

*Early childhood care &  
Development Programme  
in mauritius*

A Summative Evaluation  
by  
John Bennett

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# Early childhood care and development programme

A summative evaluation

prepared by John Bennett

On behalf of UNICEF mauritius office

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present evaluation of the GOM/UNICEF Programme of Co-operation has been written at the invitation of the UNICE Office in Port Louis. The focus of the text is on future orientations in the early childhood and family policy fields that UNICEF and the responsible ministries may wish to consider. The analysis results from a review visit to the island from 29<sup>th</sup> November to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2000, complemented by extensive documentary analysis. In the course of the review, the information gathered was cross-checked through interviews with ministry officials and a wide range of early childhood stakeholders on the island. The external reviewer was assisted throughout the review by the UNICEF Office, and an internal evaluation team composed of ministry officials. The facts and opinions expressed in this evaluation are, however, the sole responsibility of the author, and neither the ministries nor the UNICEF Office should be held accountable for any shortcomings that the text may present.

The analysis begins in Chapter II with an outline of contextual issues shaping early childhood policies and organisation in Mauritius. It covers briefly: economic and social development; infant and maternal health; family policy and support; gender equity; cultural diversity and language; children's rights and education; and the divided auspices of early development and education. The external reviewer is conscious that deeper knowledge of Mauritian society and culture, particularly of the various ethnic groups, would have allowed him to assess more accurately how notions of childhood are constructed in Mauritius, and which child and family policies are acceptable and feasible within specific contexts.

Chapters III and IV present detailed descriptions of the early development and early education sectors in Mauritius. The description focuses on the constituents of early childhood organisation that are especially relevant to policy makers, viz. auspices of the sector; legislation, regulation and monitoring; recent policy development (for the early development sector only); access; staffing, training and work conditions; quality standards; engaging parents, funding and financing. These constituents are passed in review so as to provide the reader with an overview of the current state of early development and education provision in Mauritius.

Chapters V and VI concentrate on the early childhood policy and programme initiatives taken by UNICEF in Mauritius. Very early in the review, it became clear to the external reviewer that the role of the UNICEF Office had been decisive in the recent progress of childhood policy in Mauritius, particularly in the early development and family education fields. As this role was judged very positively by the ministries and other stakeholders, we have devoted the major part of this section of the report to the future, to proposing orientations that UNICEF may wish to consider in the context of its reduced presence in Mauritius from December 2003. We outline several critical avenues to explore: reaching consensus about the values on which Mauritian education is founded; a strong focus on Ministry capacity-building and co-operation; the creation of a new funding mechanism to resource crèche, pre-primary school and after-school care; integrating services at local level, thus allowing parents, communities and NGOs a voice in the management of local services; data collection, surveys and research in the early childhood field; energetic support for school reform. The key policy challenges that emerge from these proposals are:

- The need to bring the ministries together in their appreciation of what are the fundamental aims of early development and education for children aged 0-6 years, and to unify their policies and service provision in so far as possible. To achieve this aim, we propose the creation of a cross-departmental *National Agency for Early Childhood Development and Education* which would – under the guidance of both ministries –

manage and organise provision; stimulate the sector; ensure research; take in charge current management issues such as, training; monitoring and inspection; and interface with the different groups of providers.

- To create a national funding mechanism for crèche, pre-school and after-school care. There can be little hope of significant progress in access to public services, or qualitative improvements in private sector services without greatly increased funding and investment over the next years. The potential sources of funding are: government, municipalities, employers, private providers and parents. It would be helpful if some mechanism were identified, as for example, in the pensions field, to transform the contributions of each into a stable and growing fund for the sector;
- To be vigilant about equity in access to early childhood services, and about the progress of children in need of special support through the school system. Several critics, including Prime Ministers and Ministers of Education, have commented that the Mauritian school system is not based sufficiently on fair access, nor does it give sufficient attention to the individual needs of children. UNICEF, with its special responsibility for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, may wish to reinforce its efforts to reach a public consensus about the values on which Mauritian education should be founded. Particular attention will be accorded to children in need of special supports, whether due to disability, poverty, family dysfunction or second language circumstances. Early childhood services can be very helpful for these children. Support needs also to be given to adolescent girls, who despite their good showing in the Certificate of Primary Education do not complete secondary education in the same proportion as boys.

Chapters VII and VIII propose for consideration further initiatives within the spheres of action of each ministry. The consolidation of the policy directions taken by the MWRCDFW is recommended, with, in parallel, the adoption of strategies to ease pressure of demand on public services. These strategies include: extending parental leave; expanding employer-funded services and introducing a range of family-friendly work practices. The increase of fiscal and other supports to both families and the private childminders is also discussed.

In parallel, the Ministry of Education is asked to consider the further expansion of public pre-school provision, but in a context of re-thinking early education in terms of its fundamental purposes and basic learning tools. In line with the *Concluding Observations* of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, some attention is given also to the issue of improving the supervision of the private providers. Staff recruitment, profiling and training are also examined briefly. The question of language acquisition is also raised, and the need for further research to be commissioned so as to decide the age at which Mauritian children should begin to acquire oral and written mastery of European and Asian languages. Finally, the issue of transition is treated and a recommendation is made that the solution adopted by several countries in Europe might be studied, namely, to make the pre-school years and Standard One part of the same Initial Education Cycle, based on appropriate practice.

Despite the many efforts of UNICEF and its partners in the involved ministries to provide young children in Mauritius with enhanced development and early education opportunities, many uncertainties remain, and critical policy positions have still to be clarified. What balance does the government wish to maintain between traditional child-rearing patterns in Mauritius and the growing need of the labour market for female labour? How will it sustain the strengths of the traditional family while supporting the right and need of women to obtain salaried work? How are working families to be supported to fulfil their child-rearing responsibilities? What arrangements will be made to allow parents both to care for their children and work part-time? Can parental leave be extended so as to allow working parents to care for their children at least in infancy (up to one year)? Can gender equality be sustained in this complex negotiation? Is the present situation of informal childminding and unsupervised pre-schools appropriate for young children? Is the pre-school seen, in fact, as the first level of care outside the home, while statistics on the extent of informal care are ignored? When will the government confront energetically the issue of equitable access to quality programmes for the children who most need early childhood services? Will the chosen policy options be properly funded?

Such questions are not unique to the Republic of Mauritius. One hopes, however, that the country will avoid the well-recorded error made by some European countries, namely, to ignore the question and allow a two-tiered system of “care” and “education” to develop by default. In the absence of co-ordinated policy for young

children, “childcare centres” with a paramedical and welfare orientation were established piecemeal in European countries, catering in general for children from low-income groups, while pre-school networks provided educational opportunities for middle-class children from the age of four years. It is possible, however, to develop a more unified and egalitarian system, with the role of the family recognised and supported, and well qualified personnel employed in all early development and education centres. As Oberhuemer and Ulich (1997) have written: early development and education programmes in appropriate environments can be organised “not only as an educational and social opportunity for children, but also as a forum for parent participation and community orientation.” We trust that the present report will encourage reflection on these issues.

## Chapter I

### Background to the Evaluation

1. The present evaluation report has been researched and written at the invitation of the UNICEF Office, Port Louis, Mauritius. Its purpose is two-fold: to evaluate the contribution of UNICEF to the Government of Mauritius Early Childhood Care and Development Programme, and secondly, to outline possible policy directions in the early childhood field over the next three years that the Government of Mauritius and UNICEF may wish to consider.
2. The report has been prepared by an evaluation team comprised of the following persons:
  - John BENNETT, Senior External Evaluator. Dr Bennett was former director of the Early Childhood and Family Unit at UNESCO, Paris, and at present, is project advisor to the ongoing OECD (Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development) Thematic Review of Early Childhood Policy.
  - Mr. Rajoo APPADOO, Advisor/ ECD Project Co-ordinator
  - Dr S. KALEEAH, Co-ordinator, Planning and Research Unit, Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare
  - Mrs. S. DHUNOOKCHAND, former Acting Director of Pre-primary Education and currently Acting Director for Pre-Vocational Education at the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research
  - Mr. S. GOBIN, Senior Executive Officer, Ministry of Health
  - Mr. Ahmad SOOGALI, Ministry of Education, and Local Evaluator of the review.

The review team was supported and guided by Mr Fock Seng HO TU NAM, of the UNICEF Office in Port-Louis, whose experience and advice were invaluable throughout the process.

### Schedule of the evaluation

3. The evaluation focused on “the early childhood care and development” (ECCD) sector, that is, on policies and practice relative to the early care and development of young children from birth to six years. As compulsory primary school begins in Mauritius at age five, the stage for analysis should normally have included Standard One of primary school. The evaluation took place over a ten-day period, from Wednesday 29 November to Friday 8 December, 2000. It was possible to visit several crèches between these dates, but as the period corresponded to the summer school vacation period in Mauritius, only two visits to pre-schools were made.

### Methodology of the evaluation

4. Given the briefness of the review period, the evaluation team adopted the following methodology. Firstly, the home evaluation team members and the UNICEF Office provided intensive briefings to the external evaluator, concerning all aspects of early education and care in Mauritius. These briefings were filled out, in turn, by a critical review of the main documentary evidence available. The documentation examined included the Government of Mauritius/UNICEF Programme of Co-operation 1996-2000, and other related project documents and evaluation reports. Analyses were also undertaken of the major national policy documents and plans concerning children, and documents on early childhood, education and child policy that have been drawn up by involved Ministries and other sources in recent years. The review of the relevant policy literature was then cross-checked by a series of interviews with representatives of

the relevant Ministries, senior UNICEF officials and major stakeholders in the early childhood field in Mauritius. In all, six Ministries were interviewed, three para-statal bodies, several NGOs, representatives of two teachers' unions and numerous involved persons.

5. Depending on the respondent, the interviews focused on determined themes, e.g. the context of early childhood policy in Mauritius (Chapter II), or the major themes in early care and education that need to be taken into account by policy makers (Chapter III and IV). A final, but far too brief part of the review, were field visits to different services catering for young children, particularly, but not exclusively, in the vicinity of Port Louis. Field visits are essential if one is to gain insight into how, in practice, an early childhood system works, and how it is perceived by the various stakeholders. This is an aspect of the review that we hope can be completed by a later visit, as the analyses and conclusions proposed here need to be verified and tuned by more adequate field work.

## **Outline of the Report**

6. The evaluation report comprises eight chapters:

The present Chapter I is introductory, and provides the background to the evaluation. Chapter II is a brief situation analysis of contextual issues that influence policy for young children and their families in Mauritius. An analysis of the early childhood development and education services is then presented in Chapters III and IV, following the lines of division that already exist at government level between the early development and early education sectors. The overview covers the features of each sector in some detail: auspices; legislation, regulation and monitoring; policy development (for the early development sector only); access; staffing, training and work conditions; quality standards; engaging parents, funding and financing.

Chapter V presents the early childhood programme as drawn up in the Country Programme agreed between the Government of Mauritius and UNICEF. The main activities of the programme and their implementation status are briefly outlined. There follows in Chapter VI a reflection on the policies and activities that UNICEF Office may wish to consider as a follow-up to the programme, especially within the context of its reduced presence in Mauritius from December 2003. Most of the initiatives suggested concern systemic matters related to equity, capacity building, or co-operation between the ministries and the major stakeholders in the early childhood field.

The concluding chapters focus on issues and recommendations that are more closely related to the early development (Chapter VII) and early education sectors (Chapter VIII). In particular, present and future policy issues are passed in review. We offer our suggestions in a spirit of professional co-operation, and trust that the analyses will have some interest and use for the concerned ministries.

## **Acknowledgements**

7. The evaluation team would like to acknowledge the support provided by the UNICEF Office in Mauritius during the course of the review. In particular, the external evaluator wishes to thank Stanislaw Czaplicki, the UNICEF Assistant Country Representative, Fock Seng Ho Tu Nam, responsible officer for the UNICEF early childhood programme, and the many UNICEF staff who so ably assisted the course of the review and showed much personal kindness. The Office made every effort to ensure that the evaluation team should have a fair and comprehensive overview of the early childhood field in Mauritius, focussing especially on the period covered by the joint Government of Mauritius/UNICEF Programme of Co-operation. The external evaluator also wishes to place on record his appreciation of the assistance and advice provided throughout the review by the local evaluator, Mr. Ahmad Soogali.

8. Equally, we wish to place on record our gratitude to the Ministries involved, in particular to the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare, which has chief responsibility for the

development and education of children from birth to three. The Child Development Unit of this Ministry made remarkable efforts to guide the review team and to supply it with a wide range of policy documents, programme guidelines, evaluations and publications of high quality. The Ministry of Education also made real efforts to be at our disposal for information and policy discussions. We would like to thank in particular Mrs. S. Dhunookchand, former Acting Director of Pre-primary Education, and currently Acting Director for Pre-Vocational Education at the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, and Mrs. P. Gukhool the current Head of Pre-primary Education. Like their counterparts in the industrialised world, education policy makers in Mauritius are now taking a growing interest in the pre-school sector. In fact, officials from all the Ministries whom we approached, and from the Mauritius Institute of Education and the Mauritius College of the Air, were extremely generous with their time, in receiving the reviewers, providing documentation and answering many questions about early childhood policy and process in Mauritius.

9. The visit took place at an important moment in the history of young children in Mauritius. On the one hand, the Government is coming under the obligation to support families and take much greater responsibility for young children than ever before. On the other, it will have to face this responsibility from 2004 without the present volume of support and policy expertise provided by the UNICEF Office. Overall, it is a critical juncture in which complex decisions about the future need to be made. For this reason, the analyses and suggestions offered in the evaluation are tentative, in recognition of the difficulty faced by an external evaluator - no matter how well briefed - in fully grasping the nuances of the system, and the range of issues that need to be taken into account.

10. The facts and opinions expressed in the evaluation are therefore, the sole responsibility of the external reviewer. While he acknowledges with gratitude the valuable help received from the other team members, ministry officials, the UNICEF office, and from researchers and practitioners in Mauritius, they should not be held accountable for any short-comings that this document may present.

### **Terminology**

11. In so far as possible, we have followed Mauritian terms throughout this report, except to refer to policies and programmes for children aged 0-3 years as “early development” activities. We refer to the Pre-Primary sector as “early education” or the “pre-school” sector (not itself a very satisfactory term). When speaking about the entire sector, 0-6 years, we employ the term: early childhood development and education, or ECDE. In doing so, we wish to underline that infants and the youngest children are developing and learning from birth, and that environments for them, whether at home or outside the home, should not be limited to “care” or protection.

Where age groups are concerned, we use the usual international convention. Thus, 0-3 years refers to children from birth to the third birthday, and excludes three year olds. 3-5 years refers to children from their third to their fifth birthday, that is, 3-5 years includes only three- and four- year olds.

The ministry with responsibility for family and child development policy, the Ministry of Women, has changed name several times in its short history. We refer to it throughout as the Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare or MWRCDFW.

## Chapter II

### Contextual Issues Shaping ECDE Policies in Mauritius

12. The experience of national reviews of early childhood systems teaches that the context of early development and education needs to be assessed very carefully. Early childhood policy-makers are obliged to negotiate continually with deeply-held community beliefs about child-rearing, the roles of women and men in society, and the extent to which public services should intervene in an area that traditionally has been the sole responsibility of families. In addition, the constraints placed by the economic situation on child and family policy need to be known, as well as the priorities of the educational system. For these reasons, we provide in this chapter, a brief introduction to the context of childhood and education in Mauritius. We have chosen to concentrate on: economic and social development; infant and maternal health; family policy and support; gender equity; cultural diversity and language; children's rights and education; and the divided auspices of early development and education. We are conscious that deeper knowledge of Mauritian society and culture, particularly of the various ethnic groups, would have allowed us to assess more accurately how notions of childhood are constructed in Mauritius, and which child and family policies are realistic within specific contexts.

#### 1. Economic and social development

13. Mauritius has to its credit very solid achievements in the economic and social fields: a tradition of democratic government with a commitment to social justice and progress; the creation of a macro-economic climate attractive to business and inward investment; stable development and management of key economic sectors (the sugar industry, tourism, textiles); timely forward planning for replacement activities, such as the development of tourism, financial services and small businesses; a sound infrastructure for public health and social welfare; universal primary education and a fairly literate population. Significant investments by the State in health and education has greatly enhanced the quality of life of Mauritians, and have placed the country 56th in the UNDP Human Development Index, that is, at the top of the "medium human development" countries. The country has also a free and independent press, a flourishing civil society with a strong trade union movement, and many NGOs and associations engaged in cultural and social welfare work.

14. At the same time, the economic development of the country is causing rapid and profound change at family and community levels. The first intake of women into the Mauritian industrial labour market in the 1980s was facilitated by the strength of the extended family and community. The child care needs of working mothers were absorbed by other family members, neighbours and community. As the analysis of access in Chapter III below shows, this cushion is still present, but to a lessening degree. At the same time, the rationale for women to join the workforce is growing stronger. In Mauritius today, women are more in charge of their own lives and through their work can make a valuable - and often indispensable - contribution to the family budget. In addition, if the pattern of the industrial countries is followed, girls will eventually outscore boys at secondary school level, and thus increase their value in the labour market. A repercussion of their growing employment will be greater tax revenues for government, and in turn, the increased demand by women for government to improve access to high-quality, early development services for their children.

15. The increasing participation of women in the Mauritian formal economy raises therefore several critical questions: Who will raise the children while their parents are at work? If public responsibility is

engaged, how best should the State intervene to ensure equitable access to services and the best quality possible in out-of-home early development provision? The high participation rate of women in the workforce will also result in increased focus on the policy framework provided by society as regards the function of the family. Government units responsible for family and early childhood policy will need to keep in touch with these new demands, even anticipate them. At the same time, they must be sensitive to the values and practices of traditional Mauritian society, and in so far as possible, build on its strengths.

16. Another socio-economic challenge that is coming to light is the existence of poverty, both material and educational, in certain pockets or neighbourhoods across the island. Whether their poverty is linked primarily to cultural factors or to lack of effective income distribution, labour and social welfare policies was not analysed in this review. In any event, the problem is now clearly recognised and documented in Mauritius. Children from the poverty pockets are accessing primary health, early development, and education services significantly less than other children. Indeed, it is recognised that children from certain areas or neighbourhoods, though enrolled in school, attend only irregularly, and that their failure rate in the Certificate of Primary Education can reach over 70%.

17. *The Present State of the Economy*, GOM, 2000, also indicates that the average income of 24% of Mauritian households is below 5000 MRs per month (in Rodriguez, 15% of households earn less than 3000 MRs per month), and that GDP per capita has stagnated for some years. Poor families spend less than 40 rupees per month on the education of their children, compared with the national average of 253 MRs. It is well known among which groups child poverty and educational failure are likely to be found, but yet, insufficient investment is being made in these children. Housing too has gone out of the range of low-income Mauritians (*The Present State of the Economy*, GOM, 2000) – a further reason to provide early childhood services in healthy, well-appointed centres to the children most in need. Social analysis shows also that the population is ageing and that the case for public funding for early childhood services needs to be persuasively made, as quickly as possible.

