Civil Societies' Services and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Ethiopia: Challenges, Opportunities and Lessons from Pilot Programs[1]

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Abstract: *In their pursuit to contribute to ECCE issues of access, quality and equity, some civil societies have embarked on community- based ECCE pilot programs in different regions of the country. Consequently, this research attempted to examine their contributions in view of the mediated community values and practices, the challenges, and opportunities in the process of implementing ECCE, by specifically focusing on the activities of three rural pilot ECCE centres in Ethiopia that are supported and directed by two NGOs. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with children, guardians, facilitators, and ECCE personnel. Findings indicated that the ECCE centers were serving two major functions: Availing learning resources and opportunities for children and serving as entry points to conducting community and parent education programs. It was observed that such centers would make important impacts on and contributions for communities, parents, and, of course, the children. However, some concerns were noted challenging the communities' values, practices and resources; tendency to devalue some useful community values and practices, and, more fundamentally, scalability and sustainability concerns. The opportunities identified to enable implementing such programs were existence of civil societies with long years of ECCE experience, ECCE guiding frameworks (legal, administrative, and academic), ECCE administrative structure, and the untapped social and cultural resources and partnerships in the communities. It was generally noted that the way these pilot ECCEs were designed, established, and implemented seemed to suggest lesser possibilities of scalability for low income and rural Ethiopia despite the civil societies' reported efforts. The study charted out a road map to clear out the way forward.*

Key words: Civil societies, community-based ECCE, preschools in Ethiopia, ECCE, NGOs, rural communities, children of the urban poor

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Introduction

ECCE in Ethiopia has been quite around for long (Demeke, 2007) as an urban practice of the private sectors and donors (Tirussew, 2007; Tirussew et al., 2009; Young Lives, 2012) with persisting concerns of access, equity, and relevance (Tirussew et al., 2009; Demeke, 2007). In this process, civil societies have proved to be the inalienable partners of ECCE in Ethiopia; be it because of government absence pushing them make a stronger presence to fill in gaps or because of their presence, making the government turn a blind eye to ECCE and focus on other activities.

There are divergent conceptions of 'civil society' in international legal instruments as well as in relevant literature (Sebastian et al., 2002). Putting some of these views together, we may describe a civil society as a non-political (cited in Kassahun, 2002, p. 122), non- profitable (Anton, 2007), complex and dynamic ensemble (John, 2009) of autonomous, voluntary, formal (Dessalegn, 2002), and legally protected nongovernmental institutions (John, 2009) organized at local, national or international level (cited in Anton, 2007) with resources dependent on donations partially or fully (in Anton, 2007) in addition to voluntary services. Occupying the space of intermediary between the states, on the one hand, and the lowest unit of social life, the family, on the other (cited in Masresha, 2013, p.10), civil societies articulate interests of, and provide basic services to individuals, groups, and communities (Anton, 2007) or undertake community development (Dessalegn, 2002); pursue activities to resolve suffering, promote the interest of the poor, protect the environment (Anton, 2007); promote the broad interests of their constituencies; put demands on the state for goods and services; help to extend the social space between the state and the individual (Masresha, 2013,

p.10); follow nonviolent, self-organizing, and self-reflexive approaches, and tend to be permanently in tension both with each other and with the governmental institutions that frame, constrict and enable their activities (John, 2009). But does this statement of tension justify civil societies' activities in Ethiopia, particularly *in light of the existing promulgations that have almost "outlawed" their activities?*

Civil societies play a critical role, along with the government, in the design of ECCE policies and programs that create a foundation of support for children, their caregivers, and the community. They undertake on community empowerment and advocacy for the execution of existing laws and formulation of clear policies on ECCE, work with children to promote their identities, engage stakeholders in ECCE, initiate and support child protection programs, build bridges and create networks, with other development organizations for sharing information and good practices, promote inter-sectoral collaboration, initiate a communication strategy for tracking and documenting the contribution and role of different service providers in ECCE, and design a mechanism of continued dialogue and joint monitoring and evaluation issues of ECDE (Benda, 2009).

The emergence of civil societies, mainly Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs), in Ethiopia was largely traced back to the 1974 famine that urged some NGOs to come in with food aid and rehabilitation programs. These NGOs continued to have much larger presence in Ethiopia following the 1984 drought. The number of NGOs has gradually increased since then, and their intervention areas have also been expanded from provision of basic services including education, livelihood and health and nutrition, to capacity building, and

development of infrastructure. NGO directions were further oriented to long-term development endeavors following the global strategic change as well as the Ethiopian government's response to such changes by drafting a new CSO law. A number of NGOs were, therefore, required to register as long term development, working to create sustainable community development by promoting capacity building and self-reliance.

As per this new directives, civil societies in Ethiopia then include NGOs, advocacy organizations, professional associations, cooperatives, trade unions, religious organizations, community-based organizations like Idir, and independent press (cited in Masresha, 2013, p.10). About 2,695 civil societies were registered at the federal level as per the new CSO Law, implementing a total of 5,709 projects in 2011 of which 357 were professional associations, 395 Agriculture, 420 environmental protection, 531 capacity building, 640 social support, 754 Education, 986 Child Affairs, and 1626 on health (cited in Masresha, 2013, p.13). One can assume that many of these projects deal with ECCE. We can see from these figures that there are possibly good numbers of civil societies working on ECCE and, as a result, many projects must have dealt with ECCE. Evidences indicate that these CSOs generally contribute a significant share of financial resources in Ethiopia amounting to over 8% of the annual GDP of the country (World Bank, 2007); they are more accessible to the poor, the marginalized, and the invisible. They are also known to be more efficient and flexible than government institutions (Desalegn, 2002). Furthermore, a research conducted by the Ad Hoc CSO/NGO Task Force (Dessalegn et al., 2008) has also indicated that NGOs in Ethiopia have experimented and successfully

piloted approaches and technologies which eventually came to be part of the governments' national strategies and programs in different sectors. Examples include community-based approaches to health services; alternative basic education; technologies for water-lifting and agriculture; improving access to finance and market by the rural poor and promoting new and high-value crops and stocks. Some of these innovations contributed to areas where Ethiopia registered relatively best result towards attaining the national and Millennium Development Goals. However, Desalegn (2002) indicated that the overall impact of NGOs as measured against the resources they have mobilized is quite disappointing. Development projects run by many NGOs have done little to improve the livelihood of the communities concerned. NGOs have been very good at emergency operations and the delivery of food aid to vulnerable populations. However, their interventions in the field of development have not been equally successful. A number of factors have been mentioned regarding these problems. According to Desalegn (2002), the unfriendly policy environment has contributed to the limitations of their performance since the 1970s. Masresha (2013) specifically noted that the new Ethiopian Civil Society Organization Law of 2009 has affected relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of programs. Consequently, addressing the causes as well as symptoms of poverty, inequality and marginalization were affected due to strategic changes. Infact, the new CSO law has also created a foundation for citizens to take charge of their own destinies and realize their full potential through existing local resource and systems created by the community and the government at large. The law gave emphasis in putting a system in place where NGOs regulate themselves and are held responsible for their actions. It also encouraged organizations to be accountable,

cost-effective and assess previously designed activities in order to bring the desired outputs (Masresha (2013).

The role of civil societies in ECCE provision has been least investigated. Few existing studies seem to send conflicting evidences particularly pertaining to the role of community-based organizations. For example, Demissie (1996) investigated the NGO backed community-based preschool education programs that were initiated in rural Ethiopia in the 1990s and noted such initiatives registering failure. According to Demissie, the major reasons were lack of needs assessment at the time of design, absence of community awareness about the significance of the programs, administrative problems (like lack of bottom-top-bottom coordination of activities, inability of different parties to perform their task etc.), lack of systematic follow up during the implementation of the programs, lack of community participation in the evolution and growth of the programs, and unclear roles and responsibilities of the community representatives to preschool affairs. In contrast, Desta and Azmeraw (2009)[2] examined the best practices of NGO supported community-based early childhood development programs in Ada'a Woreda and found that these programs have brought about significant positive impacts on target children as well as the families. These positive impacts included improved health, hygiene and nutrition of children and mothers. Besides, parents opted for and practiced modern methods to traditional treatments and explicitly depicted the benefit they got from modern treatments. They have improved feeding practices for their children in terms of

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[2]*This study examined the best practices of Ratson-Save the Children Norway supported community-based early childhood development and education in six rural villages of Ada'aWoreda targeting 1,200 households (Desta & Azmeraw, 2009).*

quality and quantity. The intervention has also brought about improved parenting skills, increased knowledge of parents on harmful customary practices and promoted children's rights. Children's gains in both social and cognitive aspects have also been significant. As rated by teachers and parents, children promoted from ECDE centers to primary schools were assertive, better in social skills, neat and clean, disciplined, better in understanding classroom lessons, and active participants in classroom activities. They were self-assured, able, fast, and motivated learners. Their academic and social readiness was better than their non-ECD classmates. All ECDE groups who joined primary school, had better class attendance, better performance, higher pass rates, lower repetition, and dropout rates when compared with their non-ECD peers.

However, delay in establishing the ECCE governance structure, the limited efforts to popularize the policy and related frameworks at the grassroots level, the current directions by the government which ultimately result in community engagement in the administration and management of ECCE centers were found to be critical concerns. Moreover, institutional competence of CBOs in terms of limited pragmatic experience in the field of ECCE as well as inability to allocate the required resources to comply with minimum standards were also indicated as the major challenges for CBOs' participation in service delivery. Extensive engagement in community level ECCE policy awareness, strengthening governance structure at all levels, piloting CBO-managed ECCE centers, and developing the overall institutional competence of CBOs were enlisted by these researchers as strategies for better CBO involvement.

In the same way, attempts were made to conduct midterm (KES, 2012) and end-term (Fromseas, 2014; KES, 2012) evaluation of

program effectiveness and gaps observed in the implementation processes of community-based pilot ECCE projects initiated by a certain NGO to identify challenges and promising practices in the project under implementation. The midterm evaluation[3] outcome has indicated that the project has greatly supported to improve the different aspects of the school environment, personnel and functioning[4]. One such notable improvement was that of establishing ECD facilitators' training institution and associated model community-based ECCE center that was attached to a certain Teacher Education College as well as the subsequent initiative that is planned to scale up this innovative measure to all other teacher training colleges in order to address the current access and quality concerns of ECCE in a sustainable manner (KES, 2012).

