

AN OPEN LETTER OF APPEAL TO HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER SHRI NARENDRA MODI.

THE OTHER MINORITY- IT'S TIME FOR A DEDICATED MINISTRY TO TAKE CARE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, CARE AND EDUCATION.

IF WE DON'T STAND UP FOR CHILDREN, THEN WE DON'T STAND FOR MUCH. WHERE DOES INDIA STAND IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE, DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION?

-EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION- www.eca-india.org

Children, the future

We say, "children are the future" – and that's true – but there's a fundamental problem with that idea. It suggests that... they're just kids now, but later, when they *become* the future, we can start taking care of them... with colleges and universities, a better economy, a better job climate. *But that's wrong.* A recent New York Times editorial poses the question, 'Do we invest in prisons or pre-schools?' The answer is obvious. The most critical time that you have with children is – 'right now'.

Between 0 and 5

It's the first five years. Children go through a period of rapid learning in the first five years. The most embedded parts of our personality – our attitudes and moral values, our emotional tendencies, our learning abilities, how we deal with people, how we deal with situations, good or bad – they are all a product of experiences that we have between the ages of 0 and 5. That's when we learn how to adapt and respond to the world. In April 2014, sixteen neuroscientists specializing in nutrition, chemistry, and child development discussed and debated the influence of early experience on brain development at the UNICEF offices in New York. [3 messages were delivered to UNICEF](#) from this meeting. One of the messages was "Early Intervention is the answer: it becomes progressively harder to fix problems":

ECD makes a difference

Early Childhood Development – early education and care – makes a difference that persists well into adulthood. It shapes who you become. At that age, your brain is making new connections that will one day become the blueprint for your life. And at that age, if you don't receive the right kind of care or learning, you will grow up with... a few crayons missing from your life's pencil box. And why should that happen to anybody?

Do we care for our children?

The problem is not that we don't *want* to care for our children. People just need to know how. Parents, teachers, the government – all the stakeholders in the future of our children – we go about it on a trial-by-fire basis, learning each time as the child grows up. But we need a more structured, a more uniform way to do this. Over 40 percent of India's children in the 0-6 age group are deprived of any early childhood care despite the Constitution and Parliament having recognized the importance of ECCE. Article 45 of the Constitution directs that "the State shall Endeavour to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six years". the plain truth is that after 65 years since independence early childhood care, development and education in this country is still neglected. It's time the country invested in taking care of its youngest citizens

The world is racing ahead of us in taking care of young children...

- The world is right now at a crucial period of enhancing and strengthening early childhood care and education. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and UN Member States: Put early childhood development at the heart of the new post-2015 development framework with targets that promise all children care, support and services which work together for the best start in life.
- President Obama has declared Preschool for all program so that the youngest citizens get the quality, care and education they so rightly deserve.
- The 2011 UNESCO Global Monitoring report notes that "Education opportunities are shaped long before children enter classrooms. The linguistic, cognitive and social skills they develop in early childhood are the real foundations for lifelong learning". It is obvious that ECCE sets the foundations for one's learning and development.

The provision of quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) has remained firmly on World government agendas in recent years. Public awareness of gaps in provision and of insufficient quality in services has moved the issue of child care and after-school care onto electoral agendas in many countries. There is a growing recognition that early access to ECEC provides young children, particularly from low-income and second-language groups, with a good start in life. ([Report of OECD](#))

Why countries invest in ECEC?

Among the immediate factors turning governmental attention to ECEC issues are: the wish to increase women's labor market participation; to reconcile work and family responsibilities on a basis more equitable for women; to confront the demographic challenges faced by OECD countries (in particular falling fertility rates and the general ageing of populations); and the need to address issues of child poverty and educational disadvantage. Because economic prosperity depends on maintaining a high employment/ population ratio, the wish to bring more women into the labor market has been a key driver of government interest in expanding ECEC services. European governments, in particular, have put into place family and child care policies to help couples to have children and assist parents to combine work and family responsibilities. (Report of OECD)

The other minority...

