

Education for All: A Contrasting Analysis of Preschool Policies

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Introduction

Two world-wide conferences calling for a new commitment toward children's education, sponsored by UNECSCO and held in Jomtien and Dakar in 1990 and 2000, spawned a unifying slogan: "Education for All" (EFA) (Choi, 2006). Current UNESCO reports (UNESCO, 2005) emanating from EFA examine achievements and provide detailed monitoring of the broad goals, country by country. Many questions remain, including the politico-educational context within a nation that allows for EFA implementation of its first goal of "expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education," and what part of the context seems to structurally hamper implementation? These questions have implications for policymakers and the public, and the answers are a multifaceted bundle of unknowns. I explore this "bundle of unknowns" in this paper with a focus on the United States and its early childhood policy, using the contrasting country case of Kenya to show different interpretations of EFA and its related early childhood issues.

By and large, slogans such as EFA are put forward as marketing tools for a more complex idea, policy initiative, or legislative agenda. "Education for All" of the world's 800 million children under age 6 is a daunting concept (UNESCO, 2005). A unifying slogan was deemed necessary in order for countries to endorse the work of these major educational conferences. Slogans, however, may be challenged for their very simplicity, and re-constructed. For example, the U.S. Army's "Be All that You Can Be" recruiting slogan denies the fact that military service can potentially limit life, through active duty service in war zones. The slogan of United Airlines, "Fly the Friendly Skies," was developed, in part, to deter any thought on the part of customers of potentially unfriendly weather, surface-to-air missiles, or pilot error. And the ubiquitous "No Child Left Behind" slogan and initiative (unapologetically borrowed from the Children's Defense Fund, a well-established advocacy group), was taken by the current United States administration to deflect criticism of education policy that had failed many children in the United States. In other words, slogans frequently offer a positive "spin" on what might be too complicated to explain through normal discourse.

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The overall “Education for All” (EFA) slogan helped identify problems facing children in the world: lack of access to primary and secondary education, bias against girls attending school in some nations, low quality schools, poorly prepared teachers, and the exorbitant cost of uniforms, fees, and books in many countries. Incorporating early childhood care and education into EFA provided a mechanism to focus on problems facing early care services: resources, training, ages to be served, facilities, and trained staff.

The earliest pathway to public education systems around the world is frequently described as “early childhood education”—that is, care and education primarily for children 3 to 5 years of age. The overall EFA initiative uses “Early Childhood Development” (ECD) to describe early care and education services for young children found in most nations—most frequently a “non-system” of early education that precedes more formal systems of primary and secondary education (Choi, 2006). The term ECD is also used interchangeably with “early childhood care and education” (ECCE) in various references to the EFA initiative (UNESCO/OECD, 2005). This paper will question ECD/EFA policies in the United States and—as a way of reconstructing perspectives and realities of the EFA slogan—contrast these policies with those in Kenya, a developing nation that has a long history of commitment to early childhood care and education development. The real and potential barriers in promoting and maintaining meaningful ECD policies will be addressed.

Contrasting ECD policies in one country to any other is both complex and slightly hazardous (Neugebauer, 2002; UNESCO, 2005), for country policies are grounded in their unique national education policies and economic realities.¹ After presenting brief country statistics and context, this paper will discuss five areas in preschool “education for all” policies in the United States, and turn to Kenya for a contrasting example of how two countries’ ECD policies are implemented. Areas of discussion include: early childhood education access, quality, resources, government coordination, and research/data development.

The Country Context for “ECD for All”

The United States has a population of just over 300 million people, with about 6 percent of the population being young children ages 3-5 (U.S. Census, 2005), the population target for ECD for All. Terms used in this paper to describe services for preschool children will encompass many disparate services, such as child care, day care, preschool, Head Start, family child care, nursery school, and pre-kindergarten, and will not distinguish between unique attributes of each mode of operation. These services have a relatively recent history in the U.S. (Beatty, 1997). Charitable day nurseries arose in the early part of the 20th century, the “nursery school” movement developed by universities emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, and—while some states had child care licensing

regulations early on to protect children in out of home care—the last state to enact such laws was Florida in 1976. The country’s unique comprehensive preschool program for low-income children, Head Start, was created in 1965 to help improve life chances and educational success for children living in poverty (Hart & Schumacher, 2004).