## **2. Infant and maternal health**

18. Within its region, Mauritius has been unique for decades in funding a free and efficient health service for all its people. Although the new government envisages some fundamental health sector reforms, the achievements of public health in Mauritius are in evidence, with almost 90% of one-year old children being immunised against the common viral diseases, such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, measles and polio. The country has also been a front runner in its approach to reproductive health. A high percentage of pregnant women (about 95 per cent) seek antenatal care and most deliveries (96.5 per cent) take place in hospitals and in private clinics. The utilisation of postnatal care facilities is also quite high. On average, women after delivery make two postnatal visits. In the course of these visits, they are examined medically and given advice on family planning.<sup>1</sup>

19. Yet, some stubborn infant and maternal health problems persist, e.g. unacceptable rates of infant mortality and low birth weights, a relatively high maternal mortality rate (in 1999, 7:100,000 live births); a persistent rate of teenage pregnancy (over the last ten years, 10% of the total birth rate are children born to the 15-19 age group); a growing practice of illegal abortion; and the continuance of malnutrition, growth problems and anaemia among certain groups of children. It seems, moreover, that health education, nutrition information and sex education do not adequately reach children and adolescents, particularly if they come from families and neighbourhoods in which functional literacy is weak. All this would indicate that

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1. In fact, in the effort to control fertility levels and to reduce infant mortality and unsafe abortion, Mauritian citizens have had access from the 1970s to family planning services, information and counselling.

early development and early education services in Mauritius need to promote consciously health, nutrition and the physical development of children.

### **3. Family policy and support**

20. Up to recently, child-rearing in Mauritius was taken in charge by the extended family, particularly among the majority population of Indian origin. Home-based mothers played a central role in providing a warm and nurturing relationship for infants and younger children. The child's education and socialisation was seen as a responsibility not only for parents but also to be shared by older siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents and well-disposed neighbours. Children were viewed as a resource both for the family and community. They were expected to help with household or rural tasks, to provide security for younger siblings and later, to become the support of parents in their old age.

21. Profound socio-economic changes are moving Mauritian society rapidly away from this family model. With economic development, the nuclearisation of the family has taken place. Increasing numbers of mothers leave the home to take salaried work. With more freedom, and the break from (sometimes oppressive) traditional patterns, a certain instability has arisen. It seems that separation, abandonment, and adverse parental behaviour (depression, alcoholism, domestic violence) may be on the increase. The response to this situation need not be regret for the past or criminalisation. Research shows that energetic family policies, information campaigns and support programmes for parents do much to prevent family breakdown, child abuse and violence.

22. Although social sector expenditure is relatively high (around 40% of total recurrent budget), *family* social measures are not highly developed in Mauritius. Most social expenditure is channelled to transfers to help the aged and needy, and to the provision of free health and education services. For decades, governments have been more concerned to limit population growth than to provide child allowances to families with young children. The policy is understandable, but fiscal and other supports can be provided to families to help parents rear the children they have, without necessarily encouraging a return to larger families (see Chapter VII). Indeed, such supports may be absolutely necessary for families rearing a child or children with special needs, and for single or abandoned mothers who have no other means of support.

23. The situation is rather better for working mothers, and is another example of the country's progressive social policies. Women are entitled to 12 weeks' maternity leave with full pay under the Labour Act, for up to three pregnancies. Furthermore, nursing mothers are allowed one hour each day for breastfeeding after they resume work following a birth. However, because of the lack of family-friendly work policies and/or of early development services at the work-place, few mothers are able to avail of this measure. Two para-statal bodies - the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund (SILWF). and the Export Processing Zone Labour Welfare Fund (EPZLWF) - cater for the welfare of workers in these two large industries, and the EPZLWF has even provided some crèche services (see Chapter III below).

### **4. Gender equity**

24. In the European countries in which social services are most developed, much of the impetus to provide early childhood services stems from gender equity concerns. Since 1985, the Government of Mauritius has ratified several international conventions and plans of action in favour of gender equity, including the United Nations CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women). A progressive White Paper on *Women in Development* was adopted in 1994, and subsequent to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the Government approved in March, 2000, a *National Gender Action Plan*, formulated after extensive consultations between government ministries, NGOs and civil society. Among the foci of concern named in that *Action Plan* are:

domestic violence; gender awareness and mainstreaming in the public and private sectors; women entrepreneurship and poverty reduction; women's health; gender and law reform (significant changes in favour of women's rights have been made to the Napoleonic Code since 1981); gender and the media; women's political participation. All these areas are being tackled, and according to reports, significant progress is being made.

25. The new economy has brought many advantages to women, giving them increasing independence, and the capacity to contribute both to the family budget and the Mauritian economy. At the same time, it brings increasing pressures to bear on working women, in particular on maternal health and family well-being. According to UNICEF (2000), "the real causes (of health and social problems) reside probably in the sociological structures, unhealthy lifestyles and stress on overloaded, working women, poor working conditions and an unsupportive environment linked to the rapid economic change." (UNICEF, *Revised Master Plan of Operations*, 1998). If extended family care of young children is not available, it becomes very difficult for working mothers to combine work, household responsibilities and the organisation of adequate care. Young children bear the brunt of the ensuing tension. Detailed research on this question is needed, as there is little statistical or qualitative information available.

26. The *Social Fabric Study* of 1999 draws attention also to the increasing numbers of women who must fend for their children without assistance from legal husbands or male partners. Further research is needed on this issue as no exact figures are supplied. As in other countries, women in Mauritius are increasingly more likely to be unemployed than men, and when they have work, it is often in low paid and low skill jobs. Further, there is little evidence of education programmes aimed at sensitising fathers, or boys in the primary school, concerning the need in industrial societies for both parents to share the responsibilities of child-rearing and domestic chores. These challenges are all the more difficult to resolve because of a) deeply rooted traditional attitudes to women, b) the tendency for female-headed families in all countries to sink into poverty; and c) the lack of appropriately trained personnel to implement the various gender equality programmes (*Common Country Assessment*, UN Resident Co-ordinator, 2000).

## **5 Cultural diversity and language**

27. Although exploited by the Portuguese for nearly fifty years, Mauritius was uninhabited prior to the Dutch landing in 1598, (the island is named after the Dutch Prince, Maurice de Nassau). The Dutch unsuccessfully attempted colonisation, mainly through slaves brought from Africa. The French colonisers who took control of the island in 1710, were more persevering. They developed the sugar industry, using slave labour from Africa and Madagascar, and to a lesser extent from India. The policy was continued by the next colonisers, the British, until the abolition of slavery in 1836. The British, who ruled the island from 1810 to 1968, relied thereafter on indentured labour, both Hindu and Muslim, brought from the Indian sub-continent. Today, the population, 55% of which lives in rural areas, has the following breakdown: about 1.1 million people of which 67% are of Indian origin; (the Hindu/Muslim proportion is about 3:1); 28% Creoles of mixed African/European origin; citizens of Chinese (2%), French (2%), British and other origins (1%). The influence of the cultures of origin are still strong and deeply felt. In terms of religions, the breakdown is as follows: Hindu (Sanathan and Arya Samajist) 51%; Christian (mostly Roman Catholic) 30%; Muslim 17%; Buddhist and other 2%.

28. The official administrative language of Mauritius is English, while the language of the national newspapers and media is French. Creole - a mixture of African languages and French - is the daily and maternal language of about 80% of Mauritians. Bhojpuri, an Indian dialect, is also spoken in some rural areas but, according to several sources, its use is weakening.

29. In such a situation, managing cultural diversity is a primary and delicate task for government. An island identity is being formed, which promotes respect for cultural diversity, and equality of opportunity among the different cultural and socio-economic groups. However, informants indicate that poverty and social exclusion affect the sub-groups in the poverty pockets most of all, making the educational status of their children a growing concern.

## **6. Education and children's rights**

30. In 1990, Mauritius ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the presentation of its *Initial Report* before the Committee in 1996, the Government was able to point to many achievements: the creation in 1990 of the National Children's Council; the energetic action taken by government against child abuse and prostitution; an impressive series of law reforms, especially the passing of the Child Protection Act of 1994; the ratification of ILO Convention 138 on the minimum age for admission to employment; the preparation and implementation, in co-operation with UNICEF, of the *National Programme of Action for the Survival, Development and Protection of Children*.

31. Among the problems noted by the Committee were:

- The need for an efficient monitoring system that could provide “ systematic and comprehensive data and indicators on children”;
- Given the available resources, the inadequacy of measures taken to protect the economic, social and cultural (educational) rights of children, especially the rights of the most vulnerable children.
- The slowness of the State Party to take into account in its legislation, the four general principles of the Convention, viz. the child's right to life, survival and development; non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; and respect for the views of the child;

32. Apart from the particular problems of children with special needs (see Chapters III and IV below), the Committee was concerned also that

*“the education system might not be consistent with the provisions of the Convention regarding the right to education. In this regard, the Committee was deeply concerned by the high school drop-out level, especially at the end of the primary education level, and the high rate of illiteracy. It is also worried about the absence of supervision of private schools. The Committee is concerned, in addition, at the difficulties encountered by disabled children in gaining access to regular primary schools.”*

The Committee's *Concluding Observations* recommended that Mauritius should strengthen co-ordination between the various governmental mechanisms involved with children, at national and local level, with a view to developing a comprehensive policy on children.

33. To understand the Committee's concern, a short comment on the education system in Mauritius is necessary. All commentators agree that education in Maurice has been marked in recent decades by increased investment and considerable achievements and progress. Free, compulsory school attendance begins at five years in Standard One, and is intended to last until the age of 16. However, despite the announced reform, compulsory education lasts at the moment, for a significant minority of children, only up to the age of 12 years, because of insufficient places at lower secondary and pre-vocational level. Because of this traditional bottleneck into secondary education, primary education has remained extremely competitive and formal, with enrolment in secondary school depending on the ranking of children in the Certificate of Primary Education examination. Although the situation is not in the best interests of Mauritian children, it is not without benefits for middle class parents, who can afford to pay for extra-curricular tuition for their children, or for the many teachers who benefit from supplementary tuition fees.

34. According to UNICEF, “the elitist and utilitarian characteristics of the present (primary) education system lead to many forms of inequities” (UNICEF, *Revised Master Plan of Operations*, 1998). School attendance does not guarantee functional literacy to all Mauritian children, and over 30% of children fail the Certificate of Primary Education. Many children are therefore left outside the education system at the age of 12 years, their potential underestimated and under-utilised. Several authoritative studies – not least, the *Common Country Assessment of the UN Resident Co-ordinator*, Port Louis, 2000 - agree that the primary school in Mauritius needs radical reform. Some of the reforms demanded by these studies, and indeed in Government and Ministry of Education publications, are as follow:

- Greater equity in the school system, which now caters increasingly for the middle class, that is for children who have stable family support, better language skills and who can afford supplementary tuition outside school hours. In contrast, 60 to 70% of children in the poverty pockets are failing the CPE. Many of these children are perceived as failures at the age of 11 or 12 years, and are condemned to drop out of school and remain more or less on the streets, until the legal age of employment at 15 years;<sup>2</sup>
- Better staff-child ratios and an end to crowding children into small classrooms;
- New and more effective teaching methods, which imply: better training of teachers, a radical reduction of the content-heavy syllabus, more child-centred approaches, and an end to unhealthy competition between young children;<sup>3</sup>
- A significant expansion of lower secondary and vocational education;

35. There exists also an increasing mismatch between the outputs of the education system and the requirements of the labour market. Many more young people with strong language and vocational skills will be needed in the new Mauritian economy. It seems, however, that parents prefer their children to qualify for the “safer” jobs in the public administration. In addition, language policy in pre-school and primary seems inadequate, and the methods of the schools do little to foster the skills needed in the new information-based industries of this century, such as creativity, participatory learning and working together in teams (Van Aalt, OECD, 1998).

36. The present government is planning new reforms in response to these needs. A priority must be to expand the lower secondary and pre-vocational system, as this is a requirement to address the other weaknesses identified. Only when competitive pressures are eased in primary education, can more child-centred approaches be considered in schools and pre-schools. It will be extremely difficult to change the minds of parents and teachers about the present profile of primary and pre-primary education, until all children are provided - *by right and in practice* - with a minimum of three years of free, basic secondary education.

## **7. The divided auspices of early development and education in Mauritius**

37. Early development and education in Mauritius is organised in two separate systems covering two distinct phases. The infant/toddler period is referred to as “child care”, and the second from 3-5 years is referred to officially as “pre-primary education”. Auspices for the sector are divided between the MWRCDFW (Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare) and the Ministry of Education. This splitting of auspices results from a traditional assumption about childhood, which saw

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2 . At present, according to the 1997 Education White Paper, less than a third of the almost 9000 pupils who fail the Certificate of Primary Education each year, find their way into basic Pre-Vocational or Technical education.

3 . Competition is a fact of life in all education systems, particularly at the end of upper secondary. The difficulty in Mauritius is that competition comes far too early, and leads to pedagogical practices that are inappropriate for young children.

governmental responsibility for children as beginning with “education”, while families - some helped by Social Welfare - were responsible for upkeep and “care”. The assumption is no longer entirely valid, or at least, needs to be modified in the light of research that shows the extraordinary capacity for learning of the youngest children. A real challenge exists for government officials and the general public in Mauritius - and indeed, in many of the European countries - to view the years from birth to 6 years<sup>4</sup> as an intense phase of early development and learning, with its own specificity and educational philosophy. There is the need to understand that young children are not the appendages of parents, but as a specific group in society that has a right to governmental protection and support from birth. In the meantime, urgent action is needed to improve the co-ordination and integration of services for young children, and to provide both branches with sufficient funding. These issues are treated in more detail in Chapter V.

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4 The period from birth to seven or eight years is generally chosen by early childhood experts as a specific period in which children learn primarily through their own self-interest and experience, motivated and structured by caring adults and environments. The seventh year corresponds to the traditional age of reason, from which time - as indeed, Piaget noted - children have the capacity to focus on concrete, operational learning skills.

## Chapter III

### The Early Development Sector (0-3 Years)

#### 1. Auspices of early development and family programming

38. The first phase of early development, from birth to three, has been placed, since 1991, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Women Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare and (MWRCDFW). As its name suggests, this ministry was previously responsible for family policy and women's affairs. The creation of an early childhood portfolio marked the recognition by government of the need to stimulate out-of-home early childhood provision. Women were needed in the expanding workforce, in particular, in the textile manufacturing industries of the Export Processing Zone. However, the implications of a substantive early childhood policy are much wider than workforce needs. Potentially, an early childhood policy perspective supports the learning potential of young children from birth, offers a fair start in life for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, contributes to improving child rearing practices in all families, and focuses attention on the need to reconcile work requirements with family responsibilities.

39. According to observers, the government assigned the early development portfolio to the Ministry with insufficient staff and budget. In addition, the MWRCDFW had, at that moment, few mechanisms of outreach to local communities compared, for example, to Health, Social Welfare or Education.<sup>5</sup> Another difficulty to be overcome was that the early development sector for which it was given responsibility, was (and remains) largely owned by private, unregistered providers. Only eight centres are directly under the control of the Ministry, with a further 80 centres approved - in all, a very small group compared to the extensive informal sector. However, the Ministry has made, particularly since 1995, a very important contribution to early care and development, in terms of policy development, regulation and programme funding.

#### 2. Policy developments in the early development field

40. The development of policy in favour of young children received a remarkable impetus in 1990, when Mauritius ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The ratification of the CRC is not just a question of consent but includes a strong reporting process and the expectation that ratifying countries will put into place broad-ranging and comprehensive national child policies. A further impulse to action came in 1992, when Mauritius, with UNICEF assistance, began its preparation for a *National Programme of Action for the Survival, Development and Protection of Children* (NPA) in accordance with the directives of the World Summit for Children held at the United Nations in 1990. After a series of national consultations and workshops, the Mauritian NPA was endorsed by Cabinet in November 1992, and published in final form in 1994. A mid-term review of progress, again assisted by UNICEF, was carried out in 1995, evaluating the level of implementation reached for the different goals of the NPA.

41. With the creation of the Child Development Unit at the MWRCDFW in 1995, further rapid progress was made in policy development for the early development field. Assisted by UNICEF, several key

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5. According to our respondents, this original lack of outreach has been overcome, to some extent, by co-operation with women's and social security centres throughout the country.

consultancy reports were contracted in 1997,<sup>6</sup> leading in 1998 to a *National Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy Paper* formulated by the MWRCDFW. This document sets forth seven major policy objectives for the ECD field in Mauritius, followed by a number of strategic actions to be undertaken to achieve those objectives over the succeeding years.<sup>7</sup> The following is a brief summary:

- The formulation of minimal regulations and standards to govern all centre- and home-based care;
- The creation of a Mauritian QIAS system (Quality Improvement and Accreditation System) for the sector, based on the Australian model (see Box 1, in the section on Quality Standards below);
- The development of an ambitious training programme for child care workers. (Of the estimated 4000 child care workers in formal and informal situations, 3000 are currently untrained.);
- The development of strategies for parent education and community awareness;
- The development of a curriculum framework for 0-3 years;
- Improving equity and access to services for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and localities;
- Development of integrated services for families and young children.

42. Some of the activities attached to the above objectives include: developing a monitoring group - the Child Care Advisory Committee - at national level; establishing proper data collection through surveys, studies and evaluation exercises; improved mobilisation and allocation of resources; creating a career structure and salary regulation for care workers; reinforcing attention to children with special needs; adopting an integrated approach, e.g. through working with the Ministry of Health on a growth monitoring scheme. What is most reassuring about this impressive beginning is that the objectives put forward in the policy paper are currently being worked upon or are in course of implementation. As our analysis in Chapter V shows, this is due, in no small degree, to the support of the UNICEF office.

### **3. Legislation, regulation and monitoring**

43. The legal framework for early childhood care and development in Mauritius is provided essentially by the *1994 Child Protection Act*. The Act was passed in November 1994, impelled by the accession of Mauritius to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Its major aim is to make better provision for the protection of children against ill-treatment, neglect, abandonment, destitution or any other exposure to harm. For the Child Development Unit at the MWRCDFW, the Act has been a useful vehicle to introduce new regulations for the early development sector, e.g. under Section 21, revised child care regulations and schedules governing the licensing requirements, registration and operation of early development facilities have been recently enacted in Government Notice, No. 196, 2000 (see Annex 1). These regulations are potentially an important milestone in the future governance of the early childhood field.

44. A previous act, the *1990 National Children's Council Act*, established the National Council for Children. The main goals set for the National Council were: to advise the Minister on all matters pertaining to childhood in Mauritius, to combat all forms of child abuse, neglect and exploitation of children, and to co-ordinate the activities of organisations working for the welfare of children. From the beginning, the National Council concentrated on children at-risk (the sexual abuse of children had just come to public notice) and, according to the child development agencies, its overall contribution to early childhood care and development has not been significant.

45. In short, responsibility for policy making in the early development field in Mauritius, the framing of regulations and the mobilisation of the sector fall to the small Child Development Unit at the MWRCDFW. The original problem of insufficient allocation of budget and staff to this Unit does not seem to have been

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6. Studies by Judith Evans, S. Gopalan and Professor F. Ebbeck.

7. An overview of the policies, activities, responsible institutions and the time frame envisaged is reproduced in Appendix 3.

resolved, despite the real financial effort (RPs 71 million) made by the Ministry to support the implementation of the 1998 National Policy. Capacity to expand the sector in an organised manner will certainly be weakened if funds are not found to provide sufficient incentives to the majority of providers (the informal childminders) to register and receive training. It is doubtful too whether the Unit has sufficient staff to engage in national training, monitoring or inspection, except within the limited registered sector. However, with the ongoing assistance of UNICEF, the Unit has already made an enormous contribution to policy formulation, regulation and programme development.

