



Success Stories in Early Childhood Education Gujarat 2012



Integrated Child Development Services Scheme
Women and Child Development Department
Government of Gujarat

unicef 
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ECE in Gujarat



80 per cent of the development of the brain takes place between three to six years of age

The early years are extremely important for the growth and development of children. The foundation for all development is laid during these years. Children, who get adequate stimulation, besides nutrition and health, grow and develop optimally. It is therefore urgent and essential to provide quality experiences to children at home and at Early Childhood Education (ECE) centers.

With the belief that early years are very important for young children's growth and development, UNICEF in Gujarat began its work on ECE in the six IKEA districts — Banaskantha, Bhavnagar,

Kutch, Patan, Rajkot, Vadodara — and the integrated district of Valsad.

The ECE initiative began in 2009 with the establishment of Standards and Indicators for children in the age group of three to six years in Gujarat. Through item analysis, a 23-item checklist was finalized which would help understand and evaluate children's development. All the domains of development were represented in the checklist. In 2010, quality inputs began in two districts of the state — Kutch and Vadodara. The initiative was expanded in 2011 to include Banaskantha and Patan, and in 2012, to include Rajkot and Bhavnagar as well.

In all, 11727 anganwadis have been equipped with the ECE kit which, comprises big balls, bat-and-ball sets, a set of 26 storybooks, colorful wooden building blocks, matching cards set, *khanjari* (tambourine) and *manjira* (a small percussion instrument) and puppets. 234540 children are now using a set of two activity books. Parent advocacy booklets have been distributed to 234540 parents. Six Program Officers (POs), 511 CDPOs and 8326 anganwadi workers have been trained.

The CDPOs and anganwadi supervisors were trained as master trainers by the State ECE Consultant. Supported by the District Education and ECE Consultant. They, in turn, trained the anganwadi workers. The training programs were interactive and experiential.

Building capacities through training

Developing Master Trainers has helped improve the reach and the understanding of ECE in six districts of Gujarat

Jigisha Shastri

Training programs in education have often been reduced to lecture series and PowerPoint presentations. They seldom allow two-way interactions between the trainer and the participants. “Boring and a waste of time,” is how people usually describe such programs. For training programs to have a larger impact on the audience, especially after they’re over, they need to offer good experiences.

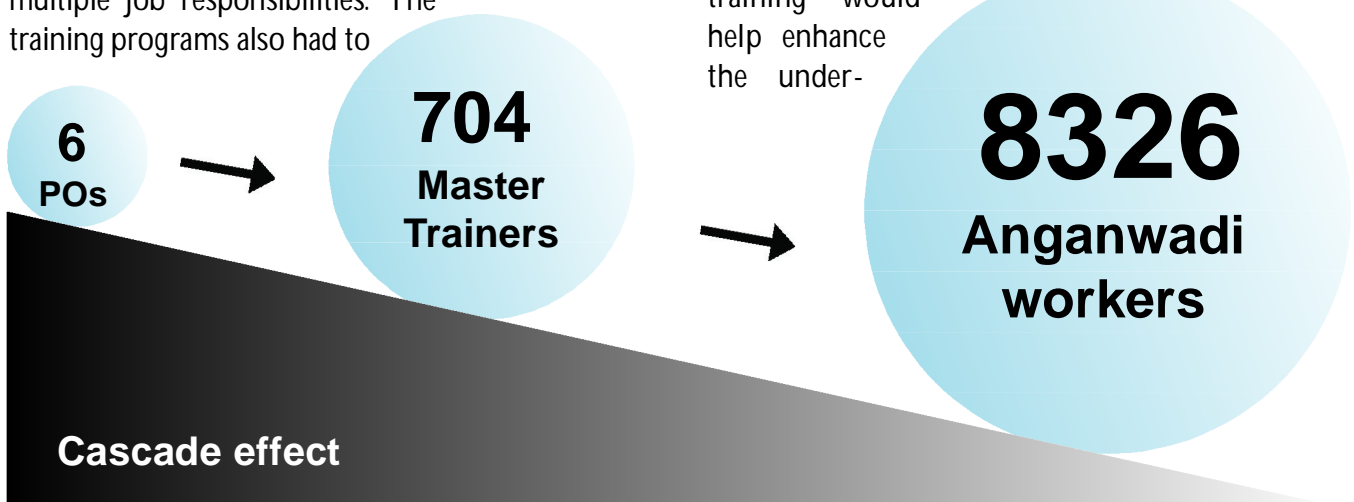
Keeping this in mind, training programs for personnel in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Gujarat were developed and facilitated by UNICEF. The participants would get an experience of the realities in the field. The programs would take into consideration their comfort, context in which they were executing their duties and their multiple job responsibilities. The training programs also had to

have a blend of theory and experience to help evolve developmentally appropriate programs for the children in the anganwadis across the state.

Cascade effect

In order to reach out to a large number of people within a short span of time, the training programs were conducted in batches. Personnel from the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) such as Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), anganwadi supervisors and trainers at the Anganwadi Training Center from the six districts of Banaskantha, Kutch, Patan, Vadodara, Rajkot and Bhavnagar were trained as Master Trainers. They, in turn, were expected to train the anganwadi workers.

This method of training would help enhance the under-





ICDS personnel perform an action song during a Master Trainers' program in Bhavnagar

standing of ECE and build capacities of the CDPOs and supervisors. It would also ensure quality mentoring and monitoring on a day-to-day basis.

During 2010-12, six Program Officers (POs), 704 Master Trainers (such as CDPOs, anganwadi supervisors and selected trainers of the Anganwadi Training Centers), 8326 anganwadi workers were provided with experiential training in ECE.

The training process

While the training programs for Master Trainers and anganwadi workers were carried out separately, they laid stress on the need for ECE and how it should be delivered in the most effective way in the anganwadis. They were planned with the belief that all individuals are capable of understanding the most complicated information that is provided to them if it is presented in a way they can understand. The participants needed to understand the importance of an action in order to implement it properly. The components of the training programs were:

Understanding ECE: Using PowerPoint presentations, the participants were told about the importance of the early years in the development of a child. By understanding the process of development of the brain, the synapses and neurons they understood the importance of stimulation in a child's early years.

Learning how to build a rapport: The participants learnt that children should be made comfortable in the initial stages, that they should be communicated with and how stress-free learning environments may be created.

Demonstration of the ECE kit: The UNICEF-sponsored ECE kit has been provided to all the anganwadis in these six districts. It contains beads for stringing, building blocks, puppets, *khanjari* (tambourine) and *manjira* (a small percussion instrument), a matching card set, a set of 20 story books, cricket bat and ball, big ball, stringing boards,



All the items in the ECE kit were demonstrated

slate pens, crayons and two activity books along with an anganwadi workers' module and a Parent Advocacy booklet. Each item of the kit was displayed and its use demonstrated to the participants. They learnt how the items would help children's development.

Understanding how children learn: Videos of children using the ECE kit in anganwadis were shown to the participants. They were discussed to understand better how children learn through first-hand experience, observation, thinking, imitation and that they need to pay attention to, concentrate on, remember and recall information.

Enhancing development of children: Each of the different domains of development — physical (motor), cognitive, language, social and emotional and creative was discussed with the participants. They also participated in activities related to these developmental domains.

Enhancing physical development of children: Using the training module, the participants were oriented towards aspects of physical develop-

ment of children. They participated in activities where they learnt how to use the big ball, about the exercises that can be done with children in the anganwadi — walking to a rhythm, walking as if they were different animals, etc.

Enhancing cognitive development: There were discussions on how objects from the environment could be used to deliver valuable concepts to children about color, shape, texture, living/non living, etc and on experiences in the learning of science, math and language. The participants sorted, classified and matched beads, blocks and cards, constructed structures from the blocks, took a 'nature walk' and came back to put together leaves, branches and flowers together to form a 'plant'.

Enhancing language development: Participants were made to understand that all experiences would promote language and cognition. They participated in creating stories, questioning and played word games such as "Be Quick" and Word Antakshari.

Enhancing social and emotional development: Sessions were conducted during which the participants learned how to encourage children to cooperate, share and understand emotions.

Use of storybooks: Emphasis was laid on how stories promote language, social and emotional development. The ECE kit contains two sets of 20 storybooks and four Meena flip books. With the help of these, good storytelling practices were demonstrated. The participants also narrated stories. Emphasis was laid on how emotions should be expressed in a story, the need for voice modulation and how stories should be narrated in an uninterrupted manner. The participants were also told to encourage children to ask them questions.

Enhancing creativity: The participants partici-

pated in creative activities using newspaper, clay and *geru* (red clay). They also made simple paint brushes with sticks, sponge and thread. They learned the importance of such activities for children.

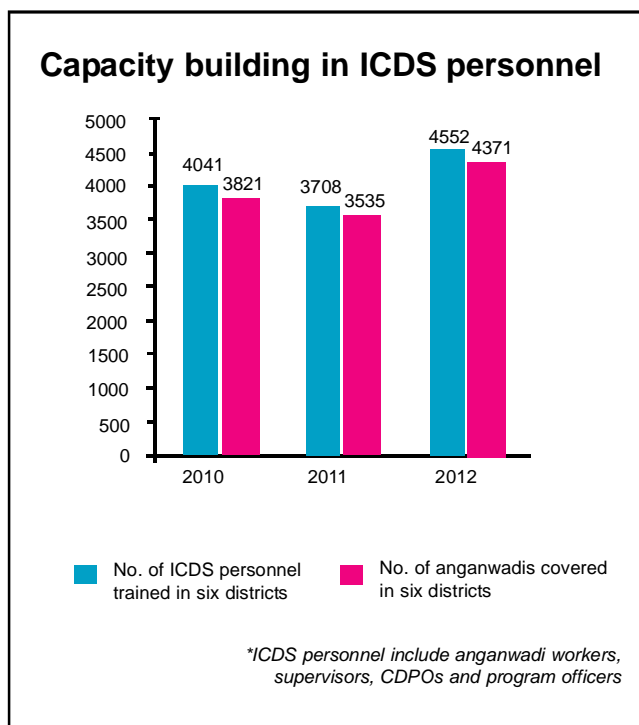
Creating an ‘anganwadi’: From a set of materials which were provided, participants were challenged to create a setting for an anganwadi. They were encouraged to use materials which were attractive, interactive and very important.

Discussing the timetable: The timetable for an anganwadi was also discussed. Their suggestions were incorporated and new versions of the timetable were shared at each training session. At one of the initial training sessions, the participants had suggested that each anganwadi should be given a laminated timetable which may be displayed on the wall. This suggestion was universally accepted.

A success

In the years 2010-12, 11727 anganwadis in these six districts of Gujarat and the integrated Valsad district have implemented ECE. 4041 ICDS personnel were trained in 2010, 3708 in 2011 and 4552 in 2012. In districts such as Banaskantha, Vadodara and Kutch districts there were a large number of participants during the Master Trainers’ programs.

At the beginning of each program, the participants were skeptical about how the training would help them in their day-to-day activities at the angan-



wadis but towards the end of the sessions, it helped change their outlook towards ECE and how it should be delivered to the children.

Since the initiation of these training programs, there has been a marked improvement in the facilities and the quality of ECE in the anganwadis of the districts. The walls of many anganwadis have been painted with pictures and are used as activity boards, handwashing is now a routine, anganwadi workers are motivated to try out new activities and, most importantly, an increasing number of children are now coming to the anganwadis not just for food but to play and learn.

