

Early Childhood Trends Around the World

by Roger Neugebauer

We asked members of the World Forum community to share their thoughts on early childhood trends around the world. Here is what they had to say:

Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia

Liana Ghent, International Step by Step Association, Budapest, Hungary

Under the educational system of former communist countries, the care and teaching of children 0-7 years was a service provided by governments in kindergarten financed and run by the state or by big enterprises. After the political and socio-economical system changed, many kindergartens either closed down or started charging parents significantly higher amounts for their services. All of the above has had the unfortunate effect of reducing access to child care and leaving it and school readiness in the hands of non-professionals in early childhood. The families that have been most affected by these changes are those with low socio-economic status, language differences, from rural areas, and with challenging personal issues.

In an attempt to improve the situation, in some countries a compulsory pre-school year has been introduced in primary schools; however, it usually focuses largely on cognitive issues

related to readiness for school. This year is not quality early childhood practice; moreover, it is not always accessible to children from disadvantaged families. Other problems include the high number of children in classrooms and the fact that in some cases day care is viewed as a business and provided by private non-professional individuals.

There are two main tasks for early childhood care in the region: 1) to raise awareness about the importance of child development in early years and the role of quality care, and 2) to secure equal access to preschool care and education. There is also a need to support teachers' professional development, including knowledge and skills for working with diversity in their classrooms.

Denmark

Helle Nebelong, Sensehaver, Gentofte, Denmark

Since 2004 it has been provided by statute that every day care centre in Denmark should work out teaching plans focusing on six themes: personal and social competences, language, body and motion, nature, and culture. In the teaching plans methods, activities, and aims should be described. It is a part of the work of documentation of 0-6 year old children's learning and development. In 2005 the The Ministry of

Family and Consumer Affairs started an evaluation of the teaching plans. The first report from March 2006 shows high implementation. Seventy-four percent of all day care centres have already worked out a teaching plan and 23% are in progress. Only 2% have not yet started.

Most of the nursery teachers express satisfaction with the plans and say that the plans help increase the educational quality and the professional consciousness, create a common language among the staff, and more focus on learning. The trend is that the idea of learning has moved into the day care centres without having moved out play.

One of the themes is nature. The basis for understanding the world is also to understand the nature which human beings live in and are responsible for. Nature experiences in childhood contribute both to the child's emotional, mental, and physical development. General education comes from experiences, interests, and knowledge of nature in an environment which offers space for wonder, asking questions, and finding answers.

When children have the chance to be in, sense, and experience nature every time of year, in different kinds of weather

and varied landscape, their senses and motor skills are strengthened.

Nature is a unique playground for body and mind. When children are playing in natural surroundings, their imaginations and being together with other children are having free rein.

Nature is a treasure chest of knowledge. In the forest, the field, and at the beach children have possibilities to get a first hand expression of animals, plants, and materials. They can construct, create, and explore materials and techniques.

To use nature as an exploration and a space to play form the basis of a lasting interest, respect, and responsibility for nature and the environment.

Around 95% of the employees in Danish day care centres have been involved in working out the plans.

The Netherlands

Betsy van de Grift, Partou Kinderopvang, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

1. The government considers child care as an integral and essential part of economic growth. The fact that a large part of the working population is middle-aged makes it necessary that mothers with young children should get the opportunity to participate in the economy and thus increase the economic wealth of the nation and their own emancipation.

2. Child care is used as a route to children who suffer from cultural and educational deprivation by working with programs such as Headstart, SureStart, and High/Scope. These programs are financed by the government and aim at fighting or preventing segregation within the peer groups. The method here is evidence-based: prove that the child prospers from the education that is offered. Cooperation with the national educational system is

essential.

Italy

Amelia Gambetti, Reggio Children, Reggio Emilia, Italy

Current early childhood trends in Italy:

- poor image of the child; children seen as empty containers to be filled
- low profile of teachers' professional development
- immigration and multiculturalism not seen as a resource, rather as a risk
- low trust and confidence in the Institutions (government, etc.) and lack of values in young generations
- country economic problems and consequent drain of resources in early childhood services — risk of poor quality of services, going back to early childhood education seen as assistance and care and not as educating communities
- anticipate lowering the age for first grade to 5 years (currently 6)

Turkey

Ebru Aktan Kerem, Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Canakkale, Turkey

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. Since 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 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 the society.

In Turkey, there are currently 552 kindergartens and 13,305 preschools in service. In the 2004-2005 academic years, there were 326 private kindergartens and 241 preschools in service. Pre-school institutions providing educational service for children in Turkey according to their age groups are as follows:

- day nurseries provide care and education for the children from 0-3 years of age.
- kindergartens aim to educate children from 3-6 years of age (from 36-72 months old)
- preschool classes aim to educate the children from 5-6 years of age (from 60-72 months)
- practical classes are the ones aiming to educate the children from 3-6 years of age (from 36-72 months old) in schools under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education.

