"Expanding and improving early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged" is the first of the six goals of the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All (EFA).

I. Introduction and Rationale

Early childhood (from conception to 8 years) has been widely recognized as a critical period in development. Research has repeatedly pointed to the holistic and multidimensional nature of early childhood; therefore it is imperative that strategies for advocacy for early childhood address all aspects of this period of a child’s development in an integrated fashion.

As a first step towards advocacy efforts in early childhood, the Regional Forum for Making the Case for Early Childhood in South Asia was organized from 28-29 April, 2008 in Bangkok, Thailand. The meeting was co-organized by the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok), the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) and the Save the Children Alliance in South Asia. Participants were invited from eight countries in the South Asian sub-region, namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, representing ministries, NGOs and development agencies. The specific focus of this meeting was to familiarize participants with research and policy frameworks for advocacy and culminated in the eight SAARC countries making commitments for action: identifying 3 key advocacy messages and strategies that they could use in advancing these messages.

As a follow-up to the regional forum, and to ensure the movement and translation of commitments made at the forum into actionable steps, a hands-on workshop was proposed, that would address critical next steps in carrying these country commitments forward. The workshop broadly proposed to equip policymakers and key personnel in the ministries, UN agencies and NGOs with the training and skills necessary to promote evidence-based policymaking in early childhood.

II. Specific Objectives and Expected Outcomes

The proposed objectives of the workshop were:

- To obtain skills in identifying quantitative (including the use of international data bases such as the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) and State of the World’s Children (SOWC) and qualitative data in building evidence-based advocacy initiatives;

- To use quantitative and qualitative evidence in crafting key advocacy messages;
• To consolidate action plans and ensure the formation and strategies for sustenance of a multi-sectoral coordination mechanism at a national level; and

• To engage as active players in contributing to ARNEC (Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood) and other regional/international initiatives in promoting research, policy and advocacy relating to Early Childhood.

Expected Outcomes at the Planning Stage

At planning stage the proposed outcomes of the workshop were that the participants would:

• Be broadly familiar with using quantitative and qualitative international data sources for advocacy in early childhood;

• Have completed a Draft Advocacy Proposal (DAP) that will start with the 3 key advocacy messages, identify and collate possible data sources and gaps, and will outline a strategic plan of action to promote these 3 key messages (e.g., outreach efforts, data hubs, conferences, media-based dissemination of messages, tapping into multiple stakeholders and national resources); and

• Have formed a multi-sectoral team of partners, with whom regular sustained advocacy initiatives can be pursued.

Organized by UNESCO Bangkok, UNESCO Dhaka and ECDRC-IED/BRACU with support from other partners including ARNEC, Save the Children, UNICEF-ROSA, PLAN and the Bangladesh ECD network (BEN), the workshop targeted country teams of 2-3 members each from each of the eight SAARC countries that attended the first South Asia Regional Forum in 2008.

Criteria for composition of country teams included:

• At least 1 key staff member from relevant ministries in the country (e.g., Ministry of Education, Health, Social Welfare, Women and Child Affairs, etc.)

• ARNEC country coordinator (where present)

• Key staff members from local NGOs/academia

Other participants from local country partnerships were also welcome to participate at their own cost.

The format of the workshop focused on intensive training in evidence-based advocacy activities. Country teams worked together to formulate strategic action plans that could be implemented in timely fashion. Sessions moved from plenary to group discussions and/or hands-on computer lab activities, including the use of hands-on exercises:

(1) For quantitative methods, this included the use of international databases such as the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), SOWC, EFA Info and other databases to build the evidence base for advocacy;
The workshop also included a field trip to an ECCE center in and around Dhaka. The field trip was also used as a context to practice using hands-on, qualitative methods of research for gathering evidence;

Finally, on the last day of the workshop, participants prepared and presented a “draft advocacy proposal” which integrated all the evidence that they identified and/or brought along with them, in the context of a “role-play” situation, for peer review by another country team.

In order to ensure efficient time-management during the workshop, country teams were requested to engage in the following preparatory work, prior to the workshop:

- **Identify/re-evaluate in greater detail, the top three priority areas of ECD, that were already identified by the country team in 2008**
- **Identify potential partners for a “follow-up” team for ECD advocacy in countries (e.g., compiling and bringing a list of potential multi-sectoral partners (from NGOs, private sector, government agencies etc) that could help advance ECD –related advocacy messages that teams would craft in this workshop. Also, identify availability of stakeholders, resources and level of interest in participating in an ECD advocacy team that can help propel the advocacy agenda after the workshop**
- **Compile a list of resources that country team members may already be familiar with within their countries**
- **Bring with them materials that have already been prepared/used in their countries for ECD advocacy**

The countries that participated in the workshop were Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

**III. Details of Proceedings and Outcomes**

The following sections outline broad proceedings and significant ideas that emerged on each day of the workshop.

