.

- **Chair:** Mr. Prem Narain, Secretary, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Govt. Of India
- **Presenters:**
 - Mr. Alisher Umarov, Programme Specialist, Education, UNESCO
 - Dr. Deepa Sankar, Senior Economist, The World Bank
 - Ms Lieke van de Wiel, Education Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office of South Asia
 - Dr. Divya Lata, Director, ARNEC
 - Dr. Shreeranjana, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Govt. of India
 - Mr. Aslam Kamboh, Secretary School education, Government of Punjab, Pakistan
 - Md. Harunur Rashid, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Government of Bangladesh
 - Mr. Karma Gayleg, Senior Programme Officer, Ministry of Education, Bhutan
 - Mr. Najeebullah Musafir Zada, Early Childhood Development Program Officer, Aga Khan Education Service, Afghanistan
 - Mr. Shiva Lal Bhusal, ECD Specialist, UNICEF, Nepal
 - Mr Kuruppuachchigedon, Director Early Childhood Development and Primary Education National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka
 - Dr. Adarsh Sharma, India Co-ordinator, ARNEC

Mr Prem Narain started the session by highlighting the vital need for ECCE in the South Asian Region with respect to the rapid societal and economic changes. With the onset of migration and lack of proper facilities he expressed his concern on the current issue of ECD and how we need to gather help to improve India's status of ECE. With regards to India, many initiatives have been taken by the government with regards to ECE. He mentioned about the draft National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy and draft Quality Standards for Early Childhood Care and Education developed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to provide holistic care for children below the age of 6 years. He raised a few issues that need to be reflected on:

- What should be the strategy to reach out to the most marginalized social groups of India?
- What measures should be taken to ensure children's learning outcomes?

Finally, he suggested that we can mutually learn from other countries of the SA region and he is looking forward to get recommendations from this conference.

Mr. Alisher Umarov, UNESCO acknowledged that this conference was the first follow-up sub-regional conference after the Moscow World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education held in 2010. He reiterated that the issue of inequity in early years leads to lifelong inequity in learning outcomes and educational opportunities. He gave the example of Ecuador and explained how economic status of family directly affects the development of a child, and because of this reason many economically vulnerable children are excluded from the ECCE programmes. He also pointed out that there are huge differences in the rural and urban areas and there is a wide variation in pre-primary participation across the SA region. Pre-primary enrolment is lowest in Bhutan and highest in Maldives. He concluded by suggesting that each country must mobilize national resources; partner with international organizations and other nations in the region; ensure access and quality; develop a policy framework which has monitoring and evaluating systems in place; and do annual reviews of the set objectives.

Dr. Deepa Sankar, the World Bank discussed Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER), for education strategy of the organization is Invest early, Invest smartly, Invest for all. The tool is designed to fill data gaps related to education policies; work with governments and their policy domains and sub systems; obtain better educational results. SABER helps to collect, analyse and disseminate data on national and sub-national ECD systems. It focuses on legal framework; intra-structure interactions; financial availability; scope of programmes; quality standards of programmes; and ensure that the monitoring complies with the standards. She concluded by saying that better infrastructure and qualified teachers lead to higher enrolments and better outcomes.

Ms Lieke Van de Weil, UNICEF started her talk by stating that by focusing on all the issues of Early Childhood Development in this kind of conference we run the risk of diluting the issue, hence care and education are two main areas of attention for the next two days. She then went on to point out that South Asia is not doing well in terms of the nutritional rates and also brought up the issue of child marriages in this region because of which young mothers are physically and emotionally not ready to bear children and interact with their little ones in a joyful manner. The centre of attention for UNICEF in South Asia is evidence strengthening; convergence between sectors; equity between groups and geography. In 1970s the issue in ECCE was to relate ECCE to better outcomes, whereas in 2000s the issue is quality in ECCE. She advocated for early childhood stimulation because it improves nutritional and educational outcomes; prevents developmental delays and adverse health effects; and improves qualities of life of young parents ((post natal depression is much reduced in mothers). She also added that early childhood stimulation helps in integrating the marginalized and multilingual children to make an easy transition to school. She brought to attention two very pertinent questions — what kind of interventions would be most effective in bringing about equitable outcomes and how to make programmes most strategic, cost-effective, sustainable and feasible. She urged that to reach young children our focus area must be adolescents development. She suggested Tanahashi model which helps to provides cumulative understanding of the ground situation, factors which have most impact in ecce and that work out the bottle necks. Towards getting children started on reading, which is essential especially for those who come from ethnic and linguistic minorities, along with advocacy the need is to contribute to knowledge in reading facility.

Dr Divya Lata began with highlighting the work done by ARNEC which is specifically to document data and practices by collecting existing reports and engaging in mapping surveys in the Asia-Pacific region. This exercise helps South Asia significantly as this region as a whole is characterised by poor

planning and implementation because of dearth of data. It has been found that children benefit most if their rights are ensured from early years. She further spoke about emerging “Velcro” that need special attention:

- pre-natal
- birth to three years of age
- community based centres
- development of early learning development standards
- children with special needs
- ethnic minorities
- time bound commitments and strategic plans along with public-private-civil society partnerships

She later stressed on the importance of home in early childhood care and development. It is important to focus on transitions programme in early childhood care and education, for children slip by due to poor school readiness, language issues.

The programmes she added should be:

- competency based
- include emergent literacy
- connect home and community
- smooth transition from early childhood development to primary schools

In the South Asia, programme or service standards are not in place and standardised, teacher/caregiver standards need some work, early literacy is a part of curriculum in some countries, but primary curriculum is majorly percolating to early childhood education.

Situation of professional development of teachers/ caregivers in South-Asia

- pre-service training is in place, but the duration ranges from 1 to 3 years
- in-service training is rarely in place, the duration ranges from 5 days to 1 year
- on-site support to teachers/caregivers is inconsistent although countries have desire to give on-site support to teachers/caregivers but they don't have actual means to achieve it
- teacher educator training varies from country to country.

Suggestion: Modules of shorter duration for maybe two weeks can be prepared for those who are working directly with young children.

48% children in this region are stunted due to lack of care and nutrition. Long term effect is reflected on child's development, in turn child's access to nutrition and pre-primary education. There is hardly

any articulated policy on language in early childhood care and education in the region. There is a growing need and demand to expose children to English language.

It is imperative to work towards establishing effective and efficient systems. Various ministries must co-ordinate properly; nations in South Asia also must find and learn ways from each other to make ECCE in provincial level more effective. She concluded her presentation by saying that public educational expenditure in pre-primary education is low in all the countries except for Maldives and this expenditure should be increased since this is an investment with high social and economic returns.

Dr. Shreeranjana drew attention to the issue of diversity in the Indian context and ways to manage it. He talked about the recent trends that indicate that India has improved in areas like malnutrition but there are still milestones to go over. He referred to 86th Constitutional amendment and article 21 and said that India's ICDS is the world's largest program providing services in the field of ECCE. Currently ICDS has 1.3 million centres catering to a large number of children, adolescent girls, pregnant women and mothers. He spoke about India's holistic and integrated approach towards ECCE and the provisions provided by the government. In the private domain there are many institutions, NGO's and CSR organizations working for ECCE.

He spoke about the World Bank Report that talks about ICDS as a valuable return to the economy which provides education and facilities for children, adolescent girls and maternal care despite low investment.

He further discussed the gaps and challenges in the field of ECCE such as low awareness and rapid changes in the social fabric, issues of access, diversity and ecology, commercialization is also one of the big challenges, weak linkages between family and community, inadequate human resources, weak linkage of ECCE with universities, inadequate investment in child development (because of the large numbers).

He also gave some new emerging directions to work in the area of ECCE which are create enabling environment, expansion of Anganwadi's in terms of infrastructure and partnerships and strengthening ICDS by adding community mobilization, child development and counseling. While sharing the government's plans ahead, he discussed about enhancing investment in ICDS to increase the number of centres, conversion of AWCs centres into crèches and hiring of more no. of professionals as well as councillors to ensure better quality.

Mr. Aslam Kamboh started his discussion by informing the fact that presently ECE is a part of the National Education Policy, but the amendments of making education compulsory does not include early childhood education. Further he continued by saying that quality is the biggest challenge and since ensuring quality is an expensive business, it is only restricted to elite schools. He talked about the measures taken in Pakistan towards ECE which includes combining male and female schools to fit the needs of ECE, to make ECE a part of pre service teacher training and forming a set of new strategies to scale up the ECE program by engaging parents and the community. Punjab province of Pakistan is encouraging all primary and middle schools to only hire female teachers since they have better capacities to take care of ECE. He also talked about the establishment of kids room in every school. Some of the documents prepared by the Country in order to ensure quality includes ECE National Curriculum (2007), early learning development standards, training module for teachers etc.

One of the biggest challenges pointed out by him, is the lack of resources for education in general and ECE specifically. He concluded by saying that, to ensure retention, we have to take care of children from an early age.

Mr Md. Harunur Rashid started his presentation by establishing that Bangladesh has a long history of ECCE and the pivotal role has been played by the NGO sector. He shared that Ministry of Education of Bangladesh created many provision to ensure ECD. Some of the provisions taken up the government include introducing informal education in theyear 1999, setting up of Child Academy in the year 2001, opening up of 8000 centres for pre-school education and the incorporation of ECD module in the government health courses. He finally talked about quality teacher training and lack of coordination between industries and sectors to find solutions collaboratively as the major challenges faced by Bangladesh. One of the achievements shared by him was the organisation of mother's assembly by every school.

Mr Karma Gayleg acknowledged the fact that Bhutan is one of the last countries in South Asian region in terms of ECCD. But nevertheless, they have realized that ECCD is vitally important to realize the national aspirations. He further explained the ECCD strategies adopted by Bhutan which includes education of parents through existing non formal channels, early stimulation programs with the help of health services, instituting and expanding ECCD centres to all the areas and developing the capacity of ECCD workers with complete emphasis on equity and access. He also shared that the ECCD policy approval by the government is into process, which will be further integrated with national education policy. Along with all this, he even shared the status of each of the strategies stated above with the plans for next 5 years. There is also a need to develop communication and advocacy of ECCD along with the development of appropriate material. He then went on to explain the future steps that will be taken by Bhutan government which includes institutionalise the ECD leaders, regularization of ECCD workers, expansion of the community based ECCD centres and also strives to achieve 40% coverage of children within the next few years. He concluded by pointing out the weaknesses and challenges. In the already established centres, there is a lack of people and also the salaries of the workers are quite low. He also shared that as they have a small compact system, there is a need to achieve quality and access by engaging and networking.

Mr. Najeebullah Musafir Zada shared the history of ECD in their country. He explained that the challenges for ECD are quite complex and there has not been significant progress in the field of ECD. Presently Ministry of Education is responsible for taking care of ECD in the country for children in the age group of 4 – 6 years. Ministry of Labour and Social Affair is responsible for children from 3 months to 3 years. In addition, he also shared that in year 2008 ECD was introduced through day care centres. He further added that the first draft of the ECD policy is ready and the objective is to provide quality development services for young children in terms of preschool to enable them to grow and thrive in all domains. He also shared that Afghanistan plans to formulate ECD curriculum in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Aga Khan Foundation.

Mr. Shiva Lal Bhusal shared that the draft education act with progressive arrangement related to ECD/pre-primary (defined under basic education) is endorsed by the cabinet but yet to be promulgated by Parliament. He even talked about the other documents which are in place such as the national curriculum and national guidelines for ECD and parental education package. On the positive note, he also shared that 70 % of children have access to ECD centres in their country. In

addition, there are more than 28,000 community/ school based and 4000 institutional school / privately run schools in which the participation of boys and girls is considered to be equal. Though the community investment is large but for quality intervention, it is important to incorporate per-child funding. The key challenge faced by the country includes inequity in terms of utilization, continuity and coverage and also between rural /urban differences, between different regions / terrain regions. Additionally, there's a lack of institutional arrangement for capacity building and parental awareness. Plans to mitigate these problems include capacity building of different stakeholders, appropriate communication strategies, evidence-based advocacy to support the equity strategy etc.

Mr Kuruppuachchigedon said that ECCE for children below 5 is primarily promoted by the Children's Secretariat which comes under the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs. The vision of the National policy on ECCD is to intervene at the start of life, in health, provide care and a stimulating environment that enables him or her to be healthy in terms of physical, mental, emotional, social wellbeing. Moreover, safety, in all senses should be taken care of. Areas that need attention are improved and expanded training opportunities for service providers, building knowledge and skills of caregivers, opening of community based child development centres and children with special needs.

The ECCD national policy includes guidelines for ECD centres, conducting pre-school teacher training programme, home-based programs, awareness programmes for parents, developing ECCD trust funds for teachers, model ECCD villages and many others. The Ministry of Education takes care of the education of children between the age group of 5-8 years. The easy transition to formal education (facilitated by the National Institute of Education) is divided into three key stages. Three teaching strategies being implemented are guided play, more activities and less desk work. Other features of the ECCE centres are mostly female workers. Play-house activities initially, where parents assist building the play-houses and are encouraged to participate. Pre-language and mathematics skills are introduced for better and easy transition from early childhood. The roles and responsibilities of department of ECD and primary education includes developing primary education curriculum, training teachers, conducting researches and courses in ECD. Policy with respect to access includes implementation of the government's free text-book, free uniform policies; implementing education for all; monitoring guidebook to empower inclusive education, free meals for underprivileged social groups; developing 5000 model primary schools with play material and other facilities. The main challenge is the attitude of parents and the society.

Dr Adarsh Sharma summed up the session by thanking all the speakers from different countries. She then flagged a few issues which are common and relevant in terms of taking the policy forward. In the field of ECCD, she expressed that we were going on the right path and she gave credit to the great knowledge explosion and research documents such as LANCET series and Global Monitoring Report. She mentioned that the problem of large population has serious implications for implementation of policies in South Asian region. Another serious problem is the poverty index and the inequality in terms of income distribution. She also suggested that ECCE policies should take into account all social, economic and political factors into account to bring in equity. Another key point she spoke about was about not having a common understanding between nations on the components of ECCE. So, there is a critical need for a common consensus in terms of understanding and concept with regard to age group covered under ECCE. She also pointed out that indicators of

quality to review measurement and outcomes are missing and need to be developed. Finally she suggested a need for indigenous research, contextualization of work, sharing of knowledge, networking and synchronization of policies with the technical needs of the countries. She concluded by appreciating the fact that donors have started giving importance to ECCE again and this should continue to ensure a better future.

Session II - Addressing Issues of Access and Equity in ECCE

The session provided a platform to discuss the participation of populations who are traditionally marginalized in the various countries. Access and equity is integrally linked with quality. Participants had the opportunity to reflect on issues and challenges related to access and equity and identify strategies to overcome these challenges.

