***Early Childhood Program Portfolio Review: Early Childhood Intervention***

***Public Summary***

**Date of review:** June 27th, 2014

**Participants:** Youssef Hajjar (Board Member), Phyllis Magrab (Board Member), Martin Woodhead (Board Member & Chair), Sally McGregor (Board Member), Barbara Ferguson Kamara (Consultant), Sarah Klaus (Director), Tina Hyder (Deputy Director), Elaine Harty (Administrative Assistant), Hollie Hix-Small (Senior Program Manager), Almaz Ismayilova (Program Coordinator), Dragana Sretenov (Senior Program Manager).

**Roles:** Martin Woodhead (Chair), Hollie Hix-Small (ECP staff lead presenter), Phyllis Magrab (Discussant), ECP staff and board (contributors through discussion)

**Rationale for Selection**

The Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) portfolio of work is situated within ECP’s Building Societies for All, Equity and Inclusion through Early Childhood concept within ECP’s 2014-2017 strategy. The ECI strand of grants and activities were selected for two key reasons: (1) several ECI project grants are scheduled to end August 2014, creating an opportune time to assess initiative progress and lessons learned; and (2) the lead ECP staff member responsible for ECI will leave OSF in September 2014 necessitating careful review of existing work and planning for any future work.

**Background**

The ECI work began in earnest with five grantees located in Bulgaria, Ukraine and Georgia in 2012 following one 2010 grant to a Bulgarian NGO. The goal of the initiative is to build sustainable, high quality early childhood intervention services for children under the age of three and their parents by responding to grantee- and OSF ECP-identified gaps in existing services and systems.

The work is focused on shifting practices from traditional deficiency-focused, fragmented services to individualized, coordinated services in which families are included as partners and the strengths of each child and family are utilized. The initiative rests on the assumption that potential grantee leaders could be selected and supported with financial and technical assistance to assemble and strengthen sustainable, high quality ECI services in their country and the region. Specifically, ECP used a cohort, leadership model and developmental systems approach to help grantee organizations identify and build components necessary for the development of an integrated, nationwide system with common principles and practice competencies supported by evidence, policy and family/caregiver-demand.

**Key Questions**

1. Should OSF play a larger role in advocating for increased funding for ECI globally either directly and/or through other organizations?
2. How should ECP address the links between ECI and inclusive education? What advantages are there to developing ECI and assisting grantees to support inclusive education versus twinning ECI and IE grantees to work together in the same country?
3. Given considerable technical skills have been created through the leadership model, how can these leaders be leveraged to expand services into more rural areas of their countries or even to other regional countries?
4. Based on early lessons learned is it more effective for ECP to provide more support to fewer countries that have a higher likelihood of developing national ECI strategies, policies, legislation and sustained services?
5. What role can ECP or OSF Higher Education Support Program or the Scholarship Program play in the development of pre-service ECI training programs (certificate or degree)?

**Summary of Discussion**

Hollie Hix-Small, the lead ECP staff member responsible for ECI-related work, provided a 7-minute presentation on the initiative. Board member Phylis Magrab then provided a 7-minute commentary and facilitated an open group discussion. Board members received an initiative overview document, list of grants and budget allocations, and additional summary documents as well as communications pieces prior to the review. At the end of the review, the group viewed a grantee film on ECI.

The discussion focused on the initiative theory of change (levers, key stakeholders, assumptions) and accompanying OSF supports (implementation/process). Participants discussed the successes and merits of the approach taken as well as drawbacks. The group discussed grantee and country selection factors as well as the role of the national foundations and other OSF thematic programs. It was noted that national foundation engagement has been key to moving NGO-driven initiatives to national policy level (Bulgaria, Georgia, Mongolia). NF engagement might be used as a selection filter going forwards. Tajikistan, where there are compelling reasons to work (ESP supported parent networks, active emerging ECI NGOs, very emergent interest in IE policy and practice), but limited ability/commitment/opportunity for the NF to lead a substantial ECI project, raises a dilemma in this regard.

