

CHILD CARE & DECENT WORK At SEWA

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Foreword / Preface

Informal women workers, like our members at SEWA, are always concerned about their children - their health, their education, how to help them obtain employment and how best to plan for their secure future.

When we began organising workers into their own union, SEWA, almost four decades ago, our members expressed their need for child care. They explained that they could not go out to work with peace of mind without child care. They felt the need for a secure place for their young children, one in which they would learn and grow in a healthy manner and enjoy themselves, while their parents were working.

Hence, this was among the first of SEWA's support services. In our three decade-long journey to provide appropriate and affordable childcare to infants and young children of our members, we have learned many lessons. We have also seen that many organizations are struggling with the same issues and developing innovative solutions. And this is not restricted to India alone.

In most countries of the South, the working poor are facing the same issues with regard to child care. Like parents, and especially mothers, in India, parents of young children in Asia, Africa and Latin America are struggling to provide the best care that they possibly can for their children. They constitute the working poor of their countries. They realize, like their Indian counterparts, that they cannot emerge from poverty without childcare.

Parents in the countries of the North also face similar issues. Child care is not available easily. And when it is, in most countries, it is expensive. It accounts for a sizeable amount of the parents' income.

This paper outlines many of the issues faced by the working poor in their quest for a better future for their children. We hope it will be of use to policy-makers, researchers, students of development studies and others. Most of all, we hope it will lead to a greater focus on the need for child care and actual services at the grass roots level, so that new and better child care services reach the working poor and their young children

The booklet being the first of its series from the Indian Academy for Self Employed Women related to Child Care and the informal sector will help disseminate the experiences in the area of child care to local, national and international audiences. We also hope that it will be used to understand the challenges and achievements in this area of work.

The Indian Academy for Self Employed Women is thankful to all these who contributed by providing their insights, materials and time. Special thanks to Ms. Mirai Chatterjee and S. Anandlakshmy for their hard work, valuable insights and going through the drafts of the booklet. Thanks also to Mita Parikh for her special coordination and getting the final product done. The Indian Academy for Self Employed Women look forward to receiving your feedback and would be grateful to see these experiences being disseminated and shared with all these who are concerned about poor women's lives and their children.

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May 1st, 2009.

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Most of all, we are grateful to the child care teachers of SEWA, the parents of the children in our centres and SEWA's Child Care Team. It is their ideas and experiences that have informed and inspired us.

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Executive Summary

Child care is an essential need of all working people, and especially for women workers. Most workers today are engaged in the informal economy, with little or no work security nor social security. The vast majority do not have access to child care. Without this support, women cannot go out to work and earn to feed their families. As work is survival for these women, they leave their young children with neighbours, relatives, alone or with their older children. Older siblings, especially girls, stayaway from school to care for their younger siblings. These older children often become child labour. Without child care, women also feel anxious, torn between their roles as a worker and a mother.

Currently, child care is provided through various programmes in both developing and developed countries. In most countries, the state bears most of the responsibility for child care. In all countries, child care is expensive. However, the existing child care services do not adequately meet the needs of working people and their families. They are particularly unsuitable for women workers of the informal economy.

There are several key messages on child care that emerge from experiences around the world. Child care is a top priority for workers, especially women workers. They cannot obtain work and income security without child care. Further, child care is poverty reduction. If a worker can work with peace of mind, knowing that her children are taken care of, she can earn more and bring in food and other essentials for her family.

Through child care services, young children get nutrition, health and other holistic care for their growth and development. Older siblings go to school and do not become child labour. All of these act to reduce poverty. Further, with child care, women work and earn, thus promoting their development and well-being.

In addition, as children of all communities play and learn together, child care promotes social inclusion. It also serves as a focal point for community development because children bring all parents together. This is particularly true in times of crisis, and when helping to re-build communities affected by disasters.

Organising of workers, especially women, and their empowerment is enhanced with child care. When their children are cared for in a common facility, trust and solidarity increases among the workers. Finally, child care is both feasible and sustainable. Involving multiple

stakeholders leads to appropriate and affordable care. However, governments will have to bear the most responsibility for child care.

