



National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The national policy on Early Childhood Care and Development has been developed with the participation and collaboration of all stakeholders of ECCD. Representatives from the various government, non government and private agencies and individuals have contributed in bringing this document to its present shape. A complete list of participants in the policy development process can be found in APPENDIX C.

1.0. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Bhutan's developmental philosophy of Gross National Happiness underlines the need to- *"Maximize the happiness of all Bhutanese and to enable them to achieve their full and innate potential as human being"*. (Bhutan Vision 2020; Planning Commission, RGOB, 1999, p.47)

This development philosophy provides the Bhutanese context for the establishment of a National Policy on ECCD. The National Policy is directed towards providing quality early childhood care and development services to children from birth to age of eight years. It is integral to the strategy of human resource development, to nurture a future community of Bhutanese to become responsible and productive members of society.

In formulating the National Policy due cognizance has been given to:

- The importance of early stimulation and education for young children as envisaged in the 'Education Sector Strategy 2020' of the Ministry of Education which states that:

"All children aged 0-5 years will be supported to enhance their intellectual, emotional and physical development through a programme that enables them to grow in their familiar and natural environment. Priority will be given to home- and family-based approaches, with additional inputs from institutional structures and options, which recognise the increasing diversity of life-styles and settings in which children are now being raised".

- The critical link between the early childhood care and development services and primary education as highlighted by the Education without Compromise report (2008), which concludes that ECCD programmes and services are necessary for Bhutan to achieve the universalization of primary education by 2015.
- The RGOB's endorsement of Education for All Dakar Framework for Action 2020 calling for *"expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially, for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children"*, and the ratification of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1991).

The country's rapid socio-economic transformation has put a strain on the traditional child-rearing practices which was based on extended family support system. There is also an increase in mothers working outside the home.

The country has a young population, with almost 30% under the age of ten (PHCB 2005). Typically, most of these children have or will start school without the benefit of services designed to foster their general well-being and enhance school readiness. It is the absence of such services, according to the Education without Compromise report (2008), that has greatly contributed to the persistently high number of children who must repeat grades and a pattern of continuing low test scores in primary schools. In this context, the formulation of the National Policy has emerged as a priority in the country's strategy for human resource development.

The National Policy charts out guidelines and intervention towards creating the provisions for quality ECCD programmes and services in the country.

2.0. NATURE OF ECCD

2.1. Early Childhood Care and Development refers to programmes and services that are concerned with the physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of children from conception to eight years, as well as supports that parents need to provide nurturing care.

2.2. The time from conception to birth is important because of the vitally important role the environment of the mother's womb plays in establishing the first phase of the child's development. The environment provided in the mother's womb shapes the formation of the foetus and how it starts shaping itself.

2.3. The first three years of life of the child has been proven through numerous studies and research as the most critical period of development. This is the time when over 80% of the brain cell connections are formed and brain development is at its peak. The environment that the child encounters during the period not only lays the foundation for later life, but also determines the physical construction of the brain. It is critical that the child receives holistic and responsive care during the period for her/him to achieve the full potential for development.

2.4. The years between three and five are also important in the development of the child. This is the period when early socialization starts for the child and contact with the outside world, beyond the home starts and foundation for learning in all aspects is laid.

2.5. The age range from six to eight is consistent with developmental psychology's view of the continuum of children's development. Children below the age of eight learn best when they have objects they can manipulate, have opportunities to explore, experiment and learn from trial-and-error within a safe and stimulating environment. At about the age of nine they begin to view the world differently, when they can manipulate ideas and learn concepts mentally and are less dependent on objects.

2.6. There are three main strategies conceived for Early Childhood Care and Development programming. The first is through family-based approaches which aim to enhance and promote sound parenting and care practices for young children in the home environment.

The second is through the use of ECCD centres that aim to provide early learning opportunities, primarily using private operators, work places, NGOs and Community based initiatives.

The third is through the enhancement of the knowledge and capacity of primary school teachers and improvement of teaching - learning practices and environments in schools.