**Day 1: Opening ceremony, Introduction, Overview of Advocacy and Evidence, Team Work**

The following were the objectives for Day 1:

- Introduction to Evidence-based Advocacy in ECCE: Beginning the process of advocacy
- Objectives: Become familiar with the concept of evidence-based advocacy
- Expected Outputs:
  1. Brainstorm and get clear picture of situation and context for advocacy
  2. Prioritize and identify top ECD issues in countries
  3. If possible, identify KINDS of data needed
Session 1 – Opening

The workshop started with an opening ceremony and launch of the workshop. In her opening remarks, Ms. Maki Maki Hayashikawa (UNESCO Bangkok), welcomed all participants to the workshop and outlined the broad history, goals and objectives of this initiative. Dr. Golam Samdani Fakir (BRAC University), Mr. Kiichi Oyasu (UNESCO Dhaka) and Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury (State Minister of MOWCA) included a number of important reiterations on the importance of this workshop as a critical next step in ensuring continuity of multi-sectoral efforts in formulating action plans for ECD, obtaining skills in identifying quantitative and qualitative data to strengthen advocacy messages, and engaging active players in regional and national ECD networks as a follow-up to the Regional Forum for Early Childhood held last year in Bangkok.

The State Minister reiterated Bangladesh’s commitment to achieving EFA and acknowledgement of the idea that learning begins at birth. Pointing out that ECE is a national priority and Bangladesh has launched many projects on early childhood, the Minister highlighted that 26,000 schools under the ministries have baby classes and classes on children development. These initiatives also emphasize developing linguistic abilities of children in 14 districts, in disadvantaged areas such as slums and remote places. There are many private kindergartens running and operating and she urged that we advocate for all children with disabilities and special needs to be included in schools as well. She hoped that safe and secure schools can be provided for children and that pre-primary schooling for disadvantaged children can be expanded. She emphasized the importance of forming multi-sectoral teams of partners in order to pursue regular advocacy activities.

The speakers acknowledged the strong support, need and expansion of networks in Asia, especially from ARNEC and SAARC countries. They also identified a need to strengthen resources, sharing/exchanging/learning between countries, increased cooperation between government and non-government key actors in early childhood through networking, advocacy and awareness building.

In Dr. Manzoor Ahmed’s presentation on the Bangladesh ECD Network (BEN), he pointed out the uniqueness of this workshop in gathering professionals from the government and non-government who should work together to encourage and support each other for ECD. He acknowledged that BEN has a representation of various Bangladeshi ministries involved in ECD in the Executive Committee and how they will continue to support the government’s operational framework. This framework for pre-primary education was officially launched in 2008. The framework, along with the government’s commitment on ECD and information on how the framework might be translated into practice, and what different ministries have developed and implemented for ECD, was shared by Ms. Qurratul Ayen Safdar, Senior Assistant Chief, MOPME, Bangladesh government.

An overview of advocacy and using evidence-based data for advocacy was covered by
Ms. Chemba Raghavan (UNESCO Consultant), who went over the different definitions of advocacy according to UNICEF and Save the Children. She also discussed the different types of evidence, such as international and national sources for quantitative data like EFAInfo, numerical summaries, GMR and SOWC; and then suggested using different methods for qualitative data, such as observational protocols, participant observations, interviews, focus group discussions, commentaries from surveys, ethnographic surveys, etc. A heuristic, theoretical framework was shared with participants on how to do evidence-based advocacy, such as first doing a situation analysis, establishment of multi-sectoral teams, appropriately crafting key advocacy messages and disseminating them, in addition to conducting evaluations of advocacy initiatives and relevance of messages. Ms. Raghavan pointed out that not all evidence is always representative and that these should always be examined in the light of whether the sample size is representative of the larger population or whether the research is addressing ECD holistically. She also noted that meaningful data doesn’t always lead to action and data can also be interpreted inaccurately.

It was also shared that a World Conference will be organized by UNESCO next year in September 2010 on the theme of ECCE. UNESCO hopes to share the outcomes of this workshop with the World Conference organizers.