#### 4. Access: who is caring for young children?

46. With the growth of the Mauritian economy, and particularly of the textile Export Processing Zone, increasing numbers of women have entered the labour force. Employment trends show that the percentage of women in the labour force rose from 32.2% in 1990 to 39.4% in 1999 (UN Resident Co-ordinator, 2000; other estimates quote a figure of 44% for 1999). Whatever the exact figure, the trend suggests that the demand for child care services and family supports will continue to grow. The percentage of women in the child-bearing and child rearing years (from 25 to 40 years) engaged in employment in 1999 was almost 52%. With continued economic growth expected, female employment will increase, in particular, if girls begin to achieve better examination results than boys in secondary schooling.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1: Child-rearing from birth to 3 years in Mauritius**

Mothers providing full-time care (over 50% in rural areas, and 25% in urban areas)	40%
Non-commercial home caregivers (that is, care provided by siblings, grandparents, extended family or neighbours)	23%
Care in formal crèches, nurseries etc. (only 32% of crèches are found in rural areas)	18%
Informal family child care in the home of the caregiver or paid care in the home (generally on a commercial basis - little information about duration or quality)	42%

47. These figures are based on the De Chazal Du Mee (World Bank) Report of 1996. The totals run to over 100%, presumably because, much of this care is part-time, and children experience during the week more than one type of care. It is clear, however, that, at that moment, families (that is, mothers, with the assistance of their spouses and the extended family group) were expected in 63% of cases to assume the basic child-rearing responsibilities until children reached 3 or 4 years.

48. An analysis of the De Chazal Du Mee figures shows also that, with the exception of wage-earning mothers in the textile industry, formal child care services have not enjoyed very wide acceptance. In fact, in the 1994 *National Programme of Action for the Survival, Development and Protection of Children*, day care is treated in the chapter on *Children in Difficult Circumstances* - perhaps correctly, given the weakness of the legal framework at that time. About 100 formal crèches exist, of which about 80 are now registered by the Ministry. Most of these crèches are located in urban areas. They cater generally for the children of wage-earning mothers, but increasingly, it seems, middle-class families are beginning to use their services. This may be a positive evolution, as middle-class parents are often more demanding about quality,

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8. For the moment, boys achieve more passes in the higher secondary exams than girls, as more boys sit the exams. However, in the Certificate of Primary Education, girls now outstrip boys by almost ten clear percentage points in the number of passes achieved.

and more readily see care as a question of child development. However, the phenomenon may also indicate that low-income parents are being priced out of the formal care structures - again, another area for further research.

49. Institutional investment is also made in the early development system by municipalities, para-statal bodies and NGOs. Some municipalities build and finance their own crèches, e.g. Port Louis, Curepipe and Quatre Bornes. According to reports, staff are better paid in municipal crèches, but again time did not allow for an analysis to be made of the organisation and quality of municipal crèches. The para-statal Export Processing Zone Labour Welfare Fund (EPZLWF) also finances seven crèches for mothers working in the EPZ sector. Likewise, the Sugar Industry has a Labour Welfare Fund (SILWF) to look after the welfare of its workers. We were not able to verify, however, whether the sugar industry supports the construction and organisation of crèches for the children of its workers, although we were informed that it takes an interest in early education.<sup>9</sup> NGOs such as OMEP, Playgroup, l'Association pour la promotion de la petite enfance, and the Ecole Puériculture de Bethléem, attached to the Bureau de l'Education Catholique (BEC), are also active in organising crèches, pre-school services and training. Given the likelihood of weak government investment in the early development field for years to come, more attention needs to be given to these institutional supports and to encourage their further commitment and investment, in particular, in disadvantaged areas.

50. During the review, concern was frequently expressed about the quality of informal care given by unregistered caregivers. UNICEF has commissioned two experienced NGOs to undertake rapid survey assessments on informal care arrangements in six deprived areas. The indications are that much of it is of poor quality, and does little to contribute to infant and toddler development. For reasons explained in Chapter VII, it seems critical to bring the informal carers into the national network, for registration, training and quality improvement.

#### *Children from low-income families*

51. It seems that children from families at risk, in poor neighbourhoods or in rural areas have least access to nursery and early development services. There are several reasons why this may be so, e.g. the reluctance of many disadvantaged parents to send their children to child care; the scarcity of early childhood care and education services in disadvantaged areas; the inability of poor parents to pay; or the inadequacy of support services to families in need (see, *Family Policy and Support* in Chapter III above).

#### *Children with disabilities*

52. The situation of children with disabilities is little better, owing to the reasons above, but also, it seems, because of a lack of positive public information about disability. Parents with disabled children receive little support from the State and often suffer from extreme isolation (APEIM, UNESCO, 1997). Only parents with severely handicapped children are helped by allowances, and these are very inadequate in meeting actual costs. In addition, systematic screening and early detection is not practised at national level. In fact, according to informants, there is no effective national policy on disability and little systematic data collection. Informed estimates for children with disabilities place the figure as high as 6000, whereas less than one thousand children are actually diagnosed and helped. According to the *UN Resident Co-ordinator's Report* (2000), "disability in the Mauritian context still generates a great deal of stigma and shame... The disabled are not very often seen in public, and there are few institutions to cater for their

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9. For example, the Medine Sugar Estate undertook an interesting initiative in 1999 - *Une journée pour Maurice* - in which it matched voluntary contributions by its workers to create a solidarity fund. Part of this fund is being used to give further training to pre-school teachers who work with the children of Médine.

needs. For the moment, most of the work is being done by NGOs, with some assistance from Government funds.”

## **5. Staffing, training and work conditions in the early development sector**

53. At the moment, staffing, training and work conditions in the early development sector in Mauritius are not sufficient to provide, at national level, a quality service for young children. As already indicated, the sector is dominated by informal, untrained carers. The formal sector numbers only about 100 crèches, of which about 77% of the personnel has received some on-the-job training. In fact, contact staff in early development centres are not required to have a minimal qualification level, and their work conditions are poor (see below). Managerial staff have better educational levels and conditions, but if regulations are properly applied, their time will increasingly be taken up by administrative and supervisory tasks, while contact with children will be left to the untrained child care worker.

54. Yet, the situation is not without hope or movement. In 1995, several training of trainers courses were launched in collaboration with the Joint Training Initiative and the Mauritius Institute of Education, with some 24 ECD trainers completing the course. In 1999, some 122 care workers were trained, with a further 150 care workers trained this year. An early child development *Trainer's Guide* was published in February 2000, after two different drafts had been piloted, modified and expanded. The preparation of this guide also served as an occasion to involve the pool of trainers. Likewise, the preparation of the *Programme Guidelines for Children 0-3 Years*, was used to give further training to 100 or so managers, head caregivers and trainers. The challenge remains, however, how to register and train the non-formal childminders who dominate the sector.

### *Work conditions*

55. Most contact staff are generally poorly educated, are paid much less than the average wage, and have received little or no training. At the same time, they may be expected to work some 50 hours a week with young children. A next step must be to establish a career structure for them through adequate classification of personnel and mandatory training, coupled with an appropriate salary structure based on qualifications and experience. Some indications of how this issue may be approached are given in Chapter VII, below, in which it is proposed that profiling and career structuring in the early development sector should remain simple and be dovetailed with profiles in the early education sector.

## **6. Quality standards in the early development sector**

56. Although the present level of quality in the early development centres appears low, Mauritius has begun to tackle the problem energetically from the central level. In addition to the new licensing regulations and the training of personnel initiatives mentioned above, a panel of writers at the MWRCDFW, co-ordinated by Rajoo Appadoo and advised by Professor Fred Ebbeck of the University of South Australia, have been developing, since 1997, curriculum or *Programme Guidelines* for the age group 0-3 years. In 2000, 34 managers of early development centres were introduced to the revised curriculum guidelines, and it is planned that early development centres, in batches of 30, will be introduced to the guidelines throughout 2001. In the light of feedback received, a final version of the guidelines will be published.

57. A Quality Improvement and Accreditation Scheme (QIAS) has also been prepared, again guided by Professor Fred Ebbeck. The Mauritius version of the QIAS draws heavily on the Australian scheme of the same name. It is a participatory process of evaluation, requiring a centre's management and staff to engage in a process of self-study in which strengths and weaknesses are highlighted. The centre, aided by its QIAS Committee (including parents) rates itself on 30 principles of quality child care. In all, eleven

different steps are required (including Staff Observation Records, parent questionnaires, plans of action, self study reports...) before the final self-study report is sent to the Child Care Accreditation Bureau (CCAB). The CCAB then sends an official Reviewer to rate the centre. Three stages are foreseen in the application of the QIAS – a pilot group of fifteen centres, then a further 50 centres and finally, the QIAS will be applied to the whole system. A national Child Care Accreditation Bureau has recently been nominated and approved, and a pilot project to launch the scheme will take place in 2001.

58. These initiatives - the new Regulations, the training schemes, the new curriculum, the QIAS and other initiatives announced in the 1998 *National Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy Paper* - all augur well for rapid improvement of quality in the sector in the years to come.

### ***Box 1: QIAS -The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System***

QIAS is a well-designed instrument that helps personnel and centres to evaluate their performance in a comprehensive and objective way. A major purpose in its use is to assist staff to discuss and reflect on their daily practice. As in the Australian model, which the Mauritius version follows closely, evaluations are conducted around the basic structural and process principles that determine whether quality care and education for young children are being provided.

In order to have QIAS accreditation, early development centres must first form an Accreditation Committee, composed of management, staff and parents. This Accreditation Committee leads a self-examination as to how 30 principles related to quality are being put into practice in the centre<sup>10</sup>. These principles with their indicators concern: the management of the centre (including how the physical environment - indoors and outdoors - is managed); staff development; nutrition, health and safety practices; the programme or curriculum followed; staff-child, staff-parent and staff-staff interaction. When the self-study is ended, a detailed report is prepared, and presented to the national Child Care Accreditation Bureau. A peer reviewer from the Accreditation Bureau then visits the centre. S/he will rate the centre independently, and verify if the centre's report reflects actual practice. If the centre receives a rating of Basic Quality on ALL 30 principles, it is given accreditation for one year. If it receives a rating of good on ALL 30 principles, it will receive a 2-year accreditation. If the centre fails on one or more criteria, accreditation is not given, and the centre will have to prepare a Plan of Action to show how it will work toward reaching basic quality, within a defined period of time. An Appeals System is being established.

One important difference from the Australian QIAS is that in Australia, accreditation is directly tied to the provision of governmental subsidies to those parents who send their children to accredited services. In short, an important motivation is provided to parents to seek only accredited services, and to centres to raise quality. As a result, over 98% of centres in Australia, whether public, private or for-profit, are participating in the quality improvement and accreditation system. A critique made of the Australian QIAS, and one that the Mauritian authorities may wish also to consider, is that the QIAS is used in some States more as an accreditation instrument than as a means of providing professional recognition and ongoing training to staff, which, in all countries, is one of the essential conditions of quality.

## **7. Engaging parents**

59. Despite growing pressures on families, almost all the literature speaks of the strong family structures found in Mauritius, and of the desire of Mauritian parents to be involved personally in the rearing and education of their children. Because of the high profile of Parent-Teacher associations in the toddler/pre-school years (private pre-schools frequently have a nursery section attached) many parents are already engaged in early care and education outside the home. In the crèche system, a further mechanism

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10 . The principles are detailed in the Accreditation Handbook. Mauritius has reduced the 52 principles of the Australian model to 30.

to engage working parents is now being put into place through the QIAS scheme (see above), where the Accreditation Committees that lead the QIAS process must have a defined parent quota.

60. Educational support for parents is also available through the UNICEF sponsored parenting education programmes, and the promotion of home-health and preventive care. Some 1200 volunteers from women's associations have been trained, supported and supervised, who in turn are committed to bringing their skills to isolated and marginalised parents. A *Guide for Parents* and a *Facilitator's Guide* have been produced to enable trainers to conduct parent education programmes throughout the country. A link has been made not only with women's centres but also with the registered early development centres, where managers and staff have been introduced to the parent education materials. All this is important work as it improves public knowledge of good child-rearing practices, which later will be critical in raising expectations about both formal and informal care.

## **8. Funding and financing**

61. The funding of the early development sector in Mauritius is based almost entirely on parental fees. According to UNICEF, these fees generally range from 200 to 1500 rupees per child per month, and may constitute up to 20% of parental income. More research is needed, however, on these figures, as the question of affordability is a critical one for many families. As mentioned in paragraph 49 above, some institutional assistance is given by a few municipalities, para-statals and NGOs. Except for financing brought by the Child Development Unit at the MWRCDFW to support the National Policy and to build some crèches, the Government does not directly subsidise early development services and, according to several sources, is unlikely to do so in the coming years.

## Chapter IV

### The Early Education Sector (3-5 years)

#### 1. Auspices of early education

62. Responsibility for children from 3-5 years has been assigned since 1978, to the Ministry of Education, through its Pre-Primary Unit. In the public mind, the goal of pre-primary education is first and foremost to prepare children for school. As the name “pre-primary” might suggest, this view was also shared by the Ministry up to fairly recently - at least if one judges from the 1998 *Action Plan for Education*, which identified reading and writing as among the skills to be acquired by children before entry into primary school (at the age of five!).<sup>11</sup> During the 1980s and 90s, a rapid expansion of pre-school services took place in Mauritius, with technical assistance from UNICEF, France and India. Universal coverage by the age of five is now within reach. The Ministry of Education is giving growing attention to the early childhood sector, and progressive policy measures are at present being formulated.

63. About 80% of pre-primary schools in Mauritius, that is 800 units, are run by registered private providers (individuals, confessional, and NGOs), and cater for over three-quarters of the children enrolled.<sup>12</sup> Many of them are one- or two-room pre-schools. More than 20% of pre-schools (over 200 units) are public, organised and subsidised by the State, or in some instances, by municipalities and district councils. Public pre-schools cater for about a 23% of the children enrolled (that is, 19% of the total cohort of 3- and 4- year olds), and generally operate within the precincts of primary schools, that is, in c. 170 primary schools. It seems that about 400 pre-schools may also be operating from private homes, without any registration or control. From 2001, there is a promise to prosecute the owners of these “schools” unless they register.

64. Policy-making and monitoring of the pre-school system is the responsibility of the Directorate Pre-Primary at the Ministry of Education, created in 1979. It is assisted in its monitoring task by the regional education directorates, which from 1996 were opened in the island’s regions. Each regional directorate disposes of officers and clerks with responsibility for pre-schools in the region. The pre-primary officers include Teacher-Educator Supervisors (TES), who hold the Certificate of Proficiency in Pre-school Teacher Training. TES have been active in setting up regional training centres for pre-school teachers, in mobilising teaching resources and toy library services, and in planning and implementing basic training programmes. Annually, each TES visits and provides advice to a fixed number of pre-schools, in particular but not exclusively, those depending on the Pre-School Trust Fund. They monitor the opening of new private pre-school centres, process and recommend their registration, and the payment of per capita grants for children in attendance.

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11. The *Action Plan* is also forward-looking, and several of its recommendations are still pertinent to the present situation (see *Legislation, Regulations and Monitoring* below).

12. Similar to other figures cited in official and non-official publications in Mauritius, all the following figures are approximate.

65. According to the organisers of our visit, the Pre-School Trust Fund (PSTF), which was established in 1984 to mobilise resources for the extension of pre-school projects, has an important role to play in the pre-school sector. The Fund, which employs some 48 staff, is managed by a board of trustees, headed by a Chairperson nominated by the Cabinet. It funds furniture, equipment and materials for government pre-schools, pays part of the personnel and provides soft loans for renovation purposes. Unfortunately, the Fund had to cancel its appointment with the team. As a result, we have little up-to-date information about its role and future plans, except to have noted the following in the *Presidential Address* to the new parliament in October, 2000:

*Government will ensure equality of educational opportunities through the provision of access to appropriate pedagogical support for all children between ages 3 and 5. Pre-primary units will be built throughout the island. The Pre-School Trust Fund will be reorganised to provide an appropriate regulatory framework.*

## 2. Legislation and regulation

66. The 1997 Education Act, in its Section 38, regulates the pre-school sector. Providers cannot, in principle, run a pre-primary school unless they are registered and in conformity with the regulations of Section 38 of the Act. In addition, a set of *Draft Guidelines* issued by the Ministry determines the licensing requirements for providers with respect to premises, furniture, equipment, sanitary conditions, health and safety, and personnel. Section 38 and the Guidelines are important in that they provide a clear set of regulations to guide the sector. Yet, these texts could be improved:

- They are technocratic documents that fail to mention the basic objectives, values and processes of early education or communicate a vision for childhood in Mauritius. There is little focus on children, their rights, their needs or their learning profiles.
- There is a strong presumption in the Act that “pre-primary” refers to a small school for children aged 3-5 years. Management or administrative issues are primarily addressed, and the language of the *Guidelines* refers predominantly to teachers, classrooms, blackboards, etc. Only once is the word “play” used in the regulation: “It (the building) should make provision for two play corners.”
- Traditionally, there has been no pre-selection of pre-school teachers in Mauritius through initial training, and little attention is given in the *Draft Guidelines* to the qualities of personnel who are actually in contact with children. In fact, a derogation is given to persons with more than 5 years’ experience of “teaching” in a pre-school, allowing them the possibility of not following an appropriate certification course;
- Once registered, a centre can renew registration every two years on the payment of a 25 rupee fee.
- The fines for non-conformity with the Act are derisory, about half the monthly fee of one pupil in a top-range, private establishment.

67. In fairness, it should be pointed out that the document *Norms for Pre-Schools in Receipt of the Per Capita Grant* is more child-centred than the Act or the *Draft Guidelines*. Mention is made in the *Norms* of the school programme and its objectives: “The Pre-School Programme should: a) aim at the overall development of the child, and b) be child-centred and play-based”. Even here, however, the text does not provide the directors and teachers with a framework of specific values, objectives or learning theory.<sup>13</sup> It does seem a missed opportunity not to provide in the regulations a firm orientation about the fundamental objectives of the pre-school.

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13. A framework of values, objectives and processes will be provided in the new *Pre-School Programme Guidelines* under discussion. However, the licensing and regulatory texts are primordial, and should reflect and protect the best interests of young children.

68. Some scepticism was expressed to the reviewers concerning the actual enforcement of *the Draft Guidelines and/or Norms*, particularly with respect to space, outdoor play areas and the numbers of children actually in attendance. Owing to the briefness of the visit, the external reviewer had no opportunity to verify the reality of such concerns. The point is an important one, however, which will be raised again in the discussion on quality below. If even a few regulations are unrealistic and/or are not expected to be carried out, then the whole regulatory system and its enforcement is considerably weakened.

69. An *Action Plan for Education* was issued in 1998 that announced stronger regulation for all pre-schools, including private ones, e.g.

- The government would focus on improving access to and the quality of all pre-schools, both public and private;
- All private schools should conform to governmental norms and criteria within three years, failing which their registration would be cancelled. They should follow the agreed curriculum and be subject to the inspectorate for yearly licences.
- Government would phase out subsidies to pupils in private pre-schools. At the same time, the Ministry would supervise and monitor private pre-schools, and provide them with pedagogical tools and equipment, including an agreed curriculum;
- Existing teachers in private pre-schools would become employees of the PSTF.

However, the present status of the *Action Plan* is not clear.