The end line evaluation of this project was also conducted to document and learn the accomplishments, outcomes, best practices, challenges and lessons of the project and finally deduce recommendations for future

project planning[5]. This assessment (Fromseas, 2014) indicated that the projects were: relevant and timely in terms of addressing access to ECCD and quality of education, aligned with, the priorities, strategies and polices of the ECCE policy framework, effective in terms of meeting intended objectives, efficient in resource utilization and time value and indicative of many emerging positive impacts in the implementation of the projects. For example, PSTA Schools and District offices have already started managing ECCD centers, and facilitators have been upgraded and considered in the GO structure; community has shown interest to send children to ECCD centers, and employed facilitators from the local context, earmarking a budget for them. Hence, ECCD centers were being effectively used and have become overcrowded. Consequently, the ECCD children enrolment has increased from 1640 from the base year 2011 to 6755 in the year 2013 in all the ECCD project woredas (Assayita, Lay Armachiho, Chilga, Wogera, Hamer, Dasenech and Gnangatom). Out of the enrolled ECCD children, 90% of the children have developed the skills of proper social

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[3]*Taken from Save the Children Norway Ethiopia Education Program (2012). Terms of Reference (ToR) to Carryout Midterm Evaluation on "Improving the quality of basic education in Amhara Region, Addis Ababa.*

[4]Example of changes noted include improvements in t*he school environment, teachers' qualification, continuous assessment, construction of schools, upgrading ABE centers and facilitators, introducing model classes and school based action researches, etc all of which have their own contributions to quality education. School-community relationship, local resource mobilization and girls' participation were also greatly improved because of such newly introduced teaching approaches, as the zero class and the model class.*

[5]*Some of the activities done regarding ECCE were construction and furnishing of ECCD, construction of ECCD shades, basic training of ECCD facilitators on Montessori methods of teaching, refresher training for ECCD facilitators, refresher training on parenting education for ECD facilitators and health extension workers, training on child growth and development for ECCD facilitators and health extension workers, Provision of 21 weeks (1 session/week) parenting education session for mothers, quarterly discussion on enrollment, attendance and children handling by ECCD facilitators, WEO, supervisors and directors, bi-annual discussion forum on the implementation of ECCE SOP? guideline and curriculum guide for ECCD facilitators, supervisors and directors, and rollout ECCE policy framework (Fromseas, 2014, p.20).*

interaction, climbing ladders, properly painting pictures, identifying Amharic and English letters, and Arabic numerals and reading and writing skills of two to three words. Sustainability of the projects to continue meeting the needs of beneficiaries long after their completion and withdrawal was also found to be high as there was a high possibility of the upgraded ABE centers and ECCD centers to function as educational institutions.

These evaluations yielded a gesture of ECCE scalability, of course, within the framework of organizational plans, expectations, indicators, and goals. However, do these NGO-initiated pilot programs, promise to ultimately join the National ECCE delivery system? Would it be feasible for the government to ultimately take hold of such programs? Can such programs ultimately address the needs and realities of the greater majority of most marginalized (urban poor and rural children) group as they purport to do so? Are these pilot programs based on the social and cultural resources, values, and practices of the communities under consideration so that they would continue beyond the NGOs' life span? Are the NGOs assuming a role that would promise a journey towards this end? What impact would implementing programs of these pilot ECCE types have on the children, parents, and communities? What opportunities are out there to exploit while conducting programs of the pilot ECCE types at a national level? What challenges are generated within such programs and in the environs that surrounds the ECCE establishments, and, what lessons can be drawn then from such pilot ventures? By way of addressing these questions, this study attempts to explore lessons (contributions, challenges, and opportunities) of the civil societies' initiated pilot ECCE projects currently under way in different parts of Ethiopia.

Methods

Study sites

The Kilinto site: To begin with the Klinto site, the preschool visited is "Feche Preschool". This is a preschool that is found in the outlying Kality woreda of Addis Ababa; about 25 kilometers away and into the outlying and extended south-eastern part of the city. It is located within the catchment areas of three agrarian villages in Klinto woreda: Koye, Feche and Tulumute. It was one of the five preschools established in 2013 as part of the community development project under implementation by Plan International and Ratson. According to the coordinator[6] of this project, this centre as well as the remaining others have been equipped with locally developed, culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate play and learning materials. The classrooms have been organized into learning areas/corners to stimulate the active interaction of children. In addition, the outdoor play materials were constructed and put in place using locally available materials through the active engagement of community members. At the moment, 154 (77 male and 77 female) children are attending in five ECCE centres. The children are from different socio economic backgrounds. Children stay half a day within the centre. Ten centre facilitators, all of them females, were hired at the beginning of the project to care and support the children. These centre facilitators were trained on facilitation skills, child development, active learning, classroom management, inclusive education, learning through play and production of locally made teaching aids on continuous basis. According to the coordinator, a good opportunity for the

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[6]*ECCE Project Coordinator since January, 2009, Klinto ECCE.*

children is the availability of the centre close to their homes, and opportunity for enrolment and learning at the expected age for preschool. However, the non-availability of a primary school in the area and also the poor infrastructural provisions in the vicinity have posed a challenge for children's further education.

The Lai Armachiho site: As regards the Lai Armachiho site of Gondar, two preschools were considered as data sources: Selam Fire and Tigwuha[7]. Selam Fire is attached to a primary school but Tigwuha is established within the community unattached to a preschool. These two are among the ten other centers established by Save the Children Norway (SCN) in the woreda and part of the education quality improvement program in the Amhara region. The centers are well supplied with learning and play materials. The facilitators were trained with childcare and pedagogical skills of the children. At the beginning, ECCE activities were not much attractive and the number of preschool children was also small. But, the number began increasing from year to year, particularly as a result of awareness training offered to mothers *(Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative)*. In 2014/2015, there were 128 children and 3 facilitators in the two centers.

Children attend in two shift system in Selam Fire center; morning and afternoon. The younger children aged 4 - 5 years are taught in the morning shift, while those who are six or older are taught in the afternoon shift. The children attend their early learning with songs and play like activities. The centers are in

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[7] *Data were obtained from Interview with the Head, ECCE, Gondar and the Focal Person of ECCE, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative.*

good condition. They enable the children to know their environments, to respect their parents, and to learn the basics generally before they go to the formal schools (Head, ECCE, Gondar).

Data sources

Children (orphans and non-orphans, boys and girls), guardians (parents and grandparents), facilitators (all females), and administrative personnel (ECCE heads, ECCE focal persons in education offices, directors, and supervisors) were employed as participants; a total of 40 interviewees. They were interviewed on the various aspects of the ECCE practice.

Children

A total of 10 children (n=4 from Klinto, n=4 from Selam Fire, and n=2 from Chig Wuha) were interviewed; some live with both parents (n=5) while others are either full orphans (n=2) and live with grandparents or single orphans (n=3) living with mothers alone; both boys (n=5) and girls (n=5) were represented; and their ages ranged from 5 to 7 (mean=5.8) years:

Interview was held to generate data from these children

The interview was made individually and in an age-appropriate way. Children were very active and expressive. In fact, some distortions were noted when it comes to factual information and hence, such information were disregarded. For example, when asked about the number of their siblings, some gave information that was not similar with their guardians. For example, the interviewer noted this "The child stated that she has four brothers and three sisters, but has none of these according to information from parents"

(*5 years old girl child, Living with both parents, Klinto Center*). In the same way, "The child stated that he has four sisters and one brother. But, information obtained from his parents revealed that he has only one brother" (*6 years old boy child, Living with both parents, Klinto Center*). In fact, interviewers were impressed with the interest, verbal fluency, and memories of these rural children. The interview items generally focused on indigenous childcare and education (songs, games, materials; child's daily routine at home, in the playground and at school; goals, values, expectations (of being a good child, for example); relationship with careers, mentors, and partners (i.e. siblings, grandparents, and friends), views about the ECCE center the child attends and the facilitators' contribution to the ECCE center.

Guardians

A total of 18 guardians were considered from the three centers (n=8 Klinto, n=5 Selam Fire, and n=3 Chig Wuha). Half of them were parents (n=5 mothers, n=4 fathers) and the remaining half were grandparents (n=5 grandmothers, n= 4 grandfathers). The mean age of the guardians were 29 for mothers (range 25 to 35years), 41.75 for fathers (range 28 to 58), 50 for grandmothers (range 45-56), and 61.5 for grandfathers (range 48 to 70). Family size ranged from 3 to 7 for parents (mean=4.67) and 3 to 12 for grandparents (Mean=7.22).

Interview was conducted with the guardians to generate data.

A total of 18 parents and grandparents were interviewed on indigenous childcare and education; daily routines of their children (at home, in the playground and at school); goals, values, interests, and concerns of childcare and education; beliefs and attitudes about current practices of childcare and education; views about the ECCE center the child attends and the facilitators; perceived contributions of the ECCE center; and their relationship with the center.

The interview with each participant was for about an hour and was enriching. All recording was made with their full consent. Some hesitations were raised but they were cleared up at the beginning with the support of ECCE facilitators who were familiar to them and gave us a hand when concerns arose to build trust with them.

Facilitators

There were all in all six female facilitators (4 were married with an average family size of 3.5 persons), as all the facilitators in the ECCE centers were females. Ages ranged from 20 to 42 (mean=32) with 1 year and 7 months to 14 years of work experience (mean =8.33).

Interview was used with the facilitators as well the facilitators were interviewed nearly for an hour each. They were interviewed on children's participation, interest, how individual differences unfold themselves, children with special needs, guardians' participation, views about the ECCE center, situation of children in the community, and on how local or indigenous knowledge and practices are considered in the ECCE implementation.

