

DISCUSSION PAPER

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT TO

parenting  
in Bangladesh and India

**Written by**  
Fahmida Jabeen  
Ravi Karkara

**Reviewed by**  
Annika Malmberg  
Lena Karlsson



**Save the Children**

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## **The vision**

Save the Children works for:

- a world which respects and values each child
- a world which listens to children and learns
- a world where all children have hope and opportunity

## **The mission**

Save the Children fights for children's rights.

We deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide.

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Office: 00977-1-5531928/9  
Fax: 00977-1-5527266  
Email: [info@savethechildren.org.np](mailto:info@savethechildren.org.np)  
URL: [www.rb.se](http://www.rb.se)

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## Acronyms & Abbreviations

BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DPT	Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
ICMH	Institute of Child and Mother Health
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPA	National Plan of Action
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RCH	Reproductive and Child Health Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

# Preface

Despite progress in improving children's survival and health in Bangladesh and India, large numbers of children and young people still lack the opportunity to develop to their full potential. There is a growing recognition that children need support not only for their physical growth but also for psychological, social, emotional and cognitive development. Parents provide the most immediate and the most important environment where children can develop to their full capacities in these domains. Although most parents have the innate skills to nurture and care for children, many parents need assistance and support to bring up their children.

The current situation of girls and boys in Bangladesh and India indicates that mere delivery of services and health messages will not improve the children's lives. More and more girls and boys are fleeing their homes, and are forced to work in hazardous and exploitative conditions. Some come into conflict with the law. Many girls enter into early or forced marriages, becoming vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Adolescent girls and boys are trafficked for the purposes of domestic work and forced prostitution. Both girls and boys are subject to various forms of physical and psychological punishment. In fact, girls and boys in various local, national and regional consultations have expressed that negative and violent parental behaviour was one of their most significant concerns.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that the family has a key responsibility to ensure children's fundamental rights, as it is the main setting within which children are cared for and protected, and the primary place where children's first significant relationships develop. These relationships provide the foundations for children's future development. The CRC also asserts the obligations of State Parties to support parents

and families to ensure children's rights. Based on these rights, Save the Children Sweden Regional Programme for South & Central Asia took the initiative to develop this discussion paper on government support to parenting.

The discussion paper intends to review the existing support given to families by State Parties, as well to identify programmes that focus on improving parenting styles for child development. The results of this preliminary study should enable Save the Children and others to stimulate further discussions that can direct future policy and programming of governments, I/NGOs, national and international organisations and other stakeholders in the region.

The governments of Bangladesh and India are supporting health, nutrition and education programmes. However, investment in these sectors is inadequate and does not cover all children. Policymakers and development partners are realising that support to parenting for child development is an investment for the future which a society cannot ignore. This discussion paper is not a policy proscription but is expected to stimulate further discussions and debate, and help direct future policy and programming.

I would like to thank Ravi Karkara and Fahmida Jabeen for producing this document. I also acknowledge Lena Karlsson and Annika Malmberg for critically reviewing the document and for their support on the issue of parenting.

**Lisa Lundgren**

Regional Representative

Save the Children Sweden

South & Central Asia

# Foreword

Save the Children Sweden recognises the importance of strengthening the role of families as duty bearers. During 2005-2007 Save the Children Sweden is prioritising the development of the organisation's knowledge and programmes concerning government responsibility to support and assist families (CRC, Article 27), and is analysing the consequences that has in different cultural and geographic contexts.

Parents and caretakers are currently included in Save the Children Sweden's programmes on issues of trafficking, child labour, child participation, etc. Moreover, Save the Children Sweden possesses experience and knowledge about children who lack sufficient parental support, such as street children, refugees, and children in prison and other institutions. Save the Children also has long experience in training professional groups who work directly with children in Sweden and internationally in relevant legal, psychological and social issues. The focus to date has mainly been on supporting children who have already been separated from their families and less on prevention and strengthening the preconditions for parents and caretakers. The organisation therefore has less experience of working at political levels to convince governments, including municipalities, to create good preconditions for parents.

This priority introduces a somewhat new aspect to Save the Children Sweden's programming as it identifies parents as a strategic group for implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and points out that State Parties have specific obligations towards parents in their role as primary caretakers.

Within Save the Children Programme Area 1, "Children exposed to violence and abuse," Save the Children Sweden emphasises the importance of working with families to equip them with skills on child development,

including positive discipline to combat physical and humiliating punishment, and to sensitise them to child sexual abuse and other forms of abuse and exploitation.

