

Children in



Early Childhood Development



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CHILDREN IN FOCUS FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE'S DESK

I am delighted to introduce you to this edition of Children In Focus Magazine which places the spotlight on Early Childhood Development (ECD). It is most fitting that as we embark on a new, dynamic programme cycle that our first focus area in this magazine be on the critical ECD sector.

In this 2008-2011 programme cycle, we have decided on a one programme approach, with elements being Social Policy, Advocacy and Partnerships for Children's Rights; Child Protection; HIV Prevention and Lifeskills; and Early Childhood Development.

It is my firm belief that what we do the first few years last forever and, therefore, we owe it to the upcoming generations of preschoolers to make sure that they have a firm educational foundation. In so doing, we must focus on their early care and stimulation through access to education and equally on the quality of that service.

UNICEF remains one of the leading agencies in promoting access to quality early childhood development services and continues to build national capacity to ensure children's rights to quality ECD.

The sector requires a strong knowledge development approach for a bolder state investment in ECD and in this programme cycle we intend to build on the work started in 2007 when we initiated national policy development in Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, Dominica and Antigua & Barbuda.

Under our Early Childhood Development project UNICEF has also remained the primary stimulus in moving countries to adopt and implement the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) ECD Minimum Service Standards which aim to guide improvements in the quality of services in member states.

This commitment to ensuring the development of national standards is even more critical in the face of a 2007 study in 13 Caribbean countries which revealed a situation where over 87% of day care and preschool institutions in the Caribbean are private sector owned with little or no government involvement.

This informality has created what the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007 highlights as a situation where there are varying standards of care and quality; an absence of national standards; weak licensing, certification and monitoring systems; small, undercapitalised operators; and low levels of training among caregivers.

As part of our efforts to have policies approved for the sector, UNICEF has fully involved ministers of government and senior officials in the consultative process in an effort to ensure that once agreed upon, there will be implementation and enforcement of the policies.

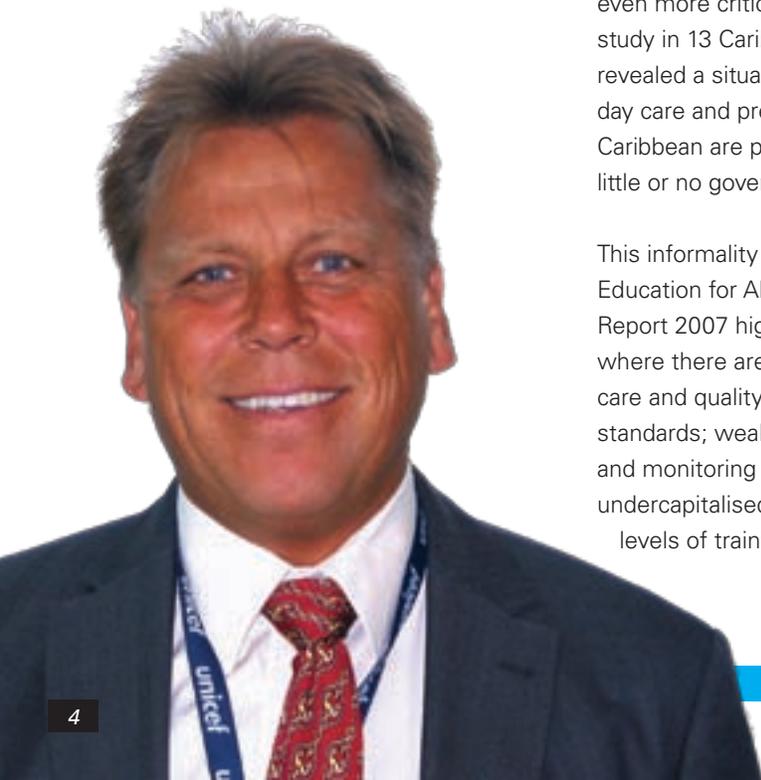
We will also continue to support additional work to produce a range of evidence-informed, financially viable policy options for up-scaling access to quality early childhood care, stimulation and education, with a special focus on the reduction of disparities which are created due to diverse geographical locations and socio-economic status as well as disability.

As we move forward in collaboration with our partners, our unfinished agenda in ECD will be underpinned by two key dimensions: (1) an overarching approach to the improvement of the quality of learning and care in early childhood settings and (2) increased access to quality ECD services by vulnerable children.

The forces of globalisation are rapidly changing the environment in which the region's children are growing up and in which they must live their adult lives, but we believe that a firm footing in ECD will give them a better chance of adapting and becoming more productive citizens in their complex world.

The articles in this edition of Children in Focus touch most of the 10 countries in which we execute programmes and give life to many of the initiatives.

I wish you happy reading.



by

Tom Olsen

UNICEF Representative to Barbados & the Eastern Caribbean



UNICEF BECO/2008/Harper

ECD can be a fun time for children.

“Development is a process by which humans change qualitatively and quantitatively over time” (Trawick-Smith, 2003).

Children experience a stage in life which is referred to as childhood. It must be emphasized, however, that the construct of childhood is not universal in nature.

This is because children are from *“diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and those with challenging conditions and special needs vary in their language, social style, self perceptions and physical competence*

by

ShellyAnn Harper

ECD Specialist - UNICEF Office for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean.

because of unique life experiences” (Trawick-Smith, 2003).

Some of these experiences, however, are lived under extremely difficult circumstances with poverty setting the stage for malnutrition, disparities in access to education, inequalities in access to health services, vulnerabilities to diseases and physical and sexual exploitation.

The international community has publicly stated that it is serious about advancing human development in positive and sustainable ways.

This means that as identified in the Convention On the Rights of the Child (1989), a child’s right to a healthy life, educational opportunities, protection from all forms of abuse and equality of opportunities must be in the forefront of our governments’ agenda.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were approved by the UN General Assembly are being used as one of the frameworks by which countries can monitor and measure progress.

***I do not have to earn
The right to learn
It’s mine.
(Robert Prouty)***

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that all children have the right to be educated.

This is complemented by the Millennium Development Goal (2) which proposes to achieve universal primary education by ensuring that *“by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.” UNICEF, 2006.*



UNICEF in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean (BECO) recognizes that education cannot be compartmentalized. Instead education requires a “*life-cycle approach, investing in learning and ensuring effective transitions at every stage of a child’s life*” (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2007).

With this understanding UNICEF ECO has placed Early Childhood Development and Early Childhood Care and Education high on its agenda.

BEGINNING WITH ECD

Researchers in the medical and educational fields have stressed that the critical nature of a child’s early years cannot be underscored.

