JORDAN'S EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE:

MAKING JORDAN FIT FOR CHILDREN

UNICEF MENA-RO
Learning Series, Vol. 2

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children

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Outreach of KG2 continues to achieve equity as children of modest
background are also stimulated.
Children learning by play in Aqaba

"Children are but seedlings planted in the world, the implements of a promising future and the fruit to be picked out of the hopes of the days to come." ('Imam's Guide on Early Childhood Development', Rashdan, 2003, p.4).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Abbreviations

AGFUND	Arab Gulf Fund for United Nations Development
BP	Better Parenting
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Child Development
EC	Early Childhood
EFA	Education for All
ERfKE	Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy
ESP	ERfKE Support Project (USAID)
ETF	European Training Foundation
FAFO	Norwegian Research Center
GUVS	General Union of Voluntary Societies
JOHUD	Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development
KAP	Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices
KG's	Kindergartens
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoAIA	Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs
MoSD	Ministry of Social Development
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoH	Ministry of Health
MOCEF	Mother and Child Foundation
HCY	Higher Council for Youth
NCFA	National Council for Family Affairs
NCHRD	National Centre for Human Resource Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
TRS	Teacher Ranking Scheme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency

ECD Preface

Early Childhood Development (ECD) has particular significance as the early years of a child's life constitute the "investment phase" in human development. Today we have more scientific knowledge on child development and brain based learning theories than ever before. Evidence points to the fact that most adult mental ability is formed in the first three years of life. Strong foundations for physical wellness, emotional security and social competence are also established during those years. ECD is a comprehensive strategy for reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The second of the learning series, this time on Jordan as a case study, further promotes intended learning on innovation relevant to children's issues. The ECD initiative in Jordan has demonstrated elements of taking good practice to larger scale. It is an excellent example of the work of UNICEF in assisting partners to transform initiatives into policy. With a clear vision, Jordan has laid the foundations for a sound national ECD movement that is not only based on latest scientific evidence and research, but is also well grounded in the country's cultural heritage.

The example of Jordan is instructive for the region despite measurable progress, countries within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region can still do better in promoting the well being and protection of its children. Countries of the MENA region have on average the second lowest enrolment rate in pre-primary education (15.7%). Most of these countries have equally low rates for exclusive breastfeeding (26%) and relatively high rates of stunting (26%). Most recent research on ECD provides evidence on the tight relationship between better parenting, responsive nutrition, brain development and the complexity of brain architecture from a neuroscience perspective, all of which should enhance early learning. Caregivers in the region have a wealth of positive practices to draw from, additional evidence will enable the wider community to adopt innovative methods for the early stimulation of children and thus, equipping them for life long learning.

As we unite for children, as parents and caregivers, medical workers, learning institutions and centers, the media, governments, civic society, and the private sector, we look forward to future collaboration on this important issue.

Sigrid Kaag
Regional Director
United Nations Children's Funds
Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa

Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah
Foreword

The early years count.

Because 85 percent of a child's brain development takes place by the age of five;

Because toddlers' brains are two and half times more active than the brains of adults;

And because children learn more from birth to age three than at any other time in their life.

Put simply, Early Childhood Development (ECD) is crucial because most development occurs during early childhood.

That is why we in Jordan have been working hard to ensure every child gets the best start to life: access to nurseries and kindergartens that are stimulating, nurturing, and fun.

Studies show children enrolled in ECD programs earn benefits that last their lifetime. They are more ready for school, perform better in the classroom, develop better social skills, enjoy better health, earn higher incomes, create more stable home lives, and are more law-abiding.

The result is that an investment in ECD pays itself off many times over. Every $1 spent on ECD generates a return to society of anywhere from $7 to $17 because of reduced special education costs, less grade repetition, higher adult earnings, more tax revenues, and reduced crime rates.

I am proud that, thanks to the strong partnership between Jordan's Ministry of Education, the National Council for Family Affairs, and UNICEF, as well as support from many civil society organizations and international institutions, Jordan has made considerable strides in improving access to, and quality of, our kindergarten care.

Enrollment rates in preschool (KG 2) are rising - from over 28 percent in 1990 to almost 51 percent in 2008 - significantly above the regional average. More public kindergartens are opening. A culturally appropriate, interactive curriculum is inspiring our youngest students. Newly trained teachers are embarking on a fresh career path. Studies are guiding policymakers. Evaluations are improving our performance. ECD is now in the spotlight.

And families are an important part of the equation too. Jordan's Better Parenting program educates and trains parents on how to give their children the best care, the safest start, and the most stimulating home environment possible. To date, through a network of thirteen partners, the program has trained over 10 percent of the population - 100,000 families. Plans are afoot to reach even more.

But we are still a long way from where we want to be. There are many more children we can help, especially in rural communities and poor urban areas. And we have to focus not just on KG 2, important as it is, but on KG 1 and nursery level children, because they are the ones who stand to gain the most from early educational intervention.

Looking ahead, I hope we can count on continuing cooperation between the Jordanian government, international partners, and the donor community to make our goal of universal enrollment for one year of preschool (KG 2) a reality. We want to reach out to all Mums, Dads, and caregivers and equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to be better parents so that our sons and daughters maximize this period of promise in their young lives.

Because the window of opportunity for ECD is real, but it does not stay open for ever. If we miss the moment for action, we do not get a second chance. Children are every parent's greatest joy and every country's greatest resource. Investing in them during their critical early years is one of the greatest gifts we can give them and one of the smartest moves we can make for the future of our world, which soon will be theirs.

Rania Al Abdullah

UNICEF Eminent Advocate for Children Queen Rania Al Abdullah

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Background and Context

Background and Context

The importance of ECD and ECCE

Attention to early childhood development (ECD)[1] and early childhood care and education (ECCE) has increased over the past three decades in both advanced economies and in middle- and low-income countries. The OECD, for instance, launched a 12-country Thematic Review of ECCE Policy in 1998 (OECD, 2001), and UNICEF commissioned a comprehensive study of the status of ECCE (Khattab, 1996, 2004) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

There are several reasons for this policy interest in the area. Research has consistently shown that when children experience quality early education and care, this benefits their short term cognitive, social and emotional development, and their long-term success in school and later life (OECD, 2001, p.13). Brain research has also conclusively shown the extent to which the first few years are crucial, with development being determined by the quality of the environment and the stimulation that is afforded to the young child (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007). The brain is almost entirely developed by the time a child enters school, having gone through a series of critical

periods in which the brain is 'wired', so that a child's experiences during the first few years determine cognitive development, attachment and security, as well as the way he or she relates to other people and the world around them. Any adversity in terms of deprived environments, stress, chronic illnesses or exposure to trauma will affect the young child's holistic development adversely (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

It is therefore not surprising that longitudinal economic and social analyses have confirmed that the cost of ECCE is best seen as an investment that is recouped (Duncan et al., 2008). Indeed, evaluations of two ECCE programmes in the US indicate that for each dollar invested, four to seven are regained in terms of broad individual and social outcomes (ADEA Working Group on ECD, 2003). For developing countries, the benefits accrued from ECCE programmes outdo interventions at other education levels, as well as investment projects outside education (Van der Gaag & Tan, 1998).

ECCE also promotes school-readiness, which has a dramatic impact on lowering drop out rates and lower grade repetition rates. Some have concluded that, in all likelihood, "the full 100 percent of the investments, and probably much more, will be recovered if we would also take into account the benefits that accrue at higher levels of education and beyond education" (Van Ravens & Aggio, 2006, p.8). Not only are early interventions long-lasting, but they are much less costly than repairing problems that develop as a result of delayed or damaged development (Keating & Hertzman, 1999; Vargas-Baron, 2005).

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[1] The terms ECCE and ECD are used interchangeably in this document, and are preferred to ECE which tends to focus exclusively on education and schooling. In contrast, ECCE and ECD highlight the importance of integrated and comprehensive approaches to early childhood, paying attention not only to education, but also to such issues as health, nutrition, security, and safety. Debates about whether to refer to early childhood as ECD, ECE, or ECCE were still surfacing at meetings I attended as part of my field research. The main issue here is precisely the focus on a more comprehensive and holistic approach to children's well-being, which goes beyond education and the cognitive domain to include sound development in all domains.

ECCE is clearly a sound investment by the state when one considers its impact on broader social outcomes such as good health, a stable family life, higher chances of employment, improved economic performance for individual and country alike, lower crime rates, and so on (Weikart, 2000; Van Ravens & Aggio, 2006; Bartik,2008). From an equity perspective, provision of quality services for young children from poor families can overcome some of the negative effects of disadvantage. Furthermore, when ECCE services are in place, women are more likely to participate in the labour market, as families can more easily reconcile the demands of parenting and work. In other words, there is an increasing acknowledgement of the fact that "equitable access to quality early childhood education and care can strengthen the foundations of lifelong learning for all children and support the broad educational and social needs of families" (OECD, 2001, p.13).

The evidence that has accumulated over the past several years therefore confirms that ECCE contributes to all Education for All (EFA) goals, and to the first six of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), namely eradication of poverty and hunger, universal primary enrolment, gender equality, reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, and combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases (UNESCO, 2007). The early years are clearly critical for chances later in life, "so the case for public investment in ECCE seems stronger than it is for the last stages of education, that many children never reach but receive a relatively large share of countries' and donors' budgets" (Van Ravens & Aggio, 2006, p.3).

Introducing the ECD Programme in Jordan

The second publication in UNICEF's Learning Series—the first one having focused on the Girls' Education Initiative in Egypt (Sultana, 2008)—sets out to document the way the ECD programme in Jordan is helping the country create environments that are more fit for children, and in doing so reaching several EFA and MDG goals. The hope here is that the documentation serves as a policy opportunity to both sustain Jordan's initiatives, and to promote a focus on ECCE in the region and beyond. Jordan therefore effectively serves as a vibrant case study which sets an important example in the region, showing the positive impact that an unequivocal national commitment to early childhood care can have.

ECCE is a relatively new area of policy focus in the MENA region: enrolment in the Arab states is generally low and predominantly private, with provision largely in the hands of for-profit entities, and to a lesser extent NGO's and religious organizations. As Van Ravens & Aggio (2006, p.4) note, only 15.7 percent of the total number of eligible children in this region have access to pre-primary education—the lowest regional average after that of sub-Saharan Africa where the figure is 12.4 percent (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2006). Factors contributing to low demand for—and low enrolment in—ECD programmes include a low rate of female participation in the labour force, coupled with a perception that nurseries and kindergartens are mainly concerned with guarding children, rather than stimulating their development.

There is no clear correlation between wealth and enrolment when it comes to enrolment rates: ECCE enrolment is much higher in East Asia and the Pacific, despite the fact that it is a poorer region than the Arab States. Understanding of the importance of ECCE, and a clear commitment to it therefore seem to be the key variable when it comes to service provision. This understanding and commitment seem, however, to be lacking: taking into account recent trends in service expansion, and unless specific policies to accelerate provision are adopted, it will take the MENA region up to 2017 to offer pre-primary education to 50 percent of eligible children, and up to 2023 to cater for 75 percent of them (Van Ravens & Aggio 2006, p.10).

When provision is largely driven by the market, the implications are clear: it is only the privileged that can afford fees to send their children to private providers, while the rest only have access to services if these are offered free or at highly subsidised rates by the state and by voluntary community-based providers. Governments that have left the sector solely in the hands of market forces have consistently failed to reach out to poor families and to families with illiterate parents. As a result, not only does a large proportion of the population fail to start strong, but the chasm between the privileged and the deprived becomes exponentially deeper. World-wide experience teaches us that universal ECCE can only be reached if the EC sector is driven both by the market ('bottom-up' dynamics), and by the state ('top-down' forces).

In what follows, we will see how Jordan has taken this learning to heart, and is now in a position to share its own experiences with others in the region and beyond. We will see how Jordan has come up with a comprehensive set of initiatives that set out to make the country fit for children.

The documentation will organise the description of the initiatives around two main poles. The first concerns the effort to make home environments conducive to healthy physical, emotional, social and educational development. This entailed not only Better Parenting programmes, but focused on earlier steps, starting from providing guidance in the search for a marriage partner, and caring for the unborn child during pregnancy. The second set of initiatives focus on efforts to establish nurseries ('hadane') and kindergartens ('rawda'), thus providing institutional environments that support healthy development in all its aspects, for children between age 0-3 (nursery stage) and 4-6 (KG stage). The emphasis in this documentation is on the KG stage, given that it is kindergartens rather than nurseries that are driving national policy strategies. Developments in the KG sector are having a positive impact on setting standards for nurseries, and obviously the benefits derived from Better Parenting programmes are enjoyed by all young children, irrespective of the stage in the formal educational pathway they are in.

The Arab states will be particularly keen to emulate Jordan, given their increasing interest in ECCE (Arab Resource Collective, 2006). At the

1990 World Summit for Children, most Arab leaders committed themselves to improving the status of the Arab child, and agreed to assume more responsibility for ECE in a context where, traditionally, this service is considered to be a private matter, not a public responsibility. The First Arab High Level Conference on Children was held in Tunisia in 1992, and this led to the adoption of a set of goals for the year 2000, which were ratified by subsequent conferences and forums, to the extent that childhood was placed on the agenda of the Summit of Arab World Leaders (Arab Resource Collective, 2006, p.10). The UN Convention for the Rights of the Child has been signed by all the Arab states, with Egypt developing ambitious plans for the sector and declaring 1989 - 1999 as the childhood decade, and Sudan aiming for a 75 percent enrolment increase by 2015 compared to the situation in 2002. Pan Arab interest in the child has also been signalled through the establishment of an Arab Institute for Childhood Studies in Cairo, under the supervision of the Arab League, which has also issued an "Arab Plan for Childhood."

Before we showcase Jordan's achievements, it is first of all necessary to provide an account of the methodology that was followed in capturing this important experience, and to give some details regarding relevant aspects of Jordan's social, economic and educational standing.

Methodology

Capturing Jordan ECD set of initiatives required the use of a range of research methodologies in an effort to do justice to the spectrum of activities that different actors are involved in. First, the documentation required extensive desk research: the ECD initiatives have generated a large amount of policy papers, research, evaluation and monitoring studies, and publications such as trainer manuals, curricula, and reports. All these documents, together with minutes of key meetings of the lead entities involved in the initiatives, were carefully analysed in order to identify the main themes and issues, thus helping develop both a clear understanding of the sector, and the questions that would be addressed to interviewees in the field-work stage. Documents were provided by UNICEF's Jordan office, which was also responsible for organising the field research. Supplementary documentation was generated privately, through a search in international databases with a view to identifying relevant papers that had been published in peer reviewed journals, and which could potentially serve to shed new light on the Jordanian initiative.

Three visits were paid to Jordan. The introductory visit took place between the 9th and the 10th of July 2008, and entailed several briefings with UNICEF regional and national staff and some of their partners. Dr. Malak Zaalouk from UNICEF Regional Office was instrumental in developing structure and purpose for this documentation. This served to establish a basic orientation towards the study and the

sector, to identify key documents that needed to be analysed prior to entering the field, and to organise the field research phase.

The latter took place between the 27th July and the 8th of August, and involved a series of interviews with key players in the ECD initiative from the state and private (for-profit, NGO and religious) sector. Interviews were thus conducted with the Minister of Education; with members of the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA), whose ECD committee is responsible for providing a policy umbrella for all initiatives in the ECCE area; with ECD staff from the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for KG's; with ECD staff from the Ministry of Social Development, which is responsible for nurseries; with a representative from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs (MoAIA), since this Ministry is playing an important and innovative role in educating fathers for responsible parenthood; with international agencies that are supporting the Jordan initiative with loans, funds, and/or technical support, such as UNICEF, USAID/ESP, the World Bank, and Save the Children; with several NGO's as well as entities that are providing services through Better Parenting programmes, and/or through establishing nurseries and kindergartens (KG's)—including Al-Farouq Society, JOHUD (Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development), GUVS (General Union of Voluntary Societies), the Jordan River Foundation, the Islamic Society and UNRWA; and with directors and trainers involved in the Better Parenting programmes.

A number of sessions delivered in the framework of the latter programme were observed in community centres (including one mosque) as well as in homes in several areas in the middle of Jordan (in and around Amman), as well as in the north (Irbid) and the south (Tafileh, Ma'an, Aqaba, Al-Risha) of the country. The spread captures some of the most important regional variations in Jordan, facilitating a better understanding of the different socio-economic factors that have an impact on the provision of services in the country. Whenever this was possible, nurseries and KG's were visited, with a focus on those run by NGO's since state-owned ones were closed for the summer.

In addition, I sat through two local committee meetings in order to better appreciate how these entities were managing the Better Parenting programme, and how they brought on board several community-based organisations in an effort to start and improve services for young children in the area. I also attended a meeting of the Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy (ER*f*KE) group when this focused on the ECD component in the reform package. As we will note in greater detail later on, ER*f*KE is the key policy forum that has been tasked with implementing a comprehensive educational reform package that aspires to support Jordan's quest for integration in the global, high-skills economy through the smart development of its human resources.

A third and final field visit was organised between the 24th and 26th

August, with a view to visiting nurseries and KG's in the private and public sector, as well as in an UNRWA camp, and to observe a number of sessions or sequences. Besides interviews with nursery and KG principals and teachers in schools, it was also possible to have a focus group interview with eight KG teachers in order to share insights and to discuss issues that had been observed in the field. Other interviews were held with University-based ECD experts, some of which had been lined up for me by UNICEF, while others I arranged privately in order to facilitate the generation of fresh insights from persons who were not directly involved with the initiatives. [2]

Interviews were carried out using a semi-structured question schedule, which drew on a data bank of questions that had been initially developed on the basis of the desk research, and which was subsequently modified in response to new insights that emerged in the field, and to the specific focus of each particular interview. Interviews were held in English, with UNICEF staff from the Jordan office (Ms. Maha Homsi and Ms. Buthayna Al-Khatib) accompanying me to meetings, providing translation into Arabic when this was necessary, and providing me with invaluable information and insights that helped me better understand the cultural contexts in which we were operating. UNICEF has initiated, promoted, supported, and funded ECCE in Jordan from the start, and therefore embodies the institutional memory of the initiatives, projects and

programmes that have shaped the field since the start.

A first draft of the documentation was shared with several key players in the ECCE field. The feedback received helped ensure that what we document below is not limited to the fieldwork carried out by the present author, but represents more fully the challenges, achievements and set-backs in trying to implement an ambitiously comprehensive ECD policy.

Despite the care and attention to detail that characterises this documentation, it must be stressed that our purpose is not to evaluate as much as to capture the dynamic process of reform in the ECCE sector. While there are inevitably evaluative elements interwoven with the representation of the initiatives in this testimony, readers should consult the work of other authors specifically commissioned to monitor and evaluate aspects of ECD in Jordan. We will be referring to these studies, integrating their main findings in an effort to do justice to the complexities surrounding the ECCE field.

Introducing Jordan, home to two-and-a-half million children[3]

Socio-economic profile

What is it like for a child to be born in Jordan? As with most if not all places in the world, the answer is: "It depends". It depends on whether Ahmad or Fatima happen to be born male or female, to a well-off and educated family or to a

[3] A child is defined as any person, male or female, under 18 years of age.

poor and illiterate one, in an urban city or rural hamlet, in a regular township or refugee camp. The weight and value of the "it depends" varies from country to country: in some contexts, the differences in the accidents of birth that I have just listed have marginal impact on the life chances and life experiences of individuals. In others, they make quite a difference—occasionally the difference between, quite literally, life and death.

Jordan stands proudly in the region for making a serious commitment to not only ensuring that it is a safe, welcoming homeland fit for all children, but also to making sure that accidents of birth are mitigated by generous, supportive national policies that give a headstart to the underprivileged. Our focus is on early childhood care and education, and the efforts made to provide learning environments that help children develop and grow, sustained by well-informed parents and suitably trained teachers in the context of home and school. ECCE efforts, however, do not—and cannot—operate in a policy vacuum, and indeed the genuineness and earnestness of Jordan's commitment become evident when we consider the manner in which it has addressed the issue of children's well-being from every possible angle. It has reinforced the legislative framework in favour of children, reviewed and amended the Penal Law, the Juvenile Law, and the Personal Status Law, and enacted new laws that directly or indirectly support children's welfare. It has introduced frameworks for child focused planning, including the National Plan of Action for Children (2004 - 2013, launched in October 2004), the National Framework for Family

Protection (including the setting up of the NCFA in 2001), the National Early Childhood Development Strategy, the National Strategy to Eliminate Child Labour (adopted in 2003), the National Youth Strategy (2005-2009, adopted in December 2004), the National Strategy for the Jordanian Family, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy of 2002. These support, sustain and complete the Early Childhood Development Strategy launched in December 2000, and the subsequent Plan of Action for the years 2003-2007.

The slate of inter-connected legal provisions, national strategies, and implementation plans—impressive though these are—does not of course mean that children's lives in Jordan are trouble-free, or that their needs are comprehensively catered for. Many of the good policy intentions need major financial outlays in order to move from drawing board to practice, and Jordan faces some major challenges in this regard.[4] While GDP growth is strong and many new jobs are being created, the country remains dependent on foreign grants and loans resulting in high external debts and budget deficits. Unemployment stands at 15 percent, and is especially high for young people aged 14-35, with 40,000 new entrants into the labour market each year. Indigence affects 14.2 percent of the population, with 29 percent of these being chronically poor. Food prices have steadily risen, so that households find themselves obliged to spend as much as 48 percent of their

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[4] The data presented in this section is derived from several sources, including European Training Foundation (2005, 2007, 2008), UNICEF & NCFA (2007), UNICEF (2007).

income on food. For rural families, food expenses represent 58 percent of their income. Seventy one percent of the total Jordanian population is to be found in 3 of the 12 country's governorates— namely Amman, Irbid and Zarqa—with regional disparities impacting on employment and living conditions for those who live far from the economically attractive centres (see Box 1). There are major differences in the quality of life between and within towns and cities, with some neighbourhoods in West Amman, for instance, boasting luxurious residences and well-appointed, safe and open play areas for children, while others in East Amman stand in stark contrast.