Session 2 – ARNEC

Ms. Junko Miyahara, Coordinator, ARNEC Secretariat next presented an overview of the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC). ARNEC is a regional network on ECD for the Asia-Pacific region covering 47 countries. Although just a little over a year old, ARNEC has been active in a number of ways. The Research Task Force of ARNEC has led efforts in compiling ECD data from international sources and is also engaged in leading the initiative for conducting a mapping survey to obtain information on ECD indicators that are not readily available in international sources. However, to gain access to these regionally-relevant ECD data, one must register as an ARNEC member first, which is free and open to anyone concerned with young children. Upon registration, members receive a monthly e-newsflash which contains ECD stories from the field, regional ECD updates, and news on upcoming events and new resources.

ARNEC is also actively involved in creating capacity building opportunities, such as in organizing workshops including this one in Dhaka. Another future event to be organized by ARNEC is the ECD Policy Review Seminar, which will be held on December 1-2, 2009 coinciding with the launch of the new ARNEC Secretariat in Singapore. In addition, ARNEC is also involved in developing regional advocacy messages for ECD and will be incorporating some of the priority issues in South Asian countries when crafting key messages. A new type of membership called “Friends of ARNEC” is being proposed for next year and the plan is to link the network with other ECD networks and organizations that promote ECD as well.

During the discussion session, it was pointed out that ARNEC is currently looking for Country Coordinators to become the official link or focus point between ARNEC and
countries in South Asia. Countries without ARNEC Country Coordinators are Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bhutan. In response to this announcement, some participants from Sri Lanka and Bhutan expressed interest in becoming ARNEC Country Coordinators. Invitations were also extended to country teams to share their ECD materials on the ARNEC website.

Session 3 – Overview of evidence

After the opening ceremonies and coffee break, the technical portions of the hands-on workshop began with a presentation on how to use evidence appropriately and where to start looking for evidence. Three kinds of evidence sources were highlighted (quantitative, qualitative and blended). The presentation pointed to strategies for accessing and obtaining quantitative information, creating tables and finding national level data from databases such as those of the Unesco Institute of Statistics (UIS) and the State of the World’s Children (SOWC). A brief overview of how to use EFA Info was also demonstrated. EFA Info allows users to search for disaggregated data and will help in identifying specific issues in the country as obtaining data all the way to the district level can be made possible. It was pointed out that sometimes data can be used out of context or can be misleading, so it is important to know how the indicators were developed. Presentation of data was a key point that was introduced in this session, and optimal options for choice of appropriate indicators, format of data presentation and issues of data quality were highlighted.

In the group discussions, a major policy-related problem identified by participants was in getting access to early childhood data because some countries have more than one ministry overseeing early childhood. Discussion centred around how coordination needs to be strengthened among ministries especially in data sharing. The consensus from the group discussions was that early childhood cuts across different ministries: If there is better coordination, monitoring this EFA goal might be easier.

Session 4 - Country teams work on identifying/updating 3 key issues

In session 4, countries worked in teams

1. To revisit/initiate a situation analysis of their countries and the status of ECD
2. To revisit the 3 key issues they identified in last year’s workshop and to update this if they have changed them
3. To examine data they might have brought with them, and to identify what data they might need

Overall, all groups were able to discuss and get through items 1 and 2 relatively easily, since this was revisiting priority areas already identified in 2008. However, progress on item 3 varied across the country teams: Some countries (e.g. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives) already had some data, while others were in the process of just beginning active advocacy efforts in their countries.
Original Commitments to Action (2008) with updates (from this workshop, 2009) are shown in blue.