ECE training for ICDS personnel

The capacity-building program will help improve the environments in 1825 anganwadis across Rajkot district



An anganwadi worker performs an action-song during an ICDS training session in Wankaner, Rajkot district

Ninad Jhala

A comprehensive early childhood care provides a strong foundation for children's good health, growth and their success in the field of education. Preschool education is important because it prepares children for primary school education. Research has shown that quality preschool education offers multiple benefits to children. It motivates them to attend primary school, provides parents with information about new approaches towards education and helps them support their children's schooling experience.

Children who attend preschool are better at academics. Their enrolment and retention rates are

higher (even during their later years in school) than those who do not attend preschool.

With a commitment to preschool education, UNICEF organized Early Childhood Education (ECE) training sessions for the Program Officer (PO), Child Development Project Officers (CDPO), Supervisors and anganwadi workers of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) Department in Rajkot district.

Training Master Trainers

A proposal of Rs 1,093,040 was sent by the ICDS Department-Rajkot to UNICEF to provide financial and technical support for ECE training across the district. UNICEF approved of the proposal and soon 90 Master Trainers, including the PO, 15 CDPOs, 69 Supervisors, three tutors from the Kanta Stri Vikas Gruh anganwadi training centre and two lecturers from Shri Sadguru Home Science College, came together for the training sessions in January 2012.

The training programs were carefully designed and facilitated by Dr Jigisha Shastri, who is the State ECE Consultant. The batch was split into two (of 45 participants each) and the training sessions were spread over a period of two days.

The program covered a gamut of areas of early childhood care and development, ranging from concepts of brain development in early childhood to facilitating activity-based learning for children in anganwadis.

Conducting block-level trainings

A couple of months after the Master Trainers Training program, 14 block-level training sessions for 1802 anganwadi workers in Rajkot district were carried out in March 2012. This time, the Master Trainers trained the workers with the help of guidance and support from the State ECE Consultant and UNICEF's Education and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Consultants from Bhavnagar, Kutch, Rajkot, Vadodara and Valsad districts in the state.

More awareness about ECE

This capacity-building of ICDS functionaries through the ECE training programs will help in the comprehensive development of 63444 children enrolled in 1825 anganwadis in Rajkot district.

Prafullaben Chauhan, Programme Officer, ICDS-Rajkot, says, "We can now compete effectively with privately-run anganwadi centres, which charge high fees and have had, till recently, the advantage of more learning aids, toys and trained teachers."

The anganwadi workers now understand the holistic nature of early childhood education that allows for a child's complete growth and development. Some of them have started telling the children's parents and villagers, "My anganwadi centre has new toys, games and educational materials that have been provided by an international agency called UNICEF. Send your children here and they will be happy to learn."

Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education is one of the six 'Education for All' goals that were identified by governments at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000.

Changing Ways by Regular Mentoring

Monthly review meetings have become catalysts of change in the model anganwadis of Kaparada block in Valsad



Vidhi Shah

The process of monitoring the model anganwadis in Valsad district began in April 2011. Initially, it was observed that Early Childhood Education (ECE) was low on their priority list. Anganwadi workers were too busy collecting and documenting data and did not pay much attention to providing ECE.

Though the 50 model anganwadis had been supplied by UNICEF with the ECE kit and the Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), Assistant CDPOs, Supervisors and 50 anganwadi workers had undergone a training program that focused on the importance of the early years and the kit's usage, there was little change in anganwadis' programs. Thus, new monitoring and mentoring strategies were devised so that ECE could be implemented properly:

Ensuring all anganwadis are opened

Regular monthly review meetings with the two CDPOs, one Assistant CDPO, 14 Supervisors and 25 anganwadi workers from the model anganwadis of Kaparada block were held. The agenda for the first meeting was to share the feedback on the initial visits to the anganwadis that were conducted during course of that particular month. The feedback was not encouraging. A majority of the anganwadis were found closed. The reasons were discussed during the meeting. The participants decided that from that day onwards no anganwadi would be closed and that children would be attending the anganwadis.

The result: Most of the anganwadis, which were earlier closed, are now open and children are coming there regularly.

Bringing children to anganwadis

During the second meeting, V C Bagul, Taluka

Development Officer (TDO) of Kaparada and the District Education and ECE Consultant congratulated the anganwadi workers for keeping the anganwadis open. However, there was cause for concern since children were not coming there. After a lengthy discussion, the workers concluded that they would try to bring in as many children — who were registered at their respective anganwadis — as they could.

The result: In nearly 50 per cent of the model anganwadis in the district, at least 50 per cent of the children in the age group of three to six years have started attending the anganwadis regularly.

Monthly supervision

Since the Integrated Child Development Services' (ICDS) officials and anganwadi workers had accepted these suggestions and worked towards getting the desired results, the agenda for the next meeting focused on the expected roles and responsibilities of the anganwadi workers and that of the CDPOs and Supervisors as mentors.

During the third monthly review meeting, observations on the anganwadis which had been visited during the previous month were shared with the workers. It was decided that all supervisors must visit at least one model anganwadi every month and their observations would be shared at the next review meeting.

The result: Nearly 70 per cent of the supervisors had made visits to their respective model anganwadis and all of them were open. More than 10 children in the age group of three to six years were present at 50 per cent of the anganwadis.

Keeping things clean

The anganwadi workers were reoriented in October 2011 about the usage of the timetable shared by the

State ECE Consultant during the training program which was conducted in July 2011 for the CDPOs, Assistant CDPO, Supervisors and the 25 anganwadi workers of the model anganwadis. The workers had to ensure that their respective anganwadis had a mirror, a clean comb, a clean napkin and soap and water for the children to wash their hands and feet before and after various activities. They were expected to encourage children to use these items and make them understand the need to maintain personal hygiene.

The result: In nearly 75 per cent of the model anganwadis in Kaparada, children now use soap and water to wash their hands and feet. They use napkins and the worker combs their hair.

Thus, the regular monitoring of systematic, specific tasks may lead to the desired changes in the anganwadi program. By setting aside some time during the monthly review meetings for the mentoring of the anganwadi workers, the implementation of the ECE program may be further improved.

Squiggles, dribbles and lots of giggles

Cheerful children in Vadodara's Sandha village draw on their anganwadi's wall, play with balls and snack on chocolates during the course of their day



Dakshaben plays the *khanjari* to accompany the children while they sing



Children busy themselves with crayons and activity books

Jigisha Shastri

Children draw and scribble on a wall in Anganwadi No 83 at Sandha village (Shinor block, Vadodara). Others gesture at the pictures of animals and birds on another part of the wall. Just a few months ago, 10 out of the 14 registered students would have been found sitting on the floor, idling their time away till they were served their meals. Now, the 16 children who attend the anganwadi regularly, including some as young as two-and-a-half years old, even demand that they should attend their classes.

ECE kits for anganwadis

The initiative of creating child-friendly anganwadis has been undertaken in all anganwadis in the four

IKEA Districts and in integrated District Valsad. Each anganwadi has been provided with a set of early childhood learning materials. The Early Childhood Education (ECE) kit consists of big balls, a bat-and-ball set, matching cards, colored beads, wooden blocks, stringing boards, set of 20 story books, four Meena flip-books, musical instruments such as *khanjari* and *manjira*, slates and pens, crayons and papers — all packed neatly into a trunk. Besides these, each child at the anganwadi is given a set of two activity books, *Ramat Gamat 1* and *2*. In each district, Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs) and Supervisors are trained as Master Trainers who, in turn, train anganwadi workers how to use the kit and help them understand the importance of offering a developmentally appropriate, play-based program to the children.

Creating child-friendly environment

The initiative of painting the walls of the anganwadi with the support of the village community and Sarpanch (village chief) has resulted in its transformation from a boring classroom to a fun-learning center. Children with fresh, scrubbed faces are dropped off here by their mothers, fathers or even grandmothers. Once there is a sizeable attendance, the anganwadi worker, Dakshaben begins the prayer service. The children fold their hands, shut their eyes and say their prayers. Some cheekily open one eye to gauge their surroundings. Dakshaben then checks their nails and faces after which, they are given chocolates. They pop them into their little mouths and throw the wrappers in the dustbin.

Next, it is time to work with the activity books, slates and the blackboard. During this 20-minute session, Dakshaben asks a group of children to sit around her with their activity books. She discusses what's on a certain page. The children pick up the crayons from a dish, and start coloring the pictures. Others busy themselves by drawing on slates with chalk and on the portion of the wall that has been painted black. After 10 minutes, the children alternate their activities.

The music session follows. The children stand in the form a circle and sing the action song, '*Ek kehata ubha thaiye*'. This helps enhance their vocabulary and motor development boosts their confidence.

After the 20-minute session, the children are led outdoors. They form a circle. A game of throwing and catching a ball helps them develop their gross motor skills. A few children play cricket. Once in a while a child actually hits the ball with the bat. Others play on the slide, swings, merry-go-round and rocking boat. The anganwadi worker sees to it that that no one gets hurt.

Soon, it's time for lunch! The children wash their hands and sit in the form of a circle. They are served hot snacks. They eat well. The helper coaxes them to have more. Once they have had their fill, lunch they all wash their hands. Dakshaben claps

her hands and draws their attention. She asks them to pick different play materials and sit in small groups. The children engage themselves with threading boards, building blocks, matching cards, playing *khanjari* and *manjira*, and reading story books. The worker sits with the children who are playing with the matching cards' set. She picks up a few cards and asks them to find their matching cards. She does this thrice. She asks them to sort the cards according to 'animals', 'birds', etc. After 20 minutes, nobody wants to keep the toys away.

The next session is on creative arts. The children are engaged in small groups, drawing with crayons on paper, pasting pieces of colored paper on a big cardboard box, and making a *rangoli* with the help of Dakshaben and her helper. After 20 minutes, she starts playing the *khanjari*. The session is brought to an end with Dakshaben narrating a story to the children, from their favorite picture story book. It leaves them mesmerized. After lunch, when it is time to go home, they are reluctant to do so.

TLMs add value to education

Dakshaben feels that the Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) have been a great addition to the program. The children have been engaged for all the three hours they spend at the anganwadi. She says, "Earlier, the children would eat food and go away. Now, they play with the learning materials, demand for activity books and do not want to go home. I have to actually coax them to go." The children initiate and ask their parents to drop them off at the anganwadi early. Sometimes, mothers and grandmothers join them too. They feel that the toys/play materials have added value to their children's education. The children even talk about their day's activities at home.

Trainings have helped a lot

It has been a year since the use of the ECE kit has been initiated in the anganwadis. The CDPOs and Supervisors in Vadodara were offered an experien-

tial Masters' Trainers' training in August-September 2011, which helped them learn and experience the effectiveness of a child-friendly, developmentally appropriate preschool program. They, in turn, trained the workers of their *seja* (a division of the block) such as Dakshaben. She says the training helped her understand how the materials should be used effectively. Most anganwadis seldom receive the TLMs and even if they do they comprise only dolls, stuffed toys and toy vehicles. The training has taught her to use blocks, matching cards, stringing boards and other materials, she says. Besides, Dakshaben has also been mentored by the District

Education and ECE Consultant on her regular visits and was found to be a quick learner, an effective worker and very open to suggestions.

According to the Project Officer, 80 per cent of the trainings conducted by the Master Trainers are of good quality. Many have tried to emulate their own training. They use the module and thoroughly orient the anganwadi workers towards it. The workers, who had never received such experiential training before, say it has helped them come up with new ideas for implementing preschool program in the anganwadis. This has made the anganwadis a stress-free learning experience for the children.