### 3. Access

70. According to official figures, about 93% of children are enrolled in pre-primary schools at the age of 4 years or over in Mauritius. In the coming years, the Ministry plans to achieve a similar enrolment rate for the 3-year olds, which, at present, is said to stand at about 64%. Both these figures may be optimistic, as other estimates suggest that over 33% of children in the 3-5 year cohorts (about 18,000 children per cohort) are not enrolled in registered pre-schools. What “enrolment” means in one or other of the 400 unregistered pre-schools in the country (one third of the pool) is open to question. There is also, it seems, a reduction in enrolments of three-year olds, since the introduction of the per capita grant for children of four years. It is said that parents prefer to wait until a child reaches four so as to benefit from the grant. Grassroots personnel point also to a real difference between enrolment and regular attendance, particularly in disadvantaged areas. In the 19 poverty pockets scattered across the island, children may attend only two or three days a week, a pattern that is seemingly reproduced in primary education. Some correspondents estimate that fewer than 50% of children aged four may be attending regularly in certain neighbourhoods. Again, more monitoring and research are needed to assess properly the patterns of access.

#### *Children from low-income families*

71. Within primary education, the Ministry has made efforts to tackle the social disadvantage of certain children with the aim of giving them assistance and improved educational opportunity. Low-achieving schools were identified, special grants to 17 “Project Schools” with pass rates in the CPE below 30% were made, home-school liaisons proposed, and an Educational Priority Zone identified. It is unclear to us what the success of these efforts has been, or whether pre-school children and their families have actually benefited from any of these measures. Family dysfunction, poor parental health, low educational levels, inadequate housing, neighbourhoods without proper infra-structure require energetic community and/or government support. Such neighbourhoods can benefit much from integrated services that bring together social welfare, housing trusts, policing, early childhood centres, pre-schools and community health services

into a tight-knit network. An integrated community model for early development and early education, supported by Health and other outreach services, is outlined in Chapter V.

### *Children with disabilities*

72. Positive discrimination for children in need of special support is not yet a feature of Mauritius society, and the inclusion of children with disabilities in pre-schools is very restricted. Indeed, several anomalies exist, it seems, in both the law and government practice, e.g. according to information received, the State guarantees the right to free education at primary level, *provided children are not handicapped!* For the 350 children who have a place in a specialised school (a fraction of the total number of children with special needs), the State offers an annual subsidy of 3500 rupees, far less than the real subsidy per child in the public education system.

73. According to several published reports, there is no formal Ministry of Education regulation concerning children with disabilities in the pre-school, although international studies on the question would suggest that pre-school is an ideal place for light disabilities to be identified, diagnosed and treated. The Ministry does, however, encourage the School Psychological Service to be at the service of parents to offer guidance and counselling. Moreover, several understanding Head Teachers or Directors, especially in rural areas, integrate, as best they can, children with mild disabilities into pre-school classes. However, there is no special training of teachers to cater for these children, and pre-schools must depend for support on a voluntary association, APEIM (L'Association des Parents d'Enfants Inadaptés de l'Île Maurice). In fact, there is a serious lack in Mauritius of all types of professionals in the field of disability, including doctors, teachers, educators, speech therapists and specialised support staff.

## **4. Quality**

74. Rather than setting down general impressions gathered during our short visit, we provide here readily available information on some critical system elements, whose presence or absence can greatly influence quality standards:

### *The Regulatory Framework*

75. As mentioned in the section on *Legislation and Regulations* above, a move toward regulating the system has been made in recent years. An Education Act was passed in 1997, and *Draft Guidelines for the Proper Operation of Pre-schools* were published this year. These constitute a useful base for a regulatory framework. However, as indicated, the regulations for the pre-school are conceived as if the pre-school were a small primary school. They do not provide the providers or directors with an understanding of what might be the main purposes and values that should guide a quality pre-school.<sup>14</sup> During our visit, several correspondents stated that despite the presence of excellent pre-schools on the island, many directors and parents perceive the pre-school as primarily a preparation for the primary school. Hence, four-year old children are often expected to be able to recite the letters of the alphabet, count to a hundred, write all the letters, spell their names, read primers, etc. - and this in two languages! In short, quality is interpreted in many pre-schools in a very narrow sense.<sup>15</sup> In consequence, the development of

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14. In fairness, it should be pointed out that a positive vision is provided in the newly proposed curriculum, and in many of the pedagogical documents that are available.

15. A sense that may well be harmful to young children. Both American (Schweinart et al, 1986) and British (Sylva and Wiltshire, 1993) research shows that didactic, directive teaching approaches in the kindergarten have a negative effect on child well-being *and* learning.

self-concept, creativity, oral language, and sensitivity to values other than discipline and competition are frequently overlooked.

### *Application of the Regulations*

76. Reference was also made in the section on *Legislation and Regulations* to scepticism expressed about the adequate application of regulations. During our visit, we were not able to verify this, except to hear the criticism repeated on several occasions. However, the weak application of the regulations concerning space and outdoor facilities indicates that the perception may be accurate (see below).

### *Buildings, amenities and space*

77. Although concerns about buildings and amenities are expressed in several reports, most buildings now conform, it seems, with the regulations. 20 sub-standard pre-schools were refurbished and provided with teaching materials, books, furniture and basic equipment. The Ministry of Education intends to renovate all those schools that do not, at present, comply with the licensing requirements. However, from what we did experience and were told, space in most schools is very inadequate for the number of children actually enrolled.<sup>16</sup> A 1998 survey by the Ministry of Education supports this viewpoint. The report found that less than 36.5% of pre-schools were offering 1m<sup>2</sup> per child, and that 40.6% of pre-schools<sup>17</sup> had no outdoor space at all. If accreditation is granted in these circumstances, it may be difficult for providers to understand the importance of other regulations or why they should be respected. The acceptance of overcrowding suggests that neither the physical development of young children nor an appropriate organisation of the learning environment are considered important aims of the pre-school. In short, the use of space and the purpose of what one is trying to achieve in pre-schools, needs urgently to be reconsidered.

### *Regulations concerning health, nutrition and physical education*

78. Existing regulations relevant to the health of children refer basically to hygiene. A positive health or physical development programme is not proposed for pre-schools and, with the exception of a handful of schools, there is no canteen or nutrition policy. Given the dominance of the private sector, most children may not even benefit from regular health visits, although every child has a health card until 5-years old, and health facilities are available all over the island. Perhaps most disturbing of all is the acceptance of overcrowding young children into small rooms in order to follow class-like activities. Yet, with the exception perhaps of Port Louis, Mauritius is not overcrowded. It is a tropical island and enjoys a most wonderful climate, which makes sea, nature, and open air activities for young children very possible, all year round (see Chapter VIII, below).

### *Child-staff ratios*

79. From our reviews of other countries, we know that optimum pupil-teacher ratios set by ministries vary according to custom, the type of programme being used and the level and type of staff training. The question is an important one, however, as above a certain number, the pedagogical strategies appropriate for the early childhood age can no longer be practised, and contact with the individual child is lost. In Mauritius, various figures are given for the average child-staff ratio (they are generally referred to as pupil-teacher ratios). The 1997 Education Act set the maximum ratio at 30:1. The UNICEF publication *Investing in Children: Securing Rights in a Changing Society* (UNICEF, 1998) gives an average ratio of 14:1. The Ministry's 1998 *Education Card* puts the average ratio at 19:1. The *Norms for Pre-School*

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16. The Regulations provide for at least 1 m<sup>2</sup> per child, and an outdoor area of 400m<sup>2</sup>.

17. The actual percentage is probably much higher, as presumably, the survey was referring to the registered pre-schools, and was unable to take into account the many unofficial and smaller pre-schools that are in operation.

*in Receipt of the Per Capita Grant* proposes a ratio of 20:1 for three-year olds, and 25:1 for four-year olds. Other observers note, however, that these ratios are often surpassed and that ratios can reach 50:1 in private pre-schools in poorer areas. The implications of such over-crowding for the health and development of children should be a matter of real concern. There is reason to believe that pupil-staff ratios go often unsupervised, and may constitute a real barrier to quality in many of the pre-schools.

#### *The level of training and commitment of staff*

80. The level of training and commitment of staff is possibly the most important constituent of quality in an early childhood system. Where raising quality standards through improved staff levels is concerned, the situation is hopeful in Mauritius. Already, the Ministry has put into place a distance learning training programme for all pre-school teachers, 600 of whom are now in training. As indicated in the section on *Staffing, Training and Work Conditions* below, further attention may need to be given to the actual quality of the training being provided, and to the motivation of pre-school teachers through improving their working conditions.

#### *The use of a curriculum*

81. The internal efficiency arguments in favour of using a general curriculum or programme framework have been well outlined by Schweinart (1988). A curriculum helps staff to clarify their pedagogical aims, to keep progression in mind, to provide a structure for the child's day and to help focus observation on the more important aspects of child development. As a first step, the Ministry of Education in Mauritius supplied manuals to the 1200 recognised pre-schools, to guide them in making low-cost, pedagogical or play materials. Aided by UNICEF, the NGOs and the Mauritius Institute of Education, it has recently been working on a general curriculum or *Programme Guidelines* for 3-5 year olds. The Ministry foresees that all pre-schools, public and private, will henceforth follow the agreed *Programme Guidelines*, on the use of which licensing, to some extent, will depend. Use of the Guidelines, it is hoped, will lead to more appropriate aims and pedagogical practices being adopted in Mauritian pre-schools, particularly if teachers are well-trained in their use.

#### *Monitoring tools*

82. Monitoring is used to encourage a system (or a particular pre-school) to deliver the objectives set for it, and provide information about fund utilisation and program management. It may be looked at from two levels, from the perspective of the central authorities who wish to maintain quality across the system, and from the viewpoint of the director and teachers wishing to monitor the centre's performance. At central level, monitoring is generally achieved, on the one hand, through research and relevant data collection (on which policy decisions can be based), and on the other, through inspection and teacher support. In Mauritius, as the Committee on the Rights of the Child noted, monitoring is not yet a strong point. The objectives set for the pre-school remain vague or are left to the individual pre-school to decide. An accurate data collection procedure (system mapping, enrolment statistics, demand tendencies, staff requirements, staff profiles...) remains to be created. At ground level, according to the teachers' unions, pre-school teachers experience inspection as predominantly supervisory. Again, this was an issue that we were unable to explore properly. It was not possible either to ascertain the actual number of inspectors devoted to the pre-primary sector, their professional profiles or the regularity of their visits to pre-schools. It was suggested, however, that many of the inspectors had little or no experience of pre-primary education.

83. At the level of the pre-school, both regular centre monitoring of the centre's optimal organisation and the tracking of each child's development and learning profile helps to maintain the quality of programmes. Regulations in Mauritius require that directors should maintain several managerial registers (admissions, attendance, staff profiles, inspection, cash, visitors, furniture inventory, etc.) and that each teacher should maintain a record of the child's progress. We were unable to verify if such registers were

actually kept, nor to assess how effectively these monitoring tools are used. A proven self-evaluation instrument could do much to train centres in the use of these tools and focus attention on quality objectives (see Chapter IV).

## **5. Staffing, training, and work conditions**

84. The three main types of staff working in pre-primary education in Mauritius are: School Directors, Teachers and Assistant Teachers (hereafter, referred to as teachers) and Teaching Helpers. Unless they have a derogation, teachers are expected to have a general education to the level of the Cambridge School Certificate, and a specific training (duration not specified) for pre-primary teaching. Training is given generally by the accredited Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) which takes in about 100 trainees per year, or by a recognised NGO. Up to the moment, about 1000 teachers or assistant teachers (from a total of c. 1500 working in direct contact with children in government and registered private pre-schools) have had some training for pre-school teaching. Yet, because of the numbers of derogations tolerated, many current teachers have a low basic education, only 30% having completed a secondary education certificate.<sup>18</sup> In the future, it seems, pre-training for two years at the Mauritius Institute of Education will be required, and the principle of the Cambridge School Certificate as a minimal basic education level is to be respected.

85. Because of the significant numbers of untrained or poorly trained teachers operating in the sector, especially in deprived areas, in-service training has been a major concern of the Ministry of Education over the last years. In principle, the regional education directorates provide pedagogical advice, in-service workshops and seminars for pre-school teachers about three times a year, but no study of the extent or efficacy of this training was made available to us. Some NGOs (OMEP, Playgroup, l'Association pour la promotion de la petite enfance, Ecole Puériculture de Bethléem) are also providing in-service training courses. However, these courses do not lead to nationally recognised accreditation, and despite the commendable efforts of these bodies, the rate of training is slow and unable to reach the majority of teachers (UNICEF, 2000).

86. For this reason, and following a UNICEF-sponsored consultancy report (Ebbeck, 1997), the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) and the Mauritius College of the Air (MCA) were commissioned in 1999 to draw up an in-service, distance learning course for pre-school practitioners, wishing to gain a recognised professional qualification, the Certificate of Proficiency in Early Child Development. The qualification is based on two years of intensive study, which comprises 40 credit units in professional ECD studies (14 credits), curriculum studies (16 credits), school-based experience (5 credits) and a study project essay of 1200 words (5 credits). Students must complete all course assignments, pass a written examination in two areas of study and obtain a satisfactory assessment of their teaching practice. Phone tutorials, face-to-face sessions, personal assignments and ongoing counselling support are a feature of the module. It is hoped that upon successful completion, graduates will be accredited also to the MIE's Teacher Certificate (Pre-primary).

87. The basic aim of the Certificate is to upgrade the skills of teachers and assistants already in practice. Of the approximately 1500 total of teachers and assistants on the island who need further training, 1047 have been enrolled on the Certificate course that started in April 2000. It has been a notable undertaking, involving technical assistance from Professor Marjory Ebbeck of the University of South Australia, the creation and production of course materials, the recruitment of trainers, trainees and support

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18. Again, this statistic taken from a consultancy report is in contradiction with the figures released by the MIE on the qualifications of the pre-school teachers enrolled in the new, distance-learning Proficiency Course. According to MIE figures, some 86% of the intake from Mauritius have the School Certificate (20% in Rodrigues).

staff, and the organisation of student outreach, meetings and support. Four months later, an appraisal of the course was undertaken by Professor Ebbeck, sponsored by UNICEF (UNICEF, 2000/Ebbeck). The results of the appraisal - generally positive - are readily available, but attention may be drawn to the following:

- That the wide-ranging, formal knowledge covered by the course may distract attention from the central objective of encouraging students to examine their own practice. As the ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa) training initiative has underlined, experiential training is a necessity, particularly in a situation where practitioners have not benefited from intensive initial training (*Experiential Training Manual*, Torkington, UNESCO, 1997). In sum, general distance education inputs need to be followed up by supervised local group work, such as common project work within a school or group of schools.
- That formal knowledge requirements may tend to outweigh other more practical constituents of the pre-school teacher's repertoire, viz. the ability to organise the learning environment of the child, both indoors and out; the capacity to reach out to parents and communities; the mastery of practical-aesthetic learning tools (handcrafts, music, dance, art, the plastic arts, mime, movement and physical education); knowledge of the socio-cultural dimensions of working with young children in certain neighbourhoods; the ability to explore the natural environment with children (the sea, countryside, plants, animals...)
- That a stronger understanding needs to be developed that parents are the first educators of children. A consequence is that teachers must learn to work with parents, and appreciate how certain children and their families can be marginalised by the education system;
- That a better focus on the central aim of early education and care needs to be maintained, in particular, that early education should first and foremost be centred on the child's well-being and her developmental needs and capacities. This implies a profound change in process in the pre-school, and a real commitment by teachers to support play-based, child-centred learning programmes.

88. According to the appraisal, students also voiced criticisms about the inability of some tutors to support students in their assignments. A general reason advanced was that the tutors did not have sufficient experience in the early childhood field, which prevents them from guiding the students to translate early childhood theory into practice. But, no doubt, these are teething problems. Time and effort are needed for Mauritius to build up a core group of trainers and professionals capable of fully servicing the training needs of the expanding early development and early education profession. The undertaking itself has been a very significant one, and should have a strong influence on raising the professional profile and practice of early educators in Mauritius.

#### *Work conditions*

89. According to unofficial sources, salaries and work conditions in the pre-primary sector are variable, ranging from Rs 500 per month in the poorest private pre-schools to Rs 4000 in the richest. There are no official guidelines for the payment of teaching helpers and other auxiliaries by either Directors or Parent-Teacher Associations. In the government sector, salaries range from Rs 800 per month for teaching assistants to Rs 3500 per month for teachers (Rs. 3000 for Grade B and Rs. 2800 for Grade Cs). Teachers affiliated to the Pre-Primary School Employees Union, recently brought under the Pre-School Trust Fund, have not had, as yet, recognition of their former years of service, nor do they receive the usual social benefits. According to the Ministry, this anomaly will be rectified.

## 6. Engaging parents

90. The *Norms for Pre-Schools in Receipt of the Per Capita Grant* mention, rather cryptically, with regard to parental participation, that “All schools should encourage parent involvement and provide such evidence.” Because of the fee-paying nature of pre-primary provision, the situation on the ground may be in advance of this requirement. The formation of Parent-Teacher Associations is encouraged in both the private and governmental systems. These associations generally provide the salaries for teaching helpers, cleaners and other auxiliary staff. We were informed that because of the fee-paying structure, parents feel they have the right to visit the pre-school and inquire about the progress of their child. In turn, they are expected to contribute financially and organise extra-curricular activities. Again, owing to the shortness of the visit, it was not possible to investigate the status of the parent associations, to measure how representative they are or to evaluate the quality of their work.

## 7. Funding and financing

91. Government funding for pre-primary education has traditionally been weak in Mauritius, accounting for over 1% of the education budget. However, it has increased steeply in recent years, from Rs 6m in 1995 to a present investment of over Rs 50m annually. Governmental pre-schools (a small minority) and the 800 private pre-schools recognised by the Ministry of Education receive small technical subsidies and also obtain a per capita grant of 200 rupees per 4 year-old child enrolled. Some criticism was made when this subsidy was announced in 1996, and the government was accused of “subsidising the private sector”. However, in a situation where most of the pre-schools were in private hands, alternative strategies could not have been numerous, although better focussing of the grant may have been possible. By all accounts, the grant was a significant factor in the increase of enrolments at pre-school in 1997, when a 16% rise was recorded. Though small, it helped parents, and sent out a firm signal to the public that the government viewed pre-school education seriously. It has also allowed the Ministry of Education to take firmer control of the sector through the *Norms for Pre-Schools in Receipt of the Per Capita Grant*. At the same time, the grant is so small that several of the richer private pre-schools prefer to forego it altogether.<sup>19</sup> It may also have a negative consequences in that many modest private schools that formerly catered for two- and three year-olds have now ceased to do so, preferring to enrol 4-year olds with a guaranteed subsidy. Again, more research is needed on this question.

92. For much the greater part, parents finance pre-primary education in Mauritius through payment of fees. Fees normally vary from 300 to 2000 rupees per month. As a result, great variations exists in the environments and quality standards of pre-schools, which range from “écoles garages” to the pre-schools attached to the “star schools” of the private system. In sum, the ability to pay determines to some extent the quality of care and education that a young child receives, which carries the implication that in its present form, the (pre-) school may be reinforcing the cycle of disadvantage for children from low-income families.

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19. The reasoning behind this refusal may be altruistic, but according to some informants, the choice of not taking the government subsidy allows private schools to remain outside government inspection, and so to have some leeway concerning the declaration of fees charged and of numbers actually enrolled. The review period did not allow time to investigate this question or its potential repercussions.

