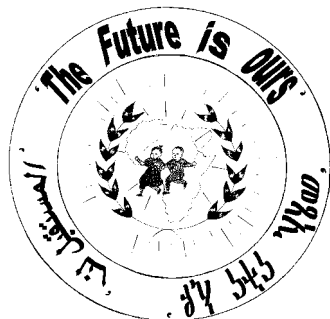


**ASMARA EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE
DOCUMENTS:
DECLARATION, OVERVIEW AND SYNTHESIS STATEMENTS**



**2nd International Conference on ECD
October 28-31, 2002
Asmara, Eritrea**

**ASMARA DECLARATION ON EARLY CHILD
DEVELOPMENT:
FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION**

**2nd International Conference on Early Child Development
October 28-31, 2002
Asmara Eritrea**

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2nd International Conference on Early Child Development (ECD) followed the First International Conference on ECD that was held in Kampala (Uganda) in 1999. The State of Eritrea in collaboration with the World Bank, UNICEF and ADEA, organized this Second International Conference that was held from October 28 to October 31, 2002 in the Hotel Intercontinental Asmara, Eritrea.

The central theme of the Conference was “Early Child Interventions: What Works and Experiences Learned’ and covered issues related to policy development, integrated ECD planning, effective community approaches and practices, disadvantaged children and indigenous knowledge and child upbringing. At the end of the conference participants reached consensus on the basic recommendations and a framework that could be used as a reference for action, collaboration, networking and future follow-up until the 3rd International ECD Conference.

2. PREAMBLE

Without doubt, investment in early childhood development is intrinsically related to the promotion of child rights, poverty alleviation, sustainable human resource development, Basic Education for All and Health for All. To this end, ECD programmes are an integral part of the National Development Goals and aim at establishing health security, environmental security, food security, social protection, and education for all children. Thus, the Asmara ECD Framework for Action takes into consideration the above thinking and is based on the recommendations put forward by participants in the conference. The Framework urges the concerted efforts of all in ECD in the next two years and will have the following orientations:-

Bases itself on the existing global initiatives and instruments of development: the Convention on the Rights of the child, The Universal Declaration of Children’s Rights, The Dakar Framework for Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

Emphasizes that the child is at the centre of all action, and the focus is on holistic development.

Realizes the importance of integrated early interventions and good beginnings for development at the individual and society level

Recognizes the great role and multiplier effect of ECD programmes as a basis for sustainable human resource development and poverty alleviation.

Acknowledges the tremendous effort and political commitment made by many countries but that further effort needs to be made to supplement the achievement through strong financial commitment and budgetary allocations.

Expresses the great importance of macro-level policy framework and integrated and coordinated planning as essential steps for the success of ECD programmes

Admits that ECD investments should be based on an integrated approach and should be geared towards the all round development that encompasses health, nutrition, learning and social protection and should aim at development of children to their fullest potential.

Asserts the central role of families and recommends support for families and care of the mother as essential strategy to be followed. The use of a life cycle approach should be advocated. ECD should be an integral and decisive part of Basic Education and ensure a smooth transition to school.

Stresses the importance of inclusive programmes for children, viable practices for reintegrating orphans into family settings and development of approaches for the young children affected and infected by HIV/AIDS.

Calls for immediate attention the great urgency and priority of averting the awesome consequences of violent conflicts and of HIV/AIDS and reaffirms the important roles ECD programmes must play in protecting, caring for, and ensuring the good development of child victims.

Asserts that ECD programmes could increase equity (in particular gender equity) if they are institutionalized in communities and reaffirms the importance of promoting diversified modes of delivery of ECD services, including through parenting enrichment. The use of values and indigenous knowledge rooted in the society is also highly recommended. The importance of bridging all community-level agents working in all areas to maximize resource utilization and raise effectiveness in ECD is also recognized.

Reconfirms the great importance of internal and external partnerships for the development and success of ECD and in particular to work for the strong government-community bond at all levels.