Scale-up for successful implementation

For successful implementation of this program on a large scale a few action points that emerge are:

- Experiential need based trainings that are contextual
- Enough budget and facility for training at each stage
- Strong, motivational and supportive mentoring. Most often the anganwadi workers/practitioners discover many problems in the field. When they find someone who can support them and not criticize their activities, they feel they can access this form of help and that leads to quality implementation
- Appropriate play materials for children to support the anganwadi workers in implementing the program — this is observed again and again in the field and reinforced by all
- Activity books help children in learning school readiness skills
- Program implementation guide/module for immediate and frequent reference
- Everyone from the CDPO should be thoroughly aware about and involved in the program of focus

A child-friendly anganwadi has:

- A stimulating environment — well painted walls with pictures, charts on the walls
- Stimulating learning materials that engage children, increase their concentration and enhance overall development
- An active, enthusiastic, child-friendly care-giver such as the anganwadi worker
- Community participation
- Parent involvement

From bored to board!

The ECE kit provided by UNICEF has led to an increase in community participation and has helped regularize the anganwadi workers' involvement in the Moolgam *phalia* of Dhamni village

Vidhi Shah

During our first visit to the Anganwadi Center (AWC) Dhamni 2 of Moolgam *phalia* (hamlet) of Dhamni village, (Dharampur block, Valsad district), we found that it was closed. When we asked the members of the community about it, we discovered that the Anganwadi worker (AWW), Ramilaben B Patel, was very irregular. She did not bring the children of the village together and her helper did not distribute food on most days. When we visited the AWW's house, we discovered that she had gone to Dharampur for some personal work. This, we reported to the concerned Supervisor and the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO).

Introducing ECE

The Supervisor accompanied the District Education Consultant during her next visit to the AWC. The AWW's irregularities were brought to her notice. On Mamta Divas, the consultant introduced the Early Childhood Education (ECE) kit to members of the community who had gathered there. Each item in the kit was demonstrated and stress was laid on the importance of the holistic development of young children. The response of the members of the community was very positive and they agreed to send their children to the AWC regularly.

"The training has helped me a lot"

During the course of the next few visits it was observed that at least 15 children would attend the



Children have started coming regularly to the anganwadi center at Dhamni because they want to play with the toys in the ECE kit

AWC regularly. As a result, even the AWW started going there on a regular basis. Initially, although the center was open, no programs were being conducted there. The children would come, play and fight with each other and then get bored. They would cry, eat the food they were served and then go back home. A few things from the kit such as slates, pens, books and puppets were used without keeping a specific objective or activity in mind.

The training program on ECE for AWWs of model AWCs helped Ramilaben understand the content of the kit better and she started using the tools effectively. The district consultant provided her with regular inputs from the field which reiterated what she had learnt during the training. "The training organized by UNICEF was really useful. Although the AWC had the kit since August 2010,

most of us (along with the supervisors and CDPOs) were unaware of how to effectively use some of the items in the kit such as beads and lacing boards. I did not know what a lacing board was and how it had to be used. But now, I now I know how to use it and I show it to the children as well."

The kit's arrival and its proper use have impacted the children too. "Now, the children have started coming regularly, their concentration levels have increased, their concepts of colors, shapes, etc have developed and most importantly, they now remain occupied," Ramilaben notes.

Understanding why their children need ECE

Vijaybhai Gavdi, father of three-year-old Roshni Gavdi who goes to the AWC, says, "Earlier, I had not paid much attention to the importance of ECE for Roshni. I thought that it was ok if she did not go to school because she is a girl and I felt it would be better for her to watch her mother do the household chores. But during the meeting, I learnt why

my child needs ECE. I then asked my wife to see to it that Roshni goes to the anganwadi regularly."

Rekhaben Barat was so unhappy with the AWC earlier that she did not want to send her son Krunal, who is four-and-a-half years old, there. But after she saw the kit and his reaction to the toys and books, she felt that if UNICEF was giving this to her child, then he may as well use it. Her son now goes to the anganwadi regularly.

For five-year-old Mitali Gavdi, the anganwadi's transformation has resulted in better prospects for her future as well. Her mother, Ramilaben Gavdi says, "I used to take my daughter to help me on the field. Therefore, her attendance at the anganwadi was very low. But after the meeting on Mamta Divas where we were shown the kit and its importance was explained to us, I now drop her off at the anganwadi and then go to work. When she comes back home, she tells me the different activities she does there. I am happy to see that she is learning!"

The introduction of ECE has not only brightened up the future of the children but also changed the social attitudes towards education in this village.

Model Makeover!

During its first 12 years, Ishwarpura's anganwadi was just a playroom for children. But since 2010, when it initiated the use of the ECE kit, it has become a model for teachers and learners



Anganwadi worker Taraben Vasava initiates an action-song sequence for the children

Eisha Sarkar

"In which district is Waghodia located?" Taraben Vasava asks the 20 children who have formed a circle around her at the anganwadi in Ishwarpura village. "Baroda (Vadodara)," they answer in chorus. "In which state is Baroda located?" "Gujarat!" "Where is Gujarat located?" "INDIA!" Their voices get louder with each answer, their faces brighter. Suddenly, they break into a song on India. Taraben

picks up the *khanjari* (tambourine) to accompany them.

Changing ways

Since its inception in 1998, Taraben has seen a drastic change in the attitude of children who spend five hours of their day (from 10.30 am to 2.30 pm) at the anganwadi. "Till 2010, all we had were a few balls and toys. I have studied only up to the ninth grade

so there was little I could offer to the children. They would just come here, play a little, eat their food and go. Yes, we would sing songs and recite poems, but that was all I knew of,” says the anganwadi worker (AWW). A little over a year ago, the anganwadi got its first Early Childhood Education (ECE) kit. Taraben also undertook a training session to understand how the kit could be used to its best advantage.

“ECE kit has helped me too”

Since then, the anganwadi has become more vibrant and colorful. The walls have been painted with names of the months of the year, seasons, birds and animals. Alphabet charts vie for attention next to a colored picture of Mahatma Gandhi. And the children color the pictures in their much-used activity books with crayons. “I read the books and create my own stories and characters and narrate them to the children,” says Taraben, adding, “The ECE kit has also helped me educate myself.”

Getting children to participate

The 28 registered children, who age anywhere between three to five years, are more or less regular in their attendance and are willing to participate in all the activities that are conducted at the anganwadi. “If they do not turn up, I actually go to their houses to fetch them or find out what the problem is,” says Ashaben Vasava, Taraben’s helper. Some of the children are intrigued by visitors and ask them questions. Others keep strangers at bay. “Jaideep, what is your name?” Taraben coaxes a shy, little boy to introduce himself. Jaideep doesn’t answer. She urges him to speak his name. He finally does, much to the delight of others. Everyone claps.

Becoming a ‘model’ for others

Of the 2638 anganwadis in Vadodara district,



Children wash their hands in the same bucket of water placed outside the anganwadi

Ishwarpura’s is a model. It provides the children a healthy environment to learn, interact and grow. It offers them proper meals (cooked in a very neat kitchen) and even teaches them about maintaining basic levels of hygiene — like using the squat toilet in a thatch-walled shed behind the brick-and-mortar anganwadi or washing their hands before they sit for their meals.

To make things better...

The anganwadi could do more to raise the bar for all anganwadis. “They could use more pictures instead of text on the walls and even allow the chil-



Children wait to dig into their midday meals

dren to draw or paint on a part of the wall. In order to provide the children with more space to move about, they should stack the chairs one on top of the other when they are not in use. And I would certainly like to see the children using a mug to take the water from the bucket to wash their hands instead of putting all their hands into the same bucket. It beats the purpose of handwashing," notes ECE consultant, Dr Jigisha Shastri.

Making a difference

Anganwadis such as Ishwarpura's have made a great difference to the lives of the children in villages around Vadodara. By June, six of these children, who have crossed five years of age, will be enrolled into the primary school at Waghodia for the new academic year and three new ones will be brought into the fold of non-formal education at the anganwadi. These baby-steps pave the way for a bright future ahead!

Where learning is great fun...

A kitchen garden, an elaborate handwashing routine and the award-winning dedication of a worker to ECE makes the anganwadi in Dhandha village near Palanpur a role-model for others of its kind



A boy washes his hands thoroughly before a meal at Dhandha anganwadi as Champaben Jadav, the helper, asks the other children to wait for their turn in a queue. The anganwadi lays special emphasis on personal hygiene and cleanliness

Eisha Sarkar

“First, we wet our hands. Then we use the soap. We rub the soap on each finger. We take special care of the nails. And then we wash all the soap off rigorously with water.” It’s a dry run for the handwashing routine that will start soon, says anganwadi worker, Parulben Nagaria. She likes the children to do it in the form of an action sequence in class. “This way, they have more fun and get habituated to wash their hands,” says Parulben, who initiated this routine at the anganwadi in Dhandha village near Palanpur after she attended UNICEF’s training program for anganwadi workers in September 2011.

Twenty-six children queue up near a bucket. Helper Champaben Jadav doles out mugs of water with which the children wash their hands. “Look how diligently they are washing their hands. Even we adults do not take such care to clean our nails every time we wash,” observes Ritaben K Patel, the anganwadi’s supervisor.

This simple task of handwashing is an important part of the lives of the children who come to the anganwadi. The drill helps them understand that washing their hands will prevent germs and dirt from getting into their mouths and, in turn, prevent them from falling sick. Some children have even ensured their parents wash their hands before they sit down to eat.

“This has been my biggest achievement. In each one of the 205 anganwadis I oversee, I have seen to it that the children have made handwashing a habit,” says a proud Shashiben Brahmabhatt, the block’s Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), who started this initiative after she attended a training program in June 2011.

Creating a ‘model’ anganwadi

With its innovative ways of teaching, fun-filled activities (that include dancing to children’s songs that are played on a DVD player), use of painted



Anganwadi worker Parulben Nagaria uses the painted walls as activity charts to teach children

walls as activity boards for children and a garden that grows onions, *lauki* (round bottle-gourds) and *arvi* (colocasia), Dhandha’s anganwadi has become a model for others in Banaskantha district.

But it wasn’t always like this. “Earlier, we did not know what to do. I have been an anganwadi worker for nine years. The children would just come here, eat and then go away. Somewhere down the line, even I lost my interest in teaching,” says Parulben.

In June 2011, she attended a training program on Early Childhood Education (ECE). It changed her outlook towards her work. “I learnt why ECE is important, how the kit should be used and why cleanliness is essential in bringing more children to the anganwadi,” shares Parulben, who holds a



A child plays with building blocks from the ECE kit

Master's degree in Gujarati.

Mentored, facilitated and monitored by the State ECE Consultant, Parulben and Supervisor Ritaben have created a child-friendly learning atmosphere in the anganwadi. She uses puppets from UNICEF's ECE kit and enacts the stories for the children. She also gets them to participate in group activities, where they play with building blocks, toys and memory cards or thread boards.

She strictly follows a timetable. Meals are now served on time and on clean stainless steel plates. There is a separate provision for drinking water. The idea of using a ladle for the water came from an anganwadi worker from Surajpura village who Parulben met at the training program. Parulben and her helper, Champaben, also see to it that the newly-tiled toilet is cleaned regularly and that children throw chocolate wrappers into a dustbin made out of a jerry-can.