During various consultations for the UN Study on Violence against Children, girls and boys highlighted the importance of NGOs and State Parties working with families to equip them with parenting skills and improved livelihoods. Within the UN Study, therefore, the setting of "the family and the home" is crucial for preventing violence against children. The home is also the most sensitive setting, since families assume they know what is best for their children and State Parties are often reluctant to address issues within families.

Due to adult resistance to listen to children and take their views seriously, children who are subject to violence within the family seldom speak up about the violent behaviour that they face. Therefore programmes designed to support and strengthen parents in their role must include knowledge on child participation and violence against children. Such programmes must target not only mothers but also fathers - and should include sensitisation on gender and diversity issues.

This discussion paper outlines the reasons why parenting support is important. It also reviews existing policies, schemes and programmes run by State Parties in Bangladesh and India which support families and parenting efforts, and outlines a number of recommendations to improve government support to parenting. The discussion paper will provide an important basis for strengthening Save the Children Sweden's programmes to strengthen support to parents in the South and Central Asia region.

**Annika Malmberg**

Programme Advisor

Save the Children Sweden

**Lena Karlsson**

Global Advisor on Violence against Children

Save the Children Sweden

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**Fahmida Jabeen**

Principal Researcher Parenting  
Save the Children Sweden

**Ravi Karkara**

Regional Programme Manager  
Save the Children Sweden

Government Support to  
Parenting in Bangladesh  
and India



# I. Introduction

**“My parents used to think that I was their property. They used to abuse me using words my mouth cannot repeat without making me cry.”**

(A 13 year old girl from Bangladesh)

**“I was only 12 years old when I ran away from home. My family was very poor. My father did not have a job but he used to drink every night, sometimes even during the day. Then he used to beat me, my mother and sisters.”**

(A street boy in India)

*(Source: Bhandari et al, 2005. Voices of Girls and Boys to End Violence against Children in South and Central Asia. Save the Children)*

## OVERVIEW

Theories of parenting and programmes designed to promote parenting skills are largely based on the belief that parental styles and behaviour directly affect outcomes for children in terms of their survival, growth, development, protection and participation. There has been growing recognition that many parents in India and Bangladesh at some time require assistance or support to strengthen their key role of nurturing, valuing and caring for children. Some parents require support, training and information to enable their children's optimum development, and in many cases to prevent the occurrence of emotional and behavioural problems, exploitation, discrimination and/or violence against girls and boys. How well parents are able to fulfil their roles as caregivers,

protectors and teachers will affect not only their own children, but also the society as a whole.

The word 'parent' can refer to the biological relationship of an adult to a child, or, when used as a verb, to the care and protection that the adult provides (Smith 1999). According to Kendziora and O'Leary (1993), **parenting** is 'anything the parent does, or fails to do, that may affect the child' and includes 'playing, disciplining, teaching, caring for physical needs, and establishing a pleasant emotional environment'. These actions may or may not be performed by the child's biological parent. (from *Parenting Information Project Volume 2. Literature Review*. © Commonwealth of Australia, 2004)<sup>1</sup>

This discussion paper outlines reasons why parenting support is important; it reviews existing policies, schemes and programmes run by State Parties in Bangladesh and India which support families and parenting efforts; and it outlines a number of recommendations to improve government support to parenting. The paper was initiated because of the lack of comprehensive research and studies on the type of support State Parties in the region give to improve parenting practices. In addition, the existing parenting and child development programmes should be examined to see if they are addressing gender discrimination and stereotyping, the role of fathers, masculinities, disabilities, violence and discrimination etc. It is hoped that this discussion paper will prompt greater practice, policy debates and action regarding parenting and the role of the State and other actors to support parents in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Although government programmes prioritise children's survival and physical growth, national initiatives to strengthen parents' and families'

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1 [http://www.facs.gov.au/family/early\\_childhood\\_pip/volume2/sec2.htm](http://www.facs.gov.au/family/early_childhood_pip/volume2/sec2.htm)

abilities to support their children's optimal development is generally lacking. The governments of Bangladesh and India provide some support to parenting styles for child development, but it is limited to Early Childhood Development (ECD) Programmes. Parenting education is generally not provided for parents who have children in the middle years (7-12 years), or adolescent children. The Early Childhood Programmes (for 0-6 years old) support parents and other caregivers to promote child development, health, nutrition and well-being, by providing an integrated package of health, nutrition, parenting education and training of caregivers. India's Integrated Child Development Services started in 1975, and have been gradually scaled up. The concept of psychosocial development through stimulation and play has emerged more recently in these programmes. The ECD project in Bangladesh was launched in 2001, and is still in a pilot phase.