3.0. SCOPE OF ECCD

3.1. The scope of the Early Childhood Care and Development programme are numerous and interrelated. A child's ability to think, form relationships, and live up to his or her full potential is directly related to the synergistic effect of good health, good nutrition, and appropriate stimulation and interaction with others.

3.2. A large body of research has proven the importance of early brain development and the need for good health, nutrition and stimulation. Children who have had good holistic care and opportunities for early learning during the early childhood period tend to be more successful in school, are more competent socially and emotionally and show higher verbal and intellectual development than children who have not had such opportunities. Ensuring healthy child development, therefore, is an investment in a country's future workforce and capacity to thrive economically and as a happy and harmonious society.

3.3. Early Childhood Care and Development is an integral part of education and represents the first essential step in achieving the goals of basic education and any efforts towards enhancing the quality of education in general. The learning capacity and value orientations of children are largely determined by the time the child reaches the age of formal schooling. Research evidence suggests that early childhood programmes and services can make a difference to critically important issues such as learning under-achievement, grade repetition, school dropouts, drug abuse and rising crime among young people.

4.0. AIMS

To ensure that children, from birth to the age of 8 years, are healthy, happy and ready to learn, the Early Childhood Care and Development policy framework aims to:

- 4.1. Provide the best start in life for children, including children with special needs, by ensuring access to quality early childhood care and education.
- 4.2. Promote and strengthen comprehensive, cost effective and sustainable Early Childhood Care and Development programmes through Public, Private and Community Participation.
- 4.3. Promote the importance of parents / caregivers and the community in the development of children in a holistic manner by integrating Early Childhood Care and Development services into the existing family institutions and communities.
- 4.4. Ensure provision of adequate resources for supporting Early Childhood Care and Development programmes and services.

5.0. ECCD POLICY FRAMEWORK

5.1. Early Childhood Care and Development shall encompass programmes and services for children birth to age 8 and their families. This age range includes the situation for 3 subgroups of children:

5.1.1. Home based parenting education and interventions through mass media and existing services such as health outreach services, non formal education programmes and community based ECCD centres to cater to children age 0-2 years to strengthen provisions of health, hygiene and nutrition and promotion of sound parenting practices.

5.1.2. Early learning opportunities to cater to children age 3-5 years through Programmes of 'care' and opportunity for early stimulation and education in private, work place and community based ECCD centres.

5.1.3. Interventions in schools to improve teaching-learning practices, particularly in classes PP-II to help children (age 6 to 8) maintain and increase the gain they made through ECCD programmes and services and also enhance the readiness of schools for children.

5.2. Early Childhood Care and Development programmes/ services in Bhutan shall be based on the principle of developmental appropriateness, contextual relevance and cultural integrity.

5.3. Early Childhood Care and Development programmes and services in Bhutan shall include health and nutrition services, early stimulation and education for young children, and parent education and support.

5.4. The Government shall not provide early childhood care and development facilities as separate institutes below pre-primary level. However, provision shall be made through:

5.4.1. Centres run by private sector. The Ministry of Education shall facilitate establishment and provide technical support for training of Facilitators.

5.4.2. Centres run by corporate bodies, factories and Institutes. The Ministry of Education shall facilitate establishment and provide technical support for the training of Facilitators.

5.4.3. Non-Governmental Organisations. The Ministry of Education shall facilitate establishment and provide technical support for training of teachers (Facilitators).

5.4.4. Community based Early Childhood Development Centres established in existing structures. The Ministry of Education shall provide support for establishment of centres, provision of play and learning materials, Facilitators for the centre and training of Facilitators.

5.4. Recognizing ECCD as an inter-disciplinary field, a multi-sectoral leadership strategy shall be pursued for delivering ECCD services.