**Commitments for Action**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Messages</th>
<th>Three-step strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>• ECD is a key to a healthy and competent educated child</td>
<td>• Update the policy and implementation guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• We cannot afford not to invest in ECCD/ECE</td>
<td>• Strengthen the ECCD coordination committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Smooth transition is essential from ECCE to primary education</td>
<td>• Media campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Still focusing on linking health to ECD and the transition to primary school</td>
<td>• Symposium on holistic approach to ECCD/ECE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Evaluation of ECD programmes and costing study followed by advocacy for increasing government allocation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop a SRI instrument and identify developmental delays in ECD programming</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure a smooth transition programme for ECCD to primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>• Invest in early years where investment impacts the most (such as those with disabilities and special needs)</td>
<td>Pushing to do this in formal context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Investing in early years quality education leads to more successful EC</td>
<td>Identified gaps: lack of technical expertise, infrastructure and learning environment needs to be created for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>• Country ECD services for all young children</td>
<td>Finalization of ECD minimum standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enhance public/private/civil society participation to ensure minimum standards for ECD</td>
<td>• Capacity assessment and mapping of existing ECD centres</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Organize national workshops</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Wants to involve more stakeholders for children, focus on the quality of ECD centers and the transition to primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>• Bachpan ka Vikaas,</td>
<td>Coordination/convergence among</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Key Issues</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>Let our children grow up happy, healthy and ready to learn. After all, childhood is not a race.&lt;br&gt; A nation is only as good as its children. Let us commit to our children.</td>
<td>Formulation of national policy on ECCE&lt;br&gt; Advocacy&lt;br&gt; Capacity building&lt;br&gt; Same key issues which were about access. They have developed an ECD policy which is due for government approval in a few weeks. It would be good to get more ECD data to use for evidence in policymaking. They are still dependent on donors and agencies like UNICEF and Save the Children and would like to persuade political leaders to incorporate ECD in the government’s plan for basic education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>The presenter clarified that she could not relay messages on behalf of the government since she was the sole NGO representative at this meeting.</td>
<td>Policymakers and parliamentarians will help support ECD and raise awareness as well. The next step is to draft policy and establish a strong network for this. Presenter reiterated commitment to share this with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop ECE curriculum</td>
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</table>
| Pakistan | • Assign priority to ECCE  
• Allocate larger education budget | Advocacy campaign  
• Coordination with stakeholders  
• Ensure integrative planning and implementation  
• Mobilize resources |

They have identified some gaps and would like the government to help plug them.

| Bangladesh | • Advocacy for comprehensive and coherent national ECCD policy  
• Mobilization and awareness raising programmes for parents, caregivers and community | • Establish a National Coordination Committee with Ministry of Primary and Mass Ed (MoPME) for effective coordination  
• Setting up national standards including curriculum, materials and training  
• Establishment of database or command area for monitoring and supervision.  

Their national ECD policy is at the final stage for approval. They are in the second stage of advocacy in the development of the implementation plan for ECE. They want to focus on monitoring how effective these plans are also. They also want to mobilize and raise awareness among parents, caregivers and communities. |

Day 1 ended with a wrap up of the day’s key lessons from the Workshop facilitator Ms. Chemba Raghavan. It was noted that since different countries appeared to be in different stages and phases of ECD advocacy, the presentations, demos and work required on subsequent days of the workshop would, indeed start at basic levels of planning for advocacy.

**Day 2: Using Evidence Appropriately, Hands-on Work on Obtaining Data and Crafting Messages**

**Objectives:**

*Become broadly familiar with using quantitative and qualitative international data sources for advocacy in early childhood*

*Start process of developing the Draft Advocacy Proposals (DAP)*
Expected outputs:
(1) Identifying indicators for key messages outlined on day 1
(2) Continue to build on 3 messages, this time with the data you may have
(3) Complete “Situation Analysis” and “Evidence” sections of draft advocacy proposal

The day began with an explanation of logistics and other details for the field trip that was scheduled for the following day. The hosts and organizers went over descriptions of the field visit sites, time of reporting, lunch arrangements and sign ups for one of the eight groups going to the four different sites.

Based on the initial overview of status of progress on ECD initiatives in different countries, the original plan of guiding the participants through a step-by-step, “chunking” process of developing the Draft Advocacy Proposals (the DAPs), was explained to participants at the beginning of the day.

The first session of the day, focused on the topic: “How do we do advocacy?” Ms. Stephanie Sison, Asia Area Advocacy and Communications Director, Save the Children, made a presentation focusing on how to do advocacy strategically. She reiterated that advocacy should not be an ad hoc thing but should be longer term and organized. She emphasized some important steps when doing advocacy, such as analyzing the country’s policy process and knowing when to influence the process and to position the advocacy messages accordingly. She also placed importance on identifying the target audience and making sure we assess what is important to them.

Another presentation by Ms. Kanitha Kongrukgreaterios, Communications Officer, ARNEC, focused on how to craft advocacy messages that will motivate the audience. She introduced the guiding principles of how to craft primary and secondary messages such as by knowing your audience (what will make people act), knowing the political environment, using powerful and active words, using evidence-based data creatively and accurately, encouraging the audience to take action and keeping the messages simple and brief. It’s also important to suggest solutions in the advocacy message.

