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# SITE VISIT: Early Childhood and Family Development Project

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Final Report of Two Year Pilot Phase. Somporn Phanjaruniti, Consultant, UNICEF, LAO PDR. December 1996.

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## *Introduction/Background*

This is the final report for the Early Childhood and Family Development Project supported by UNICEF in the Lao PDR and implemented by the Ministry of Education with the cooperation of the Lao Women's Union and Ministry of Health. This report summarizes the overall pilot project that has been implemented over the last two years as well as the initial study used for designing the project in 1993-94.

### *Initial Motivation for the Project*

Before the start of the Project, the current head of Karn village in remote Houaphan Province stated that, "Yes, there is need for solving food security and economic problems but at the same time we must work on children's issues —so that our children and us will not have to come back and keep working on the same food security and economic problems again in the next ten-twenty years. Then our problems will not go into the circle again and again. To stop this cycle of suffering in the long term we should start now to educate parents on how to develop our children."

The motivation of villagers to work to improve the lives of their children as expressed in this quote has been one of the inspirations for the project team in initiating and continuing on with this project.

The Early Childhood and Family Development Project (ECFD) grew out of past UNICEF work with village women working through the Lao Women's Union. The women's development project had already been working for over five years promoting various development initiatives for women in five provinces of the Lao PDR. It was through this experience that the interest developed and the need to more directly address child development issues was identified. The first step was an in-depth study and analysis of the current situation of child rearing practices among the various ethnic communities in the country. This study was carried out over a four month period in 1993-94 using participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods by a team from Dong Dok Teaching Training University, the Lao Women's Union, and UNICEF together with provincial and district women's union staff. The study took place in Samneua District of Houaphan Province which was selected because of its remote location, presence of representative ethnic groups, and past history of UNICEF/LWU work.

## ***Traditional Child Rearing Practices Study***

The results of the above study, *Traditional Child Rearing Practices Among Different Ethnic Groups in Houaphan Province, Lao PDR* became the basis for the design of the ECFD pilot project. The study showed many strengths in traditional child rearing practices among the three ethnic groups studied and noted key factors needed to start the project. Weaknesses and limitations in traditional practices were also identified:

### ***Strengths:***

- good village solidarity and a strong sense of cohesiveness
- presence of maternal and non-maternal caregivers
- traditional home day care structures
- availability of traditional toys
- good attitudes toward the children
- villager awareness of certain milestones and measures of their children's development
- good self-help skills among children
- acceptance and sympathy toward disabled children
- positive traditional beliefs and rituals
- prevalence of breast feeding
- availability and knowledge of useful traditional medicine

### ***Problems:***

At the village level there are two main factors which negatively affect children's welfare. First, parents and other caregivers have a lack of knowledge on certain aspects of providing adequate care and enhancing the overall development of their children. Secondly, parents do not have enough time to provide adequate care for their children. These factors are linked to many other issues and root causes such as:

- Heavy demand on women's labour (household/agricultural work)
- Poor economic status which is related to limited land availability, increasing population, decreased soil fertility, limited appropriate technologies, natural calamities (drought, etc.) and limited access to income generation opportunities.
- Older children, particularly girls, have to act as caregivers for younger children and do household work. This prevents girls from attending school and leads to the cycle of uneducated women becoming mothers while lacking proper knowledge on how to care for their children.

At all levels of government there are problems that have limited the work of Early Childhood Development in the past:

- There are very few existing resources (curriculum, training methods, etc.) about Early Childhood and Family Development in Laos.
- Formal preschools are not available and not applicable at this point in time for the rural villages. Formal preschools only serve two percent of the pre-primary children.

### ***Approval by the Ministry of Education***

Following the completion of the study and presentation of its results, UNICEF staff worked together with the team from Dong Dok Teacher Training University –Preschool Division to prepare a project document for a two year pilot project. Due to the villagers' request to focus on education as the primary focus of the ECFD project, it was decided that it would be most appropriate to have the Ministry of Education take central responsibility for this project because of the technical resources and staff they had available. The MOE was particularly interested in the project as they had been looking for alternative ECFD strategies as it was recognized that only a small percentage of children, mostly in urban areas, can attend formal pre-schools. The Women's Union and Health sectors were still included in both preparing and implementing the project. The Ministry of Education approved the two-year pilot project and UNICEF agreed to provide funding in March 1995.

### ***Goals and objectives***

The following goals and objectives for the project were defined in the project document:

#### ***Goals***

- To initiate a process of empowering villagers to improve child care in the family, to improve the capacity of child caregivers (parents, grand-parents, elder brothers and sisters), and to create an environment for enhancing the overall development of children aged 0-6 years.
- To improve the capacity of technical personnel in project operation and to have the ability to extend the project by themselves in the future.

#### ***Objectives***

- To periodically organize training for child caregivers (parents, grandparents and other people who are concerned with child care work) at the village based on traditional experiences and knowledge of villagers.
- To create the network of technical personnel at central, province, district and village levels using staff from Health, Education, and Women's Union sectors.
- To establish a resource center for Early Childhood and family development.
- To strengthen appropriate traditional family or relative home-based day care systems suited to villagers needs by providing suitable technical and material support.

- To coordinate/identify resources aimed at addressing related economic livelihood issues. These will allow the children to have better care, higher nutritional levels, good sanitary conditions and other development.
- To provide information to policy makers and increase their interest in ECFD issues.

### ***Project Approach***

The project is based on some main principles or approaches:

- Use of existing indigenous knowledge, wisdom and traditional child-rearing practices and community interest and willingness to participate as a starting point.
- Belief that ECFD must be part of a wide rural development program and cannot be implemented in isolation.
- Belief that ECFD must be a community based initiative, use non-formal approaches and involve not only children and women but the whole community.
- The training methodology and project implementation should include participatory techniques that build on villagers' knowledge, capacities, and traditions.
- Use of a teamwork approach at each level of implementation.

