

**2000 Year of Peace. "It is not enough to save a life but to live it with dignity"**



**THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
OF THE AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC**



# **ECCD IN AZERBAIJAN. LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE**

**FACT-FINDINGS MISSION REPORT**

**Baku 2000**

This report encompasses the first fact-finding exploratory mission undertaken by Martha Llanos, Human Development Specialist and UNICEF Consultant for the assessment of ECCD in Azerbaijan. The following Observations, Reflections and Recommendations are the result of three-week fieldwork in Azerbaijan. This mission was directed to set up methodological basis for the development of indicators and participatory assessment of ECCD in the country. This is part of a two-phase mission.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- a) Review current status of Pre-school education
- b) Appraisal of related ECCD activities in other sectors.
- c) Organise phase 2 in accordance with agreed upon priorities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

- 1) Review of relevant documents
- 2) Interviews with different current and potential actors for ECCD. This included upper management of MOE, MOH, MOYouth, and Committee of Statistics, CABINET MINISTRIES, NGO's, and International Agencies. (World Bank, Soros Foundation)
- 3) Direct observation of ECCD Services
- 4) Interviews with relevant stakeholders: Pre-school teachers, School Directors, District Education Authorities, Education Methodologists, Primary School Teachers and parents and children.
- 5) Field trip outside Backu to Shimaki and two IDP camps to observe their activities for young children.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

### **Contextual Background**

- 1 Azerbaijan is a new republic with 10 years of democratic existence. The main current efforts are devoted to establishing solid foundations for the **development of their human resources, and to activate the socio-economic development of the country.**
- 2. The country presents a positive profile of a high level of literacy and education, with a very good percentage of student retention in the school system. However new challenges are present in a situation of an open market economy and key questions must be

addressed in regard to the rationale, framework, content, and role of education for the preparation of their human resources to face those challenges.

3. Azerbaijan faces the problems caused by the painful predicament of displaced population, with a great number of children among them.
4. The Agreement on the Declaration of the Convention of the Rights of the child was signed 1993; and very recently attention has been devoted to the preparation of the necessary groundwork for the actions to be implemented.
5. Based on all the above two important sectors have already initiated their reforms: Education and Health. As part of this report, we will emphasise the Educational Reform.
6. UNICEF's role in the country co-operation for the years 2000-2005 is geared to support Azerbaijan efforts to provide a fair start for all their children.

### **Early Childhood Care and Development**

7. Early Childhood Care and Development in Azerbaijan is currently identified with the provision of Pre-School Services. There is a great emphasis and identification at all sector levels about its aim as "...preparation for school activities, for learning " and a unanimous concern because of the gradually decreasing number of kindergartens and/or nurseries in the country.
8. The Pre-school system has existed since Soviet times, with two main models: the nurseries and kindergarten services. The first ones for children below three years of age and the second one for children three to six years old. At the beginning of the national independence government, the total coverage of these services was 20% of this age group population but currently it has been reduced gradually to 13%. However, according to the latest Education for All report, the population aged from 3 to 5, served included 89,526 children. In comparison with the population reported by the census, of 567,500 indicates that 15.8% of the children are having access to pre-school services.
9. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has provided recent information, as of 1999, indicating a total coverage of 112,280 children (from 1 to 6 years old) in the 1814 pre-school centres. It is very important to analyse this data, since it indicates only a 13.5% coverage of the overall population, (if it is correct that according to 1997 data), there is a

total of 825,000 under 6 years old children. However, in the analysis by age it is obvious that the majority of children fall within the age brackets of three years plus (14,610 vs. 94,857). This indicates that 86.6% of the small number of children served are in the older group; and therefore the efforts required and the demand for the under three years old group is different and more limited.

