

Small ideas that work

Robert Zimmermann (editor)



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by Robert Zimmermann

Based on explorations carried out for the Bernard van Leer Foundation

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Robert Zimmermann

The Effectiveness Initiative

The Bernard van Leer Foundation undertook the Effectiveness Initiative (EI) in 1999. The goal of the EI was to explore the sources and the attributes of effectiveness in early childhood development programmes.

To help ensure that the enquiry would have a tolerable chance of highlighting the features of effectiveness, a small group of programmes were to be selected that were widely recognised for meeting the basic developmental needs and enhancing the welfare of young children and their families and had already exhibited a good track record of a minimum of ten years of positive achievement.

The Foundation carried out an informal survey among a group of veteran practitioners and acknowledged experts in early childhood development. Around 150 programmes were identified. Ultimately, ten likely programmes were invited to join in the exploration.

Participation was intertwined inextricably within the concept of the EI from the very beginning. In collaboration with the programme personnel and the target communities, the Foundation put together teams, one per programme, to observe the programmes close up and engage the stakeholders actively and meaningfully in the process. The Foundation realised that the stakeholders would know in fine detail the programme impacts in terms of the daily lives of children, spouses, neighbours and communities. Through the application of qualitative methods among children, parents, other members of the beneficiary populations and the people involved with the organisations that funded and managed the programmes, the Foundation anticipated that the teams would be able to construct pictures of the entire context of the programmes, but also gain insights into the nature of programme effectiveness.

After several years of this activity, which included the collection of a great deal of raw data and substantial documentation on the programmes, the teams drafted and submitted reports to the Foundation. Because each of the teams was allowed great freedom in the design and implementation of its enquiry, the reports vary enormously in format and the topics examined. They also contain much detail about the programmes.

Participating Programmes

The following programmes participated in the EI:¹

- *Programa para el Mejoramiento de la Educación, la Salud y el Ambiente* ('Programme for the Improvement of Education, Health and the Environment'), Colombia. Known by the acronym 'Promesa', which, in Spanish, means 'promise', this programme adopted a participatory approach to early childhood development, which supplied a foundation for community development as well. It was begun in 1978 by the International Centre for Education and Human Development (CINDE) among 100 families in Bahía Solano, Nuquí, Panguí and Valle, four remote, extremely poor farming and fishing villages on the Pacific coast of Colombia. It initially focused on training to help mothers provide better home environments for cognitive development and the main delivery system for sound hygiene, health and nutrition practices. Promesa matured relatively rapidly into an integrated community-based programme involving early childhood development, basic healthcare, sanitation, malaria control and income-generating activities. The programme eventually served about 7,000 families on the coast and in the interior.
- *Madres Guías* ('Guide Mothers'), Honduras. In the early 1990s, the national office of Christian Children's Fund in Honduras (CCF-H) undertook a home- and centre-based programme designed to help children in poor rural communities make the transition easily from home to preschool and then to primary school. The programme is integrated, and, through the programme, communities have managed to improve healthcare, control common childhood illnesses, reduce malnutrition among children, prepare children successfully for primary school, implement integrated responses to other childhood problems and enhance noticeably the self-esteem and confidence of mothers. The highly structured programme is measurably effective in relative terms according to most standard indicators of child well-being. The 55 local programmes overseen by CCF-H cover 220 communities.
- The *Self Employed Women's Association* (SEWA), India. Millions of women make up the bulk of the vast informal sector labour force in India, the poorest of all working people in the country. Since the early 1970s, SEWA has been committed to the empowerment of these women and the creation of independent unions for them in the western state of Gujarat and surrounding states. SEWA has been establishing and operating childcare centres since the mid-1980s for women in the informal sector who have joined unions. While their children are in SEWA centres, the mothers can take up full-time work, but also older girls can be relieved of childcare duties so that they can attend school. The centres rely on paramedical staff who immunise the children against communicable diseases and detect children's illnesses at the early stages. By 2002, SEWA programmes were caring for over 3,500 children in more than 50 centres in Ahmedabad, a city in Gujarat, and over 2,000

¹ Note that the ten programmes are located in ten different countries. The ties vary between the Foundation and the organisations responsible for the programmes. Six of the organisations do not currently have a financial relationship with the Foundation (the ones in Colombia, Honduras, Kenya, Peru, the Philippines and Portugal). For reasons unrelated to the Foundation or the EI, two of the ten programmes did not produce EI reports and are therefore not represented in this publication. Mozambique chose not to participate in the reporting process, while the Netherlands participated in the EI for one year and then decided to limit their EI activity to an exercise that resulted in the drafting of an evaluation paper.

children in 70 centres in the Kheda, Patan and Surendranagar districts of Gujarat.

- *The Association for the Advancement of the Ethiopian Family and Child in Israel* (Almaya). The association originated in 1985, with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, to assist members of an ancient Jewish community, the Beta Israel, who had immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia and who, in the main, did not speak the languages prevalent in the host country. The association uses the skills and resources available among the immigrants to prepare the children, the families and the community for life in Israel. It trains workers among the community, develops educational materials to help maintain the community's unique heritage and educates others about the community. The Beta Israel trained through Almaya have gone on to complete basic education requirements, continue their formal education to achieve certification as childcare providers, participate in national Ethiopian women's leadership courses and obtain university degrees.
- The *Madrassa Resource Centres* (MRCs), Kenya. In 1986, Muslim communities in Mombasa realised that their off-spring were being caught up in a vicious circle of poor education leading to poor jobs and that the root of the problem was inadequate preparation for primary school. Representing a relatively underprivileged segment of the population, the communities turned to the Aga Khan Foundation for support. The solution that was implemented relies on the Madrasa Resource Centre, which assists in establishing preschools within local Muslim religious institutions, the madrasas. The preschools help children acquire the proper learning to enter the regular education system. The centre also concentrates on the development of technical inputs, such as teacher training methodologies, teaching manuals and curricula. The inexpensive preschools have become popular, and the initiative has since spread to Tanzania and Uganda. The main office in Mombasa provides training and support to the country offices.
- *Associação da Criança, Família e Desenvolvimento* ('Association for the Child, Family and Development'), Mozambique. Since 1995, the programme has focused on a variety of community-based activities. These include assistance so that 500 community network groups can coordinate their early childhood development activities.
- *Samenspel* ('Playing Together'), the Netherlands. Samenspel was established in 1989 as a small-scale project to test strategies for reaching immigrant families, primarily from Morocco and Turkey, and to explore ways to encourage mothers with young children to participate in play centres during the afternoons. Training programmes for teams of multi-ethnic play leaders gradually developed. Samenspel groups are active in play groups and community centres and within self-help and immigrant organisations.
- The *Programas no Escolarizados de Educación Inicial* ('Non-Formal Early Education Programmes'), Peru.² This programme, which is known by the Spanish acronym Pronoei, started in the late 1960s as a nutrition education project among mothers in poor Aymara- and Quechua-speaking villages on the shores of Lake Titicaca in the state of Puno in highland southern Peru. Little by little, the programme became based on centres, each called wawa uta or wawa wasi ('children's home' in the Aymara and Quechua languages), which aimed to favour development in the villages through preschool education

2 In many countries of Latin America, daycare or kindergarten (ages 0 to 3) and preschool (ages 4 to 6) are considered together as one conceptual entity known as 'preschool' or 'early years education'. 'Non-formal' education ('educación no escolarizada' or, more literally, 'non-scholastic' education) is distinguished from 'formal' education because it is less structured; that is, it depends less on certified teachers and the imparting of knowledge about subjects organised into standard curricula. 'Non-formal' preschools are nonetheless officially recognised as education establishments.

opportunities for very young children. An ‘active learning’ curriculum that had been adapted to meet local needs and incorporate local culture also began to be applied through the programme. The low-cost programme was eventually taken up by the Ministry of Education as a viable alternative to formal preschools. It rapidly evolved into a nationwide community-based non-formal preschool system serving a substantial share of the young children in the country.

- The *Pinatubo Family Education Programme*, the Philippines, was initiated by the Community of Learners Foundation (COLF) among more than 1,000 poor, mostly illiterate Aeta families. These Aetas, an indigenous Philippine population speaking their own language, had been displaced to nearby resettlement areas after their farms and villages had been destroyed during the eruption of Mount Pinatubo, in central Luzon, in mid-1991. The programme includes a centre-based component among children 3 to 5 or 6 years old and a home-based component aimed at 0 to 6 year olds. It also involves initiatives in healthcare, schooling among 7 to 15 year olds, adult literacy, micro-enterprise development, on- and off-farm livelihoods and parent education in early childhood development.
- The *Águeda Movement-Bela Vista*, Portugal. The Águeda Movement started in the mid-1970s with the creation of the Bela Vista preschool. The movement is a loose association of individuals who work with service providers and communities to render education and other social services more sensitive to the needs of disabled children and their families, but also to maximise service access by the marginalised in general. Outreach to raise awareness has led to more inclusive community-based approaches, as well as to efforts to reduce duplication among Portugal’s social services and increase social service access among target children and families. The movement takes its name from Águeda, a municipality in west-central Portugal about 80 kilometres from Porto, but counts on the participation of many individuals throughout the country.

