

challenges facing early childhood programs worldwide

by Roger Neugebauer

We invited the World Forum National Representatives and Global Leaders for Young Children to share the challenges early childhood education faces in their countries. We had an overwhelming response, with reports from 37 early childhood professionals from 29 countries. We have included below responses, as well as a list of all the respondents.

Azerbaijan — *Ulviya Mikayilova,*
Open Society Institute Azerbaijan

Since 2006, Azerbaijan maintained its unprecedented economic growth with real GDP expected to grow by 33%, six times higher than the forecast world average. As a result GNI per capita increased from US\$950 in 2005 to US\$1,240 in 2006. However, expenditures on education decreased as a share of total budget, from 19% in 2003 to 13.4% in 2006, and 12.8% in 2007, with only 7.2% of it allocated for preschool and primary education.

According to the official data only 18.2% of preschool-age children are enrolled in preschool education, thus considerably affecting the percentage of entrants to primary education with ECCE experience, which is only 8%. Decline in preschool enrollment can be attributed both to falling quality and to

limited accessibility of preschools. At full capacity, preschools cover only 25% of the preschool-age group in Azerbaijan. A recent study on Parental Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices for Child Care and Rearing in Azerbaijan (UNICEF/MOE/SSC, 2006) indicates there are big discrepancies in enrollment between urban and rural areas. For example, while kindergarten attendance rate for 5-6 year old children in cities is 35%, it is 12% in rural areas for that age group; 75% of the mothers think that kindergarten attendance is either important or very important. The major reason for children not attending a kindergarten seems to be unavailability of a kindergarten rather than other financial and logistical reasons.

This, together with the announcement that 14% of state kindergartens (240 kindergartens) will be privatized, including four that have received substantial investment from Step by Step (SbS model sites and training centers), is a bitter blow to ECD in the country. One of the immediate effects of the privatization will be a considerable decrease in enrollment rates. The quality of service delivery will also be affected as there are no official standards or mechanisms to monitor ECE programmes.

In summary, young children have very limited opportunity for psycho-social stimulation due to limited availability and low enrollment in preschool programs, low quality of existing preschool education, and parents' lack of knowledge of child development and good child care practices at home. Child deaths are common due to preventable diseases, namely diarrhea and acute ARI (a micro-nutrient deficiency that negatively affects cognitive development, growth, and immunity).

Bangladesh — *Manjusree Mitra,*
Organization: Save the Children USA,
Bangladesh

The major challenge of early childhood education is that it has not been a part of the public education services in Bangladesh. Still there is no approved policy on ECE. Preschool education has a strong positive influence on preparedness for school and later performance and achievement of children in school. There is also a social demand for preschool education as indicated by the large number of community-initiated preschools attached to primary schools. The Government, recognizing the value of early childhood development including

preschools and the social demand for these, have encouraged NGOs and community organizations to set up and support preschools within the premises or near primary schools. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has started the Early Childhood Development (ECD) project with focus on family and centre-based early learning and stimulation interventions. The project is being implemented in limited scale in collaboration with various government departments and national and international NGOs. It is expected that project activities will be gradually expanded all over Bangladesh.

Public expenditure on primary education in Bangladesh is 42.7% of total public expenditure on education (latest from 1997-99) and public current expenditure in primary education is 1.2% of GNP (latest from 1996-99). The public expenditure on ECE is not yet assessed.

Centre-based early learning opportunities for children aged 4-6 are not common and no national system or structure is available to support young children's school readiness other than some initiatives taken by the INGOs and a few national NGOs. All of them provide preprimary education for easy transition of children to grade 1 in primary school. However, the majority of existing facilities such as child care centres, privately run kindergartens, and religious preschools (maktabs) are not considered developmentally appropriate teaching or learning environments for young children.

Long-term commitment of funding for Early Childhood Education (ECE) is absent from Government, Non Government Organizations, and the Donor side, so many programs started implementation for improving the ECE and stopped. All the good initiatives are lost within a very short period of time.

Reference:

Early Learning for Development (ELD) in Bangladesh; UNICEF
www.ungei.org/infobycountry/bangladesh_89.html

Bolivia — *Sheila Maldonado, Christian Children's Fund*

Bolivia has a young population. The population under 5 years represents 15.78% of the 8.3 million inhabitants, that is 1.3 million boys and girls. The situation from birth to 5 years is as follows:

- 5 of every 10 boys and girls are born in a health establishment or are looked after by a doctor, nurse, or trained midwife
- 54 of every 1,000 children die before they reach their first year of life
- 3 of every 10 suffer from chronic malnutrition and growth deficits that correspond to their age
- 4 of every 10 have an acute respiratory disease
- 2 of every 10 do not have a birth registration
- 8 of every 10 have pentavalent shot coverage
- 75 of every 1,000 die before they reach their 5th year
- 4 of every 10 children between 4 and 5 years attend initial education
- only 7% of children ages 0 to 4 years have the opportunity to attend one educational supportive program.

Some of these indicators represent the worst situation in rural areas. The Government does not include in its budget education programs to children under 5. What little experiences are offered are for private child centres. Population of rural areas is the most in need; children under 5 are excluded from education because of inaccessibility to health centres, and in the future there could be group of students without possibilities to succeed.

Actually, the efforts in terms of early education are few; the knowledge to invest in young children is important, but the actions are not adequate to integrate the children. Instead, the vision of that work is institutionalized; the most important vision for the first years should be education or stimulation at home with the primary caregivers.

Brazil — *Vera Melis Paolillo, National Representative-Brazil, UNESCO-São Paulo*

The social mobilization to include early childhood education in the mandatory fund for basic education — FUNDEB — corrects the proposed great initial failure, and is considered by many as a more expressive political and educational contribution during the last two years in Brazil. Children have gained a lot, because a safe horizon of access to an organization specialized in caring and education in the first years of life has been opened to them. In addition, the cities have gained considerably by getting resources to maintain their public services and the partnerships with communitarian, philanthropic and confessional nurseries, and preschools. In parallel, the working families have benefited, since all they wish and need is to count on spaces where their children spend time in a healthy, playful, and stimulating environment of learning and development. Finally, the country has gotten a basic education financing mechanism (0 to 18 years old), which is stable, coherent, and articulated among the three public administration levels (country, state, and city). This achievement has had the contribution of the Education Development Plan, which contains a specific program for the nurseries' physical network named PROINFÂNCIA, of R\$ 200 million for the next four years.

Canada — *Don Geisbrecht, Canadian Child Care Federation*

There are many challenges facing early learning and child care today in Canada, but two interrelated issues that have been pressing for some time now are the recruitment and retention of a skilled and educated workforce for the sector and the need for high quality spaces across the country. However, without addressing the workforce issues, the spaces cannot be created.

With Canada's economy growing over the past several years, along with demographic changes in Canada's population, the need for skilled workers is prevalent in almost all sectors. But as the economy grows and creates more jobs, the ability of Canada's early learning and child care sector to keep pace with market competitive wages and to recruit and retain educated and skilled individuals to work in the sector, has become increasingly more challenging across the country. It is not uncommon for individuals working in the early learning sector to be paid more to work in the fast food industry, retail sector, or to be recruited to work in the school system or in social/government services. In turn, the demand to create more high quality spaces, in all areas of Canada, has also increased due to the need for more individuals in the general workforce, which places more demands on the early learning sector to respond.

As early learning and child care programs are licensed and regulated by the individual provinces, there have been efforts by certain provincial governments to address the need for a well-educated and well-paid workforce; but generally, the provincial responses have not adequately helped to solve the issues. As for the creation of high quality spaces for children and families, there were promises by the federal government to create 125,000 more spaces starting in 2006, but so far, this has not occurred.

Canada — *Evelyn Wajcer, K.I.D.S. Daycares, Quebec, Canada*

My country is Canada; however, educational policies, including child care, are controlled by each Province and are thus quite different across this vast nation. Quebec stands separate with its very liberal \$7 per day program.

Citizens can register their under-5 year olds in government subsidized child care centers and pay \$7 per day for 10 hours child care, which includes two snacks, one meal, and programmed activities. The first major challenge for parents is to find space in subsidized child care. The second challenge is that they then become involved in the politics of Quebec child care. As I write, subsidized centers do not have an agreement with the government and thus cannot sign new contracts with parents. This is due to a recent court ruling which declared that the government's regulations were unclear in certain areas and that recent measures taken against some private child care centers were not legal. (Private daycare, including centers and home care, comprise 65% of subsidized care.) The challenge now is to see how the government will force its will on centers. In the past, they have been able to dictate compliance by threatening to withhold, or actually cutting off, subsidies. This is a very effective strategy as most of the funding comes directly from the government.

A key element in the recent battle is whether parents can choose to pay for extra-curricular activities such as dance, music, swim classes, science, etc. These activities are lead by specialists who are not on the centers' usual payroll, but are available during normal opening hours. The government is opposed to any extra billing, no matter what. Parents and centers argue that the government is interfering in freedom of

choice and in their ability to offer quality programming, which will enhance the children's day.

To add to these challenges, there is also a government mandate to work towards having 2/3 of the center's educators qualified no later than 2009. Non-compliance results in reversal of subsidies (grants), a severe financial penalty. The problem is that there are simply not enough of these certified educators available and thus competition is fierce. A sad consequence is that some of these qualified people are not always the best people to work with children, yet they are kept on staff. If fired, they immediately find positions elsewhere.

