

# **UNESCO-UNICEF Regional Cooperation On Early Childhood Policy Review**

## **The Regional Guidelines**

### **1. The Why? –Objectives of the review**

The main objective of the regional review is to support and assist the countries in meeting the first goal of Education for All, “Expanding and improving early childhood care and education” by identifying, documenting and sharing good practices as well as constraints and challenges in early childhood policy development and implementation in the selected countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

In light of the broader regional objective, the specific objectives and goal of the review at the national level shall be determined by the relevant stakeholders (of the review) in the countries, with the aim of contributing to the following broad outcomes:

- To support national governments in developing and implementing policies related to young children and their families
- To build national capacities in preparing policies that support the development, delivery and access to quality early childhood services and provisions.
- To develop knowledge about policy and identify a resource base to function as reference for policy makers, including justification and foundation for early childhood (in their countries).
- To share experiences and perspectives in policy development and implementation within and among countries on early childhood services/provisions.

### **2. The What? – Scope of the review**

#### **2.1 What do we mean by an Early Childhood policy or Policy Framework?**

A National **Early Childhood Policy** is a high-level plan that is officially adopted. It guides current and future planning decisions, policy implementation, policy advocacy and evaluation. A policy identifies and guides general programme development areas, and it provides a framework for programme coordination strategy, structure, financing and procedures. An Early Childhood Policy should include all sectoral (MoE, MoH, MoSW, and others) and cross-sectoral activities and age spans.

An Early Childhood Policy does *not* include detailed operational descriptions of programmes or particulars for programme design, implementation and evaluation. These are found in Annual Action Plans or in programme documents. Provision for embracing current and suggested national programmes should be made in the policy document under strategies. An Authority such as a constitution, legislature, parliament or executive order can establish a national policy. In countries where there are no specific Early Childhood

policies, the term policies is used to refer to the series of decisions taken by the government bodies that have an effect on young children.

A National **Early Childhood Policy Framework** is especially useful for nations that have a full array of well-developed cross-sectoral and sectoral policies dealing with issues affecting young children and their families. It can also be useful for nations that want to embrace existing policies and fill in notable gaps in policies. It should include most if not all previously established sectoral and cross-sectoral policies, plans and strategies, and also identify and react to major policy and coordination gaps, conflicts and duplications. A framework should do this by reinforcing selected existing policies and by filling policy gaps with new programmes, by setting priorities among policy areas, and by establishing key strategies and standards.

## 2.2 What is a Policy Review?

The term “policy review” can be understood in many different ways and can even create confusion sometimes. Therefore, it is important to have a clear common understanding on what we mean by a “policy review” for this particular regional initiative. The different ways of understanding or the confusion that comes along often arise from the word “review”, which implies an effort to revise or improve an already existing policy. Thus countries that do not yet have a policy or a policy framework in place, or even when there is a policy that is not yet implemented, may consider that reviews are not needed or relevant to their policy development and implementation process.

For this regional exercise, the term “policy review” is used in a more flexible and comprehensive way, in order to meet the needs of the countries in the region where the levels and stages of policy development vary extensively between countries. A policy review involves an analysis of current policy, with a focus on the ways in which the policies impact on the lives of young children and their families. Furthermore a review brings into focus whether or not policies are actually implemented, and whether or not there are gaps in policies and/or the legislation and laws that accompany them. It allows countries to determine how they want to move forward in either policy development or implementation.

There can be various ways of conducting a policy review. Depending on the needs of the country and/or the stage of policy or policy framework development, there could be three types of policy review as follows:

- Diagnostic review
- Thematic review
- Comprehensive review

While the first type (diagnostic review) can take as short as one week to complete, the latter (Comprehensive review) could take a year or more. For this review we have 4-5 months. The decision on which type of review to conduct depends essentially on available time, resources, political commitment, purpose, process, planned uses, and context. A short description of each of these three review approaches are given below for quick reference<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> From: Guidelines for the UNESCO Field Offices on National Early Childhood Policy Reviews Prepared by *the Section for Early Childhood and Inclusive Education, Hqs( 2005) p. 2-3,Section 3*

a) **Diagnostic Review:** The Diagnostic Review is useful for countries where there is no early childhood policy in place, although there may be a policy framework. It is normally conducted by one expert (or a team of experts) who reviews the relevant policy documents, meets with key government officials and stakeholders, and makes visits to main early childhood services throughout a two or three-day field mission. The discussion that occurs between the government officials and the expert can highlight priority policy issues that need to be resolved and the overall direction that needs to be considered in order to tackle the issues.