The key lessons learned from child care in different countries point to several ideas for action. Child care must be included in all programmes and action for workers' rights, especially for women workers' rights, poverty reduction and social protection. At least one child care centre for every thousand persons in the population must be provided. And this service must be developed according to the needs and working hours of parents.

In addition, it should be preferably run by local women, known to the parents. These child care workers should be recognised as providing an important service to all of society. They should obtain at least minimum wages with social security benefits. The centres where child care is available should be appropriate and adequate, thereby promoting the growth and development of the children. The latter should be provided in a holistic manner, including nutrition, health care and child development activities.

Further, the child care service should be managed and owned by the child care workers and the parents. All sections of society should support and contribute for child care in their communities. There are costs involved, but if all contribute, then child care can be sustainable. Sustainability includes the capacity-building of child care workers and the parents.

In sum, child care is essential for all working people. In every country, workers, and especially women workers, accord a high priority to child care, both because they care for their children and because they need this service, if they are to work and survive. Child care is a right of all workers. It is an entitlement. It is also poverty reduction.

There is also a strong link between child care and women's employment and empowerment. Similarly, there is a link between an increase in older siblings' school-going and a reduction of child labour. Unions, cooperatives, NGOs, working parents, employers and governments have made a start in terms of providing child care. These initiatives, in turn, have pointed out the direction that needs to be taken. Child care that is holistic, appropriate, affordable, sustainable and strengthens working people, and especially women, and their families is not only essential, but also, it is possible.

Action in the direction of universal child care must be taken as part of decent work and for the promotion of well-being for all.

Childcare and Decent Work

Introduction

For working parents everywhere, their children are the top priority. All parents want a better chance in life for their children. They are ready to work hard for their children's future. We hear mothers say:

“We have had hard lives, but we want our children's lives to be easier. We want our young children to be healthy, to grow well and to attend school. Then they can get good jobs and earn well.”

Most of the world's workers are in the informal economy. In the developing world, informal employment accounts for more than 50% of all work, and in India, for example, for as much as 93% of the workforce. It is high in other developing countries as well. In developed countries too, informal employment is on the rise.①

The world of work, for informal workers, is characterised by insecurity. The rights of labour in the formal sector have been won after many struggles. But informal workers have had to strive even to be recognized as workers, by the state or by formal workers. Since there is no identified employer or employing institution for informal workers, they are left with no certainties. They do not have basic work and income security, food security or social security. Health care, child care, insurance, pension, housing and basic amenities like water and sanitation are often not available to them. And as they are generally not organised into unions or cooperatives, their demands for these are not heard.

Lack of basic social security, especially child care, results in workers being faced by a hard and unfair choice between their work and their children. The mothers work to support their children, but in the process of their working, their young children may suffer neglect. Mothers, while they are at work, are anxious about the safety and care of their babies and young children. If their children fall sick, they are anxious. If they spend more time with their young ones, they cannot work and lose income. Invariably, child care tends to be the mother's responsibility.

In Kenya, field research has shown that “work-family conflict is an urgent and priority issue

for Nairobi's informal workers. There are millions of parents in Kenya who are still making painful choices and resort to unhealthy or poverty-perpetuating solutions.” (See attached case study on Kenya, p.4).

The vast majority of informal workers are women. In fact, informal employment, gender and poverty are intersecting sets. In all countries, informal women workers are the poorest of all. They are also the most vulnerable and have the lowest levels of collective bargaining.

It is thus apparent that for women workers, child care or more often, the absence of it, is a major issue. Without this service, they may have to stay away from work or choose options that are not satisfactory. The Thai case study of migrant sea-food workers reports that “without proper childcare, parents often worry about the children's safety from accidents, drowning and sexual abuse. Some mothers stop working to take care of the children, resulting in less income to the family”. (See attached Thai case study, p.1).

Other women workers take their children to work with them, or are forced to keep their older children out of school to care for the younger siblings. Kenyan coffee plantation workers often tie their infants to their backs while they pick coffee. Sometimes, they leave them in the care of their older children. (See attached Kenyan case study, p.2).