Economic challenges are compounded by the demographic trends in the country. While fertility has gone down from 4.4 children per woman in 1997 to 3.2 ten years later, mortality has declined faster than fertility thanks to positive preventive health policies and expansion of health services. This, together with waves of refugees first from Palestine, then from Iraq, has boosted the population from less than a million in 1961, to an estimated 6.1 million in 2008. Thirty two percent of these are registered Palestinian refugees. Needless to say, the growth in population has serious impact on the resources needed to cover increased demands for social services. For instance, since 1960, the number of government primary schools has increased fourfold, the number of students multiplied seven times, and the number of government schoolteachers increased tenfold.

Despite such challenges, however, not only has Jordan maintained its 1964

commitment to ten years of obligatory schooling, covering ages 6 to 16, but it has now added pre-school as part of the official cycle, with plans to make the second year of kindergarten (KG2)

Box 1: Jordan and its governorates
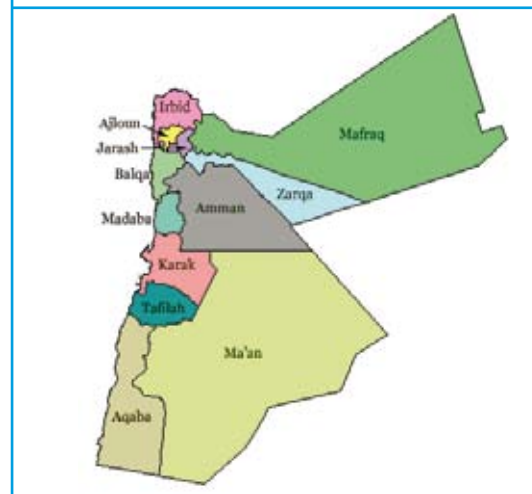
compulsory. It has increased public expenditure on children's education and health, climbing three steps up the Human Development Index over the past year, ranking 86th out of 177 countries, and 9th out of the 19 countries in the region.

Two main cleavages in access to life chances in Jordan are location and gender. The urban/rural divide remains strong, and is a key indicator of the quality of life that children can expect to enjoy. Around 20 percent of all Jordanian families live in rural areas. While nationally infant mortality stands at 22 deaths per 1,000 live births, the rate climbs to 35 for rural and poorer income groups. For the latter groups, low birth weight stands at 14.6 percent, compared to 8.9 percent in urban

zones. Chronic malnutrition and stunting increased with age from 3 percent among children below 6 months of age to 13 percent among children aged 12 - 23 months, and differ by sex, birth order, birth interval, residence and mother's education. Both stunting and wasting levels are higher among the poorer and rural groups in the South.

Many households have experienced improvement in the quality of the living space, and access to public utilities and household conveniences: over 98 percent live in permanent, substantial housing, and access to electricity is almost universal in rural (98.7 percent) and urban (99.7 percent) locations alike. Access to drinking water and sanitation facilities is high, but again the quality varies between urban and rural, and rich and poor households. Twenty out of the 73 sub-districts in the country—accounting for a total population of 403,000—have a poverty level of 25 percent, pointing to significant pockets of poverty in rural Jordan. Poorer households in rural areas tend to have larger families, with an average of 6.2 members, compared to 5.5 in urban households. Access to education for the poor and for children with disabilities is still limited, especially at progressively higher levels of education. In rural areas and in poor urban communities, there is—as we shall have occasion to note in detail in Chapter 4—a considerable unmet need for preschools. In 2002, 72 percent of all KG's were to be found in urban areas (Young & Gaag, 2002).

Jordan has worked hard in order to ensure gender parity in education (see Al-Khaldi, 2006). While female adult literacy, especially among the rural poor, is lower than that of males, the ratio of girls to boys in primary schools is excellent, and female literacy overall stands at 91 compared to men. Girls outnumber boys and perform better in the basic education cycle, even if they are slightly fewer in number at the preschool level. More boys drop out than girls at the post-primary level. Women are well-represented in higher education, but tend to congregate in the same courses that are associated with traditional female roles.

Educational achievement has not, however, brought women much economic gain: indeed, unemployment is particularly high among educated young women, representing a serious wastage of potential: while 63 percent of men participate in the labour force, the figure for women is only 12 percent. Only 11 percent of females (compared to 54 percent of males) in the 20 - 24 year-old group are working for pay.

Another variable that may be expected to have an impact on the way children experience life is their status as refugees. Standing as it does at a critical intersection of a number of regional tensions, Jordan has not only had to play a lead role in the complex diplomatic efforts in the region, but has also opened its arms to the hundreds of thousands of people that have been displaced by conflicts. The number of registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan is 1,835,704 (of whom 894,661 are females). The legal and basic services that Jordan provides is among the best in countries hosting Palestinian refugees, and many of these are fully integrated into mainstream Jordanian society. However, the quality of life for

those living in the 10 official refugee camps is similar to that of the poorer category of Jordanians. Many have little if any access to safe and appropriate leisure and recreational facilities.

Over 450,000 Iraqis have streamed into Jordan since 2003, with an estimated 26 percent of them being below the age of 15. Despite the fact that a good proportion of the Iraqi community in the country is of sufficient means, Jordan has nevertheless generously agreed to cater for their children in its public schools, with 20,000 being admitted in 2007. In this year, UNICEF and other donors supported the MoE to bear the expenses resulting from this inclusive policy, meeting both enrolment fees and the cost of textbooks. In 2008 the King ordered that all costs be waived for Iraqis. A FAFO/DoS study dated May 2007[5] however suggests that a significant number of Iraqi children may still not be accessing education, and that the lowest enrolment rate (around 60 percent) is among adolescent children and those children coming from female headed households (which make up 20 percent of the Iraqi families in Jordan).

Being a child in Jordan

Over and above these economic contexts and differences, custom and tradition also play an important part in defining children's lives in Jordan. It is important to highlight several of these socio-cultural aspects, as they have a direct bearing on the ECCE initiatives that we will be documenting, and the Better Parenting programme particularly so.

Jordan is predominantly Arab (98 percent) and Muslim. As such, it shares many cultural traits with its neighbours in the MENA region, including a tradition of valuing the child and its education. As with other cultures, Jordanian traditions are at times supportive of child growth and development, at times less so. As we will see, the Better Parenting programme was careful to acknowledge and celebrate the former, while highlighting and addressing the problems with the latter.

Throughout the fieldwork, several interviewees noted that a distinction has to be carefully made between customs that are linked to Islam, and those that are in fact embedded in traditions that have nothing much to do with religion, even though with time many erroneously assume they do. Islam in fact has an enormous wealth of wisdom when it comes to caring, raising and protecting children. This is witnessed by an impressive work of scholarship by a multi-disciplinary group of experts who drew on the teachings of Sharia, the Qur'an, and the Hadith (the Prophetic Tradition) in order to reflect on some of the key insights that modern science— and specifically medicine, psychology, sociology and education—has to offer in relation to children and childhood. The popular guidebook, whose second edition is titled Children in Islam: Their Care, Upbringing and Protection (Al-Azhar University & UNICEF, 2005), adopts a strongly rights-based approach, and tackles such themes as health, hygiene and nutrition, property and inheritance, education and dignified living, the responsibilities of the state, society and parents towards children,

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[5] This Norwegian-funded study is still not in the public domain.

positive and inclusive attitudes towards children with disabilities, the protection of children from all sorts of abuse, gender discrimination, exploitation and conflict, and the right to lifelong learning.

Islam therefore is a rich source of practical wisdom which can serve to guide parents and wider society in the care for children, not just after birth, but before that as well. There are thus injunctions to avoid marrying close relatives in order to avoid hereditary disease—a counsel that is particularly relevant to Jordanian society where consanguineous marriages affect 43 percent of married females aged 15 - 49. Pregnancy is a special time where husbands are expected to give particular attention to their wives . All children should be welcomed and celebrated at birth, with the Qur'an specifically condemning those who express sadness or dismay when a girl is born, or who fail to treat children with absolute equality.

Sharia law follows this up by insisting on equal educational opportunities for boys and girls alike. Breast-feeding, hygiene, immunization against illness are all highly recommended, as is birth-spacing which allows the mother to regain her strength after each pregnancy, and parents to take good care of the young infant. Parental example rather than violence should help in instilling values in children. All forms of physical, moral and psychological abuse of children are condemned, and indeed society has obligations in caring for the weak, the destitute, orphans and abandoned children. Child labour is prohibited, and the right of children to

play and recreation is acknowledged. Islam not only encourages education but stipulates that learning is a duty that should accompany a good Muslim lifelong. Some of the Koranic advice goes into surprising detail, as when it counsels parents to avoid giving children unpleasant names that could lead to ridicule from peers.

As interviewees indicated during the field research, culture, custom and tradition in Jordan draw on this rich source of wisdom in their dealings with children, but also on other indigenous elements that are not always as positive in their impact on the young. Some of these elements affect health: many consider the pre-marriage medical exam to be taboo, thus running serious risks, particularly when it comes to marriages between relatives. Women often labour under the belief that they should not exercise during pregnancy. There is still a strong preference for male offspring, with a woman suffering great anxiety if she only gives birth to daughters, ending up feeling pressurised to have as many children as quickly as possible until a male child is born. Repudiation and divorce can follow if the latter event does not materialise. Furthermore, if there is a suspicion that the foetus is a girl, some women feel desperate enough to resort to traditional lore and induce abortion by taking cinnamon or by carrying heavy loads.

The birth of a boy is celebrated with more pomp—especially in the case of the first-born, or "il-bikri"—and males are breast-fed longer, molly-coddled by mother, in-laws and sisters alike, and benefit more than daughters do from the family's financial and social capital

Box 2: Vignette: Putting salt on the baby's body

After giving birth to my baby, my neighbour Um-Hassan came to visit me. My baby boy was then 1-month old. I told her that my baby cries a lot and his skin is always red although my mother-in-law washed him with salt. Um Hassan's face expressions changed and she looked surprised. She told me that what my mother-in-law was doing was wrong and she told me about the training given by the voluntary society on child care.

I went with her and the trainer told me that putting salt on the baby is a wrong practice and she was able to convince me why it is so. When I went home, there was a conflict between me and my mother-in-law but my husband supported me. Thanks be to God…the rash went away. However, my mother-in-law kept insisting that she was right, and she actually went to the centre to defend herself.

in terms of access to education and other benefits. Many Jordanian mothers—particularly in rural areas—follow old customs and rub their babies in salt, unwittingly causing dehydration (see Vignette in Box 2). Many also put kohol around the eyes of their young ones to make the eyes look bigger, little realising that this can cause tear ducts to block up. Little attention is given to crying children, with the mistaken belief that "crying is good for their lungs". Breast-feeding is carried out unceremoniously, without too much attention to the child since many incorrectly believe that babies are blind, when in fact they can see the distance from the mother's breast to her eyes, with suckling becoming a privileged time for mutual recognition and bonding.

It is difficult to capture what a child means to a mother and to a father in Jordan. Certainly, that construction of meaning depends, as has been suggested, on whether the child happens to be Ahmad or Fatima—a boy or a girl. Furthermore, such constructions depend

on the socio-economic and educational background of parents, which is often related to urbanised as opposed to rural lifestyles. Children have of course been regarded differently across time and cultures (James, Jencks & Prout, 1998; May, 2000; Brooker, 2005). In the West, for instance, children have been viewed as chattel for whom the state has no interest or rights of intervention (pre-1900s); as social capital for whom state investment in health and education was intended to create a useful adult citizen and prevent social disorder (post-1900s); as a psychological being whose mental health required support and understanding by parents and institutions, leading to a more sane society (post-1945); and as a citizen who had rights derived from a fairer society (post-1970s).

Such historical and cultural studies emphasise that the way we behave with children is dependent on the understanding we have of their nature. Indeed, for several centuries the child was considered an adult in miniature

(Aries, 1973), and was dealt with as such. It was only in the 19th century—often referred to as "the century of the child" (James & Prout, 1997)—that a corpus of knowledge was built up by psychologists and other social scientists based on the systematic study of children, leading to the notion of childhood as a distinct stage in the human life cycle. Today, the whole notion of child development, of 'normalcy', as well as dominant notions of 'child' and 'good parenting' are being deconstructed. Increasingly such notions are considered to be generated within a time and context that support particular beliefs about the world. Increasingly, too, there is a growing understanding of the way such beliefs are inevitably enmeshed in webs of power, working in the interest of some groups, and against the interests of others (Cannella, 2005).

There are, to my knowledge, no similar studies in Jordan—and few for the surrounding region—which try to capture the historically- and culturally-embedded constructions of the child in the Arab world, and the extent to which they are considered to be separate, distinct persons with nalienable rights.[6] However, insights generated through interviews, observations and field visits suggest that children are highly regarded and treasured. Their education is greatly valued, and even in the poorer families,

every effort is made to ensure that access to schooling is secured, in the belief that this may serve daughters in good stead later on, while it opens up the road to many opportunities for sons. The data that is publicly available also reinforces the view that children are cared for in Jordan: child neglect remains low, with 51 cases reported in 2006. Child beggars—of whom there were 626 in 2002—often have a home to return to.

Some other statistics, however, suggest that the notion that childhood is a distinct and special stage in the life cycle is not strong. Forty percent of working children are below 15 years of age, and many are involved in agricultural work, family business and domestic work. As many as 30,000 children between ages 15 and 18 were arrested between 1999 and 2001, and annually 800 children are institutionalised in Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) juvenile rehabilitation centres.

In the more traditional households, affection is often tempered by a strong commitment to discipline, with parental authority, and especially paternal control, being emphasised. In extended family contexts, authority is dispensed by different adult members of the household (Hammad, 2000). As the Arab Resource Collective (2006, p.9) notes, "The image of the Arab child is often that of a 'good' child, one who is polite, obedient, disciplined, who should be seen but not heard, and conforms to the values of the group. It is believed that the child is born without *aql*, or reason." Fathers are an object of fear, with

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[6] Dated but still useful sources are Granqvist (1947), Ammar (1954), Miner & de Vos (1960) and Prothro (1961). Other insights can be gleaned from autobiographic writings, such as those by Said (1999) and Kharmi (2002). Patai (1983), while open to the charge of 'orientalism' given his outsider 'gaze' and his tendency to view Arab practices from the perspective of western traditions, provides a richly textured account of Arab child-rearing practices, much of which resonates with the material collected during the fieldwork for the present study, as well as with my own experiences of growing up in pre-independence Mediterranean Malta in the late fifties and early sixties.

mothers often trying to manage children by threatening to tell her husband about their misdeeds once he returns from work. With increasing cost of living and the dramatic rise in food prices, more and more fathers are absent from the home, taking on a series of jobs in the informal economy in order to try to make ends meet (ETF, 2007). A preliminary but fascinating qualitative insight into Jordanian males' perceptions of early child development and their role in it (ARM, 2003) suggests that men consider themselves to be responsible for control, guidance, and direction, and for establishing a framework of values and ethics for their children. Most men are clear about the distinct roles parents have: that of the mother is to be the caregiver, the father the provider. Child-rearing is often considered to be the mothers' exclusive domain, especially in the early years up to age three—even when they are employed and their husbands are not.

Traditional norms and values constrain dialogue between children and family authority figures. Children are allowed to decide about minor matters, but have less freedom to decide on important issues, such as academic and occupational choices (Sultana & Watts, 2007). Gentleness and affection are, I was told, somewhat thinly displayed, and in some contexts there is a strong belief that sparing the rod spoils the child, and that boys would never become men unless they endured corporal punishment from time to time. Mothers and fathers relate differently to sons and daughters. Some interviewees mentioned that, depending on age, fathers tend to be more distant from

daughters, but that they took much pride in inducting their sons in a range of social spaces, such as the mosque. Gender stereotyping is evident in the socialization of children from early ages, and as in many Mediterranean societies, girls are expected to help mothers in household chores, to run errands, and to care for younger siblings. In large families, adolescent daughters are not infrequently obliged to abandon schooling to care for brothers and sisters, often serving the role of an adoptive mother or 'sister-mother', with strong emotional bonds that may surpass those of the biological mother (Hammad, 2000). It is generally expected that females serve males, including younger brothers.

It is difficult to back some of the insights shared by informants during the fieldwork: data on child-rearing practices is hard to come by in any context, given the research difficulties such an enterprise represents. Care must also be taken to avoid exoticising the 'other', as this runs the danger of forgetting the common bond that ties humans together across cultures, where protective love of one's children—and profound grief when they come into harm's way—are among the strongest of emotions shared by all. Nevertheless, the foregoing impressionistic collage will have furnished us with what is hopefully a useful background and context. It is on the basis of this that we now move on to describe Jordan's ECD initiative, which set out to provide as many children as possible with sound, developmentally appropriate and caring environments in the home and in kindergartens.

2

A COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL ECD STRATEGY

A COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL ECD STRATEGY

Prelude

As is the case with several other countries in the region, the focus on early years in Jordan is a relatively recent phenomenon. While some private EC establishments had been set up by the 1950s to cater for the children of an urban elite, in policy terms ECCE did not feature on the agenda before 1978, when Jordan participated in the First International Child's Year (Ihmeideh, 2006). Initial interest was reinforced by the First National Conference for Educational Development, held in 1987, when the importance of providing pre-primary education was highlighted. Similar conclusions were reached in a National Seminar for Children, held in 1993 under the patronage of the late King Hussein, where the target of increasing enrolment in KG's from 18 percent to 50 percent by the year 2000 was set, and a commitment was made to develop the legislation necessary to ensure optimal childhood growth and development in the country. In addition, families and communities were to be integrated more effectively in early childhood programmes, thus ensuring a more successful implementation of ECCE services.

By 1996, these policy commitments started to take on a sharper focus and a more concrete form (Homsi, 2007). Two national studies sponsored by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education (MoE) looked at the two key ECCE contexts, namely the home and the preschool sector. In relation to the first, a KAP study (UNICEF, 1996) with a representative sample of the Jordanian population focused on the knowledge and attitudes of families towards early childhood care. It transpired that the majority of young parents—and men more so than women—lack the necessary information and skills for providing a stimulating environment in the home, especially in areas related to social and emotional development. Given the dearth of public pre-school provision, and the fact that more than 75 percent of children are cared for in the home, the conclusion from this study was logical: a strategy had to be developed to help young people and adults become better parents, through imparting skills and information to support the psychosocial, cognitive and physical development of children aged 0 - 8 in the country.

A second study by Srour (1996) focused on the situation of pre-schooling in Jordan. As has already been indicated, most KG's were then run by the private sector. The MoE role in the pre-school sector was minimal, limited to supervision and licensing of both the independent (for-profit) and NGO kindergartens. Geographical coverage was determined by market forces, and not by need, so the poorer families had limited access to services. The study revealed the poor quality of most KG's, which made use of insufficiently trained staff, and where the emphasis was on academic development at the expense of other development areas and age-appropriate activities. Existing curricula focused on language and number skills, and the educational model on which these curricula were based was not at all

clear. Few teachers used stories, drama, play, and music as teaching methods, or employed the official evaluation instruments provided. Only 56 percent of the KG's were abiding by official licensing conditions and standards, even though these were far from being comprehensive or adequate.

ECCE policy drivers

Interest in the ECCE sector firmed up as a number of public figures and lead organisations championed the cause and articulated the need for policy development in more explicit and clear terms. At least three key discourses motivated and drove policy interest in the ECCE field in Jordan, namely those informed by human capital, by rights, and by demography. First is the fact that the country has no natural resources other than its stock of human capital. Unlike the Gulf states, for instance, wealth in Jordan can only be generated through the labour and ingenuity of its people. In an increasingly knowledge-based, globalised economy, where the high-skills end of the labour market is where the value-added tends to lie, Jordan is keen to ensure that its citizens are well equipped with the competences needed to gain an edge in the competitive environment. This, as we shall see, is the rationale underpinning the massive educational reform effort that goes under the name of ER*f*KE.

It is also the rationale that partly drives investment in ECCE, given the increasing appreciation of the role that it plays in boosting educational attainment by increasing their learning readiness, and by reaching children at a time when

there is the most rapid development of their physical, emotional and cognitive domains. This human capital approach to ECCE therefore stresses its value in terms of an investment in children, with Jordan standing to recoup on its investment through improved future economic activity.

A second policy driver and discourse is more humanistic in orientation. It stresses the value of improved ECCE in facilitating children's welfare and well-being, and enhancing the quality of their life by ensuring their health, happiness, and fulfilment (Huston, 2005). Naturally, the assumption is that this will pay economic dividends in the end, to individual and country alike, but the difference here is that the focus is on rights, and on the desire to create a society that cares for its children, no matter what. There is also a stress on the fact that early investment in childcare can compensate for social inequalities, bridging the opportunity gaps for those from poor backgrounds, or for those having disabilities.

Both the human capital and humanistic motives underpinning the policy interest in ECCE are further reinforced by a stark demographic reality: close to 27 percent of the Jordanian population is under the age of 9, and thus classified as falling within the early years bracket. Getting the ECCE strategy right is clearly vital to the country—even more so than for those countries whose demographic pyramid is the other way round. As Homsi (2007, p.4) correctly notes, "a very young population holds the promise of a dynamic workforce, and a thriving cultural life."