The aims of these institutions are:

- To raise the children as the Atatürk, father land, nation, flag — family and human lovers — and to lay the foundations to bring them up as modern, considerate, and tolerant adults of the future within the cultural diversity of the country;
- To realize the children's physical, mental and sensory development and enable them to form good habits;
- To help them develop their power of imagination and gain skills of: creative and critical thinking, interacting and expressing their feelings successfully;
- To enable them to speak Turkish well;
- To prepare the children for primary education.

Today, pre-school education is a sub-department in the Primary Education Department of Education Faculty. The department has its own master and doctorate programmes. It also has an associate-professor post.

Throughout Turkey, present (2006-2007) preschool enrollment rate is between 25 and 30% for children 5 to 6 years old. There are now 20,675 schools with 24,755 teachers serving 640,849 children.

Nepal

Kishor Schrestha, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal

During the eleven-year long armed conflict in Nepal a large number of people living in rural and remote areas of the country migrated to the urban areas, mostly to the Terai (plain) areas. As a result, the number of students in the schools in the hilly regions has dropped. In some schools there are more teachers than students. On the other hand, the number of students in the schools in the urban plain areas the students' number has increased disproportionately. A single classroom has to accommodate more than 200 students and be taken care of by a single teacher. This has led to a shortage of physical facilities and teachers and adversely affects the academic environment of the schools as well as the overall performance of the children. On top of that, the school authorities and teachers are not trained to deal with the psychological trauma the children are living with because of their exposure to different violent incidences during the conflict. Interestingly, even after the restoration of peace, people are not willing to return to their original places.

Vietnam

Nicole Knock, International School of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Vietnam has a population of 80 million, of which 41% are children. Education has always been a major focus in Vietnam, but recently the focus is regarding

the quality of teacher training, increasing teacher wages (average salary \$18US/month), and providing better facilities and materials. Holistic child development and quality educational resources are being implemented in some educational institutions. They also want to implement a compulsory, one year of preschool education prior to attending the first year of primary education (6 years of age).

Since Vietnam has embraced market reform, more opportunities have been created for the country's children, especially from poor families in remote and mountainous regions, to receive access to health, education, and employment. Poverty, malnutrition, poor water quality, poor sanitation, and preventable accidents are prevalent, so there are many basic issues to tackle. In general, families in urban areas have more funds available to provide their children with better education, both in the public and increasing private sector.

Vietnam (2003-2015) plans to increase the accessibility and level of education of many children, (many parents have little or no formal education), along with information for families about the suitable care and education for their children. Once widely supported, Ministry of Education policies for Early Childhood Education, will have far-reaching benefits regarding the safety, health, well-being, and education of all children in Vietnam.

Tajikistan

Ibod Sharifi, Coordinating Child Centre for International Development, Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Since its independence in 1991, Tajikistan has been experiencing a transition from centrally controlled economy to the free market economy following the outbreak of civil war in 1992-93. With such a rapid economic decline, the country's GDP is now only about 40% of its level prior to indepen-

dence. Tajikistan ranks among the poorest countries in the world. UNDP human development index in 2005 ranked Tajikistan 127 out of 174 countries.

As a result, this frustrating situation has brought not only short-term suffering to thousands of families, but also long-term consequences for the human development and especially, the most vulnerable part of it — children, who have been:

- deprived of homes and parents, of identity and security;
- deprived of access to proper education;
- easily involved in the worst form of child labor, because children are a cheap labor force and could easily have their rights disregarded;
- traumatized by different forms of violence, including psychological and physical violence by exposure to often dangerous conditions for their health (e.g., agriculture works and/or family business or by forced marriage at early age).

1. Situation of Education in Tajikistan
Education system has gradually deteriorated due to lack of appropriate infrastructures/schools, lack of education equipment, education materials and textbooks, brain drain, poor level of educators' training and refresher courses for teachers, low payment (average \$10-15 per month) and lack of motivation of education and other sectors' workers who are responsible for child education and care, social support. For example, the per capita education expenditure is officially less than \$1US for the entire country (equivalent to less than \$5US of GDP) compared to between \$130US and \$200US before their independence.

During winter time, most schools and educational institutions have no electricity and heating, while the GoT annually promises to change the situation to the better. In spite of the adoption by the GoT, the Law on “Free of charge primary and secondary education throughout the country,” most of the schools’ (mainly in cities) teachers charge student fees (\$1-3 per month), despite the fact that many parents cannot afford even this amount. Education, furthermore, implies indirect costs that parents often incur, (e.g., parents have to pay for textbooks, fees to repair classrooms and to decorate them, electricity heaters procurement, etc.).

As a result, these and other barriers increase social exclusion of a growing number of children, a majority of which constitute girls, who lack access to compulsory primary and secondary education. While a number of girls and boys at each age group is nearly equal (average 49.6% girls and 50.4% boys), the difference between boys and girls attending schools in both sites goes up from 20% (a number of boys attending schools is higher than a number of girls) at the age of 13 years to 30% in Dushanbe and 40% in Kurgan-Tube at the age of 17 years.