Some critical statistics related to the care and education of young children may be helpful in setting the stage for ECD policy contrasts between the U.S. and at least one other country. In the U.S., there are 19 million children under age 5, which represents a 4.5 percent increase between 1990-2000 (U.S. Census, 2005). An illustration of the fact that the U.S. is an “aging” nation is that the age group of people over 95 years of age increased 35.4 percent during that same time period (U.S. Census, 2001).

Across the U.S., approximately 70 percent of women with children ages 0-17 participated in the labor force; 54 percent of mothers of infants were in the labor force at the time of the last census (U.S. Department of Labor, 2004). About 50 percent of children under age 5 are currently enrolled in early education settings. Of these, 58 percent are in child care (including full and part-day care and early education programs), 22 percent are in Head Start, and 20 percent in public preschool or prekindergarten programs (Edie, 2006). The average annual per capita income is \$25,000/year in the U.S., and families of young children are at the low end of the income continuum (U. S. Census Bureau, 2005).

Though resources in the United States addressing the care and education needs of young children are extensive, they still represent only a tiny fraction of the overall country budget, competing with war, corporate support, and national insecurity budgets. The U.S. is a free market democracy, with political governance in three branches at the federal level, but with implementation of early childhood policies governed and regulated at the state level, with the exception of federally-funded Head Start.

Families in the U.S. turn primarily to the private market for preschool education, though an increasing number of public school districts are opening their doors to 4-year-olds, with the support of state governors (Pre-K Now, 2005). There are two major funding streams for early childhood care and education in the U.S., as discussed below.

Child Care and Development Fund. Funding for preschool education at the national level comes primarily in the form of subsidy dollars distributed to the states, so that low-income working families may purchase child care; each state’s income threshold for eligibility for these dollars is different, depending on population characteristics in the state. The primary focus of the subsidy program is to support work for low-income families, and the annual funding

level is \$11 billion (Edie, 2006). The subsidy program began just over 10 years ago, following nearly 60 years of general support for low-income families through Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Now, in lieu of social welfare payments, families must be employed in order to receive support, under legislation titled the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA, PL 104-193), also known as the 1996 Welfare Reform Act. In addition, the Child Care and Development Fund for early childhood education requires a small portion of the subsidy dollars to be spent on “quality improvements,” such as training and regulation.

Head Start. The other large federal preschool initiative is Head Start, a program for poor 3- to 5-year-old children offered free to parents, and a smaller number of Early Head Start mothers and infants, ages birth to three. Head Start enrolled over 900,000 children in 2005, with a \$6.8 billion/year budget (Results, 2005). Extensive reviews of the Head Start budget, monitoring processes, and value to families and children go beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice it to say that Head Start may be the most studied early childhood program in the world.ⁱⁱ

U.S. early childhood education policy is directed almost entirely to 50 different states and four territories for implementation (Edie, 2006), and is grounded in support for poor families under these widely disparate state policies, rather than any unified approach. Further complicating the U.S. “ECD for All” policy is the fact that in almost every state the bureaucracy responsible for care and education of 3-5 year olds is not the education department, but the state’s social welfare department (such as a Department of Health and Family Services-Wisconsin, or the Department of Families, Children, and Learning-Minnesota). Interestingly, this same pattern of separating “care” from “education” is found in many other countries, including those described as “developing.” The location of early care and education services housed within family services agencies means that intensive collaboration at the state level is necessary for the goals of “education” to be inserted in “care” programs, especially for low-income working families. In a very large, wealthy country such as the U.S., the term “bureaucracy” takes on new meaning, for state and federal policies are not aligned, and it is easy to critique ECD policies as inadequate and uncoordinated.

