# Learning Roots Field Guide

*An Early Childhood Development (ECD) Technical Approach for children 3 to 6 years (Updated February 2021)*

*World Vision Ethiopia*

# Table of Contents

**Preparation**
**Monitoring and Evaluation**

**Output 1: Increased quality of ECD centers for children's development**

Activity 1.1. Output 1.1 Mobilize/ sensitize the community on the Importance of ECD

Activity 1.2. Establish ECD centers / Refurbish pre-existing centers

Activity 1.3. Furnish ECD centers with appropriate locally made play and learning materials

Activity 1.4. Train selective ECD teacher trainers on Learning Roots Methodology

Activity 1.5. Train ECD teachers on LR methodology, and appropriate curriculum.

Activity 1.6. Train ECD teachers on learning material development, maintenance and appropriate usage

Activity 1.7. Organize discussion and visit programs to facilitate smooth transition from ECD to primary school

**Output 2: Parents / caregivers provide enhanced support for child development**

Activity 2.1. Conduct training for facilitators on Learning Roots parenting manual (inclusive of health and nutrition component and Celebrating family component)Activity 2.2. Establish ECD centers / Refurbish pre-existing centers

Activity 2.2. Conduct quarterly training on parenting

Activity 2.3. Facilitate home visit

Activity 2.4. Conduct biannual CF/Positive parenting review workshops

Activity 2.5. Train parents on how to develop toys, and learning resources from local materials.

**Output 3: Increased support by government and communities for Inclusive and quality provision of Early Childhood Development**

Activity 2.1. Train District education offices, school principals and other Local institutions on ECD and coaching for professional development

Activity 2.2. Orient schoolteachers (Grade 1 -4) on the importance of ECD and smooth transition

Activity 2.3. Conduct regular learning circles among ECD
       teachers/facilitators

Activity 2.4. organize ECD clusters for technical and resource support

Activity 2.5. Hold action-learning sessions on M&E findings with local
       Education actors and authorities

Activity 2.6. Establish and train ECD management committees

Activity 2.7. Develop user-friendly learning and communication materials

Activity 2.8. Conduct regular field supervision and mentoring with ECD actors

**Appendices**

**ECD** – *Early Childhood Development refers to the holistic development of young children from prenatal to eight years of age across the various developmental domains, including physical, cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional and spiritual / cultural.*

**ECD Teacher** – *This refers to any personnel who work with young children and may include qualified teachers, teacher's assistants, community volunteers, parents and or caregivers*

**ECD** – *This will depend upon the context and refers to any environment where the young child is actively engaged in learning with other children such as kindergarten, home-based care centres, playgroups, community run ECDs, Government run ECDs, Privately run ECDs.*

**Field Guide** – *The Learning Roots Field Guide is the operational support for the Learning Roots Project Model, and is intended for use by National Office and ADP staff.*

**Partnership** – *This will depend on context, but may refer to partnerships with government, business, community leaders, NGOs, FBOs, CBOs, UN agencies, training institutions including universities,*

**Project Model** – *The Learning Roots Project Model outlines the core components of an evidence-based approach to ECD at the community level for children aged 3 to 6 years, and is intended for use by SOs, ROs, and NO staff.*

**Learning Environment** – *This refers to any environment where young children are stimulated to learn and develop and may include their household, ECD (see above definition), or the broader community including cultural ceremonies and religious activities.*

# Executive Summary

## Overview

The purpose of this guide is to support World Vision National Office and Area Programmes by identifying the core components of an evidence-based approach to early childhood development (ECD) programming at the community level for children aged 3 to 6 years. The Field Guide outlines the minimum standards of the Learning Roots approach for most contexts; Learning Roots will contribute to World Vision's Child Well-Being Outcomes (CWBO) and relevant Targets (CWBT). The core components of the Learning Roots ECD approach are illustrated within the Conceptual Framework in Figure 1 below.

*Figure 1: Learning Roots Conceptual Framework*
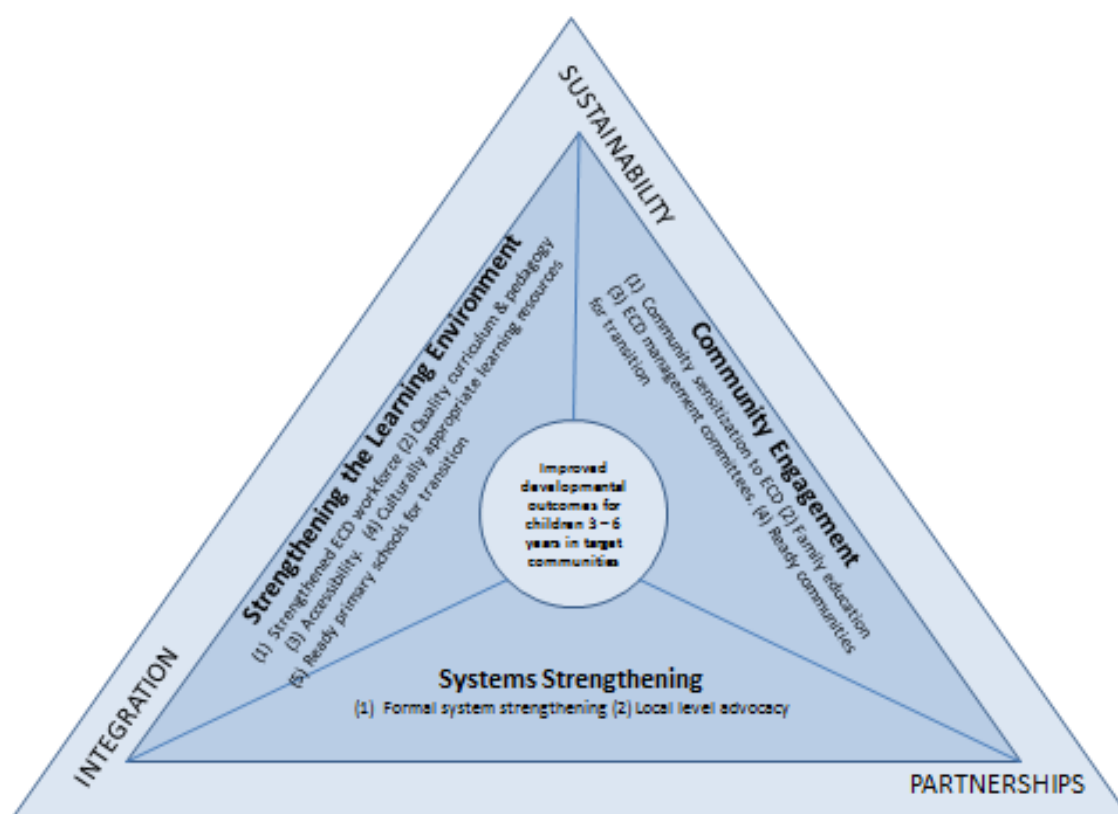


