

## CHAPTER 2: Expanding Early Childhood Care and Education

### 2.1 Introduction

Education for All goals set in Jomtien Declaration in 1990 signifies the international commitment to ensure education for every citizen in every section of a society. This commitment was reaffirmed in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 with the Dakar Framework of Action and it provided Sri Lanka the much needed stimulus not only to accelerate strategies that have been already adopted but also to formulate appropriate policies to attain EFA goals.

EFA goals especially goal 2, 4 and 6 are targeted to be achieved by the year 2015. To meet these targets it is imperative to achieve the EFA Goal 1: expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. ECCE provides a strong and a long lasting foundation to achieve the other five goals. Hence, it is timely to examine in this Mid Decade Assessment (MDA) how Sri Lanka has worked towards achieving the EFA goal 1 reiterated in the Dakar Framework of Action.

### 2.2 ECCE in the Sri Lankan Context

Early childhood is defined in the Sri Lankan context as the period of child's life from conception to age five. The upper limit of the age in this definition differs from the international definition, which is eight. At the same time, Sri Lanka has used the term "early childhood care and development" (ECCD) instead of the term "early childhood care and education" (ECCE) when designing and planning programmes that support children's development, learning, health, nutrition and other attributes, described in the UNESCO Report to define ECCE.

Therefore, the concept of education is represented wherever the term "development" is cited in this report.

The terminology used in explaining ECCE programmes vary significantly although they convey the same meaning in different circumstances. Early Childhood Development Centres, Preschools, Montessori schools, Day Care Centres and Crèches are terms commonly used in this context. Services provided by the Day Care Centres and Crèches differ from the other institutions since these take care of children in place of their working parents for longer hours. The services provided by the other institutions mentioned above are almost the same. Similarly, various terms are used with reference to ECCE care providers. Preschool teachers, ECCD officers, ECCD instructors, care givers and crèche workers are the names generally used for ECCE care providers. Care at the family level is strengthened through the Home Based ECCD Programme implemented by the Ministry of Health where the Public Health Midwife is the grass root level worker providing services to children from birth until the age of five years with special focus on the first three years.

#### 2.2.1 Expanding and Improving ECCE: Policies and Provisions

The responsibility of expanding and improving ECCE in Sri Lanka has been shared by Sri Lankan Government, Local Government Authorities, Non-Governmental organisations and International Non-Governmental Organisations. These sectors have worked towards achieving EFA goals collectively and separately since Jomtien declaration in 1990.

Numerous measures have been taken by the Government of Sri Lanka to achieve EFA goals by introducing reforms, Acts and policies through various ministries since 1990. For the first time in the history of Sri Lanka the Ministry of Education has included early childhood education as an important subject under the *General Educational Reforms of 1997*. The reforms have detailed the actions that are being implemented for Early Childhood Development (ECD) and preschool education in two separate sections; an indication that the Sri Lankan Government had taken ECCD seriously. The actions stated for ECD and preschool education could be summarised as follows:

- Strengthening the Children's Secretariat and the Non Formal Education Branch of the MoE appropriately for the task of implementation of the planned early childhood programmes
- Designing awareness programmes targeting mothers to create awareness in the public mind and among those who work in the area of child development
- Developing training programmes on early childhood development for mothers and care givers
- Promoting setting up of more preschools thus providing facilities for greater participation of children between 0-3 years in education
- Making legislative provisions for the regulations of preschools
- Designing basic curriculum guidelines for preschools
- Setting up a Department of Early Childhood Education and a Child Study Centre in one of the Universities.

The last action has been implemented by establishing the *Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education* and the *Child Study Centre* at the Open University of Sri Lanka in the year 1999 and 2001 respectively. The Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education carries out the task of providing opportunities for personnel in the field of ECCD to obtain professional qualifications.

In spite of the actions suggested above, the reforms on general education especially the primary education have been more successfully implemented through the NIE for the obvious reason that general education comes directly under the MoE and Provincial Ministries of Education. However, the Reforms have triggered the Ministry to draft a National Plan of Action to improve ECCD and literacy in Sri Lanka. The objectives of the Plan for ECCD are:

- to improve nutritional status of infants & pre school children
- increase participation at pre school education from 60% to 80%, and
- lay a good foundation for life and formal education through improving the quality of ECCD programmes by the year 2010

Apart from General Education Reforms (1997) another measure that would make an impact on the disadvantaged child is the establishment of the Department of Special Needs Education in the Open University in 2005. At present, the Department is planning to establish a Learning Centre for Children with Special needs in the OUSL, with the support of German Sri Lanka Friendship consortium.

