Chapter VI

6. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

6.1 The DFA goal for ECCE is “expanding and improving early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children” (Goal 1). ECCE covers the children of 3-5 years’ age and the goal emphasizes the meeting of care and educational needs of children, particularly those on the social and economic margin of the society.

A. Situation Review

6.2 NPA I proposed an ECED program, covering the 4-5 years old children. No structured ECED activities existed earlier for pre-school age (< 6 years) children except “Baby Classes” in a good number of primary schools for 4-5 year old children who accompanied their older siblings to school. An assigned teacher managed the class and tried to initiate the children to primary education, without a formal structure. The number of such children attending playgroup and nursery classes in kindergartens was very limited.

6.3 In context of prevailing vacuum and pending further experience, NPA I proposed to limit initial ECED programs to (a) restructuring and redirecting the existing pre-school educational facilities, (b) formalizing the ‘baby classes’ in primary schools by phases, (c) promoting and supporting wider non-formal, family and community-based initiatives, and (d) developing the concept and suitable curriculum, educational toys and learning materials; special teacher training arrangements, advocacy, parental education on physical and nutritional needs of children and undertaking research and pilot projects.

6.4 The “bulk of the work of childhood care and development” was expected to “take place in the families and within the communities, through private initiatives” with “government support to non-government and community initiatives and material supports where feasible”. The NPA I proposed to formalize the ‘baby classes’ in two phases, covering 30 percent of the primary schools by 1995 and 50 percent, by 2000. This would have covered 2.34 million of 4 -5 age group children by 1995 and 4.20 million by 2000 (of a total of 8.40 million). The government was also to have provided substantial support for classroom construction, teachers, implements, research, etc to feeder school programs at community level.

6.4 The Integrated Non-formal Education Program (1991-97) of the government had the only ECED program component with a target of 75,000 4-5 year old children. The project covered 63,000 children by 1997 (DNFE, 2000). Primary Education Development Program (PEDP I, FY1997-2003) proposed to establish ‘baby classes’ in 60,000 schools (GPS and RNGPS) and allocated funds for one million books, display and play equipments per year. Though no target figure was given, it would have covered 2.4 million children, counting at 40 per school. The ‘baby class’ was, however, treated more as an “activity for familiarizing children with schooling” but “not oriented toward ‘child development’. The ‘baby classes’ in primary schools were not formalized, no structured curriculum was prepared or introduced

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6 The terms ECCD, ECE, ECED and ECCED are often used interchangeably while referring to the concept and activities meant for care and development of pre-school age children: the World Declaration on EFA (1990) refers to “early childhood care and initial education” (Article 5); the EFA Framework for Action, endorsed by WCEFA (1990) speaks of “early childhood care and developmental (ECCD) activities”, covering 4-5 year old children. NPA I used the terms ECED and ECCED interchangeably. DFA (2000) uses the term Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), covering programs for 3-5 year old children.
and no separate teachers appointed or trained; and no clear record has been maintained about the number of children attending.

6.5 The other proposed goals were not pursued either; private community initiative was negligible. The National Committee on Primary Education (NCPE)\textsuperscript{7} recognized the importance of pre-school education but felt that in view of the shortage of teachers and physical facilities in schools and severe resource constraints such a program was not feasible; it proposed instead to treat the first six months of Grade I of primary schools as preparatory education, thereby obviating the need for separate pre-school program or baby class. However, the ‘baby classes’ continue to run as before and, therefore, need proper organization and formalization.

6.6 A sample survey estimated the 3-5 year age group children at 11.52 million (BBS-UNICEF, 1999), with a gross enrolment of 2.6 million children in pre-school education and a gender parity index of 1.1. The net estimated figure was 9.356 million children in 2000. Information gathered in 2001 shows a total of 1.864 million 4-5 year old children benefited from different ECED programs: 1.05 million in ‘baby class’ in 42,000 GPS and RNGPS, 484,000 in kindergartens, 242,000 in madrasahs, 46,875 in ‘Para’ (neighborhood) centers for ethnic minorities in Chittagong Hill Tracts and Rajshahi, 33,800 in non-government institutions, and 7,500 in orphanages, Day Care Centers and pre-school centers run under the Ministries of Social Welfare and Women and Children Affairs. Of the 4.54 million new entrants in primary Grade I in 1999 52 percent had attended pre-school program. It is claimed that ECED/baby class’ children do better in primary schools. A PMED circular in 1999 encouraged GPSs to organize and continue the ‘baby classes’ but made no provision for appointment of teachers, or a structured curriculum. However, NCTB has recently developed a new Primer for ‘baby classes’ in primary schools (to replace the 1981 version).