The situation with the described groups of girls, a potentially high risk group of the population, which could be easily involved into the worst forms of child labor, is exacerbated. There is virtually no efficient protection system in place to respond to their needs: they are not able to protect themselves or/and to solve problems they face during their lives, due to the lack of access to education and lack of knowledge about the laws (Constitution, Labor Legislation, Family Law, Criminal Law and Legislation, etc.), their civic rights (Declaration on Human Rights, Convention on Children’s Rights, etc.), lack of professional skills to find a proper job (Tajik Labor

Legislation allows children to work part-time if this work does not bring harm to their health and physical and mental development starting at the age of 16 years), poor functioning of relevant institutions, such as the Rayon/City Education and Health Departments, Commissions on the Minors’ Affairs in Hukumats, etc., which are rather more willing to support any outside initiatives than to develop their own strategies and identify resources and means for the initiatives’ implementation.

2. Problems of Child Labor in Tajikistan
After the collapse of the Soviet Union and its respective consequences — the civil war, economic collapse, drastic decrease of the living standard — the problem of child labor in Tajikistan has become even more urgent than before. To survive and to help their relatives, war orphans and children from the families that lost their breadwinners had to work. The government has been trying to resolve the problem by placing children in state institutions; however, these measures have turned to be ineffective.

The growth of destitution and poverty brought a great number of families to such disastrous situations that thousands and thousands of people have become a part of informal or “shadow” economy (trade and business, labor in low paid works). Children form a considerable portion of these employees in the sector. Working children can be met in all forms of work, both in rural and urban areas. Sectors affected by child are the following: petrol station (children are engaged in filling tanks or washing cars); selling sweets, cigarettes, and newspapers on busy streets or in the stalls; work as porters of goods or luggage in the markets, railway/bus stations, airports; loading and unloading trucks; cleaning shoes; begging; prostitution.

The national responses to combat child labor mainly focus on adherence to internationally accepted standards and policy level action. Tajikistan has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Age of Employment, and Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

Hong Kong

Maggie Koong, Victoria Kindergarten and Nursery, Hong Kong

Hong Kong is in the midst of a thorough education reform program that has recognized early childhood as an integral part of education, as the foundation of lifelong learning, and as the first stage of all-round development. This reform is deeply affecting the pre-primary sector in several ways.

- It has called for the harmonization of early childhood services and this has provoked a paradigm shift towards integrated or coordinated ECEC systems leading to improvements in professional training, greater financial support, better monitoring, and less disparity between child care centers and kindergartens.
- The need to educate the new generations to be biliterate (Chinese and English), and trilingual (Cantonese, English, and Putonghua) is causing curriculum compression that has reached all the way down to preschools, which now have greater literacy and linguistic expectations of their students.
- To enhance the quality of early childhood education, ease the financial burden on parents, and increase choice in education, the government, as of this year, has expanded its voucher program to the ECEC sector by annually providing a HK\$13,000 (US\$1,667) subsidy to every child

studying in local non-profit making kindergartens and child care centers for 3-6 year old children.

Singapore

Lily Wong, Advent Links-SAUC, Singapore

The demographic trends in Singapore are delayed first marriage, decline in fertility rate, and staying single, which is due to the changing status of women with higher educational levels. The changing expectations of marriage is that women no longer need to marry for economic reasons. The changing value of child care and family life because of lowered infant mortality and thus a prevailing view of "sacred" helpless and precocious child and that child care is very time consuming.

The trend of individualistic life styles through career advancement and economic security over family value is prevalent.

With the increasing labor force participation rate of married women, the prevalence of dual-career couples has continued to a rise in the last five years. The combined income has boosted the financial situation of dual-career couples and the increased participation of married women in economic activities has also helped to meet Singapore's increasing manpower demand (Singapore Department of Statistics December 2006). Wives spent long hours at work — up to 47 hours a week. Those wives with higher educational levels earned at least as much as the spouse and contribute to 50% of the total income.

The trend is having more child care options for working parents, to the tune of expanding infant and child care facilities to 3,000 centers by 2009. As of 2004 there were about 670 child care centers in Singapore with only 25 centers offering infant care services. This will alleviate some of the burden on working women who are seeking

professional care providers for their infants and children during the workdays.

India

Reeta Sonawat, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, India

India is a vast multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-religious country with an under-five population of approximately 150 million children as per 1991 census constituting 17.5% of India's population. A large number of them live in an economic and social environment that impedes the child's physical and mental development. These conditions include poverty, poor environmental sanitation, disease and infection, inadequate access to primary health care, inappropriate child caring and feeding practices. The programme of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) was launched in 1975 by the central government seeking to provide an integrated package of services in a convergent manner for the holistic development of the child.