Whilst Early Childhood is recognized as the period from birth to eight years the researchers have indicated that it is during the period from birth to three years old that the most learning occurs.

One researcher states: “One of the most significant physical changes in infancy is brain growth. A baby’s brain develops at an astonishing rate; by age 3 it is as complex as it will ever be.” (Shore, 1997)

There is biological evidence which supports the hypothesis that the development of the brain is a critical

factor which influences health, attitudes to, and the aptitude for, learning and behavior throughout the life cycle. (J.Fraser Mustard) This is invaluable news for parents/guardians, teachers, caregivers etc.

This news foregrounds the knowledge that the brain develops as a result of the interactions which a child has with its environment, the people and the interactive materials within it. Whether a child is at home, in school or out in the wider community, learning occurs.

In its programme cycle for 2008-2011, UNICEF ECO has identified two key elements in ECD.

As we partner with governments, NGOs, donor agencies and the media, our mandate is to increase access and to ensure quality ECD services for all children in the region, from the 0-2 and 3-5 age groups, giving particular attention to the most vulnerable.

In addressing the quality component of ECD, UNICEF is committed to supporting improvements in the physical environment, curriculum reform and caregiver/ teacher competencies.

Whether the children are accessing home care, day care services or preschool services they must be exposed to quality experiences in child-friendly, safe and healthy environments.

UNICEF promotes experiences that are stimulating, interactive, inclusive and culturally relevant and which aid in the development of personalities, talents, cognitive and physical abilities.

We support experiences which encourage creativity, promote peaceful interactions, respect for diversity and respect for self.

UNICEF believes that when Early Childhood services emphasize the quality component, the experiences should aid in the development of skills and the acquisition of knowledge which children need to eventually lift themselves out of poverty. “**GOOD BEGINNINGS – NEVER END.**”

Four critical “pathways” link Early Childhood Development (ECD) to Human Development (HD)

The first pathway runs through education. Interventions during the early years of a child have multiple benefits for subsequent investments in the child’s education, ranging from on-time enrollment in elementary school to an increased probability of progressing to higher levels of education.

The second pathway is through health. Like education, investments in health are an investment in human capital and have long-term benefits.

The third pathway links the notion of improved social behavior (as a result of being enrolled in an ECD programme) with the formation of social capital.

In the fourth pathway, ECD is linked to HD by the potential of ECD programmes to address inequality in society. And, ultimately, education, health, social capital, and equality are linked to economic growth and, hence, to HD.

(Jacques van der Gaag, 1997)



UNICEF BECO/2008/Harper

Carib children grasping ECD opportunities.

CHILDREN IN FOCUS MAKING THE TRANSITION IN ST. KITTS-NEVIS

Research has shown that young children learn best through playing in stimulating environments with lots of developmentally appropriate materials and concrete experiences. The preschool learning environment in St Kitts and Nevis is an informal setting that is well equipped with learning materials and manipulatives, organized in learning centres. It allows children to engage in self-initiated, hands on activities with a wide range of materials for a substantial portion of the day. There is also provision for snack and lunch and a two-hour rest period during which time most children sleep.

The kindergarten environment in primary schools on the other hand, is very formal and teacher-directed with very few learning manipulatives, no learning centres and no rest period. Upon entering kindergarten children experience difficulty adjusting to this new, strange and formal environment.

The Early Childhood Development Unit for sometime has been concerned about the difficulties associated with transition and began to implement strategies to address it. The first attempt was the introduction of the 'Transition Programme' in the 1990's. This on-going programme implements measures to facilitate a smooth transition from home to preschool, from nursery to preschool and from preschool to primary

school. Phase One involves children spending a few days in the new setting for a time of orientation before officially attending. Phase Two allows preschool children to actually participate in the activities of the kindergarten classes.

In 2000, Phase Three was introduced. It allowed for a few kindergarten teachers to participate in a two-week orientation workshop normally held for new preschool teachers – every other year. At the end of training, the Early Childhood Development Unit donated a supply of learning materials to the participating kindergarten classes. This was possible from funding received from UNICEF. This process however was taking too long and therefore motivated us to implement Phase Four of our Transition Programme which is again partly funded by UNICEF and OAS.

It involved first of all conducting a one-day seminar on the topic for all principals of primary schools during which time they were required to develop implementation plans to ensure a smoother transition from preschool to their primary schools. This was followed by bringing all kindergarten teachers together for a 2-week orientation workshop to discuss the importance of Transition, and to acquire knowledge and experience in relevant aspects of early childhood education and gain first hand experience of what transpires in the early childhood programme. This exposure will make the kindergarten teachers more cognizant of the skills and experiences of children entering kindergarten and thereby help them to have more realistic expectations of the children and make appropriate preparations for them.

These bold steps undertaken by the Early Childhood Development Unit were not without challenges: e.g.

- Kindergarten teachers are sometimes transferred after the training
- The supervision of the kindergarten teachers to ensure implementation of Transition strategies

- Limited human resource at the Early Childhood Development Unit to monitor and supervise the kindergarten teachers
- Lack of space and financial resource in the primary school to effect the recommended changes to their settings.

In spite of the challenges experienced however the Transition Programme will continue to have in the following results:

- Kindergarten classes resemble to some extent the preschool learning environment both in terms of materials and activities planned
- The Transition from one phase of their educational life to the next will be less traumatic for the children and the adjustment period to kindergarten will be lessened.
- A non-threatening learning environment will minimize the social problems that generally arise when children are not meaningfully engaged.
- The children's foundation for future learning will be strengthened.

In order to ensure the sustainability of our Transition Programme the Early Childhood Development Unit will continue to train new caregivers, preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers, conduct periodic evaluations of those already trained and continue to seek funding to keep the kindergarten classes supplied with learning materials.

In addition the Unit will ensure that the "Transition Programme" is included in the education policy and that a teacher training programme in 'Early Childhood Education' be implemented at the College of Further Education in St. Kitts and Nevis. As advocates for children we have to be proactive where this issue of Transition is concerned to make entry to formal schooling a smooth and pleasurable movement for our little ones.



by

Vanta Walters

National Coordinator ECD St Kitts and Nevis

ZOOMING IN ON HIGH SCOPE

by Valerie Dolphin
Class Teacher & Supervisor
- St Kitts

Young children need an environment in which they can initiate their own ideas, problem solve and experience meaningful adult interaction, which are essential to child development. This statement represents a branch of the High Scope Curriculum.