B. Rationale for ECCE program

6.7 The existing ECCE programs are focused basically on pre-school education or literacy. The ‘care’ element in such programs is negligible. Childcare includes food/nutrition, health care, affection, interaction and stimulation, a sense of security provided through consistency and predictability of behavior of the caregiver and play, allowing exploration and discovery. Child development indicates gradual acquisition of behaviors, from simple to complex, in terms of moving, feeling, thinking, and relating to others, which occurs continually in interaction. When it comes to development, every child is unique. Normally, the child spends the first two years of life with parents and the family, expanding to the pre-school during the next 3-5 years and from 6+ years at home, school and the community. The child’s brain develops fully by age two and needs stimulation through appropriate interaction and experience for all round development. The early childhood care and education cuts across a number development fields such as nutrition, health, education, social services, women and children affairs, poverty alleviation, etc. No one field can fully meet all early childhood needs of children. The figure 6.7 below shows the care and development needs of the child to grow into an integrated whole person:

\textsuperscript{7} PMED: Report of the National Committee on Primary Education, 1997
6.8 **Issues and concerns:** The existing socio-economic and cultural context of the country presents a number of issues and concerns that impact negatively upon the goal of Education for All. The vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy adversely affects the children of ECCE and primary age group, especially the vulnerable and disadvantaged families, meaning the illiterate and poor, mostly rural but also includes urban slum dwellers, children with special needs (with different types of disabilities), children in difficult circumstances (street children and such others) and of ethnic minority. The issues are:

- The children of illiterate poor enter primary school without any academic preparation required for receiving education and thus tend to lag behind;

- Due to poverty of their parents, the children often remain hungry, suffer from acute malnutrition, fall sick frequently and hence become inattentive, resulting in poor performance at school, as they get no help from their illiterate parents at home;

- The disadvantaged children generally have low achievement rate and lose interest in academic activities of schools, leading to failures and dropout; and

- As they become adults with low literacy level they are unable to get better-paid jobs. As a result, their poor income cannot afford good food, good education, and medical treatment for their children. The vicious cycle continues, poverty of the parents is visited upon the children, particularly the girls, religious minority, ethnic minority groups and children with different types of disabilities.

6.9 **Possible impact of interventions:** Research evidence suggests that early intervention programs of care and education have long-term positive impact such as:

- **Economic benefits:** investment in child development improves school performance and ultimately helps increased production. ECCE helps reduce school dropout and repetition rates and thereby ensures cost savings through improved efficiency of primary schooling. It also has an impact on health care costs and increasing parental productivity;

- **Effectiveness of programs:** The effectiveness of other programs, such as, health, nutrition, education and women’s programs can be improved through their working together with child education.
development programs which modifies the goals of all programs into more relevant, meaningful and result-oriented;

- **Consensus and solidarity:** Children provide a focus for social and political actions that build consensus and solidarity within communities. In fact, less debate happens on children's issues.

- **Moral and social values:** Desirable moral and social values can be better preserved through their cultivation beginning with the young children as they would learn to practice and pass such values to their progeny;

- **Social justice:** School preparedness program for disadvantaged children can provide them a "fair start" or "head start" to positively change the effects of inequalities arising from poverty and gender, disability, religion or ethnic identity. Studies from many cultures show that girls’ participating in ECCE programs are more likely to continue their education for longer periods, gradually changing expectations from their parents’ and their own perspectives; and

- **Needs of changing societies:** The increasing survival rate of vulnerable children, changing family structures: from joint family to single family, single parent family, urban-rural migration, increasing number of women joining labour force, etc. require increased attention to early childhood care and development initiatives.

- Besides, a high quality ECCE program that really builds children's self-esteem, curiosity, and love of learning will have greater impact beyond the pre-school years and indeed, throughout their lives – resulting in outcomes like less crime, less divorce, and high income among participants, compared to their peers who did not participate in such program.

6.10 Fifty percent of the people live below the poverty level; children of these families suffer various problems of malnutrition, diseases, and lack of a conducive family environment for learning, which is likely to affect their learning capability unless necessary interventions are made before they enroll in school, if at all, as otherwise their whole life will be at risk, apart from being deprived of their fundamental right to quality education. The government will, therefore, review the situation and take a policy decision to make ECCE an integral part of both the formal Primary Education and Non-formal Education.

C. **Program proposals**

6.11 The need for pre-school education/ECCE is well recognized, both at national and international levels. PEDP I (1997-2003) made allocation for books and toys for ‘baby classes’ in primary schools, so has the draft PEDP II (2003-2008). The challenge is to give ‘baby classes’ a formal structure, develop an appropriate curriculum, appoint a trained teacher for the ECCE class, develop and include a module in the C-in-Ed course and sub-cluster training, provide adequate and properly designed physical facilities in school, involve the community in the organization and operation of the program (SMC is already involved), and implement the program in phases to gain experience and overcome the resource constraints.

