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Issues, Concerns and Prospects 35

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Early Childhood Education Policies in Asia Pacific

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Chapter 7

Early Childhood Development Policies in Nepal: Achievements, Learning, and Implications

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Abstract Since the 1990s, Nepal has witnessed a continuous increase in investment to improve accessibility of children to quality education. Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy has been introduced to promote academic success and holistic development in young children. Based on the analysis of data obtained from the governmental agencies, this chapter examines ECD policy in Nepal through the “3A2S” framework (Li, Wang, Fong, *Int J Chin Educ* 3(2):161–170, 2014). The analysis indicates mixed results. The ECD guidelines are clearly defined to apply throughout the country, and institutions are established at different levels. To date, more than 35,000 Early Childhood Development Centers (ECDCs) have been established to benefit more than one million young children annually. However, universal coverage has yet to be achieved. Accessibility and affordability of ECDCs vary across socioeconomic groups. Children living in remote locations and from poor economic conditions often lack accessibility to quality ECDCs, and thus the problem of social justice still needs to be addressed. Accountability measures are scattered and sustainability provisions are less elaborated and poorly enforced. This chapter identifies geographical and socioeconomic variables that shape the process and outcomes of the ECD policy implementation and highlights areas for improvement to achieve a balance among accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability, and social justice of ECD in Nepal.

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Introduction

Investment in early childhood years can have significant and lasting returns in terms of human development as compared to later investments in the life cycle. For instance, it can yield intergenerational benefits by improving the prospects for future generations to break the vicious circle of poverty. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) service is also a powerful equalizer. It lays a strong foundation for physical, mental, cognitive, and social-emotional competencies and skills on which children's survival and well-being depend. There is a compelling body of evidence suggesting that early deprivation in terms of nutrition, healthcare, parental care, early emotional attachments, positive stimulation, and learning environment can have irreversible and far-reaching consequences not only during childhood but throughout the adult life (Bagdi and Vacca 2005; Cunha et al. 2005; OECD 2006; Pollitt 1990; Young 1995). Evidence from neuroscience suggests that the human brain grows most rapidly during the prenatal period and postnatal period within 6 months (Shonkoff 2010). Accordingly, well-resourced ECEC can be a very significant "protective factor" in helping young children, parents, and other caregivers cope with adversities and provide children with a strong and healthy start (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2007; Shonkoff 2010).

Realizing the critical role of Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) in the process of human development, the Ministry of Education (MoE), Government of Nepal (GoN) in recent years have laid an emphasis on expansion of equitable and affordable early childhood development services. Early Childhood Development Centers (ECDCs) in Nepal are known by various names such as *day care centers*, *early childhood development centers*, *child care centers*, *nursery*, *kindergarten*, *preschool*, and *preprimary classes (PPCs)*. Conceptually and over time, there has been a shift in emphasis from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and from ECCE to ECDCs.¹ ECDC implies the centers for the overall development of children (UNESCO 2008). The GoN has emphasized universal coverage of ECDCs with an objective of helping achieve holistic development (i.e., physical, psychological, emotional, and cognitive) of a child.

In this chapter, we attempt to assess the implementation of the ECD policy through the "3A2S" framework (accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability, and social justice) (Li et al. 2014). The chapter has divided the contents into two major parts. The first part sets the overall context within which ECD policy is operationalized in Nepal. This includes understanding the concept, history, policy and legislative framework, implementation arrangements, and financing. The next part provides assessments of ECD policy implementation in reality. This includes

¹ In this chapter, the term Early Childhood Development Centers (ECDCs) refers to centers established and run to achieve the objective of Early Childhood Development. We have used ECDCs, ECD, and Early Childhood Education Development (ECED) interchangeably.

examining the ECD process and outcomes in terms of the 3A2S framework and highlighting the lessons learned.

Understanding the Concept of ECD

Like many other fields of knowledge, the concept of ECD also has its Western origin. Friedrich Froebel established the first kindergarten classes grounded in traditional religious values in Germany in the 1800s. Rachel and Margaret MacMillan established the first nursery school in London in 1910. Italian physician Maria Montessori introduced the Montessori method with its focus on individualized self-teaching within a carefully prepared teaching environment in 1906 (Shonkoff and Meisels 2000). However, the most significant expansion of ECDCs took place after the 1960s with the end of colonialism, establishment of independent states, and dramatic increase in female labor force participation in the world. Yet, in practice, ECDCs could not make headway until the 1990s. Even within United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), preprimary education was included in its program budget since the year 1971–1972 to provide assistance to member states (Kamerman 2006). The problems facing the expansion and advancement of preprimary education were numerous including unclear benefits, scarce funds, a lack of agreement as to which government agency should have primary responsibility for policy, and a scarcity of qualified teachers. It was only after the 1990s, particularly following the Jomtien Declaration, the Dakar Framework of Action (DFA), and the “World Conference on Education for All,” that ECD agenda received more attention (Kamerman 2006; White 2011; Woodhead 2006). “Education for All” explicitly aimed at expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education for all children with a specific focus on the vulnerable and disadvantaged children (i.e., children living in remote locations and those belonging to economically poor and socially marginalized caste and ethnic groups). The issue was taken up internationally by national governments, United Nations (UN) agencies, and the World Bank, as well as by numerous other regional agencies and nongovernmental organizations. Moreover, ECD policies were increasingly informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and by the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (Kamerman 2006; White 2011; Woodhead 2006).

History of Education and Evolution of ECDC in Nepal

During the hereditary oligarchic Rana’s rule (1846–1950) in Nepal, education was exclusively reserved for palace elite. Expansion of education was perceived as a threat to their power. Receiving tuition of any kind was considered to be a capital offense (Caddell 2007; Onta 1996; Shields and Rappleye 2008). In the period

following the dawn of democracy (1951–1959), education was expanded to the masses as an avenue to achieving individual, social, and national development. Nation building was construed in terms of assimilation of different social identities and minority languages (Caddell 2007; Onta 1996). Diverse ethnic and linguistic groups in Nepal found themselves at a disadvantage, a problem that was attributed to the slow expansion of the education system and low retention rates in many areas (Caddell 2007; Shields and Rappleye 2008).

The establishment of the Montessori School in Kathmandu in 1948 marks the beginning of early childhood education in Nepal (MoE 2009b:78). However, the expansion was rather slow during the next four decades. In 1960, King Mahendra dissolved the parliament and established a partyless *panchayat* system stating that it was better than the parliamentary system and “rooted in the native soil and climate.” The dominant slogan of the ruling system became *ek bhasa, ek bhesh, ek dhesh* (one language, one dress, one nation) (Caddell 2007; Onta 1996). It was the same time Nepal Children’s Organization (NCO) introduced ECED program by establishing childcare centers in the districts. Since one district had only one branch of the NCO, the coverage of childcare center was limited to the district headquarters only and rest of the communities had no access. Most of these childcare centers established during the early 1960s by the NCO have now been upgraded to primary and secondary schools (MoE 2009b). The National Education System Plan (NESP) introduced in 1971 was tailored to achieve the vision of unified modern nation (Caddell 2007; Onta 1996; Shields and Rappleye 2008). Modernization in education, in such a unified form, downplayed and marginalized the minorities’ perspectives, cultures, and languages.

