

NEP Series by Sattva

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The National Education Policy (NEP) 2019 has suggested some monumental shifts for education in India. The policy has reflected on problems across all stages of education including ECCE, foundational learning, secondary education and higher education. This series of articles covers Sattva's perspective on the changing policy landscape and how solutions can take shape in the coming future.

A closer look at the ECCE landscape: Critical role of the non-profit ecosystem

The latest UNICEF's programme guidance for Early Childhood Development reiterated that this area is considered an international priority and foundational to the SDGs given the scientific research around the importance of first 8 years of human life¹. National Education Policy (NEP) 2019 affirms this universal fact but fails to address certain key gaps in the institutional delivery of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Despite policy gaps over the years, there have been key players who constantly supported the implementation side of ECCE. This article aims to bring out the growing need to understand the active solution space of the non-profit ecosystem within the ECCE landscape and present effective ways of greater collaboration and comprehensive solutions.

As a sector, the non-profit ecosystem offers a variety of solutions to strengthen the last mile delivery. Broadly the interventions target needs around health, pre-school education and responsive care through separate programs with few key players offering integrated services.

Understanding the white space of ECCE²

The non-profit implementers have been successfully driving innovation through contextually specific practices in the area of ECCE. A number of players in this ecosystem are often focused on a specific locality or geography and therefore approach the problem through small scale interventions which have not been able to translate to systemic change. Most interventions by non-profits are based around pedagogical practices leaving crucial white space like responsive care and parental capacity building. At the same time, there are quite a few organisations working offering holistic ECCE solutions to meet the deep-seated interlinkages between health and educational needs of children.

¹ UNICEF's Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Development, 2017

² ECCE CSR Landscape in India and Potential for Impact by DHFL Foundation and Sattva Consulting, 2019

Type of Solution	ECCE Landscape		
	Nonprofit Solution Space	Gaps in ICDS Service Delivery	Funding Sources
Health Interventions	Sneha United Way India	There are improvements in maternal and child health indicators but lack consistency across regions	CSR: Despite education and health being top funded areas, less than 30% of top funders make some contribution to ECCE interventions
Pedagogy focused capability building	Pratham Foundation Hippocampus Learning Centres Prajayatra	Only about 34.9% of time in Anganwadi centres is spent on age appropriate play based activities	
Resource Support (Assessments, Learning aid)	Akshara Foundation Centre for Learning Resources Key Education Foundation	Huge infrastructural challenges Lack of learning aid Overburdened Anganwadi workers	Private Philanthropy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bill and Melinda Gates
Infrastructure (Building spaces)	No major player		International Foundations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNICEF Save The Children
Responsive care and Parental Capacity building	Meraki Saarthi Ummeed Child Development Centre	Despite being a comprehensive scheme, ICDS has failed to address the critical needs of responsive care and parental involvement in the overall child development process.	Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State Governments Ministry of Human Resource Development
Comprehensive ECCE Solutions	Save The Children UNICEF		



Revisiting the complex ECCE problem and policy gaps

Despite initiating the world’s largest programme for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in form of ICDS in 1975, India still witnesses poor performance in quality of delivery. The scheme though unarguably the most ambitious of its kind needs process strengthening for efficient delivery.

ECCE is a complex system resting on the pillars of responsive care, health & nutrition and stimulating education. We have made an attempt to locate critical gaps that are detrimental to achieving the outcomes mentioned in NEP.