A bird's eye view of this curriculum in action on a daily basis would reveal children intensely engaged in making choices, manipulating materials, exploring and making discoveries and interacting with peers, while adults are actively involved by making observations – carefully noting child language and actions – or participating as partners in their play.

This energized atmosphere of child-adult activity is governed by two key elements of the High/Scope Curriculum:

Active Participatory Learning –

a process in which teachers and children are partners in shaping the learning experience through five channels:

- **Materials** – diverse, appealing, abundant in supply
- **Manipulation** – sensory interfacing with materials
- **Choice** – children choose materials and play partners
- **Child Language and thought** – verbal and non-verbal communication throughout play
- **Adult scaffolding** – adult support

KEY DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

There are 58 objectively written statements which are the building blocks of thinking and reasoning at each developmental stage and pave the way for later schooling and eventual entry into the adult world.

These are the guidelines used in planning activities for the children

throughout the Daily Routine bearing in mind their interests and stage of development.

There is never a dull moment working with this Curriculum. It is culturally relevant, flexible, easy to work with and follows the play-way approach with the 'spotlight' on the child.

DID YOU KNOW?

1. **A commitment to reducing poverty and increasing the chances of success for all children requires investment in the earliest years.**
2. **The right of children to optimal development has been accepted and embraced by the international community.**
3. **The Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly highlights the importance of early child development, saying that a child has a right to develop to *"the maximum extent possible."* (Article 6) and that *"States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development."* (Article 27).**
4. **UNICEF, guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, advocates for gender equality and equity in care, protection and development of all children.**
5. **The Millennium Development Goals, ratified by all UN member states, provide the world's governments with clear and tangible targets to combat poverty and raise the standard of living for the world's people by 2015. Early Childhood Development contributes to the achievement of the goals.**
6. **Seven of the eight MGD goals directly relate to child survival, growth and development.**

CHILDRENINFOCUS

THE ABCs OF ECD IN ANTIGUA & BARBUDA



UNICEF BECO/2008/Harper

Antiguan students enjoying their early childhood education.

By Earla Esdaille *Early Childhood Education Officer*

Formal Early Childhood Education (ECE) began in Antigua and Barbuda since 1915 and has been predominantly private sector driven.

Presently there are approximately 110 early childhood facilities in Antigua and Barbuda. Out of that number, there are six crèches on Antigua run by the Ministry of Health, and in Barbuda there is one day care centre and one preschool operated by the Barbuda Council. The breakdown of ownership of the other facilities in the early childhood (EC) sector is as follows: churches- 15% and private individuals and community organizations - 72%.

The Early Childhood Educational Training Centre (ECETC) is the department of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth Affairs charged with the oversight of the EC sector. The Centre has been operating since 1986 when it started with two member of staff and has progressed to a seven-member staff comprising of an Education Officer, five Field Officers and a secretary.

Although there are basic guidelines given to operators of EC facilities, there has been no legal framework governing the operation of the sector over the years.

In May 2006, UNICEF's Office for Barbados and the Eastern

Caribbean contracted a Consultant, Leon Charles, to conduct a Rapid Assessment of the sector.

The findings from this assessment fuelled the urgency for the Early Childhood Education Rating Scale (ECERS) survey which was conducted in the first quarter of 2007. The results of this survey showed that the EC sector in Antigua and Barbuda needed improvement and strengthening in many areas, and provided a springboard to launch the development of a national policy and legal framework for the operation of the sector.

Consultations were held throughout Antigua and Barbuda with operators

and the general public to get their views on areas that they would like to see included in a national policy and national standards which will govern the operation of the EC sector. These documents were tabled in the Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda during the second quarter of this year.

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth Affairs recognizes the importance of investing in early childhood development and welcomes the creation of a legal framework for the operation of the sector.

However, the Ministry is cognizant of the fact that early childhood investment is a costly venture, and has pledged its support to the operators through, among other things, granting duty-free concessions for materials which they have to import.

One of the main challenges facing the EC sector in Antigua and Barbuda is changing the 'mind-set' of operators - from operating just for the economic benefit, to putting the welfare of the children first.

Other challenges include – increasing the percentage of children in the 0-5 age group participating in 'formal' early childhood education, providing adequate space and materials for the children, improving children's language and reasoning skills, decreasing the high attrition rate of EC workers, persuading EC workers to receive formal training and convincing corporate citizens to support and invest in ECE.

The challenges mentioned above are not insurmountable, and the EC sector in Antigua and Barbuda has a

bright future ahead. Many operators have pledged their support to the ECETC and agree that regulation is needed to govern the sector. In addition, UNICEF has contracted the HIGH/SCOPE Educational Foundation from Ypsilanti, Michigan to work along with the Centre to develop a curriculum for use in the preschools.

The Centre is happy to report that three schools have consented to pilot this curriculum, and over 10 additional operators attended the training sessions which were held in March this year. The ECETC is also lobbying for the government to provide at least four EC facilities throughout the island that will cater

for those parents who cannot afford to pay for private services, so that a higher percentage of children in the birth to five age cohort can receive the necessary care and stimulation that will assist them to grow up to be well-adjusted citizens.

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth Affairs is committed to helping to improve service-delivery in the early childhood sector.

The continued collaboration with, and support of UNICEF and other such agencies, will advance and strengthen the early childhood sector in Antigua and Barbuda, thus laying the foundation for a strong and progressive nation.

ECD NEWS FROM ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

Child Month 2008 will be celebrated in November under the theme: ***Our Children, Our Heritage, Our Future: Train Us Well.*** Highlights of the month-long celebrations will include - a Church Service, a March, an Exposition, a Professional Development Day for practitioners in early childhood education, and Parent Education Workshops.

The Early Childhood Educational Training Centre in collaboration with the Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Education (ABICE) has begun the introduction of the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ) Levels 1-111 in Early Childhood Education.

Consultation has started with Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) concerning the establishment of new headquarters for the Early Childhood Educational Training Centre as well as a model centre that will house at least 40 children in the 0-5 year cohort.

CHILDREN IN FOCUS BARBADOS - PRESSING ON TO FULL ACCESS



UNICEF BECO/2006

Stimulating play - an important part of ECD.

Having achieved universal access to primary and secondary education, Barbados is now turning its attention to full access to Early Childhood Care and Education, with the government taking the lead.

According to a government official, the main objective of the programme is to facilitate universal access to early childhood education by all children ages three to five, in keeping with the policy outlined in the White Paper on Educational Reform.

The official further explained that the Ministry is committed to the United Nations' World Declaration on Education for All, which advocates the expansion of early childhood care and developmental activities, including family and community interventions, especially for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children.