New ideas, new learning ways

What sets Dhandha's Anganwadi No 2 apart from the rest of its kind is the innovation that has been put into the process of learning. Parulben uses the books not only to narrate the stories but also to cre-

ate her own. She uses a combination of poetry, dance and puppets so that children can actively participate in the storytelling process. Parulben says that she has picked up these ideas from the *Anganwadi Workers' Module*, which has been prepared by UNICEF and which she has been trained to use.

In order to allow all the children to play with puppets at the same time, Ritaben suggests that she will get a village tailor to stitch puppets that are similar to those in the UNICEF kit.

While the children have their activity books and toys to help them develop their brain and motor skills, the anganwadi worker has also devised a way to enhance their senses. She has created a 'scent box' that contains vials of spices such as *variya* (fennel), *lavang* (clove), *elaichi* (cardamom) and *gulab* (rose). A similar 'taste box' contains sugar (sweet), salt, and mango/tamarind powder (sour) to help children distinguish the tastes. She says they still have not managed to find a 'bitter-tasting powder'. Shashiben, the CDPO, suggests they could use methi (fenugreek) powder.

Turning parents into participants

The main reason for the anganwadi's quick turnaround over the last few months has been the involvement of the community, especially that of the parents who send their children here.

When Ritaben came up with the idea of painting the walls of the anganwadi, following her interaction with State ECE Consultant Dr Jigisha Shastri, she was initially cagey about asking the parents for money. But her fears were misplaced and they happily contributed the required Rs 2500 to create a bright, colorful place for their children.

Next, when she wanted to get identity cards for each child, she once again went to the parents for help. "Each card costs Rs 12. The parents told me, 'Don't worry, we will give it you'," she says adding that the parents also contributed for the files the anganwadi maintains on the children's activities.

The villagers also took pride in re-doing the place. One person put racks on the wall to create storage space for the files. Another provided two chairs and two tables. A third person paid for the utensils and others contributed to the binding of the books.

The most recent contribution has been in the form of a DVD player. "I've been asking them to put a DVD player for the past six months. But they couldn't find a donor. Then somebody gifted me a player, recently. I thought I may as well put it here so that it can be used regularly and the children can enjoy themselves," says tailor Bharat Hirabhai, whose four-year-old son, Harshil, goes to the anganwadi. "Now that we have the DVD, we'll also get a TV!" In fact, Parulben has already started advising the children to limit the number of hours they spend in front of the television.

The parents actively participate in the anganwadi's affairs. They track their children's progress records and attend parent meetings regularly.

When Parulben was awarded for her work in the anganwadi, many of the parents took time off from

their schedules to congratulate her.

To make things even better

When State Right to Education consultant, Dr Ankita Sharma visited the anganwadi along with Hetal K Patel, District Education and ECE consultant, she was taken in by the commitment of the worker, the helper (she takes on the functions of the anganwadi worker and keeps the center running when the latter has to attend meetings), the CDPO and the supervisor towards education.

The children, who only a year back were malnourished and disinterested, have now become healthy, confident and are eager to learn. Dr Sharma notes that greater participation of the parents by attending meetings regularly at the anganwadi will further benefit the children. Shashiben also points out that the anganwadi needs to be supplied with four to five liters of milk everyday. This, the village Sarpanch, Ramilaben Varecha, has agreed to provide for. She says, "For the development of the village, the development of the anganwadi is a must!"

Guiding Force

Supervisor Shree Shantuben Makwana has motivated workers to create fun-learning environments in 25 anganwadis in Ghogha

Rajendra Jani

Of the 92 anganwadis in Bhavnagar's Ghogha block, 25 have always stood apart in matters of cleanliness, the fun-filled activities they conduct for Early Childhood Education (ECE), their layouts and decorations and the workers' love for children.

What's their secret?

Conversations with the people of the village and anganwadi workers lead to Shree Shantuben Makwana, who works as the Supervisor here. She has been the major source of inspiration and guidance for these anganwadis.

Born in the village of Aambla, Makwana studied at Gramya Dakshinamurti Primary School and Lokshala — schools that have been deeply impacted by the thoughts and philosophies of renowned educationists such as Nanabhai Bhatt and Manubhai Pancholi. Since Makwana's father, Premjibhai, was also associated with these institutions her young years were rooted in education. She pursued a BA degree in Home Science at Bhavnagar University.

"God has chosen us to nurture little angels"

In May 1988, Makwana was appointed as an anganwadi Supervisor in Dwarka. Later, she worked in Jesar and Savarkundla. Since December 2004, she has been supervising and guiding 25 anganwadis in Ghogha.

Soon after she started working in Ghogha, she



Shree Shantuben Makwana (left, in yellow saree) instructs a seated anganwadi worker to check the weights of the mothers who send their children to the anganwadi

realized that the anganwadis would be more effective in providing ECE if the Supervisor could motivate and guide the staff. She took workers and helpers into confidence. She encouraged them to record the minutes of each meeting and provided them with books to record them. She also acquainted them with their roles and responsibilities. She trained helpers so that they could efficiently handle all the activities, even in the absence of the anganwadi worker.

Makwana told the anganwadi workers that they were fortunate that God had put such faith in them and handed them the responsibility of nurturing little angels in their early years. Now, they had to prove that they were worthy of carrying out their duty with honesty and perseverance. She told them that they would contribute towards the preparation of an active, dutiful and courteous generation of future

citizens for the country.

In order to keep herself updated about the latest practices in ECE, Makwana attended a training session for supervisors, anganwadi workers and Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), which was organized by UNICEF, where she learnt about the ECE kit and how it can be best used for imparting education to children. She, in turn, shared what she had learnt with the anganwadi workers so that they could implement the ECE program properly.

A good taskmaster

Makwana starts her day early. She makes it a point to go to even the most remote centers in the block. For this, sometimes, she has to walk up to five kilometers. She spends a day at each center — not just to observe and inspect the facilities that are provided, but also to help and participate. She takes an active part in the children's activities such as singing and dancing. She helps workers in other tasks such as decorating the center or even preparing breakfast meals for the children. And she doesn't just check the registers to note the shortcomings, but actively helps the anganwadi staff to prepare them. Details of all the workers — birthdays, joining dates, the training programs they have undertaken, salaries and other benefits they receive — are filled in the registers.

Makwana also visits the parents and guardians

At a Ghogha anganwadi...

- Walls are adorned with slogans, charts and pictures
- Time-tables are followed
- Prayers are offered to Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge, everyday
- Registers, materials and supplies are kept on the premises
- 15 days' supplies are stored in clean containers
- Cleaning is carried out once a week and *mahasafai* (thorough cleaning) once a month
- Children wash their hands with soap before meals and use the toilets
- A dustbin made from an empty oil can is kept for use
- All children are treated equally
- Yoga and light exercises are included before and during the activities to help children concentrate
- Every Tuesday, celebrations are held for children who have birthdays through the week
- The weight of every child is measured before the tenth of every month
- Meetings of Sakhimandal (group of friends) and Matrumandal (group of mothers) are held every month and notes are maintained
- Children go out for a day's trip to a temple or farm once a month
- Attempts are made to find donors for at least two to three *tithibhojana* (funeral feasts)

along with the anganwadi workers and ensures that Anganwadi Praveshotsav, a function where newly admitted children are welcomed into the anganwadi, is organized every year. She even gets the workers to attend the SETCOM programs organised at the block-level.

Ensuring healthy competition

Makwana makes it a point to recognize and appreciate the efforts of the workers. She organizes different competitions for decoration, recipes, sports, child health, best record-keeping, TLM creation from waste materials, and so on, thus, creating an environment of healthy competition between centers and workers. She also organizes various cultural activities from time to time.

Along with the staff, Makwana has reached out to donors and arranged for the establishment

and repairing of anganwadi centers and facilities such as water-tanks, bicycles, fans, instruments, toys and books. Many anganwadis under her purview have started growing vegetables in their yards.

Bhavnagar has 2246 anganwadis spread across 11 blocks. By emulating Makwana's model, other anganwadis may also create fun-learning experiences for children in the age group of three to six years.

Global Action Week 2012 Campaign



The Global Week raised awareness among people about the importance of sending children to anganwadis

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) is a civil society movement that aims to end the global education crisis. The GCE's mission is to make sure that governments act now to deliver the right of every girl, boy, woman and man to free quality public education.

Since its formation in 1999, millions of people and thousands of organizations in over 100 countries have united with GCE to demand Education for All (EFA). Civil society organizations, trade unions, child rights' campaigners, teachers, parents and students have come together for the cause of universal education.

One of the major events on GCE's calendar is the Global Action Week on Education that is held in April every year. This year, the focus of the Global Action Week was Early Childhood Care and Education. The slogan was, "Rights from the Start! Early Childhood Care and Education Now!"

The week from April 23-28, 2012 focused on the first goal of EFA: "Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children."

UNESCO actively supports the campaign by organizing activities at its headquarters and field offices, mobilizing networks and encouraging Ministers of Education and all EFA partners to participate.

In Gujarat, UNICEF and Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) came together to support the campaign by creating awareness about Early Childhood Education (ECE) in all the villages and communities. All the anganwadis across the state organized parent meetings and raised awareness among people about the importance of sending children to anganwadis.

The purpose of the Global Education Campaign for ECE was to advocate Early Childhood Education. Its focus was on the first goal of Education For All, that is: "Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children."

With an emphasis to reach out to as many people in the community as was possible, UNICEF, together with ICDS, in Gujarat, planned two major activities for advocacy:

- Parents' meetings: It was decided that all 'model' anganwadis and the anganwadis in the 'model' seja (division of the block) would hold meetings of parents. The purpose was to create awareness among

parents about the importance of the early years, their role in the development of children and why they should be sending their children to anganwadi regularly.

Local village leaders such as the sarpanch, members of the Panchayat Raj Institute (PRI), chairperson of the dairy, the principal or a teacher of the primary school also had to be invited to join in the events that were to be held during the Week.

- Activities with children: It was also suggested that the children at the anganwadis should be given activities such as drawing and clay work to express themselves.

In all the seven districts, the POs liked the idea very much and decided to organize meetings at all the anganwadis and not just restrict them to the model ones. All the officials of the districts also welcomed this initiative and supported the District Education and ECE Consultants.

A proforma was developed which had to be filled by all the anganwadi workers who conducted the meetings. The proforma also provided guidelines for discussions at the parents' meetings. It was suggested that all anganwadi workers should also send two pictures of the children's activities and/or the parents' meeting.

The key points that were discussed during the parents' meetings were:

- Importance of the early years in a child's development

- Understanding all domains of development
- Activities conducted at the anganwadi
- The role of parents

The ECE kit that has been provided by UNICEF to the anganwadis was displayed and its use was demonstrated at the parents' meetings. The anganwadi workers also planned different programs at their centers.

Anganwadi workers and helpers played a very active role in gathering the community members and organizing the meetings. In some districts such as Vadodara and Banaskantha, UNICEF's partner NGOs also played a very active role in gathering community members and actively participated in the meetings.

Besides the parents of children and other community members, the meetings were attended by the Sarpanch, Panchayat Raj Institute (PRI) members, dairy members, school principals and teachers, NGO representatives, CDPOs, Supervisors, and, of course, anganwadi workers and helpers. Donors too attended the meetings.

The purpose of the celebration of the Global Action Week was to create awareness about ECE. The involvement of people in the planned activities and the ripples it created clearly shows that ECE has now reached a large number of parents, members of the community and officials. The objective of advocating ECE and creating awareness about it has thus been achieved.