## Chapter V

### GOM/UNICEF Programme of Co-Operation

93. Chapter V will provide an overview of those parts of the Government/UNICEF Programme of Co-operation, 1996-2000 that refer to the early childhood field. In 1998, a revision of the programme was undertaken. The ECD activities of the revised programme are outlined, with a short evaluation of how project targets were met. This brief target assessment is based on information provided by the UNICEF Office, and cross-checked by interviews of officials from the government departments that were involved in one or other programme. The major analysis of this chapter is focussed, however, on future policy planning. Based on the analyses of Chapter III and IV, several prospective policies or interventions are presented that UNICEF may wish to consider as it takes on a new role in Mauritius.

### Outline of the ECD Programme

#### The programme objectives

94. The Government of Mauritius/UNICEF Programme of Co-operation for 1996-2000, was signed on June 1, 1995. Within the ECD domain, the main beneficiary group would comprise all those children aged 0 to 8 years who ran the risk of having their physical, social and emotional development delayed or even permanently stunted due to a deficient caring and learning environment. To achieve maximum results with limited funds, interventions were to be targeted to reach first those children at risk living in disadvantaged communities, working in close collaboration with grass-root organisations. The three main foci of the programme from 1996-98, within the early development domain, were the elaboration of a national ECD policy, the training of child caregivers and the establishment of a quality improvement and accreditation scheme for early development centres. These three objectives have all been successfully completed.

95. The first objective - *elaboration of a national ECD policy* – gave rise to a participatory, two-year long process of preparation. The Task Force responsible for the drafting of *the National Early Child Development Policy Paper* (NECDPP) comprised both government planners and representatives from the private sector and NGOs. The NECDPP approved by Cabinet in June 1998 clearly defines the national policies and strategies for the development of the infant child. Much emphasis is placed on enhancing collaboration among the diverse agencies involved in the early development services.

96. Some criticisms of the process have been voiced by the ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa) Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD). The ADEA study points notably - and justifiably - to a certain watering down of the values basis of the original policy document, the absence of a clear statement proposing affirmative action for disadvantaged children, and an avoidance of the decentralisation issue (*Case Study on Mauritius*, 2000, ADEA/WGECD Policy Studies Project). What is perhaps more questionable - despite the undoubted strengths of this ECD policy - is the ready acceptance in the policy document of the division in early childhood services. In our view, even if the line of auspices is clearly drawn at central level, there is much to be gained by *not* separating early development and early education at local level. In sum, integration of services means for us not only co-ordination of the early childhood development project with child health, nutrition and other services, but also the more difficult task of bringing together in a coherent way, early education and early development services at community level.

97. To meet the second objective - *the training of caregivers training, both parents and staff* - some 300 members of the staff of early development centres were trained and a pilot parenting education programme was launched. It seems that consolidation of both programmes is desirable. There is a need to standardise and formalise training content and methodology among the various providers of training for child care workers, home caregivers and parents. The production of training kits and supporting IEC materials is to be pursued.

98. For the third objective - *to establish a quality improvement and accreditation instrument* - the design of the *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System*, initiated in 1998, is almost complete, and the system needs to be promoted among providers of early child care services and implemented in phases (see Chapter II.1 above).

99. Another instrument to improve quality was also produced, namely, *a curriculum for pre-schools*. The latest draft of the curriculum is the *Programme Guidelines for Pre-school* developed by a Task Force based at the Mauritius Institute of Education with a broad membership inclusive of representatives from NGOs and other sectors. The guide aims at providing a theoretical framework for the activities to be undertaken and for the role of the pre-school teacher in relation to children's learning needs. After a period of trial, the *Programme Guidelines* will be updated to meet more effectively the health and psycho-social needs of the pre-school children.

100. After the 1998 mid term review, the original structure of the 1996-2000 Country Programme (CP) was revised to cater for cross cutting priority themes like implementation of the CRC and early child development. As a result, an Early Childhood Care and Development Programme - aimed at giving all Mauritian children aged 0 to 8 years the opportunity to realise their right to survival, protection, care and optimal development - was included in the revised structure of the CP, effective as from January, 1999. A holistic approach and a strong focus on the equity and quality aspects of early childhood services were to be features of the programme.

101. The programme comprised two separate but inter-linked projects: the Early Childhood Development Project, and the Child Health and Nutrition Project. Of direct interest to this report are the parts of the programme covering early childhood development, early childhood education, child health (within the early childhood period), staff development, curriculum renewal, parenting education and nutrition within the ECD sphere. The Box below on *Training and Staff Development* gives some idea of the actuality and specificity of the Action Plan for ECD 1999-2000. It should be understood that this programme builds on previous annual programmes, which had been equally ambitious, e.g. the preceding training and staff development programme included the following objective and activities.

### ***Box 2 - Planning for Training and Staff Development***

#### **Sub-Project 1: *Training and Staff Development***

**Objective:** To ensure that 120 child care workers and 1000 pre-school teachers possess the essential knowledge and skills for promoting holistic child development.

***Activity 1:*** *ECD course for child care workers*

The ECD course was officially launched in April 1999. Its duration is 13 days, spreading over a period of 3 months with a full day session per week. It covers the ten modules contained in the ECD Trainer's Guide developed in 1998, with a judicious blend of theory and practice. 120 caregivers were trained in 1999

***Activity 2:*** *ECD proficiency course for pre-school teachers*

The Certificate Proficiency Course in Early Childhood Education is a two-year (4 semesters) teachers' by distance education course jointly run by MIE and MCA. The course is targeting 1000 in-service pre-school teachers and is to be delivered by distance education mode. All the preparatory works - approval of

programme, production of course materials for the first semester, recruitment of trainers, trainees and support staff - were completed in 1999. The course will be officially launched in February 2000.

*Activity 3: Bachelor in Education (ECD) course*

This proposal aims at providing pre-school educators and other ECD trainers with an opportunity to update and extend their knowledge, skills and practices in early childhood education and care. The University of South Australia has shown interest in mounting a Bachelor in Education (Early Childhood Education) course in ECD collaboration with a tertiary institution in Mauritius. Assistance will be provided under this activity to the MIE to finalise agreement with the University of South Australia and to adapt the course content to Mauritian needs.

*[The complete Revised Programme Two and its sub-programmes is provided in Appendix 3]*

### **Assessment of UNICEF performance**

102. These and other plans made by the UNICEF office are concrete and brief. All plans are accompanied by detailed co-ordination, scheduling and funding protocols. Evaluation is accordingly rapid and without difficulty. When we checked the progress of various activities with the UNICEF Office, and then with the responsible ministries, the implementation figures were generally in excess of targets. When they were not - or, as in one case, had fallen below target - the constraints had already been identified and were being addressed.

103. But perhaps the real question is not there. Within the framework of the decision taken by the UNICEF Executive Board to reduce UNICEF presence in Mauritius from 2004, an immediate concern must be to identify key early childhood polices, and reinforce the national agencies who, in the future, will be solely responsible for their delivery and renewal. With this concern in mind, we have outlined below some upstream policy initiatives, based on present programmes, that UNICEF may wish to consider for focused investment. Many of these initiatives are inter-ministerial and will require the advocacy and consensus-building skills for which UNICEF is well-known.

## Chapter VI

### Initiatives for Consideration by UNICEF

#### 1. Reaching consensus about the values on which Mauritian education is founded

104. The values basis of early development and early education in Mauritius would seem to be a fundamental area for UNICEF intervention. Already, a good start has been made. Respectful and democratic attitudes toward children are expressed throughout the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which UNICEF underlines in all its work in Mauritius. The Convention principles with direct relevance for education are delivered in Mauritius by the UNICEF *Education for Development* programme or the BEC *Inclusive Pedagogy* project. The relevant government ministries and the public in general support these values. However, traditional attitudes to childhood and child-rearing are deeply rooted, and are often reflected in the education discourse and the official texts. Reference is more often made to the values that children *should have* or *should be taught*, rather than to the values that adults and the school system could model for children, e.g. in the goals and processes established for pre-schools and schools. It would seem from an outside perspective that a strong degree of “provider capture” exists, that is, that the education system, both governmental and private, is dominated by adult interests, in particular those of the teachers and providers. Questions are increasingly being asked about education in Mauritius today. Can schools in Mauritius be said to be models of fair access, democratic attitudes and social equity? What values are being reflected to society at large by the widespread practice of paid, private tuition by government teachers? These and other questions have drawn less than positive responses from commentators, including at times, Prime Ministers and Ministers of Education. UNICEF and its partners within the ministries and civil society may wish to begin to identify a few fundamental values for the public education system, to be reflected in the *practice* of all pre-schools and primary schools.

#### *Special attention to children in need of special supports*

105. The revised Master Plan of Operations in support of the Government of Mauritius/UNICEF Country Programme recognises the particular responsibility of UNICEF to make the Convention on the Rights of the Child more operational, in particular vis-à-vis children in need of special protection and support. According to several OECD analyses of the question, there are basically three categories of children in need of special support (OECD, 1997):

- Children with disabilities, that is, children whose learning difficulties are caused or compounded by physical or biological impairments. Generally, these children make up 4-5% of the population;
- Children from linguistic or socio-economic backgrounds that may delay formal learning. In the multi-cultural, richer countries, these children constitute from 10% to 20% of the school population. The figure for Mauritius is possibly toward the higher end of this scale, given the child poverty rate (calculated to be about 15%) and in addition, the significant proportion of children who speak and understand Creole only before entering school. There are also the children who have never had access to a pre-school service, because of distance, family circumstances and/or high cost. These children may make up at least a further 10% of the school population.
- Children in neither of the above categories whose learning is impeded either long-term or temporarily because of some trauma or upset in their lives, e.g. a divorce or parental

disharmony, an alcoholic father, sexual abuse, domestic violence and fear... Some school systems are able to identify and treat these kinds of problem, e.g. if they have a counsellor working in every school or neighbourhood. The traditional school psychology services are often not adapted to this kind of work.

In Mauritius, a fourth group of children in need of special support may be added, viz.

- Adolescent girls, who, if the analyses of secondary school completion rates are taken seriously, need greater support if they are to complete their secondary studies. Although girls outscore boys by almost ten percentage points in the number of passes achieved in the CPE, far fewer girls than boys complete secondary education.

106. All these groups of children are in need of UNICEF support in Mauritius, as equity and an inclusive attitude toward all children would seem to be challenges still to be resolved in the education system. UNICEF has been working against social exclusion alongside the NGOs, but for lack of time, the review team were unable to assess this part of the programme. The figures, in any case, speak for themselves: up to 70% of children in the poorer districts fail the CPE. The testimony of APEIM concerning the children with disabilities provides an equal challenge: no real public policy for these children has been formulated.

107. An effective and necessary policy toward taking in charge the needs of children born in poverty is through fiscal transfers toward their families, that is, through the redistribution of wealth through taxes and special support allocations. The case is illustrated by a comparison between Sweden and the United States. According to the UNICEF study, *Child Poverty in Rich Nations*, (UNICEF, Florence, 2000), 23.4% of Swedish children are born under the poverty line (50% of median, post-tax income). After redistribution measures toward these children (and their families), 2.6% of children remain in poverty. The figures for the USA are 26.7% born below the poverty line, with 22.4% of children remaining in poverty, because of inadequate, redistribution measures. Nearer home, the UNICEF updated situation analysis of women and children in Mauritius, *Investing in Children: Securing Rights in a Changing Society*, makes the following comment:

*[Poor school] results confirm the generally known fact that educational achievement is inextricably linked to the general socio-economic conditions of a region... A holistic approach must therefore be adopted, requiring intervention at various levels, provision of physical infrastructure, improved health services, and the inclusion of these regions in national economic planning and investment strategies.*

108. In the meantime, until more equitable redistribution measures are taken, many young children in Mauritius will need special educational support. Some of the measures taken at primary level by the Ministry of Education were described in Chapter III above. An interview account given by Caritas of their project “*Accompagnement scolaire*” seemed to us both respectful of communities and participatory, a programme that we would have liked to have seen in practice. APEIM has also identified the needs, the types of support measures and the partnerships required to improve the situations for children with disabilities. These strategies are summarised in their document *Ecoles intégratives et programmes de soutien communautaires*. They are strategies applicable to the whole education system and to all the children within it. Where adolescent girls as a group are concerned, they need, more than educational supports, energetic interventions toward the public, families and schools to ensure their completion of secondary schooling. The issue is not only one of basic justice and gender equity, but indeed, one of laying the foundations of a modern economy.

## 2. A strong focus on Ministry capacity-building and co-operation

109. UNICEF has already demonstrated in Mauritius the synergies that co-operation with ministries can generate. In the framework of a future reduced presence, it would seem useful if three strategy lines were followed:

- To reinforce capacity in both ministries
- To establish a stable mechanism of co-operation based on the creation of a cross-departmental *National Agency for Early Development and Education* with executive powers.
- To begin the reflection with the responsible ministries and the agency as to how to put into place a seamless ECD system for children, based on common expectations, recognised career profiles and training.

### *Reinforcing capacity in both ministries*

110. We were not able to investigate in sufficient detail in either ministry the number of full-time posts or budgets devoted to early childhood issues. It would seem clear, however, that desk officers are needed in the early childhood units to engage in policy and regulation, to ensure adequate funding, to manage training, to establish monitoring and inspection, and to interface with the different groups of providers. Up to now, many of these functions have been ensured or assisted by UNICEF. If it is not possible to increase public service posts, a way around the difficulty may be to create an independent agency outside the ministries to look after the management and execution of early childhood policy. A certain decentralisation of functions to regional level may also be desirable, although as the experience of the transition economies in Central and Eastern Europe shows, there are also disadvantages in devolving childhood policies away from ministries until a strong tradition of local expertise and administrative capacity has been built up. We treat this question more in detail in Point 4 below on *Integrated Service Provision*.

### *Reinforcing policy co-ordination between the two ministries*

111. A more immediate concern is to reinforce policy co-ordination for young children. To bring together Education and MWRCDFW (and the para-statal agencies such as MIE, MCA, PSTF (Pre-school Trust Fund), which have contributed much to the sector) remains a challenge. Already divergences in approach have become apparent: the division in auspices and organisation of early childhood services; the separate funding structures; the unnecessary differences in philosophy and objectives; the disparities in staff levels, training and pay, especially the division between “teachers” and care workers; the separate training of staff... Several joint activities are possible *now*, before the division of auspices begins to reinforce separate qualifications and work conditions, which will serve in later years to institutionalise the divide. Among these joint activities are:

- To find a national funding mechanism for all early childhood provision;
- To integrate services at local level
- To create joint data collection and research on the age group 0-6;
- To define common job descriptions and a common career structure that allow the movement of staff from one sector to another;
- To engage in common training of staff from both sectors;
- To improve the supervision, inspection and monitoring of the whole sector

In this situation, UNICEF and the ministries may wish to consider creating a cross-departmental *National Agency for Early Development and Education*, under the auspices of both ministries, with a broad membership and an executive mandate. To duplicate efforts in these fields can hardly be justified either in terms of expense or efficiency.

*The creation of a National Agency for Early Development and Education with executive powers*

112. We have remarked above that UNICEF has been a major contributor to several upstream functions of the ECDE system in Mauritius: stimulating the sector; research and policy formulation; ensuring some funding; managing training; encouraging monitoring and inspection; interfacing with the different groups of providers. These functions are common to both ministries. The creation of a national early development and education agency, funded by and reporting to a management board composed of UNICEF and the two ministries, could in the future take on these functions and, at the same time, ensure the policy alignment of early development and education. This national agency could be out-sourced to an existing institution, providing that the institution had the capacity to ensure the above functions, and to co-ordinate harmoniously the interests of the various stakeholders. Common funding would be ensured by the two ministries, and be sufficient in volume to execute an ambitious annual work plan. A major task for the Agency in the near future would be to increase local management (see also Point 4. below - *Integrating services at local level*), and bring together the development of services, monitoring and training for the entire age group, 0-6 years.

113. The arguments in favour of establishing such an agency are many. In a climate in which, on the one hand, non-expansion of public services is government policy and on the other, public demand for services is growing, independent executive agencies can take a great deal of pressure off the ministries and allow them to concentrate on essential tasks such as funding the sector, policy-formulation, liaison with Parliament and other ministry departments. Such an agency could also ensure policy co-ordination more effectively than inter-ministerial bodies, which, by their nature, have few executive powers and are often confined to statements of intent.

***MWRCDFW & Min. Education***

*Protocol of agreement*

**National Agency for  
Early Childhood Development and Education**

***Management Board***

(the Director and a high-level civil servant from each ministry),  
in consultation with an

***Advisory Board*** (all stakeholders)

**Director**

*(by open recruitment)*

**Staff**

*The focus of the Agency would be on issue of common interest, such as: safeguarding the best interests of children, co-ordination of both sectors, research, surveys, monitoring, profiling and career structures, training, parent issues... (to be specified in the Protocol)*

**3. The creation of a stable funding mechanism for crèches, pre-schools and after-school care**

114. High-quality, public care and education services are expensive to provide. The younger the child to be cared for, the more expensive services become, because of the labour-intensive nature of the work. To put it simply, one adult cannot look after ten babies adequately (the usual ratio practised in formal care is two or three babies to one adult). In short, the adequate funding of services poses the painful trade-off

between quality, affordability to parents, and decent remuneration of staff. If services are cheap (unless subsidised by the State), staff have to be poorly paid and quality deteriorates. In consequence, well-educated women do not offer themselves for recruitment, and staff turnover is high as personnel can get better pay and work conditions elsewhere. On the other hand, if costs are high and quality ensured, low-income parents cannot have access, and are obliged to choose informal, low quality care for their children. This poses a real problem of equity. Without State investment, child care becomes too expensive or of low quality, and a vicious circle of poor children receiving the poorest services is rapidly generated. For this reason, and despite the efforts made by the ministries, the funding of early childhood services in Mauritius is a matter of urgent concern. No country that we have visited is so dependent on parental fees. Whether quality services for low-income parents can be sustained in such circumstances is open to serious doubt.

115. What volume of funding is needed? One is speaking here of funding to cater for age cohorts of approximately 18,000 children in each year. The Ministry of Education reaches over 60% of children aged 3 and 4 years,<sup>20</sup> while the MWRCDFW takes in charge, at the moment, almost 20% of the younger children (rather more, if one includes children touched by parent education and women's programmes). Future projections speak of a rapid increase in the demand for services. Optimistically, the Ministry of Education hopes to enrol all children in pre-school services in the coming years, while a 1997 consultancy study of the younger children estimated that 36,000 additional children will participate in early development services in the near future, in 3280 early development centres. The same study estimated that a further 6000 care workers will be needed in the sector, in addition to the 4000 (mostly informal) already engaged (UNICEF, 1997). These projections for the early development sector seem to us rather high (see Chapter VII *Identifying strategies to ease pressure of demand for public services*), but even the lowest estimates foresee a significant increase over present numbers, and greater expectations among parents about State responsibility for the sector in the future.

116. In sum, significant new funding needs to be found. In the State early education sector alone, the following are some of the items that will need funding over the coming years:

- The refurbishing of public pre-school buildings to bring them up to the licensing requirements, and just as importantly, to render them suitable for the health, well-being and learning of young children;
- The building of new pre-school "classes" in the primary schools, especially in the deprived areas, and the recruitment of new personnel;
- The improvement of child-staff ratios by reducing child groups and ensuring that young children have always a qualified teacher or assistant teacher with them (in the private as well as the public sector);
- The training (initial training, in particular) of all the teachers and assistant teachers, and the regularisation of salaries and work conditions across the system;
- The improved monitoring of the system through the training and employment of pedagogical advisors and inspectors;
- The provision of an early childhood resource/documentation centre for teachers in each region;
- The steering of the private sector through financial inducement<sup>21</sup> and technical support, e.g. through extending the per capita grant to the three-year olds;

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20. This is consciously a low estimate, as according to some NGO estimates, c. 11,000 children are not in pre-school or attend unrecognised "p'tis écoles" not registered by the Ministry.

