2. Are Interventions Reflected in Sector and Country Strategies?

**Highlights**

- While several sector strategies discuss early childhood development (ECD), there are gaps and aspects that remain unclear.
- The Bank’s sector strategies describe the connection between a child’s development and later labor productivity, but few of them discuss the connection between poverty reduction and quality childcare that promotes a mother’s participation in the labor market.
- Country strategies increasingly include ECD interventions, but alignment between actual ECD lending and whether strategies mention interventions was lacking in many countries.

A corporate strategy does not yet exist for early childhood development (ECD). In its absence, only inferences about the Bank’s intent can be made from sector strategies. The purpose of this chapter is to describe how ECD is reflected in sector and country strategies and gaps.

**Sector Strategies**

Several of the Bank’s sector strategies, including Education; Health, Nutrition, and Population (HNP); and Social Protection and Labor (SP), give prominence to early childhood development by featuring it or interventions as a pillar or central aspect within the strategy. For example, a focus on mothers and young children is at the core of the 2007 HNP strategy, which calls for scaling up support for early childhood nutrition, child health, and maternal health services. The 2012 SP strategy emphasizes the need to invest in stronger systems to protect the health and well-being of young children. Early childhood development is highlighted as one of the three pillars of the World Bank’s 2010–2020 Education strategy: “Invest early. Invest smartly. Invest for all.” With the vision of achieving the goal of “learning for all,” the Education sector prioritizes investing early and calls for an effective ECD approach—an integrated system of parenting, education, nutrition, and health care, which would have substantial benefits for children.

Other sector strategies also note their direct or indirect contribution to children’s development. The Agriculture sector strategy described its role in improving children’s nutrition by addressing the issue of malnutrition. Going beyond food security, it
recognized the need to collaborate with other sectors to help strengthen health and nutrition access and outcomes for vulnerable groups, particularly children and pregnant and lactating mothers (see box 2.1).

**Box 2.1. How Is Early Childhood Development Featured in Sector Strategies?**

Sector strategies having a direct or indirect role in supporting children’s development were reviewed. A brief synthesis is presented describing how early childhood development was featured within each strategy.

*Education Strategy 2020:* It states the importance of encouraging early and continuous learning both within and outside of the formal schooling system. Recognizing that the foundational skills acquired in early childhood set the stage for a lifetime of learning, the strategy places a significant emphasis on the first five years of life as a building block for later learning (World Bank 2011).

*Social Protection and Labor (SPL) 2012–2022:* Early childhood development is at the center of the strategy, recognizing that without a sound foundation, subsequent development cannot be fully realized. SPL programs work dynamically over the life cycle to provide resilience, equity, and opportunity, starting with the period of pregnancy and early childhood (World Bank 2012a).

*Strategy for Health, Nutrition, and Population Results 2007:* The paper recognizes that nutrition should take a central place in development. Investing in nutrition in early childhood lays the foundation for lifelong health (World Bank 2007).

*Agriculture Action Plan 2013–2015:* It recognizes that food security, although very important for immediate and short-term survival, is not sufficient to achieve most of the Millennium Development Goals, as many relate directly or indirectly to nutrition. The action plan recognizes the importance of working across sectors to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups, particularly children and pregnant and lactating mothers (Townsend and others 2013).

*Infrastructure Strategy FY12–15:* This strategy argues that providing basic services to expectant mothers and improving the availability of clean water and sanitation to households have been shown to substantially close the gender gaps in mortality. It specifically mentions that excess mortality especially in infancy and early childhood is rooted in the failure of institutions to provide clean water, sanitation, waste disposal, and drainage (World Bank 2012b).

*Strategy for Rural Development:* Under one of the strategic objectives—improving social well-being, managing and mitigating risk, and reducing vulnerability—the strategy addresses improving access to health and nutrition. It acknowledges that childhood malnutrition can affect future labor force participation and work effort since it is associated with increased risks of morbidity and mortality during adulthood. It also recognizes the area of reproductive health as essential to achieve the goals of the rural strategy, since reproductive health care facilitates participation of women in economically productive activities (World Bank 2003).

*Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (2002):* Linking gender to growth and poverty reduction, the strategy emphasizes the importance of education for women because of its intergenerational effects on child health and survival. The strategy argues that educated mothers know more about healthy feeding practices, hygiene, and health care and are more able to exercise this
knowledge to promote their children’s well-being. Therefore, female education improves child nutrition, health, and survival, all factors that create a more intelligent, energetic, and productive younger generation (World Bank 2002).

