

Pre-School Education is the first chain in education system and has a particular importance because it has to do with very sensitive age of children, who are in rapid development.

MEST strategy, 2003

Community Based Early Childhood Education Project Phase 3

External evaluation report

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Pejë – Warsaw, June 2005

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Introduction¹

The external evaluation of Community Based Early Childhood Education Project has been conducted between 6th and 13th June 2005. **The main aim of the evaluation was to cover the implementation and identify the key issues of Phase 3 of the project.** The evaluation was also meant to help in providing recommendations for further project implementation.

The second part of the report deals with the general description of the evaluation. It includes terms of references, research plan, and the list of evaluation methods used. The third part briefly describes the background of the project.

The fourth and main part contains the evaluation results, starting from general findings, continuing through to a more specific issues related to CB ECE. National level issues, ministerial approach to this form of education is followed by are followed by local level findings concerning functioning of the projects within the local government and communities. Then, the report goes to describe the details of the centres' operations, their facilities, teachers, classes, and parent participation. In the final section of the evaluation findings

¹ This evaluation report of Community Based Early Childhood Education Project was written for EveryChild Kosova organisation. The author of the report and the field evaluator is Agnieszka Szczurek, external evaluator from Poland, with experience in evaluation of alternative early education projects.

chapter concerns EveryChild organisation, its responsibilities, future plans, etc. The recommendations and examples of good practice are included throughout

The fifth and final part provides the conclusions and the summary of recommendations.

The report makes use of my multi-year experience with a similar Polish programme, on the back of which I risk formulating some suggestions, which, I hope you find useful.

I would like to thank the staff of the EveryChild Organisation, the local coordinators, the assistants, the parents, the local authorities and the representatives of Ministry of Education, Science and Technology for their friendliness and help in preparing this study.

Direct quotes of people evaluated are in *italic*. Place names are in Albanian in English derivatives of Albanian (as in Kosova). Abbreviations used in the text:

CB ECE – Community Based Early Childhood Education

MEST – Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

Evaluation objectives, methods and sample

The evaluation objectives

- To assess how effective the work has been so far. To conduct situation analysis of the achievements, difficulties and challenges of CB ECE Project in Kosova.
- To assess the needs of the ECE team required to continue the implementation of the project.
- To identify factors, both internal and external, which have either hindered or helped the project implementation.
- To find and expose examples of good practice.
- Identify further actions for EveryChild in continuing to develop CB ECE in Kosova
- To organize a workshop with Municipal Education Authorities, Ministry of Education (Preschool Department) in identifying cooperative mechanisms between Municipalities, MEST and the Project.
- To prepare this report, including conclusions made during the workshop with Municipal and MEST authorities.

Key questions

- Have the objectives of the project been met?
- Did the project gain the community support? What were obstacles in gaining the community support?
- Did the project gain governmental (local and national level) support? What were the obstacles in gaining institutional support?
- What are the recommendations on mainstreaming the project to institutional level.
- What was the role of the programme participants
- What are the programme results for the participants: parents, children, local governments?

Evaluation criteria

Of the normal project evaluation criteria, the main two I was concentrating on were.

- Effectiveness – To what extent the expected results have been obtained?
- Sustainability – How lasting are the effects likely to prove?

Methods used within the research:

Document analysis	<i>Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Kosovo</i> , UNICEF, Kosovo, Feb, 2004; EveryChild Evaluation reports; EveryChild Project proposals; Pre-school Curriculum, 2 nd edition, the European Children's Trust-Kosova; Training Materials, the European Children's Trust-Kosova; <i>Pre-school education Law – draft</i> ; <i>Five years strategic plan for pre-school and pre-primary education</i> ; MEST; Feb, 2003.
Interviews (individual)	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology representative, pre-school department; Klina Local Coordinator, Municipality Education Representative, Klina; Municipality Education Department, Istog; 2 Teachers in Istog centres; 1 Teacher in Emshire centre; Parents/grandparents in 2 villages;
Focus group interview	EveryChild Organisation' staff.
Observation	Centres: children activity; teachers' work. State preschool in Pejë.
Other	Conducting a workshop for MEST municipalities representatives.

Background of the project

EveryChild has been working in Kosova to promote early childhood education since 1999. Organisation has established and developed 16 CB ECE centres Kosova wide within this project (the total number of centres established is 27), and tries to help them reach sustainability.

EveryChild, through local women NGO's and with the support of UNICEF, identifies marginalized rural areas with no pre-school services, and together with the local communities establishes the centres. The CB ECE facilities are owned by local municipalities, and run in schools or, in some cases, local community buildings. The idea is not to overload the communities in the future with extra financial expenditures.