While such a review cannot concern itself with all the details, it can point out an insightful entry point for the government's policy intervention in early childhood. It can also be a useful approach for countries where there are major activities being implemented, but the government, nonetheless, wishes to find room for further improvement in the future.

b) **Thematic Review:** A Thematic Review focuses on one "burning issue" and conducts an in-depth review on that issue. This type of review would be useful for countries where there is already a policy or a policy framework on early childhood, but there is a need to identify (existing/remaining/emerging) gaps in the policy or to assess the effectiveness of the policy in targeting that particular issue. It is also most suitable if the government is already clear about its critical policy issue(s) and intends to find corresponding solutions through a more analytic examination of the issue(s).

The main difference between the Thematic Review and the Diagnostic Review is that the former is broader in scope. Within a Thematic Review that is more targeted it is possible to consult all the concerned stakeholders before more elaborated recommendations are made.

c) **Comprehensive Review:** A Comprehensive Review may follow the same steps as a Thematic Review. The key difference between a Comprehensive Review and a Thematic Review is that the former covers all issue areas, including access, quality, resources, governance, etc. While the Thematic Review focuses on one particular issue, the Comprehensive Review may aim to evaluate the overall early childhood policy development of the country in all areas of policy.

The greatest advantage of a full review report is that its' comprehensive analysis can serve in itself as a good planning document for the government. It can become powerful reference material for the advocacy efforts of national stakeholders.

### **2.3 What are the themes and issues to review?**

As part of the planning process for the review, countries need to decide whether their immediate challenge is to initiate a process for developing a National Early Childhood Policy or to develop a Policy Framework building on the existing policies.

The initiation of a process leading to the development of a National Early Childhood **Policy** should be considered in a context where there is/are:

- no adequate array of sectoral and cross-sectoral policies supporting young children and their families;
- a low level of public understanding regarding the status, rights and needs of vulnerable children;

- major gaps in early childhood services;
- a need for enhancing or reconsidering national strategies for young children; or the
- existing policies were developed without wide consultation and consensus building.

A National Early Childhood **Policy Framework** is appropriate in countries where robust sectoral and cross-sectoral policies exist in all major areas of early childhood, or where only a few gaps need to be filled. In some countries the policy challenges are related less to policy gaps but to service gaps and inter-agency priority setting, coordination, integration and accountability issues which can also be addressed in a policy framework.

Based on this initial decision, the themes for the review will be different. An array of themes and questions for review are suggested for both options.

**Review in a context without policies:** In situations where there are no policies in place that target the young children’s holistic development, a different approach would be needed. In such a case it might be useful to start by posing the question, “what is the critical issue that calls for policy level guidance”? If there is no such critical issue, there might not be need for further policy development.

### **2.3.1 Identification of the policy profile**

An overview of current policy/policies is useful for all. The review would look at a specific policy or policies that target young children. Some countries may have already compiled a policy profile for other purposes and this can be used for purposes of this review as well.

In all contexts, it is useful to describe the following:

- Definition of early childhood development, care and education
- Coverage – disaggregated by age and gender
- Key organizations responsible for the implementation
- Implementation strategies
- Institutional framework for implementation, along with identification of key decision makers at each level
- Financing of implementation

In addition, useful topics to cover in an overview when there is already a policy in place could include:

- Goal of the policy
- Inclusion (or not) of a situational analysis and resource assessment
- Objectives and rationale
- Target group
- Process of policy development
- Legislation and laws put into place to support policy implementation
- Implementation strategies and timelines
- Monitoring and evaluation of policy and its outcomes

### **2.3.2. Specific themes to be reviewed: Access, Quality, Resources, Governance, and Effectiveness**

The specific areas of review by countries could be closely identified under one or a combination of several of the 5 generic themes, which are summarized in the table below. The countries participating in the review could also refer to these generic themes when deciding on the issue or focus of the review during the consultation stage with national stakeholders.