Recognizes the great importance of institutional capacity building and networking, in particular at the community level, for ECD and the vital role of information technology in this endeavor.

3. MAJOR ACTION POINTS

3.1. Policy Development

- ◆ Work to support and advocate the development of a Country Framework on ECD as an integral part of the macro-level National Development Strategy of each country.
- ◆ Conduct a highly participatory national policy planning process that is country-driven, cross-sectoral and which involves communities.
- ◆ Ensure implementation of action plans and an adequate allocation from national resources that would allow for external mobilization.

3.2. Promoting Research and Information

- ◆ In the next two years from now, research and evaluation on various ECD areas will be targeted to fill the gaps in basic knowledge and practices at all levels.
- ◆ Countries are encouraged to undertake research and programme evaluation and maximum effort would be done to promote action-based research and evaluation at the grassroots level.
- ◆ While the research and evaluation will depend on the specific context and needs of each individual country and organization, so as to prepare for the 3rd International Conference on ECD, it is stated that whatever possible will be done to target research and evaluation on policy development, integrated planning, quality and impact, effective community approaches, disadvantaged children, high risk children zero to three years of age and their parents, and indigenous knowledge and child upbringing.
- ◆ The sponsors of the conference, namely the World Bank, UNICEF, ADEA, and other interested partners, are called upon to provide support in research, evaluation, creating forums for discussions and dissemination of findings.
- ◆ Maximize the use of existing facilities and institutional capacity, such as in ADEA and others, to promote research, programme evaluation and exchange and publication of information

3.3. Institutional Development

- ◆ Use the Asmara Declaration: ECD Framework for Action and Recommendations to promote advocacy at the local, national, regional and global levels.
- ◆ Use policy makers in respective countries to integrate the Asmara Declaration: ECD Framework for Action and Recommendations in all-important sub regional, regional and global events, conferences, summits, etc. This would apply in the first place to the forthcoming MINEDAF VIII meeting; it will be important to ensure the support of the partner organizations, namely WB, UNICEF, ADEA, and others in this endeavor.
- ◆ Use the recommendations and The Framework for Action as a drive for ensuring coordination of all ECD interventions at the country level
- ◆ Work to support and advocate the development of a National Country Framework on ECD as an integral part of the macro level National Development Strategy of each country
- ◆ Support the development of institutional capacity of each country in ECD and request the main partners of this conference and others with comparative advantage to coordinate efforts in establishing African Institutions for ECD development in various sub regions
- ◆ Strengthen and utilize existing networking on Early Childhood Development and work for the establishment of ECD networking at country and sub-regional level

3.4. Organizational

- ◆ Strengthen the preparation, mobilization and organization of the follow-up conference which is to take place after two years as a way of furthering the global goals on ECD
- ◆ Make public the venue and name of the host as soon as possible.
- ◆ Establish national and international forums and workshops for sharing experiences and maximizing the preparation for presentation in the 3rd International Conference on ECD
- ◆ Mobilize more international and bilateral partner agencies and countries that could commit themselves to the 3rd International Conference in terms of human, financial, material and organizational preparations and urge the WB, in collaboration with the other partner agencies of this conference, to play the lead role.

- ◆ Establish ways of ensuring the invitation to and participation of policy makers in the coming conference.
- ◆ Promote the development of sub-regional training workshops and inter-programme peer exchanges.

