

Learning *and* Education

YOUNG CHILDREN
(0-8 YEARS)



NEPAL

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS AN INVESTMENT FOR LIFE. But in countries where poverty, armed conflict, natural disasters, and HIV/AIDS threaten a child's family and community support structures, Early Childhood Development programs seldom take priority. Against such odds, many nations and communities—including some of the world's poorest—are committed to meeting the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs of their most vulnerable young children. The evidence is mounting: Increased global investment in children under 8 years of age today builds a better educated, prosperous, and peaceful citizenry tomorrow.

EARLY CHILDHOOD MATTERS The first years of life are critical in the development of the child. Rapid physical, cognitive, social, and emotional changes begin at birth. Before a child enters school, 80 percent of brain capacity is defined. Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs ensure that young children survive and thrive—that they are physically and emotionally healthy and intellectually curious—and school readiness programs prepare them for school success. Children who participate in ECD programs compared to children without ECD are more likely to enroll in school, more likely to plan their families, more likely to become productive adults, and more likely to educate their own children. They are less likely to repeat a grade or drop out of school and less likely to engage in criminal activities. Through interventions that engage young children, as well as their parents, caregivers, and communities, Save the Children’s program for ECD is a powerful catalyst for achieving Education for All and eliminating poverty.

young children. We highlight several successful solutions here.

EGYPT: *Realizing Synergies* Minya, one of Upper Egypt’s poorest governorates (administrative unit), is the

REACHING DISADVANTAGED YOUNG CHILDREN

Save the Children works to provide the world’s most vulnerable young children and their families

- **Access** to ECD programs, using low-cost, locally available materials and resources;
- **Quality**, child-friendly approaches to learning and development that ensure the smooth transition to primary school;
- **Support** from parents, caregivers, and local communities to sustain ECD programs and advocate for policies that promote Education for All.

site of a comprehensive ECD program. Initiated in the rural councils of Taha and Shousha in 2001, the program’s holistic curriculum is designed to meet the cognitive, psychosocial, and physical development needs of young children, including those with special needs. Child-friendly approaches are used to develop language, math, science, and social skills. Children learn positive values and behaviors, including cleanliness, discipline, and respect for others. By teaching parents and caregivers how to protect children’s health and providing families an array of health services, ECD builds a solid foundation on which young children can grow into productive adults.

Traditional center-based settings are complemented by home-based ones, where mothers are often the caregivers. Home-based centers build trust and ensure that ECD services reach the most remote villages. At the same time, caregiver mothers build new skills and confidence as community leaders.

The first 520 ECD students enrolled in 2001 are now in the fourth grade and none of these students have repeated or dropped out of school. Parents, caregivers, and teachers all agree—ECD children are better prepared than

“ We work hand in hand with families, caregivers, and communities—even under adverse conditions—to ensure that young children are *happy, healthy, and ready* to take their next steps in primary school and beyond. ”

Lisa Long,
Early Childhood Development Specialist,
Save the Children

WORKING IN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Save the Children promotes partnerships at all levels—between parents, communities, governments, and civil society organizations—to help hard-to-reach, vulnerable young children access quality ECD programs. It emphasizes high-quality, low-cost, child-centered approaches; enrollment of girls and other socially disadvantaged groups; teacher training; and community organization to assume long-term management and financing of ECD centers, parent education programs, and other ECD activities.

SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

Wherever we work, Save the Children promotes a culture of caring and support, with an emphasis on developing happy, healthy children ready to learn. Strategies are owned by the community and adapted to the local context to ensure the well-being of

EGYPT *ECD student paints as Save the Children field staff member looks on.*



non-ECD children to enter primary school. When asked by Save the Children field staff what she wanted to be when she grew up, one child said, “We can’t be what we want to be unless we go to school.”

NEPAL: *Benefiting Children, Parents and Society*

In Nepal’s eastern Terai, poor villagers in Siraha District have benefited dramatically from Save the Children’s ECD program. In Siraha, about 20 percent more ECD than non-ECD children start school. Starting rates are dramatically higher for girls and other socially excluded groups. Although girls’ enrollment lags behind that of boys nationwide, girls and boys attend ECD centers and transition to primary school in equal numbers.

Parents observe that ECD children are better prepared academically and socially for primary school. They answer questions confidently, are willing to ask about what they don’t understand, and are patient at problem-solving. Convinced by child-centered teaching methods, parents of ECD children are making their voices heard. They work in partnership with teachers, assume key positions on management committees, and engage with—and sometimes challenge—the formal system on behalf of their children’s rights.

