

*[Facilitator's Note: Welcome to the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual ECOSOC AMR E-Discussion on Education: Closing the Gap. Please find below all contributions received in the second phase focusing on Access to Education. The [moderator's message](#) and background information can be found at the [2011 AMR E-discussion website](#). If you encounter any difficulties please contact the facilitator Ms. Kayla Keenan via ([mdg@undg.org](mailto:mdg@undg.org)). Thank you]*

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#### Phase Two Questions:

- 1. Early childhood care and education (ECE) provides enormous benefits and can mitigate the effects of deprivation and contribute to improved learning. From a local, national and global perspective what policy options have been effective in making ECE a reality for children and reaching the most disadvantaged or excluded children?**
  - 2. The benefits of educating women and girls has been widely documented. What experiences can you share on the bottlenecks, policy initiatives, and implementation efforts that have secured increased and sustained participation for girls in school?**
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#### Summary of Contributions:

##### [Dr. Rania Antonopoulos, Levy Economics Institute](#)

Addressing how to use Early Childhood Development to target disadvantaged or excluded children, Dr. Antonopoulos shared two country based examples (South Africa and Mexico). The uniqueness in each of these instances was the framework of the programme to address the needs of infants and young children, are community based and the care giving is provided from within the community. This construction allowed these initiatives to contribute to multiple policy objectives including: poverty reduction, creation of basic infrastructure, promotion of gender equality and improved health and nutrition outcomes. When presenting the case to non-education community Dr. Antonopoulos indicated recent research findings have demonstrated that investment in social infrastructure as compared to physical infrastructure has had economic impacts in the community (via pro-poor job creation and pro-poor income distribution).

##### [Hajara Ndayidde, UNICEF- Uganda](#)

Describing policy-based experience in Uganda Ms. Ndayidde provided the policy context and a detailed analysis on the challenges encountered and the constraints affecting access to early childhood care and education, in particular for the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Important in this was the need to address weak policy frameworks, integration of care, health, education and nutrition, data on ECCE providers, programmatic flexibility, capacity building and funding.

### Z. Patience Flomol, Save the Children-Liberia

Experiences in Liberia shared by Ms. Flomol demonstrate the significance of on-going policy and programmatic transformations. Ms. Flomol emphasized the need for cultural integration in addressing issues related to sustained and increased participation for girls. Furthermore, the contribution asserted the need for a participatory policy process that involves women and girls at the design phase to ensure the policy is targeted towards the key bottlenecks preventing girls education.

### Victoria Kayser, Independent

Ms. Kayser in her contribution drew attention to the option of correspondence courses as a means to access marginalized students, particularly in post-conflict contexts, as an opportunity utilizing low-cost ICT initiatives to reach and educate underserved children.

### Dr. Guadalupe Vadillo, UNAM

Dr. Vadillo expanding on the case study shared by Dr. Antonopoulos (Estancias Infantiles) raised a key concern that while compelling policies can be written on paper, there are often implementation gaps in what governments and institutions put into practice. In particular for Estancias Infantiles, the context information highlighted the risks in delegating service delivery for ECE to the private sector without sufficient oversight, infrastructure and proper training, which can place children at risk.

### Dr. Laban Ayiro, Moi University

Despite significant strides made to reduce the gender gap in primary education in Africa over the last decade, and using Kenya as a reference, Dr. Ayiro noted that while robust policy are formulated an implementation gap remains and efforts need to be targeted to address this disparity.

### Guozhong Zhang, UNDESA

Mr. Zhang raised the dimension that persons with disabilities brings to the issues of access to education and ECE. From this perspective, success factors were identified and shared based on UNDESA's experience in supporting governments, agencies and CSOs to advance disability inclusive policies and practices.

### Donald Wertlieb, Tufts University

Professor Wertlieb followed up on the how to integrate disability into ECE initiatives given the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). One disparity to be addressed in these efforts acknowledge a need to increase exposure, explicit references and application of the CRPD in ECE. In particular targeted analysis is required, focusing on children with disabilities that will lead to a multi-pronged and multi-sectoral approach to inclusive ECE policies.

### Dickson Wanglobo, Independent

Given the social contexts within which education takes place, Mr. Wanglobo highlighted the need for ECE strategies to include parent-sensitisation components.

### Bani Dugal, Bahá'í International Community

Ms Dugal noted that often the policy measures "needed" are known; however, if the social context is not taken into consideration these policy measures will not be as effective. Arguing for a community based approach Ms. Dugal identified a systematic approach as inherent to any sustainable efforts to ensure access to education, and in particular access for girls. Importantly, education as a process should not be the end, but instead the means to support a vision of the local society as a whole.

Julius Chockerah, UNDP Kenya

Mr. Chockerah using the Kenyan example highlighted how the legal and policy framework contribute to the realization of students rights to education, in particular with the direct bearing on girls education.

Ernestine Ngo Melha, Association d'Aide à l'Education de l'Enfant Handicapé (AAEEH) and IREDU/CNRS, France

Noting that disability is a main component of educational exclusion and marginalization, Ms. Melha shared experiences and policies in place for Sub-Saharan Africa and concerns particularly for the education opportunities afforded disabled girls. Identifying the gap between political will and implementation Ms. Melha proposed some policy options for to enable the realization of education for all objectives.

Linda Biersteker, Early Learning Resource Unit, South Africa

Using the Early Childhood Development Policy in South Africa, Ms. Biersteker noted that South Africa is employing a double pronged and importantly multi and inter-sectoral approach. In the first instance one way to combat the disparities in ECE (due to private v. public offerings) was to phase in expansion of a pre-primary year as part of government guaranteed education. However one limitation of these interventions is the children's capacity to benefit's heavy dependence on what happens before pre-primary age to maximise their health and nutritional status and develop positive approaches to learning. Complementary to this is a zero-four years old community based programme targeted to at risk children.

Dorothy Meyer, Status of Women Committee of IFUW (Past)

Based on the challenges Ms. Meyer recognized from the discussants experiences, the HIPPY example from New Zealand was shared as a way to involve families in ECE efforts to best prepare children for primary school education.

Professor Malcolm Skilbeck, Deakin University, Australia (Emeritus)

Identifying the need for a coherent integrated cross sectoral policy making Professor Skilbeck highlighted the importance in looking ahead to develop policies and programmes which do not generate new problems. Important factors for consideration from the perspective of the growing children/youth in such forward thinking policies would include issues related to urbanization, depletion of natural and life sustaining resources and high unemployment.

George Anang'a, Plan UK

Mr. Anang'a emphasized the issues that gender discrimination implies for education planning and strategies. Plan UK's experience has shown that resistance can be overcome by making allies within communities to eliminate gender inequalities in social structures, which will hopefully enable broader access to education for girls in a sustainable manner.

Rokhaya Diawara, UNESCO Regional Bureau-Senegal

Mr. Diawara using examples from Kenya, Nigeria and Ethiopia shared how ECE principles have been integrated into policy in response to issues of access and inclusion for equitable education. Key initiatives included targeting students for basic school readiness through intensive preparatory courses, use of accessible and low-cost education materials, and mainstreaming of ECCE into the key training institutions for teachers.

### Francis Sathya, Plan International

Dr. Sathya highlighted the importance of the terminology used in ECE and suggested that development practitioners focus on implementing already available policies rather than focusing on policy expansion (where political will and funding are not secured). Further building on other contributions using Plan International's [Because I Am A Girl](#) campaign as an example, Dr. Sathya outlined the key lessons learned and strategic actions that can support girls access to education.

### Matt Davies, International Movement ATD Fourth World

Mr. Davies using ATD Fourth World's "Bébé's Bienvenues" programme highlighted how community involvement increases programmatic sustainability and the need for ECE programmes to transition students towards primary education. One key lesson learned was the gains that can be made from integrating ECE as a partnership with local health care facilities.

### Dr. Supote Prasertsri, Pannasastra University of Cambodia

Dr. Prasertsri shared experiences from South East Asia that highlighted gaps in addressing "mother tongue" v. "teacher tongue" language implications in ECE programmes and for education objectives. Dr. Prasertsri further shared a strategy from Thailand that has increased girls access and retention in secondary education- the Thai National Student Loan Scheme.

### Ernesto Schiefelbein, Universidad Autonoma de Chile

Mr. Schiefelbein noted a need for policy makers to be informed by cost-effective estimates on education policies to ensure that the police deliver on ECE objectives.

### Adriana Alfaro (Devhi Foundation and Care Group Organization)

Ms. Alfaro identified that ECE is essential for educational inclusion, however it is important to note that ECE is not the sole responsibility of the education system, but can also be based on interactions with family, caregivers, community and school. Using Costa Rica as an example Ms. Alfaro detailed two programmes (Cen Cenai and Hogares Comunitarios) that can help extend coverage in the long term. One other means to ensure ECE sustainability would be to include combined (formal and informal) education systems to reach the community as a whole.

### INEE Secretariat

The INEE Secretariat shared strategies for access and gender responsive learning environments which respond to supply and demand side barriers based on the INEE Pocket Guide to Gender: Gender Equality in and through Education.

### Kari Egge (UN- Namibia)

Using the current context in Namibia Ms. Egge highlighted the issues in provision of ECE and ensuring the outreach is inclusive to disadvantaged families. In particular to address issues of quality Ms. Egge points out the need to address the connection between women and their roles in caring and providing for children. Ms. Egge further shared an experience from Uganda on a sustainable low cost model for a local community approach to ECE.

### Marc Regnault de la Mothe (WFP)

Mr. Regnault de la Mothe highlighted the role of nutrition in the provision of ECE. Using the Gambia as an example where an integrated approach to ECD was able to enhance access to ECD through the provision of school feeding (focusing on girls' participation in particular).

[Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Iqbal \(University of Punjab\)](#)

Dr. Iqbal focused his contribution on two key points. The need to provide a friendly environment with interactive hands on teaching to increase access to ECE and the utility of a proper mapping of schools in relation to rural areas to better target delivery enabling increased female education.

[Ghulam Nabi Nizamani \(ASHA\)](#)

Ms. Nizamani detailed the Pakistani experience with ECE, noting some of the challenges in implementation, and particular in provision of access to children with disabilities (in tandem with integrated health responses as well). Ms. Nizamani also shared a success story for increasing girls education via informal education in community friendly environments.

[Robert C West \(Independent Consultant\)](#)

In discussing the issues of access to education for students with disabilities Mr. West noted that an inclusive approach may not fully address the student's needs and referenced the possibility of use of radio to educate parents and those providing ECE with low-cost/no-cost means to mentally stimulate and provide organized structured interactions for their children.

[Dr. Allah Bakhsh Malik \(Literacy and Basic Education Department, Pakistan\)](#)

Dr. Malik reinforced the position that ECE and EDC impacts on student learning outcomes are considerable and highlighted the need to popularize the role of private sector in policy making.

[Dr. Sanghamitra Deobahnj \(Ranihat Highschool, India\)](#)

Detailing the India case where the Integrated Child Development Service (where provision of health, nutrition and ECE are included) are targeted to poor students in the rural and tribal areas Dr. Deobahnj noted the issues which can arise particularly in the community value of the teachers and the engagement in Supplementary Nutrition and immunization components which can lead to neglect of the ECE component. Dr. Deobahnj further detailed the issues facing girls access to education.

[Janine Marin \(ISOCARP Representative to UNESCO\)](#)

Ms. Marin described the role that parental support and the use of native/mother tongue language can play in educational attainment, particularly for girls. Further Ms. Marin shared how non-formal education could be used to support these efforts.

[Prof. Shirley Randell \(Kigali Institute of Education, Rwanda\)](#)

Dr. Randell shared the goals established by the Government of Rwanda for compulsory education in increasing girls participation in education.

[Cecilia Cuellar \(Independent\)](#)

Using the example of El Salvador, Ms. Cuellar noted that for provision of integrated services the government will need to focus on changing the priorities and infrastructure to address the varied needs, and that this implies issues on allocations of aid (short term v. longer term expenditures).

[Aurea Ferreres \(Intervida\)](#)

Ms. Ferreres shared the perspective that the responsibility for education must extend to the full community (family, state and society) supporting educational objectives in integrated and comprehensive programmes and furthered the ideal that female education is made compulsory with an incentives and penalties structure put in place to reinforce participation.