21. In a situation where private provision dominates, incentives need to be offered to the providers, if registration and training are to become a reality, and some supervision of the sector exercised by the ministry. Such incentives may take the form of subsidies and tax relief, but will be tied to accreditation and raising quality

The expenditure needs of the early development sector will be no less if a further 10,000 children<sup>22</sup> are to be brought into organised care and development settings.

117. However, in the coming years, the major educational priority (and expenditure) of Mauritius will be the expansion of lower secondary and vocational education. As our analysis has attempted to show, the expansion of secondary schooling can be positive for early education, as until the pressure of competition is eased within primary education, it will be extremely difficult to persuade either teachers or parents that a real reform of current pedagogical approaches in the pre-school is feasible. At the same time, it will be necessary to argue the case vis-à-vis the Ministry of Education, the MWRCDFW and the Ministry of Finance that without substantial investment in early development and early education, the physical, social and mental development of many children entering the primary school system will not be optimal, and will lead inevitably to later inefficiencies in educational investment.

118. The argument can be made reasonably, as the funding of early education relative to the other education groups remains unbalanced in Mauritius. In many of the OECD countries, funding for the pre-primary child is generally equivalent or marginally below the expenditure for a primary pupil. In fact, in the Czech Republic, Finland, the UK and the US, expenditure is greater for three and four year olds than for primary pupils. In Mauritius, the ratio favours greatly primary, secondary and tertiary students. The 1998 Education Card gives the following proportions of recurrent expenditure allocated to the different groups. In 1998-99, primary education received 34% of total recurrent expenditure; secondary education 39%; pre-primary 1.7%.<sup>23</sup> The case is clear for an increase in funding for young children, and a more equitable balance in the allocations. The top end of education, in which middle-class children dominate, receives far greater amounts per child. In addition, participation at that level more or less guarantees these students a high rate of return on their parents' investment.

119. Given the minority stake of the State in early childhood provision, it is not probable, however, that it will take on significant extra funding. At the moment, the major costs in the private (majority) sector are borne by parents, with investment in buildings being accepted by the private providers. It is a recipe for ad hoc arrangements and variations in quality, particularly for client parents who are poor and uneducated. The time may be ripe to undertake a study of the issue with the aim of creating of a national funding mechanism (as in the pensions field) to finance adequately a development of early childhood provision, based on contributions from the State, the employers, the communities and the parents.

120. The potential contribution of the large employers (government, municipalities, the EPZ and the Sugar Industry) should not be underestimated. The labour needs, typical unit size and work organisation of these employers in Mauritius give them a natural interest in the development of early childhood services, either through direct provision on site or through purchase of places in crèches and pre-schools. At least the situation may be investigated, and after concertation, realistic proposals made. It may be noted that in many countries, it is the government as an employer that gives a lead in developing early childhood services for its employees. It would be unrealistic to expect the Sugar Industry or other bodies to invest in crèches and pre-schools, if government departments, which generally employ significant numbers of women, do not themselves organise such services or allow flexible hours to parents of young children.

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22. One consultancy report makes an estimate of 30,000 extra children coming into public services.

23. We were informed that the portion allowed to pre-primary is actually smaller, and is nearer to 1%. It is interesting to note also that the Education Card gives an expenditure of only 2% for Technical and Vocational Education. Yet both early childhood provision and technical education will be essential underpinnings of the new Mauritian economy.

#### 4. Integrating services at local level

121. The efficiency rationale for ministries to work together is strong and evident. At ground level, co-operation also leads to greater efficiency and less duplication, perhaps especially in the early childhood field where care, health, nutrition and education are inextricably mixed. Decentralisation of operations to local level brings out-of-home care closer to parents, and enables them to contribute to the organisation of early care and education.<sup>24</sup> It also allows communities and NGOs to have a voice in setting up or improving existing child care arrangements in their locality in an organised manner. Local inputs are particularly appropriate and welcome in low-income districts, as parents and NGOs together can generally identify successfully the types of services that are culturally and economically appropriate. In the case of Mauritius, informal practice of the field seems also to point in this direction. Traditionally, there has been much co-operation between parents, informal caregivers, the small nurseries and pre-schools. Many of the informal services are age-integrated, e.g. nurseries and pre-schools catering for children from two to five years, which holds several advantages for young children and their families.<sup>25</sup> The challenge is how to organise this type of local creativity into a sustainable, integrated service. An interesting example is provided by the Early Years Development and Child care Partnerships (EYDCP) in England.

#### *Box 3 - Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships in England*

##### **Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships**

In England, the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCP) have been set up by local authorities as the primary mechanism through which child care targets and the provision of universal early education for three- and four-year-olds will be realised. The Partnerships consist of representatives from the maintained (subsidised), private, and voluntary sectors, local education, health, and social services, employers, trainers, advisors, and parents. Members of the partnership serve on a volunteer basis. Their role is to assess the current provision of care in local areas and to develop plans for future expansion. Working in co-operation with its partner Local Education Authority, each local Partnership draws up an annual local Early Years Development and Childcare Plan. The EYDCP plans are linked to national targets for the provision of early education places for three and four year olds and are required to address the need for expansion of child care and early education provision in their area. The Plans need to address issues of quality, affordability, and accessibility across the range of services in their area and to consider how to provide parents with access to information they need by developing Childcare Information Services (CIS) for their area.

**Source: Background Report of the UK, Pascal & Bertram, 1999**

122. The EYDC partnerships are one means of meeting the challenge to have integrated local services. Another means may be a creative use of the Regional Education Directorates or other region-based bodies, enabling them in a representative and democratic way, to take in charge the management of services for the whole age group 0-6 years in their region. Again, UNICEF may wish to research this question, and recommend a mechanism to the ministries that would allow local partnerships for early care and education to be organised and funded adequately.

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24. The present passage is not a plea for administrative decentralisation, which needs a much more careful assessment. It is based rather on the principle of subsidiarity, that is, seeing care and education as first the responsibility of the family (see the CRC), then of community and local statutory bodies, and finally (but not least) of national organisations and government.

25. For the young children, age-integrated services can be a very positive experience. They allow children of the same family to stay together, and they are very formative for two and three year old children as concept formation and language acquisition are at full extension in these years (see remarks on Research on Language policy below).

## 5. Data collection, surveys and research in the early childhood field

123. An important source of information for monitoring the development of an early childhood system and evaluating the effects of policy decisions are accurate statistics. They are also an important basis for national socio-economic planning and research, and can be used for international comparisons. Combined with data on population, and the labour market, statistics also show how access and demand change in different regions, thereby giving the state and municipalities a basis for monitoring and supporting development.

124. To provide an insight into the content and process of data collection in the early childhood field, we have included below a box on data collection, surveys and research in Sweden, a country reputed for the quality and accuracy of its statistics. From what we have seen, none of the activities listed below are outside the scope of Mauritius to undertake, although some of them may not be necessary:

### ***Box 4 - Data Collection, Surveys and Research in Sweden***

#### **Data Collection, Surveys and Research in Sweden**

In Sweden, data is collected annually by each municipality on the following items:

- The number of childcare units and pre-schools, and the numbers of children in each
- The number, composition and level of training of each category of personnel in pre-schools, leisure-time centres, family daycare
- The number of groups in pre-schools and leisure-time centres, and the size of groups in pre-schools
- The size of groups in family child care homes
- The opening hours in pre-schools, leisure-time centres, family child care homes and open pre-schools
- The number of children in pre-schools and family child care homes with a mother tongue other than Swedish and the numbers receiving support in their mother tongue
- The costs to municipalities for pre-school, family child care home, leisure-time centres and open activities.

In parallel to the collection of official statistics, other surveys of a statistical character are carried out more or less frequently. For example, during the 80s and 90s, major surveys were carried out on parents with children aged 1-6 years to identify demand for and access to child care in different groups of the population. Other surveys, carried out over the past three years are: "Access to child care for children with unemployed parents", "Mapping of parental fees in pre-schools and leisure-time centres" and "Children in need of special support in child care".

Research and evaluation in the ECDE area is also well developed. Much money is now being spent on developing and evaluating certain themes, e.g. "School-age child care and integration with the schools", "Age-flexible entry dates to schools" or "Pre-schools for all children" are examples of such high-priority areas. Other important program development areas have been "Pedagogical methods for working with the youngest children", "Group-oriented work-methods in ECDE groups with large numbers of children", programs linked to "Environmental protection and conservation" or "Male personnel in ECEC-settings".

Universities and municipalities working together in networks are granted special financial support from the ministry to continue this work. National authorities also invite municipalities to participate in regular dissemination seminars under different headings, and to document the work carried out.

**Source: Background Report of Sweden, Gunnarsön *et al*, 1999**

125. Similar data collection fields are included in published software packages in other countries, e.g. in the World Bank *ECD Statistics for Decision-Making in Brazil* (World Bank, 1999). The package focuses on fields, many of which are relevant for Mauritius: demographic information at municipality level; child health and nutrition; characteristics of households with children aged 0-6; socio-economic, educational and income levels of parents; level of enrolment in daycare centres and pre-schools; teacher qualifications and salaries (considered as a major indicator of the quality of services).

126. The consensus of the two ministries – and their joint co-operation and funding - will be necessary to gather comparable statistics for Mauritius. But already, a great deal of statistical data is available in the De

Chazal Du Mee survey, and in the various consultancy reports sponsored by UNICEF. This work could be exploited without too much difficulty, and its selected fields developed into a software package for use by the ministries. The experience of the MIE and the Education Regional Directorates in collecting and exploiting data can also contribute to this area.

### *A charged research agenda*

127. Where *research* is concerned, UNICEF, with its comprehensive research agenda of 1996-97, has already shown how important research can be for national policy formulation. Other issues for further research have also been raised in this report:

- The family and child-rearing patterns of the different ethnic groups and their potential impact on future child and family policies;
- Accurate statistical information on low-income families and lone mothers - their income levels, needs and the difficulties encountered by their children;
- Accurate statistical information on actual access to services, child-staff ratios, educational level of personnel in the early development and education sector...
- Identification of an adequate funding mechanism for early services in Mauritius, based on contributions from government, employers, communities and parents;
- Identification of a mechanism to ensure local policy integration and to meet the multiple childhood needs of the age-group 0-6 years;
- Finding ways and means of bringing the large private child-minder sector into the public sphere, and identifying an adequate training method for these women;
- Identifying ways and means of strengthening fiscal, social and educational supports to families with young children;
- Identifying how an extension of parental leave could be funded to allow parents to care for infants at least during the first year;
- Identifying family-friendly work practices in the Mauritian situation, including the formal recognition (in terms of Social Security and other benefits) of part-time work;
- Research on the efficacy and influence of parents groups on pre-school organisation and quality
- Research on the fundamental aims and basic learning tools of early development and education, particularly with regard to the Mauritian context;
- Research on the language of the pre-school, particularly on optimum language development for children in the age group 2-5, whose first language is neither French nor English.

The research effort needs to be sustained, and a budget reserved in the Mauritian ministries to define and pursue a well-defined research agenda.

## **6. Energetic support for school reform**

128. For reasons already outlined in the report, the present organisation of primary education raises serious concern about equity and quality. The analysis of drop-out rates and results suggests that the Mauritian education system does not yet assist the poorer children sufficiently to gain an education or to improve their situation in society. The extra-curricular tuition that characterises the system favours middle-class children, while at the same time, it does little to enhance the status of teachers in the eyes of the

general public. For these reasons, the announcement by the government of school reform and the extension of obligatory school attendance to 11 years is very welcome.

129. UNICEF may wish to encourage the reform, while remaining vigilant about its nature. A reform of this importance cannot be quantitative only, e.g. based on building new schools in which present practices are continued. Expansion of intake must be accompanied by a more adequate learning theory than at present. As long as academic competition at primary school level remains the royal road to secondary education, parents will look on early development and education as primarily a preparation for school and early literacy. They will continue to patronise pre-schools that privilege precocious literacy programmes over more important developmental objectives. This runs contrary to the *raison-d'être* of the pre-school, which in most countries have been founded to ensure a fair start for all children. From the beginning, the pre-school should be supporting health, building self-esteem and ensuring a strong enjoyment in learning.

130. From a social justice perspective, vigilance is equally necessary. Certain education policies and practices have far-reaching equity implications, e.g. selective admission, the vocational-secondary divide, milieu-biased examinations, an emphasis on grades rather than on student inclusion and motivation. A primary school reform that leads to streaming of the less academic children into a lowly considered, pre-vocational secondary stream, may lead to further difficulties for children in need of special supports. It will also contribute to the continuation of the competitive, “cramming” school, with its negative downstream effects on the pre-school.

131. An issue in this reform will be to improve the conditions of entry into school of the less academic children. In this regard, UNICEF may wish to take a special interest in building better transitions from pre-school to primary. The issue of transition, making the two pre-school years and Standard One, part of an *Initial Education Cycle* is further considered in Chapter VIII below.

## Chapter VII

### Initiatives for Consideration

in the

### Early Development Sector

132. Since it became operational around 1995, the Child Development Unit at the MWRCDFW has accomplished much. The time may now have come to consolidate the policies, programmes and instruments that it has already been launched. At the same time, we are conscious that the pressures of demand will continue to grow (see the analysis in Chapter VI above on *Identifying new funding resources*) and that new upstream policy measures need to be planned if a stable expansion of the system is to take place. We suggest, accordingly, to consolidate and continue the implementation of the National Policy Paper, while at the same time, engaging in upstream forward planning to allow a stable and controlled expansion of early development services. As mentioned above in Chapter VI, forward planning would include identifying a stable funding mechanism for the future expansion of the system, and a slowing down of demand through a policy of family support.<sup>26</sup>

#### 1. Consolidation and continued implementation of policy

133. The rationale for this policy is based on the evident need to continue with the implementation of the policy blueprint laid out in the 1998 National ECD Policy Paper. These policies focussed for the most part - and we would judge quite correctly - on training, registration and quality improvement. Much work remains to be done in all these areas. As we have suggested in Chapter VI above, it may be an efficient solution to entrust this work to a *National Early Childhood Development and Education Agency*, allowing the Ministry to focus on upstream forward planning and the funding issue.

#### *Continuation of the training effort*

134. In Chapter III, reference was made to the training initiatives undertaken by the Ministry, including the self-evaluation/self-training QIAS scheme. Even if the QIAS is a well-designed instrument, it may be well to consider also the intensive *initial* training of all child care workers, as the existing level of knowledge about child care organisation may not be sufficient for the QIAS to work alone.<sup>27</sup> A foundation course for all child care personnel raises the overall standard and introduces common expectations across

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26. Care needs to be exercised, however, that “family” policies do not undermine gender equity and the new contribution that women are making to public life.

27. This may also be true of a significant part of Australian provision, in which many centres have been granted accreditation on the basis of the QIAS. Without initial training and the opportunity to access in-service training, staff have little status, and for a number of reasons, services quickly drop back into mediocrity after initial accreditation.

the profession. For this reason, a repetition (with perhaps different implementation strategies)<sup>28</sup> of the distance training module could be considered for family child carers, on the lines of the Danish model outlined below - again not an impossible task in Mauritius if funding can be found!

### ***Box 5: Training childminders in Denmark***

In Denmark, there are no *mandatory* training programmes for childminders but courses in child care have been offered since the early 1980s. Local authorities organise four types of courses for their registered childminders: an *introductory* course, a *basic* course, *drop-in* courses and various *intensive supplementary* courses. Childminders receive paid leave when they attend courses, and they are continually supervised and supported by municipal childcare professionals. It should be understood also that unregistered childminders are not allowed to operate in Denmark.

**1. *The introductory course*** normally lasts one week, taking place immediately after the employment of the childminder. New childminders are typically introduced to the job in the form of one information day taking place in the local authority, one day of work practice with an experienced childminder, and a three-day introductory course. The purpose of the introductory course is to give new childminders an idea of the basis on which the childminding system works, its objectives and the principles governing their work relating to children. The introductory course includes subjects such as;

- Organisation of daily routines - planning and framework,
- Babies - food and sleeping habits,
- Working alone and working in groups,
- Working positions,
- Duty of non-disclosure and duty of information;
- Educators in the childminder system - guidance and supervision.

**2. *The basic course*** period is at least two weeks. It takes place within the first year of employment. The purpose of the basic course is to improve the ability of childminders to work with children through increased knowledge about child development, collaboration processes and the childminder's own working conditions. Subjects in the basic course programme include; Childminding - a workplace in your home; Child development - motor, linguistic, emotional and social development; Educational aspects of childminding - playing and learning; Communication and co-operation with parents, colleagues and the educator attached to the childminding facility; Ergonomics, work positions, lifting techniques and back exercises; Food and health; and Laws, rules and regulations.

**3. *Drop-in courses*** take place once a week, when the childminders from the same area meet together for a morning or afternoon at a crèche, drop-in or resource centre. This weekly meeting is an opportunity to exchange experiences and to work together on common projects or issues of concern, e.g. how to give young mothers more confidence or skills in looking after their babies. It is also an opportunity for the supervisor to meet her childminders in the same place on a weekly basis, and to help resolve any problems or concerns one or other childminder might have.

**4. *Intensive supplementary course modules*** are provided to childminders working in difficult neighbourhoods or requiring special skills. They may be offered modules that treat, for example: supporting socially vulnerable families, traditional ways of caring for children, first aid in childminding facilities, etc. In addition, childminders may also enrol in general, adult education courses or programmes, in relation to which they can be granted credit transfers.

135. In parallel with the training effort, the attempt to accredit (see below) and train the childminders should be pursued. Better regulation and quality can be ensured when the profession of childminder is recognised, with an appropriate social security and tax status, a salary regulation and a career structure. A career structure may be based on the extent of training (expressed in credits), giving the childminder equivalence at some stage to a teacher helper, and eventually an Assistant Teacher. Economies of scale in

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28. See comments in Chapter IV above

training can then be achieved, by common training across the sectors. Again, this is an area for careful study and eventual recommendations to the national professional boards. However, there is a certain urgency in the task as the situation is still relatively fluid in Mauritius. Once recruitment, job profiles and remuneration become institutionalised and unionised, it becomes much more difficult to reduce the number of professions or to gain agreement on career ladders and fields of competence.

### *Continuation of the parent/women education programmes*

136. A *National Early Childhood Development and Education Agency* should also consider continuing of the successful parent/women education programmes. These programmes need not focus exclusively on parenting and child issues, but can broaden out into training for PTA work, school boards, and even general education of all types. The better educated and articulate women become, the more likely it is that child and family issues will gain an important place on the political agenda. The common interest of the Ministry of Education in such programmes may be explored.

## **2. Extending parental leave and family friendly work practices**

137. The extension of paid parental leave is a major strategy used in the Scandinavian and other European countries to relieve pressure on infant services. In Sweden, for example, it is rare to find children in public or private care services below the age of fifteen months. To allow families to remain in charge of rearing children, and avoid early institutionalisation of infants, consideration may be given in Mauritius to extending maternal leave with pay to six months, with a further leave period of three to six months.<sup>29</sup> The later leave period could be made more attractive to parents through a small flat-rate payment made possible by employer and/or social security contributions. In parallel, and in compensation for the contribution of employers, a greater public effort to bring young Mauritian women<sup>30</sup> into the labour force can be made, through improving the enrolment and continuation of girls in secondary schooling.