For most informal workers engaged in agriculture, not going out to work because of young children is just not an option. It has frequently been observed, in India for example, that the agricultural worker takes her baby to the fields and places it in a makeshift cradle - a sari tied between two trees, like a hammock - near her workplace. In some areas, in the agricultural season when employment opportunities are at their peak, mothers give their children some opium so that they fall asleep and allow the mothers to work. Cases of infant and child deaths from opium use have been recorded.

And this scenario is not restricted to developing countries. In North America and Europe, with declining child care support, women's ability to work and earn has been affected. It has been observed in the United States, that families with young children spend significant proportions of their budget for child care. ② And in the countries with transitional economies, lack of institutional arrangements for child care increases unemployment among women. ③

Thus, it is clear that child care is a priority of working people everywhere. Without some provision for child care, all working parents suffer in a number of ways. It affects their regular employment, their ability to work full time and earn well. This, in turn, affects their care for and participation in raising a family. In most countries, the lack of child care facilities contributes to continuing poverty, vulnerability and deprivation.

In all countries, women workers and their children bear the brunt of the lack of child care. Not only do women go down in their economic status because they are unable to work and earn, but their mental health and psychological condition is affected. High levels of stress and anxiety are reported in all the case studies attached to this paper.

Some women may even choose to do some piece work at home, to balance out their roles as workers and mothers. Generally, home-based workers are women. They produce goods, working at home and taking care of their children, at the same time. Needless to say, this is less than satisfactory as an arrangement, as the worker is torn between the two roles. And her productivity is definitely affected, in turn affecting her income, as she is usually a piece-rate worker. Then there is the additional worry of children sticking their fingers in a sewing machine or in toxic chemicals, or even playing with raw materials or damaging finished products. Any damage or loss to the latter will be deducted from her already marginal earnings.

Children also suffer from lack of child care. Infants and young children are exposed to workplace hazards, when they accompany their mothers to work. Further, they do not get the kind of attention and care that they need for healthy growth. Either their parents are struggling to work and earn and cannot be with them or else they are left at home with relatives, neighbours, older siblings or even all alone.

Older siblings, especially girls, stay away from school to care for their younger brothers and sisters. They often take on the full responsibility of child care when they themselves are barely four or five years old. Some of them accompany their parents to the workplace - both caring for their siblings and working with their parents, side-by-side. They thus join the ranks of child workers at a young age.

Child Care - what exists today.

While we have argued that for the most part women workers and their families are left to work out child care arrangements for themselves, there are some programmes offered by the state and by civil society - mainly unions, cooperatives and NGOs.

Among national responses to child care, the largest programme in the world is the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) of the Government of India. This programme seeks to cover all children below the age of six, through a network of 700,000 centres that offer nutrition, some health services and child development activities. In the next five-year plan, the Indian government plans to increase the number of centres to 1.4 million.

In Chile, the state sponsors day care centres, and in addition, there are some run by community-based organizations and employers. ④

In Peru, the government and international agencies have developed the Wawa Wasi program for children of families living in extreme poverty. ⑤

There are similar examples in other parts of Latin America and Africa, like the early childhood programme of the Kenyan government. (see attached case studies)

In the Northern countries, child care has been recognized as a priority in the EU Employment strategy. Yet many countries - France, Germany, Italy and Luxembourg to mention a few - have cut back on support for child care in the 1990's. In her paper : "Harnessing Globalisation for Children", Bharati Sadasivam says that the level of governmental involvement in Europe varies widely and the coverage of under-three's, the most vulnerable age-group among children, is low in all countries. ⑥

She has also noted that in the countries of eastern and central Europe with economies in transition, child care has gone through major transformations. From fully funded and widespread child care facilities, the situation has changed to one where user fees are levied on parents, quality has declined and women's workforce participation has also gone down, at least in part due to this change of scene vis-à-vis child care. ⑦

In the United States, 80 per cent of child care is paid for by parents. With child care costing between \$ 4000 to \$ 6000 per annum on average, it is not surprising that this is ranked as the fourth highest expenditure by deprived families with young children. ⑧