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**Full Contributions:**

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views during this important dialogue. Let me please respond to two aspects related to the first issue raised, on early childhood care and development.

How do we make ECE a reality for those children that are the most disadvantaged or excluded? Among many country-level experiences, there are two programmes that come to mind, South Africa's Early Childhood Development (ECD) component of the [Expanded Public Works Programme](#) (EPWP) and Mexico's [Enstancias Infantiles](#). Though differently structured, what is unique about them is that (i) both address needs of infants and very young children, (ii) are community based, and (iii) the care is provided by community members for children of the community. South Africa's program is a response to the recognition that despite healthy growth rates, job creation in the post-apartheid period has not been strong, resulting in over 20-25% unemployment. In the case of Mexico, the intervention was meant to reduce the care responsibilities of mothers so as to facilitate their participation in income earning activities in urban and rural areas. Such investments accomplish, at low cost, multiple developmental objectives: while improving the physical and emotional health of children, it provides training and certification (skill upgrading) in ECD to community member-providers; mobilizes previously underutilized local resources (labour); engages productively previously socially excluded members of communities by creating employment opportunities; pays a minimum (but earned) income to the ECD providers; reduces unpaid care burdens of women; recognizes the social usefulness of caring for infants and young children. In short, such investments have the strong potential to contribute to multiple policy objectives: poverty reduction (wages paid to community workers); creation of basic infrastructure (for vegetable gardens, clean water, latrines, and creche); promotion of gender equality (in paid and unpaid work); and improved outcomes in health and nutrition of infants and very young children.

When making the case for ECE to the non-education community one of the interesting research findings is that the overall impact of investing in Early Childhood Development and Care (ECDC) (social infrastructure) as compared to other investments (physical infrastructure), such as building of roads for example, has stronger positive reverberations throughout the economy in terms of pro-poor job creation and pro-poor income distribution. Two studies I was involved in, one on South Africa-A Joint research project of UNDP and the Levy Institute: [Employment guarantee policies](#) and the other for the United States- [Investing in Care: A Strategy for Effective and Equitable Job Creation](#) show that this may indeed be the case for both developing and developed countries. Hence, it can be argued that ECDC interventions are good from a human development as well as an economic development perspective.

I would like to conclude by concurring with the comments of several previous contributors in phase I of this discussion: what might constitute "quality" education, especially at a very young and tender age? Even if it cannot live up to the highest standards, a clean, healthy environment where basic physical needs are met, mental stimulation and structured interaction with children of similar age is provided, and a sense of acceptance and encouragement to explore and learn through play can go a very long way.

Dr. Rania Antonopoulos  
Director, Gender Equality and the Economy Program  
Levy Economics Institute

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Dear Colleagues,

We all know that quality Early Childhood Care and Education programmes are critical in providing a foundation for school readiness and success in life. Children who participate in preschool programmes stand a high chance of not repeating classes. To ensure quality service we do not only need the policies to provide direction but also the resources in terms of finance, materials and human resources.

In Uganda establishment of the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) in 1987 and its subsequent report of 1989 was the first milestone for recognizing the importance of ECCE for increasing access to education, followed by the Government White Paper (GWP) 1992. The two documents strongly recommended, among other things, the attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda. ECCE is given attention since it forms the basis for sustainability of UPE and lifelong learning. However it is largely left in the hands of the private sector. The Early Childhood Development policy that was approved and published in 2008 recognizes the public sector's role in ensuring the fulfillment of children's rights. It also recognizes that Government has an obligation to provide some measures of control and responsibility for the quality. Government has obligation to support parents and caregivers to effectively play their role.

Challenges and constraints that affect the increased access early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children include:

- Weak policy framework – in the case of Uganda, in 2008, the early childhood development policy for the education sector was launched. However, the policy does not guarantee compulsory pre-primary education and therefore, enrolment of younger children in ECCE remains very low despite a high population growth rate of 3.2% (2009). Governments through their social sectors need to develop and implement a communication strategy to address a number of issues including parent to parent/ teacher to parent collaborations. The issue of culture and economic status tends to hold parents back. A well planned and systematic communication and advocacy effort to market ECCE and to create the conditions for its acceptance and implementation in countries is needed.. The challenge is not only for the caregivers but also for those of us who are designing and implementing these programmes.
- Inadequate child's holistic development as well as coherent services from birth to primary education - integration of care, health, education and nutrition is still lacking. In addition, the curriculum and contents is delivered by differently trained personnel. The focus in most cases is on academics.
- Data on ECCE providers and beneficiary groups is not substantial - Consolidated and comprehensive data on providers, users and the number of children accessing early learning and stimulation in both formal and informal setting is not readily available. This presents a serious bottleneck in trying to determine an accurate assessment of the situation and plan efficiently and effectively for the general welfare of children. Socio-economic data, local inventories of existing services and information gathered from parents and community members all contribute to a comprehensive understanding of communities and how and where services can best be developed to meet local needs.
- Inequalities in access to ECCE - Many vulnerable children especially in conflict areas, isolated communities, and poor urban and other disadvantaged communities do not access any form of ECCE or access poor quality services. Barriers that limit access to ECCE include affordability, lack of access points, hours of operation, language of service, and lack of information about services

and support for the parents. In these situations choice is either limited or nonexistent. The fact that service provision is left to private proprietors tends to compound rather than reduce inequalities. As a result, the poor fall prey to exploitative proprietors who may focus on maximizing profit rather than benefiting intended beneficiaries.

- Flexibility of programmes - ECCE should be built on principles of social inclusion that actively engages parents and other caregivers of children regardless of gender, culture, language or disability and also include practical and concrete ways to ensure that all children have access to the support, care and education throughout early childhood that equips them for life and learning. Parents in all situations face a challenge of balancing time between dealing with home chores and available quality time for child care. In Uganda there is limited opportunity for parents to come together to share and support each other. Even in the homes fathers feel that it is the responsibility of the mother to interact with children, while most mothers think that the role of the father is only to provide material things for the family. A recommendation could be to marry a national approach to implementing high quality programs with the flexibility to encourage local engagement and response to local circumstances.
- Collaboration and Networking - The effective provision of services to meet the goal of inclusion requires the combined expertise, experience and support of a range of individuals and institutions. The benefits of collaboration cannot be overemphasized. The practical question however is how to build an effective co-ordination mechanism of providers and users across sectors and departments, geographical bounds, interests and other areas. In Uganda, the proposed national ECD forum coordinated by the National Council for Children is an opportune entry point to bring traditional and nontraditional stakeholders together. It provides a mechanism for an inter- organizational/departmental approach. These efforts can be planned to culminate into clearly defined roles and functions of other organizations and agencies, modalities for interaction and then identifying, exploring and linking existing government policies that impact the well-being of children within a larger focus that evaluates the outcomes of all government social, economic, environmental and political policies that impact early childhood. Development, dissemination and implementation of a multi sectoral and holistic ECCE policy framework are needed. This will enhance the implementation of integrated programmes and services all children (0-8 years), including marginalized children.
- Capacity Building - Extensive professional, educational and training support for individuals within early childhood services and for the ECCE sub sector as a whole is required at different levels. This could cover ECCE instructors, policy development/analysis, administration, research, finance and other relevant sectors to build capacity to thoroughly examine existing ECCE models, frameworks, and best practices. Very often the proprietors and other providers have the good will but lack or have very limited technical expertise to establish a quality ECCE programme. As an example commonly community leaders or individual proprietors may be able to identify needs for education and strategies for mobilizing resources but rarely possess the full range of technical and professional skills required for building and operating ECCE centers. Capacity and technical guidance is necessary to enhance knowledge of such matters like legal requirements for creation of ECCE centers, curriculum and pedagogy. In addition there is a need to harmonize the varied experiences and competences among the ECCE practitioners, teachers/ Caregivers of ECD centres to ensure continuity and reflection on their practices in ECCE centers. The education sector in liaison with Universities and other training institutions needs to be supported to design and implement a Certificate in ECCE Teacher Proficiency using the Teacher Development and Management Systems and networks.
- Funding of ECD - the investment in ECCE remains low. Linked with this is the low quality particularly in areas where children are from disadvantaged communities socially, economically,



remote and rural sections. Discussions on increasing and involving government in ECCE funding need to be held at different fora as well. Resource allocation to support and strengthen community based early childhood services are still limited.

Thanks,  
Hajara Ndayidde  
Early Childhood Development Specialist  
UNICEF Kampala Uganda

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Dear Colleagues,

In Liberia, Early Childhood Education has in the past been submerged in basic primary education with limited priority. Children above age 5 and attending pre-grades have been required to take an entry exam before sitting in grade 1. This entry exam according to the Education Sector Plan is to be abolished; however, Pre-school has been largely dominated by private ownership at 47% and 25% public with 63% of those enrolled in the pre-primary school more than 5 years old (Education Law 2008). Studies recently carried out and the new dimension in the national education system of Liberia is to transform the ECE into ECCD (Early Childhood Care and Development). This transformation process is on-going. Why this background? Because, Liberia national strategy for ECCD I would say is moving from the formative stage to transformation. With policy and curriculum development on the way, limited human resource capacity, Liberia will require enormous support to address need of early childhood development in Liberia. There has to be a cultural integration in the programme to address some of the negative aspect and strengthened the positives. ECE has enormous economic development benefits, and for Liberia, addressing ECD is going to be a mile stone in achieving children completing and retention rates in schools. The general, situation in Liberia is that enrollments have increased but completion rates are low. ECD has the potential to provide social-economic benefits; thus improving overall performance, and quality of education in Liberia. Since the Liberian ECE programme is about to launch with a World Bank & Donors CF Grant, child parenting education needs to be a core national initiative and integrated in the agenda, policies, with child rights education mainstreamed. The national government can invest in ECD services to the most disadvantaged students in remote communities through strengthening local structures and systems to manage community-based programs and initiatives.

Addressing the efforts that have secured increased and sustained participation for girls in school in Liberia there have been internal and external efforts and investments in girls education, but with limited success stories. One key bottleneck has been the limited involvement of the women and girls for which programs have been designed, which can contribute to non-success when programs are implemented in various parts of the world. Significant investment flows into programmatic hardware but the software component is often short lived. Programs may not be needs based, or are adapted from other countries but not culturally acceptable. The cultural dimension of girls education skills development need to be studied. Why are girls who are adolescent mothers with limited support not interested in economic empowerment activities? There are many girls who received support like take home rations, cash, and supplies (uniforms, learning materials) to attend school and yet they are not able to complete their education? The Liberian culture has a deep rooted belief that girls/women need to be supported by men and therefore, they need not work but be dependent. The marriage system requires the man to pay dowry (paying for the girl or woman as property). A common saying is that “a woman kenyah does not leave by the river side”, which means no matter what a girl will find a man to take care of her, whether she is educated or not.

While various interventions have been targeting life skills, vocational education or formal and non-formal education, the environment and job market are often not designed to meet the skills developed in women. Girls may be enrolled in schools but they may not complete formal education, some due to early marriage and pregnancy. In Liberia there is cultural acceptance of teenage pregnancy and early marriage, and there are limited restrictions on the male who impregnates the female. Social welfare policy to enforce that children, especially fathers, care for the wellbeing of their children can help with this. This needs to also take into account a families level of education to provide sex education for their children is limited, for some families it is a taboo subject. Importantly, currently there is no strategy in Liberia for continuing education for girls or women who drop out of school or want to acquire skills or vocational education.

Best Regards,  
Z. Patience Flomol  
Deputy Programme Manager, Educaiton  
Save the Children- Liberia

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Dear Colleagues,

To support ECE objectives for disadvantaged children a policy option we should consider is putting in place a system of correspondence courses for children and women without access directly to schools or training. The idea could be, for example, putting books sensory self-correcting (some already exist based on [Montessori sensorial materials](#)). This could facilitate outreach to receptive students, which could include victims of war, be they child soldiers, orphans, child-headed households, or women who have been victims of gender-based violence or physical torture.

Internal strife and civil wars are often synonymous with poverty for their victims. Yet in post-conflict contexts it has been clearly demonstrated that many survivors wish to pursue their education. Where children family heads exist, they have often done their utmost to ensure, frequently at their own expense, the upbringing and education for their brothers and sisters. Continuing education for these marginalised children can permit child soldiers to be rehabilitated and thus begin a "new life," it can enable women to learn a trade with which to support themselves and their family.

