

THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

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A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN INDIA

Edited by
Mina Swaminathan



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Chapter 9

Learning from Experience: An Overview of the SURAKSHA Studies

Mina Swaminathan

The introduction to the just discussed case studies drew attention to their diversities; this analysis will focus on the insights to be gained by a close study of their commonalties and underlying principles. Starting from a consideration of the *why*, or the motivation (reasons) with which each agency entered the scene, it will go on to examine the *how*, or the manner of functioning of each, as well as the *what*, *when* and *where*, or the programme content. It will also discuss by whom, or the role of the workers — the key players in the projects — and the participation of the community. Costs and quality, the nature of finances, the question of sustainability, and the impact of the programmes or *with what* and *so what* will be some of the issues reviewed to gain insights, before summarising the lessons to be learnt from these studies.

Motivation

The reasons for entry into the child care programme can broadly be classified into two types. Five out of the eight (MC, FDC, SEWA, MSG, and PWDS) entered the arena in response to a perceived need, though this may not have been part of their original plan of

action or even personal life plan, as in the case of FDC and MC. In the case of the other three (BNS, URMUL and SIDH), it was a planned and conscious decision taken for several reasons, the need for child care being one of them. URMUL took it up as a means of integrating and deepening its community development agenda; BNS looked upon it as a new challenge in its chosen field of specialisation; and for SIDH it was the outcome of a life choice in pursuit of certain ideals.

Manner of Working

The first step in any welfare or development activity is assessment of need as the basis for preparation of a strategy and plan of action. How did each of these go about the process of exploring needs, how much time and what methods did they use?

Need Assessment

For MC, the process was, right from the start and continues to be, an intensive, face-to-face personal exploration, often carried out in small teams of two or three people making informal visits, relying on oral communication. This activity goes on as monitoring even after the programme is launched, and is hence a continuous process.

For SIDH, there was no formal needs assessment. The *balwadis* and schools were launched and then adapted in stages, through a long process of response to emerging needs, through dialogue and interaction, leading to evolution.

Both URMUL and BNS utilised a pre-launch rapid survey through a series of community meetings to establish rapport, clarify objectives, set up procedures, and lay the foundations. In both cases, since the programme was already fixed, and could not be modified, no compulsion was felt to carry out a survey of needs.

SEWA began the programme as a result of feedback from women workers about the need for creches, and continued to get information and support through its linkages with the Trade Union and with employers.

PWDS took as its starting point a formal research study on the conditions of palmyrah workers. However, as the child care programme

followed the other programmes, it also made use of information from the linkages with its other activities.

MSG started with feedback from women members about the constraints placed on them by the burden of child care, and went on to document child care patterns through a research study conducted by the University.

FDC is the most difficult to make statements about, since it refers to unrelated individuals. No systematic surveys seem to have been done, and most caregivers started their programme in response to needs perceived and learned about through friends, neighbours and personal observations, matching these with their own inclinations, needs, time, etc. Since services vary widely, this approach can best be described as trial and error in a market-oriented setting.

In four cases (FDC, SEWA, PWDS, and MSG) the programme grew out of feedback from the community, supported (in two cases) by a formal research study. In another two (BNS and URMUL), the design was fixed, while the final two (MC and SIDH) allowed the programme to evolve slowly from a predetermined launch.

Work Strategies

The strategies used by each organisation can be graded along a continuum related to the nature, timing and degree of response to, and assessment of, needs. These can broadly be grouped under five main strategies:

1. Launch programme, then inform/advertise to potential users (FDC).
2. Pre-launch campaign of visits to community to inform, clarify, seek cooperation, set up procedures and guidelines for selection of workers (URMUL and BNS).
3. Informal pre-launch exploration through small teams of resource persons. Interaction with community initiated with launch, which grows afterwards (SIDH and MC).
4. In-depth involvement of community in pre-launch feedback, needs assessment and planning (SEWA and MSG), and also in planning, decision-making, training and monitoring (MSG).
5. An unique strategy used by PWDS was not only pre-launch consultation with community but testing of the potential worker by

requiring her to run the centre without any financial support for a certain period.

The Programme Content

Quality and Cost

There is wide variety both as regards nature of programme and age-group catered to (see Table 9.1). In some cases, there even appear to be two goals, one or the other being attained at times (SIDH, PWDS, BNS). It is difficult to make statements about quality without laying down criteria and making comparisons, which is not possible at this stage. But, it appears that six are making attempts to attain high quality, defused in different ways, and succeed to a greater or lesser extent (e.g., URMUL often defeated by the circumstances, and PWDS by multiple demands). In two cases, there is no attempt — in FDC, there seems to be little awareness of the concept, while in MSG, quality has been consciously assigned a lower priority.