| Generic category  | Sub-category                           | Policy questions <sup>2</sup>  |
|-------------------|--|--|
| <b>Access</b>     | Level of participation in ECCE         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•What are the causes of low participation in ECCE? Is it a problem of availability, accessibility or affordability? Or is there a problem of low demand or awareness of the need for ECCE?</li> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> Is there any need to revisit the government's access policy for ECCE? What are the most cost-effective and pedagogically correct service options that the government should focus on to expand access?</li> </ul> |
|                   | Equity in access to quality ECCE       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Who are the advantaged and the disadvantaged and what are the reasons for the gaps in their access to ECCE?</li> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> What are the most feasible government policy and financing options and strategies for helping the disadvantaged?</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Quality</b>    | Integrated pedagogy and training       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•How well integrated are the content, practice and personnel training of early childhood care services, early childhood education services and formal education?</li> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> How should policy and systems be adjusted to integrate care and education services and to facilitate the child's transition from ECCE to formal schooling?</li> </ul>   |
|                   | Physical and material support          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Is the physical infrastructure of ECCE services adequate? What improvements are most urgently needed, and how could the necessary resources be mobilised?</li> <li>•Are ECCE teaching and learning materials adequate, quantitatively, culturally and developmentally? What are the best practices for the development and supply of quality materials that can be scaled up?</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Resource</b>   | Distribution of public resources       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Who is benefiting from public investment in ECCE?</li> <li>•How is ECCE provision financed, and <b>POLICY:</b> is this in line with the policies?</li> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> What should be done at the policy and system levels to ensure that public resources are channelled to the poor?</li> </ul>  |
|                   | Mobilisation of non-public resources   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Who are the key non-public actors and what are their contributions?</li> <li>•What should be done to systematise partnership with the non-public sector?</li> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> What type of guidance, standards, and responsibilities do the policies set for the non-public actors?</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Governance</b> | Across different sectors of government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> How are different sectors coordinated for the development and implementation of ECCE policy?</li> <li>•What is the most feasible and effective way of mustering inter-sectoral coordination?</li> </ul>   |
|                   | Across different levels of government  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•What are the respective responsibilities of the different levels of government for ECCE?</li> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> What should be done to improve the implementation of decentralisation policy?</li> </ul>   |

|                      |                         |  |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Effectiveness</b> | Implementation          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> Is policy transformed into an annual action plan? Is the plan adopted and implemented?</li> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> What evidence exists that the policies have been effectively implemented?</li> <li>•What contradictions and bottlenecks exist in implementation that should be addressed at the national level? Other levels of government?</li> </ul>                          |
|                      | Monitoring & Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> What systems are in place for monitoring and evaluating policy implementation and effectiveness?</li> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> What are the processes in place to enable data to be collected on policy and implementation?</li> <li>•<b>POLICY:</b> What mechanisms are in place to ensure the collecting and sharing of data relevant to. national EFA and MDG reports?</li> </ul> |

### 3. The How? – Principles, Modalities, Process and Methods of review

#### 3.1 Guiding principles

The policy review shall be conducted in reference to the following guiding principles, especially at the point when data and information are analyzed and (policy) recommendations made.

##### General guiding principles:

- Promote impartiality and objectivity of the review process as much as possible
- Ensure a right-based perspective and mainstream gender and inclusion as crosscutting principles

##### Particularly within early childhood:

- Acknowledge and reinforce the concept that the ultimate purpose of early childhood services/provisions is the holistic development of the child
- Acknowledge the importance of the role of primary caregivers and of the prenatal period to the child's development
- Ensure equitable access of girls and boys to services, with special measures to ensure the access of vulnerable children
- Ensure the smooth transition from home to center to school

#### 3.2 Type and scale of the review

There can be various ways of conducting a review. For this particular review exercise, the timeframe proposed for carrying out the national studies is 4 to 6 months following the regional training workshop. Each country's decision on which type and scale of review to conduct thus depends essentially on the timeframe as well as the available resources, political commitment, purpose, process, planned use, and context. Whatever the type and scale of the review, it is critical that the purpose, process and uses of the review are carefully identified and thoroughly planned.

#### 3.3 Modalities and planning the review process

##### 3.3.1 Modalities of cooperation

UNESCO and UNICEF offices in the countries participating in the review exercise shall at the outset of the project:

1. consult the relevant ministerial counterparts and national stakeholders to identify the issues/themes to be reviewed and to agree upon the type and overall scale of the review.
2. agree on the main modality of cooperation between UNICEF and UNESCO. The following examples describe some possible modalities of cooperation that could be considered depending on the national needs and time and resource availability. Note that these are illustrative not exhaustive:
  - Example 1: ONE UNESCO/UNICEF joint study on the same theme/topic identified together, with one country-specific TOR for the study and national researcher/institution identified, with joint supervision and monitoring of the progress of the study.
  - Example 2. : TWO separate studies under a common theme but with different issues or aspects of investigation/enquiry, to be supported separately by UNESCO and by UNICEF, in which case, there could be two teams of national researchers/institutions, or one national research team/institution undertaking both studies. There could also be two separate specific TORs to be prepared for each study.
  - Example 3. (somewhere between examples 1 and 2): ONE study on a theme jointly identified and agreed upon, but with a division of roles between UNESCO and UNICEF at different stages of the activity during the course of the exercise. For example, joint identification of theme/topic and national research team/institution, with divided responsibility for training, publishing, national seminars as needed, regional seminar, etc.
3. identify a team of national researchers or a local institution(s) to carry out the policy review.

