There have been multiple international definitions of early childhood care, development and education along with their alignment to relevant age groups. Early Childhood Education traditionally caters to learning readiness of children from 3-5 years in time for formal schooling. However, the multi-dimensional poverty and malnutrition hindering children from reaping the benefits of early care and stimulation makes it imperative that we tackle this issue from a wider lens, and look at the concept of ECCE as holistic and multi-sectoral covering the period from birth to eight years old (Britto et al. 2014). The release of the report by the Education Commission, “The Learning Generation (2016)”, strongly recommends that every child is supported with at least two years of free, quality preschool. Research has proven that access to quality early childhood education directly correlates with improvements in school enrolment, performance, persistence, transition, social awareness, community engagement, better livelihoods and well-adjusted citizens, resulting in positive socioeconomic growth. Realizing these benefits, national policies and global commitments have been supporting ECCE since 1989 at the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and later reinforced at the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in 1990, at the World Education Forum (Dakar) and MDGs in 2000, and at the Moscow Framework for Action and Cooperation on ECCE 2010. ECCE is now an integral part of the Education Agenda 2030 and Sustainable development Goals (SDG 4.2) presenting a solid case to invest equitably in a child’s early years to impact not only an individual but families and society making ECCE central to achieving sustainable development.

ECCE AND SDGs

The world has entered a new era of human development in 2015 where ending poverty, lifelong learning with equity, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for all is the key focus. The challenges for sustainable development in the Education Agenda 2030 are integrated: goals pertaining to poverty reduction, health, nutrition, education, sustainable agriculture and energy, gender equality, social inclusion, and development must be tackled together. There is a growing vocal constituency nationally and globally which maintains that doing ECCE right means reaching at least 11 different SDGs. The question is that how can ECCE drive the transformation we want to achieve by 2030? If we limit ECCE to SDG 4.2, we limit the power of ECCE to transform individuals and societies. ECCE lays the groundwork for lifelong well-being and is the most cost-effective strategy to alleviate poverty and improve child and maternal health etc. It is a powerful equalizer as access to quality early childhood care and education can help all children start at an equal footing regardless of their background; without such action, being born into poverty could mean many children will never escape from it. Therefore, investment in child development is strategic to stop the intergenerational transmission of poverty as it reaps long-term returns leading to higher wages and greater productivity. Hence, countries must be committed to this position.
Sindh has 4.25 million children between the ages of 3-5 years, and even within Sindh there are huge disparities within district reflected in the Katchi enrolment as shown below in the SEMIS 2014-15 data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tharparkar</th>
<th>Sujawal</th>
<th>West Karachi</th>
<th>Shaheed Benazirabad</th>
<th>Dadu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,291</td>
<td>2,530</td>
<td>3,448</td>
<td>44,576</td>
<td>53,989</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Progress towards ECCE in Sindh over the years

- **1998**: National Education Policy charts out the need for ECE
- **2002**: National ECE Curriculum developed - Sindhi version of the revised National ECE Curriculum made available in 2007
- **2009**: National Education Policy proposes that ECE is made part of mainstream education, integrated in all primary schools, and suggests action plans.
- **2013**: Sindh Right of children to free and compulsory education act 2013, the government of Sindh has taken ownership of the responsibility to provide free pre-school education.
- **2014-18**: SESP ECE is integrated in a sector-wide approach.
- **2015**: ECCE policy notified establishing developmentally appropriate Pre-Primary ECCE that will support transition towards Primary school preparation to improve child outcomes in Sindh catering to the children between the ages of 0-8 years.
- **2017**: SED approved comprehensive ECCE policy

**ECCE Policy**

Sindh is committed to achieving the SDGs 2030 as it supports the holistic development of children and society. It is to the credit of the School Education Department and Government of Sindh for creating a cadre of Basic Pay Scale (BPS) 15 for the post of Early Childhood Teacher (ECT). This immediately elevates the ECCE sub-sector; however, teachers with appropriate qualifications in a nascent sector remain a challenge. SDGs 3, 4, & 5 synchronize with the ECCE policy agenda as illustrated in Figure 1.

