



## Road map for investing in the care of young children: Indian perspective

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### ABSTRACT

The role that investments in young children play in social and economic development is being recognized globally. In the advent of strong economic and social forces that influence children and their families, childhood has become even more vulnerable today. These strains may be both macro and micro in nature. These include work pressures on parents, economic hardship among families, lack of good non familial support systems and inadequate support from the nation/state. As the world awaits the implementation of the sustainable development goals it becomes imperative to look at the issues of both parental and non parental care. In this paper the authors explore the whole phenomena of investing in child care and its effect on children's development and empowerment of women. The authors will also outline the trajectory of investments in the form of support from both the private and public sector and the possibility of partnerships in the form of corporate social responsibility.

*Keywords: Child Care, Investment, Education, Corporate Social Responsibility. Gender, India*

### Introduction

Child care encompasses a multitude of activities which are routinely done for the well being of the child. It is not an esoteric activity, it has perhaps been done from the beginning of the civilisation. Child care can be seen as a programme that caters to the developmental needs of children and also functions as a system of support for working parents who are compelled to outsource care due to constraints of time and work. It is also a strategic investment that families make for the care and wellbeing of their children so that their present is taken care for and in future they can reap its benefits both in tangible and intangible ways. "Child care is the context in which early development unfolds" (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000 p. 297).<sup>1</sup> Therefore according to Shonkoff & Phillips<sup>1</sup> outcomes of child care are related with settings that provide both nurturance and support for early learning and language development. This according to them unravels the previous distinctions between "early education" or "preschool" and "day care". This aligning of both care and education as a continuum of development processes of growth of children are aimed and visualized.

Support structures of both parental and non parental care empower women who are in most cases even today the

primary caregivers of children. Assisting caregivers especially women and single parents in taking care of their children opens opportunities for women's participation in the labour market. In disadvantaged sections it serves as a mechanism of providing livelihood and freeing the older siblings especially adolescent girls. They can as a result get educated. Thus investment in young children is not merely a tool to augment child care but it is an effective postulate to achieve equality for women.

### Understanding Child Care in the Indian Context

India, the largest democracy in the world is home to the largest population of children who are vulnerable and in need of care. Trying to understand child care in the context of India is not an easy task because of the plurality of our culture. It is even more difficult to view it from the prism of social class and caste. The lower social class suffers from issues of survival in terms of access to food and health structures and more so 'early education'. This is true even as we march towards the idea of a better India in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ideally the machinery of the nation/state should have been a haven of equity and justice for all but due to crunch of resources it is unable to care for all the children. The state is incapable of reaching to all children because of budgetary constraints. Therefore as an area of high priority it has developed a programme which is only for the poor. Therefore we have a programme in the form of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) that is targeted towards the disadvantaged. Launched on 2nd October 1975 the goal of ICDS is to provide pre-school education and tackling the problems of malnutrition, morbidity, reduced learning capacity and mortality.

The Government of India has adopted the National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013.

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The vision of the National ECCE Policy is to promote inclusive, equitable and contextualized opportunities for promoting optimal development and active learning capacity of all children below 6 years of age. The Policy focus is on early preschool learning for every child below six years. The key areas of this policy are universal access with equity and inclusion, quality in ECCE, strengthening capacity, monitoring and supervision, advocacy, research and review

(GOI, 2013, para 3).<sup>2</sup>

In India, there is a tradition of giving importance to early years of a child's life. India also has a "... rich heritage of practices for simulation development and initiating 'sanskaras' or basic values and social skills in children (GOI, 2013 p.2). The Indian state recognizes the significance of ECCE through various legislations and policy frameworks. Article 45 of the Indian constitution, The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), The National Policy for children(1974), The National Policy on Education (1986), The National Health Policy(2002), National Plan of Action for children(2005), National Curriculum Framework and National position paper on ECCE are some of the key provisions in the field of early education.