Chair: Dr. Usha Nayar, Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Presenters:

- Ms. Caroline Arnold, Aga Khan Foundation
- Dr. Suman Bhattacharjea, Director, Research, ASER Centre, India
- Ms. Natalia Mufel, Education Specialist, UNICEF

The Opening address was delivered by **Dr. Usha Nayar**, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. At the outset of the presentation, Dr. Nayar suggested that the name of the session be changed to “**Addressing Issues of Access and Equity in Quality ECCE**” and introduced the panellists.

Dr. Nayar specified the goal of the session, which was to spell out the specific marginalized groups, both traditional and emergent, as the focal need of Early Childhood Education. Further, she reiterated the need to develop regional strategies for ECCE and to be specific on the goal and mission of the particular conference. Dr. Nayar commenced the session with a note on the fact that we need to draw out the recommendations for ourselves, state, civil society, institutions and the international agencies.

Presentation by **Ms. Caroline Arnold** emphasized the need to focus on the 6-8 year olds, along with the under-3 age-group. According to her, sustained and significant benefits of ECE are the keys to addressing deep rooting problems of exclusion and discrimination. She further drew an example from a study conducted in Nepal which found a huge difference in enrolment in school between those who went to ECD centers and those who did not. Results were the most dramatic for disadvantaged children and the girls. She commented that since the programme has been scaled up, quality has taken a dramatic downturn and the pertinent question remains as to how we maintain quality. In another example of a study conducted in Brazil, she mentioned that the results showed girls from the lower-income group households, who had attended ECD centers, were two times as likely to reach grade 5 and three times more likely to reach grade 8 than those who did not. In Pakistan, a project titled the Pakistan RCC (transition project) reflected results as the benefits most pronounced for girls and government schools serving the most disadvantaged.

“The issue of access and equity is not the question of wealth, but of a political choice.”

Ms. Arnold quoted an example from Cuba, which has a much lower GDP than most Latin-American countries with higher language scores and despite unfavourable economic situations, they keep making huge investments in early childhood.

She reflected on the extent of problem of access to ECCE. Herein, with no access, children make a direct transition from home to school. Therefore, the need was felt for the schools to take cognizance of the fact that many children do not have access to ECCE. Thus the environment needs to be made more welcoming and inclusive in nature. According to Ms Arnold, although the attention to ECCE is increasing, one needs to have a more data and better analysis. Also, everyone needs to know about the devastating effect of lack of supports for early childhood and lack of attention to early primary.

“Children are not ready for schools and the schools are not ready for children”.

The Efforts to reach out to the little ones break down right in the beginning, and quality of teaching is poor in pre-schools. Even those children who stay in school fall into patterns of under-achievement. Thus the entire process becomes costly in both human and financial terms.

In addition, 6-8 year olds are ignored by professionals. The big educational reforms do not pay much attention to the early primary but which needs more attention for positive outcomes in later school years.

Recommendations:

- **ECCE for all and ESPECIALLY the marginalized** — target flexible approaches that enable reach to remote areas and excluded groups
- **ECCE budgets** —well-balanced systems invest about 10% of education budget in ECCE
- **Better Quality** —strengthening Links between ECD and primary, invest the best in early primary, experienced, capable teachers in lower primary; improved knowledge, skills and status, focused attention to lower primary in training
- **Early childhood Centres**— welcoming, appreciative, inclusive, safe, healthy environment for children and parents
- **Focus on LEARNING** – especially language and literacy, systematic teaching of reading
- **Language** — Mindful and smooth transition from mother tongue to additional language/s
- **Learning materials** — development of learning materials/ story books in various languages

In conclusion, she put forward that sufficient attention to ECCE including early primary and primary lays the ground to counter social discrimination, and ensures good start for ALL CHILDREN.

The presentation by **Dr. Suman Bhattacharjea** reflected on the longitudinal study (conducted by ASER centre and CECED, AUD) in three states (Rajasthan, Assam and Andhra Pradesh) which aimed at estimating nature of participation of four year olds in ECCE over the course of one year; analyzing curriculum, delivery of ECCE programmes; assessing children’s school readiness, early grade learning and identifying elements of ECCE that have the desired impact.

The current study was conducted in two districts (60 villages in each district with not less than 2,000 population) in three states each— Assam, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan (diverse in socio-economic, geography, language and ethnic composition). Ms. Bhattacharjea explained the contours of the

study consisting of 3 strands which combined scale and the depth through rapid assessment and longitudinal survey method; survey and observation method of facility content and processes; and case studies of known practices. Strand A was seen as a rapid, large-scale study that used a school readiness test to ascertain cognitive and language levels of children combined with a survey of children's households and of the facilities at the ECE Centre. Strand B looked at the same sample in a smaller scale and in depth and Strand C, which comprised eight case studies.

The key findings of the Strand A study were reflected in terms of *Provisioning*, where it was seen that the ICDS had reached every village and that every village had at least one Anganwadi, alongside the presence of private centers in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. Assam seemed to have no private ECE centers.

Findings from the study

- Provisions do not translate into enrollment and participation — In spite of provisions of ECE centres, Rajasthan had the highest number of children (31.9%) who were not enrolled in any of the ECE programmes. Assam and Andhra Pradesh have 100% enrollment.
- Enrolment does not imply participation — several factors determine participation, namely, working hours of the Centre, regularity of attendance etc. In all 1/4th of the children enrolled did not participate (15% in Assam and 1/3rd in Rajasthan were absent on both visits that the field team made to the Centre). On the whole, the figures were 90% participation for Andhra Pradesh and 70% each for Assam and Rajasthan.
- Parents seemed to show a preference for private centers based on the assumption that they have better infrastructure and the fact that they are English-medium. So, it is not enough to provide quality facilities in the centers alone but the need is to make the link between parents and the programme.

The presentation by **Natalia Mufuel** focused on 'ECE Study in Cambodia: Evidence Based Advocacy for Policy Formulation and Development of Innovations with the Focus on Equity'. The primary reflection was the longitudinal study conducted by the MOE, Cambodia between 2007 and 2011 comparing children with ECE experience and those without. The main goal of the study was to analyze the impact of ECE on transition to school. The introductory remarks explained the situation in Cambodia in the year 2007, where Cambodia seemed to have experienced improvements on some indicators of infant and under-5 health, nutrition, and education in recent years, despite these improvements, young children still faced many risks, the under-5 mortality rate per 1,000 live births fell from 117 to 90 between 1990 and 2008 and 30% of population was below the poverty line. Some of the major concerns expressed were 40% of children were stunted in their growth with the only exception as Phnomh Penh where there was little variation in the situation and malnutrition continued to be a national issue with obvious consequences.

ECE programmes in Cambodia were seen as basically of 3 types – state Pre-school (SPS), community pre-schools (CPS), and home based programmes (HBP). The study further evaluated the impact of

CPS and HBP on enrollment rates and learning achievements of children once they transition into primary school and also compare the outcomes from the different types of ECE (and from being in no program at all).

Findings

- The improvement in the scores after one year is not significantly different between SPS, HBP and CPS children, but it is significantly lower for children who had no preschool
- The probability of dropping out or repeating after first grade was significantly lower for SPS children compared to CPS, and significantly higher for no preschool children compared to CPS. Also, no differences were observed between HBP and CPS.
- It was further seen that even after controlling the parental characteristics, children who did not attend any preschool programme were lacking behind children who attended CPS, HBP or SPS.
- Finally, children in No programme were 10% more likely to be dropouts than children in CPS

The implications of the ECD programme reflected the importance of socio-economic status of parents, ECD being the priority for the Govt of Cambodia and the widespread expansion of pre-primary school education.

In the closing remarks and comments by the chair **Dr. Usha Nayar**, the findings / arguments from each speaker's presentation were emphasized to observe the implications in the larger context.

Key observations highlighted by the chair

- Quality does not necessarily mean high costs (Caroline Arnold). The recommendation that followed was to make use of the commonalities in language between regions in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan by developing innovative methods on getting the best results out of multilingual communities.
- Three key components to quality ECE — Provision, enrollment and participation— are critically important
- Parental involvement is the key in ECE
- Each country must adopt Bhutan's framework for their ECE programme which at the heart has equity and access as focus. Services and programmes around/for parents; intervention in school; early stimulation with specific emphasis on health; and preparation of professionals are designed with that concern of social justice and equity.

Session III – Ensuring Quality in ECCE — Challenges and Prospects

The sixth goal of Education For All (EFA) lays stress on improving quality of education. As much as it is pressing need of the time, it is difficult to measure. The South Asian Region is in the process of universalising basic education. It is not enough to put children to school, but they need to stay in the school and make meaningful connections between the word and the world. This session attempts to address what makes for quality education; and nature of challenges in that regard.

Chair: Prof. Shyam Menon, Vice-Chancellor, Ambedkar University, Delhi

Presenters:

- Dr. Eva Thorpe, Associate Professor, George Mason University, U.S.A
- Dr. Baela Raza Jamil, Director Programmes, Idara-e-Taleem-Aagahi, Karachi, Pakistan
- Dr Venita Kaul, Director, CECED, Ambedkar University, Delhi
- Ms Aparajita Bhargah, Academic Fellow, CECED, Ambedkar University, Delhi

Prof. Shyam Menon initiated the session by putting forward a question — what are the quality considerations that need to be made to strengthen our education system? With many other indicators of quality he stressed on making an organic link between community and family.

Dr Eva Thorpe began by expressing the widening gap in access and quality, and its disproportionate effects on children of immigrants, migrants, children in extreme poverty and children with varied mother tongue. To understand quality she put three questions to ponder upon —how practices are implemented, for whom are they implemented, and how to prepare teachers for equity? She went on to suggest the role of stories.

“Our brain is organised for narratives; stories connect children to families, their history, culture and language; stories provide cultural continuity and they support learning... Through ‘Self introduction: My story and lessons learned’ (as part of the teacher curriculum education in George Mason University) students get to study themselves closely... be aware of their biases...and learn from others.”

One of the major challenges for teachers today she mentioned was to welcome everybody in the classroom —children with special needs, different culture, linguistic background, ethnicity and so on. She highlighted even families need to feel welcome in the classroom. She further said that the environment needs to provide a vision for the future. Children need challenging and engaging curriculum.

Suggestions

- Integrate theory and practice— mentoring, coaching, supervision helps in developing the critical acumen of observation, analysis and planning.
- Stress on self-study — helps to examine their own story, examine biases
- Collaboration and dialogue — learning from others, learn from differing perspectives
- Learn from families—gather family stories (why, where, how these stories have come up) to use family funds of knowledge and engage families in the curriculum
- Select and examine dilemmas—are there issues of equity and social justice in this dilemma, are there opportunities for advocacy, action and change?

Dr Baela Raza Jamil posed a dilemma in the beginning, “ECCE (0-8) to love them or not? An existential issue for human kind.” She gave an overview of the ECCE situation in Pakistan. In 2009, the pre-school in Pakistan were legitimised with the coming of the National Education Policy. Since then large number of children are being registered in the pre-schools. Learning readiness has also gained momentum greatly. Early Childhood Development is an ever expanding space in Pakistan. she raised the issue of teacher preparation as cadre of professionally qualified teachers is very small.

Suggestions

- more investment in ECCE
- institutional ownership
- multi-sectoral groups
- faculty exchange within the South Asian nations
- research network among SAR nations
- develop national strategy document
- develop an annual report on ECCE such as by ASER in India

Prof. Venita Kaul and Ms Aparajita Bhargarh shared some key findings of the Impact Study. Prof. Kaul began with the conceptual framework of the on-going longitudinal study that includes participation in good quality in Early Childhood Education will lead to improved schools, readiness skills and concepts. The study looks at effects of quality variations on children going to ECCE centres in three different sectors (public, private, NGO) in three different states (Rajasthan, Assam and Andhra Pradesh) in India.

Findings from the Study

- Mostly all children in the age group of 4+ yrs were enrolled in all the three states but participation of these children in the centres was observed to be quite dismal. It is important to understand the meaning of ‘access’ not just in terms of location of the centre in the area but also consider socio-political dimensions along with the notion of quality of the programme.
- Infrastructure was not significantly associated with quality content of the programme, but learning outcomes is highly correlated with play aids.

Subsequently, the House was open for discussion. Prof. Maxine Berntsen thanked Prof. Eva for pointing out that children-at-risk are at risk of being over identified and not being welcomed in the classroom. Ms Keerti Jayaram mentioned that it is not just important to advocate for ECCE but also focus on transition from ECCE to primary school. Prof. Hridaykant Dewan suggested the panellists involved in the on-going longitudinal study to look at the facilities available and constraints faced by teachers. Prof. Hirokazu added that the longitudinal study must also look at what contextual factors predict quality in each sector.

In closing remarks, Prof. Shyam Menon observed that questions related to education have undergone a change — from whether children are going to school in 1970s to what kind of school

children go to now. 'Quality' therefore is of major concern and must be delivered in all aspects and processes of education for all children.

PARALLEL SESSION

A. Inclusion and Equity

The reformation of education and care cannot reach its full potential without awareness of and action towards inclusion and equity. This session discussed the need for inclusion, intervention, child labor, trafficking, support in emergency contexts, equity and support for individuals with disAbilities. The common thread that ran through the presentation was the urgency for awareness, implementation and action. Each presenter profoundly acknowledged that those of marginalized voices must be included in the discourse of education and care with utmost intention.

Chair: Ms Lieke van de Wiel, UNICEF ROSA Education Advisor

Presenters:

- Mr. Raja Pratap Kumar, Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty, Govt of India, Andhra Pradesh
- Dr Kathy Cologon, Lecturer, Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia
- Dr. Geeta Menon, Consultant, UNICEF
- Mr Sanjeev Rai, National Manager–Education, Save the Children, India

Some of the programmes described enhancing livelihood opportunities for people with disAbilities and migrant children. Project manager for The Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty, **Mr Raja Pratap Kumar**, specifically discussed how the integration of people with disAbilities, early intervention, rehabilitative services, and provision of livelihood support for those with special needs are achieved through self-help groups and community resource persons (CRPs). Mr. **Sanjeev Rai**, described how strategy rights programming through the creation of crèches, bridge course centers, community capacity building and networking and alliance building helped ameliorate the suffering of migrant children working in brick kilns.

A presentation on Early Childhood and Social Inclusion opened up by stating that social inclusion is more than access. It is a universal provision benefitting all children and not a separate or segregate provision. **Dr. Kathy Cologon** contrasted the terms of segregation, integration and inclusion. Segregation is a classroom of only individuals with special needs. Integration is when individuals with special needs are present but not participating or engaged in the curriculum like their classmates. Inclusion is when adaptations and accommodations are made within a classroom to ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to the curriculum as their classmates. The danger is when we settle on segregation and/or integration and call it inclusion.