By July 2004, 80 percent of 2000 ECD graduates were moving through primary school with no failure or grade repetition; ECD children were more than twice as likely to complete primary school within five years as the average Nepali student. For Dalit children—outsiders in the traditional caste system—results were even more striking. Today, in the districts of Siraha, Kailali, and Kanchanpur, the number of ECD centers has grown from 236 to 376; of the 9,280 children welcomed through their doors, 1,125 are Dalit children. This news represents significant savings for the school system and hope for a better educated, more equitable society.

GUATEMALA: *Learning through Culture*

In rural Guatemala, young children have little chance at an education. Thirty-six years of civil war have left half the country’s residents in chronic poverty. Some 67 percent of indigenous children are chronically malnourished. At the same time, Guatemala boasts a rich cultural heritage, its Mayan traditions dating back some 2,000 years. More than 20 Mayan languages are still spoken—the main ones being Quiché, Mam, Kaqchiquel, and Kekchi. Yet national and local government officials have done little to integrate culture or ethnicity into the country’s formal education system. As a result, many Mayan children have little knowledge about their cultural

GUATEMALA *Puzzles that relate to a particular Mayan story impart cultural values while teaching spatial relations and developing fine motor skills.*



identity and are illiterate in their mother tongue as well as the official language of Spanish. This can lead to early entry into the workforce.

Working in the western highlands of Santa Cruz del Quiché and more recently in Huehuetenango and Sololá, Save the Children’s ECD program is dramatically changing how young children learn. This year, the program has expanded to include 35 schools, 2,400 students, and 100 teachers. As a result, children will be better prepared for primary school and more likely to stay in school.

One innovative, bilingual approach builds learning skills through Mayan legends that also impart cultural heritage. Any one of 40 traditional Mayan stories offers a springboard for building an entire curriculum unit. A range of story-related activities develops children’s cognitive, psychosocial, and communication and problem-solving skills, while teaching them respect for nature, family and elders, and other Mayan values.

After participating in ECD teacher-training workshops organized by Save the Children, Irma Florencia Pablo, a first-year ECD teacher in Huehuetenango, began to engage her students in ways that recognized their Mayan identity. Through active participation in games and exercises, the children began to develop their intellectual and creative potential. They acquired language and math skills, and started treating each other with more respect and fairness.

Before Irma participated in the teacher-training workshops, her students passively responded to her rote teaching methods, anxiously awaiting the sound of the school bell. Today, Irma’s students no longer think of running home when the bell rings, preferring to linger over their math experiments and language and cultural materials.

WHERE WE WORK: Save the Children's early childhood development portfolio extends to 22 countries around the globe.

AFRICA

- Ethiopia
- Malawi
- Sudan
- Uganda

ASIA

- Afghanistan
- Bangladesh
- Indonesia
- Myanmar
- Nepal
- Philippines
- Vietnam

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- Haiti
- Honduras
- Nicaragua

MIDDLE EAST AND EURASIA

- Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia)
- Egypt
- Jordan
- Palestine

SNAPSHOT: WORLD'S YOUNG CHILDREN

	Percentage of Children Enrolled in pre-primary programs 2001*	
	Total (%)	Ratio of Female to Male Students
Countries in transition	30.5	1.06
Developed countries	81.9	1.01
Developing countries	35.0	0.95
Arab states	19.6	0.99
Central and Eastern Europe	60.2	0.94
Central Asia	22.3	1.00
East Asia and the Pacific	54.5	1.23
Latin America and the Caribbean	67.3	1.00
North America and Western Europe	87.0	1.00
South and West Asia	26.4	1.04
Sub-Saharan Africa	5.8	0.92

* All values are median.
Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, UNESCO.

SAVE THE CHILDREN is a leading independent humanitarian organization creating lasting, positive change for children in need in the United States and in more than 40 countries around the world. Save the Children is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance, comprising 27 national Save the Children organizations working in more than 110 countries to ensure the protection and well-being of children.

For more information, contact:

Chloe O’Gara, Director of Education
 Save the Children US
 2000 M Street NW, Suite 500
 Washington, DC 20036 USA
 phone: 202-293-2759
 e-mail: education@dc.savechildren.org
 website: www.savethechildren.org

Photography: Lisa Long (cover); Michael Bisceglie (p. 2); Oscar Santiago Lopez (p. 3).

© Save the Children USA, September 2005

