

# Early Childhood Care and Education

a community owned agenda





# FOREWORD

A decade and a half of experience and praxis has significantly contributed to our understanding a series of patterns of living and learning in communities we engage with. Though our concern from the very beginning has been in impacting the situation of child labour, we realise that the treatment of this issue or problem confounding and blocking present day existence essentially has to move away from a symptomatic cure to that of systemic understanding and engaging. This is true for most development related work MAYA has been engaged with, principally in the context of socially disadvantaged communities.

Consolidating our prior experience and outlining future directions has led to a more comprehensive and integrated strategy of work in addressing early childhood related issues and addressing the rights of our children towards quality care and education. This necessitates strengthening people's articulations through building local community institutions and facilitating towards realizing community ownership of the same.

We believe child care is native to all communities. The Early Childhood Care and Education approach of MAYA builds on inherent capacities of communities starting from where they are. The stakeholders engage in various processes of institutionalising community ownership beginning from discussion on the existing situation and concerns of early childcare in the community, moving towards articulating and building a collective vision of caring for their children.

The approach is not proposed to be a substitute for absolving the state of its responsibility, instead is intended to call for a redefinition of the existing perspective of early childhood care and education. The publication also reflects the efforts and resolve of several communities across the districts of Bangalore Urban and Rural, towards addressing issues of early childhood care and education with immediacy, efficiency and sustainability.

The organisation of the publication follows dimensions that have emerged from our experiences from within the programme:

- Foreword
- Existing scenario of ECCE
  - ECCE in today's context of education & development
  - ECCE in India
- An alternate approach
- MAYA and Early Childhood Care & Education
  - Philosophical Premise & Concept
  - Operationalising its approach to ECCE (Organisational approach/ pedagogical approach/child care approach)
- Impact, Challenges & Future Directions



# EXISTING SCENA





# ECCE IN TODAY'S CONTEXT OF EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT

In the present scenario so deeply resonant of extensive deliberations focussing on the rights of all children and universalisation of education, it would seem that issues of Early Childhood Care & Education<sup>1</sup> have been appropriately addressed. Even though significantly discussed and debated in various fora, ECCE today continues to find highly varied interpretations and definitions; largely perceived as a luxury issue, unaffordable to the majority. Further any governmental intervention in this regard almost always has adopted a predominantly welfarist approach.

Moving towards evolving a more universally accepted notion of ECCE, recent attempts have sought to bring to the fore perceived conflicts - that limit interventions in this area. The most commonly observed 'tension' is understood to be that of assigning ECCE to either a public or private domain. Across the world, there are majority instances of ECCE being addressed as either a state or a family responsibility; while only a few countries advocate complementary roles of the State and family - the approach being largely determined by the socio-political and economic proclivity of the State.

Closely related to such an approach is divergence with reference to approaching ECCE either in terms of a vulnerability perspective or as an education-centred investment for the future. The former approach addresses aspects of health, nutrition, etc., based on a view of early childhood as an age that primarily requires focussing on care and is usually targeted at the younger age group of 0-3 yrs, through services/schemes offered to families. In instances where early childhood is regarded as a preparatory phase for children before entering primary preschool, aspects related to acquiring necessary preschool-readiness skills are emphasised and facilitated in centres, usually located outside the homes.

Associated with these 'divergent' perspectives, are aspects of reach and structural arrangements for ECCE that are also found to vary across different initiatives. Viewing ECCE as requiring a focus on care and health calls for an arrangement where the onus lies with the family and is supported by the Health, Family/Social Welfare or Women & Child Department (as the case may be); furthermore, the target age-group of such efforts are mostly the under 3s. On the other hand, initiatives that perceive early childhood as children's transition to a formal primary preschool mainly work with the over 3s and a close collaboration with the Education Dept may be seen. In addition to influencing the nature and proportion of financial allocation, the perspective also has a bearing on the kind of benefits/provisions for working parents in terms of leave, housing, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Early Childhood Care & Education' as used in this document seeks to include an integrated understanding of early childhood care, education and other dimensions of the child's overall development, as described in subsequent sections of the document.

# EXISTING SCENARIO OF ECCE

## ECCE IN TODAY'S CONTEXT OF EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT


In the last two decades, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Dakar Framework (among other international instruments) have also played a key role in emphasising the need to focus on early childhood as a significant phase of children's education and development. Interventions that are thus founded on such a rights perspective are seen to focus rather on the universalisation of educational opportunities clearly distinguishing from the need of care, so critical for the age group below six years of age. This is in contrast to other initiatives, still predominant in certain areas, which tend to adopt a limited problem-solving approach for this age-group (for e.g. those remediating a particular vitamin or nutritional deficiency or efforts to register births in isolation of addressing the environment in which children are born).

Though each of the above-mentioned approaches stemming from a rights perspective, an investment perspective or in terms of treating ECCE in the public/private domain may not necessarily be found as mono-focal interventions, they often manifest as 'tensions', leading to a choice of one approach over another. There are only a few instances of nations that have integrated the different perspectives in a reinforcing manner. The purpose of highlighting these perspectives as alternatives here is rather to recognise the underlying assumptions, the determining influences of various historical, cultural, socio-political and economic factors, and most significantly, the strong bearing they have on resultant structural arrangements, impact in terms of scale & reach and financial allocation for ECCE.

Moreover, what is underscored is the need to reposition ECCE as a significant phase in itself, necessary for the healthy growth, education and development; rather than merely as a compensatory mechanism for working parents or a period for developing preschool-readiness skills, etc. As many practitioners and proponents of ECCE aver, it is the primary phase to attend appropriately to children from the beginning, and strengthen the contexts within which they spend their crucial early years; the foundation for all further social restructuring processes. The imperative therefore for a universal, integrated and inclusive approach to ECCE, that is strongly rooted in the local context, while drawing significantly from the larger scenario.



# ECCE IN INDIA



Closer home, the issue of early childhood care and education has been in discussion since the 60s-70s, when the extent of malnourishment was recognised as a severe problem in the country. The National Policy for Children outlined its primary goal to 'provide adequate services for children, both before and after birth and throughout the period of growth to ensure their full physical, mental and social development'. It is in this context that the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) was first proposed in 1975 by the Dept of Women and Child Development as a scheme for the wellbeing of children under 6 yrs, particularly for socially and economically disadvantaged communities.

Reviewing the ICDS initiative within the context of the earlier-mentioned perspectives of ECCE highlights a premise that encompasses aspects of care (health, nutrition) and education with a view to universalise these services, at least in intent. It operates from the premise of a vulnerability perspective that views 0-6 yr old children from low-income families as those requiring particular care and attention in terms of health and nutrition. The scheme also intends to offer preschool education for the 3-6 yr olds and provide better linkages with the local (Govt) primary preschools. The ICDS primarily functions through centres '*anganwadis*' that engage a teacher and a helper.

Despite this however, it is important to note that the ICDS programme covers only 22 percent of the total eligible population of 0-6 yrs. Even when coupled with children enrolled in private-sector/voluntary initiatives (including family day-care homes, nurseries, kindergartens and pre-primary classes), the total enrolment of 3-6 yr old children is estimated to be 2.23 crores, accounting for only about 20 percent of the children in this age group (Report of the Committee on ECE, MHRD, GOI; 2004).

Over the years, there have also been other initiatives from the state, private and voluntary sectors in the area of early childhood care and education. Today, it is not uncommon to find that as families in slums and low-income areas become upwardly mobile (on the monetary scale), they tend to opt for the rapidly mushrooming private ECCE facilities. Yet, the role of the ICDS as an initiative of scale that today boasts of being the largest State-driven initiative worldwide to address the needs of children aged 0-6 yrs - cannot be ignored.



# ECCE IN INDIA

The ICDS initiative, though well-intended, originates from a deficit model (focusing on what people are assumed to lack both materially and in terms of knowledge and skills) and aims towards the provision of health and nutrition services to low-income families. Furthermore, the lack of effective materialisation of convergent services between different departments ensures that such an approach not only magnifies the role of the State as the provider, it also compels families and communities to function as mere recipients. The tendency of the resultant programme has been to be message-driven. Little or almost no time is spent on finding out what parents and other community members already know and do; instead all efforts are geared towards 'educating' parents and community members about child development.

Additionally, the stated focus of the ICDS on preschool education has not translated into a structural continuum that ensures children's enrolment from anganwadi to preschool. The lack of coherence and absence of similar orientation/organisation of these two services makes the transition for children and families a fractured and most often imposed process. There are practically no instances of joint pre-service or in-service training for teachers from the anganwadis and preschools that could support in building a common vision and approach to learning. The visibly lower status and importance accorded to anganwadi workers in relation to their counterpart Govt school teachers, is further reinforced by lower educational qualification requirements for the former and considerable salary differentials between the two groups. This difference between the two services and the functionaries is so stark that any attempt for increased cooperation today might be perceived as a threat. This serves as a crucial institutional barrier for them to even consider working together, even if other factors such as geographical proximity were to be favourable. Thus, while preschool education is cited as a key objective of the ICDS programme, the absence of an integrated approach of ECCE and primary education in terms of either a perspective or accompanying supportive structures leaves this flagrantly unaddressed.

In other countries -- including the Nordic countries and parts of Italy -- the transition to preschool is understood differently. Childhood is viewed as a phase of life with intrinsic value (at least as important as any other phase) which should not be focused on acquiring knowledge and skills in preparation for primary school. The child is regarded as a competent and active learner, capable of both formulating theories about the world and using diverse situations and opportunities to foster learning (Sweden CN, 1999). ECEC seeks to promote children's multi-dimensional development and learning, but purposefully de-emphasises preschool-oriented pedagogy (Bo, 1993; Gunnarsson, 1993). Although these settings are viewed as educational, they are not designed to prepare children for compulsory preschooling, and quite different teaching and learning traditions have developed in the two sectors. On the other hand, these countries recognise the importance for children to possess some of the skills and learning strategies they will need in primary school, and the issue of co-operation between ECEC and compulsory preschooling, and children's transitions, has been on the agenda for many years (Bergman, 1993). Recently, there have been moves toward closer collaboration between ECEC services and the preschools, which has led to cross-influences on the pedagogy adopted in both sectors.

**HAND IN HAND: Improving the links between ECEC and preschools in OECD countries**

Michelle J. Neuman, May 2002

# ECCE IN INDIA

The Government of India began implementing the Integrated Child Development Services Programme (ICDS) in 1974. This programme provides an integrated package of health, nutrition, and early education services to children up to six years of age from disadvantaged households.....

The main shortcomings of the existing programme are identified below. First, overall government investment in the programme has been inadequate. In addition, ICDS has focused on quantity rather than quality, expanding rapidly in terms of geographical coverage while under-funding inputs, in particular the training of frontline service providers. The targeting of children up to three years of age has been particularly poor, and the coverage of the most vulnerable households in communities covered by the project has been inadequate. The programme is intended to actively involve beneficiaries and integrate the delivery of services. However, in practice, it has tended to be almost exclusively government owned and managed, with limited involvement of the public and the health and education bureaucracies. Finally, the programme has failed to replicate the successes of other early childhood development programmes of both the government and non-governmental organizations in the country, mainly because of rigidities in personnel and programming approaches.