The opening of preschool education classes by private schools from the early 1970s made ECD services more accessible to a larger number of children in the country. The implementation of rural development projects in the mid-1980s like *Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW)* and *Small Farmers Development Project (SFDP)*, which aimed at bettering farmer women, emphasized on the establishment of childcare centers to free the mothers from childcare responsibilities and let them focus on income-generating activities (UNESCO 2008). ECDCs in its current forms were established and expanded in Nepal since the 1990s. It is one of the important elements of the School Sector Reform Program (SSRP) today and is operational in line with the Dakar Framework of Action for EFA (2001–2015). ECDCs involve children aged 3–5 years and aim at facilitating their physical, social, emotional, and mental development. There are school-based and community-based ECDCs alongside privately managed PPCs. Age group, services, and fee modalities differ according to the types and resources of the providers. For example, ECDCs in public schools offer 1-year free access for all children ages 4–5. Communities managed ECDCs primarily cater to children ages 2–4 years and are free to all. These centers receive technical support from the Department of Education (DoE) and District Education Offices (DEOs). Private schools usually offer 3 years of PPCs at the nursery, lower kindergarten, and upper kindergarten levels and target children between 3 and 5 years. Wide ranges of services are available in private schools. The cost of attendance to PPCs ranges from less than NRs 500 to more than NRs 15,000

a month (equivalent to US\$5–150 per month) depending on the services offered. With the increasing number of women working in formal sectors, there is also a growing trend toward establishing day care centers by the private sector and non-government organizations. The analysis of such day care centers is not included in this review. Instead, this review focuses on ECDCs run and managed by the public schools and communities.

Analysis of Policies and Legislative Framework

In general, ECD-related policies and legislative framework answer the questions like *What* (type, quality, content, and pedagogy), *Whom* (beneficiaries), *How much* (scale of provision and investment), *by Whom* (provider and payers – the government, the private sector, the individual parents), and *How* (structure and organization of service delivery) (Hasan 2007). Answers to these questions depend on the country's own context.

ECDC-related policies and legislations in Nepal are reflected in a number of documents; some are dedicated entirely to ECDCs, and others serve as useful reference points. The Interim Constitution (2007 Article 22) as well as recently promulgated Constitution of Nepal (2015) protects the right of children to identity and name, as well as to basic health, education, and social security, protection from physical, mental, and other forms of violence, and calls for special provisions to protect the orphaned, destitute, mentally challenged, conflict-affected, displaced, and street children. It also stipulates that no minor should be engaged in factories, mines or similar kinds of hazardous work, in the army or police, or in conflict (MoLJPA 2007, 2015).

The Basic and Primary Education Master Plan (1997–2002), the Education for All (EFA) Core Document (2004–2009), Strategic Paper for Early Childhood Development in Nepal, School Sector Reform Plan (2009–2015), Multi-sectoral Nutrition Plan (MSNP), and Education for All National Plan of Action (EFA/NPA) 2001–2015 along with the Education Act (1971) and Education Rules (2001) constitute the core documents, determining the contours of ECDCs in Nepal (MoES 2003, 2004; MoE 2009a; NPC 2013b). Besides these, subsequent periodic development plans of the GoN, National Plan of Action for Children, and particularly Local Self-Governance Act (1999) also contain provisions related to ECDCs (MoWCSW 2012; NPC 2002, 2007, 2010, 2013c). All of these documents together set the rules for the engagement of government, private sector, and other stakeholders and for the functioning of the centers. Though many of these policy documents have common themes and thrusts related to the need of ECD opportunities for young children and provisions of the ECDCs, an integrated policy document could give a greater sense of coherence and unity of purpose. Together all of these policy documents promise all preprimary-age children with at least 1 year of special service that addresses both preschool preparation and overall development needs.

While the policies mentioned above emphasize both the supply and demand sides of interventions to improve the accessibility and affordability, the Guidelines as well as Act and Rules tend to focus more on accountability and procedures. Together, they call for continuation and expansion of free school-based and community-based ECDCs and entrust local government bodies with the responsibility of managing them. Policies also underline the need to target remote districts and children from disadvantaged groups². Policies also underscore the need for enhanced partnerships with international nongovernment organizations (INGOs), nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and private sector in establishing and running ECD centers to increase the coverage (MoES 1997, 2003, 2004; MoE 2009a). They also call for an inclusive approach and synergies across sectors/subsectors focusing on cognitive development, nonformal education, mobile health clinics, school meal program, school health program, nutrition, health, Female Community Health Volunteers, and parental education along with information and communication. The important role of women facilitators is also acknowledged (UNESCO 2008). The NPA and SSRP adopt a demand-driven approach with partial government support for urban and accessible areas and full support for the centers in deprived and disadvantaged areas/communities. Policies also envisaged for establishing at least one and four ECDCs in each Village Development Committee (VDC) and municipality, respectively, by 2007 and encouraging innovative and community-based initiatives for expansion.

The Basic and Primary Education Master Plan (1997–2002) concentrates on the educational part of early childhood development of children ages 4–5 (MoES 1997) and underlines the need for concerted efforts to expand quality primary and preprimary education services throughout the country. Recognizing a need for multi-sectoral efforts for ECD as envisioned in the plan, the GoN has established a multi-ministerial National Steering Committee (NSC) on Early Childhood Care and Education under the leadership of National Planning Commission (NPC). Other ministries in the committee include Ministries of Education (MoE); Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD); Women, Children, and Social Welfare (MoWCSW); Health and Population (MoHP); and Information and Communication (MoIC). The committee is of the highest authority for overall policy making, coordination, and monitoring related to ECD in Nepal.

Reiterating many of the provisions of other plans and strategies mentioned above, strategic paper for ECDCs has assigned the full responsibility of the establishment and operation of the centers to VDCs and municipalities with government support (MoES 1997). The local governments are also expected to leverage the resource and mobilize locally in collaboration with other nongovernment actors. The strategy has envisioned the role of the government and its functionaries on: policy and program development, decentralized implementation and monitoring of parental education, and capacity building for effective functioning of ECDCs (ibid).

²“Disadvantaged groups” here denote individuals and households who are economically poor and socially excluded on the basis of remoteness, caste, ethnicity, religion, and gender.

On the matter of social justice, most of these policy documents underline the needs to reach out to the children of disadvantaged groups. SSRP also emphasizes the equity aspects of ECDCs and intends to expand free access to quality ECDCs focusing on those unreached. For example, ECDCs of 29 districts with low human development index (HDI) are provided with day meals so as to attract children from poor and food insecure households. The current phase of SSRP (2009–2015) identifies three key results to achieve by 2015 in relation of ECD. They are (a) 87 % of 4-year-old children gain ECD experience, (b) minimum standards for the ECD are met by all ECD centers, and (c) 64 % of children entering grade 1 have ECD experience (MoE 2009a).

All subsequent periodic plans have also focused on four broad objectives of education sector in terms of improvement of access, quality, equity, and governance. The plans underline the need for attracting children to ECDCs by creating a child-friendly environment conducive for their physical, emotional, mental, social, and psychological development and by eliminating all forms of exploitation, abuse, risks, and discriminations (NPC 2002, 2007, 2010, 2013c).

One of the strategic thrusts of current Thirteenth Plan (2013/2014–2015/2016) is to expand ECDC services in a coordinated way based on facility mapping and collaboration of government with local bodies, communities, and nongovernment organizations (NPC 2013c). The *LSGA* (MoLJPA 1999) entrusts local governments – VDCs and municipalities – with responsibility to establish preprimary schools/centers by themselves and to issue permission to community-based organizations (CBOs) or NGOs to establish such centers following the nationally set minimum standards. The Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) initiative implemented by MoFALD includes several indicators of child survival, protection, and development like immunization, breast-feeding, access to safe drinking water, and birth registration as indicators to measure the performance of local government. The MoFALD has earmarked 35 % percent of the total block grant provided to VDCs for projects designed to empower children, women, and other disadvantaged groups. This can be and has been used for establishing and running ECDCs targeting marginalized communities in several districts.