Small Ideas that Work

'Familiar things happen, and mankind does not bother about them. It requires a very unusual mind to undertake the analysis of the obvious.'

Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947)

'I learned to see things in a different manner. . . . [The children] always ran away because they were hungry. At a specific moment, I was unable to control the group; by 10:30 a.m., they would run away to steal milk at school or fruits from a neighbour. I managed to arrange a meal, and the group began to structure around that. As the children grew, they started to establish rules The community and the school began to understand . . . , though it was hard. They started to understand that these children were like other children.'

An educator involved in the Águeda Movement

The EI, and some of the characteristics of the effectiveness of the early childhood development programmes that took part, are more thoroughly illustrated elsewhere.³ The purpose of this publication is rather more limited. It portrays what might be globally described as several of the many straightforward, practical schemes implemented through these programmes to achieve very specific goals within particular contexts: 'small ideas that work'.

The small ideas that work are listed hereafter. They are each introduced by a brief title and, if necessary, an explanation. This is followed by a description of programme initiatives that illustrate the realisation of the idea. The analysis of the problems and solutions presented is by no means exhaustive, but it is sufficient so that one might refer to this publication as a 'primer' on some of the innovations originating within the programmes.

By communicating this information, the Foundation hopes to encourage fresh thinking and enhance collective learning about practical problem-solving among other programme stakeholders in the field. It would be pleased if this publication helps promote additional information-gathering on similar practical approaches that may be useful within a variety of programme environments.

1. The sundry uses of fairs, carnivals and plays

A community fair as a tool to verify preliminary study results

Community fairs are sometimes easy to organise given that many people wish to participate. Merchants and artisans can exhibit their wares; local performers are offered an opportunity to show their talents to a gathered public; booths can be set up by local interest groups and other individuals and organisations wishing to spread their messages to a community. In return for helping to make the fair possible, donors can demonstrate (and publicise) their goodwill and community engagement. The community members are entertained with little

3 See the bibliography for more information. Zimmermann (2004) contains summaries of the programme reports and a broad analysis of the EI. The website of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, at <www.bernardvanleer.org>, supplies links to other relevant documentation.

effort and at relatively low cost. Children and adults play games, and everyone gets to eat. A fair is a comprehensive social event.

The festive atmosphere of a neighbourhood or community fair can likewise be used to achieve specific purposes by early childhood development programmes.

For example, as an additional means to verify the accuracy of the information it had collected among stakeholders, the EI team that explored the Non-Formal Early Education Programmes in Peru introduced key results in a lively, interactive manner during community fairs that were planned so as to guarantee a large turn-out and offer surroundings conducive to spontaneous, open discussion. The responses generated by the team in this way represented fresh research results in their own right.

A children's carnival as a tracer method

A *mela* ('fair') is loved by all in Gujarat, India, whether in a village or an urban neighbourhood. Families attend in large numbers, showing off their best clothes and buying trinkets and snacks. The thronging crowds and the loud noise are no deterrents. Indeed, they are part of the attraction and are anticipated and enjoyed.

Knowing the place a *mela* has in local life, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) decided to invite children to come to a *bal mela* ('children's carnival'). There was going to be a twist, however. SEWA wanted to conduct an impromptu 'tracer study' among children who had attended its childcare centres over the last decade or so, but the organisation had lost contact with many of these children. The *mela* would be the occasion to locate these 'alumni', find out more about what they had been doing and, possibly, discover long-term improvements in their educational achievement that could be attributed to the advantages the children had gained through the centres.

SEWA's plan proved easy to implement. Many of the children who had gone to the centres lived in the same areas as the teachers. So, the teachers invited to the carnival all the children whom they met on the streets or in their visits to local elementary schools. Each child who was invited was also asked the names of centre mates. Two or three names would be recalled, and, in turn, these other children would give an additional five or six names. Gradually, the invitation lists got longer. Entire communities heard about the *bal mela*. There was so much excitement.

The teachers had been writing down the names and the addresses systematically. They visited the children in their homes and, on their visits, found out if the children were still attending school. They asked the children about their interests and plans for the future and made brief notes. Not surprisingly, these notes on children went into the hundreds. Similar records were started for all the childcare centres.

Altogether, there were three carnivals. In the city of Ahmedabad, several urban areas were combed for alumni of SEWA centres, and the *mela* was held in July 2001. Because of space limitations in Anand, which is in Kheda district, two carnivals were held, the second in February 2002. The information collected on the children was very useful in documenting SEWA's successes and failures in the district.

Some of the children wore their brightest clothes to the mela; others came dressed as well-known historical or fictional characters. Areas were set up for various activities and games: crayon drawing, vegetable printing, hat making, puppet shows, games, music and dances. There were displays of children's art work. Several groups of children staged skits or mime shows. Some had studied so that they could introduce themselves in English. Hot lunches were served by the SEWA teachers. The lunches reminded the children of the wonderful snacks and meals they had eaten in the SEWA centres. They were also each given a small bowl filled with candy as a souvenir. More than anything else, the children were happy to meet up again with their friends and savour the excitement.

The mela also served to strengthen ties with the public officials who had been invited to participate in the inaugural functions. Their help in getting more physical space for the childcare centres was sought, as space is a perennial problem. In any case, their speeches indicated the value they attached to childcare, and their presence was viewed as an endorsement of the childcare programme.

During the carnival, a small team of researchers went around talking to the children and their mothers to find out what the children remembered about their centre experiences and the extent to which one could attribute their attainments to these experiences.

Of the thousands of children who had gone to SEWA centres and who were traced, only a very small percentage had dropped out of school. If one considers the socio-economic category in which the families fall, this was a remarkable result.

The transmission of messages through children's plays

Among the numerous institutions established in the municipality of Águeda, Portugal, through the Águeda Movement, is a health centre, which includes a children's clinic and a maternal health and family planning clinic in a local hospital, and Bela Vista, a preschool for integrated education among disabled and non-disabled children.

The Theatre Group of Águeda was active at the health centre from 1988 to 1995. From 1992 to 1994, Bela Vista ran, along with the health education unit of the centre, a health education programme that relied on the theatre group. The actors were children, and the plays dealt with health promotion concepts. Participants in the Águeda Movement believe that health is a resource belonging to all citizens and that health education and promotion can be successful only if citizens assume the responsibility this ownership implies.

Although the starting point for the theatre was the effort to increase the awareness of health concepts, the initiative reinforced the value of theatre as a means of cultivating group ties and fostering good citizenship. This applied especially to the children.

'Each [child] learns that it is unique and indispensable in its role . . . , but the differences enrich the whole: nobody is valuable alone . . . ; even the smaller roles are essential . . .'

A commentator on the theatre initiative

From the very beginning, the children presented their plays at parties and public festivals, but also at meetings on health education. Starting in 1995, at these gatherings, the children were questioned about the play experience. Eventually, these interviews became a common practice, and health education became the 'excuse' to bring children together and, through questions and answers, to promote good health and good citizenship among others. At the end of short plays presented at congresses and training sessions, the children would be 'little teachers' who could speak about the projects and discuss health issues as revealed through their own experiences.

2. Reaching children by reaching those who reach children

'While their babies were in SEWA crèches, the mothers could take up full-time work. This increase in working hours was reflected in better food for the family. For the first time in many months, the women reported that dal [pulse] and vegetables were included in the daily diet. There was also an improvement in the children's health. [Because] the paramedical workers in the crèches [got] the children immunised against communicable diseases and [could detect] a child's illness at the very early stages, the number of children who needed to be referred to a doctor went down substantially.'

From the EI India report

Children are clearly the main focus of early childhood development programmes, but actions that benefit adults can also be profitable for children and provide sustainability to the programmes. The concerns and interests of women who are mothers often mesh closely with the needs of children, for instance, and it has been demonstrated on numerous occasions that, in the distribution of household income, mothers tend to assign more importance to food and nutrition and to other expenditures that tend to benefit children. Likewise, programmes can be successful in helping children grow and develop if they meet the needs not of the children, but of fathers, families, teachers, doctors, or some other group of 'significant adults' that can then more directly help the children. The satisfaction of the needs of the programme staff, volunteers and other agents can be drawn in as well; it is they, after all, who 'deliver' the programmes.