Policy debates and lobbying are required to ensure ongoing access to parenting education for all parents whatever the age of their children. Efforts are needed to integrate parenting education in existing government schemes, and to develop additional schemes focusing on the parenting of children above six years old. Furthermore, policies and practices must reflect greater support to the changing roles of fathers and mothers in their dual roles as child carers and wage earners.

## **METHODOLOGY AND THE LIMITATIONS OF THE DISCUSSION PAPER**

This report is based on primary and secondary sources of information. Interviews were undertaken with senior government officials of India and Bangladesh, and with professionals in local and international NGOs. A review of literature on parenting education, government documents and project documents of international and national organisations was carried out, as well as web research. One limitation of the report is that very little literature exists on parenting styles and child development in the region which can be drawn upon. Moreover, this report will not

map existing legislation and/or financial allowances/subsidies to parents. There is limited awareness about the importance of parenting education on parenting skills, child rearing practices and children's physical, emotional, cognitive and social development.

## **SAVE THE CHILDREN - CHILD RIGHTS PROGRAMMING**

Save the Children's programmes are based on child rights programming, recognising girls and boys as rights holders and social actors. In a child rights approach governments are recognised as primary duty bearers accountable to their citizens, including children. Families are recognised as primary caregivers and protectors. The focus of Save the Children's work has been working with the most marginalised groups of children, those who have been exploited and abused. In this area, insufficient preventive work has been carried out that recognises and supports the family as a duty bearer.

Save the Children Sweden Regional Programme for South & Central Asia intends to review the existing support given to families by State Parties, as well as to review child development programmes that focus on improving parenting styles. Results of this preliminary study should help Save the Children and others to stimulate further discussions and help direct future policy and programming of governments, I/NGOs, national and international organisations and other stakeholders in the region.

## **BACKGROUND**

Despite significant improvements in child survival and health in Bangladesh and India in the last 30 years, children's lives continue to be lost due to communicable diseases, preventable illnesses, poor and inadequate care and childbirth related causes. Furthermore, the prevailing social, economic and cultural inequities preclude many families and children from obtaining a basic quality of life. Many girls and boys are

forced to work in inhospitable, unsafe and exploitative conditions. Many girls enter into early marriage and forced marriage and become vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Adolescent girls and boys from poor and other disadvantaged communities are trafficked for the purposes of domestic work, child labour or forced prostitution.

The family is the unit most recognised for providing basic emotional, physical, spiritual and economic support to children, and the process of socialisation starts within the family. Yet violations of children's rights frequently occur in homes and family settings. Many girls and boys run away from their homes, only to find themselves working in hazardous conditions, incarcerated in unfit institutions, or living on the streets. Sometimes they are beaten or unfairly arrested by the police for petty offences or for no crime at all. Some of these children retaliate by engaging in anti-social behaviour. Various studies show that most of these children left home because of physical and psychological abuse from their parents.

Violence against children is prevalent across racial, cultural, religious, ethnic, and socio-economic groups. Girls and boys are often subject to various forms of violence — including physical, psychological and sexual abuse — within the family, communities, schools and other institutions. Boys and girls from South Asia have expressed in various local, national and regional consultations that one of their main concerns was their relationship with their parents and their parents' behaviour towards them.

Parents and communities contribute to children's socialisation and may reinforce societal prejudices and discrimination on the basis of gender, age, socio-economic status, religion and ethnicity. Children learn to respect and obey adults. While this is no doubt a positive trait, it can sometimes lead to adults taking advantage of children's vulnerability. Most families do not allow children to participate in matters that affect their lives.

Parenting roles are often gender-stereotyped. Mothers are seen as the primary caregivers and fathers are valued for providing material resources for basic needs, as well as administering discipline and passing on skills to children. Efforts to widen expectations and roles of mothers and fathers are needed, so that fathers are supported in their child care role, and mothers in their income generation role. Gender is a cross-cutting issue in government programmes, but it is not seriously addressed. Gender socialisation is yet to be recognised in all government schemes and policies. Men's role as active participants in child care (besides being the breadwinner and the disciplinarian) is practically invisible in the national social programmes. Most social development and parenting programmes target only women and girls.