### ***Project Structure (organization)***

The project structure (location, institutional components) are as follows:

#### ***Location***

The project was implemented in Samneua District of Houaphan Province. This is a relatively poor and isolated province with a large ethnic minority population. Despite the challenges, there were many good points favoring the implementation of the project in the province:

- The strong solidarity of the government committee, village organization and villagers.
- An existing base of rural development programs such as the women's development program supported by UNICEF.
- The presence of positive traditional childrearing practices and the strong sense of community (cohesiveness).
- Data had already been collected for the ECFD study which demonstrated community interest and a high potential for the pilot project.

Within Houaphan Province, the choice of Samneua District was made for many of the same reasons as above. The position of the provincial center in Samneua made it easier for the provincial project team to communicate, follow up, and work together with the district staff.

Ten villages were selected by using the following criteria which were agreed upon with the central technical team, the province, and district government officials:

- villages that have strong solidarity (unity) and strong village administration (organization);
- awareness and concern by villagers and the village leadership of the unmet needs of their children and a demonstrated interest in improving their children's lives;
- reasonably good accessibility to the village for the provincial and district technical staff to provide regular follow up (once a month) during the pilot project;
- inclusion of representative ethnic groups in the villages selected. This resulted in the selection of four mid-land (Khmu) villages, three high-land (Hmong) villages, and three low-land villages;
- some villages selected were part of the earlier ECFD study and others were not;
- villages selected were either already part of, or just starting, a wider rural development process (through the LWU/UNICEF women's development program);
- in general, villages were not in too close proximity to each other in order to encourage maximum spread of the project impact in the future. Exceptions could be made in cases of a need to reduce disparities among villages of differing ethnic groups near each other or to encourage sharing among different ethnic groups.

After discussion back and forth, and based on the data and criteria above, ten villages were selected:

TABLE 1 —VILLAGE INFORMATION

<i>Name of Village</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Distance from the City</i>
1. Ban Lou	Khmu	5 km. by car
2. Ban Houey Kho	Khmu	14 km. by car in dry season (or walking in rainy season)
3. Ban Houey Sarn	Khmu	16 km. by car then 6 km by walking
4. Ban Houey Hom	Khmu	6 km. by car then 3 km by walking
5. Ban Houey Kai Tai	Hmong	7 km. by car and then 700 m. by walking
6. Ban Kang Kho	Hmong	13 km. by car (dry season)
7. Ban Hin Dum	Hmong	4 km. by car then 2 km. by walking
8. Ban Karn	Lao Loum	4 km. by car
9. Ban Ko	Lao Loum and Tai Daeng	3 km. by car
10. Ban Harm Tai	Lao Loum	17 km. by car

### ***Planned Expansion in Year 2 of Project***

In the project proposal the plan was to expand the project to ten additional villages in the neighboring district in Viengxay during the second year. However, during the course of the first year the central project committee decided that it would not be appropriate to do so due to the need for more time to come up with a good model, the need for staff to develop more skills and capacity in running the project and develop curriculum, and the need for additional staff to be trained before moving on and taking on an additional district. Some delays during the first year plan, involving limitations on staff time, the workload of the central team members, and difficult access during the rainy season also set back the training schedule causing a need for a longer implementation period in the first district before considering expansion.

### ***People and Institutions Involved in the Project***

The following institutions and people have been involved in the coordination and implementation of the two year pilot project:

#### ***(a) Central Project Managing Committee:***

This is the same Ministry of Education committee that oversees cooperation between the MOE and UNICEF concerning the improvement of basic education quality. They are responsible for guiding, recommending, managing, monitoring and evaluating the project. The Central Committee consists of the following people:

- (1) Director, Department of General and Pre-schooling Education .....President
- (2) Committee, Department of Teacher Training.....Vice-president

#### ***b) Central Coordinating Committee:***

This committee provides coordination between the different sectors and levels involved in the project and with the donor regarding use of the project budget.

- (1) One staff member from pre-school section .....Chief
- (2) One staff member from Department of Teacher Training.....Member
- (3) One board member, Pre-school Teachers Training school .....Member

#### ***c) Central Technical Team:***

The central technical team was established with four members. Over time 2-3 additional members have been added. The team members come from the Pre-school Teacher Training Department at Dong Dok. This team is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the project at the central level.

Criteria for selecting the central technical team members:

- awareness of children's problems and having an interest and desire to help change the children's situation for the better;
- energetic and willingness to work in ECFD project;
- two people able to work on the project 100% of the time and the rest 50% time;
- interest and eagerness to go work in the field with different ethnic villages (not discriminate against ethnic minority village), and willingness to accept and learn from the positive experiences of villagers;
- need to have potential, capacities or strengths that can developed to become trainers able to work with villagers and to produce appropriate training materials;
- need some previous knowledge or experiences with ECFD related issues such as children's education and psychology, adult education, women's life or women's development, participatory rural development;
- good health.

#### ***d) Provincial Project Managing Committee***

This committee was appointed by the province governor about six month after the launch of the project following a process of discussion over several months during trips to Houaphan by the coordinating committee and the central technical team. Finally the committee was organized with representatives from three different sectors:

- (1) Representative from Provincial Education.....Chief
- (2) Representative from Provincial Women's Union.....Member
- (3) Representative from Provincial Health.....Member

#### ***e) District Project Managing Committee***

This committee was appointed by the district officer during the beginning of the second year of the project after the evaluation of the year one project. The committee was organized to come from three different sectors:

- (1) Representative from District Education.....Chief
- (2) Representative from District Women's Union.....Member
- (3) Representative from District Health.....Member

### ***f) Province Technical Team and District Technical Team***

The technical teams at the local level—province and district level—were organized to provide training and support for the village volunteers. The team at each level has three people including technicians from education, health, and women's union departments.

Criteria for selecting the technical team members at the provincial and district level is similar to the central level except for a few points:

- Three persons are chosen at each level: one person from education, one person from health, one person from the women's union. If possible, in each three-person team, there should be two women.
- Team members should be able to work for the project at least 50% time.
- Khmu or Hmong language ability preferred.

The results of selecting and keeping staff, and the turnover rate of the technical team at different levels, will be discussed in the Results section.