EveryChild opens the centres, equips them and offers technical advice during the both preparation and the actual life of the ECE centres. It also lobbies for minimum standards the centres that would be achievable and acceptable for the communities.

The objectives of the phase 3 of the project are the following.

1. To establish six new community based centres, primarily in rural locations.
2. To continue supporting the existing centres and to improve the quality of teaching, to consolidate their programs and to move towards sustainability, in partnership with municipal education authorities.
3. To empower communities in advocating increased funding for high quality CB ECE.
4. To educate women's groups (linked to UNICEF funded Women's Literacy project) about ECE, and make them able to act as advocates for CB ECE at community, local and central government level.
5. To make local and national authority decision makers and policy advisers demonstrate a practical commitment to ECE and to create a supportive legislative and administrative framework.

Evaluation results, findings

General findings

Community Based Early Childhood Education Project is very innovative. It fills the important gap created by social and institutional conditions. First, it offers pre-school education in poor rural areas, where such education normally cannot be afforded. Secondly, the project addresses the 3-6 years olds, while the official education system concentrates so far on the pre-primary classes.

So far, the realisation of the project has been a success, as the evaluation confirmed. 16 centres were established within the project. Thanks to this, 600 children from rural areas got *something that they had never had*. Project *helped them to be more independent, to have a higher self-esteem*. The centres also provide employment for 40 people working with children, thus it helps to alleviate the unemployment problem, especially among women. Their employment helped to change these rural-area women lives – stress EveryChild employees:

We have contributed to a better position of women in society, we encouraged them. Now they are very active, even they listen to radio they take notes if there is something interesting for their centre and for children – a song or a story.

EveryChild staff member

It is interesting to note the EveryChild staff also stressing the wider context of the program: *we did something important for Kosova society*.

Innovativeness of the project is certainly its strength. But it also hit several non-negligible **obstacles**.

- **Low social awareness of the importance of the pre-school education.**

Even though EveryChild started to change the social perception of the pre-school education through the realisation of the project, there is still a lot to do. All participants of the research stress low awareness of the early (3-6 years) education not only among the local people, but also on the ministry level. One of the local coordinator's quote could be an example: *there are two ways of working on awareness: working with simple people from a village and talking to educated people, in national structures but representing the former system*.

Awareness problem is one of the key issues not only of the project but also of the whole social development process in Kosova. To decide and to act, the people must be aware of their needs and means available. This relates to the next obstacle to the project.

- **Civil society weakness.**

According to the *Subsidiarity rule* responsibilities have to be taken by the level best appropriate to solve the problem. It means that what the lesser entity can do adequately should not be done by the greater entity unless it can do it better. The rule should be (and normally is) embedded in all social projects, but its implementation is sometimes quite difficult, as the CB ECE project shows.

International aid is crucial for Kosova, but it is equally important that within the aid framework, the beneficiaries are motivated for action (other than rent-seeking), otherwise international help could be a trap. Doing everything for the beneficiaries leads to unsustainable solution. Giving must be accompanied by local activity, planning and contributions, in line with means available. It is also important to demand beneficiaries' contribution right from the beginning, even if it is only marginal at first. Such strategy, while often quite difficult at the beginning always brings results in the longer term. Otherwise, the end of financing could mean the end of a project.

Implementing such mechanism is also crucial for future, more sophisticated funds' utilisation, for example of the EU structural funds (once Kosova does become a member of the European Union). It also helps to create true civil society in Kosova.

- **Lack of census**

Since the war, and related loss of life and emigration, there was no census in Kosova. This makes it impossible to assess true demographic situation among children, especially young children of the country. School-goers are well accounted for. It makes planning and financing of education very difficult. With no decent estimates of the child population, needs awareness and efficiency of local government actions are naturally handicapped, as the scale of the pre-school education problem remains unknown.

According to UNICEF report population growth in Kosova is substantial. That means that pre-school aged children are numerous and their number is probably growing. Thus, EveryChild actions, as well as other those by other organisations are but a drop in the ocean of pre-school education needs.

One way to address the issue would be simply counting the children as they are born or vaccinated in local hospitals. The actual number of children and related statistics on pre-school education ratios could be major arguments in the hands of decision makers (MEST) or aid organisations.

The abovementioned obstacles influence the realisation of the CB ECE project to some extent. But it is important to stress that the obstacles above are of a general nature, and they influence other, also quite dissimilar projects. EveryChild organisation will not resolve them on its own, but EveryChild staff is well aware of the issues and tries to counteract the obstacles as much as possible.

National, ministry level

The general institutional environment is important for the implementation of the CB ECE project. This concerns especially the pre-school education department in MEST, which

determines what will be the future formal framework of the CB ECE and of the alternative education in Kosova.