Civil society and religious organizations have recognized the importance of child care for all people, and have set up child care centres serving the poorest of families in their communities. In Brazil, the Catholic Church was in the forefront of the movement for creches in the late seventies. Mexican NGOs trained teachers for community-based preschools in poor neighbourhoods. The “Mobile Creches” in India, which provides work-site child care for the children of construction workers in the cities is well-known for the quality of its care. Several such local child care initiatives have been documented by the Bernard van Leer Foundation in the Netherlands as part of a worldwide study. ⑨

The global labour movement, including national federations of labour like the Korean Women's Trade Union and the Self-Employed Women's Association in India, have been campaigning for child care as a workers' right. Others like the Costa Rican trade union, CMTC, have been running crèches for their members. International labour federations like the International Trade Union Congress (ITUC) and the IUF (International Food, Beverage, Agriculture and Allied Workers' Union) have been demanding child care and maternity and paternity benefits, through their collective bargaining. Some of these initiatives are described in the case studies accompanying this paper.

There is no doubt that today, there is a greater recognition of the importance of child care, thanks to the labour movement, the women's movement, the advice of early childhood development experts and the studies on poverty and development. There is a strong case for the provision of child care for women workers in informal employment, as has been presented here. However, the arguments have apparently not convinced policy makers around the world. Sparse attention is generally paid by governmental authorities to financing child care for the children of the poor. Adequate human and financial resources must be marshalled for this cause.

In Costa Rica, the union-run child care programme had to close down because of lack of funds (See the Costa Rica case study) and in Thailand, the future of child care centres for seafood workers is uncertain (See Thai case study). Wherever governments have allocated adequate funds for child care, its sustainability is assured. But even these programmes, including the ICDS in India, fall short of the coverage necessary to support the interventions for healthy growth and holistic development of the young child.

What Our Children Taught Us: Key Messages on Child care ⑩

The overview of existing child care facilities and initiatives reveals that the provision does not match the need. There are issues of both quality and quantity of facilities available, particularly to working people world-wide. In all countries, including the rich ones, like the United States, governments, employers and others have not yet committed adequate resources for child care, even where they have recognized its significance for early childhood development, for workers' full participation (especially women workers) and as a right of working people. Clearly there are large gaps in what is required and what is available to families everywhere.

However, allowing for different contexts and cultural specificities, there are remarkable similarities in what our children have taught us about child care and its significance in all societies.

1. Child Care is a top priority for workers, especially women workers.

The enormous demand for child care, as is evident from the number of movements and campaigns by workers in different continents, points to its being a top priority for workers. In country after country, women say:

“We have had hard lives. But we live for our children.”

In India, the Forum for Early Childhood Education and Creches (FORCES) has over 300 workers' organizations and NGOs in its network, and about six active state chapters. Founded in 1988 by unions and child care service providers like Mobile Creches and SEWA, mentioned earlier, it has led to a campaign from the grassroots level, for universal and quality child care in the country.

The Brazilian movement for crèches has also been mentioned above, as has the Korean workers' efforts.

2. Workers cannot obtain security of work and income without child care and related Social protection

Almost all the workers of the world are poor and many struggle for a living in the informal economy. Employment or work security and income security are the keys to moving out of poverty and towards self reliance. But if a woman worker has to take care of her children in the absence of appropriate and affordable child care, she cannot work and earn. If she

takes her child to work, her employer may even dismiss her, citing reasons of low productivity due to distraction by her child. Her work, the lifeline to survival, becomes insecure and her economic situation becomes precarious.

Further, if her children are sick and do not have proper health care, the worker has to stay at home and care for them. Hardly any informal workers have protective insurance for themselves and their children.

Thus, work and income security can only be attained if a worker has access to social security services like child care, health care and insurance, as social protection measures.