Dr. Geeta Menon explained that South Asia is a highly complex situation compounded with high susceptibility to natural disasters, endemic wars, conflicts, under development, poverty and exclusion. Internal displacement and forced migration that leads to loss of citizenship, entitlements and even basic human rights of justice and education was another issue highlighted in her presentation.

Recommendation

- Convergence of entire systems at village, mandal and district levels
- Coordination among departments, civil society, and decentralized structures
- Communities can play important role in the reformation of education and care.

The session concluded with the acknowledgment that though thought there are many initiatives being taken in this field, equity has not fully achieved and there is a greater need to focus on this issue.

B. Teacher Preparation for ECCE

Teachers play a critical role in motivating young children to learn to the best of their ability. The Teachers need to have the necessary knowledge, skills and disposition. For the same, they need to be professionally trained to interact with children with care, sensitivity and have knowledge of age appropriate activities and different needs of children; and also conduct assessments. During this session presenters from teacher training institutions shared their experiences and discussed the challenges in teacher preparation.

Chair: Prof. A.K. Sharma, Former Director, National Council for Educational Research and Training, Delhi

Presenters:

- Ms. K. Lakshmi, Chairperson, SRCECE AMS, Hyderabad
- Mr. Mohammad Mohsin, Early Childhood Development Specialist, UNICEF Bangladesh
- Dr. Venita Kaul, Director, Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development
- Ms. Swati Bawa, Project Associate, Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development, Ambedkar University, Delhi

Prof. A.K. Sharma began by laying stress on the importance of first three years of child's life. He went on to bring to notice the apathy of teachers towards teaching and also status of teachers in our society which has been reduced to the level of slum-dwelling.

Ms. K. Lakshmi spoke on issues and challenges in teacher preparation. A general apathy of how society perceives teachers and teachers as a professional group points at the quality of teacher preparation programmes which in turn gets reflected in children's care, protection, safety, nutrition, health, and education. To show support to the need to foster teacher preparation she then quoted Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: 'the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration' whether be public or private institution which deals with children.

Worrying trends

ECE is suffering from poorly trained professionals because goal of childcare is seen merely as custodian care and preparation for school readiness. Private sector is a major employer in ECE and is not under any regulation in India. Most of the employers are not interested in specially trained workers, so potential workers have no incentives in getting trained. Because of this trend institutions or courses which are offering with specialised training and for longer duration are as a result closing down. Government approved programmes which are for a year or more duration are gradually closing down.

There is no adequate attention given on training ECE professionals. There is not enough empirical evidence on the components of quality teacher training programmes for young children to affect a change in the existing curriculum of teacher preparation. There is wide gap between field and training (training which in existing structure is completely didactic), because of which teachers are not at all prepared when they reach the early childhood education centres. The teacher training programmes are not within the higher learning institutes because of which research and evidence based education of teachers, and thereby understanding of children is completely missing.

Recommendations

- need for large numbers of persons with different specialization
- need for standardized training curriculum
- need for systematic supervision and accreditation
- need for training of trainers

Mr. Mohmmad Mohsin talked on 'Teacher's Preparation: Bangladesh Experiences'. At first he argued for 'teacher preparation' rather than 'teacher education'. He gave a brief historical perspective to the initiatives taken up by the UNICEF. Bangladesh did not have comprehensive systematic ECCE services, lack of co-ordination between various agencies and stakeholders, and lack of coverage. So UNICEF initiated to engage people from the community to reach out to the marginalized groups and disadvantaged geographical areas. The teachers/care givers were hence not very well educated and equipped to provide quality services to the young children. But it did not yield results due to limited number of period of training, resources, investment, and also because of teachers/care givers' belief systems which contradicted with those in the modules and training programmes.

Based on findings from local researches, engagement with international technical institutes, professionals and networks, some initiatives that provided way ahead were:

- Curriculum and materials including teacher training strategy and modules had been revised by organizations.
- Investment on teacher training and professional development increased.
- Trainers pool developed with trained and high profiled professionals
- Advanced training courses developed , organized and imparted for trainers to improve the teacher's understanding and skills
- Interaction between different organizations on teacher's professional development started.
- Short courses on ECCD for manager, supervisor and teachers developed and organized by Institute of Education and Research, Dhaka University; Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University; and some private organization like Teacher Development Initiative (TDI), Inner Force, etc
- ECD Resource Centre at IED, BRAC University established with the support of Plan International Bangladesh
- Professional and academic courses (Certificate, Diploma & Masters course) began on ECCD, at ECDRC in BRAC University
- Collaboration between government organizations and NGOs.

The third presentation was done by **Prof. Venita Kaul** and **Ms. Swati Bawa** on 'Pre-Service Teacher Education in ECCE in India – A Study'. They brought out the issue of pre-service teacher education in ECCE in India which is unequally distributed in terms of geography; rural and urban; socio-economic groups.

Findings

- Inequitable access across states—negligible number of institutions in the North East, Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, number of institutions decreasing in Maharashtra and Gujarat due to lack of regulation;
- Lax regulatory methods and norms
- Negligible involvement of higher learning institutions engaged in teacher education
- No course for teacher educators nor any induction training, curriculum involvement nor professional development
- Curriculum for teacher preparation programmes varied since many do not conform to norms set by NCTE

Recommendations

- Enhancing quality of teacher education
- Upgrade curriculum
- Improve practice teaching
- Strengthen teacher educators' capacity
- Strengthen regulatory norms and mechanisms
- Distance education to be made available for teacher education but with innovative and creative use of technology
- Review/ assessment of the study centers to be conducted on regular basis
- NCTE to lay down rules and specifications

C. Early Learning Standards, Measurement and Regulation

Chair: Prof. Nirmala Rao, Child Development, University of Hong Kong

Presenters:

- Prof. Nirmala Rao, , Child Development, University of Hong Kong
- Dr. Monimalika Day, Associate Professor, Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development, Ambedkar University, Delhi
- Dr. Maxine Berntsen, Professor Emerita, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad, India

Prof. Nirmala Rao began with the definition given by ARNEC on Early Learning Standards (ELS), which is— “what children know and what they can do”. ELS are not evaluation of the programme or standards for the curriculum but rather standards for individual children that would guide teachers to design her classes to help children achieve those desired standards. The reason to begin with developing ELS in this region was poor retention of children in schools, high drop-out rates, and low learning achievement rates of children in this region. The seven countries included in the project to develop Early Learning Standards were Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Philippines, Thailand, Vanuatu and Vietnam. The Project was divided into three phases. Phase I was bottom-up process of selecting items, to assess where children in a population stand on the scale. The scale consisted of 100 items. Phase II consisted of a Pilot test to field test items and modify scales if required.

Dr. Maxine Berntsen began by sharing her experience of the process of development of the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha Approach (PSS Approach) to early literacy. Her plea was not to overlook the promising work that is being undertaken in beginning reading and writing by a number of small organisations under the pressure to implement large programmes to cater to the problem of reading failure. She started a full-time Marathi-medium school named Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan in 1987 and defined the PSS Approach to Reading in collaboration with Datta Ahivale.

The three components of the PSS Approach to early literacy

- A systematic teaching of sound-letter correspondences — in other words, decoding, or phonics
- Writing down experiences narrated by the children and then helping them read the written account (Sylvia Ashton Warner called it organic reading)
- Reading of additional material: stories, books, poems, etc.

Dr. Monimalika Day brought up the challenges and dilemmas in developing Early Learning Standards. She chalked out the challenges:

- Standards have a tendency to become rigid, culturally and educationally narrow
- May posit responsibility on children rather than on programme
- Risk of labelling children; children from cultural and linguistic disadvantages at higher risk of being labelled

- Should ELS be categorized by domains?
- What are the other better ways to categorize?

Dilemmas

- Is it helpful to have age distinctions in Standards?
- Is it helpful to show linear progression when we know that development is not linear?
- Is a detailed ELS helpful for anganwadi workers who have limited training in early childhood development?
- How do we address variation in culture, language, and socio-economic background?

Mr. Alisher Umarov elaborated the tool Holistic Early Childhood Development Indicators (HECDI) from UNESCO. A holistic set of indicators is needed to describe all the influences on children's development to inform policies at the national level, available services and family/child characteristics which is integrated in HECDI. Six areas mentioned in the tool are health, nutrition, poverty, parenting, social protection and education. 24 indicators developed from these six categories.

Day 3

Session I – From Practices towards Policy: A Grounded Approach

Third day began with sharing of experiences by practitioners through poster session. The session was a window to showcase best practices in various essential aspects in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) with rights based focus. Posters from different countries (India, Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Bangladesh) were put up on the very first day to engage practitioners, experts, bureaucrats and academicians in a dialogue to share and learn from each other over the three days.

The session was organised into three themes —early learning and child development initiatives; early literacy; children at risk; and quality assessment of programmes in operation.

Chair: Ms. Anju Sharma, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of Gujarat

Expert Panellists:

- Dr. Monimalika Day, Associate Professor, CECED, Ambedkar University, Delhi
- Dr. Maxine Berntsen, Professor Emerita, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad
- Dr. Eva Thorpe, Associate Professor, George Mason University, U.S.A

i. Early Learning and Child Development Initiatives

❖ **Md. Tariqul Islam, Early Learning for Child Development Project**, Bangladesh, presented ‘The Early Learning for Child Development Project’. The initiative was sponsored by the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs Bangladesh and technical assistance was given by UNICEF. Six districts were covered under this project.

Project Strategy to achieve outputs, outcomes and behaviour change

- Promote early learning centre as an entry point and use existing program structures;
- Mainstream home based early stimulation and learning into caregivers’ training;
- Integrate safety and protection activities into the project;
- Strengthen advocacy, social mobilization and behaviour change in communication activities;
- Build the capacity of national resource institutions and other implementing organizations;
- Promote partnerships and networking;
- Scale-up centre based early learning through innovations and piloting.

Implementation Mechanism

- Institute of Child and Mother Health (ICMH): mainstream ECD into the medical education system and promote safe child friendly learning environment in fixed health facilities
- National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT): mainstream ECD into the regular training programme of frontline workers, paramedics and health managers
- Integrated Community Development Project (ICDP): establish centre based early learning through existing infrastructure
- BRAC: promote early learning opportunities and expand school readiness programme

- Grameen Shiksha of GB: promote early learning opportunities and expand coverage of school readiness programme
- *City corporations* of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi: establish centre based early learning in urban slum areas through existing infrastructures
- Bangladesh Shishu Academy: establish centre based early learning in Tea Gardens, Central Prisons, Brothels, Remote Island/ through existing Crèches/Community Centers infrastructure based in the areas.

Major Output of the Project

- Center based Early Learning (Play Group and Pre-school)
- Promotion of interactive care and safe child friendly learning environment in homes and communities
- Advocacy, social mobilization and program communication
- Development and strengthening of early learning components of partners' systems and structures

Contribution to National ECD/ECE Initiatives

- initiated the process of developing a Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy under the direct guidance of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.
- Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) document was prepared and validation process is underway;
- contributed to the development of an Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education, which was approved by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education in 2008. The Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education is a guideline for implementing education programs for children between 4 to 6 years of age and it provides common standards for all preschool programs.

- ❖ **Dr. Sucheta Jasrai, UNICEF, Gujarat**, shared about 'ECE Initiative in Gujarat, India'. The initiative was a collaborative effort of UNICEF and the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Gujarat. Only in this state Early Childhood Development falls under Right To Education.

The Initiatives

- Early Learning Standards and Indicators: A 23 items checklist of Standards and Indicators for 3 to 6 years children of Gujarat was prepared. The domains of development identified were: Physical; Social and emotional; Approaches towards learning; Cognition and general knowledge; Language, literacy and communication; Values; and Creative arts.
- A module for anganwadi workers, a parent advocacy booklet, a brochure, flier and posters for ECE were developed for building capacities of personnel and supporting them in transacting a good program.
- The ECE kit consisting of learning materials and story books was distributed to 11,727 anganwadis of six districts (Banaskantha, Bhavnagar, Kutch, Patan, Rajkot, and Vadodara) of Gujarat State. A set of two Activity books for school readiness concepts were developed and

are used by over 2, 00,000 children. This has led to increased and regular attendance of children; and a happier and less burdened AWW.

- In all 704 POs, CDPOs and supervisors were trained as Master trainers.

Draft ECE policy submitted to the State is being deliberated currently. A chapter on ECE has been included in the Primary Teacher Training Course from the year 2012-13. The Gujarat State's rules on RTE now include ECE (rules notified on Feb 2, 2012).

- ❖ **Ms Anjali Gokhale**, *Centre for Learning Resources (CLR)*, Maharashtra presented on 'Fulfilling the Young Child's Right to Development and Education: an Action Research Project in ECE within ICDS Anganwadis in Dharni Block of Amravati District in Maharashtra'. The project is being conducted in Dharni, in collaboration with the government of Maharashtra. They conceptualized a new decentralized model, involving the Block Resource Co-ordinator and ICDS supervisor.

The main intervention was in terms of training and capacity-building of various groups:

- On-site observation/demonstration sites or labs were established for supervisors to encourage good ECE practices. These are also used further to train anganwadi workers.
 - New Teaching-Learning Material that addressed the gaps in previous material was given to anganwadi workers. Emphasis is also given to the use of material available around them. They are also encouraged to make material.
 - Community members visit the labs to understand good ECE practices. They also take practical sessions in the anganwadis with the children.
- ❖ **Ms Varna Sri Raman**, *Sesame Workshop India*, presented on 'Measuring School Readiness: The Sesame Workshop India Experience'. The population included in the project was around 4500 children in Mumbai. Inputs were given in the form of:
 - package that comprised training and capacity building, material etc.
 - an innovation in this respect was a call-in/call out IVRS system that the anganwadi teacher could call and get feedback or specific instructions on using the material given.

The results

- Twice the number of children who had ECD exposure was school-ready, than those who had not.
 - A follow-up study was done with the same children in grade I after a year. 80% were still school ready. So, it is sustainable to a great extent; though the effect of school-readiness dwindles, it has a tangible effect on later school life.
- ❖ **K. Vaijayanti**, *Akshara Foundation*, shared the poster on 'Akshara Foundation: Creating an Eco-system for Effective Engagement with the ICDS system'. The intervention is visualized as an eco-system that is a sustainable model.