MEST was established in 2002 and it concentrates on the education system reform. The reforms have been concerning mostly schools so far. Pre-school education has been neglected in the ministry's actions but its role is stressed at least in the official documents.

Pre-School Education is the first chain in education system and has a particular importance because it has to do with very sensitive age of children, who are in rapid development. Main goal of pre-school education is to stimulate and help building-up children's personality for further steps in life and education. Hence, there is a judgment that is for all nations and world's countries, which says: "Investing for pre-school children means investing in the future"

MEST Strategy 2003

EveryChild travelled a long way in relationship with MEST and the ministry's positive approach to alternative CB ECE is, to a large degree, a result of the work of EveryChild. According to an EveryChild staff member, MEST was *sceptic about this form of education* (as a new form in Kosova society). Low pedagogical qualifications among the teaching assistants working in CB ECE centres was one of the main sources of the official dislike to the program.

MEST officials are currently much more positive towards CB ECE initiatives. Perhaps one of the reasons behind this change in opinion is the wealth of similar alternative education solutions working in other countries: *Poland sample made us strongly convinced to this form of education* (MEST representative). It is also confirmed by EveryChild staff member quote: *A visit to Poland and to a similar project had a positive influence on MEST attitude.*

It seems worthwhile to continue such study visits by the ministry representatives, using UNICEF network and Step by Step organisation. Showing Portuguese and UK solutions would help in creating good systemic solution for pre-school education in Kosova.

MEST (Pre-school sector) recognized the value of Community Based-ECE provisions and incorporated this form of education into their five-year strategic planning. Recognizing the financial hardships faced by many rural communities, the Pre-School Sector of MEST has issued a letter of recommendation to municipalities to take over 50% of the running costs of CB ECE centres. Although MEST's current strategy for preschool and pre-primary education includes CB ECE as a third form of provision for young children, with the aim of reaching the target of 25% of preschool children (that is, 3-5 year olds) attending programs, there is still no concrete action plan for supporting CB projects to achieve this target.

The increase of the pre-school attendance ratio to the ambitious 25% target is to be made thanks to private pre-schools in towns and CB ECE in rural areas. According to MEST the strategy works very well and the intermediate targets are being reached (yet it is important to stress that if this is indeed true, it is due to the NGOs actions, not those of the ministry)

MEST included training for CB ECE facilitators in their strategy document, but there has been no concrete attempt to include such staff in training programs. So far the Ministry has only been able to offer one course for preschool staff on Children's Rights, but no community facilitators were included. At the moment MEST is working on the ECE law in Kosova,

where CB ECE are recognized, and support for them from the local and central government is planned. EveryChild is part of this working group in lobbying for equal access to quality ECE services for all children.

The inclusion of the CB ECE in pre-school education law draft is important. Even though the bill is to be turned into law in September 2005, already it can be assumed that the draft will be shaping the legal environment of the pre-school education in Kosovo. The inclusion of the CB ECE opens the way for institutionalising such form of pre-school education.

MEST appreciates the tremendous support of international NGOs during law preparation phase. It also notices the help given in CB ECEs facilities' equipment and training for teacher assistants. Overall, MEST sees CB ECE as a useful tool in fulfilling its pre-school education strategy, but so far, it does not declare any concrete form of help for CB ECE organisation.

We are aware for support that different organization have given in preschool-pre-primary education, MEST also in the future will cooperate and support Local and International NGOs.

MEST Strategy 2003

There are several difficulties which explain why MEST refrains from actively supporting the program.

- Public spending on education (especially on pre-school education) is low, as confirmed by local and central government representatives. What is more, such spending decreases annually on a per capita basis. This comes mostly from the growing number of children enrolled to the system. Also, according to the information gained, the pre-school department of MEST does not know what budget it has. This significantly hampers the planning potential of the department. It is no wonder the *government is reluctant to take the responsibility because of potential financial consequences.* ECE Situation Analysis document

The above could suggest that despite the years of work, EveryChild is unable to have a significant influence over MEST and thus needs the support of a recognised international organisation. One of the EveryChild representatives said: *Pre-school department has no budget, but UNICEF can tell the minister: "please, give more than 0% for the pre-school education". They can influence because they have the name.*

- The pre-school department in MEST is too small to effectively manage the pre-school education. Ineffectiveness also comes from the fact that a *pre-school sector is not in a very good position within the ministry. They are discriminated, there is a lot going on other education levels, starting from the primary school, but not in pre-school education.* EveryChild staff member
- The abovementioned problems with the lack of funding and inadequate personnel, one can presume MEST will have problems with fulfilling its tasks. Main activities of MEST pre-school department are following:
 - Data collection: How many children are **enrolled** into pre-schools;
 - Analysis of qualification of pre-school staff working with children;
 - Analysis of conditions, infrastructure of pre-school.