## **World Bank support for early childhood development:**

### **Case studies from Kenya, India, & the Philippines**

**Jayshree Balachander, with the World Bank Resident**

**Mission Philippines in Pasig City, Philippines.**

As mentioned earlier, though the ICDS is the single largest State initiative, several reports both from within and outside the Govt indicate its limited impact and reach in terms of age-group and population. It is posited here that these and other limitations are implicit in the very design of the ICDS programme that is so strongly rooted in a vulnerability perspective and rests heavily on the delivery mechanisms of the State. Consequently, the effectiveness of the programme is measured by the presence of the facility rather than in terms of meeting the specific needs of the particular community. Furthermore, while there are serious issues related to poor quality of facilities provided by the ICDS programme, this document perceives and discusses them as a consequence of earlier-mentioned structural issues of the scheme; rather than as issues that can be viewed or addressed in isolation.



# ECCE IN INDIA

Typically, the description of quality of a particular programme or facility refers to its quantitative, physical and infrastructural aspects, which concur with certain preset standards. The ICDS is no exception in this regard. When projected as the largest State-run early childhood initiative, the aspects described are predominantly in terms of number of anganwadis, enrolment figures, etc. Notwithstanding that such quantitative aspects are vital to take into account when considering large-scale impact, the mere presence of these facilities as static centres would be grossly inadequate to address early childhood care and education.

Though perhaps initially well-intended, the standards laid down by the ICDS have today become a serious limitation to realising the very purpose of this programme. For instance, norms - with regard to the minimum population size or other aspects related to physical and infrastructural aspects - prescribed for opening of anganwadis are increasingly extraneous in today's reality of growing migration from rural to urban areas in search of employment<sup>2</sup>. When first established, these guidelines may have exercised certain validity in the context of those times. However, their subsequent transplantation, devoid of an ongoing review process in relation to changing communities and their aspirations, is based on the erroneous assumption that meeting these standards would be representative of quality.

The one-size-fits-all premise of the ICDS programme views children in all circumstances and environments as the same. As will be agreed, this is not the case in reality. Children particularly from socially and economically disadvantaged communities - grow up in a wide variety of different physical, social and cultural circumstances. However much there is a search for the one model that will serve everyone, it needs to be recognised that there is no one ideal way to bring up children. Understanding local practices and patterns and incorporating that knowledge into programs is crucial if ECCE programmes are to serve the variety of children and families and circumstances that any macro-level programme is bound to encompass.

It is believed that issues related to irregularities in distribution of supplementary nutrition or inflated / duplication of enrolment figures are infact the result of such an input-driven approach; rather than problems that can be addressed in isolation. The attitude and disposition of functionaries - be it anganwadi workers, helpers, supervisors or others - to ensure that their 'targets' are met or atleast documented in that manner, is a natural outcome of operating within such a framework. Therefore, rather than single out functionaries, there is a need to alter the perspective of ECCE underlying this State-wide initiative.

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<sup>2</sup> An aspect also identified and suggested by the Report of the Committee on ECE, MHRD, GOI (2004). "It is clearly time to review, for example, ICDS norms for opening of Anganwadis, which were laid down in 1974."



# AN ALTERNATE APPROACH



**T**he Yequana tribals of South Venezuela are far removed from modern civilisation. Known locally as makiritare or 'men of the river', they are famed and respected for their skill as canoeists and fishermen and their life is closely associated with the river. But what has drawn the attention of the civilised world is the Yequana tribe's method of child-rearing.

From the moment a baby is born, it is constantly in the arms of either its mother, or some other adult. Never left alone, it is carried about everywhere and thus, the child is constantly in touch with the sounds, sensation and pace of human life. Once it is old enough to walk, the adults - having great faith in the child's self-preservation instincts - leave it alone to play without supervision. The child is not forbidden from doing anything and is even allowed to handle sharp instruments and climb over fallen trees! Surprisingly, there are no accidents! As the child enters adolescence, there is no adjustment problem whatsoever.

The success of this method of baby-care is borne out by the fact that the Yequanas are a happy and well-adjusted people.

**A** review of the ICDS at this juncture is deemed pertinent and important, before proceeding to propose the need for an alternate approach to effect a meaningful early childhood experience on a large-scale. Recent reports from the Govt and other experienced institutions in this field also iterate the limitations of the present functioning of the scheme, emphasising the need for change<sup>3</sup>. Not denying the significance of the State's role, such a review rather emphasises the need to redefine the role of any secondary stakeholder - the State or other organisations/institutions - as facilitators, rather than providers.

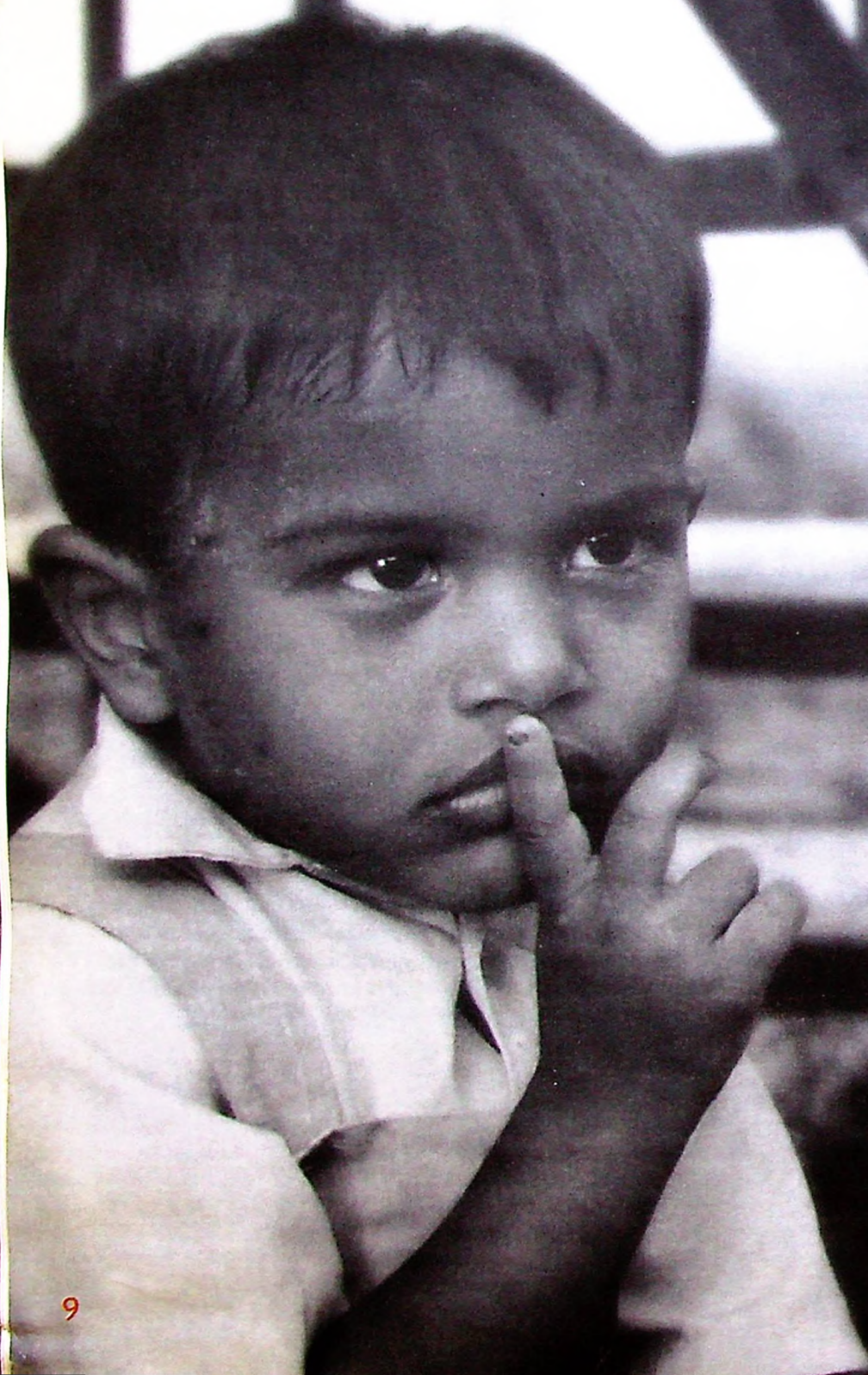
Amidst rapidly changing scenarios of livelihood and growing urbanisation, the fabric of life for low income groups in the urban, semi-urban and rural areas is coming under increasing stress; stretching the limits of traditional family and other social support systems. This coupled with severe limitations of existing State and private facilities for these communities, ensures that though the need for attention and care of the young is felt acutely by communities it remains unaddressed. Nonetheless, it is also crucial to recognise that people's lives are not fragmented as present-day welfare schemes/initiatives presuppose and often even entail.

The imperative thus for an approach that views ECCE as an important phase in itself; rooted in the culture and diversity of the particular community, while simultaneously supported to be prepared for future possibilities. An approach that builds on experiences and inherent capacities of communities, rather than attempt to 'train' parents and communities in childcare.

3 See (i) Report of the Committee on ECE, MHRD, Govt:2004;(ii) The ICDS in Karnataka, Kavitha Krishnamoorthy; FORCES - Karnataka Chapter Sutradhar, Bangalore:2004



# MAYA AND





# EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION

## **Philosophical premise and approach concept**

Initiated in 1989 as a development organisation focussing on the eradication of child labour, MAYA (Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness) has gradually consolidated its experiences and reflections to understand and address systemic causes of child labour; instead of only addressing local manifestations of these causes. The organisation's related experience with issues of poverty and empowerment further enabled a richer and more realistic understanding of socially and economically disadvantaged communities and the role of other stakeholders.

In its work with issues of early child care, the organisation functions in the belief that early child care is not a body of knowledge that can be designed by experts and disseminated irrespective of context or need; rather that every community can be facilitated to articulate its own need for early childcare and organise around that need through people-owned structures. MAYA perceives early child care as processes to be facilitated in exploring the child's care and learning needs in the context of their family and community, beginning with the understanding and practice of ECCE in each community. A core value of this process is building on the capacities of the community to articulate and directly address the needs of its children; a strength that is otherwise undermined by schemes that treat communities as mere recipients of external largesse. These assumptions and values define the framework of MAYA's approach for facilitating ownership among communities to effectively respond to the community's need.

In emphasising the role of secondary stakeholders as **facilitators** who respect cultural diversity and build on community capacities - MAYA takes into cognisance that it is not helpful to have romanticised views of the ways families and communities operate. In today's scenario of pressing economic demands and increasing insecurity of work, neglect of children in socially and economically disadvantaged communities is not uncommon. For interventions to truly impact children's well-being, there is a need therefore to understand these contextual realities and support communities in finding an appropriate balance between what exists and what they aspire for their children.





