

## **The Delivery of Early Childhood Services Egypt's National Case Study**

### **Introduction**

Public concern with early childhood care and development started in Egypt around the middle of the last century. A group of intellectuals introduced the concept of the importance of the early years in the development of the child. Meager and rather bashful efforts were noted at that time. These included research, studies, books and articles as well as childcare programs sponsored by the Ministry of Social Affairs, health care programs sponsored by the Ministry of Health and KG classes attached to the more affluent private elementary schools. In the seventies and eighties, as a result of the United Nation's concentrated efforts for women and children, Egypt experienced a surge of activities aimed at helping the families to improve the conditions of the young child.

Government support for ECCD was not openly asserted until 1989, when President Hosny Mobarak declared "The First Decade for the Protection and Welfare of the Child" and at the same time established the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM). This first declaration stated that "spending on child care and development is the best investment for the future of our Nation"<sup>1</sup>. The preschool child was not directly targeted in this first declaration. Yet the activities undertaken by the NCCM during the first decade included an outreach towards parents with publications on how to care for the young child physically, psychologically and socially and a serious attempt at improving the quality of care in nursery schools and other child care arrangements.

Ten years later, the first declaration was followed by a declaration for "The Second Decade for the Protection and Welfare of the Child, 2000-2010". This second declaration stipulates that the Nation needs to "keep up with the momentum started in the previous decade and to maintain the position of our children at the heart of our national developmental plan... in education, health, social change and cultural development". For early childhood care and development it calls for the following:

- ◆ In the health field, vaccination against dangerous diseases should be increased to reach all children in order to extirpate diseases like polio and measles. And quality health programs should reach out to all children in all areas with the intention to protect them from endemic contagious diseases.
- ◆ In the social field, protection of children who pass through difficult situations by formulating programs that would help those children and their families
- ◆ In the education field, KG programs for children 4-6 should gradually expand to enroll as an integral part of compulsory free education, 60% of the total population of children 4-6 years of age.<sup>2</sup>

This review of services offered to the small child will concern itself with four governmental bodies that service children 0-6 years of age, namely the NCCM, which

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<sup>1</sup>The Declaration of the First Decade for the Protection and Welfare of the Egyptian Child

<sup>2</sup>The Declaration of The Second Decade for the Protection and Welfare of the Egyptian Child

coordinates and prepares strategies and plans for child care and development and the Ministries of Health, Education and Social Affairs, which deal with the children directly, plan the action as needed and deliver the actual services. The paper will start by discussing the work of each of these bodies. A brief summary will be given to describe the actual situation of the three main ministries directly concerned with childcare and protection, namely The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs. It will conclude with a statistical table that details the services rendered by the three concerned ministries. It should be noted here that childcare institutions for children 0-4 are called nurseries or child care centers and operate under the supervision of the Ministry of Social affairs. While the Ministry of Education is responsible for KG classes that admit children ages 4-6. The Ministry of Health provides health services for expectant mothers and for children age 0-6 through its health units and hospitals.

Two other concerned ministries were surveyed, namely: The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Information. It was found that though The Directorate of Cultural Palaces in the Ministry of Culture offers programs for children of school age, yet it does not have any organized programs for very young children or their parents. As to the Ministry of Information, it offers, as is expected, a variety of programs for parents and for the preschool children themselves, through the various information channels. It has a special committee to advise about programs for the preschool children and their parents. However, what this Ministry is offering for early childhood care and development is very diversified and generally beyond their age level and comprehension and requires a special study that would include media analysis and popular surveys.

### **Some Demographic Concerns.**

It is felt that before speaking of children of preschool age and the status and prospects of services provided to them, the demographic issues should be addressed and clarified. Egypt's total population is presently estimated to be close to 68 million, of those 24 million (35%) are children under the age of 15.<sup>3</sup> Children 0-6 are estimated to be about 10 million in number. This means that workers in both the health and the social fields have to deal with this high number of small children. The 4-6 year olds, children of KG age, are estimated to be about 3million. This is the number to be dealt with presently when speaking of KG classes. Planning ahead requires demographic projections. In view of the fact that total enrolment at present does not exceed 12% of the KG age group, the call for admitting to KG classes 60% of the 4-6 cohort by the end of the "Second Decade for the Protection and Welfare of the Egyptian Child" in 2010, might sound too ambitious.. However, it could be possible, as would be clarified when discussing educational services.