3. Child Care is poverty reduction

Substantial documentation exists world-wide on the role of child care in reducing poverty in many countries. First, when their children are properly taken care of through organized child care facilities, parents, especially women workers, can go out to work and earn with peace of mind. Studies, including some by SEWA of workers in rural and urban areas, show that mothers reported income increases of over 50% when they had access to child care. Some of the respondents stated:

“For the first time we were able to buy dal (lentils) and vegetables for our families.” ⑪

Second, young children of the working poor get proper nutrition as part of child care. In fact, it is this assured food that is a draw for parents and their children. The nutritious snack has been one of the main benefits of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in India. And when the young children come to a common child care facility, they also obtain health care, including immunization, which prevents childhood diseases that cause deaths in many countries.

Third, older siblings can go to school if they are released from the responsibility of child-care. Their access to schooling is a right. Education ensures a brighter future for them, with better prospects for employment and a decent living.

Fourth, if parents can work outside the home, they need not send some of their children out to work, but can send them to school instead. Hence, child labour is reduced.

All of these factors have a synergistic impact on poverty and at least help to reduce the vulnerability of the working poor, and give them and their children some chance of getting unshackled from poverty and entering a different opportunity structure.

4. Child Care results in children's holistic development.

Experts in Early Childhood Education repeatedly point to how crucial child care is, and how timely inputs can have major impact on the lives of young children. The status of research on the human brain is impossible to ignore. There are tremendous possibilities for brain development in the earliest years. Neglecting the early period of childhood becomes equivalent to throwing away the most treasured human resource: brain power! It is well-documented that early childhood education, nutrition and health care are essential building blocks for the children's future.

A recent group of researchers constituting the Knowledge Network on Early Childhood as part of the WHO's Commission on Social Determinants of Health, reviewed the global evidence on child care and young children's development and presented a strong case for more outlay: "Economists now assert, on the basis of available evidence, that investment in early childhood is the most powerful investment a country can make with returns over the life course many times the size of the original investment". ¹²

UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring report resonates with similar findings; that Early Childhood Care and Education, ECCE, offsets disadvantage and inequality especially for children in poor families. Further, they have stated that "Investments in ECCE yield very high economic returns." ¹³

5. Child Care leads to increased women's workforce participation and their overall development and well-being

Women everywhere are actively contributing to their national economies and to the global economy. Child care enables them to work and to earn, and hence move out of poverty. It contributes to their development because they can work and earn full-time, and ensure that their children have greater access to education, health and other opportunities. Their stress levels decrease and their mental health improves once they know that their children are safe in a child care centre. All of this affects their sense of well-being.

Earlier we have quoted from our attached case studies to show how lack of child care affects women's participation in the workforce. Other studies also point to evidence showing that wherever child care is expensive or unavailable, women cannot join the workforce.

6. Child care encourages school-going

When children start attending crèches at a young age, they get the inputs for their cognitive and other aspects of their development. They also discover the joy of learning. The crèche setting also gets them used to being with other young children, a precursor to a classroom type of situation in primary schools. And once their parents see the obvious benefits of care and development at crèches, they are encouraged to send them on to primary school. In India, the FORCES network reports 100% school-going of all children who start out at crèches.

Further, as mentioned earlier, once there is child care, older siblings are freed up from caring for their younger siblings. This is particularly true for girls. In the ILO's Travail report, this has been noted from experiences around the world. (14) A SEWA study of the child care among below poverty line tobacco workers showed that 70% of the older siblings went to school for the first time when crèches were made available in their villages. (15)

7. Child care reduces child labour

The ILO's Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) has shown that in many countries, child care reduces child labour. This is because with such support, parents, particularly mothers, can go out to work and earn. As incomes increase, and working conditions improve, the older children will not have to join the workforce prematurely, as their parents earn enough to feed and clothe the family. If child care is provided, children, and in particular, girls do not have to work as domestic helpers and in other activities. (16)

Further, with child care, older children do not have to accompany their parents to the workplace as child-minders. This saves them from being child labour in the future.

8. Child Care promotes social inclusion and integration

Child care breaks down social barriers. At a child care centre, children from all classes, ethnic and religious groups and communities play and learn together. They make friends and learn to share things with each other. And they become familiar with each others' customs, beliefs and traditions.

