

Final Report

A Critical Review of
**Early Childhood Development Resource
Centre (ECDRC) of BRAC University
Institute of Educational Development
(BUIED)**

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I. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Background

The BRAC University Institute of Educational Development (BUIED) was established with an aim to contribute in strengthening professional capacity for educational development in Bangladesh and in the Region. BU-IED's mandate is to contribute to capacity building in the national education system, rather than support BRAC's own extensive education activities. In order to elicit inputs from the stakeholders and international experts regarding the vision and goals of BUIED a national planning forum took place in November 2003. At that forum, early childhood care and education for development was identified as a priority area for Bangladesh for the next several years. However, to obtain greater understanding regarding needs and priorities in the area of early childhood development and education, BUIED also commissioned a paper and held several discussions with leading NGOs working in the field of early childhood.

All the above efforts reveal that Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Bangladesh is an emerging field and there is room to explore many options and approaches. There is a fundamental need to establish a central resource for professional networking and training; research and innovation, and promotion of effective early learning and stimulation in Bangladesh. In terms of providing these services to the broader ECD community, BUIED aspired to be a resource institution. In order to establish an Early Childhood Development and Resource Centre (ECDRC), BUIED was seeking funding and partnership for implementation, and Plan Bangladesh, the leading organization for quality programs in ECD, was found as an ideal partner. Through this partnership, Plan Bangladesh provided BUIED with a professional knowledge base and credibility in the field of ECD, while BUIED offered a national forum where Plan could share its innovations in ECD.

BUIED requested a four year commitment of about \$190,000 annually from Plan Bangladesh. However, Plan agreed to provide fund for first twenty six months (commencing on December 01, 2004 and ending on January 31, 2007) as an inception phase with provision of subsequent assistance based on review of the progress. The objectives for the funding period were:

- 1) Establish a central resource centre for ECD professional capacity development and knowledge exchange;
- 2) Promote ECD research, standards and innovation; and
- 3) Contribute to Bangladesh's national development through broad-based, effective early learning programs and advocacy for young children.

As the first phase of the partnership is over, a review is needed to understand the progress of the undertaking in achieving the objectives. Considering the importance of such review a critical examination of the ongoing activities of the ECDRC was undertaken, which would help BUIED fulfil its mission.

Objectives

The major objective of the review was to carry out a study to examine the major activities of ECDRC undertaken and recommend areas for further improvement.

The specific objectives of the review are as follows:

1. To examine activities undertaken by the ECDRC during the last two years.
2. To identify the extent of mobilising and sensitising the Government and NGOs in terms of promoting ECD throughout the country.
3. To know and measure the contributions of ECDRC in policy formulation at the national and organizational level.
4. To examine the short and long term plan of BUIED and its coherence with the objectives of ECDRC.
5. To understand the existence of ECDRC within BUIED structure in relation to other components.
6. To prepare some recommendations for further development of activities in the ECDRC and continued support from the Plan.

Methodology

In order to undertake the review work a thorough examination of the existing documents related to ECDRC and BUIED was made so that a rationale for the Centre could be established. Besides that the following activities were undertaken to examine the overall achievement.

- Examine the relevant documents of the ECDRC and its various teaching learning materials developed for the organisations, teachers and children.
- Interviewing BUIED staff for their plan and policy for ECDRC and its progress so far achieved.
- Conduct a focus group discussion with a selected group of beneficiaries of the ECDRC.
- Interview a selected group of partner organizations who are directly involved with the activities of ECDRC.
- Visit at least two organizations who received continuous support from the centre so that the efficiencies of their services can be evaluated.

Sampling for the review

- Three partner organizations/beneficiaries (including government agency) of the ECDRC were identified from Dhaka city.
- Director/person responsible of all those organisations along with at least one field level staff of those organizations.
- Director of BUIED and head of ECDRC for interview.

Instruments used

The following research tools were developed for the review:

- Interview schedule for the BUIED and ECDRC staff
- Interview schedule for the organisational heads/responsible staff
- List of questions for the focus group discussion
- Checklist for the teaching and learning materials for their evaluation

II. OVERVIEW OF ECDRC

BUIED and ECDRC

The Early Childhood Development Resource Centre (ECDRC) was established under the umbrella of BUIED in January 2005 and the first inception and development phase will be completed by the end of January 2007. The Resource and Training centre of the ECDRC is located on the premises of the BRAC University Institute of Educational Development at Niketon, Gulshan 1. Satellites are anticipated in other rural and urban locations at the invitation and sponsorship of Bangladesh ECD partners in the ECD network. After inception of the centre a strategic plan was initiated with the assistance of an expatriate consultant (Dr. Cassie Landers, Associate Professor at Columbia University's School of Public Health). A key component of the strategic plan was a workshop with the various stakeholders held on June 13, 2005. As anticipated in BU-IED Planning forum of November 2003 and further developed through consultation and studies, the goals, objectives and principles of operations of ECDRC were articulated by the time ECDRC was in operation. The main tasks of the strategic planning exercise for ECDRC were to:

- i. Critically examine the goals, objectives and principles of operations of ECDRC.
- ii. In light of the above, identify areas of activities on which ECDRC should concentrate in the next five years.
- iii. Indicate specific components or items in each area with a timeframe and priority for work.
- iv. Formulate the steps in strategic planning and implementation.