Hereafter are several examples of efforts within the programmes to reach children by reaching others.

Parent education for the benefit of children

The Pinatubo Family Education Programme, in the Philippines, was established as a children's programme, but, from the start, an education initiative among parents was included because the staff of the Community of Learners Foundation (COLF), which managed the programme, were convinced that any project designed exclusively for children would have much less impact and would not be sustainable.

The education initiative among the parents began very informally. When playgroups were started for 0 to 6 year olds in a home-based component in June 1992, many parents remained with their children. After the playgroups, the parents would sit with the COLF staff, who wished to get to know them and to learn about their needs, concerns and interests.

Soon, adult group sessions were being held on the terrace or inside the house hosting the component. The breastfeeding infants stayed with their mothers, while the other children were in the playgroups.

Once the parents and the younger children had become regular participants in the component, it was impossible to exclude the older children. What was intended originally to be playgroups for children up to 5 or 6 years old quickly became groups for children up to 15 years old. At this stage, elements were added to support schooling among the 7 to 15 year olds and promote the active participation of these children in family health and education interventions in the home-based component and in a centre-based component.

At first, the sessions were attended mostly by mothers. The ages of these women varied from around 16 to about 50. The plan was to focus on family life, parenting issues and early childhood development. However, adult literacy was incorporated to accommodate a request by the parents. At this point, more fathers joined in. In 1993, at the beginning of the second programme year, the focus shifted slightly so as to cover entire families. This expansion was carefully orchestrated.

An on-farm livelihoods module coordinated by professionals, including an agriculturist, was eventually added to the programme, and attention to off-farm livelihoods was integrated into the education initiative among parents. Local people's organisations have since been registered in the programme communities, and cooperatives are being created. Micro-enterprises have also been established. The income is distributed equally among the families, the cooperatives and an early childhood development fund that belongs to the communities and is aimed explicitly at the sustainability of early childhood activities.

'While we waited for planting or harvest time, we made baskets and curtains and earned [money] by selling them. All this helped me because I discovered that I was capable of doing many other things besides gathering banana hearts and [clearing] the field.'

Edith, a parent education programme participant

The parent education programme likewise came to involve healthcare initiatives aimed at discovering, tracing and resolving chronic health problems among children. One result was the introduction of a 'health fence', which consisted in the sharing of information about good health practices and agreement on the concrete preventive health measures that needed to be taken to protect family members, particularly children.

Plenty of evidence supports the assumption of COLF that the programme should not be more narrowly focused on the child alone or more broadly focused on community development, but should be focused on the child, the parents and, especially, the family. This evidence includes the voices of the primary stakeholders recorded during three years of EI research and the more than ten years that COLF staff observed, listened to and interacted with the Pinatubo Aetas as they adjusted to their new homes. Whenever Aeta parents have spoken of their childcare responsibilities and practices, their attitudes and values in relation to childrearing, or their aspirations for their children, the context in which their descriptions have been couched is 'parents and children'. The Aetas always say they have learned how to care for their children and instil discipline and teach values among them from other family members,

above all, their own parents, aunts and uncles. The care and welfare of children certainly seems to be a family affair, and family groupings are also integral to social, economic and moral ties within the Aeta communities.

Integrated community development

The programme that eventually became known as the *Programa para el Mejoramiento de la Educación, la Salud y el Ambiente* ('Programme for the Improvement of Education, Health and the Environment') or 'Promesa', was launched in four communities in the Chocó, a Pacific coastal region of Colombia, in mid-1978. The first steps involved weekly meetings among parents that centred on building the capacity of the parents to help their children obtain the education and development advantages that were not available through local public or private institutions.

The meetings quickly became sites for the discussion of the problems of the community. In a sense, given the lack of local institutions, these groups of parents became key community organisations. This tendency was encouraged by the founding organisation, the International Centre for Education and Human Development (CINDE), which had already envisaged that the programme would expand in this direction, though perhaps not quite so rapidly.

Because of the flexibility adopted among the groups, the stakeholders gained confidence and developed a greater understanding of their needs, and the programme matured swiftly. The parents soon embraced non-educational programme topics such as basic healthcare, malaria control, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, the environment and income-generating activities. As CINDE had planned, the programme came to focus on childhood development within the context of integrated community development.

Moreover, Promesa engaged the contributions of many community members, not all of whom had children or were participating because of children. People were also working at solving local community economic problems through, for example, the production, sale and distribution of rice or wood or the creation of infrastructure.

Similarly, Promesa established a production component that organised local projects to bring people together to augment their skills and improve their incomes. The component included a micro-credit facility for individuals wishing to undertake an income-generating activity, such as a bakery, a carpentry shop, a community pharmacy, or a community store. Arts and crafts clubs were formed; women were trained as seamstresses, and people were assisted in the creation of enterprises to manufacture goods, such as mattresses, mosquito nets and clothing, that could be sold in the community. Though it did not achieve great financial success for the participants, the component attained modest goals in confidence-building and community organisation.

3. Avenues for programme dialogue and ownership

The existence of open, flexible channels of dialogue between programme organisers and community actors offers the opportunity to exchange useful messages and should be an important ingredient of any programme. Discussion among mothers, fathers, children,

teachers and civil and religious leaders promotes understanding and consensus. It helps link communities socially and encourages the recognition of work well done, thereby consolidating individual and collective achievement. The exchange of experiences, supported by good example, can become an efficient motivational strategy in encouraging participation in common efforts.

Part of this dialogue should revolve around the relationship between the programme and the donor. This relationship should be properly defined at the start. It should be based on a common view of desired outcomes and guided by a friendly spirit of collaboration.

It is beneficial to seek a fitting means of generating discussion among the programme community, the programme organisers and the donor. Not all stakeholders are voluble, glib, or ready of discourse; some may have difficulty expressing their views or translating their impressions into a form that can be easily understood by outsiders more or less unfamiliar with the context. A suitable avenue for dialogue can help offset these limitations.

A rather straightforward instance of this is offered by the *sammelans* (large gatherings of mothers) held in Ahmedabad and in Kheda district by the Self Employed Women's Association to let mothers know the objectives of SEWA childcare activities and SEWA's approach to childhood development. The *sammelans* also provided an opportunity for mothers to meet each other and the childcare team, to share their views and to offer suggestions on ways the SEWA centres could serve them better. Around 2,000 mothers came to the Ahmedabad *sammelan*, and hundreds of mothers came to the *sammelan* in Kheda.

Two additional examples are outlined below.

Ensuring that parents are the principal local programme actors

The national office of Christian Children's Fund in Honduras (CCF-H), located in Tegucigalpa, the capital, provides supervision and transfers appropriate, easy-to-use tools and materials to its local early childhood programmes. The approach is integrated: Raising basic literacy, boosting access to potable water and the provision of medical care, vocational training for youngsters and other training initiatives are among specific interventions. There is also a training module for personnel, and there are plans for the creation of a training institute.

The 55 local programmes cover 220 communities. Each programme is structured according to a standard model. An elected parents committee administers local funds and is in charge of the identification of the needs of children and families in the area, the establishment of workplan objectives and the implementation of specific initiatives. Management is responsible for defining and establishing strategies, while operational teams are in charge of the fieldwork. The existence of the parents committees ensures that mothers and fathers are the main community actors responsible for the welfare of children within the programmes. A monitoring and evaluation system is used to implement yearly checks of the programmes to ensure accountability and follow-up.

The structure of the CCF-H programmes is well defined; the administrative requirements have been set out clearly, and everyone is responsible for certain duties. However, CCF-H also

encourages dialogue among other community actors. Indeed, the success of CCF-H is due, in part, to its institutional respect for community organisations. In this way, CCF-H ensures the credibility of the programmes among community members, who, in turn, can influence and participate more actively in programme decision-making at all levels.

The mobilisation of community ownership

In the Madrasa Resource Centre programme in Kenya, the creation of a preschool starts with the mobilisation of a candidate community. The MRC sends a community development officer to the community to assist in the mobilisation effort and to support those who have expressed the wish to open a preschool. During the initial contact phase, the community development officer and other MRC staff undertake a needs assessment. This is centred on a workshop involving MRC staff and the community, including influential leaders such as the members of the local mosque committee. The discussions focus on the benefits of education for children and the community, the roles and responsibilities of parents and others in the community, the age at which children should begin formal education, the proper ways to encourage child development, and the impact if the needs of children are not properly satisfied. The community development officer explains the terms of the partnership under which the *madrasa* (the Qur'anic educational institution) preschool programme is willing to help the community finance, set up and manage the preschool.