Yet another challenge is the emotional cost on all involved in this battle: child care administration, their staff, the parents, and ultimately, the children. A climate of discord and unrest is not conducive to growth and harmony. The \$7 a day program is imploding. The government cannot quickly enough offer subsidized spaces on the budget it has, yet it will not allow parents to pay more. The government is not negotiating openly and fairly. It is likely that they will soon draft new regulations so as to impose their will. Uncertainty remains our biggest challenge.

Denmark — *Helle Nebelong in conversation with leading professor Jan Kampmann, Department of Psychology and Educational Studies at Roskilde University, Denmark*

Pedagogical curriculum — One of the major challenges that currently costs a lot of resources politically and in the public administration is the implementation of the national curriculum that every daycare centre is supposed to draw up since it was politically adopted in 2004. The discussion goes on how to tackle it and how the curriculum shall relate to the individual child, to the

parents, and to the co-operation between parents and early childhood educators.

The national curriculum focuses on six main themes:

- the child's all-round personal development
- social competences
- language
- body and motion
- nature and natural phenomenon
- cultural mode of expression and value

One of the primary purposes is to focus on early efforts to help particularly vulnerable children. Yet no research results show what impact the curriculum has had. Up to now there are both good and bad experiences.

Documentation — Pedagogical curriculum is a first step of the work on documentation of 0-6 year old children's learning and development. Among others, screening of 3-year-old children's language is carried out.

Valuation of children's environments — Legislation concerning valuation of children's environments is to be carried out every third year and should secure a higher quality in the daycare centres. The valuations focus on what the educators and the individual institution offer that creates proper environmental, physical, aesthetic, and psychology. Nursery teachers, architects, and others are working together interdisciplinarily on how to improve the physical frames. This tendency has also reached a higher level in the public administration where an understanding of proper environment is prevalent.

Restructuring the daycare centre structure — Organizational changes have had a big influence on the daycare centre structure for the last years. New, bigger units are established with an overall

administrative manager who does not necessarily have a pedagogical background. Restructurings are carried out with quite a lot of complaints.

Discussions of the pedagogical profession — The increasing number of demands on learning that educators are facing implies that the educators themselves and their unions now have their own agenda discussing the core meaning of the profession and how to professionalize and live up to the many demands. The increased number of demands haven't brought along increased resources.

And what about the child's right to free play without grownup demands on specific learning? Play is still a pedagogical theme that is put into practice in the daycare centres, but it is a theme that is considerably under pressure and threatened.

Egypt — *Mervat Nageeb, ECD Global leader, Education sector manager, Save the Children /USA Egypt country office*

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) services in Egypt are still not obligatory through the Ministry of Education; this is in addition to the challenges of:

The current Gross Enrollment Rate (GER). The National Level is 18.1% and it varies from one governorate to another (rural or urban).

School-based ECCD is expensive compared to formal basic education fees, so poor families cannot afford the fees for their children.

The distance young children must travel to reach their Kindergarten is an issue, especially for children living on the village edges or hamlets, so safety and security is a key issue unless children are accompanied by one of their siblings or parents.

There is a lack of awareness of the importance of preschool education. Many parents do not think it is a priority for their children.

When parents do not value education they therefore do not support or motivate their children to go to school. This is related to the general lack of educational quality itself, as it does not prepare students well for life or work.

Lack of coordination between the affiliated authorities, NGOs, and private sector.

There is not one vision and/or national strategic plan for this age group which is followed by quality standards, so each ECD provider puts whatever they think best for children in place, without a common intended impact.

Lack of the needed infrastructure, financial, and human resources.

Not enough places to receive all preschool children.

Not enough ECD teachers, especially in the rural areas where the MoE is supposed to hire graduated teachers (not available in most rural areas) from outside the village. Teachers may have to travel sometimes with more than one mode of transportation to reach the ECD center/KG and may reach the children upset, nervous, tired and without enough energy to start the day smiling, calm, and patient enough to give each child their opportunity to learn.

No training program has been developed to prepare and equip the ECD teachers, so they use traditional teaching methods and are not well aware of new teaching methodologies. Teachers of ECD lack effective professional skills because of lack of pre-service training.

The traditional KG curriculum doesn't support the holistic and integrated development of young children.

The ECCD management system, including monitoring and evaluation, is not effective or efficient. Supervision skills need to be developed.

Fiji — *Unaisi Vasu Tuivoga, President, Fiji Early Childhood Association*

A major challenge is funding as well as insufficient recognition given by the government on the importance of providing quality service to our young children and their families. A classic example of this is the recent appointment of the senior education officer at the Ministry Headquarters to coordinate early childhood services throughout the country. The officer is not a qualified early childhood person, but has qualifications in primary teaching. This officer is expected to offer a supervisory role both in the administrative and professional areas, not only to the ECE teachers, but to parents, families, and the community at large. So, this is indeed a major challenge in the development of quality service for young children and their families. Graduates in the Advanced Certificate in Early Childhood Education (25 each year) from the primary teachers college that teach in rural centres receive a salary grant of FD3500.00 per annum from the Ministry of Education. However, graduates of the Certificate and Diploma in ECE programmes with the University of the South Pacific do not receive any salary grant from the Ministry of Education. These graduates, together with urban ECE teachers, are paid by their management committees or employers. It is also pertinent to note that not all the above-mentioned courses are accredited as there is no Accreditation Board at all. Additionally, if the remuneration is attractive enough, then more men may be motivated to work with young children and their families. To date, there are only six males working in the early childhood profession in the country.

Another challenge is the lack of children's storybooks in the vernacular (Fijian language). Teachers have had to translate English storybooks for the benefit of children whose second language is English.

Not enough research is being carried out in this area of education due to lack of funding. There needs to be more local study carried out on the impact of early experiences to a child's later learning, development, and subsequent achievement. Results are to be used not only to convince policy makers to give ECCE more prominence, but also in community awareness campaigns as well as to inform stakeholders generally.

The disparity in services offered in rural/urban settings need to be addressed to ensure equity in services provided to young children, their families, and communities. ECE practicing teachers and interested students do not all have access to courses offered by the University of the South Pacific through distance and flexible learning mode because of geographical distance and isolation. Only a small number that fulfill the requirements get to attend the government training college each year.

Fiji — *Ruci Kididromo*

Early Childhood in Fiji is going through a very exciting moment because we are currently writing and trying to put together for the first time an Early Childhood Curriculum Guideline for our nation.

Some of the many challenges are:

- Kindergarten is part of the National Curriculum Framework
- The link between the kindergarten and the year 1 teachers is just overwhelming. Kindergarten teachers used to work in isolation from year 1 teachers; now they understand the need of working and sharing of ideas

together, so they both understand each one's area of work.

- The Principal of primary schools and Management of kindergartens are now talking to the kindergarten teachers, realizing and understanding their roles in the development of their kindergarten centres.
- Kindergarten teachers are also talking and reaching out to the wider community and other stakeholders.

Despite all these exciting developments, the biggest challenge is the recognition of our kindergarten teachers to Public Service, so they can receive a decent salary and good working conditions.

India — *Divya Punjabi, Managing Trustee, Billabong High International School, Lina Ashar Foundation (Kangaroo Kids Education Limited)*

In India 70 million children are below age 5 and only 40% (not census data) attend a preschool.

The major challenge facing early childhood education in India is the apathy shown by the government in formulating statutory requirements for curriculum and assessment in the crucial formative years.

Hence preschools are operated by bored housewives in cities and 'balwadis' in villages on makeshift premises run by unqualified people. The ramifications of this are:

Curriculum — There is no prescribed curriculum; hence, content taught is not monitored to check whether it is:

- Developmentally appropriate
- Sequentially created
- Learning outcomes are achieved in the four development domains

Teachers — Primary/middle schools are regulated by a government department which determines policies and laws. Early Child Care Education certification

courses are conducted by autonomous bodies.

The course does not provide sufficient practicum to empower teachers to cope with classroom related challenges like mixed ability groups, special needs, etc. It focuses on imparting theoretical knowledge. Teachers lack soft skills like time management, delegation, etc. No in-service training is provided in preschools for professional development.

Compensation — Primary school teachers are paid as per state labour laws and secondary according to the national regulation: fifth pay commission. Preschool teachers are paid arbitrarily. Salaries at call centers lure girls to pursue it as a profession. Those who need a stop gap between education and marriage work as preschool teachers, so attrition is high.

Methodologies — No prescribed guidelines to ensure whether good practices are implemented to meet the needs and rights of preschoolers. There is a gap between theory and practice. Preschools do not implement innovative teaching methods to encourage children to learn at their own pace and achieve maximum potential.

Rote learning and teaching towards securing admissions in mainstream schools makes the experience stressful for preschoolers.

India — *Reeta Sonawat*

In India, the National Policy on Education (1986), recognizes the crucial importance of early childhood education, recommended strengthening ECCE programmes not only as an essential component of Human Development, but also as a support to universalization of elementary education and a programme of women's development. ICDS is the largest government-

managed programme at present in the country. In addition, there are innumerable private, fee charging nursery schools that cater to the needs of parents living in urban and semi-urban areas.