Sri Lankan Government also has implemented strategies to ensure the child's "*Right to Protection*" by establishing the Child Protection

Authority (NCPA) under the “*Child Protection Authority Act No 50 of 1998*”. Although it was initially established under the Presidential Task Force, presently it functions under the Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Empowerment.

According to the Act, the NCPA has been established for the purpose of

- formulating a national policy on the prevention of child abuse and the protection and treatment of children who are victims of such abuse;
- coordinating and monitoring action against all forms of child abuse; and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto

The NCPA has been successful in enforcing related law on child abuse in the country and also raising awareness among people of child abuse and related issues through various strategies in the past few years.

### **2.2.2. Government Strategies and Progress since Dakar Framework for Action**

Assigning a ministry for children in Sri Lanka is a progressive step taken by the government in achieving Millennium Development Goals as well as EFA Goal 1, expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The MCDWE was for each divisional secretariat in Sri Lanka. Monitoring created in 2005 and has under its purview the Children’s Secretariat, Department of Probation and Childcare Services, National Child Protection Authority and the National Committee for Women.

In keeping with the EFA Goal 1 the former Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Social Welfare formulated the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development in October 2004. This document could be

described as a milestone in the history of ECCE in the Sri Lankan context.

Currently, the MCDWE is assigned with the task of implementing the Plan. The Children’s Secretariat has already introduced minimum standards for preschools, which have been stated in the National Policy with a view to providing quality programmes in ECCD/ ECCE.

*The National Plan of Action (NPA)* prepared in 2004 by the Ministries of Health, Education, Justice, Water Supply, Labour, Women’s Empowerment and Social Welfare for 2004-2008 is presently being monitored by the MCDWE. The Plan has elaborated the objectives of health, and education. According to the Plan the objectives of ECCE are:

- to increase participation of children between 3-5 years in preschool education from 62% -82%
- improve quality of preschool education and train all preschool teachers
- create awareness of the needs of preschool children among stakeholders

Currently, the ministries are working under the leadership of the MCDWE in the National Steering Committee that monitors the implementation of the NPA.

The Children’s Secretariat, which functions under MCDWE, has carried out home based programmes to raise awareness of parents and elders on Early Childhood Development since Dakar Framework of Action in the year 2000. Training programmes for preschool teachers, and programmes on providing daytime facilities for the care of children of employed parents, prevention of child abuse, and food and nutrition were also some of the measures taken by the Secretariat. Further, the Secretariat has appointed ECCD officers for

each divisional secretariat in Sri Lanka. Monitoring the provisions for ECCE is also within the purview of the duties of these officers. Considering the importance of the early childhood period MoH too expanded its *Maternal and Child Health programme* (MCH), which initially focused only on the provision of health and nutrition services to the target group from conception to five years to incorporate services to optimise psycho-social development of children. This integrated approach was implemented as a Home Based ECCD programme where services to improve the health, nutrition and psycho-social needs of children were implemented through the well developed preventive health infrastructure. Among the many achievements of the MCH programme is the reduction of Maternal Mortality, Infant Mortality and Stunting among under five children. The Family Health Bureau in the MoH implemented the Home Based ECCD programme with the support of UNICEF on a phased out basis since 2002 where the focus was on providing holistic care to children less than five years with a special emphasis on those less than three years of age through services provided at clinic and household levels. The Programme has covered approximately 213 areas at the end of year 2006 providing approximately 1.6 children from birth to five years with the opportunity of optimising their survival, growth and development during their critical years through improved care practices at family level. Good early child care is a process leading to improved readiness to formal school which enables children to make optimal use of the educational opportunities provided improving their life chances to be productive citizens contributing to the overall economic development of the country.