There are no policies or legislations focusing specifically on accountability and sustainability specific to ECDC services. However, though generic in nature, there are many acts, rules, and directives related to accountability that are applicable to all sectors including the ECDCs. Similarly, the outcome and effect of some of the accountability-related provisions such as Financial Acts and Rules and Procurement Acts and Rules and governance-related directives and guidelines apply beyond ECDCs and education, aiming at improving the accountability and transparency in service delivery as a whole. Some of the examples include *Seva Abhiyan Nirdesika* (service delivery directives) (OPMCM 2008) and National Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines (NPC 2013a). These provisions and institutional mechanisms require compliance from all sectors including that of ECD programs. Similarly, oversight agencies like Public Account Committee in Parliament, National Vigilance Centre, Commission on Investigation of Abuse of Authority, and Office of the Auditor General, which are mandated to ensure accountability, can also exercise

their authorities across all sectors and subsectors. Overall, a good number of policy documents and legislations are in place, emphasizing the improvement in the accessibility, affordability, and equity aspects of ECDCs. But accountability and sustainability aspects remain relatively less articulated. However, as elsewhere, two tensions continue to interfere in the whole policy and practices related to ECDCs in Nepal. One is related to the roles and responsibilities of parents/families and government/state, while the other is the degree to which education and care should be integrated (Hasan 2007). This ambivalence can be detected in policy and programs, which is accentuated by budgetary and capacity constraints.

Implementation Strategies and Institutional Arrangements

The Department of Education (DOE) has established norms and developed operational guidelines, which outline the minimum enabling conditions for setting up and running ECDCs. It entrusts the local government to provide a facilitator, build his/her competence, and provide financial resource and educational materials to the centers. Process wise, an organization aspiring to establish ECDC needs to apply to the concerned VDC or the municipality in a prescribed format with evidence of meeting the following prerequisite infrastructure (DoE 2005):

- (a) A wide, open, peaceful, and safe building
- (b) At least half a *Ropani*³ (in hills and mountains) or one *Kattha*⁴ of land (in Terai) in addition to the building
- (c) Provision of children park or playground
- (d) Provision of clean and healthy drinking water and toilet
- (e) Provision of at least two caretakers for 15–25 children

In addition, the ECDC rooms should have proper flooring, adequate number of child-friendly furniture, or mattresses, leaning corners, cupboards, and display boards (MoES 2004).

This infrastructure is followed by an assessment of the application and approval if basic criteria are met. Local government reserves rights to withdraw approval if the implementing organization does not comply with the terms and conditions agreed beforehand (MoLJPA 2002). ECDCs receive grant from the government on the basis of recommendation by District Education Officer. ECDC training packages, curricula, and learning materials are developed to cater to local needs and address children's diversity (DoE 2005). Networking of the relevant institutions is created to facilitate sharing of reference materials, knowledge, and experience for optimum benefit to each other. Membership in the ECDC National Network is open

³ *Ropani* is local measurement for land used in the hills region of Nepal. One *Ropani* is equivalent to 5476 sq feet or 0.05 ha. Half a *Ropani* is equivalent to 2738 sq feet or 0.025 ha.

⁴ *Kattha* is local measurement of land used in the Terai (plain) belt of Nepal. One *Kattha* is equivalent to nearly 3724 sq feet or 0.034 ha.

for all organizations and individuals working at the national level. Similarly, at the district/VDC/municipality levels, a provision for network of ECDC service providers has been made. These local and national level networks are used to harmonize action and measures at different levels (UNESCO 2008).

There is a provision of an ECDC Management Committee on the chairpersonship of a parent in which members consisting of one of the ward⁵ chairpersons of VDC/municipalities, the representatives of local CBOs, the head teacher of nearby school, and the parents. The committee is responsible for the establishment, running, and monitoring of centers (DoE 2005). Similarly, they mobilize and utilize the resources to recruit, develop, and monitor the performance of the facilitators and ensure community participation in the operation of center. The network of community-managed schools is encouraged and mobilized to run preprimary classes or child development centers wherever feasible (UNESCO 2008). Community participation is sought in the entire process from establishment to operation and from monitoring to evaluation. Parenting education and parental orientation programs are initiated to make the parents aware of the importance of ECDC services. Mass media is also being used to mobilize the stakeholders and raise their awareness (ibid).

Each ECDC run by the government has a provision of one facilitator with a basic qualification of school leaving certificate (SLC) (i.e., a national level board examination after the completion of tenth grade in school). Though the facilitators are not termed as “teachers,” they are used as teachers for early grades in primary schools. Emphasis is given to recruiting local female facilitators. The new facilitators receive 16-day basic training to facilitate ECDCs. These are followed by 12-day refresher training and other short-term training as needed. The salary of community- and public school-managed facilitators is at minimum, amounting to approximately US\$25 a month. MoE terms it as “seed money” and expects local government to support these facilitators. However, only few schools and local government are reported to provide them with supplements to their official salary. Because of this low remuneration, retention of facilitators remains a challenge. Turnover of facilitators is reported to be high in most of areas (Cumming et al. 2012). However, the numbers of facilitators per PPC, minimum qualification, and associated benefits differ from that of public schools and vary depending on the size of the classes, scale, and resources of the private school.

There are several institutions involved at different levels to make ECDCs more effective and for monitoring purposes. As stipulated by Basic and Primary Education Master Plan (1997–2002), a NSC is constituted under NPC at the central level to ensure sectoral coordination in policies and programs (MoES 1997, 2004). Similarly, Central Early Childhood Development Council has been formed under the MoE constituting of representatives from Ministries of Health and Population, Federal Affairs and Local Development, Women Children and Social Welfare, and relevant United Nations (UN) agencies and NGOs. The council is a decisive body to set

⁵Ward is the lowest administrative unit in Nepal. One Village Development Committees (VDC) consists nine wards.

curriculum and standards for ECDCs. The council also coordinates ECDC-related activities across all sectors for synergy. It conducts review, prepares periodic progress report, and explores ways for sustaining the programs at different levels (DoE 2005; MoES 2004; UNICEF 2011).

At the executive level, MoE is responsible for policymaking, forging collaborations and partnerships, mobilizing resources, and overseeing the implementation (DoE 2005; MoES 1997, 2004). An interagency coordination committee chaired by Director General has been set up under DoE since 2008 bringing together wide range of stakeholders from government, INGOs, and external development partners (UNICEF 2011). The DoE prepares annual and periodic programs and sets targets and indicators on ECDCs. The DoE is responsible for implementing existing policy and legal provisions in collaboration with different stakeholders. It also provides technical backstopping to organizations that are running ECDCs in communities; prepares and distributes learning, teaching, and reference materials; and develops networks of ECD centers for sharing and exchange (DoE 2005). In addition to the DoE, MoE also has provision of Regional Education Directorates (REDs) to engage in monitoring and supervision of implementation process in respective regions (ibid).