Administrative personnel

These were participants selected from individuals assuming different administrative responsibilities in the ECCE sites: Six participants were taken from three categories as follows:

- ECCE Project Coordinators:
1. *(ECCE Project Coordinator since January, 2009, Klinto ECCE).*
- ECCE Head and Focal persons
2. *Head, ECCE, Gondar*
3. *Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative*
- Directors and Supervisors
4. *Director of full cycle, 8 years teaching experience, Selam Fire School*
5. *Supervisor from Selam Fire, 10 years work experience, Woreda Education Office.*
6. *Supervisor for 10 Unaffiliated Child Centers, 10 years of experience (began work in 1997 E.C), Save the Children Norway (SCN).*

Interview with the Administrative Personnel included basic information about the ECCE center-related project; role of the organization in the process; views about the ECCE centers; design and implementation of a community-inclusive project. They were also contacted so many times to give the researchers the context of the projects, to connect interviewers with the study sites, and also provide important insights about ECCE in the areas.

Findings and Discussions

Experiences from Some NGOs

Plan International Ethiopia (PIE) and Save the Children Norway (SCN) are two of the NGOs having larger presence, visibility, and publicity in Ethiopia. Both of them were registered, as per the new CSO Law, as international non-governmental (community development) organizations, working in partnership with local organizations to enable deprived and marginalized children, families and communities meet their basic needs. Envisioning a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation, they operate as

catalysts to steer up breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. They work to promote child survival, development, care and education, through creating child-friendly environment, building the capacity of institutions, stakeholders and partners, and delivering services to target groups[8].These organizations have been active in different regions of Addis Ababa, Oromia, and Amhara regions as well as in the less developed regions of Afar and Gambella. In fact, there are differences in the nature, scope, partnership, beneficiaries, and durations of their programs. For example, while the ECD program in Klinto woreda, Akaki Kality sub city, Addis Ababa, is one of the projects that PIE implements in collaboration with Ratson Ethiopia, SCN has been implementing ECD and basic education improvement projects, among other regions, in the Lai Armachiho woreda of the North Gondar Zone in collaboration with the Regional, Zonal, and Woreda education offices.

Klinto woreda is basically the least populated, agrarian, and rural area in many ways. In fact, it has become one of Addis Ababa's most recent extensive construction sites for condominium houses that are indicative of rapid transformation of the area into a semi urban suburb. Teff and wheat have long been the main cereal crops of the villages. The community farmers use a traditional type of farming system, individual subsistence farms and small-family mixed-farm. All farmers are engaged in rain dependent farming activities. In addition, domestic animals are raised for commercial purposes. Others engage in daily labour and small commercial activities.

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[8]*This information is secured from 'Save the Children' and 'Plan International Ethiopia' flyers that describe the missions, programs, goals, and approaches of the organization.*

Christianity and Islam are the main religions. The villages are home for Oromifa and Amharic speaking cultural groups.

Plan International Ethiopia (PIE) Addis Ababa Program Unit (AAPU) had conducted a rapid assessment of the Klinto project site in 2011 so as to prepare its five years Long-Term Plan (for July 2012 - June 2016). It was noted in this assessment that there were such harmful traditional practices as abduction, rape, and female genital mutilation (FGM). There were more than 10 abducted and raped cases in 2004 E.C. alone. Other harmful traditional practices also included uvula cutting, tonsillectomy, and milk teeth extraction. Members of the community believe that they follow these practices for the sake of following 'the Oromo culture without any intent to harm their children and women.

There are no pre-primary and primary schools (except for one Government Primary school with ECCE centre) in these areas, nor are there priest schools or child-to-child; approach of learning for children as an option. Therefore, children had to cover 1 ½ - 2 hours of walk from home to attend school every day. Consequently, most children had to wait till they grow to be able to walk to the nearest possible school, and directly join formal school in an age-inappropriate manner without preparation. Distance has been a barrier particularly for girls. Community attitudes were also deterring girls from attending school. The traditional division of labour keeps them tied to home activities. Parents had no knowledge on proper feeding and health care of their children. In addition, children with special needs are unidentified and no data is available. The woreda does not have information about the private KGs while the government KG is closely followed up. Only one government and two private KGs are available in the whole woreda.

Furthermore, health service provision was almost nonexistent, forcing many pregnant women to deliver at home. There was low coverage of vaccination, lack of access to safe and clean water, and use of only open toilets, indicating that health extension workers are not effectively helping the people. Even the expanded immunization program was hardly practiced. There was no practice of using properly built latrines and use of "bush toilet" was common (PIE AAPU, 2011).

Plan International has also conducted a more formal and focused study on the status of early childhood care and development in Klinto Woreda a year later to establish baseline data, against which it will gauge the intervention package (PIE, 2013). The Woreda's provision of care (no knowledge about importance of exclusive breastfeeding before six months and additional for after six months, health, nutrition, stimulation, special care for those with disabilities) and protection is substandard; children's participation in quality early learning program (no traditional centers, no ELP centers), school-community support to ensure successful transitions to primary schools is non-existent; health extension workers and education workers lack knowledge about the importance of ECD and hence parents are not getting professional support. It is very much desired that GOs and NGOs actors work in partnership in the woreda to ensure development and protection of children at community, district, region, and national level.

In recognition of all the problems above, Plan Ethiopia, in association with Ratson's Women, Youth and Children Development Program, was involved in a holistic Community Led Action for ECCD, addressing the four pillars of the National ECCE Policy (Parenting education, early learning program,

Effective transition to primary school and partnership), since January 2013. As part of this project it opened 5 preschool establishments, employed 10 facilitators, rented houses for the centres, provided all the teaching and play materials and aids and enabled the centres function smoothly.

In a similar way, Save the Children Norway has been implementing different projects in various parts of the country including the relatively recent and comprehensive project "Improving Quality of Education Project in Amhara, Afar and SNNP regions". The project's part included establishment, strengthening, monitoring, and scale up of community-based ECCE centers. In the Amhara region, this project was implemented in all the 167 Woredas of the region since June 2010[9].According to the status assessment of Early Childhood Development Pilot Project, the initiative for the project was taken for the following reasons (SCN, 2010):

- Low enrollment, high dropout and gender disparity (disfavoring girls due to child marriage and child labor) in primary schools and ABE centers calling for introduction of ECCE centers to alleviate the situation.
- Absence of ECCE centers due to lack of awareness on its importance and shortage of finance. Children's lack of access to other alternative early years' education centers. There are limited number of priest schools and Quran schools. Furthermore, the objective of these schools is to prepare children for religious purposes.
- The felt role of ECD would be to reduce the burden of mothers and female children; where elder girls, in particular, will be relieved from caring for their young brothers and sisters and have time to go to school.
- The felt advantage of enrollment in ECD centers is to help improve children's health. This was felt realizable through making children exercise hand washing at critical times of using toilets, providing them de-worming tablets, etc.
- The importance of training mothers in personal hygiene, environmental sanitation, family planning, using fuel saving devices was also noted benefitting children as well as mothers.
- The scattered mode of settlement is currently transforming into smaller villages that are creating favorable conditions for ECD development.

The project came into being to address these problems in the region. Lai Armachiho woreda has been one of the woredas that has benefited from the project. In this woreda alone, ten ECCE centers were established, enrolling a total of about 669 children and 14 facilitators. These centers were initiated, guided and supported by Save the Children Norway (SCN) with buildings, materials, and facilitators. Most of the facilitators had completed grades 10 and 12, and they were not supported by training with ECCE. Initially, there were 20 employed facilitators whose salaries were paid by SCN. Gradually, the Woreda administration took over the responsibility of paying the facilitators' salaries (Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative).

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[9]*The components of the project are establishing model classrooms, upgrading ABE facilitators' capacity, scaling up best practices of QEP, converting ABE centers to first cycle formal schools, upgrading first cycle primary schools to complete primary schools, strengthening Dessie Teacher Education College ECD facilitators training unit.*

Currently, the screening and employment of facilitators have been taken up by the government, while SCN provides support in material provision and training *(Head, ECCE, Gondar)*. Side by side, the Organization has been engaged in extended tasks of calling mothers to meetings for awareness creation sessions on how to keep their children clean and healthy, and on the importance of child play that parents should heed and permit *(Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative)*. SCN has also highly contributed to the community's development and has registered results. For instance, it has raised community awareness on ECCE, participated in the construction of different types of buildings, indirectly served the community with construction of roads linking the schools, and carried out community awareness and sensitization activities. The SCN sponsored ECCE activities that started with few centers some time ago are now spread to several places. For instance, ECCE activities are being carried out in 54 of the 61 primary schools of the Woreda *(Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative)*.

ECCE centers, communities, parents and children

Community-Center Partnership

ECCE centers were reported to provide opportunities for conducting consultative meetings with community members and parents to discuss issues of critical importance for the ECCE centers themselves, the children, parents, and communities at large.

ECCE centers serve as entry point for conducting sensitization activities *(Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative)* and consultative meetings *(Supervisor of the 10 child centers, SCN)* with the communities for solving problems jointly *(Facilitator Two, female, 42 years old)* and, more importantly, for providing

education and skills to parents particularly to mothers about childcare, feeding, education and child rights (*at least 3 meetings in a month, Facilitator, 35 years old, female, Chigwuha; Facilitator, 35 years old, female, Chigwuha; Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire),* calling meetings with twenty mothers every Sunday for fifty weeks *(Head, ECCE, Gondar),*conducting tea-coffee program every two weeks, holding annual meetings for awareness creation and carrying out subsequent follow up on outcomes *(Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative).*

Parental support and involvement, on the other hand, took varied forms, including financial contributions *(Director, 35 years old; female, Selam Fire School).* Parents produced teaching aids for the children *(Facilitator One, male, 20 years old),* cleaned the ECCE compound *(Head, ECCE, Gondar; Facilitator Two, female, 42 years old)* and brought in water for the center *(Facilitator One, male, 20 years old);* as water was one of the serious problems of the centers. Many parents and community members knew that the ECCE provisions are important, and, except few, most had positive attitudes and perceptions of ECCE, understand the center personnel well and their support is also good *(ECCE, Gondar*). "They exchange with us views and opinions that have created conditions for correction of mistakes by the facilitators"*(Supervisor of the 10 child centers, SCN*), "follow up our activities and report when we are late or absent from our duties" *(Supervisor of the 10 child centers, SCN), "*show concerns as in, for instance, asking our whereabouts when they feel that we have disappeared from their view"*(Supervisor of the 10 child centers, SCN), "have great expectations about their children and* come and enquire about the status of the children as well as the center for the missing elements and, in as much as possible, try to provide their support"*(Facilitator One, male, 20 years old),* and, therefore, "such parental participation should

continue for it is reinforcing our activities" *(Facilitator One, male, 20 years old).*