Research specifies the positive effects of the

empowerment of mothers on early childhood care and education (Blumberg, 2006). The developments in the field of ECCE cannot be discussed without the empowerment programmes for women. In Sri Lanka, the Women's Bureau, which functions under the MCDWE, is instrumental in implementing women empowerment programmes such as the *Integrated Family Development Project, Health Care Assistants Training, Women's Home Gardening and Hostel Project for working women*. Raising awareness of women and girls on their rights, educating chief household widows, raising awareness of migrant women, and self-employment programmes for women are some of the important programmes conducted by the Women's Bureau which are directly associated with the ECCD.

To implement the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child and Child Rights Charter of Sri Lanka, the Department of Probationary and Child Care Services has provided assistance for twins who need medical assistance and rehabilitated and institutionalised children under the umbrella of the MCDWE. This department also has launched a foster parent's programme and awareness raising programmes for parents throughout the country. *Prevention of Domestic Violence Act 2005* and *Tobacco and Alcohol Bill No. 166 of 2006* are other landmarks that make an impact on the ECCE. It is a well established fact that growing up being abused, neglected, unsupervised and ill prepared to benefit from learning are some of the major reasons that contribute towards children being at risk in any country (Knitzer, 2000, Schorr et al. 1991). Therefore, these Acts are considered positive steps in improving the home environment for young children.



### **2.2.3. Programmes implemented in the area of Early Childhood Care and Education**

Although development during the first three years is optimised through the Home Based ECCD programmes, Preschool is the most accepted and commonly used provision in early childhood care and education for children between 3 to 5 years. The government, as well as Private, and Non-Governmental Organisations are involved in managing preschools and preschool teacher training programmes. Government institutions that manage preschools are mostly the local government authorities such as Municipal Councils and Urban Councils. Ministries such as Social Welfare also conduct preschools for the government Sector. The Children's Secretariat and Divisional Councils conduct preschool and teacher training programmes while Plantation Trust Fund conducts training programmes for crèche workers. Out of the local NGOs involved in preschool education, Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka manages preschools through out the country to serve urban and rural low income sectors and provides short term training for their preschool teachers in a very successful manner.

## **2.3 Policy and System Indicators**

### **2.3.1. Existence of National Multisectoral Early Childhood Policy**

Sri Lanka is yet to formulate a national multisectoral Early Childhood policy. However, the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (2004) is an indication of the effort taken by the state to achieve the EFA Goal 1. Currently it is being introduced in the provinces by the Children's Secretariat, which functions under the MCDWE.

### **The aims of the National Policy are:**

- to assure, for every child, the best start in life by ensuring access to adequate health and nutrition services along with the opportunities for responsive psychosocial stimulation
- to promote the importance of the integrated approach that brings together health, nutrition, psychosocial stimulation, safe water, hygiene and sanitation services
- to develop standards and guidelines that regulate the development and implementation of ECCD programmes i.e. home based programmes, child development centres etc.
- to clarify the role and responsibilities of central, Divisional and local government authorities in the provision and support of the ECCD services indicating their commitment to the care and development of the young child
- to clarify the relationship between governmental, non governmental agencies, the private sector, communities and families in the provision of ECCD services
- to synchronise and coordinate the services provided by the different stakeholders in ECCD so as to maximise the availability and use by all sectors of the population
- to mobilise and allocate increasing financial resources for and investment in ECCD programmes
- to promote the importance of the roles of parents, caregivers and the community in the development of children

- to enhance the capacity of parents/ caregivers and communities to be able to adequately support their children’s development

The Policy also has spelt out the following four areas of action:

1. Build knowledge and skills of caregivers to promote optimal child survival, growth and development,
2. Improve and expand training opportunities for service providers,
3. Community based child development centres,
4. Children with special needs