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<sup>3</sup>Based on calculations of demographic information issued by the government

## **Governmental Bodies Involved in Early Childhood Services.**

### **1. The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood. (NCCM)**

As indicated earlier, the NCCM was established in 1989, immediately after the announcement of the Declaration of the First Decade for the Protection and Welfare of the Egyptian Child, as an independent body. The Council is headed by the Prime Minister. Its members include Ministers of Social Affairs, Health, Culture, Education, Employment and Training, Planning, Information and Youth. Programs and activities of these ministries are concerned directly or indirectly with children 0-18. Membership of the Council also includes a number of no more than three distinguished personalities interested in the field of childhood and motherhood. This Council meets once every two months and is entrusted primarily with preparing an all inclusive plan for the protection and development of childhood and motherhood as part of the National Development Plan.

The work of the Council is implemented through the following set up:

- ◆ A Consultative Committee that has a membership of twenty public figures in the field of public service. They are chosen to serve for three years, that could be renewed for a similar duration. The Consultative Committee is headed by Mrs. Mubarak the first Lady of Egypt, who is the patron of early childhood care and development and the strong supporter of a variety of activities that aim at improving the welfare and development of the small child.
- A General Secretariat, directed by the General Secretary of the Council implements the decisions taken by the Council and manages all the work that need to be undertaken by the Council. This Secretariat has its own budget and works in constant cooperation with all ministries and bodies concerned.

Not very long after the formation of the Council, the Consultative Committee formed a working group to prepare a legal statute for the protection of children. This group included judges, lawyers and legal specialists. The result of their work was the basis for the promulgation of “ Law # 12 for the Year 1996 for the Protection of the Child”. This law covers the rights of the child including his rights to quality services at the preschool level. It details very clearly the required action of the Ministry of Health for prenatal care, safe delivery conditions, immunization requirements and health care for the preschool child. It also delineates the essential conditions that should be observed in childcare institutions, both nurseries and kindergartens.<sup>4</sup>

### **2. The Ministry of Health**

Medical care for the preschool child is sought by the public and in full cooperation with the Ministry's agencies. Resistance is noted mainly for regular, and follow up prenatal care, which, in some uninformed communities is thought to be not necessary when there is no apparent complications. Services provided by the Ministry of Health cover even the remotest parts of the country. As expected, minor degrees of efficiency and coverage exist, in the remotest areas.

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<sup>4</sup>Published by the General Organization Governmental Presses, 1999

It is noted that efforts exerted by the Ministry of Health have remarkably reduced child mortality rates in the past two decades. The infant mortality rate in Egypt is now 37/1000 as compared to 157/1000 in 1975, and the under five mortality rate is now 43/1000 as compared to 235/1000 in 1970. However, plans are being drawn by the government for further reduction, keeping in mind comparison with the rates in Switzerland and France, for example. In these two countries infant mortality rate is 3 and 4/1000 consecutively and the under five mortality rate is 4 and 5/1000 consecutively. In order to reduce total fertility rate we need to further reduce child mortality rates. In fact, child mortality rates are very closely linked with total fertility rates. In the years 1995-2000, the fertility rate in Egypt averaged 3.4/woman. In Switzerland and France, in the same period the average was 1.5 and 1.7/woman consecutively.<sup>5</sup>

In Egypt, medical care for the pregnant mother, safe delivery services and child health care are managed and systematized by 331 health offices located all over the country<sup>6</sup>. The main job of these offices is to implement the Ministerial Plan of Action, which is based on directions provided by the Declaration of the Second Decade for the Protection and Welfare of the Egyptian Child. Presently the main points in the plan of action gives special emphasis to the following:

