



CREATING A SHARED VISION: HOW POLICY AFFECTS EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

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A recent policy initiative in Ghana, *The Accra Declaration*, has established a radically new perspective and approach to the country's attention to young children. It puts highest priority on children who are at greatest risk. It calls upon all relevant government departments, agencies, non-governmental organizations, individuals, and other partners in early childhood development to collectively broaden Ghana's scope and vision for young children. The Accra Declaration has provided the impetus for greater cooperation between government, donors, and non-governmental organizations. It also sets the stage for a very different kind of programming for young children, and offers official sanction for a greater variety of activities to receive attention and funding. Moving away from the more traditional emphasis on preschools as preparation for formal schooling, it calls for early childhood care and development programmes to make a range of community-based services available to the children who are most in need.

Because the policy arose from a National Seminar on Early Childhood Development (1993), it represents a process of thinking about young children and their needs, carried out collectively by diverse stakeholders in ECCD. As the Ghana government works to adapt its education and social strategies to this new perspective, it will be supported by the stakeholders who helped bring this focus on children forward.

What does the Ghanaian experience have to do with you? It is an example of the way in which non-governmental organizations, government and donors can come together to create policies and programmes to support young children and their families. In this edition of the *Coordinators' Notebook* we will explore what policy is and how we, the early childhood community, can influence the development of policy that supports young children and their families.

Many of us engaged in planning and creating programmes for young children see policy as a distant, abstract process, carried out by suited politicians sitting behind paper-laden desks. We view policymakers as inaccessible as they make decisions about our fate, dictating national priorities and how the national budget is to be allocated. We are aware of policy only when we find ourselves supported or limited by it, but most of us do not see ourselves as active participants in the creation of policy. In reality, however, we are all affected by policy, or its lack, on a regular basis. If we are going to make a real difference in the lives of young children and their families then we must focus our efforts on creating policies that will allow needed resources to be shifted to structures and programmes which can provide that support.

It is perhaps useful to step back and consider all the levels on which we deal with policy. We begin by defining it more clearly. According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, (1969), policy is "any plan or course of action adopted by a government, political party, business organization or the like, designed to influence and determine decisions, actions and other matters". The definition also describes policy as "a course of action, guiding principle or procedure considered to be expedient, prudent or advantageous".

When we see policy as a course of action designed to influence decisions and actions, it becomes a less abstract proposition. At a national level policy represents a distillation of a philosophy about the role of government in the lives of those being governed. It positions the government in terms of what it will and will not support. Policy guides how monies are allocated and the processes that will be put into place to disburse the monies.

There is increasing interest within governments in creating national policies that guide and validate the provision of a broad range of early childhood care and development and family support activities. To do that effectively, governments need information from the field of early childhood development on what kinds of policies can be developed to most effectively support young children and families.

Many within the early childhood community fear that the energy it would take to get involved in the political process of creating policy would be a drain on already limited resources. Yet, for the long-term it is important to focus our attention on policy. If we are not involved in the policy process, others will be. We have a responsibility to bring our knowledge, skills, and experience to the creation and implementation of policies that support young children and their families. The

early childhood community needs a better understanding of the relationship of policies to planning and programmes, the types of mechanisms that can be put into place to effectively serve as policy, and how to go about creating an effective policy if that is deemed desirable.

Within this issue of the CN the question being explored is, How can we influence the development of policy that supports young children and their families? To try to answer that question we will present a series of three articles. The first offers a brief discussion of what policy is and is not. It outlines the kinds of information that policymakers need in order to make informed policies regarding young children and describes a process that can be undertaken to generate that information and get it into the hands of policymakers. This is illustrated by case studies from Malaysia and South Africa. The second article is a brief discussion of the relationship between research and policy, and the third article looks at a specific instance in which the combination of a strong programme and longitudinal research have led to the creation of a national policy.

Policy—What It is and is Not

Policy frames the course of action taken by governments in relation to the people. This happens at several levels. At the most general level is the style of government in place—democratic, capitalist, socialist, etc. At this level there are *broad policies* that frame how the government operates, the judicial and legal systems and the type of economy that is in place. Within that broad framework is *social policy* which addresses the role of the government vis-a-vis families and society as a whole. What does the government see as its responsibility in relation to families and the care and development of children? Within the general social policies are *sectoral policies* that determine the services to be provided by the sector. For example, there are education policies that specify when the government becomes responsible for the education of children, whether or not attendance at schools is mandatory, and if so, for how long. Within the sectoral policies are policies that address *implementation*. These policies are much more specific and define who has responsibility for what. If there is to be intersectoral collaboration it specifies how that should happen. Implementation policies clarify the role of central government in relation to local units, and they define standards and procedures. The levels are interlinked. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of policies within a given country it is important to assess the policies at all levels.

As part of an article on the relationship between policies and programmes in India, Mina Swaminathan (1993) presented an analysis of 135 countries. She ranked them on the continuum from developing to developed countries, and also ranked them according to where they fit along a continuum ranging from market economy to socialism. Third, she rated them from best to worst in terms of their maternity support laws and policies. Not surprisingly the Scandinavian countries (developed countries with a socialist philosophy) had the most comprehensive set of laws and policies in support of women and families, and the most generous provision by the government. Also, not surprisingly, the United States (developed country with a strong market economy philosophy) was ranked the worst in terms of its policies and laws in support of women and families, and had the least government provision. In general, whether they were developing

or developed countries, those with a socialist philosophy had more comprehensive policies and laws in place than countries based on a market-oriented economy. (8)

It is important to note that simply having a policy in place is not necessarily a good thing, for some of the following reasons.