Young children are the other minority in our country, because they are presently just 20% of our population, have no voice, cannot vote so are being ignored when it comes to policy, laws, investments. But every business house, entertainment house, corporate company, uses young children for their benefit, crimes against young children are on the rise. Young children in our country are still battling with diseases, malnutrition, lack of proper health facilities, child care. Our country needs to set up child protective services to take care of them. We need to invest in our young children because they are going to grow up and become the youth of this country. It will be too late to take care of them then, because research has proven that the early years are when the foundation of all future growth is gained.

Too little...too slow...

The Working Group on Children under Six was constituted for writing a paper in 2009 on the status of early childhood care and education in India, at the request of the Planning Commission. 5 years hence their issues highlighted are yet the same...

- That it has been seriously neglected in India is amply demonstrated by the poor developmental indices that relate to the situation of children under the age of six, whether they are infant or under-five mortality rates or the prevalence of malnutrition. It is also a fact that most interventions in this issue have so far changed the situation minimally and far too slowly.
- There is, therefore, an urgent need to prioritize policies towards children under six, not only to protect their rights but also to ensure that the future generations are healthy and well.

Urgent need to set up a ministry of early childhood development, care and education...

Our country is battling with crimes against women and children. If we want our national human resource, our young children to grow up as strong, healthy and competent youth then it is time to invest in early childhood. Because there is too much work to be done regarding laws, policies, frameworks, trainings, support systems, health, nutrition etc it's time to dedicate a separate ministry to early childhood development, care and education. The ministry can look after pregnancy, birth, mothering, parenting, child and mother health, child health and nutrition, care and education of young children. The ministry can look into child rights, child laws and thus strengthen the generations that will grow up and take this country to become a super power. It may sound impossible but there are some countries that have taken the initiative and have set up a separate ministry, Singapore, has the Early Childhood Development Agency which is an independent agency charged with overseeing child care and kindergarten education. In Scotland, governance is handled by the Ministry of Children and Young People. In Dubai you have MOSA, Ministry of Social Affairs...

Our early childhood education policy...

After 65 years of independence it is commendable that the last government thought of having an early childhood policy, a curriculum draft framework and a quality standards framework....But it is only a vision document, which means it outlines what the government would like the final document to have but has yet to detail it out and make it user friendly.

Why reinvent the wheel?

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT- OECD is a unique forum where the governments of 30 democracies work together. The OECD member countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The OECD Education Committee is a forum for the Education Ministries of the OECD countries. The Committee meets at OECD headquarters twice a year to discuss education policy and issues. Visits and the reports from the review can be viewed on the project Web site: www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood all these member countries have strengthened their early childhood policies, quality frameworks, curriculum guidelines by working together and pooling their research and draft models.

So where does India stand in comparison and what ECA recommends should be done on a war footing?

We recently compiled a comparative study of the early childhood policies of 39 countries. It shows us that we have many proven best practices that we can refer too and expedite the work for quality, safety and care in the early childhood department The countries I compared are Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bhutan, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Denmark, Dominica, England, Estonia, Finland, India, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Mauritius, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Palestine, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Uganda, United States, Wales.

Question on ECE policy	Global Trend	Where India stands	What India should do
1. ECE is under which ministry	28 out of 39 countries come under ministry of education	spread across the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Rural Development, HRD ministry	There should be a separate ministry for Early Childhood Development: Care and Education This is required as too much work on policies, frameworks, health, nutrition, and child rights is yet to be done and so a focussed ministry with a minister is required or else our national human resource our children will go unattended and uncared.
2. Do you have a separate ministry for early childhood?	28 out of 39 don't have a separate ministry for early childhood. 5 out of 39 countries do have a separate ministry for early childhood education. Singapore, the Early Childhood Development Agency is an independent agency charged with overseeing child care and kindergarten education. In Scotland, governance is handled by the Ministry of Children and	No	Firmly recommended to have a separate ministry as presently it is not getting the budget, the attention or the