10. Despite the overall lower number of pre-school services for children, in the rural area, they are with more disadvantaged in terms of the number of children being served. In Azerbaijan, the pre-school effort is mainly an urban possibility; most of the children are located in urban areas with 65,311 urban children vs 24,215 in the rural areas. (Data from EFA) In a comparative analysis with the stratified population, it means that 24.7% of children in urban areas have access, while only 8% of the rural child population can participate in these services.
11. Looking at gender issues the current enrolment situation indicates that there is some Gender bias favouring more access for boys than for girls in general (EFA national figures of children served). In 1998 there were 48,774 boys vs 40,752 girls enrolled, whereas in 1996 the gap was even bigger 53,399 boys and 42,919 girls attended the services. Also in comparison with the general national population this indicates 16.8 to 14.7% and 18.7 to 15.8% respectively. This difference reveals a bigger gap between the number of boy's vs girls living in the urban areas (35,784 vs 29,527) whereas in rural areas (12,990 vs 11,225) there is less difference between the two gender groups.
12. The current 1999 data provided by the Committee for Statistics presents the information by age, gender and type of institution. According to their classifications, there are four types of institutions within the Pre-school scenario: The nurseries for children below 3, the Kindergartens for 3 to 6; the nursery/kinder from 1 to 6 years and the so-called school/kinder (children within the primary school premises). It is not clear, however, if in reality this division is followed. In the current situation it is possible to see that the so-called nurseries, for instance have more children of kindergarten ages than younger ones (1022 plus threes vs 462 below three). The same is valid for the kindergarten. Since there is no clear-cut age division and also the requirements for the nurseries are different from those for kindergarten, this situation requires further examination. An assumption could be that many premises, facing the risk of closing down, are accepting children of all ages.

13. There is very large concentration of pre-school services, not only in urban areas but also especially noticeable 25% of the institutions are in Baku. Up until recently the data was so diffusely global that it hindered any accurate situation analysis of the country. The Statistics Committee has offered to have some desegregated data available by Districts, and by Regions, by the end of this year. This will provide the opportunity to present more specific analysis and figures than the ones presented in the "Education for All" report (that covered only two limited indicators for Early Childhood). This will be an excellent source for the future detailed assessment and for the establishment of more specific indicators for ECCD.
14. One aspect that is still not clear is the situation of children in special circumstances, institutionalised and others. Statistically they are subject to another classification and they are not included with the pre-school services. The same is valid for the children in IDP camps. During this visit we were not able to examine deeply the situation of these children. However, many institutions especially NGO's seem to be already involved in some efforts in regard to six-year-old children.
15. The Ministry of Education and Local Governments are supporting 91% of the Pre-schools services. However, it is important to emphasise that other Ministries, as well as State Companies, have been supporting 9% of those services. Yet, it is relevant to note that by a new decree (June2000) establishes that as of August of this year, all services are to be direct responsibility of the MOE. This has caused an immediate confusion at all levels, and the situation is not clear. It could be possible to believe that the new decree means that the Local Governments, together the with technical support from MOE, will assume responsibility for these services. This will be in support of a decentralisation process. On the other hand, that curtails the possibility of other enterprises to take interest in this area.
16. The above indicates that more actors were responsible for implementation of Early childhood services, and that caution is needed, bearing in mind the limited financial capacity of the already insufficient resources of the Pre-school Division. Also, since the financial implications are not at all clear, and since there is no information whatsoever about **the unit cost per pre-school child**, one should be concerned whether this measure will continue to give support to these vital services or whether it will precipitate the trends of reducing these indispensable services.
17. In terms of potential perspectives, it is interesting to note that most of the people interviewed had expectations for Early Childhood using as an ideal comparison the soviet

kindergartens with all kinds of facilities provided to the children. Expectations are for "teaching" and to prepare the child to go to first grade. There is still a very limited awareness of the psychosocial dimension and of the "developmental responsibilities" attached to services that should be rendered at this period of child's life. The only model they have been aware of, is this former. Therefore, exposure to new models and ongoing programmes is an urgent need. Also if more partners are included in the process of advocacy, ECCD could be a great challenge for the development of children in Azerbaijan.