3.5. Monitoring and Follow-up

- ◆ The ADEA through the WGECD will initiate the follow-up of the Asmara recommendations to further the ECD agenda in Africa, and will ensure full participation of all stakeholders concerned. By early next year a first outline of the steps to be taken will be circulated to all partners involved.
- ◆ Support countries to establish local monitoring capacity on ECD at community level.
- ◆ Advocate for the development of a communication plan and strategy in each country to publicize the Asmara Declaration: ECD Framework for Action and Recommendations
- ◆ Support the identification of early child indicators, measures and targets at the national level, the gathering of baseline data at national, local and programme levels, and the analysis of those data to 1) prepare country synthesis; 2) promote the exchange of information between countries, and 3) identify gap areas for future work on indicators and national assessment.
- ◆ Establish a follow-up and monitoring group for the next two years to assess the impact of the Declaration in terms of: increased political commitment; the development of national policy frameworks; expanded resource allocations; growth of programmes, community-based actions and practices; building of networks and partnerships; the strengthening of regional, sub-regional and national institutional capacities and the creation of communication strategies and plans. Report on these findings at the 3rd international conference.
- ◆ Ensure a stronger presence of health, nutrition, water and sanitation, gender and protection advocates at the subsequent conference in order to support the holistic development of the child.

Asmara, October 31, 2002

OVERVIEW OF THE CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Globally the promotion of Early Child Development (ECD) has been taken as an important strategy for achieving the goal of Basic education for All. This was emphasized in the Dakar Framework of Action, the Convention of the Right of the Child (CRC) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Indeed the child has the right for development, survival, protection and security and it is this value of humanity that has become the centerpiece of an integrated early child intervention. It is believed that this ensures successful human capital formation in a new knowledge society where education should serve living together as one of its important missions.

It has been proven scientifically that children's development begins at conception, and occurs most rapidly in the first three years of life. Second research shows that the influences of the environment, through interactions, learning experiences, maintaining health and ensuring good nutrition are critical to a child's development. Third, there is a window of sensitivity during this period of life to these influences; if the child does not have opportunities to grow, learn, and become emotionally secure during this period of life, opportunities for further development will be limited. Thus, early intervention is decisive in the human capital development of any nation. The aims of the ECD emanate from the holistic approach and rationale of all round development. Children must be socialized not only as a means to an end and a tool for development or a way for employment but also as a foundation for free and complete life. ECD is very important for learning, behavioral changes and good health of children. The education of children is a basic right that should be taken as an obligation of the government and society. Thus political will and commitment is a sufficient ground for the great importance given to ECD.

Taking the above national and global values of early childhood development, an International Conference on Early Child development was held in Eritrea. This is an area, which has been poorly represented in the education system and other sectors of many countries. The overall distribution and even worse the quality of the early childhood care and development opportunities created are of low quality, inequitably distributed and with poor allocation of resources.

The 2nd International Conference on Early Child Development (ECD) took the above vision and strategy as a basis. It followed the First International Conference on ECD that was held in Kampala (Uganda) in 1999. The State of Eritrea in collaboration with the World Bank, UNICEF and ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa) organized this Second International Conference that was held from October 28 to October 31, 2002 in the Hotel Intercontinental Asmara, Eritrea. The central theme of the Conference was “Early Child Interventions: What Works and Experiences Learned” and covered issues related to policy development, integrated ECD planning, effective community approaches and practices, disadvantaged children and indigenous knowledge and child upbringing. More than 100 international participants and about 200 from within Eritrea, including about 35 men/women as representatives of local parents and 35 children participated. Conference participants applauded the commitment of all the concerned partners and admired the effort invested to prepare the conference.

The Conference was organized under the mission of strengthening the equitable, cost effective and participatory ECD programmes nationally and globally. On the basis of the above mission the following were the objectives of the 2nd International Conference on Early Child Development: -

- To strengthen the overall vision on the promotion of early child care and development on the basis of the EFA goals and principles as stipulated in the Dakar World Declaration of EFA
- To create a forum which helps to turn the vision into reality on the basis of the goals and targets set globally
- To develop overall strategy for promoting early child care and development and help develop partnerships between countries, institutions, organizations and civil society at national, regional, global and institutional levels.
- Create a forum for the exchange and sharing of experience among experts, professionals, educators and other interested groups on early childhood care and development
- To promote and strengthen networking