Policies can be inappropriate. Swaminathan noted that many of the developing countries "have borrowed their legislation directly from the industrialized countries with very different conditions, and it is hence often inappropriate to their situation". (9) She provides the example of the Maternity Benefits Act (1961) in India. Within the act there are provisions that protect pregnant women from being fired because they are pregnant. Women are also to be freed from doing arduous work during the last 10 weeks of their pregnancy. This Act addresses the needs of women working in the formal sector. In India this is only 11% of all working women; 89% are in the informal sector, so this Act has little meaning for them. Not only does the Act apply to only a very limited work force, but even within the 11%, only 2.28% of those women have benefitted from the Act. (3) In essence the Act has little meaning for the great majority of working women in India.

Policies can be restrictive rather than facilitative. In an attempt to address an issue, policies may be created which inhibit rather than promote what was originally desired. There are many examples of this within the early childhood field. As early childhood programmes begin to proliferate, many governments decide they cannot afford to operate ECCD programmes themselves. However, they want to be supportive of the programmes being developed as the result of NGO and community initiative. They then decide that an appropriate role for government is to provide guidelines for the programmes and to register them so that they know what programmes are being offered, and where. The government develops regulations for the establishment of centres. What tends to happen is that these regulations (generally based on standards from developed countries) are so restrictive that the majority of current ECCD programmes cannot comply, and operate illegally. In effect the government limits the availability of quality ECCD programmes rather than supporting a diversity of approaches appropriate to the setting. A Nigerian example illustrates the issue.

In 1987 the Nigerian government issued Guidelines on Pre-Primary Education. (Federal Ministry of Education 1987) Within the section on Requirements for Pre-Primary Institutions the following areas were addressed: physical facilities, playground, furniture, fees, teacher qualifications, and other miscellaneous items. Within the physical facilities section (4) it states:

Building must conform to the following standards:

- (i) The classroom size should be 12 m by 6.5 m to accommodate about 25 children;*
- (ii) Each classroom should be cross-ventilated and well lighted;*
- (iii) Each classroom must have storage facilities and built-in cupboards for items of equipment;*
- (iv) The classroom should have two access doorways to serve as alternative exits, and a veranda on either side of the classroom;*

(v) There must be a cloakroom, toilets and wash hand basins of appropriate height....

In terms of furniture the guidelines state:

Provision of chairs and tables suitable for different ages and sizes should be made. Tables should be made of polished wood or formica surfaces. Chairs and tables should be of light materials and carry no sharp edges. There should be a large table with drawers for teachers' use. Provision should be made for book racks and toy storage in every classroom. (5)

In terms of the playground it requires:

(i) A well-fenced playground of varying size according to the enrolment of the school....

(ii) The playground should be grassed and installed with facilities for climbing, jumping, pulling...

(iii) A track or hard surface for pushing along wheeled toys should be provided.. " (4)

Few early childhood programmes could meet these criteria. For example, it is hard to imagine that people are able to create grassed playgrounds in the majority of settings in Nigeria. These regulations necessarily restricted the growth of registered pre-primary programmes, and incidentally led to an increase in the number of unregistered clandestine programmes.

During recent years UNICEF has been working with the Nigerian government to create a more realistic set of guidelines for the establishment of early child care, development and education (ECCDE) centres. (UNICEF 1994) Some of the differences are illustrative of a shift from referencing the experience of developed countries to a focus on creating context-appropriate programmes for children. They begin by stating that there are different types of centres (models) that can be developed (2). These include:

(a) Rural community-based centres (in community buildings or multipurpose halls);

(b) Periodic, rural market-based centres;

(c) Urban, market-based centres in low cost shades (sic) or market stalls;

(d) Work environment-based centres;

(e) Pre-school annex (in primary school premises during school hours);

(f) Church/ Mosque annex (in or near the Church or Mosque);

(g) Home-based centres;

(h) Factory/office-based creches.

The requirements in terms of physical facilities have become:

(a) Building must be safe, strong and in good condition;

(b) Classroom must:

– *be spacious*

- *be located on the ground floor if a storied building...*
- *be equipped with age appropriate seats and mats...*

In terms of the playground, it now calls for a "playground, grassed or filled with sand and with equipment safe for children's climbing, jumping, swinging, balancing". (4)

Thus there has been a shift from the regulations and standards based on Western, developed country norms to regulations that are more responsive to local needs and resources. Today the policies and the derivative laws and regulations are more supportive of the development of a range of ECCD alternatives within Nigeria, all of which could be registered.

Policies can be contradictory. An example comes from India. (Swaminathan 1993) In 1990, India adopted the National Code for Protection and Promotion of Breast-feeding. In 1992 the Regulation of Infant Foods, Breast Milk Substitutes and Feeding Bottles Act was passed. In essence these support breastfeeding for the first 4-6 months of life. Meanwhile the Maternity Benefits Act cited above provides a woman with only three months of maternity leave. Since some time is generally taken prior to the birth, maternity leave does not take the infant into even the fourth month of life. Within the Maternity Benefits Act, once women return to work they are entitled to two 15-minute nursing breaks, with a small amount of time allowed for travel if the infant is in an off-site creche. The number of working women who could actually continue breastfeeding within these limitations is minuscule. Thus while the two laws (the 1990 National Code and the 1992 Regulation of Infant Foods) try to promote breastfeeding the Maternity Benefits Act effectively forces women to use bottle feeding once they have returned to work.

Policies can have unintended consequences. Many countries have instituted policies that state that establishments employing more than a given number of women have to provide creches at the workplace for their workers' children. This law was enacted to protect women's jobs. It also facilitates breastfeeding and the caretaking of the infant by the mother. It allows women to return to work soon after the birth of the child. While this policy is supposed to help maintain women in the workplace, in many instances it has restricted women's participation in the formal sector. Employers simply hire fewer than the minimum number of women required to establish a creche. Thus before rushing to put a policy or law into place it is important to anticipate the consequences.

Policies may not be implemented. To have a policy in place does not necessarily mean that it is being implemented. There may be good (or bad) policies already on the books that have never been enacted. Thus before creating a policy it is advisable to assess what currently exists, the extent to which it is being implemented, and to determine what has stood in the way of its implementation. It may be more important to focus on creating mechanisms that allow for the implementation of current policy than it is to create new policies.

