PLENARY II: THE GLOBAL STATE OF THE ART: SCALING UP TOWARDS 2015

What challenges exist for Early Childhood Care and Education?

What should we do about them?

Nicholas Burnett

World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education

27-29 September 2010
Moscow, Russian Federation
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Nicholas Burnett
Results for Development Institute
nburnett@resultsfordevelopment.org

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Introduction

I want to address an apparently simple question that does not have a simple answer. How can it be that, as we just saw from Mmantsetsa Marope’s global overview\(^1\), there has been so little new investment in early childhood programs when the evidence of their impact is so overwhelmingly positive – in terms of child rights, brain science, economics and social justice?

The 2007 GMR. That evidence was assembled four years ago in the 2007 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, *Strong Foundations*, with its special theme of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). I was the Director of the team that produced that report, with inputs from many of the experts attending this conference. The report was supposed to refocus attention on ECCE, along with literacy one of the “forgotten” Education for All (EFA) goals. In a strong display of inter-agency cooperation, it was launched in New York at UNICEF headquarters with also high level World Bank participation. Yet even by the EFA High Level Group (HLG) meeting in Cairo where it was formally put on the agenda, I was worried, for frankly ECCE did not dominate at all the discussions and indeed secured only one sentence in the meeting’s communiqué: “HLG members committed themselves to a stronger focus on ECCE and advised that governments and aid agencies increase funding to ECCE substantially above current levels.”\(^2\)

*Strong Foundations* recommended four areas to better achieve ECCE in developing countries, and especially for the poor:

1. Move ECCE up the domestic and international agendas
   - Secure essential high level political endorsement
   - Establish national policy frameworks for children aged 0-8
   - Clearly designate a lead ministry
   - Set specific goals and funding levels

2. Increase public funding for ECCE and target interventions
   - Include ECCE in key policy documents like poverty reduction strategy papers and sector plans
   - Target ECCE for the vulnerable and disadvantaged
   - Donors to give ECCE more attention, following UNICEF’s lead

3. Upgrade the ECCE workforce
   - Critical for quality
   - ECCE workers are undervalued compared to school teachers in terms of training and pay
   - Quality standards are needed.

4. Improve the monitoring of ECCE
   - Especially for the 0-3 age group
   - Focus on the key determinants: not just participation but participation by the poor; staffing; quality; and expenditures.

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\(^1\) Mmantsetsa Marope, *Overview of Status of EFA Goal 1*, Presentation at *World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education*. 27-29 September 2010, Moscow.

The Situation Today

What has happened since then, in terms of the evidence, in terms of attention by the EFA movement, and in terms of investment around the world?

The Evidence. As we have just heard from Professor Jack Shonkoff and as we can read from the work of Nobel laureate Professor Jim Heckman, the scientific and economic evidence has got even stronger. I will not go into that here but just remind you that there is no other investment which both combines high economic returns and social justice, in terms of leveling life’s playing field for those born disadvantaged and, from an educational viewpoint, maximizing their chances of learning at school. The subtitle of this conference – Building the Wealth of Nations – is very telling.

The EFA Movement. Undeniably there has been some progress in drawing more attention to ECCE. This first World Conference is one shining example, though it could perhaps have been more inclusive in terms of partner agencies. Integrating ECCE in UNESCO’s Basic Education in Africa Program (BEAP) and the November 2009 ADEA-Senegal-UNESCO meeting on ECCE in Dakar are also good examples, though the impact of all three remains to be seen. Despite these developments, there is no getting away from ECCE still being a “forgotten” EFA goal. The communiqué of the most recent ninth High Level Group meeting in Addis Ababa in February 2010 with its theme of “Reaching the Marginalized” does not even mention ECCE! It is striking also that the Arab regional report prepared for this conference notes that many of the issues today are the same as those identified in the 2004 Arab regional report on ECCE.

Investment. And yet, as Ms Marope’s overview and the regional preparatory reports all indicate, at best, only very slow progress except in Europe and Latin America which were already well advanced. There are some jewels, of course, including Cuba, Mauritius and much of Europe and of Latin America; there has been a major movement in terms of pre-primary enrolment increases in parts of Asia; but very little has happened in either Africa or the Arab states. Indeed major problems persist. I will characterize these in terms of six stylized facts:

1. ECCE continues to be relatively neglected in terms of sector (health, education) and development (PRSPs, national plans) frameworks – including no resolution of which sectoral ministry should be in charge. According to UNICEF, in 2006 only 30 developing countries had ECCE plans.
2. Even when ECCE is included in these frameworks, the policy framework is still relatively weak, and especially with regard to the 0-3 age group.
3. Financing for ECCE is insufficient, and mainly comes from fees paid by those who can afford them. There is still little government or donor financing.
4. Those who benefit the least from ECCE programs are those who could benefit the most. In Egypt, for example, a rich child is 25 times more likely than a poor one to participate in an ECCE program; in Rwanda, 20 times more likely. Everywhere, the under-3s are less likely to participate, as the regional reports clearly indicate.
5. The quality of ECCE is very, very variable and generally not good for the few poor who are able to participate.
6. Monitoring is inadequate, though there are important developments, such as the inclusion of several indicators in the latest round of UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and the various discussions about new indicators.

What Should We Do?

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4 See [http://www.heckmanequation.org/](http://www.heckmanequation.org/)


6 Notably the neglect of the under-3s, the lack of regulation and quality control, the inadequate training of ECCE staff, the insufficiency of funding, and the lack of a strong ministerial commitment. See Early Childhood in the Arab Countries: Status and Challenges, 2010. See footnote 8 for source.