5.5. A National Steering Committee composed of relevant stakeholders to address issues concerning ECCD shall be constituted. This committee shall include members from the following agencies:

1. Ministry of Education	Chair
2. The Ministry of Health	Member
3. The Gross National Happiness Commission	Member
4. The Ministry of Finance	Member
5. Royal University of Bhutan	Member
6. National Commission for Women and Children	Member
7. Royal Education Council	Member
8. International NGOs	Member
9. Non-Governmental Organization	Member
10. Private Sector	Member

5.6. Under the National Steering Committee, the ECCD& SEN Division of the MoE shall be a nodal agency for formulating, planning, coordinating, monitoring and supporting ECCD programmes and services in the country.

6.0. STRATEGIES

6.1. Advocacy and social mobilization to improve child care practices and promote the quality of programmes and services.

6.2. Promote and facilitate establishment of public, private and community based childhood care and development centres to provide ECCD services. The 'Operational Guidelines for ECCD Centres' shall be used as the guiding document to ensure minimum standards in all ECCD centres and programmes.

6.3. To ensure provision of quality Early Childhood Care and Development services and programmes, the 'National Early Learning and Development Standards' shall be followed as the guiding document for development of curriculum, parenting education and training modules in all Early Childhood Care and Development services. Hence, all Early Childhood Care and Development services provided by various agencies shall be approved, monitored and regulated by the Ministry of Education of Education to ensure that services and programmes are of high quality and contextually relevant.

6.4. Build capacity of key stakeholders such as parents, Caregivers, ECCD Facilitators, Health Workers, NFE Instructors, Teachers and ECCD Leaders to deliver quality Early Childhood Care and Development services. The Royal University of Bhutan shall devise and provide courses in early childhood development through various modes for ECCD professionals, and also integrate ECCD components and courses in both pre-service and in-service training curricula of education and health professionals to develop expertise in Early Childhood Care and Development.

6.5. Promote collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders of ECCD to enhance effectiveness of programmes and services provided by various stakeholders and also to avert duplications.

6.6. Promote and conduct research on Early Childhood Care and Development practices to assess the effectiveness, relevance and efficiency of various programmes and services.

7. Roles and Responsibilities of Key Stakeholders

The responsibility of providing holistic early childhood care and development programmes for young children and ensuring their optimum development rests with various stakeholders. Recognizing that the fulfillment of children's needs requires inputs from various sectors, the various relevant ministries, agencies and organizations shall have the following roles and responsibilities.

7.1. Ministry of Education

In order to operationalize ECCD plans and strategies, the Ministry of Education shall:

- 7.1.1. Create awareness and educate the population on ECCD.
- 7.1.2. Incorporate and strengthen ECCD components into the NFE curriculum to enhance awareness among NFE learners and out of school youth.
- 7.1.3. Reinforce ECCD through health education in terms of nutrition, health and sanitation by addressing care practices to improve the nutrition and health situations at the household, school and community levels.
- 7.1.4. Sensitize and train primary school principals and teachers on ECCD to enable them to provide developmentally appropriate teaching – learning environments in schools for children aged 6 – 8.
- 7.1.5. Develop standards, guidelines and resource materials for use in all ECCD programmes and centres.
- 7.1.6. Strengthen capacity of all ECCD professionals including NFE Instructors, ECCD Facilitators and teachers.
- 7.1.7. Ensure that all childcare centres are registered and monitored for quality programmes.

7.2. Ministry of Health

The Ministry of Health shall:

- 7.2.1. Continue to provide and strengthen provision of health education and services for families and young children
- 7.2.2. Integrate ECCD interventions for pregnant mothers and children birth to two years of age in the health programmes and services
- 7.2.3. Strengthen capacity of health workers in ECCD
- 7.2.4. Address special needs and health issues of young children
- 7.2.5. Promote/ strengthen nutrition related interventions for young children.

7.3. Ministry of Agriculture

The Ministry of Agriculture shall:

- 7.3.1. Continue its efforts to improve the quality and availability of a wide range of agricultural products at the community level
- 7.3.2. Educate the population on nutrition and healthy food habits.