### ***g) Village Volunteers***

Each village has three volunteers selected based on the criteria discussed and agreed upon among the villagers and the central and local technical teams as follows:

- awareness of children's problems and interest in improving their children's futures;
- willingness and enthusiasm to participate in the project;
- need to have enough time to work in the project;
- have potential as a trainer and to produce appropriate training materials;
- good health;
- one person should come from the village committee;
- at least one person in each village should be a woman.

### ***h) Technical Support from UNICEF—Project Advisor and Staff***

A technical advisor was hired on a consultant basis periodically during the two-year pilot project in order to facilitate and assist the technical team in developing the project and to serve as a resource person as needed. The UNICEF Education Project Officer also helped in securing the funding, project negotiations, and in lending other support for the project including help coordinating with international organization in-country as well as outside the country. Other UNICEF staff also assisted in facilitating and administration of the project (logistics, fund management, etc.).

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## SUMMARY OF PROJECT EXPENDITURES

Number	Item	Expenditure (US\$)
1	Central Level	
1.1	Resource Room and Curriculum Development:	
	Training equipment and materials	\$8,158
	Documents (manuals) and materials	\$1,295
	Vehicle	\$6,362
1.2	Travel (air/fuel)	\$3,101
1.3	Per-diem during field work	\$4,606
	Central Level sub-total	\$23,522
2	Local Level Implementation	
2.1	Vehicles:	
	10 bicycles	\$435
	2 motorcycles	\$2,739
2.2	Training Tech. Resources Network:	
	Equipment	\$337
	Per-diem for village volunteers	\$2,313
	Per-diem for province/district technicians	\$1,018
2.3	Monitoring/Follow-up:	
	Travel & per-diem for province/district technicians	\$2,266
2.4	Caregiver's Education Training:	
	Training Equipment and materials	\$99
	Growth/monitoring equipment	\$196
	Local Level Sub-total	\$9,406
3	Local Level Sub-total	\$32,925

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## LOCAL-LEVEL SUB-TOTAL ANALYSIS

Average cost per village (total 10 villages):	\$3,296
Average cost per family (total 499 families):	\$66
Average cost per villager (total pop. 2599):	\$13
Average cost per child (total 913 children):	\$36
Average cost per technician trained (total of 48 prs):	\$686

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NOTE: These are the project expenditures as summarized by the central technical team for project funds received by the Lao government from UNICEF for project activities within the

country. It does not include money spent for the two training workshops outside of the country or for the technical advisor contracted by UNICEF to help support the project.

## *Project Implementation Process*

The process used in implementation of the ECFD project has been one of the very crucial factors in its success. The process is new and has been of interest to other outside sectors and agencies with whom it has been shared. At first the lengthy process used was quite difficult for some government officials to understand. However, the results have been of great benefit to everybody who has been involved in the process as well as beneficiary groups such as parents, other caregivers, and children. The process is designed based on the project approach as written above—using existing indigenous knowledge, participatory methods, community based initiative, a team approach and emphasizing self sustainability and empowerment. The process during the whole two-year pilot phase is as follows:

### *Project Proposal Writing Process:*

Two members of the project team from Dong Dok Preschool Teacher Training School designed and developed the project proposal with technical assistance and on-the-job training from the consultant. The project was developed based on the previous study of needs of the villagers and their existing resources and constraints. The process of project proposal design and development included:

- identifying visions;
- clarifying, and formulating goals and objectives;
- concept and approach of the project;
- assessing resources and constraints;
- developing the project activity plan (plan of action);
- developing the time line for the project activity plan;
- determining roles and responsibilities of project participants;
- project monitoring and evaluation in the plan;
- developing proper project coordination and lines of communication;
- estimating the budget.

The project team presented the project proposal to the meeting of the Departments of General and Pre-school Education, Teacher Training, and Non- formal Education, Dong Dok Preschool Teacher Training School, and UNICEF at the Ministry of Education. With the input and agreement of all the concerned sectors, the project proposal was approved by the Ministry of Education in March 1995.

## ***Building up the Technical Network***

Building up the technical network was seen as very important and became the first priority in starting the project. The emphasis on the process of building a technical resources network was very crucial because there were few Community-Based Early Childhood Development resources available in Lao PDR. The other reason, as mentioned above, was that the primary request of the villagers was for technical knowledge. The process of building up the technical network involved many interactive, consultative steps within and among the team. In each step a workshop was organized to train the technical team members at different levels including the village volunteers. The process of building up this technical resources network included these components:

### **■ TEAM BUILDING**

The process of team building involved new concepts to be introduced into the working environment in the Lao PDR. Through a variety of different methods during the two-year pilot project, the process of team building became the most crucial and significant factor leading to success of the project. Team building involved forming a new work approach that created participation within the team and making difficult work become possible in the project. This process has been rated very highly by the technical teams as having been a successful and well-liked activity and of good benefit to the project.

A team-building workshop was organized for the central technical team informally by the consultant, for the provincial and district technical team formally, and to some extent for the village volunteers.

The team-building workshop content included the following:

- definition of a team
- the meaning of teamwork (compared with traditional Lao working practice)
- basic team-building steps:
  - acceptance: trust building
  - sharing information and concern
  - setting collective goals as a team in working in ECFD project
  - organizing for action
- identifying team roles including roles and responsibilities of each person in the team
- ways to communicate and share in the team
- skills needed in work together as a team: listening and speaking
- effective feedback within the team
- conflict prevention and resolution
- decision making in the team
- agreement in working as a team and continued team development

## ■ PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL (PRA)

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) concepts and techniques have been the base of the data collecting process since the time of doing the first project study. The concept and techniques of PRA were applied for collecting information and data for different purposes throughout the two-year pilot phase. The concept used focused on the participation of villagers as part of the data collecting team and respect towards the existing knowledge of villagers. Techniques used included semi-structured and focus-group interviews, calendar and map making, and transect walks through the villages.

The central, provincial and district technical teams were trained in PRA methodology before doing the planning. Local technical teams, with some assistance from the central technical team and consultant, were trained in the field on how to collect data using PRA techniques. Then the local technical teams collected data on their own and followed-up with participatory project planning.

