Early Childhood Development Operations in LCR: Jamaica, Mexico, and Brazil in Focus by Peter Holland and David Evans

The rationale and evidence of the effectiveness of investing early in children is compelling: early childhood is the most rapid period of development in a human life, with incredible brain development occurring (85% of the brain is wired by age 5). Investments in Early Childhood Development (ECD) are among the most effective – and cost-effective – investments a country can make in its people. Simply put, investing in ECD is an investment for life. Children who participate in ECD programs demonstrate improved school readiness, success, and completion; improved health; reduced risky behavior and crime; and higher productivity and income (see Box 1). Perhaps most importantly for public policy, delays in early childhood are difficult and costly to reverse later in life.

Box 1. Selected impacts of rigorously evaluated early child development programs

**Chicago Child-Parent Center** (Illinois, USA)
- 22% increase in high school graduation
- 32% reduction in juvenile arrests

**Perry Pre-school** (Missouri, USA)
- 14% increase in age-5 IQ
- 25% reduced likelihood of ever having been on welfare as of age 40

**Abecedarian** (North Carolina, USA)
- 2.7 times more likely to have attended a four-year college

The World Bank is particularly well-poised to help clients further the ECD agenda in their countries and improve medium and long-term development for generations to come. Given the inherently multi-sectoral nature of ECD interventions, including *inter alia* health, education, social protection, and the water sectors, the Bank – also multi-sectoral in nature – has a comparative advantage in working in this area, and can truly be more than the sum of its parts – leveraging its deep sectoral expertise on issues from water and urban development to education and health, and creating synergies across those areas. This note discusses how the Bank can work with clients to develop the policies and strategies for comprehensive child development, and to scale-up quality services to children. It presents case studies from three diverse countries and highlights a wide range of the types of operations offered: A multi-sector investment project with disbursements linked to specific results achieved in Jamaica, a traditional sector-specific project in Mexico, and a program of impact evaluations in Brazil. The purpose is to demonstrate the variety of instruments the Bank has, and the tailored approach that the Bank uses to respond to specific client demands for collaborating in the area of ECD.

**The Jamaica ECD Project: A Multi-Sector Investment Operation**

In Jamaica, the Bank is co-financing the implementation of the National Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Development (NSP). Specifically, the NSP improves the monitoring of children’s development, the screening of household-level risks, and the referral systems for early interventions. Another key focus area is enhancing the quality of early childhood schools and care facilities, as well as strengthening early childhood organizations and institutions.

Improving the delivery of ECD services requires actions across sectors such as health, education, and social protection, among others. However, despite proficiency in numerous sectors being one of the Bank’s comparative advantages, coordinating programs across sectors is notoriously challenging, even when interests are aligned and there is substantial political will. In Jamaica, the Bank is leveraging its multi-sectoral experience to develop long-term and sustainable solutions for ECD projects. As of early 2009, a new Jamaica ECD operation (US$15M) is showing promise for multi-sectoral Bank operations. The Project is co-financing the implementation of the country’s multi-sector National Strategic Plan for ECD, using results-based disbursement, whereby funds are released upon the

achievement of certain milestones in the ECD sectors. The Jamaica case examines the three key design features of this multi-sector investment operation.

**Box 2. Jamaica National Strategic Plan**

**Five Actions Areas for Improving Services:**
1. Effective early childhood parenting education and support
2. Effective preventive health care for children 0-6 years old
3. Effective screening diagnosis and early intervention (SDEI) for at-risk children and households
4. Safe, Learner-centered and well-maintained EC facilities
5. Effective curriculum delivery by trained EC practitioners

**Two Action Areas for Strengthening Organizations and Institutions:**
6. Frameworks that promote achieving results in a consultative environment
7. Timely, clear and current appropriate info to support evidence-based decision making

**Setting the Stage: Three enabling factors when considering a multi-sector investment operation**

**A Cross-Sectoral Governing Body:** First, the country needs a multi-sectoral governing body that has the authority and legitimacy to coordinate activities across associated sectors. In the case of Jamaica, the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) fulfills this role: a statutory body under the tutelage of the Ministry of Education, the ECC is governed by a Board of Directors that has representation from the key line ministries as well as the political opposition. The Chairman is appointed by the Governor-General, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. The ECC therefore reaches across sectors and political parties, and is well-placed to lead a consensus-building cross-sectoral planning exercise.