7.4. Ministry of Labour and Human Resources

The Ministry of Labour and Human Resources shall:

- 7.4.1. Work to ensure that all working women have entitlement to full maternity leave during childbirth
- 7.4.2. Ensure that women workers at the lower rungs of employment are paid minimum wages as per the national labour law.
- 7.4.3. Encourage organizations and agencies to provide facilities such as crèches and nursing intervals in work places for women working away from home in both urban and rural areas

7.5. Gross National Happiness Commission

The GNHC shall:

- 7.5.1. Mobilize and allocate adequate resources for the promotion and expansion of early childhood care and development services and programmes
- 7.5.2. Incorporate ECCD in the policies and plans of the government

7.6. Royal University of Bhutan

The Royal University of Bhutan shall:

- 7.6.1. Integrate, strengthen and/ or review ECCD components in the pre-service curricula of education and health professionals and initiate pre service trainings.
- 7.6.2. Develop in-service training programmes for ECCD professionals and offer professional development courses through various modes.

7.7. National Commission for Women and Children

The National Commission for Women and Children and the Women and Child Protection Unit, RBP shall:

- 7.7.1. Ensure the protection of all children and mothers to ensure that children grow up free from all forms of abuse, exploitation and neglect.
- 7.7.2. Initiate policy advocacy on the care and protection of children at the national level.

7.8. Non-Governmental Organizations

The relevant NGOs shall:

- 7.8.1. Assist in implementing ECCD programmes and providing services, particularly to the most vulnerable and hard to reach sections of society.

7.9. Dzongkhags and Schools

The Dzongkhags and Schools shall:

- 7.9.1. Disseminate knowledge and information on early childhood development and development through various channels
- 7.9.2. Initiate the establishment of community based ECCE programmes based on needs.

7.10. The Private Sector

The private sector shall:

- 7.10.1. establish quality private ECCD centres

APPENDIX A – The IMPORTANCE OF THE EARLY YEARS

- a. **The Early Years:** The most important period in the life span of an individual is the period from conception up to the first 6 years of life, as growth and development during this period lays the foundation for future development. Growth during the first three years of life is very rapid and it is also the period of greatest sensitivity to environmental influences.

In these early years, brain development is critical and most susceptible to both positive and negative influences. The loving care and nurture children receive in their first years – or the lack of these critical experiences - leaves lasting imprints on young minds. Although learning takes place all throughout life, during early childhood the brain is taking shape with a speed that will never be equalled again.

Before birth, brain cells multiply at an astonishing rate. At birth, a child will have as many as 100 billion brain cells and most of them are not connected to each other. They cannot function on their own but must be organized into networks that require trillions of connections or synapses between them. These connections determine what we can do, what we wish to do and how we think. The period when brain connections multiply explosively coincides with early childhood when children are discovering new things for the first time in virtually every waking moment and this is where experience comes into play. Those connections (synapses) that are activated and used frequently by virtue of repeated early experience tend to become permanent and those that have not at all or often been used tend to be eliminated. It is therefore very important that the child has adequate opportunities to encounter, imitate and engage in a wide variety of responsive stimulating activities, thereby learning to use his/her brain's potential. Children who do not receive these conditions are likely to develop personality problems, mental disorders, cognitive deficiencies and learning difficulties.

The home and its inhabitants together form the child's earliest environment and the basis for interaction with the environment. The child has to have freedom and a sense of security to benefit from opportunities the environment provides. The traditional Bhutanese childcare practices and family values attach importance to nurturing family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love and respect. In the modern context, many families are fortunate to have this inheritance where children are secure and have the environment they need to grow up, interacting with parents, grandparents and relatives. Yet, with changing times, there are children who live in families where there is little interaction, or worse still, in family environments characterized by constant conflict, neglect and abuse. The early period is therefore a critical window of opportunity to correct potential risks and to maximize the developmental potential of children.

APPENDIX B. DEFINITION OF TERMS

- a. **ECCD:** ECCD or Early childhood Care and Development encompasses all the essential supports that a young child needs to survive and thrive in life, as well as the supports a family and community need to promote children's holistic development.