There are numerous reasons to support education objectives for these marginalised and underserved children. A key difficulty in targeting these hard to reach children is that there are insufficient institutional infrastructure in place, issues of leakage and often in post-conflict countries difficulty in resources appropriation. And even where nomadic schools are available, children are often unable to benefit from these institutions as they have responsibilities which prevent their participation. This can include responsibility for the family goat, or the school is located over 10km from the student's home.

Implementing a system of correspondence courses has the advantage of being a low cost initiative when compared with other systems such as [OLPC](#) (a self correcting computer with a power crank). Correspondence course work provides education easily accessible to inaccessible students, and can be created in an intuitive and uncomplicated format for students regardless of age.

Thank you,  
Victoria Kayser

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Dear Colleagues,

I would like to comment on the Mexican program called Estancias Infantiles described by Dr. Antonopoulos. One of the bottlenecks faced by many compelling policies is the that there tends to be a gap between programs in paper and the actual implementation governments and institutions put into practice. This might be the case of this program. Over 9 thousand estancias exist in Mexico and one of them shed light on the organization and lack of quality standards that they may exhibit.

For many years, early childhood education programs were created and managed by the government. The conservative last two presidents pushed forward the idea of involving the private sector in this area and decided to delegate ECE services to private investors. This meant that governmental authorities would approve those projects with the right infrastructure and human resources, comparable, for example, to the health and teaching staff that the Institute for Social Security (IMSS) provided. However this did not happen: the terrible fire at Guardería ABC in Hermosillo took the life of 49 children and wounded other 76. Lack of proper security measures and training of human resources were identified as causes of this disaster. Several societal groups claim that those conditions were not unique to that child care facility and that, at present, many children are at risk because supervision and follow up have not been installed as standard procedures in this program.

Dr. Guadalupe Vadillo  
Coordinator Science & Math  
UNAM's Virtual High School  
Mexico

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Dear Colleagues,

Girls' education on the African continent has made significant strides in that the gender gap has reduced significantly over the last decade, especially in primary level of education. Education of girls has received priority at the legislative and policy level. These include various education policies, poverty reduction and economic development agenda, the MDG and EFA initiatives as well as various international legal instruments on the rights of the child (Rendell & Gergel, 2009).

However, there are still many girls without access to primary and secondary education in Kenya and efforts to enhance inclusive education have been made (Keriga & Burja, 2010). Kenya regards inclusiveness in education in terms of education as a human right, and advocates for a policy approach to education that challenges exclusionary policies and practices and addresses learning needs of all learners in regular schools and classrooms (IBE-UNESCO, 2007). For example the government has, as a matter of policy given guidelines that girls pregnant teenage girls be allowed to continue their education after delivery as a way of removing all barriers affecting teenage mothers.

While policies may be formulated, as have the examples given, the gap between rhetoric and practice is still wide. Indeed, rhetoric on support for the girl child in education is quite popular but the resources invested need to match the expressed intentions.

Notwithstanding the existing challenges in improving girls' access to education, there have been notable progress that demonstrate the potential to overcome obstacles and inch towards UPE. The successful

strategies include introduction of FPE, efforts to eliminate worst forms of child labour, provision of sanitary supplies to girls, feeding programs and strengthening of guidance and counselling in schools.

Dr. Laban P. Ayiro,ss  
Senior Lecturer,  
Department of Educational Management and Policy Studies,  
Moi University

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Dear Colleagues,

Disability has been identified as one of the least visible but most potent factors in education marginalization which is evident in countries at different ends of the spectrum. And this is holding back countries' national progress towards achieving the goal of universal education for all. Lack of access to education including ECE by persons with disabilities, and girls and women in particular, is a major concern that needs enhanced and targeted actions to accelerate the inclusion and mainstreaming of them into development efforts, as highlighted by last year's MDG progress report, Outcome Document for the MDG High Level meeting, 2010 MDG Ministerial Declaration, as well as the latest General Assembly resolution (A/65/186).

To make ECE a reality for children with disabilities, we at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) are working in partnership with Governments, UN agencies and civil society to advance disability-inclusive policies and practices. Examples in countries such as Bolivia, China, India and Mexico suggest that the following are important to the success in achieving universal ECE for all that includes girls and boys with disabilities.

1. Raise the awareness of the rights and needs of child with disabilities among policy makers, educators, families, as well as members in the broader community. In this regards, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with 147 signatories and 97 ratifications (as of 15 Feb. 2011), obligates states to take concrete actions and measures to ensure the equal access to education for all persons with disabilities at all ages, including girls and women.
2. Early identification and interventions to address educational needs and foster abilities and potential of the children in question. Liaising and working with their families and health care providers is critical to ensure children with disabilities receive responsive health care and rehabilitation services at the possible earliest stage;
3. Involve and support home-based activities, through encouraging and supporting families to involve their disabled children in activity-based learning and care, utilizing effective communication and assistive devices such as personal mobility aids.
4. Creating inclusive, accessible and enabling communities and pre-schools. Providing a barrier-free and accessible environment and support for children with disabilities to participate and use various types of learning resources, such as play groups, day centers and preschools, with a focus on enabling all children to learn effectively and respond to diversity of needs of all learners. For instance, learning environment should be made to be accessible such as providing ramps, ensuring toilets accessible and using colours for those with visual impairments. It also means specific provisions in some cases for effective inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream settings, for example, deaf children should be provided opportunities to learn sign languages, blind children to learn Braille and orientation skills while deaf and blind children need to learn tactile Braille and mobility skills for their daily live and education.

Contributing to the ongoing global discourse on achieving universal education for all that includes persons with disabilities, in conjunction with the upcoming ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review, DESA will organize a panel discussion session, in Geneva, July 2011.

Tools and resources:

1. Keeping the Promises: Realizing the MDGs for persons with disabilities towards 2015 and beyond, report of the Secretary General (A/65/193)
2. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 24 of the Convention requires that states parties to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels. For the latest details of the Convention and updated signing and ratification, see website <http://www.un.org/disabilities>.
3. Including the rights of persons with disabilities in United Nations programming at country level: A Guidance Note for United Nations Country Teams and Implementing partners (by the United Nations Development Group/Inter-Agency Support Group for the CRPD Task Team) which is also available online [http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/iasg/undg\\_guidance\\_note.pdf](http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/iasg/undg_guidance_note.pdf)

Guozhong Zhang  
Social Affairs Officer  
Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (SCRPD)  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

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Dear Colleagues,

Many thanks to contributors and facilitators of this important discussion and for the opportunity to participate in a new momentum for what so many of us recognize as essential elements of social and economic progress.

The [UNESCO Early Childhood Education \(ECE\) Conference in Moscow](#) and the [CEC/ISSA Conference on Inclusive Education](#) document the complex and awesome challenges and opportunities we face as we move forward with ECE and Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs and policies. Focusing our discussion upon the most disadvantaged or excluded children opens the door for a catalytic and transformational perspective and strategy, integrating key ECE initiatives with leveraging opportunities inherent in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD).

A cutting edge of the synergy between the human rights and international development agendas is the situation of children with disabilities. With the 2008 adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD), the challenge of ensuring that children with disabilities become full participants in society comes to the forefront. Diverse nations and NGO's invest heavily in ECD and inclusive education (IE) (though we likely all agree that investment is insufficient), yet available and emerging tools for program implementation and evaluation neglect key variables associated with children with disabilities. Such variables are related to costs and benefits of interventions, whether providing a more realistic assessment of the challenges in the target population or in generating an appropriately differentiated scaling of impacts and outcomes. New "toolkits" guide societies as they implement ECD programs; they sometimes mention children with disabilities, but too-often only in parentheses or

footnotes, perhaps recognizing or avoiding the significant challenges inherent in truly inclusive and equitable projects. Advocates for children with disabilities have an opportunity and responsibility to seize this moment as awareness of CRPD grows and accountability parameters articulate. Advocates for ECD and ECE have an opportunity and responsibility to better acknowledge and integrate data, design, and implementation factors associated with ECD policy and programming as key preventive, promotive, habilitative and rehabilitative processes.

Children with disabilities merit less than a page of text in the 463 page 2009 Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report. However, the report recognizes that “disability is a significant source of inequality and marginalization in education.” (p.192) and laments that “progress in recognizing disability as an area needing policy attention has been limited. Only ten of the twenty-eight education plans endorsed by the Fast Track Initiative between 2002 and 2006 included a strategy for children affected by disability. While 13 others mention disability, there is little detail of strategies for the inclusion of disabled children in education, and five make no mention at all.”(p 192-193). While intergovernmental and transnational initiatives on behalf of children steadily gain traction, the particular promise and needs of young children and those with disabilities remain too often marginalized or hidden within too lengthy lists of priorities (e.g. <http://www.usaid.gov/press/congressional/2009/pl109-95arIII.pdf>). New guidance for early childhood development policies and projects issued by the World Bank lacks explicit indexing for disability, CRPD, or special education (Naudeau, et al, 2011). In the face of widespread acknowledgment of the special challenges of disability and the new CRPD mandates, these gaps and omissions threaten the effectiveness and integrity of serious efforts to meet key MDG benchmarks. The forthright re-commitment to the MDG by the US at the September UNGA makes for timely and pressing opportunity. Simultaneously, the recognition of these gaps and omissions allows for cross-sectoral problem-solving likely to enhance, even harmonize distinctive priorities in child development, education, social protection, nutrition, and health.

As toolkits for implementation of ECD programming are developed and launched, how might children with disabilities become more explicitly included? As EFA advances, how might its commitment to truly inclusive education be better realized? Just as colleagues have recently documented the relevance of the CRPD for World Bank initiatives more generally (Guernsey, Nicoli & Ninio, 2007) targeted analysis needs to focus on children with disabilities and engage the multiple stakeholders across the sectors of child and youth development, social and legal protection, nutrition, health and education. Our best thinking and our best leadership must be rallied around these catalytic opportunities.

Donald Wertlieb, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development  
Tufts University

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Dear colleagues,

In rural Northern Uganda, ECE is perceived by many as an optional education system meant mainly for children of the urban well-to-do class; and many parents in the urban setting unconsciously concurs for instance those working class women see it as an alternative for hiring baby sitters and quite some handful are only joining the prestige wagon of having a child in an ECE. So drawing from the above, there is need to sensitize the parents on the criticality of their children attaining ECE

Regards  
Dickson Wanglobo

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Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for the continued opportunity to contribute to this discussion. We'd like to focus on question 2: What concrete steps can be taken to get girls into school and keep them there?

Many studies have given us a formidable body of evidence showing the positive effects of "concrete steps" for improving the state of girls' education. What has been much more difficult is the cultural shift towards prioritizing education for girls and changing the entrenched discriminatory attitudes and structures that underlie the lack of girls in school. It is also important to stress the point, which is now increasingly acknowledged, that any sustainable effort to effect change for girls must also consider the roles and attitudes of men and boys.

In thousands of communities, Baha'is have set into motion neighborhood-level processes that foster a learning environment in which individuals of all ages can come to recognize and develop their inherent capacities and, in turn, to channel their collective efforts towards the betterment of their communities. As it unfolds, the experience of the worldwide Baha'i community in the area of education reveals a number of concepts salient to the continuous refinement of educational processes.

1. *Enduring change depends upon coherent efforts to transform both the individual and society.* Social change is neither the result of 'upgrading the individual' (through secular education and training, or religious conversion) nor of an exclusive focus on changing social and political structures. The challenge of getting girls into school and keeping them there requires a systematic approach to the transformation of attitudes in the behaviors and values of individuals, their families and communities as well as efforts to change institutional structures and norms in a way that promotes girls' attendance and meaningful educational outcomes.
2. *The means of social change must be consistent with the ends.* It is not enough to focus on getting girls into school and keeping them there. Communities and nations must first articulate a vision of the kind of society they wish to live in and then consider the kind of individuals that will bring this about. If we envision societies in which men and women of diverse ethnic backgrounds, classes and creeds can live side-by-side and enjoy mutual prosperity, then we must consider what kinds of educational processes can support that vision. For example, the characteristics of such processes may include rectitude of conduct (including justice and trustworthiness) and freedom from prejudice. It would also require fostering relationships of reciprocity, empathy and genuine affection between the teachers, parents, students and the

wider community, thereby creating a rich web of support for the children attending the schools and the parents, teachers, administrators and others involved in educational processes.