Having no policy may be better than having a bad policy. There are times when a certain momentum has been achieved by an idea and there is informal support for the expansion of a programme or project. The project may be flourishing even in the absence of a clear policy to support it. Sometimes turning the spotlight onto the project and attempting to formalize it by

creating a policy to assure its sustainability can backfire. Lawmakers can actually curtail the potential and halt the momentum of a project through slow or self-interested deliberations. Knowing when to push for a policy requires sensitivity to the political situation and a careful approach.

With these preliminary notes about policy, what it can and cannot do, we will now turn to a discussion of the process for introducing new policy and or changing current ones.

What is the Motivation for Changing or Creating National Policy?

There are a variety of reasons for creating and/or changing current policy. The motivation for making the change or instituting a new policy will greatly influence the form the new policy takes. For example, policies are often scrutinized when there is a shift in government. This is demonstrated most dramatically in Eastern Europe. With the changes to a market economy there have been dramatic alterations in government policy. In many of the countries there has been a shift from a centralized government which controls all activities to a decentralized system that requires action and decision-making at the regional or district level. In addition, the government is less willing to provide the range of services that were previously accessible to families. An example from Poland is described below by Malgorzata Karwowska-Struczyk. (1995)

Poland is a country which, after forty years of the totalitarian (communist) regime, has started creating the mechanisms of democratic and lawful systems both in the political and social spheres of life. The Republic of Poland is a parliamentary democracy. The structural transformations begun after 1989 resulted from the victory of social and political forces connected with *Solidarity* and the resolutions of the so-called *Round Table Meeting*. Only in 1992 did free, democratic general elections take place in Poland for the first time after the second World War... (1)

In the fifties and sixties creches were founded by health departments of the State administration—the Ministry of Health and Social Security—at the local level. After 1970, when changes were introduced into the health services management, creches came under Departments of Health Care, (i.e., local representatives of the Central Administration). Up until 1992 child care institutions for small children were financed from the state budget. At the beginning of 1992 creche management was taken over by local governments.

The decentralization of child care and education institutions, creches included, had both negative and positive consequences. One negative consequence of creches being financed by communes is that many creches have been closed down, but not always those with too few children. Another source of creche financing is parent fees. Previously symbolic, they are so high at present that some parents cannot afford them and prefer noninstitutional forms of child care. Parent fees cover the full cost of meals and extra activities. In addition parents pay a parents committee fee. In some communes there is an extra fee for toys, toiletries etc. The communes take upon themselves the staff salaries, current repairs and equipment.

As for positive changes resulting from the local management, they consist mainly of higher technical and sanitary standards for creche buildings, better provision of toys and equipment,

and more openness to parents. Parents can stay in a creche together with their child, not only during the days or weeks of the adaptive period, but also after it. (11-12)

Poland is an example of an instance when the change in government has brought about considerable changes in terms of the services that the government is willing to provide and the mechanisms used for the implementation of services.

Policies are also changed as a result of international pressures. There are two common kinds of international pressures. The first type are those brought to bear by initiatives that arise from international fora, where countries come together and reach joint agreement on a set of principles to be implemented. For instance, the declaration agreed upon in Jomtien, Thailand as a result of the Education for All (EFA) initiative, and the UN approval of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are good examples of this phenomenon. Countries respond to these international initiatives by setting new goals for themselves, establishing different priorities, amending current policies and /or creating new policies. For example, the Government of Botswana, in the Revised National Policy on Education, March 1994, stated:

Government recognizes the need to develop effective and comprehensive policy on pre-primary education with a view of linking it to the formal education system in the long run...Government will continue to provide an enabling environment for the expansion of this level of education as well as provision of adequately trained teachers and effective supervision. (7)

As a result of international initiatives, processes are established to determine the extent to which countries are in compliance with international norms.

The second type of external pressure comes from donors. Many international donors set up conditions for the receipt of funds and/or loans. Some of these involve the implementation or revision of a set of policies. For example, some countries are required to make structural adjustments in terms of their economic policies in order to receive funds from donors like the World Bank. Increasingly countries are realizing the need to get their house in order before working with donors, in order to better evaluate what the donor has to offer. One way to address the issue is to set policies in place so that the countries have a clear agenda when they are approached by donors. If the government has relevant policies then it is possible to more clearly facilitate donor coordination and reduce duplication of services. In a recent regional seminar held in Myanmar in March 1995, where this issue was addressed, participants made the recommendation that there be "clear ministerial policies and solid strategic plans of action to which donors are oriented, and into which they must fit" (Shaeffer 1995, 13), rather than expecting or requiring the country to adjust to the donor's agenda.

Policies are also changed when there is an increased awareness within the government of the need to address a particular issue. This awareness can come about as the result of lobbying, campaigns designed to focus attention on critical issues, and through the use of research (national and international).

What is the Process for Changing Policy?

Policy creation or change does not need to be a top-down proposition. It does not need to rest solely in the hands of lawmakers and ministry personnel. Most important, policy is not created in a vacuum. Each local solution, each successful research project, each advocacy effort has the potential to influence decision makers' thinking about what best supports young children and their families. In Turkey, as reported in *Coordinators' Notebook 17*, "A Multipurpose Model of Non-formal Education", a research project showing the benefits of parent education has led to changes in the national government policy, increasing government support for early childhood programmes through the Ministry of Education. (Kagitcibasi 1995) In the United States the mothers of children enrolled in Head Start, a national early childhood programme for disadvantaged children, took to the streets in protest in the early 1970s when the funding was about to be cut by policymakers who believed Head Start was a waste of money. The mothers' actions influenced policymakers to continue support for the programme. Later, longitudinal research results demonstrating the social benefits of preschool education helped to cement government commitment to Head Start, which continues today despite massive cuts in other social programmes.

