



Early childhood development: A foundation for inclusive education development

Learning from the 'Education for Vulnerable and Marginalised Children in Nepal' project

A child at ECDC period (3-5 year) who is visually stimulated, continuously engaged in interactive activities, hugged and comforted is more likely to fully develop language, emotion, comprehensive and social skills, all of which are vital for success in school, in the community and subsequently in life.



Jugal ECDC Balsudhar Secondary School, Duwachaur, Sindhupalchok

Context

Early childhood development (upto six years), is the period of crucial brain development, formation of cognitive skills and vital healthcare outcomes. At this period children establish cognitive, emotional and social foundations for their healthy upbringing. A child at ECDC period (3-5 year) who is visually stimulated, continuously engaged in interactive activities, hugged and comforted is more likely to fully develop language, emotion, comprehensive and social skills, all of which are vital for success in school, in the community and subsequently in life. Yet, nearly half the world's children – especially girls from marginalised populations – are likely to miss out on programmes that can develop such skills. Due to geographical barriers, poverty and lack of awareness many children are facing different problems such as: most start their school years later than their peers, and have difficulty catching up. We all want our children to become healthy,

happy, and productive adults. This issue of RRN's briefing paper highlights the status and features of early age children, their rights and childhood development, lessons, challenges and options for policy implication and way forward considering existing facts of Nepal in general and particularly in project perspective. This paper is based on the overview of ECD centers, progress review of government SSRP, monitoring and interviews with key informant- school teachers, ECD facilitators, FGD of mother groups etc. of project VDCs and schools.

Country Status of ECDCs

Childhood is the core foundation of a healthy adult. The government of Nepal has put efforts to encourage and promote pre-primary education for children under five with preliminary child education regulations. Also ministry of education (MOE) and its National Framework of Child Friendly Schools (NFCFS) for quality education

ECDC Fest held in Sindhupalchok

District Education Office, Sindhupalchok organized an ECDC festival at Khadichaur on 28th April, 2012 in collaboration with RRN/CN and other stakeholders. The main objective of the festival was to share the importance and improvement of quality of ECDCs.

Ms. Lila Bhandari, Minister of State for Education inaugurated the fest as the chief guest of the programme chaired by Mr. Gehanath Gautam, District Education Officer. Ms. Rajya Laxmi Nakarmi, Associate Director of Department of Education and ECDC Chief was the another guest at the feast where teachers, SMC members, ECDC facilitators, children and local people were participated.



The major attractions of the festival were children-made hand print collections, picture stories, local materials, children song, parents and teacher workshop, primary level education information displayed at the stalls. The stalls were managed by the model ECDCs of local schools. More than 1500 people observed the festival.

Currently there are 350 ECDCs running in Sindhupalchowk, comprised of 237 school-based, 80 community based, and 33 institutional school based ECDCs.

Empty stomachs cannot learn. Poverty and hunger are intricately related to attendance of children into ECDC and school. Many parents still send children to school almost empty stomached and without lunch-boxes.

have been encouraging the establishment of an effective learning system in the schools of Nepal. The 2011-SSRP flash report shows a total of 31,089 ECD centers from 33,160 schools having 10, 18,543 children of early 3-5 years across the country. Out of them, government/community school based ECD centers are 26,773 holding more than 85 percent of children remaining at the institutional private schools. ECD/PPC enrollment consists of 48% girls, 18% Dalit and 39% Janajati. However, due to scattered and rural village setting, the schools are not easily accessible for small children and most children stay at home doing nothing. They also do not have play materials at schools or at home. Even after the efforts of both government and non-governmental organisations in education and ECD, there are still untrained teachers, lack of awareness among parents, lack of knowledge and right attitude to mobilise local resources, lack of child friendly teaching learning environment, IEC materials and playing facilities.