# MAYA AND EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION

The organisation holds that for ECCE to be facilitated on a model of scale that is appropriate to the specific context and need, it necessitates an approach with which to redefine the role and relationships between different stakeholders through the formation of **new institutional arrangements**.

In doing so, what is represented is not a zero-sum relationship between the State and communities. Rather, it goes beyond either a lesser role of the State or a condition where the state merely provides inputs within its existing bureaucratic framework, leaving the rest to be addressed by the community. Instead, what is proposed is a mutually-reinforcing relationship between various stakeholders that transcends traditional boundaries and terms of engagement mired in their inherent social and political inequities; rather forging a synergistic engagement, within a non-statal public sphere a space that represents a truly democratic alternative instead of merely an either/or role of the stakeholders.

In order to actualise this understanding and experience, the organisation has identified the significance of engendering such an **institutionalised process of ownership** for early childhood care and education to be addressed in a dynamic and relevant manner, with various stakeholders engaged in a continuous process of action and reflection.

Another key element governing MAYA's approach to early childhood care and education is its perspective of learning. It is believed that the present-day 'expert' paradigm and the corresponding emphasis on knowledge-transfer and rote-learning limits and, most often, prevents individuals from identifying and building their capabilities. Instead, as the organisation's experience has demonstrated, when communities articulate their collective vision of education, the fabric of learning shifts from one of static knowledge to one that is contextually appropriate and therefore dynamic.

## Operationalising its approach to ECCE

Recognising the imperative of institutionalisation, at a primary level MAYA seeks to first find a means of engagement between various stakeholders, moving on to then institutionalise this engagement. Given the inequalities in the existing social and political structure, mechanisms to facilitate a basis for articulation of diverse opinions of all stakeholders are perceived as critical to address factors that might otherwise set limits to working together. New institutional arrangements that enable terms of engagement between the stakeholders and are truly empowering for the community, instead of tokenistic participatory measures, are thus, the main focus of this effort.

In order that different stakeholders come together to discuss the issue of early childhood care and education, MAYA facilitates a process of dialogue to enable collective reflection and draw proactive responses, with regard to addressing children's well-being. This is perceived as important for the stakeholders to even consider each other as 'shared' stakeholders in the process of early childhood care.



**K**onadasapura village of Doddabahalalli Gram Panchayat is located 5kms from K.R.Puram within the East Taluk. As part of our data appraisal the need for an ECCE facility seemed essential to the team of ECCE facilitators, thereby expanding our work to this GP since May 2004. Although the village earlier housed a government supported anganwadi, it was discontinued due to the problems the village members encountered with the teacher who belonged to a nearby town. The anganwadi was then relocated to Nimbekaipura, a village at a close proximity. Subsequently members did make an attempt to renew the functioning of the anganwadi but it was denied on the basis of lack of community provided space, a prerequisite for sanctioning an anganwadi.

More than 2500 members inhabit the entire village, of which only two pockets were identified and surveyed, which contained a significant child population. Of the 347 households and 1800 population surveyed by the community volunteers, a total of 141 children were identified of which 118 remained at home in the absence of accessible facility for the younger children. Like most peri-urban areas around the city of Bangalore, Konadasapura has seen people moving into the village in search of employment. For the most part, adults here are employed in agricultural labour or as workers in nearby factories. Despite it being the largest village in the GP and the election of 3 members to the Panchayat from this village, the absence of any facility for younger children had remained a critical concern; forcing the mothers either to take their children to work or stay at home or leave them in the care of older siblings (who thus missed out on schooling). A preliminary visit and informal discussions with community members to assess the situation of ECCE, followed by an information survey (conducted by locally identified individuals) and comparison with secondary data sources such as the local office of the Women & Child Development Dept (DWCD) and the Gram Panchayat office aided a deeper understanding of the village. This interaction also helped identify individuals in the village who would play an active role in steering the process. In the case of Konadasapura, it was the GP president Nagamani who was instrumental in initiating the facility.

Sharing the collected information on the village at a Sabha (meeting) with community members and parents initiated a discussion and debate on the need for such a facility and possible ways of addressing it. Several communities having experienced welfarist interventions tend to expect another scheme to be delivered upon gathering for a meeting. The GP member's participation towards the process seemed to negate this effect. Nagamani took it upon herself to organise the identified parents, members of the two Stree Shakti Sanghas and the Yuvaka Sangha for the Makkala Sabha. She further substantiated aspects of community taking initiative as opposed to waiting for a scheme to be delivered. Yet another GP member, Laxmi, strongly advocated for the need of such a facility and the need for the community to take responsibility for its organization.

Further discussions resulted in a few interested community members keen to take the process forward. In addition to identifying the need for a local teacher, nominal fees to be paid by parents and ongoing support from the local community, the role of the larger community including that of MAYA, the State and other institutions was also addressed. The active interest taken by the two GP members subsequently saw the Sabha resulting in certain key decisions: the identification of a local teacher and an assistant teacher, a nominal admission fee of Rs 25/-fee and monthly fee of Rs 25/-to be paid by parents, a common space to be allocated by the community and other contributions from community members such as local sanghas, individual donors, etc. It was concluded that though the school could provide for its basic needs certain supplementary resources needed to be identified for its efficient functioning over a longer period of time. The preschool within the span of three months, has generated the teacher's salary without any financial support from outside, parents have contributed to the initiating costs, duly substituted the teacher on days of training, planned & budgeted for school requirements, supported teacher in purchasing and generating materials for the preschool and articulated their expectations from the school in turn marking out teacher respons

The varying pace of collective decision making in different local situations is reflective of the inherent diversity of their contexts and experiences determining their preparedness in addressing various development issues. Though often through our facilitation we realize that communities such as Konadasapura exposed to an active youth group & practices of women's self help group actively participate when compared to groups who lack such exposure. This group of women take pride in the fact that they were solely responsible in creating such a facility for themselves.





# ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH



# FINDING A MEANS OF ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

## Relevant & accurate early childhood information

The experience that any facility/service can be truly effective only when it responds to a specific need, coupled with the absence of an authentic and community-validated source of information, provides the basis for initiating a process of information-collection on early childhood care and education at the local level.

Utilising information as the basis to engage various stakeholders of the local administration (Taluk, Gram Panchayat), and the Women and Child Development Department results in initiating a discussion on early childhood care in their context and the collation of related-information. These discussions also identify the existing gaps in a facility for a certain GP. Based on this process of secondary data collection, villages (of the particular GP & taluka) that completely lack dedicated early childhood facilities/services are identified.

Having thus identified a need in these villages, a preliminary discussion involving some of the significant stakeholders (Anganwadi worker of a neighbouring village/ local Govt school teacher/SDMC<sup>4</sup> members/ GP members/village elders, etc) is facilitated. Their understanding of early childhood care and education, their experience and the perceived need for a facility is deliberated upon. This preparatory meeting also helps the village members identify a local volunteer to undertake the house-to-house survey that would constitute the primary data collection process while also cross-validating the already existing data.

This process of data collection and collation places different information pertaining to early childhood care and education in the context of identifying and addressing the specific need of the particular village as articulated by community members. This process therefore, also puts in perspective, the real purpose of collecting this information; to serve as a valid basis for engagement with stakeholders and to support local institutional structures to plan and implement, based on accurate and relevant information.

<sup>4</sup> SDMC refers to the school Development and Monitoring Committees comprising parents as elected members, instituted in each Govt school in Karnataka by the State Education Dept in 2001.

## FINDING A MEANS OF ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS





# MAKKALA ARAIKE MATHU SHIKSHANA SABHA

Following the process of data collection and initial discussion, a village-level meeting on the issue of early child care (Makkala Araike Mathu Shikshana Sabha) is facilitated; comprising all relevant stakeholders, particularly parents, local elected representatives, local government preschool teachers, SDMC members and other village elders. This meeting is organised with the support of the same locally identified volunteers at a place and time convenient for the stakeholders in that particular village.

The information collected (primary and secondary data) is collated and analysed prior to the meeting and then presented to the stakeholders at the meeting; in a manner that establishes the veracity of the information while also supporting the community to identify the need for addressing early childhood care and education in their context.

The framework underlying the facilitation of this meeting seeks to primarily establish the significance of each participant at the meeting, attempting thereby to overcome traditional barriers of gender, caste, religion, etc. that divide the community. The process of information-collection and the initial discussion with key stakeholders is shared at this meeting, before proceeding to present the information and place it for discussion. The information sharing helps provide the context for a discussion on the existing situation and concerns of early childcare in the community, moving towards articulating and building a collective vision of caring for their children. It also entails that the community considers its own practices and understanding of early child care.

Keeping in mind its specific priority as articulated by the community- in terms of care and preschool education, or a combination of the above aspects the community is supported in examining various possibilities to appropriately address this need. The joint decision of the community to initiate a preschool facility in the area to suit these needs is further elaborated in terms of personnel, material and other resources. A mapping exercise follows to determine how these resources can be met - within the community and using external support.

The exercise of mapping needs and resources takes the power of allocation of resources from a select few and brings it to the public domain where in true democratic practice; people get to decide the utilisation of available resources. This also brings with it a feeling of capability and empowerment to the community. The issue of early child care then becomes relevant as a public concern, necessitating the community to be the prime decision maker in organising and supporting the initiative.

In addition to enabling an understanding of the community's early child care needs and facilitating the articulation of their concerns, the Makkala Sabha also sets the basis for institutionalising the process of stakeholder ownership of early childcare, through formation of a village level parent structure.





The village of Girigowdanadoddi, Somanahalli GP of Uttarahalli hobli with 82 households with a population of 450 is the last outpost of the Bangalore Urban district. With access being restricted, the village does not enjoy many facilities except for a Government Lower Primary School. Catering to the population of 79 children, is the single Government Lower Primary School. On completing education till the fifth grade, the children have to go to Mookodlu or Kaggipura for higher studies which are about 3 and 5 kms respectively, away from the village. The main occupations are agriculture and casual labour. A quarry nearby also draws in migrant labourers from Tamil Nadu who often leave their children at home and go to work at the quarry. Many of the women travel to Bangalore city to work as domestic help. The government bus that visits it twice a day, is the only transport available; at other times, people need to walk the 2 kms to the main road in order to access any other transport.

There was an immediate and urgent need for full-time care for the children of 2-6 years as the nearest anganwadi was 1.5 kms away at Mookodlu. However, for reasons of accessibility and insufficient population, the request for an anganwadi was turned down by the Dept. of Women and Child welfare; since according to the ICDS norms, one anganwadi can be sanctioned only for a population of 1000. The people of Girigowdanadoddi therefore had to grapple with the lack of childcare on their own. For an anganwadi to be sanctioned the criterion for minimum population for the habitat is marked as thousand, thereby already eliminating any chances for access through anganwadis.

Because of its remoteness and size, Girigowdanadoddi is always tucked away from the notice of the public as well as the State administration leading to its continuous isolation and lack of services. While assessing the situation of early childcare in Somanahalli GP, the facilitators met with all the members of the Gram Panchayat, to discuss the issue and share our concept of community owned childcare.