Urbanization and industrialization has not even left the educational sector untouched. One can witness this boom with mushrooming of child-related centers in every nook and corner of the country. Big brands and companies have now entered the market with the motive of making profits. These companies through their marketing strategies provoke people to take up these ventures, but at times these people are not themselves well equipped/qualified.

Preschools, once known as 'temples of education,' are now transformed into five star hotels. The intention is to impress the high flying parents who have the money to afford big fees but have no time for their children. The attractive, flashy brochures with quotes by the famous educationists are enough for such parents to get convinced about the kind of education such schools promise to impart to their children. Furthermore, these schools have gone ahead and hired brand managers.

Many issues and concerns confront parents in the selection of an appropriate ECCE center for their children. At present, in the absence of the system of licensing or recognition of an CCE institution, the emerging concern is of appropriateness of the learning experiences for children and safety of the environment in which such programmes are conducted. Several such preschools in the guise of play schools for very young children (1.8-2.0 years), do not do justice to the claim of 'learning by doing.'

Other closely related issues in ECCE are:

- Qualification and training of teachers, teacher trainers, teacher educators, and

caregivers

- Pressures imposed on children for performance and achievement (regardless of age, development, pace, and readiness of the individual child)
- Parental anxiety and demand for formal learning
- Over-emphasis on reading, writing, and math
- Daily and weekend homework for preschoolers
- Over-crowding in the classroom and overburdened preschoolers
- No room for joyful learning
- Rigorous interviews before admission

Hence, commercialization is a major concern, which if not handled properly could lead to serious consequences. The professionals should be responsible while planning and developing programmes for young children's education. They should be responsive towards a child's diverse needs since it is not possible to develop a good program without understanding the basic needs of a child.

India — *Nirali Mehta, Technical Advisor- ECCD, Plan International (India)*

Early Childhood Education initiatives in India have been documented formally in the latter half of the 19th century. The writings of great Indian educational thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Zakir Hussain have also drawn attention to this important aspect of education in the formative years of a child's life.

However, the current picture is not very encouraging for 160 million children under 6 in India. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) by Pratham in 2006 highlighted that as many as 46.6% of 5 year olds are enrolled in primary schools, the situation varying widely between states! Only 68.6% of 4 year olds and 59.9% of 3 year olds attend pre-schools/ECE centres. Hence, by the time children reach 6 years, 90.3% of

them are enrolled in primary school. One implication is that the proportion of under-age children in Class 1 is high, resulting in a highly uneven group of children in Class 1 — some of it spilling over into Class 2.

The major government vehicle for ECCE services is Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), recognised as the largest public initiative in the world to offer early childhood education and care services in an integrated way. But there are various flaws in its implementation. The FOCUS survey 2006 suggests that, where pre-school education is provided at the ICDS centre, such activity is sporadic and limited. Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh were the only states with a fairly active educational component in ICDS. Low coverage, inadequate infrastructure and learning materials, and untrained and overburdened workers further aggravate the problem.

The 86th Amendment to the Constitution in 2001 was a great blow to advocates of ECE as a right of the child as it recognised elementary education for 6- to 14-year-old children as a Fundamental Right. ECCE remains article 45 of Directive Principles of State Policy, which reads: "States shall endeavor to provide ECE for all children until they complete the age of 6 years."

There are rays of hope visible as ECE is considered as a major component in the next phase of ICDS by the Ministry of Women and Child Development; the Supreme Court issued an order to raise the number of centres to 1.4 million by December 2008.

Indonesia — *Antarina Amir, High/Scope Indonesia*

There are two types of early childhood education programs in Indonesia: formal and informal. The distinction

is made based on the supervisor, namely, the directorate. The particular directorate — at least the one who carries the name — who supervises the informal type is Directorate for Early Childhood Education. This directorate serves children ages 2-4 years old, while 4- to 6-year-old children are served by another directorate, called Directorate for Basic and Middle Education. The directorate for Early Childhood may serve the older children if the other directorate does not accommodate them.

The implementation in the society is that they have developed two programs, namely the main and supporting programs. Day care centers, playgroups, and other services offered by local institutions, such as mosques, churches (Sunday schools), include health services, and services given by local organizations that form the main program. The supporting program deals with physical structures and equipment, such as the inventory of fairy tales, traditional child's plays, songs, learning through play methods, movement activities, and socialization of the early childhood program in varied strategic places (e.g. city parks, markets, hospitals, and train and bus stations). These programs will be completed in 2009. Included in the supporting program is the World Bank-supported program called Early Childhood Education and Development for less wealthy families in 50 regions.

The challenges people face are:

- Early childhood education is a newcomer. Not many people know what this education means and the importance of it.
- Early childhood education is not yet an obligation; the government does not yet allocate a good portion of funding for it.
- Not every region has a special department that deals with early childhood education.

- Lack of qualified teachers for early childhood.
- Very limited numbers of universities have an early childhood education department.

Iran — *Mehra Jalili, Mehraeen Preschool & Kindergarten, Kerman, Iran*

One of the basic challenges early childhood education is facing here is the developmentally inappropriate practice that some preschools put too much emphasis on academics, and others do too little to encourage learning and development in every domain. The number of trained teachers is another challenge.

Education itself has a lot of flaws in its methods of teaching and its expectations from children. The emphasis on theory, much more than practice, does not generate enough confidence about their knowledge and their skills, especially when it comes to representing what they have been taught. Many do not have up-to-date knowledge about what is really going on in the field of early childhood education. One reason is directors lack enough knowledge themselves to encourage and facilitate their staff development. Luckily, child-related NGOs nowadays are playing important roles in training preschool staff and this is good.

Iraq — *Hassan Baey*

We are facing a lot of challenges in our daily life; for example, recently I was exposed with my family to a terrorist act when five gunmen wearing police uniforms attacked my home; they injured me as well as my older son; they tightened my daughter, my wife, and my little boy; and they stole the gold and jewels of my wife and the money that we have at home. Now my children are suffering from this horrible trauma and they have typical signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress

disorders. Fortunately we are still alive and our wounds healed, but we may suffer from psychological scars in the future. The terrorists had warned us not to tell the security authorities, otherwise they will kill us or kidnap my little boy from his elementary school. So from this real story that we live, you can imagine the situation in a relatively secure town (Babylon City, 100 kilometers south of Baghdad, March 2008).

In armed conflict areas like Iraq children are the silent victims; their parents put in their minds the high priority of safety. Going to school or kindergarten is risky during conflict and post-conflict time due to kidnapping from militias or theft gangs. There are also other risks such as the risk of injuries from gunfire during military actions, bombed cars, suicide bombers; that is why parents usually avoid sending their children for education. In addition, parents are usually suffering from the economic burden of war and cannot pay for the kindergarten costs, including the transport costs in the climate of high inflation. Because of this challenge there are about 300,000 Iraqi children out of elementary schools during the year 2006-2007 (according to UNICEF). The infrastructure of the education system was destroyed due to a series of wars and sanctions imposed on Iraq for the last three decades. We have a severe shortage of school buildings. If you can imagine, three schools serve about 2,000 children (6-12 years of age) sharing one building in the same day; each school has only three hours per day to use the building which is lacking minimum facilities for teaching, places for drawing, playing, etc. The average number of children in primary school classrooms is about 50 pupils; this number may reach 70 or even 80 in a 4 meter x 6 meter room. The situation is the same in the few kindergarten buildings; it is estimated that only 7% of Iraqi children were registered in kindergartens — both public and private

sectors ones. Iraq has a rapidly growing population and this means that about 60% are children below 18 years of age.

Iraqi teachers are also suffering; they are usually poor and underpaid, according to a study carried out by my colleagues and me on the psychological health status of elementary school teachers in Babylon province. We found that 23%-48% are suffering from chronic anxiety and depression respectively; they are lacking effective on-job training. We are fighting to support them as NGO with very limited resources, corruption, and very bad ministerial management, which threw a huge burden on education in the early childhood sector in Iraq. Child rights are severely violated right now; children are abused physically in the schools by teachers and their peers as well as at home, psychologically abused, and we have no child psychiatrists in Iraq.

Unfortunately the support to our children (from international agencies like WHO, UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, and other INGOs) is not effective due to conflicts between different sects and militias, insecurity, poor civil society activities, corruption, social factors, and poor ministerial managements.

Japan — *Satoshi Yamamura, Ph.D., President, Seiya College*

Shrinking population and isolated mothers in child rearing — Japan has struggled with a steep decline of the birthrate down to 1.32 as of 2006 (a birthrate of 2.07 is required to maintain the population). Another social issue relating to this question is increasing uneasiness among young mothers on child rearing.

Urbanization and modernization have repainted the image of family to make the nuclear family form dominant against the traditional extended family system. And at the same time a work ethic today has extensively contained

husbands in their workplaces unable to join child rearing properly. This social climate has been somewhat excused by the remaining cultural value of sexual division of labor despite the fact that more women work today outside the household. The insufficient supply of adequate day care services, especially in large cities, has also made young working women uneasy about child rearing.