New state early childhood policies develop each year, some in response to preparation of and public hearings for the state’s required CCDF plan, and still others in response to legislative agendas of governors and legislators. Seldom is a new care and education policy linked to “Education for All” in promoting or passing the policy. It is as if EFA did not exist, except for the annual reporting to UNESCO, which incorporates data and findings from state policies—and may miss the work of advocacy groups who argue for improved quality to be achieved with the policies that exist. Perhaps no country has more potential resources than the U.S. for preschool-age children in a complex society, but the

story of how well we are doing for this age group shows little comprehensive overview of “national policy.” It is instructive, therefore, to examine policy setting and implementation in at least one other country.

A contrast may be found in the relatively new country of Kenya, which gained independence from Great Britain in 1963. The population of 31 million people includes 13 million children under age 5, or about 42 percent of the population (UNESCO/OECD, 2005). Kenya has had a preschool initiative almost since independence, starting in 1972, partly in response to high female labor force participation; about 77 percent of mothers are employed (Choi, 2005). The per capita annual income is rising, but is still only \$1,010/year (UNESCO/OECD, 2005).

Kenya has centralized education policies for all levels of education, including preschool. Kenyan policies for early education at first began in the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare until a policy shift was made in 1980 that all preschool education policy and implementation would be within the Ministry of Education (MOE) (Early Childhood Development Policy Framework, 2006). While initially this meant a considerable “stretch” for a Ministry accustomed to dealing with primary and secondary education planning, the ECD work was enhanced by external funding from the Bernard Van Leer Foundation for a number of years. The foundation funding, as well as that from the Government of Kenya (GOK), helped create the National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE), with responsibility for teacher training and curriculum development. The government later established District Centers for Early Childhood Development (DICECEs) in every district.

For over 25 years, Kenya promoted the development of preschools, pre-units, nursery schools, and early childhood centers, and increased training for teachers of young children at a rate unparalleled in all of Africa (Sessional Paper, 2005)—all under the same set of umbrella policies. This “top down” system of preschool education reaches to the community level, be it a small trading center, a plantation, or a major municipality, affecting thousands of parents, children, teachers, and other stakeholders (Adams & Swadener, 2000; Swadener, Kabiru, & Njenga, 2000). Currently, about 1.2 million 3- to 5-year-old children attend child care programs across the country (UNESCO/OECD, 2005).

However, centralized policy carried down to the community level as a structure that evokes questions about actual implementation at that level—and the potential for unintended consequences unknown to central government, at least for some time until the next inspection visit or annual report. For example, the cost of preschool teachers (both their training and their salaries) must be borne by the local community, rather than the government body (Teachers’ Service Commission, or TSC) responsible for employing, and establishing salary levels

and terms of pay for all other teachers across the country. One critical study of how well communities responded to actually employing and paying ECD teachers revealed that these teachers were frequently either “sacked” or remained unpaid in far too many instances, especially when they obtained the two-year ECD training certificate (Adams & Kabiru, 1995). The communities, perhaps rightfully, believed the teachers would demand higher salaries with more training.

A further complication for Kenyan preschool policy has come with the advent in 2003 of Free Primary Education (FPE), which added 7 million school-age children to the rosters of primary schools throughout the country over a two-year span. Reports of families refusing to pay for preschool education have been forwarded to the recently-formed Kenyan ECD Policy Framework Committee, as the families say they can look forward to free primary education in just a year or so and do not want to pay for preschool now (Choi, 2006). It would take a critical study of the structural features of preschool education in each of the 78 districts within Kenya, and careful analysis of the data to know whether this reported phenomenon is widespread or found only in isolated instances. However, preschool enrollments do appear to show a decline nationwide over the past two years since FPE began (Sessional Paper No. 1, 2005). The most recent report says: “Most parents are refusing to pay pre-school fees, arguing that the government should provide free pre-school as well as primary school education” (UNESCO/OECD, 2005, p. 26).