18. The Methodologists based in each District Education Offices are responsible for the ongoing supervision of the kindergartens. But they themselves have not received training on new methodologies in this field. It seems also that each kindergarten is very autonomous. There is evidence that the low morale of teachers is affecting their motivation. Their main efforts are geared towards feeding the children, and the maintenance of old buildings. Hence, the areas of proper child development and socialisation, the promotion of autonomous expression, identity, problem solving skills, more security, independence are all being left behind.
19. In relation to the educational materials present in the kindergartens we have seen many toys and dolls and other things made by the teachers. However they give the impression clearly that many of them were just for the children to see. Usually they are located on high shelves. They look very nicely done and new. Therefore it will be very important to use this positive motivation of the teachers towards a basic package that **will allow a more active, and exploratory, activities for the children. They are already talents among teachers that have to be activated.**
20. The Ministry of Education is carrying out an **Educational Reform in which the guiding principles and theoretical framework offers an excellent context for early childhood care and development.** However, in the interviews with the Pre-school Director and some colleagues, what it is not clear yet, is the conception of Early childhood, and how this basic and vital concept is reflected in curriculum, and even more in teacher training. This will be the biggest task to achieve, since in the observations in the field, unfortunately, kindergartens seem to be overwhelmed by their problems, and the emphasis on food and shelter. So little, very limited is expressed in regard to appropriate interaction towards socialisation and development of the children's potentials.

21. There is a genuine need to analyse the rules and regulations that govern the Pre- school scenario. This is urgent, because any other possibility of developing other new models of early childhood services will utterly fail under the current rules. It is not clear under the current reform, what is the scope and space given for Early Childhood. There is a constant verbal support expressed by the upper management of MOE. However, alarmingly is the fact that, in order to provide the right and opportunity to children, to have a fair start in the Reform of Education, and as subscribers of Education for All, **Early Childhood was not included in the World Bank project** proposal. However it is hoped that some mechanisms could be developed in the near future to support new developments in this area and to have a solid foundation for the investment in education.
  
22. Few NGOs are supporting some of the efforts for ECCD; **Soros** is currently experimenting his already designed early childhood programme called Step by Step. In the field we observed that the **rooms within the kindergartens that have been selected for this programme look very impressive** with many materials, ready-made furniture and in general the **setting is very alive and welcoming to children**. It seems that all teachers involved in this methodology have in common one trait: they are most active, most motivated persons within the system. It could be very constructive and stimulating to see the spreading of their actions within, and with other kindergartens. So far within the same kinder, it is as if two worlds exist; one in which the beds for children to sleep occupies 75% of the room, and a very limited space is allocated for children activities. This in itself, is a reflection, and clear manifestation of the approach towards pre-school. It is valuable to follow the process of change and sustainability of new programmes.
  
23. The methodology used by Soros is within the framework of active learning and further, also trying out involvement of parents, it sounds quite promising for new alternatives to be developed in this field. Regrettably the interaction that Soros has with the MOE is very limited and this unfortunately seems to cause unnecessary difficulties. The materials (guides and others) have not been shared with the MOE personnel and nor with the District officers; so it is hoped that in the **near future a proper communication of their activities** could be shared for the benefit of all people interested in Early Childhood and especially the children themselves. A proper evaluation will be needed to bring together all the best lessons learned, thus contributing together with others in the national effort towards the vision for the ECCD in the country.

24. In general there are quite a number of adults present in every kindergarten (from the kindergartens visited average of 65 adults for 200 children). But no review has ever been made, nor has there been any thinking or consideration about a cost-effective way to plan and run these efforts. With current economic restrictions, **planning skills should be prioritise**, as well as the management of financial matters; this for all levels. It seems that now, like up to in the past system, this was considered to be mainly a concern of upper management exclusively.
25. In summary it is possible to reiterate that Early Childhood care and Development refer at least in the case of Azerbaijan, only to the old tradition of preparation for schooling and currently mainly a food and shelter provision as priorities. Now the new concepts try to integrate new visions for the child, plus previous efforts carried out by many involved partners. It is therefore **necessary to share new research findings, new methodologies, and to look for new partners** so as to make possible a more effective and quality ECCD effort to take place in Azerbaijan. It is important to include a greater number of children and provide to them a variety of options that can be creative locally. The current system has a very positive aspect like art development, especially music that should be maintain and creativity fomented.
26. **Parental involvement** seems at this stage still very limited, following the tradition that the kindergartens have been always identified as the place only for the children and the teachers having a strong responsibility for the small children. Therefore this area is totally new for the pre-school system and will require not only training on new methodologies but also work with other levels of communications strategies. To recognise the potential of parents, to build partnerships with caretakers, teachers, health workers, and others, for the development of their children is a genuine challenge.
27. In the past there were some other alternatives for provision of early childhood education. The family kindergartens were developed and 1000 were functioning up until a few years ago, when because of lack of finances, they were all closed. This experience will have to be documented in order to systematise the most important lessons learned. At least there is a positive sign that some new alternatives have been thought about in the country.
28. The IDP population is quite large and there are already 37 children centres in action in different camps in the country. The physical arrangements have different conditions, but all with a practical focus. They use materials provided by UNICEF. The human resources involved varied very much, from very highly motivated, active and independent ones to



others that like in the old system seem to be always relying on requests and actions from others. There is, however, the positive aspect that they all belong to the same community and feel motivated to do their best for their children. This experience also needs to be followed up.