Crèche services are provided through public schemes and also through statutory provisions. One such scheme is the Rajiv Gandhi National Scheme for children of working mothers and it offers ECCE services to children upto 6 years of age. There are also targeted and conditional schemes such as the Janini Suraksha Yojna and the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog that provides maternity benefits. According to the Census<sup>3</sup> (2011) there are 158.7 million children in the age range from birth to six years, out of which around 75.7 million children i.e. 48 percent are reported to be covered under the ICDS (MWCD, 2011). India has also joined the various global movements for the rights of the child. It is a signatory to U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989 and Education for All (EFA) 1990. The current Five Year Plan (12<sup>th</sup> Plan) emphasizes the need to address the areas of systemic reform in all possible centres of care and not limiting it to the ICDS programmes.

### Salient Theoretical Perspectives

There are many theorists who have influenced the way parents and caregivers bring up children. The Observer<sup>4</sup> (2001) a U.K. paper mentioned Jay Belsky, Penelope Leach, Benjamin Spock, John Bowlby and John B Watson as the most influential theorists whose work influences parenting today. The most significant is the change in the opinion which occurred is the turnabout in the thinking about the harmful effects of the mother's employment on the child. One another interesting fact is that prior to 1976, the most widely used baby-care manual by Spock emphasized that mother's role is vital for the care of the children and the extra money earned or the satisfaction she receives from outside work is not important at all. Benjamin Spock is also called the father of 'instinctive' parenting. The 1976 edition and subsequent editions of Spock's Baby and childcare abandoned this viewpoint completely. The book now advises parents who work should not give it up for children.<sup>5</sup>

### John Bowlby- Attachment Theory

Attachment has been defined by Bowlby as an emotional and secure bond between an infant and a primary caregiver.

Bowlby<sup>6</sup> made a relation between the attachment of an infant and mother and the shaping of an infant personality. From this an association was placed on the mother caring for the child instead of working outside home. At that point in time welfare policies were focused on a post war development of the family, and working freedoms afforded to women during the war were heavily curtailed. Latest research on caregivers support the argument that children eventually begin to warm up to people who are loving and kind to them.<sup>7</sup>

Attachment theory is grounded in evolutionary theory with its basic tenet that every human characteristic is shaped through selection processes and represents an adaptation to contextual demands. Bowlby stressed explicitly the contextual nature of attachment in his early writings. Yet Bowlby focused mainly on the social environment, especially the mother, since he did not include information about other caregivers....

(Keller 2014 p.1-2)<sup>8</sup>

### Urie Bronfenbrenner: Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems views the child as developing within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment (1979). It specifies distinct types of nested environmental systems, with bi-directional influences within and between the systems. This finds resonance in the way Bronfenbrenner defined the ecology of human development.

The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded.<sup>9</sup>

The Indian society faces changes and challenges in relation with child care. World Health Organisation (WHO)<sup>10</sup>, (2004) has developed an extended model of care which delineates the resources required at a national level to meet the goal of child survival, growth and development.

Many researchers have used the systems approach to explain the phenomena of child care. This approach emphasizes that a combination of different layers of institutions of care form a boundary around the child where in outside stimulus permeates these systems and influence the upbringing of the child. Konantambigi<sup>11</sup> (2007) have called the family as the primary system of care which is engulfed by the secondary and tertiary systems of care, which is the nation/state and neighbourhood/community. Konantambigi further delineates the host of associated factors that unfold such as the work of the parent, attitude towards maternal employment, the kind of childcare facility available in the vicinity, the economic condition of the family and the structure of the family which influences the care of the child.

### Charles M. Super and Sara Harkness : Developmental Niche

The developmental niche is a theoretical framework which is used for understanding and analyzing the way culture shapes child development. The developmental niche is seen as the composite of three interacting subsystems: the physical and social settings, customs and practices of child care and child rearing and the psychology of the caretakers.<sup>12</sup>

Parents' understanding about the nature of children, the structure of development, and the meaning of behavior are to a large extent shared by members of a cultural group or subgroup....Because cultural understandings that parents hold are organized into larger categories for mutually supportive beliefs, we refer to them as parents cultural belief systems or parental ethnotheories.