A brief review of how ARNEC has been developing relevant advocacy messages for the region was shared. During a previous policy review workshop in Southeast Asia, based on the needs and concerns specifically for that region, participants came up with top priorities or issues such as access and equity, quality and coordination. It was pointed out that a similar process of identifying priority concerns for South Asia in order to develop key messages will be very relevant for the South Asia region as well. It was also pointed out that since participants have already identified goals and some key priority messages, the emphasis on day 2 was now looking for evidence to support their messages, possibly tapping into data from international sources, the ARNEC mapping survey and policy reviews.

A presentation on data availability and data quality by Mr. Venkatraman Subramaniyam, (UNESCO Consultant) was next introduced, as the organizers saw a need to emphasize that
not all data is reliable and that people must take into consideration the source and methodology used for collecting data. He also pointed out that the communication design of the advocacy messages needs to be adapted for different countries and there needs to be an assessment of the impact of such advocacy messages. He also reminded participants that qualitative data is just as powerful as using quantitative data, and that the appropriate use of data would involve consideration of issues pertaining to relevance, reliability and validity.

This presentation was followed by a hands-on practice session on EFAInfo. Participants actually logged into the database, identified relevant background information and data on key indicators, and learned about presentation options using such software: charts, tables, maps and graphs.

Group work after EFAInfo presentation on how to generate tables, maps and graphs:

All these presentations were followed by hands-on group work on all data sources discussed and presented in the workshop until this session. Working with resource persons and their own country team members, participants spent a solid afternoon on identifying national level data and relevant evidence for the priority areas that they had identified.

At the end of the session, when groups reported back to the facilitator, participants noted that the ARNEC website was a very useful source for ECD information, there were some difficulties using EFAInfo as the computers were slow and kept crashing. The facilitator emphasized that advocates of ECD need to use multiple sources of information to look in existing international as well as national/sub-national data sources.

During wrap up, an overview of the different potential sources for data collection was shared, including the versatility of using these data and the multiple modes of presenting data. The wrap-up session also focused on explaining the protocols for qualitative methodology training that participants would undergo in each of the four field sites that were visiting. Handouts of the protocols were issued to each team, and objectives, procedures and reporting back were discussed in detail.

Day 3: Field Trip

Objective: Gain hands-on, grounded experience in actual early childhood settings
Expected Outputs:
(1) Participate in group activities intended to train for qualitative methodologies
(2) Gain expertise in brief monitoring and assessment procedures
(3) Participate in wrap-up sessions, feedback to host sites and incorporate practical knowledge into draft advocacy proposal

Participants went to one of the four different sites to practice using qualitative methods in gathering evidence. Day 3 included a field trip for the participants. The field trip was also used as a context to practice using hands-on, qualitative methods of research for gathering
evidence. The participants were divided into 4 groups of ten members each, and each group, led by a native Bangla speaker, from the Bangladesh country team, used one method of qualitative research on site, in gathering information about various aspects of Early Childhood. Group 1 visited the Bangladesh Shishu Academy and used *a checklist* to observe the early-childhood programme run by the government. The second group visited a BRAC learning centre and two early childhood centres, and utilized *a focus group* discussion method with staff members. The third group visited a SAVE the Children early childhood centre and used the *participant observation* method of data collection. The fourth group visited PLAN Bangladesh and used the *narrative interview* method and interviewed a programme manager. At the reporting back session, the participants reported that they found the field trip to be very useful because the information that they obtained was more in-depth than non-systematic observations. They also learned that such qualitative methods could complement quantitative data methods well.

At the end of the day, during the wrap up session, in addition to key lessons learned from the day, the facilitator explained the guidelines (see annex) for the draft advocacy proposal (both the written version as well as the verbal presentation to be made the following day).

**Summary of Reporting-Back Session after the Field Visit**

**Group 1 went to Bangladesh Shishu Academy and used a checklist for evaluating the early childhood programme at the government-run school.**

The group observed the physical setting and environment of the school and how the kids were engaged with one another and with teachers. There were two classes for 3-4 and 5-6 year-olds who go to school in the morning for about 2.5 hours during the week. The classes had about 22 students each.

In their “reporting-back” session, the group noted that the rooms were well-lit but one of the rooms were used for multiple purposes (it was used as an ECD classroom in the morning and in the afternoon it was used for something else) so this was a challenge (because there was nothing the children could relate to in the room as everything is packed up after the classes are over). The group also felt that the rooms were quite bare and had no furniture although there were mats. Children were able to run around during free play and each corner had different play materials (coloring books, dolls, picture books, etc). It was observed that children interacted with the teachers without fear and with one another. It was also noted in this session that teachers were responsive to questions and although parents weren’t usually in the classrooms normally, there were parents that day who observed the teacher in the classroom. The group learned that parents felt more encouraged because it allowed them to have some free time from the children to attend to work or do other things.
The group felt that safety was a concern as there was only one teacher and no other assistants were there.