It is useful to note that the enrollment of children affected by preschool education policies in each of these two countries is not 100 percent. In the U.S., about half of all preschoolers are enrolled in formal systems of early education prior to required school entrance, at an age determined by each state, usually at age six (Helburn & Bergmann, 2002), and in Kenya, less than one-third of children under five attend preschool programs (UNESCO/ OECD, 2005), thus raising the question: what does “all” mean?

Early Childhood Education as a Foundation for Primary School

The EFA Initiative specifies that ECD goals should include holistic development, while laying the foundation for lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2005). There is considerable evidence, from research literature and the popular press, that “preparation for school” is enhanced by children’s access to appropriate learning activities, attention to their health, nutrition, and physical development, and establishing close, supportive relationships with the primary caretakers (Committee for Economic Development, 2002; Choi, 2006). A set of seminal research projects in the United States starting in the 1960s consistently found that some children—primarily from poor and ethnic minority populations

in the U.S.—are behind their peers by as much as two years when they enter formal primary education (Barnett, 1998; Schweinhart, 2003). Careful reading of the many reports on the positive advantages of preschool education shows considerable bias toward preventing later remedial education and more costly grade retention for children who are not “ready for school.” In fact, most of the economic arguments for preschool education have to do not with how “inexpensive” such education is as currently offered, but with calculations about estimated “cost savings” in future education and other expenditures (Committee for Economic Development, 2002). Widely-quoted reports show “returns on investment” ranging from \$7 for every \$1 invested to \$17 for every \$1 invested (Schweinhart, 2004), depending on various measurement constructs, time periods, and assembled data. One caveat about calculating the estimated rates of return on the preschool investment is that, for the most part, these studies focused on economically disadvantaged children (Research Report #2, 2004; Schweinhart, 2004), not on all children in a given community, state, or even the nation. Other more critical studies of low-income mothers and children help provide more instrumental perspectives on ECE, such as the poignant and long-lasting “lives on the edge” interviews in Valerie Polakow’s work (Polakow, 1994).

Despite the cautions and critiques, policymakers (as well as business and education leaders) in the U.S. are easily persuaded that investing in early education (“for all”) would not only be the right thing to do in the short run, but would ultimately pay for itself in the long run. While the goals of ECD policy are “affirmatively pro-poor,” (UNESCO, 2005), early childhood education is intended to lay the foundation for lifelong learning. Early childhood, in the U.S. as well as in many other countries, including those that are considered as “developing countries,” is frequently not a priority of the education sector, making it difficult to integrate health, nutrition, care for children of working mothers, and appropriate preschool education (Choi, 2006).

The nations contrasted here, the United States and Kenya, only two among hundreds of countries endorsing “Education for All,” have different historical antecedents leading to today’s policies. The continuum of ECD policy development in each country is contrasted in Table 1.

The U.S. first developed “day nurseries” for poor immigrant children in the 19th century and early part of the 20th century, with the primary motivation being the “protection and care” for children so they did not die from physical or other neglect. State child care licensing laws enacted one by one between 1930 and 1976 were designed to monitor children in “out of home” care, with a continued emphasis on care and protection. Today, primary ECD policies in the U.S. are often initiated by private sector interests, with an emphasis on “investment” in young children as the way to secure a solid, responsive workforce in the future.

Further, it is almost impossible to know which federal agency is responsible for overall ECD policy, and advocacy groups abound—each urging more funding and more attention for early childhood services it has under its jurisdiction.

In each of these two countries, early education policies have shifted and changed as new demands for country development arose. U.S. early education policies have shifted from those first “day care centers” for poor children to “child care programs” of many varieties under many different auspices, in order to cater to the need for child care for the post-World War II explosion in the number of working mothers of children under six. Only in the past 10 years has there been a concentrated effort, based on national and state research, to expose the lack of quality in many of these arrangements and call for solutions (Adams et al., 2006; Cost, Quality, Child Care Outcomes, 1995; Edie, 2006).