**A National Strategic Plan:** Second, this cross-sectoral governing body should lead the development of a National Strategic Plan, using a participative approach that fosters ownership. In Jamaica, this process was recently completed, culminating in the endorsement by the Cabinet, and launched at a conference presided over by both the Ministers of Finance and Education in early 2009. Building on years of country-led empirical evidence and institutional policy development, and with World Bank technical assistance, the strategy development process lasted approximately one year. The final product is a five-year fully-costed plan featuring approximately 160 milestones, 45 of which are linked to disbursements (disbursement-linked targets, or DLTs – see Box 3), and which span seven action areas (see Box 2). The NSP captures notions of both supply and demand side interventions, the former largely in the education and health sectors, and the latter in social protection.

**An M&E System:** Third, the country requires a robust monitoring and evaluation system that will enable the ECC and the line ministries to track progress toward the NSP milestones and its expected outcomes. With technical assistance from the World Bank, Jamaica has developed a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system that compiles information from the existing systems in each of the line ministries.

**Innovation: Co-financing the Implementation of the NSP using Results-based Disbursement**

With these three preconditions in place, there is now a cross-sectoral strategy that the Bank can co-finance, with clear results (outputs and outcomes) that are easy to monitor: the DLTs. To oversee the implementation of the strategy is the Early Childhood Commission, the Bank’s main counterpart.

**Lending instrument:** The instrument is a Specific Investment Loan (or SIL – a standard, flexible Bank lending instrument) that uses a Sector-Wide Approach (or SWAp – an emphasis on country systems and locally developed programs) for component 1 and standard financing for component 2. Component 1 disburses upon the demonstrated achievement of the disbursement-linked targets in the implementation of the NSP. For each DLT achieved, the Bank disburses US$180,000. The attainment of the DLTs is evaluated by the Early Childhood Commission in collaboration with sectoral ministries, and supporting evidence is reviewed by the Bank during supervision missions. Disbursement-linked targets may be rescheduled, subject to the Bank’s not objecting, should they be missed (or achieved ahead of schedule), in which case they will be paid upon the following (or previous) yearly DLT assessment mission. Component 2 disburses against the expenditures for the inputs, as with standard Bank operations – in this case consultancies contracted by the Government of Jamaica to assist with the implementation of the NSP.

The Jamaica design therefore has several advantages over traditional project designs, two that are particularly important: First, the Government’s cross-sectoral implementation arrangements – including the ECC governing the various sectors, the National Strategic Plan, and the joint planning and review mechanisms among ministries of the disbursement-linked targets – promise coordinated interventions and a holistic approach to child development. Second, the results-

**Box 3. Examples of Disbursement-Linked Targets**

**Early Childhood Institutions:** that 30% of all ECIs meet accreditation standards

**Health:** that a new cadre of health workers known as Child Development Therapists, be trained and hired in the health sector

**Screening:** that a certain number of vulnerable households are screened in order to identify required early interventions for at-risk children
based elements place emphasis on achieving outputs and outcomes, rather than processes and inputs (such as procurement), thereby channeling attention, resources and technical expertise from the Government of Jamaica and the Bank into improving services for children and their parents.

