



The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development

PROGRAM PROFILES

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"Here are two wonderful coconut shells, now they are hung with a brown string, and some pebbles and rocks and stones and our fine little scale is now complete."

ECCD in Sri Lanka

By Judith Evans

Based on presentations by: Ms. Amara Amarasinghe, Project Officer, Early Childhood Education, UNICEF; Ms. Chintha Akuretiyagama, Director, Children's Secretariat, Ministry of Transport and Women's Affairs; Mr. P. K. Ariyasena, National Institute of Social Development at the UNICEF Regional Meeting in Bangkok, December 1995.

Sri Lanka is a country that historically has placed a high value on education. Thus the government has consistently made the funding of education a priority. Children begin school at age five, and most of the children enroll (overall 93.1%; urban 93.6%; 92.6% rural) and remain at school until Grade 5. (There is a 91.6% completion rate for grades 1–5.) At that point more boys than girls begin to drop out, primarily to undertake work to earn money for the family. (The dropout rate for boys is 4.9% and for girls it is 3.8%—from grades 1–9.) The repetition rate is 7.74% Grades 1–5 and 5.04% Grades 6–8.)

In 1979, the International Year of the Child, the government established the Children's Secretariat. In 1986, Sessional Paper no. 111 on ECCD was submitted to the government by the Children's Secretariat, making ECCD a priority within the country. It provided a national policy

in support of the care and education of young children and put forward a delivery system for ECCD programmes. Support centres for ECCD programmes were established in each division. The plan also specified a management structure and staff development plans. Emphasis was given to the development of ECCD programmes in the plantations and new settlements. Resources were allocated to support ECCD activities at both the national and district levels. Also, an experimental ECCD project was initiated.

In 1991, UNICEF participated in creating a Plan of Action (NPA) with the National Planning Department, Ministry of Policy Planning and Implementation. Within the NPA the main emphasis in terms of government provision is on home-based approaches to ECCD, with formal preschool and day care services being provided by NGOs, the private sector and religious bodies. Today 25% of preschool-aged (3–4 year old) children attend preschool.

Two different studies have been conducted that guide UNICEF's work in the country. One was a study of the impact of preschool. The study measured social competency, writing and movement coordination, letter reading, terms of relations (spatial development), sentence structure, language competency, counting, quantity, and maths. Four groups of children were compared: those with no preschool, those who attended for 1–6 months; those who attended for 7–12 months and those attending for more than a year. Those who had some preschool experience did significantly better than those without preschool. However, it was also discovered that children attending preschool more than one year (i.e. 2 years) did not do significantly better than those who went for only 1 year. In fact, their performance was essentially equivalent. The study also revealed that the mother's education was the best predictor of children's performance in all subjects except quantity and maths, where the father's education is a better predictor. The mother's education is also the best predictor of children's health status.

The second study was conducted in 1988 to better understand the education needs within the country. A national study on the entry competency of Primary 1 children was completed by the National Institute of Education. A sub-sample of children in deprived areas was included. The instrument used to measure children's readiness for school could be adapted to other cultures. It consists of a series of pictures that are used to determine children's understanding of space (position, distance), number, sequence, and seriation. There is also a test of language development. The findings from the study led to curriculum reform in Primary 1 and textbook reform.

In conducting its work in Sri Lanka, UNICEF, together with the Children's Secretariat, identified a number of problems that are now being addressed directly.

1. Only 25% of the 3–4 year-olds go to preschool. Thus there was a need to reach the other 75%. To do this, the home-based option was developed. This has taken the form of home-based activities to strengthen parental skills in optimizing the home and the immediate environment as the primary source of learning and development before school age. Within this line of activity UNICEF has been:

- developing the activity booklet to be used by parents;

- supporting the development of a structure for the delivery of parent education through the government infrastructure and NGOs;
- designing a model for mobilization of the home-based programme. (See case study below.)

2. There is no uniformity in provision since a variety of organizations and agencies are involved in preschool provision. Thus there was interest in the promotion of quality in preschool education. To move toward more uniformity, a set of guidelines has been developed and activity books have been created. Within this initiative UNICEF is supporting:

- a study on the situation of pre-school education; a forum for the exchange of ideas among NGOs;
- the development of guidelines for prechools;
- the development of activity books for preschools; (materials for preschool teachers have been developed.)
- the design of teacher training programs;
- the creation of self-evaluation packages for preschool teachers.

3. There is a lack of institutional support to monitor and evaluate preschool programmes. In response, a self-evaluation package was developed that teachers can use to assess their own programme.

The Self-evaluation package is worth disseminating to others. It is titled, *Where am I going?* Teachers are asked to evaluate themselves in terms of eight content areas: free play, an understanding of children's differences, storytelling, the use of the environment, aesthetics, health, language development, and maths. The tool comes in two forms. There is a chart that is hung on the wall. Parents can refer to this to see what should be happening within the school. Teachers also have this in booklet form and they use it weekly to check on their own programme.