The attainment of universal early childhood access is one of the key planks in the National Strategic Plan of Barbados 2005-2025, a document which provides the blueprint for the realization of Barbados' vision of becoming a fully developed society by 2025.

"Early learning experiences contribute to the sound educational development of children. Students, who are provided with early opportunities to develop literacy, numeric competency and social skills, achieve development norms sooner than their peers who have not had similar opportunities.

"Formal educational opportunities need to be provided for those children who might otherwise not be able to access early education. The expansion of nursery education is therefore essential to ensuring that all children are transferred to the next level with the pre-requisite skills for literacy, numerical competency and social development," the document states.

Catherine Blackman, Education Officer with responsibility for Early Childhood Education in the Ministry of Education, said the attainment of universal access to preschool education is being pursued by both the government and private sector with equal vigor.

She said the private sector is making an impact in the sector, with 168 private pre-schools being registered with authorities, but government is still providing over 90 per cent of access for

the age 3-5 cohort. These early learning opportunities are being provided in seven specialist nursery schools and in nursery units which are attached to at least 60 of the 82 primary schools across the island.

Blackman said while the Education Act only provides for compulsory education from the ages of 5-16, the legislation covers the settings in the schools which cater for pre-school children.

The education official said there have already been some gains in the sector with the provision of nursery aides, a reduction of in the teacher/pupil ratio, improvements in physical structures and access to teacher training in Early Childhood Development courses at tertiary institutions in the island.

The long-standing educator said the challenge is now to maintain the teacher/pupil ratio while broadening access and maintaining the quality in the sector through such provisions as child appropriate furnishings, facilities for adequate water and sanitation materials and interactive materials to facilitate the educational process.

The previous administration had identified Early Childhood Education as one of the critical components in its educational programme, and the government which came to office in January 2008 has also signaled its intention of making universal Early Childhood Care and Education a reality.

The new government has committed itself to the provision of "new state-of-the-art pre-school learning centres" in close proximity to existing industrial complexes where there is a large concentration of workers as well as within large residential communities throughout the country.

CHILDREN IN FOCUS

CARIB PRESCHOOLERS

A FRESH START



Time for role play in class.

UNICEF BECO/2008/Harper

It was approaching Friday afternoon and soon time to be out of school for the exciting weekend ahead.

But the group of eager students who were taking part in the lively, interactive final session for the day, showed no anticipation for the time when they would be able to leave their classrooms behind for another week.

They are among a new generation who, deep in the heart of the 3-000 acre Carib Reserve Territory on Dominica's wave-battered east coast, are caught up in the quiet education revolution which is taking place.

The 3,700 descendants of the mountainous country's original population are on a crusade for universal

early childhood education as they seek to position both formal education and skills training as the avenues to empower their young population to cope with the realities of a hostile and ever-changing global environment. As a man who has seen the benefits of formal education, Carib Chief Carl Williams says with six preschools dedicated to the realizing the dream of full early childhood education, the Carib people are demonstrating a passion for education that is unmatched anywhere else.

"With regard to early childhood education in the Carib Territory I think this is one thing we are proud of because we have a good concentration of early childhood schools throughout the Carib territory.

"I don't think there is any other area in the world where people take pride in getting their children dressed and nice for preschool education ... the people take pride in the fact that they can dress their little ones and take them to school everyday," he says.

Dr. Charles Corbett, the man who heads government's Carib Affairs department, readily agrees with the Chief on the passion and direction early childhood education is taking in the indigenous population.

"The area of Early Childhood Education is one that is under control. Yes we would like to see more children participate in the programme but we think it is an area that we have made some progress," he said.

While both officials proudly show examples of the progress witnessed so far, especially as it relates to access to

education, they are also keeping their eyes on the quality of that education.

“Under the Education Act which came into being a few years ago, early childhood education became part of the government’s responsibility so you just can’t wake up this morning and say you are going to go set up a preschool.

“You must meet certain standards and the teachers themselves must be trained so there are a number of areas that have been addressed over the years in early childhood education,” Dr. Corbett says.

However, Chief Williams says there are still some hurdles to be crossed.

“We have limitations and our limitations are I think few teachers, fixtures and so on. The schools are not totally equipped as we would like them to be because most of the schools that have started have started on a private level, if not all of them.

“Although they get support from central government they are not run by central government and as a result we are missing out in some areas,” he said.

He says with a Caribbean Development Bank study pointing to a 70% poverty rate in the Carib Territory, as opposed to a national poverty rate of 29%, and with new international trading arrangements virtually bringing a halt to the trade in bananas – previously the lifeblood of the territory – residents will need to have economic power in order to keep education on the front burner.

“The economic power of the Carib community is lacking and if the parents are not able to sustain the children to keep them so that they can be strong and healthy to work at school then we have a big battle.

“Irrespective of how many facilities you have and you lack energy you will not learn and that is very important for



UNICEF BECO/2008/Harper

Carib official Dr. Charles Corbett (seated) and Carib Chief Carl Williams in discussion.

me so that is why I am saying we need to have economic power in the Carib territory because if the economy is strong at home it means that you can sustain all of your children,” he adds.

Dr. Corbett says that in recognizing some of these challenges the government has initiated a national schools’ feeding programme which targets some of the most deprived communities in Dominica, including the Carib Territory.

“Here in the Carib community we have two schools that fall under the school feeding programme. Its not what we would like in terms of the quality and so on but at least it guarantees that when the children come to school that they might be a bit better when they go back home,” the official says.

As far as education in the region’s most recognized indigenous community is concerned, the officials say they are in for the long haul.

“We have already seen the progress in the children who come through

preschools. They can cope much better at the primary level and the results are much better from those students so we just need to encourage people to take advantages of those services.

“The opportunities are now open to as an indigenous people. What we need to do now is embrace those opportunities and that is what we are trying to get through to people from the preschool level right up,” Dr. Corbett says.

With over 50 Carib students presently pursuing undergraduate studies at universities throughout the world, Chief Williams is hoping that the strong foundation being built in early childhood education will result in an even stronger Carib student seeking to make his or her mark on the world.

“When you go out and get a university education, it means that you are ready to compete any place in the world, so now there is an opening. If you start from preschool education and bring it up to tertiary education you would realize that a lot of people are in fact making strides. so I am very happy to see that,” he said.