ECD programming involves creating the optimal environmental conditions in order to produce the best outcomes for holistic child development. It is important to foster a supportive environment for children to develop across the four developmental domains including physical, cognitive, language-communication, and socio-emotional development. There is an abundance of evidence that highlights the need to urgently invest in ECD to help the most vulnerable children reach their full potential. Therefore World Vision is investing in the Learning Roots approach to ultimately improve the developmental outcomes of children aged 3 to 6 years in target communities through effective and holistic ECD initiatives.

The Learning Roots approach engages an ecological framework to child development to improve the environmental conditions surrounding the individual child. This is captured by the three outcomes and associated outputs as highlighted in Figure 2 below. The first outcome focuses on the household and community environment, the second

outcome on the learning environment, and the third outcome focuses on the policy environment surrounding the individual child.

The Learning Roots project model addresses the developmental needs of children from age three through six. The model aims to enhance the comprehensive development of children and improve parents' skill to impart quality support for their children. It follows three part approach
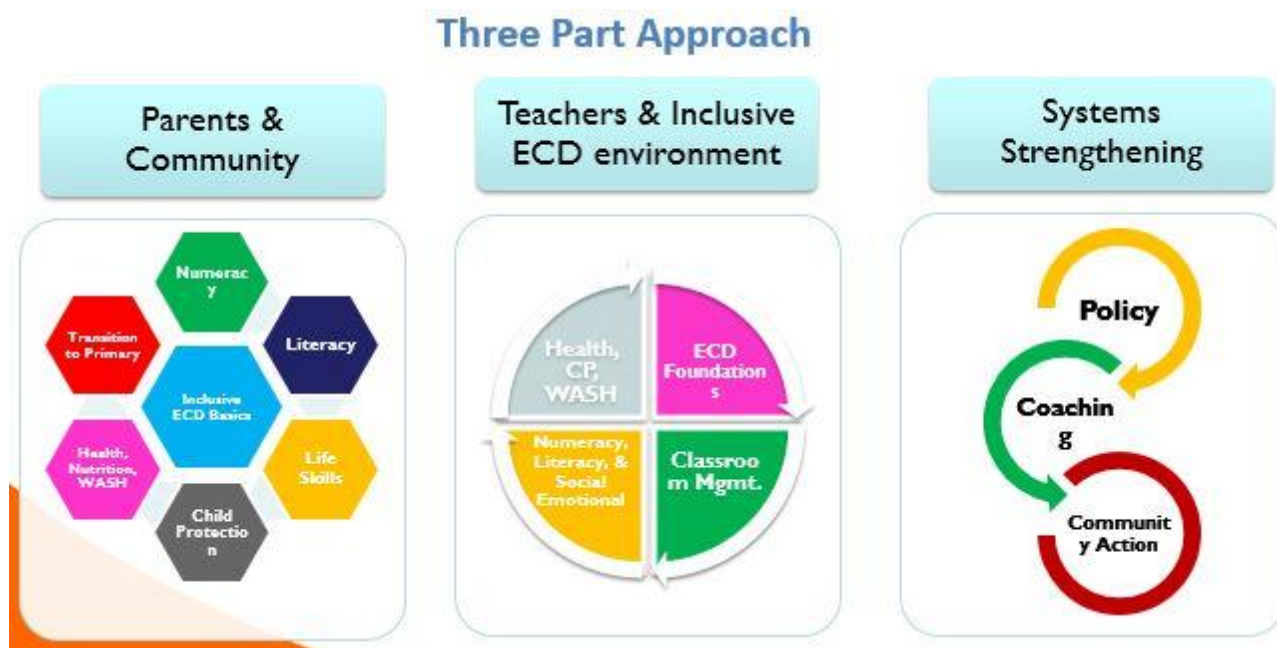


World Vision Ethiopia with its new Start Education Early for Children (SEE4C) strategy aspires to implement LR ECD in more flexible modality to address the needs of the most vulnerable in the inner villages. The new approach tries to establish a quality ECD program with high flexibility of contexts, schedule , learning spaces, and kind of learning and play materials. It is believed that quality is mainly about responsive interaction among the child, learning materials/environment and teachers.

1. **Awareness raising and capacity building** for District education office, primary school leaders and selected first cycle teachers
2. **Community sensitization and mobilization:**
3. **ECD Center management Committee (CMC):** facilitates smooth communication among ECD actors, mobilize resources, ensures the functioning of the center and its sustainability.
4. **Well-tailored training and coaching for ECD teachers**
5. **Use of Locally made learning and Play Materials**
6. Well prepared learning environment
7. **Engagement DEO and Primary School Leaders to monitor and support the ECD center**

CMC identifies spaces for the ECD establishment and mobilizes resources for establishment of rehabilitation. A primary school is responsible to manage and administer the established 4 or 5 Satellite ECD centers in collaboration with CMC. DEO is responsible for enrolling ECD teachers/facilitators and paying their salaries/stipends. WVE provides selected industrial materials and builds the capacity of ECD teachers, CMC, DEO and school leaders.