3. *Consider service to society as an essential component of education.* Service to society helps the individual to develop skills and attitudes that awaken them to their inherent potential to contribute to the advancement of society. Furthermore, it creates a dynamic coherence between learning and action (service)—‘being’ and ‘doing.’ In this way, society can begin to rethink the assignment of categories to individuals based on age, gender and experiences, which obscure the individual’s potential for meaningful contribution to society.
4. *Consider the material and spiritual dimensions of the individual.* The human being is not only an economic and social being but a spiritual one—concerned with the meaning and purpose of life. Education, in its fullest sense, must provide the space and the environment to explore these fundamental questions, in a manner appropriate to their stage of development. In this way, educational processes and educators can acknowledge the inherent nobility of the child or youth, and, rather than seeing her or him as an empty vessel waiting to be filled, can foster interactions and experiences that help each one to discover and develop their inherent capabilities, whether technical, artistic, social, moral or spiritual.
5. *Think in terms of process, not projects.* The framework guiding Baha’i efforts in the area of education has been rooted in a dynamic of learning—characterized by action, reflection (on action), and consultation (to determine subsequent action). In many ways, the impetus for progress comes from many schools themselves being involved in a learning process. In this way, schools are oriented towards helping each other to advance rather than trying to out-compete one another. The insights from this process help to determine the way forward rather than looking to prescriptions for any one approach to education. The objective is not simply to establish a set number of schools or the imposition of a particular model of education but rather to set into motion a process that builds the capacity of the community, its parents, teachers, administrators, community leaders and children to create an environment conducive to the well-being and meaningful and sustainable education of the girls in their community.

Bani Dugal  
Principal Representative  
Bahá’í International Community

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Dear Colleagues,

Formal schooling in Kenya consists of eight years of primary education, four years of secondary education and four years of university education, this is referred to as the 8-4-4 system. The national education system has evolved over time. In 1984, the 7-4-2-3 system was replaced with 8-4-4 system, with both systems providing 16 years of schooling. Basic education is defined as 12 years of primary and secondary education. Parallel to the formal system are non-formal education programmes catering for disadvantaged populations in arid and semi-arid regions and urban slums. These include programmes teaching literacy, vocational and other skills are provided by NGOs, religious organizations and local communities.



The Government introduced free primary education in public schools in 2003 and free day secondary education in day schools in 2008. Some private schools complement the public schools and offer other systems of education (e.g. British and American). University education takes a minimum of four years depending on the degree pursued.

Education in Kenya continues to generate many questions especially in relation to content, equity, access, relevance and quality. There has been a long-term concern that the 8-4-4 system of education does not sufficiently prepare young people for employment, self-sufficiency and the current realities of the nation. According to UNESCO (2006), “too many students are graduating from schools without mastering a set of minimum skills”. UNESCO further affirms that the extent to which education can translate into personal, social and developmental benefits are vital but “in many countries that are striving to guarantee all children the right to education, the focus on access (to education)” often overshadows attention to quality”.

Gross enrolment rates (GER) for primary education in Kenya increased from 105% to 110% in 2008. The GER for girls are lower than for boys but the trend appears to indicate that the gap is gradually narrowing. The net enrolment (NER) in primary education also increased from 83 in 2005 to 93% in 2008.

Equality and equity in education in Kenya is a challenge at all levels. Disparities exist regionally, in urban and rural areas, and among communities due to social, cultural and economic factors. For years, girls in Kenya have been sidelined with their role as mothers being emphasized over and above their need for education. With the introduction of free primary education, the Government has achieved impressive primary school enrolment rates. Gender disparity at primary education is very small but disparities become progressively more obvious from secondary through to university education.

The existence of a facilitative legal and policy framework has contributed to the realization of the education rights to the young people and has led to improved service delivery in several areas. One restriction on delivery has been the slow pace of enforcement of existing legislation and policy, partially caused by lack of adequate financial and human resources. Key legal and policy reforms that have had a direct bearing on the ECD include the National Plan of Action on Education for All, the national Gender and Education Policy; the Education Act of the laws of Kenya. The national gender and education Policy provides a framework for addressing gender inequalities and discrimination in key sectors such as education and provides a framework for achieving gender parity at all levels of education. However, enforcement of this policy has been problematic and gender differences in tertiary and higher education are still large.

Best regards  
Julius Chokerah  
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)  
Kenya

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Dear Colleagues,

After the previous speakers who have addressed the issue of disabled children I would like to focus on the situation in the countries of Sub Saharan Africa.

Disability is considered as one of the factors of educational exclusion and marginalization. According to some statistics, only 2% of children with disabilities are educated in the world and very few complete a full course of study. A higher proportion of children with disabilities excluded from education systems are located in the developing countries of Asia and Sub Saharan Africa (one third of the 35 million excluded according to the Monitoring Report on EFA UNESCO 2009). In sub Saharan Africa, despite the improvements in terms of parity between boys and girls especially at the primary school, the situation of girls with disabilities is even more worrying because of the double prejudice developed against women and persons with disabilities. The MDGs cannot be achieved without the inclusion of persons with disabilities and girls with disabilities in particular. Aware of this situation, the international community and sub-regional bodies have developed instruments that guarantee the right to education for children with disabilities (The Dakar Declaration (2000), United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the Plan of Action for the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities...)

At the national level, the constitution of most countries has made education an obligation and responsibility of the State and recognizes the specificity of certain groups including people with disabilities. Following the recommendations of international bodies, policies for the inclusion of persons with disabilities have been developed in some countries in sub Saharan Africa however they have been framed as strategies for poverty reduction rather than in education. With regard to those relating to education, several countries have drawn out since 2002, plans for education development in a comprehensive way to access to fast track additional resources in order to meet the requirements necessary to achieve the EFA goals by 2015 and universal primary education; in some of these plans the concerns of children with disabilities are highlighted while in others they are sidelined (Bines, 2007). Most countries have also adopted measures to free primary education and strategies to encourage girls to attend school in areas where resistance to schooling girls has been hard to overcome (e.g. the case in Cameroon, Sénégal).

UNESCO recommends inclusive education to take into account the needs of all learners marginalized or at risk of educational exclusion (IBE-UNESCO, 2008). Inclusive education and equal opportunity are the options chosen by some countries in sub Saharan Africa. However there is a gap between political will and the actual practices observed. In terms of educational provisions, schooling for children with disabilities is more the matter of the private sector, ministries in charge of Social Affairs and NGOs. From the demand side of education, some families do not see the interest and the need to send a disabled child at school in contexts marked by overcrowded classes, increased school dropout rates and high unemployment rates affecting even young graduates.

Education for people with disabilities in early childhood overall is of great importance because it represents a critical step to success in later learning and plays a key role in the formation of personality (Tiressew, 2000). Specifically, the education of female children with a disability is as essential as the contribution of an educated woman in society is recognized.

To reduce the gap between the political will and reality observed in practice, it would be necessary to develop effective education policies that increasingly recognize the right to education for all, promote

access and retention of children with disabilities (girls and boys) in the school system from early childhood. These policies should be in line with the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This requires awareness and incentives aimed at families and communities, training of persons to receive and care for handicapped students at the school level, the provision of human, material and financial to support students in their education, the involvement of families / communities and organizations of disabled persons in the definition, implementation and evaluation of educational policies towards this target and inclusion of the disability dimension in the implementation of all existing national strategies aimed at boosting girls' education.

Ernestine Ngo Melha

Chairperson Association d'Aide à l'Éducation de l'Enfant Handicapé (AAEEH)

Educational researcher IREDU/CNRS Dijon-France

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Dear Colleagues

The evidence for benefits for disadvantaged children of holistic ECCE interventions of different kinds, which include health, nutrition and stimulation components, is indisputable, provided that they are of sufficient quality. A challenge is that ECE is too often seen as referring to preschool centre programmes and in the majority of countries access to these is unequal, favouring children whose families can afford to pay for the service and those in urban centres, while those who would gain the most benefit are excluded. The trend towards adding a pre-primary year to primary schooling is a way of providing equitable access provided that children are not excluded through fees or distances. However, children's capacity to benefit from such an intervention is heavily dependent on what happens before pre-primary age to maximise their health and nutritional status and develop positive approaches to learning.

In South Africa early childhood development policy has taken a two pronged approach. Firstly, a pre-primary year is being phased in for 5 year old children as part of basic schooling. By 2014 all children are expected to have received this service, which is offered either in accredited community schools or in a reception class at public schools. Secondly, and more importantly given the need for the earliest possible intervention, an integrated policy for children zero to four years is being phased in. This recognises that most children in this age group will not attend a preschool centre (though provisioning of this kind, is being upgraded and extended) and that the majority of children need to be reached through their families and communities. It also recognises the importance of a broad range of developmental factors such as the need for primary caregivers to be enabled to support health, nutrition and early stimulation. The focus of this national integrated plan is the 3 million children living in poverty - in particular orphaned children, children with chronic diseases and disabilities, children in child headed households; children affected by HIV and AIDS and children from dysfunctional families. The services to be delivered include maternal and child health, psychosocial support, access to social services, facilitation of birth registration and early stimulation.

This requires an inter-sectoral approach at all three tiers of government – national, provincial and local. It also requires a different kind of early childhood worker who is able to work at community level, engaging with families, linking them to services, providing education and information in a way that is sensitive to local context and child rearing practices. Issues such as developing a local evidence base about the most appropriate approaches that provide value for the investment and reach into the poorest and most remote homes; learning to work interdepartmentally and inter-sectorally; developing quality guidelines for this type of service; and defining funding and provisioning norms engaging

government, UNICEF, NGOs and academics. Financial resources and training are still largely targeted to preschool centres which are the established ECE provisioning model. Advocacy is needed to raise awareness about the importance of a range of ECD programme approaches. While there is a great deal to be worked out for effective delivery of this National Integrated Plan for young children under 5 years, this is a very promising policy to lead the development of an effective ECCE system.

Best,

Linda Biersteker  
Research Director  
Early Learning Resource Unit  
Cape Town, South Africa

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Dear Colleagues

As I come from a country, New Zealand, where Early Childhood Education in various forms is widely available I have been interested to note some of the issues faced by administrators in establishing ECE in developing countries. The issue of parental involvement in ECE, especially among lower socio-economic and migrant groups of people was one that has been addressed successfully in a number of areas in New Zealand using the HIPPY Programme.

I am sure that many of you will be aware of HIPPY (Home Interaction Programme for Parents & Youngsters), a home-based programme that supports parents in becoming actively involved in their four- and five-year-old children's learning. Parents and children work together for fifteen minutes a day with storybooks, puzzles and learning games that help children become successful learners at school. The programme builds on a bond between parents and children and offers support to parents so that they can provide their children with skills and confidence to commence school with confidence and a positive attitude to learning.

Details about the operation of HIPPY in New Zealand can be accessed at <http://www.familyservices.govt.nz/working-with-us/programmes-services/early-intervention/home-interaction-programme-for-parents-and-youngsters.html>

Best,

Dorothy Meyer  
Past Convener of the Status of Women Committee of IFUW

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Dear Colleagues,

It is evident that as countries become materially richer (per capita GDP) one set of problems associated with early childhood care and education come to be replaced by another. For example, in the Western ("developed") world there is now a massive problem of childhood obesity which, as health experts remind us, is very likely to increase the incidence of illness and disease – and not only in later life. Likewise, violence toward children resulting from a range of social, economic and interpersonal issues within families is at an unacceptably high level in many of these countries. A significant policy issue arises from the human rights agenda, vis-à-vis the rights of parents or of particular categories of adults

(e.g. men convicted of child molestation) vis-à-vis children's rights – and needs – and the responsibility of the state. Major inequities in effective access to participation in schooling and structural pre-schooling continue in many countries, as shown for example in the international program for student assessment (PISA).