At the district's level, District Early Childhood Development Committee is constituted under the chair of District Development Committees (DDCs) for program management, coordination, monitoring, and resource mobilization. ECDCs' focal persons are designated in all 75 administrative districts that are responsible to facilitate and coordinate activities at the district levels (DoE 2005). These focal persons are linked to 1053 Resource Centers (RCs) throughout the country. RCs are responsible for technical backstopping and monitoring.

Despite all of these multilayered actors and institutional arrangements for implementation and monitoring, the effectiveness suffer due to number of shortcomings and constraints. For example, the capacity development plan prepared by the MoE focuses on training of ECD facilitators but is not explicit on capacity building of the ECDC Management Committees at VDC/district levels and ECDC Coordination Committees and caretakers. There is a conspicuous lack of emphasis on data collection, collation, and reporting at ECDC levels. The flash report does not include data and information on the number and training status of facilitator, nor does it show facilitator-children ratio. Although the flash reports cover both school- and community-based ECDC enrolment data, it is the schools that are given the responsibility of collecting data from community-based ECDCs. This is problematic not only because the schools do not have sufficient time and resources but also because it heightens the risks of inaccurate reporting of data.

Financing

Financial investment for ECDCs comes from public, private, and community contributions. Despite emphasizing its importance throughout major policies and programs related to education and children development, only about 5% of total education budget is allocated for ECDCs from the government that accounts for less than 0.1% of the GDP (The World Bank 2013a). The total cost allocated to early childhood development in School Sector Reform Plan where ECDC is one of the important elements is US\$62.87 million for 5 years.

The plan has acknowledged resource constraints for universal access and therefore has envisaged mobilization of additional funds through local governments, INGOs, NGOs, voluntary groups, civil society, and community organizations as well as from the parents' contribution (MoE 2009a). Within the government system, Financial Comptroller General Office (FCGO) tracks expenditure across the sectors. However, the fragmentation of programs and implementing agencies makes it difficult to come up with a consolidated report on expenditure at the district as well as at national levels. There is a lack of data to indicate the actual level of financing in the ECDCs that combines all investment from government, local bodies, community, and private sectors. Nor there have been effective efforts to coordinate funding between GOs, NGOs, and development partners. In many instances, funding agencies directly fund NGOs without reporting to the relevant government agencies and absence of elected local government since almost two decades has resulted into limited capacity of the local bodies to explore, coordinate, and regulate investment on and functioning of ECDCs in the districts.

Understanding the Accessibility of ECD Policies in Nepal

One of the main strategies to achieve the goal of “Education for All” is to increase the number of ECDCs especially in remote and disadvantaged communities (DoE 2015). As Fig. 7.1 shows, there has been a continuous increase in the ECDC facilities over the past 10 years throughout Nepal. Until 2014, there have been 35,121 ECDCs in the country that serve more than one million children every year.

As the figure shows, community-school-based ECDCs dominate with more than 85% share in total as compared to less than 15% run and managed by institutional (private) schools. This comparison indicates that access to school is a prerequisite for many children to attend ECDCs. In terms of coverage among children, in academic year 2014–2015 alone, a total of 1,014,339 children attended ECDCs, representing about 59% of the total population of children aged 3–5 years in Nepal. About 41% of children ages 3–5 years still have no access to ECDCs. Though Nepal has achieved gender parity in basic and secondary school enrollment, the ratio of girls to boys is 0.93 in ECDC attendance (DoE 2015).

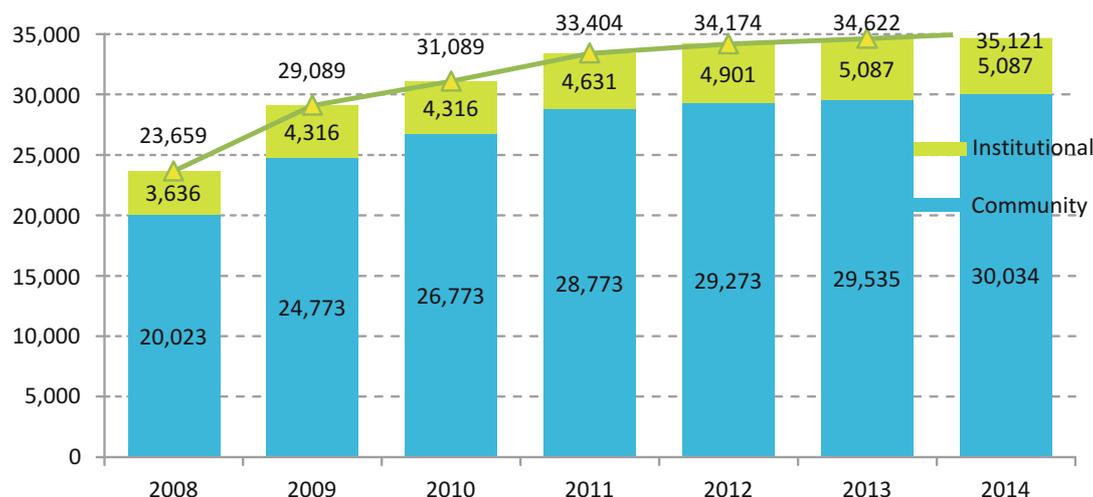


Fig. 7.1 Trends in the growth of ECDCs in the last 7 years (Source: Flash Report, MoE 2014/2015)

Despite the government strategy to expand the coverage of ECDCs throughout the country, universal access is still a distant goal. Some districts and communities, especially in remote villages, are not aware of the ECDC policy and provisions. Most of the ECDCs are still concentrated in urban and semi-urban areas. In some cases, ECDCs are established far from villages and therefore are inaccessible to young children. Poor road conditions and a lack of transportation facilities and lack of bridges across the rivers, particularly in the mid hills and higher mountains, remain important inhibiting factors. The community's engagement has worked well in most of the cases to expand the coverage. However, in some cases, they find the conditions set up by the local government and DoE too demanding to establish the center. Private schools and preprimary classes are also usually concentrated in more accessible areas. With these reasons, despite the government's plan to achieve universal coverage, access to ECDC facilities continues to be limited to the children, especially for those living in remote, marginal areas, and therefore the achievement of universal coverage is far from satisfactory. There is a need for a greater level of effort and collaboration on the part of government and other stakeholders to expand the coverage of ECDCs, reach the unreached, retain the reached, and help those retained to transition into grade 1.

Physical access is only one of the elements of accessibility as quality of service also determines access. Defining quality of education is always difficult, and once defined, measuring it is fraught with dangers (Cumming et al. 2012). The quality of ECDCs is determined by a number of factors, one of them being facilitator-child ratio. The present average facilitator-child ratio in ECDCs is 1:29, which falls short of the desired ratio of 1:20 (ibid). The ECDCs hosted by community schools have one teacher/facilitator each with the total number of facilitators standing at 30,034 at the moment.⁶ The preprimary classes run by private school usually allocate two teachers per class, but this is not the case in the majority of community-based and

⁶However, the exact number of total facilitators throughout the country is not available.

public school-managed centers. The situation is mostly attributed to the resource constraints.

Larger teacher-child ratio affects the ability of the teacher to pay individual attention to the children.

Another important factor in determining quality is related to the availability of trained human resources and physical and material well-being of the centers. Usually, the community and public schools managed ECDCs are constrained due to the lack of adequate level of physical infrastructure, learning materials, and trained human resources. The midterm evaluation of SSRP has suggested measures for improving quality by developing standards for ECDCs, providing adequate training to facilitators, developing a curriculum for the centers that relates to the age of the children, and engaging children in learning through play/activity and through their mother tongue (Cumming et al. 2012). Though the government has put a number of measures to improve the quality of both school-based and community-based centers with increased provisions of training and material support (MoE 2009a), a challenge that remains is to achieve minimum quality standard and uniformity across the country.