(Harkness and Super, 1996, p. 2)<sup>13</sup>

### **Greenfield's Theory: Theory of Social Change and Human Development**

This theory of human development links social change to developmental change. It essentially unravels the complexity of individual and societal linkage. This theory not only describes but can also predict development.

A major goal of the theory of social change and human development is to explain how, as sociodemographic conditions change, cultural values and developmental patterns are transformed across generations. Because sociodemographic conditions are changing throughout the world—in the direction of greater urbanization, higher levels of formal schooling, increasing commercialization, and ever higher levels of technology—the influence of social change on developmental patterns is an important domain in which theory is needed to guide empirical research and to understand children and youths in the United States and around the world

(Greenfield, 2009, p. 401)<sup>14</sup>

### **Perspectives on Investment in Child Care**

There has been sharp convergence of findings of research in economics, neuroscience, child development and developmental psychology in relation to the plasticity of the brain at young age and its financial implications for the economy.

Evidence from neuroscience, medicine, developmental psychology and economics demonstrates that large-scale, public preschool programs lead to better education, health, economic and social outcomes for children, families and countries. This is particularly true for disadvantaged children. However, these programs are also cost-effective for middle-income groups – US evidence indicates that the economic benefits typically outweigh the costs of providing these educational opportunities, by between three and seven to one

(Yoshikawa, 2014, para 2)<sup>15</sup>

### **The Capability Approach**

Amartya Sen's capability approach functions as a conceptual framework in the analysis of issues of contemporary development. They find home in the Human Development Reports (HDR) which are published annually for United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since the year 1990. "Sen's ideas provide the core principles of a development approach whose flexible framework allows policy-makers to analyze diverse challenges that poor people and poor countries face, rather than imposing a rigid orthodoxy" (Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 302).<sup>16</sup>

Sen has broadened economists' notion of human 'well-being' so that it encompasses not just additional

consumption but also developing human potential. Sen has also studied how development policies at times adversely affect women and has argued that economists who study economic development need to focus more on developing opportunities for people and less on maximizing the production of goods and services

(Pressman & Summerfield, 2000, p. 90)<sup>17</sup>

So if one were to expand the utilitarian aspect of the capability approach to early childhood development it clearly means providing good care to children according to their needs at different ages within the growth span. It also means strengthening the capacity of the caregivers in terms of training and high wages as in India and some other countries the child care workforce remains poorly skilled and paid. In large programmes para professionals are hired with low training and skills to fill the need. We also have to put more value in the systems of child care by having a bottom up model, replicate it and then scale it up.

### **The Developmental and the Neuroscience Approach**

Developmental research has confirmed clearly that the early years are significant for a full range of human competencies. There is also research available which implies that there are critical periods in development where there is heightened sensitivity to the effects of experience whether positive or negative. Thus age appropriateness of methods of child care and education is vital to children's development. According to the Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University, the basic architecture of the brain is built through an ongoing process which starts before birth and continues into adulthood. Therefore the period of early childhood is extremely important as the foundations of all learning, health and behaviours are being built.

### **The Human Rights Approach**

"Human rights are those rights which are essential to live as human beings – basic standards without which people cannot survive and develop in dignity. Human rights are inherent to the human person, inalienable and universal" (UNICEF<sup>18</sup>, 2015, para. 1). The U.N Convention on the Rights of the Child protects the rights of every human being who is below the age of 18 years which includes infants and young children. It also provides guidance on how children should be raised and educated. The human rights approach advocates the agency of the child and pays importance to the voices of children. It does not treat children as future adults or part of the future workforce who are burdened with expectations of parents. These enable children to remain what they are and that is children.