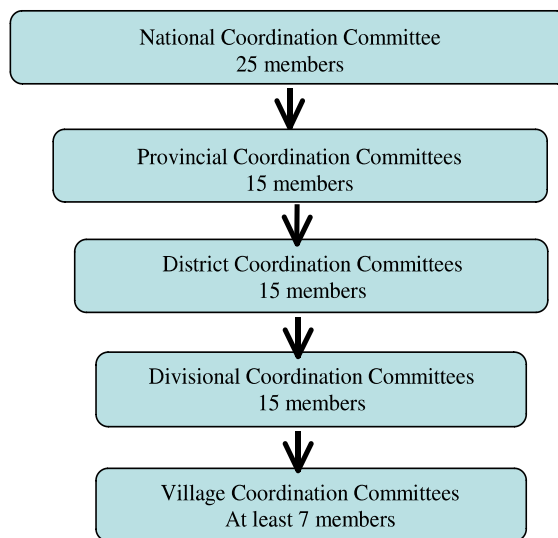
To assure the successful implementation of the National Policy on ECCD throughout the country it proposes a National Coordination Committee which includes all relevant governmental organisations, non governmental organisations, ECCD specialists etc., Provincial coordination committees, District coordination committees, Divisional coordination committees and village committees. Responsibilities of all these committees are explained in the policy. In addition, the policy suggests that local government institutions in Sri Lanka should recognise ECCD work. To assure, for every child, the best start in life, the National Policy has emphasised that special attention should be paid to children with special needs including children with disabilities, children of migrant workers, single parent families and war victims.

**Strategies adopted in implementation of the National Policy**

To assure the implementation of the National Policy on ECCD (2004) throughout the country the National Policy has proposed a management structure that links the Central

Government at ministerial level through provincial councils, officers at grass root level and primary care givers/ parents.

**Figure 2.1: Management Structure of the National Policy**



The proposed National Coordination Committee will be represented by all relevant governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations including INGOs, and ECCD specialists. The main task of this committee is to oversee implementation of National Policy and make adjustments to the Policy when deemed necessary. Rest of the committees are responsible for coordinating and implementing ECCD activities in their respective locations. Developing ECCD programmes appropriate for the province is one of the key responsibilities of the provincial committees. In addition to implementing the National Policy, District and Divisional Coordination Committees are expected to ensure accurate reporting and documentation of service delivery and maintain a data base. Village Coordination Committees comprising officers at grassroots and care givers/parents are expected to assess and analyse ECCD needs in the area in addition to

other responsibilities. Thus the National Policy on ECCD has attempted to incorporate governing authorities at various administrative levels.

### **Policies at Provincial level**

The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka by Article 154G (1) empowers the Provincial Councils to make necessary legislation to supervise the management of preschools. As a result, the Provincial Councils of North Central, Western, and North Western have passed their own statutes on preschool education to ensure the quality of the services provided by preschools. Minimum standards for ECCD centres, qualifications of the ECCD service providers (preschool teachers) and registration of ECCD centres have been stipulated in these statutes and necessary legislations have been passed to implement these statutes. It is noteworthy that other provinces too are working towards developing strategies to regulate ECCD programmes conducted in their respective Provinces. There is no significant difference between the National Policy and the policies formulated by provincial councils in many aspects. They agree on standards laid down for ECCD institutions mainly preschools and Crèches, care giver qualifications etc. However, the provincial policies are silent about coordination committees stated in the National Policy. Hitherto, no proper coordination exists between national and provincial authorities on implementing National Policy on ECCD. Lack of coordination may cause confusion among various sectors involved in ECCD programmes.

### **2.3.2. National Standards for Monitoring Developmental Readiness**

Sri Lanka is yet to set national standards in monitoring developmental readiness in children between 0-5 years. Conversely, there are no established mechanisms to gauge children's

readiness before entering the primary school. However, sample surveys have been conducted by individual academics to assess child development and school readiness (*Perera, 2003*) and the relationship between their abilities and age (*Talagala, 2004*). Attempts also have been made by the state to identify and understand children at entry to grade 1 in the primary school. Their work skills, social skills, pre-literacy competencies, pre-maths competencies and motor coordination are observed and assessed to identify entry competencies. However, identifying entry competencies per se will not serve the purpose of monitoring developmental readiness. Although state-run schools attempt to identify entry competencies through an assessment provided by the MoE, it has not been employed to review or monitor children's total development. Lack of national standards for "developmental readiness" is an issue identified in many research studies.

### **2.3.3 Presence of early screening programmes**

Screening physical growth in children was practised in Sri Lanka for several decades. The Child Health Developmental Record (CHDR), introduced by MoH mainly, looked at the weight of children in relation to their age periodically from birth to five years to monitor and promote the growth of children in order to achieve optimal nutrition for children. With the recent revisions to the CHDR length/height for age was also introduced as an indicator to monitor the growth of children.