In short, although on a global scale the impact of poverty and warfare must remain targets for action, it is important in looking ahead to develop policies and programs which will not generate new problems. Thus severe overcrowding and high unemployment in conurbations are predictors of continuing and almost certainly growing threats to the well being of children. We need more and better publicized studies of such social and cultural trends, as urbanization, depletion of life sustaining resources and threats to mental as well as physical health – all from the perspective of the growing child and young person. Such knowledge – often partial and scattered – needs to be consolidated, reviewed and used in making the case for child/ youth focused policy coherence. UNICEF is well placed in this regard by comparison with other inter-governmental bodies.

It is important to continue drawing on and providing more publicity to case studies and specific instances; it is equally important to draw up a research –policy agenda which both pulls together diverse experience and identifies the need for further trend analysis. Something like this occurred incidentally, under Roosevelt's New Deal, in a national effort to overcome the impact of the Great Depression. There is a global crisis in early childhood education and care, at least in one reading of the EFA Monitoring Report. If this is accepted we need coherent, integrated cross sectoral policy making and this should engage all countries, not only those most often targeted.

Emeritus Professor Malcolm Skilbeck  
Deakin University, Australia

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Dear Colleagues,

In a recent survey, we asked Plan International staff to list the challenges they faced in the implementation of projects to support the rights of girls. Amongst the 34 responses we received, the most frequent reply can be broadly categorized as “resistance to change”.

Resistance to improving the lives of girls is the manifestation of gender discrimination. It has its roots in value systems, culture and tradition and works its way up into societal systems that reflect these values and beliefs. Initiatives to increase gender equality are encountering gender discrimination at all levels of society, from relationships within families to organized religion.

In many countries where Plan works a sizeable number of parents do not support the schooling of their daughters, sometimes at the primary level and more often at secondary or tertiary levels. Obstacles for girls to realize their right to education are found on many levels. They include the higher status of sons in family hierarchies, customary practices such as child marriage, and an education system that does not accommodate young girls after marriage and childbirth. Offering bursaries for girls may help overcome some obstacles in the short run, but it will not lead to sustainable changes in the lives of girls if the attitudes and beliefs that underlie the value system do not change.

Whereas it may be difficult to address gender discrimination that is rooted in culture and tradition, that may be supported with interpretations of organized religion, and that helps consolidate the existing

power structure of communities. Plan's approach to overcoming the resistance is based on identifying potential allies within families, within communities, within governments and within religious bodies and strengthening their position without ever discounting the power of those who want to maintain the status quo.

Plan's approach is to promote the rights of girls and to eliminate gender inequality and gender-based discrimination from within social structures. The strategy is not without risks. It has to be applied carefully in order not to expose potential allies to a backlash by those who are resisting change.

Thanks,

George Anang'a  
Development Education Adviser  
Plan UK

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Dear colleagues,

Neuroscience research findings on the various stages of child development point to the importance of investing in early childhood and the added value of early learning and stimulation. These findings have been used to advocate for ECCE with policy makers. Despite this evidence, ECCE programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa are highly inequitable on all accounts. The disparities are correlated with economic, geographical, social, and cultural disparities.

However, some interesting experiences have taken place in several countries to face the challenges of ECCE programmes in term of access and inclusion with objectives to increase access to quality basic education for all, which I would like to share.

An innovative approach to ECCE service delivery termed 'Rapid School Readiness Initiative' was formulated to enhance access to ECCE amongst children from poor households in Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASAL) districts of Kenya. The main goal was to increase basic school readiness skills through two months of rapid preparation amongst the many children from the poor households who do not attend ECD but enrol in primary school due to the free primary education services begun by the government.

Programme objectives are to:

- equip children (5 years plus) with minimum basic school readiness competencies through a two-month rapid preparation approach;
- increase access to ECCE through creating awareness among parents and community of the importance of ECCE;
- mobilise communities in target areas to initiate and sustain ECCE programmes;
- link beneficiary children with primary school for standard one intake.

The programme targets children from 5 to 8 years. These children are chronologically ready for formal schooling but may not have had an opportunity to attend any ECCE programme. The children were also not attending primary school in spite of the offer of free primary education.

The programme employs a multipronged approach that combines the following components and activities:

- development of a rapid school readiness initiative Module I guidebook for teachers;
- identification of beneficiary poor households in target districts;
- identification and orientation of teachers on the RSRI guidebook;
- community awareness creation and mobilisation involving discussions about the programme with beneficiary communities and mobilising them to start and sustain the programme;
- 60 days of rapid preparation for children and establishing linkages with primary school and
- follow-up monitoring and comparative outcome evaluation.

Five thousand children have been served through this innovative approach, with 80% transitioning to primary school where they remain. About 1,200 students are provided access annually; 2,000 parents have been mobilised; 150 ECCE centres have been established, with 80% ongoing and 80 teachers and district field officers who have been orientated and are actively involved in the programme. The children who undergo this programme are better off in terms of school readiness and perform better in primary school than those who go to primary directly. However, children from the regular ECCE programme perform the best.

Additionally an innovative and cost-effective approach towards school readiness for 6-yearold children is developing in Ethiopia. With a small budget, more than 3,000 children have been reached in 3 different regions by using low-cost materials that made an enormous impact on school readiness. The most valuable lessons learned from that programme are: young learners are quite eager to learn; and participation of parents is much more than expected. Parents allow their children to learn and to teach their younger brothers and sisters; they are eager to learn themselves and to support their children in many ways. Awareness raising on the importance of school readiness is a side effect. The intervention included translating and adapting materials that have been developed by the Child-to-Child Trust and UNICEF HQ.

These materials are the *Children's Early Learning Pack, Young*

- *Facilitators' Guide to School Readiness, and Teacher's Guides.* These materials were adapted and translated into three local languages of the three pilot regions and printed before the implementation started in September 2008.
- *Children's Early Learning Pack.* An all-inclusive learning pack to help young learners get ready for school. The older children participating in the approach received an early learning kit filled with activities to foster the skills of early literacy and numeracy in their local language.
- *Young Facilitators' Guide to School Readiness.* This is a step-by-step simple guide to accompany the activities contained in the learning kits; a more general guide has also been developed. These guides, designed specifically for use by older children in their role as young preschool facilitators, explain the purpose of each learning activity, how it should be used, and why it is important for children who are about to start school within a year.

- *Teacher's Guide and Training Workshop*. This is a guide for grade 6 teachers that highlights how each activity supports early thinking and young children's motor and language development.

To increase access to ECCE for children aged 3-5 years and make the service available to every child in this age cohort, a directive was given to the Nigerian states by the federal government to establish at least one ECCE class in every public school in the country. The resultant gap in teacher/caregiver provision led to a review of the pre-service teacher education programme and the introduction of ECCE as an area of specialisation at NCE. Consequently, to meet the increased need for caregivers and teachers, ECCE studies is being mainstreamed into the curriculum of an initial 18 pre-service teacher training institutions (Colleges of Education), while plans are under way to scale this up to the other Colleges of Education nationwide. The National Teachers' Institute has also been retraining teachers and caregivers already within the system to build their capacities. The curriculum materials developed have also been translated into 13 local languages while plans are underway to mass produce these documents under a public-private partnership arrangement.

Rokhaya Diawara  
UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Africa  
Dakar, Senegal

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Dear Colleagues,

**Early Childhood Care and Education (ECE):** Before we consider the policy options, there must be agreement on the concepts of ECE. Is it ECE or ECCE or ECD (Early Child Development) or ECCD? The term, 'pre-school' is also used by many. The International Standard Classification of Education (1997) uses the term pre-primary education. Agreeing that learning begins at birth, World Declaration on Education for All (1990) called it, 'early childhood care and initial education'. However, the Guidelines for implementing the World Declaration on Education for All (1990) mentioned about the 'expansion of early childhood care and developmental activities'. The paper for the strategy session of the World Education Forum (April 2000) referred to it, ECCD. I wonder how the EFA Goal (Goal 1) reduced it to ECCE? I think that clarity in the concepts and definition are crucial to develop clear policies.

Although everyone agrees that ECCD is important, the political will and the resources are either not there or they do not match the needs or promises of governments and donors. Policy without a strong will and money is of little use. Therefore, I wouldn't recommend more policies. Let countries implement the policies that they already have with a particular focus on marginalized children and communities.

**Education of Girls and Women:** [Plan International](#) has an ongoing global campaign for lifting girls and women out of economic and education poverty. The campaign, known as [Because I am a Girl](#) is based on our experience of supporting child rights programmes in more than 40 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The following lessons underpin our work in general and the Because I am a Girl campaign in particular:

- Poverty and exclusion must be addressed simultaneously
- We must work at the local, national and international levels to address the policy, financing and practice issues of girl's education



- Empowerment of the excluded groups, particularly girls and women must be an important element of the strategy for inclusive education.

In addition to the above, some simple actions that everyone, including children parents and care givers can take are:

- Understanding the origins and implications of one's own stereotypes and prejudices and striving to overcome them
- Resisting discrimination of all kinds both individually and collectively
- Leaders of social institutions including family, community, school and religious institutions ensuring the application of the principles of equality and non-discrimination in practice.

Dr. Francis Sathya  
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Plan International Headquarters  
[francis.sathya@plan-international.org](mailto:francis.sathya@plan-international.org)

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Dear Colleagues,

One of the International Movement ATD Fourth World's greatest involvements in ECE has been in Haiti, in impoverished neighbourhoods perched on the steep slopes of Port-au-Prince. Because of their isolation (there are few roads, schools, or community centres), birth registration and immunization rates are low. Infant and child mortality rates are high not only because of the low income levels, but also because of the number of young parents with inadequate information on early childhood development. The Movement has organized within the zone in which it works two projects: one for children from 0-3, and a second one for children 3-6.

#### **"Bébés bienvenus": an ECE programme for children 0-3 years of age**

The programme is carried out by an 'animatrice' from the neighbourhood, who has been trained by the Centre for Special Education, and continues to benefit from the Centre's ongoing support and training courses. In the beginning, in 1997, mothers helped to identify an available space outdoors, where they could meet for a weekly two-hour session. The programme was thus visible to the community, and easily accessible. This was important in gaining the community's trust, and generating interest in the activities. As the number of participants increased, the programme was moved indoors to ATD's community centre. By this time – 2009 – the programme had become a regular part of community life. Regular visits in homes and neighbourhoods helped maintain a personal link and ensure that all those who are most in need of support are reached.

The mothers receive basic health and nutrition information, as well as information on their child's physical, mental and emotional development. The 'animatrice' ensures that the children are registered, and maintains a link with a local health clinic, which ATD helped to open. Because the clinic staff are involved in some of the sessions on health care, they have become known to the parents, who therefore feel more comfortable in taking their children to the clinic. In order for the families to be able to use the health clinic for regular check-ups, ATD covers the insurance payments to a partner organization, which provides each family with a health card. Once a month, the parents gather without their children to make mobiles and toys, and evaluate their child's progress.

## Pre-school for children 3-6 years of age

The pre-school activity was launched after discussions within the neighbourhood confirmed that it would respond to a felt need on the part of parents, and they were willing to invest in its success. It is also supported by the Centre for Special Education, as well as by UNICEF. ATD accompanied the parents who needed to go to court in order to obtain birth registrations for their children. Pre-school activities take place two mornings a week. As for the 'Bébés bienvenus' programme, the activities were originally organized in the open space between two adjacent houses, and then were moved indoors where the facilities were better. Meetings are regularly organized for the parents on a specific theme related to child development, as well as to ask for feedback on the programme and resolve any problems encountered (discipline, importance of punctuality and regular attendance, etc.). The children's families also receive a card, granting them access to health care.

The Centre for Special Education provides training, followed by ongoing support to the teachers in terms of planning the programme of activities, developing the necessary materials, and evaluating the children's progress. The programme is evaluated every three months. Links have been established with the local primary school, and the parents are helped to enroll their children at the end of the pre-school programme.