**ECCE and Health**

ECCE sets the trajectory for lifelong health. Programs including routine visits/ examination for mothers and children, and immunization can help address multiple health issues including pre-natal care, post-natal care, mortality rate, and hygiene. It also plays a pivotal role in ending hunger as early stimulation with nutrition supplementation achieves better outcomes and tackles issues of stunting and malnutrition. UNICEF Pakistan Annual Report 2013 reported that in Pakistan, malnutrition accounts for 35% of deaths under the age of 5 while 40% of children are either moderately or severely stunted. According to MICS 2014, in Sindh, 48% children are stunted, and more than four out of ten children under the age of five (42%) are underweight. Early Child Development cannot wait in Sindh; it is awaiting urgent actions.

**ECCE and Learning**

Under Article 25-A, Pakistan has promised to provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 5-16 years. After the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010, the provincial governments have been empowered to make appropriate laws for the realization of the rights of children. The Sindh Compulsory and Free Education Act 2013 enacted by the government of Sindh has extended this age group to include children of the ages of 3-5 years as well (Article 9). Under the rules made for the right to free and compulsory education act 2013, the government of Sindh has taken ownership of the responsibility to provide free pre-school education. “The Government may make necessary arrangements for providing free preschool education and early childhood care for the children above the age of three years until they join the school for..."
Currently according to the SEMIS data (2014-15), Katchi represents approximately 14% of school enrollment in both rural and urban areas of Sindh and the total enrolment in Katchi in government schools is more than half a million (585,718 children). ASER 2015 and SEMIS (2014-15) report that 63% of children aged 3-5 years are still out of school in Sindh. This highlights the urgency to work towards models of partnerships and alliances to incorporate ECCE for all.

In rural Sindh, learning levels reflected in ASER for children aged 5 in grade 1 (as a proxy indicator for ECE) reveal very poor results. It illustrates that children lack complete readiness skills when they enter grade 1. Govt. school data in 2015 shows that 60% children can read letters in their mother tongue, 20% can recognize at least numbers (0-9), and only 13% can read at least small letters in English.

**ECCE and Gender Equality**

ECCE interventions can promote gender equity by compensating for gender biases in nutrition, health care, or early stimulation that may occur in the home (Arnold, 2004, p.10). In Pakistan, discriminatory practices continue from infancy on, with girls receiving less stimulation, less quality of care and less attention. However, data from ASER 2015 indicates that between the age of 3-5, parents are more likely to send both the genders to school with negligible gender gaps in enrolment (51% boys and 49% girls).

If we build on these gender equitable foundations that will also improve transition rates, it can help us target the overall problem of gender inequality in the education system as well.

**ECCE: Tracking Key Indicators**

Tracking ECCE indicators as agreed under SESP 2014-18 and SDG 4.2 is a major challenge. Whilst PSLM and provincial EMIS/AEPAM do capture enrolment/access indicators to some extent disaggregated by gender, the more critical indicator of SDG 4.2.1 or 'the Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex' needs systematic engagement, ownership, skills and resources. The thematic indicators for SDG 4.2 cover three streams: readiness to learn, participation and provision.

**ECE Budget & Allocations**

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) has supported this shift through its grant as reflected in the comprehensive Sindh Education Sector Plan 2014-18 where ECCE is integrated in a sector-wide approach with funding provided to the provincial and district governments. It is an accomplishment for Sindh that it was the first province to complete the ECCE Policy 2015 which has been integrated into the government organization structures, and budgetary allocations for ECCE in fiscal year (FY) 2016-17. The Percentage of budget allocated for ECE is 1.89% of the Annual Development Plan of the School Education Department (refer to ECE Reference document for detail).

**Challenges**

- The ECCE Policy 2015 covers and plans to address the entire period between birth and eight years of age. However, due to resource and institutional capacity constraints, currently ECCE only targets pre-primary education for one year prior to grade 1.
- Policy and theoretical planning has been completed and efforts are being made by the Government of Sindh for its successful implementation. However, due to lack of institutional structures and human resources to implement policy as there is low utilization of budgets allocated in FY 2015-16 and 2016-17, the implementation process remains slow and requires a significant push.
- Low inter-sectoral coordination among various government departments (Health, Social Welfare, Special Education) slows down initiatives such as Sehatmand Sindh as well as negligible networking among public, private sector, NGOs and INGOs further constrains the ECCE.
- The Government and the Development partners working on this sub-sector have been unable to propel good policies into actions due to lack of availability of qualified teachers and officials who meet the minimum standards. There is an urgency to
set priorities for ECCE Implementation in the Province and synergize resources, efforts and initiatives to ensure targets set under ECCE are met successfully.