Table 1
Continuum: Early Childhood Policy Development
in the United States and Kenya

Country	From	To
U.S.	Protection and Care	Investment Strategies
Kenya	Elite/Colonial Education	ECD Policy Framework

In contrast, in the 1940s, when the colonial education system was created in Kenya, a few private nursery schools were created for children of new colonial workers. Today, the Ministry of Education is on the cutting edge of ECD for all, having just completed a new ECD Policy Report, and is in the forefront of fine tuning problems inherent in launching a massive new free, primary education system. Currently, some 30-40 “private ECD training centers” also flourish, helping train more and more teachers in early childhood education, and Kenyatta University has graduated over 200 students enrolled in its newly-created Early Childhood Development Studies department (UNESCO/OECD, 2005).

The newly independent state of Kenya created an entire education system in 1963, modeled, in part, on the former British colonial system of primary and secondary education, with headmasters, teachers from the U.K., examination certificates, and qualifying curricula. The “need” for nursery schools for the younger children of the expatriate community was responded to by talented leaders within that group and, in Nairobi and Nakuru, several nursery schools were established. In still other communities, some origins of ECD centers were found on the agricultural plantations (for example, Eastlands in Nairobi), established by the plantation owners, while Nairobi City council ran urban “day

nurseries.” Kenya was also a site for the cross-cultural research of a Harvard University team, who documented child-rearing practices in the country (Whiting & Whiting, 1975; Whiting & Edwards, 2003). There were, thus, many individuals and groups that sparked an early interest in preschool education, and when EFA was launched, Kenya was one of four developing nations to be selected for review on a consistent basis (UNESCO, 2005), due in part to its well-developed early education infrastructure. Prior to these formal studies and the advent and eventual adoption of western-style nursery schools, precolonial early childhood socialization and nurture was carried out by village leaders who saw to it that children were “educated” in the ways of a particular community. Moreover, for remote areas of the country, or those beyond the “reach” of national preschool policy, this practice endures, and many children continue to lack formal schooling beyond age six.

Analysis of Current EFA Policies in the U.S.

Access

The “Education for All” initiative has made great strides in reporting countries’ enrollments in all levels of education, including preschools. It is important to note that the U.S. has only 7% of the world’s preschool children, while Africa and Asia have 25% of that population, so comparing enrollments is fraught with difficulty (Neugebauer, 2002). The data show that in the U.S. there are over 105,000 child care centers. In addition, the U.S. has—with frequent disagreements about the purposes, supports and inspections needed—promoted family child care (that is, care for a few children in the home of a child care provider). There are about 425,000 regulated family child care providers in the U.S., coming under varying state regulations (National Association of Regulatory Administration, 2005).

In contrast, Kenya has about 28,000 preschool centers; many of them attached to primary schools, and thousands of others operated by religious and community-based organizations or corporations/companies (UNESCO/OECD, 2005). In Kenya’s rural areas, children may have to walk long distances (through terrain that may be highly dangerous) to attend pre-school, even though they are young. There are not enough places for 3- to 5-year-old children in either country—though spaces for infants and toddlers are in particularly short supply in the U.S., and there are also very few places assigned for the “under 3’s” in Kenya (Swadener, Kabiru, & Njenga, 2000).

Is “access” to comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the “most vulnerable and disadvantaged children” (EFA goal number one) a reality in either country in the near future? The answer is probably not, but because of different features of their histories, and current policy contexts.

Quality

Many people in national research communities profess to know how to define and measure child care and early education quality (Love, et. al, 2003; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000), yet others remind us that quality remains an elusive concept (Blau, 2000; Melhuish, 2001). Still others lead the way in re-constructing thought around quality as a part of awareness of context, complexity, plurality, and subjectivity (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). EFA may be more about the number of preschools and preschool children served than questioning the quality of ECD arrangements, but the discourse of quality is critical to the future of ECD.