To reflect on the content of this first workshop in relation to their various educational requirements and their strategies to solve the problems they may encounter in early childhood education, development and care, community members also hold separate meetings organised by the mosque committee. If the wider community agrees that preschool education is critical among its problem-solving options in child education and development, a second workshop is arranged at which participants, including MRC staff, discuss the functions and structure of the preschool. This covers personnel, the election of a school management committee, the period of office and the responsibilities of the committee, the role of the teachers, and the resolution of any gender issues in school management. It also covers the goals in education and in life that the community members foresee for their children.

The linkage between the MRC and the community is then defined in a contract signed by each of the parties. The contract sets the terms and conditions of the MRC-community partnership and the specific duties of each party in the creation and management of the preschool.

The contract requires considerable investment in time and effort by the community. For example, a typical MRC contract might require a community to elect a viable school management committee, identify motivated young women for training as teachers, supply facilities conducive to the learning and play among children that are essential features of a preschool, and officially register the school. Community participation is often called for in the construction of classrooms and the development of teaching aids and learning materials.

Once a contract is signed and the school management committee has been formed, the community development officer begins training committee members in management, finance, ways to cater for the demands of teachers, and the maintenance of school infrastructure.

Motivated women with basic education – an average of ten years of schooling – are selected by the community for training as early childhood educators. Often this is the only career training open to women at their level of educational attainment. Teacher training programmes last two years and provide a combination of centre- and site-based training, extensive supervision and feedback, as well as opportunities to work with peers. The sustained MRC support during the training creates an environment favouring a sort of active learning that is rare in community schools in Africa.

The madrasa programme is experimenting with an innovative concept to supplement the income from fees in order to support preschools. MRC staff suggest that communities create small endowment funds for each preschool, the annual income from which would supplement the preschool's finances and facilitate the regular payment of teacher salaries. The endowment funds would be centrally managed for maximum efficiency. However, each endowment fund would be expected to consist of money raised by the community, matching grants from the madrasa programme and a one-off grant awarded to each school that successfully completes a contractual two-year relationship with the MRC. During the contract period, the management committee of a candidate school is expected to demonstrate an ability to maintain educational quality and financial accountability.

It is made clear in the MRC contract that the community will ultimately 'own' the preschool, though the MRC will fulfil a pivotal function in the interim. The goal of the MRC during implementation is therefore the creation of a preschool that is sustainable. Because the communities are poor, this means that the programme must be cost sensitive and must rely on local human resources, which, in turn, means that the community must become aware of the merits of volunteerism from the start. Indeed, the entire mobilisation process is aimed at awakening the consciousness of at least a core group of people who have given thought to the community's needs in education and to strategies to fill these needs. Curiously, the communities sometimes realise the value of the process so thoroughly that they subsequently undertake similar mobilisation efforts independently to address other problems.

After a period of two or three years of intensive MRC support, monitoring and evaluation, the preschool 'graduates'. This involves a 'validation' process to guarantee that the community has satisfied the contract in terms of community involvement and the creation of a well-functioning management committee and an appropriate and sustainable teaching and learning environment.

4. Local people as programme agents

The diversity of the methods employed by the programmes to involve local people in the performance of key programme functions has been especially rich. Such involvement can help engage the energy and commitment of target communities in support of programmes. Moreover, it provides programmes with personnel – the people themselves – who are able to offer expert advice on the needs and priorities of the local populations and who can speak in favour of the programme among their close contacts in the communities.

Programmes that assign responsibility to community members stimulate the initiative and encourage the commitment of these people in the solution of community problems. By

discovering their ability to find solutions to their problems, these community members legitimise their potential in their own eyes.

Thus, the programmes can represent opportunities to recover the natural talents of communities. 'Empowerment' conducted in this way represents a fairly direct, hands-on means to build and capitalise on capacity among a target population and also ensure some measure of endurance of a programme after the programme founders and donors leave.

Parents as child development workers

In the Philippines, at the beginning of its programme among the Aeta people in 1992, the Community of Learners Foundation viewed itself strictly as a facilitator. It therefore planned for the eventual withdrawal of the personnel based in Manila in favour of local programme staff and took steps to encourage parents in the settlements to work as volunteers.

COLF was not obliged to make a significant effort to gain these volunteers, however. From the very first months, parents came forward to help. Often, this engagement would begin with a parent assisting with meals for the children, then playing with the children or constructing teaching aids or toys. Many parents made themselves available, and there was always someone to take up any slack.

In 1993, when the programme funding was renewed for three years, COLF decided to ask selected parents to work with the programme on a more regular basis. Some of these people were trained as full-time teachers and child development workers. Provision was made in due course for a monthly honorarium in the programme budget. By the end of the 1990s, all but two of the 24 programme staff were from the settlements, and six of the staff were Aeta parents who had been participating in the programme since the first year.

Aagewans

District-level spearhead teams formed by the Self Employed Women's Association have been functioning in Gujarat, India, since 1998. Each team consists of three to five *aagewans* (grass-roots women leaders) who are selected from among the association's members. The spearhead team leader is a SEWA organiser who focuses on childcare.

The spearhead team promotes the leadership of local women who are the users and managers of activities and programmes such as childcare and, eventually, of their own worker organisations, cooperatives, or district economic associations. The team takes responsibility for running the childcare centres in its district. This involves visits to monitor the centres, monthly meetings with teachers, weekly meetings with local and district childcare coordinators and supervisors, assessments of financial viability and of the potential of associate workers to take over the management of childcare programmes, the provision of supplies and medical services, and the establishment of new centres, including site selection and the related contacts with the local *sarpanch* (elected headman).

The management of childcare cooperatives has also been part of the capacity-building inputs. Childcare activities in Ahmedabad and in Kheda district are run by two worker-owned and

managed cooperatives, Sangini and Shaishav, respectively. Each has an elected board of crèche teachers, two of whom are office-bearers: president and secretary of the cooperative.

Through the Gujarat State Women's Cooperative Federation, which has been supported by SEWA and of which both Sangini and Shaishav are members, regular training sessions on cooperative management have been organised for officers and other board members. They have learned methods for keeping proper, detailed minutes during meetings, maintaining account books and filing records. A more systematic, three-year programme for capacity-building and management has also been initiated.

Animadores

In Peru, the programme communities construct or otherwise provide the locations for the Non-Formal Early Education Programme (Pronoei) children's homes or centres. The programmes themselves are implemented by *animadores* ('activity organisers'). These generally minimally educated volunteers from the communities undergo a few weeks' initial training in child development, teaching techniques and the construction of educational materials before assuming the duties of teachers, one per centre. They are normally selected through a public community assembly and obtain a modest stipend to cover the cost of training. Each group of animadores is supervised by a *docente coordinador* ('teacher coordinator'), a certified teacher. A *docente especialista* ('specialist teacher'), a certified teacher who has become specialised in early years education, coordinates each zone or region. The coordinators and specialist teachers are employed by the public sector, while the animadores are not. A parents committee might run the day-to-day affairs of each centre.

The animadores and the coordinators tend to identify closely with the communities and with the programme and dedicate much effort to improving both. Likewise, within each community, there is often a feeling of ownership of the Pronoei centre. This is encouraged because the community can select the animadores. The community is also free to add non-educational activities, and the Pronoei centres do not require large community outlays, but depend only on local construction and the employment of locally available materials.

There are now over 17,000 Pronoei centres in Peru. They are organised into the 'early education network', a cooperative effort that groups child development experts, animadores, coordinators and assistants, and is supported thanks to the participation of communities, parents and other collaborators, including governmental and non-governmental institutions. This participation permits Pronoei to provide nutrition education to mothers and supply integrated education and deliver food, nutrition and healthcare services and other forms of assistance among hundreds of thousands of children.

Madres guías

From among volunteers, Christian Children's Fund in Honduras and the programme communities select women who show leadership qualities, and CCF-H provides them with extensive (and on-going) instruction. Each of these women, who are known as *madres guías* ('guide mothers'), counsels an individual cluster of mothers in a half-dozen nearby households. The *madres guías* are trained to coach their clusters on proper child healthcare,

nutrition, early childhood stimulation and educational practices. They teach parents how to identify acute respiratory infections, undertake oral rehydration therapy, use proper sanitation and purify water. Throughout Honduras, nearly 2,000 *madres guías* monitor clusters of mothers who look after the health of around 23,000 children.