- ◆ To further reduce the mortality rates of infants and children under five by extirpating polio and tetanus through mass immunization. Vaccination against tuberculoses, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, virus B that attacks the liver and measles are to be administered, also to all children under five.
- ◆ To reduce the rate of malnutrition and iron deficiency among children under five.
- ◆ To reduce maternal mortality due to pregnancy complications and unsafe delivery practices . (currently it is 170/100000 births )<sup>7</sup>
- ◆ To encourage prenatal care and proper nutrition for pregnant mothers and mothers to be during the early formative years, with view to decreasing the number of children born under weight.
- ◆ To minimize the spreading of infectious and endemic childhood diseases that interfere with the growth and development of children, such as bilharziosis and hepatitis and their complications.
- ◆ To continue the widespread use of dehydration medicaments for dehydrated cases.
- ◆ To develop recording and information systems related to children's health for the purpose of registering progress, communicating knowledge and exchanging data.<sup>8</sup>

### **3. The Ministry of Education**

KG classes started in Egypt in some private schools, which operate under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Since the fifties of the last century. In 1994, the ministry of Education started to add KG classes for children ages 4-6 to its

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<sup>5</sup>UNDP Human Development Report 2002

<sup>6</sup>The National Center for Information on Health and Population 2002

<sup>7</sup>UNDP Human Development Report 2002

<sup>8</sup>The National Center for Information on Health and Population 2002

elementary schools. Two classes, KG1 and KG2 were introduced to some schools as an integral stage of the fundamental elementary education period. The plan for this development started with, 2045 elementary schools spread in the 27 Governorates of Egypt. The first year KG classes were added to 200 elementary schools in 22 of the more populated Governorates. This development continued to be implemented according to planned stages. Along the way more schools were added to those originally chosen. In the school year 2001/2002 this first plan was completed by the opening of KG classes in close to 4000 elementary schools in all the Governorates of Egypt. These KGs are spread as follows:

\*Greater Cairo 1040      \*Lower Egypt 2113      \*Upper Egypt 838<sup>9</sup>

Demand for education in all stages, including preschool, has been continually increasing and valued in Egypt. It has proven to be a good vehicle of social mobility and enlightenment for the citizens. The demand for preschool education is increasing continuously, not because of real understanding of the importance of early childhood development, but mainly because parents want to start educating their children as early as possible. Quantitative development would eventually serve to explain to parents the development that need to be addressed in this preschool period. As mentioned earlier by the year 2010, 60% of the age group 4-6 would be granted admission to KG classes. Presently, Egypt has 12500 KG classes, both public and private. They accommodate 12% (400 000) of the 4-6 age group. They are distributed as follows:

	Number of Girls	Number of Boys	Total	Number of Classes
Public KG	93978	107032	201010	6610
Private KG	88238	111500	199738	5891
Total	182216	218532	400748	12501 <sup>10</sup>

After allowing for the increase in population, it is estimated that at the end of the second decade in 2010, 60% ( about 2 million ) of this age group should be attending KG classes. At first glance this might seem too ambitious a target. But looking at the growth in KG admittance in the past decade, it becomes clear that it is quite feasible. The rate of growth in KG admittance since 1991 and the possible demographic projection are summarized in the following table.

The year	enrolment	Increase in enrolment/#of years	Rate of increase/year	Comments
1991-1992	223 041			
1999-2000	354 435	131 384/9 years	14 600/year <sup>11</sup>	An impressive increase

<sup>9</sup>Statistical Guidebook 2000-2001, Issued by the KG Directorate at the Ministry of Education

<sup>10</sup> Statistical Guidebook 2000-2001, Issued by the KG Directorate at the Ministry of Education

2001-2002	400 748	46 313/2 years	23 150/year	Almost double the increase /year
2010-2011 projection	2 000 000 (60% of the present age group census is 1 800 000)	1 600 000/10 years	An average of 160 000/year <sup>12</sup>	With doubling the increase every year enrolment at the end of the ten years will exceed this average.

The Ministry of Education has already taken action towards improving KGs qualitatively. Currently it is implementing a project, which aims at developing and modernizing the efforts that the Ministry of Education exerts in the field of preschool education; and to prepare an all inclusive strategy for educating the small child based on the experience gained from the implementation of this project. This project will include:

- ◆ Developing the KG curriculum.
- ◆ Establishing a training center for KG teachers and other workers with small children if need arises.
- ◆ Establishing a model KG setting and an information center for preschool child care and development.