Cross cutting linkages

Empty stomachs cannot learn. Poverty and hunger are intricately related to attendance of children into ECDC and school. Many parents still send children to school almost empty stomach and without lunch-boxes. Childhood development has many factors linked together such as nutritious food result in healthy children who thrive in early years of every ECDC. However, there has been significant progress in the past 15 years, though there are still 41% of children who are less than five years of age have stunted growth. 11% are wasted, and around 30% are underweight in Nepal. In the post ECD level, 16 %

of children who enroll in grade 1 drop-out, and 30 % repeat the grade. Thus only 54 % continue on to grade 2. Researches show lack of early child care development is a key factor for these. The instrumental role of ECD in increasing the efficiency of primary education in Nepal is of extreme importance. A grade 1 child with pre-primary early child development exposure had much higher success rate than those without. Only 6% of children with ECD exposure repeated the grade compared to 37 % without ECD; 11 % of children with ECD dropped-out compared to 22 % without it. And 83 % of children with ECD were promoted to grade 2 compared with only 42 % without it. It is found that having women as primary teachers is not only desirable from the perspective of gender equality and social justice, but it has a very direct impact on the enrollment and retention of girls in schools. We only have 36% female teachers at the primary level, 19% in lower secondary and a meager 12 % in higher secondary schools. The government objective of having at least one female teacher in every primary school is yet to be materialised.

Achievements & learning by project interventions so far

RRN is implementing "Education for vulnerable and marginalised children in Nepal" project funded by European Union (EU). Early childhood development was one of the components of the project which aims to increase access, promotion and development of early years in children at 30 Early Childhood Development Centers (ECDCs) of Sindhupalchowk, Dolakha and Ramechhap. Project has been supported with kits and stationery, flooring carpet, cupboard rack,

painting (wall ground), playing materials and kitchen pots. At the beginning, 30 ECDCs based on the government/community schools were selected with the coordination of Village Education Committees (VECs), Schools and DEO, where marginalised children studied. A full set of ECD materials (stationary, ECD kits, flooring carpet, cupboard, rack, kitchen pots, snack boxes, water bottles) has been distributed to 30 centers including other child friendly posters. Each year a total of 740 children having 55 % girl children are benefited by the equipped and trained ECDCs in 3 districts. There have been regular meetings and concern given to ECD and kids in school management committee (SMC) for sustainability of early children skill development. Their daily set up routing for kids has developed the learning attitude of children in an effective way. Parents are encouraged and self motivated for the preparing of snacks for their kids in rotation basis in some ECDCs of Sindhupalchok district. Parental meeting has supported to send their kids regularly in the centers.

Children are self-motivated to go to ECD classes with the availability of playing materials, flooring carpet, chair cushion, educational puzzles and charts contributing to a good class room environment. As child friendly indoor and outdoor materials help for physical and mental development of kid. It is observed that children didn't have a separate ECD room and room for grade one was adjusted for the ECDC in most of the community/government schools. There is hardly a seating mat, educational materials, and kits, physical facilities such as open space for a room, furniture carpet, tiffin and water bottles. Hence, children are not interested to stay in the school. It was also felt that facilitators could not handle the children well. They were found to be demotivated due to their meager salaries. Also,

early childhood endeavor was found to be given less priority by head teachers and SMC members.

Besides the overall scenario, there are visible efforts of improvement in some schools and ECDCs. A separate room has been encouraged for ECDC by some communities. There have been improved child centered teachings and skill development training. Positive attitudes have been developed toward ECDCs by creating a child friendly environment with teachers and parents. Mothers' meetings were conducted. The number of children has also been increasing in ECDCs. Kids are enjoying staying in ECDC for a longer time up to 3 pm. Now there are facilities of furniture, carpet, cushion and parents can be seen carrying their children in ECDC with their tiffin box and water bottle. In some ECDCs, mothers have been rotationally making tiffin at school. Overall assessment is good. However, child's nutrition, education, development, participation, health and hygiene related aspects have to be included at ECDC. The concerns and commitments for early childhood development at ECDC is greatly realised by teachers, SMC members and portents (mothers).

Children are self-motivated to go to ECD classes with the availability of playing materials, flooring carpet, chair cushion, educational puzzles and charts contributing to good class room environment.

