Achieving Women’s Economic Empowerment and Early Childhood Care and Development as Mutually Reinforcing Objectives

Toward an Integrated Vision of Early Childcare Programming

A Technical Note
Achieving Women’s Economic Empowerment and Early Childhood Care and Development as Mutually Reinforcing Objectives

Toward an Integrated Vision of Early Childcare Programming
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Women’s Economic Empowerment and Early Child Care and Development” produced by Gemma Adaba (Consultant to UNICEF, Early Childhood Development Section). Technical inputs and revisions were produced by Romilla Karnati, Ph.D. (Consultant, Early Childhood Development and Gender Sections). The Note benefitted from substantive inputs and constructive feedback from Pia Britto, Ph.D. (Section Chief and Senior Advisor, Early Childhood Development Section), Anju Malhotra Ph.D. (Principal Advisor, Gender and Development), Anna Zonderman, MPH (Lecturer Child Study Center, Yale University), and Lucia Rost MPhil (Ph. D. candidate International Development, University of Oxford). Thanks to Adrián Cerezo, Ph.D. for the Translational Policy Visualizations included in this Technical Note and to Kerstin Vogdes Diehn for the design and layout. Special thanks to The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation who provided grant support for the overall research project: “Women's Economic Empowerment and Early Child Care and Development.”
## Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECCD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Care and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMICs</td>
<td>Low and Middle Income Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PICO</td>
<td>Population(s), Intervention(s), Comparison method(s) and Outcome(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>UN Women</td>
<td>United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEE</td>
<td>Women’s Economic Empowerment</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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Poverty is a persistent feature of women’s lives in many parts of the developing world. 200 million of the world's children live in poverty and experience malnutrition. These circumstances seriously impair their growth and development. Clearly, women's and children's poverty are closely interlinked. This Technical Note proposes an integrated framework of policies and programmatic interventions aimed at reversing these trends which have negative impacts on the wellbeing of mothers and their young children. An important objective is to achieve two-generational outcomes that advance women's economic empowerment (WEE) while promoting successful outcomes for children. The key policy and programmatic interventions proposed in this Technical Note are summarized below, along with their rationale and expected outcomes in terms of impact on women’s empowerment and holistic child development.

A model of co-responsibility for childcare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVANCING WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT</th>
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<tr>
<td>A shift is needed from prevailing cultural norms which characterize child-bearing and child-rearing as the individual responsibility of mothers. Social actors must embrace collective responsibility for supporting women in their functions as mothers and caregivers. This approach will relieve the time burden borne disproportionately by mothers.</td>
<td>The policy environment must be underpinned by a Model of Co-responsibility for childcare, with clearly defined roles for the state, employers, childcare centres, and parents.</td>
<td>The supportive, co-responsible environment will assist mothers to care adequately for their young children, and gain access to quality childcare.</td>
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Figure 1: A Model of Co-Responsibility for Childcare
<table>
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<tr>
<th>ADVANCING WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT</th>
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</table>
| Affordable access to quality childcare is key to releasing women from their disproportionate burden of childcare responsibilities, while offering them opportunities for paid employment. Income earnings are vital to women’s economic empowerment. Family friendly workplace policies ensure the necessary protections to pregnant women and protect mothers of young children from workplace discrimination. | The State has a key role to play in standard-setting, in creating the enabling environment for women’s empowerment and quality childcare through policy and normative frameworks that:  
• support women’s employment  
• remove gender-based discrimination in employment  
• promote family friendly workplaces  
• foster equitable access to quality childcare. | The increased household income provided by mothers’ employment will be of benefit to children, offering better means for meeting their needs: health, nutrition, quality childcare. |
| Implementing family-friendly workplace policies:  
• contributes to productivity,  
• supports social reproduction and work/life balance,  
• promotes women’s empowerment. | Employers should prioritize critical family friendly workplace policies, including maternity, paternity and parental leave, flexible work hours and schedules offered to mothers who are pregnant or with young children, and breast feeding provisions for women with infants. Employers should comply with legislation aimed at removing gender-based discrimination in the workplace. | Family-friendly workplace policies  
• improve job satisfaction for mothers,  
• remove sources of stress,  
• facilitate responsible co-parenting,  
all of which have positive impacts on children’s psycho-social development. |
| Quality childcare promotes women’s economic empowerment. | Childcare Centres should implement the principles of quality childcare and facilitate an environment of growth and development for the children in their care; they should offer parenting programmes—with an emphasis on father involvement to promote joint parental responsibility for childcare. Childcare centres should partner with other organizations to maximize the impact of service provision. | Quality childcare contributes to holistic child outcomes. |
| These family friendly measures improve co-responsibility and improve women’s power and agency in the home. | Parents should use parental leave provisions and flexible work hours. They should seek to strengthen co-parenting practices, providing adequate care for their young infants and toddlers. Parents should participate in parenting programmes. | Children benefit from an improved environment of co-parenting. |
Family-Friendly Workplace Policies
- Maternity Leave & Breastfeeding Provisions
- Paternity & Parental Leave
- Social Security Entitlements and Social Protection