**Learning Roots Log frame**

| Outcome | Enhanced early learning and readiness of children 3- 6 years in target communities | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Output | Increased quality of ECD centers for children's development | Parents / caregivers provide enhanced support for child development | Increased engagement by government and communities for inclusive and quality provision of Early Childhood Development |
| Activity | Mobilize/ sensitize the community on the importance of ECD (include COVID issues) | Conduct training for facilitators on Learning Roots parenting manual (inclusive of health and nutrition component and Celebrating family component) (include COVID issues) | Train District education offices, school principals and other local institutions on ECD and coaching for professional development (COVID sensitive planning and support system) |
| Activity | Establish ECD centers / Refurbish pre-existing centers | Conduct quarterly training on parenting (Be COVID sensitive) | Orient school teachers (Grade 1 -4) on the importance of ECD and smooth transition |
| Activity | Furnish ECD centers with appropriate locally made play and learning materials | Facilitate home visit | Conduct regular learning circles among ECD teachers/facilitators |
| Activity | Train selective ECD teacher trainers on Learning Roots methodology including parenting (CF) (COVID sensitive ECD programming) | Conduct biannual CF/Positive parenting review workshops | Organize ECD clusters for technical and resource support |
| Activity | Train ECD teachers on LR methodology, and appropriate curriculum. | Train parents on how to develop toys, and learning resources from local materials (Be COVID sensitive) | Hold action-learning sessions on M&E findings with local Education actors and authorities |
| Activity | Train ECD teachers on learning material development, maintenance and appropriate usage | | Establish and train ECD management committees (managing COVID effects) |
| Activity | Organize discussion and visit programs to facilitate smooth transition from ECD to primary school | | Develop user friendly learning and COVID sensitive communication materials (NO level activities) |
| Activity | | | Conduct ECD baseline study employing IDELA (NO activity) |
| Activity | | | Conduct regular field supervision and mentoring with ECD actors (NO & AP level) (employ COVID safety checklist) |

**How to use this Field Guide**

The Learning Roots Field Guide is the operations support for the Learning Roots Project Model. The intention of the Learning Roots approach is to strengthen existing ECD programming, rather than replacing what is currently being implemented in the field. Therefore when a district already has ECD programming being implemented, it is recommended that a review of existing programming is undertaken to identify how it can be strengthened, using the Learning Roots Project Model. ECD is a most opportune time to give a good head start for all children, especially those who are most vulnerable. It is also recommended that inclusion of the most vulnerable children is ensured as the programming is reviewed.

For an ECD project to become a Learning Roots project, it must contain all three outcomes of the model as outlined in the log frame. Contextualisation of Learning Roots will occur at the output level to ensure that each project is relevant for the target population. **It is recommended** that Area Program Office's engage the national ECD technical expert to support with contextually adaptions where the need has been identified.

The Field Guide is structured in alignment with the three outcomes and associated outputs, with guidance on project preparation as well as monitoring and evaluation. However it is important to note that the Learning Roots Field Guide is not a step-by-step process, but rather the outputs can be simultaneously implemented according to each context. If you need step by step guidance, you can consult LR field guide-2.

Learning Roots is a programming approach for ECD targeting children 3 to 6 years of age and is recommended to be implemented alongside with health projects targeting under 3 children.

**Assessment**

It is assumed that a broad assessment of the target area has already taken place using the recommended DPA tools and that Early Childhood Development programming was identified as a priority need by the various stakeholders, including the target communities.

Consideration must also be given to how the Learning Roots approach and recommended DME framework fits within the existing DME framework at the AP and NO level. It is anticipated that the Learning Roots programming approach will contribute to the Child Well-Being Targets and associated reporting for each NO, as holistic ECD programming provides the solid foundations for sustained well-being of children and their families, especially the most vulnerable, across all four CWB targets.

In addition to the broad assessment using the WV DPA tools, the Learning Roots approach specifically recommends assessing the following aspects of the proposed target area(s):

✓ Assess current knowledge, attitudes and child raising practices (KAP) amongst people in a young child's (3 to 6 years) circle of influence, (i.e. parents, caregivers, and community leaders), to identify practices that impact child development (both positively and negatively)

✓ Assess situations of the most vulnerable children in the community who fit in the target age group, and identify ways that could better include them in existing ECD efforts in the community.

✓ Assess current levels of sectoral integration within the NO, ADP, existing ECD programming, policy environment, and consider how this could be strengthened to achieve holistic child development

✓ Assess current levels of stakeholder partnership and identify opportunities for strengthening to achieve sustained holistic child development

Currently, we are employing IDELA and MEQA tools to capture all the LR components.

<u>Time commitments</u>

**It is recommended** that the Learning Roots approach is supported for a minimum of four to five years, including at least a 6 month assessment and design phase, to ensure the sustainability of holistic child well-being outcomes. However **it is important** to also note, that this time frame may be less in areas where there are existing ECD programing and the Learning Roots approach is used to strengthen the existing ministry.

**It is recommended** that each Learning Roots project starts slowly with a small target focus in the first year of implementation to use as a pilot model. As the community experiences the benefits of the pilot model, relevant stakeholders may become more willing to support Learning Roots in their community by committing resources to support the implementation. This slow approach will require an understanding from the donor, partners and community alike, as well as strong and consistent messaging to all relevant stakeholders from the project team.

**Sustainability Considerations**

Sustainability and transition planning must be considered from the onset of the Learning Roots project model. Each Learning Roots project must promote a community development approach to programming whereby the community and relevant partners are empowered to sustain the program and associated outcomes without the support of World Vision. The ultimate aim of sustainability is for the circle of influence surrounding young children to value ECD and for the culture to positively impact child development. Thus the first sustainability measure for any Learning Roots project is to ensure the inclusion of all three outcomes of the model as outlined in the *Logframe.*

To sustain the project goal of improved developmental outcomes for children 3 to 6 years, there must be an overarching awareness that any change takes time to emerge, whether amongst the household, community, or policy environments. There should be supportive policies for early childhood, with the necessary investment, both financial and human, to implement such policies.