Strategies and Outcomes

Each strategy had a different outcome, since different combinations of factors lead to different results. Hence, any attempts to categorise the agencies also lead to different outcomes according to the criterion used. The following are more of indications of a tendency towards one side rather than another, and not a rigid demarcation. Three kinds of categorisation of strategies and outcomes are illustrated below:

1. Need-based	Programme-based
MC	BNS
PWDS	URMUL
SEWA	FDC
MSG	SIDH

The group on the left started out with some attempt at assessing needs, while the group on the right began with a fixed programme base.

Table 9.1
Programme Characteristics

	FDC	MC	SIDH	URMUL	SEWA	PWDS	MSG	BNS
Main agency focus	Mother and child	Child and mother	Education/ community development	Rural development, people's rights	Women's development and rights	Economic and social development	Women's awareness/ development	Preschool/ school education
Age group served	0-10	0-10	3-8	3-6	0-3	3-6	1-6	3-6
Nature of programme	Custodial	Holistic	Educational	Custodial/ Holistic	Holistic	Educational and custodial	Custodial	Educational/ Holistic
Cost/Quality	VQ LC	HQ HC	HQ MC	VQ MC	HQ HC	MQ LC	LQ LC	VQ MC
Most outstanding characteristic	Convenience to parents and timing	At the door-step service to transients and poor	Alternative school for 3-8 years old children	Achievement limited by clash of work styles/culture	Efforts for sustainability and women orientation	Mobilisation of resources	Child care as tool for empowerment of women	Quality resulting from specialised skills and extra inputs

Notes:

HQ = High Quality
 MQ = Medium Quality
 LQ = Low Quality
 VQ = Variable Quality

HC = High Cost
 MC = Medium Cost
 LC = Low Cost

2. Process-oriented ↔ Content-oriented

MSG
 MC
 SIDH

BNS
 URMUL
 FDC
 PWDS
 SEWA

The group on the left is more concerned with the *process* of development of the programme, while on the right the emphasis is oriented more towards *content*.

3. Slow growth/ Optimal size Rapid growth/ Target-oriented

Small-scale
 MC
 SIDH
 MSG
 SEWA

Large-scale
 PWDS
 URMUL
 BNS
 FDC

The group on the left grows slowly and has been quick to recognise optimal size, beyond which quality constraints may outnumber advantages. The group on the right has, or has been given, targets and is more constrained thereby. The scale of operation also differs.

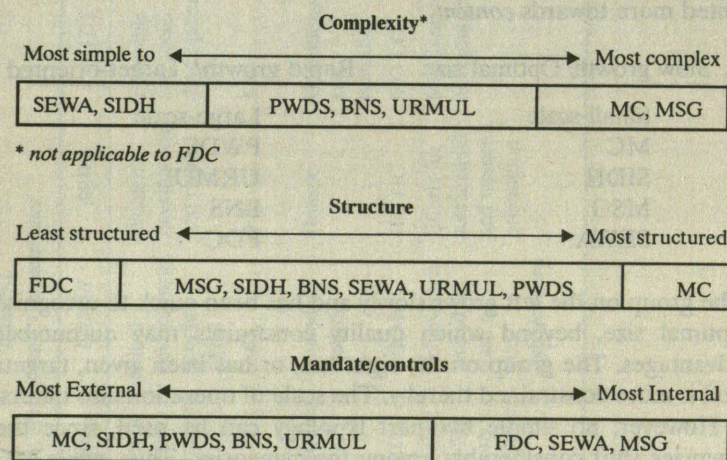
However, no simple two-part typology can be used, since the agencies shift considerably among the categories. Thus, while MC and MSG fall on the left side for all the categories, and can be described as need-based, process-oriented, small and slow-growing, FDC, BNS and URMUL fall on the right side in all cases and can be described as programme-based, content-oriented, large-scale and fast-growing, though even such a description is not altogether fair. The remaining three (PWDS, SEWA and SIDH) refuse to fit in so neatly, and combine the characteristics in various ways. The exercise, hence, is intended to illustrate the complexity of the programmes rather than to make judgmental statements.

Organisational Structure and Methods

The organisational structures evolved by each agency not only grow out of their history and suit their individual needs, but also reflect the philosophy, work style and approach of each. Again, a sliding

scale reflecting tendencies to swing to one side or the other seems to better reflect the situation than a simple classification. The scales indicate the degree of complexity, the degree of structure and the extent to which mandate/controls come from the agency or the community.