Quality Childcare Programmes
- Proximity
- Affordability
- Convenience
- Quality-Enhancement Measures

Figure 2: Family-friendly Workplace Policies and Quality Childcare Programmes

Three key elements to promote quality childcare

1) convenience
2) affordability
3) quality enhancement measures

1) CONVENIENCE

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Proximity or convenient location of the childcare centre is an important determining factor in a mother’s ability to engage in paid work. Flexible work hours of child care centres accommodate the schedules of mothers, particularly those having non-standard hours of work.</td>
<td>Convenience in service delivery of childcare covers Proximity, or convenient location of the childcare centre in relation to the workplace or the home is a desirable feature for working mothers. Flexible operating hours of childcare centres is an important, accommodating feature.</td>
<td>Convenience features help guarantee mothers’ employment and improved earnings, thus contributing to the family’s capacity to provide quality childcare.</td>
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## 2) Affordability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advancing Women’s Economic Empowerment</th>
<th>Policy and Programmatic Interventions - An Integrated Framework</th>
<th>Achieving Holistic Child Development</th>
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<tr>
<td>Large numbers of women in developing countries work in low-paid jobs in the informal sector or on a part-time basis. Some are unpaid workers on family farms. Cash transfers offered by social protection schemes are of critical importance in making childcare costs affordable to these workers.</td>
<td>The State should establish or strengthen child-focused, social-protection systems to provide cash transfers to parents for affordable access to childcare services, particularly for informal sector workers and those facing vulnerabilities, many of whom are women.</td>
<td>Income supplements offered through social transfers are crucial for low-income families. They provide assistance to meeting the vital needs for young children, helping them overcome early childhood deprivations that hinder children from reaching their full development potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers are pleased when the centres receive funding for quality improvements because of the positive impacts on their children’s development.</td>
<td>Social protection systems should include subsidies directly to community-based childcare centres in low income communities.</td>
<td>For community-based childcare centres in under-served communities, subsidies provide much needed funding to maintain the quality of childcare services.</td>
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**Figure 3: Making Childcare Affordable Through the Strengthening of Child-Focused Social Protection Systems**
### 3) QUALITY ENHANCEMENT MEASURES