It is well documented that early childhood initiatives need to be multi-sectoral in nature to contribute to the holistic development of young children and to sustain the benefits of such programming. It is expected that the Learning Roots project staff actively work cross-sectorally with other WV colleagues, partners and government departments. Sectors that should be considered for integration with the Learning Roots approach include:
-   Health and nutrition
-   Economic development
-   Child protection
-   Environment and livelihood
-   WASH
-   Resilience

**It is recommended** that all Learning Roots projects have a strong focus on the following aspects to make sustainability a reality:
- ✓ Investment in community engagement to strengthen awareness around child rights and the value of ECD
- ✓ Invest in approaches that strengthen capacities and work to empower stakeholders at the household, community and government levels
- ✓ Involvement of local partners and government from the onset of the project
- ✓ Strengthening of monitoring systems including supervision and support for the ECD workforce, ECD management committee's and the formal government system
- ✓ Instil a shared responsibility to invest in the future generation
- ✓ Strong integration across multiple sectors at the output and activity level relevant to each context

# Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is important for documenting progress, recording effectiveness of programs, and engaging stakeholders in a cycle of continuous improvement. Effective M&E helps determine the nature and quality of change that has taken place, contributes to learning and reflection, and most importantly helps to identify improved child development as a direct result of the Learning Roots intervention.

Monitoring requires the collection of quantitative and qualitative data at multiple points throughout the program cycle and should be used to determine if activities need

> **Figure 3:** Evidenced Base Programming (EBP)
>
> Evidenced Based Programming can be thought of as the bridge between research and practice; between theory and reality; between the laboratory and the field. The term itself comes from the health sector and was coined to reflect the finding that what works in the laboratory (pure research) may not work as expected once applied outside laboratory conditions.
>
> Evidence is used before, during, and after programming. It is not just about collecting data. As NGOs we are also concerned about the following elements:
> - *Voice and inclusion of especially the most vulnerable:* presenting beneficiaries perspectives on effects of an intervention.
> - *Appropriateness:* using methods that are justifiable given the intervention.
> - *Triangulation:* using mixed methods and multiple data sources.
> - *Contribution:* demonstrating how change happened and explaining the causal pathways.
> - *Transparency:* open about data sources and methods used as well as limitations.
>
> Ord, K. 2014. *Evidence Based Programming,* World Vision International

adjustment during the Learning Roots intervention. Evaluation, on the other hand measures how well the program activities have met expected objectives and the extent to which changes in outcomes can be attributed to the Learning Roots intervention. The measurement of child developmental milestones (IDELA instrument) is the gold standard in evaluating the effectiveness of ECD interventions, along with changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices among the key adults in a child's life (IDELA caregiver). The work of M&E is a shared responsibility among program staff and DME teams.

There are three approaches to M&E within the field of ECD:
- Direct observation of children in a natural setting
- Adult engagement (by parents, caregivers, and/or teachers)
- Assessing Children

Direct observation of children in natural settings such as homes and schools has the advantage of being unobtrusive; however, it requires intensive training of observers and may not capture the full range of a child's abilities or behaviours. Parental, teacher, caregiver, and reports from other adults who are important to a child can provide rich information on children since it comes from observers who know the child best. It does not require, as much training but bias on the part of the reporting adults must be considered. Finally assessing children in a controlled environment has the benefit of producing relatively unbiased assessment but testing only provides a snap shot of a child's ability and may say more about the child's ability to meet the demands of testing rather than actual capacities.

**Figure 4:** Assessment versus Testing and the Danger of High-Stakes School Entry Exams

The terms assessment versus testing are often used interchangeably. But it is important to recognize the difference between these concepts, especially in the context of children age 3-6.

- Assessment is the process of gathering information over time to monitor progress and make educational decisions if necessary. An assessment includes methods such as observations, interviews, essay or multiple choice tests, and/or behaviour monitoring.
- Testing is a method to determine a student's ability to complete certain tasks or demonstrate mastery of a skill or knowledge of content (testing is one type of assessment).

Assessment, over time, using methods such as parent interviews, observation, and behaviour monitoring is recommended for measuring young children's progress against developmental milestones. However, formal testing of children 3-6 is not appropriate. Children are too young to perform in this way. Formal testing can lead to unhealthy labelling of children at young ages, increased competition among parents, and pressure on young children.

Furthermore, World Vision along with the wider ECD and ECE communities does not recommend the use of a one-time-use school readiness test to determine whether or not a child enters primary school. We should not determine a child's ability to do well in school by a single test administers at a single point in time with a single evaluator. Rather, a child's overall development over time must be considered. The focus should be on monitoring children to identify individuals who might need extra help and attention, not keeping them out of school.

# Strengthening the Learning Environment

## Output 1 – Increased quality of ECD centers for children's development

### 1.1: Mobilize/Sensitize the community on the importance of ECD

The focus of output 1.1 is to mobilize the community and influential people to help them understand the value of early childhood education. The community members should be oriented on the importance of ECD so that they will provide the required support for the upcoming activities. Prior to the community mobilization key district education officers, KETEB and nearby primary school directors should be oriented so to engage them in the community mobilization activity. These people have the authority and acceptance to share such valuable information for the community and our WVE education officers should play facilitator role to conduct fruitful orientation. During the mobilization process, school leaders and district education experts should encourage the community to mention the challenges they on their children education in terms of children's reading ability, behaviour, physical well-being and so on. This is will help them as starter to portrait how ECD enhances children's academic performance, facilitates the development of acceptable behaviour and lays a foundation for further learning and development. The orientation session should start from the existing problem identification to actionable solutions setting. The community should be stimulated to really understand the value of ECD, to find viable solutions to support their under 6 children with ECD programming and select vibrant Committee members for mobilizing resources, identifying centre establishment area, enrolling ECD facilitators and others.

## *1.2: Establish ECD centers / Refurbish pre-existing centers*

This activity is about creating a conducive learning space for children. The will be established/refurbished ECD centers can be instituted in any child friendly areas where there are children who can benefit out of the program. They can be established attached to primary school, in old AP compound, in the villages' communal spaces or service giving institutions like Churches, Mosques, Idir and Associations' halls. The places to be selected have to be conducive for children's quality learning and development. Most importantly, our community managed ECD program advocates the high engagement of community members and local administration in order to sustain the program. The local administration and community members have to establish the centers in close work with WVE and besides the pocket money for the volunteer teachers have to be covered by the community. It is a must to link all the established/refurbished ECD centers with the nearby primary schools. In other words, primary schools should administer and support the ECD center with the active engagement of center management committee since ECD is a part of the overall general education system.  Education officers are encouraged to plan thoughtfully and engaging our center of gravity to establish few, learning centers which can be replicated in fidelity. In short, Our LR centers should be learning centers with high quality standards.