An important point was made about how easy it is to criticize schools during field visits. The facilitator and other resource persons pointed out that it is important that participants try to observe and respect the people who are trying to run the place as best as they can with low salaries, limited resources, and high expectations from all around. It is important to have an attitude of programme learners and not programme evaluators.

**Group 2 Conducted a focus group interview with staff members at a BRAC training center and two early childhood centers**

The group conducted interviews with five teachers and two supervisors working in BRAC.

After the interview, participants felt that there needs to be more comprehensive pre-service training for teachers. They noted that it would be good if the government can step in and help improve the system and that the services were good in preparing children for primary schools. They observed that children are very interactive and happy and parents looked forward to sending their children to the center, there were no dropouts. Participants noted that teachers were selected from the local communities.

Participants also observed that health has been taken into consideration at the ECD centers and teachers advise parents for regular health checkups, and also noted that children were provided training in hygiene and cleanliness and centers were disinfected at the time of setup. However, they observed that there were no medical kits in the centers. They pointed out that the field visit was very useful and that children were important sources of information. They emphasized that data can become richer with this kind of qualitative, anecdotal information.

**Group 3 Visited Save the Children ECD centers and used the participant observation protocol**

The group reported back and said the field visit was a meaningful experience and that it was satisfying to learn of a method that can give more insight than from just reading a document about the centers. Furthermore, they felt that it was a good experience to be a silent observer as it allowed them to look into things that they may have missed otherwise if they were interviewing people.

A briefing was given when they arrived at the ECD centers, which was useful in giving them a bird’s eye view on school learning for disadvantaged groups in the area. This group saw two centers, one was home-based and another school-based. The objective was to prepare the students for smooth transition to primary school. Having the sheet with the participant observation protocol available made it easier as they knew what to focus on and what to look for.
In the home-based center, there were 17 students, 12 girls and 5 boys, while the school-based had 22 children. Both centers had the same programmes but at different times (drawing, learning alphabets, playing matching cards and blocks).

The group noted that there was a slight difference in infrastructure for home and school-based centers. The home was provided and set-up by the community; the group observed that the centers had small rooms and no ventilation. However, they observed that the teacher had arranged everything nicely and had utilized every inch of the room properly, there was even a sand pit in the room. The group as a whole felt that despite the number of children in the small room, the teacher was very skilled in interacting with the children; she was responsive, praised the children, spoke softly, made eye contact and encouraged children to praise one another. There were plenty of school materials.

However, the group felt that sanitation around the centers could have been better. 16 sessions on sanitation and health were taught to parents annually. The group also felt that skills of workers needs to be improved and salaries higher.

**Group 4 Interviewed the Programme Unit Manager at Plan Bangladesh**

The group added some new questions to the list of questions they already had. In the interview, participants found that investment in early childhood is still an issue and that children were scared to go to primary school because they found the school environment to be threatening and unfriendly. The Programme Unit Manager emphasized that there needs to be a programme that encourages going to school without fear. The interview pointed to the idea that quality of education was a major concern. While Plan Bangladesh has been organizing learning camps to help improve the quality of teachers, he was concerned that public school teachers felt that this was more work for them. He reiterated that preschools are essential for preparing the child for primary schools (transition).

Some important points from the field visits:

- Overlapping of methodologies is desirable, it’s not necessary to just stick to one methodology when going on field visits.
- Many participants expressed the idea that quality of school curriculum and teachers seem to be a huge concern in several countries. All the teachers seem to have a maximum of 15 days training, which is not enough. There needs to be more pre-service or in-service training. People should advocate for more teacher training because the foundation is laid by the teachers who are the ones in the end teaching the children.
- The Bangladeshi government is coming up with new courses to train the trainers. The government is establishing a training center. It is still important to convince and advocate to the government how important ECD is.
Day 4: Preparing and Presenting Draft Advocacy Proposal: Communicating Evidence-Based Advocacy Messages

Objective: Develop and present draft advocacy proposal

Expected Outputs:
1. Complete “Content of Messages” and “Communication Strategies for Messages”
2. Firm up list of multi-sectoral advocacy team
3. Present the DAP in a “role play” situation to potential “policy makers” for decision-making (using ALL sources of evidence discussed and identified thus far in workshop, including site visits)

In the initial overview session, country teams reported back on how they have integrated quantitative and qualitative data into their DAP. Bangladesh reported that overall, the team had enough quantitative information. In the past four years they have developed an early learning environment weighting scale and are trying to make the child environment friendlier in schools.