Queen Rania Al Abdullah narrates a new story she has written, titled "Eternal Beauty",
to the 40 children gathered at the Children's Museum to celebrate Mother's Day.

The National ECD Strategy: Launching a decade for the child

It was the charismatic Queen Rania Al-Abdullah who took up the gauntlet in 1999 and commissioned a team of Jordanian professionals, representing different areas of expertise in dealing with young children, to develop a national ECD strategy. All three discourses outlined above are present both in the terms of reference to the 10-member team, and in the document that was finally produced. In many ways, the process that led to the articulation of the National ECD Strategy is as instructive as the outcome itself.

Process

The operative words characterising the development of the Strategy seem to have been *collaboration*, *comprehensiveness*, and *credibility*. The team brought together a broad range of knowledge and experience, facilitating a cross-disciplinary, multi-sectoral approach that was better equipped to consider the diverse aspects of ECCE, and to avoid adopting a 'piecemeal child' perspective (Myers, 1995, p.49). Collaboration between different partners ensured more value-added when it came to understanding the interconnected nature of initiatives that wish to have a positive impact on the survival, growth and development of the child. UNICEF, as one of the institutional team members, and key catalyst for the ECCE agenda, brought with it its international experience in promoting early child care approaches that combine interventions in health, nutrition, hygiene, cognitive and psychosocial development.

The credibility of the team can be attributed to a number of factors. Having the support and patronage of the Queen ensured that the work had visibility and respect at the national level. A highly esteemed ex-Minister of Education, President of the National Centre for Human Resource Development (NCHRD)—Dr Munther Masri—co-ordinated the whole exercise, bringing to the discussions a range of local and international experience, as well as extensive contacts that were put to good use throughout the term of the committee. Several experts in various fields were thus called in from time to time, in order to inform and strengthen the drafts as they were produced. Dr Masri's role as a technical expert in a range of other fields of educational policy making ensured that there was continuity and consistency between the goals, values and principles underpinning initiatives.

As with much educational policy development in Jordan since the promulgation of the Education Act in 1988, the emphasis was on local expertise that tried to identify and build on local examples of good practice, but which also turned to the international arena for alternative models and inspiration in the search for healthy and balanced child-rearing practices and holistic early childhood education systems.

Credibility was also earned the hard way: the team met weekly over a period of one year, opening up the process to as many partners as possible, and

sharing an advanced draft with over 300 national institutions representing governmental and non-governmental sectors, community-based and religious organizations. When the Strategy Paper was launched in November 2000 in front of over one hundred participants, the groundwork had therefore been carefully prepared, facilitating consensus and ownership of the outcome.

Content

The final version of the strategy was launched in December 2000 (UNICEF & NCFA, 2000). It adopted a lifecycle approach and defined early childhood in relation to five sub-stages, including:

[1] pregnancy
[2] birth to below one year
[3] from one year to below four years
[4] from four years to below six years (the preschool education stage), and
[5] from six years to below nine years (the lower basic education stage).

The strategy encompassed five main goals (see Box 3) and 14 themes covering a range of aspects aimed at providing children with protection and an appropriate environment that enhance their growth and development.[1] For each theme, it presented an overview of the current situation for young children in Jordan, and then a vision of desirable and optimum conditions with possible routes to achieving this.

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[1] The themes are: planning and management, legislation, health care during pregnancy, caring for children in nurseries, preschool education, basic education in the first three primary years, family upbringing and the local community, children with special needs, curricula and programmes, health care services, child culture, the role of the media in early childhood development, human resources, and social defence.

Throughout, the strategy is infused with a principled commitment to the needs of the more deprived members of the community: there is thus an emphasis on the equitable distribution of services between the urban and poorer rural areas, many of which did not stand a chance of ever being served by private child care providers since they could not afford to pay fees.

In policy terms, the goals were to be reached through an integrated comprehensive approach that encouraged civil society and governmental partnership in the advancement of the early childhood agenda, while maintaining the overarching governmental regulation of the sector. This interplay between encouraging local actors through promoting decentralised provision, but within quality frameworks established centrally, laid the ground for the development of national standards, which we will cover in greater detail below. Universities, researchers, statistical databases—one and all were to be mobilised in order to support the translation of a vision into a realisable mission, in ways that followed the best available knowledge and practices world-wide. While appealing to the good will of the relevant parties, the Strategy also emphasises the need for the development of legislation which would entrench children's rights to the best environment possible, supportive of their health, safety, and optimal development.

Few stones were left unturned: the list of aspects that needed to be addressed is daunting—from nursery and KG staff training, to improved caregiver-

> **Box 3: The five main goals of the National ECD Strategy**
>
> 1. Seeking to achieve balanced, comprehensive development for children in the target
> age groups, to meet their needs, and to provide them with protection and the appropriate environment for their growth and development.
>
> 2. Identifying the basic needs of the early childhood sector in the different educational, social, psychological, physical, and health-related fields, in order to contribute to mobilizing the efforts of the different institutions concerned.
>
> 3. Drawing up a general framework for the directions and policies related to early childhood development, which will enable institutions and organizations concerned to take necessary measures, draw up programs, and implement projects appropriate to serving the early childhood sector.
>
> 4. Organizing, coordinating, developing, and institutionalizing the efforts of the institutions and organizations working in the field of early childhood development.
>
> 5. Developing family and community awareness in children's issues and in the importance of early childhood development, its characteristics and demands, as well as providing the necessary support to achieve this aim.

student ratios; from incentives to private providers, to schemes for promoting local funding of initiatives; from legal reform to curricular transformation; from specialised services to the gifted, to targeted assistance to those with special needs. A commitment to access and geographical coverage required a consideration of transport arrangements, while the pledge to cater for all children meant building more educational settings which respected the needs of those with disabilities. The desire to immerse children in rich cultural environments called for new milestones in children's literature and higher standards in the mass media environment. In short, the Strategy is a model of a rational, measured and at the same time inspired planning that took objective stock of the situation, and dreamt of a better future for Jordan's children. The challenge now was to transform dream into reality.

Instruments supporting implementation

Policy implementation is a reef on which many ships founder: it is much easier to script change than to actually make change happen. Jordan adopted three key initiatives in order to facilitate reform. First, it prioritised the Strategy's broad long-term objectives and transformed them into SMART goals, i.e. goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound. This became the national ECD Plan of Action (GoJ, UNICEF & NCFA, 2001). It then appointed an executive body to oversee the implementation

process. This became the national ECD Committee, housed in the NCFA. It finally launched the Educational Reform for a Knowledge Economy (ERfKE), with ECD being one of its four components. All three initiatives are briefly described below.

Action Plan

The ECD action plan for 2003 - 2008 was developed under the auspices of the NCFA with UNICEF support and the aid of an international ECD expert. It identified 9 goals, each of which specified targeted objectives with details about the inputs and activities that were needed to attain those objectives. As with all action plans inspired by a management-by-results approach, it indicated the specific outcomes and outputs, the related timeframes, and the agencies responsible for each of the activities mentioned. The emphasis is on multi-sectoral collaboration at government level, in partnership with a wide range of civil society organizations. The Plan identifies 9 inter-connected goals, stressing that these can only be reached through cooperation and the effective use of pooled resources. The goals are presented in Box 4 below, followed by one example of an output for each.

While the ECD Action Plan added the operational dimension to the ECD National Strategy, it did not develop detailed financial costing for each of the activities and outputs proposed. These were added at a later stage when in 2004 Jordan articulated a National Plan of Action for Children for the year 2004 - 2013, with the ECD Action Plan becoming revitalised and secured in

policy terms as a subset of the National Plan. Catering for all children below 18 years of age, the National Plan was approved by King and Queen, and endorsed by Cabinet, paving the way for increased government budgetary allocation for ECD activities.

NCFA's National ECD Committee

Within the broader National Plan of Action for Children, monitoring and evaluation are distinct components which set out to ensure that reliable and effective follow-up mechanisms are in place. The Plan identified the NCFA as the agency mandated to monitor implementation, and the Council has established a committee of liaison officers from the various ministries to ensure that the respective obligations are respected. Established in 2001, the NCFA is a civil institution designed to promote the status of the Jordanian family and strengthen its role in society, through a participatory approach, which allows it to work as a convening and enabling 'umbrella' organisation and coordinating body for the relevant governmental and NGO agencies working in the field of human and social development. It also acts as a national policy think tank, and as an advocacy body for family issues. The NCFA's strength and influence comes from the enthusiastic and committed patronage of its President, the Queen, who is supported by a Board of Trustees that includes four Ministries (Education, Social Development, Health, and Planning), as well as representatives of the lead NGO's, private sector agencies, and independent experts.

Decentralized intersectoral coordination and collaboration
in planning and implementation of ECD takes place *in Irbid.*

Box 4: SMART Goals in the ECD Plan of Action

Goal 1: Comprehensive ECD legislation and government policies.
Output: Child-centred framework on national protection and provision supports.

Goal 2: Decentralised intersectoral coordination and collaboration in planning and implementation of ECD.
Output: One integrated ECD committee in each governorate.

Goal 3: ECD planning and targeting supported by hard data.
Output: Identification of indicators to be incorporated in national, sub-regional data collection system.

Goal 4: High quality group care/classroom curriculum materials for ECD sector.
Output: Draft curriculum framework.

Goal 5: National regulatory framework for all early childhood institutions.
Output: Comprehensive standards for licensing nurseries and KG's.

Goal 6: National system for training and certification of ECD workers.
Output: National occupational standards for caregivers.

Goal 7: Training and monitoring systems to improve the quality of ECD programs.
Output: Training of ECD supervisory personnel, and development of TOT manual.

Goal 8: ECD supports extended to the unreached, vulnerable.
Output: 260 additional KG's to be provided by the MoE.

Goal 9: Increased advocacy and investments in early childhood development.
Output: Use media to enhance public information and awareness campaigns.

The NCFA has set up a national ECD committee, which functions as a key focal point for ECCE issues in Jordan.[2]

ERfKE

Many of the ECD plans, goals and

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[2] NCFA runs several programmes, with projects clustered around four key themes, including [a] Family protection against violence, [b] Education, culture and health, [c] Social, economic and environmental issues, and [d] Monitoring and evaluation. The projects in the education, culture and health programme are quite extensive, including: the articulation and monitoring of the Jordanian National Action Plan of Action for Children (2004-2013); the study on disadvantaged children; the reporting on the implementation of child rights; the assessment of the regulations for the establishment and licensing of KG's; the situation analysis of children in Jordan; the national preschool education development set of actions; the better parenting project; the development of a national framework for effective services for children from birth to below four years of

age; the review and development of standards for establishing and licensing nurseries; the development of day-care curricula and teachers' resources project; the input in developing child-friendly budgets, ensuring increased national resources for children so that MDGs are achieved; the framework for ECD standards and indicators; and the articulation of the second ECD plan of action for the years 2008-2013. As we will have occasion to note throughout this documentation, most of these projects were either outsourced, or carried out in collaboration with a range of development partners, with NCFA acting as coordinator and national focal point. NCFA's effectiveness has been hampered somewhat by frequent turnover of key staff, but its role and responsibility in keeping children's issues on track cannot be stressed strongly enough. UNICEF has been a major partner and supporter in most of the above initiatives.

objectives that had been articulated, formally or informally, over the span of over a decade attained a new lease of life as well as a fresh implementation dynamic through being integrated within the multi-donor, multi-million dollar reform initiative, which dedicated one of four components to ECD. The reform, to which the government has allocated unprecedented resources, is designed to revitalise the education sector starting from early childhood in the framework of lifelong learning with a view to increasing Jordan's competitiveness in the knowledge economy, and to making Jordan a leading IT hub in the region. The first phase of the reform—which covered the years 2003 - 2008 and which became known as ERƒKE I to distinguish it from the second phase of the reform, ERƒKE II (2009 - 2013)—reinforced and funded two central action areas set out in the National ECD Strategy. NCHRD was assigned the role of an external evaluator of the ERƒKE I activities. The first focused on parental education, setting out to enable home-based caregivers to better understand the importance of quality EC experiences and to improve their awareness of their role as children's first educators. The second targeted equity and quality issues in the KG sector. It thus set out to expand ECD access for the poor by creating public KG's, to establish KG curricula and licensing standards, and to develop training and occupational standards for KG staff.

UNICEF HQ, feeling the need to build capacities on ECD globally, has developed a comprehensive Early Childhood Resource Pack, which was later arabised and culturally adapted to suit the Arab Region by Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MENARO). The ECD Resource Pack is designed to help program planners and managers understand the basic elements of 'the best start in life for children' and how to most effectively work together to achieve this goal. It combines advocacy arguments with experiences, exercises and information that can be used to develop skills and understanding in programming for young children in situations of development and emergency.

MENARO in collaboration with JCO organised a regional workshop to build capacity and develop resource persons for ECD. This ECD resource pack played a very important part in shaping the ECD environment in Jordan, providing the required knowledge base as well as the pedagogical tools to communicate the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to thousands of young people and adults.

The next two chapters provide a testimony of the initiatives in both parental education and early childhood education. The focus will be on the Better Parenting programme, and the KG sector. References to ECCE provision in nurseries (0 - 3 year-olds) will also occasionally be made. In describing the different initiatives, attention will be paid to identifying the key implementing actors, the structures and resources that supported them, the obstacles and challenges that had to be faced, and the reasons that could account for the successes attained. The goal is to provide enough qualitative detail to inspire regional and international learning from both the stronger and the weaker aspects of this commendable set of initiatives.

3

CREATING HOME ENVIRONMENTS FIT FOR CHILDREN

CREATING HOME ENVIRONMENTS FIT FOR CHILDREN

The role of parents and caregivers

Internationally, among scientific communities as much as political ones, there is well-nigh absolute consensus around the fact that the first years of life—particularly from conception to age 3—represent the period of most rapid growth of mental and socio-emotional capacities, as well as the key period for ensuring survival and adequate growth (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).[1] As Britto & Ulkuer (2007, p.2) point out, at this age in particular "Children need to be protected from the risks of exposure to violence and stress as well as poor health and nutrition, and need positive and responsive interactions with at least one consistent caregiver, including exposure to language and opportunities for exploration and learning". Such opportunities occur primarily in homes and communities, with children aged 3 to 6 also benefiting from educational opportunities in group settings since this is the stage when early socialisation and the foundations for learning are laid. The broader environment of the community in which a child lives becomes increasingly important as the child becomes older, with age 6 to 8 marking the transition to schooling and independent interaction outside the immediate family. It is because there is consensus around the fact that the most immediate and important environment for care is the home and the family that governments and development agencies the world over—while increasing their investment in the ECCE sector—have acknowledged the central role played by the family, and include parents and caregivers as crucial partners in the effort to ensure the child's survival, protection and development.

Jordan's efforts must be considered within this broader context of commitment. That resolve has a special edge to it for Jordan, where only 35 percent of its children attend formal pre-schooling, and less than 2 percent attend any form of day-care centres. This means that the vast majority of children are cared for at home. Certainly, life in Jordan, as it does in many parts of the region, spills out into the streets, which are best seen as an extension of the home, where children play and interact under the surveillance of the extended community.[2] However, there are very few safe, child-friendly areas specifically built for play and leisure in Jordan, which means that, for children, what is provided within the home is all that they are likely to get.[3]

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[1] The most sophisticated accounts make similar claims, but largely inspired by Vygotskian socio-cognitive theories and by constructivism, are more aware of the notion that there is not one form of human development, and that development is a cultural phenomenon.

[2] As social scientists have shown us, this community surveillance is a common feature of many societies, including Mediterranean ones. It is through gossip that communities frequently exert moral control, thus ensuring that a family's honour is maintained, and that shame does not come upon the household (Foster, 2004). BP sessions showed that mothers are concerned about their daughters' behaviour—including ways of dressing—especially when they reach puberty. They are also keen to ensure that their sons do not smoke and drink. Community surveillance and reporting back taking place spontaneously, in ways that alert parents when behavioural codes are broken.

[3] The strong ECD agenda in Jordan has raised the awareness of policy makers regarding the need for safe and child-friendly play areas, with some municipalities donating land for public parks, and with Amman establishing new standards for parks. Some play areas have been built

While efforts to expand pre-school ECCE provision are of critical importance—and indeed we will be covering these initiatives in the next chapter—Jordan cannot wait for KG's and nurseries to be built, while cohorts of children remain deprived of adequate support and care at home. Jordan's strategy, as we have seen in the previous chapters, has therefore been two-pronged: aiming for improved access to nurseries and KG's, while at the same time working closely with caregivers and their communities to build up better parenting skills. Improved knowledge and skills will also serve ECD in good stead when nurseries and KG's invite parents to be strong partners in their educational endeavours.

Better Parenting

It is this acute awareness of the role of the parents in early child development that prompted UNICEF's Jordan office to enter into partnership with sister offices in five other countries in the Middle East in 1996, following a regional workshop on better parenting. Partners in the six countries resolved to develop strategies to empower parents and caregivers to provide a stimulating, loving and protective environment at home, through increasing knowledge and parenting skills in the areas of health,

nutrition, and the cognitive and social development patterns of their children aged 0 - 8 years. The need for such a programme became evident when a KAP study carried out in Jordan in 1996—already referred to in Chapter One—revealed that "the majority of young parents lack the necessary information and skills for providing a stimulating environment at the home, especially in areas related to social and emotional development."

The Better Parenting (BP) project, as it came to be known, targeted in particular urban and rural families disadvantaged by conditions of poverty, unemployment, and low literacy and educational achievement. With over one-fifth of the population falling below the poverty line, and with poorer families tending to have larger households, it was then estimated that nearly a quarter of Jordanian children from birth to six years of age fell within the project's target population, representing around a quarter of a million children (Brown, 2000, p.7). UNICEF's concern was thus to reach out to the majority of young children who have no access to organised group care during the day by developing a programme targeting these children's parents and caregivers within their homes and informal community settings.

Piloting phase

The initial step started with a pilot initiative in 1996, with a UNICEF project team adapting materials on child development issues for parents of children from birth through age 6 that had been developed by UNICEF

thanks to donations of land and funds by philanthropists. In many cases, however, parks are run by private concerns, with fees placing them outside the reach of most people. It is not a coincidence that as many as 12percent of the total number of accidents reported for 2004, i.e. 9057 out of 77314, involved children below age 16. Many of these accidents, one fifth of which end up in death, take place in the home and in the street. In 2006, there were 98,055 accidents leading to 899 deaths, 247 of which (27.47percent) were of children below 18 years. Injuries related to road accidents for the same year were 18,019, including 4,606 (26percent) children below 18. Jordan is in fact among the countries where deaths among pedestrians (37.3percent) are high, and even higher in the age group 0-5 years (NCFA & UNICEF, 2007, pp.58-59).

A rural women accompanied by her youngest child explains how
the Better Parenting affected her relationship with her children.
Palestinian Camp in Northern Jordan

internationally. Working closely with Jordanian consultants in order to ensure sound adaptation to the local context, the team produced four video presentations, four accompanying parent booklets on child development, and four facilitator guides supporting the use of these materials. The resources were field-tested and implementation carefully monitored and evaluated. Piloting involved training of trainers, who in turn trained facilitators in delivering the 8-session programme in centres in greater Amman, as well as in southern and northern Jordan. Based on feedback from the field, the resource materials on child development was revamped and a training manual on 16 key child development aspects were developed by Jordan River Foundation (JRF) under the guidance of the ECD Steering committee lead by NCFA.

The pool of 16 topics for sessions were identified after a needs assessment, and include child development and the role of the family, cognitive, emotional and physical development of the child, communication with children, positive discipline, and the role of the father. In some cases, toy-making from readily available materials is taught in order to encourage even the poorest participants to creatively recycle objects turning them into safe play items. This highlights both the importance of play and the value of spending quality time with children.

Participants are asked to choose the topics that are of most use and relevance to them. The 8 sessions, which add up to 24 hours of contact time, are normally delivered within 4 to 5 days, but participants and trainers negotiate the frequency of meetings to ensure that as many as possible attend all the sessions. Some groups prefer to have intensive workshop sessions over a week, while others stretch them out over a longer period of time. The size of the group varies, but efforts are made to keep it small enough to permit interactive and experiential learning. The groups I observed ranged from 15 to 20 in number, and were generally seated in a circle using movable chairs and tables which permitted active engagement with tasks in groups.

The piloting phase already foreshadowed some of the key characteristics that were to become permanent features as the programme went to scale. There was thus a commitment to engage professionals and paraprofessionals from governmental and non-governmental institutions, with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Development, the Queen Alia Fund for Voluntary Work (now JOHUD), and the General Union of Voluntary Societies (GUVS) making an early commitment to delivering different aspects of the programme. Partnerships with NGO's made sure that facilitators and 'rural motivators', as they were sometimes called, were rooted in the communities they were to serve in, making acceptance less of a challenge. From the start, attention was given to both equity and quality.

As the programme extended its geographical and participant coverage, facilitating access to both remote and rural communities as well as to urban enclaves marked by poverty, regular

Trained facilitator engages women in participatory Parenting Session.
Al Deisa Southern Jordan

evaluations were made to measure the impact of the BP sessions on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of mothers through the use of pre-test/post-test methodology. Further evaluation was carried out by external consultants from time to time (e.g. Srour, 1997, 1998; Brown, 2000).

Monitoring and evaluation protocols were firmed up after 2004, with due attention being paid to both the programmatic and the administrative levels. Reporting templates were established in order to ensure that the focus of the facilitators, liaison officers and technical directors was

to increased motivation to attend the BP sessions.[4] In later stages, the videos were no longer used since they had not proved effective enough and tended to make participants slide into a passive stance. Training manuals were developed, with a professionally produced set of thematic notes which provided facilitators with the knowledge they needed to lead each session in interactive ways. Quality has been further enhanced through a rigorous cascade training plan that aims at equipping all service providers with the necessary skills to manage and implement the project.