The milestones incorporated in the CHDR were used to screen the development of children less than five years. Since the milestones present in the older version of the CHDR looked only at some aspects of development and did not do a complete assessment the Family Health Bureau of the MoH took steps to revise it in 2004 and introduced items that represented the main domains.

Since development is greatly influenced by the child rearing practices in a country it is important to use screening instruments standardised for Sri Lanka. In this context the FHB in the MoH has taken steps to standardise the Denver Development Screening Tool II (DDST II) for Sri Lanka where the assessments are done based on domains. This tool is expected to be incorporated into the CHDR since 2008, as a tool to be used by the caregivers as well as the PHC level worker who is the Public Health Midwife (PHM) for the purposes of from birth until the age of five years. In addition to the initiations of the MoH to validate Denver Developmental Scale II, Early Screening Inventory Revised (ESI-R) has been adapted and validated on a sample of preschoolers between the ages of 3-4½ years to identify children who may need special education services in order to perform successfully in school. Anyhow, it is regretful to note that early screening at national level is not an established practice in Sri Lanka.

#### **2.3.4 Health Links in ECCE established with visits by health professional, diagnostics or referrals**

Children from birth to five years are screened by the Public Health Midwives who are the grass root level workers in the health infrastructure in Sri Lanka. This is done periodically during their home visits. If any problems are identified by the PHM or mothers' complain about any ill health such children will be referred to the Child Welfare Clinic where the Medical Officer of Health will screen and take appropriate action. If the Medical Officer of Health is unable to manage the children would be referred to the hospitals with a paediatrician for specialised care.

Within the preschools too the health sector is responsible for the health and nutritional status of children. There exists a very good relationship between the preschool teacher and the PHM who visits these preschools for regular growth monitoring and promotion with the participation of parents. The Public Health Inspector also does regular visits to ensure the safety of the physical environment.

However it is not a routine practice for Medical Officers to visit preschools to screen children. Currently the MoH is planning to conduct mandatory screening of all preschool children from the beginning of year 2008 by a health team comprising the Medical Officer of Health in which the preschool is situated.

#### **2.3.5. Careers for ECCD Care Providers**

ECCD care providers (in which ever name they are being called i.e. preschool teacher, child development officer/instructor or crèche worker) need to be rewarded with opportunities to upgrade their careers. This will help them to acquire higher education, higher salaries and enjoy higher status. Higher education and higher pay will increase quality of the ECCD Programmes they serve.

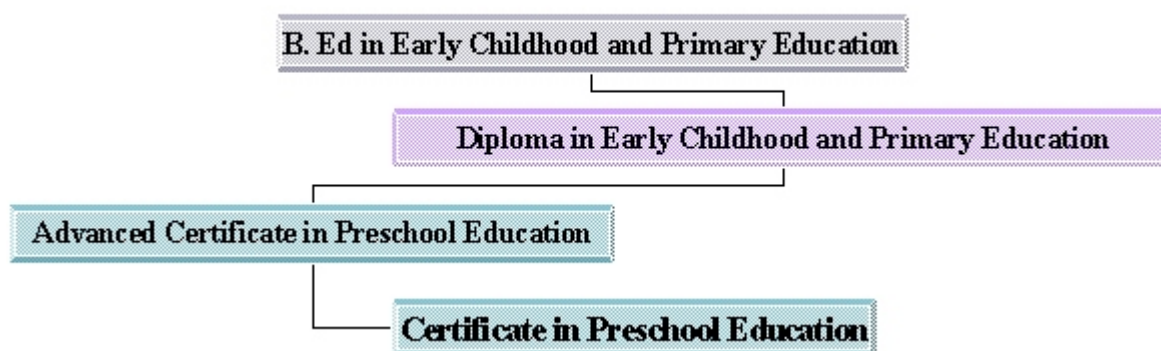
Sri Lankan Government's involvement in ECCE, when compared to general education is fairly recent. Although the OUSL has been conducting certificates (Advanced Certificate and Certificate programmes) in teacher training since its inception in 1980, opportunity for teachers to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in early childhood education was not available until the year 2006. It was in 2006 that the OUSL commenced offering the Diploma Programme in Early Childhood and Primary Education for those who are interested in progressing in the field of ECCE. This Diploma will lead to a Bachelor of Education Degree in Early