As a unit of BRAC University Institute of Educational Development (BUIED), ECDRC shares the Values and Vision of BUIED and is an integral part of its Mission. ECDRC works in full cooperation with the other departments of BU-IED and has complete access to all resources of the Institute. ECDRC also takes advantage of the many partnerships that have been established by BUIED.

Principal Goal for ECDRC

To establish the Early Childhood Development Resource Centre (ECDRC) as an institutional base for creating and disseminating state-of-the-art knowledge on child development including related research, professional education, learning materials development, networking and policy and advocacy dialogue in Bangladesh and in the region.

Objectives of ECDRC:

ECDRC intends to seize the opportunity provided by the growing interest and support in early childhood development to achieve the following key objectives:

- ❖ To promote and assist in developing and designing cost-effective, sustainable and large scale early learning programmes.
- ❖ To establish a resource centre for capacity and professional development and knowledge exchange in the field of early childhood development (ECD).
- ❖ To promote ECD related research, standards and innovations, and
- ❖ To engage in policy dialogue and advocacy for young children.

Principles of operation

- ❖ ECDRC works on initiating innovative models, programme approaches and resource materials in the field of child development. It does not work as an implementing agency, but would offer technical assistance to implementing agencies and other organisations, professionals and individuals.
- ❖ ECDRC plans to operate in partnership with ECD stakeholders (GO/NGO/INGO/UNO/educational institutions) at home and abroad.
- ❖ ECDRC is not a funding agency. It provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on child development and plays a supportive role in partner activities.
- ❖ ECDRC intends to offer a range of professional training courses for ECD professionals. The courses can be at certificate, diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
- ❖ ECDRC endeavours to have access to and contributes to creating state-of-the-art knowledge and expects to establish itself as a centre of excellence.

III. ACTIVITIES OF ECDRC

The Inception Phase

During the first phase of the Centre from January 2005 to January 2007 ECDRC has built a record of accomplishments in the field of early childhood developmental activities. Its various achievements in the field have created awareness among the stakeholders including government. Prior to inception of ECDRC there was interest in the subject among the stakeholders, but the concepts and thinking on ECD were not clear and the activities for very young children were also not very well-organized. The government undertook the ECD as a new intervention but with 'still to organize' views and ideas. PEDP-II adopted an elaborate plan but specific actions could not be undertaken due to the complexity of the task. Establishment of ECDRC under BUIED open-up the opportunity for government to develop a link between them and NGOs in this regard.

As an autonomous academic body ECDRC have more flexibility in undertaking quick action in the light of changing needs and opportunities. Considering these strength and possibilities government has supported and cooperated with the activities of ECDRC. Bangladesh Shishu Academy (BSA) has set up a direct link with the Centre and undertaken programmes accordingly. Government funds for ECD activity have been spent for technical services from ECDRC through UNICEF and other Ministries.

Depending on the needs of government and other stakeholders ECDRC prepared and planned its activities. Plan Bangladesh (PB) offered their fullest financial and technical support in developing the plan for activities. Consultations and meetings were held along with a day-long workshop in which following were identified as ECDRC's areas of focus for the medium plan.

- 1 Curriculum, Learning Materials and Programme Models Development
- 2 Research, Program Monitoring and Evaluation
- 3 Networking, Knowledge Dissemination and Advocacy
- 4 Professional Development, Training and Technical Assistance

These areas of work are related to major categories of ECD program priorities – parenting, young child care and development, pre-school education programs and transition into formal education. The progress so far has been achieved is indicated below according to the areas of activities:

Curriculum, learning materials and programme models

At least eight activities were completed in the area of curriculum and learning materials. These are mentioned under the following heads:

Picture Dictionary: ECDRC has developed a Bangla Picture Dictionary for the children of 3 to 7 years of age. It contained 500 word entries for 50 Bangla alphabet characters. It is planned to be released in February 07.

Math Activity Book: published a Math Activity Book in January 2006 for 4 – 7 year old children to enhance their logical thinking, creativity and reasoning skills. Ninety-two exercises of six types are included in the book.

Play Activity Book: published an age-specific Play Activity Book in Bangla in March 2006 for 0-6 year old children to help increase their physical, emotional and cognitive development.

Low cost Material Development: has developed play and toy materials using waste paper and other low-cost, no-cost materials. The purpose is to prepare educational materials for young children at a low price.

Story Books: Fifteen story books have been selected for publishing from forty three books developed in a writing workshop in December 2005 in Sylhet. The books were edited, necessary illustration work was prepared and field-testing was done among children in Chandina, Comilla. All the books have now been printed and are being used by different organizations/agencies. These books will supplement or replace earlier learning materials used by Plan Bangladesh and other organizations.

Preparing a Book on Low-cost, No-cost Materials: The resource centre is developing a guide book on preparing low-cost, no-cost teaching-learning materials/aids to be used by supervisors, teachers/facilitators and parents/guardians.

