

RECOMMENDATIONS POST CONFERENCE

Early childhood Association (ECA-India) organized **2nd International Conference entitled “Ideas to Implementation for Early Childhood Education in India”** in Mumbai on the 23rd and 24th February 2013 and reviewed challenges and progress made towards the context of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a social, human and economic development imperative. In the conference we adopt a broad and holistic concept of ECCE as the provision of care, education, health, nutrition, and protection of children aged zero to eight years of age during the conference. ECCE is therefore a right and an indispensable foundation for lifelong learning. Its proven benefits are manifold, and include better health and nutrition, improved educational efficiency and gender equity, greater employability and earnings, and better quality of life. ECA understand early childhood care and education must foster in children a spirit of peace, understanding, non-discrimination and harmonious relation with nature, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We recognise the intrinsic value of childhood and children’s inherent rights to provision, protection and participation.

THE CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED AND RECOGNIZED

- ECCE is part of the right to education and the main foundation for holistic human development. In addition ECCE is instrumental in poverty eradication and a critical stage to seed foundation for sustainable development. ECCE is an investment in the wealth of nations. There is a strong knowledge base; there are models, including at national levels, of high quality scalable provision; there is good evidence that families and communities respond to high quality initiatives; there is knowledge of how to build capacity. But we do face challenges
- ECCE policies are not always part of national socio-economic development plans and do not reflect a holistic and integrated approach; they are insufficiently backed by political commitment and are not on a scale to reach all parts of the population. Inadequate core public funding and low external support continue to impede sustained ECCE provision. Existing levels of integration, articulation and coordination of services, institutional weaknesses and poor operational frameworks limit the effectiveness of ECCE programme delivery
- Lack of infrastructure, and persistence of cultural and poverty barriers deny access to ECCE to millions of marginalised children, including those living in occupied territories and conflict and disaster affected areas. The benefits of ECCE are put at risk by low quality and lack of inclusiveness of services. There is lack of reliable and timely information on the provision of equitable holistic ECCE services
- Low capacity at multiple levels and among various stakeholders’ compromise ECCE programmes. Partnership for provision is not what it could be, and there is a need to for all partners to heighten their contribution to service provision-at the household/community level with civil society, the private sector, government and development partners

- To address the challenges we need to take advantage of the knowledge base and good experiences that already exist, and universalise these

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERCOMING CHALLENGES/ ACTION AGENDA

i) Legislation, Policies and Strategies

- a) Develop legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms that are conducive to the implementation of the right of children to ECCE from birth;
- b) Adopt and promote an approach to ECCE that is both holistic and multi-sectoral to ensure good birth outcomes, (prenatal stage), neonatal health and nutritional well-being, care and education of the zero to eight, with a special focus on the zero to three age group;
- c) Integrate ECCE policies into human and socio-economic development policies and thus as a shared responsibility across sectors and departments, parents, families, communities, and society ;
- d) Strike an appropriate balance between centralised and decentralised governance guaranteeing collaboration among all spheres with related responsibilities, level of authority and resources;
- e) Strengthen political commitment through evidence based advocacy on the benefits of ECCE for human development

ii) Access and scaling up

- a) Scale up ECCE efforts, identifying enabling factors in effective ECCE programmes, with careful attention to flexibility and adaptation to diverse contexts and income groups, particularly targeting the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, and promoting partnerships with stakeholders at all levels;
- b) Place a key emphasis on achieving good birth outcomes to mitigate poor outcomes for neonates through developing and expanding parenting programmes to orient families in good ECCE practice, with particular emphasis on the 0-3 year old age group;
- c) Develop a framework to improve pathways for successful transitions within ECCE and to primary schooling

iii) Assessment, Research, Monitoring and Evaluation

- a) Enhance reliable and timely assessments of ECCE services;
- b) Strengthen and institutionalise monitoring and evaluation of ECCE programmes to guide sound policies through the provision of reliable, relevant and timely disaggregated data for informed decision making;

- c) Use locally relevant knowledge for informing policy-making, strengthen ECCE research capacities and contribute to knowledge creation across all regions

iv) Enhancing Quality

- a) Empower and strengthen the capacity of parents, families and service providers, so that they can provide protective relationships, quality care and education to the young child;
- b) Improve curriculum and methodology in tune with childhood, valuing play, affection, cooperation, talent and creativity, joy, the fostering of self-confidence and autonomy, as well active learning pedagogies that take into account children's point of view;
- c) Focus on programme outcomes by adopting consistent assessment criteria and methodologies;
- d) Explore and use the full potential of ICT to promote all aspects of ECCE;
- e) Include education for sustainable development as a central part of quality ECCE;
- f) Put in place human and material conditions required to achieve quality for ECCE; committed valued and trained professionals, appropriate ECCE environments as well as context sensitive curricula and materials

v) Capacity building

- a) Develop new approaches and methods to build professional capacity, in areas of critical importance to quality improvement;
- b) Improve and expand teacher training, accreditation and the professional development programmes

vi) Harness resources for ECCE

- a) Support the above measures by increasing budget allocations by all government departments concerned with ECCE promotion, and mobilize diverse and innovative financing sources and mechanisms in support of ECCE. Invest as much as it takes to meet all rights to ECCE according to set quality standards;
- b) Increase targeted resources for programmes for 0-8 years old, with particular attention to the early years due to their importance for human development;
- c) Conduct and encourage finance analysis of ECCE provisions and service delivery