The CCF-H programme includes two components: a home-based component and a centre-based preschool component. The first component covers 0 to 3 year olds. The *madres guías* visit their clusters of mothers twice a week in their homes to teach them early stimulation exercises for their children and other 'guided' activities that favour the proper development of children within traditional approaches. They also track the children's immunisations, nutritional status and general health and perform twice yearly evaluations of each child's growth and development. The evaluations rely on a growth and development scale that Christian Children's Fund has adapted from monitoring techniques and indicators used by numerous organisations worldwide, notably UNICEF. The information contained in the evaluations is transparent so as to ensure that the programme is accountable to the families of the children, the communities, the Government, other non-governmental organisations and international donors.

The second component covers 4 to 6 year olds at preschool centres, where the children learn to socialise by interacting with their classmates, teachers and other community members. It is designed to help the children make the transition easily from home to preschool. The women responsible for watching over the children in the preschools are known as *aides* or *jardineras* ('gardeners', as, for example, 'kindergarten' or 'jardin des enfants'). The more than 165 *jardineras* are trained to build a child-friendly environment. They work in partnership with parents and community groups on health and nutrition issues and on the development of social and emotional competencies and cognitive and learning skills. They maintain records on each child that track various indicators of interest to the programme. The component has recently been extended into the early primary years to facilitate the transition of the children from the preschools to the primary school system.

The title '*madre guía*' is a source of pride because it represents a recognition of a woman's knowledge about the upbringing of children, healthcare and family welfare. It likewise gives her status within the community. She becomes an example for others. Being chosen is an honour that marks her before the community as a good mother. This recognition helps stimulate the *madres guías* in their work.

The programme aims to build the capacities of people so that, through their own efforts, they become the real protagonists of their own development. The process encourages the generation of new ideas, supports the initiative of individuals and communities and relies on local human resources. People are encouraged to develop their creativity and use their own means and abilities to discover new solutions to local problems.

The local organisational model of the programme involves parents and individual women and mothers as protagonists. The community recognises that the *madres guías* represent one of the programme's principal local structures and are fundamental to the programme goals.

Madrichot

'[Almaya was] one of the first organisations [in Israel] to take people from the community to work with the community.'

An EI interviewee in Israel

The programmes of the Association for the Advancement of the Ethiopian Family and Child in Israel (Almaya) use the skills and resources available among the Beta Israel immigrants from Ethiopia to help the children, families and the community make the transition to life in their new homes. Many of the programmes have been designed to address problems identified by the immigrant population. 'Culture' is never neglected.

Innovative community-based programmes are being run by Ethiopian *madrichot* (paraprofessionals), who serve as agents of change and create links between the immigrants and the broader society. Through the Almaya Home Visiting Programme, *madrichot* seek to enhance the development of 0 to 3 year olds and facilitate the cultural and social acclimatisation of the mothers and other family members. They visit young Ethiopian children, guide the mothers in the children's development through play and verbal interaction, and demonstrate ways the mothers can integrate their common Ethiopian cultural heritage into the children's education. Part of the weekly, one-hour home visit is devoted to the mother and her health, home management, nutrition, family relations, toy swaps and so on. Monthly meetings of mothers and children provide additional cultural enrichment and peer support. Ethiopian families living in isolated neighbourhoods have especially benefited from the programme.

The preschools involved in the Almaya Parents Cooperative Preschool Programme offer a nurturing environment and educational enrichment for Beta Israel children 18 months to 3 years of age without taking responsibility away from the parents. Children and their parents are exposed to a classroom environment that supplies invaluable experiences and paves the way towards the formal education system. Around 20 children attend each preschool, which is staffed by two Ethiopian *madrichot* who have been certified as childminders. The *madrichot* are assisted by a parent on a daily rotation. The parents acquire hands-on experience in education through play. Warm meals are served in the preschools at midday, and the parents assist in food preparation on the premises, thereby learning how to cook simple, inexpensive and nutritious meals for their children.

Almaya's Parent and Infant Play and Stimulation Corners Programme provides small facilities in clinics so that parents can play with their children and ask the *madrichot* questions about childhood development while they are waiting to see the medical practitioners. The *madrichot* also translate for the parents and the staff and calm expectant mothers and mothers who are anxious because their children are about to undergo health check-ups or immunisations. They likewise help non-Ethiopian families on medical visits.

The training and use of Ethiopian *madrichot* have served as a practical model to empower other women in the immigrant Ethiopian community and give them the means to succeed within Israeli society. National leadership courses offered through the National Ethiopian Women's Leadership Programme are now being sponsored by Almaya, the Joint Distribution Committee, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and the Israel Women's Network to

provide tools and frames of reference to enable Ethiopian immigrant women to cultivate initiative and leadership capabilities. The women have designed and executed projects with the tools, information and skills they have gained through the courses, and the training has become an important stepping stone for women with little or no formal schooling.

In interviews conducted during the EI exploration, *madrichot* often pointed out that their contributions to the community have become very meaningful. They are now actively transferring knowledge and skills to children and their families. Indeed, Almaya's ground-breaking commitment to reliance on *madrichot* drawn from the immigrant community was initially met with scepticism by potential partners, including government, but has since become an accepted model for training and service delivery across the country. Most projects dealing with newcomers in Israel now work with community-based agents of change as a matter of course. The Almaya *madrichot* and others like them have demonstrated their usefulness in bridging the gap between the host and immigrant communities.

Promotores

The initial activities of the Promesa programme in the Chocó, in Colombia, revolved around toy libraries in the four participating communities. The libraries each provided 25 educational toys, 25 pyramids with squares, another 25 with triangles, 25 with circles and so on. From each community, 25 mothers were initially chosen to participate, for a total of 100 Promesa families. The mothers used the toys in their homes to stimulate the physical and intellectual development of their 3 to 7 year olds by playing games and interacting with the children in other ways. They met together once a week to learn how to employ the toys to best advantage in their 'preschools in the home'. A new group of mothers was added every six months for the first two years.

The weekly meetings were conducted by *promotores* ('programme agents'), who were usually women (*promotoras*). The original *promotores* had been trained by staff of CINDE, the founding organisation, in Sabaneta, a municipality close to Medellín. The *promotores* received instruction in basic healthcare, nutrition, hygiene and other relevant areas. They provided the parents in the communities with an integrated education that enabled them to cultivate the well-rounded development of their children, but also with the knowledge, skills and motivation necessary to transform the environment within which the children were growing up. Veteran *promotores* served as community problem-solvers and leaders.

The programme involved a health component in which community participation was substantial. The *promotores* were selected by community members (through secret ballot), which tended to confer on them greater authority, and their training permitted them to carry out duties as primary healthcare aides in the promotion of proper preventive healthcare, particularly among families. The focus was on diseases responsible for the high infant mortality rate in the Chocó, such as acute respiratory infections and diarrhoeal diseases. The *promotores* likewise ran healthcare stations for the distribution of basic remedies and the supply of other essential health services. Gradually, steps were taken to develop appropriate technologies for the treatment and supply of water and to find alternatives to salting or smoking for the conservation of meat and fish.

5. Insiders and outsiders

Almaya's slogan is "The community for the community". A person who is on the inside [an Ethiopian paraprofessional] knows both cultures, the difficulties in each culture and the experience of transition and absorption. An outsider doesn't understand. The staff is of both cultures.'

An EI interviewee in Israel

In several instances, the programmes employed in their routine operations some personnel who were 'insiders' and others who were 'outsiders' with respect to the target populations. These programmes were thereby attempting to tailor their approaches to tap into the perceived advantages, and avoid the disadvantages, of reliance on only one or the other sort of personnel.

During the EI explorations, members of the target populations and other stakeholders described some of these advantages and disadvantages. Thus, some stakeholders mentioned that insiders 'understand' the traditions and the needs of the target population. Insiders may act as important mediators between the community and the programme. The insiders may be more likely to communicate well with other local stakeholders. A positive attitude among insiders towards a programme can therefore play an important role in the success of the programme.

Meanwhile, outsiders are generally more well prepared, according to some stakeholders. It may be tremendously difficult to find qualified insiders or train them properly as staffers, while qualified outsiders are usually readily available. Insiders may show limited initiative and poor long-term planning capabilities. The community may feel it can exert more control over the work of insiders. Insiders may not be able easily to gain acceptance as figures of authority.

The perceptions among a target population concerning the benefits or drawbacks of the use of insiders and outsiders may influence the effectiveness of a programme. If mothers find warmth and a caring attitude among the insiders who are their points of contact with a programme, or if they find competence and professionalism among the outsiders, then their relationship with the programme is more likely to be positive even if their perceptions about the insiders and outsiders are due to bias.