On the one hand, it is well known that though ICDS is impressive in its scope, aims, and reach, the quality of services are poor. On the other hand, in the private sector, though there are undoubtedly a few outstanding institutions doing wonderful work, the majority are little more than teaching shops, where ignorant management compel untrained and underpaid teachers to force formal learning down the throats of unwilling children with inappropriate curriculum and archaic methods in ill-equipped classroom. The state does not have any body to describe standards and/or persons running centers to submit documents that they meet the standards and then register the center. The existence of center accreditation, which brings the highest standards of quality into early childhood programmes, is out of question.

Globally, India is being recognized as a nation whose time has come,

New Zealand

Toni Christie, Childspace, Wellington, New Zealand

In New Zealand early childhood is attracting a great deal more funding than ever before. The government has made provision for free ECE for up to 20 hours a week for 3 and 4 year olds starting July 1 of this year. Funding is based on the number of qualified (degree trained) teachers as well as the number of children attending the service. Very soon at least half of all teacher in-services will be required to be qualified and by 2012 all teachers will be required to be qualified and registered. Our curriculum, Te Whariki, continues to be a guiding document for practice and the recently released self-review guidelines are ensuring services are striving for continual improvement.

Jordan

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

Jordan is amongst the first countries in the region that developed an Early Childhood Development Strategy (ECD) and a plan of action (2003-2007). The ECD Strategy has adopted a definition of early childhood that includes the period extending from pregnancy up to below nine years of child age. The ECD Strategy encompasses 14 themes covering a range of aspects aimed at providing children with protection and an appropriate environment that enhances their growth and development. Since then, Jordan has witnessed a noticeable development in its policies and programmes relating to early childhood in the different sectors. Another important policy document is the National Plan of Action for Children (NPA) (2004-2013) that is based on the UN document "World Fit for Children" and the League of Arab States document "Arab Plan for Childhood."

The NPA includes a sub-component on ECD. The National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA), that is headed by HMQ Rania Al-Abdullah, is mandated to follow up on the implementation of the ECD Strategy and the National Plan of Action for Children.

With regard to pre-school education, the percentage of children enrolled in kindergartens (KG) (4-6 year-olds) has risen from 23% in year 1990 to 29.4% in 2002, and reached 37.9% in 2005 (23.4% in KG1 and 51.5% in KG2). The total number of KGs increased from 545 in 1991 to 1595 in 2005, of which 70% is provided by the private sector, 15% by NGOs; and 15% by the public sector. The Ministry of Education (MOE) oversees the establishment and licensing of KGs, and establishes public KGs in disadvantaged and remote areas. In relation to developing the institutional capacity, a national KG interactive curriculum was developed in year 2004 by the MOE and NCFA, was tested in the field and an updated version will be printed for the next scholastic year. A curriculum framework is also under development.

Many challenges still prevail in early childhood education as the quality of programmes varies. Most private preschools do not abide by the conditions of establishing and licensing of preschools, as monitoring tools are weak. Hence, the KG licensing standards were updated in year 2004, and is being tested in the field by MOE and NCFA to determine their applicability. MOE also initiated work on developing a comprehensive KG accreditation system. Another challenge is that most KG teachers lack needed educational specialisation, and do not receive comprehensive "in-service" training on early childhood education. In order to tackle this issue, a professional development system has been put in place by the MOE to train teachers on the KG curriculum and on

Wisconsin University training program "Working with Children."

Nurseries, which provide temporary care and play activities for a few hours daily to the youngest and most crucial age group, are extremely limited. Despite the rapid growth of the number of nurseries, they cater only for 2% of children in the age group from birth to below four years. It is worth noting that of the 795 nurseries in Jordan, 57% are governmental, 38% are private, and 4.6% are affiliates of the NGO sector. There are several challenges in the particularities of these nurseries and of the manpower working in this field. Again, the quality of programmes and the standards of services vary from one nursery to another. The Ministry of Social Development (MOSD), who supervises the nurseries, developed in 2005 a legislation for establishing and licensing nurseries and is currently working on relevant instructions. In addition, standards to license and establish child care centres for children deprived of parental care were recently developed.

To achieve the objectives of the ECD Strategy in relation to improving the services provided for children in nurseries, a comprehensive project will be undertaken starting in 2007 by MOSD and NCFA that aims at developing curriculum and training manuals; prepare guidelines and tools for assessing the learning and physical environments in nurseries and child care centres; devising national occupational standards for caregivers; developing tools for assessing care giver performance; building the capacity of caregivers and expanding parental education and support.

Alongside the institutional approach to ECD, Jordan has strengthened the support system for community- and family-based care. Since 1996, the Better Parenting Programme has been imple-

mented by a network of 13 governmental and non-governmental institutions; delivering parenting education training that promotes providing a stimulating environment for children at home to ensure their holistic development. By 2006, the programme reached more than 70,000 parents and caregivers particularly targeting urban and rural disadvantaged families.