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mothers experience satisfaction in knowing that their economic choices, investments and sacrifices are paying off in terms of successful child development outcomes.</td>
<td><strong>Low child-to-staff ratios</strong> constitute an important dimension of quality childcare.</td>
<td>Low child-to-staff ratios facilitate more frequent, caring, focused caregiver/child interactions; These foster psycho-social development, social and cognitive learning, and contribute to successful child development outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers feel satisfied knowing that their children are developing to their fullest potential in a safe environment.</td>
<td><strong>Adequate space, safety and security</strong> are important dimensions of quality childcare.</td>
<td>Safety and security provide an environment conducive to optimal learning and positive outcomes for children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers experience satisfaction in knowing that their children are advancing in cognitive development and receiving adequate preparation for primary school.</td>
<td><strong>The curriculum</strong> should be rich in content, offering diverse learning and play activities, and using stimulating pedagogic materials and methods.</td>
<td>Such comprehensive programmes cater to the physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development of children, and prepare them adequately for primary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers are pleased to observe improved health and nutritional outcomes in their children.</td>
<td>For low-income communities experiencing vulnerabilities, provision of nutritional supplementation, healthy meals, and health checkups including immunizations are all important interventions.</td>
<td>These interventions are critical for addressing the high incidence of malnutrition, underweight, stunting, and susceptibility to infectious diseases, all of which have severe and lasting negative effects on children’s physical and cognitive development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mothers have great confidence in childcare programs when they know that the staff is well-trained.</td>
<td><strong>Subsidized and affordable pre-service and in-service training programmes</strong> should be available to care providers.</td>
<td>Well-trained staff possess the necessary skills to implement quality programmes across the multiple domains of ECCD: physical, emotional, psycho-social and cognitive development, as well as acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mothers receive assurance that their children's needs are being met by dedicated staff.</td>
<td><strong>Decent pay and conditions of work</strong> should be available to ECCD staff.</td>
<td>Good working conditions are conducive to developing a cadre of dedicated, motivated staff, and thus positive child outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers gain knowledge in improving their parenting skills and interactions with their children.</td>
<td><strong>Parenting programmes</strong> should be in place and parents should attend, adding an enriching dimension to quality childcare.</td>
<td>Parenting programmes are a proven, effective avenue for improving parenting practices in the home, and improving child development outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers are typically more easily available to participate in parenting programmes. Involvement of fathers helps to promote better co-parenting practices, and the sharing of childcare responsibilities. This helps relieve women’s time burdens or the disproportionate amount of time they spend in a combination of paid and unpaid work, compared to men.</td>
<td>Parenting programmes should promote the involvement of both mothers and fathers.</td>
<td>Involvement of fathers helps to promote co-parenting practices and a more loving, secure home environment.</td>
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<td>Co-parenting practices are enhanced when parents have access to such family-friendly provisions and services.</td>
<td>Where maternity and parental leave provisions are in place, parents should avail themselves of these measures.</td>
<td>Parental leave measures help to resolve work/life conflicts and facilitate greater sharing of childcare responsibilities in the home, with positive benefits for children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With greater sharing of responsibilities, women develop a greater sense of self-efficacy and assertiveness as they participate more fully in household decisions.</td>
<td>Where parenting programmes are in place, parents should avail themselves fully of these services.</td>
<td>Children benefit from mothers who are empowered with better parenting knowledge.</td>
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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 provides a comprehensive, ambitious, transformational framework which aims to place countries on a firm path towards the achievement of sustainable development in the next fifteen years. The Agenda recognizes that poverty and gender inequality are defining features of our times, and affirms the need to invest in early childhood care and education, and equip today’s younger generation, so that their capacities can be realized, and utilized for the promotion of sustainable development.

This Technical Note is being published at an opportune time. It raises a number of critical questions about the linkages between women’s poverty and child poverty, and proposes a range of policy recommendations aimed at overcoming the obstacles hindering women’s economic empowerment and successful child development outcomes. The Technical Note emphasizes the fact that poverty is a persistent feature of women’s lives in many parts of the developing world. Women account for 70 percent of the world’s poor. On average, working women earn about 23 percent less than men (UN Women, 2010). Significant gender differences exist in access to credit, land and other productive resources. Women seldom own the land they operate. In Latin America, women own, on average, only 10 to 30% of farmlands. (World Bank, 2011). Despite their more limited resources and endowments, women often find themselves in the position of both primary caretakers and providers for their children. All of these gender disparities hinder their ability to break the cycle of poverty for themselves and their families.

In addition, 200 million of the world’s children live in poverty and experience malnutrition. These vulnerabilities seriously impair their growth and development. Clearly, women’s and children’s poverty are closely interlinked. Thus, by addressing women’s economic empowerment (WEE) and early childhood care and development (ECCD) as twin policy objectives, we can reap much richer dividends than pursuing these objectives independently.

UN Member States, the UN System, and multi-stakeholders have pledged to come together in a global partnership for the realization of the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 169 accompanying targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda affirms that the SDGs are universal, integrated and indivisible, balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental. All three dimensions are of critical relevance for the thematic areas covered in the Technical Note, and, in particular, the goals and targets which focus on: poverty eradication, ending hunger and malnutrition, achieving food security, significantly reducing maternal and child mortality, ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality early childhood care and education, achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment, through, among others, ensuring women’s equal access to productive resources, and addressing the question of women’s unpaid care and domestic work.

The Agenda stresses that policies should “Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility
within the household as nationally appropriate” (Goal 5, Target 5.4. Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2015).

The large number of women engaged as family farm workers and food producers should be supported through improved access to infrastructure such as transport and energy to enhance their market opportunities, and through access to land, economic resources and extension services, to improve their economic livelihoods and food security. This is also critical to their ability to improve the nutritional health of their children.

Achieving safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements (Goal 11) through improvements in infrastructure, access to decent jobs, public services and quality childcare, this is of vital importance to the increasing numbers of women working in urban settings. With two-thirds of the world’s population predicted to live in urban areas by 2050, the global landscape is rapidly changing, particularly for the lives of urban women who are increasingly participating in paid work (National Democratic Institute, 2015). For most women, participation in paid work has not reduced their time spent on unpaid work such as domestic work and caring for children and the elderly. The time poverty that women experience as a result of dual responsibilities restricts their ability to pursue a range of economic and political opportunities offered by urban areas (Chant, 2014). Women’s economic empowerment can only be achieved through improvements in basic services and infrastructure, as well as access to affordable, quality child care.