The central government has launched a new policy to facilitate more day care services. Local governments have coordinated with educational institutions, day care centers, and kindergartens to provide more local services of consultation and counseling for jittery mothers on child rearing. However, the fundamental purpose of these social policies should be to nurture or revive the mentality of locality or local community that conceives that both a single family and the community bring up children in it jointly. This philosophy aims at the same time to transform the work ethic of overworking fathers to a more family-friendly social climate. When we can observe some achievements in this social effort, Japan may show the world a way to overcome the effects of urbanization and modernization.

Jordan — *Lara Hussein, The National Council for Family Affairs, Amman, Jordan*

Key Challenges in Meeting Children's Right in Jordan: Cross-cutting challenges

Children's lives are conditioned by many factors: the economy, environmental conditions, population growth, settlement patterns, governance systems, adequacy and efficiency of basic services, parental education and income levels, the status of women and social norms. Neglect and violation of children's rights are surface manifestations of problems stemming from

complex and deep-rooted underlying and structural causes. Redress of these closely linked issues requires long-term, multi-dimensional efforts to changes in laws and institutional mechanisms, improve socio-economic development levels, and positively modify societal attitudes and behaviours.

Approval and regularization of some draft and temporary laws is pending, and there are unaddressed concerns such as the low age of criminal responsibility, the absence of protective laws for child workers in the informal, domestic, and agriculture sectors, the legal leniency regarding the permissible extent of parental discipline.

Services in cities are under extreme pressure due to rapid population growth, while the scattering of rural populations in small settlements constrains equitable service coverage in remote areas, resulting in differences in regional and human development.

Action planning for marginalized children, who are not likely to benefit from generalized approaches, is hampered by limited causal analysis of vulnerabilities, shortage of technical expertise and financial resources, or the absence of strategic frameworks. Marginalized children include children in conflict with the law, orphans, children with disabilities, and those most affected by poverty.

The sustainability of impressive gains in child and women's health and education and efforts for further qualitative improvements may be at risk due to increasing population pressure and the conflicting demands on resources.

Except in the education system, the rights of adolescents continue to be mostly subsumed in the concerns of either younger age children or those of adults. Few government, NGO, or community services focus specifically on this group.

Despite much progress on women's legal, health, and education status, the socio-economic status of less educated girls and women of lower income groups has not changed substantially. Nor have attitudes changed appreciably towards women's political and economic roles.

There is insufficient attention to decentralized and participative development planning and management approaches. An enabling process has begun for some community groups to acquire minimum capacity to handle their local problems, but much stronger efforts are needed to correct knowledge and capacity imbalances, to induct a conscious focus on children's and women's rights issues, and to take the enabling process to scale.

Partnerships 'for' children between government agencies, NGOs, and international agencies are steadily increasing and have achieved good results, but they do not exist in all areas, and there is room for better coordination. Critical challenges relate to building of partnerships 'with' children and women at the grassroots. While women are prominent in national NGOs, including in management positions, they have little power in community-based organisations (CBOs), and adolescents are absent from most planning and decision-making forums, community organisations, and NGOs.

Neglect and violation of children's or women's rights are surface manifestations of problems stemming from complex and deep-rooted societal norms, but behaviour change strategies are not yet well defined. Moreover, child and women development interventions often tend to be disconnected from mainstream development programmes, and planned without consulting the intended beneficiaries and their families, leading to inadequate outcomes. These closely linked, macro,

socio-cultural-economic issues cannot be addressed through isolated remedial action that is disconnected from mainstream development processes or the family and community environment. For instance, child labour cannot be prevented without improving the economic condition of families.

Securing Healthy Lives

The health sector faces a growing demand for services that may outpace the availability of financial resources, facilities, and specialized personnel. There are knowledge gaps and practical difficulties in quality service coverage of underserved groups. Health care awareness is low among many communities, and proper awareness does not necessarily lead to behaviour change. Inappropriate nutritional practices are contributing to poor health and obesity.

The focus of health services for women has been predominantly on their maternal roles, so information about their general health is incomplete. Maternal health services are vastly improved, but affected by inadequate family awareness of and support for women's health and nutrition needs especially during pregnancy, advice provided and monitoring of high-risk pregnancies by health personnel, availability of quality obstetric care facilities in remote areas and women's participation in post-natal services.

There have been striking reductions in infant and child deaths and illnesses. The main pending tasks are to reduce neonatal deaths, improve family care practices which determine child survival and health risks in early childhood, sustain the gains in disease prevention and control, and track and address emerging health risks. Pre-adolescents and adolescents have the most unmet health needs. The still incomplete recognition of their needs

has led to information gaps about their health status and lack of appropriate health services. Low access to health education and constructive recreational opportunities results in unhealthy lifestyles, such as smoking, unhealthy diet, limited physical activity, and increased vulnerability to STIs and HIV/AIDS.

There is inadequate research on the health of vulnerable groups, such as the impact of consanguineous marriages on disability incidence, occupational health hazards of child labourers, and the health status of institutionalized children. Their access to quality health services is often constrained by practical circumstances, such as limited family means to cover the cost of transport and services, and also because not all categories of children with disabilities are entitled to free medical rehabilitation services. The coverage of services for early detection of disabilities and premarital testing is expanding, but is not yet universal. Child abuse detection and rehabilitation services are in extremely short supply.

Education and Development

Further progress towards narrowing the 'knowledge deficit' in Jordan will depend on the country's ability to match the quantitative and qualitative needs of a fast-growing, school-age population with the changing demands of the national economy.

Budget allocations to education have been substantial, but large percentages are spent on salaries and other administrative expenses, with not enough left over to cover all infrastructure and human resource development. Donor funding has provided a partial cushion through the ERfKE project, but given the needs of the education sector, adequate resource availability is likely to remain a major challenge in the long term.

There is a considerable unmet need for better preschools, especially those that poorer communities can afford and which provide quality services. Despite very high enrollment in basic education, access for rural children is lower than the national average, as are their chances of benefiting from secondary and higher education. Public sector schools need better physical infrastructures, sports facilities, and a better range of extra-curricular activities.

Quality issues affect the value added of ECD facilities in ensuring school readiness, the relevance and comprehensiveness of curricula, teaching approaches, learning resources and the nature of knowledge and life skills acquired in school and their impact on personality development. Vocational education needs better alignment to market requirements to enhance employment prospects of graduates.

Girls outnumber boys and perform better in the basic education cycle, but are fewer in number in preschools. Female adult literacy, especially among the rural poor and employment prospects of female graduates are much lower than that of males. On the other hand, more boys drop out than girls at the post-primary level. School dropouts have few alternate educational and skill building options. Support services for children with learning difficulties are still not fully developed and most children with disabilities are out of mainstream schools and special education services. Children in institutions have inadequate encouragement for academic achievement.

Induction of suitable personnel into the ECD and the basic education cycles is affected by unappealing working conditions and incentive packages, besides low prospects of professional development and upward mobility. There is not enough scope for area

specific creativity in school activities and management. Student councils and parent-teacher associations (PTAs) are not very active, while outside the educational system, recreational, social, and cultural options for young people are very limited.

Child Protection

Children most at risk are normally scattered, requiring multiple small localized initiatives, and this strains financial and human resources. Data concerns cut across all categories of vulnerable children, most of whom face neglect or violation of their rights, while others like some categories of child workers also remain invisible in the law books and national strategies. Despite recent campaigns to bring public attention to issues of the vulnerable, action is needed on many other fronts over the long term.

The heavy emphasis on institutionalization for categories such as orphans and juvenile offenders and the design of custodial care programmes inhibits personality development of the residents and their reintegration into society.

The juvenile justice system has a fairly high punitive and custodial care orientation, without due attention to more community-based alternatives. Juvenile reform centres do not have clear and comprehensive objectives and procedures that could assist improved design of reform and rehabilitation activities. This has an inherent risk of the children becoming repeat offenders, especially as many detainees also face problems of family acceptance and integration. It is noteworthy that according to the Juveniles Law, offenders by juveniles are not recorded in a criminal record.

Development and welfare approaches for the vulnerable tend to focus

primarily on basic needs provision and reducing problematic aspects such as 'prosthetics and physical rehabilitation of the people with disabilities' and 'reforming the delinquents', with little attention to identifying abilities and building on the children's positive potential.

The current inspection system has limited capacity to enforce adherence to minimum quality standards and protection from abuse at foster homes, reform centres or workplaces employing child workers. Awareness-raising programmes about abuse issues have not been regularized or effectively supported with practical interventions to change attitudes and behaviour. Support services for the victims are also in short supply.

Inattention to the health and environmental risks in refugee camps, the non-availability of safe play spaces, and the lower access of refugee children to higher education and employment chances could aggravate both health and social problems.

Positive legal provisions to prevent young peoples' access to addictive drugs and smoking are not fully effective in the absence of proper implementing mechanisms. Curative services for treatment of young addicts are not age specific, and available services are not well publicized.

The absence of an accurate database and a comprehensive framework and plan of action for children with disabilities has resulted in service gaps. The official approaches are predominantly medical and charity oriented, and without adequate linkages between the relevant agencies. The outreach of CBR activities is limited.

Kenya — *Henry Kemoli Manani,*
Kenya Institute of Education, Nairobi

The early years are very important in later growth and development. In Kenya, the government and other stakeholders have put in measures to improve delivery of the ECD services to the Kenyan child. ECD services are mainly community supported. However, there are still major challenges that affect the efficient and effective implementation of the ECD programme.