Work with MOWCA: The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has decided to develop a framework on ECD policy guidelines. MOWCA has formed a working group of six members. One representative from ECDRC has been serving as member in the committee and the ECDRC has been acting as focal point for discussions.

Preparing pre-school curricular framework: The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) has decided to prepare a curricular framework which would provide the parents and teachers an appropriate sense of direction for the development of children. The ECDRC has acted as secretariat for coordinating this work and has prepared a draft framework document which has been submitted to the government.

Research, programme monitoring and evaluation

Research and evaluation is a central focus of ECD activity. The success of ECD depends on the rightly identified issues based on research. ECDRC have identified some issues for their research and evaluation. These issues and a prioritised plan still under discussion, but a good start has been made. There is scope of empirical research in the country but for that experimental work area is required. There is a strong need for early childhood laboratory centre and controlled field area where this research can be done. Some concerted efforts from ECDRC have been taken, which are as follows:

Formation of Research Advisory Group: An advisory group of eight members has been formed with ECD specialists, child psychologists, educationalists, epidemiologists, paediatrics, academics and research methodology specialists.

Research: The research 'Extent of ECD programmes in Bangladesh- an Activities and Resources Map' has been completed. The objectives of this research were to identify the organisations working on ECD in Bangladesh, explore the characteristics of ECD activities in Bangladesh and explore human resources and other strengths in the field of ECD. Two research reports on "Playing with Mathematics" and "A literacy intervention for pre school children in Bangladesh: the benefit of dialogic reading" have been finalized and will be published in January, 2007.

Partnership for research: A partnership with Village Education Resource Centre (VERC), supported by Save the Children - USA has been developed and a literacy intervention research has been implemented in the programme area in Kaliganj. The draft research report has been prepared.

Field visit with Plan

The Head of ECDRC visited Plan early childhood development programmes in three districts of Bangladesh from 16-20th July 2006.. She visited preschools, SBK and the parenting programmes of Plan Bangladesh and prepared an assessment report.

Networking, knowledge dissemination and advocacy

Several collaborative efforts on network building have been taken by ECDRC. These activities are highly appreciated by concerned government, international and national agencies. Following are the major activities of the Centre in this area:

National ECD Conference: The first "National ECD Conference 2006" was organized by Bangladesh ECD Network on 10th December 2006. About three hundred participants from Government organizations, NGO's, UN organizations and individual professionals active in ECD took part in the conference. The theme of the conference was "Building Partnerships for ECD". There was an exhibition on ECD related books, materials, posters etc in the conference. It was appreciated by all participants and was desired as an achievement for ECDRC as the Secretariat of the network.

Directory Updating: The Bangladesh ECD Network has decided to update the ECD Directory. The purpose is to include the Network's new members and update existing members' profiles. As ECD Network Secretariat, ECDRC has undertaken this task. The preparation for publishing the *Directory of Early Childhood Development Partners in Bangladesh* has almost been completed by the end of the year. In the previous directory there were only 81 enlisted organizations. Approximately 200 organizations are enlisted in the current directory. Before finalizing the members' list, it was cross checked by field staff of BRAC Education Program, where necessary.

BEN website Updating and inauguration: Ms. Yasmin Murshed, former Honourable Advisor of the Care taker Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh inaugurated the updated website at the National ECD Conference 2006. The website (www.ecd-bangladesh.net) is now operational and interactive.

Information regarding ECD research and available ECD resources in Bangladesh are on the website. Inclusion of the quarterly newsletters to the website is one of its new features.

Publishing ECD Newsletter: ECDRC has published the Bangladesh ECD Newsletter quarterly on behalf of the Network. This newsletter contains the up-dated activities undertaken by ECDRC as well as other member organizations.

Participating in Plan's Regional Sharing Session: One member from ECDRC joined Plan International's Regional Experience Sharing Session of the Asia-Pacific Region in Australia in May 2006. Attendance at such sharing session helps the staff to benefit from and contribute to professional exchange.

Presentation at BIAM: A national workshop was organized by Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) at BIAM Foundation in Dhaka on 4th September 2006. The Secretary of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs was the chief guest. ECDRC presented the keynote paper. Other stakeholders and partner organizations dealing with early childhood development were also present. The Director of Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum presided over the workshop.

Professional development, training and technical assistance

Many training courses and workshops have been organized to develop professional competence. The ECDRC has a plan to run regular certificate courses and a degree programme in future. Following are some professional developmental activities undertaken by the Centre:

Training on IT: An agreement has been signed with **Analyst**, a web developer firm, to train two professional staff members of ECDRC on Internet Basics, File Transfer Protocol, HTML (Dream Weaver), Quark etc.

Workshop on Pre-school and Early Primary Low-Cost, No-Cost Teaching Aids Technology: ECDRC organized the training workshop, facilitated by Mary Ann Dugupta of **Sharehouse Charitable Foundation, India**. The objective of the workshop was to increase ECD professionals' capacity in making teaching aids using low-cost and no-cost materials.