This Technical Note highlights key factors linking WEE and ECCD, underscoring how outcomes in the two arenas interact with and impact each other. It identifies a number of critical features of the social policy environment that can foster both women’s empowerment and holistic child development. It proposes an integrated policy framework aimed at addressing women’s empowerment and child development simultaneously, and realizing two-generational outcomes that advance WEE while achieving successful outcomes for children.

This integrated approach to ECCD and gender equality programming presented in the Technical Note provides a number of useful entry points for UNICEF’s consideration, as the organization embarks on the implementation of SDG-based programming. The integrated approach also aligns fully with UNICEF’s Strategic Plan 2014-2017 (UNICEF, 2014), which upholds a strong “equity” focus and specifies “social inclusion” as one of its strategic outcomes. Within the Strategic Plan, UNICEF pledges support to global efforts aimed at strengthening “families in their childcare role, particularly for the youngest children” and supporting “the poorest and most marginalized families to demand and access basic services.” The Strategic Plan further promises support for the promotion of “legislation, policies and budgets that reflect equity principles and address the causes of inequity,” thereby protecting the right of every child to survive and thrive. In addition, the Strategic Plan expresses UNICEF’s commitment to mainstreaming gender equality into all relevant policies, programmes and activities, and to promoting gender sensitive interventions as a core programmatic priority. In this regard, UNICEF “will emphasize the empowerment of girls and women”, while particular efforts will be focused on “increasing access to services and opportunities for women and girls and their inclusion and participation in all facets of life.” With a view to strengthening support for realizing the gender equality outcomes formulated in the Strategic Plan, the Gender Action Plan (2014-2017) was developed. It identifies the pathways that lead to improving gender equal results. The issues of child-care and women’s employment are treated as mediating factors that can be the subject of bold interventions in promoting both early childhood care and women’s empowerment.
In proposing a conceptual framework and policy options for integrating WEE and ECCD, this Technical Note serves to support and strengthen UNICEF’s efforts to mainstream gender equality in all aspects of early childhood programming, as outlined in the Strategic Plan, and the Gender Action Plan.

Thus, in keeping with UNICEF’s holistic approach to programming, this Technical Note is a collaborative effort between the Gender and ECD Sections. It is part of a broader research endeavour involving a number of cross-cutting activities undertaken by the two sections, with the aim of capitalizing on their complementary areas of expertise. The key objective is to improve the evidence base for inter-sectoral programming that promotes quality childcare while supporting women’s empowerment. It is hoped that the Technical Note will contribute to the realization of quality ECCD programming combined with support systems for mothers.
Achieving Women’s Economic Empowerment and Early Childhood Care and Development as Mutually Reinforcing Objectives

Achieving Three Strategic Objectives

- To **identify** the critical links between WEE and ECCD that can be leveraged to yield positive two-generational outcomes for mothers and young children.
- To **advocate** for a model of co-responsibility for childcare that empowers women through the redistribution of childcare responsibilities, with clearly defined roles for the state and public policy, as well as for employers, parents and centre-based caregivers.
- To **propose** a broadened definition of quality childcare that takes into account women’s empowerment in combination with holistic child development, thereby providing a comprehensive and integrated framework for policy and programmatic interventions to benefit women and children.

Intended Audience

The Technical Note is intended for use by practitioners and policy makers working in the fields of ECCD and/or gender equality, as well as by focal points in the ECCD and gender sections of relevant ministries at the national level. The strategies proposed can be used as entry points for cross-sectoral programming, with the aim of realizing positive outcomes for women and their young children.

The Technical Note highlights the role of the State in setting standards that establish policy and normative guidelines to promote women’s economic advancement and quality childcare. Understandably, the institutional capacities and constraints operating within individual country contexts will influence what is possible and feasible in terms of implementation. Nevertheless, governments and social actors should strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for women’s empowerment and child development, making use of the policy and programmatic framework proposed in the Technical Note.

Organization of the Technical Note

- **Section 1** provides the background to the review of literature from which the Technical Note is derived.
- **Section 2** identifies a number of key constraints impeding the realization of WEE and holistic child development.
- **Section 3** focuses on strategies to overcome the constraints identified. It proposes an integrated policy framework for childcare and women’s empowerment, based on the notion of co-responsibility, or shared societal responsibility for ensuring optimal early childhood development outcomes and women’s advancement.
- **Section 4** concludes by advocating for a proposed integrated policy framework for quality early childcare programming, informed by an expanded definition of quality childcare that promotes both women’s empowerment and holistic child development.
1 WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Definition of Terms

**Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE)** is defined in terms of two interrelated components: *economic advancement*—the ability to make economic progress—and *power and agency*—the ability to exercise choice, and to make and act on decisions, and control over resources (Golla, Malhotra, Nanda & Mehra, 2011).

**Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)** is conceptualized as a multidimensional system encompassing policy and normative frameworks, at the distal level, and programmatic interventions, at the proximal level. All aspects of the system promote family wellbeing and holistic child development across the physical, psychosocial, and cognitive domains (Britto, Yoshikawa & Boller, 2011).

**Distal Systems** refer to the policy environment for childcare and related social policies created by national governments.

**Proximal Settings** refer to community-level settings such as the home, the workplace, and informal and formal childcare settings where caregivers work and/or interact with children.

**Social Reproduction** refers to the processes of socialization, provision of physical and social care, and social learning that are the proper realm of child development undertaken in family and formal childcare settings.

Background to the Literature Review

The evidence base underlying the policy discussions and proposals contained in this Technical Note derives from a UNICEF desk review entitled: “Strengthening Families: A Two-generational Solution - Women’s Economic Empowerment and Early Childhood Care and Development.” The desk review is, in turn, part of a broader research project undertaken by UNICEF’s ECD and Gender Sections. The objectives of the research project are two-fold: (1) to identify which features of childcare benefit both women’s economic advancement and holistic child outcomes, and (2) to understand the pathways through which women’s participation in childcare improves their economic empowerment. The desk review addresses the first objective. The review explores the relevant body of literature with a view to advancing knowledge related to the direct and mediating factors linking WEE to child development. The review makes use of a conceptual framework that encompasses child care and social policies formulated at the *distal systems* level of national governments and institutions, as well as programmatic interventions in more *proximal settings* where caregivers work and/or interact with children, such as the home, the workplace, informal and formal childcare settings. Implications are drawn for integrated policy and programme design that incorporates objectives for achieving WEE and holistic child development.
Methodology adopted for the Literature Review

The process adopted for selecting literature for the desk review allowed for articles to be organized and assessed according to the “PICO” methodology, including population(s), intervention(s), comparison method(s) and outcome(s). In addition, the researchers paid careful attention to context, prioritizing literature from low and middle income countries (LMICs), and turning to literature from industrialized countries only when themes were particularly relevant to the objectives of the review.

Some auxiliary sources of documentation were also selected, based on references to relevant literature found in the original selections, as well as recommendations made by members of the Inter-Agency Advisory Group on Women’s Economic Empowerment and Early Childhood Development (IAG).¹

1 The Inter-Agency Group (IAG) is convened by the UNICEF Gender and Rights and ECD Sections. Constituent Members are from the International Labour Organization, the World Bank and UN Women, in addition to UNICEF. The Group serves in a technical advisory capacity for the UNICEF Research Project: “Strengthening Families: a Two-Generational Solution - Women’s Economic Empowerment and Early Childhood Care and Development, of which this Technical Note is a product output”.

Mothers of young children in low income areas in developing countries, often find themselves in situations of social and economic hardship characterized by:

- **Low socio-economic status**—low levels of literacy, educational attainment and training, and limited job skills;

- **Time poverty**—the combination of paid work with an inordinate amount of time spent in childcare and unpaid work such as household chores, caring for sick or elderly family members, and contributing to family farms or other family businesses; and

- **Income poverty**—engagement in low-paying employment with poor working conditions, often part-time and in the informal sector.

- **Lack of power and agency in the home**—little or no control over household decision-making, including on how their own income is spent.

These socially and economically adverse circumstances experienced by mothers reflect a lack of empowerment. In turn, these situations have a direct impact on mothers’ capacity to care adequately for their young children, and on their ability to place their children in quality, centre-based care.

### Gendered discrimination in the workplace and in society

Cultural norms and the gendered division of labour determine women’s lower socioeconomic status compared to men, and relegate them to lower-paying jobs. Particularly in developing countries, this often means part-time work in the informal sector. Women employed in the informal sector are hindered by lack of access to supports such as maternity protection and childcare allowances, derived from social security entitlements. Furthermore, cultural attitudes often characterize the reproductive role and child-rearing as a woman’s individual responsibility, failing to recognize that society as a whole benefits from social reproduction, and that a shift is needed toward collective responsibility for supporting women in their function as mothers and caregivers.