Areas of Intervention

- A scientifically developed curriculum that addresses gaps in previous material given to anganwadi workers. It helps the worker engage in various activities for cognitive/motor skill development with children and school-readiness activities.
- Capacity building of anganwadi workers, helpers and independent balwadi workers. It was done through a cascading model where supervisors were trained; sometimes, workers were trained directly. Anganwadi helpers, who could be called upon to engage with the children in the absence of the worker were trained too.
- Learning standards were assessed by trained anganwadi workers.
- Community strengthening measures included supporting an inactive Bal Vikas Samiti by giving them kits and training them to plan the functioning of anganwadis under their supervision.

ii. *Early Literacy*

❖ **Ms. Sandhya**, *Pratham Books*, shared about creating joyful learning material, emphasis is on early readers, while working closely with grass-root organizations. Focus is to make available good quality learning material at affordable prices. Material is provided to the children in their own familiar language; hence there publications are printed in many regional languages. Various innovations include:

- Creative story cards in A4 size which costs just Rs 2. This initiative has helped millions of early readers the govt and NGOs too.
- Stories in a bag. Around 100 books fit into the bag which is portable and carried into the classroom by a teacher.
- Stories on a sachet
- They are working on collaborating with storytelling champions.

❖ **Ms. Geetanjali**, *Quality Education Support Trust*, Maharashtra, presented on 'Assessing Print and Phonemic Awareness'. Their work is in the tribal belt where the children have no access to any newspaper or books. The tool developed by them focuses on print and phonemic awareness in regional language which is closely linked to success in reading. She shared about other components of the programme which are to help children modelling of writing through Bal Mitra, encouraging children to segment and blend sounds. They worked in two anganwadis for six months. Because of impressive results through their intervention they are going to expand their activities to 40 aaganwadis.

❖ **Ms. Manjri Nimbkar**, *Pragat Shikshan Sanstha*, Maharashtra talked on 'Learning Environment and Literacy Development—Pragat Shikshan Sanstha'.

Important components of their programme

- Capacity building of teachers —to change the role of a teacher to that of a facilitator.
- Workshops and meetings with parents— invite parents to come and visit the classroom to observe and later exchange their views with the teacher. Parents are called every month to

discuss the progress of the child through the documented work of the child done over a month.

- Stimulating and challenging learning environment—art and writing material is made available to the children all through the day. Children have access to spaces in the classroom and school, and time in the day’s schedule which allows them to interact and share with each other. That helps in building self-confidence and social skills.
- Research and documentation — teachers are encouraged to do action research.

❖ **Ms Amita Govinda**, *Santa Maria School*, talked about children’s drawings which tell stories. The question she posed was whether we listen to those stories. Drawings capture and reveal the inner world of the child. Drawings are a way to tell the parents to not to hurry up their development. Drawings by children on self and family reveal their personal space and the changing environment around them over a period of time. The need in Early Childhood Care and Education is to listen to the narratives of the little ones.

❖ **Mr Shahidullah Sharif**, *Bangladesh*, presented ‘A Case Study of Mother tongue-based Multilingual Education in Pre-primary to Early Primary Stage’. Bangladesh has 45 ethnic minority groups which have separate dialect and cultures. So, the aim of the project was to understand key features of mother tongue based multilingual education for Chakma Children so that they have smooth transition from Preprimary to Early Primary level. The pilot project follows the Teaching-Learning Method. It includes Story track and Primer track.

Strengths and practices of the project

- Exciting course duration of six years –from pre-primary to grade 5
- Teaching-learning method is based on peer learning and action based learning
- The project maintains a language progression. There is a gradual bridging from mother language to other national language.
- Varied material development done by community people. The material is finalized and printed after consultancy and editing is done by the community people.
- Teachers are recruited from within the community.
- Trainers and resource persons are also from the community.
- Training and refresher training is a regular feature.

Challenges faced

- Lack of trainers in Chakma and other languages.
- Material editing experts are not available at times.
- Teaching English language in upper grade is still a challenge.

❖ **Mr Karma Gaylek**, *Bhutan*, presented on ‘ECCD Communication for Development and Early Stimulation Intervention through Health Services’. ECCE programme that is running in Bhutan is being done in collaboration with UNICEF and the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education Bhutan. He shared their experience in Bhutan:

- Health services component is a part of ECCE.
- Through health services a platform was provided for integration of ECCE services.

- Material was developed for children and the caregivers. They are prepared keeping in mind those with lowest literacy level. They are distributed through health centres, which have served as an efficient way of promoting information.

He concluded by sharing that they are working towards making the programme sustainable by integrating early stimulation, in-service training programme of health workers in the various Ministries of Bhutan.

Dr Maxine Berntsen concluded the session by laying emphasis on converging theory and practice. She said that discussion on multilingualism is imperative and it needs a greater understanding to reach out to all the children, especially those who come from the marginalized society. She stressed on sharing our knowledge with each other and the need to be candid about the problems and challenges faced on the field in the region to find ways to tackle them. She also maintained that there is a need to find ways to open up channels of communication with the government so that dialogue continues to foster environment conducive to young children's development.

iii. Children at Risk

❖ **Ms. Shubra Chatterjee**, *Vikramshila Education Resource Society*, presented poster on 'Seeds for Life-Long Learning'. It runs a special programme called Naba Disha for children aged 3 to 18, **following a life span approach to education** - "from school readiness to job readiness". This programme runs in collaboration with the Kolkata Police, serving hard to reach populations residing in crime prone areas.

The programme lays great emphasis on teacher- child interaction. It believes this aspect is the key to ensure success of this approach. Three dimensions around which the interactions are based on are:

- Stimulation
- Sensitivity
- Autonomy

Empathetic understanding forms the basis of all our interactions. This understanding is built on the knowledge of the needs of children passing through a particular phase of development. Appropriate materials are made available to children, who are then encouraged to explore and exercise their choice, and to express their thoughts and feelings on experiences acquired. Children enjoy autonomy to move at their own pace and be guided by their interests, and at the same time are also implicated in the setting of rules and solution of conflicts. The **three key strategies** adopted are a) The range of activities that are selected should be developmentally appropriate b) individuality of each child should be respected and c) the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of children should be valued.

❖ **Ms. Ruchika Nigam**, *India Vision Foundation*, presented some of the features of the programme for young children under age 6. IVF initiated a welfare program for women and children in Tihar Jail where a creche facility is managed by IVF and a vocational training program is carried out for the female inmates.

Features of the programme for the young children

- **Facilities in the creche** — Orientation and sensitization on ECCD; needs of Early Childhood and techniques of early care; holistic Development; age appropriate activities; class room management; health and nutrition; and techniques of documentation for the creche workers.
- **Crèche Training Project** - Intensive training programme making professional crèche workers out of the mothers in the prison. Mobile Crèche partners to train the workers.
- **Residential Schooling** - IVF undertakes the identification of children in need of further schooling from crèche and when referred to by the prison inmates. As a continuation of the in-house Crèche Project, IVF introduced the Children of Vulnerable Families Project (CVF) in 1995. The general aim of this project has been to facilitate the social, physical and psychological rehabilitation , i.e. Access, Equity and (Re)Inclusion of these children.
- **School Visits** - We supervise and evaluate the performance of the children. We collect feedback from their school authorities, regular school visits are arranged (once a week). During these school visits IVF organizes - individual and group sharing sessions, the distribution of useful articles (books, clothes etc.) Additionally, time is devoted also towards group activities that induce the physical and psychological rejuvenation of the children. We find these methods vital in attaining the socialization and personal development of these children.
- **Home Visits** - Regular home visits and follow-ups help to keep in touch with the parents as well as the children to make useful interventions more meaningful.
- **Prison Visits** - Under the CVF project, counselors organize parent-child meetings inside prison as well as parent-counselor meetings in order to share important matter or suggestions regarding the betterment of children.
- **Celebrations and Outings** - Providing entertainment and giving these children a break from their day-to-day activities, IVF also organizes festival celebrations and leisure/educational outings.
- **Workshops and Seminars** - seminars and workshops are designed to motivate the children to polish their natural and inherent potential. These seminars/workshops aim at offering these children a platform otherwise unavailable to them in regular classroom set-ups.
- **Parents-Teacher Meeting** - Parent-Teacher meetings are organized twice a year with the intention of showcasing IVF's most recent activity drives as well as inform them about their child's progress. Their respective roles in promoting their child's educational development are highlighted and center staged during these meeting.
- **Medical Check-ups** - Organized on a monthly basis with the help of partner schools. Appropriate action is taken when necessary. In case of emergency and serious medical conditions IVF facilitates the hospitalization of the child and intervenes accordingly.
- **Education beyond Plus-two** - Vocational Training and/or Distance Education for higher studies with scholarship and placements is provided.

❖ **Mr Najeebullah Musafir Zada**, *Child-fund, Afghanistan*, presented the project undertaken in a refugee camp in eastern Afghanistan, one of the most difficult areas to live in today's times.

Child Fund is working with the most deprived returnee communities who, upon return to Afghanistan from Pakistan, settle in places that lack access to basic services including access to health, education and water. The programmes are for children 0-3 and 3-5 years old. Interventions for children aged 0-3 engage parents with practical inputs on age-appropriate care and nurturing practices for their very young children, which include raising awareness on the importance of positive parent-child relationships, bonding and attachment, healthy brain development and early detection of possible developmental delays in a child's growth and development.

Sheik Mesri New Township, Afghanistan, is ethnically diverse (Pashto, Tajik, and Pashai), and ChildFund includes all communities in the design and implementation of the project.

Main Interventions

- Nutrition and education to adolescent and young mothers having children under age 3 years old.
- Awareness on ECD and the importance of early childcare to mothers, fathers and caregivers.
- Mobilize and motivate parents and families to access to ECD services.
- Counselling and support mothers, fathers and caregivers towards improved knowledge, behaviour and practices on proper childcare and development.
- Advocating through government and partners for sustained efforts around ECD.
- Engaged community and government support for ECD.

iv. Quality Assessment of Programmes in Operation

- ❖ **Ms Kanitha Kongrukreatiyos**, *Asia-Pacific Regional Network in Early Childhood (ARNEC)*, presented some noteworthy ECCD practices initiatives in the South Asian region. ARNEC documents the work done by noteworthy ECCD programmes to help in the development of inspection modules. The field-workers are research fellows who subsequently give recommendations on how to run the programme effectively. The research method is a mix of qualitative tools like interviews, group discussions, observations and desk research. Features of noteworthy practice are: address community needs, promotes a holistic development, engages parents and community, cost-effective and sustainable, and reaches/impacts disadvantaged or vulnerable groups. Noteworthy practices rather than being very academic, formal they are community-based and decentralized; they involve intensive training for community workers. Every year the project focuses on a different domain of practice. Eg. 2010 was devoted to inclusion; 2011 to 0-3 years old programmes. Sustainability appears to be a common challenge.
- ❖ **Ms Aparajita Bhargarh**, CECEd, Ambedkar University, Delhi, presented Early Childhood Education Quality Assessment Scale (ECEQAS) developed by the team. It is a tool to assess quality in early childhood programmes. The tool is divided into three parts — detailed observation of the programme (in every interval of ten minutes); rating scale on the centre which includes three domains (infrastructure; learning/play aids; classroom management and organization); and rating scale on the programme which includes six domains (personal care, hygiene and habit formation; language and reasoning experiences; fine and gross motor activities; creative activities; social development; and teacher's disposition). Based on the first part the researchers rate the centre

and programme. There are a total of 63 items. Reliability of the tool is high and validation is in progress.

❖ **Ms Meenakshi Dogra**, CECED, Ambedkar University, Delhi, shared the ongoing study on the right to Early Childhood Development which looks at all provisions from prenatal to 8 years that ensure enabling and stimulating environment for children and address their developmental and educational needs in an integrated manner. It aims to understand and convey the multidimensionality and complexity of the concept of 'early childhood development' which must necessarily follow the life cycle approach. The study reviewed 16 laws, 9 policies, 10 programmes and case laws to arrive at recommendations to fill gaps in the policy and implementation level in the area of early childhood. It was found that:

- some entitlements have weak or no support through laws, policies and programmes;
- some entitlements are provided for by laws or policies but not operationalized through any programme;
- some entitlements are provided for by laws, policies and programmes, but poorly implemented;
- some entitlements are provided for by laws, policies and programmes broadly but lack specific details; and
- some entitlements are provided for by laws, policies and programmes in an effective manner.

Dr. Eva Thorp in her closing remarks said:

“it is important to reach out to the most marginalized by collaborating with new parties (such as the criminal justice system) to formulate new practices.”

She laid stress on professional development of teachers to welcome all children including those from the most marginalized section of our society. A centralized system of delivery has not proved much help so different models of decentralized delivery system must be imagined. Many innovative initiatives have been undertaken in this direction in this region, it is important to document and share those efforts to learn from each other and help many other children who are still deprived of their entitlements.

Ms. Anju Sharma concluded the session by pointing out the need to identify age-specific developmental needs for children so that excessive and unnecessary input is not given. Reaching out to the last child is most crucial for any programme or policy. She cautioned, “Clash of values between the centre and community or parents should be avoided.” It may require fine-tuning of parental behavior. She laid stress on the need to support grass-root level workers in terms of resource materials and their training.

Session II – Parallel Discussion

A. Partnerships with Private Sector and Community for ECCE

The session proposed to discuss the need of establishing and developing a partnership with private sector and community for the effective development and implementation of ECCE programs. The session further scans the coverage of private sector for ECCE across countries. The session tried to lay down specific recommendations for improving the coverage of ECCE by involving various sectors and through regularized monitoring of the quality procedures conveyed by these sectors.

- **Chair:** Mr. Manohar Prasad, Director of Centre for Development and Research (CDR), Andhra Pradesh
- **Presenters:**
 - Dr. Madhav Chavan, CEO of Pratham Education Foundation
 - Dr. Lalit Pande, Director, UttarakhandSevaNidhi, Almora
 - Ms. Sashwati Banerjee, Sesame Workshop, India
 - Dr. Suman Sachdeva, Technical Director, Education, CARE (India)

Mr. Manohar Prasad introduced the key speakers and also laid out his concerns “How can we carry the recommendations of this conference and this session, to the classroom?”

Dr. Madhav Chavan started his presentation by stating that one cannot involve institutions but the involvement of a person can lead to substantial change. He mentioned the name of Mr. Wagud who helped Pratham start its initial preschool programmes. Dr. Chavan then expressed the growing interest of corporates and young professionals to participate in educational ventures. But a lot of them are unable to do so considering the barriers of rules and regulation set by the government. The underlying principle of his argument was to remove barriers and create opportunities for any and every one including governments, corporates or individuals to participate in social and educational change. He also suggested that the government should reform some of the regulations around donation and investments to be tax free. He started that it is important to facilitate a free-flow of funds for developmental reforms. He also expressed that how technical knowledge of corporates and other knowledge-based companies can be used to create content at a low cost or even cost-free. He emphasized that the area of content creation for children have to be thoughtful, and new communication mediums such as that of cell-phones and television should be used to initiate changes at the grass-root level.