**Mexico: Parent education equalizes opportunities for the poorest**

Established in the 1970s, the Consejo Nacional para el Fomento Educativo (CONAFE) has found successful ways of providing quality services to the hardest-to-reach populations throughout Mexico. Recognizing the importance of helping children start off right, CONAFE developed an ECD program to improve child development and school readiness for 0-4 year olds and their parents (educación inicial). One of the largest programs in the region, educación inicial reaches an estimated 400,000 children and their parents in remote communities throughout Mexico. While very successful (as reported by teachers, school directors, and parents), the program only reaches about 20 percent of its potential population and should be expanded to include a larger portion of Mexico's 10 million children between the ages of 0-4. Of these, about 2 million children live in communities of high poverty incidence. The World Bank co-financed Compensatory Education Project (to be approved by the Bank's Board of Directors in March of 2010) aims to help increase the breadth of the program to include 172 of the poorest and hardest to reach municipalities in the country. The Project will take the form of a $100 million Specific Investment Loan.

**Setting the Stage: Low-cost quality model relies on communities and highly trained volunteers**

CONAFE's approach uses existing systems and infrastructure such as preschools and public spaces for meeting areas to enable a network of volunteers to teach parenting education classes in target communities. This community-based approach is a low-cost way to provide important services to poor children. Preliminary evidence reports that 80 percent of teachers and 76 percent of school directors find greater parental attention and support provided by parents who had participated in CONAFE's ECD program, and that 86.6 percent of parents themselves reported that their children had made an easier-than-expected transition to preschool as a direct result of the program (a more robust impact evaluation is pending).³

CONAFE provides training for parents and caregivers of children aged 0-4, to improve their competencies and practices in caring for children and contribute to the children's comprehensive development and school readiness. These measures ensure that high quality services are provided to CONAFE's target population, all the while keeping costs reasonable: $112 per child per year, thereby allowing the government to serve large numbers of their target group in a sustainable manner. The Bank-financed portion of the Project aims to provide coverage to 225,200 children by 2013 and partially refocuses services to expand the program to approximately 52,670 children in the 172 municipalities targeted under the Agenda for Educational Equity.

Training sessions and activities for parents and caregivers, their young children and pregnant women aim to strengthen family understanding of early childhood development, and demonstrate how the family can best stimulate the process. Each parent education session follows a didactic approach consisting of four phases: reflection, sharing ideas, practice, and closing, and is supported by program materials provided by CONAFE. Evaluations are integrated into the program cycle at the beginning (3 sessions), periodically during the course of the year (4 sessions), and at the conclusion (1 session). A trained promoter provides 18 weekly two-hour sessions to families with children aged 0-4 years, eight monthly two-hour sessions to mothers, and eight monthly two-hour sessions to expectant mothers, during nine-month yearly cycles.

**Innovations: Providing Early Stimulation and Targeting Fathers**

Building on the successes of the long-standing partnership with CONAFE, two innovations have been designed under this new operation: more early stimulation activities working directly with children (together with their parents), and parenting education directed explicitly toward fathers. The Project supports 18 weekly two-hour early stimulation sessions for children under 2 years old accompanied by their parents and five special two-hour sessions aimed at fathers. These sessions address the issue of fathers' underrepresentation in parenting education programs, and promote their participation in childrearing. By targeting fathers explicitly, CONAFE signals to them the importance of being involved with their children and supporting their children's development. Recognizing that fathers have different needs and levels of knowledge from mothers with regard to childrearing and are potentially more constrained in their availability to attend sessions, CONAFE offers a smaller number of sessions (five) tailored to fathers' needs. In addition, offering sessions only for fathers creates a space for them to share and learn amongst their peers, thereby reducing any potential negative association with attending the program or discussing personal matters.

**Brazil: Helping sophisticated clients plan and develop ECD**

**Setting the Stage: Affecting Policy through Knowledge Generation**

The Bank is funding a program of analytical work on ECD in Brazil, including i) a detailed mapping of which groups currently have access across the country and ii) a menu of practices in providing early child development (across health, education, and other interventions) throughout Brazil. These analytical
products have been elaborated in careful collaboration with early child development specialists in government and civil society, with the intent to feed directly into municipal and federal decisions about how and where to best expand early child education programs. Another element of the Bank’s analytical engagement in this area in Brazil involves rigorous evaluation of innovative early child education programs.