Gaps exist within the sector strategies. Parent support programs and stimulation are only mentioned in the Education and Social Protection and Labor strategies, despite the fact that other sectors also have a role in supporting parents. Survival and physical health is emphasized in the HNP strategy, but the role that the sector plays in supporting stimulation and early intervention strategies to advance the development of children is not. Despite evidence that affordable quality childcare increases a mother’s engagement in the workforce, as well as the school enrollment of older female siblings, these effects were only touched on by the Gender and Sustainable Development strategies and omitted from others. The dual synergy between increasing women’s income and girls’ education depends on availability of childcare. The social development strategy addressed the inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, and ethnic minorities, but not much is said in relation to children. Sector strategies do not delineate areas of responsibilities, thus sectors have overlapped in their implementation of ECD interventions (see chapter 4).

There are several unanswered questions. Given the Bank’s recently adopted twin goals (World Bank 2013), how much priority will be given to ECD as a means to reduce poverty and share prosperity? Which sectors have responsibility for ECD since most areas of the Bank have a direct or indirect role in supporting children’s development? Which sector(s) will lead the work? How will sectors coordinate respective responsibilities and pursue multisector solutions? Which interventions will be prioritized and sequenced by the Bank? What common indicators will be used across Regions? A framework for ECD would clarify the Bank’s approach to ECD and promote a long-term vision as well as contribute to the attainment of the Banks twin goals and the SDGs.

Country Strategies

Country strategies increasingly include ECD interventions as seen in the upward trend between FY05 and FY13 (see figure 2.1). Less than one-third of the strategies prepared in FY05 referenced ECD interventions, while over half of them did in FY13. Maternal and child health interventions are increasingly contained in country strategies. Child nutrition featured more prominently in country strategies since FY12, while preprimary education has been stable across the years.
More than half of the country strategies prepared between FY05 and FY13 include ECD interventions (see table 2.1). The Africa Region has the highest proportion of the countries with ECD interventions mentioned in country strategies, followed by the Latin America and the Caribbean Region and the Middle East and North Africa Region.

Table 2.1. Country Strategies Containing ECD Interventions by Region, FY05–13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Strategies</th>
<th>AFR</th>
<th>EAP</th>
<th>ECA</th>
<th>LAC</th>
<th>MNA</th>
<th>SAR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number containing ECD intervention</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage containing ECD intervention</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: AFR = Africa; EAP = East Asia and Pacific; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; ECD = early childhood development; LCR = Latin America and the Caribbean; MNA = Middle East and North Africa; SAR = South Asia.

Regions approach early childhood development differently in country strategies. Those in the Africa, South Asia, and Middle East and North Africa Regions that contain ECD interventions are mainly focused on maternal and child health and child survival. In Latin America and the Caribbean Region, there was a balanced description of interventions across sectors, while country strategies in Europe and Central Asia were more focused on preprimary education. Nutrition interventions are included infrequently in East Asia and Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Middle East and North Africa Regions but more frequently in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South Asia Regions (see figure 2.2).
Country strategies and subsequent ECD operations were not aligned in many countries. As Figure 2.3 shows, there were many cases where strategies made no mention of ECD interventions in countries where the Bank financed them. The largest number of cases occurred in relation to nutrition. The Bank supported nutrition in 40 countries, but the country strategies did not mention nutrition. Nearly half (19 of 40) of these cases occurred in the Africa Region, which may be due to the fact that ECD interventions typically comprise a portion of a project and thus are not viewed as a prominent area of support. When the country had an operation fully devoted to ECD, 69 percent of strategies mentioned ECD interventions. In cases where the financing of ECD interventions took place but they were not mentioned in country strategies may indicate that the Bank did not anticipate or detect government interest.
Findings and Recommendations

The Bank’s Education, HNP, and SP sector strategies address elements of early childhood development. Other sector strategies note direct or indirect contributions to children’s development, but gaps exist. The nexus between women’s economic empowerment and the development of children through quality childcare has been missed across strategies. A framework for ECD would bring clarity to (i) who is in charge of ECD and responsible for coordinating within the Bank and with its partners; (ii) what the Bank’s approach are toward the development of children; (iii) what the Bank’s long-term vision is; and (iv) how the Bank will position itself to become an important player in reaching the SDGs related to early childhood development.
While an increase has occurred in the number of country strategies containing ECD intervention between FY05 and FY13, there were a number of countries where interventions were financed but country strategies made no mention of them, suggesting that the Bank did not detect borrower interest in ECD.

The Bank’s new model of country-level engagement and systematic country diagnostics can provide mechanisms for the Bank to assess the situation of children in the context of preparing country partnership frameworks, and thus identify the most-needed intervention and alignment with other partners.

The first recommendation is directed to Country Management Units.

- Adopt the practice of using diagnostics in the preparation of systematic country diagnostics to determine ECD need — identifying when ECD should be made a country priority and coordinating the relevant support across Global Practices and Cross-Cutting Solution Areas.

References