Most guardians also expressed that they held frequent contacts with facilitators to discuss about what is missing and suggested ways of improving things at the center *(58 years old, grandfather, Chigwuha);* both as a parent and a parent committee member *(a 45 years old Father, Klinto Center)* they participated on such issues as educational conditions of the children in general *(45 years old, grandmother, Selam Fire),* childcare and development *(a 50 years old Grandmother II, Klinto Center),* children's learning and facilitator's role *(27 years old, mother, Selam Fire)* specific child's condition of learning*(28 years, Father, Klinto Center)*, what one should do in order to fulfill the needed materials or activities *(58 years old, father, Selam Fire), child's* behavior in both the indoor and outdoor activities *(35 years old, mother, Chigwuha),* and caregiver's concerns and needed information *(29 years, Mother, Klinto center; 48 years, Grandfather, Klinto Center).* However, some parents contacted facilitators only occasionally or quite infrequently *(a 50 years old Grandmother, Klinto Center; 25 years old mother, Klinto Center; 28 years old Mother, Klinto Center),* and some, particularly grandparents, didn't even attempt at all *(56-year-old Grandmother, Klinto Center; 70 years old, grandfather, Selam Fire; 70 years old Grandfather, Klinto Center).*

Impacts of the partnership on parents and communities

The establishment of ECCE centers is likely to impact on the lives of the communities, parents, and children either directly or indirectly. Changed perceptions about children's learning capacities, support secured in childcare, attitudinal and behavioral changes about child upbringing, and notions about the nature and role of ECCEs and the facilitators are examples in this regard.

Furthermore, conceptions about age of child's first schooling has improved and parents are seen now sending their children, observing the appropriate age for school *(Facilitator Two, female, 42 years old; Facilitator, 35 years old, female, Chigwuha, Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire)* and some parents have begun giving more attention and support for their children's learning now than previously *(Facilitator Two, female, 42 years old).*One facilitator expressed this experience as follows:

Parents don't think that it is a place where children can acquire knowledge and skills. Parents send their children with the main goal of keeping them away; so that they won't be disturbed or given a hard time looking after them. They don't have the inkling regarding the knowledge and skills that will be acquired from experiences in ECCE. Leaving other things aside, parents don't even believe that the children have written themselves when they inspect their exercise books. They even deny this fact, saying,' it is not you that wrote these, it is your facilitator'. When we ask the children to show their parents what they have written during the day, parents of course would have a look at their exercise books. But, they don't believe them that they themselves have done the writing. They would instead say, 'it is your facilitator who wrote this for you, not you'! When I consequently call parents for talks, they really marvel at the children's performances as these are beyond their expectations. They would say, 'I sent the child simply because there was no one who would help me in her care. It was only when I couldn't find anybody who would look after my child, that I put her in this center, expecting only care with play, not expecting at all that she would acquire such knowledge and skills' (Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire).

Direct parental benefits from the Establishment of the ECCE Center

The establishment of the ECCEs close to the homes and the placement of the child in the center, has helped parents to be relieved of the needed care and has greatly enabled them to

freely go to and come back from their daily work *(a 45 years old Father, Klinto Center).* The ECCE establishment has helped parents or grandparents in: greatly reducing the burden of care for the child *(a 56 year old Grandmother, Klinto Center)*, helping parents to follow their routine work with little interferences *(a 50 years old Grandmother, Klinto Center),* relieving parents of their obligations and focus on their jobs *(a 50 years old Grandmother II, Klinto Center),* substantially reducing the transportation costs in ferrying the children to and from the center *(48 years, Grandfather, Klinto Center), and in providing* free of charge services for their children (*a 25 years old mother, Klinto Center; a 28 years old Mother, Klinto Center).*The mothers, in particular, have been helped, as they are relieved from their daily engagements in childcare to freely deal with their work *(a 25 years old mother, Klinto Center; a 56 year old Grandmother, Klinto Center);* 'it has also strengthened their social life and has helped them to maintain health' *(a 25 years old mother, Klinto Center).* Parents are also spared from being worried about the whereabouts of their children and from the possible harmful conditions they could encounter daily *(Supervisor of the 10 child Centers, SCN)*.

Indirect parental benefits are inevitable from the center mainly through children. Asked how far the change they see in their child now has further contributed to changes they see in themselves and their family in terms of beliefs, values, child rearing practices, and in terms of family and social relational behaviors, guardians share the spillover effect as follows: " I learned several things from the center through the child"*(70 years old, grandfather, Selam Fire); "* I can feel the change in me and my family in terms of the feeding and cleanliness habits" *(35 years old, mother, Chigwuha)*; "It has helped me to reflect on my beliefs, and values of respect for parents, and cooperation with others" *(45 years old,*

grandmother, Selam Fire); it has contributed to changes in my family's child care, child feeding, and child cleanliness behaviors" *(49 years old, grandmother, Chigwuha);* it has provided me with good knowledge in the teaching of ethical behaviors like showing respect for the mother, the father, the community and the teacher" *(58 years old, father, Selam Fire). And "our observations of our children's changes through their ECCE experiences have in turn helped us to improve our practices of childcare" (36 years old, Father, Selam Fire).*

***Community attitudes and values towards childrearing and child rights* are** also subject to some changes due, among others, to the ECCE establishment. Interviews were held with parents and grandparents regarding their childhood upbringing, issues they remember most and views about childrearing of their time compared with the present. Recurrent themes emerging from the transcribed interviews included issues like "…limited school attendance, intensive engagement in work, limited play and social interaction with peers in the neighborhood, use of physical punishment for disciplining the children, early marriage, and unmet physical needs" (i.e. low level of health, nutrition, clothing that were not to the satisfaction of the participants): The following quotes depict the reality:

Indeed, the past and the present childhood years are incomparable. In the past, children were not kept as clean as children of today. We were also asked to bow down whenever we committed some mistakes. Kerosene lamp was not available in the past as it is today. We were then required to prepare a wooden lantern called **shug** *while herding cattle in the fields, and hold it alight during parental meals in the evenings. Often times, our parents would put one or two morsels of food in our mouths as we stood with the alighted wood stick, and we used to have our main dishes,*

usually after them. In contrast, children of today are seen getting their meals before their mothers and fathers are served (49 years old, grandmother, Chigwuha).

We were brought up with oppression. As children of the former times, we were brought up with beatings, lynching and herding cattle. In our childhood years, we were often sick. There were several forms of childhood illnesses. We used to eat food and dirt altogether. We didn't use the latrines as we didn't know. We also didn't keep our cleanliness. With reference to balanced diet, we used to be served with milk. But no one cared whether it had to be heated. We simply ate and drank whatever we found and in whatever form it was availed to us. As usual, when we are done with our daily routine of herding cattle, we come home in the evening with **shug** *(a special type of dried wood collected to serve as a torch light) that we light up and hold for our parents when they have their evening meals. We used to stand with the lighted* **shug** *until our parents' meal services, and then it was our turn to eat their leftovers. But today, children are served food at the same time with their parents. In olden times, there was no experience of children appearing for meals with their parents, and there wasn't much of parental care either. Nowadays, the government is training us through meetings and with all means. Our care for our children is good. Today, we are obliged to observe our children's rights and not to violate their rights. Nowadays, children get foods that are spiced and cooked (36 years old, Father, Selam Fire).*

Generally, different parents and grandparents explained that in their communities present-day children are lucky compared to those of their times in many ways: They have learning opportunities at the right age and comfortably get play materials bought for them; they have access to technology and media and information that widens their knowledge; they are not forced into early marriage; their basic material needs are fulfilled (i.e. they are regularly fed, clothed, bathed.). Thus, the current parent education programs communicated to parents and grandparents through ECCE centers seemed to make them develop more favorable attitude to present childcare practices.

Improved attitude towards child work was noted as specifically related to the prevailing cultural views. When participants were asked if it is good for children to work, many of them *agreed* that work is good to save children from state of aimlessness and lack of direction to grow *(45 years old, grandmother, Selam Fire).* Work is useful for children's development if calibrated to their age level *(70 years old, grandfather, Selam Fire; a 50 years old Grandmother II, Klinto Center; 58 years old, father, Selam Fire; a 56 year old Grandmother, Klinto Center; 70 years old Grandfather, Klinto Center, a 45 years old Father, Klinto Center; Mother of a Female Child, 29 years old, Klinto center, 35 years old, mother, Chigwuha , a 28 years old Mother, Klinto Center);* if it is *gradually introduced to differing intensity as children grow into* maturity; *c*hildren can start work diligently and on their initiative *(58 years old, grandfather, Chigwuha; 49 years old, grandmother, Chigwuha; a 25 years old mother, Klinto Center);*children can appreciate the usefulness of *work if they are* not forced to wake up in the morning and made to move in a field covered with frost but are instead assigned to some tasks of their liking *(36 years old, Father, Selam Fire; 45 years old, grandmother, Selam Fire).*

Qualities of a 'good ECCE center'

Community views about 'good ECCE' center are to be shaped by the kind of establishment that is put in place. Whichever way things work out, attempts were made to examine how **g**uardians, facilitators, and administrative personnel described 'good ECCE' center.