In some countries, with marked caste and community divisions, child care plays a significant role in breaking down barriers and promoting social inclusion. Children learn early about equality, equity and diversity, and the importance of shared values, cooperation and mutual support.

9. Child Care centres are a focal point for community development

There are several reports about the role of child care centres in community development and even in mobilizing communities. One such documentation is the Effectiveness Initiative report of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. In very different settings and cultural contexts Colombia, Honduras, Kenya, Israel, Mexico, India, Portugal and the Netherlands among others children and child care centres served as focal points to bring communities together, to support recent migrants, to help in reconstruction after a disaster and to revitalize communities. This was because young children are everyone's concern. Children persuade adults to come together and pay attention. And through child care and crèches, trust develops and parents proudly watch their children learn, play and grow together. Shared experiences help in developing solidarity.

10. Child care centres can be a focal point for disaster management and the re-building of communities

For the reasons mentioned above, child care centres are a magnet for all parents. And in times of crisis, this is even more evident. When the worst-ever earthquake in India struck the state of Gujarat in 2001, the first thing SEWA's members asked for was child care - both to take care of their children while they tried to re-build their homes and their lives, and to ameliorate the trauma the children had been through. Soon these centres became a focal point for relief and rehabilitation work. Medical care was provided at the centres, food packets and water reached communities and building materials were distributed via the centres. Children's laughter and resilience converted a mood of despair in the community to a positive approach of re-building their lives.

11. Child care promotes workers' organizing

Child care can thus become a focal point and even an entry point for mobilizing communities and organizing workers, especially women workers. When child care is

provided, trust and solidarity gets quickly built up among workers. And if worker-run child care organizations are set up, this leads to further strengthening of bonds and to mutual trust among the workers. This has been the experience of all workers, whether in Korea, India, Costa Rica or Chile.

12. Child care can be feasible and sustainable

Work on child care from different countries around the globe show that not only is child care feasible, but it is also sustainable. The case studies attached to this paper, spanning three continents, show that sustainability in child care is possible, even in resource-poor settings. Multi-source funding is the key to sustainability. This includes fees and other contributions from parents, employers' contributions, private donors' contributions and state funding. There are several partnerships between stakeholders in society - parents, who are the workers, employers, national and international donors and civil society.

The case studies referred to earlier show that it is the multiple stake-holder approach which leads to appropriate and affordable childcare. It is noteworthy, that almost everywhere parents contribute by way of fees. In most of the institutions for child care, contributions from employers are minimal or non-existent, with the gap being made up by government and international donors. However, the fact that several stake-holders have joined hands for child care is, in and of itself, a major message for all concerned with this issued.

Undoubtedly, governments will have to bear the largest share of responsibility for child care. It is important that the state acknowledges that child care as a public responsibility. As the largest development actor, the state must underwrite the costs of the care of the very young. And child care costs are considerable in every country. When the state assumes the primary responsibility for child care, it also recognizes the important contribution of workers to the country, especially that of women workers. And it also acknowledges its role in promoting the well-being of its young children.

This is not an exhaustive list of what our children taught us. But it is clear that the experiences of labour and grassroots workers in all continents point to the fact that the provision of child care is essential. That children and their working parents benefit from child care is self-evident. There are several, spin-off effects of child care on families and

communities, on the economy of the country and, most of all, on the sense of well-being of workers.

Child Care as a Worker's Right: What we need to do

There are many different ways of ensuring that young children get child care and that their parents can go out to work without anxiety. Some of these approaches and experiences from around the world are documented in brief along with this paper. This section is not just prescriptive, but rather, shares some ideas for action, based on the case studies.

1. Child care must be included in all discussions of workers' rights, especially women workers' rights, poverty reduction and social protection.

That child care is essential for young children and their working parents is well-known and the empirical evidence from all over the world is easily available. And yet, somehow this remains a gap in our conceptual understanding when we discuss workers' rights, women and girls' development and poverty reduction in general.