Nepal reported that the team has some data on the completion rate of children’s cohort who have ECD experience in primary school – retention rate. They feel that if the school has sufficient quality materials for learning, the money should be invested in teacher training.

Afghanistan expressed concern at the fact they have very low numbers of female teachers which affects the numbers of girls attending schools because parents don’t want to send their daughters to school with no female teachers. There needs to be strong advocacy for female teachers in pre-schools and invest more in quality teachers.

In Sri Lanka, the team reported that the Ministry is doing a full ECCD survey on teachers, facilities, health and other areas related to ECCD. They will be incorporating the different methodologies learned in this workshop (focus group discussion, etc) into the study.

Bhutan reported that the team has data on the number of students in day care and community learning centers. In terms of gathering qualitative data, at the end of the year they do an evaluation of the community centers to see how well they are running and how the centers have impacted the district. They are looking to expand the centers in communities based on data of children who have excelled. Bhutan is interested in using the different methodologies in conducting field visits to better understand classroom management, children’s feelings and psychology.

The India team reported that it has identified sets of existent data and would like to use these in support of their advocacy messages such as brain development, correlation of ECCE experience and success of children at primary level, expenditure of ECCE as a portion of education. They also have different case studies and best practices available to tap into. They think conducting a situational analysis would be good.
In Maldives, the team reported that there is a lack of data and trained teachers. They would like to do a situational analysis first to determine where best to put the money. Then they would look at best practices and focus on scaling up these activities if they work.

The Pakistan team reported that the country has a huge number of public and private ECD schools but the team is not sure if the data is complete as not all privately run schools report to the government. Since some schools are not formally recognized, they feel that the government should do something to institutionalize such initiatives. They mentioned that a lot of the schools have good models and are driven by community programmes. They acknowledge that the private sector is a powerful vehicle and the government should commit to institutionalizing this, provide accountability for the schools and monitor them. They should encourage private schools to register and find some means to support them also through teacher training or curriculum development as some schools may feel threatened with the monitoring and teacher qualification requirements imposed on them. This would help ensure quality and standards in the programmes.

Bangladesh raised an important point in that when developing standards or ECD policies in the country, the country context (cultural heritage and values) was the most important factor when they were developing Early Learning and development Standards (ELDS). One team member reiterated that some traditional practices may be harmful, for example breastfeeding was never an agenda for Bangladesh until the issue of using powdered milk became an issue. Again, it was emphasized that the process of deciding what is positive or negative can be determined through systematic methodologies.

Following this overview, on the final day of the workshop, participants returned to their country teams to put together their draft advocacy proposals in addition to a brief presentation. Participants spent the first half of the day preparing their proposals and presentations. They organized and integrated all the data they had identified from UIS, SOWC, EFAInfo, the ARNEC website database, and other databases from their own countries. They also used their experience on the field trip, to add qualitative data into their draft proposals. These proposals were prepared in great detail, but their presentations of the proposals had to be succinct and precise.

In the latter part of the day, presentations of the advocacy proposals were conducted in the form of role play. This session was facilitated by Ms. Maki Hayashikawa, and during the session, each team presented their proposal to a peer country team which acted as “mock high level ministries” that were reviewing the advocacy proposals. The country teams had to make their case for advancing early childhood priority initiatives, using their presentations, in 5 minutes. The mock ministers could be from the departments of Finance, Education, Women and Children’s Affairs, or the Prime Minister. The presentations of each country reflected the data available for those countries for early childhood, and the priority area that they wanted to advocate for. The exercise was rated by participants as being particularly useful in that it honed the country team’s abilities to collect, organize and integrate evidence, incorporate this
into a presentation, and above all, provided practice in actually presenting and making the case for early childhood to different sectoral audiences.

The workshop was wrapped up by facilitator Ms. Chemba Raghavan, who stressed to the participants the importance of following through with the advocacy proposals outlined in the workshop, and effectively pursuing their learnings when they go back to their countries. The participants assured the organizers that the experience was a fruitful one, and that they would use their new learnings productively.