Workshop on Appropriate Paper-based Technology: A nine-days training workshop on Appropriate Paper-based Technology (APT) was organized and facilitated by Ms. Janet Ivin, a children's occupational therapist and material developer from U. K. This workshop provided the participating organizations with knowledge and skill of preparing cheap toys and learning materials for their early learners.

Professional Development Programme for Researchers: Two researchers at ECDRC participated in an intensive training course under the facilitation of Frances Aboud, Professor, McGill University, Canada from March to May 2006. This training was necessary for capacity building for the research group of the Centre.

Child Language Development Workshop: A three-day training workshop on Child Language Development was organized jointly by the ECDRC and IER, Dhaka University on the theme inviting lead practitioners from different organizations. Most

of the organizations working with early learners and pre-primary age group children do not have much exposure to the developmental aspects of language; so this workshop provided them greater understanding about the language development in children and can use this knowledge in developing their regular education programme.

Training for the Community Learning Resource Persons of Plan Bangladesh: ECDRC has designed and conducted a training workshop for community learning resource persons. As a result of this workshop community leaders and many interested persons in the community will be able to cooperate with ECD activities at the grass root level.

Strategic Planning of ECDRC: Work plan for 2007-2011 has been drafted and finalized engaging Dr. Cassie Lander, Associate Professor; Columbia University, USA. The draft plan has been shared with Plan Bangladesh management and Mr. Fazle Hasan Abed, Chairperson of BRAC.

Course at Aga Khan University: Three staff members from ECDRC have been enrolled in Course 1 of the Advanced Diploma in Human Development Programme (Early Childhood Development) at Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan to increase their professional capacity.

Agreement with OSF: BU-IED has signed an agreement with Open Society Foundation on 31st October, 2006. Objectives of this agreement are to design, develop and adapt an ECD Professional Development Programmed at BU-IED in collaboration with OSF and experts and institutions identified and called upon to assist by OSF. OSF is an associate institution of the Soros Foundation. According to the agreement OSF will complete initial drafting, designing and adapting the courses, visit BU-IED and review course content and will submit finalized content. They will also design seven course units and implementation plan of the professional development program for ECD.

Agreement with UNICEF: An agreement has been signed with UNICEF to help ICDP project in using the book 'Block Die Mojar Khela' and pattern block set. According to the agreement BU-IED will provide required quantity of PATTERN BLOCK SETS of six different shapes and coloured sponge. UNICEF will pay for block sets in accordance to the agreement. BU-IED will also provide soft copy of the Teachers Manual on Pattern Block Set to UNICEF for producing required number of the book.

HRD manual: An agreement has been signed for undertaking a HRD study of BU-IED with "Eshna Consulting Team Ltd". According to the agreement Eshna will complete some specific tasks related to analysis of HRD issues of BU-IED including ECDRC. They will prepare organizational structure of BU-IED, PMS (Performance Management System), Training and staff development, Salary and benefits structure and an HRD Manual with a focus on personal management covering the stated items. The Study is planned to be completed by February 2007.

IV. EVALUATION OF MATERIALS AND MEANS

The materials

Most of the reading and play guide books are multicoloured paper back books. These are designed and prepared in highly professional manner. The books are attractive and durable. NGO personnel interviewed spoke highly of these materials. However, according to them the price of the books are high which would be difficult for individual poor parents to have these for their child. Because of price smaller NGOs and NGOs having many centres could not purchase such materials. They only can have it when it is available free of cost. Only one or two set per centre is not enough for the purpose. Learning materials in affordable price could be of much help for the learners. The price of the visual materials may be reduced if they are printed on some cheaper paper with the same quality of printing.

Workshop on toy making with waste materials was done once with a small number of participants. This workshop was very useful for those who participated. In order to get maximum benefit such workshop may be organized at least 3-5 times in a year.

The curriculum framework for early childhood education programme, which was developed for MOPME, is a timely exercise. The curriculum framework is a holistic one suitable for age one to six. This is the first time such a framework is being considered for the children of that young age. This not only provides the age wise learning outcomes, it also identified learning sequences of activities with reference to the child's' various domain of development. The distinctive feature of the curriculum is that it is prepared by a group of individuals representing government, UNICEF, NGOs and academics. ECDRC provided the technical support and leadership for completion of the task.

The research activities

Research on early childhood in Bangladesh is relatively few for at least two reasons; one, there is shortage of experienced researcher and two, unavailability of research fund for this purpose. ECDRC has created an opportunity to bring the experience of national and internal researcher together and possibility for generating fund for such research.

Identification of common research need is also an important task to begin with. The ECD network as well as the research forum of ECDRC may provide the interested researcher and the donor to identify the urgent needs in this field. The research advisory group in this regard is a help to both the researchers as well as to ECDRC.

Recent study undertaken by the Centre on 'Playing with Maths' and 'Literacy intervention for pre-school children' are the examples of this research planned to be undertaken by ECDRC. Member organizations in the ECD network may take the opportunity to undertake their own research and get support from the research advisory group.

The ECDRC staff as well as the network's members also expressed their interest in developing various monitoring checklist and research tools for assessing their own activities.