Childhood and Primary Education and when these Graduates pass out they stand a better chance to progress in their career. It is noteworthy that only one university i.e. Open University of Sri Lanka offers programmes for the professional development of ECCE care providers. However, opportunities are available at the OUSL as well as other universities with Faculties of Education for post graduate research degrees in ECCE. In the recent past ECCE has not been identified by policy makers in Sri Lanka as an area that makes an impact on the country's

development. As a result there is a dearth of specialised academics in the field of Early Childhood Education in Sri Lankan universities. Since investing on ECCE has been proved to be beneficial for a country's development, universities should design programmes for career development of caregivers. Unfortunately, in the present context where students have to face a highly competitive examination to enter universities one cannot expect them to select this field as a career for which the status as well as wages are not attractive.

**Figure 2.2: The Ladder for Professional Qualifications**



### 2.3.6 Provision of ECCE to vulnerable and disadvantaged children

Although National Policy has targeted “children with special needs” it has not identified street children, beggar children, and displaced children (due to war or other reasons) as a special category although they are a vulnerable and disadvantaged section. The implementation and expansion of the Home Based ECCD Programmes too has been rather slow in the districts of Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa while it is not implemented in the districts of Killinochchi, Mullaitivu and Mannar due to the conflict situation and limited man power. This will

therefore create a gap in implementing the ECCE and Education polices and achieving EFA goals.

According to National Policy on ECCD children with special needs are:

- children who are at a disadvantage due to physical or mental impairment
- children who have suffered abuse in the home or community
- children who have faced discontinuity in care due to loss of parents/care givers, and
- children who have faced deficiencies in health and psychosocial stimulation

The National ECCD Policy has incorporated special provisions for children with special needs to provide equal opportunities for their survival and optimum growth and development. The policy admits that these children should be addressed separately. However, policies targeting the unreached children mentioned above should be formulated and incorporated into the National policy if EFA goal 1 to be fully realised.

Lack of data on vulnerable and disadvantaged children makes it difficult to review the situation of these children. However, the following table on why children who do not attend preschools

would provide information pertaining to these vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

In the North Eastern provinces data is available only in two Districts due to the on going war. However, the table indicates that a considerable number (28384) of children are placed in disadvantaged situations due to disabilities and poverty. Children not attending preschools since there are no schools in the vicinity also indicate the facilities of the location where those children live. Therefore, these reasons provide cues to policy makers in taking appropriate actions to minimise disparities prevailing among children in the early childhood.

**Table 2.1: Why children do not attend preschools**

Province	Disability	Poverty	Long term illness	No schools in the vicinity	Preschool is not important	Total
Western	137	1036	196	341	847	2557
Southern	176	2064	45	362	906	3553
Sabaragamuwa	110	1049	40	413	1873	3485
Uva	161	1660	27	667	542	3057
North Western	92	3893	51	261	667	4964
Central	572	2729	208	1278	1778	6565
North Central	139	1072	71	181	1419	2882
North Eastern	43	693	3	141	441	1321
Total	1430	14196	641	3644	8473	28384

Source: The national survey to identify children who do not attend preschools, 2006

### Strategies adopted in the National Policy

Strategies adopted in implementing the National Policy are:

- create awareness of the rights of the differently able children
- encourage family/community based approaches
- create awareness and educate parents
- provide adequate information, guidance and support to parents •ensure availability of adequate professionals and well trained support staff to provide effective and efficient childcare
- provide training to caregivers
- provide specialist medical consultation
- provide adequate spaces in institutions for children who cannot be cared for at home or do not have homes
- support families at risk with counselling services information and education

- provide support to parents and family members looking after differently able children and
- undertake regular studies aimed at the development of special programmes and materials

These strategies will be adopted along with other strategies adopted in implementing the National Policy. Since poverty is one of the major factors behind children being vulnerable and disadvantaged the Ministry has established a National Children's Development Fund to provide financial assistance to needy children.