The most comprehensive studies of early care and education quality in the United States document that the majority of child care center settings are inadequate to meet children's developmental needs, with only about 10 percent rated "excellent" (Edie, 2006). While individual operators claim to offer "quality care" in their advertising, and over 10,000 child care centers have become nationally accredited using research-based criteria (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2007), the research that examines both administrative data and classroom quality verifies that—particularly for low-income children—quality is not what it should be in a rich nation (Riley, Roach, Adams, & Edie, 2001)

In the U.S., there is great interest in quality rating systems that could be used across all types of sponsorship for preschool (private forprofit, religious, private non-profit, corporate sponsored, etc.), and about two-thirds of states are experimenting with rating systems as a way of encouraging quality (Edie, 2006).

In Kenya, just about 50% of preschool teachers are "untrained" (25,452 out of 51,596 preschool teachers). Studies of teachers "in training" report that many teachers tend to use formal, rigid styles of teaching with rote learning (UNESCO/OECD, 2005). Further, preschools (as well as the newly-expanded free primary education classrooms) tend to be crowded. Using a rough estimate achieved by dividing the 1.2 million children into the 28,000 preschools there would be an average of about 49 children per classroom. No matter how quality is defined by a society, many child development experts are in agreement that small groups of children are ideal for promoting child development (see Tobin, Davidson, & Wu, 1989 for more debates on this issue).

Is the debate on quality in these two countries, and undoubtedly in others, well-framed and achievable? How can Education for All recognize country variations and also maintain universalized types of notions such as "quality" for all?

Resources

According to the Administration, the total estimated U.S. government expenditure is \$18 billion annually for all preschool/child care (White House, 2006). However, according to the Council on Economic Development, it would take \$25 billion annually to “do it right”—pay teachers enough and improve quality (Committee for Economic Development, 2002). Despite subsidies for low-income families and Head Start for the very poor, parents pay a large percentage of their incomes for full-time child care while they are employed, with a higher proportion of income paid by the lowest-income families who do not qualify for federal subsidies. The richest nation on earth can be challenged for its inadequate ECD resources and inequities that extend to thousands of parents using early childhood services and thousands more low-paid workers in those services.

In contrast, there is another type of “crisis” in Kenyan preschool education that can best be summarized by looking at the lack of resources for each child—both in free primary education schools as well as in preschools. In the U.S., federal education grants go directly to the states for education, and then to school districts—frequently under a state formula determined by the state constitution. In Kenya, allocations for schools come from the federal treasury to the Ministry of Education, who then sends funds to the Provincial and District/Municipal Education Offices, which then sends funds to the Divisions and then to schools. By the time each governmental unit has received its administrative “share,” each child in primary school is estimated to be allocated about Ksh. 1,000/- per year (about \$15 in US dollars). ECD centers are even more severely short-changed because the Teacher’s Service Commission does not pay the preschool teachers’ salaries. So in terms of resources, Kenya is unable to fulfill its commitment to “education for all” due, in part, to the “trickle down” economics of education sector practices. More attention may be paid in the near future to having the TSC cover salaries of preschool teachers, as well as arranging funding for at least 4-year old children to attend “free” education settings (ECD Policy Framework, 2006).

Is the “resource question” answered by current country demands (with funding for defense, infrastructure, and manufacturing) or a vision of missed opportunities for young children?

Government Coordination

In the United States, there is pitifully little coordination among governmental entities. State turf battles sometimes exist between state licensors (who claim their service of protecting children from harm in out of home care exemplifies quality) and state subsidy payment agencies (who pay for care whether or not

there are serious licensing violations). Further, many states are only now considering how to coordinate services for preschool children between state education agencies, and traditional social services or work-related agencies.

Kenya's policy framework, on the other hand, is a great start to seeing more coordination among government sectors, such as education, social services, and economic development. The danger may lie in "re-creating" a new system of Early Childhood Development "for all" in Kenya—effectively throwing out the years of development of a system with integrity that meets the country's cultural and education values—in order to meet UNESCO goals.

Is this un-coordination simply an artifact of discourse, or can it never be a reality because bureaucracies tend to operate in their separate partitions?