The approach of Almaya in Israel offers a good example of the benefits of the use of insiders and outsiders together. Each of the Ethiopian madrichot, or paraprofessionals (insiders with respect to the Beta Israel immigrant community), is typically paired with a local non-Ethiopian Israeli professional social worker (an outsider with respect to the Beta Israel) to run early childhood programme components. In this 'dyad', the Israeli professional guides the technical aspects of the Ethiopian paraprofessional's work in satisfying the needs of the community, while the Ethiopian, acting as a sort of cultural interpreter, coaches her non-Ethiopian counterpart in the community's language and values. The sensitivity of the professional towards the community and the technical abilities of the paraprofessional are both enhanced to the benefit of the Beta Israel and the programme.

Almaya has helped ensure this outcome. During training, which is delivered to the professionals and the madrichot together, the importance of knowledge of the community (the madrichot) and of technical expertise (the non-Ethiopian professionals) is emphasised. The training incorporates exercises in cultural sensitivity and regular in-service instruction. This also tends to diffuse some of the natural tension between the madrichot and the professionals.

6. Specialists and ad hoc teams as troubleshooters

The establishment of a vibrant system to supply the assistance of appropriate experts on a regular basis for the benefit of interventions can enhance the ability of programmes to reach target populations effectively. One method to accomplish this is to create roving teams of professionals who are regularly available to address specific issues of relevance to a programme and of concern to communities. A good model of this approach is offered by the Águeda Movement in Portugal.

Special education teams

The Ministry of Education of Portugal gave strategic endorsement to the movement by sending educational experts to Bela Vista, the preschool in Águeda for integrated education among disabled and non-disabled children, and, in 1981, created roving *equipas de educação especial* ('special education teams') to work with parents and provide expertise on integration, inclusion and other innovations to teachers and education authorities in mainstream schools.

Each of the special education teams consisted of an educator, a social worker and a doctor. The common aim of the teams was to analyse relevant issues and discover and create opportunities for children, especially children with special needs, to participate in all facets of daily life.

The teams sought answers to questions such as: 'What are the problems that worry parents and educators?', 'What do the children need to learn to increase their autonomy, self-esteem and participation in their families and schools and among their peers?' and 'What resources are available to help achieve these goals?'. The teams tried to ensure that information and expertise circulated efficiently among mothers and families and to guarantee timely planning and assistance for the benefit of children with disabilities.

Whenever possible, the children themselves would be asked about their preferences, interests and concerns. Educators often invited the children's school friends and brothers and sisters to relate the likes and dislikes of the children. The responses were registered in books in which new ideas and innovative approaches were also recorded.

The Águeda special education team was among the first to be created. Although some of the members of this team had not had specialised training, the experience of the educators at Bela Vista and other nursery schools in Águeda that had been involved in the integration of children with special needs was considered particularly valuable, and the choice represented an acknowledgement of the pioneering work of Bela Vista.

The development consultation team and the multidisciplinary team

It was recognised that the cooperation among the health, education and social support sectors, which had been informally facilitated by dedicated professionals during the initial phase of the Águeda Movement, had played an important role in the establishment of new services. Two types of teams were created to solidify this cooperation.

The development consultation team was created in 1981 as a continuation of the clinical consultation service in the health centre. The team included a paediatrician, an educator from the special education team and a health centre psychologist. The team sought to support communities after they had drafted local childhood care and development plans.

Six *equipas multiprofissionais* ('multidisciplinary teams') were created in the country in 1982 as two-year pilot experiments. The life of the teams was extended in 1984, for two more years. In Águeda, the multidisciplinary team, like the development consultation team, was based at the health centre.

The two types of teams were expected to play a complementary role with regard to existing services. They gave guidance and support to parents and to health and education professionals when institutions had exhausted their own possibilities of understanding and solving problems for children in a parish. They represented an extension of the actions of the informal groups that had supported school integration during the initial phase of the Águeda Movement.

The development consultation team and the multidisciplinary teams took an integrated approach to the solution of the problems of the parents and professionals with whom they worked: They encouraged habits of good listening among team members; they placed a great deal of importance on the enrichment and enlargement of social networks that could supply formal and informal support to children's families; they met directly with specialists working in the regional services. This ensured access to information and other kinds of resources and guaranteed coordination in relation to the problems and needs of children and their families.

The 'zone element'

'We were present in several settings within a community. We were at the school, the kindergarten, the home, the healthcare unit . . . We knew almost all the families with problems, and it was easy to pull the people together because we knew how to tie up [all] the loose ends. I had a community group in Casa do Povo, and people came there to talk to me.'

Isabel Santiago, who acted as a 'zone element'

The Águeda special education team created the *elemento de zona* ('zone element'), a post held by a person whose task it was to optimise the management of resources and address global needs in poorer neighbourhoods in which children who were disabled seemed more prevalent. Among their many duties, the zone elements helped families arrange medical visits with family doctors, even accompanying them to the appointments, and showed them

how to register with the social security system, since many of the families did not know how to prepare the necessary documentation. The zone elements subsequently inaugurated the practice of keeping parish dossiers containing survey information on children with problems and children at risk and indicating children who were receiving assistance.

7. The demonstration effect

When programmes realise new ideas and fresh approaches in an open, public manner, other people in the community can witness the example and may be inspired to follow suit. This can become another means of building local capacity.

In the programme of Christian Children's Fund in Honduras, for instance, the reliance on *madres guías* who use standardised approaches and act as trainers among clusters of mothers, guarantees the transfer of knowledge within the community. All the people involved in the programme have regular opportunities to view the actions of the *madres guías*, acquire knowledge and pass on this information to others. Capacity-building occurs because of this multiplier effect whereby programme interventions involve the transfer of knowledge. This is true even among populations exhibiting high rates of illiteracy. The programme possesses a multiplier effect because the participants perceive the positive changes that result from the efforts undertaken in common.

In India, the Self Employed Women's Association set up a childcare technical team in 1997 to gather and evaluate the knowledge and skills needed for proper childcare and child development and transmit this to SEWA centre workers. The first technical team had 24 members, including *aagewans*, teachers, supervisors and coordinators from districts where centres were located. The technical teams meet once a month to share experiences and test new ideas. Child development experts, nutritionists and paediatricians, as well as people who work with children with special needs, are invited. When the teachers and *aagewans* implement changes or incorporate innovative ideas, others in the district observe the new activity and the results; they are often thereby spurred to follow the example.

8. The power of print

The timely distribution of easy-to-read descriptive materials about programme structures, methodologies and goals helps clarify roles, allay doubts, prevent conflicts, augment the opportunities for learning and maintain procedural standards and the quality of outcomes among programme agents, beneficiaries and other stakeholders. Essential programme concepts can be portrayed in words, but also through images. Book literacy is thus not essential among stakeholders. The existence of printed materials, including images, supports capacity-building and facilitates visual assimilation by non-literate programme participants.

An anti-malaria campaign in the Chocó

Because of the incidence of malaria in the Chocó, the fight against the disease was one of the most important contributions of the Promesa healthcare component. The efforts relied very much on community awareness campaigns carried out with the help of children, teachers and community leaders. People in two of the communities were trained to take blood samples

and examine them under microscopes to make diagnoses. The campaign led to a significant and fruitful research project starting in 1989.

The anti-malaria unit of the healthcare component began circulating a printed guide for group leaders, 25 publications on various aspects of the struggle against malaria, audio tapes for people who could not read or wished to use the publications to learn to read better and an instruction booklet on the production of mosquito nets.

In part through the endeavours of Promesa and the International Centre for Education and Human Development and with the support of the Ministry of Health and other national and international institutions, the infant mortality rate in the Chocó fell by a factor of two in only nine years (1988-1997), and the incidence of malaria dropped by more than half.

Books of truth

'We, as madres guías, have learned what is written in the manuals in order to share it with the children's mothers.'

An EI working group of madres guías

In the communities involved in the programme of Christian Children's Fund in Honduras, a ceremony is conducted to highlight the moment when qualified local women volunteers become madres guías. They are each given bags of simple objects to be used in the early stimulation activities among the children in their clusters. They are also presented with manuals that contain instructions, descriptions and explanations concerning the activities they will carry out within the early childhood programme, including sample growth and development charts, and practical guidelines on healthcare, nutrition, early childhood stimulation and education.