Recent HRD study undertaken by Eshna Consultants has proposal for new research strategy which would contribute to the improvement of the ECDRC. This report also describes the organizational structure and personal developmental strategy suitable for the Centre.

Networking and dissemination strategy

Bangladesh ECD Network is a relatively new activity of the Centre. Previously there was a directory of ECD related organizations but that was not interactive means of information sharing. A Network website can provide greater opportunity to communicate for the organizations and individuals who are interested in early childhood. It covers all aspects of respective organizations including, publications, training information, research agenda, activity information and the personnel. The quarterly Newsletter published by the Centre can also be downloaded from the website by any one who wishes to see it.

The only challenge to making the network website more interactive is that smaller organizations do not have the access to the website because of the unavailability of the equipment and necessary connection. Otherwise, the network website is the excellent means of knowledge dissemination to the larger audience.

Advocacy in favour of child development is another important component of the Centre. The ECDRC has now gained the credibility in terms of their human resources and activities. All its programmes are highly appreciated by individuals and organizations, which is evident from the attendance of any event like ECD National Conference, seminars, and other activities.

A major challenge of the advocacy programme is to reach the high level programme managers and government officials. Strategies have to be developed to involve these people in the dialogue of early childhood development.

Professional development

Professional development is key to the success of any programme in the country. In Bangladesh there is deficiency in trained manpower in many sectors. This is particularly true in the case early childhood development. At least 12 categories of training and seminars held during the last two years helped individuals to update and enhance their professional skills.

The workshops were attended by workers and professionals of NGOs as well as concerned government officials. These activities also have the potential of supporting the advocating strategy. Government policy papers, administrative guidelines etc. are indirectly influenced by these activities.

Working condition in ECDRC

BUIED is a medium size institution staffed by about 50 professionals, of which nearly one fifth are engaged in early childhood care and development. The Institute is

located within the city in an up-scale area. All the modern facilities along with trained and supporting resource persons are available in the Institute. IED was established under the banner of BRAC University and the University has created this Institute with a view to develop and support early childhood education along with other educational programmes. In this respect BRAC University has become the pioneer in introducing ECCD programme in the country by creating a separate unit of ECDRC under the umbrella of BUIED.

The head of the Institute is an internationally reputed education specialist having high credibility with both the government and development partners. Other senior faculties of the Institute are also nationally reputed individuals by their own merit. Frequent visits of international experts and academics on education, particularly ECD experts, to BUIED and ECDRC are an added advantage for maintaining the quality and reputation of the activities.

Working environment in the Institute and ECDRC is encouraging because of cordial atmosphere and ample learning opportunities. ECDRC has offered itself as the secretariat for many governmental efforts, such as assisting in preparing curriculum framework for the early learners and pre-primary school children. Three major Ministries of the government like MOE, MOPME and MOWCA recognize BUIED and ECDRC as a potential academic and technical source of ECD and pre-primary educational support. BUIED's liaison with international partners like UNICEF, UNESCO, Plan Bangladesh, Aga Khan Foundation, ICDDR,B etc. are a source of encouragement and professional pride to its staff. Signing MOU with many of them brought BUIED and ECDRC in a position to contribute further in the field of ECCD, primary education and teacher education.

Stakeholders' perception

In order to understand the perception of various stakeholders about the contribution of ECDRC, both government and non-government organizations were interviewed. It appeared from their comments that being a new setup in the field ECDRC could not yet satisfy their needs in the requirement of training, materials and professional consultation. During last two years ECDRC could conduct a handful of training courses on developmental issues of children, development of learning and play materials and teacher training. These training and workshops could serve only a few selected organizations and their staff. A large number of NGO staff are still in need of such training.

According to the respondents of this review the resource centre is yet to go a long way to fulfil the expectation and needs of the people. ECDRC requires a full strength resource library with a sufficient number of training and learning materials, audio and video resource pool for use of other organizations and collection of ready research findings for use of other users. ECDRC need to have an exclusive library with good collection of books on child development and early learning. The long desired network on ECD has recently been established and it will take time to be in operation with full capacity, because NGOs and workers are not yet fully acquainted with the electronic system of the network. So the network has to continue in future for ultimate benefit of teachers, students and ECD workers in various capacities.

ECDRC has a potential to convince people in the management of organizations, policy makers and various other stakeholders who may have the scope of contributing child development and their education. Question arose in discussion that government officials frequently moving among Ministries and Directorates need to be acquainted with ECD concepts. Media people in press and air also require orientation in ECD so that they can contribute to advocacy. Though ECDRC had a workshop with children's writer, they did not have any orientation training for the news papers or broadcasters as such. Discussants in the interviews and FGD also feel that such training need to be frequently done so that a large number of workers and concerned individuals can be benefited.

There are a group of development partners and donors who are interested in ECD projects. Amongst them Plan Bangladesh, UNICEF, AKF, Save the Children etc. are the few who are well-known. If viable projects are created in an innovative mode fund will not be a problem. At least it became clear to this reviewer that all the development partners have confidence on BUIED and ECDRC for their innovative and untiring effort. It also appeared that signing of MOU with some reputed partners are due in coming weeks and supplementation of funds for agreed activities is very likely for some of the projects.