CHILDREN IN FOCUS DOMINICA'S ROADMAP TO PROGRESS

UPGRADING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTRES IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA

In 2005, with the assistance of UNICEF, the Ministry of Education in the Commonwealth of Dominica inspected all of 84 Early Childhood Education (ECE) facilities, 12 day cares and 72 preschools.

The aim of this inspection was to begin issuing licences to the providers in an effort to encourage them to maintain the Standards as stipulated in the Statutory Rules and Orders No. 39, 2003. The exercise revealed a dearth in many areas.

Since all ECE facilities are either privately owned or owned by non-governmental organizations, improving these facilities presented a major challenge.

However, with continued support from UNICEF, the United Kingdom National Committee for UNICEF and the Jersey Overseas Aid Project was born and a



UNICEF BECO/2008

Individual attention is a welcomed feature in the classroom.

total of £148,000.00 was allocated to enhancing ECE facilities on the island.

The aims of the project include providing access to running water, construction of toilets, production of materials on water and sanitation, as well as provision of basic play equipment and learning materials.

Given the needs of all the facilities, and endeavouring to guarantee that many of these facilities benefited from the project, parents were expected to contribute towards the labour.

Therefore meetings were held with the parents of children attending the preschools where major upgrades were to be done to sensitize them about the nature of the project and the critical need for their contribution towards labour.

by

Veda George

Acting Coordinator – Special Education, Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, Sports and Youth Affairs. Commonwealth of Dominica.

It was agreed that a maximum of four workers would be contracted to work on each preschool with one being the lead worker.

Then in September 2006, a consultant was contracted as the overseer to the project.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Since then major upgrading has been done to six preschools. They are:-

1. Penville Preschool – North
2. Cottage Preschool - North
3. Grand Fond Social Centre Preschool – East
4. Mahaut River Preschool – Carib Territory
5. Bagatelle Community Preschool - South
6. S.W.O.R.D Preschool – South

A number of other facilities have also benefited from the project. Work done at these facilities included tiling, access to running water, construction of toilets, repainting of walls and repairing of roofs and/or ceilings.

Training sessions were conducted with the preschool teachers on the island and they also received teaching/learning materials. Each of the 12 day care centres on the island and some of the preschools have received rocking boats for recreation.

So far, the upgrading process has concentrated on facilities that are either community owned or which are located on government owned facilities.

CHALLENGES

Since its inception, the project has been faced with a number of challenges:

Work commenced in 2006 rather than in 2005.

There was a shortage of cement on the island for very long intervals in 2007. This resulted in work being put on hold for months.

Work on the initial six facilities proved to be more intensive than estimated and took longer than expected because as work progressed, other needs would materialize.

To reduce cost and as a means of ensuring that the project benefited as many facilities as possible, it was agreed that transportation services for bringing materials to the sites would be provided by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Community Development and petrol would be provided to the vehicles. However, this was also a great challenge because the vehicles were either very often otherwise engaged or not functioning. A decision was therefore taken to pay for transporting materials to the sites. This resulted in a reduction of the actual funds that could

be spent to enhance the facilities.

A landslide at the back of the Penville Preschool caused by heavy rains during the hurricane season washed away the boundaries. It meant that boundaries would have to be re-established and a retaining wall constructed before any work could continue.

STILL TO COME

The project is now into its final phase and the following activities will be implemented:-

1. Continuation of the recreational facility at the Bagatelle Community Preschool
2. Construction of recreational facilities at the following preschools:
 - S.W.O.R.D Preschool -South
 - Grand Fond Social Centre Preschool - East
 - St. Joseph Infant Preschool- West
 - Dos D'Ane Preschool- North
3. Training of daycare managers
4. Distribution of teaching/learning materials to daycare managers
5. Construction and distribution of rocking boats for remaining facilities

Despite the challenges, the project has brought great joy and satisfaction to all stakeholders.

For example, there have been increases in the role at the Bagatelle Community Preschool, the Grand Fond Social Centre Preschool and the S.W.O.R.D Preschool.

The lead teacher at the Grand Fond Social Centre Preschool reported that parents were eager to send children who were not yet of preschool age to school. Of course she had to turn them away.

It can be safely said then, that the project has not only enhanced the standard of ECE but it also helped to raise the awareness of Early Childhood Education on the island.

For this, the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica; the Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, Sports and Youth Affairs; the Council on Early Childhood Education; the ECE providers, the parents and guardians and of course the children are forever grateful to UNICEF for yet another invaluable contribution towards improving ECE in the Commonwealth of Dominica.



CHILDREN IN FOCUS ON CAMERA

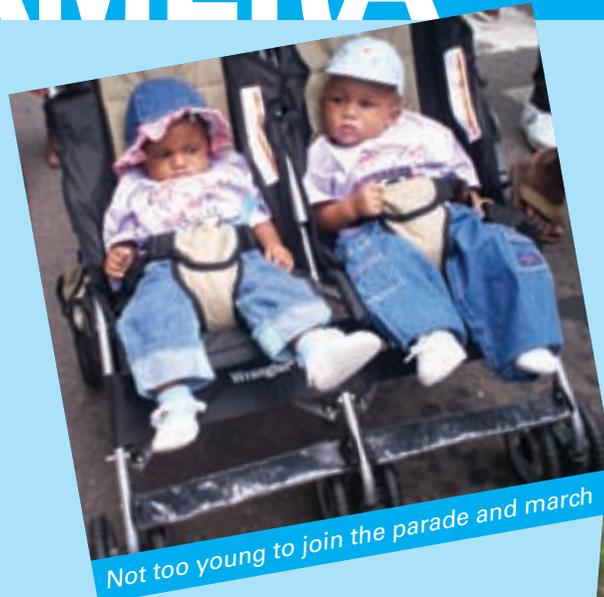
Credit for all photos
UNICEF BECO/2008/Harper

Over 2,000 preschoolers took to the streets of Basseterre at the end of June in a colourful parade to bring a spectacular end to Child Month.

Under the theme **“Celebrating the Present with an Eye on the Future”** the enthusiastic children who were dressed in their cultural wear as well as special T-Shirts took part in the rally and march which also marked the 25th independence anniversary of St Kitts and Nevis.

The event also coincided with the 24th anniversary of Early Childhood Development in the twin island federation.

The parade and march was one of the many events to mark child month.