Box 5: Better Parenting implementation structure

NGO → Technical Director → Trainers → Liaison Officers → Facilitators
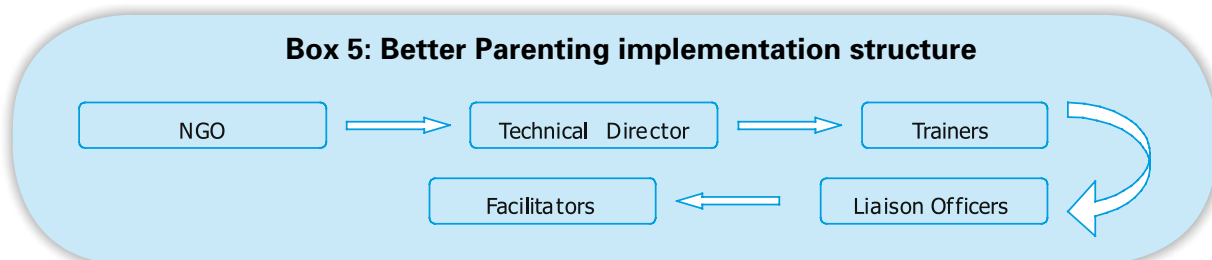
placed not only on quantitative input indicators—such as numbers of sessions and of participants—but also on qualitative analyses of processes, factors contributing to success, and on-going critical reflection rather than merely routinely reporting for reporting's sake (Ghosheh, 2004).

Changes were introduced on the basis of the evaluations and the team's experience in the field. Liaison officers were introduced to supervise and monitor training (see Box 5), and certificates were awarded to mothers for completing the full course, leading

At the national level, three core training teams drawn from the various partner organisations are formed to become master trainers, who then coach and mentor the next level of trainers who are the facilitators at the governorate level. In turn, these facilitators conduct the educational sessions for parents and caregivers.

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[4] In some cases, such motivation could not be assumed, especially in areas where people associated any programme with the possibility of getting development aid in the form of food coupons or cash. This was the case with Mafrak, to mention just one example. Certificates acknowledged the effort made by individuals and, especially for the illiterate or those with low educational attainment, were a source of pride given that this was the only record of educational achievement they had ever obtained. Some communities—such as the Bedouin hamlet of Al-Risha in the south of Jordan—organise social gatherings to honour mothers who attend BP sessions.

The emphasis in training was on both content and method. Interactive and participative teaching methodologies were stressed, with facilitators being encouraged to weave participants' experiences, insights, and narratives in the session, and to avoid didactic forms of instruction. That they managed to do this even when some of the women in the group were covered head to toe in a burka, with only eyes showing through a slit, seemed to me to be an impressive feat that was handled with ease, assurance and composure by the facilitators whose sessions I observed.

Gaining momentum

As the initiative gained momentum, more NGO's came forward, wanting to join the UNICEF-coordinated partnership in delivering the BP programme. Many did this inspired by the spirit of community service and voluntarism. Some incentives were also available. Trainers, liaison officers and facilitators, for instance, are generally paid staff of the participating partner organisation, often with other agency responsibilities. Some—especially in the case of facilitators—are volunteers. Besides providing technical support and covering training costs, UNICEF also gives stipends, meeting up to 75 percent of costs incurred by an organisation in delivering the BP sessions.

UNICEF support is regulated through an agreement signed annually with individual organisations, where each party's responsibilities are outlined, targets set, and the sum to be allocated

specified[5]. The plan is for UNICEF to gradually reduce its financial support as the BP programme becomes integrated within the mainstream activities of the partner organisations involved. NGO's are also learning to raise resources for their BP activities through private-public funding agreements, though this is more likely to happen in economically dynamic zones. In Aqaba, for instance, JOHUD has developed several partnerships with multinational companies, which have donated computers as well as equipped a medical clinic that is attached to one of the NGO's community centres.

As the network grew to first 10, then 13 Governmental and non-governmental institutions[6], and as the initiative reached more districts and governorates, it became necessary to have an organisational structure to take care of logistics, and to ensure that groups sustained and learnt from each other. A Steering Committee was thus established, with technical directors from each organisation serving as representatives, and holding responsibilities for monitoring and periodic documentation of BP activities within their organisations. The Steering Committee develops an annual plan, and meets on a monthly basis to review

[5] The status of these agreements differ depending on who they are made with, and are thus called Project Cooperation Agreements when involving a legal contract with NGO's, Project Plans which specify activities and outputs signed with Ministries, and Memoranda of Understanding when signed with UNRWA or other UN agencies.

[6] Besides the Ministries of Education, Health, Social Development, and Youth, the lead participating national organisations were GUVS, JOHUD, the Al-Farouk Charity Society, the Jordan River Foundation, the Jordanian Women's Union, the General Federation of Jordanian Women, the Abu-Thur Al-Ghafari Society, and the Noor al-Hussein Foundation. International organisations included UNRWA.

progress and address issues and problems. It does its best to ensure that the BP approaches and materials are integrated as widely as possible within other strategies reaching families of young children within communities. It has a field level arm made up of a team of liaison officers at the governorate level.

These liaison officers meet the facilitators and monitor the delivery of the BP sessions, providing written feedback on the constraints and successes encountered in the field. Another monitoring system was introduced in 2006 to track project implementation and to document impact on children and their families. While somewhat impressionistic given that it is based on self-reported rather than observed behavioural change, pre/post-test questionnaires suggest that there are impressive gains in better parenting behaviour, with caregivers claiming that following the course, they were paying more attention to gender equity in dealing with their sons and daughters, or that they were resorting much less readily to corporal punishment, for instance.

Better Parenting sessions are generally delivered in the premises of partner organisations in the community, with parents going to social development centres of the MOSD and UNRWA, maternal and child centres of the MoH, KG's and ECCD centres of NGO's, Youth centres of the HCY, and PTAs of the MoE. Not all venues proved suitable: when the Islamic Society tried to organise BP sessions in relief centres, it encountered difficulties since participants were reluctant to be associated with places that had a social stigma attached to them. When large premises with multi-functional rooms were used, some organisations offered child-minding facilities to participants. The fact that the project makes use of the infrastructure of participating agencies has kept the costs down, with an external evaluator noting the relatively low cost of reaching parents and other caregivers—not more than USD3 per child (Brown, 2000).

In some cases—particularly in more conservative communities where married women's mobility and freedom is more restricted—sessions are delivered in homes, with several parents meeting at a friend's house or in a diwan, madafa or mejles. In the sessions I observed in these contexts, many of the participants are related, with two, sometimes three generations of parents being present. Specially adapted handouts and resources have been prepared by the Jordan River Foundation for BP sessions delivered in homes. Interviewees confirmed that home-delivery was necessitated by strong cultural norms as to what is appropriate, and that having BP sessions organised in one's home brought prestige to the household.

Increasingly, the media is being roped in to support BP programmes. Not only has the Jordan River Foundation offered training in BP issues to some media staff, but radio programmes have been launched to deliver BP sessions to a wider public. Yum Gadid has become a popular morning radio programme targeting housewives in the main, while Al-Farouk Charity Society has worked

with Yarmouk University to develop a BP radio programme aimed at students.

Participants are generally young mothers. Opinion as to whether to have joint male-female BP groups is divided. Many feel that it is culturally appropriate to separate the sexes. Others are strongly of the opinion that there is much to be gained by having both present, as fathers and mothers can discuss their different roles in parenting and child-rearing, with each becoming more aware of the other's perceptions, needs, and potential input. Indeed, some participants suggested that it would also be useful to have sessions organised with children present, as this too would enhance mutual understanding. As we shall note later on, the different work and life rhythms followed by women and men meant that they were hardly ever available for parental meetings at the same time, so initially the focus remained on mothers.

With time, BP sessions have become more targeted towards specific groups of women, often depending on the nature of the population that the NGO in question worked with. Facilitators and technical directors told me that they had to adapt the material to the needs of diverse categories of parents, with distinctions being drawn between recently married women and older mothers, between working wives and housewives, between those who had children and those who did not yet have any, and between the more educated and the illiterate. 'At-risk' families represent another challenge, especially where disadvantaged children are not enrolled in KG's. BP programme

leaders therefore adapted aspects of the Cognitive Training Programme for mothers that had been developed by the Mother and Child Foundation (MOCEF) in Turkey (Smith & Gocer, 2007). This sets out to enhance the mother's potential as an educator, providing opportunities for mother and child to work together in the context of the home, thus targeting children in their natural environment.[7]

Some districts have their own specificity: Aqaba, for instance, is a special economic zone that has attracted a lot of international investment, with workers flocking in from different parts of Jordan to work for multinational companies. As a result, these do not have access to the extended family support systems that Jordanians are accustomed to, and in addition, many suffer from a cultural shock in their interaction with international colleagues at work. Their needs as parents are therefore different.

Given the diverse profiles of parents in a community, some organisations try to group participants according to their different background and circumstances. In Irbid, for instance, the Al-Farouk Charity Society organises sessions for widowed mothers (see Box 6). The Jordanian Woman's Foundation works with divorced parents, and with abused women. The Jordan River Foundation

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[7] While there is international evidence that the programme has a number of positive effects on child and mother alike—in terms, for instance, of improving school readiness, improving mother-child relations, increasing commitment to education on the part of the whole family, and so on—its implementation in Jordan was discontinued partly because it proved too labour intensive and hence unsustainable without UNICEF support, and also because it tends to focus almost exclusively on the cognitive dimensions of child development.

Mother communicates patiently with her child.
Eastern Amman

Box 6: Widowed mothers at a BP session in Irbid

"I have three children, and the first two are girls. I often feel guilty about the way I deal with them. I am over-protective, and often feel stressed and end up shouting and screaming at them. I am so scared that something will go wrong with them, …I am like a police officer with them most of the time…But now they are afraid of me, and will not talk to me about what they feel or what they are going through in life. They always see me so nervous and tense…."

Another mother stated

"I was also very nervous with my boy. I used to allow him to play with his friends

for two hours, but he disobeys and stays longer, sometimes up to four hours. It is difficult to bring up boys on your own! But I have learnt not to be too nervous about it all. I take him aside, tell him that I am his mum, that he needs to trust me and tell me what's going on so that I don't worry about him. He seems to react well when I deal with him as a grown-up."

A third mother

"My son was born with Down's Syndrome. It was really a big challenge. He sometimes comes to my room to look at his father's photo, and it is so difficult! I have learnt to talk to him every day, and you know, he has made so much progress! He can say the names of all the persons in the family, and he even has made a list of the things he wants to buy. So I am letting him go off to do some shopping on his own, and I watch him from a distance to see that all goes OK. I want him to be as independent as possible. Last time I noticed that his favourite TV programme was about a chef, so we now sometimes do some cooking together…"

delivers BP programmes to Iraqi refugee mothers in East Amman, while UNRWA and the Islamic Society targets Palestinian refugee parents, making sure that issues raised are sensitive and responsive to the crowded household in the camps.

In Al-Risha, a remote Bedouin hamlet an hour out of Aqaba in south Jordan, sessions were organised in a branch of a Princess Basma Centre with young adolescents, given that early marriage is still common in this particular region.

In this case as in some others, groups accept older mothers as well—including mothers-in-law—in order to learn from their experience, and to facilitate better understanding of the dynamics in households. Several organisations— such as the Women's Union and Al-Farouk—are now extending BP sessions to students in high schools, especially to girls in Grades 10 to 12.

Facilitators are generally female members of the partner organisations. This is culturally appropriate, given

> **Box 7: Vignette: Desperately waiting for a son to be born**
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> There was a mother who had a daughter, and another daughter, and yet another daughter in a row. Her husband was unhappy, wanting to have a son. The young wife repeatedly got pregnant, without waiting to recover after each birth, in the hope that the next child would be the much desired boy, but nine childbirths later, no male offspring had materialised. She became desperate, depressed and dejected.
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> The mother-in-law did not support her daughter-in-law. Indeed, she made matters worse—much worse. She repeatedly told the poor mother that unless she had a boy, her husband would repudiate her and find another wife capable of giving him a male to carry his name. The mother had two more children, until finally she bore a son.

that most of the BP work is done with mothers.[8] In some areas the BP programme has involved KG and nursery school teachers and caregivers, thus integrating them into the wider circle of persons relating to very young children. This in itself proved salutary as it strengthened the bonds between teachers, parents and caregivers, linked the preschool sector more firmly to the home, and increased the opportunity for sharing and learning. Sometimes facilitators invite resource persons from the community to address parents. In Aqaba, for instance, a dentist made regular inputs in the BvP programme, particularly on the issue of children's dental hygiene. Her contributions were even more appreciated by participants as she drew on her own experience as a mother, and as a participant in BP sessions.

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[8] In any case, it is unlikely that men would accept to lead sessions given the low remuneration that is offered by most organizations involved in the project. Women put up with the low stipends, but this also means that there is a high degree of turnover among facilitators, as women become more house-bound on getting married or on having a child. UNRWA, for instance, loses half its facilitators every year, which has implication for recurrent training costs and cumulative learning through extended experience in the field.

By 2006, the material for parents had proved so popular that it had run out of print, while the ECD parenting curriculum itself was updated. All resources have benefited from feedback from project facilitators and parents, thus addressing issues of gaps in content (e.g. sibling jealousy, relationships with members of the extended family, role of eldest child in child-rearing, health problems, family planning), repetitiveness, cultural appropriateness of illustrations (e.g. images of pacifiers) as well as adequate representation of diverse contexts (e.g. pictures of persons from different socio-economic groups, as well as from both urban and rural contexts).

The latest manual for trainers, revised and updated with the support of staff from the Jordan River Foundation, takes the form of ring-bound resource and activity sheets that trainers can choose from and adapt. It also has several case studies collected from the field by health and social workers, which encapsulate real life situations that

trainers can use in order to stimulate discussion among participants in a BP session. The vignette in Box 7 was used to good effect by a facilitator leading an interactive session with young women in Al-Risha, with whom it obviously struck a chord. The fact that one of the participants was an older mother-in-law introduced an interesting dynamic, since she had her own views to contribute, including a vehement critique of the way her counterpart in the story had behaved.

Scaling up

By the year 2006—i.e. within 10 years of its launch—the BP programme had reached more than 70,000 parents across all governorates, representing 8 percent of the population. This translates into approximately 140,000 children who are likely to have benefited from improved care practices at home (Homsi, 2006). 44 percent of parents who attended the BP sessions are to be found in the northern region of Jordan, 38 percent in the middle region, and 18 percent in the southern region. 15,692 service providers attained improved knowledge of ECD practices throughout the country. The cadre of ECD professionals formed with UNICEF support included 35 trainers from the MoE, 25 trainers from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs (MoAIA), 383 facilitators, and 148 liaison officers. 37 percent of this cadre are males, 63 percent females. 36 percent of them come from governmental organisations, 60 percent from NGO's, and 4 percent from international organisations. The number of parents had increased to 100,000 by 2008, with sessions delivered

at 200 centres nation-wide, with a recent evaluation of the programme by Al-Hassan (2008) indicating that community interest remains unabated.

There are clear signs that the programme is well on the way to becoming mainstreamed and institutionalised (Al-Hassan, 2008): partner commitment is often exemplary, with the project being firmly embedded in local institutional structures. Many partners—such as the MoE, MoSD, MoH, MoAIA, UNRWA and JOHUD—also seem to be ready and able to run the programme, both technically and managerially, and have adequate budgets and equipment to ensure sustainability of the activities. The MoSD, has declared ECD, and specifically BP, as one of its key strategies for combating poverty, and has created a special section within the ministry's department for the promotion of ECD activities. As we have noted earlier, the MoE has included BP as an important element of its ECD work and incorporated it within ERfKE, allocating an annual budget of USD 40,000 in support of the programme. The NCFA has secured extra funding from Arab Gulf Fund for United Nations Development (AGFUND) to support the expansion of the BP project nationally and regionally. NGO's, on their part, have sustained their commitment to BP, not least because it has proved to be an excellent entry point for them into families, and into other aspects of development work in the communities they serve, and to opportunities for capacity building. For some, involvement in the BP initiative represented a shift from a focus on

charity to a focus on development. Many have attained increased legitimacy and credibility. This is particularly crucial in Jordan, where—as in some other Arab countries—NGO's are closely monitored by the state in order to ensure that they do not become breeding ground for radical politics. NGO's have to be licensed by the state, and their track record in BP serves them in good stead, opening the door to funding from donors, both local and international.

Even before these numbers were reached, it became clear that responsibilities for the BP programme should be devolved at the governorate level. It is at this level that all government directorate representatives of relevant Ministries, all NGO's offering services to families of young children, and other child development services can coordinate more cost-effectively and collaborate in providing programmes serving the wide range of young children and their families. Such needs include the prevention and treatment of childhood illnesses, early detection and management of childhood disabilities, identification and treatment of cases of child abuse and neglect, and so on. Important inputs at this governorate level of coordination would also be made by community councils, local area committees, and parents themselves acting as child advocates. As local communities and organisations take on more lead responsibilities, UNICEF's role increasingly becomes that of a catalyst for mobilising partners and resources towards convergence of efforts at the community level, generating support for better provision of care for children, particularly the most vulnerable and at risk.

Issues and challenges

Clearly, the BP programme is responding to a felt need and has proved both popular and sustainable. Several BP participants, when asked to evaluate their experience of the programme, felt that not only was it most positive, but that they wanted it to include special sessions on better parenting with adolescents. In response to this demand, a manual was developed by UNICEF and the Ministry of Health in 2007 with the objective of raising awareness and developing the skills of parents of adolescents. The manual is structured in the format of sessions to be conducted with parents, with 16 sessions targeting parents, including some joint sessions with parents and adolescents.

Given that the goal of this testimony is to facilitate regional and international learning from successful ECCE initiatives, it is important to highlight the issues and challenges that arose throughout the life span of the BP programme. Some of these have been referred to briefly in the previous sections. Four deserve to be considered in greater detail, namely the challenge to avoid fragmentation, particularly at the local level; the problems arising from perspectives that view parents as having deficits rather than strengths; the challenge of including fathers in the Better Parenting effort; and the issue of impact. Each of these is addressed in turn.

Avoiding fragmentation

The BP programme is still struggling with a perceptive critique made by Brown in the evaluation she carried out in 2000. She had noted that while the BP project could be said to have content which integrates all the elements that UNICEF recommends in an integrated approach to ECE in order to safeguard children's survival, growth and development, "the programme does not of itself deliver the integrated interventions" (Brown, 2000, p.13). Efforts to ensure better coordination between the different actors that are responsible for diverse aspects of children's welfare were initially piloted in Al-Nasir in East Amman. Here, the Area Local Committee for the BP programme worked closely with UNICEF in order to more effectively link health, nutrition, early education and parent education delivery at the community level, through improved local networking and planning, with children's needs as a central focus.

This initiative, which reinforced the notion of convergence of attention to ECCE issues at a specific level of community governance, has led to the idea of setting up Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) Committees, whose role it would be to assess local needs and local resources, and coordinate with the government and non-government services in response to these assessments. By 2008, three had been set up—one each in East Amman (est. 2004), Irbid (est. 2005), and Mafrak (est. 2007).

My observation of a meeting of the first two of these IECD Committees suggests that while there is still much to be done,

in that working together depends on information flows that are often missing, the potential is enormous.[9] Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how one can elaborate a comprehensive early child development programme agenda and strategy unless "all the mosaic pieces fall into place" (Hammad, 2000, p.15), i.e. until one gets complementarity between programmes that focus on (a) family conditions and practices, (b) community conditions and practices, (c) social policies, laws and institutions, and (d) cultural values and beliefs. IECD Committees seem to be an ideal structure to attain just that, particularly if they are organisationally well-connected to central governmental and non-governmental structures. It is this comprehensive programming that are the most effective approach for improving children's holistic development, since they leverage the natural synergies between multiple domains of development (Britto & Ulkuer, 2007).

A deficit approach?

An important issue is the key assumption underpinning the initiative itself. The reference to 'Better Parenting' tends to suggest that those who attend the sessions have a deficit in knowledge, skills, attitudes and/or values, and that

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[9] Partners in the IECD Committees take turns in chairing proceedings. It is envisaged that the integrated Committees will supervise the establishment of child development resource centres, offering KG programmes, parent education groups, outreach activities to parents in remote areas unable to attend central activities, and sites for a range of community-based meetings and activities related to children's lives. In ER*f*KE I plans, the proposed remit of these centres would also be to offer training activities—decentralised teacher and caregiver training, supervisor and principal training, outreach worker/facilitator training, and a range of short-term workshops for community members related to such topics as child heath, child nutrition, disabilities management, early detection of disabilities and abuse, and so on.

they need to somehow be 'put right'. In Arabic, the BP programme is referred to as "Parental Awareness" which, while less strong in imputing parental deficiencies, nevertheless also vehicles the notion that fathers and mothers lack awareness of elements that are needed for effective parenting to take place. Needless to say, and as the 1996 KAP study had shown, such deficits are real. Many people in Jordan, I was told, consider that having and raising children is a matter of course, part and parcel of life—Sounat Al-Hayya—a task for which people are prepared by nature and instinct rather than by instruction. In this case, BP serves to at least problematise the parenting process, and introduces new knowledge, which in turn provides parents with different behavioural options, potentially breaking dysfunctional patterns that are passed on from one generation of parents to the next.