Poverty affects every aspect of family life, including interpersonal relations, the ability of families to solve their own problems and to provide quality child care. Parent-child relationships are affected by poverty. Worries about the availability of food, or about health problems, can lead to depression and violence against children and thus can have serious consequences on children's development. With this in view, governments are investing in programmes to alleviate or reduce poverty. However, such programmes cannot succeed unless they are accompanied by programmes that address the root causes of poverty, such as patriarchy, unequal power relations in relation to gender, age, class, disability, caste, religion, etc. The existence of violence in society and the lack of opportunities for children to participate in decisions that affect their lives need to be addressed. In local and national consultations many children have expressed their concerns about the physical, psychological and sexual abuse they must endure, as they are not encouraged to express their views and since adults do not take their views seriously. Children must be encouraged to speak up, to break the silence that has for so long fostered their marginalisation.

Governments have initiated national programmes on primary health care, nutrition and education to support families in improving children's survival, health and schooling. The national programmes have focused on quantity rather than quality, expanding rapidly in terms of geographical coverage while under-funding inputs, in particular the training of frontline service providers. The importance of psychosocial, emotional and cognitive development of children is very little recognised. Moreover, overall government investment in these social sectors has been inadequate to support parents in their role.

Parenting education on the psychosocial development of children is included in Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes, which are run in early childhood centres called *Anganwadis*. However, most Anganwadi workers, those who work directly with families in these centres, lack the capacity to provide parents with education on children's physical and mental development. Moreover, not all Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) projects include parenting education for child development. In addition, this programme does not cover key groups of marginalised children, including children living in the streets (often with their families), children of migrant workers and children living in some remote areas. Thus, India's ICDS programmes must be scaled up to cover all children below six years of age, and Anganwadi workers must be given appropriate training on parenting education. The ECD project in Bangladesh (see below) was launched recently and is being implemented only on a small scale.

No government parenting programmes address parenting of children who are over six years old. In fact not even health programmes are provided for children between the ages of six and twelve, as they fall neither under ECD programmes nor under adolescent programmes.

The programmes for adolescents and for young mothers focus on health and nutrition issues, sexual abuse and behaviour, sexual and

reproductive health, early marriage and gender discrimination, with a recent focus on violence against children. However, the existing programmes do not really prepare the participants for parenthood; nor do they increase their capacity to ensure optimal development of their children.

## **PARENTING IN RELATION TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

All countries in South Asia have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which means that the government in each country has taken the responsibility to fulfil its obligations.

The CRC emphasises the role of the family as a key duty bearer to ensure children's fundamental rights. The CRC asserts that the family is the 'natural environment' for the growth and well-being of its members. Article 27 states that State Parties shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to fulfil the right to an standard of living adequate for his/her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

### **CRC Articles that emphasise the importance of the role of parents and families in the upbringing of children**

- **Article 5** stresses that the State must “respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of fathers and mothers [in providing] appropriate direction and guidance”.
- **Article 6** states the inherent right of every child to life and to survival and development.
- **Article 7** includes the child's right, “as far as possible to know and be cared for by his or her parents”.
- **Article 8** says that the State must “undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations”.

- **Article 9** states that “a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will”. It allows exceptions, subject to careful judicial review, in cases such as abuse or neglect.
- **Article 12** assures a child the right to express his/her views freely in all matters affecting him/her.
- **Article 14 (2)** recognises “the rights and duties of parents and legal guardians, to provide direction to the child consistent with the evolving capacities of the child”.
- **Article 18 (1)** acknowledges that the best interests of the child will be the parent’s basic concern, and so states that “parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child”.
- **Article 19** protects children from abuse and exploitation.
- **Article 29** provides that a child’s education be directed to “the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values”.
- All children have a right to survival, growth, development and protection from abuse and exploitation and participation in matters that affect their lives. These rights are enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The CRC recognises that governments have the responsibility to provide support to parents and families so they can ensure their children’s physical, psychological, social, educational and spiritual growth. Under the terms of the CRC, it is a duty of the state to support families as duty bearers.

#### **CRC Articles that set out the obligations of State Parties to support parents and families in ensuring children’s rights**

- **Article 3.2:** State Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate and administrative measures.

- **Article 4:** State Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the present Convention.
- **Article 18.2:** For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, State Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.
- Refer to **Article 27.3.**

Investing in children is the responsibility of all duty bearers to ensure that their rights are protected. Investment for children's advancement and rights is essential to attain the Millennium Development Goals as well as goals of national policies and plans.