No matter what the impetus for change, policy-making is a process. The process should assist the government in formulating ECCD policies linked to overall national development priorities. The process should also lead to arrangements for effective implementation, monitoring, management and coordination of ECCD programmes, and subsequent identification of policy and strategy options for strengthening ECCD's contribution to national development. The next section describes a process that was undertaken in recent years in Namibia, Malaysia, and South Africa to create national early childhood policies.

Initiating the Process

The impetus for examining policy can come from a variety of sources, as noted above. As the process gets underway it is critical to ensure adequate participation from relevant agencies and groups, both within the government and from outside. Then someone within the government has to take the responsibility for actually overseeing the process. The extent to which the exercise is taken seriously will depend on whether or not this individual has power or access to power within the system. Policy reviews that are initiated by the Planning Office, or the Prime Minister's Office, or an equivalent body, will get the cooperation of high ranking officials within the various ministries. If the initiative is taken by a ministry with low status, it may be possible to change the policy within that ministry, but it is unlikely that the ministry will be able to impact national policy.

The Office or Ministry that begins the policy review process may receive support from an external agency. As noted, donor agencies may provide technical and/or financial support for such a review. UNICEF is another organization that has taken an active role in the policy-making process.

Determining Who is to Be Involved in the Process and in What Capacity

As noted, a government ministry/department generally coordinates the process because ultimate responsibility for establishing policy lies with the government. However, a much broader constituency may well be involved in developing the policy. This can include citizen groups, non-governmental agencies, and the private sector. When a broad-based constituency is involved in the process of creating the policy, and includes representatives of all the people who will ultimately be affected by the policy, it is much more likely to be accepted, embraced and implemented.

Somebody needs to take the lead in overseeing the process. The ministry or office that initiated the activity may continue to coordinate it over time, or stakeholders may decide that the policy would carry more weight if overseen by a different ministry with more perceived power. For example, in the Education for All Initiative, Ministries of Education are designated as the key implementors. However, in many countries it has been necessary to involve other ministries and offices in order to develop national social and economic policies that would support the initiative and garner the necessary resources required by the Ministry of Education to meet national educational goals.

Because government ministries are generally interdependent, and sometimes must compete for limited resources, it is important that the formation of national ECCD policy not be seen as a unilateral *education* policy. ECCD deals with the whole child in its family and community context, and thus policymakers need to draw on the support and engage the participation of diverse ministries such as Health, Social Welfare, Women and Youth Development, and, as was the case in Namibia, the Ministry of Regional and Local Governments.

Regardless of who takes the lead in the process, in order to ensure maximum participation by key agencies and sectors and to enable adequate data to be collected, a Task Force should be set up. The Task Force may be composed of only government representatives, or it may be more broadly based, comprising representatives from government agencies, the private sector and NGOs. With the assistance of a small part-time team of local consultants/resource persons hired to undertake specific activities, the Task Force should have responsibility for the following functions:

- define more specifically the needs to be addressed through the study;
- undertake and coordinate the various sub-studies and activities of the review;
- facilitate the collection of data;
- make arrangements for major review events, such as seminars and workshops;
- ensure broad representation of relevant points of view;
- supervise the preparation of the report;
- review the recommendations and finalize the report.

Once the policy is framed by the Task Force, it is then the responsibility of the lead Ministry/Office to take the recommendations through the legislative process.

To help the government become aware of a broad range of possibilities, and to make the best possible choices within their country, it is useful to provide case studies of alternatives tried elsewhere. Examples from within the region may be of particular interest. In order to provide the international perspective and a degree of 'objectivity', it may well be useful to include a person with regional and/or international ECCD experience who can inform the Task Force of relevant and alternative experiences from other countries. Sometimes, when stakeholders have competing political agendas, an external consultant can help catalyze the participation of Task Force members who would have trouble accepting the expertise and guidance of any one local resource person.

Gathering Information

The Task Force needs to build a case for increased investment in ECCD. Policymakers require information that will both convince them that policies need to be changed and guide them in terms of what appropriate policy might be. The data to be gathered need to answer the following questions that policy makers are likely to ask:

- Why should we invest in ECCD programmes?
- What is the need (under what conditions do children live; what is their physical, emotional and mental status) and what is the demand for ECCD programming?
- What coverage is provided by current ECCD programmes, and in what ways does this respond to need and demand?
- In the best of all possible worlds, what would we like to see in terms of ECCD provision? What are some short-term and long-term goals we can set in order to move toward the kind of coverage and provision we envision?
- Where are there gaps in service and why do these gaps exist?
- What would be the most productive role for this government to take in addressing the gaps and supporting provision of quality services?
- What supports and resources—legislative, financial, human, organizational, and technical—are available for the creation and maintenance of ECCD programmes (including governmental, non-governmental, and international resources)?
- What are the costs associated with different models of ECCD provision? Who is currently paying those costs, and who will pay them in the future?

Moving From Recommendations to Policy and Action

The data-gathering process provides an important foundation for the development of policy. But gathering data and making a set of recommendations are only the preliminary steps in the process. There is then the task of taking the recommendations through the legislative process within the country. The lead government agency will have responsibility for this, and the procedures will vary from one country to another. Even as the process begins it is wise to anticipate what some of the roadblocks might be. For example, is there a significant group or organization that has not been included in the policy-formulation process who may raise

opposition as recommendations are put forward? In one instance the government developed its ECCD policy without the inclusion of NGOs who have been involved in ECCD programming in the country over the past 30 years. When the new policy was put forward the NGOs effectively blocked adoption of the policy because they had not been involved in framing it, even though, had they been involved, a similar policy might well have been drafted.

Opposition might also come from a political party that is not currently in power. Their reaction should be anticipated and addressed if possible.