Once the modality of cooperation and the research team is identified, the key process for the review should be planned and agreed upon by the stakeholders concerned in the country.

### **3.3.2 Planning the review process**

Key phases or steps for the policy review process can be identified to guide the national level review planning, even though the detailed steps for the review process vary from one country to another. Based on the guidelines by the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development and guidelines by UNESCO, the national researchers/institutions identified for the exercise could consider planning their review exercise by taking into consideration the following steps:

1. Pre-assessment of country commitment and focus of review
2. Establishing the Task Force (as necessary and appropriate)
3. Compiling of background information
4. Conducting an initial workshop (as necessary and feasible)
5. Data collection and analysis

6. Analysis of data and formulation of policy options
7. Review and finalization of recommendations
8. Moving from recommendations to policy and action

In situations where there are no policies in place (as yet) that target the young children’s holistic development, a different approach is needed. In such a case it might be useful to start by posing the question: “*What are the critical issues that call for policy-level guidance?*” If such issues can be identified, participatory working groups of key stakeholders can be formed to initiate a process of policy mapping and development followed the other steps suggested above as relevant.

### 3.4 Methods and tools

The reviews teams are encouraged to collect data through various methods, both qualitative and quantitative. In conducting the policy review exercise, however, countries are encouraged to apply qualitative methods as much as possible with quantitative support in the analysis and recommendations of the review.

The selection of tools to be used depends ultimately on the context and the policy environment in the country. There are however some existing processes and methodologies available that might be useful in planning and in carrying out the data collection process. For example, household surveys, Focus Group discussions, questionnaires and Interviews.

### 4. The When? – Regional time frame of the review exercise

The table below summarizes the overall regional time frame for the policy review exercise. Each participating country shall further adjust and work out and agree on a detailed country specific work plan and time frame for the country review exercise under the overall time frame at the regional level.

| Timeframe             | Regional level action   | Remarks for Country level action   |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| By end September 2006 | Confirm the list of participating countries   | Confirmed: China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Vietnam, DPRK as partial participation   |
| October 2006          | Develop Regional-level general TOR/Guidelines for the review  | A more country-specific TORs to be developed later on the basis of the regional TOR.   |
|                       | Countries start identifying issues to focus in the study  | FOs/COs to initiate detailed consultation between UNESCO/UNICEF offices and with national counterparts/stakeholders for issues identification and on possible cooperation modality and type/scale of review.           |
| November 2006         | Share TOR with FOs, identify issues the national researchers  | FOs/COs to identify national researchers and the regional review TOR to be adjusted/adapted to a country-specific TOR  |
| December 2006         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare research framework/protocols and tools as necessary, to be introduced at the regional training workshop as above.</li> </ul> | Countries to prepare a draft national plan for the study and in preparation for the training based on the country-specific TOR to be further elaborated and revised during the regional training workshop in Jan 2007. |
|                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify regional</li> </ul>   |  |

|                            |   |   |
|----------------------------|---|---|
|                            | consultant for the eventual regional synthesis production.                                      |   |
| Early February 2007        | Regional training workshop for national researchers for the policy review studies               | Venue BKK: FO to arrange travel of national researchers   |
| February-June/July 2007    | Support to countries as required  | Country policy review studies to be carried   |
| End July 2007              | Prepare for regional seminar  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submission of the country studies</li> <li>• National level workshops/meetings for country report launching and dissemination as appropriate</li> </ul>  |
| August 2007                | Regional seminar to share the country policy reviews: tentative venue: Vietnam to be confirmed. | National level workshops/meetings for country report launching and dissemination as appropriate   |
| August/September 2007      | Regional compilation: the regional compilation will incorporate the seminar outcomes.           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FOs/COs comments and feedback to regional synthesis draft</li> <li>• National level workshops/meetings for country report launching and dissemination as appropriate</li> </ul>  |
| End September/October 2007 | Regional compilation completed  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissemination of report at country level</li> <li>• Translation of regional synthesis into local language as necessary</li> <li>• National level workshops/meetings for country report launching and dissemination as appropriate</li> </ul> |

### **Annexes:**

Implementation Guidelines for the UNESCO/OECD Early Childhood Policy Review Project, UNESCO, 2005.

Creating A Shared Vision: How Policy Affects Early Childhood Care And Development, Coordinators' Notebook No. 17, 1995, The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, Judith L. Evans

Planning Policies for Early Childhood Development: Guidelines for Action, Emily Vargas-Barón, ADEA, UNICEF, UNESCO 2005.