Having said that, however, the programme's name does tend to emphasise the shortcomings of participants rather than their strengths, and some may very well have an objection to that. This came through in a particularly striking manner after I had observed a BP session with fathers in a mosque in East Amman. In a focus group interview after the session, one of the participants declared that the programme seemed to him to be a 'western' idea, and that he resented the assumption that was being made that Arabs did not know how to raise children, that they were uncaring and rough towards them, and that they therefore needed to be taught better ways. This, he felt, reinforced negative

stereotypes about both Arab people and Islam. A similar point was made by one of the ECD experts interviewed privately.

Such criticism and resentment, however, seem to be rare, and in many ways, qualms about the BP label may be unfounded: there does not seem to have been any negative reaction on the part of participants, and indeed, even the better-off and educated parents have been asking for the sessions.[10] This is not unexpected: all of us who are parents know only too well how often we feel inadequate in responding to the myriad demands made upon us in what is probably the most rewarding but also the most complex and responsibility-ridden role of our lives. Many interviewees noted that "children are children" and that, wherever you go in the world, mothers have to deal with very much the same issues, though how these are dealt with may vary from place to place.

Concerns about cultural appropriateness of the model have been handled very thoroughly, with careful adaptation of resources to reflect the specificity of context. Furthermore, the danger of insinuating deficit in parents has been mitigated due to the fact that the programme is delivered by trusted NGO's who are well-embedded in communities, whose members they support in a variety of ways, including financial ones. These NGO's therefore enjoy the respect and trust of the communities they serve, with some

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[10] Interviews suggest that parents from higher socio-economic groups are often absent from the home, delegate child-rearing to maids, and often seem to think that they can compensate for this by surrounding their children with material goods.

Mother shows her understanding of the importance
of eye contact for early bonding
Eastern Amman

interviewees commenting that had the programme been delivered by an external agency, this might have aroused suspicion and even resistance.

While a rose is a rose by any other name, the labelling and branding of any development programme needs to be sensitive to the associations and connotations it gives rise to. In many ways, the 'Better Parenting' (or, in its Arabic format, 'Parental Awareness') label contradicts the spirit in which the programme was conceived and is in fact delivered, i.e. by building on the knowledge, wisdom and life experiences of participants, and extending these further through mutual learning. Indeed, empowerment is very much at the core of this programme, and was often articulated in these terms by the persons associated with it. Interviewees from the different partner organisations made it clear, for instance, that they were very much aware of the impact of the economic downturn on people's lives, that mothers "have a lot on their plate, with husbands often out from six in the morning to late at night, so that they have to be not just mums, but dads as well."

Others emphasised that BP sessions are not there to make participants feel guilty, but rather "to enable them", to encourage them to "celebrate motherhood and care of the self". Personal life experiences, including trials and tribulations, but also successes, "are affirmed by being shared with others", and "much of the learning in fact takes place through the exchanges between group members." Facilitators do not adopt the role or pose as an 'expert', but in the best of cases—and certainly in all

of the sessions I observed—are friendly, warm and informal in their manner, inclusive and non-judgemental in their attitude, and genuinely open to learning and sharing in the BP encounter.[11] 'Better Parenting'/'Parental Awareness' may therefore be something of a misnomer for the programme, but it may be too late to change it in Jordan's case, as it is now well established and has positive connotations in many communities across the country. Other countries who may be inspired to adopt and adapt this initiative may wish to think hard about an alternative name, one which more readily and faithfully captures the spirit behind this Parental Empowerment effort.[12]

Reaching fathers

One of the important challenges faced by the BP programme from its very inception was the difficulty to reach fathers. By the year 2000, only 8 percent of participants in BP programmes were male. This was partly due to the times in which the sessions were offered, with fathers being still at work or otherwise unavailable. It is also due to the fact that, as noted earlier, child-rearing is seen to be mainly the mother's role, with fathers largely playing the part of the disciplinarian.

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[11] Even when facilitators are not yet parents themselves, membership in large households means that most are involved in child-rearing anyway.

[12] In her evaluation of the BP programme, Brown (2000, p.41) notes that a brainstorming session with stakeholders came up with an alternative name: "Together for Children", which had the additional advantage of signalling a broadened and enhanced BP approach, captures the child-centred nature of the programme, as well as hints at its collective inputs (i.e. parents together, community members and organizations together, government and NGO's together, and so on).

Father enjoys playing with his disabled daughter in a warm family atmosphere
Eastern Amman

Such role-typing is not necessarily made by choice, or conscious choice at any rate: in large households with many women present—including not only wife, but also mother-in-laws, aunts, grandmothers, sister-mothers and close female family relatives—it may be difficult for a man to carve a niche for himself in the child-minding business, particularly as custom and tradition dictate that he has other roles to play, such as being "the captain of the ship" and "provider", where stern and serious demeanour precludes him from relaxing with the children, especially when these are of a tender age. The ARM (2003) report on male perceptions of ECD has some interesting insights in this regard. Men often feel that they cannot relate to children before they have become more mature, or when they are ill. They oppose emotion to rationality, with the former being construed as weakness rather than a strength, and a feminine rather than a male trait. They also feel that nature favours women when it comes to child-rearing: mothers, presumably, have the instinctive 'touch', while men consider themselves ill-equipped and inadequate, treading on ground that is best left to the womenfolk at home.

Earlier evaluations of the BP programme, together with data generated through focus group interviews and observation of BP sessions, indicated clearly that women felt that parenting skills should also be taught to men. All evidence at hand suggests that, generally speaking, Jordanian men need to improve their knowledge, skills and attitudes towards child-rearing, and indeed the 1996 KAP quantitative study had not only revealed meagre knowledge among all those surveyed, but that the gap was much more serious for men. The ARM male perception study provides us with qualitative details about this deficit, with men claiming that they were puzzled when they saw their wives talking to their babies ("I found it really strange… I used to ask her what on earth she was doing and I told her that children could only understand when they were at least three years old"), that they were afraid of holding babies in their arms, and that disciplinary severity was superior to—and at times exclusive of—affectionate bonds with one's children.

UNICEF, together with its BP programme partners, were determined to address the challenge, knowing full-well that a truly effective and comprehensive ECD approach had to involve men. There was sensitivity to the fact that the invitation to men to recognise their important role in child-rearing, and to take a more active part in it, had to acknowledge the realities of their everyday lives. As has already been noted, many Jordanian men are involved in all sorts of work in the formal and informal sector, with the economic pinch and rise in food prices placing additional burdens on them when it comes to providing for the family. The invitation to participate more actively in caring for the children was therefore not to be presented as yet another chore, but rather as a source of joy and fulfilment, which benefited not only the children, but the fathers themselves.

It was therefore not a question of desperately finding more time for

**Box 8: How fathers can contribute
to the development of their children
(Source: 'Imam Guide on ECD', Rashdan, 2003, p.18)**

- Contribute to and enjoy observation of the growth and development of their children.
- Follow up the health conditions of their children and make sure that they took the necessary vaccines.
- Help in preparing their children's meals.
- Talk with the child since the moment of birth: singing, lulling and utterance of sounds that please the child.
- Bestow love and compassion such as kisses, cuddling, smiling and showing happiness.
- Make the children feel confident, and appreciate what they do - "respecting their feelings and emotions".
- Enjoy playing with children and encouraging them to play.
- Provide the social atmosphere within the family including affection, serenity, compassion, respect, and security and rendering support to the mother during pregnancy, delivery and breast-feeding.
- Protect the children against accidents, diseases, violence and fear.
- Enrich the environment surrounding the child.
- Tell stories.
- Interact with the child's imagination, make-believe/imaginary games and role-playing.
- Participate in the children's daily routines: food, dress, watching children's programmes, waking up with them at night.
- Involve and habituate the child to participate in his/her family's life and house chores.
- Help in organising the child's life.
- Rouse the child's interest in environment and surrounding phenomena and link the child with what is going on around him/her.
- Help the child develop his or her own interests and give him/her the opportunity to choose and take decisions.
- Forge good relations with children, and establish eye contact, and physical and lingual communication with them.
- Encourage the child to explore and build up his or her experience about surrounding environment and foster his or her curiosity.
- Make discussion and debates with the child, give him or her opportunities to express himself or herself and respect and answer his/her questions.
- Participate with children in drawing, scribbling, colouring, plus browsing stories and magazines.
- Take them in short trips, picnics, social visits, to the market, to the street, to the places of worship, libraries, exhibitions and museums.

the children in a week that was already packed with work, but to try to spend quality moments with sons and daughters during weekends and available leisure time. It was also about learning to enjoy holding children, showing affection, playing and talking with them, so that parental bonds would be strengthened, and wives feel supported in attending to the emotional needs of the family.

MoAIA, with the support of UNICEF, came up with an initiative in 2002 which was to make an important contribution to the BP programme's success in reaching fathers, and which deserves to be showcased in the region and internationally. On reflecting on the places and times that men could be reached in Jordan, it became clear that the mosque was an ideal space for BP sessions. Most men go regularly for Friday prayers to the mosque, and give a lot of weight to the preacher, who is highly respected.

Within a year, UNICEF had produced an Imam Guide on Early Childhood Development, compiled by Dr Mahmoud Ayed Rashdan (2003), who made good use of the findings of the ARM (2003) research on men's perceptions of ECD. This guidebook was to be used to train imams and khatibs (mosque preachers) to prepare sessions on better parenting that could be delivered during the Friday sermon or after the religious function was over.

The guide doubled as a resource book for ideas about the importance of childhood in Islam, the role of fathers in young children's lives (see Box 8),

and on a variety of themes ranging from ingredients of a successful and happy family, to equality between genders in the raising of children, the impact of marital discord on children, and strategies to reinforce healthy communication in a family context. The guide also had tips about public speaking, and how imams could be more effective when reaching out to adults. One of the key strengths of the guide is that it draws on both scientific and religious foundations in order to reinforce a set of healthy attitudes regarding childhood and parenting.

Imams received training on ECD issues over a six-day period, with additional resources for sermons being mailed to them on a monthly basis. ECD issues also started featuring regularly in publications issued by the MoAIA, consolidating the ministry's commitment to the field, and to improved understanding of the importance of the role of the father in child-rearing, and of ways in which fathers could interact more positively with children and other family members.

Many imams seem to have taken to the idea like a duck to water. They had been encouraged to have at least two sermons a year on ECD issues, and a few went overboard to such an extent that some of the faithful, I was told, started wondering aloud whether the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs had been taken over by the Ministry of Health! From my own observations of a session in a mosque, it was clear that the programme had triggered off not only an interest in BP, but also in finding ways of creating more powerful

learning environments, though the tendency to preach rather than teach remains ever present. Imams are using flipcharts, pictures, flash cards, and experiential learning methods in order to ensure that the message gets across, allowing fathers to ask, challenge and question. In one case, an imam asked two men to role play a situation where one talks about his feelings, while the other one pretends to listen but does not. Forgetting that this was a role play, the first got so upset that he became angry at the lack of consideration on the part of his friend—a powerful learning experience that showed him and the rest of the group what it must feel like for children when their concerns are not taken seriously. The vignettes in Box 9 give us a sense of the impact that some of the learning had on fathers.

A key motive to change behaviours is the presentation of the Prophet Mohamed—Peace be Upon Him—as a loving father, who was full of care and affection to his daughters, and allowed them to play with him. Some of the stories recounted show the Prophet overcoming formality, even during prayers, in order to accommodate the needs of young children, as the vignettes in Box 10 show:

The effort to reach out to fathers therefore proved to be quite successful, with participation of men in BP sessions increasing to 23 percent from a meagre 2 percent in the early years of the programme, and 8 percent in the year 2000. Other attempts have been made to reach fathers in other social spaces such as work places and welfare societies. These, however, have been less successful than the imam-and-mosque approach.

Impact

As has been already observed, there has not been any reliable measure of the impact of the BP programme, and to do this well is both costly and methodologically challenging, especially if the focus is not as much on the participants' increase in knowledge, as to how much this knowledge modifies attitudes and behaviour. There is overwhelming anecdotal evidence, however, suggesting that the impact has been tremendously positive. Furthermore, post-session questionnaires filled in by BP participants, together with evaluation reports put together by technical directors and liaison officers, give further substance to the claims made on the programme's behalf (see Box 11).

It is therefore clear that thousands of mothers and fathers have become more aware of the role they can play in bringing up children, and that while maternal and paternal love is instinctual and deeply engrained, there is important new knowledge to be learned that can help change negative and dysfunctional attitudes and behaviours, ensuring that children develop more fully, and in more secure, safer environments. Many have learnt new skills, from strategies to more effectively communicate and bond with their children, to safeguarding hygiene or ensuring access to nutritionally sound diets. Parents have learnt about the importance of play and quality leisure time with their children, and that tenderness is as necessary as food and drink, and not a sign of weakness. They have, in many cases, developed critical views about traditional gender prejudices that have caused so much

Religious leader engages fathers in a parenting session in a mosque
Eastern Amman

misery and closed so many doors for women, and are treating their daughters in a more equitable manner.

It is not only children who have benefited. Several interviewees noted the multiplier effects of BP sessions, whose impact was not restricted to the participants or solely to ECD issues, but rather went further afield thanks to mother-to-mother as well as mother-to-father impact. The life skills BP participants acquired—such as those relating to communication, for instance, or to anger and conflict management—served them in good stead when it came to other social relations, including those with partners. For many women, having a privileged space where they could discuss and share the trials and tribulations of everyday life, as well as the joys and successes, has proved immensely empowering—especially for those living in remote, rural

areas where the possibility for social intercourse is limited. In Al-Risha, for instance, some of the women who followed the BP course gained enough self-confidence and leadership skills as to present themselves for municipal elections, leading to the first woman ever to be appointed an official on the basis of votes won, rather than due to preferential quotas for women.

Formal evaluation of Jordan's BP programme is of course necessary, if anything because policy makers have a number of parental education approaches to choose from, and having systematic evidence of the strength and weaknesses of the different models guides decision-makers as they weigh the available options in view of their own country's context and needs. Robust evidence of this type is not yet available for Jordan—and indeed, is hard to come by in relation to several

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Box 9: Fathers learn to be better parents

A father learns to play with his children

A father was really impressed by the idea that he could spend time playing with his young children, and started doing so whenever he could after work and during weekends. His wife had never seen him horse around on the ground with the kids, letting them get on his back, pull his beard, and ruffle his clothes. She was completely disoriented by this new behaviour, and started suspecting that all this excitability and exhilaration was due to the fact that he had met another woman, had fallen in love, and that he was about to leave her. One day she could not stand it any longer, and she burst into tears, accusing her husband that he no longer cared for her. The man was taken aback, and he did his best to reassure her, but she remained unconvinced. Finally, when the Better Parenting course came to an end, he invited his wife to go with him for the Certification of Attendance Award ceremony, and that was when she became finally convinced that what he had told her was true.

A father apologizes for beating up his children

I was convinced that beating the child will make a man of him when he grows up. I then heard in the session that was held after prayer about the dangers of beating children and on how religion conceives this act and its negative impact on children… I felt frustrated in the beginning because I beat my children to make them better men and because I love them… When the lecture was finished I went and spoke to the lecturer and I told him how I treat my children and I also asked him if there is a way to remedy this. My children are 7, 5, and 4 years old… He said that we learn tolerance with children and the past is not important but the future is.. I went home and gathered my children and my wife… I apologized to them and from that day on I did not beat any of my children. I have noticed that my relation with them has become much better.

A father becomes aware of gender discrimination

In the beginning, I did not mind when my male children asked their sister to bring them a glass of water, food , or to clean the table when they finished eating their lunch. I thought this was important for my daughter to learn how to manage house affairs… Now I know that this is a form of discrimination as it deprives my daughter of her right to play… Accordingly, I took the decision, to distribute house work among all male and female children... and I also told the boys not to ask their sister to serve them… My wife at that time was reluctant about all this, but I must say I was especially touched by evidence from Prophet Mohammad's Hadith prohibiting discrimination between boys and girls which the person supervising the session in the mosque gave on this topic.

other BP models.[13] Nevertheless, a recent evaluative survey by Al-Hassan (2008), involving 337 male and female BP participants who were asked to fill in questionnaires prior to and following the BP sessions, again indicates that learning gains and attitudinal changes are taking place. As has already been noted, one of course needs to be careful to distinguish between declarative intent on the part of the participants, and their actual, observable child-rearing behaviour in the context of the home, given that knowledge does not necessarily transform habitual behaviour. This, however, should not detract from the relevance of Jordan's initiative for the region and beyond, given its proven status as a cost-effective measure that so effectively brings together pre-school and adult education, and which can be delivered by paraprofessionals who are firmly rooted in the community they serve.

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[13] It is for this reason that UNICEF, together with other partners such as the Aga Khan Foundation, Soros/Open Society, Bernard Van Leer, Inter-American Development Bank, World Bank, and the Policy Research Bureau set up a Parenting Evaluation Consortium in July 2006. One of the first tasks of this consortium has been to commission a comparative study of the different parenting education models in use, in order to test for effectiveness.

عيادة الأسنان
الأمومة والطفولة

Father taking his son for medical care.
Eastern Amman

Box 10: Insights into the Prophet's attitudes towards children, as glimpsed from Prophetic (Hadith) Texts

Source: 'Imam's Guide on Early Childhood Development', Rashdan, 2003, p.81

Buraydah al-Aslami said: "Once the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) was preaching us, and all of a sudden al-Hasan and al-Hussein came in dressed in two red garments. They were walking and stumbling. The Prophet (PBUH) descended from the minbar (pulpit), carried them both and put them before him and said: "Certainly Allah speaks the truth (when He says): (Quranic verses). I looked at these two little boys walking and stumbling and I could not help interrupting my sermon and lifting them both."

'Ibn Abbas (MABPWBOT) was quoted to have said: "When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) entered Mecca, he was received by the young children of the Abd al-Muttalib clan and he placed one of them in front of him and another behind him on his mount."

Anas ibn Malik (MABPWH) – quoted Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to have said: "I often start my prayer intending to be as long as I can in performing it. Then I hear a baby crying, whereupon I cut down the prayer; for I know how much emotionally upset his mother is because of his crying."

Box 11: Typical comments by BP participants

- "Before the course, my attitude was that the children have to adapt to us adults. Now I feel that we should perhaps listen more to them and to adapt to them."

- "I was always screaming at my children to get them to do what I want… always so nervous and stressed. Now I have learnt to calm down a little, to reason things calmly with them…It was so nice when one of my daughters told me she is no longer afraid to talk with me."

- "I don't hit my children any more, and I set aside time to play with my children everyday."

- "This training has made me realise how important my role as a mother and caregiver is in society, and it has made me change all the negative practices with children. It has also made me relive my childhood…"

- "After these sessions, I have gone back home feeling that I have so much to give, and a lot of passion to communicate with my children and get to know them better."

- "I am more patient with my children now, and I realize how important it is to communicate with them and to listen to them."

Brother cares for his younger sister and empowers her to write her first letter.
Camp in Eastern Amman

4 CREATING INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS FIT FOR CHILDREN

CREATING INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS FIT FOR CHILDREN

From home to community care

Better parenting is only one of the two key integrated strategies that Jordan has adopted in order to improve family and community care practices that impact positively on young children's survival, growth and development. The second is the establishment of state nursery and kindergarten facilities, especially for the poorer sections of the population. In this chapter, we will focus largely on Jordan's achievements in the KG sector (age 4 - 6), with occasional reference being made to the nurseries (age 0 - 3). While progress in the former sector has been rapid, the latter sector is still in its infancy, with attention being paid to setting strong foundations and appropriate regulatory frameworks. We will thus first provide an overview of the situation in early childhood education and care in Jordan, contrasting previous neglect with the new policy determination to ensure that all children will have access to at least one year of kindergarten experience (KG2 at age 5) by the year 2010—even if universal access by this date now appears to be unattainable, leading to revision downwards for goals targeted by the MoE. We will then outline the different steps that were taken in order to facilitate and orchestrate the expansion of KG's across the country, giving due attention to the central issues of curricula, teacher training, and quality assurance. We will finally consider the challenges that remain to be tackled, and the way forward.

Early beginnings

In Chapter 1, we had highlighted the fact that, as with many other countries in the region, Jordan's policy interest in institutionalised ECCE was slow to appear. While Jordan, together with Tunisia, was often ahead of other Arab states in terms of its investment in the primary, secondary and higher education sector, it lagged as far behind as most when it came to preschool education. There were thus only 7 KG's registered in the whole of Jordan in the 1950s, 19 in the 60s, 24 in the 70s, with the number increasing exponentially to 165 in the 1980s (MoE, 1988), as a new generation of educated citizens came of age, and as more women found new employment opportunities in the burgeoning public sector, particularly as teachers, nurses and clerks (Ihmeideh, 2006). The total number of KG's in Jordan stood at almost 600 in 2008.

As with other countries, the first to invest in this sector were private, for-profit entities, in response to the needs for child care that developed as a small minority of women from elite backgrounds entered the labour market for the first time. Initially, therefore, the motives were largely pragmatic ones, and not driven by a policy that recognised the critical importance of the early stages of one's life in terms of the development of an individual's cognitive, social and emotional domains, thus providing the foundation for later living and learning. NGO's also developed an interest in the preschool sector, for sundry reasons that included philanthropy, as well as in response

to needs expressed at grass-roots, community levels. The overall numbers, however, remained small, with little if any supervision exercised by the state in relation to the quality of services offered (Ihmeideh, 2006).