Not too young to join the parade and march



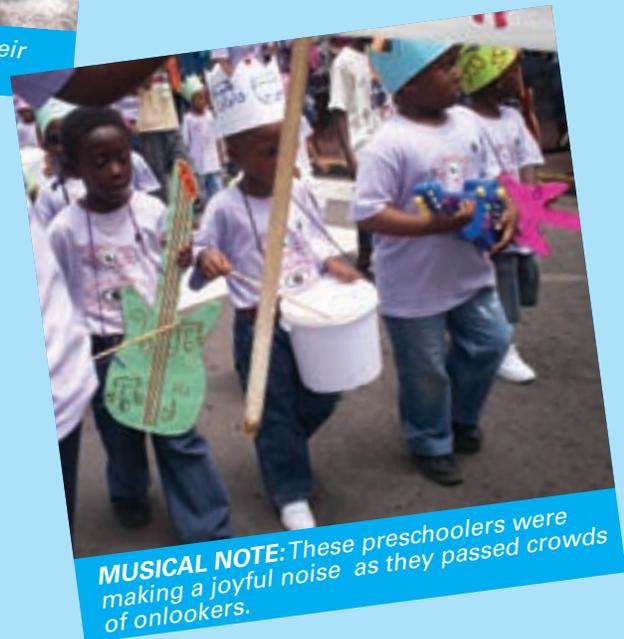
A proud daddy poses with his two daughters before the march and rally.



Maybe they have already mapped out their career path.



Some of the participants proudly parade in their cultural wear.



MUSICAL NOTE: These preschoolers were making a joyful noise as they passed crowds of onlookers.

CHILDREN IN FOCUS ST. VINCENT'S ROVING CAREGIVERS

TEACHERS WITHOUT BORDERS

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is known for its mountainous and rugged terrain, with coastlands which rise inland towards a mountainous central ridge stretching from North to South.

If you happen to be a resident or a visitor to the beautiful Emerald Isle of the Caribbean and you happen to be traveling through the districts of Barrouallie, Byera or Sandy Bay, it is likely that you could encounter a Roving Caregiver on duty.

NO BORDERS

The Roving Care Giver programme was launched in Kingstown in 2005 and there are presently 23 "rovers" who have been trained in the basic principles of Early Childhood Development.

With this training they are better qualified to go into assigned communities to deliver early stimulation

exercises to children who are not participating in formal daycare.

The role of the Rover is to work directly with the parents, helping them to develop skills which they will use to engage their children in creative and interactive ways.

The Rovers are flexible in their approach, working with individual families or at other times, with small groups.

These interactive sessions are carried out inside the home, on a patio, under a tree, on the beach – wherever it is convenient for the parent, child and Rover. The Rovers are currently meeting the early educational needs of more than 313 children.

THEY CALL HIM 'TEACHER.'

One of the gems in the Emerald Isle is Roving Caregiver, 29-year-old Ekron Francis, who has been in the programme for two years

It is his love for children, supported by some information from his friend Jasmim (also a Rover) which encouraged him to get involved in the Roving Caregivers' programme.

"I love children and being a Rover will help me to deal with my own children when I get them," said Ekron. He made it clear however that he had some educational goals which he wanted to achieve before starting a family.

Ekron feels good about being a Rover and is currently the only male Rover in a female dominated group.

"I am not intimidated by the ladies. I am accustomed to dealing with ladies because I get along well with two

my sisters and my mother," he said.

Ekron takes his role seriously and wants to send a strong message to all males in the communities who think about Early Childhood Education as a "sissy thing."

His message to them is that Early Childhood Education helps them to learn how to interact with their children since they need to be more involved in the care-giving of children. "It should be a partnership between the mother and father," said Ekron

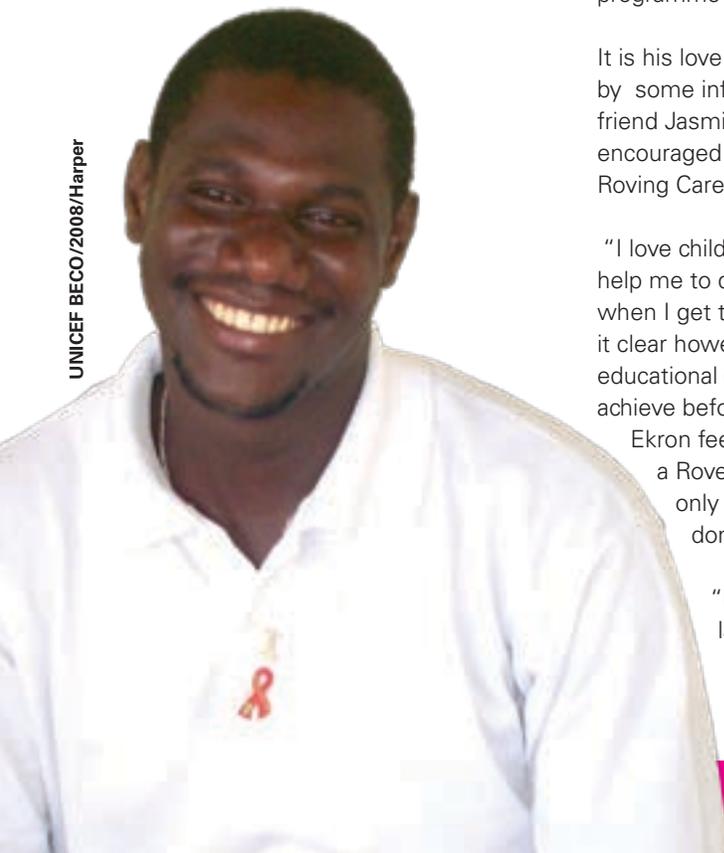
As a role model for the children in his care, Ekron sees it as his duty to "help children to be better men and women as they grow up."

He expressed concerns that too many children seemed in danger of taking the 'wrong road' in life and sees it as his responsibility as a Rover to help to guide them back onto a "straight path."

Ekron credits the Roving Caregiver programme as contributing positively to his personal development, noting that he has learnt more about Early Childhood Development and has a "better understanding of the importance of stimulating young minds."

His self confidence is boosted by the respect and recognition which is given to him by the parents and children in the community.

Even when he is not the Rover who is directly involved in the early stimulation process, the parents still call him "teacher." Ekron is fully focused on his goals which include becoming better educated, completing his certificates, continuing his training in ECD and eventually working at a more advanced level in the field of ECE – possibly in the Ministry of Education.



Ekron has started his journey towards these goals and from all reports - his steps are steady and confident.

ROVING TIME



UNICEF BECO/2008/Harper

Two year old Donte

Two-year-old Donte has been participating in the Roving Caregiver programme for more than six months.

Donte demonstrated eagerness to have a session by meeting us outside carrying the book and the puppets which he wanted to work with.

His mum Sylvorn said she loved the programme because it helps her to interact with her son in a more positive way.