#### **Initiatives of the Ministry of Health**

The MoH has taken measures to provide services to vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The Family Health Bureau of the MoH has incorporated a policy on services for children with special needs into the drafted MCH Policy. The FHB is developing a programme to provide services to children with special needs focussing on the multidisciplinary approach. A record book for the children with special needs is also being developed by the MoH in order to facilitate recording of continuous care provided to such children thus strengthening linkages among various agencies working for disadvantaged children. Another progressive step taken by the MoH is appointing community paediatricians whose primary responsibility would be to provide services to children with special needs.

#### **Other initiatives**

The National Policy on Disability which has been accepted by the cabinet in 2003 could be described as another step taken by the Government to address this issue. This National Policy includes sectoral policies for children, women, school education, and health. However, this policy should be strengthened with appropriate regulations if it is to be implemented effectively.

## **2.4 Core EFA MDA ECCE Indicators**

### **2.4.1. The enrolment rates in ECCE programmes**

There are home based programmes, health programmes, crèches and preschools that serve the needs of children in the early childhood in Sri Lanka. All these programmes except preschools serve children from birth onwards to a relatively young age group. However, non availability of systematically updated comprehensive databases on a national level makes it difficult to provide a valid statistical picture of ECCE Programmes especially regarding 0-3 year old children.

Data related to preschool education is available with the Children's Secretariat and Divisional Councils since it is the most organised programme in ECCE. Nevertheless, it is regretful to note that a data base covering all the districts or divisional secretariats were not available with the Children's Secretariat or with some of the provincial councils at the time of writing this report. However, the following data would give a general idea of enrolment rates in preschool education in Sri Lanka.

There are 315 Divisional Secretariats in the 9 provinces in Sri Lanka. However, data on enrolment in preschools were available only in 185 divisional secretariats. The enrolment ratio of the preschool children in table above denotes the number of children enrolled in preschools as a ratio of total number of children between 3-5 years of age in the divisional secretariats of the nine provinces. Data pertaining to preschool children in the Northern Province as well as some divisional secretariats in the Eastern province are not available due to the prevailing disturbed situation.

**Table 2.2: Gross Enrolment Rate of Sri Lankan Preschool children**

Province	No of Divisions	No. of Preschools	No. who attend preschools	Gross Enrolment Rate
Western	27	2067	63861	94.08
Southern	39	1658	43442	85.02
Sabaragamuwa	21	1062	23017	57.15
Uva	20	874	19185	83.87
North Western	26	938	27019	83.17
Central	30	1796	48824	78.91
North Central	16	632	13827	80.00
North Eastern	06	220	5065	77.55
Total	185	9247	223540	79.95

Source: National Survey on Children who do not attend preschools (Children's Secretariat 2006)

The available data indicates that nearly 80% of children have enrolled in preschools in their respective divisional secretariats. The Western Province reports the highest access to school as well as the highest enrolment rate at 94%. The Sabaragamuwa Province reports the lowest at 57.15%. This rate indicates that, enrolment is limited to more than one third of the child population of preschool attending age in Sabaragamuwa Province. However, the overall picture depicted in the table is to a certain extent is not discouraging in respect of achieving EFA Goal 1. It could be said that the significant roles played by the government and the NGOs as well as INGOs have contributed towards increasing the enrolment levels in preschools in Sri Lanka.

The data in the below table includes preschools run by local government and Government institutions, NGOs and private institutions. Data could be disaggregated only by province.

#### **2.4.2 Percentage of New Entrants (NE) to Grade 1 who have Attended some form of Organised ECCE Programme**

Attending an ECCE programme prior to formal school will prepare children with necessary skills needed to perform well in school.

However, the quality of the ECCE programmes is the most important factor, which makes an impact on the overall performance of a child.

Although ECCE experience itself may not guarantee that a child will perform excellently in primary school it may develop a child's ability to build social relationships and help the child to overcome characteristics such as egocentrism, which are common to children in the early childhood. In that sense children who have ECCE experience will stand a better chance than their counterparts who have not gained any experience in an organised ECCE Programme.

The following Table presents new entrants to grade 1 who have attended some form of organised ECCE programmes from 2001-2005.