As part of the initiation process, when the team member met with the GP President, Patlamma who was also Panchayat member for Girigowdanadoddi, was quick to respond to the issue of initiating this facility. The GP and the SDMC members had also been supportive and actively interested in the functioning of the local school, which had relatively good facilities for the children. An ex GP member, Gundanna keen on the facility, took it upon himself to organize a volunteer in the village to undertake a survey of the children in the 2-6 age group. 25 children were identified and a discussion among the GP member, SDMC member and few interested parents was conducted prior to the larger meeting in the village. People already enrolled to the idea of initiating such a facility in turn enrolled people to be present at the Makkala Araiike mattu Shikshana Sabha. Even during the Sabha, Gundanna played an important role in persuading the parents to pay a fee, explaining that the village could not otherwise access any child care from the government and that a nominal fee of Rs 25 was necessary. Ably supported by the local government school teacher and the SDMC president, the people of Girigowdanadoddi assembled to address the issue of childcare after a survey of the village by a local volunteer revealed that 28 children were of pre-school age without any facility.

Though there was an initial hesitation about parents sending food for their children and paying a fee; during the discussion, the entire community rallied together to support the preschool- donating mats, low benches, colours, toys etc. The govt. school teacher allotted a room within the govt school premises for the preschool. The relationship within the facility and the community members, were strengthened with subsequent processes of- mapping parents expectations, planning and budgeting with the parents, parents generating learning materials continually ensuring that parents in turn send their children very regularly to school with food and fees paid on time. The parent committee of the preschool and the local representative are very committed to the effective functioning of the facility which further strengthens the community's effort at childcare.

The approach to facilitating community ownership in creating the facility reveals that when communities have relevant information to act upon and are facilitated through contextualised and appropriate mechanisms, they are able to take responsibility for their immediate local needs. Girigowdanadoddi is just one among thousands of little villages scattered across the country- that are equally if not more remote and have no access to the services provided by the government. Girigowdanadoddi highlights the fact that community ownership does not come in tandem with schemes or edicts and does not require prior criterion to be fulfilled. Rather it is the simple coming together of people as a community to own and address their life issues wherever or whoever they may be.



# MAKKALA ARAIKE MATHU SHIKSHANA SABHA

Set 2.5 kms off the highway, Nagnayakanahalli in the Sommananhalli GP of the Uttarahalli hobli, is reached by a long winding road that cuts through the surrounding greenery till one reaches the group of 97 houses tucked away in the foliage. Further on are the two hamlets Gudipalya and Mallipalya. Access to these places is through the government run bus that comes in twice a day which in turn determines the timings for the Govt Lower Primary School. There are no other facilities in the village for children necessitating that older children walk a long distance to school while young children loiter and play around the village as they are not able to walk the required 2 kms to reach the nearest anganwadi.

There has been very little representation of the community's issues at the local administrative level. The tradition of appointing the member from a higher caste background has been followed even though there is only one family of the higher caste in the village and the rest of the people of the village belong to a 'lower' caste. Based on the secondary data collected in the Uttarahalli hobli it did appear the village required an efficient early child care & education facility, which was then reconfirmed by the GP President.

The School Development and Monitoring Committee of the local Government school primarily took up the responsibility of initiating a facility in the village. Ably supported by the local school teacher who was appreciative of the difference such a preschool facility would make to the continued education of village children, a survey was undertaken of the village and the neighbouring hamlets, identifying 70 preschool aged children. The parents, SDMC members, Stree Shakti Sangha members congregated to discuss the issue of Early Child Care in a Makkala Sabha.

This discussion on issues of ownership and accountability was a totally new perspective, triggered by a discussion on the issue of fees. Since the first reaction is a comparison of the community approach to the government run anganwadi, there was an intense discussion on what the community could determine for itself. A person donated Rs. 200 for any materials that needed to be purchased. The govt. school teacher later accommodated the preschool within the govt. school premises and the community run preschool began to function with a total of 26 children. The community of Nagnayakanahalli managed to run their preschool completely of their own volition for a period of three months before they initiated processes to strengthen their facility by seeking outside donor support.

The Makkala Sabha is crucial in that it marks the coming together of different stakeholders traditionally divided by various social and economic barriers on the issue of early childhood care. The equal emphasis on each individual to participate in the meeting, express opinions and arrive at a collective decision, binds the gathering into a 'community'. It also ensures that decision-making about such a critical issue is not the privilege of a favoured few but the right of every stakeholder; equally significantly, it ensures that all members present share the responsibility to realise this collective vision. The shared concern and will of the community to address its need for early childcare finds expression in the joint decision to share available and new resources while also assuming responsibility to mobilise externally whatever else might be required.



# MAKKALA ARAIKE MATHU SHIKSHANA SABHA

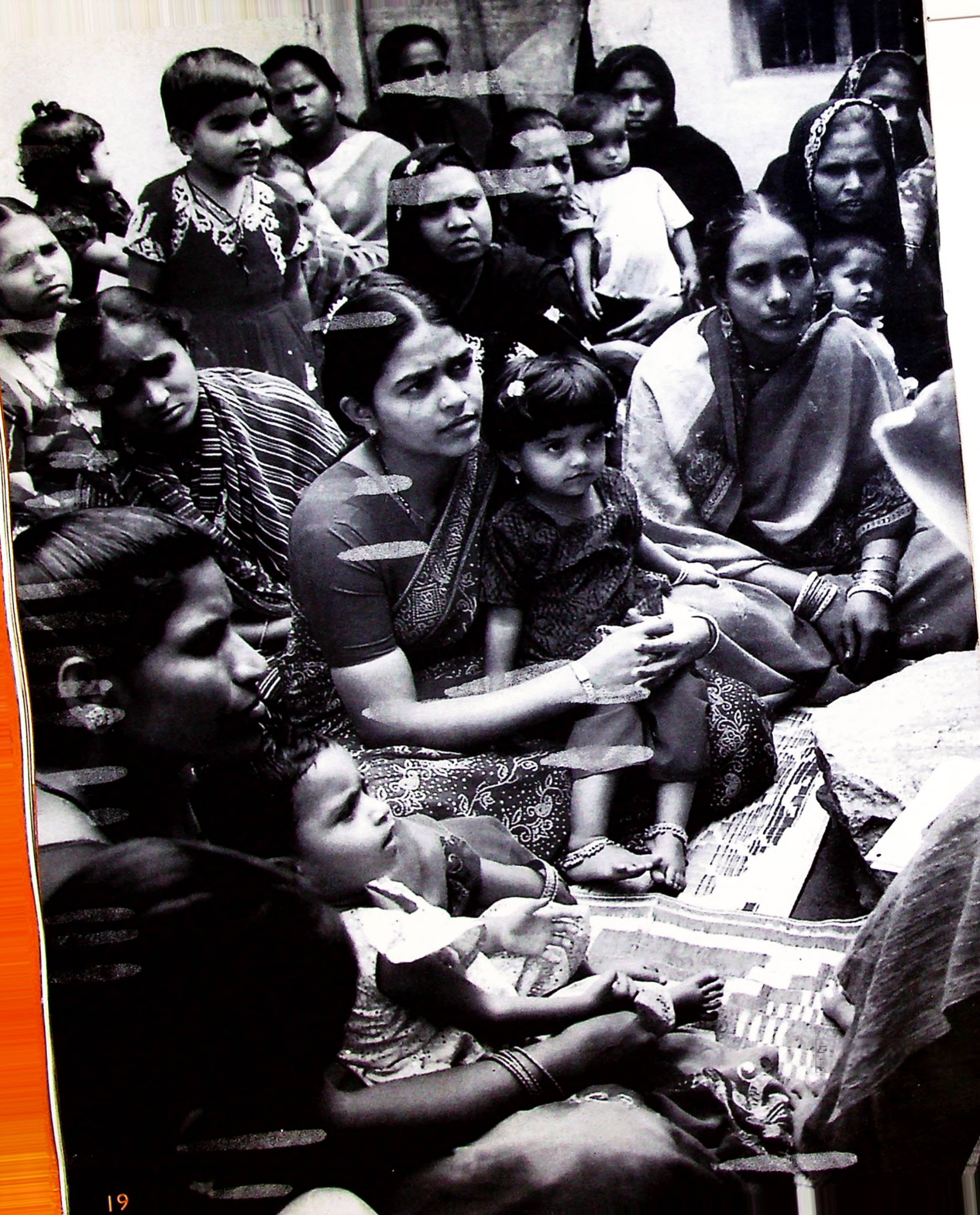
About a kilometer off the Anjanapura main road and yet reminiscent of an island in a dried-up stream, such is the isolation of this little colony of people in Avalahalli. Labeled Avalahalli Quarters, this is a group of families, from a predominantly Muslim background, who have been relocated from Bangalore South Ward (J.P.Nagar) area in a slum resettlement deal to a place with no access to basic amenities such as water and electricity. There are around 500 similar looking houses and little lanes teeming with children, many drop-outs of school and many who have never been enrolled to school. The women, who are not out working as domestic help, sit around chatting and making beedis or leisurely going about their chores. The small children, ever visible, are mostly unattended.

A lone Government Urdu LPS in recent years and another private organisation for the past seven years strive to keep the children off the streets and in the school but to very little avail. One of the main reasons being that the children are their little brothers' and sisters' keepers as there is no anganwadi or childcare facility and their mothers are otherwise occupied. The fathers are employed as coolies or as auto drivers; and incomes are adequate though not high. Nevertheless, parental concern about issues of nurturing and educating young children is abysmal. This lack of active concern has been compounded and strengthened by years of looking upon the community as beneficiaries to either government or private donor support.

Given this scenario, the facilitator discussed the situation with the local headmaster, and enlisted his support in initiating a community process to evoke and articulate the community's concern for early childcare. The headmaster identified a volunteer, Waheeda from within the community who conducted a survey of the colony, which threw up the shocking fact that over 100 children in the preschool age had no organised care. Taking this to the leaders of the community, the facilitator organised a meeting with the local representative, the Madrasa committee heads and a few parents to initiate a discussion on the issue of early childcare and education. The initial reaction from the community was to find out what this particular "scheme" offered them. On elaborating on the experiences of other such community owned child care facilities there was a lot of skepticism among some and total cynicism among others especially on the subject of parents taking responsibility for the facility and paying a fee. Nevertheless, since Waheeda and the facilitator pressed for a discussion with the general parent body, they offered the use of a bus driver's rest room as a place for the preschool. Taking it up as a challenge, Waheeda backed by the facilitator went ahead and invited the parent community to a discussion of the issue.

Contrary to the leaders' expectations, the parents responded eagerly to the discussion of early childcare as they felt acutely, the lack of any such facility. The process of the discussion, the unspoken respect that underlies the act of being asked their opinion, the value attached to the decisions of a group of people who hitherto had not thought about such matters, goes a long way in reinstating a sense of dignity and responsibility amongst people who until now alienated from the very care of their children. The community of Avalahalli quarters responded to the process of the Makkala Sabha with the decision to initiate a facility for their children that would be their responsibility to sustain.