This includes integrating health, nutrition and intellectual stimulation, providing the opportunities for exploration and active learning, as well as providing the social and emotional care and nurturing that a child needs in order to realize her/his human potential and play an active role in her/his family and society.

- b. **Early Childhood:** The period from the time of conception of the child until the age of 8 is referred to as the early childhood period. This is the most critical stage in the life cycle of a child since it is during this period that the full potential of the child is established and the foundation of the development of a human being is laid.
- c. **Care:** Care includes what adults and *caregivers* in the child's life are able to provide, such as a healthy and safe environment, supportive and affectionate interaction, appropriate modeling, stimulation and protection.

The term care was added to the phrase 'Early Childhood Development' in the 1980s in recognition of the fact that young children need care and nurturing. They need attention to their health and nutrition, their evolving emotional and social abilities, as well as their minds.

- d. **Development:** Development is defined as the process of change in which the child comes to master more and more complex levels of moving, thinking, feeling and interacting with people and objects in the environment.

Both the child's physical growth (the child's health and nutrition status) and the child's intellectual, emotional and social growth are crucial in the child's overall development. The child's current developmental status either facilitates or inhibits future learning. Thus learning is part of the development process.

- e. **Daycare:** is for care of children (1-2 years) provided during the day, by a centre or a person other than the child's parents or legal guardians, typically someone outside the child's immediate family. Day care is provided in crèches for children in their own homes, work places and community centres.
- f. **Early Childcare and Development Centre:** is a place where children aged 3-5 are provided early childhood care and education. This is a place that is safe and stimulating for children to learn through play and exploration.
- g. **Caregiver:** Caregiver is generally referred to a person who is responsible for attending to the needs of a child, including parents and family members, providing care and education for children aged 1-3 in crèches as well as in home environments.
- h. **ECCD Facilitator:** An ECCD Facilitator is a person who provides ECCD services such as childcare and Education for children aged 3-5 and parenting education to members in a community.

APPENDIX C –NAME LIST OF PARTICIPANTS OF THE ECCD POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

1. Tshewang Tandin(Chair)	Director General	Department of School Education
2. Chencho Dorji	Chief	Programmes Division, MoE
3. Chimi P Wangdi	Secretary General	Tarayana Foundation
4. Dasho Meghraj Gurung		Thimphu
5. Karma Chimi	Lecturer	Paro College of Education
6. Tshering Wangmo	Lecturer	Paro College of Education
7. Dr. Mimi Lhamo Myanak	Paediatrician	JDWNRH, Ministry of Health
8. Ugyen Tenzin	Labour Officer	MoLHR
9. Choeki Penjor	Programme Officer	NCWC
10. Capt Karma Rigzin	Officer in Command	WCP Unit, RBP
11. Sangay Jamtsho	Education Specialist	Royal Education Council
12. Chencho Lham	Education Specialist	Royal Education Council
13. Karma Dyenka	Programme Manager	Save the Children
14. Parvati Sharma	DM&E Manager	Save the Children
15. Kezang Deki	Programme Officer	NFCED, DAHE, MoE
16. Karchung	Curriculum Officer	CAPSD, MoE
17. Lham Tshering	Asst TEO	Thimphu Thromdey
18. Jigme Dorji	Principal	Changangkha LSS
19. Kelzang Choden	Teacher	Pelkyi Losel Daycare Centre
20. Thinley Rinzin	Planning Officer	PPD, MoE
21. Karma Jurmi	Programme Officer	Programmes Division, MoE
22. Karma Thinley	Programme Officer	TED, DAHE, MoE
23. Phuntsho Lhamo	EMO	EMSSD, DSE, MoE
24. Karma Choden	Programme Officer	ECCD Unit, MoE
25. Ruby Q Noble	Education Specialist	UNICEF
26. BB Mishra	Education Officer	UNICEF
27. Karma Gayleg	Programme Coordinator	ECCD Unit, MoE

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