

World Vision Myanmar's Lessons Learned from Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centres in partnership with primary schools

Township: Aungmyaytharzan, Mandalay- Basic Education Primary Schools # 9, # 40, #27 & # 4



Principals and the township education officer (TEO) in Aungmyayetharzan, urban township in Mandalay, shared that children from resource-poor families in the school neighborhood could benefit from preschool experience to allow a smooth transition to primary schools. Often, older siblings missed school because they have to take care of younger brothers and sisters when parents were working. Principals and the TEO requested proposed MEC ECCD to be established on primary school campuses. Acquiring community land also had challenges due to high land prices in the area, therefore, upon donors' approval; four ECCD centers were established as part of primary schools.

Despite challenges and lessons learned, the initiative enjoyed a tremendous support by township level education administrators and served as a model for future school-based ECCD in the area. See the details below.

Management

ECCD management committees were formed under the leadership of primary school principals. The committees were represented by representatives from the communities, teachers, parents and business owners in the community. The principals usually served as the chair and took overall responsibilities of managing the centers. Unlike community-based ECCD where committees played a critical role in managing the day-to-day operations of the centers, the school-based management

committees, though effective, were more or less advisory to the principals. Principals who were present on campuses were able to provide close monitoring and often made key decisions without consultations with committee members. At times, implementation of ECCD project activities had to be negotiated with school regulations, for example, the location of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, separate fencing for ECCD on school campuses. Construction process and financial management of the center operations also posed a challenge for the principals because they were not familiar with WV guidelines for construction. During construction, project staff worked closely with the principals and management committees to make sure process follow required financial guidelines, like record keeping, quotation and tender processes etc. Applying a community-based management in school setting didn't work out well and resulted in confusion over responsibilities of individuals -- committee vs. school administration -- over center operations. Based on the experience, in future implementation of school-based ECCD, World Vision Myanmar (WVM) will develop a management committee structure that is relevant to school setting, considering the role and responsibilities of the principals and teachers. At the same time, recognizing the importance of parent and community participation, WVM will invest in capacity building of school – based management committees to ensure a meaningful representation of parents and community members alongside principals and teachers.

Sustainability:

The principals were not familiar with income-generating activities (IGA) or willing to engage in IGA. Schools were not allowed to fundraise. Therefore, ECCD management committees couldn't engage in fundraising activities to support center operations. All school proposed that they prefer to officially register the centers as government- run school-based ECCD when Ministry of Education (MoE) establishes the plan for school-based ECCD. Meanwhile, they would like to continue working with WV and other agencies to receive financial support for the centers. Pending decisions on school-based ECCD created uncertainties over long-term sustainability of ECCD on school campuses. Despite uncertainties, WVM was able to work with one out of 4 schools to engage in IGA with a strong support the management committee WVM will continue to work with the school management to explore options for income generating activities, like savings and loans for teachers that are feasible in school context.

Caregivers:

Selected by the principals and committees, ECCD caregivers were trained in WV led one-month and refresher caregiver training. They also had access to additional trainings provided through government agencies and its partners. Teacher salary support was provided by the project to date and will be supported by WV when schools don't have IGA until the centers are recognized by the government as school-based ECCD. Though they were part of the school system and managed directly by the principals, ECCD caregivers were not official employees of the school or received the same compensation package as primary level teachers. ECCD teachers often felt left out from other teachers and they were considered as "support personnel" because they lacked the training and official status as basic education teachers. Their ability to apply the skills and knowledge from ECCD training sometimes depended on the management structure and the support from the principals. In some cases, primary teachers, who were not familiar with ECCD, were put as the lead teacher for ECCD by the principal; ECCD teacher could only provide support to that teacher. In such circumstances, WV project staff worked with everyone on regular MQS assessments, reviewed the findings with them and discussed necessary technical interventions. That brought everyone to be

onboard with necessary program standards for ECCD centers and to recognize the need to apply training knowledge and skills into ECCD programming.

Parents:

Parent involvement was marginal in ECCD programming. It is not typical for parents/guardians to be actively involved in primary schools (same for middle and high schools). Except for those served on Parent Teacher Association (PTA), parents were not expected to have regular meetings with teachers or involved in school activities. As the results, parents were confused over ECCD requirements for regular parent-teacher meetings, opportunities to serve on ECCD committee and attending parenting education sessions. Parents saw ECCD as part of primary school and assumed that the same rules applied to both levels. Hopefully, ECCD experience would serve as a model for active parent involvement in school in the near future. As most parents were casual workers, they worked most of time, therefore they were not available for meetings and PE sessions. Due to limited capacity of management committee as discussed under “management,” parenting awareness sessions were not conducted on a regular basis. Principals and teachers were not originally from the area and they didn’t know the families well, adding difficulties in reaching out to the parents. WV will continue to closely work with the principals, teachers and management committees to facilitate parent meetings and reach out to the parents for increased participation in ECCD.

Quality, Standards and Monitoring

Regular monitoring was conducted and results were reported. Principals, teachers and TEO, as education professionals understood and welcomed quality standards required by the project and were supportive of the processes and documentations. That was not the case for community-based ECCD where members of the management committees didn’t have either the education level or the experience. The principals recognized these ECCD practices as a way to bring quality standards to the centers and that they (the centers) could be models for future school-based ECCD in the area. In preparing for school-based ECCD program, ECCD teacher training were organized by the Department of Education at township and regional levels and all four MEC- supported centers were asked to serve as practicum sites for these training.

Bureaucratic Processes

Since ECCD centers were located on school campuses and administered by principals and TEO, processes required to get a permission from the state and national level governments, was not always easy, rather lengthy, for example, building repairs, getting permission for non-Myanmar citizens, “foreigners,” to visit the centers. WVM maintains a good working relationship with government agencies, health, education and social welfare at national and regional levels. Aungmyethazan Area Development Programme (ADP) in particular was able to host visits from donors and MEC over the course of the project and were able to arrange visits within short timeframes.