

Education NOTES



Getting an Early Start on Early Child Development

The children born this year—2004—will be eleven years old in 2015—the age of primary school completion in most countries. This is the MDG* generation—for whom the international community has pledged that by 2015, all children will be able to complete primary schooling. Ensuring good early child development is the first essential step toward achieving these goals.

* Millennium Development Goal

The early development of these children will determine, to a large extent, whether they succeed in school and later in life. A child who is ready for school has a combination of positive characteristics: he or she is socially and emotionally healthy, confident, and friendly; has good peer relationships; tackles challenging tasks and persists with them; has good language skills and communicates well; and listens to instructions and is attentive.

ECD services include center-based and home-based child care and development, formal and non-formal preschool programs, and parent education programs. ECD projects have complementary objectives, require innovative designs, and target diverse groups to reach children directly or through their parents or caregivers. Interventions include educating and supporting parents, delivering services to children, developing capacities of caregivers and teachers, and using mass communications to enhance people's knowledge and practices.

The Benefits of Early Child Development

Investments before a child enters school (as compared with remedial programs) have high payoff. Well-targeted ECD programs cost less—and produce more dramatic and lasting results—than education investments at any other level. Early child development and education have positive effects on achievement, grade retention, special education, and high school graduation and socialization. These positive effects can change the development trajectory of children born into poverty.

Special Benefits for the Poorest

By the time poor children reach kindergarten age, they already have had an unequal chance to be ready for school or learning. Interventions in early childhood particularly benefit poor and disadvantaged children and families. For example, in India's Haryana project, a six-year ECD intervention, dropout rates did not change significantly for children from the higher caste, but fell a dramatic 46 percent for the lower caste and

an astonishing 80 percent for the middle caste. A study conducted in Jamaica shows that nutritional supplementation for undernourished children improves their mental development. ECD programs in India and Guatemala resulted in a significant decline in enrollment age for girls.

Early interventions also yield higher returns as a preventive measure early in life, compared with remedial services later in life. Nobel Laureate Heckman (1999) argues that investments in disadvantaged children bring a higher rate of return than investments in low-skill adults. Policies that seek to remedy deficits incurred in the early years are much more costly than initial investments in the early years.

Options for ECD

Often, policymakers equate early interventions with formal, center-based programs, which are not affordable or universally accessible to all children. However, options include non-formal early childhood programs, which are flexible and less expensive to administer than formal kindergarten. By bringing ECD services into the home, non-formal programs reach many children, who would otherwise be missed. Properly targeted, non-formal ECD programs can yield returns as great as, or greater than, those from formal preschools.

The ultimate goal of all ECD programs is to improve young children's capacity to develop and learn. These programs can offer a combination of the following complementary approaches:

- Delivering services to children. Examples include the U.S. Head Start program, Bolivia's Integrated Child Development Project, Colombia's Community Child Care and Nutrition Project, Indonesia's Early Child Development Project, and India's Integrated Child Development Project.
- Training caregivers and educating parents. Examples include, Mexico's Initial Education Project, Chile's Parent and Children Program, Uganda's Nutrition and Early Childhood Development Project, Kenya's Early Childhood Development Project, and the Philippines' Early Childhood Development Project.

- Promoting community development and helping women achieve development objectives. Examples include the Colombia Community Child Care and Nutrition Project and Kenya's Early Childhood Development Project.
- Strengthening institutional resources and capacity. Examples include Kenya's early education centers, Mexico's Initial Education, and Africa's ECD Virtual University.
- Building public awareness and strengthening demand. Examples include Uganda's Nutrition and Early Childhood Development Project and Eritrea's Integrated Early Childhood Development Project.