### **The Economic Paradigm**

James Heckman, a Nobel Laureate in Economics has proposed a case for investing in early childhood. His analysis of a preschool program shows that there is "... a 7% to 10% per year return on investment based on increased school and career achievement as well as reduced costs in remedial education, health and criminal justice system expenditures" (The Heckman Equation, 2014, p.1).<sup>19</sup> This is a path breaking shift in the world's perspective on early childhood education and is thus even on the agenda of the new sustainable development goals being formulated. Therefore as he propagates early childhood education is an efficient and effective investment for economic and workforce development



which specifies that the earlier the investment, the greater the return on it (Heckman<sup>19</sup>, 2014).

Well known are the estimates of return on human capital investment during the formative years of life. On the other side of the argument also becoming known are the losses associated with the cost of inaction. Failure to invest in ECD can lead to short and long terms costs for individuals, families, and society.<sup>20</sup>

### Stakeholders as Participants

Different stakeholders will invest in child care for varied reasons. The reasons why governments invest in child care is very different from a CEO of a multinational company who builds an onsite child care centre. The different kinds of investments if one were to look traditionally were the private (or profit and philanthropic), the public (Government and local bodies) and civil society. Britto & Sher have offered a more holistic way of looking at these investors. They suggest that "...beyond this point of categorization of public, private, and civil society, the detangling of sources becomes more complicated because of the multiple actors, including families and communities engaged in ECD service provision". (2014, p. 6)

### Investments by the Nation/ State.

The reason why the nation/state invests in its children is manifold. The highest principle of it is to ensure equity to all its citizens. Nancy Folbre<sup>21</sup> (2008) has suggested a nuanced way of looking at child rearing. She compares the process of caring of children as an investment in human capital which will increase our gross domestic product (GDP). She furthers her point by saying the purpose of GDP after all is to make our life better. Thus she proposes this circularity in flow within the larger environment with spillovers in our lives.

### Investments by the Employer

On the other hand an employer supported child care is essentially to retain the employees especially women employees. "The consequences of child-care problems for employees and their productivity at work serve as a primary motivation for employers to provide child-care assistance to their employees (Morrissey, Warner & Buehler<sup>22</sup>, 2009, p. 1340). There is sufficient evidence that employer supported child care helps in reducing absenteeism and attrition in workforce especially for mothers. Sher and Fried<sup>23</sup>(1994) have evolved categories of employer sponsored child care after interacting with many families and employers for over twenty five years in the United States of America. They have done path breaking work and have thus come up with innovative methods in which employers can support the child care needs of their employees by providing supporting mechanism structures. Their solutions are broadly categorized into six categories which include provision of direct services, providing alternative work schedules, financial assistance to employees to meet their family needs, providing education through resource building and providing assistance to communities and using other creative options to increase productivity at work. Parental leave policies can also be provided to assist parents that are employed prior to giving birth in order to remain at home for a period of time so that they are able to care for the child.<sup>24</sup>

### Investments by the Private Sector

Private-for-profit covers a very wide spectrum indeed, from single individuals running a small business that offers children a few hours care in their homes, through to large corporations running major chains of multipurpose nurseries. It also encompasses both highly committed, professional private providers as well as entrepreneurs whose main interest is to exploit a market opportunity. (Woodhead & Streuli 2013, p.308)<sup>25</sup>

In India there is a range of private ECCE centres that are available such as those run by big business houses who offer corporate discounts and which are handed down as freebies or benefits to their employees or public at large. One can also see high tech centres based on NAEYC and High Scope curriculum running in cities. These are clearly for those who have enough money to afford it. In India, especially in the middle class one can clearly see a phenomenon where in people put more value in education as a result spend more money in their children's education than they can afford. But high cost does not guarantee quality education. On the other hand one can see one room nursery schools run by individuals which are also very popular as they are economical and easily available. There is a mushrooming of such centres in both the urban and now in the rural areas.