Suggestions

- Crucial need for universities to play an active role in the field of content creation and delivery
- need for public and private sectors to come together to devise systematic solutions in the field of education
- need to indigenize the content for children using local languages, folklore, lullabies

Dr. Lalit Pande talked about the exemplary community-driven model run by him at the grass-root level. He started by questioning the need for community-driven models and explained how high-level policies and huge investments have not shown any substantial results. He also emphasized that initiatives at the village level should not be treated as research extensions or deeply stratified romantic concepts. Community-driven models are a mix of practical work and classroom learning, hence the relationship between action and learning is the key. Dr. Pande strongly felt that core group leadership of impeccable character with no hidden agenda or personal interests as the bases of his community driven model. He further explained about the local context of Uttarakhand and challenges faced by the people which further highlighted the need for pre-school education. He shared that his model is based on the needs of the local people and also with the understanding what they can do, who they are and how they can be trusted. They started by identifying volunteers from the community who were provided with comprehensive training and orientation towards play-way learning. Another significant process integral to their initiative was the involvement of parents and community mobilization. With the help of this process they were able to set up self-help groups, balwadis and pre-schools in Uttarakhand where there were no education initiatives two decades ago. The impact of their program led to a sense of community ownership and emancipation of women through their involvement in issues related to education, sanitation and alcoholism. Dr. Pande also clarified the fact that their role in the intervention is only as facilitators as they function by reinforcing the norms of equality, inclusion and building strong networks among the villages. He also pointed out how most of the NGO's are dependent on either the government or on foreign funds and this can be changed by adopting people oriented approach with the participation of all stakeholders. He concluded by emphasizing the fact that the responsibility of providing EFA and ECCE should also be taken up by civil societies and not just the state. He also added that there is a crucial need to bridge the gap between the government and the village.

Ms. Sashwati Banerjee initially introduced the "Sesame Street" initiatives in US and how it has led to quality in ECCE. According to her "If you can hold children's attention, you can educate them." She then talked about the program "Gali Gali Sim Sim" and its collaboration with public and private sectors. She also stated the argument that most NGOs frown upon profit making institutions. In their case, "profit is not a bad word", explained Dr. Banerjee. She shared that the mission of their program is to help children reach their highest potential. She talked about various programs by Sesame going on in different countries and the strategies adopted by them in order to collaborate with the government to align their content and curriculum with the country's educational framework. She raised the issue of teaching children through media with bases on methodical research studies, as they were able to observe and record impact on young children's learning outcomes and social behavior. She stated the challenges faced in India starting from access, quality, limited funding and less awareness. She also mentioned how CSR in India is at a nascent stage. In India their program has three means i.e. TV, radio and digital media. They have partnerships with government, private and civil sector. In the community, they provide digital content at low cost which includes radiophones, community radios and cell phones. Their program is also spread to government pre schools, NGO run schools, franchise pre schools and low cost affordable private schools. They are also working in partnership with Pratham Education Foundation and Delhi government schools and have recorded improvement in literacy scores of children. In Bangladesh they also have rickshaw viewings in media dark communities. Dr. Banerjee concluded by sharing

lessons and challenges faced by them and also suggested the need to make more investment in order to improve quality.

Dr. Suman Sachdeva shared the Integrated Approach to Early Childhood Development adopted by them. She said that ECE interventions by CARE are small scale and they use intensive strategy. They use an “Essential ECD package” which aims to provide holistic support to children and their caregivers by addressing all the domains of development. She considered partnership with corporates as an important component. They generally follow a donor driven approach. She informed the group that this essential package of services has been applied in various countries. She also said that the main role of CARE is to build understanding on issues and to take the strategies further. According to her the integrated approach leads to convergence and partnership with the community and between the sectors. The assumption behind the integrated approach is to bring in interdependency of the developmental domains. Further she also added that early intervention is important as it leads to economic strengthening but nutrition also plays a crucial role as it facilitates the growth of the child. She suggested that integration of all the domains i.e. nutrition, education, social, economic development and collaboration between government and civil society are essential premises of a successful integrated approach. Some of the key strategies adopted by CARE (India) are measurement of impact on children’s physical, socio-emotional & cognitive development, empowering caregivers & communities, enhancing parenting skills, improving household income security, building capacity of child care centers and so on. She concluded by highlighting the areas of impact which includes food and nutrition, child development, economic strengthening, child rights /protection and health.

Mr. Monohar Prasad towards the end of the session raised many relevant issues that came up during the discussion. One of the issues he talked about is the failure of the delivery system of India and how education is one of them. He expressed that presently the government chooses to be owners and not participants, whereas they should be participants in people’s plan of action. He strongly suggested to the group that litigation should be filed against the low quality of education and everyone sitting in the room should be the ones to initiate this action. He gave an example of a case study from Andhra Pradesh where tribal communities have created self-help groups which run balwadi’s (preschools) in the village in order to bridge the gap between home environment and school. He said that the preschools run by local women are considered to be safe place for children while mothers go for work. He also added that, “Being poor is not being helpless. He concluded by saying that ‘when someone can provide an impetus in getting the community together for a common cause, only then can social change be inclusive and participatory.”

The House was open for discussion. Few of the issues that were discussed revolved around government’s priorities and role of the state in providing quality education to children. The discussion further progressed to the rights of tax payers to demand the proper utilization of resources and an activism on the part of the civil society to initiate systemic change. It was also suggested that corporate sector should incorporate child care facilities into their structure. The session ended on a brilliant note of ownership among people and not merely depending on the government to provide rights and facilities.

B. Financing ECCE—Issues and Challenges

Poor allocation of finance at national and state level budget, and also poor use of the allocated budget cripples the early childhood care and education services. To critically look at the present situation the session was organized.

Chair: Prof. R. Govinda, Vice Chancellor, National University of Education Planning and Administration, New Delhi

Presenters: Dr. Deepa Sankar, Senior Economist, The World Bank, New Delhi

Dr. Madhumita Purkayastha, Co-ordinator, Children and Governance, HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, New Delhi

Dr. Shailendra Sigdel, Regional Statistical Advisor, UNESCO

Dr. Deepa Sankar began her address by stating that data on financing is scant, especially in South Asian countries, so she stated that she would focus on several key questions that need to be answered with regard to financing. To maximize returns from the allocated budget it is important to have an outcome / results based approach. And these outcomes in ECCE is that all children should have the opportunity to reach their full potential in terms of physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development / skills. Therefore, finance must cater to activities:

- physical facilities;
- enabling materials;
- teachers and their development;
- curriculum and material development;
- programme management;
- community mobilization;
- monitoring; and
- nutrition supplement.

Questions that need to be thought about with respect to financing

- Should the centre allocate funds or should it be done at the district/sub-district or taluk level?
- Should teacher-provisioning be done at centrally or not?
- Where do funds for specific programs come from – the centre or states?
- Is financing adequate for access, quality, support processes and monitoring?
- Is financing ultimately reaching the disadvantaged?
- Are there capital investments or recurring investments?
- Is non-governmental financing complementary or competing and how free or accessible is it?
- Are the correct components of ECCE being funded?

To adopt a transparent budget process and to ensure that burden of finance is equitably distributed across various segments of society she suggested Systems Approach for Better Education Results

(SABER). It is useful and pertinent, knowing that ECCE in this region suffers from poor allocation, under spending and poor distribution of resources.

To push her case for the need to invest more in ECCE, she presented a chart which showed highest cumulative brain growth in children between ages 0 to 5 years compared to other age groups but ironically lowest amount spent on their development.

Dr. Madhumita Purkayastha gave an overview of child budgeting in India. Her organisation, HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, has been working in the field of child budget analysis since 2000. The organization also has been working on advocacy to establish budget for child at the national level. The aim was to influence planning. Budget for child finally became formalized in the budget of 2007. Then welfare schemes for children were provisioned. Budget for child is necessary because children's rights need to be protected – namely, their education, health and protection have to be given attention through specific schemes. Major hurdle in child budget analysis is to separate schemes for children from schemes for mothers; and to discern budget allocation for various components in large schemes. According to official declaration of state budgets, out of the total budget for children, the expenditure on education is the highest (49.05%) and protection the lowest (1.08%). The problem of under-spending adds to this. In spite of such low expenditure, protection had highest under-spending. This can be seen in schemes such as the International Child Protection Scheme (2007-2008) where there was no spending and in 2008-2009 40% was reported for under-spending. Also, budget for child is a mere 1.1% of the Union budget. It covers gamut of schemes from health and immunization to adoption and ICDS. All these schemes are marked by under-spending (eg. crèche scheme – over 5 years 147.25%). Through these figures, she emphasized, that political commitments have to be translated financially.

In the analysis of budgets, the organization is faced with several methodological and analytical constraints. There are few schemes that are child-specific. And of these, finding information for allocation on specific groups like girl-children is difficult. She ended by mentioning that the organization has developed software that allows tracking of money allocated and recommended that states use it to track their budgets.

Dr. Shailendra Sigdel brought out the issues and challenges in monitoring the first EFA goal – to expand and improve comprehensive ECCE, and enrolment especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Data collected from the member states shows that there has been a 100% increase in enrolment in South-Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. This increase in gross enrollment is not linear and there are huge variations across the region. Countries where Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) was low saw a high increment and countries with higher GER saw a lower increment. In gender parity there was almost no difference in the regions hence an overall improvement was observed. Dr. Sidgel proceeded to talk about the problems with unavailability of data with respect to budget allocation to educational expenditure. Again, this points to a lack of concrete financial structure in the field of education in the countries.

Issues and challenges in monitoring the first EFA goal:

- Low coverage of data including expenditure

- Not within the structure of education, so implementing it as additional programme which makes it difficult to account expenditure
- No physical facilities data at international level
- Gray line between ECCE and ECCD- Ministry is responsible for ECCE and ECCD, difficult to account only one part
- Uncoordinated interventions/monitoring at the national level
- NGOs and private sector are playing substantial role and not accounted financial contributions
- Difficult to map in International Standard Classification Education (ISCED)

Suggestion for the way forward on Early Childhood Development (ECD) monitoring

- **Identifying** common learning goals for ECD, primary and secondary such as Competency for Early Childhood (Centre for Universal Education, Brookings Institution)
- **Developing** Holistic Early Childhood Development Index (HECDI) including education, health, nutrition and protection of children from zero to eight years of age
- **Launching** regional module for effective monitoring at regional level from 2014
- **Enhancing** capacity on data collection, compiling and analysis for effective monitoring

In the discussion that followed, some of the issues that were raised from the audience included:

- Measures need to be instituted immediately to track the progress of goals (especially the EFA goals). To that effect, there is a need to understand where institutions responsible for implementation stand, along with the need to identify schemes where funds should be allocated.
- Whether data found is reliable
- Private financing is considerable, so data on it needs to be sought

In the closing remarks by **Prof. R. Govinda**, he argued that lack of clarity in advocating and demanding finance for specific component of ECCE has led to low financing.

Suggestions

- When asking for funds it is critical to be clear and specific in articulating the component in ECCE (health, education, protection and so on) in detail.
- Secondly it is essential to furnish evidences from the field for funding in that particular component of ECCE.

He concluded by saying that policy makers need concrete directives and local examples, not global initiatives. There is a need to be more systematic and analytical to improve the financing scenario.

C. Reaching the 'under 3's with Care and Early Stimulation

The session discussed the significance and importance of reaching the under threes, 'at risk' children, and challenges and possibilities in reaching the under threes. Many speakers profoundly recommended that early childhood care and stimulation should begin at conception due to the fact that child brain development is most rapid and vulnerable from conception to 5 years old.

Chair: Ms. Mina Swaminathan, ECD Expert

Presenters:

- Dr Christine Powell, Professor, The University of The West Indies, Jamaica
- Dr Pratibha Singhi, Chief Paediatric Neurology and Neurodevelopment, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, India
- Ms. Zakiya Kurrien, Former Director, Centre for Learning Resource, Pune, Maharashtra, India
- Ms. Mridula Bajaj, CEO, Mobile Creches, New Delhi

Prof. Pratibha Singhi stated that conception to 5 years old is a critical period marked by neuroplasticity, synaptic pruning and synaptogenesis. **Christine Powell** also drew awareness to the fact that the development of a child's brain is modified by the quality of the environment. Under nutrition, stress, poverty, domestic violence, homelessness, iron deficiency and lack of stimulation in early childhood are some of the risk factors that contribute to stunting, poor cognition and poor school achievement.

The government of India has not done much for children below the age group of 3 years except in the sector of nutrition but the efforts are not adequate due to lack of knowledge. Every third Indian child is malnourished and three fourths of Indian children are anaemic.

A presentation on the case of migrant children and Mobile Crèches by Ms. Mridula Bajaj gave importance to the condition of the migrant child and stated that these children are going nowhere, they are not physically acknowledged, and their condition is worse at construction sites as they are getting no water and food. The Mobile Crèches project has had incredible impact on its targeted population with 1200 children getting safety, security and protection. Sibling care relief is provided to 400 children and a 67% nutrition rate improvement as a result of the program.

Home based intervention was the primary topic of discussion in terms of intervention. **Dr. Zakiya Kurrien** stated the conditions that support home-based interventions included: most children are taken care of within families, the reality of resource constraints for starting day care centres, and the statistic that increased "at risk" children are younger than preschool age.

Many recommendations were shared by presenters such as centre based approaches, home visit approaches, individual counselling at health centres, parenting and community groups, and comprehensive early childhood development, health and nutrition. Interventions such as prenatal care, antenatal care, peri-natal care, early detection, and promotion of female literacy and life skills were recommendations championed throughout the session.

The session concluded with many remarks from Chairperson Ms Mina Swaminathan, ECCE Specialist. She said, “Cultures and societies are different in India but one thing is common; it is a deeply patriarchal society.” There are multiple caregivers in a family so not much burden must be put on girls/women. She drew the attention to the need to push for 6 month allowances for all women who have recently given birth so that early stimulation and quality early childhood development may be the focus of mothers during this critical period. Sheer ignorance about the feeding needs of children on the part of working mothers should be addressed. The under three stage is critical in terms of development. Building partnership with stakeholders is imperative. She concluded by articulating that infants can’t be considered in isolation and early comprehensive intervention programmes are necessary and required.

Session III. Strengthening Institutional Capacity for ECCE

Chair: Ms. Anshu Vaish, Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India

Presenters:

- Dr Shreerajan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt. of India
- Mr. Mohammad Mohsin, Early Childhood Development Specialist, UNICEF, Bangladesh
- Dr Deepa Sankar, The World Bank
- Ms Tanushree Talukdar, The World Bank
- Mr. Binay Pattanayak, Department of Women and Child Development, Govt. of Jharkhand, India
- Prof. T.S Saraswathi, formerly Professor, M.S University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India

The session commenced with opening remarks and introduction of the panelists by Dr. Monimalika Day. Further, Ms Anshu Vaish, our esteemed chairperson welcomed the guests and the presenters for the session.