## 2. Government policies, programmes and schemes on parenting

*This section of the report outlines existing government policies, programmes and schemes in Bangladesh and India which provide a basis for support to parenting.*

### GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILDREN

#### Bangladesh

##### A. Provisions in the Constitution of Bangladesh

- Articles 31 and 32 of the Bangladesh Constitution protect the right to life as a fundamental right.
- Article 15 outlines the elements that will ensure “improvement in the material and cultural standard of living” of the people — right to food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care, recreation and social security.
- Article 17 mentions that the State shall create a “uniform” mass oriented and universal system of education for all children.
- Articles 19(1) and 29(1) emphasise “equality of opportunity”.
- Articles 27, 28 and 31 lay down the general principles regarding the protection of children from all forms of discrimination.

##### B. National Policy for Children 1994

The principal objectives of the policy are to harmonise all child development activities in the country with the provisions of the CRC. It declares six general objectives, including safe birth and survival, proper educational and psychological development, ensuring a family

environment for development, providing assistance to children in difficult circumstances, ensuring the best interests of the child, and protecting children's legal rights and thus protecting them from discrimination.

### **C. National Plan of Action for Children in Bangladesh**

The NPA II in Bangladesh included the provision of health, nutrition, and other services through child care centres, provision of education of parents and caregivers to strengthen their knowledge and child care practices, and organising community development activities aimed at establishing an enabling environment to foster child development.

### **D. Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)**

The government of Bangladesh has given priority to children's rights and advancement in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. In the area of children's rights, four strategic objectives are identified: (1) creating opportunities to help children realise their full potential (access to health, nutrition and education, water and sanitation etc); (2) serving the best interests of children in national, social, family and personal situations (empowerment of children); (3) ensuring safety and security at home and in the public space (protection against abuse, exploitation and violence); (4) establishing and protecting children's rights (social inclusion, decent work and livelihood). The PRSP mentioned the need for supporting families in special needs, such as poor families, families in distress and families affected by disasters, through the mothers<sup>2</sup>.

“To protect the interests of the children, if there is conflict between the interests of a child and an adult, or the child's family, community, ethnic or religious group etc. the resolution must be in favour of the child. Thus the mindset of people must change and they must realise that children are not there to fulfil parents'/adults' wishes or protect

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2 <http://www.mdgbangla.org/poverty/prsp%202005/PRSP-FIRST%20DRAFT%2012%20JAN%202005.PDF>

their interests. Massive awareness programmes must be undertaken to treat children with dignity within the family setup and also in public places. The best interests of children must be reflected in all legal and institutional frameworks. It must also be reflected in government allocations and the expenditure priorities in the national budget” PRSP 2005.

## India

### A. Provisions in the Constitution of India

National Commitments: Article 39 of the Indian Constitution states that all children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

- Article 45: State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years.
- Article 46: State shall...promote...educational interests of the weaker sections of the people (and)...protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
- Article 47: State shall...raise the level of nutrition and standard of living of its people and (promote) the improvement of public health.

### B. National Policy for Children 1974

The adoption of the National Policy for Children in 1974 was a landmark. This policy states that the State shall provide adequate services to all children, both before and after birth, and during the growing stages for their full physical, mental and social development. The National Policy also states that efforts would be directed to strengthen family ties so that children’s full potential and growth is realised within the normal family life, neighbourhood and community environment<sup>3</sup>.

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3 Government of India (2005). India Country Report on Violence against Children 2005. Ministry of Human Resource Development; Department of Women and Child Development.

### **C. National Children's Charter 2003**

This Charter has the intent to secure for every child her/his inherent right to be a child and enjoy a healthy and happy childhood; to address the root causes that negate healthy growth and development of children and to awaken the conscience of the community in the wider context to protect children from all forms of abuse, while strengthening the family, society and the nation.

### **D. National Plan of Action for Children 2005**

The National Plan of Action (NPA) for Children 2005 commits itself to ensure all rights of children up to the age of 18 years. The government shall ensure all measures and an enabling environment for survival, growth, development and protection of all children, so that each child can realise her/his inherent potential and grow up to be a healthy productive citizen. The NPA activities focus on survival, development, protection and participation of children in India.