At present these actions concern only state pre-schools. With the new law in place the responsibilities will be widened to include the private pre-schools and CB ECE pre-schools. MEST may have problems with meeting these responsibilities.

At the same time, systemic changes related to the introduction of the new law will increase the importance of EveryChild and other organisations who will take part in shaping the new reality. New responsibilities of the NGOs will include counting the children not enrolled to any form of pre-schools, conducting infrastructure analysis, writing a know-how manual describing the CB ECE organisation. It seems important to consult and create documents for MEST: eg CB ECE curriculum, or training programme for teachers working in the centres. This suggests a new role for EveryChild, as ministerial consultant, expert in pre-school education. A good practice in that respect is inclusion of EveryChild representative in the pre-school education steering group works, and in the group drafting the new pre-school law.

2003 MEST strategy document includes the following section regarding the relationship between the ministry and the local communities.

According to primary and secondary education law, the competences for preschool-pre-primary education in relationship between MEST-Municipality have been distributed as the following:

- *MEST has the right and Legal obligation (Section 2.3, Article (a)) to arrange timeframe, working hours, curriculum and other issues related to preschool education;*
- *Section 11. MEST plans and coordinates development of the preschool institutions ...in Kosovo in consultation with municipalities.*

The law as not change in this regard, but it would be useful to include EveryChild as a link in relationship between MEST and the municipalities, given the organisation's long and diverse experience in contacts with both.

Local community and local authority level

Planning the project, EveryChild assumed local communities would be involved in running of the centres. EveryChild's staff admits it counted on bigger financial support from the local communities. They are aware that general environment was not supportive.

From 1999 to now a lot of things have changed, there are more problems in social life: higher unemployment, increase of poverty level, in villages there is no cash money to support teachers. Although the money expected from them is symbolic, it is still a problem for them.

Funds for education are limited, further budget cuts hamper the creation of additional ECE pre-school centres, even though they are relatively cheap to maintain and their opening is financed by EveryChild.

Another obstacle is the centres' staff qualifications requirements. Ministerial regulations require that in order to come under the MEST education department a teacher must have pedagogical qualifications (and higher education). This requirement is often very difficult to meet in rural communities, and the both the Kosova's and international experience suggests secondary school degree suffices for this work.

Another issue is low awareness of the importance of pre-school education, mentioned above. An example could be the turnout at the pre-school education workshop organised by EveryChild, at which MEST representatives were present. Four out of 30 local governments

were represented. As one of the participants said, *the municipalities have other priorities nowadays.*

Perhaps the next meeting of this kind could be organised on the MEST premises. The ministry representatives offered hosting such meeting, and it could both bolster the attendance and prove official engagement in CB ECE.

Local governments are not obliged to run pre-school education, given the current legal state. Most local governments start pre-primary classes in schools operating in their area. It is considered a major achievement in the field of pre-school education. It is also quite easy to do, because the school infrastructure in rural areas is good. Many local schools were rebuilt after the war, or built from the scratch using the aid money.

It is the local governments which decide on both opening and of keeping the centres. The Polish experience is the same, and an EveryChild staff comment reflects this: *if they want this centre to exist, then their work will be much important than that of us all. Their needs and our pushing are the most effective combination to create new centres and to achieve their sustainability.* This is why it is important to target the awareness of the local government, but also to show the proven strategies and benefits of investing in pre-school education.

It often happens that all that counts for the local government is the physical infrastructure investments (new road, school building, running water). Over time, when these basic needs are met, there will be time to concentrate on less tangible, but equally important projects, including pre-school education. It requires awareness building already now, as the process is time-consuming. Thus, the EveryChild focus on education needs awareness should be continued and strengthened.

An example of good local government practice is Glogovc, where municipal discussion was held to find a solution and funds for centres. EveryChild which monitored the situation in the community and pushed for decision was instrumental in this. The centre in Glogovc has now been working for a year, as a project funded from general municipality budget.

The Centres

The most visible result of the project are the running centres. This section analyses several key aspects related to their functioning.

The facilities

The centres are normally located in schools. Among the visited three centres one, in Mahalla, Klina was placed in a private building, leased for the needs of the centre in exchange of the renovation. The centres operate in dedicated rooms. They are very well equipped (certainly better than similar Polish centres and similarly to the state pre-schools in Kosova). They have wooden furniture (tables, chairs, cabinets), books, education games, drawing materials. The walls are colourfully decorated, often with works done by the children.

The centres I saw lacked specially designed outside playgrounds, even though the space for it is certainly there. One of the teachers declared it goes outside with the children, but it is quite difficult for her alone to arrange this. A teacher in another centre said she likes going out with children, especially as older kids from the school then come and help her with the younger

ones. It maybe useful to propagate this idea to promote voluntary work among the schoolchildren.