Jordan also witnessed a continuous improvement in relation to child and maternal health. Maternal mortality dropped from 48 to 41 per 100,000 births between the years 1990-2002. The number of mothers who delivered with the assistance of qualified medical supervision has reached more than 98%, regardless of geographical location. The under-five mortality rate was reduced from 39 to 27 for every 1,000 live births between the years 1990-2002, while infant mortality rates dropped from 34 to 22 for every 1,000 live births during the same period. This decline in infant and child mortality have resulted from expanding mother and child health services throughout the kingdom, sustained vaccination coverage, implementation of programmes to control diarrhoeal diseases and acute respiratory infections, in addition to tackling micro nutrient deficiencies by supplementing children with vitamins and implementing national programs such as salt iodization and flour fortification with iron.

One of the important milestones is the development of ECD standards and indicators that outline the expected outcomes of Jordanian children in the early childhood stage. These standards serve to assess the progress of individual children; guide the development of curricula; and evaluate programme effectiveness. Jordan was selected as one of six pilot countries by UNICEF New York to

participate in this project in collaboration with Columbia University that aims at developing global ECD indicators. This key national level achievement is acknowledged as a valuable contribution to the regional and global ECD knowledge base.

Palestine

*Ali Shaar, Public Health Specialist
Jerusalem, Palestine*

General trends:

- early childhood care and education programs are far from being comprehensive, coordinated, and the quality of these services is not evaluated, controversial and in many aspects such as the qualifications of staff, physical and social environment, and existence of policies to govern the delivery of service is modest and not implemented in a structured manner.
- only about 20% of children in the age 3-6 are enrolled
- early child care and education institutes are run by NGOs and private providers; the later enjoys better standards of quality, especially in large cities
- although huge investments have been allocated to support this sector, bureaucracy within the governmental sector, municipal system, and NGO sector hindered the ultimate utilization of early child care and education facilities
- lack of community mobilization and proper involvement of marginalized communities resulted in aggravated marginalization of the poorest children and most of the institutes created to serve the poor population ended being used by the higher class
- the content of programs addressing the early childhood period is widely variable; academic education and

religious education form the two main areas to focus in the curriculum, leaving minimal or no space for personality development activities and psychosocial support activities highly needed in the case of Palestine

- the previous point is supported with the parent's perception about early childhood education institutes as being the pre-school phase of the academic life of the child; other aspects related to parents is the perception that early childhood institutions are the place to leave the children safely while going to work.

Specific issues related to children 3-6:

- this age group is extremely marginalized in terms of access to care; children 0-3 are covered by the health insurance policy and those in the age group 6-18 are covered by the school health policy ensuring all school children; the age group 3-6 falls outside the insurance policy and hence has no formal right to care, except within the private health sector
- while the under-5 mortality in Palestine is 28 per 1,000, infant mortality accounts for 22 of this number. The rest of the figure is affecting those 2-5 with preventable home and road accidents being the major cause of mortality and morbidity in this age group
- due to severe deterioration of economic situation and poverty affecting about 60% of the Palestinian population, malnutrition in its different forms is now the major physical health problem facing children in the early childhood period; with the continuation of the current political and socio-economic conditions, it is expected that further deterioration in nutritional status is underway

- direct and indirect exposure to violence is causing a severe mental health problem for children; this general statement becomes more true for children in Gaza strip, where military operations during the last year have increased in intensity and were aggravated by the internal clashes affecting most of the population in the Gaza strip.

Egypt

Ahmed Al Damrawy, National Union for ECD, Cairo, Egypt

Situation in Egypt Micro Level:

ECD is one of the most critical interventions to ensure that all children succeed in school and fulfill their potential as citizens. EC education investments are efficient, compensating for lack of development in later years is both difficult and expensive. ECD is becoming important in Egypt as more women join the workforce and families do need additional help and support with child care in the first years of child's life.

The foundation of learning and the greatest effects of learning on brain structure is made up in the first 6 years of child's life. Recognizing the importance, Egypt has been seeking international support to invest more in early childhood education. Egypt on the other hand, had made very strategic investments in the last couple of decades that drastically brought down infant and child mortality rates. Basic education coverage stands at almost 100%, and the goal of universal primary education creates an urgent need for EC education to ensure that children from illiterate and isolated households can succeed in school and the caring and education system can operate efficiently and effectively.