29. The current system counts on more than 200 pre-school methodologists and inspectors spread through out the country. Also there are a great number of professional teachers of which 22% have university degrees and 74% come from technical schools. Their inservice training needs to be improved, since they have to be prepared for new challenges in the development of new options for the ECCD efforts in the country.

### **Ministry of Education. Educational Reform Perspectives for ECCD.**

30. The current Educational Reform has the aim of **obtaining high qualitative education with focusing on personality.**

The main objectives are:

- a. To preserve and develop all the potential accumulated on the pre-school, secondary and higher education
- b. To work out legal standards regulating the educational system
- c. To achieve the State policy, aiming at the democratisation of the political and economic, as well as social life of the society, as contained in both the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and in the Law of Education.

31. The major directions given in the Reform for pre-school indicates:

- a. **"Establishment of the pre-school education institutional framework in the territory of Azerbaijan taking into account the sharp decrease in the number of children".**
- b. **Establishment of new types of institutions and to adjust them to the needs of the disabled children (rehabilitation and pedagogic purposes)**
- c. **Establish rehabilitation centres for the children suffering from psychological tension and from horrors of the undeclared war.**
- d. **Create new types of teaching and new type of education enterprises in order to make timely discover of gifted and talented children and for improving their education**

32. The above statement in point 30 awakens some concern about the overall philosophy and framework of the Pre school education. It seems that within the document there is no

clear position, or rationale in regard to this age period. It has been asserted that a sharp decrease in the number of children has occurred. This assertion does not reflect a proper rationale for ECCD. It seems that emphasis is put on gifted and handicapped children. However, there is now a worldwide trend towards prevention of developmental risks by providing a solid foundation of ECCD in the early years of life. It has been found that children in many ex-soviet countries were very easily "labelled" and "institutionalised", therefore here, a review of all these aspects is needed, if we are to achieve a solid, realistic, and innovative position within the reform of Education.

33. The traditional concept of "preparation for school" is mentioned in the declaration of content and aims of the Programme. This requires further critical analysis since it does not propose a more comprehensive view of the child but instead tends to rely on "teaching, and sees the child as a passive learner." Furthermore, a report on the situation of pre-school services presented to the Cabinet of Ministers, indicates that their main concerns were the food provision and maintenance of physical environment. This situation confirms that more technical support is needed for the Ministry of Education, to carry out an objective assessment geared towards the proposal of alternatives that will be of good quality, cost effective, and provide for the rights of the great majority of young children.
34. It is necessary to build a vision for Early Childhood in the country, and is now a very auspicious momentum to build a vision or a clear conceptual framework. In the global statement of the Educational Reform, the following is declared: "We have not yet developed a national ideology- based education conception yet. The Ministry of Education will need to look deeply into this conceptualisation, and organise national Consultation that takes into account the voices of all interested stakeholders. The current proposed assessment and indicators would help to provide insights for that vision.
35. Pre-school Education Division is included within the structure of the Ministry of Education at the same level as Primary Education. This is a positive aspect for its role and interactions and also for consideration under the Jomtiem concept of Basic Education reiterated by the recent Dhaka meeting. Still, it is important, for future decisions, to analyse the roles and functions of this division and provide the necessary human resources to function appropriately.
36. In interviews with primary school teachers who are already involved in active learning methodologies, there is an enormous recognition about the role of the pre-school and its

interaction with the primary schools. The achievements of children with this early childhood experience are identified by teachers who stated: "they are more independent, they socialise better, they make our work easier, they learn better".