# PLANNING & BUDGETING MEETINGS

Identifying parents as a key stakeholder group, MAYA facilitates specific processes to find a means of engagement with and between parents. The process of budgeting and planning for resources needed in the preschool, is an occasion to review and affirm the community's contribution and ownership of the individual preschool as all the preschools access the basic resources of space, teacher and fees from within the local community. This process also serves as an opportunity to build and strengthen the facility seeking external support.

The planning & budgeting meeting is conducted at the end of the first quarter of the preschool initiation, during which the preschool is entirely supported by the community seeking only locally available resources. After which the process occurs biannually engaging the community in a discussion, mapping the requirements of the preschool and providing an opportunity to reflect & discuss with parents- the organisational aspects of early child care and education both within and outside their respective communities; resources to be locally generated and externally sought in a manner most suited to their needs.

Each community is found to be at a different pace and confidence in garnering local & external donor support. For instance the preschool committee at Avalahalli is at a stage meeting all preschool requirements from only amongst the parent group, whereas the preschool committee of Konadasapura proactively supported by the women's sangha and the GP seem to exhibit more confidence in garnering resources for two other schools in their locality, from close by factories, of their own volition, preparing a list and an application to meet with the managers of the factories



# PARENTAL EXPECTATION MEETINGS

The parental expectation meeting is also a process to find a means of engagement with the parents; designed to support parents in defining their children's learning outcomes at the preschool. Being viewed as key players in defining children's learning outcomes was a seemingly alien and a new concept for parents at the outset. This was not unexpected considering the existing scenario of Govt and private facilities accessible to socially disadvantaged communities; where parents are most often called upon either to receive certain free schemes or to pay fees which may well be beyond their means. Neither do they engage with the parents in understanding their aspirations and concerns for their children. The parent expectation meetings is intended to build a framework determining the contents of the classroom sessions in keeping with what the parents want their children to learn. Even more importantly for the parents, it supports in fostering a sense of real involvement in their children's learning while reflecting on the relevance of education. It leads them to think beyond the preschool years to the schooling that they intend for their children; therefore often viewing preschool education on a continuum with school learning.

The preschool teacher's learning framework is then a derivative of the learning outcomes and expectations as outlined by the parents, facilitating them to articulate their expectations beginning from where they are and not imposing externally set standards. Every year commences with a process of mapping parental expectations from the preschool which could be outlined broadly into categories of expectations on learning; and that of care & safety. Parents come together to discuss and define more and more accurately each learning outcome of their children. The process when newly initiated was filled with biases of the sort claiming that "as illiterate parents we will not be able to mention what our children are expected to learn at this school".





The facilitation of this process is directed towards parents being able to articulate the simple commonplace expectations and support we give our children in helping achieve the learning outcomes. It ranges from child learning to eat independently, and to be toilet trained to partaking collaboratively with other children in performing the preschool activity. Most parents are able to easily identify and articulate these outcomes because despite any academic input parents inevitably expect their child to learn the language and speak simple words from their own environment; and be prepared for adjusting to the local government school. Collating such information has over a period of time enabled the team of facilitators to brief themselves with an ability map which the preschool should hone in their children. Apart from deriving a common framework most communities also throw up their specific expectations for instance many Urdu speaking communities do expect their children to learn Kannada as well as English both being languages of preference.

Every cycle of expectation mapping is also linked with engaging -the parents as a significant stakeholder group- enhancing the extent of parent ownership and participation in the preschool processes; affecting their quality of knowing which in turn would tangibly change their expectations. This would imply affecting preparedness of parents through re-examining their assumptions about their roles & responsibilities; their views about the experience their children are living and taking a participative approach towards the whole school experience.

Drawing from various processes of defining outcomes by parents held across all community owned preschools, a framework of learning outcomes has been outlined as an ability framework-

- ability to perform tasks independently and complete tasks
- ability to support other children in performing their tasks
- ability to seek support
- ability to communicate (develops reading, writing, language & numeracy skills; follow instructions; speak and express their individual meaning forms)
- ability to care for material in their learning environment; share & collaborate with other children
- ability to recognize and construct meaning of various concepts

Although parents in the beginning stages are not able to explicitly outline each of these skills befitting as abilities, the facilitators support parents in articulating and consolidating their expectations in outlining a framework of learning to be undertaken in the preschools, which are relevant to their contexts.

## PARENT'S WORKSHOPS

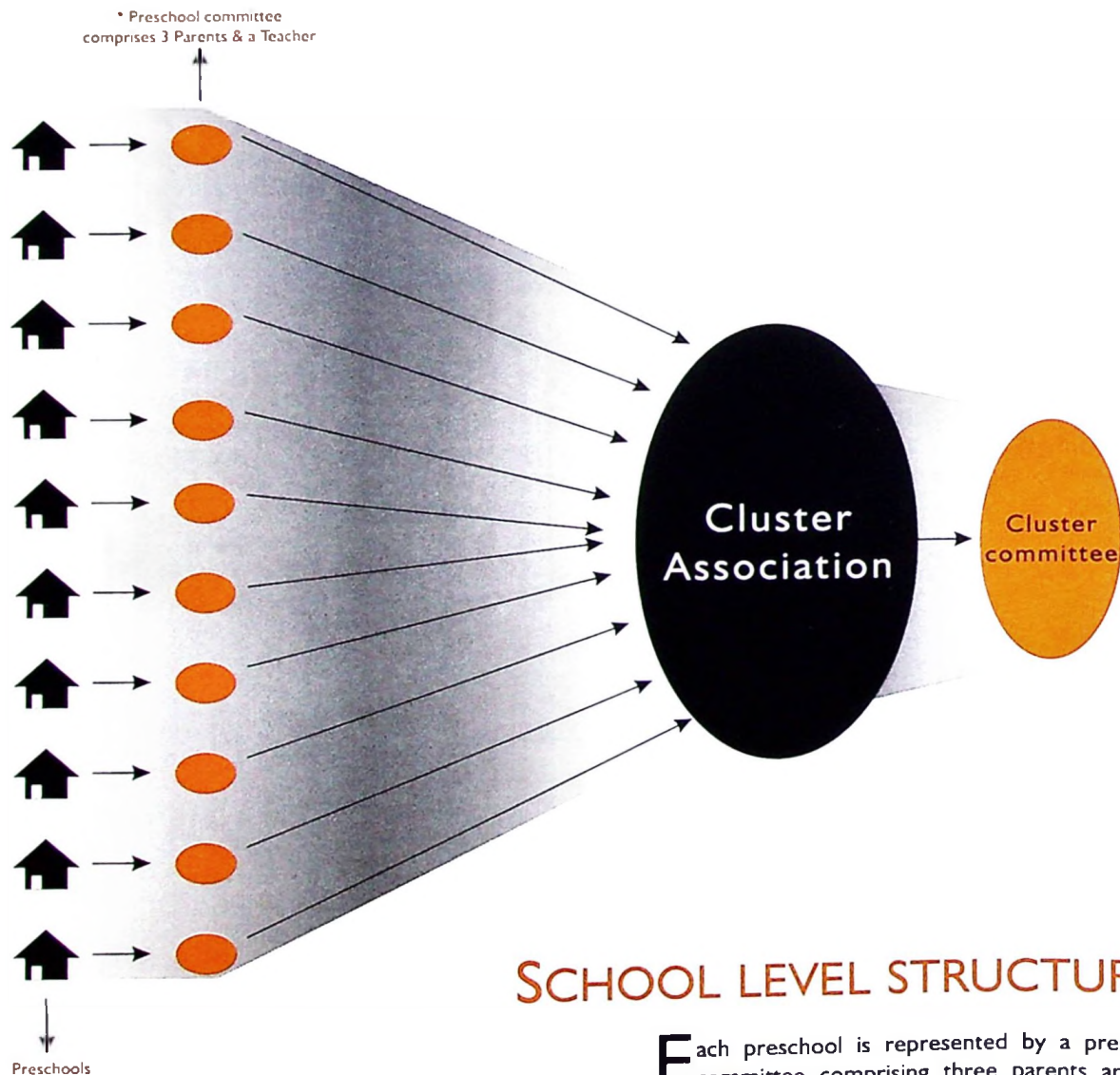
Attempting to find various means to engage parents in the process of early childcare, MAYA also facilitates parents' workshops that focus on preparation of identified learning aids by the parents or planning on aspects of nutrition and health of the young children. The workshop creates an opportunity for parents to partake in the activities of the school and relate to each other as parents with a common concern. In the making of several resource materials they established and strengthened their links with the preschool, simultaneously building their capacity to sustain the preschool and enrich their children's learning environment.





# INSTITUTIONALISING THE PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT

Central to MAYA's approach to early childcare is the recognition of the essentiality of institutionalising processes of engagement between different stakeholders. Institutionalising this process of engagement is therefore a core process that the organisation facilitates. Efforts in this regard focus on building new egalitarian structures, rather than working within the prescribed limits of existing structures of authority and power.



## SCHOOL LEVEL STRUCTURES

Each preschool is represented by a preschool committee comprising three parents and the preschool teacher. This committee is supported in identifying and mobilising local resources for their preschool. A 6-monthly planning and budgeting exercise is facilitated in each of the preschools with the teacher and 3 parents. This process focuses on supporting the committee to build on the organisational aspects of their preschool and institutionalise the relationship between the teacher and parents towards development of the preschool.

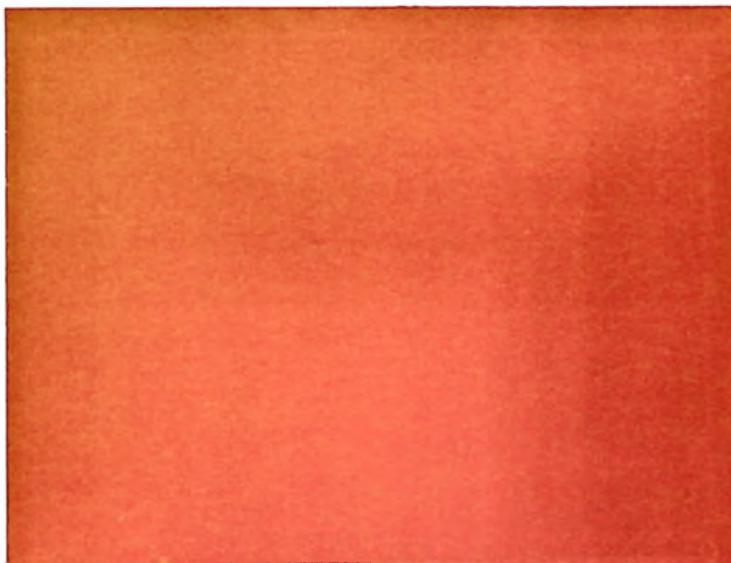


# CLUSTER LEVEL STRUCTURES

**B**ased on its experience of working extensively with communities and early childcare, MAYA has perceived the need to form such a cluster-level structure to institutionalise the engagement of stakeholders at this cluster level (10 preschools to a geographical cluster). Through the formation of such a structure, parents and teachers are supported in building on the learning's from their individual preschool to view the issue of early childcare at the broader level of their community and environment; sharing experiences and relating to different preschools; collectively planning for addressing early childcare at the cluster level (on aspects of health, learning, expenditure and support); identifying possible resources and accessing these resources both within and outside their immediate community.