Costs of KG:

The great demand for KG services has led schools to regulate the intake of children by increasing fees. One unfor-

tunate consequence is that the neediest children who most benefit from KG are being excluded. The Government of Egypt, with support from the World Bank and later joined by CIDA and WFP, has been developing an EC national project to target children in the ages of 4 and 5 years old. The five years project got rolling late in 2006 and is expected in a phasing approach to cover needy children in 18 governorates out of Egypt's 27 governorates. For the community-based, the National Union for Early Childhood Development, through the Children of the Nile Project, is biggest non-governmental in the country. The neediest children in the ages of birth to 6 years old, in some 720 community-based associations in 14 governorates are served. Still, the current annual cost estimate to the government for each KG pupil varies between LE 80-400. After the new regulations are instituted the annual cost is expected to be within the range of LE 35. However, the reality now is that families are paying LE 200-400 annual fees, with fees ranging from LE 100 in poor areas to LE 800 and much more per year for foreign language KGs, which are most popular among upwardly mobile parents.

Nigeria

Olasumbo S. Apanpa Ph.D., NERDC, Lagos, Nigeria

Early child care and development started in Nigeria in the '80s as part of the Survival Strategy, and was linked to the Primary Health Care system, which was introduced to improve 1) the maternal health and wellbeing of mothers; and 2) the under-five mortality rate in the country. With mass immunisation, and subsequent drop in under-five mortality rate, parents were sensitised to take proper care of the health of their children under five years of age.

At the height of the Survival Campaign was the call for early stimulation of the child to improve their mental and

physical development. To that end, with support from UNICEF, and the Bernard van Leer Foundation in the Netherlands, a number of child care centres were established and linked to the - Primary Health Care Centres in some communities in the country to take care of the need for early stimulation of the child aged 0-5 years. Before Nigeria's attendance of the Education for All (EFA) Conference in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, early learning for children below the age of 6 years was in private hands, and established by private and religious organisations mainly. Government's role then was in the establishment of guidelines for setting up the centres (which were referred to as Nursery Schools), and the giving of approval for their operation. Predictably the then National Policy on Education (NPE, FGN, 1981) clearly puts the establishment and operations of Pre-primary Education in private hands. To that end, most children from poor families and in the rural areas could not benefit from early childhood education and these form the majority of children aged 0-5 years in the country.

After the country's attendance of the Education for All (EFA) Conference in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and in line with the EFA declaration, the Government came out with a "National Framework of Action for the Survival, Development, and Protection of the Nigerian Child" in 1992 (FGN/NPC 1992). The role of the Nigerian government with regards to Early Childcare and Development, then changed to be that of an active participant and sponsor of Early Child Care and Development programmes for the overall benefit of the Nigerian child. With the provision of counterpart funding provided by the Nigerian government, both at national and state levels, for early childhood programmes, donor agencies such as UNICEF increased their own funding, and expanded their operations to include many more communities

throughout the country. With support from UNICEF the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (a federal government agency) undertook the training of caregivers, and developed training manuals and pre-school readers to improve the quality of delivery of early child care and development programmes in the '90s.

Advocacy and sensitisation visits were also undertaken to get states and communities to establish early child care centres nationwide. The centres/facilities so established were low-cost and community-based with minimal or no contributions from parents, especially in poor rural communities and amongst urban-poor families. Predictably such centres were established in marketplaces, churches, mosques, and in homes, to take care of the needs of children aged 0-5 years, for early care and stimulation. Such facilities established were encouraged with the provision of locally made toys and books by UNICEF. In some states, the early child care centres were linked to local primary schools, to ease the transition of the child from home to school.

Present scenario:

Early child care and development is now widely practised in the country, and with the Dakar Declaration on Education for All (2000), Early Childcare and Development was to be expanded to make it universal. With the new National Policy on Education (NPE: FGN 2004), early childcare and development was no longer to be solely in private hands, but was to have the active participation of the government at all levels. Also with active participation of NGO's Community-Based Organisation (CBOs) in order to universalise the delivery of Early Childhood Development in Nigeria and to benefit many Nigerian children who, hitherto, could not benefit from early stimulation and learning.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Emily Vargas-Baron, The Rise Institute, Washington, DC

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the major challenges to good child development are disease, severe malnutrition, and developmental delays. Wars, famine, poverty, migrations, domestic violence, and a lack of basic social services have all taken their toll on vulnerable children. Increasingly, African nations are formulating ECD policies with strategies to develop integrated community-based programs that provide parent education and support, child stimulation, preschool education, health care, nutritional supplements, community sanitation, potable water, and protective services. Vulnerable children in Africa urgently require more intensive and higher quality services to reach their potential. For this reason, special attention must be paid to formulating and implementing ECD policies, increasing national and international investment in ECD, establishing effective national ECD resource centers, building pre- and in-service training systems, and forging public/private partnerships for children and parents.

Kenya

Henry Manani, Kenya Institute of Education, Nairobi, Kenya

Kenya as a country has greatly been affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic which was declared as a national disaster by the President in 1998. All Government organs have developed various mechanisms and interventions to control the menace. The Ministry of Education has been affected greatly and has taken a number of measures as follows:

Effects

HIV/AIDS pandemic has affected the education sector in various aspect:

- Kenya's children population in primary schools is 7.5 million, of which over 900,000 are orphans. At

secondary level we have over 120,000 orphans.