The major challenges facing the implementation of the ECD programme are as follows:

- *High attrition rate of teachers from the profession:* Many ECD teachers who have undergone training are not currently teaching. This is mainly due to poor and irregular salaries. ECD services are mainly sponsored by parents and communities. The government runs very few ECD centres through the local government authorities. The rest are put up and maintained by communities. Where the communities are poor the teachers are not well taken care of, hence the exodus from the profession.
- *HIV/AIDS pandemic:* In 1999, the government declared HIV/AIDS a national disaster and public health emergency. There are very many (3.7% of the total population) orphans as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Children have been forced to stay away from school because of their sickly parents. Some of the parents are not able to be involved in income-generating activities and find it difficult to provide basic needs for the children. Some of these children are malnourished and this also hinders them from fully benefiting from ECD services being provided. These children also suffer psychosocial distress due to the difficult home environment.

The government has responded to this crisis through supporting organizations such as the National AIDS Control

Council (NACC), whose mission is to mobilize and coordinate resources for prevention of HIV transmission and provision of care and support to the infected and affected.

- *Training of ECD personnel:* There is a gender imbalance among ECD personnel. At the Training of Trainers (ToT) level there are more males (70%) than females. At the ECD teacher training level, there are much more females (99.9%) than males. This scenario does not augur well, both for the Kenyan child and the ECD teacher because it gives the impression of not being a worthwhile profession at the lower level.

Secondly, there is an inservice ECD teacher training course offered to teachers who are already in the service. The government has late encouraged primary school teachers to upgrade themselves academically, so many have enrolled for this course. However, there is no translated benefit to the Kenyan child because their main aim is either to get certification for future promotion or they use it as a bridge to further studies, especially at the Bachelor's level.

- *Poverty and its related effects:* Due to high poverty levels in many communities (around 46.5% of Kenyans live on less than a dollar per day), ECD services cannot be offered effectively. This has led to a lack of enough teaching and learning materials. This means that the classrooms do not have a stimulating environment for optimum benefit of the children. Moreover, the quality of child care and services are wanting.

- *Impact of free primary education (FPE) on ECD:* The government introduced free primary education in Kenya in 2003. Parents do not pay any levies for primary school children, yet they are expected to pay for ECD services. Early childhood education is not a prerequisite for graduating to the next level of

education (primary school). This has led some parents not to give it the seriousness it deserves. Some end up keeping the children at home until the children attain the age required to join primary school. This has made some children miss out on the services offered at ECD centres that prepare them for easy transition to primary school.

The government has, however, put measures in place to improve delivery of ECD services such as the development of a comprehensive ECD policy framework and ECD service standard guidelines. These service standard guidelines will ensure that all ECD service providers, including parents, communities, government ministries, multilateral and bilateral partners, and private sector provide quality, accessible, and equitable ECD services for young children.

Lithuania — *Regina Sabaliauskiene, Center for Innovative Education*

The Provisions of the State Education Strategy for 2003-2012 have established the development of the infrastructure of pre-school and pre-primary education in rural areas as a priority. The Pre-School and Pre-Primary Education and Care Development Plan for 2007-2012 introduces diverse forms of provision and flexibly adjusts to family needs (e.g. several hours per day, several days per week, weekend, and other types) that are better suited for child education and care from birth to the age of 3. The plan includes complex models of services to child and family (e.g. preschool curriculum for the child coupled with different informal adult education programmes: language instruction, computer literacy, and similar; also pedagogical counseling on child education. The Plan includes the fostering of administrative and managerial skills of municipal administrative staff in order to facilitate more expedient establishment of preschool

and pre-primary education needs and prioritizing leading to more diverse forms of provision in response to the needs of different families.

Currently in the draft stage, a Model for Bettering Child's Living and Education Conditions from Birth Until Compulsory School-Age will be applied to tackling problems of children in families of social risk or social exclusion. The model founded on inter-agency cooperation will enable earlier identification of children at-risk and their inclusion, in the order of priority, into schemes of preschool and pre-primary education and care, coupled with complex assistance to the family (social, psychological, health care, etc.). The measures planned are going to broaden the participation of children from social risk and socially excluded families in preschool and pre-primary education and reduce social differences (children will receive free meals and specialist services, supplied with clothing and footwear, and taken to the education facility).

Lithuania — *Elena Markeviciene, President, OMEP, Lithuania*

After Lithuania regained independence in 1990, the attitude towards children and children's education has changed significantly in many respects.

Now, teachers have all possibilities to develop education programs and models of preschool education institutions taking into account the society and family needs, as well as particularized conditions in local communities.

The state provides favorable conditions to raise the child: allowances are paid every month for the child; one of the parents can take child-raise leave up to 2-3 years; a wide network of public kindergartens under local authorities provides education and care of children; a growing number of private child care institutions emerged which bring into

play various education methods. The family has a choice to raise the child at home up to 3 years of age or at the child care institution.

The major challenge facing early childhood education in Lithuania is to achieve harmonized manifold improvements in the following areas:

- To minimize the existing significant gap in quality of learning environment and services provided by the leading child care institutions to compare to the others, some of those with mediocre and, sometimes even low quality of learning environment and services.
- To improve and make widely available different models of education:
 - Education in institutions: enriched by games, self-expression means, visits to theatre, art studios, nature;
 - Education assistance: expert assistance to parents (foster parents), that supports increasing effectiveness of education;
 - Other institutions: clubs for children, playgrounds at the shopping malls, and other places.
- To increase parents' involvement in observing and taking part in their children's activities at the institutions.
- To promote healthy lifestyles and creativity — creating possibilities for indoor and outdoor activities, playing and doing sports, organizing children's theater and art studios in the kindergartens.

México — *Graciela Borja and Iván Galindo, World Forum Global Leaders, México*

According to a reform passed by México's Congress in 2001, three preschool years are compulsory for all Mexican children. However, this reform is not being enforced by the Federal Ministry of Education because there is a lack of sufficient schools and trained teachers. Presently preschool remains a

de facto two-year program. During the academic year 2004-05, the Mexican government was able to make compulsory the third academic preschool year for children aged 5-6 years. In the Mexican curriculum, this is the first year for a child before entering Basic Education (K+9). Apart from having to persuade parents to assume the commitment of taking their children to school instead of leaving them at home with other busy adults, the obstacles to fully carry out this measure are well known:

- There are not enough schools in the country to meet the demand of young children’s preschool education.
- There are not enough preschool teachers.
- Some teachers lack the needed level of education.

Thus, we can conclude that young children not only need to have the right for preschool education, but should have the real opportunity to find a preschool and a trained preschool teacher! The 2004 Preschool Educational Program:

- Theoretically it is a constructivist approach.
- Includes liberal ideas such as stressing children’s ‘competencies’ in different knowledge areas.
- Promotes and demands more adult planning and evaluation than the previous 1992 program.

The Mexican Ministry of Education claims that it is looking for Quality Education. To us that type of education necessarily requires two main things: 1) A larger economical investment in infrastructure for the adequate providing of sufficient classrooms with appropriate spaces (enough square meters of playing areas for children); 2) More human resources: Preschool Teachers.

Year 2006	Students	Teachers	S/T Ratio	Schools
Preschool	4,452,168	197,841	22.5	84,337
Elementary (Grades 1-6)	14,548,194	561,342	25.9	98,045
Preschool growth (2005-2006)	8.9%	10.1%	-0.9%	6.2%
Elementary growth (2005-2006)	-0.7%	0.3%	-1.1%	-0.1%

Source: Sergio AGUAYO: op.cit; p. 64.

Preschool in private schools: 661,282 students (14.9% of total); 40,020 teachers; a ratio of 16.5 students per teacher; 13,309 schools.

Main deficits: Research and experience suggest that Mexico faces some important deficits in preschool children not attending preschool: 1,184,277 (which amounts to 26.6% of total population aged 3-5 years).

Preschool teachers: 52, 635 (estimating a teacher/student ratio of 22.5).

At this point it is really difficult to handle these situations in public schools where most of the time there are about 25 children working with just one teacher in a classroom in an area of less than 50 square meters. This Educational Reform was decided prior to solving these issues.

Nepal — *Kishor Shrestha, Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID), Tribhuvan University, Balkhu, Kathmandu, Nepal*

One of the major challenges confronting the case of expanding and sustaining early childhood education (ECE) programs in my country, Nepal, relates to the debate between developing ECE programs in a structural model or retaining it under the broader scope of a program model. The development both in quality and quantitative terms so far achieved is based on the program model. The advantage of developing a program model is that it can get special attention and funds for the development of the program. The disadvantage is that the program will run as long as the program is continued. The development of Child Care and Education Centers

during the late ‘80s and early ‘90s under the Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW) and Small Farmers Development projects were good examples in this regard. Hundreds of early childhood care and education centers established during that time could not continue after the project period, although emphasis was made to sustain the basic centers due to the lack of structural provisions.

The expansion of ECE services from less than 10% GER in 2000 to more than 41% GER in 2007 again relates to the development of ECE under the program model. The program is being expanded without basic structure, such as institutionalized training institutions, regular funds flow, supervision and monitoring mechanisms, etc. Without the availability of such structural provisions, it is more likely that the centers established under Education for All (EFA), a multi-donor program, are likely to be discontinued after the termination of the EFA program. Currently there are more than 20,000 ECE centers being run under the EFA program.