The first presentation by **Dr. Deepa Sankar** discussed on the results of evaluations from the 'Bachpan Project' in Madhya Pradesh and the lessons learned. The primary focus was on Improving Early Childhood Development through Community Mobilization and Integrated Planning for Children.

In the introduction, she mentioned about the initiative to pilot the 'Bachpan' project in a block in the state of Madhya Pradesh. The project was intensive in nature and included planning for children at the grassroots level. The basic vision was seen as a 'Happy, Healthy, and Learning Child with a mission to facilitate Integrated Child Development by helping improved service delivery through coordinated and convergent approach (addressing supply side); and by promoting better child care and development practices by educating community and providing information about child care practices, outcomes and availability of services and schemes.

She addressed

- project objectives
- key features
- four stages of early childhood and the interventions including Participatory resource/service delivery mapping
- Provision of information and educating the community on child development issues, as well as managing service delivery
- Community mobilization aimed at bringing parents and service providers on common platforms to discuss child development and service delivery issues
- Formation of Village Resource Groups (VRGs) called Ekta Samuhs (unity groups) to discuss child advancement issues, identify gaps and requirements, and formalize it in the form of village plans
- Facilitation of the interactions between VRGs and block- and district-level health, nutrition and education officials, and feeding the village plans into district plans for RCH, ICDS and SSA

- Enable specific service provisions like the fixed day health checkup (a particular day in a month agreed between the health worker and the community on which the health worker visits school and the community brings the children for regular checkup)
- Provide training to frontline service providers (health workers, Anganwadi workers, and teachers) to manage service delivery records, effective service delivery, and sensitize them to ensure enhanced accountability.

The overall results indicated improvements in community's knowledge, awareness levels, and practices, on most of the outcomes/sub-stage development milestones, between base line survey and end line survey period and the improvements in project area were seen as significantly better compared to the control area. In continuation, there was discussion on the monitoring and impact evaluation being done in the project. The results from the baseline survey done in 2005-06 and the end line survey in 2009 were shared. Regular monitoring by NGOs was reported as an important feature of the project.

The inferences drawn were:

- Coordinated cross-sectoral approach in planning and implementation produced better results than when delivered in silos
- social sector outcomes are a result of a bouquet of interventions, identified in a contextual manner through participatory planning, rather than a top-down approach
- Process documentation is important and the social sector interventions involve a critical minimum gestation period for impact.

The second presentation by **Md. Mohsin** on the 'ECD Network: The Bangladesh Experience' drew the parallels of ECD network in Bangladesh as almost being parallel to ARNEC, where the ECD component is a combined forum of Government, NGO's and the UN agencies engaged in promoting early childhood development in Bangladesh.

He provided the historical background by expressing that ECCE is a relatively new concept in Bangladesh, introduced by the International agencies. Initiative was taken in 2002 to form Network of ECD stakeholders in Bangladesh with the support from UNICEF-Dhaka as an activity of the national ECD project implemented by Bangladesh Shishu Academy (the national academy for children). Further, the overall goal of BEN is seen as, to encourage and support the governmental, non-governmental, national and international organizations and partners and other relevant actors in their commitment and investment in ECD in Bangladesh.

Lastly, the key achievements of the network were shared, which included:

- Having an operational framework for pre- primary education (Bangladesh has an approved pre- school framework)
- The GO, NGO collaboration guideline
- Comprehensive ECCD Policy Framework
- Initiation of National children policy 2010
- Having Early learning Developmental Standards Document
- Implementation of Interim package on pre-primary education

- National Pre-primary Curriculum

He concluded by reflecting, **“a network in a country can influence policy planning and future perspective of the government.”**

The third presentation by **Mr. Binay Pattanayak** on ‘Towards a Preschool Learning Program in Rural Jharkhand’ started the discourse by stating, “their small story is primarily of convergence in a new state despite political instability.” He appreciated the Jharkhand government for carrying out the significant work in the area of preschool education despite multitude of challenges.

Challenges in Education in Jharkhand

- High dropout rate
- Different home language of nearly 95% of children from the language used in ECE centres
- Not so welcoming attitude of teachers leading to no preschool experience by many children
- Majority of children fail to understand teacher and text as there also seems to be attitudinal issues
- Anganwadis focused on *khichdi* (nutrition) than learning. Learning outcomes remained unsatisfactory
- Majority of children enter class 1 without any school readiness
- Poor awareness regarding significance of pre-school learning programme in state

In his presentation, Mr. Pattanayak, further expressed certain shifts in perspective and action, where the onus was laid on the pre-school learning as a starting point; advocacy for quality pre-school learning programme in rural areas; arranged visit of senior officials to AP, Kerala, TN, Karnataka; notified *Anganwadis* as *Anganwadi Nursery School Kendras* with thrust on learning aspects; designed and supplied Pre-School Learning Kit for first time to every; designed School Preparedness package *Ankur* for ensuring interest and preliminary skills of 5 - 6 year olds in basic literacy and numeracy and finally trained every Primary School teacher in 2011 to use *Ankur* as a starting point in class .

Further, he shared brief preview of some of the major activities carried out in the year 2011. This included Identification of 50 AWC’s in all 24 districts, training of AW Sevikas, development of theme books to be used in the training workshops and issue of guidelines to AW Sevikas for thrust on activity based learning.

Recommendations

- Advocacy for inclusion of holistic child development and ECCE in RTE and to develop a holistic ECCE policy harmonized with all the other related policies and provisions
- Enhance the budgetary allocation for ECE under ICDS. Make budgetary provisions to ensure infrastructural facilities to be child-friendly
- Development of a National Curriculum with flexibility for states to be followed by AWCs and private preschools and ensure the availability of developmentally appropriate curriculum/materials

Recommendations continued

- Develop guidelines on ECE standards as well as adequate monitoring tools and standardize curriculum/norms to be introduced by the AWTCs, B.Ed colleges and private institutions
- Devise a strategy to reward and motivate Anganwadi workers and consider arrangements for an additional AWW to support ECCE activities
- Regularly organize ECCE forums and workshops
- AWC mapping and issuance of guidelines/circulars for ensuring the physical presence of AWCs / in the campus of primary school
- Regulations for the construction of AWCS within the premises of the primary schools
- Guidelines for regular visits of primary teachers to AWCs and for joint activities
- Revision of primary curriculum in accordance with preschool curriculum; Development of strategy to address the problem of transition from home language to school language
- Ensuring registration of children below 6 years in the AWC catchment area and providing certificate to children after completing their preschool.
- Provisions to be made for a specifically trained female teachers for Class I of primary school
- Provide all possible support for Early Learning - Capacity Building of Trainers, Supervisors, Parents and Community

The last presentation in this forum by **Prof. T.S Saraswathi** primarily focused on the importance of investment in a good research as good data has the quality of bringing conviction and feedback towards making informed decisions and secondly, the proposed agenda for research which needs to be multipronged at macro, mid and micro level. There were reflections on the research agenda for South Asian Region in the Early Years Care and Education. In addition, she detailed out the research questions, and the sources of funding at each of these levels. Hence, systematic convergence of these levels and of the large scale data was mentioned as an essentiality. Which would in turn, help in converging the pool of information and talent.

In conclusion, she touched upon the future recommendations by reiterating on the significance of early years and the need for sound empirical data; demanding macro-level information on public and private programs; developing culturally relevant understanding and appropriate strategies for care and pedagogy; initiating collaborative research across the region and within countries especially for mid-level large scale studies; encouraging funders to support coordinated series of micro-level studies in thrust areas of EYCE and finally the inclusion of EYCE as a thrust area by national funding bodies.

Concluding Remarks by **Ms Anshu Vaish** paraphrased the panelists' key points by restating the need to carry out research, to help, put in place institutional mechanisms and to feed data in policy making. She shared an account of various Government and Institutional frameworks in India e.g. India National Policy which has laid a lot of importance on ECCE and exemplified the potential of ECCE for girls education, crucial role by SSA in developing school readiness skills for preschool children.

She reminded the audience about the 86th Amendment Act, Article 21 A, which indicates free and compulsory education of the children till the age of 14 years as a Fundamental Right and that the Central Advisory board on Education has put in place a committee for extending this Right to the preschool education as well. Ms. Vaish indicated progression from a programmatic approach to a Rights based approach where the Right to Education has been added as a Fundamental Right to the Constitution and immediate need to find a point of convergence between the SSA and ICDS like bringing Anganwadi center within the premises of the primary school using the infrastructure under SSA for training of the ICDS functionaries.

Stating some of the limitations, she mentioned that the challenges lie in lack of appreciation in public sector, pre-school education not being accorded importance under the ICDS as ICDS is seen more of a nutrition program; the shift in parental expectations for their children to learn English and no guidelines or standards of quality in preschool program

Her focus towards the end remained on expansion, inclusion and quality as the key elements under the SSA program and application of the same in the pre-school education. Finishing at a positive note, the mention was made about the fact that under the 12th 5 year Plan, there are plans to extend pre-school facilities even in the government primary schools and SSA too has assigned a place to ECCE in its program.

She concluded by saying that:

- the gaps that need to be addressed are building the capacity of Anganwadi workers;
- educating the parents and community about quality preschool education; and
- enhancing the technical and managerial capacity for the ECCE and research data to feed into policy making.

Session IV. Sharing & Finalisation of Draft Recommendations for Regional Strategy & Collaboration: Presentation and Discussion

Chair: Mr. Toby Linden, Lead Education Specialist, The World Bank

Presenters:

- Dr. Suman Verma, Child Development Expert
- Ms. Deepika Shrivastava, Convenor, Core Committee & OSD, Planning Commission, Govt. of India

Mr. Toby Linden reminded the main objective of the conference which was to deliberate, discuss and bring out strategies for the eight South Asian nations. To bring out a document this brings together a consensus on to how to move forward as a region in various dimensions in ECCE. Two key strands of conference were special interest groups and the other on general discussions.

Dr Suman Verma presented the recommendations arrived at by group of experts and professionals over two days. The four themes for the deliberations were inclusion and equity; learning standards; teacher preparation; and under 3's. Setting up of the special interest groups in the four issues was to share knowledge, database, experiences from the field, challenges and constraints faced in the institutions; and also explore possibilities for collaboration, areas for cross-cultural research within the region in the future.

Inclusion and Equity

Facilitators

- Dr. Neerja Sharma, Professor, Child Development, University of Delhi
- Dr. Lawrence Schweinhart, President, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, U.S.A.

Recommendations

- **Programme**
 - Improvement of programmes in terms of accessibility, quality, supervision and monitoring
 - Monitoring and implementation of RTE, catering to reservation of 25% seats for marginalised children
- **Teacher/Anganwadi worker**
 - Training of anganwadi workers and the ECE teachers to make children from all backgrounds feel *welcome*.
 - ECE worker made part of the planning and decision making
 - More institutions of higher education must participate in improving ECCE centres
- **Community** engagement in ECCE to increase use of comprehensive services
- **Co-ordination** — Effective coordination mechanisms among sectors at both the national and local level, and between public and private sectors. Integrating sectoral responsibilities may be one option.
- Develop database with the focus on vulnerable and marginalized children

Learning Standards

Facilitators

- Prof. Nirmala Rao, Professor, Child Development, University of Hong Kong
- Dr.Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Dean, Harvard Graduate School of Education, U.S.A

Recommendations

- All stakeholders be involved in the process of development of Standards
- Cross Country collaborations to develop culturally sensitive early learning standards
- Conduct within country assessment of the usage of existing standards to develop baseline data across states, regions and communities.
- Integration of learning standards in pre service, and in-service teacher training programmes

3. Teacher Preparation

Facilitators

- Ms. K. Lakshmi, Director, SRCECE AMS, Hyderabad
- Dr. Eva Thorp, Associate Professor, George Mason University

Recommendations

- Inter-sectoral and inter- ministerial convergence in teacher training
- Joint pre-primary and primary teacher training programmes
- Increase duration and content of ECCE component in ICDS pre service, induction, and refresher trainings
- Continuous professional development and capacity building for ECCE personnel through direct instruction and distance learning programmes
- Training of the **centre based care givers.**
- Special focus on parents community in teacher training programmes
- Development of norms and regulations for teacher education training programmes and curriculum.

4. Under 3's

Facilitators

- Dr. Pratibha Singhi, Chief Paediatric Neurology and Neurodevelopment, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, India
- Dr Christine Powell, Professor, The University of The West Indies, Jamaica

Recommendations

- Life-skills education for adolescent girls and women to address teenage and early pregnancy; reproductive health; maternal health, childcare
- Effective child care support system for the working mother at her work place and close to her residence
- Accessibility of services for Antenatal care, institutional delivery, availability of trained person for safe delivery
- Accessibility of services for after birth — medical check-ups at regular intervals, immunization, early detection and screening.
- Training of the health worker
- Simple strategies for growth monitoring/ assessing achievement of developmental milestones
- Appropriate services for at-risk children/ children with developmental delays
- Quality benchmark for activities for children under 3 and regulations for programmes
- Alternate childcare arrangements within the community
- Awareness generation of the role of the family, father and grandparents for providing support and care for childrearing.
- Availability of counselling services for mothers
- Initiate Cross-cultural research with a multi- and inter- disciplinary approach in formulating family based interventions in improving the status of the under 3's.
- Develop mechanisms to collect data on issues related to children below 3 years that can be used to formulate policies guidelines and frameworks.

Ms Deepika Shrivastava put forward the work of core committee who prepared the draft recommendations. The list of core committee members is annexed at the end of the report. The core committee members arrived at consensus on the criticality of investing in ECCE; need for a regional strategy on ECCE, recognising core strategy elements — to be developed through a consultative process; broad recommendations made for the elements of a strategy framework; country specific recommendations to be evolved by country teams; and regional collaborative areas and special interest themes identified.