Discrimination is also evident within the workplace, where women experience pay inequity. Work-family conflicts result in interrupted careers, and limit opportunities for women’s professional advancement. Many workplace environments are not conducive to accommodations for working mothers, such as designated breastfeeding facilities for mothers of infants. In the home setting, women often lack autonomy, decision-making power, and control over resources. Yet they bear an unequal share of childcare responsibilities. These are all dimensions of women’s lack of empowerment, and they can have a negative impact on child development outcomes.
3 OVERCOMING CONSTRAINTS TO WEE AND HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Considerations for Effective Policies

To be effective, childcare policies must take into account the nature of the linkages between WEE and ECCD. Notably, these linkages are bidirectional:

- Childcare responsibilities are a major obstacle impeding women’s efforts to achieve economic empowerment; and
- Women’s lack of economic empowerment has a negative impact on child development outcomes.

In general, social and childcare policies in LMICs have failed to take these critical linkages into account and, thus, the opportunity is lost for achieving coherent programmes that aim to ensure mutually reinforcing, positive outcomes for WEE and child development.

Effective Care Policies Must Account For and Accommodate the Links between WEE and Holistic Child Development

- Given the right combination of supportive measures, WEE can lead to positive outcomes for young children as well as to enhanced wellbeing for mothers (Quisumbing, 2003).
- In the absence of supportive measures, such as adequate, paid maternity leave and formal quality childcare, mothers’ early return to employment after childbirth may contribute to less-than-optimal child development outcomes (Hirani & Premji 2009; Nakahara, et al., 2010).
- The unequal burden of childcare responsibilities on women can act as a barrier to their favourable positioning and advancement in the labour market (Cruz, 2012).
Addressing impediments to women’s empowerment implies a clear role for the state in formulating integrated public policies that link support for women’s reproductive and childcare roles to their participation in labour markets. Effective policies must prioritize co-responsibility, promoting redistribution of responsibilities from the home to the state, from working parents to the market, and from mothers to fathers (ILO & UNDP, 2009):

- The state should provide the necessary policy and normative frameworks and supports to facilitate provision of, and access to, affordable, convenient, quality childcare, enabling mothers to find full-time, well-paying employment. Normative frameworks should incorporate a range of family-friendly workplace policies.

- Employers should implement family-friendly workplace measures aligned with national policies to ease work-family conflicts, and to facilitate both mothers’ continued engagement in work and children’s holistic development.

- Childcare centres should promote quality childcare programmes which prioritize important features including affordability, inclusive access, and extended hours, and which strive to achieve key objectives: professional standards, decent conditions of work for staff, caregiver training, and holistic child development.

- Measures should be taken to promote greater sharing of childcare responsibilities between mothers and fathers in the home setting.

**Figure 1: A Model of Co-Responsibility for Childcare**
Key Components of the Model of Co-Responsibility

Family-Friendly Workplace Policies

Social, labour market and ECCD policies should align with relevant international standards at the national level. Legislative provisions should be underpinned by the key international standards concerning support for social reproduction, resolving work-family conflicts, the introduction of family-friendly workplace policies, and quality childcare and education services.

Maternity Leave & Breastfeeding Provisions: As far as possible, paid maternity leave should be instituted according to the ILO Maternity Protection Convention 183 (ILO, 2000), with measures to facilitate exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of the child’s life. Policies should be put in place to facilitate continuing supplemental breastfeeding after the mother’s return to work and during the child’s first year of life, with these provisions aligning with the WHO Global Standard on Breastfeeding (WHO & UNICEF, 2003). Principles of non-discrimination in employment contingent on pregnancy status and childbirth, and protection of mothers’ employment during the perinatal period, should be upheld as well (ILO, 2000).

Paternity & Parental Leave: Parental leave should be available as a shared benefit accessible both to the mother and the father, thus facilitating the sharing of childcare responsibilities, and easing the burden that, in the absence of such measures, would fall almost exclusively on mothers (ILO, 1981a; ILO 1981b). Working fathers may be reluctant to take leave due to fear of disapproval by employers and the jeopardizing of chances for professional advancement. This points to the need for governments to be proactive in supporting provisions on paternity and parental leave to be taken by fathers, without prejudice to their professional careers and advancement.

Social Security Entitlements: Women who are employed in part-time jobs often lack entitlements to childcare subsidies and child allowances enjoyed by their counterparts working in full-time employment positions. Social security entitlements for working parents, and especially for working mothers, should be guaranteed for childcare irrespective of full-time or part-time employment. Priority should be given to establishing childcare support transfers through non-contributory social protection systems. This would be of tremendous benefit to the large number of women working in the informal sector who have no entitlements to childcare allowances through social security schemes.