	Young People.		work that it deserves
3. Does your country have an ECE national curriculum framework?	30 out of 39 have an ECE national curriculum framework. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Te Whariki of New Zealand • “Early Years Foundation Stage” in England • “De Cero a Siempre” in Colombia • “Lesotho Early Childhood Curriculum” in Lesotho • “Curriculum for the Preschool” in Sweden • “Pre-primary Curriculum” in Bangladesh • “Palestine Early Childhood Education Curriculum” in Palestine • “Early Learning and Development Standards” in Bhutan • “National Early Learning Standards” in South Africa 	A vision document is in place. No developmental milestones details or developmental outcomes for various age groups given.	A focussed ece national curriculum framework needs to be in place that should be basic yet comprehensive for all centres be it government or private. Top sample is the te whariki curriculum of new Zealand
4. What it is called?	12 out of 39 countries call it Early Childhood Development Curriculum and 6 out of 39 countries call it Preschool Curriculum	Presently no special name	Giving it a name will give it an identity across India
5. Do you need a license to start an ECE program?	28 out of 39 countries need a license to start an ECE program	Presently None	There should be a licence or registration required
6. Is there any regulator or accreditation body?	25 out of 39 countries have ministry of education and training as their regulatory or accreditation body and 9 out of 39 countries do not have it	Presently None	There should be an accreditation body that can also derecognise and close centres if not maintaining quality of program
7. Are the fees charged controlled or specified by the government?	26 out of 39 countries does not have fee structure controlled or specified by the government	Presently no	Fee blocks to be specified if necessary of what has to be provided in fee structures.
8. Is the teacher child ratio specified and fixed?	26 out of 39 countries follow specified and fixed teacher child ratio but it varies from country to country	In the new policy document it is specified	The present one specified is fine.
9. What is the minimum area/sqm requirement to set up an ECE program?	14 countries out of 39 have approximately 2.5 area/sqm requirement to set up ECE program and rest of the countries have 3.5 area/sqm or above to set up ECE programs.	1 classroom measuring 35 square meters for a group of 30 children and availability of 30 square meters of outdoor space for a group of 30 children	Ok

<p>10. Are assessment guidelines given/specified by the government?</p>	<p>27 out of 39 countries have early childhood assessment guidelines given / specified by the government.</p>	<p>Presently Very rough categories mentioned. Non guidelines.</p>	<p>Urgent need to get this in place as most centres confuse assessment with testing. The EYFS (early years foundation stage) assessment and observation guidelines of the UK government are good</p>
<p>11. What subsidy on fees is given to parents by the government?</p>	<p>15 out of 39 do not have subsidy on fees is given to parents by the government</p>	<p>None. ICDS program is free for parents</p>	<p>Required for a poor country like India so that our youngest human resource can be developed and nurtured.</p>
<p>12. Is this subsidy given to the parents or the centre?</p>	<p>22 out of 39 countries give subsidy to the centre. 4 out of 39 countries also give subsidy to the parents depending on their income.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand: The Government has two current subsidies: one based on the family's income, and the second based on the age of the child. If the family qualifies for the subsidy based on income, they receive a subsidy of \$3.93 per hour. The second subsidy is for children over 3 years of age. For these subsidies, children over 3 receive 20 hours per week of care at a subsidized rate. In most cases if you qualify for the ECE income subsidy, you then don't qualify for the 20 hours of ECE. • Finland: Government pays the municipalities for organizing the ECE services so parents' fees in public ECE service are relatively low. If parents choose a private service provider, government pays financial support for the centre, which decreases the fees charged from parents. Government also pays child benefit for every child under 17 years. • Bangladesh: The ECCD centres are free of cost; all costs are borne by the government. Private initiatives run by the NGOs provide school books, exercise books, pencils, learning materials, and so on. • United States: Public subsidies 	<p>Parents do not pay fees but the subsidy is not passed on to the centre</p>	<p>Lets learn and adapt from all these countries mentioned</p>