The World Bank joined with local researchers in 2007 to assist the Municipality in a rigorous impact evaluation of the effectiveness of daycare centers for children from 3 months to 4 years (crèches) in improving child cognitive and socio-emotional development, as well as improving maternal labor force participation and reducing maternal stress. With more than two children applying for each available crèche opening, the Municipality adopted a lottery to ensure fair and transparent allocation of these limited spaces – a decision which allowed for a randomized trial, the gold standard in impact evaluations. The impact evaluation team has kept track of a sample of children who were randomly selected into the program as well as a sample randomly selected onto the waiting list so that – this year – a cognitive test adapted especially for the Rio de Janeiro context can be applied to demonstrate the effect of these crèches on children's development. Data collected in the first year demonstrate that the program did lead more women to enter the labor market. In addition to measuring the overall impacts of crèches, this evaluation has occasioned an ongoing dialogue on appropriate instruments for measuring children's cognitive development, such that the Municipality is now working to include cognitive testing in each daycare center as a monitoring tool to flag children in need of special attention.

In December of 2009, the Municipality piloted a new program, called Primeira Infância Completa (Complete Early Childhood), which takes advantage of existing crèches to offer childcare on Saturdays, coupled with parent training in health and education. These training classes use videos and discussion to cover a range of areas from specific health interventions (How to treat infant diarrhea?) to stimulating playtime (The world of make-believe!). Based on the intensely positive parental response to the program, the Municipality will work to expand the program in the coming months, and the World Bank technical team will be assisting to implement a careful evaluation of the same, taking advantage of a lottery assigning children to the program. This will inform the Municipality as to the relative effectiveness of their weekday childcare program as compared to the Saturday care with parent training, which will directly affect future plans to expand both programs.

In Conclusion....

The Bank has a variety of instruments available to help clients move the ECD agenda forward and tailor the program to each country’s needs. These instruments can be designed to leverage the Bank’s comparative advantage of being a multi-sectoral institution. The cross-sectoral elements can be introduced through the institutional arrangements for implementation, as done in Jamaica, or can be built into the results frameworks of SILs or the actions and triggers of Development Policy Loans (currently being considered in Brazil) through the careful selection of indicators across sectors. The Bank can use its health experts to improve government early child education goals, and it can use its education experts to improve government early child social protection policies. It can encourage countries to innovate and to expand on promising innovations, as in Mexico.

Underpinning the technical design of ECD operations is knowledge generation about who is receiving ECD services, the quality of those services, and how those services can be improved and expanded. Existing evidence on the effectiveness of ECD programs has been a catalyst to many countries expanding investment in children; the next round of knowledge generation will examine the relative effectiveness of different interventions, such as the weekday versus Saturday care in Brazil, interacted with parent training. It will also explore how to implement quality programs on larger scales; most existing evidence comes from relatively focused areas. The Bank is providing technical assistance in these areas with a number of clients in Latin America, the Caribbean, and in other regions. Beyond all of these country-specific efforts, the Bank is coordinating a region-wide community of practice to facilitate dialogue between policymakers across countries and across sectors. To follow the developments on these topics join us on http://comunidadprimerainfancia.ning.com/

Box 4. Selected Results Indicators for Evaluations of Early Child Education in Brazil

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<tr>
<th>Children:</th>
<th>Parents:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Vocabulary</td>
<td>• Labor force participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fine and gross motor skills</td>
<td>• Stress</td>
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<td>• Social interaction</td>
<td>• Parenting practices</td>
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<td>• Frequency of illness</td>
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<td>• Height and weight</td>
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Innovation: Evaluating the Relative Impact of Weekday versus Weekend Care, Plus Parent Training

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