This ceremony is full of symbolism that resonates within the local culture. Thus, because the illiteracy rate is high in many CCF-H communities in Honduras, the transfer and possession of the manuals communicate a particularly meaningful status on the madres guías. The manuals are perceived as 'books of truth'. The ceremony therefore not only legitimises the new role of these women. It also automatically heightens the importance of the women within the community and reflects the trust that they are to enjoy among mothers.

For this reason, the EI team in Honduras adopted similar manuals for its exploration. Specifically, methodological manuals were created to organise and guide the application of the EI tools that were key elements in the process to plumb perceptions and opinions. Each methodological manual had precise objectives. This helped focus the study systematically so as to avoid improvisations and incomplete results, thereby giving the EI team the opportunity to obtain more accurate impressions.

The 'rotlo'

In India, the women in the Self Employed Women's Association are willing to pay for trained childcare that includes meals, but their ability to pay falls short of the costs. An awareness of costs and resource availability is therefore important for all SEWA centre staff if the childcare programme is to be sustainable.

Efforts to create such awareness began within the technical team. A pie chart, called a 'rotlo' (the traditional flat wheat or millet bread), was used to show how costs could be broken down. The rotlo was easy for everyone to understand, and teachers, aagewans and mothers gained a better idea of the costs involved in running a centre. This prompted them to seek contributions from parents, other SEWA members, employers, farmers, local village leaders, government schemes and private trusts. The result of the exercise was an increase in the donations in cash and in kind from all the districts.

9. Groups and other tools for reflection

A hallmark of the EI exploration was the frequent use of 'tools' such as interviews, workshops, the establishment of project timelines, the recording of anecdotes and stories about the programmes, the exploitation of analogies and pictures to plumb the opinions of stakeholders, observations of programme activities by team members, and additional techniques to allow programme beneficiaries, staff and other community members plenty of opportunities to describe the programmes in which they were involved. Within the 'space for reflection' created through these tools, the stakeholders were able to embark on an evaluation of their programme experiences, take stock of their reactions to the programmes and the reactions of others and gain a deeper understanding of ways the programmes related to their goals and their needs. The space for reflection became an environment for learning that could contribute to more well informed community action.

Certainly, the persistent application of these tools by many EI teams was noteworthy in such diverse contexts in numerous countries among people, including children, who were, in many cases, illiterate and who spoke languages and followed traditions that placed them in the minority within their own countries. Nonetheless, the tools and other components in the overall EI approach were proposed to the teams as aids in their enquiries, but the teams were free to employ them or not. (Actually, many of the tools were singled out only as the EI evolved.) The teams were encouraged, in fact, to embrace or create whatever tools they found most appropriate. The key was that the methods and techniques would foster participation and be relevant within the programme contexts.

Thus, the EI tools were not all implemented by all the teams, and many of the tools used by the teams had been identified and adapted individually by them.⁴ Indeed, tools like those in the EI toolkit have been used by sociologists and researchers in other fields for many years already, and, before their participation in the EI, some of the programmes had been relying on similar tools to encourage communication and facilitate relevant learning among stakeholders on issues of importance to the programme communities.

For example, when the EI team in the Philippines set to weaving its activities into the daily routine of the programme of the Community of Learners Foundation, the task proved quite straightforward because, ever since the beginning of the programme in the early 1990s, COLF had been relying on interactive group-oriented interventions to engage the participation

⁴ It was expected only that the teams would enquire among the stakeholders, gain insights into the complexity of the programme experiences, weigh programme impact, document the EI process and report on findings to the Foundation.

of the Pinatubo Aeta families. These interventions were highly suited to the EI. Thus, the parents had created many of the programme learning materials, and, along with COLF child development workers, had been drawing on games, discussion groups and writing activities adapted from the ‘whole language’ approach implemented by COLF in educational programmes; they had been analysing the issues that affected them as caregivers and community members, and they had always been involved in determining the steps – small or large – necessary to realise their own learning activities and in setting the pace at which the learning took place.

During the EI exploration, the EI team in Israel conducted focus-group discussions and one-on-one interviews with Beta Israel stakeholders in the Almaya programme. Irrespective of age, these immigrants from Ethiopia were well known among the team members for being taciturn. They tended to be very reticent in any kind of conversation with strangers. The trick was to employ community insiders among the interviewers and to exercise a great deal of patience during the process. If responses were considered too brief, the interviewers urged elaboration by asking follow-up questions. The interviews were therefore relatively open ended.

In India, the Self Employed Women’s Association promoted observation and reflection as monitoring tools in order to ensure that its childcare centres were moving in an appropriate direction. Thus, crèche teachers and supervisors were urged to maintain daily journals to record events and comments about the special needs of individual children. These journals then become the groundwork for activity planning in each centre. Moreover, they helped enhance the writing skills of the staff and the sensitivity of staff towards the needs of the children.

The interview as a tool in the Chocó

In Colombia, the International Centre for Education and Human Development had been envisaged as a research and development centre for early child development initiatives, and a process of planning, evaluation and research was implemented from the early stages to accompany the Promesa programme in the Chocó. The programme communities there, especially the mothers, gradually became more and more involved in the process. This feature went some way in establishing the credibility of Promesa among the population.

At the outset, information was gathered on the communities and among the inhabitants as a baseline so as to be able to gauge changes during the implementation of Promesa. One of the most important tools in this effort was the interviews conducted among parents. The interviews included questions about the education, occupations and incomes of family members and questions about the home, such as the condition of the sanitation and water facilities, the floors, the walls and the roof. Parents were asked about their self-image, their aspirations for their children, their ability to care for the physical and emotional well-being of their children, and family activities involving the children. Information was also collected on under-five mortality and on live births among the families.

The results were used to assess the needs of the community, and, subsequently, evaluations, including a tracer study, were conducted to gauge the responsiveness of the programme to some of these needs.

The wheels of reflection

A series of projects managed through the Águeda Movement in Portugal, sought to incorporate community learning strategies that involved children and others more directly. In January 1995, two existing projects, *Viver Melhor entre Nós* ('Living Better Together') and *É Nossa Saúde* ('To Our Health') were combined into the *Viver à Saúde da Comunidade* project ('Living for the Health of the Community'), which ran until December 1996. In these projects, whenever possible, children, youth and sometimes entire families were asked to talk about their lives in terms of health risks and in terms of the risk of exclusion so that the movement could judge more accurately the views and the needs of the communities in these areas.

The *Contador de Sonhos* ('The Narrator of Dreams') project took this trend one step further. It promoted informal encounters among children, families, professionals and other community members. During these encounters, any participant could speak openly about subjects of common or individual interest, including planning issues. Activities were also organised that involved the use of imagery, myth, dance, music, the plastic arts, or theatre to 'animate' this public space for reflection and encourage the expression of the inner realities of individuals. People were urged to share even their dreams.

Informal meetings such as these had already been at the heart of the Águeda Movement since the beginning, in the mid-1970s. They came to be called '*rodas*' ('wheels') because the participants typically sat together in a circle or semicircle so that everyone could see each other. The effect of these meetings was so powerful that, in a manner not entirely conscious among the stakeholders, they helped maintain cohesion within the movement. Somehow, the various informal spaces generated similar questions, discoveries, innovations and strategies within distant groups who had no tangible contacts. There seemed to be a sort of indirect communication, an osmosis.

This cohesion of the movement should not be surprising. The key to the movement over so many years has been inclusion, and this inclusion has been practiced scrupulously from the very beginning in all the discussions as well. Thus, for instance, at the Bela Vista preschool in Águeda, preschoolers sit on cushions in a semicircle to listen as each one of them takes his or her turn to tell a story. Likewise, there is normally a 'wheel hour' among the older children, during which, one by one, they talk about their problems, concerns, desires and plans. The 'wheels' among the professionals and other adults are similarly symmetrical.

The wheels are symmetrical not only in terms of the form, but also in terms of relationships. There is the same dedication to serious reflection and the same consideration for the opinions of others. Participants are respectful of differences and tolerate the errors of others, while learning to recognise their own errors. Individuality is appreciated, even as the group is constructed. The respect and the toleration generate a climate of confidence in which knowledge can be built up based on experience.

The 'wheels of reflection' have therefore favoured a culture within the movement that is based on the value attributed to the individual and to interpersonal relationships. This is the approach of the movement and is a significant reason why there is a movement.

Bibliography

Information on the Effectiveness Initiative

Information about the Effectiveness Initiative, including downloadable documents, is available at the website of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, <www.bernardvanleer.org>. See, for example, the series *Early Childhood Matters* especially the following.

Bernard van Leer Foundation (2000), 'The Effectiveness Initiative: Creating an Environment for Learning', *Early Childhood Matters*, No. 96, Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague.