4. There is a lack of co-ordination among organizations working for early childhood development. In response to this need, an NGO forum has been created where ideas and experiences can be shared, and where a better system for coordinating the activities of NGOs can be created. Work is also being done with NGOs to design appropriate preschool programmes for children in the rural areas. Also, a resource group is being created to assist the Children's Secretariat.

Currently a study of preschool education is underway that should provide data for use in the pursuit of other activities.

The Home-Based Programme

The results of the Grade 1 study indicated that 30% of urban and 60% of rural children were not ready for school. Thus the decision was made to focus on home-based programmes in remote areas with an emphasis on mothers.

The programme is designed to train parents to:

- to be aware of developmental stages and recognize them;
- to identify learning situations at home through daily activities;
- to recognize the human and material resources in the home environment;
- to stimulate children while attending to daily work;
- to recognize the difference in children's development over time.

To develop the curriculum, the team visited homes and observed the kinds of activities that adults and children were engaged in throughout the day. They got parents to talk about their children, what they were like, and what they could do. This stimulated parents to pay more attention to what their children were doing and got them involved in what their children could learn.

The resulting curriculum is based entirely on household activities. In the booklets provided for parents, there are pictures of common activities and an explanation of what the child learns while undertaking a given task. It also suggests ways parents can stimulate problem-solving skills and encourage the use of language while involved in the tasks.

A series of 8 activity books has been created for the village group to share with parents. Since most parents can read and write, they are given the materials directly. One of the booklets is on cooking. Within the booklet, the curriculum addresses six areas:

1. While getting the rice ready for cooking
2. While washing and cooking rice
3. While scraping coconut and extracting milk
4. While cutting vegetables
5. While getting curries ready for cooking
6. While making *mallun* and salads

And within each of these areas there are six specific activities that can be undertaken with children, some for children under 3 and the others are for children over 3 years of age.

One of the most important impacts of the programme is that it has *stimulated adult-child interaction*. Traditionally there is little communication between adults and children. The activities in the curriculum encourage and require adults to talk to children. This has been very positive in terms of children's language development and the strengthening of the bond between parents and their children.

The programme is introduced in a village through the Village Committees. (There are 3 Village Committees within each District Secretariat Division.) The programme is being implemented by 48 Village Committees in the Sinahala Area and 12 Village Committees in the Tamil Area, each committee consists of 10 members. There are 3 facilitators per village; facilitators are volunteers. Each of the three facilitators within the village is assigned to work with about 6 children.

The work of the Village Committees is supported by Middle-Level Officers, who in turn are supported by Divisional Secretariat and Divisional Planning and Education Officers. To begin the programme, the Village Committee prepares a map of the community and identifies families with

preschool aged children. The facilitators then go from house to house and invite parents to be a part of the programme. Subsequently the facilitator either does home visits or works with the parents in a group. Once a month the facilitators get together to share experiences and do planning. Neighboring villagers are invited to attend one of the group meetings to learn about the programme and determine if they want to set up something comparable in their village. There is now a high demand for the programme. As parents see what the programme has done for other parents and their children, more parents are requesting to be included. There is high competition in terms of education, so if parents see other children getting ahead, they want the same for their children.

This programme is excellent in its use of everyday activities to support all aspects of children's growth and development. The curriculum for the programme is solidly grounded in everyday experience and truly builds on the activities and culture that exist.

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ECCD in Viet Nam

by Judith L. Evans

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Viet Nam is a country with a population of 73 million. There are 53 provinces, 520 districts, and 53 ethnic minorities. There are 10 million children 0–5 years of age. 2.2 million are in some form of an ECCD programme: 7.76% of the 0–3 age group are in child care; and 32.9% of the 3–5 year-olds (65% of five-year-olds) are in kindergarten.

In 1989, Viet Nam's Government began a shift to a market economy and began phasing out government subsidies. Since then Viet Nam has achieved remarkable macro-economic growth, and many state services have been privatized, including day care. As a result, many services once accessible to all families are no longer within the means of poor families. One problem facing poor families is appropriate day care.

Viet Nam is moving toward a decentralized administrative structure. There are administrative offices and People's Committees at the central, provincial, district and commune levels. The District level Management Committee is responsible for education at the commune level. There

is a Commune Management Committee that is responsible for the home-based and centre-based day care programmes and for the kindergartens.

Kindergartens can be found in primary schools, some are institution-based, and some are community-based. The kindergartens are used as the base for **the support and training of day care childminders**. At the present time the Government is focussing on the five-year-old group in an attempt to prepare them for school. (Ten percent of the government education budget is devoted to ECCD.)

In UNICEF's programme they are supporting the development of:

- community-and home-based ECCD programmes;
- primary education—non-formal and formal;
- innovative programs such as credit schemes;
- and the Viet Nam National Committee for the Protection of Children.