The recommendations were divided under various themes:

- Enabling policies and legislations
- Ensuring access
- Inclusion and equity

- Promoting quality and standards
- Institutional capacity development
- Enhancing parent, family and community based interventions
- Advocacy and communication
- Resources
- Monitoring and accountability
- Research and evaluation
- Regional collaboration
- Moving forward: towards 2015 & beyond

Enabling policies and legislations

- Develop / update a comprehensive National Policy on Children in the early childhood stage - addressing health, nutrition, care, and education and also child rights for play, protection and participation
- ECCE to be brought within RTE ambit and A Child Rights Code to be framed
- Develop National/Sub national ECCE Plans of Action anchored in national plans covering Govt., Private and Voluntary sectors
- Universal infant and child care support and maternity protection to be mandated
- Set up/strengthen a expand a multi-sectoral National Child Council or a specific National ECD Council, headed at the highest level (eg. Prime Minister) to ensure-
 - high priority to ECCE in national plans, resource allocations in young child specific and related sectors
 - convergent action and coordinated implementation
- Create a child friendly policy and legislative environment – legislation of related entitlements

Ensuring access, inclusion and equity

Access cannot be separated from quality and equity

- Child's needs to be planned holistically and in continuum (Prenatal, Children under 3 years; 3 to 6 years; 6-8 years)
- Prevention, early detection and intervention for disability to be an integral part of the strategy
- Encourage innovative approaches & evidence based replication
- Enabling children to get early learning opportunities in their mother tongue
- School readiness interventions to be ensured for children 4-6 years old with transitional support
- Distinction between enrollment and participation to be acknowledged and data of both analysed

Promoting quality and standards

- Introducing outcome focus on all planning for ECCE- quality to be demonstrated & viewed also as outcome
- Quality standards (to cover normative and contextual relevance aspects) include:
 - Early Learning Development Standards
 - Programme/Service Standards
 - Teacher/Caregiver Standards
 - Curriculum Standards
- Preschool teaching to be professionalized in terms of training, salaries, career opportunities in parity with school teacher
- Pre-School and early primary training to be integrated
- Early learning standards to be defined
- Need for accreditation of centers
- Basic infrastructure to be ensured
- Planning, monitoring and on-site supportive supervision in all programmes for each sub stage

Institutional capacity development

- National Child/ ECD Council to be formed with leadership at the highest level of Government (e.g.PM) for convergence, coordination and financial investment across sectors
- Strengthen government and civil society ECCE resource institutions at different levels, with perspective planning for Human Resources
- Accreditation of ECCE training institutions, training of teacher educators and normative framework with flexibility for pre service, in service teacher training
- Professionalization, regular training and status of ECCE personnel- and creating a career ladder

Institution Capacity Development

- Improve decentralized training capability, field based supervision, coaching and mentoring support
- Involvement of teacher educators, teachers and their representatives in developing training curriculum
- Progressive formation of ECCE Teacher Councils
- Setting up of ECD resource centres with Masters' and PhD courses for ECCE in higher learning institutions – (eg. Universities) for creating a pool of professionals
- ECCE resource units in State /Dist. Educ. Institutes, networked with the above
- Private pre schools and creches to be brought under regulation to ensure appropriate quality
- Decentralized Planning to address the local context – respecting universal guiding principles and diversity

Enhancing parent, family and community based interventions

- Involvement of parents' groups, local youth and communities as an advocacy strategy – making ECCE visible
- Strengthen parenting programmes including parents' groups and support networks, peer learning, demonstration of positive care practices
- Strengthen initiatives for women's literacy and support them in their multiple roles, responding to local patterns of women's work and time
- Local activity banks with community contribution
- Deinstitutionalise young children by promoting foster care, alternate family care especially for vulnerable children

Advocacy and communication

- National/Sub National Strategies for Advocacy, Social Mobilisation and Communication for ECCE in support of ECCE goals and Plans of Action
- Includes advocacy for high priority investment in ECCE and the need for legal provisions
- Communication for all institutional levels for understanding of inclusive and developmentally appropriate ECCE for children at different sub stages
- Integrate ECCE in ongoing communication strategies for the Right To Education, Nutrition and Health, Protection, Water, Sanitation, others

Resources

- Ensuring adequate resource allocations and public spending, prioritised according to needs - for all levels – with support for capacity development
- Adequate resource allocation for quality ECCE in national development plans and in sectoral plans (e.g. education, health, women and child)
- Decentralization and ensuring availability/ utilisation of resources at local levels -linked to outcomes
- Mobilise additional resources through development partners, public private partnerships and CSR for ECCE

Monitoring and accountability

- Setup/ strengthen national/ sub national/ local mechanisms for monitoring ECCE programmes
- All countries to have an updated ECCE status assessment to enable policy /programme development-
 - Using methodologies /tools such as SABER
- Strengthen monitoring of quality - as process & as an outcome
- Develop simple monitoring indicators for communities to track progress (across sectors)
- Social Audits- for greater public accountability

Research and evaluation

- Promote longitudinal research
 - to develop understanding of contextual priorities and variations across and within countries and their interface with program content and quality
 - To understand variations in women and child care practices and their impact on children's development
- Qualitative and action research to be supported to develop systemic insights into the processes and mechanisms that determine quality and inclusion
- Institute Country level Annual Reports on the status of the young child and ECCE (in South Asia Region) - like ASER with collaborative development of tools

Regional collaboration

- Prioritise ECCE in SAARC plan- including ECCE in SAARC priorities and in relevant Ministers' meetings
- Next South Asia EFA Ministerial Forum to focus on ECCE
- Consider setting up of a South Asian Regional / SAARC Centre for ECD/ECCE (Like SAARC University)
- Possible areas of regional collaboration-
 - Research and Documentation
 - Training and teacher preparation
 - Methodology for developing standards
 - Curriculum development both for children and teachers
 - Innovative Programmes
 - Monitoring and Evaluation, including South Asian relevant indicators
- Regular networking, experience sharing and regional thematic enrichment workshops
- Faculty Exchange & Study Visit Programmes
- Creating Regional/National ECCE Resource Inventory – and resource support network
- Mechanisms for collaboration such as: Web Portal, Special Interest E-groups, journals, newsletters
- Regional themes emerging (supported by networks such as SAARC etc.)
 - Convergence, Linkages with Nutrition, Equity and addressing underlying gender discrimination

Moving forward: towards 2015 & beyond

- Regional/ National Task Forces on ECCE
- Country level consultations for the development of national strategy/ plan of action
- All SA countries to put in place national/sub-national plans of action for ECCE by 2015
 - Progressively moving towards universal access with quality and equity

Moving toward: Towards 2015 & Beyond

- Strengthen regional/ national resource institutions (Hubs) for ECCE
- Regional agreement on nomenclature and indicators to measure progress of ECCE systems in South Asia
- Create a critical mass of ECCE support groups at different levels to provide the impetus for change
- Embed early childhood stimulation (ECS) in Health (Child Health, IMNCI) and Nutrition sector strategies
- Extend and strengthen partnerships in action

Concluding Session

- **Chair:** Prof. Shyam Menon, Vice- chancellor, Ambedkar University, Delhi
- **Presenters:**
 - Dr Deepa Sankar, Senior Economist, The World Bank
 - Dr Venita Kaul, Director, Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development, Ambedkar University, Delhi
 - Mr Alisher Umarov, UNESCO
 - Ms. Lieke Van de Wiel, Education Advisor, UNICEF regional office of South Asia
 - Ms Junko Miyahara, ARNEC
 - Ms Caroline Arnold, The Aga Khan Foundation
 - Prof. Pravin Sinclair, Director, NCERT
 - Dr. Monimalika Day, Associate Professor, Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development, Ambedkar University, Delhi

Dr Deepa Sankar gave an overview of the conference. It began with inauguration of poster exhibition by Mr Prem Narain, the Chief Guest. Prof. Shyam Menon and Prof. Venita Kaul welcomed the experts, bureaucrats, academicians, professionals and participants to the conference, which was followed by lighting the lamp ceremony by the Chief Guest and others on the dais. Policy Briefs prepared by CECED, AUD were launched by Prof. Shantha Sinha, the Guest of Honour. Dr Lawrence Shweinhart and Dr Hirokazu Yoshikawa gave evidences from various studies to bring out the effect of enriching and stimulating early childhood environment and programmes on successful outcomes in school lives and later on the society. She then went on to sum up the next day which focused on status of ECCE in the SAR nations; issues of access and equity; challenges and prospects in ensuring quality in ECCE. The parallel sessions highlighted issues in inclusion and equity (with the special focus on disability, emergency situations, migrant brick kiln children); teacher preparation for ECCE; and early learning standards and emergent literacy. The third day commenced with sharing of experiences from the field in the form of poster session. Parallel discussion sessions highlighted four themes — partnerships with private sector and community for ECCE; issues and challenges in financing ECCE; reaching the ‘under 3’s’. The afternoon sessions Dr Sankar mentioned sketched out strategies to strengthen ECCE within each SAR countries, and explored opportunities for collaborations to foster ECCE network within the region.

Mr Alisher Umarov started the discussion by saying that this was the first conference and not the last one. He also said that people are more concerned about education rather than other aspects of ECCE. It should be more playful, joyful to bring a happy childhood. He stated that this conference was possible due to the combined partnership of international organisations, state government and the NGOs. He added, we should not think about the far future, instead should work on something which we can start today.

Ms. Lieke van de Wiel in her initial message said that lots of initiatives have been going on about child care and education in South Asian Region but it is important to do everything in a timely manner. Momentum is set and need to work towards it urgently. She further said that we have to reach out in a more consistent and innovative manner as it is urgent. She added that we need to be more strategic to see what we can do and how others can contribute. She focussed that it is

important not to be over ambitious but be clear, concrete, active and have a time frame while forming the policies.

Ms Junko Miyahara, ARNEC in her initial remarks believed that a lot of work has been happening in South Asia as mentioned by many but we have to make several recommendations for the process. She added that 'time' is critical for early childhood development as EFA and MDG is finishing with 2015. She further added that from now on till mid next year, a lot of national as well as international consultations will commence in several South Asian countries and the need of the hour is to work for collective benefits. She also informed the group about the next upcoming ARNEC conference to be held in November.

Prof. Pravin Sinclair started by giving feedback about the three days and also congratulated the presenters, participants as well as organisers. In her opening remarks she shared her comments based on her NCERT experience. She said, *"there is an overlap between ECCE which is till 8 years and what we call as primary / elementary education which covers from 5 to 14 years."* According to her, *"the overlap is appropriate until people have their own turfs or are more protective about them like the curriculum, practices and so on. So the common understanding is the issue."*

Suggestions

- A task force to look at the curriculum, teaching practices, policies, ministries and the funding and so on related to ECCE. Early childhood is looked after by the elementary education department at NCERT and now the faculty at NCERT are spending time in the field in order to touch base with the teachers, children through the materials as well as through practical research.
- Open learning system like Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is a wonderful opportunity to reach out to the community. It has already been used for the anganwadi workers at Madhya Pradesh.
- National Task Force that may promote case studies and conferences

Ms. Caroline Arnold shared that 40% of education budget of the Aga Khan Foundation goes into Early Childhood Development. She also shared three years back it was decided that all parts of the Aga Khan development network which includes health services, education services and so on should incorporate early childhood development. She said that now there is a need to put those draft recommendations into practice and keep those exchanges happening. She added that by working together we can ensure rights of young children.

Prof. Shyam Menon in his closing remarks said that matters related to children should be handled by those who have passion for it. He recommended that there should be a **separate, specific ministry for children** which look after all the issues related to children be it health, education and all other functions etc.

Prof. Menon said, “the problem with the government is instead of governmental structures being more isomorphous; they want the problem to be more isomorphous”. He recommended that child and children should become a part of the important constituency for policy related advocacy in this country. He also mentioned that there should be proxy educators for younger children unless children are capable enough on their own to participate in advocacy movements. He also shared that this conference has marked an age for Centre for early childhood education and development (CECED) in demonstrating what they can achieve by strategic partnership with actors in ECCE field. He also said that it is important to reiterate the intention with which CECED was formed. He wishes that more collaborative researches can be conducted by CECED with partnership with other schools at Ambedkar University.

Dr. Monimalika Day presented the vote of thanks. She shared that the “*South Asian village have come together to look after children*”. She thanked Prof. Sinclair, the chief guest of the evening, the government of India especially the MWCD and MHRD for their encouragement and support, Prof. Shantha Sinha for sharing her insightful comments. She also shared her gratitude for Prof. Adarsh Sharma for her constant support in organising the conference; Ms. Deepika Shrivastava for being the convenor of the core group meeting; Ms. Suman Verma for being the convenor of special interest groups. She again extended her thanks to the eminent key note speakers and international presenters for sharing their expertise in the area. She also thanked all the experts who chaired the various sessions and provided a wonderful environment for sharing of ideas. She extended her gratitude to all the eminent speakers as well as participants from various parts of the region for sharing their experience.

South Asian Regional Conference 2012
Recommendations – Special Interest Group (SIG)

The purpose of SIG is to:

- Provide a forum to communicate and connect with colleagues around issues related to early childhood
- Provide a platform for mutual sharing of experiences and resources, knowledge and database
- Generate opportunities and mechanisms for collaboration
- Identify topics of interest for collaborative cross-cultural research
- Identify the type of support needed from the international organisations
- Develop recommendations for the South Asian Regional strategy on ECCE in regard to above issues.

1. Inclusion and Equity

Facilitators - Dr. Neerja Sharma, Professor, Child Development, University of Delhi and Dr. Lawrence Schweinhart, President, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, U.S.A.

2. Learning Standards

Facilitators - Prof. Nirmala Rao, Professor, Child Development, University of Hong Kong and Dr. Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Dean, Harvard Graduate School of Education, U.S.A

3. Teacher Preparation

Facilitators - Ms. K. Lakshmi, Director, SRC, ECE, AMS and Dr. Eva Thorp, Associate Professor, George Mason University

4. Under 3's

Facilitators - Dr. Pratibha Singhi, Chief Paediatric Neurology and Neurodevelopment, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, India and Dr. Christine Powell, Professor, The University of The West Indies, Jamaica

Inclusion and Equity

Challenges

- Non-availability of services
- Underutilisation of accessible ECCE services by the community
- Social exclusion in terms of Caste, Class, Religion, Location
- Multifaceted nature of ECCE give rise to the challenge of effectively coordinating provision of policy development and implementation across different sectors

Experiences

- Use of regional language to break barriers
- Awareness programmes for community about services available for children

- Regular monitoring, mentoring and hands on support for teachers and child care workers
- Culturally sensitive innovative strategies and program content to break the barriers
- Lack of quality services in welfare, health and education in key areas such as access, regulation, funding, and workforce, lead to problems of inequality and lack of continuity for children, parents and workers.

Recommendations

- To improve access for vulnerable groups, we need to improve programme quality, supervision and monitoring with activities that are based on culturally salient practices that benefit children
- Monitoring and implementation of RTE, catering to reservation of 25% seats for marginalised children with a special focus on orienting school leadership in helping parents to overcome integration barriers
- Empowerment and motivational incentives for anganwadi workers and the ECE teachers so that teachers get a feeling of pride and participation
- Include a component in teacher training on strategies to create a learning environment that engages children from diverse backgrounds.
- Strengthen the linkages between ECCE centres and student placement from Institutions of higher education for sharing of knowledge and innovative practices
- Community engagement in ECCE to increase use of comprehensive services
- ECE worker made part of the planning and decision making
- Coordination issues need to include coherent regulation, funding, and staffing schemes with a common vision of care and education.
- Effective coordination mechanisms need to exist among sectors at both the national and local level, and between public and private sectors. Integrating sectoral responsibilities may be one option.
- Urgent need for relevant and accurate data across ministries and agencies.
- Available data from sectors of health, nutrition, and child protection needs to be integrated with a focus on vulnerable children.
- Strengthening of reporting structures for data and knowledge management on the basic ECCE indicators
- Disaggregation of data to ensure the inclusion of research on children in indigenous communities, in ethno-linguistic groups, with disabilities, in remote areas, and in emergency situations.