138. Another focus could be to examine how the labour market should cater for the needs and requirements of *working* parents with young children. The aim would be to allow parents to combine working life, family life and early development care arrangements for children in such a way that there is 'space' for parents and children to spend time together. Labour markets can help families not only through parental leave schemes, but also through authorising more flexible working hours, and increased opportunities for part-time work.<sup>31</sup> All these practices significantly relieve demand. They influence too the structure of day-care, the number of part-time and full-time places that need to be offered, and the opening hours of day-care facilities.

## **3. Increasing fiscal and community supports to families with young children**

139. It is suggested that early childhood policy officials will work closely with Social Affairs and the women's and family policy sections in the MWRCDFW *to increase fiscal and community supports to families with young children*, especially to working mothers and vulnerable families. Attention has been drawn to this issue in Chapters II and III. In a situation in which adequate funding for public childcare has not been found, support needs be given to families to rear their children. In the case of women rearing

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29. From our discussions on the subject, it would seem that the extension of parental leave in Mauritius will require advocacy, and complex negotiations with the relevant ministries, social partners and employers.

30. The present policy of bringing in young unmarried women from abroad for a limited number of years seems, to an outsider at least, to be doubtful in terms of the UN conventions, and perhaps inefficient in the long term.

31. The downside of part-time work, is that unless governments bring in certain protections, much the greater proportion of part-time work is taken up by women, with negative influences on career, earning capacity and pension rights. To combat bias, government in the Netherlands supports a "two times three-quarters" policy, each spouse working three-quarters time, which allows parental care of young children for a half day, every day.

children alone, financial assistance is a necessity. It is outside the remit of this report to suggest how child-rearing allowances should be calculated or under what conditions they should be paid, but society has an obligation to ensure the health, nutrition and well-being of young children. In finding realistic solutions to the difficulties of families in real poverty, it is helpful to consult with the NGOs working in the child and family welfare field. Supports to families can also be educational, as for example, the UNICEF Parenting Education programme mentioned above.

140. *Increasing the range of low-cost, community care arrangements* is another means of supporting families, through morning or afternoon crèches in women's centres, open-air infant and toddler groups, part-day drop-in facilities, children's play areas. In many countries, local authorities establish open educational facilities for children below school age or play centres where children and parents may meet. These low-cost but equipped facilities are generally managed by trained women with child development backgrounds, and are open for a number of hours every day. They give a wider choice to parents, and if well run, can be popular and reduce the need for long-day early development centres.

#### **4. Bringing private, informal child care into the mainstream**

141. Family daycare in Mauritius takes place in private houses, in most cases the childminder's own home. For better or worse, it seems to be a feature of child care in Mauritius at the moment. For several reasons, regulation of the sector is needed, preferably in a voluntary manner as it is a difficult sector to influence from the outside. Many countries use both regulation and incentive to bring the private childminders into the public sphere, and so protect children and the interests of parents. A basic start may be to make it an offence for a non-family member not to declare that she is looking after two or more children for commercial purposes. An amendment to the Child Protection Act of 1994 may be considered in this sense.

142. Real incentives must also be offered to the informal childminder if she is to be motivated to declare what she is doing, accept some supervision and training, seek accreditation and provide a quality service. A strong incentive is *public* recognition of the function of childminder for social security coverage and pension rights (see training of child-minders above). Frequently, incentives also include tax concessions to both the accredited child-minder and to parents who use accredited services. *Supports* also can be offered such as, grants from the municipality or government for the improvement of the home premises, advice about the effective administration of their service, social security benefits; encouraging the creation of a special insurance package, a weekly or fortnightly visit by the district nurse, a local drop-in centre where childminders can meet for an afternoon with each other, and receive some training or short refresher courses. In addition to the training requirements mentioned above, a simple instrument might be devised to encourage some voluntary reflection on quality. This could be an offshoot of the QIAS, although as mentioned in Chapter II.2 above, a financial incentive would make this voluntary effort far more attractive for providers.

## Chapter VIII

### Initiatives for Consideration in the Pre-Primary Sector

143. The Ministry of Education has been active in the early education field for over twenty years. Since then, the sector has grown exponentially and is now picking up the majority of children aged 3 and 4 years. Whenever exercised, Ministry intervention has proven to be very effective, as the recent per capita grant and distance training initiative for teachers have shown. The time would now seem ripe for clear policy-making and increased investment.

#### *A major policy shift*

144. As mentioned in Chapter VI, the major policy shift to be considered is bring a certain unity to the early childhood field in Mauritius, seeing the period as stretching from 0-6 years and stressing that the role of the ministries is to ensure development and education for young children and their families rather than merely providing a “garderie” for young children. In this endeavour, consideration may be given to creating a national agency for the implementation of policy across the age group. The purpose would be to give greater unity to the sector in terms of continuity of policy and of the avoidance of expensive duplication. Common issues that might be taken in charge by *a National Agency for Early Childhood Development and Education* would include: identifying, with the ministries, a national funding mechanism for all early childhood provision; integrating services at local level; creating joint data collection and research; defining job descriptions and a common career structure that would allow the movement of certain categories of staff from one sector to another; initiating common training of staff from both sectors; developing joint quality improvement instruments.

#### **1. Reformulation of the pre-school regulatory frameworks**

145. The grounds for re-framing regulations have been treated in Chapter IV above. A central reason is that the guiding values of early childhood education are not clear in the present legislation. We would suggest that the legislation and regulations should reflect more strongly the philosophy and objectives of the pre-school. Rather than stressing the licensing requirements, a new Regulation could link registration and accreditation with providing appropriate learning environments for children in accordance with the Ministry’s objectives. A reformulated text would attempt to communicate clearly:

- The continuity of the pre-school with early development objectives, e.g. stressing the main developmental goals for children in the age group 0-6 years, especially the common learning thread;
- A clear pre-school profile that can guide the providers;
- The human rights basis for early education and equitable access for all children.

## 2. The expansion of *public* provision, especially in deprived areas

146. From a children's rights perspective, fair access to pre-school has still to be achieved for children from low-income families, children with language difficulties and children with disabilities (see Chapters IV and VI above). From an educational perspectives, the concern is equally real. Denial of early access to disadvantaged children adversely affects subsequent school achievement levels, the future employment prospects of these children, their level of earnings, their social integration and general contribution to the economy. It is known also that unless the financial returns are great, poor school outcomes lessen the motivation of adults to engage in subsequent lifelong learning opportunities.

147. An undoubted reason for the lack of good pre-schools in poor and rural areas is the weakness of public provision, which accounts for less than 20% of the pre-school pool. Further expansion of public provision through opening pre-school classes for 3-5 year old children in the primary schools servicing these areas should be considered. It is hoped that the expansion of public early education "classes" in these areas will be models in terms of the intelligent organisation of the learning environment, both indoors and out. It is insufficient to simply add on a classroom. The construction of learning environments for young children must come from an understanding of how young children learn. The primary classroom with its little chairs, copy books, blackboard (and even television set!) is a counter example, and offers young children little opportunity to learn through exploration and play.

## 3. Re-thinking early education in terms of its purposes and basic learning tools

148. A special plea may be entered here for an in-depth re-thinking of the purposes of early education and its learning tools. Among the central objectives of the pre-school should be the holistic development of the child, and the enhancement of their learning. The basic tools that the pre-school places at the disposal of the child are twofold: enriched indoor and outdoor environments, and caring adults who are trained to support the natural learning desire of children, with respect, professional expertise and creativity. These "tools" are incompatible with over-crowding, unattractive surroundings and the conduct of the pre-school as if it were primarily a teaching situation. What is at stake here is not a definition of the exact amount of space needed per child. Surveys show that such definitions and regulations have been met in Mauritius with incomprehension and non-compliance. It is a question of keeping to the fore the fundamental purposes of early development and education. Obviously, where the small private providers are concerned, there is question also of removing them from a situation where they are obliged to cut corners in order to make a living (see Note 21 above).

149. Regulations from the Health Department rightly focus on sanitary and safety factors, but educators need also to stress the child's need for balanced nutrition, rest, learning, recreation, play and fresh air. Mauritius, with its wonderful climate and natural environment, is well-placed to cater for pre-school children in the open air, and achieve their well-rounded development.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Box 6: The Forest Kindergarten***

In Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries, forest kindergartens are common. The children spend most of their time outdoors in small groups with staff members, even in winter. They explore the surrounding forest; engage in games together; make use of the outdoor equipment; plant flowers, shrubs and vegetables; spend time round open fires; chop wood and generally taking advantage of the beauty and resources of the natural setting. The educators join with them in their explorations, providing explanations and the names of the flora and fauna discovered. The kindergarten centre is often a wooden construction, much like a cabin

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32. Several countries with much colder climates have, as a basic regulation, that *every* room for young children should have French doors opening onto an outdoor garden or play area for the children.

and decorated with all the things children find outside, or choose to treasure or learn more about. These items included pieces of bark, wild flowers, birds' nests and feathers, stones with fossils, acorns and nuts collected from the forest floor.

On visiting an urban child-care centre in Copenhagen, we saw a group of children and some staff members mounting a bus outside. When we enquired where they might be going, we were told they were travelling to the 'forest' kindergarten for the day. This was a weekly part of the routine of this urban centre. We were informed that the journey took about an hour in each direction. When we asked how well these young children coped with travelling in the bus so long, we were assured that they mainly slept, and did not appear to experience any difficulties.

The Forest Kindergarten illustrates a strong commitment among Danish pedagogues (teachers) to share the natural environment with as many children as possible, regardless of where they live. To experience and explore the natural world and its wonders is seen as an important part of growing up in Denmark.

Source: Danish Country Note, OECD 2000

#### **4. Improving the supervision, inspection and quality control of the early childhood sector, including the private providers**

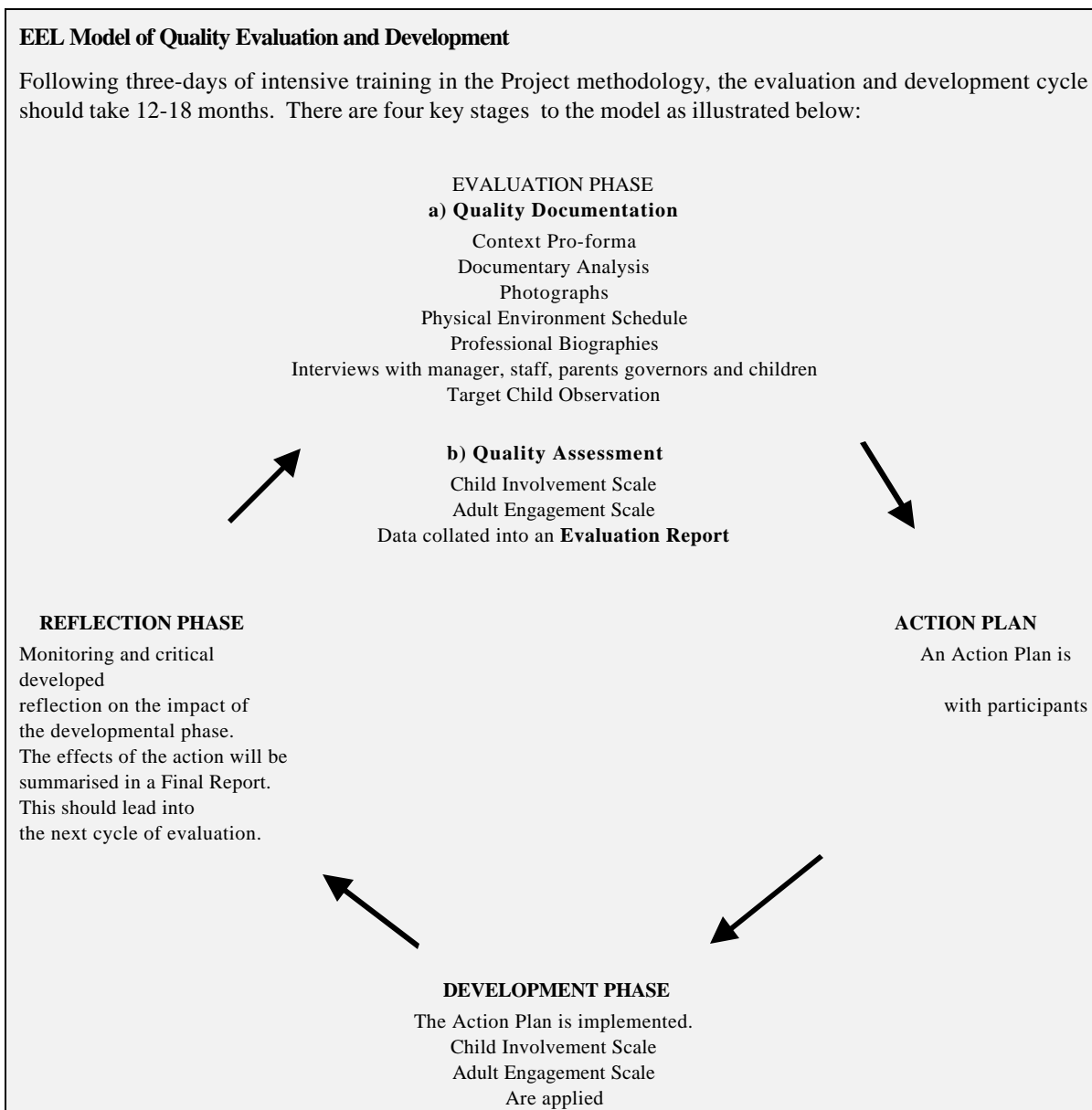
150. Attention was drawn in Chapter II to the concern of the Committee on the Rights of the Child concerning the lack of supervision of the private providers of both "care" and "early education" in Mauritius. Both ministries are conscious of the issue, and are putting into place separate regulatory, inspection and quality control processes. In this field, the argument in favour of co-ordination between the two ministries is again strong. If one takes seriously that we are speaking about the development and early learning of children from 0-6 years, the bringing together of regulatory frameworks and inspection is inescapable, and will avoid expensive duplication. However, even in the event of a National Agency for Early Childhood Development and Education being formed to bring together parallel arrangements, a special responsibility will continue to lie with the education authorities where training, quality control and inspection are concerned, as these are areas in which Ministries of Education have a great deal of experience and expertise. We would recommend, for example, that a wider responsibility be taken by of the regional education offices to monitor all early childhood services in their region. At least, an in-depth inspection by a qualified team should be carried out before accreditation of any service is granted.

151. Where the 4-year olds are concerned, a good start to improving supervision has already been made through the per capita grant. Linking the grant to compliance with *Norms for Pre-Schools in Receipt of the Per Capita Grant* has allowed the Ministry to leverage quality improvement in all pre-schools that accept the grants. However, the requirements are still rather external, and insufficiently based on self-evaluation and in-depth inspection of pedagogical approaches and processes. As we have already indicated, some confusion exists between licensing regulations and the far greater effort that should be demanded of providers and staff, so that well-being, development and education are ensured for the young children in their care. Better results may be possible through the use of a more demanding quality instrument that emphasises self evaluation and child observation, e.g. a modified version of the Reggio Emilia documentation process or of the EEL (Effective Early Learning) Self-Evaluation Model used in the UK may be considered (see Box 7 below). A further opportunity to guide the sector, would be to extend the per capita grant to 3-year olds, and to link the QIAS scheme in the early development sector with some small financial advantage for parents who use accredited services. Without some incentives, the development and education of the younger children may remain a question of "care" or childminding.

152. As mentioned in Chapter IV, several useful tools for managing the daily activities of centres are already required by the regulations. The requirement to maintain a development portfolio for each child

seemed to us to be particularly useful, whether one is speaking of a crèche or pre-school. Their use could be further enhanced with the help of the inspectors and qualified early childhood supervisors. The prosecution and fining of providers that do not register should also be considered. Again, the Child Protection or the Education Act may need to be modified in this sense, as one is dealing here with potentially abusive situations for very young children. Such an amendment would also reassure the Committee on the Rights of the Child that progress was being made on this issue.

**Box 7 - The Effective Early Learning Self-Evaluation Model**



## **5. Attention to recruitment, training, professional development, and the work conditions of all staff in the ECDE sector**

153. As mentioned in Chapter VI above, this activity remains a key issue of co-ordination between the two ministries and a special responsibility of the Ministry of Education and for any new ECDE agency that may be established. Well-trained and motivated staff are the key to high quality services. Greater emphasis needs to be placed in Mauritius on suitable recruitment and initial training of all staff working in direct contact with young children. The question needs to be conceived from a long-term perspective that foresees seamless developmental and early education services for children from birth to six years - services that provide, in parallel, support to families to ensure adequate home learning environments for young children. Training and adult education remain the special responsibility of the Ministry of Education in this endeavour. Long-term policy frameworks need also to be decided, e.g. that define common job descriptions and a common career structure allowing the movement of staff from one sector to another and permitting a certain amount of common initial and in-service training. Work conditions, salaries, and professional development (access to in-service training) are also important if a well-qualified corps of professional staff is to be retained in the early childhood sector. The Ministry has already achieved much in the field of training, not least through its distance training initiatives. Its efforts to professionalise the early education field needs to be extended across the entire sector.

## **6. Research on the language of the pre-school**

154. A special circumstance in Mauritius is that children must become proficient in two languages (French, English) and possibly three (see para. 130 of the Presidential Address, 2000), by the time they sit the CPE at 11 years. None of these languages is exactly foreign, but neither - except among a minority - is English or French the language of the home. Research in the field indicates that for emotional security, and for concept and language development from 2-5 years, young children need much oral work in the language of the home, even if it is perceived as a dialect. Although language is a sensitive political issue in Mauritius, a case may be made for sponsoring international research on the language of the pre-school, particularly on optimum language development in the age-group 2-5. A hypothesis that may be tested is that the non-use of the home language, (in this instance, Crèole) and the early learning of two other languages have a negative impact on emotional security and concept development in young children, and may become a barrier to later literacy. We would suggest for consideration by the Ministry the sponsorship of international research on the situation, keeping in mind the best interests of children.

## **7. Ensuring a smooth transition and a more appropriate curriculum**

155. The difficulties of transition into Standard One of the primary school are particularly acute for children with special needs. For this reason, APEIM (L'Association des Parents d'Enfants Inadaptés de l'Île Maurice) has prepared several practical suggestions to ease this transition, which are also pertinent to transition for all children, and should be widely disseminated in pre-schools and primary schools, especially in disadvantaged areas. Initially, Standard One of the primary school (at five years) was conceived as a transition year, and its contents and methodology were intended to provide a smooth transition for children coming in from pre-school. However, according to informants, Standard One has gradually become a reading/writing year, with a formal focus and discipline. Among the shortcomings of the class mentioned to the review team, and reflected also in educational research and reports from Mauritius, are the following:

- *The child-teacher ratio, which rises from perhaps 20 to 1 in the pre-school to as much as 45 to 1 in Standard One.*<sup>33</sup> Such ratios give children no room to move about or to engage in

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33. See our comment concerning statistics in Chapter IV above.

meaningful group work. Yet, these are essential requirements for children of this age (5-6 years), who have short concentration spells and need movement, interchange (and fresh air) for their development. Moreover, the influence of such overcrowding on teachers and their manner of teaching cannot be positive.