The sight for the center has already been designated and plans for the KG classes and furniture have already been prepared. Committees for developing the work in KG are being formed. The qualitative change will most certainly help to make the envisioned quantitative increase for 2010 easier to achieve. It will also have a qualitative indirect influence on all early childhood services in Egypt.

Presently teachers in KGs are mostly university graduates the majority of them are specialized graduates of KG training colleges and teacher training colleges. Yet, continuous training and retraining are always required, especially in the teaching profession. It should be noted here that public KGs are more particular about recruiting highly qualified teachers, compared with private institutions, as apparent in the following table, that shows the present status and qualifications of the 19310 KG teachers currently on the job: <sup>13</sup>

	Specializes University Degree	Not specialized University Degree	Specialized Secondary Education <sup>14</sup>	Not specialized Secondary Education	Less than Secondary Education
Public KGs	8367	1090	484	644	27
Private KGs	2299	5262	119	937	81

<sup>11</sup> Statistical Guidebook 2000-2001, Issued by the KG Directorate at the Ministry of Education

<sup>12</sup> Calculated with reference to previous increases

<sup>13</sup> Statistics from the Statistical Yearbook 2000-2001, Issued by the Directorate of KG at the Ministry of Education

□ The Teachers with less than a University Degree are older teachers who are close to the retirement age.

<sup>14</sup> These are graduates of a secondary training center which was closed in the sixties of the twentieth century.

Total	10666	6352	603	1581	108
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For the purpose of clarifying some issues about the quality of work currently in progress at KGs all over the country, a short pilot questionnaire was prepared by the study team and administered in KGs in various geographic areas in Egypt. One hundred and fifty questionnaires were filled with the help of members of the study committee and some KG supervisors in five governorates, namely: greater Cairo, Alexandria and Dakahlia, representing lower Egypt and Aswan and the New Valley, representing upper Egypt.

The questionnaire revealed the following:

- ◆ KG classes are very crowded. On average 40 children to one teacher are crowded in a room, which often is not bigger than 30 square meters. Classes in urban areas are more crowded than in rural areas. In one area in Alexandria the number of children in a class room with one teacher reached up to 55 children.
- ◆ Furniture, equipment and educational toys are adequate in kind. Yet, more often than not, they are exhibited in the small classrooms in a very crowded manner. Due to the fact that the available space is small, it would help if the educational materials are stored outside the classroom. They would be brought in as needed.
- ◆ Most of the teachers are acceptably qualified. As expected in the cities and crowded areas qualifications of teachers are higher than in the remote areas, which certainly makes up for the draw back of the crowded classrooms.
- ◆ The curriculum is set by the Ministry, the content of which is provided to the KGs in the form of books or cards to be used by the children. The Ministry, also, provides periodical training courses to the teachers. The video conference training located at the central premises of the Ministry is sometimes used to deliver short training messages and can provide ample opportunities for continuous training programs.

#### **4. The Ministry of Social Affairs**

The Declaration of the Second Decade for the Protection and Welfare of the Egyptian Child calls upon the Ministry of Social affairs to protect “ children who pass through difficult circumstances, especially school dropouts, working and street children , children in social care and penal establishments” for the purpose of ensuring “their sound upbringing from the psychological, social and vocational point of view”. It does not mention the normal 0-4 years old, who attend the nurseries or day care centers licensed and supervised by this Ministry. Nevertheless, the “ Law #12 for the Protection of the Child” , as mentioned earlier details the essential conditions that should be observed in nurseries and child care centers..

The nurseries and day care centers started to work under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs around the Middle of the past century, as a service for the less privileged working mother. Presently they are used widely by middle class working mothers, such as teachers, government employees, even young female lawyers and medical doctors. Most of these centers are operated by private voluntary societies. These societies or NGOs are initiated by a group of people who cooperate

to serve the community. The establishment of an NGO stipulates licensing for its work from the Ministry of Social Affairs. In order to get the license it has to define clearly its aims and purposes, to specify the programs and activities to be undertaken, accept to work under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs and meet the official requirements in accordance the civil service societies statute and laws.<sup>15</sup>

A great number of civil service societies run child day care centers, that enrolls children until the age of 4. Children 4-6 are expected to be in the Ministry of Education KG classes attending an educationally oriented curriculum. Yet because KG classes presently accommodate only 12 % of the total number of children aged 4-6, nursery schools accommodate by necessity a number of 4-6 year old children. This problem will be solved partially at the end of the second decade for the development of the child, when most 4-6 year olds will be accommodated in KG classes.