"It is a very good program. It builds the self esteem of the parents. We learn to interact and to cooperate better with the children. If we try to 'rush up' the children the Rover says no, be calm and give them a chance.," she said, smiling.

After Donte's session of reading, singing songs and rhymes while using his puppets, Sylvorn added to her previous statement, " he couldn't speak much before he started the programme. He was shy. Now he is more interactive and interested in everything."

"When Donte goes into Preschool and Primary school he will be ready. This is a good programme. Donte is learning a lot of things. He is wiser than he used to be."

Ekron is Donte's Rover and he received high praise from Sylvorn. "Ekron is doing a great job. He is patient and shows Donte his love. He is reliable too and lets me know if he is not coming."

She added, "if Ekron passes by, Donte calls out to ask if he will come by him. They have a good relationship."

MUM AND ROVER

Meet Jamielia Frederick, a young mother with two sons, who is one of the enthusiastic roving caregivers in St. Vincent.

Jamielia admits that she did not know the "real importance of Early Childhood Development" before the advent of the programme, but decided to grasp the opportunity to become a roving caregiver as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

She says she has no regrets and is happy that she took the decision to get involved.

"I love helping the children to develop ... it is a good programme and should help to make the preschool teacher's job easier," she says.

The young mother says that in addition to helping other children in the community, the programme is also affording her an opportunity to improve her parenting skills and be a better communicator with children.

"The programme gives ideas on how parents can talk to their children and discuss things with them," she said.

She says it has also affords her an opportunity for personal development and has solidified her goal to become an early childhood educator.

Jamielia says she is also very happy with the developmental gains demonstrated by her four-year-old son who participated in the programme and is just about to start preschool.

"He began to socialize more. He learnt about his body parts and can sing the songs. He even knows numbers and letters through finger play," she notes proudly.

If there is one thing the young mother will like to see in the near future it is that more men would become caregivers.

"I understand that they have to work during the day and are not at home when the rovers come but they still need to be role models for the boys," she said.

Jamielia says this male presence is particularly important because society is becoming more violent and men are needed now more than ever to train boys to become responsible citizens.



UNICEF BECO/2008/Harper

Jamielia Frederick

CHILDREN IN FOCUS RAISING THE BAR FOR PARENTING FACILITATORS



Parenting facilitators across the Caribbean now have an opportunity to become certified through training that meets freshly-approved vocational standards, thanks to an 18-month collaborative effort between Parenting Partners Caribbean (PPC) and UNICEF.

The ground-breaking development comes at a time when Caribbean parents, caregivers and their families are becoming increasingly stressed, vulnerable and in need of parenting support.

PPC and partners, with financial and technical support from UNICEF offices in the Caribbean, built on previous work in the parenting support sector in Jamaica to develop the new training course.

In 2000, the National Council for Technical and Vocational Education

and Training (NCTVET) approved vocational standards for parenting facilitators, which were later refined and updated in collaboration with the Early Childhood Commission's Parenting sub-committee and PPC.

In December 2007, over 40 participants from 19 countries and a PPC team arrived in Antigua for a full week's work to develop these standards into course offerings for certification.

A draft of the amended standards and a proposed training framework and course outline were enthusiastically received and discussed at length within the context of the common and pressing challenges facing parents and other caregivers of children in the region.

Key to the discussion was the need to strengthen participatory approaches to training, which the group explored through related material and a workshop.

At the core of the consultation was the agreement that PPC and UNICEF would help each country to develop a course based on the approved standards and course outline. Professionals and paraprofessionals could then obtain the CARICOM-endorsed and portable Level III Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) via the course and/or NCTVET assessment.

Participants from all 19 countries presented draft plans for implementation of an initial course within an anchoring institution which could continue offering the course if local demand required.

The consultation ended on a very high note of solidarity of purpose, with a signed Memorandum of Understanding to sustain the network of support developed during the week.

The year 2008 has brought exciting developments in the roll-out of the course. PPC will monitor and support the agreed implementation plans, while NCTVET will develop a full course curriculum based on the agreed training framework, and seek avenues to train regional assessors.

In the second quarter of 2008, PPC also offered distance-mode training for course instructors to strengthen participatory methods of teaching.

UNICEF BECO/2008

CHILDREN IN FOCUS

VOICES OF THE CHILDREN

Pre-schoolers in St. Kitts And Nevis were asked: *“What activities do you like to do in preschool?”*

Their unrehearsed responses were as follows:



Jeneé Joseph

Age: 3 years
Sex: Female
School: Cayon Day Care Centre
Response: *“I love to play inside with the toys and play outside on the swing.”*



Anaya Didder

Age: 4 years
Sex: Female
School: Victoria Road Preschool
Response: *“Look at my Police Car.”*



Kelvone Williams

Age: 4 years
Sex: Male
School: Cayon Day Care Centre
Response: *“I love to colour, and cut paper with the scissors and I love to play outside.”*



Junique Gabriel

Age: 4 years
Sex: Female
School: Victoria Road Preschool
Response: *“I love to colour, sleep and work in the Block Area”*



Alliah Francis

Age: 5 years
Sex: Female
School: Cayon Day Care Centre
Response: *“I love playing in the Home Area, feeding the baby and playing with my friends Erren, Antonia and Keanda.”*



Kirtiana Herbert

Age: 4 years
Sex: Female
School: Cayon Day Care Centre
Response: *“I love to cook and make soup, then wake up for town, in the Home Area.”*



Israel Chumney

Age: 5 years
Sex: Male
School: McKnight Day Care Centre
Response: *“Playing outside with the tyres and if no rain coming teacher send us outside to play and do some exercise.”*



Tarhia Slack

Age: 4 years old
Sex: Female
School: McKnight Day Care Centre
Response: *“I drew my teachers and their children.”*



Tashema Walters

Age: 4 years
Sex: Female
School: McKnight Day Care Centre
Response: *“I love to work in the Home Area to cook macaroni and cheese and share it with my friends.”*



Brianda Berridge

Age: 5 years
Sex: Female
School: Cayon Day Care Centre
Response: *“I love to paint and colour umbrellas and I love Devotions and the singing.”*

CHILDRENINFOCUS

UNICEF BECO NEWS UPDATE

AUSTRALIAN BOWLER DELIVERS ADVICE TO GRENADIAN CHILDREN



UNICEF BECO/2008/Peters

Australian bowler Nathan Bracken getting the full attention of students.

Known for his incisive deliveries on the cricket field, Australian fast bowler Nathan Bracken assumed a different role recently when he delivered advice to groups of receptive school children in Grenada.