India has declined to prepare a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and argued that her 9<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) adequately addressed the issue of poverty reduction and contained everything needed for poverty reduction. The 10<sup>th</sup> Plan has substantially increased the allocation of resources for social services and proposes steps to improve the delivery of these services<sup>4</sup>.

## **MAJOR GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES AND SCHEMES**

### **Bangladesh**

*In Bangladesh there is just one main government programme which supports parenting and parenting education. This is the Early Childhood Development Programme.*

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4 <http://www.adb.org/documents/CSPs/IND/2003>

### Early Childhood Development Programme

In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and UNICEF with the Institute of Child and Mother Health (ICMH), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, BRAC, Grameen Shiksha and Shishu Academy launched the ECD project in 2001. Its objective is to empower caregivers to create a safe, secure, stimulating and enabling environment which promotes the cognitive, emotional, and social development of the child from birth to five years. In this project parents' education involves training of caregivers on early childhood development. Parenting education includes health and nutrition for both mothers and children, the importance of nutrition and stimulation for children's brain development, child rights, gender issues and the role of the community in child development. The programme focuses on mothers, fathers, adolescent brothers or sisters, and grandparents. A TV spot on ECD was also developed and aired on national television. The TV spot showed mother, father, grandfather, grandmother and older sister as caregivers.

As part of the ECD programme, similar parenting education initiatives are also incorporated into some ongoing programmes of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and various health and educational programmes of some of Bangladesh's leading NGOs. Parent Education on Early Childhood Development is implemented through health field staff in community nutrition and health centres. Family Welfare and Health workers also provide health messages and parenting education on child development through a door-to-door service. The Bangladesh government is supporting BRAC (a leading national NGO) to enable BRAC's extensive network of health outreach workers to deliver messages on Early Childhood Development to their women's organisations, micro-credit groups and to the government's community nutrition and health centres. The Government of Bangladesh also supports Grameen Shiksha to deliver ECD messages at women's credit groups.

This is the only government supported project that focuses on parenting education for Early Childhood Development. But this programme is new and still in its pilot phase.

*The following government supported programmes do not contribute to parenting skills in child development but they indirectly support child development. The programmes below can be strengthened to include parenting education for promoting child development.*

### **Maternal and Child Health (MCH)**

The Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Programme has been an integrated part of the primary health care services. Under the programme, efforts are being made to promote early registration of pregnant women, with a view to ensure ante-natal check-ups, immunisation and intake of iron and folic acid tablets. The ongoing MCH programme of the country has been strengthened by launching a Child Survival and Safe Motherhood Programme. The programme is directed towards strengthening immunisation, oral rehydration therapy, and improving maternal and neo-natal care at the community level. The development of health facilities and use of an integrated approach of packaging maternal and child health care with nutrition, education, water and sanitation, etc. has helped parents reduce children's mortality and improve their health.

### **Female Secondary School Stipend Programme**

In January 1994 the Government of Bangladesh launched the Female Stipend Programme, a nation-wide stipend programme for girls in secondary school (grades 6-10) in all 460 *upazilas* (subdistricts) of the country with support from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. Stipends are also given to girls in higher secondary grades 11-12. Now the programme is focusing on improving the quality of education. This programme motivated parents to delay their daughters' marriages,

increased girls' mobility and encouraged parents to improve the quality of care for their daughters.

### **Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health**

In Bangladesh, the government incorporated adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues into the health policy and essential services packages programme. The government focused on meeting adolescents' needs through the provision of services and information, as well as through education programmes and campaigns to change behaviour. It has implemented programmes in schools as well as in community settings, in agencies and civil societies. Efforts are currently under way to translate national policy into a set of achievable goals and activities.

### **Water and Sanitation Programme**

In recent years, the problem of arsenic contamination of ground water has increased risks to large sections of the population, as they did not have access alternative safe water supply solutions. Sanitation coverage in the country is estimated at around 40%, with wide differences between rural and urban areas. The water and sanitation programmes reach parents, families, women's organisations and adolescents to teach and train them on water purification, hygiene and sanitation practices.