Home Based Day Care Centres (HBDCC)

In early 1994 UNICEF began to support a local credit scheme that was developed in conjunction with home-based day care centres. The programme is being implemented in minority communities in two of Viet Nam's poorest provinces. The project involves the Viet Nam Women's Union at the local level and the Early Childhood Development Department for the Ministry of Education and Training for training and supervision. The project currently covers 1800 families with 730 children under the age of 3 being served in six communes.

The Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU) motivates and selects women to be the day care mother (childminder). Those selected are VWU members who are in good health, show enthusiasm and love for children, and are willing to take on the task. They may be literate or not. They are trained by day care or kindergarten teachers in the same commune. They are provided with cloth charts with health and nutrition messages that they display in their centre, which is usually their home. (The cloth charts are durable and can be washed!) One childminder looks after 4 to 10 children. Centres are generally open from 7–11 A.M. and again from 2–5 P.M., although the schedules may differ from village to village depending on the needs of the mothers.

Parents bring cooked food to the centres for the children's meal. Every parent contributes 20 kg of *paddy* per year, and the community pays the childminder 50,000 VN Dong (about US \$5.00) per year for running the HBDCC. (The estimated annual costs for one HBDCC serving to children is US \$37.)

The programme encourages family-based food production systems, based on traditional uses of foods. This can include a vegetable garden, fish ponds, and/or the raising of livestock—primarily pigs. The Women's Union encourages its members to provide fruits for the children; oranges are abundant in the area. The motto is "One fruit tree and one animal for the children."

One of the unique features of this programme is the credit scheme with which it is connected. All the mothers of the children in the HBDCC, as well as the childminders, are members of the credit scheme. On a rotating basis, they receive US \$30 to develop income-generating activities within the family. (These generally are linked to the food production activities listed above.)

Women are eligible for the credit scheme if:

- they have children under the age of five who are malnourished and attend the day care centre;
- they are pregnant;
- they have children who have dropped out of school;
- they are illiterate; or
- they are childminders or health workers.

There are 10 women in each savings group. Only 8 of the 10 women in the group have a loan at a given point in time. Thus there is considerable pressure on the women with loans to pay back their loans so that other women in the group can take out a loan. The loans have to be paid back in 6 months. Each month the woman pays back part of the principle plus 2% interest, plus she makes a contribution to the savings fund. (The interest is used to cover costs of: inflation (15%), risk (10%), administration (25%), incentives (40%), and social welfare (10%.) Women are able to receive three cycles of loans (for \$30, \$40, and then \$50). Their eligibility depends on their ability to pay back previous loans. After the third loan, it is assumed they will be able to continue their income-generating activities without support. If women are unable to pay back their loans on schedule, other women in the group help them out. There is also a range of contingencies when animals die, etc.

The savings groups are organized into Clusters, with 5–10 groups in a cluster. The Clusters are overseen by the Steering Committee, consisting of 7 members. The Chair is the Chair of the Women's Union. The other members are selected by the Women's Union and usually include one ECCD teacher.

Once a month the members of the credit scheme meet together. The meeting includes health workers, teachers, and managers of the credit scheme who provide information on child care, nutrition, safe motherhood and family planning, and management of the credit scheme. The monthly meeting is also the time for collecting capital and interest and savings connected with the loans. In addition, a literacy programme has also been introduced.

To date loans have been provided to 232 women by UNICEF. In 1995 the groups were able to provide an additional 154 loans from the savings already generated by the project. Thus a total of 386 women have received loans. The project has gone from 3 communes to 29 communes involved in the scheme.

Community reaction to the project has been positive. The enrolment of children and the use of the day care services resulted in the creation of effective linkages between education, families, and communities. Local teaching staff now have relationships with families to the extent that they consider themselves members of the children's families and feel free to discuss issues of child care, nutrition and attitudes with mothers. Community leaders are aware of the importance of early child care and development and are supportive of the centres. Mothers are happy that their

children are well looked after. Women are provided with an opportunity to meet, participate in group discussions to talk and learn from one another. Girls are freed from taking care of younger siblings; they can go to school and help to improve their family's quality of life.

An evaluation of one commune after a year of being involved in the programme showed the following results:

- the commune went from having no home-based day care centres to having eight;
- they went from having two centre-based day care centres to having three;
- they went from two to three kindergartens;
- there was a significant improvement in women's health. Before the programme only 64 out of 300 women were healthy; at the end of the year 215 were healthy;
- children's health status also improved. At the beginning there were 145 healthy children among the 308; after one year this increased to 215 out of 308; the percentage of families without sufficient food for a month decreased from 96% to 51.5%; and
- 182 women achieved literacy.

Not all these improvements are the direct result of the HBDCC programme as there are other UNICEF initiatives in the same communes, such as integrated health, nutrition, and water and sanitation projects. However this is a good example of how an integrated approach to family support can help create positive outcomes for both children and the community.

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