Besides some short training and workshops long term training on ECCD and degree programmes are expected by the workers in the field. Development partners also expressed their interest in this direction; so ECDRC's developing capacity towards running a education programme would not be in vain.

Research is another component in the list of the Centre. So far a few research projects have been done, but other important areas are yet to be considered. Several important research topics have been identified in the project proposal for 2007 – 2011 plan period; these are considered as priority research areas for Bangladesh. If these studies are successfully completed in due time then ECD work will get a big boost. Besides these topics, new research topics should be taken up on the basis of needs of the member organizations of the ECD network.

It appeared from the review that government is the largest recipient of the service of the ECDRC. Particularly the Bangladesh Shishu Academy (BSA) has projects in every district and it is going to launch a large number of ECD centres in many parts of the country. Projects on parenting education are also in its prospective scope of work. In this respect ECDRC is only professional body who can significantly contribute to these government projects provided that its services are suited to the government requirements. The question already raised by the government counterpart is that the services and materials of ECDRC are relatively expensive for government projects. Such a view has to be taken into cognisance and serious consideration must be given to bring the expense down to a tolerable limit. A compromise between the cost and quality has to be found for maximum utilization of services.

V. FUTURE PLAN OF ECDRC

Professional capacity development

As an institute of BRAC University, BUIED enjoys autonomy in determining its own activity and work strategy. As BUIED has been setup in response to the existing demand of education and childhood development, it has the blessings of relevant development partners and funding agencies for fulfilling its objectives. ECDRC is a unit within BUIED and has a focused agenda of childhood development and early learning promotion. Recognizing the importance of ECD, IED has devoted strength to the activities of ECDRC. Since the ECDRC is the only organization in the country to address the issues of ECD professionally it has the added benefit of attracting all the government, non-government and international partners to come forward with technical and financial support. Both BRAC authority and BRAC University have expressed their full confidence in and support to ECDRC has been proved to be well-founded through on-going interactions between ECDRC and many national and international agencies.

As mentioned above, the capacity building of organizations, trainers and individuals are among the primary goals of BUIED-ECDRC. Demand for such training is high within the country. Existing training programmes focus purely on academic and critical issues of child development. In order to continue with capacity building of people in the field of ECD, following courses are being planned to prepare in collaboration with international institutions and offered by ECDRC:

- *Plan and implement Diploma and Masters level courses for mid-level ECD professionals and supervisors.* Plans and designs are under way with Open Society Institute/ISSA with advice from Dr. Cassie Landers of Columbia University. Implementation is expected to begin in 2007
- *Identify and review existing courses* in joint collaboration with UNICEF, PB, BRAC, SC-US, ICMH and IER.
- *Thematic short-courses for child/health care workers* in joint collaboration with ICMH, UNICEF, ICDDR'B, MOSW, MOH and NNP.
- *Short courses for pre-school teachers* can be offered in collaboration with SC-US, CLR, AKF.
- *Short certificate courses on specific topics for mid-level professionals* will be offered in collaboration with UNICEF and ICMH. The expected starting date is third quarter of 2007.
- *Child development courses for paediatricians* is under discussion expected to be offered in 2009 in collaboration with BU School of Public Health.

Relationship with BRAC University

ECDRC is a build-in unit of BUIED and it was developed in the fulfilment of the objectives of BUIED. All the activities of ECDRC in fact reflect the needs of children and pre-primary education as such so these activities are fully endorsed by both the BRAC University and BUIED.

ECDRC focuses on the needs of child development and provide support to organizations and individuals in becoming skilled provider of child developing services. BUIED's objective is to provide support to the mainstream education through technical and professional activities, and ECD is one of their objectives. Now a days it is highly endorsed by the concerned authorities that without focusing on ECCD no further education would be successful. From that perspective ECDRC is a legitimate part of BUIED and its success is largely expected by both BRAC University and BUIED.

Advocacy programme and mobilization

The success of BUIED and ECDRC has largely depended on the effective communication with government and other stakeholders through knowledge dissemination and advocacy. An ambitious plan has been developed and followed by ECDRC. Under this plan an efficient network among the stakeholders is expected to be formed. The purpose of the activities are:

- To establish a network for ECD stakeholders in Bangladesh
- To gather, share and disseminate existing practices and new knowledge
- To function as a repository of information
- To engage in policy dialogue and advocacy efforts

These are well-endorsed purposes for the ECDRC network. If the financial commitment and supports are available in time then the scope and intensity of work already begun can be enhanced. Through the ECD network thematic seminars, experience sharing sessions, holding policy dialogue with relevant quarters will take place. Inadequate awareness on ECD remains a concern among all ECD stakeholders. ECDRC's plan to collaborate with UNICEF, BSA, PB, BRAC, SC-US, IER and CAMPE to create awareness regarding ECD will remove the obstacles currently faced by implementing organizations.

