
SITE VISIT: Nepal—Project Entry Point

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Project "Entry Point" is unusual for its joint attention to the child care needs of working women (families) and the developmental needs of young children (Arnold 1990). The setting for the project is rural Nepal where more than 42 percent of the population is estimated to live below the poverty line and where the infant mortality rate is above the national average of 119 per 1000. Women play a major economic role in the sustenance of the family farm which produces approximately 80 percent of the families average annual income. They are also engaged in a range of informal income generating activities.

Recognizing the women's economic role and their need for credit, the government initiated a programme of Production Credit for Rural Women. The goal of the credit scheme was to support activities that would simultaneously generate income and improve conditions in the community, including levels of health, nutrition, and literacy. As the project took shape; it became clear that working women (because society continued to assign them responsibility for the upbringing of children) needed an alternative arrangement for child care. "Entry Point" was born, both to free women's time for economic activities and to improve the well-being of their children.

To obtain and guarantee repayment of credit, the credit programme asked that the women organize themselves into small groups of five or six. These groups of women also became the unit for organizing day care. Within the group women agree to share responsibility for taking care of their children between the ages of 1 to 3 in their homes, and on a rotating basis, each woman taking the children in her home for one day of each week. In 1989, approximately 54 groups of mothers in 11 districts were in operation, and an estimated 1,700 children participating in the home day care arrangements.

All women in the group receive an intensive 4-day training course at the village level. Each group is provided with a basic kit of materials. Since the majority of the women are illiterate, pictures of different activities are used in the curriculum and training that has been provided by an innovative Nepalese NGO.

A pressing demand for training—beyond the capacity to meet the demand—suggests the project is successful because others also want to start similar programmes. A variety of factors seem to contribute to this success including the power of group support, a decentralized planning process involving community definition of needs, a comprehensive curriculum, and on-site training which respects traditional practices while incorporating new information. Success has occurred in spite of difficulties related to Nepal's difficult geography, the need to follow-up initial training,

and occasional conflicts between traditional and child-centred approaches to childrearing.

Because the care is provided by local women on a rotating basis, the operating cost to the government of this project is very low. Benefits accrue to both women and children.

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