Understanding the Affordability of ECD Policies in Nepal

The concept of affordability is often understood in terms of monetary resources. However, affordability can also have connotations that are beyond the monetary or material resources. It may imply other more “symbolic” forms of payment including the costs in terms of time, “privacy or negative social and psychological consequences” (Roose and De Bie 2003: 478; Vandenbroeck and Lazzari 2014). In the context of low-income countries like Nepal, parents may not be able or willing to arrange ECD experience for the children. Therefore, basic education in public schools including preprimary schools and ECDCs is free in Nepal with learning materials. In most cases, school uniforms are not mandatory. Parents may incur some transportation costs. Thus, the direct private costs of ECDCs appear to be minimal for parents. In additions, in many districts (29 out of 75) that are characterized by low human development index (HDI) and/or low primary school enrolment and high dropout rates, children are provided with day meals to motivate attendance and retention. In private facilities, which constitute 14.5% of the total, however, parents need to pay for enrolment and meal as well as for the care and learning materials.

The government has introduced two outreach programs that are being piloted to address the issue of affordability. One is home-based child development program which extends interventions at the household level by focusing on children below 3 years of age. It brings together parents, grandparents, and other members of the family and provides them with information and knowledge about early childhood development. The family members in turn are expected to execute the knowledge in their daily care practices. The target children are engaged with and provided learn-

ing opportunities by other family members through interactions, inspirational behaviors, songs, and stories. The second outreach program is called entrance program, which is catered to children between 18 and 36 months of age. In this scheme, ECDCs are run in neighborhoods with seven to ten families as a group. The mothers are provided with orientation and training and are entrusted to apply concept of ECD to their children (DoE 2010). These interventions are still in the pilot phase and their effectiveness is yet to observe.

The stigma and discriminations attached to certain caste groups, particularly the Dalit, are progressively reduced which can be seen by the increasing enrolment rates among Dalit children. However, the availability and affordability of programs do not necessarily make provision accessible, as there are multiple obstacles, such as language barriers, limited knowledge of bureaucratic procedures involved in admission, and long waiting lists to get enrolment tend to exclude children from poor and especially new immigrant families (Vandenbroeck and Lazzari 2014). These barriers are not uniformly distributed in a highly diverse society like Nepal. Yet there are a few common barriers that influence the perception of affordability of programs for children among the parents. First, there is a low level of awareness among parents and communities, particularly in the rural areas of government provisions for ECDCs. Many rural women still consider sending children to ECDCs as unnecessary and expensive, as they are not fully aware of its importance on child development and free provisions of these programs by the government. Second, the coverage and quality of parenting education have been far less than required. Third, the learning environment and materials available at the centers often fail to attract the parents and children especially when the languages differ. Many of the parents, especially in urban and semi-urban communities, prefer to send their children to privately run centers, where available, on fee-paying basis because of the public perception that private is better in quality. Fourth, there is a high turnover rate of teachers in these programs due to a poor incentive structure, resulting in a lack of continuity. Fifth, there is an absence of effective regulating and monitoring mechanism to ensure that the centers are providing high-quality education to the children. Sixth, it is generally agreed that in poorer communities, the level of funding is too low to provide quality services. Retaining ECDC facilitators has remained a challenge unless communities are able to provide additional funding (Moriani 2012). Finally, though the local government bodies have increased their involvement according to the emphasis on CFLG, the system itself has not taken ECD agenda seriously nor has internalized its significance. As Vandenbroeck and Lazzari (2014) argued, policies that address the issues of accessibility and affordability should be planned at the local level, starting from the analysis of barriers that prevent children from different economic and social groups from using provision. This sensitivity, ownership, and capability of local bodies are yet to be realized, and lack of elected local government since almost two decades in the country has further aggravated the situation.

Understanding the Accountability of ECD Policies in Nepal

Making schools “accountable” is the current *mantra* of politicians, business leaders, and school administrators and has become a centerpiece of school reform programs (Hatch and Grieshaber 2002). In general, accountability systems refer to the mechanisms and instruments used to ensure that individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions meet their obligations (Hatch 2013). It carries a host of concepts and tools. Accountability components can include well-defined outcomes and a system of national tests and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that minimum quality standard is being met. It also needs to specify clear performance targets, develop more sophisticated monitoring systems, establish significant incentives and rewards for meeting those targets, and ensure that the system has expertise, motivation, financial, and human resources to function adequately (ibid).

Overall a well-functioning ECDC entails promoting two key aspects of accountability: answerability for the achievement of short-term goals and responsibility for the fulfillment of broader purposes. Nepal faces challenges associated with building capacity for both. Developing policies that address both answerability and responsibility and responding to the cultural, geographic, political, and economic realities are two major challenges (cf Hatch 2013) faced by the country. While accountability is important for the functioning of governance and the effectiveness of ECDCs, some scholars have advised caution against wholesale marketing of accountability framework as it can have serious negative consequences for young children’s experiences in early childhood programs (Hatch and Grieshaber 2002). As Kohn (2001) cautions, too much emphasis on accountability framework might create a situation when both teachers and children face heightened pressures for performance and can detract from true learning or at least interfere the learning process. Yet the absence of accountability framework can lead to another extreme of anarchy.

The education sector in Nepal suffers from a lack of a well-established accountability framework. Accountability provisions and procedures are scattered in various policy statements, program documents, Education Act, Education Rules, and other more generic rules applicable to all sectors of government. The enforcement of these policies and legal provisions are weak. Midterm review (MTR) of SSRP hinted that the large increase in funding have been creating perverse incentives leading to unintended consequences. It also advised stakeholders to develop a “robust accountability system” along with a viable system of incentives, linked to consequence for poor performance (Cumming et al. 2012). The emphasis on decentralization and empowerment of the local tiers of government for improving service delivery at the local level and the extensive roles assigned to local communities for managerial and monitoring functions of ECDCs have not been effective due to prolonged absence of elected local government and political instability in the country. As Moriani (2012:11) argued, it is “a situation in which decentralized delivery is carried out in the absence of decentralized government,” and the accountability context of ECD policy is not immune to the situation. The DEO is overloaded and unable to monitor the growing ECD centers in the districts.

Though a number of accountability mechanisms including the Public Accounts Committee, the Office of the Auditor General, the Department for Revenue Investigations, the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority, the National Vigilance Centre, and the Public Procurement Monitoring Office have been put in place to ensure accountability, none of them reach at the level of local schools and ECDCs. Center Management Committees in the communities are far from being capable for effective monitoring and ensuring accountability. The Right to Information Act was introduced in 2007, but due to procedural hurdles and costs involved, access to information continues to be constrained. These central level institutions and accountability process continue to be centric with limited reach at local levels where services are delivered (Moriani 2012). Similarly, a number of rules, regulations, manuals, and directions have been developed and disseminated. There exists a significant disconnect among teacher performance, incentives, and downward accountability (ibid). Similarly, there is an absence of organized, citizen-friendly mechanisms for public grievance redress. This contributes to general problems in accountability and discipline in the ways ECDCs are run today (ibid).