Quality Childcare Programmes

A number of features of centre-based childcare are essential for securing positive two-generational outcomes for working women and their young children. Three key elements should be the focus of these system-wide efforts: convenience, affordability, and quality-enhancement measures.

Convenience covers two features of childcare centres that are of crucial relevance to women’s empowerment and work/life balance: 1) Location and 2) Opening Hours.

1. Proximity or convenient location of the childcare centre in relation to the workplace or home can be an important determining factor in a mother’s ability to engage in paid work, maintain adequate working hours, and earn a decent wage. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. In some cases, childcare centres located within close proximity to, or at, the workplace can be very convenient. In others, where this would entail a long and difficult commute for infants and toddlers, proximity to the home may be preferable.
2. Hours of childcare centres may be rigid, with set opening and closing times in the morning and afternoon. Women’s choices are thus constrained, when reconciling work with childcare responsibilities. They are forced to work in sectors of the labour market where they are able to find short working days and part-time jobs that permit them to combine work with childcare responsibilities. Frequently, such jobs are concentrated in the informal economy. Many women would prefer full-time, formal sector work with social security benefits and better opportunities for advancement, but finding daycare centres that would accommodate their longer working hours or overtime work is virtually impossible. Thus, remaining in the informal economy or in part-time work provides a way of reconciling work/childcare conflicts. Women working non-standard hours such as night work or shifts also have great difficulty finding formal childcare arrangements that accommodate their schedules. Women may be forced to combine multiple care arrangements as they struggle to maintain their working hours, thus adding to their woes, the logistical challenge of pick-up and drop-off of children at different locations. Clearly, convenient location and opening hours to accommodate the work schedules of employed mothers of young children are features of childcare centres that are important for the promotion of women’s empowerment.

Affordability: Viable financing strategies are key to the long-term sustainability of quality childcare services, and to the maintenance of affordable costs for low-income families. Evidence from the review of literature points to the fact that quality childcare is prohibitively expensive for many low-income families. However, the review also illustrates examples of good practice in the realization of sustainable funding. For example, the NGO Mobile Crèches of India relies on funding from builders operating the construction sites where the crèches are located. Additionally, they rely on other sources, such as foundations, to ensure affordability to low-income families, and to support basic infrastructure, materials and salaries of personnel. Some examples of workplace-based childcare centres reviewed in the literature show that this model can facilitate an intra-company equity focus by ensuring equal access to childcare services for workers across the company hierarchy. The issue of affordability speaks to the priority focus on equity in UNICEF’s Strategic Plan, and to the principle
Achieving Women's Economic Empowerment and Early Childhood Care and Development as Mutually Reinforcing Objectives

The supplemental indicator for Social Inclusion in the Strategic Plan measures countries’ progress in expanding “access to affordable, quality childcare.” Strong advocacy is needed to encourage governments to prioritize social inclusion through increased access to affordable, quality childcare, and to strive for satisfactory progress on the corresponding indicator. In this regard, child-focused social protection systems should be an important component in the financing of quality ECCD services, thereby ensuring the provision of benefits such as cash transfers, cash vouchers and child allowances.

**Quality-Enhancement Measures:** Staff-to-child ratios constitute an important dimension of a quality childcare environment. Low ratios facilitate more frequent, caring, focused caregiver-child interactions. Comfortable, attractive physical premises; adequate space; safety and security; a curriculum that features rich content, diverse learning activities and pedagogic methods; and a stimulating environment are also critical. Well-trained providers who have the opportunity to develop skills through in-service and other trainings further support quality settings. Decent pay and conditions of work for ECCD staff are also critical for retaining highly motivated staff, and are therefore important components of quality settings.

Supplemental services such as parenting programmes, can also have a significant positive impact on child development outcomes. All of the features of formal childcare settings listed above help promote a warm, enriching environment for children, enhancing their emotional and psychosocial development, while contributing to achieving satisfactory cognitive development and learning outcomes.

*Figure 3: Making Childcare Affordable Through the Strengthening of Child-Focused Social Protection Systems*
Roles of Social Actors

The State

- The state should adopt policies and legislation that provide the enabling environment to support social reproduction, while ensuring women’s empowerment. This policy environment should include family and child-focused social security and social protection systems which extend their reach to part-time and informal sector women workers, and to disadvantaged communities, through social transfers and employment guarantee schemes. The state should further encourage employers to promote family-friendly workplaces, and should introduce a judicious mix of compliance mechanisms and incentives to promote implementation of family-friendly workplace policies.