The greatest constraint is likely to be time. Unless there is considerable pressure to act quickly, it can take several years from the time the policy formulation process begins until a policy is actually in place. Then there is likely to be a gap in time between the policy's adoption and putting the mechanisms into place to allow for its implementation. Thus it is important for those involved to realize that they are making a long-term commitment to the process. It also suggests that policy should not be thought of as a way to respond quickly to current needs. Policy should be designed to foster long-term, national development goals and not be viewed as a stopgap measure to respond to pressures of the day.

In sum, those involved in ECCD activities in the country need to determine what they would like to see as appropriate policies within their country. Guidance on what those policies might be can come from outside the country, in line with international initiatives, but ultimately national policies have to be developed within the ethos of a given nation. The questions that need to be asked are: Does the policy strengthen ECCD's contribution to national development? Does the policy allow for ECCD programmes to be linked to and reinforce high priority objectives of the current national development policy?

A Sample Design for an ECCD Review

One possible design for a policy review is to set up six phases. The activities in each phase would be as follows:

■ PHASE ONE—ESTABLISH THE TASK FORCE

Membership on the Task Force should include all the important stakeholders, both those currently providing ECCD services and those who could potentially be involved. When possible the Task Force should include NGOs and representatives of private providers as well as government officers. In instances where the government does not want outside participants during the study, NGOs and the private providers can be brought in when the study is reviewed, but before final recommendations are made.

■ PHASE TWO—CONDUCT AN INITIAL WORKSHOP

The purpose of the first workshop is to analyze the issues, identify data and research requirements, and propose methods of obtaining and analyzing data. During the Workshop the Task Force members and key individuals should make presentations on ECCD activities sponsored by their agencies. This will help establish the level of current ECCD provision and

activity among the current stakeholders. The Workshop should also offer an arena within which arrangements can be made for data collection by agencies and by individuals/ groups undertaking sub-studies on areas such as curriculum, children's activities and materials, training and supervision of teachers, parental involvement, community participation and management arrangements, costs, etc. A possible agenda for a two-day workshop is as follows:

INITIAL WORKSHOP AGENDA

- Introductions
- Clarify expectations for Workshop in relation to the study
- Arrive at a common definition of ECCD
- Brainstorm what it means
- Develop definition acceptable to group
- Define why the country should invest in ECCD
- Presentation on reasons for investment (The Consultative Group publication, Meeting Basic learning Needs is a good resource for this.)
- Come to agreement on what the aims of ECCD provision should be
- Determine the status of ECCD provision in the country
- Reports by each of the agencies on their coverage. (Before the meeting they should be asked to prepare relevant statistics/tables to be handed out at the meeting.)
- Identify the gaps in provision
- Outline the information required in order to determine if additional provision is required, and by whom?
- Develop a framework and timeline for gathering the information
- Determine next steps

By the end of the workshop the Task Force members should have a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the study and their role in it.

■ PHASE THREE—DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS (6-8 MONTHS)

During this phase, the individuals/ institutions contracted collect data and carry out research according to the requirements and methodologies identified at the workshop in Phase Two. Information collected during this phase will help establish a foundation for the development of policy options to be examined in the next phase.

■ PHASE FOUR—ANALYSIS OF DATA AND A FORMULATION OF POLICY OPTIONS (1-2 MONTHS)

Once the sub-studies are completed, the researchers should compile the report to be submitted to the Task Force. The report should include a set of recommendations in relation to policy.

■ PHASE FIVE—REVIEW AND FINALIZATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

During this phase a second workshop would be held. Prior to the Workshop, all those who will be attending should receive a full copy of the draft report and recommendations. Participants at the second Workshop would include Task Force members, those involved in the studies, and invited outsiders (NGOs, private providers, and possibly donor agencies). At this second workshop the findings of the study would be presented, major issues would be discussed and analyzed, and ECCD programme experiences and funding options would be shared for discussion and analysis. Through small group work, participants would then formulate recommendations. These could be shared with the large group and consolidated into a single set of recommendations.

After completion of the Workshop, a subcommittee of the Task Force would prepare a comprehensive report setting out the data base, the issues, the options and the consensus of the workshop. The final report would then be submitted to the Ministry/Office taking primary responsibility for the process.

■ PHASE SIX—MOVING FROM RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY AND ACTION

The Task Force should develop a strategy for disseminating the recommendations and for moving them through the political process. In addition, steps should be taken to inform the broader public about the recommendations so that they can undertake lobbying and advocacy efforts to help assure adoption of the policy. If there is broad representation within the Task Force, it will simplify this task and assure ownership of the policy by constituents.

Case Studies: Where this Process has Worked

Malaysia

Malaysia¹, a country rich in culture and resources, is projected to have a population of nearly 20 million people by 1995. It consists of two land masses separated by the South China Sea. Peninsular (or Western) Malaysia, which holds 82.3% of the population has 40% of the land. Sabah and Sarawak, on the other hand, with 60% of the land, are the home to 17.7% of the population.

The population of Malaysia is relatively young. According to population projections, at the present time the 0-15 age group constitutes approximately 39% of the population (18% are in the birth through 6 age group), and 57% of the population is in the 16-64 working-age group. Nearly 4% of the population is 65 or older (EPU 1991). The population growth rate was 2.3% in 1990. (Yusof and Zulkifil 1992)

In terms of health indicators, Malaysia has an infant mortality rate of 11/1000 live births, with a maternal mortality rate of 2/1000 live births. The child immunization rates are high: more than 90% of all children have been immunized against BCG, DPT and Polio, with nearly 80% of all children immunized against measles. In terms of nutritional status, 75.5% of all children are in the normal range; only .5% are severely malnourished.

In the 1970s, Malaysia implemented the First Outline Perspective Plan (OPP1), which embodied the New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP focused on eradicating poverty and the restructuring of society. The Second Perspective Plan (OPP2), covers the years 1991-2000 and embodies the National Development Policy (NDP) It aims at balanced and sustainable development. It also aims at promoting human resource development and gives priority to the role of the private sector as the engine of growth.