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### Criteria for a safe learning environment

- ✓ Well-aerated and lighted wide learning areas/classrooms
- ✓ Learning area is clean, dry and hygienic
- ✓ Adequate space to accommodate 30 – 35 children (approximately 1.5 metres per child)
- ✓ Only children of age 3+ up to 6+ are accommodated in the ECDs
- ✓ Classrooms are organized as per the age of the children (3+ - 4; 4+ - 5 and 5+ - 7)
- ✓ Children of above 7 years of age should not be admitted in the center since the program is not designed up to their needs.
- ✓ Safe and caring environment
- ✓ Located in close proximity to children with disabilities
- ✓ The outdoor play area is safe and located away from high-risk areas (such as ponds, busy roads, markets etc)
- ✓ Children escorted to and from the ECD centre by parents or teachers
- ✓ Positive and consistent feedback
- ✓ Learning resources equally accessible to all children
- ✓ ECD Teachers have good time management with no long wait periods
- ✓ Children have the opportunity to learn in larger groups, smaller groups and alone
- ✓ Adaptations are made for children with disabilities
- ✓ Activities are culturally appropriate and promote mother tongue instruction
- ✓ Accessibility to safe water
- ✓ Accessibility to toilet facilities for all children
- ✓ Learning area has good ventilation and lighting

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It is possible to deliver an effective, high quality ECD program despite the absence of a physical structure. Therefore the budget allocation for this output should focus on making the learning environment surrounding young children safe, rather than on construction, which does not directly influence the learning outcomes of young children in the same way that well trained ECD Teachers, quality learning materials, and community support for ECD does. In fact the Learning Roots approach recommends the project team to negotiate an alternative meeting space within each target community where ECD activities can take place. This could be within a local church, community meeting hall, or even in someone's home, and is a good indication of community readiness to support ECD.

### 1.3. Furnish ECD centers with appropriate locally made play and learning materials

Children learn best through doing, rather than by observing or listening and therefore learning through play and game-like activities must form the cornerstone of ECD pedagogy. In order to support child learning outcomes, the resources available to young children in the ECD setting as well as within the home environment need to encourage play, be age appropriate, culturally relevant, and support the child's holistic development across the four domains including;

1. Physical development (growth, fine and gross motor)
2. Social and emotional development
3. Language and communication skills
4. Cognitive development (knowledge and critical thinking skills)

The learning materials and experiences provided by the ECD setting need to be specifically linked to the appropriate child development milestone. The learning resources must be challenging enough to stimulate the child's brain and to gradually support the child's mastery of that specific skill as guided by the relevant developmental milestone. It is the responsibility of the ECD Teacher and caregivers to provide enough time for children to be engaged in child-initiated and adult supported play. Once a child has mastered a specific skill, they will typically become bored and will need further stimulation in the form of different learning materials and adult support for their brain to continue its development.



It is common for the community to request commercially made, often expensive toys that are not sustainable once damaged, not culturally relevant and rarely developmentally appropriate. Therefore **it is highly recommended** that the Learning Roots project team support the development of locally made learning materials that are safe, low cost, developmentally appropriate and attractive. Engaging the community in the production of locally made learning materials is able to raise awareness of the importance of learning through play for children, and promote a sense of pride and empowerment in the process. Employing the Material Creation and Toy guide, the education officer should organize material development workshop to develop ample learning materials for the classrooms.

Community groups who may be involved in the production of learning materials for young children include;
- Parents (consider a toy making workshop integrated into the parenting education sessions – output 1.2)
- ECD Teachers (conduct a toy making workshop as a key component of their ECD Teacher training)
- Grandparents (often possess the traditional stories, recipes, games, songs, dances)
- Men (consider skills that they have to support the development of culturally relevant resources)
- Youth or religious groups (could join the toy making workshop for parents. Parents could conduct training of trainers methodology for sharing some toy making methods)
- Primary school students (could support toy making activities through the transition outputs)

The production of locally made learning resources needs to engage a systematic approach to ensure that they support the child developmental outcomes of emergent literacy, emergent numeracy and foundational life skills. The systematic approach used to support the production of learning resources may include community consultation, analysis, and design, purchasing of stationary, collection of household materials, training and construction of the toys. Another important consideration is the storage of the learning resources to ensure that they are secure and protected from the weather.

Material Creation and Toy guide is an excellent resource to support the development of learning materials that should be available to support the development of young children, including;

1. Blocks and building
2. Games and puzzles
3. Books and pictures
4. Sand and water play
5. Imagination
6. Learning materials to support emergent literacy
7. Learning materials to support emergent numeracy

> **Benefits of locally made learning resources**
> ✓ Increased accessibility of resources
> ✓ Cost effective
> ✓ Able to replace resources if they are damaged
> ✓ Culturally relevant
> ✓ Able to promote mother tongue language
> ✓ Able to promote community participation
> ✓ Able to increase community ownership of the project
> ✓ Able to foster and preserve traditional learning activities
> ✓ Able to integrate with environmental awareness and promote recycling
> ✓ Able to adapt the learning resources to support gender-fair play and promote the inclusion of children with disabilities
> ✓ Encourages a strengths based approach to ECD programming which identifies the assets within each community

In terms of out-door play materials and games, it is quite advisable to use wood, old tires and other local materials to construct varieties of engaging and colorful play equipment.

### 1.4 – 1.6: ECD Teachers have strengthened capacities to support improved learning environments

Under this general activity, there are three similar yet separately presented activities. Activity 1.4 is aiming to create selective ToTs to cascade the training in their impact areas. Activity 1.5 and 1.6 are about building the ECD teachers' capacity on the basics of LR and material development skills. The overall purpose of this task is to improve the skills and knowledge of the ECD workforce so that the quality of the learning environment helps children to develop in all domains and be ready to succeed in school. Strengthening the capacity of the ECD workforce is an essential component of any effective ECD initiate and thus the budget allocation for this output needs to be adequately supported. In fact the investment in ECD workforce capacities are far more important than the actual physical structure in relation to quality learning outcomes of young children. Employing the LR teachers training manual, the ECD teachers should be trained on the 12 sessions with the required guide either three or two times in a year.

In either context, our role is to strengthen their capacity through exposure to quality training opportunities. Training of ECD Teachers will depend on context and be provided by the ToTs aerated at National level.