- A big percentage of the children affected spend a lot of learning time taking care of the sick family members, hence affecting their class performance.
- There are increased drop out cases thus affecting EFA goals.
- The number of teachers dying is increasing rapidly while others are too sick to work, thus denying the education sector of vital skilled human resources.
- Implication of all the above is the weakening of the quality of education. It is interesting to note that teachers who are HIV positive have formed an association, Kenya Network of Association of Positive Teachers (KENEPOTE).

Measures:

- The ministry of Education has developed a policy on HIV/AIDS and support the establishment of voluntary counselling and Testing (VCT) Centres.
- The Ministry of Education is also encouraging and overseeing the development and implication of HIV/AIDS policies in the various service autonomous government agencies.
- The Ministry of Education has now put in place systems to strengthen its capacities to provide HIV/AIDS prevention, care, support, and mitigation interventions.

South Africa

Juliana Seleti, Early Childhood Development Directorate, Pretoria, South Africa

South Africa has over the last 12 years experienced significant transformation in the field of ECD. Most of the transformation has occurred in the area of policy development across the different sectors and government departments that deal with programmes and services for children. Various government and non government collaborations and partnerships at different levels over the years have lead to the production of different policies that are currently influencing ECD trends in the country. The long policy development process in ECD was as a result of the need to redress the Apartheid government ECD status which had very few and discriminatory policies and regulations in place for children.

The new ECD policies, together with other relevant political and economic frameworks, have influenced the ECD trends in the country that are leaning towards:

- Supporting and strengthening families and communities as primary caregivers and educators of young children. Different programmes and services are in place through various providers, addressing particularly the needs of orphaned and vulnerable children, especially those affected and infected by HIV and AIDS.
- Poverty alleviation through job creation in the ECD sector and increasing of access to quality and equal ECD services as well as provisioning of Social grants and subsidies.
- Professionalisation of the ECD sector, through the review and development of the ECD qualifications including the development of training programmes and accreditation of private ECD training providers.

The above trends mark the ECD landscape in the country, which is in the

ECD policy implementation stage with the participation of various role players from government and non government sectors. The country is going through some challenges in relation to the delivery of ECD services and programmes. This is mainly as a result of the long time it takes to establish government systems and mechanisms required to be in place for effective and efficient provisioning, particularly in the context of government's decision to use the integrated / intersectoral ECD approach.

Bolivia

Roxana Salazar, National Council of Women, La Paz, Bolivia

In Bolivia 58% of children between one month and six years of age live in poverty conditions, in risk to die or to get an avoidable disease, due to high rates of malnutrition, low access to basic services, and lack of education and early care and stimulation. Only four of each 100 kids, have access to integral attention, and only 16 of each 100 kids between 4 and 6 years old attend a preschool centre. In addition to this, there is a wide cultural and socio-economic diversity in the Bolivian population. This topic is not a priority for government, society, not even the families care too much about this age.

The challenge is enormous, but not impossible. The answer must contain an integral answer. Not only surviving, but also giving the children the opportunity of living. And that means education. It goes through searching strategies and initiatives to achieve equity and to promote a unique childhood development culture across the diversity of cultures. In order to respect the diversity, it is important to diffuse all that early education means for human development as a whole. To improve opportunities by implementing programmes and projects with local actors. All the ways to serve childhood must be supported in formal and non formal

directions: public, private, or community-based organizations. In poverty contexts no initiatives can be refused.

Peru

Martha Llanos, Human Development Specialist, Lima, Peru

Peruvian early childhood education is facing great challenges. In the early '70s the Educational Reform had a very special recognition and organization was considered a Directorate within the Ministry of Education. Emphasis was placed in development of different models for the education and care of younger children. In the '90s it was cancelled as a Directorate and joined with the Primary Education; then the overall number of children attending was diminishing and also the quality of the programmes were a main issue of concern. In 2006 a major event took place because, after 16 years, it was again recognized as a main Directorate.

The current situation of Peruvian children is very critical, levels of malnutrition and lack of facilities for the number of small children (especially below three years of age) is a focus of attention. There are many efforts that are currently being redimensioned or revitalized as the Wawa wasi programmes (non formal early childhood care for children under three) under the Ministry for Women and Development and the Ministry of Education is setting different community strategies to bring about integrated efforts for the education of young children.

A special feature is the children in rural areas and the indigenous children; emphasis is currently ongoing in the area of research and finding methodologies for appropriate intercultural bilingual education. There is quite a variety of creative programmes in small scale promoting play, libraries, open spaces for development, child to child, and many more.

Access with quality is the main focus, budget allocation is still a no win battle, still a long way to consider an investment within the overall human development dimension. Teacher training is focusing on improving the content and interaction with local governments is an ongoing effort. There are interesting modalities if attention in different regions and the NGOs and the civil society are increasingly becoming aware of the need to continue advocacy and mobilization for a greater coverage — especially for improvement of quality.