It was only in 1994 that the MoE assumed some responsibility for such monitoring, establishing a set of minimal standards that KG's were obliged to comply with in order to obtain a ministerial licence that allowed them to operate. The government policy was to encourage private initiative, even if this inevitably reinforced social inequalities, given that only the well-to-do could afford paying ECCE fees. Two other features of early ECCE provision deserve to be mentioned: geographical distribution and curricular coverage. With regards to the first, private enterprise driven by the profit motive naturally seeks to establish itself in areas where it can find clients willing and able to pay for services. As a result, and prior to government commitment to ECCE, KG's were clustered around exclusive urban centres, with no services at all in rural, let alone remote areas. With regards to the ECCE curriculum, most of the early efforts seem to have ignored the special status of the infant child, and generally set out to accelerate mastery of the literacy and numeracy targets of the primary curriculum, even when this was not developmentally age-appropriate. The emphasis then was on a scholastic curriculum, with KG's prefiguring mainstream schooling rather than promoting an alternative learning paradigm.

The pivotal role played by the private sector

Private sector initiative in Jordan, therefore, ran ahead of governmental provision—a systemic feature in the development of ECD provision that is to be found in many other parts of the world (see Myers, 2002). Our focus should however go beyond a concern with the quantitative dimension of expansion, and consider the educational models and philosophic approaches underpinning the KG's that were opened in increasing numbers since the 1980s. Here again, it was the private sector that introduced a paradigm shift that has shaped the development of the KG sector in Jordan.

The origins of this shift in ECCE can arguably be traced back to a series of serendipitous events that seem to have been triggered off by an evangelical private elite school that had been established in Amman in 1926—the Ahliyyah School for Girls. By the 1970s, the school also had a KG section. The head of that section, Haifa Najjar, together with some teachers, felt dissatisfied with the prevailing methods and overall approach to the sector, and started looking for alternative models. Their search led them to consider some European early childhood specialists, such as Montessori, Pestalozzi and Froebel, as well as Piagetian psychology, and eventually constructivism. They however also tried to find inspiration in oriental pedagogues, such as Ibn Rushd and Al-Farabi, in an effort to ground their approach more firmly in their own histories and cultural traditions.

Their search also took them to Reggio Emilia, to observe first hand Italy's most famous 'scuole materne' and 'scuole d'infanzia', whose reputation had already spread world-wide. The focus on the child as a curious protagonist in his or her own learning, keen to interact and learn from the environment through creative play, with the teacher facilitating the educational process by being first and foremost a resource person (see Edwards et al., 1993), made a deep impression on the Jordanians, who were probably the first Arab team to visit Italy's showcase KG's. Here then was an alternative that promised to initiate children to joyful learning which addressed all domains in a holistic manner—a welcome contrast to the drab and scholastic models that, together with custodial models (Weikart, 2000), tended to prevail in Jordan, as indeed in many parts of the world. Further sustenance in developing and articulating this approach to ECCE, where the child is considered to be scientist, artist, communicator and explorer, came through a partnership with South Carolina University, so that the 'learning through play' approach took root and gained further legitimacy at the Ahliyyah School.

One of the graduates of the school was none other than Princess Basma, who was sufficiently impressed by what she saw happening in her old school that she encouraged the Foundation she patronised, JOHUD, to adopt the same approach, and indeed to have JOHUD novice teachers placed at the Ahliyyah School for their practicum and training. Many of the routines that are now established in Jordan's KG's, including the so-called 'corner approach', as

well as the 'topic approach', were in fact trialled by JOHUD which, by the 1980s, had opened KG and nursery branches in several parts of Jordan. In this way, awareness of the alternative approach to the education of young children increased, and in 1989 an Early Childhood Association was established, thus taking the ECD agenda and the 'learning to play' approach to a national level, effectively launching an early childhood movement. While the association is no longer active, in its heyday it did much to promote early childhood education, using the media effectively to reach its goals.

The state takes up the baton

In many ways, the Early Childhood Association passed on the baton to the Ministry of Education when it became clear that the state was finally convinced that it should be more proactive in the ECCE sector. As pointed out in Chapter 2, the years 1993 to 1996, leading up to the ECD National Strategy in 2000, were pivotal years which raised the profile of early childhood issues high on the national agenda, and which led the MoE to reconsider its role from that of being merely a regulator of the ECCE sector, to also becoming a provider: the state's share of KG provision was only 5 percent, compared to 77 percent of KG children enrolled in the private sector, and 18 percent in the NGO sector. The ECD National Plan of Action called for increasing the percentage of children enrolled in public preschools (KG1) from 28 percent to 35 percent by the year 2008, and to 50 percent by the year 2013, and to increase enrolment in KG2 from 47 percent to 52 percent by the year 2008, and to 70 percent by the year 2013.

There is a strong awareness that nurseries too need to be expanded, even if these fall outside the remit of the MoE, and are the responsibility of the MoSD. Their total number reached 795 by the end of 2006, with 57 percent of these being governmental, 38 percent private, and 4.6 percent affiliated to the NGO sector. But the whole provision manages to cater for only 2 percent of children in the age group from birth to four years—which is very limited when one considers that this age group constitutes almost 13 percent of the total Jordanian population. Quality is variable, as are the standards of service, with the MoSD developing legislation in 2005 for establishing and licensing nurseries, and more recently for child care centres that cater for children deprived of parental care. Implementation is however lagging behind, though AGFUND seed money is supporting the initial stages of developing a curriculum for nurseries.

All in all, it is clear that government focus is on KG's, which, as Kaga (2007, p.1) rightly points out, "seems at odds with the lifelong framework in which the whole [Jordanian] reform programme [i.e. ERfKE] was conceived. It also seems to pay insufficient heed to scientific research findings showing that major brain development occurs in the first years of life, pointing to the need to invest in the earliest years." Some in fact feel that the holistic and integrated approach to ECD that is favoured by the Jordanian government and its key partners is not served well by having the nursery section in a different ministry, even if a steering committee was set up in January 2006 bringing the MoE and MoSD together so that they jointly examine and define ways to improve the quality of nurseries.

The key motive driving MoE commitment to expanding the KG sector is a concern with equitable access for all, especially for those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. The MoE's resolve was strengthened by evidence from studies commissioned by UNICEF showing that despite the fact that the KG sector suffered from variable quality, children who had access to preschooling enjoyed a number of advantages over those who did not, particularly in relation to school-readiness. This is a critically important notion—one which has been well researched in Jordan—and needs to be explored in some detail.

Learning readiness

There is strong evidence from international research studies that children who experience preschooling attain a 'head start' readiness for learning, which translates into improved success of learners from an early age and throughout basic and secondary schooling. It also increases enrolment in the first grade, since it is easier to transition from preschool to school. 'Readiness' here does not just refer to cognitive skills, such as extent of vocabulary or complexity of spoken language, but also social and emotional skills, given that at school children are expected to follow rules and directions, work with a group, engage in classroom tasks, and express, interpret and control feelings and impulses.

There are in fact at least five dimensions related to school readiness which interact with each other, and which have an impact on children's ability to learn and succeed at school. These are physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional

development; language development (including emerging literacy, print awareness, story sense), approaches to learning (such as enthusiasm, curiosity, persistence in completing tasks), and cognition and general knowledge (including understanding of shapes and spatial relationships, knowledge derived from looking for similarities, differences and associations).

The Jordanian government, through the NCFA, commissioned a number of studies related to an assessment of learning readiness from one of the country's premier education research institutions, the NCHRD[1] (NCFA/NCHRD 2004, 2008), with at least one other study being carried out independently (Hussein, 2003). The NCHRD has conducted a study to adapt the EYE instrument (Abu Taleb, 2004) before applying it on Jordanian children. Initially, the Learning Readiness studies by the NCHRD used the Early Years Evaluation (EYE) instrument (Al-Hassan 2005 & 2007). However, in 2007- 2008, the MoE together with its partners decided to start using a Canadian instrument, the EDI, or Early Development Instrument, since this is more comprehensive and allows for global comparability. NCHRD was given the responsibility to adapt it to reflect the Jordanian context. A great deal of study and effort was put into validating the adapted instrument, in order to make sure that it was fit for purpose.[2]

Taking national samples of first grade children distributed all over Jordan, the studies set out to examine the variables that influence the level of learning readiness at entry to first grade, including KG enrolment, KG type, gender, parental occupation, and socioeconomic status. The 2008 study for instance revealed that while 38 percent of first grade children in Jordan are considered ready for school, 25 percent are not. A number of variables had an impact on school readiness, with males, those who attended private KG's, and those from urban areas exhibiting better learning readiness than girls, public KG pupils, and students coming from rural areas. Children's learning readiness also increased in relation to higher family income, higher levels of father's and of mother's education, lower number of siblings and smaller family size.

Such studies provide the MoE with a baseline of children's developmental outcomes and support the setting up of a national monitoring system which produces data at the community and regional levels for making ongoing decisions, as well as to better gauge how effective individual schools and specific community intervention programmes were in preparing children for school.

Early Learning and Development Standards

Closely linked to the learning readiness research are the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS), a set of statements that reflect expectations for children's knowledge and behaviour—in other words, what young children

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[1] The research centre that was eventually to become the NCHRD, or the National Centre for Human Resources Development, was set up in 1990 to support Jordan's human resource development agenda, and to ensure that monitoring and evaluation functions in education were carried out by an independent body, rather than by the Ministry which provided the services that were to be assessed.

[2] The dangers of taking on learning readiness instruments that are not sensitive to cultural differences, leading to the construction of indigenous children in deficit terms, is explored in some detail by Brooker (2005).

Children enjoy group work in the Stimulation Corner in a Kindergarten
Eastern Amman

should know and be able to do by the time they reach the end of each of four critical stages of development: 18 months, 36 months, 60 months, and 96 months.[3]

These expectations for children's learning and development are articulated across several domains in Language and Literacy; Social and Emotional Development; Physical Well-being, Health, & Motor Skills; Cognition & Reasoning; and Approaches to Learning—thus underscoring the fact that young children's learning is multi-dimensional. They are therefore important, particularly in a context where learning and development are often exclusively associated with cognition. In contrast, ELDS highlight the fact that young children grow physically, socially, emotionally, linguistically, and cognitively at the same time, and that therefore all these dimensions of learning are critical to healthy development and must be valued. Box 12 provides an example of the indicators and benchmarks in the domain of social and emotional development.

As we shall note later on, ELDS support and inform the curriculum development process, but they also go far beyond that. They effectively set out benchmarks for the growth and development of young children not only in child care or in private or public preschools or schools, but also in homes and in early intervention programs. The standards serve as a source document, informing parents and caregivers in all these settings about expectations for children's development and learning. They reflect the perspectives, values, and recommended practices of a diverse range of people, institutions, and communities throughout Jordan, and as such represent Jordan's hopes for young children.

The ELDS went through a series of validation processes starting with content validation with experts, academia and parents. This was followed by age validation study on a representative sample conducted by NCHRD (Al-Qudah & Abu Libdeh, 2004). The ELDS were then modified and endorsed by MoE.

Driving comprehensive reform through ERƒKE

While the MoE's reform efforts in relation to various aspects of the education system were somewhat dispersed at times, with flurries of activities taking place in response to the availability of national or donor funds, ERƒKE—designed after the ministry secured a major World Bank loan— provided an unprecedented opportunity to package its most important reform initiatives under a comprehensive programme.[4] This served to coordinate

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[3] Jordan in fact became one of the six pioneering countries in the world, chosen by UNICEF New York to collaborate with Columbia University to develop global ECD standards, indicators and benchmarks. The intention is to develop the national standards and move to the global standards by compiling data from the six countries.

[4] The reform priorities in relation to the ECD sector had been previously articulated by several partners, UNICEF included, and had been systematized in a report by Young & van der Gaag (2002) in the context of a government request for support from the World Bank for a proposed 5-year investment project, the third Human Resources Development Sector Investment Loan (HRDSIL-III), to finance implementation of human resources development in Jordan. The MoE had requested that attention be given to the expansion of kindergartens.

**Box 12: A selection of Indicators and Benchmarks
in the domain of social and emotional development**

Standard 2.2: Children demonstrate effective social interaction with peers

Indicators	Benchmarks	Age
2.2.1 Child engages with peers and starts forming friendships.	Child distributes roles in group play (football, basketball, etc…).	4 - Below 6 Years
	Child abides by the rules of group games.	
	Child suggests group activities and projects to his peers.	
	Child participates in organized group games fairly (progressively suppresses the tendency to change the rules of the game on the spot in order to win).	
	Child accepts differences between him/herself and peers (gender, appearance).	
	Child participates in team works as a group & feels proud of the result of a group effort.	
2.2.2 Child demonstrates age appropriate methods to solve conflicts with peers.	Child asks questions to identify a problem or conflict; negotiates solutions and reaches age-appropriate compromises (agrees to share and take turns playing, uses positive words to solve problems, gives up agitation and works out the conflict quickly and resumes playing).	
2.2.3 Child sympathizes with peers (can put him/her self in peers' position).	Child gives solutions to his/her friends to help them solve a problem (assists a friend in finishing his/her puzzle).	

**Standard 2.3: Children demonstrate effective self-concept
and self-esteem and value their initiative**

Indicators	Benchmarks	Age
2.3.1 Child demonstrates age-appropriate satisfaction with hi/her own abilities and characteristics.	Child shows pride & content with own ethnicity & family culture (his/her house, family name) family members' professions, achievements, special skills (cooking or other skills).	4 - Below 6 Years
2.3.2 Child demonstrates age-appropriate independence.	Child displays acceptance when separated from caregiver, parents, or home environment.	
	Child makes his/her own choices (chooses his/her clothes, favorite food or toys).	

Peer activity slowly leading to friendships.
Kindergarten Eastern Amman

the initiatives as well as resources of the various national actors and international donors and development agencies in the field, under the leadership of the MoE.

The first three components of the reform package addressed (i) the challenge of governance and administrative reform, (ii) the transformation of curricula and pedagogies, and (iii) the provision of quality physical learning environments. The fourth component of this package, on its part, focused directly on (iv) promoting learning readiness through ECD, with particular emphasis on disadvantaged children in low income households from remote rural areas.

As Box 13 shows, there were four sub-components here, namely (a) public awareness and understanding of the importance of ECCE—which we have already covered in the preceding chapter in our account of the better parenting initiative; (b) institutional capacity building for ECD; (c) expansion of KG's for the poor; and (d) professional development of all those involved in ECD. We will deal with developments in each of these areas in turn, though of course, as with all educational reform, the different components and sub-components interact with, and have an impact on each other. One cannot, for instance, imagine expanding KG's without attending to the institutional and governance structures that need to be put into place to manage both the quantitative and qualitative development of the sector.

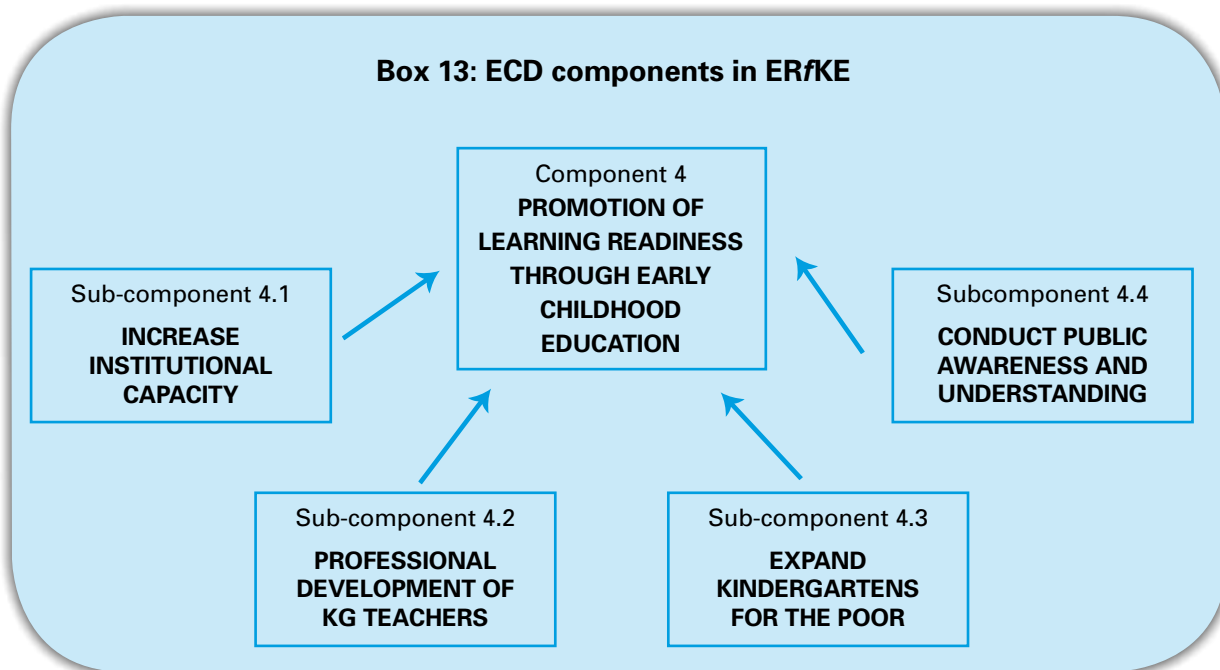## Institutional capacity building for ECD

By its very nature, the ECCE sector involves a broad range of actors, and it is a challenge to find ways of bringing all these actors together so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (McDonald, 2001). Efforts to attain this goal in Jordan included the setting up of a national ECD committee which brought key actors in the ECD sector as part of the NCFA overall responsibility for family and childhood affairs in Jordan. In addition to that, an ECD steering committee of stakeholders made up of representatives from the MoE, MoSD, NCFA, UNICEF, IELC, and USAID was set up in 2004, with regular monthly meetings in order to ensure efficient implementation of the ECD component in the ERfKE framework.

Increased initiatives in, and focus on ECD—in a context where the government correctly insists on being in the driving seat—required the MoE to assume the role of a strong counterpart that had sufficient administrative and technical capacity to lead, and to become both a focal and a reference point for all developments in the sector. An effort in this direction was made in 1999, when a KG section was established at the Ministry's central administrative office in Amman. Parallel, dependent units were also set up in the General Directorates of Education in the governorates.

Linkages between the centre and the different layers of the system are still being defined, and the rationalisation of this is vital to implementation (Honig, 2004a) particularly in view of the

Box 13: ECD components in ERƒKE

Component 4
PROMOTION OF LEARNING READINESS THROUGH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Sub-component 4.1
INCREASE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Subcomponent 4.4
CONDUCT PUBLIC AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

Sub-component 4.2
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF KG TEACHERS

Sub-component 4.3
EXPAND KINDERGARTENS FOR THE POOR

demands that will be made on the KG department to support decentralised planning, management and administration of KG service delivery at sub-national levels. With USAID/ESP support, a needs assessment of the ECE Division of the Ministry of Education was carried out in order to define the kinds of assistance they needed to handle newly assigned responsibilities for kindergartens.

Licensing standards

Responsibilities of the KG unit include licensing, accreditation, administrative and technical supervision, and monitoring the teaching and learning processes. Licensing standards stipulate the minimal requirements meant to protect the health and safety of children, and versions of these had been in use in the past. These were updated in 2004 with NCFA technical support and funding from AGFUND, and have been

field-tested and implemented—though this presents the MoE's KG unit with a major challenge of training a cadre that will be able to review and assess current KG facilities and provide training of ECCE providers on the licensing standards so that knowledge about the standards can serve as a guide to self-assessment and improvement prior to formal MoE licensing reviews.

The licensing standards outline the conditions that need to be met to establish a KG in Jordan, including details regarding the curriculum, the nature of the KG site and facilities, the characteristics of the building itself, including features of the classroom—in terms of size, apertures, furniture, and teaching materials—and a whole range of other requirements such as heating, bathrooms, child-friendly playgrounds, and so on. As is to be expected, there is a major emphasis on safety and hygiene.

Box 14: Jordanian Standards for Licensing Kindergartens

Article 12: The Kindergarten Site
The following conditions shall apply to the kindergarten's site and facilities in order for it to secure approval for its establishment:
1. The kindergarten must be in a populated area.
2. The site must be chosen in a healthy area which is sunny and well aired.
3. The site must be in a quiet area far away from noise, traffic, polluted areas and high electricity pressure points.

Article 13: The Kindergarten Building
For permission to be granted to establish a kindergarten, the following conditions shall apply to the kindergarten's building and its facilities:
1. The kindergarten must be on the same floor as the play area (the floor that leads to the play area – the entrance must not be more than one meter higher or lower than the entrance that leads to the play area). It must have an independent entrance. If there are steps, then these must be no more than five in number. The steps must have protective railing.
2. A sign showing the name of the kindergarten must be placed at the buildings entrance.
3. Smoking must be completely prohibited in the kindergarten building
4. The building must contain fire extinguishing equipment, a first aid kit and an emergency exit.
5. The emergency board must be placed at the entrance to the kindergarten. Phosphoric arrows must indicate the exits.
6. There must be no less than two separate exits in the kindergarten, these must be far apart.
7. The storage areas must be firmly closed so that they do not constitute a danger to the children.
8. The building must have wide corridors between the rooms that are appropriate for the movement and activities of children.
9. The kindergarten must have a multi-purpose area which meets children's needs.
10. There must be a special place suitable for nursing children and isolating sick children.
11. The kindergarten must have a land phone or a mobile phone.

Article 14: The Classroom:
When choosing and organizing the kindergarten classroom, the following conditions must apply:
1. Safety conditions must apply to the kindergarten room.
2. The classroom must be no less than 20 m2 in size.
3. The size of the classroom must be appropriate for the number of children i.e. 2m2 per child.