Research and Data

In the U.S., the federal Child Care Bureau allocated \$10 million annually for 10 years to "child care research partnerships," research by scholars, and other independent researchers. In addition, individual university researchers have been able to obtain foundation funding for intensive studies, such as some cited in this paper. Head Start has had multitudes of research studies since 1965, some finding positive results and others directed toward cutting Head Start budgets on ideological grounds.

Partly as a result of an immense federal budget deficit, ECD research funding is currently hard to come by, and the federal commitment has been weakened. The progress in data collection and syntheses of data about early care and education may now be lost in the shuffle between funding priorities, political ideologies about which research, if any, to fund, and even how to understand which knowledge or evidence to privilege as "truth."

In Kenya, a few ECD studies funded by the World Bank in the mid- 1990s provided an impetus to "insider" Kenyan-led research, rather than research by "outsiders." Currently, there is a desire for ongoing research, but no particular funding exists from the Ministry of Education for studies of early education programs and their long-term impacts on child development. Further, there has been difficulty completing UNESCO's EFA monitoring reports due, in part, to data collection and reporting capacity infrastructure issues.

Conclusion

Education for All, and most particularly, Early Childhood Development for All, is complex, as can be seen from this contrast between just two countries. First, we really know little about global comparisons of preschool education.

Certainly, the future of early childhood centers in Asia and Africa will provide intriguing insights in how well “ECD for all” is working, since three out of every four children under age five reside in these areas of the world (Neugebauer, 2002). Second, the world may be divided between countries with high “dependency ratios” (those with a large percentage of children under age 15, as in Kenya) and those nations that have a large aging population (as in the U.S.). The Dakar EFA meeting report reflected program goals from the “E-9” countries, the nine nations that have the preponderance of young children in the world (Dakar Framework, 2000). Thirdly, there are huge disparities in child mortality rates among nations, despite rapid advances in medicine and ecology. In the U.S., the mortality rates of infants of color is much higher than the majority white population; in Kenya, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has created large increases in “AIDS orphans” who may not be able to take advantage of “ECD for all” because they do not live long enough, drop out of school, or for other reasons such as the extreme poverty created when families deal with AIDS (Sessional Paper, 2005).

According to Neugebauer (2002), in order to truly compare ECD policies we need to know:

- how much national governments are investing in early childhood
- how much is invested by charitable institutions such as UNICEF in each nation
- the extent to which women are employed outside the home in each nation
- the percent of children enrolled in early childhood services in each nation

EFA provides an opportunity to collect comparative data on just such features of ECD services. However, it is easy to fall into the trap of massive reports produced by UNESCO being received uncritically—and taken as signs of “progress” without questioning the local context.

In an insightful new book, John Iliffe reports on a similar global effort sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) in combating the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS, particularly in Africa (2006). Comparing incidence rates, death rates for varying population cohorts, and the nature of medical/political conflicts, Iliffe synthesizes one continent’s varied approaches to a global problem, with certain parallels to EFA’s complex national policy efforts. The model could well apply to EFA.

By any measures selected, the U.S. and Kenya have fully-fledged early childhood programs serving millions of children, helping parents, training teachers, and supporting the economic development of their market-driven economies. Of equal interest is the fact that these two countries exemplify

access to early care and education by promoting various models and sponsorships in a free-market system. However, what we know about the quality of those programs and their enduring capacity to enhance children's growth and development leads to a more pessimistic picture of the potential negative impact of some of the arrangements. When parents are driven to select early care and education programs quickly, without overall evaluation, or knowledge of quality—most particularly when the parents must rely on early care and education for long periods of time, not just a few hours per week—then each of these societies has reasons for concern about their ECD “for all” programs.

The slogan of “early childhood development for all” has the ring of promise and high expectations. The reality is much messier. It will require massive fiscal and policy will to create enough places of quality that fit the cultural context in the nation for all the children in all the countries of the world to accomplish the promise.

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- ii A fairly comprehensive set of 2,900 Head Start research reports may be found at www.eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/HSLC_Search.

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