### Public Private Partnerships- Corporate Social Responsibility

Another way funds can be raised in a strategic way is via the route of Corporate Social Responsibility "Corporate Social Responsibility is a management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders" (*United Nations Industrial Development Organization* [UNIDO], 2014, para. 1).<sup>26</sup> Companies are expected to contribute to society and there is a rise in expectation of people because of legislation and civil rights movement. Though under the new Companies Act (2013) benefits for employees does not qualify as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). There is growing consensus on not leaving the employees out of this loop. "A company's provision of services for the welfare and well being of all cadre and levels of its employees may well be an indicator of its wider CSR Ideology" (Sethi, Singh, & Sharma, 2013, p. 13).<sup>27</sup> Thus companies are adopting issues of relevance to society and providing both financial and structural support to it. Corporate community and business leaders can be convinced to invest in early childhood education sector.

### Implications for Policy

Walker<sup>28</sup> almost two decades ago highlighted the absence of reliable statistical data on the functioning of what he calls "the child care market". But he furthers his point by talking about the most celebrated part of child care. He says "One encounters a (seemingly) infinite supply of personal experiences when discussing child care. This and the emotive nature of children's issues make policy discussions on child care spirited if constrained by objective evidence" (p. 51).

Blau<sup>29</sup> (2000) also makes a point on the same lines when he says after studying the quality of child care "if child-care research is to inform public policy, it must have a sound scientific basis. Replication is the most important part of building a solid base of scientific knowledge" (p. 148). The

issue I would like to ascertain here is that most child care research is scientific and the idea of being able to measure everything from human development index to happiness quotient is by itself an area of concern. To be able to scale up requires a national level commitment and this role in the context of India has to be taken by what I suggest in the form of Public Private Partnership where the state legislates and forms a framework which is national in approach and local in delivery. Private investments can be routed to specific parts of these programmes such as teacher training, developing of infrastructure and resource building. India also faces a problem of commoditization of early childhood education by some privately run centres. There is a great demand for both these centres in both urban and rural areas. Some are corporate chains and some individually owned both are running for profit motives. In India at present the private sector is considered to be providing quality preschool education as compared to government run crèches and Anganwadis which may not be necessarily true.

Britto & Sher<sup>20</sup> have taken cognizance of the problem of commoditization and have offered a multithronged solution which the state needs to take in order to provide access to good quality programmes for all.

Some differentiation between programmes and provision (programmes such as parenting have really become quite commoditized – sold and copyright

For those with an evidence base and difficult to generalize to the most needy settings). Provision may not necessarily be in a one direction (provider to parent for example), but may allow for environmental inputs, infrastructure provision, social protection and cash transfers for example... Higher order vision such as state provision of daycare, early child care, good quality environments, supports in the form of maternity payments, parental rights, access to facilities, social stimulation and environmental provision. (p. 9)

## Conclusion

The discourse on investment is gaining momentum as the importance of early childhood education is being recognized globally. Children need what economists call “human capital” which comprises of good supply of health, skills and knowledge and “social capital” which comprises of supportive families and communities in order to grow and reach their full potential. (Waldfoegel<sup>30</sup>, 2006). Therefore we have to develop an amalgamation of programmes and services which best define the purpose of supporting children and their caregivers. It is true that national level change cannot happen overnight and the thrust of the level has to be done by the government. The reason why government support is absolutely essential is as it provides economic growth and can also correct the lacunae of the systems such as high costs and poor quality. Governments’ role is more of a leveller who can provide free and subsidized care to those who cannot afford and set standards by example. Private and public employers can help parents with young children by providing child care support. Workplace support can be provided by the employer in the form of paid child care leave and onsite support structures such as onsite crèches. It is evident that workplace support systems enhance well being of family including young children and older persons. The economics of child care is in the outcomes. We have reached a point in research where outcomes of early childhood care and practice are easily measurable. The key is to provide an integration of services for holistic development and engage in partnerships with

community and providers to ensure well being of all children. In the context of India the corporate social responsibility hub can be channelized to generate more funds. Therefore by engaging different stakeholders we need to build sustainable models of care need to be put in place to beat the rhetoric and add substance to this mission of best care for all children.

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