Figure 9a
A Sliding Scale



The Worker

The centrality of the worker to the entire programme is one of the most outstanding features common to all the agencies. The worker is the key person around whom the success of the programme is built. Yet, there is considerable variation as regards the workers' profile, selection, training, motivation, remuneration, job satisfaction, and status (see Table 9.2).

In two cases, the workers are selected by the organisation, in one by the community, and in four by some combination of the two, while, obviously, in FDC they are self-selected. The level of wages and nature of working conditions also vary, being best in the NGOs and worst in the government-dependent agencies (excepting PWDS). Yet the outcomes, as seen by the level of job satisfaction,

Table 9.2
Worker Characteristics

	FDC	MC	SIDH	URMUL	SEWA	PWDS	MSG	BNS
<i>Training Duration/Extent</i>	None	Continuous	Continuous	Initial	Continuous	Initial + some Content	Initial + some Process	Continuous
<i>Methodology</i>	—	Process	Process	Content-oriented with innovative methods	Evolving	Content	Process	Content-oriented with skilled trainers
<i>Curriculum Resources</i>	—	Localised Internal	Localised Internal/External	Standard Internal	Localised Internal/External	Evolving Internal/External	Localised Internal/External	Standard Internal
<i>Selection</i>	Self	Organisation	Organisation	Community/ Organisation	Organisation/ Union	Organisation/ Community	Community	Community/ Organisation
<i>Wages and working conditions</i>	B	A	A	C	A	B	C	C
<i>Job satisfaction/ Motivation</i>	A	A	A	B	A	A	B	B

Notes:

A = Excellent

B = Good

C = Average/Standardised

seem to be as much linked to the extent of community involvement in selection (and hence status, self-esteem, and accountability) as to wages and working conditions. This is seen in the case of URMUL, BNS, MSG and PWDS.

On the other hand, MC, SIDH and SEWA not only offer good wages and working conditions, but also make special attempts to deal with motivation and morale as part of training and human resource development.

The training patterns are equally variable, and each has had to develop its own unique model in five of the organisations. FDC has no training. BNS and URMUL adopt a standard curriculum and the training package is the same, but with different outcomes, due to differences in skills and approaches. MC and SIDH share similar approaches and have similar outcomes. All are still evolving.

Community Involvement

The extent, nature and quality of community involvement can be described as a series of steps, from least to most.

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 1. Preliminary survey | BNS, URMUL |
| 1a. Including formal research | PWDS, MSG |
| 2. Inform, communicate and casually consult | BNS, URMUL, SIDH, PWDS |
| 3. Educate, communicate | MC, SIDH, BNS, PWDS |
| 4. Participate | MC, SIDH, PWDS, BNS |
| 5. Consult, monitor | SEWA, MSG, MC, SIDH |
| Some informal consultation | |
| 6. Plan, strategise, take decisions | MSG, SEWA |
| 7. Mobilise resources | PWDS, SEWA |

The growing depth, intensity and complexity of community involvement as one travels up the scale reflects the shift from a service-delivery and implementation type of approach (most evident in the government-sponsored programmes) to a genuinely need-responsive, participatory and flexible one. It is also evident that an optimal size is indicated for achieving the highest and most satisfactory levels of community involvement.

The Finances

The financial situation can be examined from two angles, that of expenditure, or costs, and that of income. The issue of sustainability comes into play here.

The most significant element in child care is the human element, hence the major element in cost is the human cost, which includes wages and working conditions on the one hand (which affect job satisfaction, motivation and social status), and training and worker development on the other.

The wide variability in costs and in quality of programme, among the eight organisations, has already been indicated in the earlier table on programme characteristics. Further analysis of each of the programmes shows that the factors underlying cost and quality are the same in several important aspects.

Cost/Quality Relationship

High cost/high quality	Low cost/low quality
High worker/child ratio	Low worker/child ratio
High worker salary, and good working conditions leading to satisfaction/motivation	Low salaries and poor working conditions leading to absenteeism, apathy, poor motivation and low job satisfaction
High supervisor/worker ratio	Low or no supervision
Flexible programming	Fixed programming
Continuous training	No/minimal training or one-time initial training only
Community involvement and structures for local initiative and decision-making	Centralised decision-making with little/no scope for community involvement

The relation between costs and quality is linear, but in one direction only. Cost cannot predict quality, but quality is predictive of cost; that is, high cost need not be accompanied by high quality, but high quality invariably leads to high costs. To put it the other way around, low quality may accompany high cost, but low cost is usually low

quality. This relationship is often concealed by the phenomenon of 'hidden costs', reflected in the so-called 'free' inputs made by voluntary agencies in terms of zeal, application, motivation and personal charisma. However, if all these were suitably allowed for in accounting terms, the true costs would be much higher than they appear. Since the costs are borne by someone other than the programme itself, they remain 'hidden', but exist nevertheless.