Employers

- Employers should prioritize critical family-friendly policies, including maternity, paternity and parental leave; flexible work hours and schedules; and breastfeeding provisions for women with infants.
- If workplace-based childcare provisions are available, employers should use these institutions to facilitate active engagement among fathers in caring for and raising their young children.

Directors of Childcare Centres

- Childcare centres should facilitate an environment of growth and development for the children in their care, including fostering a culture in which interactions between parents and service providers are valued and encouraged.
- Childcare centres should offer parenting programmes—with an emphasis on father involvement—as part of a package of services, so as to promote joint parental responsibility for and sharing of childcare, thereby enhancing the quality of centre-based care and the outcomes for children and their families.
- Childcare centres should partner with other organizations, institutions and places of employment in the community to maximize the impact of service provision.

Parents

- Parents should avail themselves of the measures put in place to address work-childcare conflicts, using parental leave provisions and flexible work hours in effective ways for the sharing of childcare responsibilities.
- Parents should seek to strengthen co-parenting practices, providing adequate care for their young infants and toddlers, particularly with regard to their health, nutrition and enhancement of emotional, psychosocial and cognitive development.
- Parents should participate in parenting programmes, which can provide effective means for enhancing parenting practices and promoting greater sharing of childcare, with positive impacts both for women’s wellbeing and child development.
Fundamental Preconditions for Achieving WEE

Economic advancement—economic gain and success—promotes women's power and agency. In turn, when a woman exercises power and agency—by controlling resources, sharing in making decisions about their allocation, and exercising choice—she is better able to advance economically and to provide an environment that supports her children's development. These fundamental elements of WEE, along with holistic child development and quality childcare, must inform all efforts to achieve equity for women workers and their children across the proximal- and distal-systems levels of policy formulation and implementation. This Technical Note serves to support efforts aimed at implementing bold interventions that build on the rich new evidence base provided by the literature review which makes the case for combining quality childcare programming with the promotion of women's economic empowerment.

The Need for Inter-Sectoral Coordination

Realizing co-responsibility for childcare requires effective inter-sectoral coordination among relevant government ministries and departments, as well as systematic follow-through with regard to programmatic interventions and supports in proximal settings. A coordinated approach should aim to ensure integration and policy coherence, both in terms of a continuum of care across the various phases of early childhood, and alignment with policies promoting WEE linked to childcare. A coordinated, integrated approach to policy—involving the care, health, social protection, education, labour, and gender equality sectors—offers tremendous potential in terms of harnessing the synergies of key social actors for the realization of objectives that are crucial for sustainable development.

Toward an Expanded Definition of Quality Childcare

Based on key findings and conclusions from the UNICEF desk review, this Technical Note has presented the case for integrated policies based on a model of co-responsibility for childcare, and linking child development outcomes to WEE. In implementing these integrated strategies, a key focus must be the improvement of the quality dimensions of childcare. Within the policy framework presented here, realizing quality childcare calls for a new and expanded definition—one emphasizing factors that facilitate WEE in combination with holistic child development. This definition encompasses ten key elements:
Achieving Women’s Economic Empowerment and Early Childhood Care and Development as Mutually Reinforcing Objectives

1. Prioritize societal co-responsibility for childcare and create an enabling environment to facilitate women’s economic empowerment, autonomy and self-efficacy.

2. Align ECCD programmes with the standards enshrined in national policies at the distal-systems level with regard to childcare provision and gender equality.

3. Allocate adequate resources for childcare.

4. Provide universal access to affordable childcare services—utilizing schemes such as cash transfers, child allowances awarded through social protection systems, and other financial supports—to promote equity and the principle of social inclusion through concerted outreach efforts to the most marginalized and vulnerable groups of mothers and young children.

5. Realize features in childcare settings that are of special interest to working families, including access, affordability, proximity; and the possibility of flexible, adjusted and extended childcare hours to cater to women’s part-time or atypical work schedules.

6. Ensure that attention is paid to quality-enhancement measures including hiring of professional staff, maintenance of optimal staff-to-child ratios, provision of enriching curricula and materials and staff training opportunities, and decent working conditions.

7. Create satisfactory and supportive communications and interactions among providers, parents, caregivers, educators and children.

8. Ensure comprehensive interventions across the physical, psychosocial, and cognitive domains of early childhood development.

9. Create safe and secure care and learning environments.

10. Incorporate parenting programmes into childcare services to enhance childcare quality by promoting co-parenting and sharing of childcare responsibilities in the home.

Constructing an Expanded Definition of Quality Childcare

Figure 4: Constructing and Expanded Definition of Quality Childcare
REFERENCES