Midterm review of SSRP highlights a need to develop tools to make the implementers accountable for results by strengthening outcome monitoring and evaluation systems and to detect deviations and see whether or to what extent the programs achieved desired results (World Bank 2011 as cited in Cumming et al.) in order to enhance effectiveness of ECDCs. However, in practice, monitoring hardly takes place at the community levels, and when it does, it is based on input and not on outcomes. International evidence suggests that decentralized management is only effective when there is a strong accountability framework and incentive structure. There is some evidence suggesting that student achievement may suffer in decentralized systems in developing countries with weak governance structures (Cumming et al. 2012). The multiplicity of players and interventions reduce opportunities for streamlined, coordinated, and aligned implementation (ibid). The situation suggests that accountability in the education sector in Nepal is fragmented with the absence of an overarching education policy as each program- and project-specific policy (e.g., TEVET and nonformal education) proposes separate accountability systems, and often there is absence of effective coordination. Moreover, the accountability process is currently central government centric, while services are delivered at the local level and is therefore less effective (ibid).

For the local level, the government has introduced provisions of social audits, which have been tied up with fund release. In theory, the ECD centers are also required to conduct social audits every year. In practice, however, there is a weak enforcement of this provision. As Moriani (2012:11) illustrated, funds for ECDCs have been released even to the schools and centers that did not comply with social audit requirements. Where they are carried out, most often, the social audit activities and issues revolve around statements of income and expenditure of the center. The audits rarely cover the issues of accessibility, affordability, equity among the social groups, and quality of services. In addition, despite the wide acknowledgment of social audit process as an effective community-based oversight mechanism to

strengthen accountability, the process often ends as a ritual and therefore currently adds little value in terms of outcomes (ibid).

Understanding the Sustainability of ECD Policies in Nepal

Sustainability lacks generally binding operationalization (Hartmuth et al. 2008). The survival and welfare of systems are dependent on the well-being of the societies in which they are embedded (Link 2007). Mostly the case of sustainability is made in financial and environmental terms. According to Fiorino (2010), the challenge of sustainability involves appropriate balance among three systems: environmental, economic, and political/social. A major deficiency in common definitions is their narrow focus on political/social dimension. Social equity, fairness, participation, legitimacy, as well as just and effective governance – rule of law, integrity systems, security, and stability – are important to ensure sustainability. In the Nepalese case, program and institutional sustainability is usually measured in the context of financial sustainability. However, ensuring participation of relevant stakeholders in decision-making is equally important for the sustainability of process as well as outcomes.

Decentralization has been one of the key strategies in sustainable implementation of ECD centers. The LSGA has entrusted local governments with the responsibilities of establishing and running ECD centers in partnerships with NGOs, CBOs, and local groups. Guidelines empower the local government bodies with responsibility to coordinate and authority to approve/disapprove establishment of ECDCs, to monitor and sanction (DoE 2005). There is an increasing trend of different actors working together based on their expertise in coordination of DDCs. And all relevant stakeholders and partners are involved in planning jointly for the consolidation and expansion of ECD centers in the districts (UNESCO 2008). Since 2012, GoN has launched a new initiative of developing integrated district-level ECD plans. These plans aim to establish a coordinated planning of ECD centers from all stakeholders (private sector, government, and communities) and ensure equitable distribution of the centers across the districts. District Education Office has responsibility for coordination and enforcement of such integrated plans. So far, 20 districts, out of 75, are implementing such integrated plan for ECD centers. It is expected that such plans will help institutionalize ECDCs at the level of local government and help ensure sustainability of the ECD centers.⁷

Midterm review of SSRP highlights some evidence that government partnerships with NGOs and local communities have resulted in successful outcomes in sustaining ECDCs in terms of both finance and quality. Some DEOs have mobilized local resources for strengthening ECDCs to sustain them. However, there is a wide

⁷According to DoE records, districts implementing integrated plans for ECDC are Jumla, Mugu, Dolpa, Kalikot, Jajarkot, Bajura, Bajhang, Achham, Rukum, Baglung, Rautahat, Mahottari, Parsa, Dhanusha, Saptari, Panchthar, Sarlahi, Siraha, Rupandehi, and Udaypur.

variation in the ECDC models, and the result indicates the need to map and analyze different approaches for achieving efficacy. Stakeholders' participation in decision-making is ensured through ECDC Management Committees, but there is a need for strengthening capacity of the committee and its members, especially from the communities. In the case of poorer communities, the available resources are inadequate (Cumming et al. 2012). For sustainability, it is critical that the local government bodies internalize ECDCs as their mainstream agenda and own the process of its institutionalization. As Moriani (2012) noted, a stronger change management process needs to be in place, to enable smooth functioning of the local governments and to pave the way for improving the performance of SSRP in general and by extension of ECDCs and their sustainability component in particular.

The MTR also noted capacity gap among School Management Committees and Parent Teacher Associations to perform complex management and oversight tasks at the local level. A larger proportion of capacity-building funds are used at the central level, while a need to address the capacity gap is more at the local, i.e., districts and community levels. It is important to reorient capacity development efforts away from center (MoE and DoE) to district and schools to sustain the process as well as outcomes of ECDCs. The resource persons (RPs) and the school supervisors are important links in the chain for support and supervisions of ECDCs, yet they are provided with little incentives and opportunities for professional development (ibid). ECDC facilitators receive inadequate level of training and remuneration resulting in a lack of motivation and frequent turnover. These entire situations affect the sustainability of the program.

Understanding the Social Justice of ECD Policies in Nepal

Social justice is a complex and difficult concept to define as it means different things to different people and has temporal and spatial aspects (Rizvi 1998). Gewirtz (2006) drew our attention to multidimensional nature of justice with potential to conflict between its different facets. She identified two forms of distributive justice (1998): a weak form as in equality of opportunity and a strong form as in equality of outcome. In education, distributive models of social justice are reflected in compensatory programs, allocating designated resources for the disadvantaged. However, many of these compensatory programs do not question the curriculum itself, the pedagogy or the regimes of testing used in the classroom, and the role of these factors in creating educational inequality (Atweh 2011). The recognition paradigm, on the other hand, sees injustice as being entrenched in the political/economic construction of society (Hawkins 2014; Frazer 1996). Undoubtedly, a remedial action is essential in addressing the two forms of injustice: (1) lack of recognition and (2) lack of equitable distribution.

The very concept of mass education was virtually nonexistent in Nepal until recently (Reed and Reed 1968); however, in recent years, there has been significant improvements in access to education at all levels. The progress, especially in terms

of increasing coverage and achieving gender parity, has been significant, but still the inequality in access to quality education remains especially between the rich and the poor and between the urban and rural locations. Education in Nepal is figuratively (and literally) a landscape of hills and valleys, and those in the lowest positions are increasingly assertive in asking why the large investments in education have created so little tangible change in their lives.

Nepal is one of the most diverse countries in the world especially in terms of geography and sociocultural identity. The concentration of poverty and vulnerability is higher in some caste and ethnic groups especially among Dalits and indigenous ethnic groups and lesser in the others. Social and cultural variables such as caste, ethnicity, and gender also determine who can access to what type of education. While accessibility to education, notably at the ECDCs, has improved significantly since the past few decades and this progress applies to all economic and social groups, there is still significant inequality in terms of the access to quality education (DoE 2015). In general, people from poor households and from Dalits and disadvantaged caste and ethnic groups have less access to quality education compared to others (Acharya 2007; The World Bank 2013b). The same applies to access to ECDCs.