The Sixth Malaysia Plan: 1991-1995 has as its main thrust, "to sustain the growth and momentum and manage it successfully so as to achieve a more balanced development of the economy". One of the specific strategies undertaken to achieve balanced development is to "enhance human resource development".

The goals of balanced development are based on the following:

Firstly, the principle of growth with equity is fundamental to ensure the realization of a fair and equitable distribution of national wealth. Secondly, a balanced societal development is conducive to the maintenance of social and political stability. Thirdly, the nurturing and moulding of a Malaysian society with high moral values and ethics as well as positive attitudes are fundamental towards the creation of a responsible, resilient, progressive and caring society...The balanced development of the economy is essential to ensure stable growth, minimize social conflicts, promote racial harmony and enhance national unity. (Sixth Malaysia Plan: 1991-1995, 5)

With the above parameters of national development, Malaysia has in the last twenty years experienced rapid changes economically and socially. There have been increasing education and employment opportunities for women. For example, the proportion of women classified as unpaid family workers fell from 39.7% in 1970 to 21.6% in 1990. This was largely due to the absorption of women into the modern economy. The proportion of women classified as 'employee' rose from 38.9% in 1970 to 62.9% in 1990. (Sixth Malaysia Plan: 1991-1995, 415.) Women's participation in the labour force has increased significantly since the Sixth Plan began. Between 1970 and 1990 women's participation rate increased slowly, from 31% in 1970 to 32.7% in 1980, 34.6% in 1985 and 35% in 1990. In 1993 it was 47%. (Mid-Term Review of the Sixth Malaysia Plan: 1991-1995, 239) Thus, increasingly women are entering the labour force. This has impacted on their role within the family.

There have been other changes which have influenced family life. Over the past twenty years there has been a significant rural-urban migration, as well as resettlement programmes engaging rural communities in land development and rehabilitation schemes. These have disrupted the traditional extended family structure; many families now live as nuclear families. This means that women lack the traditional supports in terms of child care, thus creating an increase in the demand for alternative care of young children.

Since the 1970s, and due to the emphasis given to the importance of education, there has also been an increased awareness among parents, government and non-governmental agencies (NGOs) of the importance of preschool education for five-and six-year-old children. Given parental demand, there is a rapidly increasing involvement of the private sector in providing

preschool programmes, particularly in terms of bringing in imported models and materials. In addition, there is a tendency for many in the private sector to provide commercialised programmes which are appealing to parents, preschool teachers and caregivers, but which may not be sound in terms of child development principles.

Besides the increasing demand for programmes for children from zero to six years old, there is now a demand for afterschool care for children of working parents.

It is in relation to this changing situation in Malaysia that the Government of Malaysia was interested in undertaking a study of needs and formulating an ECCD policy that would support the national development goals. The study provided an understanding of the strengths of ECCD provision within Malaysia. It also indicated issues to be addressed to enhance the capacity of government, non-governmental agencies, the private sector and the public to promote the well-being of all young children. As a result of the study the following set of recommendations was formulated, based on findings from the study.

Recommendations

1. At the present time Malaysia lacks a comprehensive policy to support the overall development of young children as they make the transition from home to care outside the home, to preschool and then into the primary school. Current services are fragmented and there is a lack of interface among the agencies currently serving young children and their families.

Therefore it is recommended that:

a comprehensive and integrated ECD policy for Malaysia be adopted to meet the needs of children from conception through the early primary school years. The policy should:

1) be related to Vision 2020, and the National Development Policy;

2) address important national issues, for example:

– challenges associated with the quality of life desired for Malaysians, including the strengthening of the family and moral, ethical and spiritual values;

– the support and enhancement of the National Plan of Action related to the World Summit on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children;

– challenges associated with increasing the labour force participation among women for the industrialization programme, and the implications for the family.

Thereby, ECD contributes to Human Resources Development.

2. Currently ECD services are fragmented, addressing only selected ECD needs.

Therefore, it is recommended that:

a review of current legislation affecting young children and their families be undertaken.

3. There is a lack of knowledge about what happens to children who are not in registered child care and preschool programmes, and what happens for children when they are not attending child care, preschool or lower primary school.

Therefore, it is recommended that:

a study be undertaken to more completely document the situation and needs of young children.

4. There are well-developed Preschool Curriculum Guidelines for children 4-6 years of age. There is no equivalent curriculum guideline for children under the age of four.

Therefore it is recommended that:

comprehensive, integrated Curriculum Guidelines be developed for children from birth to six years of age that interface with the Primary School Curriculum.

5. ECD planning and practice must rest on a comprehensive and integrated data base. At the present time there is no comprehensive data bank on ECD needs and provision. It is important to have a better understanding of needs as related to provision.

Therefore, it is recommended that:

the Ministry of Health, through additions to their Home-based Child Health Card, collect relevant data on children 0-4.

Further, it is recommended that:

the Ministry of Education maintain responsibility for the data base for children aged 4-9. Agencies providing services to this age group should channel their data to this Ministry.

Further, it is recommended that:

data for target groups like immigrant children should be collected by the Ministry of Home Affairs and channelled to the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Education for the respective age group.

6. A cornerstone of effective early childhood programmes internationally is parent and community involvement in all aspects of the programme. The study revealed that this is lacking in most programmes.

Therefore it is recommended that:

the concept of parent involvement be broadened to a concept of parent participation which respects and strengthens the parent's role in the child's development and establishes linkages between the home, early childhood programmes and children's transition into the primary school.

Further, it is recommended that:

parent and community support and involvement be mobilized in creating awareness, planning, implementing, and sharing the cost of ECD programmes.

It is also recommended that:

media be involved in promoting a greater understanding of child development, and the responsibility and role of the private sector in ECD provision.

7. Training is a key component in the successful implementation of any curriculum. The study revealed that current training, for the most part is inadequate.