Of considerable importance also are the supportive linkages, which have the effect of reducing costs, since these are shared between several activities. Looked at from this standpoint, the agencies can be graded along a scale from those with most to least supportive linkages. These factors have a significant bearing on the issue of replicability.

Supportive linkages:

- Most: SEWA, MSG, PWDS.
- Some: BNS, URMUL, SIDH.
- Least: MC, FDC.

As regards income, the organisations have different patterns of funding, and can be ranged along a continuum according to the degree of dependence on government funding or donor funding.

Funding pattern:

- Government-dependent: BNS, URMUL, MSG.
- Wholly self-reliant: FDC.
- Donor-dependent: SEWA, SIDH, MC, PWDS.

However, not all of them are in the same position, and the degree of efforts to mobilise other resources, diversify sources of funding and progress towards self-reliance and sustainability varies considerably. The pattern is indicated below.

Moving towards sustainability:

- Most: SEWA, PWDS, FDC.
- Some: SIDH, MC.
- Least: MSG, BNS, URMUL.

The last two, BNS and URMUL, are dipping into other resources to a great extent to sustain their programmes, since they cannot run

their projects according to standards acceptable to them on the basis of the funds made available by the government. At the same time, they are prevented from raising funds from other sources, except within the constraints laid down by the rules applicable to government programmes (e.g., no 'fees' may be charged from the children, and no regular contributions can be collected from the community). Evidently, donations will not be attracted to a fully funded government programme, hence the phenomenon of 'hidden costs' already mentioned. As far as MSG is concerned, the leaders have not yet thought ahead to the time when donor/government funding will no longer be available or will be reduced. The rest of the agencies are all making efforts, each in its own way, to diversify sources and look for new ones, reduce dependence on any one agency, and increase community participation. The most innovative in the matter of mobilisation of resources is undoubtedly PWDS, which seems to think of new financial schemes every day. The common thread is partnership, which appears to be an essential ingredient of sustainability.

The Impact

While only a few formal evaluations, surveys, or research studies have been done on the eight agencies to assess impact, this documentation is in itself one such attempt. It tries to bring together all the available information and insights and attempts to draw some conclusions from them. The impact will here be considered at four levels:

1. Impact on children, women and older siblings

Well-documented	MC, SEWA.
Some	SIDH, MSG, PWDS.
None yet	FDC, BNS, URMUL.

The importance of such studies is now amply realised, and much more information of this nature may soon become available.

2. Impact on community and institutions

Some documentation	SEWA, PWDS, MSG.
None	FDC, MC, BNS, URMUL, SIDH.

Indicators for studies of such difficult-to-measure, complex and intangible variables have still to be worked out.

3. Impact on training

It can be said that MC's approach and methodology of training has had considerable influence nationally and over time, both on the ICDS system of training itself, as also on several other institutions. This has been achieved through its Extension Training work and publications. As for the other agencies, it is too soon to say, as the efforts are on a tiny scale and still evolving.

4. Impact on policy and wider concerns

Some	SEWA, MC.
A little	BNS, URMUL.
None yet	SIDH, FDC, MSG, PWDS.

The efforts of SEWA and MC to launch a national network to act as a pressure group for child care services has begun to yield results, though still on a small scale. Systematic campaigning and lobbying has led to the establishment of the National Creche Fund, and to some other achievements. With limited resources of money and human power, the agencies can obviously spare very little time and energy to put in the kind of effort needed to make a dent in policy. Only a beginning has been made as yet, and much more remains to be done. For instance, BNS and URMUL can play a significant role by sharing with a wider public the advantages and limitations of partnership with government, the clash of work styles and cultures, and their own unique ways of resolving these conflicts.

Insights and Lessons

How can one consolidate the experiences of these innovative programmes of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)? Do the insights gained have relevance for mainstream programmes in the country? What directions do they suggest for the future of ECCE?