In line with the overarching principle of social inclusion which forms an essential part of the national plans and policies, the government has remained effortful to increase access of girls in ECDCs along with children from disadvantaged and marginalized communities, especially Dalits and indigenous ethnic groups. The accessibility of girls has improved over the years. As illustrated in Fig. 7.2, there is a narrow gap between enrolment of girls and boys in ECDCs in the past 7 years. The gender parity index (GPI) for ECDCs/PPC enrolment is 0.93 in 2014.

As the Fig. 7.3 shows, the enrolment of Dalits and indigenous ethnic groups in ECDCs has also gone up over the years. Out of the total enrolment of 1,014,339 in 2014–2015 in ECDCs/PPCs, 18.0% of them were Dalit and 38.6% ethnic groups. Among the Dalit children enrolled, 18.8% were girls and 17.4% boys. Similarly, among the children of indigenous ethnic groups, 38.8% were girls and 38.5% boys. It is encouraging that girls from disadvantaged caste and ethnic groups are increasingly enrolled in the ECDCs contributing to the parity.

The proportion of children entering first grade with ECDC experience has increased to 59.6% in 2014 from 56.9% the previous year. The current Thirteenth Plan of the GoN has set a target to reach to 64% by the end of 2015/2016 (NPC 2013c). As shown in Fig. 7.4 below, across the eco-belts, the Terai shows the highest intake (68.8%) of new children with ECDC experience in grade 1. In the Mid and Far Western regions and even in certain pockets in the Terai, particularly among Dalit communities, the participation in ECDCs is still low.

The increasing trend of participation in ECDCs has contributed to the reduction in repetition as well as dropout rates in grade 1 (see Table 7.1).

These silver lines notwithstanding, there are persisting disparities in access to ECDCs across the regions, districts, as well as among social groups. As shown in Fig. 7.4, only nearly 60% children out of those enrolled in primary school have ECDC experiences. The remaining 40% are yet to reach. There are inequities in

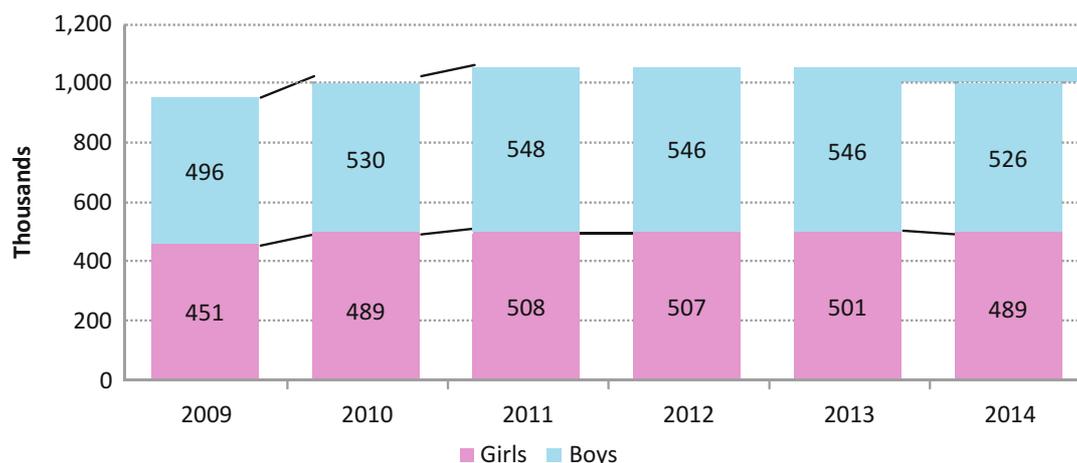


Fig. 7.2 Trend of girls' enrolments in ECDCs (Source: Adopted from DoE 2015)

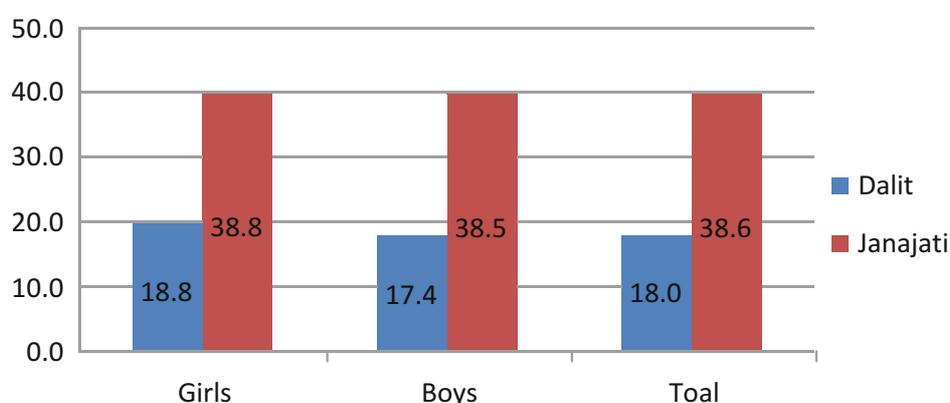


Fig. 7.3 Percentage of Dalit and Janajati in total number of children in ECDC/PPC (Source: Adopted from DoE 2015)

access to ECDCs across regions and mountain and hills lack far behind compared to national average. According to DoE 2015, there is variation between the districts even within the ecological belts. For example, 5 hill districts out of 75, namely, Khotang, Pyuthan, Jajarkot, Bajura, and Achham, have less than 30% of children in grade 1 with ECDC exposure (DoE 2015). The inequity is closely associated with the physical access and remoteness of these districts. Likewise, within the districts, there is also a noticeable urban bias in the enrolment. Urban centers have more number of children with ECDC experience compared with the rural. More efforts are called to reach out to the unreached in the remote and sparsely populated rural hinterlands where children do not have access to ECDCs.

Although the gender-disaggregated data at the basic level are available throughout the country, enrolment of children with various forms of disabilities is not. Nearly 2% of children in Nepal are living with some forms of disabilities. Dominant forms of disabilities in Nepal among the children are physically challenged, hearing and speaking difficulties and blindness. As public infrastructure in Nepal including

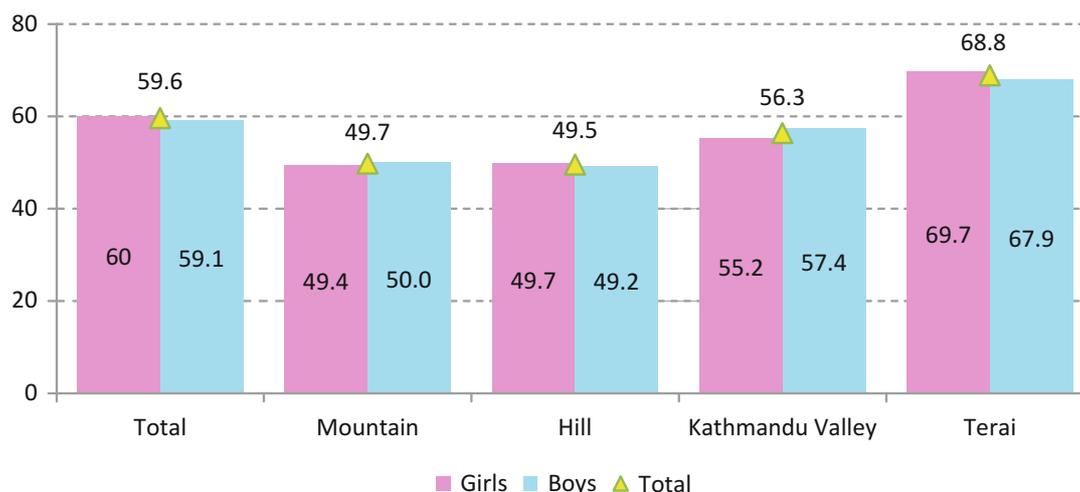


Fig. 7.4 Rate of children entering grade one with ECDC experience across ecological belts (Source: Adapted from DoE 2015)

Table 7.1 Declining trends of repetition and dropout rates in grade one

School year	Repetition rate %	Dropout rate %
2007	29.4	16.1
2008	28.3	12.1
2009	26.5	9.9
2010	22.6	8.3
2011	21.3	7.9
2012	19.9	7.7
2013	17.5	7.1
2014	15.2	6.5

Source: DoE (2015)

the health, education, and local government offices are yet to be friendly for persons living with disabilities (PLWD), children with disability usually find difficult to access and benefit from ECDCs. The concept of universal design to meet the needs of learners with diverse background within a common setting at the early childhood level (Conn-Powers et al. 2006; Darragh 2007) is yet to be fully applied.