Lessons learned and recommendations:

1. *Importance of ongoing involvement in the community:* It is of critical importance that the person responsible for the ECE programme be a part of the community, and therefore be trusted by the community. In addition, he/she must maintain regular contact with the parents, in order to support their efforts to provide the best possible environment for their child, and to help them handle the challenges they encounter in their struggle for survival. In the pre-school programme, the teacher makes the round of the neighbourhood before each session in order to encourage the children to participate, and to maintain contact with the parents.
2. *Need for partnership with local health care facilities:* Often people living in poverty do not make use of public services even when available, because they are often humiliated, and feel blamed for their child's situation. By sensitizing the health care personnel to the challenges faced by the people in the target neighbourhood, and inviting them to participate in the sessions with the parents, the teachers have created an environment in which the people feel welcomed at the clinic. The programme has likewise helped the clinic to extend its services into the neighbourhood. The support of the local clinic for health care, immunizations, vitamin supplements, food supplements for malnourished children, etc. is essential in order for the parents to be able to put their new information into practice. In situations where no health care services are available, it is important that they be created.
3. *Importance of ongoing professional support to the ECE providers:* The involvement of the Centre was essential in providing the materials, support, and ongoing training required for a programme aimed at preparing children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to successfully perform in primary school. The Centre's support in monitoring and evaluating the programme was also key to ensuring that the programme was adjusted as needed.
4. *Attention to preparing the transition to the formal school system:* It is important to establish a bridge between the community and the formal school system. The school staff and teachers need to be sensitized to the situation of children living in extreme poverty, and the need to take

their situation into consideration - for example, not punishing them if they miss school one day, but instead recognizing the challenges they face (they might have been absent because they had to help their family forage for food that day). Teachers need to be supportive of the parents' efforts to ensure that their children go to school, and to ensure that the children will not be victims of discrimination, taunting or bullying.

5. *Importance of families' participation in the programme development:* An ECE programme cannot succeed without the full support of the families. It is therefore essential to involve them from the beginning – in the choice of site, the selection of the person from the community to be trained as the 'animatrice' or teacher, the ongoing evaluation of their children's progress and of the programme itself. Not only is this important in order to ensure the continued participation of the children and their parents in the programme, because they see it as directly relevant to their needs, but also the parents' empowerment through their involvement will help their children to develop the self-confidence and self-esteem that they will need to later succeed in the formal school system.
6. *Need to work through local organizations or community groups:* In order to ensure that the poorest and most socially excluded families are not overlooked, it is useful to identify local organizations or religious institutions that have already gained their trust, or that are at least known to them. Such groups can play a lead role in helping a community to carry out a mapping exercise to ensure that no child is left out, and then to ensure that these families are not made to feel unwelcome in the ECE activities.
7. *Positive impact of coupling ECE with income-generating projects:* Experience in other projects has demonstrated that the impact of ECE projects in impoverished neighbourhoods can be optimized through the provision of income-generating opportunities. Otherwise, the ECE programme will need to be very realistic about the families' capacity to meet their children's nutritional and health care needs.
8. *At an international policy level, importance of multi-pronged, human-rights-based approach:* It has become increasingly recognized that extreme poverty is both a cause and a consequence of human rights violations. People living in extreme poverty face a lack of income, food insecurity, homelessness or inadequate housing, lack of official identity, poor health, lack of justice (arbitrary detention, harassment, impossibility to defend themselves), and insufficient educational opportunities; they are not heard or considered in community decision-making processes; the unity of their family is threatened; and they are easy prey to exploitation. Therefore, the greatest impact on children's ability to take full advantage of ECE, pre-school and then basic educational opportunities will be achieved through a multi-pronged approach aimed at improving the families' overall living conditions. Because choices will need to be made in terms of priorities, it is critical that the families themselves be involved in the decision-making processes. All too often, programmes fail to make the best use of available resources because they have overlooked some of the obstacles and challenges faced by the families.

Matt Davies  
Head of International Policy and Advocacy  
International Movement ATD Fourth World  
[www.atd-fourthworld.org](http://www.atd-fourthworld.org)

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Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for organizing this forum. Please allow me to share some experience and thoughts.

While ECE provides enormous benefits, many governments have not committed sufficient resources nor policy support to programmes. Experience from Thailand shows that community-based action on ECE, with financial support from the Central Government, produces a high participation rate and positive physical growth for children. Unfortunately, since the program is operated in the Central Thai language, most children from ethnic backgrounds have immensely suffered from the loss of their mother tongue. These students grow up speaking only in "teacher's tongue". This creates a considerable cultural gap between grandparents and children; local knowledge and wisdom are lost through this program. In Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea, where mother tongue is required at an early age, the program has produced positive results both culturally and physically. We must urgently review ECE policy in many countries to ensure that it enhances cultural and linguistic diversity as well as creativity for future generations.

At the primary level through the utilization of a school lunch program has significantly facilitated increases in enrolment among the deprived population, especially for girls. Experience from Thailand again proves this point. However, Thailand is a food surplus country, where children can attend schools all day. In food deficit countries, some of these options should be considered: (a) provision of emergency food aid by World Food Programme linked to food production by parents. Children receive free food, while parents receive seed loans for food production or income-generation (b) books and all learning materials provided free of charge or on a loan basis (c) scholarships should be made available for girls from poor families, thus preventing their early drop-out for work.

Focusing on addressing issues in secondary education, all schools should be located within walking or cycling distance to allow girls to attend regularly. In deprived communities, pupils could be required to attend only half day, enabling students to engage in productive work at home. This program works very well in Bali, Indonesia. A second key policy option is to create a national student loan scheme for all deprived girls and boys at secondary and university levels. In Thailand the scheme for the first ten years of operation (1995-2005) lent a total of \$ 10 billion to 3 million upper secondary, vocational and tertiary level students. Candidates come from families with an annual income less than \$ 6666. The program has greatly enhanced equal education opportunities among the youth nationwide. Thailand has succeeded with this scheme, reaching the stage where most unskilled workers are now drawn from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, because most of Thai girls are in schools. Of course, this has created a lot of drop-out among secondary school girls in these three neighbouring countries. Similar loan schemes are needed in these three countries, too, if we are to achieve the EFA goals in ALL countries.

Policy makers should consider trans-boundary migration phenomena as a result of inequality of education opportunity for each region.

Dr. Supote Prasertsri  
Advisor to the Board of Trustee  
Pannasastra University of Cambodia.

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Dear Colleagues,

Various options are available to provide ECE: parents, preschool, TV programmes (i.e. Sesame St or Blue Clues); child care for employees, public libraries, access to computers & games, feeding programs, monitors, retraining primary teachers, health checkups, supervisors or information systems.

The problem is to compare the probable benefits (related to costs) of each alternative. With Larry Wolff we have used a [Delphi technique](#) to build cost-effectiveness estimates (ratios between estimated increments in learning and costs) that may alert policy-makers to the strategies they are actually selecting. Examples of applications in Africa and Latin America for primary schooling are available in the website of the EFA-Fast Track Initiative Partnership:

- <http://www.educationfasttrack.org/media/library/afrSchWolffCostEffeug262007.pdf>
- <http://www.educationfasttrack.org/media/library/lacschiefwolffcepal.pdf>

This simple exercise helps to challenge conventional wisdom and press planners and decisions makers to double check some of the assumptions routinely built into more traditional decisions (mainly formal preschooling). However, the value of the estimates depends (of course) on the quality of the "judges" selected for estimating impact and feasibility.

Best,

Ernesto Schiefelbein  
Senior Lecturer  
Universidad Autonoma de Chile

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Dear Colleagues,

To answer the questions on making ECE a reality for disadvantaged children we need to build support for several premises:

- Education and daily life are natural and potential spots for transformation of human progress;
- ECE is essential for educational inclusion; it is the foundation for school success; it is necessary for achieving an equitable world where underprivileged children can start from a solid foundation; it is essential for achieving gender equity; it is a good strategy for poverty reduction;
- ECE, from our perspective, cannot lie only in the education system since at this age, the interaction between family, caregivers, community and school is essential for achieving "quality" and integral-ecological point of view;
- Talking about quality in the Early Years Care and Education, is a complex approach that cannot be measured only in terms of schooling, it should be evaluated in terms of rates violence against children, desertion, rates of emotional stability, accidents, nutrition, security, health, recess time, and spaces for recreation, sports and playing with a children focused perspective.

In Costa Rica, free early years education starts and is obligatory at 5 ½ years old. Based on statistics from the Ministry of Education, out of 9,601 institutions, only 2755 incorporated preschool. In the last article

of Costa Rica from UNICEF website, only six of every 100 children are in a public care system (from 0 to 8 years old); and only 5% of children between 0 to 3 years old are in a care system or in early stimulation programmes. Knowing that ECE is possible through the education system, the Cen Cinai Program and Hogares Comunitarios are initiatives that can help coverage in the long term, however they require significant investments.

It could be a good strategy after contextualizing, identifying an overall perspective and strengthening skills, and faculties to empower people that are involved in any way through the early years through training programs from a human rights perspective. The ECE approach could be a combination of an effort between the formal and informal system where programs can be accessible to parents, family networks, caregivers, community leaders, day care staff and teachers.

A positive breakthrough would be to create synergies through cooperation between the Government, United Nations, NGOs, and others, where everyone can contribute and complement a national approach for ECE. From that perspective, some proposals have been presenting positive results, such as: Reggio Emilia in Italy; The Pratham Organization in India (Balwadi); "PITC" Program in California (USA), and other more organized perspectives in countries, such as: Finland, Canada and Australia.

In Latin America, there are many programs trying to interconnect efforts between the formal and informal system, some of them are: Chile (Manolo and Margarita learn with their parents, Educated in the early years); Colombia (Hobis, Atlantic Coast Project, Leadership Training Program, a Good Start); Brazil (Family Brasileira Strengthened); Venezuela (Little Simon, Teacher at home) and others.

Adopting a decentralized model, through the systematic training and a well-established monitoring and evaluation system with an open line communication, can help closing the bridge of The State as a duty bearer on these issues.

Adriana Alfaro  
Executive Director  
Dehvi Foundation & Care Group Organization  
Costa Rica

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Dear Colleagues,

Through its global network, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) has compiled a range of good practice guidance to ensure that girls, boys, women and men have access to quality and safe education in times of emergency and crisis.

Below, we are pleased to share strategies for equal access and gender-responsive learning environments, on both the supply and demand sides of educational provision, drawn from the new [INEE Pocket Guide to Gender: Gender Equality in and through Education](#). These lists are far from exhaustive, and examining the exact nature of barriers in each situation is essential.

Sincerely,  
INEE Secretariat  
[www.ineesite.org](http://www.ineesite.org)

#### Supply Side Barriers and Possible Strategies:

Barrier: Schools are far away and girls and/or boys are unable to access them safely.

Possible Strategy: Temporary learning spaces established near to communities; adults accompany groups of learners to and from school.

Barrier: Learning spaces are staffed only by male teachers resulting in girls or their families being reluctant or unwilling to attend; learning spaces are staffed only by female teachers resulting in a lack of role models and boys being unmotivated to go to school.

Possible Strategy: Recruit female or male teachers and classroom assistants. Where trained staff are not available, consider asking trusted volunteers to participate in educational activities.

Barrier: Minimal or no sanitation facilities result in low attendance and high drop-out rates for adolescent girls who are menstruating.

Possible Strategy: Work with water and sanitation colleagues and the local community to build male and female toilets and hand washing facilities

Barrier: Female learners are at risk of sexual violence or abuse from the teaching staff and stop attending.

Possible Strategy: Create protective learning environments by developing a Code of Conduct for Teachers and Other Education Personnel.

Barrier: Young mothers or girls and/or boys formerly associated with armed forces are unable to (re)enter school as they are too old for their grade level.

Possible Strategy: Work to ensure there are flexible educational opportunities in the form of extending the age for school attendance, or providing non-formal training. Avoid mixing older and younger boys and girls.

#### Demand Side Barriers and Possible Strategies:

Barrier: Poor families prioritize boys' education and don't send girls to school.

Possible Strategy: Provide incentives or targeted support to female learners, such as uniforms, schools

fees or food to reduce the direct cost on families.

Barrier: Communities are ideologically opposed to girls' education or cultural practices such as early marriage and pregnancy curtail girls' access to schools.

Possible Strategy: Work with communities and local organisations to promote the importance of culturally acceptable female education; Launch a media campaign or negotiate endorsement by religious leaders.

Barrier: Girls or boys are occupied with household or income-generating duties and don't have time to attend school.

Possible Strategy: Consider using shift classes to improve flexibility of school timing; where caring for younger siblings is a concern, consider establishing early childhood spaces to care for young children while their siblings attend school.