### **India**

*In India the following government schemes directly support parenting and parenting education: Integrated Child Development Services, Crèches, and Balika Samridhi Yojana.*

### **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)**

Launched in 1975, ICDS is a holistic early childhood and development programme that addresses the integrated needs of children under six years old, adolescent girls, pregnant women and nursing mothers from disadvantaged communities. It provides a package of services including supplementary feeding, immunisations, health check-ups and referral

services. The project also provides parent education on child care, early stimulation and learning, health, nutrition, water and environmental sanitation through home visits or in Anganwadi centres. The programme works through a network of these centres, which are each run by an Anganwadi worker, usually selected from the local village. Currently, there are 5652 ICDS projects in operation in the country, including 45,236,000 women and children, with 37,711,000 children in the age group 0-6 years. The projects are run by local government and local NGOs but overall administrative responsibilities lie with the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development<sup>5</sup>.

### Crèches

The Department of Women and Child Development of the Government of India runs 14,800 crèches for working women. Children from 0-5 years are provided with day care services, supplementary nutrition, immunisation and pre-school education<sup>6</sup>.

### Balika Samridhi Yojana (Girls Dedication Scheme)

This is another scheme which influences parenting styles to value both girls and boys and to reduce gender discriminating practices against girls. The scheme has the objective of changing negative family and community attitudes towards the girl child, improving enrolment and retention of girls in schools, raising the age of marriage and assisting girls to undertake income generating activities.

*The following programmes do not directly support parenting styles in child development but they provide indirect support to parents by easing some of the pressing survival and health issues that affect their lives and their children's lives. Most of these*

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<sup>5</sup> Government of India (2005). India Country Report on Violence against Children 2005. Ministry of Human Resource Development; Department of Women and Child Development.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

*programmes work directly with families and provide opportunities for government to integrate parenting education that leads to the optimal development of children.*

### **Reproductive and Child Health Programme (RCH)**

This programme provides effective maternal and child health care, micronutrient interventions for vulnerable groups and reproductive health services for adolescents. The programmes cover immunisation for children (DPT and Polio) and tetanus toxoid for women, administration of vitamin A to children, and iron and folic acid to pregnant women.

Other health programmes for children include National Immunisation Day, the Universal Immunisation programme, and various public health education initiatives. Parents are either supplied with health kits or given health education on acute respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, neo-natal and ante-natal care.

### **Rural Water Supply Programme**

The supply of clean drinking water is taken for granted in developed countries, but many families in developing countries face a serious shortage of safe and clean drinking water. This programme aims to set up hand pumps in all rural habitations, especially in remote areas, ensuring access to safe drinking water.

### **Total Sanitation Campaign**

The objective of this campaign is to bring about attitudinal and behavioural changes in hygiene and sanitation practices. Parents, children and community members are given information and education on hygiene and sanitation. The projects also include establishment of toilets in all government schools, community complexes, in Balwadis (crèches) and Anganwadis (early childhood centres).

### **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**

This is a national programme that aims to enrol all children in mainstream schools, alternate schools or other non-formal schools with a focus on girls' education. This programme strengthens school infrastructure, focuses on quality education, girls' enrolment and retention in schools.

### **National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level**

This programme is being implemented for children in difficult circumstances, including out-of-school girls, drop-out girls, working girls, and girls from marginalised socio-economic groups to enable them to access elementary level education.

### **Mid-day Meal Scheme**

The Mid-day Meal Scheme was introduced in all schools which had children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. It has increased enrolment and retention.

### **Apni Beti Apna Dhan (My Daughter, My Pride) Scheme**

This scheme in Haryana involves monetary incentives offered to mothers and girl children to end female foeticide and infanticide, promote education for girls and prevent early marriage. A sort of savings certificate is given to the mother of a newly born daughter in favour of the child. The child can encash it on reaching 18 years with compound interest. This has led to changes in the parenting style by reducing gender discriminatory care practices against girls.

### **Cradle Baby Scheme**

This scheme was established in Tamil Nadu with the intention of stopping foeticide and infanticide, as parents were able to abandon their unwanted baby daughters to the care of the state.

### 3. Recommendations

- **Strengthen parent support through existing government programmes.** Make a comprehensive analysis of the content, coverage and impact of the above-mentioned government supported programmes to parents from a rights perspective and give concrete recommendations concerning where and how the support to parents can be strengthened.
- **Map existing legislation and/or financial subsidies/allowances to parents.** Laws and legislation regulating parental leave (for mothers and fathers), working hours and working conditions should be reviewed and parent-child friendly legislation should be promoted.
- **Integrate parent education in national programmes on health, nutrition and education.** Assess national programmes on primary health care, nutrition and education and propose how they can be strengthened to integrate parent education to ensure the holistic development of the child.
- **Lobby for parental education for children older than five or six.** Lobby for parental education that targets children above the age of six in India and above the age of five in Bangladesh. Ongoing opportunities for parent education are needed at all stages of a child's development. Furthermore, specific sessions may be required for parenting of children in the early years, the middle years, and in adolescence.
- **Lobby for all parents to be able to access quality parental education.** Good parenting programmes should be accessible to all, as they not only provide families with critical information on care practices and parenting styles, but they also help families give

their children the best foundation of development. Parenting education should be designed to address the holistic development of children as the basis for a just society. The programmes should include health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation, education, child rights, child development, traditional and religious beliefs, gender discrimination, gender stereotypes, violence against children, positive discipline and children's participation.