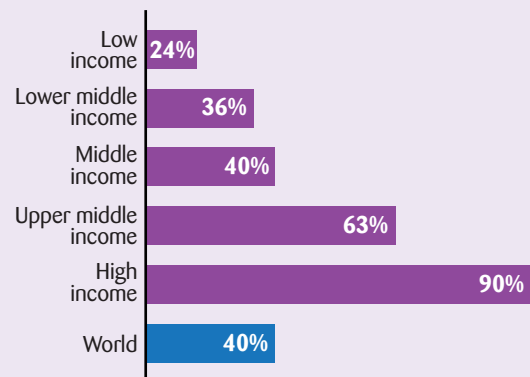
Coverage of ECD by Countries and Regions

In developing countries, the barriers to success in school and society include malnutrition, ill health, HIV/AIDS, and war. Figure 1 depicts the differences between industrialized and developing regions of the world, for pre-primary school enrollment ratios. Figure 2 depicts the pre-primary gross enrollment ratios by region.

Statistics on enrollment are difficult to obtain, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. The data on pre-primary school enrollment worldwide can be summarized as follows:

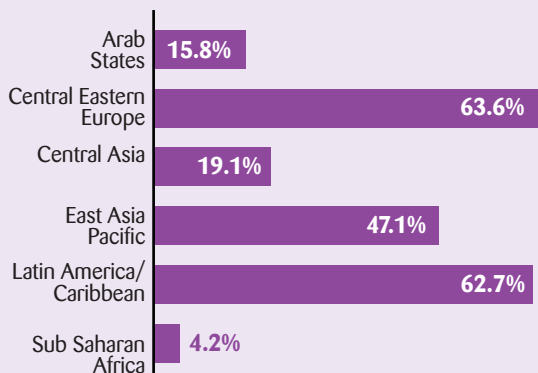
- Children of urban and better-off families attend pre-primary school more than children of poor or rural families.
- Most countries show a relative gender parity in pre-primary enrollments.
- The relative roles of the state and private sector vary widely: some countries tend toward greater government involvement, others tend predominantly toward private-sector involvement.

Figure 1: Pre-Primary Gross School Enrollment Worldwide by Country Income



Note: Pre-primary gross enrollment ratio = total enrollment in pre-primary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population age group corresponding to the national regulations for this level.
Source: World Bank Development Indicators 2004.

Figure 2: Pre-Primary Gross School Enrollment by Region



Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/2004.

Recognition of the importance of early interventions has increased considerably in the past decade, but government funding continues to be very low (often less than 2 percent of the total education budget). Families, communities, and non-governmental organizations bear major responsibility for early childcare interventions. Lack of funding is a major barrier to access.

Lessons Learned

Similar lessons can be distilled from large programs initiated at a community or national level, such as Colombia's Home Day Care program and the U.S. Head Start program. These lessons are as follows:

- Strong national institutions need to complement, but cannot substitute for, local capacity and commitment. The participation of both formal and non-formal institutions in ECD programs is key to the success of these programs.
- ECD programs need to be strongly supported nationally to become financially sustainable. Federal financial support to local projects in a mixture of block and matching grants strengthens local ownership, but complete reliance on national funds can impede local efforts.
- Monitoring and evaluation are important. Monitoring and evaluation should be a cyclical and interactive process that begins in the initial design phase, and program managers must be prepared to make changes as needed to respond to local needs and to achieve effective outcomes.
- Increasing public resources and funding by the private sector
- Provision of incentives to civil society, and local government
- Creation of demand by consumers
- Creation of new providers (i.e., mothers in home-based programs, such as those in Colombia and Bolivia)
- Modification of the government's role, to provide information, standards, in-service and pre-service training of staff, and evaluation of alternative providers (to help consumers make informed choices)

Remaining Challenges: ECD Programs for All Children

Governments tend to treat early education as a downward extension of primary school rather than an upward extension of the base built in early childhood. For the MDG generation to receive the services it needs over the next few years ECD policies must include the following:

This note series is intended to summarize lessons learned and key policy findings on the World Bank's work in education. The views expressed in these notes are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank. For additional copies of Education Notes, please contact the Education Advisory Service by email at eservice@worldbank.org or visit the web site: <http://www.worldbank.org/education/>

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