6.12 In view of their experience the primary schools should be able to take the 5-year old children and manage a formalized ‘baby class’. To take in the 3-4 year old children will over-extend their capacity and purpose. The ECCE program will, therefore, be implemented in two tracks: in the form of
the ‘baby’ or pre-school class in primary schools for 5-year old children and the ‘family and community’-based program under the non-formal sub-stream for 3-5 year olds of marginal families.

6.13 The ECCE program will cover all 3-5 year old children under both the formal and non-formal education sub-streams in phases. In the formal education sub-sector it will run as an integral part of all government, community, satellite and non-government primary schools. It will also encourage and promote expansion of programs of Shishu Academy pre-schools, schools for ethnic minorities and disabled children, government children homes and Mosque-based Maktab and Forkania madrasahs to bring them under the cover of ECCE. In the non-formal sub-sector the families living below the poverty line will be empowered through training of parents and caregivers and programs organized at community level such as Daycare centers for children of working mothers and others in cooperation with the owners of employing enterprises, relevant ministries and civil society organizations and NGOs.

6.14 Centers like Shishu Bikash Kendra of Shishu Hospital, Kalyani Schools (of Bangladesh Protibondi Foundation), and other schools for children with hearing, vision, speech, physical disabilities and low cognitive abilities may experiment with the ECCE program, especially tailored for children with different types of disabilities to overcome their deficiencies and meet their developmental and education needs as well as universal needs of young children, i.e., survival, love and affection, security and participation.

6.15 The programs in both the formal and non-formal sub-sectors will have to link up with health, nutrition, water and sanitation and poverty reduction programs of the government and NGOs, as well as engage in socialization and initiation to education. The target population for both the programs, with projection is shown in the table 6.15.1 below. It adds a 5% for growth and 5% for disadvantaged children to be covered by the two programs. The distribution by formal and non-formal sub-sectors is shown in Table 6.15.2 (the figures are in millions):

Table 6.15.1: Total ECCE program target population by benchmark and Projection by phases of the NPA II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Benchmark 2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>9356</td>
<td>9420</td>
<td>8728</td>
<td>9231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added 10%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10439</td>
<td>9601</td>
<td>10154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.15.2: Distribution of projected ECCE target population by sub-sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-sector</th>
<th>Benchmark 2000</th>
<th>Program Projection and distribution by selected years (in 000s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10,292</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Primary Education</td>
<td>1566</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Formal Education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,292</td>
<td>3132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. Strategies and Indicators

6.16 The strategies will include (a) attending to the needs of children through childcare centers, with health, nutrition and other services brought to the center or providing access to
such services, (b) educating parents and other caregivers to enrich their understanding and practice of care-giving, both at family and community levels, (c) fostering community development activities designed to enhance the environment of the young child in cooperation and coordination with the Ministries of Women and Children Affairs, Social Welfare, Local Government, others; NGOs and private sector. NGOs, particularly in the NFE sub-sector will be the cooperating agencies. The formal school will add an appropriately designed classroom with adequate space, fully equipped with play and learning materials, and a trained teacher. The NFE part will organize ECCE centers in various forms, equip them with necessary materials, a Facilitator, and possibly one or two professionals of other relevant disciplines, such as child psychology.

6.17 The indicators will include the rate of transfer and enrollment in formal schools after completion of ECCE, performance in formal schools and continuing beyond primary level schools or institutions (determined through tracer studies).

E. Governance – Organization and Management of Implementation

6.18 DPE will implement the pre-school program and DNFE, with the experience of working with NGOs, will implement the ‘family and community-based’ part through NGOs and Community-Based Organizations (CBOS), dealing basically with the vulnerable and the disadvantaged children. Thus, both DPE and DNFE will each establish an ECCE unit and maintain liaison with Children units in other Ministries/Departments, particularly those of Women and Children Affairs, Social Welfare and Local Government and Rural Development and NGOs and carry out all relevant activities from conceptualization, planning, implementation, monitoring, supervision, coordination and evaluation. DPE and DNFE will coordinate the transfer and enrollment of the 5-year olds from NFE stream in primary schools. MPME will facilitate coordination with other ministries for nutrition, health and other aspects of the program.

F. Complementary activities for all stakeholders: Social Mobilization and Advocacy

6.19 This has to be pursued vigorously to create awareness about the importance and benefits of ECCE at all levels, in the government, private and NGO sectors as well as the broader civil society, both for support and mobilizing resources.