37. The Reform of Education efforts is strongly supported by a World Bank Loan. However, in the project components, all efforts are directed for Primary Education and no single mention is made of Pre-school. According to the World Bank the Government did not include this request. This again points out, the urgent need to work as soon as possible on clarification and dimensions of the ECCD area, in order to expand the traditional concept of pre-school. There is understanding in the World Bank office in Baku of the importance of Early Childhood. At this stage of a key National Reform it is crucial to include Early Childhood and to provide the opportunity to try new alternatives, with more international cooperation for this task.
38. In the specific case of Pre-school the Law in Article 16 establishes:
  - a. Designated to promote physical, moral and psychological development by formation of knowledge, skills of children, and to prepare them for further education.
  - b. Pre-school education is implemented in families and pre-school establishments
  - c. Children are admitted to pre-school education establishments depending on the willingness of their parents or tutors
  - d. State executive body sets up special medical, psychological and pedagogical aid services related to families.
  - e. Average density of children in pre-school education. The corresponding executive body determines the size and establishment of groups.
39. Early Childhood Care and Development find it necessary to move from Teacher Directed Centre, Republican wide planning to a of Child-Centred strategy, and with adults as Facilitators of Learning and Development; with great focus on values and teachers/adults having a broader concept of education. This will be an effort that requires the creation of a vision in which the child and the adult come into an active interaction.
40. All the above represents a challenge for the content and strategies of the inservice training and for shaping the future education of human resources in the country. One has to be aware that the adult generation that is now in contact with the children, has lived a life of, rote learning, uniformity and limited personal self expression. Therefore, to transmit to these adults the ability to face change and take risk, to promote creativity, decision making and self confidence is a great formidable task that will take time.

41. There is a general consensus in Azerbaijan about the importance of education, and it is an asset to have a country like Azerbaijan with such a high level of literacy. However, to move towards concepts of child centred policies, children's rights, active learning, learning spaces, nonformal educational approaches, and family as educational agents is something that will require efforts, commitment, and time. In the past "education" happened in institutions, and there had been a delegation from family to pre-schools and schools with very limited participation of the families. A total authority and trust was delegated to the teacher. Now there is a shared action, and more partnerships with the family, community, and others, for the development of the child.
  
42. The Ministry of Education is planning to play a major key role for initiating the discussions for the area of Early Childhood. In order to have a sound perspective, the assessment of the current efforts, and the development of indicators will be needed. The creation of a support network with all other government sectors, as well as academic institutions, NGO's and other International Organisation is indispensable for attaining more integrated actions.

### **Other partners for ECCD**

As a fact-finding mission, one priority was to look into other potential partners at both Government and non-governmental levels, and to look at their current involvement and the prospects of integrated ECCD efforts.

### **The Ministry of Health**

43. The Ministry of Health is the first ally in terms of the co-operation for the development of the child. More ideas for an integrated approach are needed. They have a system of children polyclinics for children, of which they are very proud. However in a 1998 report of the Education system concern was express about doctors responsibilities. In general what is needed is a positive awareness towards child development, and more actions are required to fulfil the health rights of the under 6 year-old child. The current reforms, and the current system of health information for all levels, can provide a very good interaction within a more integrated approach.

44. Within the health sector and very much related to Early Childhood Care for Growth and Development, we can identify the following programmes: Maternal and Child health, Breastfeeding, Nutrition, Iodine supply, School Health, Adolescent pregnancy, IMCI. It is important to review these programmes in order to reinforce an update the integrated vision of ECCD.

The strategy is not to create other programmes, but to facilitate a more overall global understanding of the specific actions, within a vision of the "total child"; and to reinforce the convergence of programmes, for a more strategically interactive, integrated performance.

45. There are some key health indicators that are very much linked with ECCD, among them the current statistic data shows the following: an increment in Low weight birth babies, a level of stunting of 20%, a trend for adolescence pregnancies, iodine deficiencies and presence of goitre. They represent potential developmental risks for children.

46. The role and responsibilities of the health system for the current pre-schools must be clarified, so that a good use of the human resources can be pursued. For instance, monitoring of growth and development are done by the doctors, but health carnets are kept in the schools, there is a full time nurse in the kinder, but there is no group indication of the growth and development of children as a group. Therefore analysis of the joint actions for pre-school children health is needed. The current ongoing activities towards a Health Communication system offers an excellent opportunity for a life span strategy, that takes into account different indicators and that strengthens the functioning of the primary health care system.