- **Integrate parental education, life skills and gender awareness for adolescent boys and girls in the education system, including in non-formal education.** Parental education should be more prominent in the education system, so that both girls and boys are prepared for their future responsibilities. Include sessions with girls and boys on gender relations. Girls and boys should be encouraged to take on untraditional gender roles.
- **Build upon positive traditional practices, and change negative practices.** While it is important to recognise and build upon traditional practices that are beneficial to children's upbringing, it is also important for parents to identify and change practices that are harmful to girls and boys. Parents should have the opportunity to add new knowledge to their existing beliefs to ensure opportunities for each child to develop to his/her maximum potential and to create an equitable society free from violence and discrimination. Parenting programmes should be culturally relevant and culturally appropriate and should introduce new concepts and practices gradually. Such methods create less resistance to new ideas. Meeting places for parents should be promoted and encouraged, where mothers and fathers can exchange ideas and get support from each other in their roles.
- **Promote children's expression and participation in all parenting programmes.** Enable young girls and boys to dialogue with their parents about physical and psychological punishment, sexual abuse, sexual behaviour, HIV/AIDS, gender discrimination and gender socialisation. Involve children as part of the development of parenting programmes. Parenting styles affect them directly and

they are in a good position to express their likes and dislikes about various parenting styles.

- **Promote and support more inclusive concepts of fatherhood and motherhood.** Efforts must be made to find opportunities to influence concepts of fatherhood or motherhood so that societies can accept fathers taking on the primary caregiver role for their children and mothers can play a greater role earning the financial resources and/or in educating their children. Men should have the option to be the primary caregiver and women should have the right to choose to be the primary breadwinner. Efforts must be made to create an environment where men and women assume equal responsibility for childcare and children's development.
- **Strengthen a focus on fatherhood in all government schemes.** Existing programmes must develop a strong component on fatherhood and fathering. It is time for the government in general to break the stereotypical model of working only with women on parenting. Working with men and young men on issues of fatherhood and parenting education is important.
- **Support fathers and mothers to form their own associations.** Support the organisation of fathers and mothers to claim their rights to parental support from the government. When organised collectively, fathers and mothers will have more negotiating power, and will be in a better position to access information and assert their rights.
- **Support further research, analysis, practice and policy debates on parenting and the role of the government.** Wider discussion and research is required on the role of parents and on public policies which would assist successful parenting.
- **Support NGOs/INGOs to integrate parent education in their programmes.** Analyse INGO and NGO programmes (including Save the Children) to assess how aspects of parenting are covered in the existing programmes (direct support, advocacy, capacity building, etc). Advocate for parenting education to be incorporated into existing I/NGO health, education and other social programmes.

# Annexes

## I. LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Loveleen Kacker, IAS, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India

Dr. Mahbubur Rahman, Director (PHC) and Line Director, ESD (Health), Directorate General of Health Services. Government of Bangladesh

Dr. Golam Mostafa, Team Leader-ECD Project, Child Development and Education Section, UNICEF Bangladesh

Majeda Haq, Gender Advisor, UNDP Bangladesh

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## **The vision**

Save the Children works for:

- a world which respects and values each child
- a world which listens to children and learns
- a world where all children have hope and opportunity

## **The mission**

Save the Children fights for children's rights.

We deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide.

### **For more information:**

#### **Save the Children Sweden**

Regional Programme for South & Central Asia

c/o Save the Children UK

Lalitpur, GPO Box: 5850, Kathmandu, Nepal

Office: 00977-1-5531928/9,

Fax: 00977-1-5527266

Email: [info@savethechildren.org.np](mailto:info@savethechildren.org.np)

[ravikarkara@savethechildren.org.np](mailto:ravikarkara@savethechildren.org.np)

URL: [www.rb.se](http://www.rb.se)