A Holistic Development Perspective

The most outstanding innovative examples share a holistic perspective in which the development of the young child is part of a larger whole — the development of the community. Here ECCE has to perform multiple tasks and address multiple needs — support for

the hard-pressed working mother, release from child-minding for the older girl, attention to the most vulnerable 0–2 years-old infants, rather than focus on the education of the 3 to 6 year old child alone. This trend is inevitable in a developing country, where ECCE has to compete for scarce resources with demands from other sectors. Gradually, however, awareness of the educational needs of the age-group, 3 to 6 years, is spreading among those who have so far given it less emphasis; and one is encouraged to believe that in future they will attend in more detail to developing enriching activities to promote children's learning. Unfortunately, such a trend is not immediately visible among those institutions which purportedly focus on purely educational objectives in the private sector, and this has a negative impact on the voluntary/development sector in turn. A greater emphasis on ECE per se is undoubtedly needed.

Programme Quality

A holistic interpretation of the term 'quality' also begins to take shape from these experiences. Quality is related to factors like relevance to the community, and the basis in perceived needs, which vary greatly, as well as to more stable, easily measured, and 'objective' indicators, such as attainment of certain standards in health, nutrition and education. Hence, flexibility, sensitivity and responsiveness to need, localisation or adaptation to diversity, cultural relevance, low-cost approaches, and extent of community participation become important criteria for evaluation of quality. Here too, the curriculum of preschool education and its transaction in the classroom takes its place as only one among several aspects of quality, an aspect which requires renewed emphasis.

Human Resource Development

The importance of the worker as the most significant element in the success of the programme as well as in the attainment of standards of quality stands out very strongly. What brings out the best in her? There seem to be two kinds of answers, one related to training, and the other to motivation. As far as training is concerned, aspects like continuity over a period of time, methods, style and tempo, links with practical ground realities, and type of relationship with trainer,

that is, the *process* elements, are of far greater significance than the more formal conditions like duration, type of curriculum and qualifications of trainers, that is, the *content* elements.

Secondly, as far as motivation is concerned, while adequate wages and decent working conditions undoubtedly play a crucial role in helping the worker get job satisfaction — especially in a situation where the norm is poor wages, low status and unsatisfactory working conditions — the role of the community in selecting, sustaining and supporting the worker is equally powerful in giving her a sense of self-esteem and status. In some cases, this even makes up for poor wages and working conditions.

Costs and Quality

Not enough information is available yet to make an accurate determination of costs, especially as the 'social costs' and 'hidden' benefits of various programmes have yet to be quantified and appropriate indicators developed. However, it is interesting to note that the factors underlying cost and quality seem to be the same in many respects. The main elements in cost are the human resources. Experience in India is sufficient to establish that the cost of materials and equipment is not a significant factor in either quality or cost. It has been demonstrated that all aspects of a good programme, from nutrition to play activity, can be run with low cost, locally available materials. It thus seems more meaningful to speak of cost-effectiveness than to pursue the mirage of 'low cost'.

Replicability and Sustainability

No model is exactly replicable, nor should one expect it to be so. However, there are replicable elements, and these can be isolated, defined and replicated. In management terms, these elements can be isolated as participation, commitment, communication, decision-making, leadership, training and steady focus on the basics. All these are encountered in each of the case studies. It would be useful to work out what structures and managerial strategies promote the development of these elements, so that they could be incorporated, as far as possible, into mainstream programmes. (The following note by Anjali Mehta expands on this.)

Sustainability can be looked at from three angles:

1. *Programme:* It appears that the process-oriented, need-based and evolving strategies have a higher chance of sustainability than the more programme-based and target-oriented ones. Sometimes, in fact, the latter may even begin to deviate from or, run counter to, the community's perceived needs.
2. *Organisational:* The more the community is involved, the more the sense of community 'ownership', the greater the chances for sustainability, since dependence on an outside agency for decision-making, funding and other elements of continuity is reduced. It is even possible to visualise a situation where the initiating agency can hand over the programme to the community and move away.
3. *Financial:* The agencies which have diversified their funding sources, reduced dependence on any single source (whether government or donor) and mobilised community resources have the best chances for sustainability.

These brief comments must suffice to indicate the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn from a study of these few innovative programmes, and of the many more which it has not been possible to name or describe here. The crucial question is to what extent the insights from these small but richly meaningful programmes can be applied on a larger scale to the mainstream child care services in the country. Too often one tends to rest in admiration of the 'small is beautiful' idea, and to forget that 'large is necessary'. The challenge for professionals in the developing world is going to scale, spreading the 'beautiful' to all our children.