Clearly, progress has been insufficient; why is this and what should we do? First, the “marketing” of ECCE has been weak. Second, even when the broad case has been made, we have not sufficiently addressed the four key issues that stand in the way of broader adoption of ECCE programs: responsibility, access, finance and quality.

**Marketing.** There are several strong examples of effective marketing of ECCE, notably the US Committee for Economic Development, a business-based organization focusing within the United States, and Fundacion ALAS, a coalition of entertainers assembled by Shakira focusing on Latin America. There are other examples of groups of experts, like the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Education and the Working Group on Early Childhood Development of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, which are both important for exchanging information but unfortunately do little in terms of general promotion. There is little engagement with ECCE by the major lobbies in favor of EFA, notably the Global Campaign for Education.

Generally, however, marketing has been weak and, despite the strong scientific and economic case, does not address what appeals to politicians and the general public. It has focused too much on rights and not enough on the contributions of ECCE to economic growth, to equity and to saving future expenditure by encouraging learning at school and avoiding future issues of social cohesion. It has not addressed directly the grave reservations that certain societies have about the relative roles of the state and of the family, especially for very young children up to 3 years old.

A new advocacy coalition is needed, combining international agencies (especially UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, and the World Bank), advocacy CSOs (not just ALAS and the Global Campaign for Education but also the groups advocating child survival and child development), business (possibily through the World Economic Forum), and some prominent political leaders and celebrities. Who is going to organize such a coalition and coordinate its advocacy?

**Key Issue 1: Who is Responsible?** The regional reports highlight the continuing lack of clear accountability in developing countries for early childhood programs. Country after country has confused responsibility resting with ministries of health and education and sometimes also social welfare and women. It is not important which ministry is in charge; what is important is that a ministry is clearly in charge and that the others recognize this. This can be done; Cuba is a leading example.

Resolving this issue can probably best be done by focusing on who is in charge at the decentralized service delivery level, by ensuring that public policy focus on all service provision (i.e. private as well as public provision, since private provision accounts for over 50% of all provision in every region except Latin America), and by ensuring attention to the 0-3 age group.

**Key Issue 2: Access for the Poor.** This is perhaps the central issue that still needs addressing if ECCE is to become more widespread. At present those who would benefit relatively the most from ECCE programs – the poor – are those who are least likely to participate, mainly because globally most provision is by the private sector and requires household payments that the poor cannot afford. The access question is thus essentially a financing question (see next section). But there is also an advocacy element – the CSOs advocating EFA have been noticeably quiet on this topic.

**Key Issue 3: Financing ECCE.** Finance is not economics. ECCE enjoys the peculiar distinction of there being overwhelming economic evidence in its favor yet a shortage of investment. Given the returns to investment in ECCE, it should be a prime candidate for public investment; in practice, governments have not in general made it such a priority, in part because of the weak marketing discussed above. According to the regional reports, spending on ECCE is equivalent to only 0.2% of the education budget in Africa, compared to 7% in Latin America and the Caribbean and 8% in OECD countries, the two regions with the most investment.

Action is needed on both the domestic and the international fronts. Nationally, more public investment is definitely required, especially in Africa. But it must also be more targeted on the poor, to address the access issue and to ensure that spending is focused on those who will benefit the most. Conditional cash transfer mechanisms are of particular importance. Ideology should also play a lesser role and financial support should be available to private as well as public providers, so long as the private providers enroll the poor. Regulation, which insofar as it exists is currently mainly confined to such
issues as the health and safety of the young children, should be seen in a wider context as a public policy tool for governments to shape the early childhood sector that they want to develop.

Internationally, it is perhaps time to consider a global fund for ECCE. Targeted funds can have their complications in terms of the international aid architecture, as we have seen with the various health funds in recent years, notably the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and GAVI for immunizations. Yet there is no doubt that such funds have generated resources that would not otherwise have been available and, also very importantly, raise not only funds but also the profile of the issue.

Innovative financing offers a possible route to raising both domestic and international financing, again as has been done in health for vaccine development and distribution. Particularly promising may be local currency development bonds for ECCE, some sort of ECCE Venture Fund (perhaps particularly for Africa), and the idea of affinity credit cards for early childhood.

**Key Issue 4: Addressing Quality.** It is very clear from the regional reports that much more is needed in terms of guidelines, regulation and enforcement. But fundamentally the quality issue, like the access issue is a financing issue – the key determinant of the quality of ECCE, as all the evidence shows, is the quality of the interaction between the children and the adult carer. This in turn depends on the training and competence of that carer, which will be enhanced if she or he is better trained and better paid.

**Summary**

Never was the case for investing in early childhood programs stronger. The evidence is overwhelming.

For this to happen, however, two key actions are needed: increased political commitment and resolving the financing issues. The first requires much better advocacy by broad-based coalitions, domestic and international. The second also requires that advocacy but also an examination of innovative financing techniques. A focus on these two aspects can also lead to resolving the other issues of ECCE responsibility (ministries will become more interested if there is more funding), access for the poor (essentially a question of how to subsidize their participation) and quality (linked to the training and remuneration of ECCE carers and providers).

Key policy elements domestically are to focus across sectors, to focus on the private as well as the public providers and to increase and target public spending. Internationally, there is need to build a broader coalition, to consider a dedicated fund for ECCE (or at least in Africa) and to use innovative financing techniques.

Early Childhood Care and Education is the Scientific thing to do, it is the Economic thing to do and it is the Right thing to do. Let us renew our efforts in the specific ways I have outlined.

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