4. The classroom must have two exists if its size exceeds 100 m2 and if the number of children exceeds 50.
5. The sun must enter the classroom through drawn-opened windows, which are not less than 10percent of the size of the classroom floor area. There must be more than one window with iron protection and wire from the outside and appropriate curtains from the inside.
6. The doors must be lightweight opening outwards and the door handle must be appropriate for the height of the children and must, therefore, be 75 - 100 cm high.
7. The walls of the room must be sturdy and must not have any cracks. The ceiling must be no less than 2.7 m high.
8. The paint must be attractive and appropriate for the age of the children. It must be washable. It must be non-toxic for children.
9. The floor of the room must be covered with a safe cover (carpet or rubber) with the exception of one area (the art corner). The art corner must constitute one quarter of the total area of the room.
10. The floor covering (the carpet or the rubber) must be chosen so that it muffles noise, is easy to clean and is not slippery when children play and move around.
11. The floor covering (carpet or rubber) and the curtains must be fire-proof (please note that carpets and curtains as well as doors can be sprayed with special paint to make them fire-proof).
12. The kindergarten must be centrally heated.
13. The kindergarten must be lit by electricity.
14. The electric points must be secure and out of reach of the children.
15. There must be a teacher and an assistant teacher in the kindergarten classroom.

Training and other requirements for the whole range of staff involved in setting up, administering and teaching in KG's are also specified. Details outlining the reasons for withholding or revoking a licence are provided, and from visits to KGs and interviews with KG administrative staff it became clear that even some of the best equipped private KGs, which enjoyed a long-established and solid reputation, were anxious about MoE inspections, suggesting that the licensing standards were being taken seriously. Box 14 provides some examples of these standards.

Accreditation

The MoE also developed accreditation standards with the support of ESP—the ERfKE Support Project team that was engaged by USAID as its contribution to the reform of the ECD sector (see Box 15). Accreditation frameworks, which are meant to support higher standards in a number of key areas related to quality provision, establish requirements for programme inputs such as group size, teacher-student ratios, teacher qualifications, curriculum, and evaluation. The ECD accreditation system uses the ECD licensing standards

An example of a Kindergarten adhering to the licensing standards.
Ma'an

as its first level, and then extends the standards to include such topics as child health and nutrition, curriculum and assessment, teacher behaviour and classroom management, enhancement of children's social skills and emotional adjustment, relationships with families and the community, and administration and management.

The process involved in developing the accreditation system was quite complex, involving several months of work by an Advisory Committee constituted of a variety of stakeholders within the system (e.g., Ministry of Education staff in Amman, UNICEF, The Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD), National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA), Development Coordination Unit at the Ministry of Education (DCU), Save the Children and private sector representatives). This group agreed upon the accreditation areas on the basis of the learning objectives that had been established for kindergartens. Then, ESP staff in coordination with MOE formed focus groups for each accreditation area, taking on the responsibility for

drafting the standards for each area. To guarantee active participation, ESP staff organised additional focus groups in each governorate to make sure that issues that are significant in all the areas of Jordan are included in the system.

In 2007, MoE has started focusing on building a system for quality assurance for public KGs which aims at assisting KGs reach the highest quality standards as per the vision of the mission statement of the ministry. The MoE has identified seven areas for quality assurance and working groups have developed 25 measures to ensure that these quality standards are attained.

Curriculum and curriculum framework

The MoE had published a KG curriculum in 1980 and 1993, but KG's are not obliged to follow the same curriculum, though they have to obtain permission and approval from the Ministry to use the curriculum of their choice. Often, these curricula are picked off the shelf from local or regional textbook producers, even if many of these do

Box 15: USAID'S ER*f*KE Support Programme (ESP) and its contribution to the ECD effort

The ERfKE Support Programme:

- Sponsored 100 public KG's.
- Field-tested the KG curriculum.
- Is developing an accreditation system in partnership with the Government of Jordan during the second and third year of ER*f*KE II.
- Supported the training of principals, supervisors and teachers in the implementation of the first national KG interactive curriculum.
- Refurbished 170 public KG's and equipped them with instructional materials.

not employ teams of ECD experts, leading to programmes that are not age-appropriate (Ihmeideh, 2006). As a consequence of the widespread use of unsuitable curricula, the MoE together with the NCFA embarked on a major effort to develop a curriculum that reflected best practice in creating learning environments for young children (MoE & NCFA, 2004a, b). A National Curricular Task Force was set up (2002 - 2003), headed by the President of NCHRD, and composed of representatives from the MoE, the NCFA, NGO's, university-based ECD specialists, the private sector, and international consultants, and charged with the task of making progress in this area. Funding was provided by AGFUND.

Those working in the ECD sector were aware of the prevalence of traditional curricular approaches in most KG's across the country, where pre-schooling often did not differ much from the compulsory education cycle. On the basis of available reports, research, and interviews carried out during the field work in the context of this documentation, it would probably be fair to conclude that the most prevalent curricular traditions in Jordan have tended to be those informed by a custodial approach, or a programmed approach.[5] In the custodial approach, teachers/adults provide basic care while the children entertain themselves, with little interaction between caregiver and children unless called for by schedule, and with little activity undertaken by the children. The programmed approach, on its part, requires teachers to determine

and initiate the required learning activities, with the child expected to respond and learn from what the teacher offers. There is a set sequence of objectives that need to be attained, with the teacher's and the child's activities being scripted and pre-determined. In this approach, the content stresses specific pre-academic skills, and learning is viewed as the acquisition of 'correct' responses with respect to the programmed instruction goals.

The curricular reform team clearly set out to work within a different learning paradigm, more akin to open-framework and child-centred curricular approaches. While many Jordanian KG's emphasised information, skills and behaviours, the plans for the new curriculum were that it would address the whole child, supporting children's growing awareness of self, intellectual, physical and emotional development, and the foundation for lifelong learning. The emphasis therefore would not be—as many parents expected—on the acquisition of specific pre-academic skills or on cognitive development narrowly defined in terms of specific skills, but rather on fundamental cognitive processes and concepts, with learning resulting from the child's intended, direct experience in and action upon the environment. The role of the teacher is therefore to structure the environment in ways that support such learning, and also to respond to the child's particular interests and activities. The child typically initiates learning by playing, thus requiring classroom environments to be open and rich in stimuli.

The curriculum development team had

[5] The early childhood education curriculum models referred to here follow the typology proposed by Weikart (2000).

to face a major challenge as they wanted at one and the same time to adopt a participative approach—hence soliciting views and comments about the desired child outcomes for Jordanian children from as broad a spectrum of society as possible, including not just expert educators and teachers, but also parents—while at the same time steering the process towards a radical departure from the prevalently traditional curricula that many KG's were working with.

In order to do this, the team identified best practice nationally and internationally, and created forums for discussion and debate in order to arrive towards a consensus regarding the values and attitudes, social skills and behaviours, cultural understandings, physical competencies and cognitive skills that young children should have before they entered the first grade. In this process, they were well supported by the Early Learning Development Standards, which have been described in an earlier section in this chapter. As we have noted, these standards serve as a benchmark against which Jordan can evaluate the impact of the curriculum on young children, thus supporting programme reviews as well as informing professional development efforts with teachers (IBE, 2006).

The curriculum identified the key objectives for the KG sector, which it organised around seven key categories, namely religious and spiritual, psychological, nationalistic, social, physical-motor, cognitive, and performance objectives, corresponding to the cognitive, emotional, physical, social and moral domains. It also lists the learning outcomes in relation to

each of these areas for the different age levels from four to six. These learning standards were carefully articulated with the help of expertise from Columbia University, and were validated by NCHRD in order to make sure that they were appropriate for Jordanian children. Care was also taken to have linkages with the curriculum development processes for basic education, in order to ensure continuity and coherence.

The MoE field-tested the curriculum in 2003, and this led to a realisation that teachers required more support than had been envisaged initially. Further assessments were made in 2004 - 2005, resulting in another revision of the curriculum in 2006 and final endorsement in 2007. The final version, which is now being gradually implemented across the country, structures the curriculum for daily delivery, greatly facilitating the teacher's work since it provides step-by-step instructions, and detailed activity sheets, which have proved especially popular with novice teachers.

Interviews suggest that the curriculum development process was a contested one, and this is not unexpected since curricula define what is worth knowing, and the ways to arrive to such knowledge. One of the bones of contention, for instance, was whether or not there should be textbooks, with some members of the curricular team insisting that if they went down that way, this would reinforce traditional learning approaches, thus contradicting the philosophy they were hoping to encourage. In the end, ten thematic units that include over 1000 activities to be implemented throughout the

Children act as trees in the wind following some story telling in a Kindergarten.
Irbid

school year were developed, together with supplementary resources that included not only a teachers' guide and textbooks[6], but also flashcards, posters, and other educational material. Five children's practice booklets that include the Arabic and English alphabets, Arabic and English numbers, and a variety of exercises were also produced. The resources are colourful and attractive, and clearly of great support to KG staff— though it must still be seen whether the reservations and misgivings referred to earlier are justified, and whether the material supports or thwarts the hoped-for curricular reform.

As the new integrated curriculum is implemented in KG's, issues are arising which show how complex change can be. Interviews with facilitators indicated that many parents want a "solid curriculum", i.e. one that focuses on numeracy and literacy, and which foreshadows the learning that takes place in the basic education cycle. They put pressure on teachers to give homework, and are upset when their child has not yet learnt how to read or write, or when they return home and, when asked about what they did at school, reply that they had played all the time. JOHUD had of course already faced these problems, since as we have seen they had long since adopted the learning through play method. Their advice was to explain the new approach to parents, and to involve them as much as possible in the class, so that they could see the types of interaction

encouraged. Many also started realising from experience with elder children that, for those who had been in more traditional KG's, the first grade was experienced as repetitive and boring.

Expanding access to the KG's

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the ECD National Strategy as well as the ECD National Plan of Action both made a commitment to expanding the number of KG's in disadvantaged as well as remote areas. The target was to increase gross enrolment in preschools to 50 percent by 2012 and 60 percent by 2015.

The MoE adopted a two-fold strategy in 1999 - 2000 in its effort to increase access. The first was to identify unutilised classrooms at ground floor level in existing girls' primary schools, with, in each case, one or two rooms being transformed into kindergarten classes. Sometimes, girls' secondary schools were used, with girls in the senior classes encouraged to 'adopt' a pupil and spend some time in class at regular intervals. Within two years, 101 such KG classrooms had been opened in 25 of the 30 District Directorates in the country, enrolling 2370 children. Brown (2002, p.5) notes that many of these KG's were poorly furnished with very little if any basic equipment and educational materials.

A second strategy was to build new KG classrooms as annexes to public schools[7], as well as to plan such extensions for schools that will be

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[6] The teacher's text contains information on the historical development of early childhood education; children's characteristics, developmental needs, learning styles, learning difficulties, and behavioural problems; teachers' characteristics; and the environment of a kindergarten classroom.

[7] A further strategy to enhance free access to KG's involved stimulating NGO provision through transfer of MoE teachers to their premises and meeting their salary costs. This was not sustainable in the long run, and was found to have the potential of causing more problems than it solved.

constructed in the future. In some cases, the head of the main school also has responsibilities for the KG section. In other cases, a different head is appointed to be in charge.

Not all parents were keen to send their children to newly available preschool facilities, especially when this represented something of a chore since it required the daily dropping off and picking up of children. Others were not persuaded that a KG environment was better for their children than the home, and did not see much point in using the service given that much of the mother's sense of identity—as well as that of several female members of the extended family—revolved around child-minding. In select areas marked by indigence, the ministry decided to provide incentives by giving the children a daily meal and warm clothes every winter.

The areas targeted for expansion were chosen with the support of the Planning Directorate, with the main criterion being the desire to reach out to the most deprived communities in remote areas. The MoE was resolved not to enter into competition with the private sector, and indeed encouraged the latter to expand its activities. Interestingly, the ministry rejected aspects of the mapping exercise provided by the World Bank, since they felt that this relied too exclusively on population clusters around poverty indices, when other socio-cultural dimensions as to where to build KG's had to be taken into account.

An unintended consequence that the ministry had not considered and that was referred to by some interviewees was that, with the economic downturn that Jordan was experiencing, parents who previously sent their children to fee-paying KG's switched to using public KG's when they could, since these were free. Some JOHUD centres also felt that with public KG's becoming available, they could wind down their own provision and focus on other areas of community care.

ERfKE injected a new life into the process of KG expansion, with a target of opening 50 KG classes annually being met. By 2008, the number of public KG's had increased to almost 600, reaching 50 percent of the KG2 age cohort. USAID/ESP took on the task of renovating and furnishing 170 KG's through the ERfKE framework. The KG's were jointly selected by the ESP team and representatives of the Ministry of Education so that the group of 170 was fairly distributed across the 12 governorates. Each classroom is at least 30 square meters in size.

Once renovation is completed, ESP staff bring in age-appropriate furniture, equipment and materials, such as wooden furniture (e.g., child-sized chairs and tables, cupboards, storage shelves, book display racks), educational tools and toys (e.g., magnifying glass, abacus, puzzles), books and flash cards, stationary, an electrical heater, carpets and curtains, and outdoor play equipment (e.g., swings, slide, climbing structure, balls). Finally, ESP staff work with the teacher to ensure that she understands how to set up the environment and use it optimally.

Observations of interactive sequences in a number of public and private KG's suggest that teachers are comfortable

Box 16: Key facts about Jordan's kindergartens

- KG's are somewhat equitably distributed by governorate: between 14 students per 1000 population in Ajloun and Karak, to 21 students per 1000 population in Aqaba. There are two exceptions: Jarash, at 9 students per 1000 population, and Mafrak at 2 students per 1000 population.

- The KG2 system now serves almost 50 percent of the age cohort. The private and NGO sectors still enrol almost 90 percent of all KG students.

- The highest KG enrolment rate in the school year 2004 / 2005 was in Al-Balqa governorate (57 percent) followed by Ajloun governorate (56 percent). The lowest enrolments were in Jerash (31.3 percent) and Madaba governorates (31.5 percent).

- KG coverage of children aged 4 - 6 years is estimated at 46 percent in urban areas and 24 percent in rural areas. The target is to increase gross enrolment in preschools to 50 percent by 2012 and 60 percent by 2015.

- On average the child/teacher ratio in KG's in 2002 / 2003 was 18:1, with that for rural areas being 22:1. Amman has the lowest ratio at 17:1 and Jerash the highest at 25:1. The maximum enrolment permitted is of 30 students per classroom.

- The space ratio allocation per student is 1.2 square metres.

- There are about 5,417 KG teachers: 17.5 percent have a bachelor's degree, 80 percent a diploma and 3 percent only have a high school certificate.

- The school year at the preschool level consists of 28 weeks.

- KG's run for 23 hours per week.

- Most public KG's start at 0800 and finish at 1230.

- Parents who send their children to private KG's pay between JD110 - 250 per year in tuition, with some KG's charging as much as JD1700—double the average fee paid annually by students attending a public university.

using a corner approach which, as had been noted earlier, had become widespread in JOHUD KG's. Children quickly became accustomed to the routines of play followed in the Arts corner, the Blocks corner, the Math and Science corner, the Home corner (reminiscent of the children's homes, containing a child's cooking stove, refrigerator, plastic pots, pans and tableware), the Book corner (which is where children have quiet time to themselves or otherwise relax), and the computer area.[8] The latter relates to the Smart Kids project, which sets out to introduce IT to children from an early age.

Parental involvement in KG classrooms

Rapid expansion of KG's created challenges in terms of meeting the requirement that all KG teachers had to have an assistant if the number of children in their class is 25 or more. A joint MoE, USAID/ESP Parental Involvement Initiative set out to introduce parents of KG-age children into kindergartens, acquainting them with the teaching methods used, and the philosophy underpinning the routines followed. It aims also at enriching the classroom environment through tapping onto the experiences and expertise of parents in facilitating children's learning

and ensuring that all are partners in the learning and educational process. The initiative invited not only mothers, but also grandmothers, aunts, and sisters of KG-age children into the classroom and, with some preparatory training, enlisted them as volunteers in support of KG teachers. The initiative was piloted, and was deemed to be so successful that it is being rolled out to all governorates.

As with most parental involvement programmes, successes are tempered by a number of challenges that often prove difficult to overcome (Wolfendale, 1992), particularly in educational systems where there is little if any tradition of opening up the school to parents. The ER*f*KE II draft document on ECD notes, for instance, that care must be taken so that "the involvement of parents as volunteers must benefit children and should not merely serve to fill financial gaps" (2008, p.2). An evaluative study carried out by Ihmeideh and colleagues (2008) indicates, for instance, that issues arose in relation to a number of aspects. KG principals were not always keen to accepts parents in the class, and parents were often deemed by teachers not to have the right skills needed to teach properly. There were also differences in what parents and teachers considered to be appropriate KG education, with the former often putting pressure on the latter to do 'real teaching', by which they meant putting more stress on reading and writing. While teachers and principals—particularly those that had not received much training in ECCE— tend to view parents either from a deficit perspective, or as intruders, or merely as resources to be drawn upon when it comes to fund raising for the school,

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[8] The 'corner approach' is based on social constructivist principles, and to what is usually referred to as 'Developmentally Appropriate Practice' (or DAP). This encourages teachers to use a variety of ways of flexibly grouping children to support learning, collaboration and a sense of community. Children have the opportunity to work on their own, in small groups, and with the whole class. The main goal of DAP approaches is to enhance development and learning through finding a balance between children's self-initiated learning and adult guidance and support (Siraj-Blatchford, 1999).

Volunteer mother engaged in story telling in a Kindergarten.
Irbid

a few have started to consider family members of KG children as partners in the task of improving educational standards all round. In some ways, and despite the challenges, Jordan's Parental Involvement Initiative may be setting the ground for that.

Professional development

Decades of experience with educational reform in the region and beyond have shown clearly that the best-designed of blueprints will fail unless teachers—the so-called 'front-line implementers' (Honig, 2006)—are on board and have been sufficiently trained (Sultana, 2002). The KG teacher preparation agenda was very high on the MoE's list of priorities from the start of the ECD reform strategy, and as we have seen, constitutes one of the sub-components in the ER*f*KE agenda for the sector. Previous efforts to ensure quality teacher inputs at all levels of the system relied almost exclusively on specifying the qualifications that teachers had to have, and on inspection and supervision. Both strategies need to be addressed briefly before providing more detail about the current efforts to address quality input by teachers, and indeed by all staff involved in the ECD sector.

In relation to the effort to maintain and improve KG service quality through supervision and mentoring, Jordan still has a long way to go. For years, the MoE did not have the capacity or funds to organise a supervisory service, and it was only in 1987 that some progress was made in this regard, with one or two KG inspectors being appointed in some of the governorates. Much of the supervision, however, has tended to focus on formal and administrative aspects, and on ensuring that licensing standards are met, rather than on the teaching and learning process (Ihmeideh, 2006). With the impetus given to the ECD sector, and within the framework of the ER*f*KE reform effort, the number of supervisors has increased, many have received specialised training, and a template has been developed supporting supervisors in their effort to assess the teaching and learning environment in the KG's they visit.

The situation with KG teacher education has, till recently, not been much better. Regulations dating back to the 1988 Education Act (Updated later to become Act No. 3, 1994) require teachers at the basic education level to have a first degree or equivalent, with those applying for a post at the secondary education level to have a bachelor's degree in a school subject together with a one year diploma in education (Ahlawat & Billeh, 1996; Imheideh, 2006). KG teachers, on their part, are normally recruited after graduating from a two-year community college, having obtained an intermediate-level diploma, two years after getting the Tawjihi exam. Few of those who become KG teachers through this route will have followed ECCE at the college.[9]

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[9] In 2002, 7.1 percent of KG teachers were holders of university degrees, 89.6percent were graduates of community colleges, and 3.3 percent had secondary level education. Only 32.2 percent of those who had a university degree or a college diploma were specialized in ECE or related fields (Heyasat, 2002).

With the increased attention to the ECCE sector following the launch of the National ECD Strategy in 2000, some universities began developing research interest in the area, and also to offer bachelor's degrees in early childhood education.[10] In some ways, this promised to align KG teacher training with the levels of preparation of the rest of their colleagues teaching older students, presumably adding to the status of the preschool sector. While in many ways commendable, the effort encountered several challenges, of which three deserve to be highlighted. In the first instance, Jordanians who obtain degrees are unlikely to be attracted by the KG sector which, on average, pays the lowest wages on the Jordanian salary scale. The status of being a child care worker is also quite low, not only through its association with feminine work, but also because there is not much public awareness and recognition of the skills levels involved: the perception is that anybody (or rather, any woman) can do the job, which is basically about child-minding and being a nanny. Efforts have in fact been recently made by the MoE to increase the public status of KG teachers, both by integrating them in the new teacher ranking scheme[11], thus affording them a career pathway with increases in salary on the basis of performance over the years, and by organising an Excellent Teacher Award scheme as well as Public Appreciation Ceremonies.[12]

A second reason as to why university training of KG teachers encountered difficulties is due to the fact that many of the private KG's in the country prefer to employ graduates from community colleges rather than from universities, as the salaries of the former are even lower. Many of those who invest in the nursery and KG sector for profit-making reasons are happy to cut costs in this way, and to address quality issues through, at best, providing some form of in-service professional development opportunities for the community college graduates they employ. Those employed by the MoE receive some practical in-service training during the summer before their first appointment, or during the school year. In some cases, the prospective KG teachers have a community college diploma but no specific training in early years, so that, as one interviewee put it, they "are dumped blind in the KG classroom, and have to sink or swim."

Finally, Jordan's KG degree programmes ran into the same difficulties that university-based teacher education efforts the world over have encountered, namely the charge that while they may have increased the level of theoretical knowledge of their students, they left much to be desired when it came to practical skills development. Competency-development was further weakened by the fact that field experience and practicum placements had to be organised in KG's around the university area, whose standards of teaching were often low. As one university lecturer exclaimed during an

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[10] There are presently 7 state and 3 private universities offering ECD programmes, with the Hashemite University offering distinct programmes for the Early Childhood Education and the Early Childhood Care areas. To date, it is the only University in the region to have established a Faculty of ECE—the Queen Rania Faculty for Childhood, established in 2002.