In part, this has been connected with the patriarchal notion that child care is something that women must do at home. In other words, when children are born, mothers must stay home and take care of them, giving up or making adjustments with their other work. But with more and more women entering the workforce world-wide, these kinds of ideas have begun to change. Both the women's movement and the labour movement are responsible for valuing women's work and promoting the right to child care.

It is also increasingly recognised that for poor families, and especially mothers, work is a must. Staying at home and caring for children is not a choice that women workers can make - they have to work to earn and feed their families.

For all these reasons then, increasingly there is discussion about child care as an entitlement and worker's right.

But we still have a way to go before child care is viewed as an essential part of social security and decent work in all countries. Hence, workers both women and men, employers, policy-makers in government, legislators, donors and civil society have to include child care in all policy discussions, leading to tangible programmes for workers.

2. There must be at least one child care centre per 1000 population

We have to develop child care centres either at the workplace or near the home for our children. There should be at least one such centre per 1000 population - to start with. One centre per 300 population would be ideal.

3. Child care must be developed according to the needs and working hours of the parents.

We should not have one standard model of child care, but rather, flexible approaches and systems, according to parents' needs and those of their young children. However, it makes little sense to have centres in locations that are inconvenient for the mass of workers in a particular community. Nor is it workable to have facilities available for a few hours only per day, when parents toil from dawn to dusk.

Consultations with local people, particularly women workers can help to decide how, where and when such facilities can best serve their purpose.

4. Child care should be preferably run by local women and men, who are known to the parents

Experiences around the globe have pointed to the effectiveness of child care run by local people. When women from the very communities from which the workers come are the care-givers, there is trust. There is also a sense of ownership.

This approach also results in the creation of local employment, especially for women of the area. Further, if contributions in cash and kind are solicited from parents, there is a greater likelihood of a positive response. People will generally contribute to local initiatives run by women whom they know.

5. Providing adequate and appropriate child care facilities for total development is essential.

In many countries, the appropriate space for a children's centre - sufficiently large to house 30 to 35 children, well-ventilated, safe and with toilets - is still not available. Many child care centres are run out of the child minders' homes which in most countries are often small and cramped spaces.

If some countries cannot afford to construct special centres for child care, there are other options that can be explored: a large home in the community, a community centre or health centre with extra space, free classrooms in primary schools which can be converted into centres, local government offices or union offices with some space etc.

Countries like Chile have child care centres adjoining or attached to their neighbourhood health and social insurance centres. Indian policy documents have suggested that rooms in primary schools be opened up for crèches and even that panchayats (village councils) construct or make their rooms available.

The bottom line is that children need space to play and learn together, and in a safe and healthy environment.

6. Child care means overall development of young children

Child care is a rather broad and catch-all term. Here we mean that our children should have access to holistic care, including nutrition, health care, child development activities like games, exposure visits, craft-work and other activities that promote cognitive and emotional development, and in a culturally appropriate way. It also includes close contact with parents and siblings, so that there is consonance between the centre and the home.

7. Ownership by child care workers/teachers and parents

When parents and the child care workers have a sense of ownership of their child care facility or system, they run quality services and contribute in many ways, both tangible and intangible. They may provide some fees, contributions in kind like food grains or fruit and vegetables. The parents may encourage employers and their co-workers to contribute and to ensure that the child care is tailored to the needs of their children.

There are many ways of developing this sense of pride and ownership. One effective strategy is developing organizations of parents and teachers - a collective or cooperative. This organization then runs the child care facility. Another way is to encourage unions, cooperatives, self-help groups and NGOs to develop and run their own child care services. Still other ways are to get groups of workers to leverage existing government programmes and run crèches. Of course, there may be combinations of these arrangements as well.

But experience around the world points to the need for ownership - often called community participation - which really means that workers take responsibility, as a group, for running the child care services. So they are not just “participating”, although they do this as well, but in fact are themselves in charge, right from developing the care to ensuring its sustainability.

8. Sustainability of child care must be ensured through multi-source funding

Child care is not just the responsibility of women workers or of parents with young children. Children are all of society's concern, and this understanding should be matched by contributions from the state, from employers, workers whether or not they still have young children, parents of the children and others in the community.