## ■ PROJECT PLANNING

The ECFD project planning involved villagers and the different levels of government. Consultations and consensus building about the plan were done at each level and in every village. The process of project planning involved the following:

- Training sessions and materials for the *ECFD Project Planning Workshop* were developed by the central technical team with assistance from the consultant.
- *The Planning Workshop for ECFD Project with Houaphan Provincial and Samneua District Officials* was organized for three days in the provincial town. The workshop provided an opportunity to seek consensus about the concept and approach of the project designed by the central technical team based on the earlier study. The provincial and district staff agreed upon their own roles and responsibilities.
- The provincial and district technical teams received on-the-job training from the central team on *Project Planning with Villages in a Participatory Way*.
- *Project Planning Workshops for ECDF with Villages* were organized for two days in each village.

Village-level project planning resulted in villagers agreeing on the need and objectives for the project, an understanding of its overall design, assessments of the resources and constraints at the village level, planning for activities, setting up the project committee, setting criteria for, and then choosing, their own village volunteers.

The process of selecting the technical team, project sites, and village volunteers was important in getting the project off to a good start and maximizing the potential for success in the project. The criteria for selecting project villages needed to be defined together with the local people. This

required a consultative negotiating process over several visits. Emphasis was also given to coordinating with other project activities in the same villages using the same project committees.

## ■ TRAINING OF TRAINERS

Since the project mainly focuses on training, it has been essential for the technicians at all levels, including village volunteers, to have good training skills. The *training of trainers* curriculum was developed based on the first TOT training in Laos at Nam Souang in 1991, further adaptations and curriculums developed from the experiences of NGOs in Laos such as Consortium and World Education, and from other curriculums and experiences from within and outside of the SE Asia region.

- Developing the curriculum for the *training of trainers* two week course focused on participatory concepts, team-training approaches, adult learning, good facilitator skills, participatory training techniques, production of local training materials, formulating of training plans, training session designs, and practice.
- The *training of trainers* workshop in Houaphan Province, conducted by the central technical team, took place in May, 1995 for 19 participants from the provincial and district technical teams as well as other provincial staff in different departments and Viengxay and Samtai district staff.
- A second *training of trainers* workshop was subsequently organized for 30 village volunteer participants coming from the ten project villages. Province and district technical staff were able to provide this training with some assistance from central team members.

## ■ COMMUNITY-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

A community-based curriculum development workshop was organized first for two days at Dong Dok Preschool Teacher Training School for the ECFD central technical team and teachers at the school. The facilitator was the UNICEF technical advisor and a guest resource person on curriculum from Quaker Service Laos. The central technical team then trained the local technical teams in these techniques during a ten-day period in November, 1995 and developed a framework for caregiver education.

The community-based curriculum development process focused on participatory input from the local level to create a curriculum that could be adapted to the particular needs of different ethnic groups. The process focused on village data collection and needs assessment and analyzing existing traditional knowledge to use as a base for curriculum development. The central team first produced a broad outline for the curriculum and closely involved the local teams and village volunteers in its development. The main steps were data collection/needs assessment, setting goals and objectives, providing learning experience, and monitoring/evaluation. As part of the curriculum a training video was produced with the assistance of Pa Dec Lao, a Lao training organization.

## ■ GENDER TRAINING

The central technical team was invited to and participated in a gender training workshop organized by the Lao Women's Union and UNICEF in Thalat in September, 1996. This training helped improve the team's awareness of gender issues and their skills at using gender analysis tools in their work.

**Summary.** The above training included important skills that the technical teams at all levels needed in order to plan, initiate, and implement the project and to be good facilitators in working with the villagers. The capacity building of the technical teams and village volunteers is an on-going process.

### ***Caregiver's Education Development and Training***

After the establishment of the technical resources network, the next step was developing the unit-by-unit curriculum for Caregivers' Education and providing the training in use of the curriculum for local technical teams and village volunteers. Each unit included a handbook for the use of local technical teams and village volunteers and other booklets and training aids. Then, with the assistance of the local technical teams, the village volunteers began providing training to caregivers in the project villages. Details of this process are included in the paper *Participatory Community Based Curriculum Development for ECFD in the Lao PDR*.

The six units in the caregiver's education curriculum are:

- Unit 1: Appropriate Food for Young Children 0-8 Years Old
- Unit 2: Growth, Monitoring, and Promotion
- Unit 3: Health and Hygiene
- Unit 4: Care and Prevention of Common Illnesses for Children
- Unit 5: Child Development and Stimulation
- Unit 6: Promotion of Play and Cultural Entertainment for Children

A new unit was introduced about every two months during visits by the central team and after subsequent training of the village volunteers. This process continued for a full year (November, 1995 through October, 1996) during which all six units were developed and introduced.

### ***Resource Room Development***

In addition to the above activities and because of the project's focus on increasing ECFD capacity and knowledge in the country, the development of an ECFD Resource Room was initiated at the Dong Dok Pre-School Teacher Training School and at the provincial level in Houaphan. Resources on related trainings and issues for community-based ECFD projects within and outside of the country are being collected by the project team for the resource room. This resource room has already been useful in pulling together and organizing existing resources on ECFD and in helping to develop the curriculum and training materials used in the project.

### ***Regional/International Contacts***

During the course the project staff had an opportunity to participate in external workshops on ECD issues in the region. In December, 1995 the vice-director of the Project Management Committee and the central technical team leader and UNICEF Laos staff attended a regional ECD in Asia conference in Bangkok, Thailand which included participants from many countries in the region and provided an opportunity to share experiences and present the Lao case study on the ECFD project. In November, 1996 the head of the Teacher Training Department in the MOE and central technical team member along with UNICEF and NGO staff in Lao PDR attended a regional conference on ECD at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. The Lao team made a presentation during a session on New Paradigms for ECD on "Participatory Community Based Curriculum Development for ECDF in the Lao PDR."

### ***Monitoring and Evaluation***

Monitoring has been done informally. When the teams go to the village to introduce new units they follow up on the progress over the previous two month period and check to see if the training by the village volunteers has taken place as planned. They try to talk with the village volunteers and see if they have been encountering any problems in implementing the project activities.