	<p>and funding for early childhood education are provided via a multi-level set of programs administered by a combination of federal / national, state, and local agencies in the form of payments to parent, tax credits for parents, and direct subsidies to centres. Most of the funding goes to support the care of low-income families, families who are poor, and for children with special needs. Many private employers also provide subsidies to underwrite the cost of child care for their employees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesotho: Non-monetary subsidies are given to the centre. Food is also provided by Government or its development partners for the reception class and home-based ECCD centres. • Singapore: The financial subsidy is paid to the centre for each child. Those parents in the lower-income bracket could get more support. • South Africa: The government provides Site Management Committees R15 per child per day. • Sweden: From the autumn term when the child reaches the age of 3 and up to the times when school starts, there is a right to 525 hours of care, free of charge per year. All municipalities apply a system of maximum fees. This means that there is a cap on how high fees can be for a family. The maximum fee system is voluntary for municipalities, and municipalities that apply it are entitled to a government grant to compensate them for loss of income and to secure quality. 		
<p>13. Are educational outcomes defined?</p>	<p>22 out of 39 countries educational outcomes are defined. It varies from country to country in terms of who defines their outcomes. For example: early childhood national curriculum, ministry of education, early childhood care education policy etc.</p>	<p>A vision document is in place. Developmental outcomes of different age groups need to be specified.</p>	<p>Basic educational outcomes need to be defined and further need to be in sync with primary as presently there is a disconnect between expectation of primary and developmental appropriateness</p>

<p>14. Is teacher salary/minimum wages fixed by government?</p>	<p>13 out of 39 countries do not have teacher salary/minimum wages fixed by government. 20 out of 39 countries do have teacher salary/minimum wages fixed.</p>	<p>Presently No</p>	<p>in kindergarten Minimum qualifications need to be defined and tied to minimum wages like for B.Ed teachers.</p>
<p>15. Are toilets for girls and boys separate?</p>	<p>20 out of 39 countries do not have separate toilets for boys and girls</p>	<p>Separate</p>	<p>If toilets are same, it is better as young children get over their curiosity of body parts and then there are no later issues.</p>
<p>16. Any other points that can help?</p>	<p>20 out of 39 countries want that ECCE should receive attention in various ways like making preschool education mandatory, having no difference between childcare and preschool so that they don't have 2 separate ministries, have more funding for preschool etc.</p>	<p>Preschool education is not mandatory. No guidelines for crèches, daycares. Teacher qualifications for day-care and preschool are different. No regulations, frameworks or training in place. Too much emphasis in policy only on ICDS program. There should be a common minimum standard across the nation. ECCE programs that cater to children from groups such as migrant populations at construction</p>	<p>2 years preschool should be made mandatory for every child. The policy should cover daycares too. There should be no distinction between ICDS and private or NGO programs. Government to redo all ICDS centres and make them sample centres for others to follow (case in point PAP preschools in Singapore set up by the People's Action Party – affordable quality preschools for all. Minimum qualification and syllabus of course to be common across India.</p>

		sites, street families not covered	
17. How much percentage of your country's budget is allotted for early childhood education?	7 out of 39 countries spend between 5% to 10% of the country's budget is allotted for early childhood education and 4 out of 39 countries spend between 0.3% to 4% of the country's budget is allotted for early childhood education.	1% of the total union budget	10% of the union budget to be allocated for early childhood care, education and development. Money collected through the education cess should accrue to the early childhood sector as well.
18. What is the qualification required of caregivers in ECE in your country?	10 out of 39 countries require their caregivers to pass at least B.A level 9 out of 39 countries require their caregivers to pass at least 12 th std pass. 4 out of 39 countries require their caregivers to pass at least 10 th std.	None defined, it says 'adequate trained staff'	Can be 2 year course after 12 th std. With one year of theory and one year of internship with pay. Course syllabus to be defined and common across.

98% of our brains develop in the first 5 years. "Brain development occurs shortly after conception and progresses at a very rapid pace in the first few years of life."When our brain fails to get what it expects and needs, especially in certain critical or sensitive time periods, then the amount of effort required to set it back on track is enormous and optimal outcomes are less likely.

Conclusion

The change is not going to happen overnight. We are looking at big changes, revolutionary changes – but we are still taking baby steps. Still, if we can learn anything from these children, it's that baby steps can make a big difference if they are in the right direction. The world has made an agenda for 2015 for early childhood; maybe we can make 2017 a year by which to ensure that the poorest and youngest citizens of our country gets the care, development, education that it deserves.

IT'S TIME TO INVEST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD. IT'S TIME TO HAVE A MINISTRY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD.

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