The following channels have been identified to facilitate networking among ECD stakeholders. The Executive Committee of ECD network will make further decisions, as needed. These channels are:

- *Publish monthly online newsletter* starting with the third quarter of 2005.
- *Quarterly activity report of ECDRC* starting with the third quarter of 2005.
- *Annual Report of ECDRC* starting with 2005.
- *Making ECD website interactive*
- *Updating ECD directory*
- *Database on ECD organizations and activities*

Good advocacy and dissemination work is a precondition of success of any programme. The activities what have been identified during the project period is highly endorsed by the present stakeholders. The magnitudes of all these tasks are so great that it would be difficult to complete for the current resource and manpower of the ECDRC. Therefore, new recruitment and working strategy is necessary for successful completion of all those works.

Sustainability of BU-IED

Setting up of the ECDRC in successful manner in the first phase of Plan BUIED collaborative project is a strategic achievement of this collaboration programme. Through this establishment at least three important objectives of the collaboration have been met e.g., a) promoting and assisting in designing cost-effective and large scale early learning programme, b) Establishing a resource centre for capacity and professional development in ECD, c) Promoting ECD related research, standards and innovations, and d) Engaging in policy dialogue and advocacy for ECD.

The new strategic plan for 2007-2011 aims at continuing the major on-going activities with necessary modification where appropriate. The support, both in funding and technical cooperation, of PLAN Bangladesh remains as commitment to come but along with it other funding is also necessary. In this respect BUIED is continuing their effort to collect fund for its various programmes (like material development, training etc.) as well as staffing. From discussion with the development partners and possible donors it appears that fund for ECD activities is possible. So far discussion has progressed with Aga Khan Foundation, Canada for collaboration in professional development including advanced studies for ECDRC personnel and cooperation in ECD research with Canadian institutions and specialists. UNICEF Bangladesh has already used some training support and learning materials of ECDRC. Discussion is underway for cooperation and an agreement between UNICEF and ECDRC for support to the five-year Bangladesh country programme of UNICEF in the areas of training, learning materials and research. If such an agreement is reached, ECDRC will have new opportunities to exercise influence on strategies and policies in ECD programme in Bangladesh. It will also enhance institutional and financial sustainability of ECDRC.

Sustainability of an institute depends on the success and credibility of the programmes undertaken by that institute. ECDRC has earned both the reputations and credibility in this matter. Now it is known to every quarter that ECDRC is the only organization that is in a position to provide technical and professional support to either government or non-governmental organizations. So if donors in the field of ECD provide fund to Bangladesh then ECDRC is the most potential body where the money should come.

VI. THE FINAL WORDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ECDRC is the only professional and academic entity in the country which is exclusively involved in developmental work in the field of early childhood development. It was a brave initiative and a challenging task to introduce a new concept of ECD in a country where about 13 percent of the population falls in the under-five age group. Where primary education is far from universal, how can the young children under five can get any attention ? ECDRC and the network of partners have succeeded in establishing the need for care and education of children between birth and age five through their concerted efforts. Before ECDRC came into being, Plan Bangladesh took a lead in working with children of age 4-5, the pre-primary age group as well as younger children. Through this effort demand was generated for care of children prior to reaching the pre-school. ECDRC utilized that demand and promoted the dialogue at the national level. There is now greater acceptance of the fact that children from birth to age five need developmental support and care for their success in latter life.

ECDRC works under the banner of BUIED where education from primary to tertiary level is given attention. Inclusion of ECD into the whole BUIED programme gave it a holistic character in its approach to development. Increasing acceptance of BUIED to the national and international community is a big strength. Because of this advantage any programme undertaken by BUIED and ECDRC would be successful provided it responds to demand and practical consideration of the country's reality. ECDRC has already been successful in developing a working relationship with government and drawing their attention. BUIED has also engaged itself in the national mainstream education in primary, secondary and tertiary education stream of Bangladesh.

During last two years ECDRC has been engaged in preparing skilled human resources, learning materials, teaching guides and parental information tools. The work has been highly appreciated by all quarters. However, it is still a good beginning only; the extent of these services is not quite adequate in the face of huge demand. Inadequacy of these activities are partly due to the lack of sufficient manpower in the Centre. There are only 8-9 professionals working in the Centre for conducting such a big task. If the activities of the Centre are expected to be scaled up, the capacity needs to be enhanced through appropriate partnerships and perhaps increased staff in the centre itself.

Major funding is required for training in ECDRC and for some of their working partners' staff. Regular training, material production, advocacy and community mobilization all require fund. It is expected that the needed amounts would come from funding agencies, which have shown interest in supporting and promoting ECD in Bangladesh. If ECDRC is able to continue its level and quality of activities, funding should not be problem for the Centre. However, ECDRC also striving for generating its own fund for sustenance through various means like selling play materials, publications and providing trainings. Prior to that initial financial support for development partners is necessary so that their activities can be publicised. From the discussion with people concerned it appeared to the review team that if the initial

activities are continued for sometime and can be conducted effectively then it would not be difficult for them to sustain without outside fund. Training and educational materials are current need in the people who are engaged in the field of early childhood education and development.