A more formal review was done at the end of the first year of the project. Before this review took place a workshop on *Participatory Evaluation* was organized for the local technical team and village volunteers by the central technical team with assistance from the UNICEF technical advisor. The local teams and village volunteers together with the central technical team designed the evaluation tools and then went to the project villages in small teams to conduct the evaluation together with the villagers. Information collected was presented and discussed at annual project review workshops held at the province and in Vientiane during March, 1996. A similar process is now occurring near the end of the second year of the project. An outside evaluation of the project took place in early 1997.

### ***Results of the ECFD Project***

In November, 1996 the central team members and UNICEF staff went to Houaphan and conducted the second year summative evaluation of the project. The information collected on the results, of the project are divided into Impact (at both the village level and in the government structure); Outputs produced by the project, and Key Factors influencing the results of the project (strengths and weaknesses).

### ***Impact from Participatory Rural Appraisal***

The process of collecting data using PRA concepts and techniques in itself had an impact:

- It created for the villagers a sense of ownership of the information and knowledge available in their own villages, and an ability to better analyze their own problems and find

their own solutions. Village leaders learned more about the actual situation of their own villages.

- Awareness was raised and villagers saw the importance of developing their children and their communities.
- The teams learned how to collect data and analyze it together with villagers, how to facilitate, and how to ask question and help villagers identify their real needs.
- Traditional knowledge from each ethnic group was collected and used as reference for designing the curriculum.
- Team members were able to identify the resources available in the village and to facilitate project activities.

### ***Impacts from Project Planning Process***

- Villagers became used to making decisions about implementing their own project.
- The volunteers were selected and organized with the participation of the villagers.
- Village volunteers took charge and led the villagers in implementing the project.
- Village leaders facilitated village volunteers to implement the project and received good cooperation from the villagers.
- Villagers understood and accepted that the ECFD project (as part of the overall rural development program) only provides knowledge —not materials. They value knowledge as very important and didn't think only of material gains.
- Central and local level team members learned techniques and skills in working with the villagers in a participatory manner and how to practice the process of consensus building for project implementation.
- Six local technicians and village volunteers for 10 villages were mobilized and designed and implemented project activities together.

### ***Impact from Training of Trainers (TOT), Caregivers' Education Curriculum, Training Caregivers at the Village Level, and Evaluation***

- Villagers received new knowledge and practiced new child care ideas.
- Young children were able to improve their living status and overall development.
- Some village volunteers become trainers and resource persons in their own villages.
- 15 village volunteers out of 28 can do their own work without outside support.
- Local and central technicians learned to utilize local materials.
- Local technicians become trainers and were able to train the village volunteers to work with the other villagers.

- The central team is able to design and conduct high quality TOT workshops. They have been requested to conduct such training at many places outside of the project, including mass organizations, in the MOE and for other rural development projects.
- Villagers could understand and learn from the lessons presented in each unit.
- Villagers and village volunteers took charge to monitor and evaluate informally after the training in each unit.
- Villagers were eager to use local materials and cultural songs to promote beneficial play and to entertain their children.
- Changes in health status and sanitation were seen in villages—a decrease in illnesses, increased fencing, caging of animals, and more use of latrines and garbage pits.

### ***Impact from Team Building***

Technical teams included representatives from three different sectors at the provincial and district levels. They were able to work together as a team in a participatory manner. The central level team also gained capacity and experience. They were recently invited to share their experience and provide training on team building at a forestry conservation workshop.

### ***Comparisons of child care practices and child development status before and after project implementation (2 years later):***

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#### APPROPRIATE FOOD FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Before Project Implementation: Mothers in 3 villages gave colostrum to the newborn. Some caregivers gave supplementary feeding too soon (as soon as one month). Caregivers in 7 villages gave chewed sticky rice to infants.	At the End of Project Implementation: Mothers in 10 villages gave colostrum to the newborn. Most caregivers start giving supplementary feeding at 3-4 months of age. Caregivers in every village stopped giving chewed sticky rice to the infants.
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#### HEALTH PREVENTION AND HYGIENE

	Before the Project Implementation	At the End of Project Implementation
Drinking boiled water	288 families	381 families
Fencing the house or village	4 villages	10 villages
Using latrine	65 holes	204 holes
Water supply (well and gravity fed water system)	15 sources available	21 sources available
Garbage pit	45 pits	112 pits

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### ***Integrating other Rural Development Activities into the ECFD Project***

As the ECFD project was being implemented, other development activities, supported through the LWU/UNICEF project, were also taking place. This helped increase the effectiveness of the ECFD project initiatives.

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#### INTEGRATION OF ACTIVITIES FROM DIFFERENT SECTORS IN 10 ECFD PROJECT VILLAGES

Type of Project	Before the ECFD Project Implementation	At the End of ECFD Project Implementation
Ricemill	3 villages	7 villages
Poultry Rev. Loan Fund	1 village	3 villages
Clean Water Supply	3 villages	6 villages
Rice Bank	1 village	3 villages
Irrigation	1 village	1 village
Drug Revolving Fund	none	5 villages
Weaving Loan Fund	none	1 village
Fish Rev. Loan Fund	none	3 villages
Cow Rev. Loan Fund	none	1 village
Semi-perm. Primary School	none	3 villages
Birth Spacing	none	3 villages
Latrine Making	none	1 village
Community Forestry	none	1 village

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The project has shown that the coordination of different sectors and integration of different rural development activities helps support the knowledge villagers learn and facilitates the changing of behavior. This coordination helps have a more comprehensive impact to the village overall.

### ***Special Impact from Unit 2 of Caregiver Curriculum***

Village volunteers reported that Unit 2 of the Caregiver Curriculum on *Growth Monitoring and Promotion* was particularly well received and had a big impact in the project villages. The unit, which follows the first unit on *Appropriate Food for Your Children*, has helped villagers to see the link between food and growth. Villagers were able to see the actual concrete results in their children (better growth) from consciously providing them with more nutritious food. The curriculum in the second unit was designed very well and helped the village volunteers to be able to perform weight and height measuring using color charts. Now villagers know about and try to improve the level of nutrition of their children.