[11] The Teachers' Rank System (TRS) recognises four categories of teachers, namely Assistant Teacher, Teacher, First Teacher, and Expert Teacher. One of the criteria for moving up the scales is to clock up a number of hours in specialised training programmes approved by the MoE.

[12] See http://www.esp-jordan.org/update/kg.aspx for an example of this.

interview, "Our students come back from these KG's telling us that they found exactly the opposite of what we had described as commendable practice during our lectures!" A number of interviewees from both the MoE and international development agencies also hinted that many of the ECD syllabi in both community colleges and universities needed to be modernised.

For these and other reasons, the MoE strategy for improving KG teacher inputs has been three-fold. It has encouraged and continued supporting university input at the pre-service teacher education level, urging reform of curricula, and commissioning research, providing individual members of staff with an opportunity to work with international experts, thus facilitating capacity building. Additionally, the ministry is contemplating adopting a rather sensitive and contested policy initiative which sees teacher appointments being made not by the public service commission in line with the terms of service binding all public servants, but rather on the basis of proven and demonstrable competences. This would give the MoE greater discretion when it came to licensing and hiring teachers at all levels, and would also make it easier to dismiss those who prove to be incompetent or unprofessional. Needless to say, this proposed policy initiative is meeting with a lot of resistance, and is presently still under discussion.

A third strategy to improve the quality of teaching in the KG sector is through investment in the in-service professional development of all ECCE workers, with funding provided through the ERfKE

framework. Here, two international agencies have made a particularly strong contribution to MoE efforts, namely USAID (through its ERfKE Support Programme, or ESP) and Save the Children. Their input is described below, after a brief background about the state of in-service teacher training is provided.

As noted earlier, the ministry had run several in-service courses during the summer months, often in cooperation with the private sector. Several NGO's also offered their own particular brand of training, supplementing ministerial efforts by organising ad hoc sessions on specific themes. ERfKE, however, served to rationalise the system of professional development, making it more comprehensive and strategic in scope. The teacher training ERKE sub-component in fact had, as a goal, the establishment of occupational standards for all early childhood professionals and paraprofessionals, and the setting up of systems for equipping and supporting workers to meet these standards. The plans also took into account the ToT (training of trainers) aspect, since the numbers to be trained or retrained is quite large and will continue to increase as the KG expansion process gathers momentum, so that cadres of trainers, supervisors and skilled practitioners will contribute to the professional development effort.

The goals articulated in the ERfKE initiative included the development of flexible and accessible pre-service and in-service training courses; the assessment and certification of worker performance at all levels of

the ECD delivery system; and the equipment of enlarged cadres of supervisory personnel to support new trainees within a structured system of assessment. Priority was to be given to the KG sector, and particularly to the KG2 teachers, which is where most expansion was targeted. Training of teachers, administrative staff, principals and supervisors working with younger children would also be catered for, but at a later stage, and on the basis of the experience gained. While the training was targeted at staff in public and non-profit NGO KG's, those from the for-profit sector could also join after concluding a special arrangement with the MoE.

The content of the training focused on new classroom curriculum based on child outcomes, and on interactive pedagogies that formed the basis of that curriculum as well as the foundational philosophy of the reform in the ECD sector. There thus had to be continuity and congruence between the KG staff training programmes, and the new KG integrated curriculum, so that trainers would be modelling the activity-based pedagogical approaches that they were inviting KG teachers to adopt in the classroom.

The training programmes had also to reflect the approach adopted in the ECD curriculum by specifying standards, essential competencies and levels of performance that had to be attained and demonstrated by the trainees. As Heyasat (2002) noted correctly, the key challenge here was to create flexible, modular training that successfully addressed the needs of a teaching force with widely varying educational backgrounds and exposure to ECD training and experience. Additionally, the challenge was to create meaningful linkages between the in-service initiatives and the pre-service training on offer, in order to ensure continuity, complementarity, and a sound, supportive environment for teacher development throughout their careers. While most of the training will initially be delivered face-to-face, there are plans to deliver some of the modules in an e-learning environment.

Box 17: Teacher comments after ESP training

"Since we opened the new kindergarten, the hours I spend with the children fly by," says Naayem Rasheed, a school teacher at the Um Abhara School in Amman. "Before, it was difficult to keep their attention. But now, the children don't want to leave the kindergarten."

"Before the training I didn't know anything about children's development or the types of quality experiences needed to enhance their learning. It was also difficult to spend time with them. Since then, however, I am able to plan activities according to themes and create learning opportunities in each of the classroom educational corners," explains Naayem. "I am now able to provide an exciting learning environment for the children," concludes Naayem.

Two models of in-service training are offered. The first is the AGFUND-funded, IELC-led 160-hour course which follows the tried and tested Wisconsin competence-based approach using the Working with Young Children material (Herr, 2003), especially adapted for the Jordanian context. With the help of 50 Master Trainers, IELC staff organize the basic level of teacher training for new kindergarten teachers, introducing them to the KG Interactive Curriculum approach and methods. The training has been adopted by MoE and is being offered every year since 2004, often during the summer, but also at other times in the year depending on need. All KG teachers must have completed the initial 42 hours of training before entering a classroom.

Advanced training is offered by ESP on the National Curriculum and other needs to those who have completed the basic course. Training follow-up is offered through monthly meetings with groups of teachers, their ECE supervisors, and ESP staff to ensure that the lessons teachers learned in the summer training sessions are implemented during the year, to give teachers and supervisors the opportunity to exchange experiences, and to provide all concerned with a forum for discussion of best practices in teaching children of kindergarten age.

The KG teacher training agenda is also being consolidated through a number of other initiatives, which are presently at the drawing board stage. Key among these is the plan to establish an ECD Centre for Excellence to support teacher training in KG's, and which is to be run by the MoE. Funding to the tune of

USD700,000 has been made available by the Orphans' Society, and land to house the Centre committed by the government. A concept paper has been drafted, outlining the potential that the Centre has for providing dynamic examples of best practice which ECD novice teachers can emulate. The Centre will thus complement and take to another level the attempts that have been made by some NGO's—foremost among them JOHUD—to provide model KG's for training purposes, with trainees being able to observe teachers in action through one-way mirrors.

Other initiatives include the establishment of a National Institute of Education, and the setting up of the Queen Rania Teachers' Academy… all commendable though Jordan has to ensure that it avoids chaos and the creation of too many institutions which could lead to overlap and lack of clarity regarding the service offer. Thanks to investments it has wisely made over the past decade, selecting and sending promising individuals to universities overseas, developing links and joint projects with universities with well-known ECD strengths (such as those of Columbia, Wisconsin in the USA, and Huddersfield in the UK), Jordan now has its own capacity to provide enlightened leadership and cutting edge services in the area.

Children enjoy their social meal together.
Irbid

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FOR THE BENEFIT OF CHILDREN IN JORDAN …
… AND BEYOND

FOR THE BENEFIT OF CHILDREN IN JORDAN …
… AND BEYOND

Taking stock of achievements

The ECD initiative in Jordan has managed to achieve much since the commitment to provide quality education and care for the early years was made in 2000. Eight years down the road, a great deal of the National Strategy as well as of the Plan of Action has been transformed from wishful thinking to reality, with the two key programmes—that of creating home environments fit for children through Better Parenting, and of ensuring institutional environments through expanding access to quality kindergartens—being the key vehicles that have propelled Jordan to the forefront in ECCE provision in the region. Both programmes are framed within a comprehensive policy environment that enables, sustains and institutionalises the ECD agenda.

A group of international consultants from Yale University charged to prepare a second Plan of Action for the coming years went meticulously through the goals that had been expressed in previous years for the ECD area, noting the extent to which they had been reached, and identifying what still needed to be done (Britto et al., 2008). As many as 70 percent of the activities outlined in the first Action Plan have in fact been implemented. The Yale group notes that the policy landscape has changed in ways that not only demonstrates awareness of the importance of ECD, but also directly addresses a whole range of

ECD issues. The latter are integrated in a holistic and comprehensive manner in a broad spectrum of policies, where the commitment to care for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children is specified over and above the effort that Jordan is prepared to make in response to the needs of all children.

They noted, as we did throughout this documentation, the effort invested in ensuring that ECD planning and targeting was supported by hard data, with several studies being commissioned in order to both provide a clearer picture of the action to be undertaken, and to evaluate its effectiveness. Communities have been reached, and knowledge, attitudes and practices in relation to child-rearing have been improved in ways that provide young ones with improved chances for health, safety and optimal development.

The tempo of building public KG's to cater for children in remote and disadvantaged communities has picked up, with quality provision being enhanced through the implementation of a new interactive curriculum that promotes joyful, developmentally-appropriate, active learning that engages the child in a stimulating, well-resourced environment. KG teachers have several opportunities to receive training, with a new career path being laid out for them in order to stimulate and maintain commitment, which is further reinforced by the

public acknowledgement of their work through teacher awards. The emphasis on quality provision is also evident in the regulatory frameworks that are being introduced for all early childhood institutions, including licensing standards as well as accreditation.

The latest evaluation of the KG sector, carried out under the auspices of NCHRD (Al-Hassan & Obeidat, 2008), suggests that all these efforts are starting to bear fruit. Working with a stratified random sample with KGs from north, middle and south regions in the kingdom, and focusing on both urban and rural, as well as public (n=84) and private (n=23) KGs, the evaluation used both quantitative (revised edition of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale; questionnaires with 107 principals, 107 teachers and 192 parents)[1] and qualitative (KG session observations, follow up interviews with teachers) methodology in order to address a series of questions relating to the quality of the KG environment, including a focus on teaching and learning processes, as well as perceptions of quality. KG class sequences were observed for a minimum of 3 hours at a time.

While the study revealed concerns about age-appropriate facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and the need for more training, it also showed that not only

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[1] The ECERS-R instrument, is comprised of 470 indicators organised into 43 items under 7 subscales, namely Space and Furnishings, Personal Care, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Programme Structure, and Parents and Staff. The instrument uses a 7-point scale with scores 1,3, 5 and 7 anchoring 'inadequate', 'minimal', 'good' and 'excellent' provision.

had public KG's caught up with private ones, but had, in many cases, overtaken them in relation to a range of indices. Public KG's, on average, outperformed private provision in the kind of training offered to teachers, in programme structures (i.e. schedule, free play, and group time), in class-based interactions (i.e. general supervision of children, order, staff-child interaction, and interaction among children) and activities that promote development and learning readiness (i.e. motor skills, art, music, movement, blocks, sand/water, dramatic play, nature, science, math/number, and use of TV, video and/or computers), and in pupil attainment in the language and reasoning domain (i.e. books and pictures, encouragement of children to communicate, using language to develop reasoning skills, and informal use of language).

Both public and private KG's attained 'good' and even 'excellent' performance levels when it came to personal care routines (i.e. greeting/departing, meals/snacks, nap/rest, toileting/diapering, and health and safety practices).

Remaining challenges

Despite the many achievements, and to the country's credit, there is a general awareness among those involved in the ECD field that there are a number of important challenges that need to be addressed over the coming years. In the policy arena, the Childhood Act, which sets out to anchor many of the ECD provisions expressed in a whole range of policy documents within a legally binding framework, has still

As the parenting initiative expands more challenges are faced in reaching all parents.
Home in Eastern Amman

to be approved, despite the fact that a draft has been available since 2004. Efforts are sometimes hampered by the difficulties of cross-sectoral collaboration, both between and within ministries that have responsibilities for various aspects of ECD, leading to difficulties in getting timely and transparent information flows to support the policy-making process. It is not always clear that data generated by studies in one sector of government impact on the policies and action plans of other, corresponding sectors.

There also seem to be difficulties in finding the optimal governance structures to lead and implement the range of ECD initiatives that are now on the ground: linkages between different layers are still not clear, and these are especially important given that the goal is to establish decentralised, intersectoral collaboration and coordination in planning and implementing ECD. Governorate-level structures, such as the planned Integrated ECD committees, represent fledgling attempts which need to be supported and sustained in a variety of ways.

Most importantly, ECD services, while growing, are still limited in terms of their reach. Better parenting programmes cover only around 10 percent of households by 2008, representing limited coverage in relation to need. Furthermore, much of the KG expansion has taken place at the upper level of the early years, targeting age 5 children in KG2. Such expansion is not necessarily always taking place in governorates

with large populations of disadvantaged citizens. Present knowledge of ECCE strongly confirms the need to cater for younger children in both KG1 and nurseries, since this is where much of the development—in all its aspects and domains—takes place. Presently, nurseries cover only 2 percent of the 0 - 4 year age group, which makes up almost 13 percent of all the population. Current levels of funding available through a second ERƒKE cycle suggest that expansion will go on targeting KG2, with little chance of focusing on the earlier years. There are concerns too that while the vulnerable and disadvantaged in rural communities are increasingly being reached, the growing numbers of children among the urban poor are not.

Quality issues too remain a preoccupation. While the latest evaluation of the KG sector referred to above (Al-Hassan & Obeidat, 2008) is encouraging in that it shows that public KG's have made important quantitative and qualitative leaps forward, there is no cause for Jordan to rest on its laurels: 13.1 percent of the public KG's sampled are considered to be inadequate, and 43 percent of all KG's involved in the survey have only managed to cross the threshold fulfilling minimal requirements for the sector. Only 1.2 percent of KG's can be said to have an excellent environment, with outstanding resources. KG's scored particularly low on parent and staff issues (i.e. provision for parents, provision for personal and professional needs of staff, level and quality of staff interaction and cooperation,

staff supervision and evaluation, and opportunities for professional growth); on activities that promote children development in a range of domains; and on the space and furnishing aspect of the KG environment (i.e. indoor space, furniture for routine care, play and learning, furnishing for relaxation and comfort, room arrangement for play, space for privacy, child-related display, space for gross motor play, and gross motor equipment). Most of the private KG's (around 60 percent) only just manage to attain the minimal requirement standards, with 20 percent being inadequate and requiring urgent attention and intervention.

Lessons learnt and learning shared

One of the main goals in this Learning Series is to showcase regional examples of commendable initiatives from which other MENA countries can draw inspiration, and which they can emulate. While there are no blueprints in educational reform, and what will work in one context cannot be simply lifted and unproblematically transported to another one, there is nevertheless much that can be learnt from each other's efforts. That such learning takes place along a South-South axis adds another valuable dimension to the process, particularly in a context where much of the development discourse represents low- and middle-income countries in deficit terms, failing to recognise that the best strategies to address challenges are often those that are generated ecologically in the very place where those challenges arise.

What, then, are some of the elements that can account for Jordan's achievements in ECD, and which can be a source of inspiration and emulation for others in the region and beyond?

First and foremost is the clarity and comprehensiveness of vision that Jordan succeeded in developing for its children. Here, then, is a good example of a serious, principled commitment to making a country fit for children, embraced by government and promoted as a top priority issue by the highest authorities, in this case the King and Queen themselves. That vision was built step by step, in a consensual manner, involving several key actors from a whole range of sectors in an ever-widening circle of partnerships. This is not easy to achieve: indeed, as a World Bank experts with much development experience internationally exclaimed at an ERfKE meeting discussing the ECD component, "What is the magic here?! What makes the ECD parts come together so well, keeping everybody on board...including NGO's?" Such surprise is understandable: organisations naturally have their own agendas and priorities, as well as their own views about how issues should be addressed—and a holistic approach to ECD demands that all these different—sometimes divergent—views are nevertheless brought together in ways that create a meaningful mosaic. This is impossible to realize unless there is a strongly articulated policy framework, that takes into account the latest ECCE knowledge and experiences available, and which is driven by competent, committed, caring leaders.

Children's creativity is much encouraged.

As so many ECD specialists and researchers have constantly reminded us, it is necessary to think of ECD policies in a holistic, integrated manner. Child development is a multifaceted, integral, and continual process of change stimulated by the child's interaction with his or her surrounding environments. Because of this, policies which set out to improve early child development must encompass complementary strategies linked to the different environments that surround a child. This is a challenging task, which Jordan has tackled not only by promulgating comprehensive ECD legislation, but by ensuring that there is consistency in both philosophy and strategy between government policies that set out to translate words into programmatic action. In some ways this has been easier for Jordan to achieve than it might prove to be for larger countries. Many interviewees, for instance, noted the value of having the same key people on several of the committees and boards of ECD initiatives, as this created continuity and connections between the different parts, which would have been difficult to attain otherwise. This, of course, ends up in making enormous demands on the same small group of individuals, and in the wrong hands, such a concentration of influence can be detrimental. In the case of Jordan, principled commitment and honest, transparent governance has but paid to such issues, and seems to be serving the country in good stead.

Indeed, evidence of sound leadership is high in Jordan, and commendable for several reasons. The Royal couple has been unwavering in its support of children's issues, sending out a clear signal that not only the country's reputation as a beacon for respecting the dignity of the human person would be at stake if it failed its children, but also Jordan's very future would be jeopardised unless it made a serious investment in them. Queen Rania has made children's future very much her own personal mission, strategically and tirelessly using her ability to connect with people in order to champion and drive the agenda forward. As she has been reported to have said several times at meetings, "I don't want to be just a figurehead in all this", and she has made good on her promise by patronising several ECD initiatives, helping to give them national visibility, status, legitimacy and credibility.

But there are other layers of leadership that have played a pivotal role. The government, and particularly the Ministry of Education, has resolutely accepted the responsibility of directing the ECD initiative. With so many local and international players with a stake in the ECD scene, it is easy to imagine a situation where the hoped-for mosaic disintegrates, where initiatives multiply but never connect, where resources are wasted through costly overlap, and where the sum of the parts fails to create a meaningful whole. In contexts such as these, where the Ministry is not in the driving seat, donors and aid agencies—despite themselves—tend to become part of the problem rather than contributors to the solution, failing the countries they mean to serve in development terms.

This was not the case with Jordan. Here the Ministry was unequivocal about its responsibility to the country's children, and developed structures that enhanced its capacity to make wise and informed decisions, while remaining open to learning from its international partners, as well as from actors that worked at the grass roots and had privileged access to community concerns. When, for instance, the World Bank proposed its own instrument for assessing learning readiness, the Ministry carefully considered it, but opted for another instrument which, after due consideration, it felt was more suitable in reflecting Jordan's needs, and more amenable to adaptation to its cultural realities. Similarly, when the World Bank mapped the priority areas where public KG's had to be opened, the government went with an alternative proposal that took more adequately into account the prevalent socio-economic realities in the kingdom. It also challenged the World Bank conclusion that renting rather than building rooms to serve as KG's was a less costly option in the long run.

Consistently, the Ministry has striven to build up the capacity of its own people and of those institutions and research centres that support it, ensuring that they had wide international experience, and entrusting them with key tasks. Wisely, too, it has had external experts evaluate local efforts, and in the process not only quality-auditing local efforts against best available international standards, but increasing opportunities for capacity building internally. Incidentally, it has also made sure that ECD materials—whether they are models, programmes, resources, instruments, and so on—are not only fit for purpose, but also suitable for context. Little if anything has been picked off the international shelf and merely adopted in Jordan: rather, as one interviewee put it, the guiding principle has been to "revise and revise until it is Jordanian".

A leading partner in this commendable achievement has been UNICEF, their role has been multi-fold with an emphasis on catalysing new ideas, providing technical assistance, coordinating between various partners and finally serving as a mediator between central and grass root levels.

Dynamism in central leadership naturally creates some problems, even as it solves many others. Working with circles of trusted colleagues who have already proven their worth can make it difficult for some 'outsiders' and 'newcomers' to be given the opportunity to contribute to the national effort, leading to potentially serious loss of available expertise which Jordan can ill afford. Furthermore, and as has already been intimated, the linkage between the centre and lower levels and layers of governance is not yet highly developed, and this has serious implications both for policy implementation but also for community issues to rise up the ranks and influence the policy making process (Honig, 2004b). This is important for good governance in all policy areas, but is especially critical in the ECD field. As we have seen, NGO's are firmly embedded in the communities they serve, and have done wonders

in implementing at the local level, translating policies into practice in the crucible of everyday lives as lived by ordinary citizens. In some cases, these civil societies have expanded their initiatives horizontally, with NGO to NGO activities ensuring learning from each other's experiences, and overall capacity building that serves ECD in good stead. Their role has been much more modest in informing policy debates, and their linkages with the centre are weak, both when it comes to their own organisation's leaders at headquarter level, and with national overarching structures such as the ministries, or the NCFA.

Jordan has achieved much, and is now poised to tackle the remaining challenges in the ECD sector. Key among these are the continued efforts to improve access to services, ensuring not only wider geographical coverage but also more effective outreach to younger, relatively poorer and marginalised children—including those with special needs. Additionally, Jordan has to keep on striving for improved quality of the services that are already being rolled out—not an easy task given the high standards that the country aspires to, and its principled reluctance to compromise when it comes to catering for children's welfare. The paradigm shifts in relation to interactive learning that are being introduced at the KG stage have to be sustained by curricular and pedagogical reforms from Grade 1 upwards. Finally, Jordan has to maintain its resolve to strengthen its regulatory frameworks and policy guidelines, which it has carefully and systematically developed over the years, on the basis of best practice available internationally.

As it struggles to maintain its commitment to make the country fit for children, Jordan can be assured of the widest acknowledgement and recognition of its efforts. It can also stand tall in the region, knowing full well that despite the many setbacks and challenges, it has provided neighbouring countries with a fine example to consider, and to emulate. Of this it can justifiably be proud.

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