### **The Committee of Statistics**

47. The personnel at the Statistics Committee have been very helpful. They have good compilation of information at all levels. They are clear about the importance of new indicators and standards. A more dynamic analysis of the current data will be available in the future, and there is a good potential for working on further analysis of data. They centralised all related information from districts. This is an asset to establishing target priorities in future planning and programming.

### **Ministry of Youth and Sports.**

48. A very promising new Ministry. The person in charge of the Committee for Children and Youth has been and is very much involved in the actions derived from the Convention of the Rights of the Child. A new office will be created. They are undertaking a number of actions specified in the plan of Action. They were part of a bigger Working group that was organised to deal with the Convention in Azerbaijan.
49. Their network includes the schools and circles specially organised for dissemination of the Children Rights. This ministry offers prospects perspectives for future nonformal community orientated actions, mobilisation of youth groups and for experimenting some alternatives such as child to child programmes and others.

### **Cabinet of Ministries**

50. At this level it was a great understanding of the overall potential possibilities of ECCD, they have had a very active involvement with the review of the status of women situation as well as policies and legislation. They have a closer interaction with all Ministries. It is possible to indicate that their main concerns on children, women and youth goes beyond the specifics of a particular sector. Their involvement in ECCD is crucial for all the linkages needed to active this area in a multisectoral perspective.

### **University/Academics**

51. It seems that the University has been very active in the production of knowledge, and Research, and keeps very high standards. It is interesting to learn that they have been involved in the formation of many teachers. They are interested; and they are going to be involved in studies that could support a better knowledge and understanding of the Azeri child and his family.
- For ECCD, this information is of special importance for evaluation of the development of the child, formeasuring tools of achievement levels and for learning methodologies. They should, however, carefully review the psychological instruments currently being used. We notice that there is a tendency to easily arrive at to diagnosis and to label children in a facile way, even using testing instruments that obsolete and of dubious reliability.

### **NGOs**

51. The NGOs will always play a very important role in the providing new alternatives, and for having direct contact with the field. As part of the II Mission more emphasis will be placed

on getting to know more about their current work. So far, we have been exposed to some of them:

**Center for Development**, We have been exposed to a very effective work done by this young local NGO, devoted mainly to active learning methodologies. Their main experience is in the Primary Education area, yet it has good potential for cooperation in ECCD.

**Women and Development** is another NGO with International reputation. Their main concern being children and women in IDP camps. They could provide an excellent link with all the women networks in the country, and cooperate into the assessment of child and family patterns of rearing and expectations, and with the current informal systems for caring for the young child.

**Soros** is an International NGO. The Open Society to whom they belong has very comprehensive programmes that include leadership training and linkages with Primary Education. Their Step by Step programme as described by its Director, sounds theoretically appropriate, and it would be very valuable to have a follow up of their achievements and their cost efficiency for the reality of Azerbaijan.

**UMCOR** has started some day care alternatives for children in IDPs. Both parents and teachers manage them. It will be another experience of value to follow up.

**World Vision** is ready to include Early Childhood activities as part of their community development programme.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The current situation of ECCD in Azerbaijan requires a thorough assessment, and needs to use methodologies that will promote a dynamic interagency participatory exercise. This in turn will provide the basis for an objective discussion, for reflection and the analysis required to jointly (all stakeholders) create a vision for ECCD in the country.
2. For Azerbaijan, the exposure to new methodologies, and to alternative programmes is very urgent. The current Pre-school system has many limitations, not only because of the current economic difficulties, but also because of the limited scope for the quality of the services that are seriously affected.