The classes I participated in were not attended by many 3-4 year olds. They may be too small and could feel lost in a big school which holds the centre rooms. It would be helpful to ask mothers to come with the younger children. This would not also encourage children participation but also engage the women in the working of the centres.

More young kids were present in Mahalla, perhaps thanks to the small size of the building. Another reason could be a different, more free-form approach by the teacher there. The children could feel more at ease thanks to that.

Rest and hygiene

In the centres visited there was no rest place for children. In two of the cases it was a direct consequence of a small amount of room available, but also of the fact the children only come to the centre for two hours per day. Still it would be useful to create such a “chill-out zone” in the future, which could be used not only for rest but also for reading or story-telling.

According to CB ECE curriculum, the toilets should be easily accessible and adapted to young children’s needs: *Each pre-school has a hygienic toilet facility. Children will be taught simple hygienic rules to keep the healthy.*

Only in one of the centres visited (Mahalla) the toilet was close to the room, and children were free to use it easily. In the remaining three centres, the children use the school toilet and the teacher cannot always help them. Young children often need such help, also, when they go alone, they cannot be taught hygienic behaviour, like washing hands.

Some of the standards, toilets including, are difficult to meet in a country like Kosovo. It is worth seeking temporary solutions. For example, parents could help in assisting the children.

Attendance

Attendance is very big, there is no problem of children not turning up for the classes. On the contrary, a teacher sometimes must take care of as many as 20 children, and in one case the class reached 34 children. The teachers agree to such a big number of children coming. They know it negatively influences the quality the sessions, but they choose the lesser evil by excluding as little children as possible.

The work with children

The assistants included in the evaluation declared they liked their work. They felt special to be selected among other candidates. Their main source of satisfaction was the progress of the children, and observing the multi-dimensional developments of their “students”.

The teachers appreciate that EveryChild created them a good working conditions: furniture, materials necessary and other equipment.

One difficulty they mentioned was *being left alone in planning the classes*. The teacher complained she has no-one to consult.

The numerousness of the children is another problem. Large attendance makes good classes difficult to arrange, but the teachers feel it is unfair to refuse attendance to some kids.

Another problem is, as always, the finances. It happens that the teachers get their wages with delays, and those teachers who are paid by the parents complain of free-riding by some of the contributors.

In two of the cases observed, the assistants ran the classes in a “school-like” manner: for example they asked children question, and they answered all together. The children spent quite a long time sitting in chairs, most did the same, or at least were advised by the teachers to do so. It could be a result of a limited space and large number of children present.

Another example was drawing: the assistants told the children what to do, they were helping them with more difficult elements. It is a common practice in regular kindergartens, especially if the work is later put on display. The teachers want the works to be as “pretty” as possible, as the drawings are also a display of the quality of their work. But according to the CB ECE principles, stimulating the children creativity is much more important, and it would be useful to discuss the matter with the assistants. It is better for the work to be a child’s own, rather than outright “pretty”.

In Mahalla centre, the children were spread out in several small groups. In one they were browsing books, a few boys played with bricks, and the teacher walked from one group to another. In that way, the teacher (perhaps intuitively) used the method of small playgroups, and the children had an opportunity to develop their interests and learn by playing.

It is worth noting that the assistant was male in that centre. This goes against the general prejudice that women are specially suited for pre-school work.

I did not see any special welcome or good-bye ceremony. In many pre-schools there is a special ceremony to start and end the classes: for example, everyone sings a song, holding each others’ hands. This helps to draw limits to the activity and allows to include the shy children. It may be useful to introduce such ritual. Possibly some teachers try to do it, but with the big number of children it could be difficult.

Reading books

Even though books are universally present in the centres I rarely saw children freely using them. I also have not seen the teacher reading aloud. Reading aloud should be promoted, as, according to the education research, frequent reading positively influences child’s development.²

² <http://www.calapolskaczytadzieciom.pl> is a Polish NGO, which campaigns for reading aloud to kids. According to their research, reading.

- Creates a bond between the adult and the child
- It promotes emotional development of the child
- It develops the language, memory and imagination
- It teaches thinking and improves concentration
- It strengthens self-esteem
- It widens general knowledge
- It helps in formal studies
- It promotes moral values, and helps in upbringing

Promoting reading could also strengthen the influence of CB ECE project on the Literacy Project. The child's reading custom would spill-over to parents also, especially those involved in the Literacy Project. This would be a good chance to improve the adults' reading skills also. An example of a good practice is Mahalla (Klina) centre (again), where a library, is located in the same building as the centre, and mothers read books together with the children.