According to an information sheet issued by the Childhood Division of the Directorate of Family and Children at the Ministry of Social Affairs in February 2003, there are 8949 nurseries supervised by the Ministry. They accommodate a total of 559084 preschool children 3 months and older. <sup>16</sup> The table in the next section of this paper will detail enrolment in nurseries.

Due to the fact that most of these nurseries operate on a very tight budget the services provided in them are not ideal. Strangely enough, it is observed that some of these day care centers take pride in teaching children to obey rules and to read and write both Arabic and English at a very early age, sometimes as early as the age of two. This is done upon the demand of parents, who are not familiar with early stages of development and are anxious to see their children learning to read and write as soon as possible. The Ministry of Social Affairs issues directives and provides training and is starting to get some positive results. Nevertheless, the need to educate parents about the developmental needs of small children still remains crucial for achieving the real objectives of child development

In addition, the Ministry of Social Affairs manages and supervises shelters for homeless children, as well as a program for placing children in foster homes. The number of preschoolers accommodated in shelters in the year 2000 , according to the information sheets issued by the Ministry totals 9641 children .

The Ministry of Social Affairs, also, serves children through centers called children's clubs where about 55000 children are served therein. It is difficult to estimate how many preschoolers join those clubs. Nevertheless, although they could potentially serve the preschool age group. All it needs to attract the small children is to create programs and activities that would suit this age group.

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<sup>15</sup> A new law for civil societies was approved by the parliament three months ago and civil societies are currently reorganizing themselves in accordance with this law.

<sup>16</sup> Working women in Egypt are entitled by law a three months maternity leave.

## Provision of Early Childhood Services

Name of Service	Setting	Age Served	Hours of Service	Enrolment	Responsible Ministry	Comments
Maternity and Health Care	204 Health Centers and 698 Hospitals	Prenatal	-----	1 253 356 deliveries for the year 2001	Health	1 247 573 live births and 5 783 dead births. <sup>17</sup>
Early Childhood Health Care	As Above	0-6	-----	-----	Health	The result of good health services is the reduction of infant and under five mortality rates discussed on page 3. <sup>18</sup>
KG1 and KG2 Classes	Cairo and Guiza	4-6 years	8-2	142 699	Education	
KG1 and KG2 Classes	Upper Egypt	4-6 years	8-2	60014	Education	
KG1 and KG2 Classes	Lower Egypt	4-6 years	8-2	180057 <sup>19</sup>	Education	
Nursery Centers	Cairo and Guiza	Three months-4 years	7-4	147898	Social Affairs	Not all nurseries operate the full length of the indicated time.. Some work less hours and others extend the time if required by the community.
Nursery Centers	Upper Egypt	Three months – 4 years	7-4	94971	Social Affairs	
Nursery Centers	Lower Egypt	Three months- 4	7-4	316718 <sup>20</sup>	Social Affairs	

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<sup>17</sup>The program for maternity health care has three components namely, maternity care, training of midwives and care for the newborn infant.

Source: The National Center for Information on Health and Population

<sup>18</sup>Components of the program of early child health care include: vaccination for polio and childhood diseases, and combating malnutrition

Source: The National Center for Information on Health and Population.

<sup>19</sup>Statistical Guidebook 2000-2001, issued by the KG Directorate at the Ministry of Education

<sup>20</sup>Statistical Sheet provided by the Childhood Division of the General Directorate of the Family and Child at the Ministry of Social Affairs.

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<sup>21</sup>Ms. Abdel Maksoud was head of the KG Directorate at the time the study began. A few months later , she reached the legal pension age and was replaced at the Ministry, but continued to serve on the study team.