3. There is a need to develop a framework for ECCD that will reflect the values of a growing nation. The concept of ECCD is an integrated concept by means of which personality development values and opportunities for the expression of the child's potentials, as well as educational prerequisites can become the main responsibility.
4. Mobilisation and awareness of ECCD at all levels should be started. The first priority to share assets with all interested divisions of Ministry of Education and other stakeholders. This initial training is essential for the overall success of the assessment. It is suggested as the basis for the II Mission.
5. All identified actors involved in the provision of Early Childhood Care and Development have to be strengthened in their understanding of this field. This is an area that constitutes a challenge to all investment in human development. Appropriate training and mobilisation is strongly recommended.
6. Both, the current pre-school training, and curriculum need to be reviewed. The curriculum should reflect the guiding principles of the new child development framework, based also on the knowledge, cultural attitudes and practices of the Azeri families. It is therefore necessary to carry out research on patterns of rearing and child development. There is very limited research information available about teachers and parents as well as on children development.
7. There is a need for a communication strategy that will make possible that different partners (government, private sector, NGO's) take their share of responsibility for ECCD, and actively exchange information on their activities and results. The children profile proposed and supported by UNICEF has a wider scope as basic information for planning, and therefore should be reinforced.
8. To establish criteria for allowing innovations, experimentation and piloting of different early childhood models; as well as for training methodologies based on realistic cost-effective alternatives.
9. To give priority to cost analysis studies. It is crucial to analyse the current cost of the pre-school institutions, and of the institutions for handicapped children, as well as estimated costs of other alternatives in the ECCD area.



10. To create a dynamic link with the Educational and Health reform that will benefit the already independent programmes for children. This will call for more convergence within and among programmes and sectors (Long term goal).

### **Methodological suggestions for ECCD Assessment**

11. Bearing in mind that ECCD relates to all aspects of child life, a multisectoral Task Force has been recommended. However the MOE will need to strengthen itself in order to play an increasingly dynamic role, since it already has the leadership in this area.
12. The methodology suggested for the assessment of the ECCD in Azerbaijan will be a mixture of traditional and innovative methods. First it is recommended that a workshop be held with all interested levels at the MOE and with the Multisectoral Task Force. This initial training will set up the basis for agreements to be entered, within the current concepts of ECCD, for establishment of projects and implications within the current Education and Health Reform and for definition of indicators for the ECCD assessment.
13. The use of statistics based on the proposed indicators will be crucial; therefore Statistics Committee will be an active partner. Also the results from the current MICS (multiple indicators cluster surveillance) will be available and some cross analysis, as well as focus groups could be organised.  
Traditional assessments have until now put emphasis on statistical data. At this time and bearing in mind the contextual reforms in the country, it is recommended to prioritise the aspects of " quality of services" within the perspective of realistic sustained planning and programming.
14. The Task Force that has been recommended will have as an overall aim to guide and support the national ECCD effort, to implement ECCD as an outgrowth of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. As a high-level inter-agency committee, the regular discussions on early childhood care and development will be an effective form of advocacy that will mobilise high-level political and technical support within the various central government ministries, local authorities and stakeholders in general. It is possible that in the long term they will support the development of policies for ECCD and a comprehensive national plan of action.
15. The main responsibilities for the Task Force will include:

- Propose a set of indicators for assessing the different dimensions of ECCD.
  - Review existing systems of data collection and information already existent in the country as well as instruments that might have been developed or used for assessment purposes.
  - Identify the methodologies to be used for the assessment of ECCD.
  - Design a plan for actions that should be included within the time frame of the current UNICEF cooperation in order to strengthen the development of ECCD in the country.
  - Define and conceptualise a vision for ECCD in the country using their own mechanism and networks for a national consultation.
  - Identify the information needed, training, research and others in order to plan a variety of ECCD models according to the characteristics and demands of the Azeri family.
  - Activate the ECCD discussion and programmatic thinking in their own institutions.
  - Assumption of the responsibilities as a watchgroup for the fulfilment of children rights.
  - Suggest the design and experimentation of appropriate ECCD alternatives.
  - Review existing policies and their impact on decentralised planning and programme implementation; identify existing obstacles, and gaps in effective service delivery and programme implementation.
  - The Task Force will serve as a clearinghouse for operational and action research, that will guide preparations for an integrated national programme for ECCD.
16. For the composition of this Task Force it is recommended that representations be included from the ad-hoc ministries such as Cabinet of Ministries, Ministry of Education (Pre-school, Planning, Basic Education; Ministry of Health, maternal and child health, Planning, Health communication, Ministry of Youth, office of children rights, community development; Ministry of Women, Committee of Statistics, Pedagogical Institutes, Research and Academic Institutions, Local Government, NGO's, teachers, parents.
17. Organise mission II with the following main objectives: ECCD Dissemination Training for Task Force members and Ministry of Education, and, to jointly Plan an ECCD mobilisation strategy for the country.