With the purpose of building community capacities in institutionalising the approach to care and education and its effective functioning of all preschools within the cluster, cluster level processes are facilitated, wherein representatives of ten preschools in the cluster - 3 parents and the teacher from each preschool - come together as a group that is responsible for developing relevant plans (including financial plans) for each of the constituent preschools. This group then selects a three member structure of cluster representatives-2 parents & 1 teacher forming the cluster level structure. The cluster-level structure draws from individual preschool experiences and assumes responsibility for formulating plans and implementing these plans through identifying preschool requirements, raising necessary resources from within the local community and externally. They are also responsible for maintaining cluster bank accounts and are signatories to its operations.

The cluster level committees are strengthened through capacity building processes of skill training provided by facilitators enabling an efficient system based on the above aspects. Structural and institutional inputs are essentially provided in each cluster coming together and organizing the routing of resources through a cluster wise bank account. Representatives are elected from amongst all preschool level committee structures in a given cluster, to undertake responsibility of signatories of that account, looking into and monitoring of resources towards the expenses and support of each of these preschools.





A community created by the edict of the government Beedi worker's colony in the suburbs of Kengeri is, as the name suggests, a colony of people linked by their occupation of making beedis. A rather recent community, it came into being around the year 2000 since the government allotted houses to certified beedi workers. A registered co-operative society of Beedi workers with a membership of 1800 people, and registered in 1998 as a cooperative seems to be the focal point of implementation of several government schemes- 570 houses constructed with the support of subsidy from the Central Government under the Rajiv Gandhi Housing Scheme and an interest free loan from HUDCO ; inclusive of health schemes, rain and drain water harvesting schemes with a cost effective model brought in together by the Dept of Labour Welfare.

Proposed to be a model colony of 570 houses, with a scheme in place for every aspect, it nevertheless revealed a startling lack of plan for the numerous young children in its 3000 populace. Barring the only welfare scheme catering to 60 preschool children, there were no other facilities for the younger children. Even to attend primary school, children travel 2 kms to get to a school; depending upon a bus service that is none too regular, often necessitating a long walk to school. Only later, in June 2004, a Government Urdu Lower Primary School was started in the colony to cater to the children from 6-10 years. Simultaneously, a private school also was initiated during this period.

Characteristic of the residents of the colony, Umera also moved into the colony with her family from Ramnagaram taluk in Rural Bangalore. She found the absence of adequate facilities for children very perturbing, the situation made even more piquant by the high concentration of young children and a majority of mothers engaged in beedi making. Having already been a part of one of our community owned preschools as a parent in Ramnagaram, she felt that it was necessary for the community here to be facilitated to create similar facilities for themselves instead of waiting for the Government to provide the next welfare scheme. Taking the initiative and backed up by her prior experience of a community childcare facility, she conducted a survey of the children in her area (pocket of 100 households), finding 48 children in the age group of 2-6 years, 30 of whom did not have access to any facility.

She organized a meeting with their parents and discussed the issue of early child care facilities in the colony, initially finding it difficult to garner support given the prevailing mindset of dependency. Finally upon much deliberation, they came together to a decision to organize their own preschool, deciding upon a monthly fee, space, teachers, and timings. They opened the preschool in Umera's home on May 10, 2004 with strength of 20 children creating in every sense, a community owned preschool, born of the felt need of the working mothers for full-time, reliable, quality child care. It was at the same time, an important step forward for this community towards a stance of determining how to deal with the various factors that affect their life on their own.

After a fortnight, the teacher approached the MAYA facilitator requesting support for their initiative as they felt that outside support would help improve the preschool facility in terms of training as well as material support. Having conducted the initial processes in a systematic and transparent manner, MAYA facilitated the formation of a parent structure towards undertaking responsibility for the effective functioning of the preschool. The parents planned and budgeted for the school and proposed that MAYA support the preschool. Given the strong community foundation of the school, the teacher finds co-operation from the parents who are very involved in the daily process of the school, leading to the growth of the number of parents enrolled to the idea of early child care, resulting now in 30 children attending the preschool.

Our approach to ECCE has also required recognising the mind-set of the community, particularly against the backdrop of a culture that offers Govt schemes, where the community is viewed merely as a passive recipient. The plethora of schemes intended to empower often make us wonder to what avail might it be to people who first form the group of project targets by the policy makers; and as they realise the scheme define themselves as project beneficiaries. How empowering can such an experience be? Juxtaposed with the existing situation wherein all members of this community are flooded by welfarist schemes, this preschool is unique in that it has taken shape without the patronage of local leaders or the bureaucracy; and solely on the efforts of working women as an independent attempt to address their own needs.



# PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

## FACILITATING LEARNING



While recognising the limitations of a perspective that only views the preschool as a preparatory period for primary schooling, MAYA also perceives the critical need for an approach that offers an advantage to children from socially disadvantaged communities by facilitating a meaningful learning experience from an early age. It is well-known that enrolment to school is not a natural transition for these children, thereby necessitating an environment that supports learning that is relevant and useful to that context. Moreover, if enrolled to school, the argument of education for education's sake does not translate into a life support tool or empowerment for these children; since the quality of education accessible to them at the local Govt School is most often limited and disconnected to the existing market realities.

It is believed that for learning to be truly empowering, there is a need to focus on building capabilities of individuals and enhancing the relevance of education, rather than on promoting rote-learning in an instructive manner. MAYA has attempted to integrate this perspective of learning in its approach to early childcare; thereby redefining the process of training which forms an integral part of capacity building processes of teachers as well as the community. Having identified the local volunteers as teachers (a young woman from the community or a young mother) MAYA as the facilitating organization, supports them in a manner garnering their skills to be new age ECCE practitioners in their own communities of dwelling, taking care and nurturing their young.



**T**eacher: The training of teachers, an ongoing process, includes three main aspects: Preschool management, Health and Learning, is conducted on a regular monthly basis for every cluster, supported by weekly follow up sessions of teacher circle meetings. Ongoing teacher training also provides a space for teachers to reflect on how to better their skills and overall learning levels of their children. The varying background of teachers often ensures that we only begin from where they are and not at an externally determined level. For instance every cluster facilitator is also responsible for their own teacher training, knowing each teacher's learning level and where to begin from. Teachers during the weekly two hour session at the teacher circle get together at a cluster preschool to undertake planning for their preschools; sharing and problem solving; documentation and using it as a space towards learning new concepts with help of older or lead teachers.

Every cluster is supported by a lead teacher who has had the experience of organizing a preschool with the community and is now able to share that experience with teachers who require support to do the same and have been newly initiated to the training programme. Every twenty five to thirty preschools are supported by a lead teacher- a teacher who has been with the preschool programme for a significant period of time and now supports and strengthens other preschools by partaking in organizing community processes; regular monitoring and ongoing maintenance related issues.

The preschool management related aspects are spread over first initial months; interspersed with sessions over health and learning which ensure expected learning outcomes and transactions of children within the classroom. The framework of training encompasses various concepts, practices and processes to be undertaken by the community in supporting the learning and care of their children. Every practice is undertaken as an aspect for the teachers to be trained on; and to derive a framework prior to the process being undertaken in the community jointly by the facilitator and the teacher.

**T**he classroom: On keeping with the parental expectations we organize the entire day in an eclectic manner deriving an organic approach which is appropriate to meeting these expectations. For instance, the theme of the week provides ground to help children recognize and make their own meanings of the theme and its related concepts. A typical day at the preschool flows through- free play, talk time, reading & writing, break, lunch, creative activity and group games which provides a framework for teachers to initialise work with thirty children.

The concepts though drawn from the list organized by parents and teachers together are initially structured into sessions to help teacher plan and prepare for better understanding about the concept. The classroom sessions are in effect an initializing tool for the teachers to get an understanding of how a classroom can be organized reaching out to as many as thirty young children. Progressively the teachers are encouraged to work without this tool and be more fluid (free flowing) in their approach at engaging with various concepts. Most teachers over a period of time are encouraged to take contextually relevant themes and organize activities and discussions around it in a manner which flows from one session to the other the objective clearly being to enhance the ability of children to recognize and comprehend concepts, building their own meanings of concepts related to the theme. But underlying every different stage following either a structured or a non structured classroom format the teachers are facilitated to observe in essence a set of guiding principles to organize their classrooms and the processes they undertake within. Some of the guiding principles are enumerated as recognizing-

- every child learns differently
- a non threatening environment is conducive to learning
- a stimulating environment supports children express themselves better
- understanding and relating to a child is essential for learning
- conversations around experiences, memories, thoughts and ideas of children often allow children to understand a concept and attribute it own meaning
- teacher engagement with child begins only after the child has had time to adjust to the preschool surroundings



**A**ssessment: The mapping of parental expectations of the preschools in various localities helped us experience that caregivers/parents articulated both academic and non-academic expectations of the preschool. These expectations formed the basis of reflection in framing an assessment process in the preschools. The assessment process entails familiarizing the children with different concepts at the preschools over a period of one month (as defined in the expectations), followed by a mother's meeting enquiring and engaging them in the process of child's learning and knowing the child's learning level. The parents are encouraged to visit the preschools during the class hours to work with their children on various activities. Drawing a parallel to the pedagogical strategy used in the preschools the process of assessment is open to various interpretations and expects changes in its formulation over time in keeping with the methodology of learning suited to community expectations.

The objective of the assessment is to- ensure that the parents and teacher are both aware of the child's status with regard to levels of learning; understand the level of learning of the child without conveying to the child that he/she is being judged or examined; have a record of the child's level of learning for the parents to use during admission processes to other schools; and provide the child with a more interesting method of expressing what the child knows.

The process facilitating parents to articulate their expectations on children's learning is conceptualised as a process of engagement bringing to the parents the consciousness that the community owned preschool requires them to outline their values and meanings in defining the roles & responsibilities of the preschools in their communities. In the effort to provoke and sustain the interest of the parents in the child's learning, the process of assessment is only a tool that has been used to plant the seed of questioning the values and attitudes of the current education system and its impact on children both in terms of learning and development of the concept of the self.