New Zealand — *Dr Andrew Gibbons, New Zealand Tertiary College, Auckland, New Zealand*

Education and care before school became an educational concern when responsibility for the sector was shifted to the Ministry of Education in the late 1980s. Many developments since then have contributed to the current terrain, most notably the development of a national curriculum framework and review and auditing requirement. At the turn of the 21st century Aotearoa/New Zealand's Ministry of Education, an Early Childhood Education Strategic Plan Working Group, pushed these reforms further, with attention to increased and variable funding mechanisms, and benchmark qualifications for teachers. These strategies were underpinned by a policy of improving quality of, and access to, early childhood education — with particular attention to groups considered 'needy' in terms of their early educational experiences (or lack thereof). To date, these reforms have largely involved consultation with the sector, and have provided scope for the maintenance of special characteristics of services and the vested interests of a plurality of stakeholders (for instance both private and public, parent-led, sessional and full day). However, the major challenge facing early childhood education in my country is protection of this plurality. Accompanying increased attention to quality, professionalism, and so on is increased intention to form nationally agreed standards and definitions; however, such intentions may conflict with the protection of diverse needs and interests.

Such concerns have already been realised in dramatic terms for very experienced teachers who are required to return to study in order to remain in the profession. The primary concern then is how to protect these voices, experiences, and

this knowledge that has in part made professionalisation possible. In a sector crying out for 'good quality mentors,' many potential candidates for this essential role might be left outside of the centre gate, marginalised by explicit and implicit assumptions regarding their value to the sector. Finally, this concern has particular relevance to Maori communities, where essential cultural knowledge and practices of those responsible for educating and caring for the young may vary significantly from the dominant, and increasingly regulated, paradigm.

Singapore — *Lily Wong, Advent Links-SAUC*

Singapore, with its need to meet the demands of parents for quality child care and preschool, came down on the teachers and the would-be teachers with two new initiatives in February 2008. The entry requirements to do a diploma course in preschool teaching have to be 5 O level passes with B4 grade in English Language, which replaces the 5 GCE O level passes including English Language. For those teaching the kindergarten level, a diploma in preschool teaching is required. For the nursery level, a certificate will do for now. Principals and supervisors will need to have a Diploma in Preschool Leadership, with the encouragement to work towards a degree in the future.

Quality assurance is on the way to get preschool centers accredited. The trend is to have qualified teachers with a good command of the English language. There is a growing trend in the infant and toddler centers (which the press has called 'baby school') for these caregivers or teachers to have a certificate in infant and toddler caregiving. It has gone beyond the caregiving role.

Slovakia — *Nadacia Skola Dokoran*

The major challenge facing early childhood education in Slovakia is the integrated high quality preschool education of Roma children due to the fact that the Roma minority are in an unequal position to the majority mainly in the field of education. The Roma issues have social and economic character and are connected to poverty. These facts has been incorporated into the conception that within the period of 2005-2015 the Slovak republic shall join the regional initiative of the Decade of the Roma inclusion under the umbrella of the World Bank, Open Society Institute, and other international and NGOs institutions.

The priority is to strengthen early childhood education and its availability giving all Roma children opportunity to choose and to support their effort to learn and know.

To achieve better results and ensure quality early childhood education for all socially disadvantaged children, especially for Roma children, requires the following steps:

- to increase offers of alternative options of education
- to create an inclusive environment on the institutional level
- to support Roma culture manifestations on classroom and school levels
- to exercise bilingual education and the use of Roma language at lessons
- to create formal and informal bias free, multicultural early childhood education system on different levels involving the families and the local communities.

With respect to the need to manage a broader spectrum of expert special and pedagogical social abilities and competencies, to provide better conditions for follow up In-service Teacher Training, and specialized innovative study for teachers and teachers' assistants

working with socially disadvantaged children.

South Africa — *Meryl Hewett-Fourie, Global Leader and ECD specialist and consultant*

There are many elements and issues that inhibit or slow the progress of what needs to be done in this vital area of education in South Africa. Minister Naledi Pandor has acknowledged in her reports for 2007/8 that the government's poorest area of performance has been Early Childhood Development and that this area needs to be urgently addressed.

Few realise the magnitude of what has to be achieved and we are just touching the tip of the iceberg. To give one an idea:

- The target numbers of children in Grade R (Reception year before Grade 1) to be included by 2010 is 810,000 (85% of all five year olds) in public primary schools, and 135,000 (15%) in independent Grade R and at community-based ECD sites. By the beginning of 2006, there were 441,641 children in Grade R making up 47% of the population (this is according to National policy as set out in Education White Paper number 5, 1996). Starting from a base of 241,525 children in Grade R in 2001 and increasing an additional 200,116 in the following years. The rate in 2002 was an additional 37,201; 2003 — 36,661; 2004 — 41,100; 2005 — 48,700; and 2006 — 36,444.

- The target is 945,000 children, which means that an additional 503,359 children need to come into the system by 2010. This is not possible. Note that this is only about 5-6 year olds; there is very little established for 0-5 year olds and they fall under Social and Health Services Policies.

Budget expenditure for Grade R has increased from 2007 by 43%, 2008 by

34%. By 2009 the total expenditure will only be 1.3%, most of this coming from National as the Provinces provide very little funding to ECD. This is shocking in a country where we are trying to uplift and better our population. The manner of funding in per capita subsidies creates more problems as qualified teachers will opt for working in the Foundation Phase in schools (7-9 year olds, grade 1-3) as there are pension, medical, and housing benefits. Of the 54,503 educators/practitioners working with children in ECD sites, 12% are qualified, 88% require additional training of some kind, and 23% have no training at all.

This impacts directly on curriculum as the teachers in Grade R are not fully qualified teachers. As a result they often do not comply with the informal programme and teaching methodology required, thus failing to support the sub-skills development required for children to learn to read and write in grade 1. A vacuum has been created which has resulted in the systemic base line assessments in Grade 1 and Grade 3 producing only 32% in Numeracy and 34% in Literacy proficiency in the country.

One of the major factors holding us back is the lack of training centres that give high quality training to teachers and caregivers. Support is urgently needed in community-based sites, the most important being finance and training. Additionally it has been found that teachers in Grades 1-3 are not properly qualified and need support and training in the New National Curriculum. This support has only been given in the Western Cape and nowhere else in the country.

There are issues around inclusion of children with disabilities. Of the 4% in the country, there are only 1.36% in ECD sites. There are also children infected with HIV/AIDS in centres who require

additional support in the communities.

Our biggest challenge is to increase access and improve the quality of ECD programmes. Much has been done and there are changes in attitudes about the importance of the Early years as indicated in all our 'Policies.' This has not made a difference to enough of our children. More action and financial support is required to close the 'black hole' our children are falling into with the lack of adequate care and education. Where does this leave the future of our nation?

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South Africa — *Norma Rudolph, Children's Institute, UCT, Cape Town, South Africa*

The social and economic context in South Africa leaves many young children extremely vulnerable as a result of deep poverty that is compounded by HIV and AIDS, recurrent cycles of drought and floods, as well as increasing levels of crime and violence. South Africa now has a progressive set of laws and policy for ECD. South Africa is also a signatory to international instruments, such as United Nations and African Child Rights Charters. The Bill of Rights in the 1996 SA Constitution includes children's rights. Key principles include: Best interests of the child; non discrimination; survival; protection; development; and participation. The new Children's Bill is the most significant development. National Integrated Plan for ECD is in the process of development. White papers on Education, Social Development, and Health all refer to ECD. The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)

makes provision for training of ECD practitioners as part of the job creation strategy.

Unfortunately since the first democratic election, the new government has focused primarily on Grade R (an additional year of schooling before the first grade) as apposed to the provision of services for the full age range of young children from birth to school-going age; 84% of young children do not have access to any ECD service provision.

However, the status of ECD has improved immeasurably through the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005, which was signed into law by the President in June 2006 and parts of the Bill came into effect 1st July 2007. The main beneficiaries will be "communities where families lack the means for providing proper shelter, food, and other basic necessities of life." It recognizes ECD as an important preventative strategy and includes community development and family-based approaches. National and provincial governments are now required to have strategies to ensure a sufficient spread of services in each province. Government is required to establish or strengthen data collection systems.

However, the new law falls short of expectations. Provincial Ministers retain discretionary powers with regard to funding for ECD. Services still have to register with different government departments, and there is still no mechanism to ensure integrated service delivery and collaboration between different government role-players (Health, Social Development & Education) and sphere or levels of government.

Sweden — *Anette Sandberg, Mälardalen University, National Representative for Sweden to the World Forum on Early Care and Education*

The importance of giving attention to environmental issues has decreased in Sweden in the last years, as environmental problems like global warming, greenhouse effect, and climate change is on the global agenda. Attention is also given to sustainable development, which is about defending the needs of future generations. The fact that economic, social, and environmental circumstances and processes are integrated and are the leading principle — they are each other's precondition and support. But sustainable development is also a concept that includes activities in preschool.

