

Summary NGO Forum – 7 June 2005

The NGO Forum of 7 June 2005, was held at LINS, Oslo University College, Norway, Pilestredet 52. The theme was: ***Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): Historical Development and Diversity in Practice - Examples from Norway and Mozambique.*** The keynote speaker at the forum was Prof. Jan Erik Johansson, from the Early Childhood Education (Førskolelærerutdanningen-FLU) section of the Faculty of Education at Oslo University College.

Professor Johansson introduced the topic by providing a historical background of the development of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Europe, in particular, the emergence of the kindergarten -- 'barnehage' -- in Germany and in the Nordic countries. Among many other things, Professor Johansson pointed out that the idea of ECCE, or rather, the concept of kindergarten in Europe was started by women mainly from the urban-based elite as a part of the bourgeois women's movement. In its early years, the whole idea was perceived as controversial by states and churches because of its connection to women's liberation. For many years ECCE in Europe was organised outside the state administration. In this part of his presentation Professor Johansson emphasised the fact that from the beginning there has been a wide variation in the practice of ECCE and the concept of kindergarten or 'barnehage', which still exist today, in Europe. There is much to learn from this background, in order to organize ECCE in the future.

Based on his earlier work and experience in the field of ECCE in Mozambique, Professor Johansson mentioned one case documented by Helene Anderson, Save the Children Norway, Mozambique. The local authorities in the Maputo area responded to the needs of women working in large agriculture plantations during the 1980's. This led to the start of their own kindergarten that suited their local circumstances. But, due to, among many other things, lack of funds these initiatives could not go further and have now stopped. This is a good example of a local, rural adaption of the European models.

The discussion part opened up with a contribution from Janne Lexow, who briefly presented the findings and experiences from her work for the World Bank on ECCE in Eritrea. There, she observed mainly two models of ECCE. In the urban areas there are more formal kinds of kindergarten, with teachers and a curriculum, whereas in the rural areas one finds a more community-based type of kindergarten where the teaching and activities are more seminar or workshop oriented. As the discussion unfolded, it became clearer that despite the contemporary rhetoric in the EFA, as well as a clear demand for it, ECCE is still very much marginalised and underserved sub-sector in education sector of most developing countries. Given the ECCE's role in the individual development of the child and the general development of education and society at large there was a general consensus among the participants that a very special and deliberate attention should be accorded to ECCE in developing countries. This was seen to be an area where NORAD needs (and therefore urged) to look into more closely in its future involvement in education in the South.