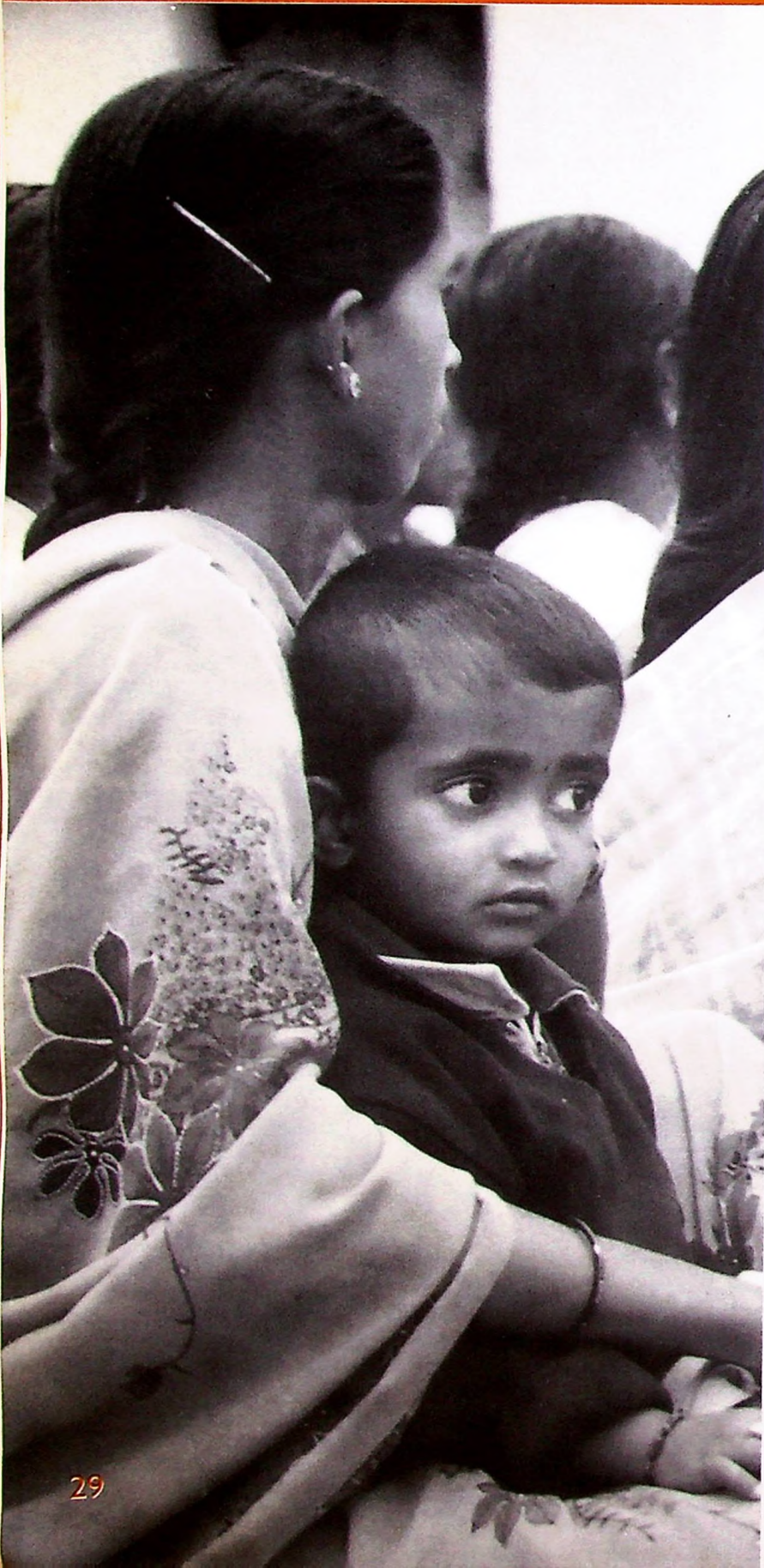
Valmikinagar near Mysore Road is a predominantly Muslim low-income area that is home to a population of around 10,000 people. The long narrow lanes teem with life, colour, industry and above all children ranging all sizes and ages. Small industries of every type- mechanics, auto repair workshops, agarbatti karkhanas, beedi making units, scrap and recycling shops, butchers, bakers, small time vendors of vegetables, fruits, clothes can be found at every turn.

Amidst all the flurry of movement and activity one nevertheless senses the steady, unhurried pace of life obvious in the small groups of men and women gathered around to discuss local news and events. Tucked away in one of the lanes, children's voices chorus " Machili jal ki rani hai". Closer up, one can see three women organising a class of 35 children, occupied with rhymes and writing, while two are involved with some children who are filling up booklets spread out before them on the floor. We have stumbled upon a preschool, one among the ten other preschools in this area, where the children are filling up a booklet. One may be excused for thinking that the woman so involved with the children is the teacher, however it turns out she is the mother of one of the children, who after supporting her child to complete the booklet, has stayed on to encourage and support another five children; while the teacher looks after some of the other children. This parent is one of the many parents who through their involvement with the preschool in all its various aspects display a sense of ownership both of the facility as well as their children's education.

A subsequent meeting to discuss the children's learning and its documentation was held. The clear understanding of the values behind understanding children's learning levels as opposed to mainstream standard testing and its impact on children is a telling endorsement of the commitment those parents had towards the wellbeing and education of their children. This is made even more striking by the fact that most of the parents were illiterate. The parents of the Madrasa preschool are an example of the slow but sure impact that is fostered by the community's involvement in education. It holds out hope that a further involvement of parents in their children's higher education will bring about changes that can ensure that learning becomes a meaningful process for children. The community owned preschool is one of the first steps in that direction.



# CHILD CARE APPROACH



Health being an integral aspect of care of young children, MAYA's ECCE approach, seeks to address it through distinct community processes that ensure that the health and well-being of the child is looked at holistically; and rather as a public concern than in isolation of the preschool alone or relegated to the individual responsibility of the family. Addressing health of the young child as a community agenda calls for complete involvement of the caregivers in the health related processes of the ECCE facility. Given the prevailing situation of the young child in the country (47% of children aged below three years are undernourished and 58% of children -in the 12-23 months age group-are not fully immunised)<sup>5</sup> addressing issues of health by the State has become a critical concern, especially in terms of creating access to these facilities & organising both preventive & curative measures.

The approach entails addressing three different aspects of care, rooted in the context & experience of the community- the nutrition; preventive & curative care; and accessing health services. Beginning from prevalent practices already existing in the communities, the caregivers and the significant others in the communities are encouraged to build on health related understandings and experiences in promoting the young child's health. The various aspects are addressed in a manner enhancing community capacity- be it in the parent's committee taking responsibility towards providing supplementary nutrition to their children; or parent's negotiating with the local PHC (Primary Health Center) to make possible regular visits of the ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) and doctors; or teachers and parents together organizing immunization camps. Underlying the health related tasks are processes facilitated by the group of ECCE facilitators and lead teachers, towards strengthening communities in organizing continual care for their children. Hence most activities do not seek only tokenistic participation of the parents acting as mere beneficiaries instead lay emphasis on enrolling parents beginning from identifying child care need; planning and organizing towards its fulfilment and its implementation.

<sup>5</sup> NFHS-2 conducted by International Institute of Population Sciences Mumbai.



## 1. Nutrition:

Nutrition being mainly the responsibility of the parents, the community owned preschool tries to inculcate the awareness of and the need for good nutrition especially for young children. This takes the form of dialoguing with the caregivers on aspects of nutritious food content. This input is often a part of community health meetings involving mother's as participants mapping what could be enhanced in a child's diet. The apathy towards child care so acute in urban low income areas characterized by atomized families and often strained employment conditions of parents, is often the cause of neglect of child's dietary needs. Although over the years with all community owned preschools we have been able to bring about a culture & habit of parents partaking in the child's development- all children coming to the preschools are seen carrying their lunch boxes with a can of water.

Although the preschool level committee members have over time expressed the need to support their facilities with the provision of supplementary nutrition, organizing its provision by the preschool committee on an alternate day basis. In fact several urban centers requiring a nutritious meal supplement provide the snack to the children before they leave for their homes. Involving the community entirely in the process of providing supplementary nutrition, from preparation to actual distribution and ensuring each child gets a regular share ensures that the community continues to take primary responsibility for their children's nutrition. The parents are trained to prepare a health drink that is made from locally available cereals and grain. Supplementary nutrition is provided 4 times a week in the form of a health drink, fruit, milk, and egg in the evening, before the children leave for home.

Most preschools in the rural and peri-urban areas closely linked to the local government schools have also been able to extend their mid day meal schemes to reach out to even the younger children in their villages. In some spurred on by the interest of the local school master whereas in some it is through the volition of the local GP member. Having effectively run their own schools without any external support for the first three months and then generating resources from within to support their schools has only confirmed their belief in being able to organise early child care and education facilities by themselves only seeking external resources for further strengthening their facility. Most external support sought by the communities is then allocated for providing meals or towards enhancing the monthly honorarium requirement for the teachers.

## 2. Accessing health facilities:

The teachers of the preschools with the support of the parents create and maintain individual Child Health Records that document the medical history of the child, including immunization. Apart from check ups during times of illness, most parents were not seen maintaining their child's immunization records and very rarely accessing the local general hospital for accessing vitamin supplements and de-worming dosages.

Characteristic of the present system is the gap in information between the people- service target groups- and the various government departments. The health department in liasoning with the ICDS has a convergent policy which helps the government to finally reach out to children in adverse eco-socio circumstances. The existing service of the local Government hospitals extended to the Government Anganwadis include a monthly visit by the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) to provide regular de-worming, vitamin and iron & folic tablets; and ensuring that appropriate vaccinations are given on time. This is supplemented by an examination of the children by a Government doctor once in three months.

In providing the community with accurate information about the various services which can be accessed by them, annual health processes are undertaken briefing them on the locally accessible service and the manner in which they could plan and effectively organise its access to all children in their areas. The cluster committees then plan for organizing health check ups with their local hospitals and prepare lists of number of children, addresses of various preschools to be appended with a formal application in extending the community health services. For instance, the committee members of Azadnagar & Farroqianagar cluster met with the superintendent of the local general hospital which also houses the Urban Ward Centre in organizing quarterly check ups by the doctors and visits by the ANMs on a monthly basis across all community owned preschools in their cluster for the complete academic year. Such processes reflective of community institutions engaging with state run services to access health and articulating their expectations of such services in terms of extent and coverage is indeed a step towards communities defining and building on ownership towards their facility.



### 3. Preventive & Curative care:

The aspect of organising preventive & curative care of children entails working with the caregivers in a consistent manner over a period of time building capacities to actualize many of the tasks. For instance, the teacher is specifically trained in maintaining & preparing child health records before a health check up by the local doctor. It involves the teachers to undertake a house to house survey of the children of the community owned preschools in recording their immunization details ( helping recall in case of missing cards) and organise the mothers to meet before the actual commencement of the health check up, emphasizing the significance of immunization and keeping a track of each child's health status. Following which each teacher is trained to also monitor growth of every child and share the information at mother's meeting, using that as factual data with which to begin discussions on provision of healthy nutritious food and development of the child. Training sessions of teachers on health; ongoing processes with the mothers; and follow up processes with both the above group of caregivers form the core of formulating processes & activities around preventive and curative health care.

#### a. Immunisation

Immunisation being the most important issue of preventive health care, which is primarily provided by the State health services for the low-income groups, the community owned preschool partner with the Health department at the local levels in ensuring the complete immunisation of all the children who attend the preschools. Almost every local general hospital is involved in ensuring complete immunization of all preschoolers in the community owned preschools and in extending health check up and referral services to them as in the anganwadis. This has proved effective in garnering the support of the larger community and providing recognition for the many community owned structures that organise the preschools.