### ***Comparing weight and height charts in 10 project villages from the first month to the eighth month (the last month of pilot project implementation)***

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Level of Nutritional Status	Result of the First Month	Result of the Last Month
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Healthy	81.12%	89.93%
Mild Malnutrition (First Degree)	15.77%	9.39%
Moderate Malnutrition (Second Degree)	2.25%	0.67%
Severe Malnutrition (Third Degree)	0.28%	0%

### *Impact of the Community-based Curriculum Development Process*

Both central and local technical team members were able to:

- learn new methods for developing curriculum outlines;
- analyze traditional knowledge that has an effect on development of the whole child;
- adapt the curriculum to fit the villager volunteers and villagers;
- develop and adapt the trainers' manual for local technicians and village volunteers.

### *Evaluation of Caregivers' Curriculum*

The provincial and district technical teams and village volunteers were asked to rate the six units in the Caregiver's Training Curriculum. Their responses are summarized in the chart:

<i>Components of caregiver's training curriculum</i>	<i>Rate</i>	<i>% of participants rating</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Content	very good	85%	In general content of all units was rated highly. Some responded that Unit 5: Child Development and Stimulation was somewhat difficult to understand and too technical compared to other units because it involved new concepts and a new perspective for villagers to look at the children. The term "child development" is new for local people.
	good	11%	
	fair	1%	
	need to improve	2%	
Method	very good or good	50%	Units 5 and 6 recommended for some improvement, Unit 1 for slight improvement. It was recommended that Unit 6 requires more advanced training skills to teach it because some techniques require a talented facilitator with good creative skills.
	fair	40%	
	need to improve	10%	
Materials	very good or good	80%	Units 6 and 1 were suggested for some improvement and Unit 3 for slight improvement.
	fair	17%	

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need to      3%  
improve

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### ***Impact on Policy***

The project has stimulated the *interest and commitment of policy makers in the government*. They have expressed that they are impressed with the model, especially the effectiveness of village volunteers. They see this approach as a good compliment to the formal preschool sector, especially for more disadvantaged children. In the past the large majority of children in the country have had no access to formal pre-schools.

### ***Outputs***

These are the outputs that the team worked together to produce. The Lao project team carried out most of the work. The consultant provided informal training to the central team and ongoing advice and support. This usually occurred when there were specific needs for outside input in order for the work to proceed effectively and when there were requests from the team. The outputs are mainly in Lao language, except for the project proposal which has been translated into English.

1. Project Proposal including project plan of action with time-line
2. *Team Building* workshop manual and materials
3. Document of training curriculum and materials for *Project Planning for ECD at the Province and District level* and *Planning for ECD at the Village Level*
4. Document of training tools for *Participatory Rural Appraisal for ECD at the Village Level*
5. Documents and materials for *Training of Trainers* workshop for local government staff and village volunteers.
6. Village produced project plans for each village
7. Six unit manual including materials for local technicians and village volunteers.
8. Booklets for each unit for reinforcing knowledge of villagers after training
9. Training document on *Evaluation*
10. Three videos were produced in cooperation with Seuk-sa Mal and Pa Dec Lao:

First video: Early Childhood and Family

Second video: Is It Appropriate?

Third video: We Call Do It! (English Narration)

In addition, the project was able to assist in the formation of a technical resource network for ECFD including village volunteers as detailed on the following two charts:

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### TECHNICAL RESOURCES NETWORK

<i>Level</i>	<i>Technicians Trained</i>	<i>Sex</i>		<i>Organization</i>
		<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	
Central	7 (3 assistants to the team informally added later)	4	3	Dong Dok Preschool Teacher Training School, Ministry of Education
Provincial	3	2	1	One: education sector One: health sector One: women's union sector
District	3	2	1	Two: education sector One: health sector Note: District women's union does not have staff available so two come out from education.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	

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### TRAINING OF VILLAGE VOLUNTEERS

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Village Volunteers Trained</i>	<i>Sex</i>	
		<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Low Land	9	3	6
Mid Land (Khmu)	11	3	8
High Land (Hmong)	8	0	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>22</b>

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### ***Keys Factors Affecting the Results of the Project***

#### ***Strengths***

- The project started from the need and willingness (determination) of the people (villagers). The villagers expressed interest and saw the necessity of development of children as well as the overall community. There was participation from villagers in every step of the project.
- The project offered mainly knowledge for villagers rather than material goods. This came out of the process of village discussion for an extended period which led to the increased interest of villagers in wanting to improve their child rearing knowledge.

- The governmental administration at different levels facilitated and cooperated well with the project.
- The ECFD project took place as part of a larger development process at the local and village level including activities such as ricemills, clean water supply, revolving funds, birth spacing, drug revolving fund, etc.
- There was excellent team work and use of a participatory approach in every step of the project cycle.
- The local curriculum development process allowed local technicians to participate and know how to adapt the curriculum to fit each ethnic group.
- There were realistic, concrete activities that helped empower villagers to be able to be in charge and gain a sense of ownership in improving care for their young children such as weight/height charts that village volunteers can monitor on their own.
- The project had the flexibility to adapt the approach during implementation—such as in deciding not to expand to additional villages before the project teams were ready.
- The project used participatory, fun, culturally appropriate techniques and activities in training that villagers easily understand and are able to bring to use in everyday lives.
- The results of the Project implementation has an impact on children as well as the parents, other caregivers, and the community overall.
- The leaders at all government levels including the village gave guidance and facilitated the work of technical teams in order to be able to work regularly.
- UNICEF showed interest in and gave funding for the project and supported the provision of technical resources, including the project advisor.

### *Constraints*

- In some villages (really only one) the village administration didn't see the importance of the project and didn't help facilitate and support the village volunteers.
- Rotation of some village volunteers and local team members caused a lack of continuity of the lessons learned and delays in project implementation.
- Some local and central technicians still lack knowledge and experiences in project management and communications, causing project delays.
- The short project time frame sometimes conflicts with other village priorities.
- Commitment and selection process of village volunteers was sometimes weak.
- Economic problems in some villages make solving child development issues difficult even with good training/knowledge.
- Follow up and monitoring after training lacked continuity.