Songs, Speeches and Solutions

At Bhavnagar village in Kankrej, Banaskantha villagers get an insight into ECE and find ways to reduce the anganwadi's woes



Villagers take a close look at the *khanjari* (tambourine) that has been provided to the anganwadi as part of the ECE kit

Hetal K Patel

A cheer rises up from the anganwadi center at Bhavnagar village in Kankrej (Shihori) block of Banaskantha. A group of three-to-six-year-olds have just finished an action song. It's now time for them to wrap up their drawing, coloring and singing activities, while their parents wait outside for the celebrations for the Global Action Week on Education 2012 to begin.

The 80-odd people who have gathered here include two anganwadi supervisors, Madhuben M Mesarvala and M A Katara, the representatives of UNICEF's partner NGO ANaRDe Foundation, members of the Panchayat, Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) worker, village volunteers, the headmaster of the primary school and village children of all ages.

Supervisor Mesarvala welcomes the members of the audience and explains to them the objective of the meeting, of how it has been organized to help them understand the importance of ECE.

The District Education and ECE Consultant demonstrates the ECE kit that UNICEF has provided to the anganwadi. Each item in the kit is described and special emphasis is laid on how it will help a child's development. She urges the parents in the audience to send their children to the anganwadi regularly for three hours. They nod in response.

"Greater exposure helps children in school"

Few people in this village have had the opportunity to meet to discuss their children. "We have attended many meetings for the school, health or PRI but this is the first time we have learnt of the importance of Early Childhood Education," a villager says.

"Now, it will not be very difficult for us to handle the children who have newly enrolled into Class I in the school because they will have been exposed to

many things and will have greater experience,” says Virbhanbhai Desai, the headmaster of the Bhavnagar Primary School. He suggests there should be greater synergy between the anganwadi and the school. He also pledges his support by providing for the *tithibhojan* (a funeral feast) and giving a donation to the anganwadi.

Dealing with issues

The meeting also gives anganwadi worker, Harshaben Parekh, a chance to discuss issues regarding the center's infrastructure with prominent members of the community. She talks about the need for repairing the toilet, getting new plates and bowls, cleaning of the anganwadi's surroundings, development of a kitchen garden and painting the anganwadi's walls.

The villagers, unanimously, pledge their support to see through the repairs and maintenance.

Becoming a 'model' anganwadi

Of Kankrej block's 261 anganwadi centers that cater to 11313 children of three to six years of age, Bhavnagar's anganwadi is a 'model' one. And it has taken some effort to get there. “Earlier, only 15 chil-

dren were coming here. We did not have materials related to pre-primary education so it was difficult for us to keep the children busy for three hours,” says Parekh. “I would conduct simple activities that would last for only an hour. The children would then eat their snacks and go back home,” she notes.

In 2011, Parekh attended a training program that was conducted for CDPOs, supervisors and anganwadi workers by UNICEF. The CDPOs and supervisors were sensitized to initiate ECE activities in the anganwadis.

The ECE program further got an impetus when a meeting of workers from 'model' anganwadis was held in February 2012 with the District Collector and District Development Officer (DDO) and many of their issues were discussed and solved.

Over the last four months, since Parekh started conducting the ECE activities regularly, around 20 children have been coming to the anganwadi regularly. Parekh has successfully managed to get them to stay there for three hours. “Now, the children enjoy the toys and learning materials and stay here for much longer,” she says. She also notes that the support she has received from the District Education and ECE Consultant and members of the community has helped her make this anganwadi a 'model' one.

Not Just Child's Play

At a parent meeting at the anganwadi in Dhanpura village, Amirgadh, villagers learn how ECE paves the way for higher education



Children are guided through their coloring activities at Dhanpura's anganwadi while parents learn about the ECE kit

Hetal K Patel

Nearly 100 people have gathered around 'model' Anganwadi Number 1 at Dhanpura village in the tribal block of Amirgadh in Banaskantha. In a block where the overall literacy rate is only 34.4 per cent (according to District Information System for Education 2009/10 – SSAM), the fact that so many villagers should have assembled to celebrate the Global Action Week on Education 2012, is quite significant.

Developing ECE

It has been only three months since anganwadi worker Shardaben Dabhi has been conducting ECE-related activities regularly. Till 2011, the anganwadi center was often found to be closed or had no children coming here. And even when it was

open, the center was never cleaned and children would only come for the food and go home. Then in June 2011, CDPO Chandrakant G Joshi and anganwadi supervisor Sarojben Gohil attended a training program on ECE organized by UNICEF. Later, in October 2011, Dabhi too attended a training program for workers where she learnt the importance of ECE.

Through repeated intervention by the District Education and ECE Consultant, the anganwadi worker has managed to initiate a successful ECE program and around 20 children now come to the anganwadi regularly. It is now one of the 60 'model' anganwadis among the 172 anganwadis in Amirgadh block that offer ECE to 9533 children of three to six years of age.

The event unfolds with Shilpaben Vaishnav, the project coordinator of M G Patel Sarvodaya Kendra, which is UNICEF's partner NGO in the

block, explaining to the villagers the importance of ECE in their child's development and urging them to send their children to the anganwadi for three hours regularly. Each item in the ECE kit that UNICEF has provided to the anganwadi is then displayed and its objective is described. The use of *Ramat Gamat Bhag 1* and *2*, the activity books in the kit, is also explained.

The activities that had been chalked out for children were coloring and folk dance. However, since it has been only three months since the ECE program was initiated properly at the anganwadi, the children are still not able to hold the crayons properly and are unable to sing and dance. The PO-ICDS, State ECE Consultant and District Education and ECE Consultant jointly request the CDPO and Supervisor to lend their support to the center.

Regular attendance is important

Sarpanch Sarupaji Desai appeals to all villagers to send their children who are between three to six years of age to the four anganwadi centers in the village from 11 am to 2 pm. Project Coordinator Vaishnav tells the audience in the local dialect about how preprimary education lays down the foundation for school education. She says, "In cities or in private schools children join school, after complet-

ing their preprimary education and therefore they find it very easy to learn new things. Children, who enroll into government schools without preprimary education, fear going to school and may even drop out of school later. Thus, we request parents to send their children to anganwadis for three hours a day regularly."

Resolving issues

Supervisor Gohil then illustrates the anganwadi's problems and appeals to the Sarpanch and the community at large for help to solve issues regarding water connection, building of a compound wall for the anganwadi and repairing of the toilet. The Sarpanch offers his support to help alleviate the problems of the four anganwadis in the village.

Having heard the parents' complaints about the irregular functioning of the three other anganwadis, he also asks the villagers to inform him when the anganwadis are closed so that he shall inform the PO-ICDS and thus some kind of action can be initiated against the anganwadi worker.

The success of the parent meeting lies in the fact that the community has come all out to support the cause of ECE and to bring about a change in the functioning of not just the 'model' anganwadi but also the other three anganwadis in the village so that their children will benefit in the long run.

The Art of Giving

Rajendra Jani

Villagers in Vanali, Gadhada, donate large amounts of grain to the anganwadi, which they say, is like a temple

Children squeal with delight as a puppet appears from behind a makeshift screen at Uday anganwadi in Vanali village, Gadhada. The show, a part of the Global Action Week on Education's celebrations, has been organized by a troupe from Gijubhai Badheka's Dakshinamurti, Bhavnagar, which is known for bringing new trends to rural and children's education.

Around 120 people, including 55 men, 65 women and 70 children watch the puppeteers in action under the canopy of colorful streamers and balloons that the anganwadi has been decorated with. The village's



Children perform an action song at Vanali's anganwadi



Drawing is a popular activity in Bhavnagar's anganwadis

Sarpanch, members of the Panchayat, dairy officials, the BRCC, teachers of the primary school, anganwadi supervisors, health worker, and representatives of UNICEF's Partner NGO, Vivekananda Research and Training Institute (VRTI) look on cheerfully.

Earlier in the day, the children were busy drawing, coloring, doing craft and paperwork, clay work, and printing work. Some of them even performed *balgeet* (children's songs) and action songs.

The ECE kit that has been provided by UNICEF is opened and displayed. As if on cue, one by one, officials and representatives step in to talk to the vil-

lagers about the need for ECE. The BRCC tells the villagers why they should send their children to the anganwadi and the importance of preprimary education. The CDPO describes the different activities that are conducted at the anganwadi and how they will help the children.

The health worker then stresses on the need to wash hands and maintain personal hygiene and finally the NGO's representative asks villagers to help in achieving the goal of reaching out to all children under the Right to Education Act.

Coming forward to help

While the children dance to the rhythm of *manjira* and *khanjari* that are part of the ECE kit, the villagers start discussing how they can help the anganwadi in their own ways. Many of the villagers here are followers of the Swaminarayan sect. They donate large amounts of grain to the temples. Some of them pledge to donate to the anganwadi too. "The anganwadi is like a temple and children are *avatars* of God," they say.

The villagers come up with a decision to donate *mung*, *chana*, milk, buttermilk every week to the anganwadi, in turns. They even draw up a schedule for such donations. The donors also decide to provide for snacks and midday meals for the children.

As the events at the anganwadi conclude, the air is that of warmth and goodwill. The villagers leave with a sense of pride that comes from giving to the place that will shape their future generations.

The Clean Theme

While the focus was Early Childhood Education, health and hygiene were also discussed in detail during the Global Week in Bhavnagar's anganwadis

Rajendra Jani

Health, hygiene and sanitation were some of the key issues that were brought to the notice of officials, villagers, anganwadi workers and children during the celebration of the Global Action Week on Education 2012.

A task force for cleanliness

At the anganwadi in Melana village in Vallabhipur, Medical Officer Dineshbhai Parmar talked about issues of cleanliness, hygiene and immunization and the need to have a first-aid box in every anganwadi. The audience comprising 38 people, mostly women, and the CDPO nodded in approval. While BRCC Hemraj Chauhan spoke about the need for ECE and learning through fun-filled activities, Sarpanch Champaben P Ghoghari drove home the point that keeping the anganwadi clean will help bring in more children. She even created a task force of women and segregated them into groups based on their *mohallas* (neighborhoods) so that they would help out in various tasks such as keeping the anganwadi clean, maintaining the kitchen garden, and providing nutritional meals to the children.

Sanitation is important

At the anganwadi in Vangar village in the Bildi *seja* of Mahuva block, the Global Week was a cause for much celebration. *Dhols* (percussion instruments), *shehnais* (wind instruments) welcomed the children and their mothers to the anganwadi. Under a huge



At an anganwadi in Ghogha, mothers' heights were measured to calculate their Body Mass Indices (BMIs)

pandal (canopy) outside the anganwadi, some of the children performed action songs. Labhuben Hamirbhai Shiyal, member of the district panchayat; Shantuben Chauhan, President, Taluka Panchayat; Dudhiben Bhikhabhai, Member, Taluka Panchayat; Nagjibhai Makwana, Sarpanch; Bharatipuri Goswami, Talati, representatives of UNICEF's Partner NGO Gram Nirman Samaj, the CRCC and the headmasters of both the primary schools in the village were among the 120 people who were present during the event.

Members of the panchayat and the Talati said that they would help in securing better sanitation facilities and even a playground for the anganwadi. The members and the officials quickly made the decisions and pledged to look into the matter with a

degree of urgency.

Getting storage for potable water

Ghogha is situated on the coast. Most of the residents of Machhiwada village belong to the Muslim community and lean in favor of religious education. Through constant efforts of anganwadi worker Induben Hasmukhbhai Kadiya, over the years, the villagers have started sending their boys and girls to the anganwadi.