On the one hand, there is a need to expand ECDC coverage and accessibility across the country to enable more children attending ECDCs prior to the enrolment in first grade. On the other hand, there needs specific strategies to address the inequities between the ecological belts, with a special focus on mountain and hills. The government is considering the option of residential schools for the grown-ups in these disadvantaged areas. However, this option would not be feasible for children under age 5. One of the possible strategies would be to strengthen capacities with resources at local government and community level to scale up ECDCs and ensure equitable coverage throughout the districts.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed at evaluating how the ECD-related policies and program in Nepal have been implemented, by using 3A2S framework. Nepal's historical context was outlined, and institutional architecture was elaborated to set the context for understanding how policies are framed and implemented for ECDCs and in which context the ECD policy is implemented. With the use of national and education sectoral data, the paper demonstrated that significant investment is made by the government to increase coverage and accessibility to quality education for young children in Nepal. Introducing ECD policy is one of those efforts. ECDCs in Nepal are established and run by government, community, and private sectors individually as well as in partnership. ECDCs exist in various forms today, majority are school based, while few are community managed. Government and community-managed centers are free of cost, while the ECDCs in private school charge tuition fee. The facilities and quality of ECDCs, however, vary significantly and so do the outcomes. While evaluating the ECDCs in Nepal, we have assessed how government policy is addressing the issue of accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability, and social justice of ECDCs.

To summarize, accessibility of ECDCs and percentage of children enrolled in primary school with ECDC experience is increasing since the past few years. The country has nearly more than 35,000 ECDCs registered with more than one million children attending every year. In terms of access, the gender gap is being narrowed across all ecological belts and social groups. Nearly 60% of children enrolled in primary school have ECDC experience. There are evidences that children with ECDC experience have better retention and performance compared to those who did not have the experience. Despite the increasing coverage and better gender parity, however, the country is yet to achieve universal access. More than 40% children enrolled in primary schools, especially those from poor and remote communities, do not have ECDC experience. Most of the ECDC are concentrated in urban areas and accessible places. The lack of awareness and unavailability due to remoteness are the major reasons behind the gap. Access to ECDCs also varies across the ecological belts and regions. Mid and Far West regions and mountains have less access compared to the national average. ECDCs are yet to address the specific needs of children living with disabilities that consist nearly 2% of the total population.

The government of Nepal has adopted a free education policy in public school starting from ECDC and has announced targeted activities such as free meal for children of remote districts and poor communities to ensure affordability. Except in private schools, the affordability issue has been addressed with tuition-free provisions. While such targeted interventions have been effective to increase the accessibility, the number of other constraints including high ratio of facilitator-children in the center, lack adequate level of infrastructure, and low level of remuneration, training, and teaching learning materials have negatively affected the quality of the services from ECDCs. There is a need for a comprehensive plan aimed at increasing coverage and to strengthen quality. This needs to be accompanied by implementing

quality assurance mechanism, curriculum, and teacher development activities and providing adequate level of incentives for facilitators of improvement in the quality of ECD centers and their resultant outcomes.

Several institutions and instruments have been introduced to strengthen accountability of government and stakeholders for better outcomes of ECD centers. However, most of the accountability mechanisms are central level centric, and there is limited monitoring and follow-up activities at the local levels. Social audit has been recognized as one of the good practices of establishing accountability at local levels. The application of social audit needs to go beyond the income/expenditure statement to check and improve the accessibility, equity, and quality of ECDCs for young children.

The government has adopted a number of strategies to increase the coverage and strengthen quality of ECDCs across the country and for the sustainability of the outcomes. Specifically, the government through SSRP has ensured funding to establish and run ECDCs throughout the country. Public-private partnership (PPP) modalities have been introduced for better coverage and quality. Active engagement of local communities, parents, and integration of ECDCs in the local government planning process all have aimed at strengthening local level accountability and the sustainability. However, a lack of elected government and political instability since the past two decades has remained as one of the major challenges in ensuring local level accountability and to ensure sustainability.

In conclusion, early childhood education and ECDCs are priority components of education sector of the GoN aimed at improving access to quality education and holistic development for children throughout the country. The government demonstrates a clear commitment to addressing the specific constraints faced by the children living in remote areas, from disadvantaged caste and ethnic groups and those with specific needs through targeted interventions. Such commitments are expressed in the national and local level policies and programs. However, there are major gaps between policy aspiration and achievement in reality. This policy review cannot provide a full picture of the free ECE policies in Nepal, especially in the context where the school enrolment, distribution among public, community, and privately run centers, school fees, and the numbers and quality of teachers are varied between public and private managed and even within these categories depending on the location, resource endowment, and capacities of the owner/manager. Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive updated and disaggregated database to provide a more complete picture on the status of ECDCs, facilitators, and participants. Nevertheless, with the use of government-produced flashcards and review reports, this chapter has at least raised an awareness of the importance of evaluating the ECDCs. Using the 3A2S framework, we have integrated our evaluation on the basis of not only quantities but also and more importantly the qualitative aspects and outcomes. Taking Nepal as a case study, we have identified important geographical, economic, and sociocultural factors that affect the processes and outcomes of ECD policies in Nepal. Similarly, we have highlighted structural and methodological constraints that need to be addressed to improve accessibility, affordability, accountability,

sustainability, and social justice of ECDCs. The findings could contribute for improvement not only in Nepal but also elsewhere in similar context.

Appendix: Full Names of the Terms and Their Acronyms

Full names	Acronyms
Community-based organization	CBO
Department of Education	DOE
Early childhood development	ECD
Early childhood education	ECE
Early childhood education and care	ECEC
Early childhood development centers	ECDC
Gross domestic product	GDP
Government organization	GO
Government of Nepal	GON
Gender parity index	GPI
Human development index	HDI
International nongovernment organization	INGO
Kindergarten	KG
Local government institutions	LGI
Ministry of Education	MOE
Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development	MOFALD
Ministry of Health and Population	MOHP
Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare	MOWCSW
Midterm review	MTR
Nepal Children's Organization	NCO
National Education System Plan	NESP
Nonformal education	NFE
Nongovernment organization	NGO
National Plan of Action	NPA
Production Credit for Rural Women	PCRW
Preprimary class	PPC
Resource Centers	RC
Small Farmers Development Program	SFDP
School Sector Reform Program	SSRP
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	UNESCO
Village Development Committees	VDC

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