



Improving Health, Education, and Nutrition of Children in the Kyrgyz Republic

Prior to its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991, the Kyrgyz Republic had well-funded health, education, and nutrition services for children. The transition period following independence marked the scaling down of many social protection programs, including health care for children and childcare centers. In the Soviet Union, preschool institutions comprising full-day nurseries and kindergartens offered a package of child nutrition, health, and education services free of charge to more than a third of preschool-age children. During the transition, many preschool institutions have been closed down. In 2001, an estimated 7% of children were malnourished, and approximately 14% of the population had no access to health services. Some diseases of poverty, such as tuberculosis, have re-emerged and particularly affected teenagers.¹ Many poor families had to shell out payments for basic health care and education services for their children. The transition period also saw the weakening of traditional family and kinship networks, which have always provided an important social safety net in times of crisis for the poor and non-poor alike.

Imperatives for Effective Early Childhood Development Program

Social indicators of the Kyrgyz Republic show the effects of increased poverty and declining public investment in child development. Achieving by 2015 the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to which both the Kyrgyz Republic and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) subscribe, may be at risk. Major efforts will be required especially to meet the targets of reducing infant mortality rate (IMR) and under-five mortality rate (U5MR) and

sustaining universal primary education by arresting the problem of increasing dropouts.²

The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic has long recognized the importance of child development. The Law on Protection of the Kyrgyz People's Health clearly stipulates the state's responsibility for protecting children's right to living conditions required for sound physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development, and the obligation of citizens to take care of children's health, physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development. Its Education Strategy for 2010 highlights the expansion of early childhood education as a major priority. Moreover, investing in early childhood development (ECD) is directly relevant to the basic human development needs of the Kyrgyz Republic as stated in the Government's poverty reduction strategy.³

Ensuring healthy child development is an investment in a country's future work force and capacity to thrive economically and as a society. The benefits of ECD encourage greater social equity, increase the efficacy of other investments, and address the needs of mothers while helping their children. A healthy cognitive and emotional development in the early years translates into tangible economic returns.⁴

In 2003, ADB approved the Community-Based Early Childhood Development (CBECD) Project,⁵ designed to help the Government improve health, nutrition, and psychosocial development of young children between

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birth and 8 years of age, and contribute to the attainment of MDGs to reduce infant mortality rate and under-five mortality rate, and sustain universal primary education. The CBECD project is being implemented in 12 poorest *raions* (districts), while ensuring that the extended program of immunization covers the needs of all eligible children in the country. The project also includes capacity development for *ayil okmotus* (village authorities) and communities to plan, improve, and sustain child development. Its key components include: child health and nutrition, early childhood care and education, and capacity building.

The CBECD project has three distinct features:

- **Integrated ECD**—health, nutrition, and education are integrated in the project since integrated interventions have been found to be more effective than isolated single sector interventions;
- **Multisectoral and decentralized implementation**—successful ECD interventions have shown that multisectoral and locally-implemented projects are more likely to progress than those handled by the central government.
- **Community-based interventions**—communities are encouraged to develop, manage, and implement their local ECD projects (i.e., community-managed preschools) through grants from the Village Initiative Fund (VIF).

CBECD Project Updates⁶

The CBECD project started implementation in March 2004 and is expected to be completed in March 2010. To date, the project has successfully sustained immunization (based on government and independent surveys). Procurement of vaccines and vaccination of children less than 8 years old have been conducted according to the procurement plan. The cold chain for keeping the vaccines has been established; all refrigerators for immunization centers have been procured and established at the local level.

The monitoring of primary health care workers' performance showed an increase in the treatment of

childhood diseases employing Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) guidelines. For access to affordable medicines, the CBECD project piloted in 2008 the establishment of community-based pharmacies in three *raions*.

Since the project started, 190 community-based kindergartens (CBKs) have been established and attended by more than 7,700 children. The training for the second batch of 209 CBK teachers and state kindergarten teachers has been completed in the 2nd quarter of 2008. The formal inclusion of alternative models of preschools in the preschool standards and the establishment of CBKs have been major contributions of the CBECD project. The number of CBKs is rapidly increasing, as *raion* education departments have taken increasingly active interest in CBK establishment, and communities realize that the CBKs receive material and training support by project. To strengthen home education, the parents' training program was developed and approved by the Ministry of Education. About 30,000 parents have already been trained under the program.

The VIF has been officially registered with the Ministry of Justice. There has been rapid increase in the number of projects supported by the VIF, and the ceiling of the grant was increased from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per application. About 430 projects have been approved by the evaluation committee since 2008 and total disbursement of the VIF project contracts has exceeded \$1.1 million.

Sustained Project Implementation

The CBECD project is 85% accomplished. Sustaining the initial gains achieved by the project even after its completion will guarantee future productivity of the Kyrgyz Republic's current children. Moreover, it will also provide more time for women to participate in economically productive activities.

As the country faces the impact of the current global economic crisis, the CBECD project has established the necessary safety nets for one of the country's most vulnerable groups—its children.

Endnotes

- ¹ Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre website. *Country Overviews*: Kyrgyzstan. www.childhoodpoverty.org/index.php?action=countryo#25
- ² Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2003. *Report And Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors on a Proposed Loan and Technical Assistance Grant to the Kyrgyz Republic for the Community-Based Early Childhood Development Project*. www.adb.org/Documents/RRPs/KGZ/rrp-kgz-32143.pdf
- ³ ADB. 2003. *Report And Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors on a Proposed Loan and Technical Assistance Grant to the Kyrgyz Republic for the Community-Based Early Childhood Development Project*. www.adb.org/Documents/RRPs/KGZ/rrp-kgz-32143.pdf
- ⁴ World Bank Early Child Development website. *Why Invest in ECD*. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTCY/EXTECD/0,,contentMDK:20207747~menuPK:527098~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:344939,00.html>
- ⁵ Loan 2007 KGZ Community-Based Early Childhood Development. Approval Date: September 2003. Completion Date: March 2010. Loan Amount: \$10.5 million. Executing Agency: President's Office.
- ⁶ ADB website. Project Information Documents. Community-Based Early Childhood Development: Kyrgyz Republic Available: <http://pid.adb.org/pid/LoanView.htm?projNo=32143&seqNo=01&typeCd=3>

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