Therefore it is recommended that:

a national ECD training system be established which provides a framework for the development of training packages, certification for trainees, accreditation of trainers and training centres, decentralized resource centres, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating training programmes.

8. Research and evaluation provide data important in the planning process. Across ECD programmes there is a lack of evaluation of programme effectiveness and impact. Further, there is a gap between academic research and its application in terms of programming.

Therefore it is recommended that the following research be pursued:

–the impact of available models (e.g. home and community-based as well as centre-based) on children's later growth and development.

–the cost-effectiveness of different programme approaches.

9. At the present time government provision of ECD is heavily subsidized.

Therefore, it is recommended that:

in line with government policy to increase the private sector participation in all public services, strategies be developed, which will shift the financing of ECD from Government to the private sector, the community and parents.

Further, it is recommended that:

alternative models of financing ECD be explored, including taxation, the development of Trusts, and philanthropic initiatives. The 1994 Budget includes a tax benefit for businesses offering ECD services. The effectiveness of the approach needs to be evaluated.

To address the issues identified and the recommendations made thus far,

It is recommended that:

as an interim measure, a National Early Childhood Development Council be created within the Prime Minister's Department for the purpose of formulating, conceptualizing and overseeing ECD programmes in the various sectors (government, non-governmental and private). The Council should be supported by a strong Secretariat with technical skills related to ECD. In the long term the Council should be institutionalised within a major Ministry.

The draft policy that resulted from the study reads:

A National ECD Policy

It is known that:

the foundation for children's growth and development is established within the first few years of life and that learning begins at birth;

Further, it has been demonstrated that:

–conducive and stimulating environments that enhance young children's physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual development lead to holistic and balanced individuals; and that

–investments in early childhood development modify social and economic inequalities, addressing the issues of accessibility, equity and equality; and that

–quality early childhood programmes provide an environment which supports the transmission of cultural, moral and religious values that are the underpinnings of a fully moral and ethical society.

Thus, with a focus on Vision 2020 and the nine central strategic challenges, the Government of Malaysia has made a commitment to the promotion of the importance of early childhood years, from conception through the early primary grades. Further, in accordance with government policy, close collaboration will be sought with the private sector in the implementation of appropriate early childhood programmes.

The recommendations of the Task Force are currently under review by the Government of Malaysia.

South Africa

The motivation for the study in South Africa² was different from the motivation in Malaysia. The study was begun a year and a half before the first free election in 1994. The impetus for the study was the high rates of repetition and dropout in education for a large percentage of the population. It was recognized that once the new government came into power there would be political demands to level the playing field. Therefore the new South African government would

need to consider how to ensure that all children were ready to enter the first year of primary school.

A Study Team, consisting of eight ECCD specialists from South Africa and an international consultant, undertook an examination of the situation of young children in South Africa, looking particularly at the kinds of supports that are available to them and making recommendations in relation to how they can benefit more effectively from basic education. The Team was charged specifically with making recommendations in regards to the value and feasibility of creating a preschool programme for five-year-olds. While the Study Team did in fact conclude that an essential part of the strategy for upgrading education is to bring five year olds into the education system, the team felt that if this were to be the sole focus of state input to early childhood development, it would be too little too late for the majority of young children. Furthermore it fails to take into account the particular vulnerability of the first three years of life and the particular needs of working parents.

The Study Team also believed that a preschool year for five-year-olds could only be effective if it was part of a larger strategy designed to address the roles that government, non-governmental agencies, the private sector, communities and parents should play in supporting children's growth and development. Thus the recommendations placed the creation of a programme for five-year-olds in a broader, more appropriate context.

Results of the Study

The study included information on the following:

- The evidence from South Africa on the effects of preschool on repetition and dropout and on nonschool outcomes was summarized.
- The key skills that all children should have acquired by the end of the preschooling period were identified and elaborated upon.
- The types of skills required of preschool staff in order to support the development of children's skills were defined, and an appropriate cost-effective mix of staffing was proposed.
- There was an examination of the various 'bridging' modules being offered at the time to see to what extent these provided the skills defined in section (a), and an assessment was made of the modules' strengths and weaknesses, including their impact on repetition and dropout.
- A mapping of the preschool provider network was undertaken. This included a description of the provision of ECCD programmes by various government and NGO programmes and the number of children served, and the geographic spread of provision. The process also allowed for the identification of programmes or programme elements (e.g., initial training, ongoing support, instructional materials) that could be used as models for future expansion of ECCD provision.
- Recommendations were made in relation to an appropriate cost-effective mix of preschool staff, and the availability of training for different levels of staff, and cost per trainee was

determined. Given the capacity at that point in time an estimate was made of how many teachers could be trained in a 12-month period. There was also a specification of the conditions under which the existing training capacity could be expanded.

- The roles that government, NGOs, communities and parents should play were defined in relation to: setting standards and monitoring provision, the development of curriculum, training, paying staff, providing physical facilities, and covering the costs of recurrent materials. Also, recommendations were made in terms of the institutional arrangements that were needed in order to coordinate preschool if it were to be offered by government.
- An assessment was made of the recurrent costs associated with the existing models of preschool provision, and a description was provided of how these costs were being financed.
- A description was provided of the positions of the then-current government, political movements, parties and extra-parliamentary groups in relation to preschool provision.
- The key policy issues to be resolved by a new democratically-elected government were identified and, where appropriate, recommendations were made for consideration by the new authorities.
- An intervention strategy and programme were proposed to address the demand for preschool services over time. On the basis of different models of provision, the cost of a new government offering a year of preschool to every child in the country was estimated. Cost estimates were also made for a gradual increase in ECCD provision over a five-year time period.