Finally the BUIED and the ECDRC both are headed by a single person who has high credibility so in his absence new leader have to be developed. Currently there are staffs who may replace him in future. But in this respect their development is essential through on the job training and higher education; ECDRC, however, appreciates the need and preparing people in that direction by giving them sufficient opportunities and exposures in the field.

Recommendations

On the basis of the review the following recommendations are made for Plan Bangladesh and ECDRC:

For Plan Bangladesh:

1. The ECDRC was established under the umbrella of BUIED with a set of objectives of understanding and promoting the activities of early childhood development in the country. The project of ECDRC has come to reality with the financial support form Plan Bangladesh and the project has proved its worth. The first phase is going to be completed soon. It is recommended that the project should continue its work further so that the long term perspective of the Centre can be realized. The financial support for the centre, as foreseen in its strategic plan, until the end of 2011, would be an appropriate and worthy investment.
2. A range of reading and learning materials were developed for pre-primary age group children. These materials are very colourful and attractive and hence are costly for many children in the country. Consideration should be given to producing larger amounts of materials in bulk at economy price along with higher quality materials at regular price so that users may have choice depending upon their financial ability. Plan Bangladesh and other donors may provide subsidy for production for local NGOs, community schools, and government supported ECD centres at large.
3. A network of ECD workers, organizations and government has been developed under the direct supervision of ECDRC. This network has a tremendous potential for improving the quality of ECD activities in the country. Financial and technical support is required for this initiative to be more effective through involving more people in developing network activities like collecting more materials, creating opportunity for interactive communication etc. Plan should provide technical and financial support to expand the scope and performance of the network.

For ECDRC:

4. There is huge dearth of early learning materials particularly for the children of birth to three years of age. ECDRC can do research on this area and prepare reading and visual materials as well as graded toys for them. Considerations must be given to keep the prices of the learning materials low so that individuals and organizations have financial constraints may purchase them and use for their own consumption.
5. Bangladesh Shishu Academy is the government initiative for ECD and pre-primary education. It has limited opportunity to work in the field of ECD; in this respect ECDRC can offer its services to BSA considering their scope and limitations. The services and products have to be cost effective and affordable for large scale operation supported by the government.
6. There is a complete dearth of developmental toys in the country. ECDRC should look into the matter and take necessary steps to provide training to individuals and organizations for making developmentally appropriate toys for children. Arrangement may also be made with the proper toy maker companies to produce such toys for a larger clientele. Arrangement should be made with the government and larger NGOs to purchase those for their use in the ECD centres.
7. Appropriate model of early childhood education is not available in the country. NGOs having ECD programmes run their activities in a conventional way, i.e., teaching only indoor or in a classroom setting. ECDRC should set up a model centre for younger children in both rural and urban areas so that individuals and organizations may observe and develop a full understanding about care and education of very young children.
8. A large number of NGOs, development partners and individuals are interested to get involved in the ECD Network. Members come in contact with each other through this network, but the network itself is yet to become fully interactive. In order to make the network interactive opportunities for sharing views of users and experts have to be created.
9. Some training programmes have so far been organized by the ECDRC. Several training activities such as the ones on material development from waste product, language development, etc. were highly appreciated by the participants and their organization. There is a great need of such training for other workers. These training should be repeated to extend the benefit to a wider group of organizations.
10. Training for writers and material developers also need to be repeated for a larger audience. In this regard children's publishers, illustrators, and media reporters also require orientation for developing age-wise learning materials.

11. Though training is a priority and the demand for it is high, ECDRC may share the responsibility of training with other reputed organizations in the country. In this respect IER of Dhaka University may be considered for training of resource persons of various kinds.
12. A draft national curriculum framework for the ECD programmes was developed by a group of national experts, Academics and people from government and non-government organizations. The activity was facilitated by ECDRC as secretariat under the guidance and ownership of MOPME. Efforts should now be made by the Centre to get the approval for this framework from government and take initiative to implement the curriculum framework through the ECD network.
13. There is a great demand for courses on various aspects of child development leading to professional degrees. In order to make these courses cost effective, national resource persons and BUIED's own faculty may be utilized instead of depending on overseas experts and faculties. International donors, like Plan Bangladesh, Aga Khan Foundation, SC-USA, SC-UK or other agencies may be approached for funding for overseas training of selected national experts (from inside and outside BUIED) who would constitute the faculty for professional development programmes.

LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED

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Director, BUIED
2. Ms. Mahmuda Akhter
Head ECDRC, BUIED
3. Mr. Haider Wasim Yakub
Programme Support Manager, Plan Bangladesh
4. Mr. Mohammad Mohsin
Learning Advisor, Plan Bangladesh
5. Mr. Golam Mostafa
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6. Mr. Saiful Islam
Research Evaluation Development Manager, Plan Bangladesh
7. Dr. Amir Ali
Chief Executive Officer, Aga Khan Foundation
8. Mr. Iqbal Hossain
Programme Officer, Bangladesh Shishu Academy
9. Mr. Dewan Sohrab Uddin
Programme Manager, Dhaka Ahsania Mission
10. Ms. Suraiya Haque
Executive Director