Documentation

The assistants working in the centres run documentation concerning every child (description of their development), according to the standards passed on by EveryChild organisation. The teachers note if a child participates in games, has good contacts with peers, how his/hers vocabulary is developing, etc. The documentation includes both facts and opinions of the teachers.

It can be assumed that running such documentation could be a significant burden for the assistants, especially, as many as 20 children must be described by one teacher.

Cooperation with parents, local community involvement

According to the MEST education strategy, *every education institution should be aware of that without a good cooperation with families there can never be a successful work in education process, so, one of the priorities of the work of each institution should be effort to a good cooperation. In order to achieve this close cooperation as soon as possible we recommend as the following:*

- *Each preschool institution to have established Parents' Council.*
- *Each preschool institution and pre-primary classes to put friendly signs for parents!*
- *Put the work of all the children on the walls.*

In every centre parents' council was created, children's work is displayed on the walls, the CB centres apparently took the MEST guidelines seriously.

Judging by the observation and interviews, it can be claimed that the parents have a very positive attitude towards the centres and the fact that their children attend them. The parents notice positive changes in their children's behaviour. They see the children becoming less shy, more active, they invent new games. They claim their children like going to the centres.

As one of the local coordinators noticed, the parents provided *moral support*. In some of the centres they also pay the assistants' salaries, in others they pay for transport of the children.

However, when teachers salaries depend on the parents' donations, an immediate weakness of the solution shows. Timely payments towards the centres are a major challenge for many of the parents: *It happens to parents that they start paying for one, two or three months and then they give up because they do not have the money. Then, they withdraw their children from a centre* (Local coordinator)

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- It prevents TV and computer games addiction
 - It prevents from mass culture threats
 - It shapes the reading and studying custom for life.

In one village the school's headmaster had to collect money from teachers to pay the centre's assistant, as the parents failed to pay.

It must be stressed, however, that parents can help the centres in many other ways than just paying towards the assistants' salaries. Many of them are unemployed, and they have their time to spare.

It is thus worth to encourage the teachers to move farther than the MEST strategy states, and to make them engage the parents more. They could.

- Invite parents to participate in classes, as voluntary workers.
- Organise informal meetings, parties with parents.
- Make use of the parents' skills (often idle after years of unemployment): eg ask them to build a playground, using old tires and wood (both almost free, and easily obtainable).
- Organise an event or outing together with the parents.

An example of a good practice in that respect could be building of the staircase railing by the entrance to the centre by the parents of the children in Istog.

While the teachers certainly have their own thoughts and ideas, but it seems they lack confidence in dealing with their relationship with the parents.

Engaging the parents in the centre's activities will bring results later, as the parents remain active also when their children go to school. Additionally, persistently unemployed parents gain both self respect and respect and pride of their children, when they see their fathers and mothers doing something productive.

Finally, when the centre assistant enjoys practical support of the parents, raising community awareness of pre-school education is easier. The idea is to open the centre to the outside world. The teacher could.

- Let the children visit other places in a village.
- Invite "celebrities" to the centre to run classes for a day: a policeman, a doctor etc.
- Organise open days in the centre – invite young children with their mothers or other neighbours;
- Organise an event for the whole community, a spectacle, show, sports competition, etc.

Thanks to such action, the pre-school centre could become also a culture centre for all the locals. Most of the activities mentioned do not require *any* financial support from anyone, just some help from the parents.

EveryChild organisation

Evaluating the Phase 3 of the project it is crucial to compare the plans with their realisation.

There were three centres established in Istog municipality during this project phase, and three other places around the country were defined, but EveryChild refrained from opening them due to external circumstances.

One of the reasons behind limiting the scope of the programme was inadequate time and resources to address the local government decision inertia. Apart from the technical preparations, equipment of the centres and training of the teachers, the work with local authorities is equally important, and, sometimes, more time consuming. While opening the new centres would have been easy, given the resources available, ensuring their sustainability would be much more difficult: *Foundation has to have a time and possibility to talk to local community and to those that are behind a centre (...), they need enough time to work with a municipality.*

The experience of EveryChild staff suggests that the planning phase, and the period during which the assistants' salaries are financed by the organisation must be longer.

EveryChild not only opens and finances the centres – provides equipment and pays the teachers' wages. It also deals with "quality assurance", which was one of the Phase 3 tasks. EveryChild coordinators visit the centres regularly; some of the locations are visited more often because of the problems arising. The coordinators monitor assistants' work with children, give them feedback and *recommendations. Coordinators also visit families or arrange meeting with parents.* Finally, the foundation's representatives work with municipalities to find out a sustainable and mutually acceptable solution for the centres.

