THE ROLE OF ECCD IN PROMOTING BASIC EDUCATION FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN

ECCD programs affect gender inequality by:

- **PROVIDING A FAIR START TO GIRLS AS WELL AS BOYS.** It is not unusual to find that there are an equal number of boys and girls in early childhood programs. Thus at this entry point into the educational system, boys and girls appear to be attending on a par with one another.
- **HELPING PARENTS BETTER PERCEIVE THE CAPABILITIES OF THE GIRL CHILD, LEADING TO A LONGER PERIOD OF SCHOOLING.** When parents see a girl child succeeding in an ECCD program, they are more likely to perceive her as a learner, and support her participation in school. Research on the ICDS program in India indicates that girls who attended the ICDS program are more likely to both enter primary school and continue in it than girls who did not attend the ICDS program.
- **PROVIDING A PLACE WHERE GENDER STEREOTYPES ARE MODIFIED.** When parents see that girls are just as capable of learning as boys, they are more likely to think of their daughter as a whole person with multiple capabilities. A positive early childhood experience also helps the girl see that she can learn and reinforces her interest in developing her abilities further.
- **PROVIDING ROLE MODELS OF WHAT WOMEN ARE ABLE TO DO.** The great majority of those working in early childhood programs are women. They provide a role model for young girls in terms of what they might be able to achieve as adults. The more status and prestige those working in ECCD program have, the more effective they will be in providing girls with positive role models.

Basic Education for Women

While women deserve an education in their own right, it is also true that when women are educated, the next generation benefits. Each year of education a girl receives correlates with her ability to provide better health and education for her own children. ECCD programs support women's development. When child care is established within a community it can serve two purposes:

- **IT PROVIDES APPROPRIATE CARE FOR THE YOUNG CHILD.**

- **IT CAN ALSO FREE WOMEN (AND YOUNG GIRLS) FROM THEIR FULL-TIME CHILD CARE RESPONSIBILITIES** so that they can earn and learn. In this way early childhood programs meet the intersecting needs of women and children.

Political Commitment to Equity

The political commitment to provide basic education to all girls and women in a spirit of equity can be translated into effective policies, reforms, programs, measures, and behavior by:

- **UNDERSTANDING MORE ABOUT GENDER DIFFERENCES DURING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS AND THE OBSTACLES TO EQUITY.** Many studies of childrearing practices that might provide insight into gender differences—where they begin and how they are shaped—have not included gender as a variable. More recent studies have looked at the impact of socialization on early gender identity.

- **CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON WHAT HAPPENS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM TO KNOW IF THERE IS DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT AND/OR IF NEGATIVE OR DIFFERENTIAL MESSAGES ARE BEING GIVEN.**

  - ***Observe classroom practice.*** What do teachers do to promote gender inequity? One study found that boys were rewarded more often for correct answers and when they gave incorrect answers, they were helped more often to get the right answer.

  - ***Review curriculum and media to see what messages are being given.*** This information should provide the basis for curricular reforms and for teacher training reforms so that gender roles present more variation for boys and girls.

- **CREATING EXPERIMENTAL ECCD PROGRAMS DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY TO ADDRESS GENDER INEQUITIES, AND EVALUATE THE RESULTS.** Data from this type of experiment would inform planners and policy- makers about alternative strategies that could be explored to promote equity. This would then lead to the creation of a range of ECCD programs that could be implemented to help achieve equity.

- **UNDERTAKING INFORMATION, EDUCATION, AND COMMUNICATION (IEC) ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE AN AWARENESS OF ISSUES RELATED TO GENDER.** Socialization practices are difficult to change. A first step in the process is awareness. This is achieved by using a range of IEC strategies to help people identify and understand the issue and then to promote appropriate strategies.

Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.
CD-ROM. The Consultative Group on ECCD. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1999.