- Coordination techniques are still weak, especially between the different sectors and higher levels. Staff shortages mean it is sometimes difficult to allocate enough staff to work with the project—especially in the health sector.
- Some villages have difficult access, especially in rainy season and transportation for local technical team members is limited.

## *Recommendations*

The following are the recommendations of the UNICEF technical advisor for future work on Early Childhood Development programs in the Lao PDR. These recommendations have been made after much consultation and input from participants in the pilot project at many levels.

### *Reasons for Investment in Early Childhood Development*

Experience from around the world, in both developing and developed countries, shows that ECD is an essential and cost-effective investment that leads to positive long term changes in childhood development and has important benefits to society. Some of the benefits include:

- ECD helps increase school enrollment and reduce repetition and the drop out rate in schools which saves the education budget of individuals and the government in the long term. It also increases production in the society due to the improved quality of human resources. Parents have more time for other productive tasks.
- ECD helps children have the right to live and to develop to their full potential. This helps reduce social-economic inequity as well as gender-related inequities such as with women's education and girl child issues.
- ECD helps in maintaining and reinforcing moral and social values which must be stressed during the early years of a child's life.

In the Lao PDR, project participants have identified clear reasons why the ECFD project should be continued and expanded:

- It is an alternative low cost model to give opportunities for the 98% of children who do not have access to attend a formal preschool. This is a large population—In the project villages pre-primary school children 0-8 years old are the largest population group—34% of the total population. There are 40% more pre-school aged children than school age children.
- The approach of ECD work to focus on training caregivers so they can better raise children is practical and important in trying to stop the cycle of uneducated women raising children as was documented in the original ECD study from Houaphan. This approach has been endorsed by the Vice-Minister of Education as very appropriate for the Lao situation.
- The ECFD project uses a community-based approach which is appropriate to Laos—because it is low cost, integrated, and responds well to the needs of the rural areas.
- Although the project started off targeting training caregivers or families who have children age between 0-8 years old, in reality many more families participated—around 90%

of all village families. This demonstrates that the project can be a good tool for wider community education as well.

### ***Expanding the ECFD Project***

Project participants at many levels are seeing the project expand so that the positive results seen in the ten project villages can be replicated on a much wider scale. A challenge will be to balance the need to expand to reach a much larger area while keeping the same basic participatory approach. The project will need to expand both horizontally (a broader, geographical reach) and vertically (improving the quality of the project's programming).

### ***Geographical Expansion***

The project should expand its geographical impact by entering new villages, districts, and provinces. This process must be done carefully and may need assistance from other aid agencies besides UNICEF who could add ECFD components to their rural development activities. Within the framework of UNICEF support, plans need to be considered for short term expansion (within the next year) and longer-term (within the next five year UNICEF project cycle).

### ***Plan for Expansion in the Next Year (1997)***

1997 will be a transitional year of preparation for a new cycle of UNICEF programming support. It will be appropriate to take time to evaluate and summarize the progress of the project to date and to make new plans for the next project phase. During the year the project should plan to:

- Arrange to have a formal evaluation using outside resource people who could analyze and give a broad perspective to the project.
- Continue work to complete the rest of the manual for building technical resources network curriculum—PRA, project planning, TOT, monitoring and evaluation for each unit.
- Formalize and print the whole set of building technical resources network and caregiver education curriculum in preparation for expansion.
- Complete the development of the ECFD resource room at the Dong Dok Preschool Teacher Training School.
- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation aspect of the program.
- Continue to train village volunteers on the monitoring of each unit. In Houaphan the emphasis should be on monitoring work, through additional training for local technicians and village volunteers.
- Conduct Project Management Training, plus computer and English skills, especially for the central technical team in order to improve their capacity to expand the project.
- Organize study tours or a consultative round table meeting among different ECD experienced persons within and outside country in order to get more new ideas and formulate the long term plan for the ECFD project.

- Use PRA approaches to collect data for a new proposal and preparation of a new five year program. Develop a plan for expansion during the next cycle.

### ***Outline Plan for Expansion in Five Year Program***

During an expansion period, the approach of the project should be similar to the past project but with some changes to improve the efficiency of project staff. As new districts and provinces are added, training and local team support should be conducted more in a way that brings in the provincial technical teams to be trained in Vientiane rather than having the central technical team go out to many different locations to provide the training. The central technical team, based in Vientiane, can play the role of advising, follow-up and monitoring. The provincial technical teams would become facilitators to continue to provide training and support to the district teams. One person from the central technical team might occasionally monitor the training in each province and provide feedback. If these steps are taken, the project could consider expansion to at least two new districts in each of five new provinces during the next phase. Main components of this expansion would be:

Further development of technical network:

More provincial teams would be established and receive training and then continue to train district teams and assist implementation in the villages. The training used could include the *Curriculum of Building a Network of Technical Resources* during the first six months of the project phase and include two sessions as follows:

First session:           Team building, PRA, and Project Planning Workshop  
Second session:       Training of Trainers and Community-Based Curriculum Development Workshop.

New curriculum should also be developed to include new aspects of building of technical resources such as:

- ECFD Project management curriculum
- ECFD Monitoring and evaluation curriculum
- Gender analysis and planning in ECFD

#### **B. Caregiver Education Curriculum Development Workshop**

Caregiver education curriculum can be further developed based on the information collected from the field and the six unit curriculum already developed. All drafts of curriculum should be developed using the consultative process among the local teams with input from the central team.

### C. Training the Village Volunteers

This would continue as the key aspect of the project, District technical teams will train village volunteers with the assistance of the provincial team. Central technical team members would make visits and monitor occasionally.

### D. Training the Caregivers in the Village

Village volunteers will continue to work with and provide training for village level caregivers with assistance and monitoring by the district team.