Bernard van Leer Foundation (2001), 'Effectiveness Initiative: First Fruits', *Early Childhood Matters*, No. 99, Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague.

References for the reports that have been produced by individual Effectiveness Initiative teams on eight early childhood development programmes in as many countries and that have been used extensively in this book are listed here below.

Colombia: Myers, Robert G., Marta Arango, Glendon P. Nimnicht, Alejandro Acosta Ayerbe, Arellys Moreno de Yáñez and Fernando Peñaranda Correa (2004), 'El Caso de Colombia: Promesa' ('The Case of Colombia: Promesa'), March, International Centre for Education and Human Development and the Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague.

Honduras: CCF-H (Christian Children's Fund of Honduras) (2002), 'El Trabajo de la Madre Guía en el Contexto de la Iniciativa sobre Efectividad' ('The Work of the Madre Guía within the Context of the Effectiveness Initiative'), Christian Children's Fund of Honduras and the Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague.

India: Anandalakshmy, Subra, Mirai Chatterjee, Kashmira Pandit, Vasumati Rawal, Naimeesha Joshi, Kalana Vyas, Rasheeda Ganchi, Janak Kapoor and Dhangauri Makwana (2003), 'Utsah: The Effectiveness Initiative at SEWA', SEWA and the Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague.

Israel: Lipsky, Dina, Miri Levin-Rozalis, Mamuye Zere, Liesbeth Zwitser and Kirk Felsman (2002), 'The Effectiveness Initiative: Almaya, the Association for the Advancement of the Ethiopian Child and Family', December, Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague.

Kenya: Mwaura, Peter (2003), 'Creating an Effective Early Childhood Education Programme: A Case of the Madrasa Resource Centre Programme', Madrasa Regional Research Programme and the Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague.

Peru: Vásquez de Velasco, Carmen, Rossana Sarmiento, Fiorella Lanata, María Eugenia Linares and Arellys Moreno de Yáñez (2003), 'Proyecto Iniciativas de Efectividad: Programas no Escolarizados de Educación Inicial' ('The Effectiveness Initiative: The Non-Formal Early Education Programme'), Sumbi and the Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague.

Philippines: de los Angeles-Bautista, Feny, Tina Abad, Myke Bismar, Lewie Baguyo, Nenet Aldecoa, Lotus Postrado, Nato de los Angeles and Kokoy Francisco (2002), 'A Report on the Effectiveness Initiative within the COLF Pinatubo Programme', COLF Pinatubo Programme and the Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague.

Portugal: d'Espiney, Rui, María José Tovar, Teresa Almeida, Clara Lima, Antonio Gomes, Isabel Cristina Oliviera, Fátima Cerveira and Emilia Penetra (2001), 'Águeda: Uma História que Vamos Contando à Medida que a Vamos Descobrimos' ('Águeda: A Story We Tell as We Learn about It'), Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague.

A detailed overview of the Effectiveness Initiative, including an appraisal, can be found in:

Zimmermann R, (ed.) (2004) *Stories We have Lived, Stories We have Learned*; Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague.

'Following Footsteps' Tracer Studies

Under the auspices of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, tracer studies were conducted among some of the programmes and in some of the countries involved in the EI. The studies formed part of 'Following Footsteps', a pilot programme initiated by the Foundation in 1998 that explored the effects over a period of from three to twenty years of a selection of early childhood programmes on children, adolescents, parents, teachers and others who had taken part. An overview of 'Following Footsteps' can be found in:

Cohen, Ruth N. (2004), 'Introducing Tracer Studies: Guidelines for Implementing Tracer Studies in Early Childhood Programmes', Bernard van Leer Foundation: The Hague.

The tracer studies have been individually described in a series of publications issued by the Foundation, as follows:

Degazon-Johnson, Roli (2001), 'A New Door Opened: A Tracer Study of the Teenage Mothers Project, Jamaica', *Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections*, No. 13, June.

Griffith, Jean (2002), 'To Handle Life's Challenges: A Tracer Study of Servol's Adolescent Development Programme in Trinidad', *Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections*, No. 16, February.

le Roux, Willemien (2002), 'The Challenges of Change: A Tracer Study of San Pre-School Children in Botswana', *Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections*, No. 15, February.

Levin-Rozalis, Miri and Naama Shafran (2003), 'A Sense of Belonging: A Tracer Study of Almay's Parent Cooperative Kindergarten, Israel', *Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections*, No. 19, March.

Molloy, Brenda (2001), 'Still Going Strong: A Tracer Study of the Community Mother's Programme, Dublin, Ireland', *Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections*, No. 17, April.

Njenga, Ann and Margaret Kabiru (2001), 'In the Web of Cultural Transition: A Tracer Study of Children in Embu District, Kenya', *Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections*, No. 14, November.

Reports on a tracer study of children and families involved in the early stimulation programme of Christian Children's Fund in Honduras and on a 20-year follow-up among children and families in the Promesa programme, Colombia, are forthcoming.

Other Resources

The websites listed below typically also contain numerous other interesting links. This list and the links represent only the briefest sampling of the links available on the worldwide web.

Child Care Information Exchange: <www.childcareexchange.com>. Child Care Information Exchange has been in existence for 25 years. The website offers early childhood learners worldwide many opportunities to share ideas, access resources and keep up to date on developments in the early childhood profession.

‘Child Development and Early Childhood Education,’ The Finance Project, Welfare Information Network: <www.financeprojectinfo.org/wfn/childev.asp>. The website offers information on relevant laws and childhood education and development initiatives in the United States.

Children’s House in Cyberspace: <www.child-abuse.com/childhouse>. This is an interactive resource centre and information exchange on the well-being of children.

Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development: <www.ecdgroup.com>. The website offers detailed information, working papers and reports. It also offers on-line resources and non-electronic resources relating to young children and their families. See, especially: *Coordinators’ Notebooks*, Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development: <www.ecdgroup.com/coordinators_notebook.asp>.

Early Childhood Education on Line: <www.ume.maine.edu/ECEOL-L>. The website supplies a wealth of information on educational approaches and opportunities for information exchanges on subjects of interest, particularly the provision of quality care and the creation of good learning situations for children 0 to 8 years of age.

Enabling Education Network, The University of Manchester: <www.eenet.org.uk>. The Enabling Education Network is an information-sharing network aimed at the support and promotion of the inclusion of marginalised groups in education worldwide.

International Step by Step Organisation: <www.issa.nl>. ISSA is a forum for parents, teachers and faculty to promote the values of an open society and equal access to a quality education for all children. ISSA’s activities grew out of the Step by Step Programme, which was created in 1994 by the Soros Foundations Network and Children’s Resources International to foster democratic principles and strengthen community involvement in early childhood education. At the time of ISSA’s establishment in the Netherlands in 1999, the Step by Step Programme was being implemented in 26 countries, reaching over 500,000 children and their families.

World Bank Group: ‘Early Childhood Development: The ABC’s of ECD’, <www.worldbank.org/children>. This site proposes a collection of Internet resources on early childhood development and related topics. Priority has also been given to sites of international importance. Click on ‘Country and Region Specific Resources.’

Zero to Three: <www.zerotothree.org>. Zero to Three is a national, non-profit organisation located in Washington, DC, that is dedicated solely to advancing the healthy development of babies and young children. See, for instance: Griffin, Abbey (no year), ‘How to Put together a Good Infant/Toddler Programme’, Zero to Three National Centre, 2000 14th St. N, Ste 380, Arlington, VA 22201, Tel: +1 703 528-4300, Fax: +1 703 528-6848.

The Effectiveness Initiative was undertaken by the Bernard van Leer Foundation in 1999 with the announced purpose of exploring the attributes and the sources of the effectiveness of a small group of early childhood development programmes. Each programme was widely recognised as ‘effective’ in the broad sense that they were meeting the basic developmental needs and enhancing the health and welfare of young children and their families and had shown a good track record for a minimum of ten years. Teams were put together to observe the programmes close up and talk with personnel and members of the beneficiary populations. After several years of this activity, which included the collection of a great deal of raw data and substantial documentation on the programmes, the teams drafted and submitted reports to the Foundation.

Small Ideas that Work portrays several of the many straightforward, practical schemes implemented through these programmes to achieve very specific goals within particular contexts. One might refer to this publication as a ‘primer’ on some of the innovations originating within the programmes. By communicating this information, the Foundation hopes to encourage fresh thinking and enhance collective learning about practical problem-solving among other programme stakeholders in the field.

The Foundation would be pleased if this publication helps promote additional information-gathering on similar practical approaches that may be useful within a variety of programme environments.

Bernard van Leer  Foundation