As the number of the centres and locations grows, coordinating the project and ensuring sufficient quality becomes more difficult for the staff, especially, as the closest centre is 40 minutes drive from the EveryChild headquarters. *It is very hard to be in 7 municipalities, to organise training everywhere, and to visit them regularly.*

This problem, however can be seen as a consequence of organisation's success, especially as most of these centres are good ones. This is not our opinion, but opinion that we get from teachers, from authorities, from parents (words of an EveryChild employer).

One idea to streamline the quality maintenance is to transfer more responsibilities to local coordinator, to train them, and to monitor the local implementation of the project through them. Local coordinators are usually engaged in other projects too, which could pose a problem with such a solution. Alternatively, someone from the local education structures (eg a primary school teacher) could be trained to be a coordinator.

An example of good practice is Klina municipality, where a local community leader is the local coordinator. She knows local problems, and the decision makers. The coordinator visited the local school to check on the progress of the centre's "alumni". Thus, the local coordinator can influence the decision makers, which was confirmed by the fact that the municipality's pre-school department representative (along with the coordinator) were among few present at the EveryChild-organised workshop.

The main problem for EveryChild is ensuring sustainability of the centres: how to ensure that these centres that have been established and they are integrated they will get support from local institutions?

Many actions were taken to address the issue: EveryChild representatives meet local authorities, they take part in drafting the pre-school education law, they organised a workshop for the local governments. Even though the foundation hopes that *these existing centres will be supported by local authorities*, the local authorities admit that running the centres pose a

major difficulty due to their stretched finances. The question of sustainability has to remain unanswered (or at least unanswered positively).

Basing on the data collected, it appears that in the following phases, EveryChild should concentrate more on systemic actions relating to the alternative pre-school education.

- Raising awareness of the decision makers responsible for pre-school education. Cooperation in drafting the legal framework for CB ECE, eg specifying the qualification standards for the teachers, or writing curricula for the CB ECE.
- Training the teachers, and thus creating the standards for professional excellence for CB ECE teachers.
- Spreading out experiences and solutions proven in Kosova.
- Creating the network, or institutionalising the cooperation for pre-school education.

The above points will be tackled in turn below.

Cooperation with the decision makers

The role that EveryChild could play in raising the awareness of the decision makers was described in the chapter on MEST. It is worth stressing the achievements so far.

We have increased awareness that there are different alternative forms of education and now people know there is no need for a beautiful building, quality staff and very high investments to help children. You just need to be creative and you can help them. We showed the MEST other solutions, that exists somewhere else, not only the formal pre-school education.

Thanks to our activities MEST and local authorities know now about CB ECE, they have this education in their plans, agendas and it is a big achievement.

On the other hand, there are several problems that must be addressed. From MEST's point of view, one problem is the qualification level of the CB ECE staff. According to one of the local government's representatives, *municipality can employ the staff, but MEST doesn't accept them*. Perhaps it will be necessary to work out common criteria, acceptable by the ministry and the other sides, which must be fulfilled by the CB ECE employees. They would be included in the CB ECE "product manual".

Before the concrete steps are taken, and formal solutions adopted, *there has to be parallel work with municipality and MEST*, as mentioned by an EveryChild staff member.

Teachers' training

EveryChild so far responsible for training the teachers in *Step by Step* method. These were typically local-level trainings with teachers from one centre or area. The assistants claim the training was very useful.

Further training should certainly be recommended, as it is key for quality maintenance. It is worthwhile to consider other, more effective modes of training. Possibly, it would be better to run one nation-wide course in a year, instead of conducting several local trainings. The Polish experience shows such nationwide trainings were very attractive for the teachers. They felt appreciated, and the training was seen as a perk. Additionally, during such courses the teachers can swap experience, they see they are a part of a bigger network and non-local community.

Because CB ECE is directed to the rural areas, some trainings specifically adopted to rural needs could be useful:

- Work methods with mixed-age groups – training modules exist, which describe the mode of high-quality work with children of various ages, suitable for their development.
- The use of natural and cheap (recycled) materials for making toys and organising games with children. It seems to make sense to acquaint the teachers with the general idea and the assumptions, and show the methods and examples after. The Polish example shows that parents who do not know why such materials are used, are often disappointed thinking their children “play with trash” or have to settle for a poor-quality toys.
- Finally it is important to train the teachers in efficient cooperation with the parents – how to ask for help, encourage participation, and otherwise make them more active. International experience shows it is not easy and takes time, but the sole existence of CB ECE crucially depends on the parents’ participation. The parents can do voluntary work for the centres and learn useful skills themselves.