**It is recommended** that the ECD Teachers are initially exposed to foundational training, which is

to provide practical training that is closely linked to the ECD learning environment with opportunities for hands-on

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**Case Study #1:** # Quality training for quality results!

Selamawit Ferede is a diploma holder in preschool education and has been teaching at ECD center for the past couple of years.

She is one of the teachers that took World Vision ECD training and it brought about a progressive change on the way she teaches and manage classroom. She says, "The knowledge I had from my diploma course was theoretical. I was bored, sleepy and lacked interest to stay long in the classroom. Neither was I satisfied with the way I offer the teaching learning process."

Selamawit continues explaining its significance "World Vision ECD training is absolutely practical. The presence of structured daily routine and organized learning corners in the classroom makes the day very engaging, and exciting for children and me as well. Now Children no longer show a sign of tiredness and lack of interest. They rather wish to stay longer."

Yetsedaw Melesew, 6, is one of the student at this early childhood development centre. He says, "Our school is a good place to stay at. I am able to learn both Amharic and English Alphabet. I play various games. Our teachers are reading stories of animals and people to us. I always long to visit our school every day. I love to be here all day long."

skill development. The training needs to focus on what children need to learn, as well as how they learn and effective teaching methods that promote child development.

The ECD Teacher should be closely supervised for the first year or so with follow up training provided at least one day a month. The person providing the follow up training should be familiar to the ECD Teacher and preferably delivered by the same person who provided the initial foundational training where possible. This provides opportunity for ECD Teachers to come together and share experiences, challenges and support on a regular basis. In addition, the ECD Teachers should have the opportunity to participate in refresher training and to learn with other ECD Teachers on a yearly basis through study visits to other community ECD initiatives.

### *1.7: Organize discussion and visit programs to facilitate smooth transition from ECD to primary school*

As we read in output 1.7, transition is not an event but a process by which gains from ECD programs can be built upon or lost. This critical process has impact on success in primary grades of 1, 2, and 3 and beyond. Children's readiness for transition depends on mainly on parental readiness, primary school readiness and ECD and primary school readiness. Therefore, there are lots of preparation and readiness expected from the learning institutions and the readiness of ECD actors to create wECDoming atmosphere for children. Series of meetings and visit programs should be organized between ECD and Primary school teachers to share information and facilitate smooth transition. Please the tables below:

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How ECD Teachers can support successful transition to primary.
- ✓ Provide for a wide range of interests and abilities beyond the child's chronological age (challenges).
- ✓ Design experiences to stimulate all areas of development—physical, social and emotional, cognitive, and language.
- ✓ Plan activities that are responsive to the child's interests, culture, and linguistic background.
- ✓ Organise an environment for children to select activities from a variety of choices.
- ✓ Organise the day so that children work individually or in small informal groups for much of the day.
- ✓ Provide many opportunities for children to see how spoken and written languages are related.
- ✓ Get to know the grade 1 and 2 teachers.
- ✓ Schedule a visit to primary school for the ECD children.
- ✓ Discuss activities to expect at the new school to help children feel comfortable and confident.
- ✓ Plan to talk to primary school teacher about each child's progress.
- ✓ Provide parents with information about the new school and registration.
- ✓ Encourage parents to attend an orientation meeting at the school.
- ✓ Organise community forums on transition to primary school
- ✓ Work with the primary school to implement a plan for transition.

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> **How Primary School Teachers can support a successful transition to primary.**
> - ✓ Work with ECD teacher; respect each other's professional roles.
> - ✓ Invite preschool children to visit grade 1. Send grade 1 students to the ECD centre to tell children what they can expect.
> - ✓ Involve grade 1 children in making a book about going to school that they will give to the children when they visit the ECD centre.
> - ✓ Conduct joint preschool and grade 1 screenings.
> - ✓ Invite parents to school for wECDoming and orientation.
> - ✓ Visit children and families and get to know them outside of the school environment
> - ✓ Have a personal conversation with each parent before school begins; listen to them talk about their child.
> - ✓ Begin grade 1 with similar activities to those found in the ECD centre and/or preschool so children can begin school with confidence.
> - ✓ Design experiences to stimulate learning in all areas—physical, social emotional, linguistic, and cognitive.
> - ✓ Provide a wider range of abilities than chronological age suggests.
> - ✓ Provide an environment where children can learn through active exploration and interaction with concrete materials, adults, and other children.
> - ✓ Plan activities that are responsive to child's interests, culture, and language
> - ✓ Read and tell stories that deal with a range of child's emotions and discuss.
> - ✓ Incorporate parent / caregiver-volunteers to help assist teachers with mother-tongue translation.

# Community Engagement

## Output 2 – Parents / caregivers provide enhanced support for child development

### 2.1: Conduct training for facilitators on Learning Roots parenting manual (inclusive of health and nutrition component and Celebrating family component) (include COVID issues)

This activity is about creating capacitated parenting education facilitators. These facilitators can be ECD teachers, Center management committee members and invited professionals from Health and protection stream. Employing the LR parenting manual, the facilitators should be trained with practical simulations in order to conduct similar kind of participatory parental discussion. There are six core sessions and additional supportive sessions. And parents in each ECD centers are encouraged to attend this monthly parental sessions in order to enhance their awareness and involvement at home with their children quality development. Therefore, parenting education facilitators should be trained thoroughly and need to have the manual in their local languages for better facilitation.

### 2.1: Conduct parenting education (Be COVID sensitive)

Parents are their child's first teacher and have the most influence on their young child. Therefore, parenting education is a vital component of any ECD project. Participation of parents and other caregivers in the development of their children is important to support learning and development in the home and to therefore sustain child well-being outcomes. It is also the platform to understand, challenge and re-evaluate cultural views and practices that impact child development in a negative way.

Parents can also make a significant difference for the lives of especially some groups of children, such as girl children in certain culture or children with disabilities including those with intellectual disabilities, Parents of these children, as well as parents who are most vulnerable can be provided with special attention and extra encouragement to support their children's ECD.