Consequently, administrative personnel's views of a good ECCE center included some of the following descriptions:

- Sufficient play and teaching materials that would allow prompt learning without boredom *(Director, 35 years old, female, Selam Fire Center).*
- Well-equipped outdoor play materials that can develop the fine and gross muscles of the children, toilet facility, potable water, fenced compound, greeneries, and children's feeding room. Adequate light in the classroom and adequate space for children to move freely, smooth and leveled floor surface *(Project Coordinator, Klinto ECCE).*
- A clean room, a room that is spacious to allow free movements, sufficient play materials prepared from local sources; a center that has all the required learning materials and conditions *(Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire).*
- Adequate light, circulation of fresh air, a clean room with sufficient width, displayed children's drawings on the wall, outdoor play materials and a place where children can dine out *(Facilitator Two, female, 42 years old).*
- Sufficient learning materials, rooms with leveled and comfortable floors, light, chairs, different pictures posted on the walls *(Facilitator One, male, 20 years old).*
- Attractive pictures that draw the attention of the children, materials that can be cut and assembled, good water supply, play materials that can be put to good use, good security, and a sufficient number of care givers *(Facilitator, 35 years old, female, Chigwuha).*
- *Guardians' description*s: Guardians' description of a good ECCE was noted with the following illustrative remarks: "a good ECCE is *a center that avails sufficient condition for repair of broken play materials… has trees and shades for children to play under a cool place… with*

teachers who treat children with full acknowledgement of their individual selves…"

The responses generally showed that a good ECCE has adequate **financial**, **human** *(good and caring facilitators; good administrators),* **material** *(sufficient numbers of chairs and tables, outdoor and indoor play materials, toys;* sufficient classroom materials and books and service for children, potable water) and **physical resources** *(smooth and leveled, spacious and clean compound, playground latrine and classroom; dining room for children, recreation center, tea room; green, clean, and insect-free compound, good fence, and a fenced compound to keep away older children).* .

Opportunities ECCE centers offer to children

Guardians' views regarding the opportunities the center offer the children reveal that the ECCE centers provide learning opportunities and resources for learning, and play, and create important impact on children's transition to primary school.

ECCE **centers** have also served to protect children from some undesired encounters. The mere fact that children are contained in a place to spend their time playing with their age mates is one glaring advantage of having such a center (a 50 years old Grandmother, Klinto Center). The center has enabled preschool age children to stay away from home *(Facilitator One, male, 20 years old)* so that they may not vegetate in their home, (*9 years, Mother, Klinto center), and are* not in undesirable places (*49 years old, grandmother, Chigwuha*). The center prevents them from daily engagements in dirty places (*Selam Fire "gudgnt" Supervisor),* relieves them from the task of herding calves and goats (*70 years old, grandfather, Selam Fire)* and plays a pivotal role in reducing children's aimlessness

(*45 years old, grandmother, Selam Fire;* It creates conducive conditions for children to begin their education on time *(Facilitator Two, female, 42 years old)*; it is a setting, having physical proximity to children's home (*49 years old, grandmother, Chigwuha; 58 years old, grandfather, Chigwuha; 58 years old, father, Selam Fire; a 28 years old Mother, Klinto Center; a 45 years old Father, Klinto Center; 28 years, Father, Klinto Center; 36 years old, Father, Selam Fire),* and it allows learning without being exposed to heat *(49 years old, grandmother, Chigwuha), or* exposure to scorching sun in the dry season and to rain in the wet season*(36 years old, Father, Selam Fire).*

ECCE center as a resource base for learning was unequivocally expressed by guardians and facilitators. On top of being provided a safe place to venture out, children also benefited to learn from good caring (*a 28 years old Mother, Klinto Center*, 58 *years old, grandfather, Chigwuha; 50 years old Grandmother, Klinto Center),* by very beautiful and lovely facilitators *(35 years old, mother, Chigwuha*) in a setting that is equipped with play materials *(35 years old, mother, Chigwuha; 58 years old, grandfather, Chigwuha;49 years old, grandmother, Chigwuha; 36 years old, Father, Selam Fire),* teaching aids *(29 years, Mother, Klinto center; Facilitator Two, female, 42 years old),* different learning materials in sufficient number in one place *(Facilitator Two, female, 42 years old)* as well as spacious room, floor carpets, toilets, water supply *(58 years old, grandfather, Chigwuha), and* through methods that allow sufficient time first to play after their arrival at the center before classes *(a 56 year old Grandmother, Klinto Center)* and also after class *(Facilitator One, male, 20 years old),* with play like activities *(Facilitator One, male, 20 years old),* It is a very relaxing environment *(Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire),* with all the freedom and support from others *(Facilitator Two, female, 42 years old); thus helping the children to be happy and satisfied with their whole day stay at the center (Facilitator One, male, 20 years old).*

Impacts on the children were reported to be multifarious. Guardians and facilitators have noted that children's participation in ECCE centers have enabled them get the right balance of diet (*70 years old, grandfather, Selam Fire),* instilled a sense of purpose and discipline in them beginning from their early childhood years (*45 years old, grandmother, Selam Fire),* and has more importantly, prepared them for formal schooling *(a 25 years old mother, Klinto Center)*through building: knowledge and skills *(49 years old, grandmother, Chigwuha; 27 years old, mother, Selam Fire; 35 years old, mother, Chigwuha),* writing and drawing skills *(Facilitator One, male, 20 years old),* ability to read the alphabets*(29 years, Mother, Klinto center), and in* counting and letter identification skills*(a 25 years old mother, Klinto Center; a 56 year old Grandmother, Klinto Center; 49 years old, grandmother, Chigwuha).* According to the opinion of guardians, there are no more adult illiterates as they are now *(49 years old, grandmother, Chigwuha).* They also stated that the children have developed speaking and listening skills (*70 years old, grandfather, Selam Fire),* stories *(35 years old, mother, Chigwuha),* social skills to easily mix *(a 45 years old Father, Klinto Center) or* get along with persons *(a 70 years old Grandfather, Klinto Center),* group play, turn taking behavior and mutual concern and respect *(a 45 years old Father, Klinto Center),* good manners*(28 years, Father, Klinto Center; 45 years old, grandmother, Selam Fire),* orderliness and respect for the elders; speaking properly *(28 years, Father, Klinto Center),*improved feeding habits of varying types *(49 years old, grandmother, Chigwuha),* hygiene habits *(a 50 years old Grandmother II, Klinto Center),* ability to distinguish between good and bad behaviors *(70 years old, grandfather, Selam Fire),* table manner, dressing oneself, walking around, and respecting parents *(58 years old, father, Selam Fire).* As intimated by some caregivers, children know many things that parents don't know (58 years old, father, Selam Fire) are inquisitive and ask

questions that are difficult to answer *(27 years old, mother, Selam Fire).*

Participants talked passionately about the importance of ECCE experiences in their locality in preparing the children for formal schooling. Nearly all believe that going through ECCE helps in clearing the ground for success in later years. ECCE children were found more competent academically, socially, and psychologically when compared particularly to those who joined grade one directly from home: "The ECCE child, unlike the non ECCE child, readily speaks his name when asked while the other shies away and hangs his head down when asked, gives respect and behaves better" *(27 years old, mother, Selam Fire), "*has better knowledge and skills" *(Selam Fire "gudgnt " Supervisor),"* is often quick to grasp learning and is a better performer" *(35 years old, mother, Chigwuha; 36 years old, Father, Selam Fire, "*does not fail in any subject, and even excels others in performance" *(58 years old, grandfather, Chigwuha).* An elderly expressed this point metaphorically as follows:

How do two people walking in different lanes, one rugged, the other straight, smooth and even, derive equal pleasure from their travels? Definitely, as the one who walks on a smooth and even plane would not worry of thorns sticking into his bare feet, so also would a child who first goes to the center. This is simply because of the fact that his educational plan is shown to him early, and in a well-planned manner (70 years old, grandfather, Selam Fire).

Challenges, opportunities and way forward

Challenges

The concerns voiced generally were resource p*roblems*, child work, parental misconceptions, distance from ECCE centers, parental educational status, the situation of children with special needs, harmful practices and devaluation of cultural values.

Resources: Lack of plot of land for ECCE establishment and clean potable water were reported to be the major problems experienced surprisingly in a (rural) context where they are expected to exist in abundance; this reminds one of the Amharic proverb, that refers to "The Son of River Nile being Thirsty for Water" (Ye abayin lej wuha temawu"). According to the facilitators and administrative personnel, it has been difficult to convince the community in securing a building site, as people are worried of being evicted from their land; difficulty of getting water supply was an added problem *(Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative).*

With reference to the human resource challenges, there seems less focus on the roles of grandparents, family members or the community in ECCE. Indeed we can note that grandparents' involvement in the center was extremely low; even parents involvement is limited only to attending meetings (Interviewers' personal notes, *2014).* Furthermore, centers were more reliant on expensive materials, and on facilitators whose training was not supported by cultural knowledge and practices. Thus, the challenge of integrating cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity issues in ECCE must be addressed alongside caregivers and the communities' cultural knowledge and resources (Britto, et al., 2012).

According to a remark from an interviewee, "*the teaching materials we have been using so far are not locally made / homegrown (Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative). All the resources are imported; classroom and outside resources are not* made from locally available materials". Indeed almost all the resources hardly reflect local

situations (Interviewers' personal observation, 2014) . Realizing the need for indoor and outdoor playing materials, Save the Children Norway has recently purchased and distributed materials to all the ECD centers (SCN, 2010). Interview responses also support this view: *"We are dependent on teaching materials brought by SCN; we cannot say that these are produced locally (Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative). Furthermore, we have the Montessori play materials (Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire). They were prepared to reflect Montessori approach (Interviewers' personal observation, 2014).* The play materials are good. But because of lack of proper management, many of these play materials have some of their elements missing"* (58 years old, grandfather, Chigwuha).

The descriptions given earlier regarding qualities of ECCE were also typical features of a very well established ECCE center that is so characteristic of the one mentioned in the Ethiopian ECCE standard. One would doubt if these expectations are also typical of even the urban centers. If the following descriptions hold true, then the classroom is a typical European ECCE center than a center in a rural Ethiopian setting, *"Education is offered with play materials, and children learn their lessons being very relaxed. We have the Montessori play materials, and the children are happy with them. They are also eager to stay prepared wide awake for the next task when I bring to their attention about what we did today, and what we are going to do tomorrow"* (Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire). One would imagine how unrealistic these practices are as they are not in line with the objective realities where the ECCE center is operating. Its sustainability as well as scalability are under serious question.

Many guardians also mentioned lack of balanced diet as a developmental concern for their children *(28 years old Mother, Klinto Center; 56 year old Grandmother, Klinto Center; 70 years old Grandfather, Klinto Center; 50 years old Grandmother II, Klinto Centeer).* This situation reflects the limitation of this basic material resource in the communities.