### ***Expanding ECFD Program Quality (vertical expansion)***

The project process during the pilot phase was very effective and participatory but it was time consuming. The project can expand through the network of the LWU/UNICEF project but it will be a challenge to maintain and improve the program quality during expansion. It might be appropriate for some agencies like NGOs to consider becoming involved in the next phase as there is a good potential for developing project activities that are grassroots and process oriented and that stress the quality more than quantity. Many NGOs also have existing rural development activities going on in the field to which an ECFD project component could be added. The ECFD project should continue to try new ideas and explore new initiatives. Those that are successful could then be more widely adapted during the project expansion. The project could facilitate cooperation with NGOs or other private organizations:

- The central technical team could organize a half or one day workshop presentation of the project for NGOs and their interested agencies. The process and outcome of the project, integration of ECFD into NGO's existing work, and the level of cooperation could be discussed.
- The points of the project that may be of special interest for work with NGOs and other agencies—such as team building, community-based curriculum development, the process of local curriculum development, and the six units of caregiver education curriculum, could also be further adapted with and by villagers through those agencies' projects.

### ***Continued Development of Caregiver's Education Curriculum***

The caregiver curriculum already produced should be improved and the six units produced can be the base for continuing to develop new units. Each of six units should be looked at closely and expanded more in depth based on the needs prioritized by the caregivers in villages and the needs identified after monitoring and evaluation. Curriculum should continue to be developed locally using just the outline from the central level and leaving room for local technical teams to have chances to edit and maintain a curriculum appropriate for local conditions and ethnic groups.

The training related to health and nutrition should be more specific and be aimed at children 0 to 3 years old because data from the project shows that that is the age children that gets sick the most. The production of units on infant care and health prevention as well as infant stimulation should be considered. Infant mortality is still a problem in the ten project villages. Unit 2 on

Growth Monitoring was particularly successful for villagers in promoting better child care/development. Expanding its effectiveness should be a priority.

### ***Media and Materials Production***

The project should continue to develop media and materials that can be used effectively for the training and that can facilitate expansion through cooperation with Lao training organizations which have good resources available. This cooperation could create the potential for producing videos, radio cassette tapes, or TV shows using the content of the unit already developed in order to communicate and pass on the knowledge much more effectively to the villagers.

### ***Coordination Structure***

#### ***Inter-sectoral Coordination***

The outcome and constraints identified in the project shows that there must be coordination between different ministries for ECFD and there should be formal representatives from MOE, Health, and LWU on the central project committee. This formal coordination will facilitate the work in the field and allow participants to work formally and be accepted by all parties.

#### ***Adjusting Structure of the Project***

In order to simplify the project structure and to economize on available resources, it is recommended to strongly consider combining the central project coordination committee with the central technical team. The project management committee could then assign one person to liaison with the central technical team rather than the project coordinating committee.

UNICEF should continue to coordinate with the resources outside of the country, and continue to pass on newsletter, books, other ECD resources to the central technical team in order for them to widen their ideas and knowledge of ECD and to develop more curriculum and materials.

#### ***The Central Technical Team***

For the pilot project the involvement of the central technical team at Dong Dok Preschool Teacher Training School was crucial. The team members have an unusually strong ability to work together as a team and to use their many different strengths for the benefit of the project. The next project phase would greatly benefit from the continued involvement of this team so that the capacities and experience gained are not lost. The team could play a crucial role in the next expansion phase of the project and their continued involvement is strongly recommended. The issue of moving the Dong Dok Preschool Teacher Training School to Dong Kham Sang next year (1997) needs to be considered as it will have a major impact on the team. It is important that the team be together in the same place, with time to devote to the ECFD project in order to design the curriculum or initiate other creative ideas for the project. The link between the project and the preschool teacher training school should be continued.

Areas for further capacity training, for the central team include:

- Project management training. The training should include a team approach management style. The training should be followed with hands-on practice for solving real problems that occur in day to day management. There are now local organizations in the Lao PDR that could provide this training.
- Continue to strengthen and develop their coaching and advisory skills so the local technical teams can run the project on their own without relying so much on the central team.
- Continue to develop analytical/critical analysis skills.
- Continue to improve the speed and skills in reporting and coordination with the project committee, different sectors, ministries, and other agencies.
- Continue to develop coordinating and networking skills with different ECD and related resources within and outside the country

### *Village Volunteers*

The key link and factor for the success of the project will continue to be the village volunteers. If the village volunteers are able to conduct training for villagers on their own, the project then has a chance to expand. Prominent village volunteers who can be trainers and are interested in going out and doing training in new villages nearby their own villages need to be identified and supported. Experienced village volunteers can help the district technical teams to train the new village volunteers. The first group of village volunteer could help to monitor the new villages near by. In order to be able to do that, the government would need to prepare some budget for their food, lodging and travel costs. Strategically selecting the villages for expansion in order to effectively use existing experience and resources will be very important.

More consideration will have to be given to what compensation and benefits are provided to volunteers. Despite the strong motivation and idealism they have shown in the project villages, it will be difficult for them to continue on like this indefinitely.

### *Policy Advocacy*

At this point the policy based on the education to the year 2000 only talks in very general terms about ECD without a clear policy or strategy. It mentions encouraging ECD to expand at a realistic rate and to coordinate with the related government sector and private sectors and with international organizations. In the long term there needs to be a clearer policy for ECD. There will need to be political will for ECD to work. The ECFD Project can help in forming such policy and political will through demonstrating the benefits to Lao society gained through the experience of the project's implementation.

ECFD experiences and outcomes from the grassroots level will help provide feedback to the system and influence policy formulation for the coming 21st century. The central team, beside being technicians and trainers, must be advocates and prepare information and real data from the field in order to help policy-makers be able to formulate the strategy and make policies that are relevant and go in a clear direction that will promote the well-being of young children in the Lao

PDR and reduce the disparity between advantaged children (more in the urban areas) and disadvantaged children (especially in the rural areas).

The enthusiastic reception for the Lao ECFD project presentation *Participatory Community-Based ECFD Curriculum Development in the Lao PDR* at the recent regional conference in Malaysia shows that Laos has some good experiences to share at the international/regional level. Although the ECFD Project is a new initiative in Laos and started later than many countries in the region, the conference participants saw that Laos is now at the forefront of ECD development. Much work will need to be done, and important decisions be made, in order to make the project's success be long term, sustainable, and expandable to a wide area for the benefit of many children. This could be a point for policy-makers from government and donors to consider and act on for the project to go forward strongly in the coming years.

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*Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.*  
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