- *A crowded, content-heavy syllabus*, which leaves little time for recreation and play, nor indeed for the essential developmental and learning activities of this age;
- *A pedagogical approach to children, which is typified in several studies as being directive and formal*. The singling out of reading and writing from general communication activities<sup>34</sup> is one facet of this approach. It is generally agreed that children at five years are still in the emergent literacy stage, and need creative language activities, such as mime, drama, rhymes, debate, etc. Given the confusion of languages in Mauritius, concentration on oral communication in Standard One could be a worthwhile exercise for many children (see Language above).

156. A solution to be considered may be, as in France, Belgium, Denmark and several other countries, to make the pre-school years and Standard One, part of a common *Initial Education Cycle* with its own special curriculum and staffing organisation.<sup>35</sup> As in Denmark, pre-school teachers would be encouraged to work alongside teachers in Standard One, and a teacher assistant would be made available to all classes in the cycle. Consideration may be given also to discouraging literacy *teaching* (not to be confused with attention to the emergent literacy environments, literacy activities or play), and to delay the *introduction* of the first language (French or English as the case may be) to Standard One. This language could be decided by the local school, with the undertaking to introduce the other language in Standard Four or Five (when a child is eight or nine years). Intensive writing exercises in either language and the fine motor skills that they require, would be postponed until Standard Two (when a child has reached 6 years of age). In Standard One, there would be a concentration on general communication skills, and the experience of fine motor skills (on which writing is based) through drawing, painting, play-writing etc. In such a reorganisation, Mauritian children would still be far in advance - in terms of age - of children in most other bilingual countries where early learning of languages is concerned. However, as indicated above, more research is needed on the question before choosing the optimal means and time of introducing European or Asian languages to the young children.

## Conclusion

Despite the many efforts made by UNICEF and the early childhood personnel of the involved ministries to provide young children with enhanced development and early education opportunities in Mauritius, many uncertainties remain, and critical policy positions have still to be clarified. What balance does the government wish to maintain between traditional child-rearing patterns in Mauritius and the growing need of the labour market for female labour? How will it sustain the strengths of the traditional family while supporting the right and need of women to obtain salaried work? How are working families to be supported to fulfil their child-rearing responsibilities? What arrangements will be made to allow parents both to care for their children and work part-time? Can parental leave be extended so as to allow working parents to care for their children at least in infancy (up to one year)? Can gender equality be sustained in this complex

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34. Communication activities themselves, “the hundred languages of children”, are but one part of the early childhood developmental programme.

35. It makes little difference that Standard One is compulsory and the pre-school is not. What is at stake here is to provide a curriculum appropriate for these very young children who, in most other countries, would be part of a common kindergarten cycle. In fact, children in Standard Two (6 year olds) would still be part of the pre-school cycle in Finland and Sweden, where compulsory school age begins at 7 years. Yet, Finnish and Swedish children came respectively first and third in the world in the international IEA reading tests at age 9.

negotiation? Is the present situation of informal childminding and unsupervised pre-schools appropriate for young children? Is the pre-school seen, in fact, as the first level of care outside the home, while statistics on the extent of informal care are ignored? When will the government confront energetically the issue of equitable access to quality programmes for the children who most need early childhood services? Will the chosen policy options be properly funded?

Such questions are not unique to the Republic of Mauritius. It is to be hoped, however, that the country will avoid the well-recorded error made by some European countries, namely, to ignore the question and allow a two-tiered system of “care” and “education” to develop by default. “Childcare centres” with a paramedical and welfare orientation were established piecemeal, catering in general for children from low-income groups, while pre-school networks provided educational opportunities for middle-class children from the age of four years. It is possible, however, to develop a more unified and egalitarian system, with the role of the family recognised and supported, and well qualified personnel employed in all early development and education centres. As Oberhuemer and Ulich (1997) have written: early development and education programmes in appropriate environments can be organised “not only as an educational and social opportunity for children, but also as a forum for parent participation and community orientation.” We trust that the present report will encourage reflection on these issues.

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## **Annex 1 - A selection of legislative texts governing the ECD Sector**

### ***1. Government Notice No. 54 of 1997***

#### **THE EDUCATION ACT**

Regulations made by the Minister under section 38  
of the Education Act

1. These regulations may be cited as the Education (Pre-primary Schools) Regulations 1997.
2. In these regulations  
“authorised officer” means a public officer authorised by the Minister;  
“pre-primary school” means an establishment providing educational services, including custodial, to not less than 10 children above the age of 3 and up to the age of entry to a primary school.
3. (1) No person shall run a pre-primary school unless the school has been registered under these regulations.  
(2) A person who wishes to run a pre-primary school shall make an application for the registration of the school not later than 31 July of the year preceding the year in which the school is to begin to function.  
(3) An application under paragraph (2) shall be made to the Minister on a form set out in the First Schedule.
4. (1) Where the Minister grants an application made under paragraph 3(3), he shall, on payment of the fee of 25 rupees, issue a Certificate of registration in the form set out in the Second Schedule.  
(2) A Certificate of Registration issued under paragraph (1) shall be valid for a period of 2 years and may be renewed for further periods of 2 years on payment of a fee of 25 rupees.
5. (1) A pre-primary school shall not be registered unless, it complies with such requirements relating to—
  - (a) the premises
  - (b) sanitary conditions;
  - (c) furniture and equipment;
  - (d) health and safety,as may be imposed by the Minister.  
(2) Where a pre-primary school which was in operation before the commencement of these regulations does not satisfy the requirements specified in paragraph (1), the Minister may grant a certificate of provisional registration for such period as the Minister may determine.
6. (1) A pre-primary school shall be under the responsibility of a manager.  
(2) Every manager of a pre-primary school shall be registered.  
(3) An application for registration as manager shall be made to the Minister on a form approved by the Minister.  
(4) The Minister may issue such directions as he thinks fit for the effective running of the pre-primary school.  
(5) No manager shall be responsible for more than one pre-primary school..
7. (1) No person shall teach in a pre-primary school unless he is registered.  
(2) An application for registration under paragraph (1) shall be made to the Minister on a form approved by the Minister.  
(3) No person under 18 years of age shall be registered..  
(4) Subject to paragraph (5), no person shall be registered to teach in a pre-primary school unless—
  - (a) he is the holder of the Cambridge School Certificate or an equivalent qualification acceptable to the Minister
  - (b) he has followed a relevant and appropriate training course to the satisfaction of the Minister; and
  - (c) he produces a medical fitness certificate and X-ray certificate.

- (5) Where a person establishes, to the satisfaction of the Minister, that he has, for a period of 5 years immediately preceding the commencement of these regulations, continuously been teaching in a pre-primary school or other similar institution, the Minister may exempt the person from the requirements under paragraph 4 (a) and (b).
- (6) A teacher registered under these regulations shall, every 3 years after such registration, submit to the Minister a new medical fitness certificate and X-ray certificate.
8. Every manager of a pre-primary school shall keep—
- (a) an admission register; (b) an attendance register; (c) a register of teaching and non-teaching staff; (d) an inspection register; (e) a cash book; (f) a visitor's book; (g) an inventory of furniture and equipment; (h) a timetable; (i) a Health Record Card for each pupil; and (j) a record of every pupil's skill in such activities as may be designated by the Minister
- 9.. A pre-primary school teacher shall keep—
- (a) a weekly plan of work; (b) lesson notes.
10. An authorised officer may at any reasonable time visit and inspect a pre-primary school.
11. In every pre-primary school—
- (a) there shall be at least one teacher for every 30 children;
- (b) the teaching time shall be not less than 5 hours daily;
- (c) there shall be 3 terms which shall be the same as those of the primary sector or as otherwise approved by the Minister
12. The manager of every pre-primary school shall, by the end of January in every year submit to the Minister a list of pupils as well as a list of members of the staff.
13. Every pre-primary school may be inspected by such medical and sanitary officers as may be deputed by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health.
14. Any person who contravenes these regulations shall commit an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding 1,000 rupees.
15. The Education (Pre-school Institutions) Regulations 1987 are repealed.
16. These regulations shall come into operation on 16 May 1997.

Made by the Minister on 15 May 1997.

## ***2. Section from the Norms for Pre-schools in Receipt of the per capita Grant, 2000***

**6. Record Keeping:** Every school should keep all administrative and financial records as stipulated in the Pre School Act of 1997.

**7. Parental Participation:** All schools should encourage parental involvement and provide such evidence.

### **8. Staffing**

8.1 The ratio between teachers and children should be: one adult per 20 pupils of 3 to 4 years, and one adult per 25 pupils of 4 years.

8.2 Academic qualifications: As stipulated in the Pre School Act of 1997, all pre-school teachers should possess at least the Cambridge School Certificate and show evidence of having followed a basic course in Early Child Care or Pre School Education.

8.3 However, all those who were working as teachers prior to the 1997 Act are exempted from clause 8.2 above but they are expected to improve their academic and professional qualifications.

8.4 Age of the teacher should be above 18 years.

8.5 All teachers should undergo an annual medical examination and a copy of the Medical Certificate should be sent to the Ministry of Education & HRD

8.6 Every teacher should have an up-to-date certificate in first aid.

### 3. (New) Draft Guidelines, 2000

The purpose of the 'guidelines' is to ensure the welfare of children, providing them with the necessary environment to help their overall development. The 'guidelines' consists of 6 sections:

#### (i) Premises

(a) Classrooms - the objective is to see to it that children are not at risk, that they do not hurt themselves and that the place be attractive.

(b) School yard — it is important to look into the safety of children while they are playing outside.

(ii) **Furniture:** Specification of furniture allows the proper flow of blood keeping children comfortable and alert.

(iii) **Equipment:** Children need to develop manipulative skills, develop their curiosity. A proper sets of toys/books. etc. are essential tools.

(iv) **Sanitary Conditions:** Children must be provided with all amenities to ensure they do not fall ill.

(v). **Health and Safety:** The physical safety of children is very important. Hence all necessary precautions must be taken

(vi) **Personnel:** Children must be managed and supervised by people who are competent and healthy.

e.g.

#### School yard

1. School yard should be properly fenced and secured with an appropriate gate, the minimum height of which should be 9 ft or 2 mts 70 cms.
2. School yard should be equipped with an appropriate covered dustbin.
3. The school yard should at least be 400 sq metres in area.
4. Playground and school yard should be free from physical and health hazards.
5. Playground should either be tarred, cemented or planted with grass.
6. A moving space of not less than 2 square metres should be provided per child.
7. Out-door equipment should be regularly maintained.
8. Stray animals should be kept out of school premises.

#### Furniture

1. Shelves, blackboard, individual hangers should be at children's level (75 cms from ground level).
2. The size of furniture (infant chairs and tables) should suit the age of the child. It can be painted in bright colours, with non-toxic, lead free paints. Each child should have one chair. The specifications are as follows:

##### (i) Infant chairs// Size:

- (a) Height of seat: 29 cms
- (b) Size of seat: 25 x 25 cms
- (c) Height of back rest: 13 cms
- (d) Space between top of seat and back rest 13 1/2 cms
- (e) The back rest and seat should be covered with formica on both sides
- (f) The inclination should be between 95° and 106° degrees

#### Personnel

1. All members of the staff (teaching/non teaching) should undergo an annual medical examination and the Medical Certificate produced when required.
2. No person below the age of 18 and above the age of 60 should be allowed to teach or to look after the children in the classroom.
3. Every teacher/Assistant-teacher should have an up-to-date certificate in first aid.
4. All teachers should possess at least the Cambridge School Certificate or equivalent and have followed a basic course in Early Child Care or Pre-school Education.
5. Teachers need a toilet and a sink which are not used by children.

## **Annex 2 - 1999-2000 UNICEF Action Plan for ECD**

### **Planned Activities**

#### **Sub-Project 1: *Training and Staff Development***

Objective: To ensure that 120 child care workers and 1000 pre-school teachers possess the essential knowledge and skills for promoting holistic child development.

##### Activity 1: *ECD course for child care workers*

The ECD course was officially launched in April 1999. Its duration is 13 days, spreading over a period of 3 months with a full day session per week. It covers the ten modules contained in the ECD Trainer's Guide developed in 1998, with a judicious blend of theory and practice. 120 caregivers were trained in 1999

##### Activity 2: *ECD proficiency course for pre-school teachers*

The Certificate Proficiency Course in Early Childhood Education is a two-year (4 semesters) teachers' by distance education course jointly run by MIE and MCA. The course is targeting 1000 in-service pre-school teachers and is to be delivered by distance education mode. All the preparatory works - approval of programme, production of course materials for the first semester, recruitment of trainers, trainees and support staff - were completed in 1999. The course will be officially launched in February 2000.

##### Activity 3: *Bachelor in Education (ECD) course*

This proposal aims at providing pre-school educators and other ECD trainers with an opportunity to update and extend their knowledge, skills and practices in early childhood education and care. The University of South Australia has shown interest in mounting a Bachelor in Education (Early Childhood Education) course in ECD collaboration with a tertiary institution in Mauritius. Assistance will be provided under this activity to the MIE to finalise agreement with the University of South Australia and to adapt the course content to Mauritian needs.

#### **Sub-Project 2: *Parenting Education Programme***

Objective: To increase the knowledge and skills of 5000 parents and other caregivers for better child care and stimulation.

##### Activity 1: *Parenting education programme - Mauritius*

Though the overwhelming majority of parents would like to provide the best care and environment, many of them are unable to adequately meet the developmental needs of their children due to lack of relevant information and skills. The peer-to-peer approach is to be used for transmitting knowledge and skills between people of similar backgrounds and references. Some 2,400 mothers - three from each of the 800 women's associations existing in Mauritius - will follow training on positive child care practices. Afterwards they will pass on the information to their peers and motivate them to pursue positive practices and replace the harmful ones.

Activity 2 : *Parenting education programme - Rodrigues*

Two Rodrigues-based organisations - The Association of Pre-primary Schools and the Community Health Workers Group - initiated a study during the second semester of 1999 to find out the actual child rearing knowledge, attitudes and practices of parents. The study report will be completed in January 2000 and will be then disseminated among those voluntary organisations working with parents. The findings will also provide a basis for selecting contents of parenting education messages and designing specific IEC materials.

Activity 3 : *Accompagnement scolaire - Rodrigues*

A group of benevolent workers, commonly known as "Agents de l'éducation", has started since 1996 to help children who perform poorly at school and to assume the liaison between home and school. They visit parents and motivate them to send their children regularly to schools and to create a supportive learning environment for their children at home. The focus in the year 2000 will be educating parents and communities about the importance of stimulation and interactions for the cognitive development of children during their early years.

**Sub-Project 3 : *Quality Improvement***

Objective : To ensure a stimulating environment for all children attending child care centres and pre-schools.

Activity 1 : *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System*

The ECD Policy Paper (1998) indicated the need for an accreditation structure that was non-bureaucratic and based on the concept of self-study. The purpose is to develop over time a national system that is not expensive and bureaucracies to operate to monitor and improve the quality of care services for children aged 0 to 3 years. The first step will be to create a Mauritius Child care Accreditation Bureau under the umbrella of the NCC with financial support of the government and possibly of the private sector. The Bureau will have the power to confer accreditation. A three-phase approach will be adopted to implement the accreditation system with the pilot phase starting in January 2000.

Activity 2 : *Innovative models of home-based care arrangements*

Three NGOs will help poor communities to organise themselves and set up innovative child care arrangements. The first scheme initiated by Commission Femmes de Roche-Bois is the setting up of a crèche cum family empowerment centre at Roche-Bois, where many single mothers cannot go to work as they have nobody to look after the baby. The second initiative is from Ecole Periculture of Bethleem and aims at improving the quality of care and the environment of home-based facilities at Chemin Grenier. The third action is from SOS Pauvreté and is about the setting up of a day-care centre cum pre-school at Valley Pitot. The three initiatives will be closely monitored and periodically evaluated. The results and lessons learned will be disseminated to other groups interested in provision of ECD services.

Activity 3 : *ECD curriculum development*

The MWCDFW and MOE developed Programme Guidelines for the 0-3 years and pre-primary representing during 1998 and 1999. The pre-primary curriculum was pre-tested in 1999 and will be introduced in all pre-schools shortly. The 0-3 years curriculum will be pre-tested during the first semester of the year 2000 in 30 crèches. Staff will be inducted prior to they being requested to use the new curriculum. Feedback meetings/workshops will be organised regularly to input into the refinement exercise during the trial period.

Activity 4 : *Promotion of music in pre-schools*

In Mauritius, singing, beating rhythm and differentiating among various sounds are part of the pre-school activities. However, children have very scanty contact with musical instruments, which they can handle to produce sounds and discover the world of music. There is a need to make a larger variety of musical instruments available at schools to give the opportunity to children to explore for themselves and imbibe music at an early age. A curriculum for music for pre-school children as well as a training programme for teachers has been prepared with the collaboration of the *Conservatoire de Musique*.

**UNICEF inputs**

Subject to availability of resources, UNICEF will provide USD 110,000 from its general resources and another sum of USD 50,000 from supplementary fund for the project in the year 2000.

**Counterparts' Contribution**

The implementing agencies - government institutions and non-governmental organisations - will provide all premises, facilities, personnel, materials and expenditures necessary in addition to UNICEF inputs for the implementation of the planned activities.

**Monitoring and Reporting**

The Ministry of Economic Development, Productivity and Regional Development will be responsible for the overall co-ordination of the project. The Ministry in collaboration with UNICEF will carry out quarterly reviews to monitor the implementation progress, to identify constraints and remedial action and modify project work plan if necessary.

A focal point will be designated for each activity. She or he will work in collaboration with UNICEF staff and will have overall responsibility for the day to day management of the activity. Each implementing agency will submit a progress report to MEDPRD and UNICEF prior to the quarterly reviews.

## **Annex 3 - Mission Statement and Table of Contents from the MWRCDFW Work Plan for Early Development**

### **a) Mission Statement**

The mission is to introduce and adopt an integrated and holistic approach to ECO, an approach which will emphasise the child's overall development - intellectual, physical, emotional, social well-being, initiative and self-esteem. In addition, it takes into consideration the child's diverse skills and need for autonomy and independence. The approach thus focuses on the social, physical, economic and cultural environment including the family and community in which the child is embedded.

The challenge of ECD is a powerful investment in the future both socially and economically. What is done or is not done for children in their first years when their intellectual potential, personality and social behaviour are being developed will determine not only their own future but quite significantly the future of humanity in the coming millennium. This Policy is a commitment to the cause and welfare of children and the future they represent. As such the objectives of the Policy are:

- To deal directly with the issue of young children's development as well as with the importance of ECD programmes with a view to ensuring an improved and coordinated planning and execution process.
- To define roles and responsibilities to Government and non-Governmental institutions, NGOs, the private sector, communities, and families for the welfare of children and to establish positive relationships amongst them.
- To foster inter-relationships and synergy among the various sectors involved in ECD through a well-defined national framework
- To develop a monitoring mechanism and strategies which will ensure that quality gains achieved for ECD will be strengthened and long-lasting.
- To develop a supportive legal framework, programmes and activities related to ECD which will serve as guidelines and standards for ECD caregivers.
- To mobilize and allocate resources for ECD programmes available within government and obtained from donor agencies.
- To enable every child to evolve in an affective and materially secure environment.
- To provide systematic and comprehensive parent/community awareness and support focusing on child development.

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