Parental educational status

One noted observation limiting enrollment of children points to the parental educational status in supporting the children once they are enrolled in the centers. Such parents tended to relegate the responsibility of childcare, education, and support to the centers and withheld their support and turned their attention to other competing responsibilities, believing that the responsibility of educating and socializing children belonged to the centers. This misconception is justified by the fact that many of the parents in the area were not able to competently read and write and were obviously not in a position to provide some educational support for the children for example, in their children's school homework.

Children with special needs encounter problems of attendance, participation, and inclusion in the ECCE centers, At the time of the field work, there weren't any children with special needs (Supervisor of the 10 child centers, SCN). There were some who were enrolled in the center earlier but, they were transferred to another school for the needed provision of support in an accommodating center (Director, 35 years old, female, Selam Fire Center). There were no special benefit or service that children with special needs get from the center as parents were not willing to accept special support, care or assistance, fearing that their children would be stigmatized and isolated from the community *(Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire)*. "There were three children of special needs

living around the center, but not included in our center. They didn't include children with hearing impairments, as these learners need a specially trained facilitator who can cater to their needs. For instance, a child with hearing impairments had to go back home after her registration at our center, as we don't have a facilitator trained in the handling of the deaf" *(Facilitator, 35 years old, female, Chigwuha)*. In the national ECCE feasibility study, it was also noted that the efforts in addressing them were reported to be minimal *(Britto et al., 2012)*.

Devaluation of cultural values and practices

Implementation of ECCE centers in the communities also seemed to bring some unintended impacts including a tendency to reject the past, unrealistic perception about ECCE centers and sense of dependency on external support. One noted scenario in this study was a tendency to downplay everything in the culture, and the fear that cultural practices can be packed aside altogether as traditional, less useful, and be avoided. Positive cultural values (e.g. respecting elders, serving adults during meals…) were severely critiqued by guardians. Reversing some of these values was also appreciated. For example, a facilitator said, "*There are some signs of improvement…Nowadays, children join their parents and eat together at tables*" *(Facilitator One, male, 20 years old)*. Disciplining methods (mainly physical punishment) were totally condemned; yet such none-physical methods as '*Merekat*' and '*Ergiman*' were, on the other hand, not even mentioned.

Even if formal ECCE centers were not in place, rural children used to go through a kind of upbringing that ultimately shapes their characters. These desirable characters included sharing, helping one another, hard work (little play), obedience, shouldering responsibilities and knowing obligations. Stories, games and plays that were learned in

childhood were not remembered or possibly not practiced. Disciplining children was highly valued to grow them into responsible adults and there was much use of physical punishment to correct misbehaviors and blessing (or '*mirikat*') to strengthen desirable behaviors. In fact, '*Mirikat*' is even much stronger and common mechanism of shaping children in rural Ethiopian societies than physical punishment. Even adult children behave to please their parents so that they can get parental '*mirikat*' or blessings and avoid "*ergiman*" or being cursed. While '*mirikat*' is commonly employed to approve desirable behavior, '*ergiman*' is sparingly used and for serious offenses. In fact, '*mirikat*' and '*ergiman*' are so subtle and invisible that neither parents nor professionals have recognized them as important instruments of building character among children in Ethiopia. In this adult-centered society, it was believed that children would do better and grow stronger if played lesser, worked harder, and disciplined stricter; thus parents becoming more demanding of the children.

A 70 years old grandfather narrated child upbringing of his time in a very comprehensive way as follows:

I was brought up without much care about our clothing. I remember when I was with or without clothes. The clothes we wore were from cheap and rough cotton linen, called abojedie ar merdofa. The child wearing merdofa was usually the one from a family that was a bit better off. We were also partially clad. Even a female child is not worried about being partially covered when she sits. We used to borrow clothes from friends to partake in weddings and other similar holidays. As children, we slept on dry floors, with mats carpets and sheepskins spread on them. Our fathers slept on beds of woods and hides. In addition, we were brought up with values of mutual sympathy

and concern. Today, these values are no more seen. We also used to share the same dish during our feeding schedules. But, there was no medical service, and no practice of visiting the doctor when we got sick. Our feeding schedule was usually after our parents had had theirs. We used to serve our parents with a jug of water for washing their hands, and by holding "shug" or a lighted torch for them during their evening meals. We, as children, were served last, and after our parents were done with their meals. In case of no stew service to go around, there were times when we would go to sleep after only eating dry food with only a piece of salt as a sweetener. We were brought up, sharing clothes with our brothers and sisters. As brothers and sisters, we were also brought up sharing food from one mesob, and showing love and care for one another. In contrast, today's children do not eat and sleep together with their sisters and brothers, let alone with children of their ages. With reference to education of good manners, we were brought up, sometimes receiving some slight knocks on our heads, /kurkum/, or beatings for wrongs we committed. But today's children resist such parental reprimands and would tell you that it is their right to have their ways. Schools teach about respecting mothers and fathers. But the children come home leaving the moral lessons there (70 years old, grandfather, Selam Fire).

Child absenteeism

A noticeable decrease was noted in the number of children after registration at the center *(Supervisor of the 10 child centers, SCN)* for various reasons. A major reason is the heavy work load *(Facilitator, 35 years old, female, Chigwuha; Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire)* that children have to attend at home *(Facilitator One, male, 20 years old, Klinto; Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire)* as when parents require support in taking care of younger siblings, or when they are required to assist their parents or when the parents generally require the children's labor *(Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire).* In fact, child labor was also found to be a limiting factor particularly for girls' school enrollment as also reported in previous research done in the area *(SCN, 2010 status assessment).* Indeed the *es*tablishment of the ECCE centers and the parent education programs has brought a number of important developments, particularly in the fight against harmful practices like early marriage, heavy child work, corporal punishment etc. Many guardians and facilitators were found to have a good understanding of harmful practices in the culture, as well as some better ways of child upbringing, child needs and rights. With regard to child work, however, many parents seem to denounce child work, though in reality they would be tempted to continue the practice. There is, expression of ambivalence, where, on the one hand, there is a desire for apostasy,[10] but, on the other hand, a demand on the ground for child work. This seemed to leave some parents in confusion with a preferred coping of denial about children's involvement in work while in reality the children listed a number of activities they were engaged in everyday while describing their typical day. One of the participants

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[10]*Consider these parents as an example: Her age mates of the area do not work (a 28 years old Mother, Klinto Center); Children of the surrounding are not engaged in work and work like activities (a 45 years old Father, Klinto Center); The children of the community are not engaged in work (Mother of a Female Child, 29 years old, Klinto center); The children are not engaged in a type of work (a 25 years old mother, Klinto Center); Their work is just play. What else would they do other than play? (58 years old, father, Selam Fire); There is no work that engages neighborhood children of her age, except perhaps running errands sometimes (27 years old, mother, Selam Fire); Not at all! There is no work for them (70 years old, grandfather, Selam Fire).*

indicated this attitude of ambivalence that he would have loved if children are freed from work and focus on their education but their involvement in work is a matter of necessity to help parents:

> *We force them to work, because of our state of poverty. Otherwise, it is our very wish if they wholeheartedly focus on their education. I can explain the rationale of engaging a child in a work as follows- we have a calf. The calf has to be directed by someone from behind. If there is no one to herd the animal, it will be in a forbidden field of corn, whose owner demands its total safety from animals. The calf may also die if it is not directed to a meadow with green grass. To keep our calf safe from the property of others and still keep it alive for our wellbeing, we need our child to help us in the task of shepherding (36 years old, Father, Selam Fire).*

Infact, child work plays an important role in the development of rural children. First and foremost, children value the support they provide to families, and adults value their contribution (Bray, 2003). Second, as children take on work responsibilities and participate in routine activities, they learn useful skills (Rogoff, 2003), and values such as helpfulness (Woodhead, 2004). Work enhances a sense of identity and connectedness, self - esteem and self - efficacy, cognitive abilities, technical skills and local cultural competencies (Dawes, 2010). For example, evidences indicate that Children in Zimbabwe who sell vegetables to the market with their parents begin to understand profit earlier than their counterparts in modern societies (Jahoda, 1983). Observations in rural Bolivia also indicate that children's unpaid work not only benefits the household but also increases their sense of autonomy, enabling them to gain skills and competencies useful for their individual independence (Punch, 2001, p. 818).

Third, child work and earnings enable participation at school if parents are unable or unwilling to cover school costs (Young lives policy brief (2012). Fourth, when attending school and working for money at the same time, children feel pressured into dropping out (Young lives policy brief, 2012); as they have to attend to the most urgent priority need; lest survival itself would be at stake let alone education. For example, it was noted that child heads of households drop out and work to earn but to cover expenses of their siblings and allow them continue school (Belay and Belay, 2010). Child work in this case shouldn't be viewed as a hindrance to education but as a coping mechanism to the demands of life. But this issue of child work needs to be an important area of intervention on civil societies working on ECCE in rural Ethiopia.

Parental misconceptions that the children are too young for learning *(Facilitator, 35 years old, female, Chigwuha)* were expressed as other reasons contributing for child absenteeism after enrollment. Many parents wonder whether a 4- 5 years old child can really learn, and consequently refuse to send their younger children to the center *(Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire).* They were heard saying "I doubt if a child of this age would learn anything after all'? *(35 years old, mother, Chigwuha).* They understate the age of the child just to keep him/her away from the center *(Facilitator, 35 years old, female, Chigwuha).* There is a tendency to associate education only with grown up/ older children as young children are not considered to be able to learn *(Facilitator, 35 years old, female, Chigwuha)* and are consequently held back from school for fear of vulnerability to dangers on the way to the centers *(Supervisor of the 10 child centers, SCN).* On the other hand, parents downplay the child's vulnerability to danger when children are in the field tending cattle or fetching water from a river.