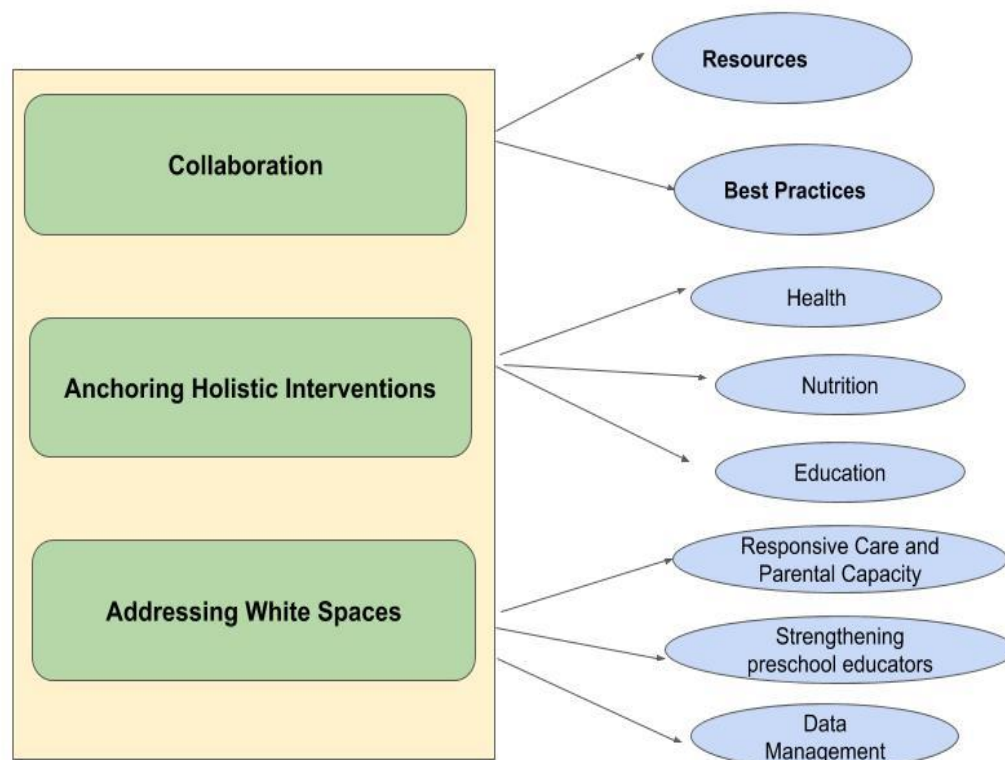
- Emphasising on bridging accessibility by co-locating *anganwadi* centres with primary schools without taking into account the operational challenges and dilution of community space around ECCE.³
- Keeping school readiness as the major outcome of ECCE rather than looking at it as comprehensive play-based learning period for children which is highly contextual.⁴

³ Draft National Education Policy 2019

⁴ Towards Schoolification of Early Childhood Years, Economic and Political Weekly Vol 54, Issue No 40, 2019

- Unlike the ECCE policy 2013, NEP fails to look at the interlinkages between different areas of development including health & nutrition, responsive care and pre-school education.
- NEP fails to emphasise on the need of best pedagogical practices and the capacity of preschool facilitators which is essential for quality pre-school education within ICDS.

How can non-profits drive systemic change?



1. Collaborate on resources and innovation practices

NEP doesn't address the critical need of data availability for pre-school education in India:

- There is little reliable and accurate data present around early childhood education
- Lack of data driven decision making takes place at a systemic level with no comprehensive quality monitoring process available for tracking pre-school learning progress
- ECCE falls short of meticulous knowledge management practices at an ecosystem level to strengthen learning and development of the active players

As next steps, ECCE players should

- Consolidate experts and organisations to work towards making common ECCE resources to address white gaps
- Build strong data and knowledge banks that address the ecosystem wide ECCE needs with 70% standardisation leaving room for 30% region-wise customisation scope

Common resource sharing platforms on best ECCE models and comprehensive data collection will enable greater capacity development for non-profit organisations practicing on ground.

The European Platform for Investing in Children is a prominent example of a common online platform that educates families on all different policies available for supporting ECCE. In the context of non-profits, a common platform can further aim to provide opportunities for collaborative projects among organisations offering solutions in different spaces. Documentation of innovative practices in specific contexts can be extremely valuable resource to key stakeholders like government for running state implementation programs under ICDS.

Regulation of quality should be linked to developmentally appropriate practices and the ECCE platform can be an asset for providing well defined indicators and outcomes to benchmark particular developmental priorities for distinct phases of early years period. This can help drive major investments from donor groups like CSR and philanthropic foundations which at present focus relatively less on ECCE as an area.