The overall purpose of parenting education is to empower caregivers to positively influence their child's development regardless of their own education levels. Project staff work to help parents identify the key priorities for their children and to strengthen their skills and confidence to achieve their aspirations. Parenting education aims to strengthen knowledge, practical skills and confidence to support their children's over all development. Parents are also key motivators within their community and have the ability to increase demand for quality ECD services when informed, participating, and empowered.

The parental education meeting should be organized on monthly basis with the facilitation of ECD teacher or CMC members. The core 6 sessions and supplementary sessions should be conducted systematically. The initial meetings with the caregiver group should provide an opportunity to explore cultural views, practices and priorities for young children in their community, as well as raising awareness about child development, the importance of positive role modelling, and the benefits of investing in ECD. Project facilitators need to use a peer-to-peer learning approach and have strong skills in facilitation to promote the sharing of knowledge between group members. The facilitator should talk less and listen more, and have the ability to sensitively probe for details as well as being able to respond when harmful practices are shared.

> **Figure 5:** Guidelines for Parenting Education
> - ✓ Regular meetings at least monthly
> - ✓ Small groups of less than 30 caregivers
> - ✓ All parents who have children in the ECD have to attend each session
> - ✓ Each session to promote in-depth discussion as well as the opportunity for caregivers to develop practical skills on ECD
> - ✓ Contextualised content based on priorities identified by the group as well as education levels of the group members
> - ✓ Integrated topics that promote holistic ECD and compliment the ECD centre curriculum
> - ✓ Use a strengths based approach that builds on the assets existing within the group
> - ✓ Focus on peer to peer learning approach and strong facilitation skills
> - ✓ Respect cultural values and traditions that shape differing perspectives on child development
> - ✓ Engage significant others within the community such as;
> - ✓ grandparents ( i.e. share traditional games and stories)
> - ✓ youth (i.e. take care of children while parents engaged in the meeting. It is possible to use some of the toys, puzzles and blocks from the ECD to work with young children)
> - ✓ primary school children (i.e. support toy making for ECD centre)

## *1.3: Facilitate home visit*

Home visits are an effective way to provide additional tailored support to most vulnerable households, having more impact than a caregiver discussion group alone. Home Visits provide individual support for caregivers and their child, giving time for the ECD teacher to talk with the caregiver about their child's strengths, learning skills, what is working well and any concerns they have.

ECD teachers should spend extra time with caregivers/families who need extra support1 including caregivers and children with disabilities, as they may need support to get to the sessions, may not use local resources such as health services, and may have home environments that are more difficult for children. While home visits should be made a priority for most vulnerable households, if capacity and time allows home visits can be provided to all children within the ECD centre.

As a minimum standard, the LR program includes at least three home visits throughout the year to most vulnerable or selected households as follows:

- A visit before the start of the year to build a rapport with the child and the family; talk about the benefits of attending an ECD centre; introduce the Daily Routine and ask about any barriers to the child attending the centre.
- A visit to discuss the child's development, observations from the classroom; interests of the child; areas of strength and learning skills requiring further development that can be promoted within the home.
- A visit shortly after the year closes to follow up on the child's development, areas of strength and learning skills requiring further development that can be promoted within the home, and to discuss the plan for transitioning to school or onto the next year of ECD centre

In some situations, such as fragile contexts, outbreak of disease or if the home is known to be unsafe for visiting, then regular phone calls to the family following a similar structure can be used as a replacement to home visits.

Please consult the Home visitor manual for the details!

### *1.5: Train parents on how to develop toys, and learning resources from local materials (Be COVID sensitive)*

This activity is about helping parents to develop some play materials at home to support their children's quality development. Therefore, the parenting education facilitators can lead parents with the creation of local materials employing the *Toy creation guide. During the monthly parenting sessions, facilitators can allot some time for material creation activity and extend the activity to home assignment as well. Facilitators even can arrange a separate dedicated time for materials creation workshop.*

## Systems Strengthening

**Output 3 – ECD promoted at community level with active participation of partners.**

### *3.1.: Train District education offices, school principals and other local institutions on ECD and coaching for professional development (COVID sensitive planning and support system)*

The ECD work force need to strengthen the sector through technical, emotional and financial support to beget quality program for the betterment of children's development. The center of gravity (district and school level education leaders) have all the tools and power to influence the sector for good if proper training and guidance delivered up to their capacity level. It has been witnessed in Jabi Tehanan AP where the capacitated center of gravity scaled up the ECD program with its own budget and technical persons. So it is quite advisable for LR implementing APs to plan thoughtfully and target key persons in the center of gravity for further training and engagement. Most importantly, the capacitated center of gravity can conduct the regular monitoring and coaching activities in their sphere of influence in sustainable manner. Education officers should provide the monitoring tools, contextualized training, creating experience sharing program and encouraging the leaders to continue with their regular coaching and monitoring.

## Case Study #2: Capacitated partners boost ECD in Jabi

Access to pre-school programmes of any kind have historically been very low, and almost non-existent in rural areas of Ethiopia. Hence, the most disadvantaged children in rural and hard to reach communities are either coming to grade 1 without having the necessary preparation or are enrolling late. Animut Yeneayehu, Jabi Tehnan District ECD focal person has this to say, "Our district had no pre-school programmes of any sort earlier. Parents had to keep their children at home up until they reached seven years. When they joined primary education at seven, they used to struggle to learn alphabets, face difficulties socializing themselves with the school environment, peers and teachers. For this reasons, many were forced to drop out of school."

In a bid to ease these challenges, World Vision started its ECD programme in the district. It capacitated 1,058 teachers on early childhood development, provided training on learning and play material development utilizing local resources, supported the community with industrial materials to construct ECD centres and created awareness on the importance of ECD. In the last three years, 42 ECD centre were opened through World Vision industrial materials support. 125 ECD centres opened across the districts by the government and community participation. "Children's social skills, school performance, interest for education has improved significantly. The dropout rate at primary education has reduced from five percent to below one percent," Animut happily explains

Animut is very grateful to World Vision for introducing and supporting children development and learning at the district. He says, "World Vision has shown us the road map as to how to enhance our children's future potential. We will do all our best to sustainably run the early childhood development works going forward flourishing." It is true local level capacity building makes a difference in sustainably expanding the services at the heart of the community.