As reiterated by the parents distance or location of the center far from the home locations of these families aggravates the problem of early childhood enrolment *(Facilitator, 35 years old, female, ChiguWuha),* further giving cause for parental justification that the children's safety on their way would be endangered. As a result of these justifiable parental fears, there are children who do not participate in the center *(Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Selam Fire).* Finding the center too far from home, some parents fail to send young children out of parental worries and concerns that the child might be exposed to such harmful conditions, as excessive heat, cold weather, muddy roads or over flooded river banks *(Supervisor of the 10 child centers, SCN),* *(36 years old, Father, Selam Fire).*

Sustainability concerns

It can also be stated that the center has a great role and has helped parents to realize the importance of preschool education for their children. Earlier, parents didn't send their children to a preschool. Now, they have realized the facilitative role that a preschool plays, and the little or no difficulty their children show when they are enrolled in the formal school. In addition, the establishment of the center, close to the homes of the children and free of charge for all, has particularly helped poor parents who lack the financial means in the care and education of their preschool children (Director, 35 years old, female, Selam Fire School).

Noted scenario of challenges in the fields

Interviewees' Sense of Dependency and Involvement of Local Administration

It would be of much interest to mention first one outstanding scenario, that interviewees display in the fields, the interviewees' sense of dependency. This is expressed with the following observations:

- *Interviewees as well as facilitators were expecting service charges for participating in the interview. This has been a noticeable change of values in rural areas where people are normally ready to help outsiders, share their resources and time; rather than asking payment for little support rendered. It could be because of an understanding that the interviewers were working for NGO that usually donates a handout*
- *Dependency feelings were noted among people in the sense that they expect all the ECCE resources, materials, and other required input to be provided by NGOs and the Government.*

The second scenario noted is the involvement of the local government administration, the Kebele, was, also not to the expectation of some ECCE stakeholders:
- *The kebele administration were requested to mobilize the people for discussion on these aforementioned issues of childcare. the kebeles were provided with report of some centers that were sometimes looted. But the kebele administrators and others in leadership did not give us the necessary attention as they consider our ECCE engagements as secondary duties (Head, ECCE, Gondar)*
  .
- Indeed, the limited involvement of the kebele officers in the planning process may have reduced the effectiveness of the services (Britto et al., 2012).

- *The kebele administrators do not give attention to the centers. The kebele administrators are, in the main, bored people. These centers are, however, mainly run under the leadership of the supervisors and the directors. It is only thanks to the facilitators that we see the centers being managed well. The kebele*

administrators do not provide the needed support, reasoning that the facilitators themselves, as adults and educated could provide direction for the centers (Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative).

- *Despite these discouraging scenario, however, we also note the support of the Kebele administration. You first meet with the Kebele administration when you think of setting up an institution in a Kebele. It is the Kebele administration that could allow us get the plot of land we need for the ECCE. When SCN came to the Woreda, it was also the Kebele administrators that saw to it that the facilitators had to first be employed. Hence the Kebele administration has a big role in overseeing the center, and in closely following up the educational delivery, and in coordinating the parents. We meet every three months to discuss with the Kebele officials, as the administration is one of the stakeholders on matters related to ECCE (Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative).*

Sense of Community Ownership

A supervisor expresses that there is the challenge of calling parents to meet with the school personnel, discuss issues, and eventually develop a feeling of ownership in matters related to the center. These challenges are expected as, we after all, are working to change perceptions (Selam Fire "gudgnt" Supervisor). There are nominal Centre Management Committee members in all ECD centres. The committees consist of up to 8 members. It was said that meetings are held once in a month and discussions centre on absenteeism and dropouts. Facilitators and administrative personnel also raise such concerns as religion-based perception and

suspiciousness of the community (Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative)

Community ownership can still be doubted when reference is made to the issue of ECCE centre protection. There is lesser community involvement in terms of caring for and protecting the ECCE resources *(Interviewers' personal Notes, 2014)*. We discussed with the facilitators on a limited time basis to address some of the problems of the center, including issues of theft at the center and decide on how to keep it safe from being looted (36 years old, Father, Selam Fire). Until recently, the ECD centres were not fenced and guarded. It was learned that two centres in Lai Armachiho were looted. It appears that communities have not yet considered the centres as their own properties. With measures taken to make the community aware of the importance of ECD provision, communities in Chilga woreda have employed guards for most ECD centres. Similar efforts are being taken in Lai Armachiho. In the 2010 baseline assessment, SCN (2010) found out that parents and woreda education offices didn't seem to have awareness on the importance of ECD centers and didn't even seem to feel that the ECCE centers were their own properties as instances of looting and theft have affected the centers. We provide the kebeles with report of some centers that are sometimes looted and yet the Kebele is not responsive (Head, ECCE, Gondar).

Opportunities

Availability Civil Societies

A large number of registered civil societies are functioning in the various development issues including social support, capacity building, Education, Child Affairs etc. (in Masresha, 2013, p.13). These societies have been supporting the country financially (World Bank, 2007), empowering the poor and the marginalized (Desalegn, 2002), and had

successfully piloted approaches and programs that eventually became part of the governments' national strategies and programs in different sectors (Dessalegn et al., 2008). Hence, they can be important sources of support to be exploited in expansion of ECCE programs in marginalized areas.

Favorable legal, administrative, and academic guides

There are significant developments in Ethiopia in terms of laying the ground rules (legal, administrative and academic) for ECCE to take off. The legislative ground rules include the FDRE Constitution recognizing children's rights for education (FDRE, 1995), the National Education and Training Policy (MoE, 1994) upholding that preschool education will focus on all rounded development of the child in preparation for formal schooling (p.14) 11, the ESDP IV (2010) document presenting an ECCE program package of intervention to improve access, quality, and equity, the National ECCE Policy Framework (MoE, MoWA & MoHa, 2010), operational plan (MoE, MoWA & MoHb, 2010), and guidelines of implementation (MoE, MoWA & MoHc, 2010).

The administrative guideline includes the standard for supervision of ECCE that was in

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[11]*According to this Policy, kindergarten will focus on all round development of the child in preparation for formal schooling and that this education has a significant role in introducing children to basic learning skills that are needed in primary schools and enhance their chances of success in the education system. The Education and Training Policy of the government contains provisions concerning the kindergarten structure, curriculum development and teacher training programs to meet the educational needs of children. Although, only limited number of teachers are trained.*

fact developed in 1982 (NCC, 1974a E.C) and then improved in 1995 (MoE, 1995). In the same way, there are also educational guides that in fact made their presence prior to the legislative provisions and went through successive revisions: the curriculum in 1981 (MoE, 1973 E.C), and the teachers' guide in about the same year (NCCb, 1974 E.C). The curriculum guide was then successively improved in 1999 (MoE, 1999), 2006 (MoE, 1998 E.C.), and 2009 (MoE, Ginbot 2001 E.C, increasingly becoming "developmentally organized, thematically integrated, competence-based, and participatory" (MoE, Ginbot 2001 E.C). Consequently, we note enrolment of children in 0' classes that are attached to public primary schools and the arrangement of Child-to-Child initiative for more accessibility of the greater majority rural children; thus raising gross enrollment from about 2 % nearly two decades ago (EMIS, 2000) to about 26.1% (with12, 639 teachers and 3,688 centers) in more recent years (EMIS, 2014).

Administrative structure in place for implementation.

A joint government agency was set up composed of three line ministries (namely Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth Affairs) who eventually signed a Memorandum of Understanding to implementing early childcare and education in a multi-sectoral, integrated and holistic manner (MoU, 2010). More importantly, efforts were made, among many other measures, to establish ECCE focal persons at different levels of education offices, beginning from the Federal Ministry of Education down to the lowest government cells (i.e. Kebeles).

Implementation experiences from sister programs

Commensurate with formulations of ECCE ground rules, lots of developments have been underway, implementing ECCE in three other modalities of ECCE provisions: Prekindergarten of birth to three years of care and education, Preschool education for 4 to 6 years children, conducted in the urban centers mainly by private investors and the newly initiated cost-effective school readiness programs for children of 5 to 6 years. So, lessons (academic, administrative, resources) can be drawn (best practices to pick up, undesirable ones to be avoided or modified…) from implementation of ECCE in these different programs.

Social and cultural resources

Rural Ethiopia in particular is endowed with a number of material, human, social, and cultural resources that can be tapped into ECCE. Materially, the environs of ECCE establishment presents resources for teaching-learning and play unless the ECCE center is conceived in an exclusionary way as also noted earlier in this report. Games, proverbs, and songs are abundant in the culture. Social institutions (Idir, Senbete, Mahiber…) are quite common that would also give a hand in ECCE implementation. Human resources are also available to be mobilized in the conduct of ECCE. For example, elder siblings can be used to assist small children educationally; thereby filling in the gap created because of parental education. Grandparents can also be mobilized to share their rich cultural knowledge and practices.

Community-based partners

There are a number of community-based workers (Adult literacy workers, health extension workers, agriculture extension workers), committees (child rights committees, PTAs, CBO committees) that can also be mobilized for ECCE-related activities. The training of some of these agents (e.g. HEW) was perceived to be good, though it needs to be aligned with the needs of cultural, ethnic and linguistic minorities (Britto et al., 2012).

Early sustainability measures

As some of the participants has expressed, "*we cannot always continue being dependent always on NGO, we have to think of making use of the resources of the surrounding (i.e. materials, grandparents stories, music, play, etc). Consequently, we are currently collecting stories from older adults we find around the schools. We are also preparing ourselves to publish the collected stories*" (Focal person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative). Construction of buildings, training offered to facilitators on how to make use of local materials, salary of teachers being in the government payroll, training college giving courses in ECCE, and community awareness have already been created regarding the importance of ECCE *(Focal Person, SCN Woreda Deputy Representative).*

The Way Forward: How Should Civil Societies Involve?

ECCE provision has a long history in Ethiopia (Demeke, 2004; 2007). In this longer span, it has been operated by different stakeholders (government, the private sector, local communities, religious organizations, and NGOs) that run ECCE through diverse programs (Britto et al., 2010) and modalities including preschool education (KGs), community-based ECCEs, formal (Zero-grade classes), non-formal (child-to-child) and traditional (priest schools) school readiness programs. However, despite this longer

presence and diversity of delivery mechanisms, ECCE provision has still been a *smaller impact factor* on access, quality and equity. It has remained a dream particularly for the urban poor and rural children (Young Lives, 2012) that account for over 75% of the underserved Ethiopian children (EMIS, 2014).