Child care is not a low cost activity. It involves various inputs like food, health care, child development materials and recreational facilities. Not all of these are low cost. Milk for infants and young children is expensive in many countries. Food may be scarce and expensive and medicines also add to costs.

However, if all sections of society contribute, then sustainability of child care is not impossible.

Further, continuous review of costs and appropriate resource allocations or fund-raising is required. Some governments develop large programmes with little regular review of costing.

As mentioned earlier, the primary responsibility for child care should rest with the state. Governments must make adequate resource allocations for child care, which can and must be matched by the array of contributions mentioned above. Legislation for child care as a worker's right, and in the larger context of social security and decent work, should be enacted.

In India there was a strong movement for legislating the right to education, but unfortunately education was deemed to start at age six, and not from birth. Hence child care fell out of the ambit of this proposed legislation. This is currently under review.

9. Proper recognition to the care-givers - the child care workers

Child care is an important service to all of society. Yet, unfortunately, child care workers or

teachers, the care-givers, do not enjoy the recognition and status that is their due. They are generally underpaid and overworked. All our case studies show that the care-givers work for long hours - ten to twelve hours a day may be routine. There is no question of extra wages for overtime work. In fact, the workers are very poorly paid for what is a skilled and labour-intensive occupation. In one of the case studies from Kenya, it is stated that the care-givers obtain wages that are lower than that of a parking attendant!

In other countries like India, workers in the ICDS, mentioned earlier, get less than minimum wage. In fact, in several states in India, child care workers have formed a union for better wages and working conditions.

There is no reason why poor working conditions and wages for child care workers should continue. While working to put child care more firmly on the agenda of all, we should ensure that the care-givers get the recognition that is their due, including proper remuneration for their important work with young children. Child care workers must also get basic social security like insurance and pension for themselves and their families.

The international agencies like ILO, UNIFEM, WHO and UNICEF, as well as national governments and civil society must work to ensure that child care workers obtain basic work security and social protection.

10. Capacity-building for child care

Caring for children cannot be done only by instinct or experience. There is a need to provide training for the capacity-building of child care teachers or workers. This is a very weak link in the chain of child care. There are hardly any capacity-building programmes or training schools. Those that exist do not have the kind of praxis-oriented training that the care-givers require. Governments, donors and civil society need to recognize this gap and plan for the capacity-building of child care workers or teachers.

In particular, adequate resources must be set aside for the training and capacity-building of child care workers. The curricula developed for the workers must have the right mix of theory and practice.. All efforts should be made for pre-service training and child care teachers' continuing education, both for their own growth and for the sake of the young children whom they so ably care for and serve.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the importance of child care for working people everywhere. In every country, workers, and especially women workers, accord a high priority to child care, both because they care for their children and because they need this service if they are to work and survive. Child care is, therefore, both a right of all workers and an entitlement. There is some evidence to show that child care increases incomes of families living in poverty. There is also a strong link between child care and women's employment and empowerment.

Further, child care benefits all our children - the young ones for whom this service is intended and their older siblings, who can go to school if there is child care. And they no longer have to work to help their families earn. Thus child labour will also be reduced.

Some existing child care services offered in different countries were discussed. But these continue to be less than adequate, and are generally not geared to the needs and reality of working people. Several key messages from child care experiences around the world have been outlined in this paper, in the hope that policy-makers, workers, employers and the public at large will recognize the importance of child care for working people.

And finally, some of the measures that could be considered in developing child care for young children and their working parents, around the world have been outlined. There are and should be a multiplicity of approaches, adapted to local conditions and above all, to workers' needs and their lives. In particular, child care has to be developed in a manner that is empowering for women workers, and promotes their organizing. Workers' rights to child care should be promoted and protected. We must recognize this as their legitimate entitlement.

We have argued that child care is not only an economic and social necessity in every country, but also that our children must have every opportunity, through child care, to grow and develop healthily. The well-being and growth of societies and nations cannot be taken care of without child care. The time has come to allocate increased resources - human and financial for child care. Policies and programmes must be in place, and the right to child care must be made a reality for all working people.

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