G. Program Activities

6.20 To implement ECCE in both the formal and non-formal sub-sectors the following activities will be carried out:

(a) The formal primary education sub-sector:

(i) Give formal recognition to the ‘baby class’ as the ‘pre-primary class’ as an additional class in all primary schools by phases, taking only the 5-year old children (depending on number of children available for enrollment, generally 40 per class or less);

(ii) Establish an ECCE unit or cell in DPE to develop and manage the program, and coordinate/liaise with other Ministries/Departments of the government, civil society/NGOs and other relevant/concerned stakeholders as appropriate;
(iii) Develop appropriate and use curriculum/syllabus and learning materials for 5-year old children, covering one academic year, preparatory to enrollment in Grade I of primary school;

(iv) Develop/select learning toy and play materials appropriate for 5-year old children and ensure adequate supply of the same in light of number of schools selected and children enrolled by phases and individual years;

(v) Develop and implement an ECCE module for training of teachers at PTIs and train one Instructor in each PTI to conduct/facilitate training of teachers, including parenting training of parents;

(vi) Develop and use an ECCE module in sub-cluster training at school regions and/or URCs for the ECCE teachers;

(vii) Involve SMC and local community in the planning and managing of the pre-school class and parenting training program, and identification and procurement of relevant learning and play materials;

(viii) Assign one teacher in each project school for managing/facilitating the pre-primary class, maintaining contact with parents and involving them in the planning and managing of programs and conducting parenting training of parents once every week or as convenient for the parents for empowering them;

(ix) Ensure access of pre-primary class children to nutrition, health (screening of health, eyesight, arm circumference, etc and remedial action if warranted) and other services for all-round development of children; and

(x) Take all appropriate measures to ensure retention and transition of children to primary Grade I.

(b) The non-formal education sub-sector:

(i) Make ECCE a component of the NFE program, covering the 3-5 year old children of marginal families and other disadvantaged children;

(ii) Establish an ECCE unit or cell in DNFE to develop and manage the program, and coordinate/liaise with other Ministries/Departments of the government, civil society/NGOs and all relevant/concerned stakeholders as appropriate;

(iii) Develop appropriate curriculum/syllabus and learning materials for 3-5 year old children, covering a three-year program, gradually preparing and leading to enrollment of the children in Grade I of primary schools at the end of the course; children reaching age 5 may also be selectively transferred to pre-school classes of primary schools, if seats are available;

(iv) Develop/select learning toy and play materials appropriate for 3-5 year old children in a graded manner and ensure adequate supply of the same in light of number of ECCE centers planned and established by phases and annual plans;
(v) Coordinate with the civil society, the community through utilizing the services of NGOs in establishing programs both at the family and community levels

- Through home visits and counseling the parents of ECCE age group children;
- Establishing ECCE centers at community level which could carry the names such as ECCE center, Daycare Centers or Child Care Centers, and provide ECCE services for children and parenting training and help the parents in other organizational matters;
- Devising appropriate management system for engagement of institutions in ECCE programs;

(vi) The implementing NGOs, with the support of DNFE, will arrange with relevant Departments of Government to bring services to the centers such as nutrition (courtesy of Bangladesh Integrated Nutrition Project – BINP), health checks and other support services or ensure access of children to such services, both in the government and NGO sectors;

(vii) The Facilitators for the centers should be females and selected carefully having adequate qualification, aptitude for working with children and inspiring them, where necessary the implementing NGOs can appoint competent professionals, such as child psychologists and others depending on the needs and types of programs;

(viii) DNFE would also work with and provide necessary support to NGOs working with or managing centers/institutions for children with special needs, in difficult circumstances and of ethnic origin; where the need exists but no agency works to deal with such needs DNFE will promote/encourage formation of appropriate agencies for the purpose; and

(ix) Encourage industrial establishments, particularly where large number of women is employed, to establish and contribute towards establishing suitable day care facilities for the children of working mothers.

(c) **Common activities for both sub-sectors**

(i) Coordinate action in developing a database, through the common household survey (in cooperation with BBS) proposed in the primary education chapter, on 3-5 year old children and update it every year/or once every three years

(ii) Develop necessary materials for creating awareness and promoting advocacy about the need and benefits of ECCE; use these materials and other methods jointly or in close coordination between DPE and DNFE as well as the NGOs, broader civil society for raising awareness and support for ECCE;

(iii) Arrange effective monitoring and supervision of the programs in both tracks by the respective Directorate in conjunction with the local Center Committee to be established;
(iv) Make periodical assessment of the performance of the ECCE children in primary level institutions;

(v) Promote appropriate changes in the educational systems at kindergartens, maktabs, feeder schools, orphanages, etc. to make them more relevant to the needs of children in context of Bangladesh society;

(vi) Conduct studies, research, undertake experimental and pilot projects, continuing evaluation of ongoing programs for making the programs more effective through improved management;

(vii) Expand the role and function of Shishu Academy to provide meaningful support to ECCE programs and its own program;

(viii) Mobilize community support and encourage NGOs and other civil society organizations to undertake ECCE programs.