During the meeting participants also discussed the critical need to have strong organizations available to train other people from the region and to act as centres of excellence. These centres, under careful and knowledgeable leadership, can serve to demonstrate to other countries how ECI can be delivered despite contextual challenges.

Hollie recommended the two-year funding model if ECP uses the ECI cohort leadership approach with new grantee countries. She emphasized need for continued effort to support the development of national strategies as well as on-the-ground implementation. She recommended further scale-up through giving smaller grants to less experienced NGOs offering ECI with current leadership ECI grantees available for training and mentoring. Although more funding is being allocated by governments for ECI services the costs associated with training and mentoring/supervision are inadequate.

Phyllis noted the importance of leveraging other financial resources. Much of the ECI initiative funds go toward technical assistance and few donors support ECI. She also noted the need to be more intentional about training the cohort on leadership skills through the development of a leadership strategy as part of a longer-term project. Measurement of child, family, and community outcomes were also thought to be important as ECI requires a community-wide and individual as well as professional philosophical shift in the way disability is understood and supported.

Dragana discussed the possibility of future alignment between the ECI and Inclusive Education efforts both strategically and geographically. She noted a need to address the gap in inclusive services for children age 3-6. There is a need to develop the capacity of existing teachers of children 3-6 years to meet the developmental and behavioural needs of children with delays and disabilities. A seamless transition into inclusive educational settings is needed for children and their families who receive and graduate from ECI.

The ECP Call for Proposals in 2011 may have indirectly contributed to perpetuating this gap in that it was a bifurcated call that offered opportunities to fund either 1) ECI-focused projects or 2) projects that linked special and normal (regular) schools/preschools. The majority of the 6 selected inclusive education (IE) projects, however, with the exception of Georgia, focused on inclusion in primary schools leaving a gap in services and more importantly in systems, in 2 countries where OSF ECP funds IE and ECI projects (Mongolia, Bulgaria). ECP should consider going forwards prioritizing countries where there is a possibility to work towards continuous services (ECI, inclusive preschools, inclusive primary schools etc..) and stronger linkages with ESP and HRI in these contexts.

Youssef noted the importance of working with local authorities as much as possible. Other board and staff members echoed his statement since funding is often through the municipalities and local authorities are in a position to support the development of coordinated services. Youssef also suggested the further development of a community of practice and funding a longitudinal study that can measure the impact and outcomes of an integrated approach.

The group discussed how the existing grantees and countries were selected and what countries might be considered for expansion. Potential key facilitators and barriers were raised. Noted in the discussion was the crucial role of medical professionals and the need for physician champions. Other key levers included EU pressure for deinstitutionalizing babies 0-3 years and the important role the national foundations have played in select countries toward building national ECI strategies and systems. Parent support groups were also mentioned including the expertise of ESP in developing these groups and the positive pressure of parent-demand on government development of and support for ECI services. Discussants proposed designing future calls for proposals to attract parent and paediatric groups.

Some questions were raised about the sustainability of services and the role of OSF, particularly in an environment that seems to favour grant-giving over provision of technical assistance. The ECI projects require high capacity-building and technical assistance. The ECI project is classified as ‘field-building’ but functions in some ways more as a ‘concept’. The group wondered if ECI would continue to provide technical support following the end of the funding relationship. Barbara, a guest at the review, noted the importance of integrating ECI across sectors to increase available funding and need to “make ECI everyone’s business.”

**Future plans/actions**

The existing cohort of grantees will continue to have technical and financial support in order to phase-out external support by further strengthening capacity within countries and the region from 2015-16. Georgia will be further positioned as a regional training hub.

Current grantees will be consulted to see how OSF can best support a two-year strategy to get ECI firmly in place before the end of, or significantly reduced, OSF funding. Clarifying if the goal of the initiative is NGO or country level is something ECP should aim for in the next strategy.