México

Ivan Galindo, Instituto High Scope México, Queretaro, México

The general trend in basic education in México, for maybe six decades, has been incrementing coverage of the population. Up to 1993 universal education was only six years (primary school); some secondary (middle schools) existed but they did not pretend to cover the whole population. Since 1993, secondary school is compulsory for all children in México. Since 2005, one year of preschool is obligatory and for 2008, three years of preschool will be obligatory for all children in México. Coverage in general is around 65% in preschool (3-5 years), 92.9% in primary school (6-12 years), and 88.2% in secondary school (13-15 years) for a total population of 104 millions. Preschool coverage should increase to more than 90% in the next 4 years. This may imply overpopulation in many school buildings.

In the push for coverage, quality has suffered and private education has been increasing. Private education in preschool is 12.81%, primary 8.1%, and secondary is 7.5%; in the urban areas this percentages can easily double. Five decades ago, most urban middle class sent their children to public schools but now choosing a private school is necessary for many middle class families. This is because they feel they get better quality in general. The participation of

private schools will keep growing.

To improve quality the government has changed programs in preschool to emphasize competences and more “constructivist” style of learning in classrooms. In addition, this program promotes a more open, reflective, flexible, and creative practice from teachers. Nevertheless, the implementation of these new programs is far from satisfactory. There is a huge gap between intention and implementation. There is a great lack of good training and capacity building for teachers on the job. Programs have changed but not “waterfall” training (in two days 10 *genius* train 100 *not so genius*, and in the next two days these train 2,000 *average citizens* then train 30,000 *mortals* and so on); by the time the real training gets to the local school, the message is diluted in confusion and contradiction. It is easier to change education on paper than changing 200,000 preschool teachers.

The level of education has increased and now four years of college is required to be the main teacher in a preschool classroom. You can be a preschool teacher, educational psychologist, or study pedagogy to work as the main teacher. Assistant teachers have a shorter technical training.

Another important trend is transparency through national evaluation. In the past, educational evaluations were not known by the public, but since México started participating in international evaluations like PISA about ten years ago, the results were very poor. The last government (in 2000) initiated a public national evaluation program in the primary and secondary school. This year, anyone can consult all the results by school and classroom through the Internet. We do not yet know what kind of influence this is going to have in preschool programs and practice.

Intellectually speaking, México is in a trend of more open, whole child constructivist education; in practice, these are dreams yet to be achieved.

Haiti

Carolyn Hudicourt, Step by Step, Petion-Ville, Haiti

Institutions offering educational services for early childhood have spread throughout the country during the last 10 to 15 years: in urban areas, 53% of the children attend preschool programs and 47% in rural areas. About half of school-age children in Haiti do have a chance to go to school and 55% of the adult population is illiterate. Although 70% of the people live in rural areas, only 20% of the educational funds go to rural areas.

Part of the reason for the recent spread of preschool programs in Haiti is the entrance examination of elementary programs which favor children who have already received some degree of formal education. The tendency of these programs is to function like small schools in which small children start learning the basics. It is common for toys to be completely absent from these settings.

There are now about 30 schools in Haiti that train pre-school educators and a few NGOs offer their services to the existing institutions. A lot of teacher training is done through seminars for teachers already working in the system. Eighty percent of these teachers have not completed high school and have received no formal pedagogical training.

The great majority of the pre-schools and schools in Haiti are private. Only 4% of the preschool population attends public schools. Most of the financial support for these programs come from the parents' limited resources.

Among the NGOs involved in Early Childhood Education in Haiti are UNICEF, Save the Children, CRS (Christian Relief Service), OMEP

(Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Préscolaire), Step by Step, CES (Centre d'Éducation Spéciale). The Haitian government is working with them in designing programs and policies to offer adequate services to young children throughout the country.

Source: “Analysis of the early childhood situation in Haiti and proposal for an active and integrated policy for children between 0 and 6 years of age” by Dominique Hudicourt Riboul (Step by Step), Colette Vilgrain, Me. Dilia LeMaire.

Canada

Dr. Laurie McNelles, Mothercraft, Toronto, Canada

In Canada, municipal, regional, and federal governments vary in their commitments to early care and education. The Canadian federal government has chosen to put early care dollars directly in the hands of parents in the form of \$100 per month for each child under 6 years of age. Many municipal and regional governments have questioned this approach to a universal commitment to Canadian children, preferring to invest in strong community networks for children and families that include community programming and child care services.

Most regions in Canada are concerned with increasing the level of professionalism associated with the care and education of young children. As we know, great training contributes to great programming and positive outcomes for children. Many regions in Canada are experiencing a shortage of qualified early care and education professionals. Predictably, some of these shortages are associated with low wages and poor benefit packages offered throughout early care and education. In addition, these shortages are also related to specific cultural considerations as ethno-cultural groups build their internal capacity to meet the early care and education needs of children within their communities.