As part of the Global Week's celebrations, the anganwadi organized various competitions for the

women in the village. Forty-four women competed with each other for the best recipe, mehandi, rangoli and kitchen contests. Some won, others were more than happy to just participate in these fun-filled activities. The women also agreed to contribute Rs 50 each to ensure that they could provide the anganwadi with a Syntex tank to store the potable water that the anganwadi gets a supply of only once or twice a month.

These small initiatives taken during the Global Action Week will go a long way in strengthening the anganwadis of Bhavnagar district.

Rallying for ECE

It's all about community participation at Todiya village, where villagers have gathered to create awareness about Early Childhood Education



Villagers carry placards with messages on ECE in support of the anganwadi in Todiya village

Dinesh Makwana

At Todiya village's Anganwadi Center Number 2, the celebrations for the Global Action Week on Education 2012 are in full swing. This year's theme for the celebrations is Early Childhood Education (ECE) and 15 men, 30 women and 28 children have gathered here to learn, understand and create awareness about ECE.

Discussing ECE

While the children are busy with crayoning, anganwadi worker Goswami Nirmalaben introduces the concept of ECE to the villagers. She then goes on to talk about the various activities that the children

do at the anganwadi and how they are important for their development.

The District Education and ECE Consultant then displays the ECE kit that has been provided to the anganwadi by UNICEF. He tells the villagers how the materials in the kit help the anganwadi worker in creating a learning environment that aids in the holistic development of a child. This makes the parents very happy and they promise to send their children to the anganwadi center regularly, something they haven't paid much attention to before.

Weeding out issues

In his address to the audience, Karshanji Sodha, the

village Sarpanch, says, "Such programs should be organized periodically so that they will help create awareness amongst people." He stresses on the need to send the children to the anganwadi on time and regularly. He also encourages the anganwadi worker to share the problems that the anganwadi has to deal with.

The anganwadi worker says that the anganwadi must have a boundary wall, a soak pit so that the area around the anganwadi does not get waterlogged due to sewage, and that the area around the anganwadi should be re-surveyed. This will help in identifying which children may go to which of the two anganwadis in the village, based on the proximity of the anganwadi to their homes.

In his bid to do something for the anganwadi, Sodha says that he will put these issues before the

village Panchayat and try to get some funding from the Panchayat fund to help alleviate these problems.

Creating awareness through a rally

After the meeting, the villagers, along with the Sarpanch, the ICDS Supervisor, SMC members, principal of the primary school, the president of the local dairy and the ASHA worker rally around the village with placards displaying slogans about ECE. They keep ringing a bell and calling on others to join in. The local press has also been invited to cover the event.

"Today, we have learnt much about the activities that are being conducted in the anganwadi and the importance of early childhood education", says a parent as he joins the rally.



Changing Ways

At a parent meeting at Vijpasar village's anganwadi, parents learn about ECE, hygiene and sanitation and one mother even quits her tobacco habit

Dinesh Makwana

As part of the celebrations for the Global Action Week on Education 2012, a parents' meeting has been organized at Vijpasar village of Bhachau block, Kutch. Three men, 19 women and 36 children have gathered here at the anganwadi along with the village's Sarpanch, ICDS Supervisor, Female Health Worker, Multipurpose Health Worker and village Panchayat members and eagerly wait for the events for the day to unfold.

"Happy children will come to anganwadi"

Anganwadi worker, Lilavatiben Prajapati tells the assembled audience about the importance of the development that takes place in children during the period from three years to six years. She tells the villagers about the importance of the physical, social, language, intellectual development a child undergoes during this age, the activities that are conducted at the anganwadi for children and how they will benefit them in the future. She goes on to describe the activities: playing with beads, balls and bats, storytelling with books and puppets, drawing on paper, action songs; and illustrates how each activity is helpful for children's development.

The District Education and Early Childhood Education (ECE) Consultant then displays the ECE kit provided by UNICEF to the audience. Each item in the kit is demonstrated, its use explained. Sarpanch Janaksinh Jadeja stresses on the need to



Parents and children go through the story books in the ECE kit that has been provided by UNICEF

use the ECE kit optimally. He says the children should enjoy coming to the anganwadi regularly.

While watching their children perform action songs or play with the toys from the ECE kit, many of the parents say that they were not aware of how ECE helps in the healthy development of their children. "Now that we know about it, we shall send our children to the anganwadi regularly and also

take care of them at home,” a parent says.

“Hygiene is very important”

While the focus for the meeting is education, the female health worker, Mamtaben, seizes the opportunity to spread a word or two about hygiene as well. She talks about the need to keep the anganwadi clean. She says that it is also important to wash one’s hands before and after eating and after using the toilet. Moreover, she appeals to the parents to

add more green vegetables to their children’s diet.

ICDS Supervisor Ushmaben Chawda requests all the women to give up their habit of chewing tobacco. She tells them that it harms not just the consumer but also the other members of the family. A woman stands up in front of the audience and takes an oath that she will quit chewing tobacco.

The success of this parent meeting lies in these small changes that will help shape the community’s attitudes towards education and health in the future.

All for One!

Donors, Panchayat and villagers come together to contribute to the anganwadi at Vaghpura village in Sami block



Villagers discuss issues of attendance at the anganwadi

Rupal Raval

There is a buzz at the anganwadi at Vaghpura village in Patan's Sami block. More than 50 parents of the children who come to the anganwadi regularly have assembled for a parent meeting. They wait in anticipation for the celebrations of the Global Action Week on Education 2012 to begin.

Discussing ECE

In keeping with the theme of Early Childhood Education (ECE) for the Global Week, Supervisor Ijuben Kanjibhai Chaudhari steps in front of the audience to illustrate the various activities that are conducted at the anganwadi. The ECE kit that has been provided by UNICEF is displayed as the parents look curiously at its contents and learn about their usage. "Children learn about colors and shapes

with the help of the blocks," says Chaudhari. The District Education and ECE Consultant then tells the parents how the activity books and story books should be used. Anganwadi worker Jamunaben Vinodbhai Thakor also mentions the snacks that are provided to the children and how the anganwadi stresses on hygiene and cleanliness by following rigid routines for washing hands and feet. The audience, comprising mainly women, listens intently and appreciates the efforts that have been put in to make it a 'model' anganwadi.

"Attendance is mandatory"

While the parents discuss the amenities the anganwadi provides, the children are busy with coloring, drawing and clay work activities. Parents of children who are irregular are told by the village leaders to send their children to the anganwadi regularly. Sarpanch Tejabhai Thakor says it is mandatory for all the children of the village who are below six years to attend the anganwadi.

Finding new ways to contribute

The two-hour parents' meeting allows for donors to share their views on the anganwadi too. Madhuben Thakor, who provides for the milk for the children every Wednesday, tells other villagers about the different ways they can contribute to the anganwadi. The parents' meeting is a success. It has brought in a certain degree of awareness about ECE among the community members and may help mobilize them to contribute to its development.

Nurturing Creativity

Rupal Raval

Chandrikaben J Patel, the helper at Anganwadi Kendra Number 2 in Khali village in Chandravati *seja* of Sidhpur block picks up a toy made of clay and displays it proudly before the 40-odd villagers who have gathered here for a parents' meeting as part of the Global Action Week 2012 celebrations. Parents of the 14 children, who come to the anganwadi, take a closer look. Many marvel at their children's creativity and say that they had never noticed their talents before.

Demonstration of ECE kit

CDPO Rekhaben Joshi describes the activities that are conducted at the anganwadi and how they will help in the development of children of three to six years of age. Supervisor Hansaben B Patel takes her cue and displays the ECE kit that has been provid-

ed by UNICEF to the anganwadi.

Along with Lataben R Patel, the anganwadi worker, she demonstrates the use of the various items in the kit — the puppets, the stringing board, the plastic balls, the matching cards' set and the activity books.

Joshi also discusses the story books that have been provided for the children and how they help cultivate the children's imagination.

Support from the community

Sarpanch Thakore Keshaji Malaji, elected members of the Panchayat, members of the school coordination committee, principal of the primary school and chairperson of the dairy encouragingly lend their support to the cause of Early Childhood Education and say that they will also provide their support to promote the activities of the anganwadi and get more children enrolled in here.



Pathway to Progress

Ninad Jhala

In a 'Nirmal Gram' in Sardhar cluster of Rajkot district villagers are now becoming aware of the importance of ECE

Raj Samadhiyala, a small village in the Sardhar cluster of Rajkot is famed for its rainwater harvesting success. The village never faces water scarcity even during droughts because of the 45 check-dams and storage tanks that have been constructed around it and a green-belt of 60000 trees that surrounds the village. Raj Samadhiyala was also the first village in the state to have been awarded the 'Nirmal Gram' status. A Nirmal Gram is an "Open Defecation Free" village where all houses, schools and anganwadis have sanitary toilets and there is a high degree of awareness among community members about the impor-



Mothers go through the Parent Advocacy booklets that have been prepared and distributed by UNICEF



Children play with the matching cards' set from the ECE kit

tance of maintaining personal and community hygiene and clean environment. Now, the village is all set to carve a niche for itself in the field of ECE.

Calling on mothers for support

As part of the celebrations of the Global Action Week on Education 2012, Bhavnaben Vaghela, the 48-year-old anganwadi worker organized a mothers' advocacy meeting at the Raj Samadhiyala anganwadi. Thirty-four mothers of the 43 children between three and six years of age, who are enrolled at the anganwadi, attended the meeting. They actively participated in the discussion on ECE. Sarpanch Sharda Muchadiya, former Sarpanch Hardevsinh Jadeja, Talati Anju Sharma and ICDS Supervisor Prafulla Makwana were also present.

"Give opportunities to children to learn"

Vaghela told the audience that a majority of the children are not able to develop to their potential because they get inadequate care and learning opportunities, due to poverty and the nutritional

deficiencies they suffer from. Their poor performance, at a later stage in life, is attributed to the lack of appropriate stimulation during their formative years, she said. She added that the ICDS program, where early childhood education is an integral component, aims to provide children with those opportunities that are vital for their all-round development.

Vaghela also mentioned that UNICEF is actively involved in the protection and promotion of child rights in Rajkot district and elsewhere in the world.

Pravin Khimsuriya, the Project Head of UNICEF's Partner NGO, Navjeevan Trust, informed the audience about duties of the village Child Protection Committee, where the anganwadi worker and sarpanch play important roles.

His speech was followed by a reading of UNICEF's Parent Advocacy Booklet. All participants were given a copy of the booklet to read.

The UNICEF-sponsored ECE kit was also displayed. The children played with building blocks and the matching cards' set from the kit. Some of them also performed action-songs and sang prayer songs. They queued up for 'Balbhog candies', which they popped into their mouths and put the wrappers into a dustbin.

"ECE will help my village progress"

Community members and officials were happy that they had participated in the meeting. "This is the first time I have learnt of an approach that deals so comprehensively with ECE through the anganwadi system in our state," said Talati Anju Sharma.

The former Sarpanch Hardevsinh Jadeja, in impeccable English, noted, "It is this task of helping children to learn through playful activities that will help my village progress, as I have always envisioned. It will now mark a step towards the direction where the children of my village will be able to get the education they have the right to."

