
THE COSTS AND AFFORDABILITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

MESSAGES:

1. *Early Childhood Care and Development programs are affordable.*
2. *The costs of ECCD should always be considered in relation to effects.*
3. *A variety of strategies exist for keeping costs low in relation to effects.*
4. *In general, ECCD is under-funded.*

ECCD PROGRAMS ARE AFFORDABLE BECAUSE:

- *The range of costs among possible program options varies a great deal.*

The costs depend on how ambitious goals are, on the size of the program envisioned, on the number of components or services integrated into the program, on the model chosen, the intensity of the program, and the kind of staffing selected. There are many models and dimensions to choose from.

- *An ECCD program can be constructed in parts or phases.*

Unlike building a dam, which involves a large investment all at one time at the outset, an ECCD program can be constructed over time, adding pieces to improve quality and extending the program gradually to new populations.

- *It is possible to share costs.*

It is normal for the costs of an ECCD program to be shared by the government, participating families and local communities, and often by organized sectors of the civil society, the private sector, and international organizations as well. Therefore, governments can look for ways to avoid large start-up costs and to spread out the recurrent costs of a program.

- *Spending on ECCD can reduce other costs.*

If an ECCD program can be shown to reduce costs in another program (as, for example when repetition in primary school is reduced or when early attention reduces health costs later on), then overall expenditures will not increase.

An example of an affordable program comes from Kenya where (in 1991) less than one-tenth of one percent of the education budget was spent for a community-based preschool program reaching 900,000 children. This was possible because of the way the program was designed—para-pro-

professionals staff the program, children are in the program for a limited time each day, the program has been phased over time, and communities accept a major responsibility for sharing costs. At the same time the program has sacrificed quality through what might be termed an under-investment by the central government in ECCD.

■ *The costs of ECCD should always be considered in relation to effects.*

Returns to an investment in ECCD can be high. Even though the cost of an ECCD program may seem to be relatively high, if it produces large effects and benefits to society as well as to the individuals involved, it will be worthwhile in both human and monetary terms. Research evidence suggests that this can be the case because ECCD not only leads to reduced costs in other programs as suggested above, but can also: increase productivity in later life for those who have participated, help free parents and siblings to earn and learn, enhance social participation, and help to reduce economic and social inequalities. In Brazil, the PROAPE program paid for itself in terms of the reduction of repetition and associated costs in primary school. The High/Scope Perry Preschool longitudinal study, comparing children who participated in a quality preschool program with children who had not, has quantified the returns to the preschool program as US\$7.16 for every US\$1.00 invested.

■ *Low costs should not be sought for their own sake.*

This is an important conclusion from the previous point. The level of expenditure is not directly related to quality. While there may be a correlation between cost and quality, simply putting a lot of money into a program will not ensure desired outcomes. On the other hand, if the level of investment is too low then there is a likelihood that the program will have little or no value. If a per child cost of, let us say, US\$10 produces few or no effects, it is obviously not a good investment, no matter how affordable that level of expenditure might be. But if a cost of US\$150 per child produces a very great effect it may be an excellent investment for a government, even though it appears to be relatively high cost.

A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES EXIST FOR KEEPING COSTS LOW IN RELATION TO EFFECTS.

These include:

- Focusing programs on limited and disadvantaged populations;
- Establishing programs in which trained para-professionals or family members are the principal caregivers and teachers;
- Identifying underutilized resources that can be incorporated (e.g., people of all ages, facilities that are used part time, recycled materials);
- Taking advantage of synergistic effects and existing infrastructure by incorporating ECCD into on-going programs of health, nutrition, regional development, adult education, etc.;
- Making use of media and popular channels of communication.

In addition, governments can seek joint arrangements for covering costs—with communities, families, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations. Such sharing can make a program possible, but if not instituted carefully, it can be overdone, especially with respect to cost recovery schemes that demand too much of the poor and therefore make their participation impossible.

IN GENERAL, ECCD IS UNDER-FUNDED.

- *The returns justify greater investment.* This point has been made above.
- *Budget allocations to ECCD are low.*

In general, budget allocation to the early years is low and disproportionate to the representation of that group in the population at large. For instance, in Jamaica, approximately 2% of the education budget is for ECCD, but approximately 20% of the total number of children in the education system are in early education. In Mexico, the budget percentage reaches 5% of the total education budget but the number of children in preschools is about 10% of all children in the education system. *Thus it may be that the regular budget of the government is not being tapped at the level that is justified by the return on social investment that we assume will occur.*

- *Governments must recognize their role and responsibility for attention to children.*

This is so because times are changing and many of the arrangements for caring for children that existed in the past do not now exist, negatively affecting the growth and development of young children, which, in turn, causes problems in school and society for these children later on. A social expenditure could help to remedy these growing problems. Accordingly, the idea that the family is exclusively responsible for children, a concept promoted primarily in the West, needs to be turned around, recapturing the principle that “it takes a village to raise a child”, with the government acting as a support to the village. This cannot be done without a willingness to give due priority to ECCD and to accept and absorb the costs implied.

The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, 1997.