Child care in Sweden is mostly public and extended to children ages 1-12. Since 1998, the preschool has been incorporated as the first step in the overall education system and has its own national curriculum. Sustainable development as a concept is not utilized in the policy context, but an ecological approach is the main issue and should be implemented in all daily activities in preschool. Sustainable development for small children has a dual task: both to lay the foundations for a democratic approach and to establish a genuine interest in nature, the environment, and natural science.

Educating children is a general dilemma; we never know what they need to know to meet a changing future. But we know from history that democracy is not something that can be taken for granted and is a process where the foundation needs to be laid in the early years. We also know from scientists all over the world that environmental issues are highly topical and must be treated with great seriousness for the fulfilment of human need and survival of the earth. So the challenge in

the 21st century is to permeate teaching as an essential part of everyday activities for a future sustainable world.

Tajikistan — *Nazarkhudo Dastambuev, IOC Member, Tajikistan*

Tajikistan is a country with a low per capita income and widespread poverty. Soon after getting independence, a civil war was unleashed in the country which lasted for five years (1992-97) and caused a deep economic crisis and political instability, large losses of human lives, and serious physical destruction. The majority of the working population, including highly qualified specialists, migrated to other countries for temporary or permanent residence, which has resulted in an acute need for qualified personnel.

The country is in transition from a post-conflict rehabilitation situation to one where long-term solution of problems in a transitional economy is required. Lately the country has started implementation of institutional reforms, including the reforming of the public sector and of state enterprises, improvement of the quality of public services, and improvement in management and effectiveness of public expenditures. At present the process of formulation of the National Development Strategy is underway in Tajikistan.

There are a number of factors in the Republic that negatively affects education, which will make it difficult for Tajikistan to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and 'Education for All' (EFA) objectives. Collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent lack of subsidies, combined with the destructive aftermath of the civil strife, seriously weakened the education system in the country, which had been previously successful in providing all citizens with basic education and training of highly qualified cadres in the education sector.

Preschool situation — Over the past decade, the number of preschool educational institutions has decreased significantly. The main reason for this worsening situation in preschool education is a sharp decline of public financial allocations for the maintenance of preschool institutions. This has led to a significant decline in the coverage of children by preschool educational institutions due to closure. This decline is particularly high in rural areas, where over 75% of the population resides. There is also an absence of a culture of quality parental preschool education at home and in the community, with such responsibilities being seen as that of the state.

There are more than 1 million children of preschool age in the country at present. In 2004 the outreach to preschool-age children by preschool educational institutions remained at only about 6%. Attendance levels in preschool institutions, especially among children from poor families, has also decreased significantly, as parents are not able to pay the basic complementary costs. Preschool institutions are also facing problems of a lack of qualified pedagogical cadres, curricula, learning and didactic aids, special equipment, toys, meals, and medical services. Tajikistan, therefore, needs to expand services rendered through creating new forms of preschool educational institutions at low costs. The survey of the needs of children and mothers, conducted in 2004 by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, showed that many parents (mothers) showed limited knowledge about the needs of the child at an early age. Educating parents on raising children in the families and providing a positive learning environment, therefore, also becomes an approach to preschool education that needs to be introduced in the country.

Materials — There is a poor level of resources available to the education system today in terms of materials such

as textbooks, learning and teaching materials, and libraries — all negatively affects the quality of education.

Turkey — *Dr. Ebru Aktan Kerem, Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Istanbul, Turkey*

"Today's child is tomorrow's adult."
— Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

Preschool education is a systematical educational process which provides 0- to 72-month-old children with stimulating environmental conditions appropriate to all degrees of development and individual features, supports all areas of development, orients children in accordance with cultural values of society, and prepares them for primary education.

In Turkey, the significance being attached to early childhood education is increasing day by day; activities on family consciousness are being performed, and the studies on the elevation of teacher training quality and the expansion of early childhood education are being carried out as well. In our country particularly, social purposes are influential in opening preschool education institutions, in regulations and acts by Ministries of Labor and Health (apart from the Ministry of Education), it has been stated that preschool education is a special field. Thus in Turkey, Early Childhood Education General Management was founded within the Ministry of Education in 1992 to actualize the early childhood education studies in a more organized way and to meet the need increasing in society.

Through the Turkish National Education system, it is intended to raise children who are attached to the principles, revolutions, and nationalism of Atatürk, aware of their responsibilities to the Turkish Republic, have a healthy and moderate personality, who are far-

sighted and respectful for individual differences. Besides that, the intention is to deliver an education which provides children with appropriate physical, intellectual, and emotional development, with nice habits such as making them speak Turkish appropriately, preparing them for primary education, and offering a common training environment to the children who come from several inconvenient environments and families (Okul Öncesi Eğitim Programı Kitabı, 2006).

When we look at the administrative structure of preschool education in Turkey, we see that the services are supplied by two different organizations: formal organizations and non-governmental ones. Most formal organizations are affiliated with the Ministry of Education and there are some others that deliver preschool education like the Society for the Protection of Children, the ones affiliated to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, Armed Forces, Turkish Grand National Assembly, universities and municipalities (www.7cokgec.org/turkiye.php). In addition to governmental facilities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also been delivering different services of preschool education cooperating with several governmental organizations and on their own. Some of them are Mother Child Education Foundation, Foundation for the Support of Women's Work, Association in Support of Contemporary Living, and UNICEF which is an international one (www.7cokgec.org/turkiye.php).

The Programme of Preschool Education is an entire work of 0- to 72-month children who have educational experiences which are planned, systematic, and appropriate for the behaviours that are supposed to be gained in accordance with determined objectives in order to realize the aims of

preschool education and inclusive of evaluation, showing at what degree the objectives are achieved (Aral & Kandir, 2002, p. 60).

Evaluation in programmes of preschool education:

- Knowing about the child and its evaluation
- Evaluation of the programme
- Self-evaluation of the teacher

Preschool education has been applied as home centered, organizational centered, and organizational/home centered. Organizational-centered education aims to train children within a determined organizational-centered plan and programme. Those programmes are national and have a 'frame' feature. Regulations of Preschool Organizations of Ministry of National Education include all details regarding the applications in preschool education in Turkey (Erken Cocukluk Egitimi Politikaları Raporu, 2003).

Percentages of models applied in preschool education in Turkey are:

- 92.5% in organizational model and
- 7.5% in other models (summer schools, mobile nursery schools, centers for women and children, etc.)

Aimed percentages by the year 2010 is to reach a rate of:

- 80% in organizational model and
- 20% in other models

Home-centered programmes are the ones which are for parents and their children who live in rural areas and shanty towns and have social and cultural disadvantages. They have been formed to support families with child care and education. Those programmes support education in a natural environment and encourage parents to have better communication with their children and directly participate in educational processes (Kartal, 2005). Throughout Turkey, present preschool

enrollment rate is 32% for 5- to 6-year-old children.

Virtually all the problems related to preschool education in Turkey are discussed on different platforms and the right ways of solving these problems are sought. Nevertheless, the attempts to standardize the curriculum, the personnel and physical properties of the system, and to make control mechanisms work properly couldn't be achieved as much as required because the coordination of services between the institutions cannot be provided. The aim of this research is to gather the teachers' opinions on the 'problems of pre-school education' in our country, to study the case, and to make suggestions to the authorities and the teachers concerned on finding solutions to these problems. The subjects of the research were 1,760 teachers working in state and private schools under the provision of the Ministry of National Education or the Society for Protection of Children and in practice schools within the universities in 49 provinces nationwide.

A questionnaire had been designed by the researchers of this study to learn about the preschool teachers' opinions on the problems of pre-school education in Turkey. It consisted of 25 questions asking some personal facts about the teachers and their opinions on a number of topics such as the province/town and the type of school where they work, their gender/age, their educational status and work experience at the time of the research study. The main body of the questionnaire consisted of the questions evaluating the effectiveness of the 2002 Preschool Curriculum, staff, physical environment, administration and administrators, class management, parents, control mechanisms, working regulations, personnel rights, self-awareness and self-improvement, finance, and spreading the preschools nationwide; the questions asked whether they received in-service

training in preschool education (if not, the topics, place, and time of the in-service training they would like to receive). The research study was carried out from February to June in the spring of 2003-2004 school year.

It is clear from the findings of the research that physical environment was found to be the most important issue as 70.3% of the preschool teachers responding to the questionnaire considered it 'very important.' The second most important issue was self-awareness and self-improvement (65.3% of the participants believed that it was a 'very important' problem. The issues considered to be 'not important' by the teachers were as follows:

- 1) 1.9% of the teachers stated that control mechanisms were 'not important'
- 2) 1.4% of them believed that class management was 'not important'
- 3) 1.3% them thought administration and administrators were 'not important.'

1,086 (61.9%) of the preschool teachers who participated in the research study had received in-service training before, but 669 (38.1%) hadn't received in-service training before. A great majority of these teachers (1,392 in number, i.e., 79.2%) stated that they wanted to receive in-service training where they lived. 196 of them (11.1%) preferred a holiday resort and 170 (9.7%) said a big city would be appropriate for in-service training. 802 of the participants (45.6%) said that the dates from June 15th to June 30th would be the most appropriate period for in-service training. 445 (25.3%) gave the dates between the 1st and 15th of September. 395 teachers (22.5%) preferred the summer holidays and 116 (6%) preferred a semester holiday as the right time for in-service training they wanted to attend. As for the favourite topics of the in-service training, the techniques of knowing the child (39.2% of the

teachers), was the most preferred one. The second was how to use drama in preschool education. It was chosen by 15.8% of the teachers. The third topic was education of parents that 13.7% of the teachers needed to learn about. The teachers thought that one of the issues of in-service training should be having a course on readiness for literacy was the least important one — the choice of 3.2%.