2. Anchor holistic interventions

It is universally established that adequate development in early childhood cannot take place without provisions for nutritious provisions, responsive care environment and stimulation-based learning opportunities. The linkages between these supposedly separate areas of health, nutrition and education are so strong that intervention around one specific area can fail to create any desired change if the other needs are not met within the context.

Non-profit ecosystem requires more actionable insights on comprehensive ECCE interventions. At present, there are quite a few organisations planning an integrated approach. For instance, United Way does extensive combined interventions for healthcare and education at a community level in India. They work with Anganwadi centres and other community groups to provide access and awareness of healthcare and education.

As next steps, the ECCE players should:

- Work on capability building of non-profits to anchor holistic solutions effectively in terms of organizational structures, people capabilities, processes and systems and fundraising support

3. Address the white spaces

There are several essential white spaces of early childhood interventions that require higher attention given that NEP fails to emphasize upon them. Ecosystem players at both donor and implementation levels must prioritize these areas for achieving scale and impact in ECCE. This primarily includes:

- Infrastructure of the ICDS system
- Lack of responsive care and parental capacity building
- Technological interventions around ECCE management
- No stakeholder focus on parents, community and supervisors of *anganwadi* centres
- Low opportunities to meet the needs of children with disability and special needs

Infrastructural support is crucial to quality ECCE programmes and the poor state of infrastructure of the ICDS system is a well-documented issue. Infrastructure needs include resource-building in terms of installing proper functioning spaces for better community interaction and to enable child-centred pedagogy. CSR funding has demonstrated an affinity to infrastructure-building as a part of their interventions and non-profit players can develop partnerships for addressing this white space.

Delhi based non-profit organisation, Meraki, works on building capacity of low-income caregivers to foster early childhood development by guiding them through tangible steps. By conducting more than 130 workshops that has impacted around 1500 parents, Meraki sets an influential example of practical working models for such white space that requires scale and collaboration for greater impact.

Technological interventions around driving data collection practices, establishing processes and meeting the needs of disabled children would add significant value for the future roadmap. This would require adoption of tech driven practices as well as careful contextualization of solutions for assisting learning of various common disabilities found in children

Anganwadi workers require better processes given that ICDS as a program is highly people dependent. The need is for NEP is to recognize Anganwadi workers as ECCE professionals given the multiple responsibilities they carry with respect to delivering quality health and education services. Along with providing better ECCE training and higher monetary benefits, Anganwadi workers require human resource support to facilitate their overburdened responsibilities more efficiently. Therefore, multi-stakeholder focus in the interventions are essential for long term success and greater ownership of the process.

As next steps the players in ECCE space should:

- Create ecosystem awareness about the need for an integrated ECCE intervention to create sustainable outcomes through advocacy, intervention redesign and creating proof of concept for the successful operational models
- Reimagine existing ECCE intervention designs to focus on all 3 stakeholders: parent, child and the system

Conclusion

The involvement of non-profit sector will be critical for ECCE in coming years. Through this article, we have outlined some of the possible solution pathways to quality ECCE provisions with the support of non-profit ecosystem. NEP 2019 is a major shift from the comprehensive ECCE policy of 2013 and recommends measures for expansion and greater accessibility of services with limited focus on revisiting the holistic nature of early childhood development.

The proposed solution approach of the article encourages non-profit players to facilitate collaboration of best practices on a common ECCE platform as a first step. A dedicated focus on interventions that integrate health, nutrition and education is essential for quality delivery

that can align with SDGs globally. Finally, the article encourages innovation towards the indicated white spaces of the area without which holistic ECCE will not be possible. After all, this fragile state of early childhood demands several caring hands and a safe path to discovery of life.

Sattva has been working with various non-profits and social organisations as well as corporate clients to help them define their social impact goals. Our focus is to solve critical problems and find scalable solutions. We assist organisations in formulating their long-term social impact strategy by strategically aligning with business to provide meaningful solutions to social issues.

*We'd love to hear your thoughts and feedback on this topic. Do write to us:
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