The private sector has been the major stakeholder in the urban areas. In fact, civil societies have a longer presence but second visibility in ECCE provision in the urban centres. With the need to push their cause to the most marginalized and yet majority group of children, civil societies (mainly Plan International and Save the Children) have been trying to pilot ECCE programs for children of these groups with the possibility to ultimately awaken, influence, and convince the Government so that it would envision ECCE provision within its domain of responsibilities. For example, Save the Children started such programs in 2006. Attempts were made to examine possible lessons to be drawn including possible impact on the communities, parents, and children; challenges prevailing around the ECCE environs and limitations in the delivery systems and opportunities that would assist in the process if properly cultivated.

The ECCE centers established for the purposes were found to serve two major functions: Availing learning resources and opportunities for children as per standard ECCE programs and serving as an entry point to conducting community and parent education programs as stipulated in the ECCE policy (MoE, MoWCYA, and MoH, 2010 a). Data collected has shown that establishment of such centers would make important impacts on and contributions for communities, parents, and, of course, the children. From the communities and parents perspective, it would build their notions about the nature and importance of ECCE center which in turn

would help a lot in mobilizing community resources and ownership. It would also help improving community beliefs, attitudes, values and practices (of childrearing, rights, and education) by challenging misconceptions and harmful practices. It was noted in this regard that parental support and community involvement was tremendous and at the same time direct parental benefits were observed as in sharing women's burden of childcare as it was also noted in previous research (SCN, 2010). This experience informs that some of the benefits listed in the policy (MoE, MoWCYA, MoH, 2010) to be reaped from ECCE provision are indeed achievable: Increased opportunities for parental and community mobilization and empowerment, improved family welfare as parents and communities acquire more knowledge, skills and positive attitudes on various issues related to community development, increased productivity as the support provided to parents enables them to raise healthy and well-nourished children., and also lifts mothers from childcare routine, and engage in other productive work.

The impacts on children are even far reaching particularly compared to those in schools without ECCE background. The impact was so great that it stretched to indirectly influencing parental knowledge, roles, and practices. It is also believed that there are lots of opportunities to be exploited as well in the conduct of such ECCE programs: existence of civil societies with long years of experience in conducting scalable programs in the country, favourable (legal, administrative, and academic) guides, administrative structure in place to oversee program implementation, possibility to learn from many sister programs (e.g. urban preschools, Zero-grade classes, child-to-child initiative, priest schools), the social and cultural resources and partners built into the communities, and lessons from early

sustainability measures taken from the pilot ECCE implementing organizations.

However, challenges were noted threatening ECCE implementation as well as limiting possibilities for exploiting these opportunities. Poverty that is rooted deep into urban and rural communities (in some cases this is attitudinal as in serious complaints of organizations to get a plot of land to construct ECCE buildings for children in rural Ethiopia), HTPs, Child absenteeism, and exclusion of children with special needs are some of the factors that need to be visualized when thinking ahead about opening or expanding ECCE programs in these kinds of communities.

A related concern is the tendency to devalue some useful community values and practices as harmful: child work, physical punishment…Thus the developmental niche to which children must adapt in the first few years of life varies across cultures (Super & Harkness, 1986), and there is no single culture of universal acceptability. Many of the issues, policies and conventions advocated today to promote child development are primed on western theories of child development. For example, the International Child Development Steering Group (ICDSG) has proposed a synthesis of theoretical ideas (in fact of a western making) as a policy guide to increase the quantity and quality of ECDCE services in areas where there is less systematic, formal provision than in the affluent nations of the Global North. Some of the ways in which the ICDSG has marshaled supporting evidence, especially as it applies to those in the Majority World tend to exaggerate the degree of consensus within the scientific community in order to convince lay audiences and funding agencies that science has come up with a definitive solution. This has led to oversimplification in several influential ECDCE advocacy documents. For example

such documents sometimes imply that such parental practices as parental discipline that emphasizes egalitarian reasoning are always more effective in promoting healthy socio-emotional development than corporal or harsh verbal punishment; structured, interactive play with a nurturant adult parent or teacher is a uniquely effective way of promoting a child's early cognitive development, child labor takes children off the developmental plane. Each of these generalizations is grounded in an influential Western theory of child development. But aspects of these interpretations have also been challenged on grounds of systematic research evidence. Responsibility for infant care is variable across societies, and the sensitivity of a caregiver's behavior cannot be defined or measured independently of the mediated cultural norms and practices. Research in cultural settings where strict parenting is widely endorsed has found that the negative impact of harsh punishment on children's mental health depends on how normative such punishment is perceived to be.

In a similar vein, Nsamenang (1992, 2005) charts out developmental milestones of an African child in which the second phase that corresponds with childhood is Nsamenang's social ontogeny, 'social apprenticing' stage in which its principal developmental task is to recognize, cognize and rehearse social roles that pertain to four hierarchical spheres of life: self, household, network and public. Adults assign family and neighborhood responsibility and work to children. Adult delegation of responsibility for care and socialization of younger children serves the function of priming the emergence of social responsibility.

The priming strategies embedded in indigenous African childcare practices have important implications for the design of culturally appropriate forms of intervention to

optimize developmental opportunities for children in contemporary Africa rather than, as mentioned above, advocating for apostasy of mediated cultural values and practices in early childhood care and education.. Indeed, in many African subsistence economies, far from constituting a form of exploitation or abuse, care giving responsibilities assigned to children are better understood as part of an African educational strategy that keeps children in contact with existential realities and the activities of daily life, which represents the participatory component of social integration (African ECD Voice, 2014).

A more important limitation that would creep in while conducting such kinds of programs is fundamentally the issue of scalability, and sustainability of these programs. This is a central concern that threatens the validity of such programs at large. NGO-led projects tend potentially to generate feelings of dependency. Problem of community ownership and failure in community resources would jeopardize the whole venture. Community involvement noted as important contribution earlier was found to be too shallow. In fact, how can a community develop sense of ownership of an ECCE centre that is alien in terms of approaches and resources, expensive in terms of resources, and difficult to fathom the conduct of its end state in early child development?

In general, we would say that the way ECCE was designed, established, and implemented in a pilot program hasn't been any different from those urban-based private ECCE centers. Resources are all imported and are very expensive. Facilitators can hardly operate without extensive training; their cultural knowledge and social savvy being less likely to relate to a training that is about Montessori approach. There is a sense of NGO-dependency on the part of the community in conducting the ECCE. Hence, we seriously question the scalability of such ECCE

programs for low income and rural Ethiopian communities. We recommend that civil societies need to check in their pilot ECCEs before thinking about even further expansion; let alone scaling them up for a wider audience. They need to endeavor revisiting their ECCE approaches so that there is a fit between their noble services and the mediated community values and practices.

We believe that the design of appropriate, effective ECDCE services for African societies requires close attention to prevailing socio-cultural conditions, especially in rural areas, including the strengths and limitations of local childrearing knowledge, attitudes and practices. Such attention has been conspicuously absent from the vast majority of ECDCE intervention programs. This essay is devoted to exposition of some of the more salient, widely recurrent features of child development and socialization in Africa and their implications for the optimal design of ECDCE programs (African ECD Voice, 2014).

Our recommendation for civil societies conducting pilot ECCEs is then to check in their objectives, approach, responsibilities, and indicators long before they check out from these programs.

In terms of objectives, they need to work not to improve access but to come up with a model ECCs that are feasible to be scaled up. What is important is not how many ECCEs are being opened and the tendency to aggressively work to improve access in their own self-styled meaning of quality ECCE, 'but to cultivate even one feasible, culturally rooted, and genuinely community-based ECCE. The fact that the program is conducted within the communities and for children of the community doesn't make it a community-based ECCE. In fact, it was noted that what is local in the ECCE centers is only the children;

the classroom set up, the resources in the center, the pedagogical tools and methods, and the psychology and philosophy of facilitators is not community-born.

In terms of approaches, we recommend a bottom-up approach be pursued rather than a top-down approach:

- Empower communities to initiate ECCE themselves and work along them without making one's presence louder so that community voices and roles may not shrink
- Reactivate existing traditional centers that are on the verge of dying out. Priest and Quranic schools are best examples. Civil societies may conduct feasibility studies and come up with strategies to revitalize these genuinely community based programs.
- Supporting existing cost-effective ECCE establishments (mainly Zero-grade and child-to-child) in a manner that they would operate into sustainable organic units

In terms of tasks, activities, and responsibilities, we suggest that civil societies need to stay behind and operate to empower others in its genuine sense rather than conducting ECCEs themselves. The practice so far is as if that the pilot ECCEs are owned by these NGOs and if these owners disappear from the scene, the centers will obviously cease to exist. As it is also believed by these societies, civil societies need to be a catalyst of change rather than being a leader or an agent of change. No start is better than a wrong start because the legacy of misdeeds will be expensive to correct.

In terms of indicators for program phase out, we recommend the importance and feasibility of gauging performances in terms of an ultimate community ownership rather than instituting ECCE in the government structure. The government is handling the two school readiness programs at the moment and it will be a huge burden to target including even the most expensive ECCE program in it. Hence, in a manner to ensure division of labor, optimize feasibility, and community education and development, it appears more meaningful to target community ownership of the pilot ECCEs.

If civil societies opt to continue doing ECCE as planned, we also recommend taking care of the following measures for a better provision:

- Learn from and optimize early sustainability measures already identified
- Gauge parent education to make it culture sensitive. Many Health Extension Workers conducting parent education programs also noted that there was a need to improve the quality of learning and didactic materials addressing early childhood stimulation (Britto et al., 2012).
- Align ECCE program with the needs of cultural, ethnic and linguistic minorities (Britto et al., 2012).
- Close attention must be paid to children with disabilities and ethnic and linguistic minorities *(Britto et al., 2012)*
- Plan to conduct impact assessment by an independent body rather than a consultant hired to fetch needed data to prove that one is really sustainable.

Whichever way civil societies opt to proceed, there is a need to fit services with mediated community values and practices, and there is a need to focus on local strengths as well as challenges and build on local strengths, if indeed they have to work in the interest of the communities (African ECD Voice, 2014).

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