Bracken took time out from 2008 One Day International series between the West Indies and Australia to visit select locations in Grenada and interact with school children to show his support for the ICC's partnership with UNICEF on HIV/AIDS.

"Never give up on your dreams. You can achieve whatever you put your mind to once you are disciplined enough and work hard for it.

"I was exactly the same as you and had to work hard to get to the point where I now proudly represent my country," the 30-year-old international cricketer told eager school children assembled at the St. Rose Secondary School.

As well as taking questions from the children on a wide variety of topics, Bracken happily got involved in a game

of cricket which helped reinforce some of the key messages of the ICC's partnership with UNICEF and UNAIDS. "It was a good opportunity to see what sports they are able to play. It was pleasing to see that the kids wanted to play sport and they wanted to do well and bowl straight.

"They were learning discipline, which can help them in whatever they are doing, and apply it to other areas in life as well," he said after the visit.

Bracken, who also stars in a global Public Service Announcement campaign on HIV/AIDS, along with other leading world cricketers including Graeme Smith, Kumar Sangakkara and Mahendra Singh Dhoni, believes that it is important for cricketers to use their status to deliver important social messages.

"I look at it as an opportunity to give something back to young people who don't always have the education or opportunities in life.

"The programmes that I saw today really give young people an opportunity to learn," he said.

In addition to the school programmes which are being implemented by GRENCODA, a NGO which is committed to the development of Grenada's rural community, Bracken also visited the Grenada Youth Development Centre, a multipurpose facility which offered a wide range of sporting and cultural activities to help the personal development of young people.

The centre was extensively damaged during Hurricane Ivan in September 2004, which caused devastation throughout Grenada killing 37 people, but with funding from the Australian government to UNICEF, it is being restored to provide opportunities to the local community.

Tom Olsen, UNICEF Representative for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, said his office was happy to help facilitate the visit because of the recognition of the strong link between sports and positive youth development.

"We see the visit as not simply talking about cricketing skills but as a demonstration to the children that commitment to sports can impart the discipline and life skills which can help them to negotiate the challenging situations which will confront them well into their adult life," he said.

At the ICC Cricket World Cup 2007 and ICC World Twenty20 2007 there were 24 separate player visits to community projects in the West Indies and South Africa aimed at raising awareness of HIV/AIDS.

Further activities are planned at the ICC Champions Trophy 2008 in Pakistan, where players will wear red ribbons as a show of support for people living with HIV/AIDS.

CHILDRENINFOCUS

UNICEF BECO NEWS UPDATE

JE-MEILA PROUDLY REPRESENTS REGION AT GLOBAL SUMMIT



UNICEF BECO/2008/Harper

UNICEF Representative Tom Olsen congratulates JeMeila Maloney on being selected to represent Latin America and the Caribbean at the J8 Summit.

When young people from the powerful G8 countries and some representatives from the developing world convened in Japan in early July to discuss burning global issues, the Latin America and Caribbean region were well represented.

Je-Meila Maloney, a 17-year-old Barbadian student, joined peers from around the world for the Junior 8 (J8) Summit - a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) initiative which brought together young people from G8 countries and the developing world to share their unique perspectives on burning global issues.

Each G8 country sent a team of four representatives to the July 2-9 summit in Chitose City, Hokkaido, Japan, with non G8 representatives coming from Barbados, Cote d'Ivoire, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal and South Africa.

Je-Meila was chaperoned by Laura Arthur, the guidance counselor at a secondary school in Barbados.

The member of the Emerging Global Leaders Group in Barbados said while she recognized the great responsibility placed on her to adequately represent a region as diverse as Latin America and the Caribbean, she was up to the task.

Indeed she was the only representative from a non G8 countries who was nominated to join her peers from the

industrial nations to meet G8 leaders who were also attending their summit in Japan. The young people presented the powerful leaders with a series of recommendations, taking the form of the Chitose Declaration, which revolved around three topics: climate change, poverty and development, and global health.

"I think the trip of itself was the easy part. Coming back to the region and implementing programmes, trying to reach as many young people as possible will be the hard work and the type of hard work that I am definitely looking forward to," she said.

She said while the young people at the conference came from diverse backgrounds, there were a lot of common issues as they sought to work through the agenda which focussed on climate change and global warming; global health issues, including child survival and health challenges such as HIV/AIDS; along with poverty and development.

"I learnt from them how they approach their social problems and I shared with them how we here in Latin America and the Caribbean approach our social issues as well," she said.

Tom Olsen, UNICEF representative for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, said he was delighted that a competent young person from the Eastern Caribbean region was selected to represent the LAC region.

"Je-Meila represented us well and I now look forward to her sharing her experience and knowledge with her peers in such a manner that we can all benefit from the experience.

"It was a tremendous opportunity for her to meet her peers from around the world, and through sharing experiences, identify solutions to some of the problems facing not only young people, but indeed all age sectors in the region," he added.

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN EMERGENCIES

UNICEF Office for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean is collaborating with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) to make this hurricane season safer for the region's children.

The two agencies have designed an emergency awareness campaign which is aimed at informing parents and caregivers how to take children into consideration when making their emergency preparedness household plans.

The campaign, which covers radio and television spots, as well as a series of newspaper articles, addresses such areas as health, psycho-social issues, child protection and children with special needs.

The theme of the campaign is: "Planning for Emergences ... Plan for Children".

DOMINICA LAUNCHES NATUREISLE INFO

Dominica has become the latest country to launch its version of a harmonized data collection system that authorities expect to greatly enhance the country's collation and presentation of data on human development.

NatureisleInfo, an adaptation of DevInfo, was launched on July 11 during an impressive ceremony attended by President of the Commonwealth of Dominica, His Excellency Dr. Nicholas Liverpool.

DevInfo and its adaptations, which boast of easy-to-use facilities such as user-friendly production of tables, graphs and maps for inclusion in reports and presentations, have the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) indicators at their core, but users can adapt the software to their specific needs.

St Vincent is expected to launch its version of DevInfo later this year, while Barbados, Suriname, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago are at various stages of preparation for the rollout of the system. Jamaica (JamStats) and St Lucia (HelenInfo) have already developed national DevInfo systems.

Children in Focus is a newsletter of the UNICEF Eastern Caribbean Office covering Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Turks and Caicos Islands. It is intended as a channel for the exchange of information between this office and the field on issues related to child development and protection in the Caribbean. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of UNICEF. Articles may be reproduced provided credit is given to **Children in Focus**.

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