Mum's the Word

Mothers come together in full support of Early Childhood Education in Moti Paneli village in Upleta block, Rajkot



Mothers from six anganwadis are oriented about ECE

Ninad Jhala

At Moti Paneli, a village in the Upleta block of Rajkot district, 58 women and 23 children have gathered to share, discuss and learn something about ECE.

Setting the stage for the meeting

In the days that led to this mothers' meeting, Sharda Desai, the CDPO of Upleta block, had undertaken the herculean task of mobilizing mothers from the six anganwadi centers in the village and orienting them about ECE. She told them that the meeting was part of a larger movement at the global level to promote ECE and that several action programs

were being undertaken by people who work in the field of ECE to help in its advocacy during the course of the Week. Desai also successfully convinced the village Panchayat to provide the village community hall for free for the meeting.

ECE is vital for future growth

The women are told that children need care and education in their early years of life so that they grow and become adults with balanced personalities. Desai also tells them that caring for a child is the shared responsibility of the parents, the ICDS Department and the village itself and shying away from it means shying away from development.

Lending a helping hand...

Gyanjyot Education Institute's Chandrakant Channabhathi happened to be visiting Moti Paneli from Rajkot when he heard of this meeting. He has come here to support the efforts that are being put into early childhood care and development. As a token of appreciation, he even offers tea to all the members who are present here. He also commits his support to the anganwadis in Moti Paneli.

The tea-break is followed by a demonstration of the UNICEF-sponsored ECE Kit, which is something the mothers are very curious about. The meeting ends with a handwashing demonstration. The audience is told about the need to maintain basic hygiene at home as well as at the anganwadi.

Getting Parents to be Creative

Drawing, dancing and demonstration of the ECE kit were part of the celebrations for the Global Action Week 2012 at Mankodi village in Kawant block, Vadodara



A child takes her pick of crayons during the drawing session

Eisha Sarkar

A group of children scramble on the floor of the anganwadi at Mankodi village for a new set of crayons. A boy picks up a red crayon and on a piece

of chart paper, draws a boat with a flag, one that he must not have seen in this interior, underdeveloped region of Kawant in Vadodara district.

It's a busy day at the anganwadi. But in spite of the din around, he doesn't look up till he has finished drawing. The other children around him lack that concentration. They keep looking out for their parents who have assembled to participate in the celebrations for the Global Action Week on Education 2012. While the anganwadi's helper Ramilaben Rathwa tries hard to maintain decorum inside the center, Kapilaben Rathwa, the anganwadi worker, joins the 300-odd villagers who have gathered there to welcome the State ECE Consultant, Dr Jigisha Shastri and the District Education and ECE Consultant, Dhruti Mankodi. The mood is that of a wedding's. Young girls perform Timli, the folk-dance of the Rathwa community. Kapilaben sings for the villagers and men sway to the beat of traditional drums.

The music gradually fades away. Jayantibhai Vankar, Block and Cluster Coordinator of Baroda Citizens Council (BCC) (which is UNICEF's partner NGO in the area), tells the villagers about ECE and why pre-primary education is necessary. "If your children go to the anganwadi before they go to a primary school, they will be able to grow and



A man plays with a puppet from the ECE kit while another leafs through the pages of a story book

develop better," he tells them.

Parents turn puppeteers

The villagers look on curiously as Dhruti Mankodi opens the UNICEF-sponsored ECE kit. She picks the puppet of a parrot, gloves it and shows them how it can be used to narrate stories. Then she asks them to do the same. Since the villagers have never seen a hand puppet before, they shy away. Finally, one man takes the bait. He gloves it much to the amusement of his fellow audience members. Encouraged by the consultants and BCC members, he manipulates the puppet. Now, the rest of the men want puppets too. "Look, if you have so much fun with them, imagine how much more fun it

would be for your children. You must send your children to the anganwadi so that they can play with the puppets," Mankodi tells the villagers. They all nod in response.

Artistic delight

It's time for the parents to do some drawing as well. Boxes of crayons and sheets of chart paper are passed around. "How many of you have ever done any kind of drawing?" Devdoot Rajyaguru, a sculptor from Bhavnagar and a Fine Arts' alumnus from The M S University of Baroda, Vadodara, asks the villagers. They shake their heads. "Here's your chance to do something that you don't do everyday. Draw, color, paint — do whatever you want," he

urges them. The men start off gingerly while the women stare in silence. A man picks a blue crayon and starts drawing a parrot. Another dips his index finger into a vessel containing *geru* (red clay) and draws the picture of a bird. The women take the cue. One of them writes the name of the village in Gujarati with *geru*. The younger ones draw flowers with crayons. A group of teenage boys jointly create a scenery — hills, trees and jeeps.

Good community participation

“The villagers take great pride in participating in this parent meeting,” says the village’s Sarpanch, Ashokbhai Rathwa. “It’s different now. Parents come for meetings regularly and are more involved in the anganwadi,” says Kapilaben, who not-so-long ago had to persuade parents to send their children so that she could teach them. Her 25 years as an anganwadi worker have been full of challenges. Yet, she has soldiered on. “It’s for the betterment of our children,” she says, adding that now at least 33 children come to the anganwadi regularly.

The idea of getting the parents to do some activities as part of the celebrations is to sensitize them towards ECE in particular and education in general. Kawant is one of the most impoverished regions of the state. The fact that Panchayat members, teachers



Women write the name of the village, Mankodi, in Gujarati with *geru* on chart paper during the parent meeting

and principal of the primary school in the village, the Sarpanch and prominent members of the village community are present at this meeting to support ECE is a small step that may help pave the way for development in this region.

“I Did Not Know My Child is So Creative”

At a parents' meeting in Sandha village of Vadodara mothers discover not only their children's hidden talents but also their own



Women decorate a *chaadiyo* (scarecrow) with scraps from old *dupattas* at the Sandha anganwadi

Dhruti Mankodi

It's a busy day at the anganwadi in Sandha village in Sinor block of Vadodara district. A group of women, mainly mothers of children who come here, jostle for space as they try to put together a *chaadiyo* (scarecrow) from scrap. One woman holds the skeleton made of sticks in place; another ties a scrap of cloth (from an old *dupatta*) to one of the thin wooden arms while others, who have assembled here for a parent meeting as part of the Global Action Week's celebrations, simply cheer them on.

Showcasing ECE

Anganwadi worker Daxa Patel tells the audience comprising 45 women, 12 adolescent girls, eight adolescent boys, 25 children, members of the panchayat, Deputy Sarpanch Deepak Patel, donors and prominent villagers, who have gathered here, about the activities that are conducted at the anganwadi and how they are beneficial to children in the age group of three to six years. She displays and demonstrates the items in the ECE kit that has been provided by UNICEF to the anganwadi. The newly-elected Deputy Sarpanch, Deepak Patel, then addresses the group on the importance of education and nutrition. He pledges his support to the anganwadi center.

A riot of color!

Members of the audience are then asked to form groups so that they can participate in a drawing activity. They are given the topic, "*Mara gaam ni anganwadi*" (The anganwadi in my village). The women stare at the sheets of chart paper and crayons. Some say they don't know anything about drawing. After a few minutes, two mothers make an attempt. They pick their crayons and start drawing on paper. Others soon follow suit. It will only be a matter of time before the ample supplies of crayons and chart paper will be exhausted.

Making mothers proud

It's not just the mothers' creative works that are

being exhibited at the anganwadi. The children's drawings, paintings, paper and craft work, collage work are on display inside the center. While looking at the display, a mother remarks, "I had no idea that my child is so creative!" Another mother marvels at the newly painted walls of the anganwadi that have replaced the old activity charts and made learning a fun-filled experience for her children.

The fact that the event has brought the people of the village — including members of the PRI, the anganwadi worker and helper, the head-teacher and teacher of the primary school (who have attended this event in spite of an ongoing teachers' training program) and members of the community — together to learn about and support Early Childhood Education on a very hot afternoon is a success in itself.

Shaping a Better Future

While children mould clay in Kaparada's anganwadis, the villagers discuss ways to provide better infrastructure to help them in their development



Clay modeling is popular among the children in Kaparada

Vidhi Shah

Children at Anganwadi Center Nanipalsaan — 1, Kotbi *phalia* (hamlet or neighborhood), Kaparada block are busy getting their hands dirty. They roll small balls of clay between their tiny palms to create a form that only they know of. A few bold ones strike a pose for the camera before they break into giggles. It's a day of laughter and fun, as people gather to celebrate the Global Action Week on Education 2012 that has ECE as its theme.

Discussing ECE and its importance

The day starts with the three-to-six-year-olds reciting a prayer. Supervisor Jhinuben P Patel then

introduces to the villagers the motive for celebrating the Global Week, that is, to create awareness regarding ECE. Anganwadi worker Kantaben L Vaghmare then discusses the activities that are conducted at the anganwadi and how they will help the children's growth and development. The members of the audience — who include parents of children who come to the anganwadi, Sarpanch, members of the village Panchayat, primary school teacher and donors — listen attentively.

The anganwadi worker then displays the kit that has been provided by UNICEF. She describes and demonstrates the items in the kit and tells the villagers how the activity books will help their children if they are used properly.

Driving attendance issues away

While the children are busy with art activities (collage-making, drawing, coloring, etc) and games such as Musical Chairs, the parents' meeting gives the anganwadi worker a chance to raise a few issues that are plaguing the center. She tells the villagers that of the 49 children between the age of three to six years who are registered at the anganwadi, 29 live at a *phalia* which is a little far away. It is difficult for them to walk this far and hence, they are very irregular, she says.

Sarpanch Lakshibhai Z Raup and members of the Panchayat suggest that a member of the community, Uttambhai D Mouda, who drives a jeep, will pick up these 29 children from their homes, take them to the anganwadi and then drop them home

after the angawadi closes for the day. Mouda agrees immediately. It is decided that the anganwadi helper will accompany him to pick up and drop children.

Elsewhere in Kaparada...

At other anganwadis in the Kaparada block, such as those at Sulia, Nishaad *phalia* and Rohiyaad Jungle, Moolgaam *phalia*, the Sarpanchs explained to the parents why it is essential for them to send their children to anganwadis.

Some of the other areas of discussion were related to the renovation of the anganwadi building, providing water connection in the toilets and kitchen and reconstruction of anganwadis that are run in very old buildings. At Sulia 1, Nishaad *phalia*, Kaparada block, Sarpanch Nainaben M Gavit even

passed the "*tharav*" (order) for the reconstruction of the anganwadi center.

Full support of the officials

The success of the parents' meetings lies in the fact that many of the issues that the anganwadis have faced were brought to the forefront and tackled head-on by members of the community themselves.

The two CDPOs, one Assistant CDPO, 14 anganwadi supervisors and 25 anganwadi workers in the block worked hard along with the District Education and ECE Consultant to not just celebrate the Global Action Week 2012 but also create awareness among the community about education and ECE. This will help turn parents into participants in their children's development process.

Team Effort

In Valsad's Dharampur block, community members take the onus of providing for the anganwadis infrastructure, children's meals and even ensuring their attendance



Children are busy with clay work at Panwa's anganwadi

Vidhi Shah

At the anganwadis of Valsad's Dharampur block, the efforts by the members of the community to sensitize their own people about education and ECE and to help provide for the infrastructure of the anganwadis is remarkable.

At Panwa, Patel *phalia*

The celebrations start with anganwadi worker Jantaben H Gavdi and anganwadi supervisor Ushaben C Patel telling the villagers who have gathered about the importance of the early years in a child's development and the need for ECE. They display the ECE kit that has been provided to the

anganwadi by UNICEF and demonstrate the use of each item in the kit. They discuss the need to send the children to the anganwadi regularly and the importance of maintaining personal hygiene. They also share the anganwadi's timetable with the parents.