- As ECCE is being initiated for the first time in the Province by the SED therefore there are no ECCE specific teams to comprehensively address all qualitative measures of teacher preparation, curriculum, learning materials, assessments and quality assurance in Sindh through which the informal Katchi may be transformed into formal ECCE Classes. Efforts are being made by the SED to formulate the Sindh ECE curriculum and teacher preparation materials for both pre and in-service to not only ensure better pedagogy with children and care givers, but also ensure positive learning readiness and outcomes.

- The SEMIS and NEMIS provide government disaggregated data of only public schools without capturing ECCE human resources or facility information. It also does not include the efforts of the private schools and non-formal sector. Formal ECCE must include tracking information on developmentally appropriate standards with respect to: a child-friendly environment, health, psycho-social well-being, a variety of learning resources and age-appropriate curriculum and teaching methodologies which the Katchi system currently lacks at this initial stage. While the MICS data on this is useful, it is still not a robust measure of developmentally appropriate standards.

- There has been an increase in the Budget allocation for the Education Sector in the Budget 2016-17. However, the utilization still remains the biggest challenge. The system and the implementing agencies especially in the field require extensive capacity building to be able to utilize the available budget.

**Recommendations**

1. **Institutional Level Presence for ECCE** through a Focal point/Directorate at the Education Department needs to be urgently established that will also help to activate intra and inter departmental collaboration.

2. **Multi-sectoral opportunities for ECCE in Sindh** are imperative to work on early detection of disabilities and establish *ECCE and Inclusive Education* Links by working with the Special Education Department. Moreover, *ECCE, Health and P&D Departments* need to work together. Schools can be used as a medium for service delivery to improve health and nutrition programs targeting immunization coverage, and interventions for both mothers and children. The Health Department can also collaborate to hold informative sessions on prevention in schools for care givers, parents, teachers and children.

3. There is a need for **collecting Data and Mapping the ECCE Universe in Sindh** by identifying, taking stock, and tracking different ECCE initiatives on ground in order to collaborate and complement the work coverage and materials developed instead of starting from the beginning. In addition, profiles of teachers who have previously taken trainings in ECE and are working in this sub-sector need to be obtained and tracked both in terms of their skills and experience, and their qualifications.

4. **Teacher Profiles** need to be formed allowing flexibility in teacher qualifications. In the first phase (5 years), flexibility is required for recruitment with induction and modular trainings through endorsement of STEDA and PITE, NGOs, private sector training through universities need to be arranged leading up to degrees and diplomas. Moreover, workforce diversification is needed in ECCE beyond the EC Teacher to ECE Assistants and part time support teams for health, nutrition, early detection and inclusive needs. This approach will allow better use of resources for optimized outcomes.

5. **National ECE Curriculum 2007 needs to be reviewed and upgraded** diligently through a working group of practitioners of ECCE programs in the province and nationally. The standards for ECCE also need alignment with the curriculum and also for teacher preparation. The Importance of mother tongue language in ECE National curricula should be increased. There is a growing body of research indicating that community participation and educational success can be founded on early learning and schooling in the mother tongue.

6. **Expanding the ECCE Core Group from Policy to Implementation** by monitoring ECCE Indicators (SDG 4.2) and Actions under SESP 2014-2018. The Implementation also needs to be faster from the government’s side and a number of initiatives need to go to into comprehensive execution which requires the Core Group members list to be expanded in order to cover all dimensions in implementation.

7. **Expand the scope of ECE** as ECCE programs need to be holistic at pre-primary education level with logical links to primary years for continuity of the approach in pedagogy. This would emphasize ECCE’s logical support linkages with primary education while ensuring the use of developmentally appropriate pedagogies and indicators.

8. There is an urgent need for **Knowledge Generation and Partnerships** in this area, especially in Sindh and Pakistan to facilitate the continuous analysis and synthesis of ECCE interventions, evidence and research, identifying priority areas for further learning, and support. A knowledge portal for ECCE core concepts, indicators tracking, research, training and think tanks needs to be developed by SED with its partners and relevant bodies for the public to access in Urdu, Sindhi and English.

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**Prepared by:** Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA), ASER & Right to Education Team – Sindh – in collaboration with The Reform Support Unit (RSU) School Education Department, Government of Sindh – The State of Provision and Financing of ECCE in Sindh.