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)

[www.ineesite.org](http://www.ineesite.org)

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Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for including me in this debate which I find of very high importance. I am currently based in Namibia where our new Education Minister recently declared he would like to undertake education system reform from ECD or ECE through tertiary education, and the debate about quality becomes even more relevant.

A little bit of background - Namibia has a hybrid education system based on the former Apartheid education system – sad to say more than 20 years after Independence but it is the case, and the British Cambridge system. With two distinctly different systems forming the basis for education provided to children and young people in the country, the challenges are many and highly evident to all. While undertaking major education system reform, the country is bound to face numerous challenges.

To establish a new education system and improve the quality of education for all children and at all levels needs support and it is therefore important that the much needed resources and technical assistance are provided not through a piecemeal approach but based on a well-grounded situation analysis and a road map for action that embraces all aspects and components of the work – with a clear time line and milestones for stock taking and measuring of progress.

When the above is said, from my perspective, Namibia has an excellent point of departure for taking ECE and quality education forward as it is and must form an integrated part of the education reform debate and formulation. One challenge we will face is the absence of qualified staff and child care attendants, especially at local and community levels, with the relevant background to ensure that the growth and development of children under the ECE programmes are regularly monitored and reported on. Access to learning material and facilities are also challenges due to the distances and accessibility that must be considered.

In respect to outreach, local community based models for ECE must be developed and promoted, especially in disadvantaged communities and among disadvantaged families and those run by children and/or are female headed. Namibia has more than 200,000 orphans and vulnerable children due to the



AIDS epidemic and outreach programs that enhance their opportunities for stimulation, learning and growth, must be a priority in the debate.

While we are addressing the issues of quality, I would also like to raise the issue of the connection between women and their roles in caring and providing children, from the perspective that women also need to care for themselves. This is an area that is often neglected when programs are planned and women are hence often left out of the dialogue when it comes to their own needs for health care and nutrition, generation of income beyond subsistence, access to and education opportunities and participation in the economic mainstream that often make them remain in poverty and deprivation. Women's participation in political and decision making processes, at community, regional and national levels must also be included in strategies that address ECE as women would otherwise only be expected to remain at home, unable to take full part in the societal processes and to break away from the vicious circle of poverty and exclusion. Acknowledging that women are key in ECE and also in the education of their children, empowering women with knowledge, tools and instruments must take place for them to provide and care for children from the early age also relates to raising their status in their families and communities.

With increased focus being given to ECE within the framework of global education, women who commit to and implement ECE programmes and activities, must be given status in society and be recognized for what they are doing to educate the nation, not only at the local level but also through national and international fora. Since it is mostly women who take on these roles, they need also to be able to take time off from their family duties and take part in educational activities outside of the home. Should they not be compensated in one way or the other for this work, like in my home country where this is recognized through a monthly allowance provided to the woman in her name until the child/children reach the age of 18!

Although I am now based in Namibia, I would like to share one model used in Uganda as an idea for how a local community approach to ECE could function, successfully used already in the early nineties when I was working there.

In a relatively small local rural community there were many households with many orphans from the raging AIDS epidemic and since these children had almost all lost both parents, they were residing with their grandmothers, very seldom with both grandmother and grandfather. As there was hardly time for these women to get to health clinics, go for PTA meetings or even do the necessary farming/ gardening or shopping, they organized themselves in groups of five. Every day, one of the five women would organize child care for her "own" children and those of the neighbors, while the others would attend to their own needs. Although the women did not have big houses, they were able to cater for the children who would also help out for the hours the child care arrangement lasted. The women, who brought their children, could while the children were under mentoring, attend to training activities in addition to do the necessary chores mentioned above. With enhanced knowledge about child care, stimulation and health activities, they gradually became more confident, more caring and understanding and felt empowered to attend to the PTA issues in their local communities. They also could take a day off to attend to their own health care needs etc. The concept of five days came up because the women would like to be with the children during weekends and this was also when relatives would visit, they would go to church and also visit others.

The model was very low cost and worked well in rural communities where the environment was quite safe and the women also knew each other from the school, church and other places where they used to

assemble. Community outreach was used by the NGO to build the capacity and for mentoring of women who were implementing the learning with children of different ages. The programme created strong community cohesion that was a benefit in situations where there was a need to draw upon extra ordinary resources for example in relation with funerals that were quite common those days.

What would it take to get ECE to figure more prominently on the global agenda?

I would immediately say leadership – to call upon prominent leaders like the Rt. Honourable Prime Minister in Namibia who has made child nutrition his main priority in the fight against poverty and deprivation. With nutrition comes the understanding of the complexity of poverty eradication and that all development issues are inter-dependent and related. Such leaders must be called upon as national and international champions and stimulated to take up roles as role models for other countries and at global levels. They will need to be supported with the necessary resources to enable them to develop models of their eminent work, share strategies with other countries and contribute in fora where ECE issues are debated. There are too few leaders today who see ECE as their priority, often as they also do not know enough about the issue and how it can be approached from their political platform. The role models/champions role is therefore strategically important to help to set the agenda correctly and give priority to ECE at the respective political levels, whether this is nationally, regionally or internationally.

Non-education community engagement may be the most challenging, as we need to know who they are first of all and also acknowledge that “they know everything about education as they have all gone to school”! Most of those who express such attitudes may change them if education/ECE is given higher status in society, if teachers are paid like medical doctors and education is recognized as core in all development debates whether these are around finance, mining of gold, diamonds or uranium, about fisheries, agriculture, health, or other issues. To place ECE as the determinant and education as the central issue that determine the future of the nation and not only of the poor should be re-considered and supported by effective communication campaigns, evidence based reports and positive examples on how ECE and education have brought positive changes in local families, communities and to the nation as a whole.

An inclusive debate engaging all sectors in a visionary and future oriented fashion about what the citizens regard as Quality Education, what they want and need from a future oriented education system that matches the modern world, and how they think the governments and local authorities should take leadership in this endeavor may give some interesting perspectives for enhancing quality of education at national and local levels.

Thank you for your attention and warm regards

Kari Egge  
UN Resident Coordinator  
Namibia

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Dear Colleagues,

Worldwide every year millions of children start school malnourished, in ill health and in poverty in their early years. Early childhood trauma like retarded growth in the womb, stunting and anaemia are not typically viewed as mainstream education issues, but evidence strongly suggests that they should be. Malnutrition during the critical first 1000 days of life can leave a young person with permanent physical and mental impairments, harming a child's ability to learn, and robbing children of their very potential in life.

If there is a silver bullet for development, this is early nutrition and education. Good nutrition may be not just the best way, but the only way to reach all of the MDGs. Without adequate nutrition, people cannot break the crippling chains of poverty, they are more vulnerable to diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria, and hungry children cannot learn in school. Effective early childhood care and education can provide children with a better chance of escaping the poverty trap. Appropriate and timely nutrition gives a head start in life: we have to unlock that potential. There is strong – and growing – evidence that high-quality care in the early years can act as a springboard for success in school. In turn, education provides vulnerable and disadvantaged children with a chance to escape poverty, build a more secure future and realize their potential.

The Journal of the American Medical Association reported the adverse intergenerational impact of poor nutrition – with mothers who were stunted as children having a 40 percent higher risk of their children dying in their first five years of life. The science is clear that healthy mothers are a pillar of a healthy family, and we must target mothers and young children directly in order to build food secure communities.

A study in India estimated that the country loses 4 percent of its GDP to malnutrition. A WFP study in Central America found the cost of malnutrition is as high as 11 percent of GDP. WFP are right now working with the African Union to conduct a study on the cost in 10 African countries which coincides with the finalization of the AU's nutrition policy.

We know why and we know how to improve nutrition and care for children. Now is the time to act. We need to embrace a comprehensive vision of health for children and families. Support interventions that incorporate elements of good nutrition, effective health care, de-worming and hygiene practices. We have to ensure that all child health and developmental concerns are identified, and children and families are linked to an ongoing source of continuous, accessible care to meet their basic health needs. Importantly we need to provide all children with a safe, nurturing, engaging, enjoyable, and secure learning environment, in order to help them gain the awareness, skills, and confidence necessary to deal with school and life. The continuum of children's growth and development does include the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of each child.

The World Food Programme assisted 2.3 million pre-school children in 2009. Among the countries it supports, Gambia is a particular success story. WFP development project in that country achieved an increase of 23% increase in enrolment in ECDCs and noted that food is clearly a major element in attracting children to pre-school education. The Gambia addresses the challenge of universal primary education by highlighting the priority of access and quality basic education in its PRSP II and 2004-2015 Education Policy. Based on past performance in education, policy priorities are identified to allow for the growth of educational opportunity and improve the effectiveness of education at all levels, from early

childhood development (ECD) to tertiary and higher education. According to the Education Policy (2004 – 2015), the Department of State for Education (DoSE) has developed strong linkages with other government departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and committees to promote an integrated approach to ECD. Through these linkages, the DoSE will participate in the implementation of the National Policy on Integrated Early Childhood Development and strengthen its ties and collaboration with parties interested in this area. Through the multi-sector working group and the committees set up for the promotion of ECD, partnerships and alliances with civil society and international agencies will be promoted and sustained. The growth and development of children between the ages of three and six (ECD) is recognized as a means to improve the learning outcomes at all levels. As such, the Education Policy (2004 – 2015) states that the access to ECD will be enhanced through the provision of school feeding, with a main focus in girls' participation.

Best Regards,

Marc Regnault de la Mothe  
Policy Officer  
World Food Programme

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Dear Colleagues,

The issues, ECE and education of girls are especially pertinent given the current circumstances.

In Pakistan, ECE has been formally recognized recently, as the curriculum for ECE was approved in 2007. In the past ECE was informally available, but was not part of the formal school system in government schools, although private sector is very much active in this regard. However, the problem that we face is that a large number of children dropout before reaching the end of primary schooling, which is five years in duration. The reason for dropout is that children of very young age are not received in school in a comfortable and conducive environment. In order to increase access to ECE it is imperative that children be provided with a friendly environment and teaching be based on hands on and interactive activities, less structured as far as possible. Moreover schools need to be provided with necessary infrastructure and facilities.

Secondly, in Pakistan about 70 percent of the population lives in rural areas and many are girls. In the past enrolment of girls in schools has been very low but, recently due to various government interventions significant improvements have taken place, in terms improved enrolment and retention rate of girls. Still a lot remains to be done in this regard. It is important that proper mapping of schools is carried out and in future school are built in areas of reduced access. Moreover, education, particularly for girls, needs to be linked with the local requirements, trades and occupation.

But, the most important is to make at least primary education compulsory both for boys and girls, which is not the case at moment in all countries.

Prof. Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Iqbal  
Dean Faculty of Education  
University of the Punjab

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Dear Colleagues,

Early Childhood Education (ECE), in Pakistan termed Katchi or pre-primary, is defined as both formal and informal as well as public or private education services for children aged 3-5 years. In the public sector traditional style dominates: the child sits in a multi-grade classroom, sharing the space, material and teacher time with students of Class I and II. In the traditional style, there are no special funds for ECE and the regular primary teacher allocates a portion of his/her time in teaching "Katchi" students. Even students don't understand when they became eligible as regular students? In this system children at early ages don't find comfort at school and depend on her/his sibling or relative already studying in same school. Even teachers are not trained to handle such kind of students. As there is no policy for ECE many teachers discourage attendance of these young students. Private institutions exist, encouraged by Government and Non-Government Sector, but they are relatively limited and without any planning. Same time no guidelines have been made available for ECE. You may see these two resources from Pakistan; <http://www.ecdpak.com/publications/Sofia-Shakil.pdf> ; <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001472/147222e.pdf>.

Most of our discussions on ECE we neglect children with disabilities, who cover more than 10% of overall child community. Without including these children in education systems we can't achieve our goal of "Education for All". ECE is a crucial stage for children with disabilities because this is the stage where a child with disability is often identified then the rehabilitation process started. Mostly rehabilitation focused on physical development for children left behind in mental development or the ECE process. There is a huge need to revise policy of ECE at international level and steps should be taken to include children with disabilities in at the ECE level. In developing countries like Pakistan were special education remains limited, such interventions are needed and inclusive education should be promoted. But same time at health sector such facilities should be provided that a child with disability early defected and early intervention may be possible.