#### b. Monitoring of growth

Given the age group of the children, the teachers of the community owned preschool are trained to monitor the growth of the child through a quarterly checking of the child's height, weight and mid-arm circumference. This information is shared with the parents to ensure that they remain informed and aware of their child's growth while observing any signs of malnutrition which is rather common among young children in low-income groups.

Besides this, the individual attention paid to each child would offer indications of changes in health which the teachers will be trained to observe through an awareness of health related issues that are generally common in children of this age. Specially-abled children requiring specific attention are also referred to appropriate sources of treatment and care. These processes of monitoring are adequately reinforced by the regular visits of the ANM and the Government doctors.

#### c. Health Check up:

The community is supported to organise an annual health check up for all the children of the preschools through the local government hospitals. This health check is useful both for the children and their parents in identifying any medical problem of the child while also providing the community the opportunity and the learning of organizing & accessing facilities from the larger community for the well being of their children.

#### Preventive & Curative Care

- ☐ Immunizations
- ☐ Health check ups
- ☐ Referrals
- ☐ Growth Monitoring

#### Nutrition

- ☐ Extending mid day meal scheme
- ☐ Preschool committee organizing supplementary nutrition

#### Access to health facilities

- ☐ Accurate information collection & dialogue
- ☐ Negotiation with local state service provider
- ☐ Organizing community to access the service



# IMPACT AT MICRO & MACRO LEVEL SOUGHT AND SO FAR

## PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Building upon MAYA's organizational belief that communities can organize themselves in a manner to meet their own needs the initiative attempted at strengthening the local parent institutions through identifying and articulating their concerns and finding ways and means to access them. Although fees collected from the parent and contributions from the GP, reflective of community's ownership of the facility, are essentially to provide a teacher with an honorarium and to buy some basic materials for the preschool, often low income communities feel the need of support through access to supplementary resources.

Learning from our experience of initiating preschools that had no other support mechanism besides the parent community, the initiative liasoned with the Sarva Shikshana Abhiyaan (SSA), for support to the preschools which were initiated by the community. The SSA, as a strategy towards universalisation of elementary education, had earmarked a budget for preschool education. The SSA forthcoming in their support of a 100 community owned preschools in the last year established an exemplary record of the interaction of the statal and civil forces in reaching out to communities in need. The total budgetary support included supplementary resources such as honorarium for teachers, learning materials and infrastructural maintenance costs for the children. Such a linkage may be defined as a beginning of practices whereby the resources available from the government for the purpose of education and child care are directly linked to people's initiatives, via locally accountable bodies such as the Gram Panchayat or SDMC, setting a desired precedent for the manner in which public money is disbursed and utilized to the optimum.

BTB - a low income area - adjacent to Banerghatta Road in the city of Bangalore, till a few years ago, faced a predominant culture of older siblings staying at home to look after younger ones, coupled with a sheer lack of facilities to take care of the learning needs of the young. The history of high employment of child labour, especially in the surrounding garages and petty shops only compounded the propensity of children to either enter the workforce at an early age or dropout of school on enrolment, like many neighbouring slums and low-income areas.

It was in this context that a dialogue was initiated with the parents and other community members to address the issue of early childhood education as a priority; building on their inherent capacities and existing experience in this area. Following several discussions, a few community members took the initiative to start a preschool in their area. The space - a community-allocated room (a Madrasa) was identified to house the preschool for the whole day; providing a learning and stimulating environment for the children and respite for their parents who are engaged in coolie work, beedi/agarbathi rolling or in petty vending. Despite their daily struggle to earn a stable and secure income, these community members were able to enroll other parents to support their children's learning.

Since its initiation in 1998, the BTB school has steadily built its capacities in providing an enabling learning environment to its children. The teacher has been consistently trained by the facilitators on a monthly basis on aspects of child learning, child care, interactions with parents & community members and with external support organizations. Over the years more than 250 children and their families have benefited through this facility. The local community with a high incidence of child labour has gradually been enrolled into the culture of early child care and education, critical to the child's development.

The parents have continually strengthened the school through- allowing the usage of their home spaces on non availability of the community space, substituted for the teachers in their absence, ensured regular payment of fees etc. This active participation of the parent's and community through the years has now evolved into more sustainable linkages with the school. For instance the parents now have a formal body of four members who are responsible for monitoring the school, planning & budgeting for the school requirements, substituting for the teacher, defining children's learning outcomes and teacher responsibilities, and most importantly accessing supplementary resources for enhancing the school's capacity for providing an enabling learning environment for their children.

The Early Childhood Care and Education initiative presently reaches out to over 4600 children through 180 community-owned preschools, similar to BTB School, in the low income areas of Bangalore Urban and Bangalore Rural districts. The initial years experienced the organisation supporting all supplementary costs for the preschools through accessing resources from private donors. It saw us eliciting more of community participation, which manifested in various ways such as enrolling local self help groups and federations to partake in the activities of the preschool. Over time, the focus to create more sustainable longer-term partnerships and establish a sense of social responsibility between the stakeholders has led MAYA to build further linkages between the parents, the local community and other supportive institutions- government, individual and other donors.

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# CHALLENGES

faced by the facilitator team over the growth of the initiative

differing political interests often weaken peoples resolve

caste still maintains the divide amongst people-affecting decisions they make

community wants government schemes  
-perceiving it to be more permanent

community preschools are competition for the private facilities

convincing other stakeholders about  
the viability of this approach

will this approach be able to impact and change the  
existing child care system in the state

people need to have a say in what happens in their lives without  
making it a demand/ delivery situation

build our ( team ) capacities to meet the  
challenges of community owned ECCE facilities

creating structures and formalised systems in unorganised  
and informal scenarios

men often refuse to attend meetings along with the men



To the preschool a furlong away, through swift turns, quick crosses and narrow lanes...

you start to wonder whether this would lead to a noisy overcrowded place teeming with children and you are faced with a paradox.

At Suraya School, thirty little children diligently work at their creative activities and not a stir, apart from a nod or a low-toned 'salaam walekum' and back to their projects. With walls covered with colourful charts and mobile toys, and a teacher like Suraya who is a new age practitioner, researcher and spokesperson redefining the perspective of early childhood education, the children appear organised and engrossed in pursuing their interests.

Till a few years ago, this locality - a low-income area on the outskirts of Bangalore - faced a predominant culture of older siblings staying at home to look after younger ones, coupled with a sheer lack of facilities to take care of the learning needs of the young. The history of high employment of child labour, especially in the surrounding silk-reeling units only compounded the propensity of children to either enter the workforce at an early age or dropout of school on enrolment, like many neighbouring slums and low-income areas.

It was in this context that a dialogue was initiated with the parents and other community members to address the issue of early childhood education as a priority; building on their inherent capacities and existing experience in this area. Following several discussions, a few community members took the initiative to start a preschool in their area. The space, a community-allocated room was identified to house the preschool for the whole day; providing a learning and stimulating environment for the children and respite for their parents who are engaged in coolie work, beedi/ agarbathi rolling or as petty vending. Despite their daily struggle to earn a stable and secure income, these community members were able to enrol other parents to support their children's learning and provide a large part of the basic needs for their children in enhancing the capacity of the preschool as an enabling learning environment for their children.

The school initiated as the first of its kind in Channapatana in 1998, having reached out to more than 250 children over the last six years threw up an interesting insight during one of our training sessions. In keeping with our goals of reaching out to each and every child in the area, every cluster was to undertake an area survey. It seemed significant for the programme and the facilities to consolidate their strategies based on accurate children and local information. The teachers Suraya, Ruhi and Husna belonging to this cluster continuing with their convictions of enrolling the children to school, undertook the survey with great ardour. The collated data reflected that of the 181 children in the area, 78 were enrolled into the three community owned schools and 56 were already in the first standard in the two local schools and 47 children had no access to any of these facilities. On mapping our concern with the teacher in strategizing the next steps the facilitator came up with a challenge which we earlier did not pre-empt. Since the existing schools could not further enrol as they were filled up to their capacities in proportion to space, the facilitator suggested initiating one another facility with the help of the existing teachers and parents. Suraya, the veteran teacher was of a differing opinion suggesting if another such facility opened their schools would suffer in the next academic year for a lack of numbers!!!

A pause, it made us realize that a simple functional system of reaching out to all children had over the years gathered more complexity in having to sustain itself as an institution in its own right. The concern had now shifted from not only enrolling children and their parents into the culture of schooling but manifesting its institutional needs both of the teacher & the school to retain its much acquired shape and identity. Though what followed in the series of discussion helped analyze that most children could not wait being in the critical circumstances they were in. Not relating to the children at the earliest might implicate writing them off to the insidious cycle of bondedness and labour. This instance is an articulation in point, revealing many such challenges to come, slowly apprehending the extent to which we can influence the communities especially the trained facilitator (teacher in this case) in making decisions now affecting the tricky balance of ownership.

# CHALLENGES

In operationalising this approach, we realized the need for more effective and sensitive facilitators, who have an awareness of the varied social contexts and the ability to articulate appropriately. For such an approach, building skills of facilitators through traditional training methods was not a viable proposition, as these interventions required developing one's understanding as the processes evolved. The initiative needs now to pay attention to the fact that to address an organic issue like early childhood to impact state structures and practices; it has to respond to the dynamic needs of an evolving society, thereby necessitating in its facilitators & functional practices- an ongoing process of reflecting and doing.


















## ECCE programme 2004-05

Community Contribution	60.5%	
MAYA support (external donors)	39.5%	

## Extent of the programme

Bangalore Urban	Preschool 100	
Bangalore Rural	Preschool 80	
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	

## Taluk wise information

Bangalore South	Preschool 93	
Bangalore East	Preschool 7	
Ramanagaram	Preschool 26	
Channapatana	Preschool 30	
Doddabalapura	Preschool 12	
Kanakapura	Preschool 9	
Magadi	Preschool 3	

Reaching out to over 4610 children (2004-05)

# FUTURE DIRECTION

The experience of building institutional capacities of communities in organizing and supporting their own early child care facilities has convinced us of the approach, that community ownership of any issue forms the basic premise to initiate any engagement with communities and develop further in enhancing its capacity. It then seems significant to draw interpretations, upon consolidation of these experiences for the larger system, in a manner that translates the approach to impact systemic conceptualizations and ways of functioning.

Without limiting this experience to confines of a good alternate model we propose to derive an approach impacting the existing largest child scheme in the country, the ICDS. The aspects drawn from our approach could clearly be on impacting the learning of children in the anganwadi; building of community ownership towards the facility; redefining roles of the teachers; and role clarity for supervisors and the ICDS hierarchy. This can truly be attempted in liaison with the existing government machinery administering the scheme- the Women & Child development Department, comprehending their structure and functioning and supporting processes which would only enhance the quality of the care & learning entitled to every child.



MAYA welcomes individuals and groups interested in knowing more about the work and issues we address. You could visit us at [www.mayaindia.org](http://www.mayaindia.org) for more details about our work or could contact us at 111, 6th main, 5th block, Jayanagar, Bangalore - 560041  
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