It would be advisable to get MEST official approval for the EveryChild’s trainings. Thus, such trainings would be mainstreamed into the official system of teachers’ professional development. It would be yet another factor strengthening the CB ECE position as a legally-recognised form of pre-school education. This should help EveryChild to cooperate also with universities, so far uninterested and unhelpful for the alternative forms of pre-school education. With MEST-endorsed trainings in place, the universities could well invite the EveryChild experts’ skills in their own courses.

Spreading out experiences and solutions proven in Kosova

An example of a good practice in this respect is the workshop organised for the municipalities, also attended by the ministry representatives. The attendants expressed interest in future meetings of such kind, yet higher turn-out would be welcome.

Another idea is a publication including the current experience and advice for the local governments interested in CB ECE.

Building the network

It appears that the natural consequence of the EveryChild progress so far will be building of a wider network. When the latter becomes reality would support efficient cooperation with the education authorities, ensure the quality of pre-school education, and raise the awareness of pre-school education importance of all the Kosovars, including the decision makers. including. The network would allow for joining the forces of organisations and institutions acting on that field, especially as there is a need to consolidate the preschool education system, in which community-based ECE are the key to including more children from rural areas and poor areas.

EveryChild worker sees one more function for such a network: We think about a network of the CB ECE centres, not only those created by EveryChild but also supported from other NGOs. The network that can manage all the CB centres, on the national level.

The network linking all NGOs working in the field of pre-school education makes sense because it is exactly such organisations which *have played a vital role as an interlocutor between communities and the State*³. By creating such a network NGOs' position and reach would be strengthened.

But it is of an utmost importance that the network included not only the NGOs. It is worthwhile to build the cross-sector network, basing for example on the earlier functioning steering group. It would be good to consider building the network on several levels, with slightly different, but complimentary goals and tasks.

The net around a centre – or people interested in the centre functioning: the parents, the local primary school teachers. As noticed by one of the foundation' coordinators in creating such net, *it depends a lot on a assistant. If an assistant works with parents, contacts them, then their awareness will be higher*. A network created around a particular centre opens the latter on local community needs. Thanks to that the people start to understand that they are the true owners of the centre and that they are responsible for what is going on in it.

Local, municipality network - people working, or concerned about education in a municipality. Over time, such a network could become a local education council, and could participate in education strategy for the local authorities.

National network – including the institutions and organisations working for pre-school education. It would *develop national mechanisms that would continue the development of established centres*. Over time, the net could act an association (legal body, national association / charity) fighting for external or internal funding.

³ UNICEF report, page.13

Conclusions and recommendations

- Community Based Early Childhood Education project, given the social, economic and political environment of Kosova, seems very efficient and it is worth to be continued, especially as the country has many regions where CB ECE is very needed. The project helps in children development, as confirmed by primary school teachers, not associated with the program. The program has the acceptance of the local authorities, where the centres are located.
- During the few years of existence of EveryChild Kosova, there has been a noticeable change in the central education authorities regarding CB ECE, and the organisation was instrumental in this change. Currently MEST recommends this form of education and encourages the municipalities to co-finance the centres.
- Local municipalities, which have co-operated with EveryChild are satisfied and grateful for the help in developing the pre-school education on their grounds. But it is difficult to widen the reach of the project and create new centres, because the municipalities are – as they say – not able to finance such education themselves.

I advice taking into account the following recommendations, which should support realisation of the future activities of EveryChild

- Close cooperation with MEST is important. As both the strategy and the upcoming law take into account CB ECE, one can assume the cooperation with MEST to develop further, but EveryChild should take an active role of a consultant and expert in CB ECE. Draft law on preschool education – although it goes into a good direction (and is in line with EU standards), is quite general and calls for further legislation and regulation work. It can be an important role of EveryChild and other identified stake-holders to prepare these additional acts, regulations etc.
- It would be good if UNICEF supported EveryChild in CB ECE financing negotiations with the ministry as an important, universally recognised international partner.
- More contacts with municipalities are needed, to work on their awareness, using good practice examples from the collaboration experience so far. The participation of the local governments in discussions and meetings should aid implementation of the new law and strategy.
- Further PR activity is recommended, on various levels. EveryChild employers should organise meetings, seminars and workshops, invite important people to see the centres working. Pre-school education promotion will take time, especially as there is much to do also in other basic areas, like health, gender equality.
- Because the CB ECE projects have been run since 1999 also by other organisations, it would be good to collect and publish experience and proven solutions, and to warn of pitfalls.
- Establishing a network and consolidating all the stakeholders that in future is advisable, as it can form an association of different approaches to ECE. It would also help to advocate for and implement CB ECE provisions in Kosova.
- Further support for existing centres is of utmost importance. Still some innovations could be introduced: to open centres for other local initiatives and needs, involvement of parents etc. Further training of the assistants working in the centres.