In essence, the Task Force recommended that the government, in partnership with NGOs, the private sector, trade unions, the community and families, invest in the provision of early childhood services for children from birth through the early primary years. The recommendations focussed specifically on the provision of support to early childhood development programmes for selected children from birth through age four, and the provision of universal preprimary education for five-year-olds prior to entry into the formal school system. However, the report made the point that it was important that this year not be offered in lieu of or apart from school reform at the junior primary level.

The recommendations made as a result of the study were based on resources already developed within South Africa. For example, there is a strong community of non-governmental agencies which have developed appropriate curriculum for young children, and a variety of outreach models allowing for the provision of services to isolated rural areas. The variety reflects a sensitivity to differing regional and local needs within generally accepted principles of development which seek to redress historical imbalances through appropriate and cost-effective strategies.

The NGOs involved in early childhood development (ECD) programmes have also developed extensive training systems that 1) provide ECD staff with appropriate skills and knowledge to work with young children and their families, and 2) enable communities to take ownership of ECD programmes and sustain them over time. It is these strengths that will be built upon in the creation of a national system of support to ECD programmes.

It was the belief of the Study Team that over the next five years the current training agencies could develop the capacity to train the required number of ECD workers, provided that they were given the necessary resources to do so, and provided that appropriate linkages were established with formal teacher training institutions. Within the recommended Plan of Action the services provided by current Resource and Training Agencies will be expanded and strengthened.

Selected Recommendations

- Support for the development, expansion, management and funding of early childhood provision is the joint responsibility of the state, provincial and local governments, the private sector, the community and parents.
- Responsibility for the development of policies and guidelines for the implementation of early childhood development programmes should be the responsibility of central government.
- A Department of Early Childhood Development (ECD) should be created within the Ministry of Education and Training, responsible for creating policy and guidelines.
- Curriculum guidelines for early childhood development should be established by the National Institute for Curriculum Development (NICD), taking into consideration children's needs in health, nutrition, education and psychosocial development.
- Responsibility for interpretation and implementation of guidelines and policies for ECD programmes should be based at the Provincial level.
- Implementation of ECD programmes should be the responsibility of Local Authorities and ECD management committees. They would be responsible for stimulating the development of ECD programmes, registering and monitoring the activities of individual early childhood programmes, and they would be involved in direct provision.
- At the programme level, parents will have responsibility for management of early childhood provision. They would be responsible for establishing and maintaining the facilities, and paying of the teachers whose salary would be provided through a combination of state subsidies, local funding and parent fees.
- An Interministerial ECD Committee should be created to promote integration across sectors of services in support of young children and their families.
- A Reception Class for five-year-olds should be created. This is to be phased in over a period of five years. By the end of the fifth year 100% of the five-year-olds should have access to a Reception Class.
- Resource and Training Centres need to be established in each Province to provide training and support to ECD programmes. Current NGOs can be accredited and contracted to serve as RTCs. These should be subsidized by government.
- A Reception Year for five year olds should not be implemented in isolation. It must be linked to reform within Junior Primary.
- Alternative ways of reaching those under 5 need to continue to be explored.

The costs of implementing the recommendations were calculated. The per capita costs of provision, inclusive of the costs of facilities and the training of teachers and appropriate support staff, decrease as more children have access to the services. In the first year there would be state subsidies of ECCD services for 579,000 children, from birth to 5 years of age, in a variety of settings. The average per capita cost is R1,960 (US\$ 653/year). By the end of the fifth year more than 3 million children would have access to ECCD provision, at an average cost of R1,504 (US\$ 501) per child per annum. This is a small investment to make in the foundation upon which a nation is being built.

When the new Government came into power the Report was submitted to those formulating government policy. What follows is what was written into the Draft White Paper on Education and Training. (Staatskoerant Government Gazette 1994)

57. The care and development of infants and young children must be the foundation of social relations and the starting point of a national human resource development strategy. The national and provincial Departments of Education will have specific roles to play in this field. They cannot undertake the full responsibility for ECD, which is a multi-disciplinary field. Instead, the national Department of Education will liaise with the Departments of National Health and Welfare in order to establish an inter-departmental committee or working group to develop their joint interests in policy for the infant and young child.

58. The Department of Education has particular responsibility for the education components of ECD, especially the development of policy frameworks, norms and standards in relation to curricula and teacher education, including paraprofessional training.

59. The new national department is planned to have a directorate for early Childhood Development, and Lower Primary Education, in the light of the continuity in developmental approaches to the young child and the need for a reshaping of curricula and teaching methodology for the early years of school. Hopefully, similar units will be established in provincial Departments of Education, which will undertake similar liaison functions with Health and Welfare.

60. The new national directorate will have the major responsibility for developing policy for the reception phase, the first year of compulsory general education programme, in consultation with its provincial counterparts. These new provincial units would therefore take up the massive challenge of spearheading the phasing in of the policy, in conjunction with NGO providers and accredited training agencies.

61. However, before the policy process could properly begin, it would be necessary to consult with all national stakeholders in the field, including the national representative body of ECD practitioners, in order to develop an appropriate statutory consultative group to advise on ECD policy, resourcing and development.

62. State funds will not be sufficient to mount a major developmental programme in 1995, but the seed money should be made available, as in the new ABET programme, to begin the startup phase and attract other funders. This process needs to be driven through a partnership of local government, community, business, worker and development agency interests, in order to build public awareness and develop a funding strategy for a national ECD programme.

The South Africa case study provides a good example of how recommendations can be turned into policy language. The policy has not yet been put into place and implementation has not begun, so it is not possible to evaluate the effort. However a start has been made toward a policy that unifies diverse efforts into a cohesive nationwide response to the needs of young children.

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Endnotes

¹ The material for this case study has been taken from *Malaysian Early Childhood Development Study* by J.L. Evans and K. Ismail, 1994, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: UNICEF.

² The material presented in the South African case study was taken from the Report of the South African Study on Early Childhood Development, published by the Centre for Education Policy Development, with support from the World Bank and USAID. Johannesburg, 1994.

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