In light of the findings above, a one-year preschool education is to be compulsory for 60- to 72-month-old children. Parents should be made conscious of the problems which they may confront during their children's pre-school education. Some supporting precautions should be taken immediately, especially if the need arises. Teachers and administrators working in pre-schools should follow the current trends in the field and should receive in-service training at certain intervals in order to enrich their practices. The laws, regulations, and standards related to the education at early childhood period should be reexamined and different model curriculums should be developed in order to spread the preschool education nationwide (Aktan Kerem, E., 2005).

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Uganda — Professor Barnabas Otaala, Uganda Martyrs University, Kampala

At the Commonwealth Head of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Kampala, Uganda, in November 2007, the issue of the Millennium Development Goals and other developmental issues was discussed at length. It was noted that the three most critical threats to Uganda's development were: HIV and AIDS; poverty and hunger; and the diminishing capacity to deliver services, thus threatening children's rights to survival, health, and protection, especially in the northern and eastern parts of the country, where fighting has been going on for over 20 years and many people were forced to live in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). What has been achieved? What are the challenges?

Achievements — On controlling HIV and AIDS, Uganda has for some time now become a lone star, but a few African countries have become even more aggressive in fighting the pandemic. Uganda has managed to hold down the prevalence of the disease at 6.4% from a peak of 19% in 1992. The population living below the poverty line (US\$1 per day), fell from 56% to 31% between 1992 and 2006, and in 2006 the proportion of underweight children fell from 25.5% to 20%. High numbers of children have better chances of survival, have better chances of survival beyond their 5th birthday, and have higher hopes of obtaining primary education as well as secondary education, both of which have been made universal in Uganda.

Challenges — Uganda has 2.3 million children orphaned by AIDS, and 110,000 are living with HIV and 20,000 are infected annually through Mother-to-Child Transmission (MTCT). There is a need for the Uganda AIDS Commission, a child-focused NGO; the National Council for Children; and various stakeholders in prevention, treatment, care, and support to lend a hand to children affected and infected by HIV and AIDS. This can be done through in-school programmes; out of school prevention programmes; and involvement of family members, teachers, and the community. Although there have been quantitative increases in enrollments in school, and retention in school, dropout rates and issues of qualitative improvements still loom large.

Uganda's Response

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Concluding Remarks — The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are in line with Uganda Government's Poverty Eradication Plan, covering objectives, strategies, and overall arching framework for Uganda's development. Uganda has made strides in the eradication of extreme poverty, in the provision of universal primary and secondary education, gender equity, as well as the attenuation of the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. Illustrative examples cited indicate the importance, not only of early childhood development and education, but also of adult education as well as 'quality education for all, for the good of all' — a theme adopted at the 16th Conference of Commonwealth

Education Ministers, held in Cape Town, South Africa, in December, 2006.

United Arab Emirates — *Dr. Eman Gaad, British University in Dubai*

The major challenge to early childhood education in my country is the inclusion of young children with special needs in mainstream kindergarten and primary education. Although we have a federal law (29/2006) that supports and protects the rights of people, inclusion of young children with special needs and disabilities, schools and KGs have yet to come to terms with such an idea. Resources and human support are needed in order to make this happen, and schools are struggling with this new phenomena. For years children with intellectual challenges and those with severe additional needs have been institutionalized. The idea of schooling them in the neighborhood school is not yet easy to digest. All are in agreement, however, that inclusion is beneficial and will happen eventually.

United Kingdom — *Susan Hay, freelance consultant*

The new UK Childcare Act 2006 has formalised a strategic role for local authorities to:

- improve the *Every Child Matters* outcomes for all preschool children and reduce inequalities in these outcomes
- secure sufficient child care for working parents
- provide better parental information services.

The Act reforms early years regulation by introducing the *Early Years Foundation Stage* curriculum framework, which seeks to integrate education and care for children ages birth to 5 years. All child care settings will be assessed against a new set of *Childcare Register Standards* by OFSTED.

At the same time, the *National Education Grant* has been extended to all 3 and 4 year olds. From April '08 the grant will allow parents to access places in any setting, using the grant to cover 15 hours of 'free' early years education and care. The grant has been set at a level that generally recognises the cost of providing this service within a state school, and providers are prohibited from asking parents to make up any difference between the grant and their market fees. Significant capital programmes are underway to improve state school facilities to accommodate younger children, and they are being encouraged to provide extended school services to offer greater flexibility for working parents.

There will be less difference than before between the service provided in schools in terms of the age range of children accommodated, flexibility of services, the curriculum framework in place, and cost to parents for children ages 3 and 4. This will place a serious strain on independent providers who do not have the budgetary advantages of schools, as they see their roll of older children diminishing. The standardisation of services will lead to a level playing field of parent expectations; however, it leaves less room for providing a specialised service, at a premium fee. Although the government talks about raising the compulsory school entry age to 6, many agree that the Childcare Act could be construed as lowering the school age to 3. Much lies in how schools learn to become 'bottom up' in their approach to our youngest children.

United States — *Luis Hernandez, Trainer, Western Kentucky University, Miami, Florida*

Funding will be the biggest challenge for early childhood education in the U.S. Funds define the level of quality in individual communities across each of

the 50 states. Typically, funds flow from the federal level to the state levels to local communities. While the funds provide a framework for operations and quality procedures, each state also has the ability to define its own set of rules, application, and design of programs. In addition, individual states can supplement funding for their own state PreK programs or supplement ECE programs. It is both a central and local funding formula that can be daunting to any observer or user.

Families also access ECE programs according to their ability to pay, including the use of tax rebates in paying for child care services. As in most places, wealthier families have access to higher quality programs while poor families (depending on funding availability) may qualify for some type of subsidized programs. Since public dollars are limited by current revenues, available funding only reaches about 50% of eligible families. Ability to pay, be it private or public, defines the degrees of corresponding services.

Public reimbursement is dependent on the age of the child, family work eligibility, and state market rate formulas. These reimbursement rates then define salaries for teachers and other staff. A resulting challenge is a lower pay scale for teachers with minimal professional skills, most often resulting in high staff turnover in many centers. While there is support and focus on greater quality in ECE, the greatest challenge is to maintain teachers with preparation and expertise. For families and their children, it would be a testimony of a true and informed public commitment on what is best in early childhood.

Vietnam — *Nicole Knock*

The Early Childhood Education Department in Hanoi, Vietnam, states that it wishes to increase the quantity

and quality of schools/kindergartens, play materials, equipment, and to address teacher wages/qualifications.

Vietnam continues to embrace economic reform and with this comes increased opportunities for some to access EC facilities. Government and private sector financial support can employ qualified teachers whilst some EC facilities employ, often out of necessity, anyone prepared to work with young children.

In country areas, the government is pursuing ways for children to better access educational facilities. Difficult, long travel routes and extreme weather conditions (monsoons and cold), means many children cannot attend kindergarten regularly. Some teachers live far from their home, at or near the 'school' during the week so that they can teach daily.

Generally speaking, many parents cannot afford to send their young child(ren) to school, to pay fees, supplement teachers' wages (a common practice in Vietnam), and therefore opt for the child to stay at home with family. The short-term benefit of the child at home, sometimes to help with domestic duties, far outweighs the medium/long-term educational benefits. It is a matter of 'day to day living.'

Funded 'educational programmes,' organized by government and non-government organizations, can show communities the benefits of children attending Early Childhood programmes/kindergarten. Training of the local people wishing to work with young children is being undertaken, and by 2010 it is predicted that 70% of teachers will have access to a 2-3 year training course (Early Childhood Education Department, 2006).

The Vietnamese government's current concerns are poverty reduction, social policies, HIV/AIDS issues, and economic reform in Vietnam, thus Early Childhood education will be more of a focus in the near future with the aid and policies from the UN and aid organizations, in collaboration with the government.

Vietnam — *Bui Huy Chien, Plan in Vietnam, Vietnam*

- **Appropriateness of Policy:** The local ECE was just put under the educational system and mainly supported under the policy, which is called 'the socialization.' That means all resources supported to ECE relies on the contributions from the local inhabitants, including facilities, teacher's salary, etc. It's really a big challenge in the context that the local poverty rate is extremely high and parents simply think that ECE is not adequately important as other educational levels (i.e., primary or secondary); those are compulsory and supported by government.

- **Perspective of ECE aging:** Everyone simply thinks that ECE is needed for children at ages 5 or 6 (i.e., just before entering primary education). So, most of the children under 4 years old are not benefited by ECE service.

- **Inadequate service level:** the mother is allowed to take 4 months as maternity leave while the ECE centre only accepts enrollment of children from 18 months upwards. This creates a lot of problems for mothers as they may lose their job for taking care of their children or sending the children to home-based care centres, which are self established; the caregivers, mostly retired workers or jobless, are not well equipped with knowledge on child care and development and facilities are not appropriate to ECE service.

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