Challenges and options

Despite the growth of ECD in recent years, many challenges remain before the enrollment target can be achieved. There are regional differences in the growth of gross enrollment ratio. The hill, mountain and terai zones have achieved GERs of 38.1 per cent, 36.8 per cent and 36.3 per cent respectively. The highest GER is Kathmandu Valley with 128 per cent. Being economically and socially advantaged, Kathmandu Valley has the highest concentration of pre-primary education providers in the country. The overwhelming majority of institutional schools with pre-primary

ECDCs Encouraged to Improve Primary Classes

The Education Project has resulted significant changes in the attitudes towards early childhood development in the public schools. Due to the enhancement of ECDCs, mothers are free to do their household chores as their kids stay day long at schools. Behaviors and sense of responsibilities of teachers and SMC members have been changed towards loving and caring the kids. Similarly, the facilitators are encouraged to care the kids through teaching by playing and rhyme tools after the training.

"Some of the ECDC graduate kids do not want to go to the grade one, because of an inappropriate class room and seating arrangement as compared to an ECDC class. This has challenged us to maintain the learning environment of other primary classes as well", said Mr. Chakra Bdr. Tamang, Head Teacher of Kalidevi Secondary School, Dolakha.





Local materials being used at ECDC in Dolakha.

Parents are to be made aware about the fact that ECD entrants have a higher learning outcome than non-entrants.

classes are concentrated in the urban areas. The quality of ECD provision, which is generally poor in most of the school-based and community-based centres, is a concern. The issues and challenges of ECD mainly relate to parental awareness and involvement, qualifications and training of ECD facilitators and the capacity of the system. There is still a need for the development of norms and standards regarding qualification of ECD facilitators and for the development of criteria for implementing ECD programmes at the district level. Moreover, parents are to be made aware about the fact that ECD entrants have a higher learning outcome than non-entrants. In addition, children as zone of peace & protection (CZOPP) and school as zone of peace (SZOP); the commitment of the government for these centers should be materialised in act and kind.

Policy implication and way forward

Interim constitution of Nepal has guaranteed full rights of children and is the state party to UN convention on rights of the children (CRC-1989). It has made commitments for overall child development, education, participation and protection. Education for All, Dakar goals and

MDGs have also emphasised the comprehensive early childhood care, education, nutrition especially for most vulnerable groups. Learning starts right from the birth of a child. ECD program fosters a congenial learning environment for the children of 3 to 5 years to develop their motor, mental, social and emotional skills. Therefore, teachers have to make their classes joyful and creative; manage local resources for education and playing materials.

In addition, immunisation, supplementary nutrition, health checkup, weighing and referral services are also basic services at ECD centers to be addressed for overall child development. For this, well managed schools should come up with to address these crucial issues in collaboration with Village Development Committee, Village Community Health Volunteers, and ECD facilitators.

According to SSRP, ECDCs are not recognised as the basic education despite they exist in school premises. Consequently, the ECDCs have grasped insufficient attention from the school communities. Therefore, at policy level, government has yet to do much for motivating ECD facilitators regarding their remuneration and number of facilitator/volunteer for the kids in each ECDC. Possibly 8th amendment of education Act could address these issues. So, the number of facilitators in the ECDCs and their remuneration have to be increased.

Studies in developing countries show that early childhood development (ECD) programmes lead to higher levels of primary school enrollment and educational performance, which in turn positively affect employment opportunities later in life. On the contrary, children who start school late and lack the necessary skills to be able to learn constructively are more likely to fall behind or drop out completely, often perpetuating a cycle of poverty. Therefore, it is imperative to protect the rights of the child by addressing the every aspects of an early childhood development.

Prepared by : Bhanu Parajuli
Layout design : Som Rai, RRN

Published by : Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN)
P. O.Box: 8130, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Street Address: 288 Gairidhara Marg, Gairidhara, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Tel: +977 1 4004976, 4004985, Fax: 977-1-4004508 & 4443494 , Email: rrr@rrn.org.np
Website: www.rrn.org.np

Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN), established in 1989, is a Nepali non-government, social development organisation involved in rural development, action-oriented research and policy advocacy focusing on peasants, poor women, dalits and indigenous nationalities, and other vulnerable communities through the process of acilitation, social mobilisation, empowerment and self-organisation. RRN's work is based on the four-fold approach to rural reconstruction covering: education to combat illiteracy and empower people to access their rights; sustainable livelihood to fight poverty; health to prevent disease, and self-government to overcome civic inertia.



The publication of this issue of RRN Briefing Paper is supported by European Union (EU)