*1.2. : Conduct regular learning circles among ECD teachers/facilitators*

Effective early childhood teachers are the most important component of ECD centres, as they fulfil the critical role of helping children to be well-prepared for school and life. Effective teachers know how to provide caring interactions and inclusive teaching techniques that encourage children to think, solve problems, and learn through play. Teachers who have specific preparations in ECD and education are more likely to engage in warm and positive interactions with children, offer richer language experiences and create playful environments that result in learning. Teacher education significantly predicts ECD centre quality. Thus, professional development is the cornerstone for a quality and inclusive ECD programme.

An effective professional development programme is based on a body of core knowledge and competencies. There is a system in place to ensure the quality of training. There are clearly defined requirements and incentives for participants. Increased competence gained from training and experience results in job advancement. An effective system provides for the needs of teachers at all levels. Training is provided on a continuum to expand and deepen knowledge over time. A learning circle is one of the major way of professional development approach where teachers themselves organize discussion forums to digest challenging and critical education issues. There is a guiding manual (Professional Development Guide) to facilitate this learning circle practice. It consists of a minimum of six sessions covering the topics of nutrition & WASH, child rights and participation, including those of children with disability, and child protection. All sessions are provided within this manual. These sessions should start a month after the foundational Learning Root Teachers Training and be continued once per month thereafter. More can be added depending on need and topics can be adjusted accordingly. All nearby ECD teachers can be members of the group and conduct the learning circle at regular basis capturing the key notes for further support and documentation.

### 3.4.: Organize ECD clusters for technical and resource support

This is activity is about creating a learning center for the purpose of further learning and sharing. In principle, all Learning Roots implementing ECD centers should be learning centers since It is a must to establish quality centers for children's quality development. However; to go along with the current situation, each AP will purposely plan to uplift the existing LR implementing ECD centers to the level of learning centers with the required quality standards so that all other actors can come and learn from them. Our centers will enjoy the mark of excellence that is the aim of our LR program – setting best example.

### 3.5.: Establish and train ECD management committees (managing COVID effects)

The ECD Management Committee is an integral component of the Learning Roots project model because it is the main support structure for ECD mobilisation within each community. Investment in strengthening the ECD Management Committee is more likely to result in sustained ECD initiatives and thus sustained child well-being outcomes within the target community. It should be noted, that in some contexts, there may already be similar structures that exist, such as Parent-Teacher Associations, and Kindergarten Management Committees. Therefore our role is to strengthen the existing structures to support the ECD initiatives within the community, rather than to duplicate what is already there.

The composition of the ECD Management Committee should be parents of young children within the community. The committee members should also be attending the Parenting Education sessions and thus are developing their skills to support child development in the home and community. Some Committees may also include a few additional community members who are champions of ECD and thus have the role of influencing and mobilising the community to support early childhood. The overall purpose of the ECD Management Committee is to ensure the quality and sustainability of the ECD activities within the community. **It is recommended** that the committee meet regularly (at least every month). The committee is responsible for:
- Mobilising their community for ECD support
- Support the financing of ECD Teachers
- Support the financing of ECD centre maintenance
- Engaging with parents of young children
- Monitoring attendance of ECD Teachers and children
- Monitoring of ECD Teacher performance
- Facilitating primary school transition activities (i.e. exchange visits, teacher awareness raising)
- Advocating to increase the support for ECD within their community

Given that the ECD Management Committee is the voice of ECD within the community and the link to sustainability of community based ECD initiatives, then adequate support and investment must be prioritised to strengthen the capacity of the group. Activities to strengthen the committee may include supervision, financial management training, advocacy training, income generation support, monitoring support, ECD capacity building, follow up support, study visit to a model ECD centre and committee. Committee members need to be engaged in the development of the transition plan from the beginning of the project.

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**Case Study #2:** **ECD management committee: a bridge between the community and ECD centers**

Every early childhood development centre has one management committee elected from the community by the community to serve as a bridge between the community and the ECD centers. The committee meets with children's parents every month to discuss the overall performance of the centre. Sewnet Mola, Tsion ECD center management committee secretary says, "The committee supports the teaching learning process of the ECD centres, advise teachers, take disciplinary measures, if any, and mobilize resources and the communities to contribute their part and send their children to school. "

The entire community have full trust and respect for ECD management committee and so does the teachers and the local governments. The community obeys the ECD management committee in every aspect of education issues. Sewnet says, "There is no community member that does not send preschool aged child to ECD centre. They community are now delighted in their children school performances and count us as the trustworthy leaders. They have also taken ownership of the ECD, contributing their part and working hard for better."

Sewnet is grateful to World Vision. He says, "World Vision is our reliable partner that ands with us in all of our challenges. World vision is the father of education for our little ones and a real partner to end poverty from our Community."



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### *3.9 & 3.5. Conducting field supervision and review meetings*

In order to maintain the quality of the program, having regular field supervision and mentoring is quite pivotal to transform the program to the standard level. Field supervision checklists will be employed to assess and discuss on the core thematic areas of the visits. There are summarized and detailed observation checklists for ECD, questionnaires for parenting group participants and ECD management committees and rating scales for classroom level observation. During the observation session at the ECD or parenting education sessions, it is quite advisable to have more time in observing the natural scenario in order to capture strengths and limitations. Having a discussion on the captured issues enhances and the capacity of the ECD teachers; ensures transparency between the observer and ECD teachers; and improves the quality of the program as well. During the monthly supervision session, the QA officer, representative of ECD management committee members and education specialist will execute the field level supervision and reflection sessions. This helps to capacitate the ECD committee members to undertake such kind of support of program by themselves. Whereas when there is quarter level monitoring and evaluation, government experts or officials should be included in the team in order to have common understanding about the program. It has to be noted that the LR ECD model is all about capacitating the community members and local administration staffs to own and run the program by their own capacity.

Review meetings are equally important like the filed visits in order to inform the represented stakeholders (government officials, religious leaders, ECD management committees, represented community members, adjacent primary school directors, selected early grade teachers, ECD volunteers, selected parenting group members, etc) about the progress and challenges of the ECD works. One best way of assuring transparency and sustainability on the ECD program is established through conducting review meetings with relevant stakeholders. Their feedbacks and compliments enhance the program to the desired stage.