Early Learning Standards

Challenges

- Lack of a common understanding and definition of learning standards across and within countries along with the mode of implementation
- Who need learning standards? Is it for educational system, teacher, Policy maker?

- Formulation of standards: domains of developments, inclusion of different stakeholders, cultural sensitivity, approaches to learning, holistic child outcomes and indicators, regional languages and cultural diversities.
- Lack of Implementation of Early learning standards result in high dropout rates, low retention and low school readiness levels.
- Parental expectations and education also affects defining learning standards.

Recommendations

- Learning Standards may be viewed as a tool for communication for developmentally appropriate goals, all stakeholders be involved in the process of development of Standards.
- Cross Country collaborations can be undertaken to develop culturally sensitive early learning standards with guidelines for implementation.
- Conduct within country assessment of the usage of existing standards to develop baseline data across states, regions and communities.
- Diversity should be kept in mind in the process of developing standards
- Integration of learning standards in pre service, and inservice teacher training programmes

Teacher preparation

Recommendations

- Need for Inter-sectorial and inter- ministerial convergence in teacher training.
- Since ECD comprises of birth – 8 years old, the pressure should not be built on children once they enter class 1 and 2 which can be done by introducing joint pre-primary and primary teacher training programme.
- Duration and content of ECCE component in ICDS pre service, induction, and refresher trainings should be increased. There is also a need of including periodic recurrent in-service training
- Need to provide for continuous professional development and capacity building for ECCE personnel through direct instruction and distance learning programmes
- Need for qualified and trained manpower in training centres.
- Emphasis on training of the **centre based care givers.**
- Parental education should be included in teacher training programme. The teacher training should provide mind-set to the teachers' to focus on the families and communities. It is important to build accountability of the programme towards the families through training strategies.
- Urgent need for norms and regulations for teacher education training programmes and curriculum.

Under 3`s

Recommendations

- Life-skills education for females right from the adolescence to promote awareness about the reproductive health, maternal health, childcare

- Maternity benefits stemming from the need for care and bond between the mother and child
- Need for an effective child care support system for the working mother at her work place and close to her residence (time and support for childcare—cuddling, playing, interacting and massaging the child—early stimulation activities)
- Accessibility of services for Antenatal care, institutional delivery, availability of trained person for safe delivery
- Accessibility of services for after birth- medical check-ups at regular intervals, immunization, early detection and screening.
- Training of the health worker
- Simple strategies for growth monitoring/ assessing achievement of developmental milestones
- Appropriate services for at-risk children/ children with developmental delays
- Curriculum for under 3`s/ quality benchmark/ regulations for programmes
- There is an urgent need for alternate childcare arrangements within the community.
- Awareness generation of the role of the family, father and grandparents for providing support and care for childrearing.
- Address Issue related to teenage and early pregnancy- physical immaturity, -psychological immaturity, -lack of support systems
- Availability of counselling services for mothers
- Initiate Cross-cultural research with a Multi- and inter- disciplinary approach in formulating family based interventions in improving the status of the under 3`s. (UN agencies play an important role in bringing together all the different professionals).
- Develop mechanisms to collect data on issues related to children below 3years that can be used to formulate policies guidelines and frameworks.

South Asian Regional Conference 2012
Draft Recommendations: Towards A Strategy Framework

Preamble

Recognising that “The early years last a lifetime... And more”, this Conference reaffirms that:

- Investment in the early years is a critical development imperative - as the foundation for achieving education goals, cumulative lifelong learning and human development
- Investment in early childhood is thus crucial for human development for realising national goals
- And as the most effective intervention for breaking an inter generational cycle of poverty and multiple deprivation and inequity
- Integral to fulfilling children’s rights to survival, development, protection and protection (UN Convention on The Rights of the Child)
- We rededicate ourselves to achieving global, regional and national commitments to achieving Universal Access to ECCE with Quality and Equity as the first Goal of Education For All. And progressively moving towards Learning For All by 2015 fulfilling children’s rights and human rights, as enshrined in international, national conventions.

The process of formulating the recommendations has been:

- 3-day participatory process with multiple stakeholders
- Teams from 6 countries in the South Asian region
- Inputs from 6 country teams— around 200 participants representing governments, institutions, international development agencies, professionals, networks and civil society
- Rapporteur notes of each session — plenary and parallel, special interest groups
- Synthesis by Core Committee

Outcome

- Consensus on the criticality of investing in ECCE
- The need for a regional strategy on ECCE reaffirmed, recognising core strategy elements
 - to be developed through a consultative process
- Broad recommendations made for the elements of a strategy framework
- Country specific recommendations being evolved by country teams
- Regional collaborative areas and special interest themes identified

Guiding principles

- Rights Based Approach - survival, development, protection and participation
- Child-centred and developmentally appropriate
- Holistic- addressing the whole child: physical, emotional, social, cognitive, creative and language development
- Child development- continuous and cumulative
- Comprehensive- addressing inter-related developmental domains and related sectors at each sub stage of the continuum
- Address sub-stages in a continuum: Prenatal Children < 3 years; 3 to 6 years and 6-8 years – focus on under 3s
- Ensuring inclusion of all children & social justice
 - No discrimination based on class, caste, ethnicity, religion, location, gender or different abilities
 - Affirmative action for the marginalized
- Early Preventive Action for realization of full development potential and learning capacity
- Early learning through stimulating environments, trained caregivers and opportunities for children's interactions and experiences
- A gender sensitive life cycle approach
- Empowerment of families and communities
- Decentralisation – contextually relevant
- Focus on child related outcomes
- Evidence based policy and programme design

Enabling policies and legislations

- Develop / update a comprehensive National Policy on Children in the early childhood stage - addressing not only health, nutrition, care, and education and also child rights for play, protection and participation
- Each of these components to be reflected in sector specific policies, for effective operationalization
- ECCE should also be developed into a legal right - May be linked to RTE, and rolled out in a phased manner
- A Child Rights Code to be framed for the above
- Develop National/Sub national ECCE Plans of Action – anchored in national plans
- Covering Govt., Private and Voluntary sectors
- Universal infant and child care support and maternity protection to be mandated
- Create a young child friendly policy and legislative environment – legislation of related entitlements
- Strengthen Social Protection measures for young children of disadvantaged community groups, including in emergencies, with sustainability
- Set up/strengthen and expand a multi-sectoral National Child Council or a specific National ECD Council, headed at the highest level (eg. Prime Minister) to ensure-
- high priority to ECCE in national plans, resource allocations in young child specific and related sectors

Ensuring access, inclusion and equity

- Access cannot be separated from quality and equity
- Child's needs to be planned holistically - specific needs of each sub stage along the continuum
 - Prenatal, Children under 3 years; 3 to 6 years; 6-8 years
- Area specific approach, with decentralisation
- Priority to reaching marginalized and deprived community groups - with both universal and targeted interventions
- Affirmative actions for the marginalized - making interventions equitable in access and quality
- Prevention, early detection and intervention for disability to be an integral part of the strategy
- Encourage innovative approaches & evidence based replication/ scale up
- Maternal and infant care entitlements to be ensured
- Crèches/day care centers/ play centers to be set up in a professional manner
- Enabling children to get early learning opportunities in their mother tongue
- Transition/bridging strategy needed from mother tongue towards school language
- Ensure developmentally appropriate play based environments in families, community centres, all ECD provisions and schools
- School readiness interventions to be ensured for children 4-6 years old, with transitional support
- Distinction between enrollment and participation to be acknowledged and data of both analysed

Promoting quality and standards

- Introducing outcome focus on all planning for ECCE- quality to be demonstrated & viewed also as outcome
- Child's environment must be responsive and nurturing
- Quality standards (to cover normative and contextual relevance aspects) include:
 - Early Learning Development Standards
 - Programme/Service Standards
 - Teacher/Caregiver Standards
 - Curriculum Standards
 - Teacher preparation system to be regulated and normative framework determined- with flexibility
 - Preschool teaching to be professionalized in terms of training, salaries, career opportunities - in parity with school teacher
 - Pre-School and early primary training to be integrated
 - Early learning standards to be defined- for tracking children's developmental progress and assessment method identified/ developed
 - Need for accreditation of centers

- This should applied to crèches /day care centers -also for home training facility, norms and standards need to be developed
- Home based program -standards need to be identified and expected outcome determined
- Basic infrastructure to be ensured – especially activity/play space, locally relevant play/activity material, sanitation, usable toilets, drinking water
- Planning, monitoring and on site supportive supervision in all programs for each sub stage

Institutional capacity development

- National Child/ ECD Council to be formed with leadership at the highest level of Government (e.g.PM) for convergence, coordination and financial investment across sectors
- Strengthen government and civil society ECCE resource institutions at different levels, with perspective planning for Human Resources
- Accreditation of ECCE training institutions, training of teacher educators and normative framework with flexibility for pre service, in service teacher training
- Professionalization, regular training and status of ECCE personnel- and creating a career ladder
- Improve decentralized training capability, field based supervision, coaching and mentoring support
- Involvement of teacher educators, teachers and their representatives in developing training curriculum
- Progressive formation of ECCE Teacher Councils
- Setting up of ECD resource centres with Masters’ PhD courses for ECCE in higher learning institutions – (eg. Universities) for creating a pool of professionals
- ECCE resource units in State /Dist. Educ. Institutes, networked with the above
- Private pre schools and creches to be brought under regulation to ensure appropriate quality
- Decentralized Planning to address the local context – respecting universal guiding principles and diversity
- Strengthen parent community ownership of ECCE
- Curriculum for children between 3 and 6 years age must be competency based and promote emergent literacy, foster systematic teaching of reading; and connect home and community.
- Training modules prepared for teachers/care givers for shorter duration
- More training programmes for persons with specialization

Enhancing parent, family and community based interventions

- Parent and family education to be accompanied by support /enabling measures for parents
- Involvement of parents’ groups, local youth and communities as an advocacy strategy – making ECCE visible
- Strengthen parenting programmes – including parents’ groups and support networks, peer learning, demonstration of positive care practices
- Empower families and communities for
 - improving care behaviours - integrating inputs from different sectors for ECCE
 - improving the demand for quality ECCE services and monitoring

- Strengthen initiatives for women’s literacy and support them in their multiple roles, responding to local patterns of women’s work and time
- Strengthen capacity of community level institutions and local self governments (as relevant) for ECCE
- Development of a core parent communication module for ECD with simple tools for counselling and tracking
- Local activity banks, with community contribution
- Deinstitutionalise young children by promoting foster care, alternate family care especially for vulnerable children
- Teacher training programmes must include components of reaching out to communities and learning from families

Advocacy and communication

- National/Sub National Strategies for Advocacy, Social Mobilisation and Communication for ECCE in support of ECCE goals and Plans of Action
- Specific and clear components (health, nutrition, education and so on) for which funds is sought from the government with evidences from the field and research
- Includes advocacy for high priority investment in ECCE and the need for legal provisions
- Social mobilisation for creating ECCE support groups / forum - with extended partnerships
- Communication for all institutional levels for understanding of inclusive and developmentally appropriate ECCE for children at different sub stages
- Parent and Community education to influence parental choices and inform demand for quality ECCE
- Integrate ECCE in ongoing communication strategies for the Right To Education, Nutrition and Health, Protection, Water, Sanitation, others

Resources

- Ensuring adequate resource allocations and public spending, prioritised according to needs - for all levels – with support for capacity development
- Adequate resource allocation for quality ECCE in national development plans and in sectoral plans (e.g. education, health, women and child)
- Decentralization and ensuring availability/ utilisation of resources at local levels -linked to outcomes
- Encourage Country specific innovative ways of ensuring resources for ECCE
- Additional resources to recognize and motivate communities/ villages with improved ECD outcomes
- Mobilise additional resources through development partners, public private partnerships and CSR for ECCE
- Development of materials/story books in various languages to help systematic teaching of reading and smooth transition from home to pre-school and then to primary school

Monitoring and accountability

- Need for a well planned data system (MIS) and disaggregated data for addressing community specific status –including children with special needs

- Setup/ strengthen national/ sub national/ local mechanisms for monitoring ECCE programmes
- All countries to have an updated ECCE status assessment to enable policy /programme development-
 - Using methodologies /tools such as SABER
- Move towards monitoring child related outcomes
- Strengthen monitoring of quality - as process & as an outcome
- Develop simple monitoring indicators for communities to track progress (across sectors)
- Social Audits- for greater public accountability

Research and evaluation

- Promote longitudinal research
 - to develop understanding of contextual priorities and variations across and within countries and their interface with program content and quality
 - To understand variations in women and child care practices and their impact on children’s development
- Given focus on outcomes, need to develop/ adapt quality and school readiness assessment measures
- Qualitative and action research to be supported to develop systemic insights into the processes and mechanisms that determine quality and inclusion
- Institute Country level Annual Reports on the status of the young child and ECCE (in South Asia Region) - like ASER with collaborative development of tools

Regional collaboration

- Prioritise ECCE in SAARC plan- including ECCE in SAARC priorities and in relevant Ministers’ meetings
- Next South Asia EFA Ministerial Forum to focus on ECCE
- Consider setting up of a South Asian Regional / SAARC Centre for ECD/ECCE (Like SAARC University)
- Possible areas of regional collaboration-
 - Research and Documentation
 - Training and teacher preparation
 - Methodology for developing standards
 - Curriculum development both for children and teachers
 - Innovative Programmes
 - Monitoring and Evaluation, including South Asian relevant indicators
- Regular networking, experience sharing and regional thematic enrichment workshops
- Faculty Exchange & Study Visit Programmes
- Creating Regional/National ECCE Resource Inventory – and resource support network
- Mechanisms for collaboration such as: Web Portal, Special Interest E-groups, journals, newsletters
- Regional themes emerging (supported by networks such as SAARC etc.)

- Convergence, Linkages with Nutrition, Equity and addressing underlying gender discrimination

Moving forward: towards 2015 & beyond

- Regional/ National Task Forces on ECCE
 - Building on existing networks/ mechanisms
- Country level consultations for the development of national strategy/ plan of action
- All SA countries to put in place national/sub-national plans of action for ECCE by 2015
 - Progressively moving towards universal access with quality and equity
- Strengthen regional/ national resource institutions (Hubs) for ECCE
- Regional agreement on nomenclature and indicators to measure progress of ECCE systems in South Asia
- Create a critical mass of ECCE support groups at different levels to provide the impetus for change
- Embed early childhood stimulation (ECS) in Health (Child Health, IMNCI) and Nutrition sector strategies
- Extend and strengthen partnerships in action

Appendix A:

Members of the Core Committee

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