Regarding the second question I would like to share a success story from our area. In this part of world still today girl's education is not compulsory. It is still optional and school dropout rate for girls is very high. On a self-help basis and experimental basis we started a community based school as informal education in a room donated by one of the community members in his house. Suddenly we observed the interest of girls and women increased and male family members didn't objected on their female family member's education. In this way not only new girls entered in education but adult education also started. After such success we formalized that school through local government support. But sustaining these gains proved difficult as space was limited and there was a huge female community interested in education. If such model of community based education adopted then education can be promoted for girls in conservative societies.

Best Regards

Ghulam Nabi Nizamani  
Coordinator ASHA  
CEO PDPO / DPI PAK

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Dear Colleagues

I appreciate the experiences and insights that contributors have shared over the past week. My contributions are from a macro-planning perspective.

There have been comments on the gap that one often finds between policy and practice and on the rights of children to which national governments have made commitments. The difficulty is invariably that education budgets in developing countries are inadequate to cover all the needs, and attention to one aspect almost inevitably means that something else is neglected. The investments to get more (all) children into school had as an unintended consequence- deterioration in the quality of education in many schools. The elimination of inefficiencies in government spending and the full and efficient application of donor funding to the priorities of the national education strategic plan, with adequate attention to the most disadvantaged communities, would help towards achieving more with the same budget.

The “inclusive” approach to educating children with disabilities may often include them in the classroom while still preventing them from engaging in learning, either because the teacher is unaware of how to meet the child’s special needs, or because of class size. This raises the question whether colleges of education and universities offering an initial teaching qualification routinely train their students to use inclusive approaches, not just theoretically, but also during teaching practice.

Of course, there are situations in which dedicated adults with little formal training provide a more stimulating environment than do many qualified teachers. What I have missed in the contributions is any reference to the successful sustained use of radio to educate parents and those providing ECE of low-cost or no-cost ways in which they can provide mental stimulation and organize structured interaction for their children.

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Dear Colleagues,

The early years of children are extremely precious and there is almost a consensus and unanimity of views that Early Childhood Education (ECE) is important. ECE is not only crucial for childcare but also significant for the personality development of the child. Appropriate ECE is the foundation of success and has an enduring effect on the future of children in terms of their learning capacity and thinking patterns. These early years lay the foundation for what follows and are determinant in building and developing the initial capacity of children to learn and acquire knowledge. ECE supports the attitudinal development in personality of the child.

The impact of Early Childhood Education and Development on the learning outcomes of the students is enormous. Through ECE, the chances of early dropouts from schools are drastically reduced. The learning is improved facilitating the continuity and secure understanding of students. The worst dropout cases have been reported from the disenfranchised and marginalized sections of society and the effect can be mitigated through regular stream of ECE in our education system. There is a dire need and incessant demand for introduction of ECE in the public schools system.

The private sector has already introduced ECE and is catering for affluent sections of society especially in urban areas. There is a need to popularize the idea at policy making regional, national and international level through advocacy and secure dissemination on the importance and impact of ECE on the life and careers of students. The utmost concentration with stoic determination and focus on students from disadvantaged and less affluent households will not only help to reduce the dropout rate and but will significantly enhance access and improve the quality of education.

Dr Allah Bakhsh Malik PhD  
Secretary to the Government  
Literacy and Basic Education Department

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Dear Colleagues,

My sincere thanks to everyone concerned for initiating such type of valuable e-discussions which gives everyone a global platform to put forth his/her views.

We all know that the first five years are crucial for a human being. Researchers have found that 90% development of the brain of an individual takes place before 5 years of age. This explains the importance of these formative years in our lives. ECE or the early childhood education deals with this vital period. But unfortunately functions in a neglected way in many developing and underdeveloped countries. Using India, which is one of the most populous and developing countries, as an example there is a huge gap between the rich and the poor which is highly visible in the access to qualitative Early Childhood Education (ECE). There are private institutions imparting ECE for with parents who are willing and able to pay more.

In India ECE provided by government, is one of the six packages of ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services). This programme caters mainly to ordinary public and very poor. It helps children in rural and tribal areas to come to ECE centres and avail of the other packages of ICDS as well. In some Indian states where ECE centres are associated with the Primary schools while in others these are independent.

But it has a dark side as well. Though the job is no less important than primary education, the teachers in ECE are paid much less and in many cases looked down by others in society. For this reason there is deficiency of well-educated and well-trained staff in this area. Also staffs of ICDS remain engaged most of the time in Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP), immunization and health related activities neglecting totally the ECE component. As a result majority of children enter primary education ill-prepared which hampers the growth of their further education.

Government ECE centres which function for the majority of the population living in slum, rural and tribal areas lack the minimum child-friendly infrastructure. Many lack spacious, safe playground and the lively and attractive environment for children where the very young minds would have learnt the foundations of life ahead.

Discussing bottlenecks in the field of girls' education in school, in India girls disproportionately face sanitary and hygienic problems at school. The majority of schools do not have separate toilets for girls and in those schools which have, are usually not at all clean, hygienic and safe. I think this is a serious bottleneck which leads to a lower percentage of attendance of female students in many schools.

Some schools located in remote areas do not have female teachers which is a handicap in handling problems of female children. Many school also lack properly-trained teachers in handling the problems faced by the girl child during the physical, mental and emotional changes taking place in adolescence. In rural areas stress should be placed on opening more girls' schools because of the existing societal customs and traditions which does not allow interacting freely with male students. Also this facilitates the all-round growth of the female child in a more relaxed atmosphere.

All are taught general subjects in school but relevant and interesting subjects such as sex education, self-defense techniques, house and family maintenance concepts, personality grooming, better communication skills, national and global gender issues should be discussed in separate special sessions for girl students to motivate them to come to school regularly. After gaining expertise in these types of useful life skills, it could definitely secure their increased and sustained participation in schools. Girls should feel confident of facing life after finishing school as well-equipped with necessary life-skills. Free counseling also should be available to the female students for their personal problems.

Another point to ponder here is the preference of male child in many families. Sometimes it leads to female foeticide and neglect of girl children in the family. This situation is also prevalent in Kerala, the highest literate state of India, so one can well imagine the plight of girls in states like Rajasthan and Haryana. It needs urgent attention in many states to provide the female child the opportunity to live, be educated and be an active part of the nation's growth movement.

Before concluding I would like to add that there is urgent need to have an anti-corruption system in the society as well in organizations to ensure the planning and programmes for ECE and education of female children are successful and for outreach to the most disadvantaged or excluded children.

Thank you,

Dr. Sanghamitra Deobhanj  
Ranihat High School, India



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Dear colleagues,

As Junuz Korkzac used to say "the child is a person," and the 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on the Rights of the Child was an opportunity to further promote that concept worldwide. So it seems that the basic attitude is to consider firstly the person we face to be educated. From here we must find the means with which to show him/her that s(he) is a unique person who has something to offer others and receive from them. In order to do this this we have to find the exact words to be understood, particularly towards children who face difficult situations due to the different kinds of poverty: food, of course, money, certainly, but above all attention, even love, that are important deprivations to sentiments of a person as someone of interest to others.

When, as teachers or educators, we try to highlight positive aspects of every one which can be different from one child to the other, then children could feel concerned. It seems that before changing our attitude towards children, individually, we should seek to change the outlook on children. Some could say this is "utopian", but utopia represents an ideal to be reached, that can be achieved! It is true that we, as a teacher or an educator, have to face a one hundred children classroom, it could be difficult, but not impossible, if we have in mind that basic idea: every child is a unique person, and I must show it that it is true in my conception of education.

If this open mind to the others is always present in our teaching or educating early childhood, the benefits will be present in primary school, since this should motivate children with the pride to show his/her best, and, may be, in that way of looking at school, there should less and less children drop from non-finished primary courses. By the way, for this positive result, to link formal and non-formal education appears as a very good kind of education, and can be (has to be?) realized at a local level and slowly become to a top-down attitude or policy.

For girls in particular in their education they could receive better benefits where parents can play a role; for instance if parents are firstly educated on the positive input of educated girls. To do so school could be open in order to inform parents on the unique person that every boy or girl is. In fact, when girls, particularly in difficult situations, have bad results at school, the parents "know" what they will be told about their child by the teachers, and do not wish to go and see teachers who do not have something positive to share concerning their child. A changing attitude of teachers towards very young pupils could help in maintaining girls at school, showing the parents that it is useful and fruitful.

It is more and more accepted that kindergarten or preprimary school must follow up the education given by the parents. To be efficient, the use of mother language should be practiced by the teachers for the 2 or 3 first school years. This will enable children to better learn concepts, and on the other hand, mother and girl(s) would be able to follow up together daily schooling lessons contributing value to parents, particularly mothers at home, who do not speak National or official languages.

Finally, possibly non-formal education could help. Some international NGOs welcome parents and promote education through games. For instance, AMI (Association Montessori International) teaches all basic concepts through games, allowing to really know surfaces, volumes, series, associating forms and colours; the experience conducted in a transit camp in Kenya, near Nairobi, named "A corner for hope" is a good practice than can help girls and families. On a similar way, OMEP (Organisation Mondiale de l'Enseignement Préscolaire) aims to give motivation for studying to children through games, implemented in Canada, then in several African countries "A ludotheque for you".

In conclusion as well new attitudes towards children, particularly girls, the use of the mother language especially in ECE, could represent an opportunity to maintain girls at school. But overall, it seems important to discover a link between formal and non-formal ECE.

Thank you for your attention,

Janine Marin

ISOCARP Representative to UNESCO

President of the NGO-UNESCO Joint Program Commission "Eradication of Poverty"

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Dear Colleagues,

The Government of Rwanda's policy of increasing compulsory schooling from the six primary years to the first three years of secondary school has been successful to date in increasing girls' participation in school through the traditional early dropout years. The President's promise to extend this initiative to the full six years of secondary school during his current seven year term of office will also be an incentive for girls to stay in school. We will be able to judge whether this is sustainable at lower secondary levels in two or three years' time.

Attention to the quality of education is of course also needed

Best,  
Shirley

Professor Shirley Randell AO, PhD, FACE, FAIM, FAICD  
Director, Centre for Gender, Culture and Development  
Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) Rwanda

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Dear Colleagues,

In countries like mine, El Salvador, training for parents starting from pregnancy is almost nonexistent and largely focuses on nutritional and health needs. Health care officials do their part from the perspective of health. But education is only recently starting pilot programs in urban areas for daycare (Guarderías) (focusing attention care of mothers - for children from 6 months to 3 years for working mothers- free vocational training only).

But expanding Guarderías facilities in rural areas and improve training in mothers caring capacities, investment requires a change in priorities from governments are not designed for education. Changes in education policy from maintenance to implementation on from foreign aid are usually limited projects that only run for a short duration. In summary this will require lobbying the government to increase investment in education for quality and access and not simply investment in projects for photos and public relations.

To get and keep girls in school, based on the measures I see in El Salvador gender does not affect school participation of students. For a specific school of 800 students, we have happened to see that only 10

students who were pursued by the maras (gangs) which led to the decision of parents not sending children to school for safety .

Best,  
Cecilia Cuellar

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Dear Colleagues,

The first 6 years of life of the child are decisive for their development. At this stage children acquires skills such as crawling, walking, running, writing, building, as well as abilities to think, speak, learn and reason and interact. The expression of these feelings and values that accompany a child throughout its life and allow it to integrate into society where it happens to be born. In this context it is life itself that demands education from an early age with a more holistic, participatory, integrated, and contextualized with significant and varied learning. This education must respond to social, environmental and communications that the planet presents.

How can this objective be achieved? Joining forces and being responsible in the education of children. Schooling is not the answer to reach 100% of the population. Only when the family, state and society come together and rethink their educational role; only then people will begin to feel more secure, creative, critical, leaders and happy.

The proposal would create integrated and comprehensive programs, including information by different means, which may be developed with minimal costs, so that people are well trained and committed to their communities, are the answer. It is imperative that children are prioritized. A process of awareness of the role of the whole society in forming a child's life is carried out.

Regarding female education, the answer is specific and unequivocal: it must be compulsory for the state, which should establish a whole system of penalties for negligence to parents or carers who do not send girls and boys to school. The State must guarantee access and the family must fulfill its duty to register, support and stimulate learning.

Aurea Ferreres  
Intervida