**Overall Summary of Workshop**

The Workshop had as its specific objectives that all participants would:

- Be broadly familiar with using quantitative and qualitative international data sources for advocacy in early childhood
- Have completed a Draft Advocacy Proposal (DAP) that will start with the 3 key advocacy messages, identify and collate possible data sources and gaps, and will outline a strategic plan of action to promote these 3 key messages (e.g., outreach efforts, data hubs, conferences, media-based dissemination of messages, tapping into multiple stakeholders and national resources).
- Have formed a multi-sectoral team of partners, with whom regular sustained advocacy initiatives can be pursued.

While outcomes 1 and 2 were clearly achievable (and were achieved in this workshop), outcome 3 is more of an ongoing initiative, to be established and sustained by the country teams. It is our hope that the evidence obtained, and the integrated Draft Advocacy Proposal that was developed, will be put to use by the country teams in their ongoing efforts for advocacy.

At the time of finalizing this report, the Bhutan team indicated that they would present/incorporate the learnings from the workshop and the DAP in a report to a high-level Ministerial meeting immediately following the workshop. Sri Lanka indicated that the team would actively incorporate several aspects of the report in its ongoing policy initiatives, and will also share the outcome with the “to-be-newly-launched” ECCD network on Nov 20, 2009. The Nepal team plans to present these to the Inter-Agency Working group on ECD. Afghanistan has already indicated interest in using some of these materials for curriculum development and teacher training. Since Bangladesh has already developed a policy framework for ECD, they now hope to use these learnings in the Implementation part of the policy initiatives. India, Maldives and Pakistan also pledged to use some of this information in their ongoing efforts for policy development.

Overall, workshop feedback forms and verbal reports in the formal feedback session at the end, as well as informal conversations with participants, in addition to “thank-you” email
correspondence with participants after the workshop, indicate that the workshop was considered to be a valuable learning experience by participants in general, and the content and organization of the workshop was found to be very useful and timely. This is heartening because all the country teams that participated were in different stages of the policy development process, therefore the material and organization had to span the range from basic to advanced issues and methods in the advocacy process.

**Summary of Feedback from Participants**

Overall, the workshop was well-received by the participants. Participants found the content and organization to be timely and useful in advancing their own advocacy initiatives. In general, comments ranged from “the workshop content was very good” to “Content is relevant for the country’s current requirements. Format of the workshop was tight but went on smoothly. Facilitators and resource persons conducted the workshop very tactfully and sucessfully”.

With regards to the upcoming World Congress in Moscow in 2010, some participants expressed interest in participating (e.g. authoring a country report with a colleague, or compiling a report or a model to advance advocacy initiatives). Some participants felt that it would be beneficial if some kind of repository of resources, noteworthy practices, and software from member countries is made accessible to all the participants, with a platform to share experiences. There was also a request to coordinate expert help in the form of continuing contact with facilitators and resource persons.

However, as is the case with every event or initiative, each experience is a learning experience and there are some key lessons and “messages” for all stakeholders from this workshop as well. Three major suggestions that emerged from participants’ feedback included the following:

1. **Streamlining initial contact and communications prior to the workshop.** A big problem that was noted by several country teams was the delay in obtaining invitations for the workshop in timely fashion. In many cases, multi-sectoral teams (which were the initial target audience for the workshop) could not be present. In some cases only Ministry officials were present (and sometimes not the nodal ministries), and in others, only NGO representatives were present, and no relevant Ministry persons. A major recommendation was to start the communication process 6-8 weeks prior to a workshop of this nature.

2. **Allocating more time to hands-on quantitative exercises:** While participants recognized that with a substantive opening ceremony, and a full-day allocated to a field trip and qualitative methods, they still felt that with the introduction of new databases such as EFAInfo, more time was definitely needed for hands-on workshop. A major recommendation in this regard is to conduct a workshop of this nature in a 5-day format.
(3) There was a concern from one team that (a) more resource persons were expected and (b) the quality of some presentations was “basic”. With regards to point (a), perhaps in the future, several resource persons can be contacted in timely fashion to ensure diversity of perspectives. With regards to point (b), while this criticism has merit, it should be noted that not all countries were at the same level of policy advancement as others. In fact, there was a wide variation in level of advocacy and policy initiatives in the eight countries in the region. It is noteworthy that most of the teams, however, expressed the view that the presentations were relevant, sound, engaging and more importantly, useful to their advocacy work.

Overall, it appears that the South Asian Regional Workshop brought the eight SAARC countries one step closer in moving from the commitments they had made in the Regional Forum, to translating these commitments into action. It appears that the idea of doing evidence-based advocacy to further strengthen initiatives to advance early childhood in the region was warmly received by all participants.