While the children are busy with clay work in the anganwadi's courtyard under the supervision of helper Kalpanaben Gavdi, Jantaben and Patel show the children's activity books to the parents. "I am surprised that my child does such good coloring in her activity book," says Laxmiben Gavdi, mother of four-year-old Anita Gavdi, who comes to the anganwadi.

Sarpanch Ramanbhai Kavdad asks parents to send their children regularly to the anganwadi. A donor also pledges to provide stainless steel plates and bowls to the anganwadi so that the children will not have to carry these vessels from home to eat their hot lunches and *balbhog*.

The meeting ends with a game of Musical Chairs, where parents and villagers also join in the children's fun.

At Bilpudi Sherimal, Upal *phalia*

Joy lights up the faces of mothers as they browse through their children's activity books. "It is because of UNICEF's efforts to regularize the functioning of the anganwadi and its constant monitoring that my four-year-old child now gets a hot meal regularly and enjoys coming here to participate in the activities," notes Sumitraben Gavit, a parent.

Since 2011, after repeated interventions and constant monitoring by the District Education and ECE Consultant, the anganwadi has been opening regularly, children are being served hot food and the ECE program is being implemented properly. This has alleviated many of the concerns of the parents regarding the irregularities in the anganwadi's functioning. However, one major problem persists — that of the attendance of the children.

Anganwadi worker Vanitaben V Patel explains to the community members about the importance of early years in the physical, psychological, social, emotional and language development of children. She further talks about the toys and learning materials supplied by UNICEF and how they are used at the anganwadi in accordance with the timetable. She requests the community members to ensure that all the children in the three to six years' age group come to the anganwadi regularly.

Helper Vanitaben K Patel suggests that parents should monitor the attendance of children in their respective *phalia* and ensure that other parents send their children to the anganwadi. The mothers agree.

To help solve some of the anganwadi's problems, Sarpanch Sureshbhai K Mahla says that before the commencement of the monsoon, the anganwadi's roof shall be waterproofed and that he will help in the reconstruction of the broken toilet and in ensuring that the anganwadi gets proper water and electricity connection.

At Tiskari, Haiti *phalia*

Anganwadi worker Shardaben K Patel, helper Somiben J Chaudhary and Supervisor Kamlaben M Patel have left no stone unturned to make this parents' meeting a success. While the children engage themselves with clay work and paper-folding, Kamlaben requests parents to send their children to the anganwadi regularly and stresses on the need for ECE in a child's development. Shardaben displays



Parents say they were earlier unaware of their children's coloring talents

the ECE kit and the activity books of the children to the parents. Filled with pride after looking at their children's work, many parents say that they did not know such activities were taking place at the anganwadi alongside *purak poshan* (supplementary food) and immunization programs.

Kamlaben then tells them that a few children in the anganwadi are malnourished and severely malnourished and thus, the parents should bring their children to the anganwadi center regularly so that they can get proper nutrition in their diet.

One of the parents mentions that he knows about the activities that are conducted at the AWC and that he will see to it that his daughter attends the anganwadi regularly. In his speech, Sarpanch Ranjitbhai B Chaudhary emphasizes on the importance of the early years and shares his own experiences. He requests them to send their children to the anganwadi regularly. Hareshbhai D Patel, the head of the local dairy cooperative, pledges to supply milk for the children (one glass for each child) every Monday to the anganwadi. The meeting ends with applause.

126583 Mothers

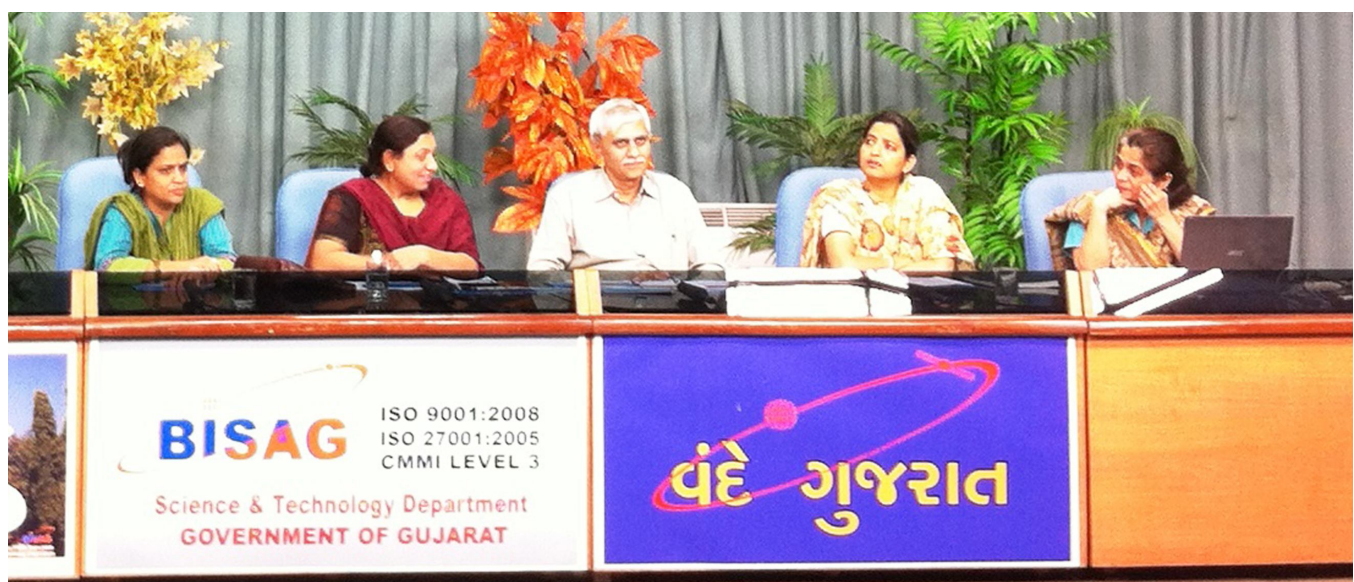
31276 Workers

1453 Supervisors

watched the Panel Discussion on ECE
in 24 out of the 26 districts in Gujarat

During the Global Action Week, a panel discussion on ECE was held by ICDS Gujarat and UNICEF. The proceedings were shared via a satellite communication (SATCOM) network with anganwadi workers, supervisors and parents of the children who are enrolled into the anganwadis. The panelists were Dr K B Upadhyay, Director, ICDS; Dr Sucheta Jasrai, Education Specialist, UNICEF; Dr Bhargavi Dave, Joint Director, ICDS; Dr Jigisha Shastri, State ECE Consultant; and Vasvi Sengupta, Project Manager, ICDS.

Dr Upadhyay initiated the discussion and talked about ICDS, its services, the role of ECE and the need for stimulation in children during their early years. Dr Jasrai discussed the importance of the early years and the role of experiences in the development of a child's brain. She described UNICEF's initiative in ECE in six districts of Gujarat. Dr Shastri explained the concept of model anganwadis and demonstrated the use of the ECE kit provided by UNICEF to all the anganwadis in the six districts. A few video clips of children using the kits



From left to right: Panelists Vasavi Sengupta, Bhargavi Dave, Dr K B Upadhyay, Dr Sucheta Jasrai and Dr Jigisha Shastri

were shown. Dr Jasrai told the audience why play is important, how the material should be used and how older children may be involved in the process. A pictorial Powerpoint presentation was shown. Dr Dave summed up the panel discussion and emphasized the role of the anganwadi worker, how learning materials may be procured for the young children in the anganwadi and how the community may be involved in the anganwadi.

The presentation was followed by comments. Within just half an hour, 27 calls were answered by the panelists. It was very heartening to learn that more calls were made from districts such as Amreli, Junagadh, Tapi and Sabarkantha where UNICEF has no intervention. Anganwadi workers, CDPOs, supervisors from different centers said that they liked the panel discussion and the ECE kit very much. The ICDS personnel from the districts where UNICEF has interventions described the benefits of the ECE kit, training and activity books. They mentioned how UNICEF's intervention has led to an increase in the number of children attending the anganwadis, greater involvement of parents and

support from the community, and has helped in the implementation of a good program. The respondents from other districts said that the panel discussion had brought forth some new ideas, which they wanted to implement in their own anganwadis.

Many of the respondents requested that an ECE kit such as the one that had been demonstrated, be sent to their respective block or district. Some also talked about their own efforts in ECE, the program they have been implementing, the donations they have received from the community, and so on.

Data gathered from the state revealed that the discussion was observed in 24 out of 26 districts. 31276 anganwadi workers and 1453 supervisors viewed the program. At many centers, mothers of children aged three to six years also watched the program. As per the data, 126583 mothers had watched the program.

The panel discussion received tremendous response from members of the ICDS community and also from the community at large and was thus a success. It was a fitting culmination to such an active week of celebrating ECE.

Conclusion

Over the years, it has been observed that the ECE program component of ICDS has got de-emphasized. The ECE initiative in the six districts of Banaskantha, Bhavnagar, Kutch, Patan, Rajkot, and Vadodara and in 50 model anganwadis of Valsad has been instrumental in reviving the program and efforts towards implementing a quality ECE program have begun.

Among the major issues that were observed were the weak monitoring of anganwadis and the lack of mentoring of workers. To overcome these problems, a pilot has been initiated in each district, where a block or *seja* has been selected for more inputs. Every month, during the day the salaries are paid or when monthly meetings are conducted, inputs are given to the supervisors and anganwadi workers. This empowers the supervisors as well as anganwadi workers to perform their respective roles better.

The success of these model *sejas* and blocks has led to more supervisors and CDPOs taking the initiative for close monitoring and mentoring. Parents too, in greater numbers, are participating in the activities of the anganwadis. More parents now send their children to the anganwadis regularly.

In February 2012, Gujarat became the first state in India, where ECE has been included in the Right to Education Act.

The celebration of the Global Action Week on Education 2012, which lay special emphasis on ECE, too came at a very opportune time. The decision to get the parents, the community and the office-bearers involved was very advantageous.

According to the data from the districts, 162730 people participated in the events that were organized during the Global Action Week. In many villages, this was the first time meetings were conducted for discussing the young children of the village. Earlier, people in the villages had never had much

opportunity to talk about their children. Therefore, a large number of people attended the meetings and participated in the activities that were conducted during the course of the Week.

The people also learnt about the activities that were carried out in the anganwadis. They became aware about the importance of the early years, the learning materials for children and how their use would help promote the development of children. They also became aware about their own roles in the lives of children. The meetings also proved to be fruitful in bringing to the notice of the people at large the problems structural and functional — faced by the anganwadis. Newly elected sarpanchs and other officials passed orders to take action and alleviate these problems. Donors came forward to contribute to the anganwadis. What was particularly noteworthy was that such initiatives were taken in all anganwadis across the seven districts.

The way ahead...

- Developing a detailed curriculum for ECE, including monthly timetables
- Building capacities of Anganwadi Training Centers (AWTCs). This will ensure strengthening capacities of the anganwadi workers at both pre- and in-service stages
- Forming parent groups, advocating quality child rearing to parents
- Strengthening anganwadis
- Scaling up in the whole state

The future of the children of Gujarat looks bright. As more children get the developmentally appropriate ECE program, together with nutrition and health services, there will be a greater number of healthier and brighter citizens tomorrow.