The Conference was structured in a way that created a clear perspective and a deep insight into the stock of knowledge and practice on ECD in Africa and globally. It attempted to identify some of the best practices and innovative experiences, which lead towards the promotion of equitable, high quality and cost effective ECD programmes and practices. This was done by focusing on four interrelated areas and was structured across three levels of stock taking which promoted a great deal of participation and critical reflection by all participants. The three levels included macro-level contexts and discussions, panel discussions and general plenary sessions for synthesising the discussions. Two initial plenary sessions were used for establishing a macro-level context to the whole process and discussion. The major sponsors of the conference shared their commitments and comparative advantages in ECD developments and practices during these sessions. Panel discussions were also held in each of the four interrelated workshops and were very successful in creating critical reflection and analysis on some specific issues of concern in the development and implementation of Integrated ECD programmes and practices.

The organization and structure of the panels was very instrumental in promoting discussion, dialogue, critical review and experience sharing. In each workshop (thematic area) four panel discussions were arranged and comprised the following:-

- ❑ Policy, Planning and Research: - Policy development, integrated planning, management and issues of quality and effectiveness of IECD programmes, ECD Networking and effectiveness

- ❑ Community Based Approaches: - Alternative approaches in ECD, sustainability of community programmes, institutional capacity building, building community capacity in IECD
- ❑ Disadvantaged Children and Children at risk: - War affected children, Nutrition and Health, HIV/AIDS, Inclusive programmes
- ❑ Indigenous Knowledge and Child Upbringing: - Case study on indigenous knowledge, consultation forum of parents, consultation forum of children

Each panel forwarded a set of recommendations and plenary sessions were conducted to draw conclusions and co-ordinate horizontally with the other panels in each workshop at each stage of the proceedings. To promote thematic reflections, working group discussions encompassing all the panels in each theme vertically, were used to establish greater understanding and consensus on major strategic issues and trends on IECD. Each working group that was established for each thematic area made synthesis of all the panel discussions in each workshop. On the basis of the synthesis report of each workshop (thematic areas), a synthesis statement has been developed and is outlined in the following section of this document (The Synthesis Reports will be compiled in the Proceedings of the Conference).

SYNTHESIS STATEMENTS OF THE CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference can take pride in terms of contributions that led to an excellent set of recommendations and Synthesis Statements. They represent a thoughtful focusing of the 3 days of work in the Conference and in some cases provide a useful 'road map' for forward action. A critical review also highlights some common themes and constructs across the 4 sets of recommendations. The few words and phrases that figure prominently in the recommendations are a part of the current ECD vocabulary in Africa.

They are clearly a part of the present ambitions and should figure prominently in the future. It was unanimously agreed that if each of us bears in mind these words, and the concepts that lie within them, we would not go too far wrong in our individual efforts to make a difference for children.

Understanding the whole child

When we speak of ECD and the work we do within ECD we must strive to understand the child in his or her totality; even though we ourselves may be addressing a specific aspect of the child's well being we must remain aware of the child's total development and recognize the importance of good health, adequate nutrition, a safe environment, and emotional support for this development.

Integration

The discussions here relate to the need to not only better coordinate our work in ECD, but to seek means to truly integrate services and supports in ways that are seamless and complementary—becoming themselves a holistic reflection of meeting the needs and rights of the totality of the child.

Community

Recognizing the child and family as members of communities; communities that shape and support them in their lives, and which in turn deserve and require support.

Indigenous knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is another term that is increasingly evident in the world of ECD. Such respect represents an effort to appreciate the many forms of knowledge that are a part of our world and our lives. What emerges here is an image of the complex 'ecology' of the child and the need to appreciate the interactions that take place across ecological borders. These include interactions from the micro-systems in which the child is nurtured, the meso-systems that embrace these child environments, and on up through the exo-system (e.g., the community) and macro-systems (e.g. ECD policies). All of these influence directly or indirectly the child and are in turn influenced by it. It was highly recommended that we must be aware of each of these system-levels and be prepared to advocate for the child, in concert with the child, and with others in the child's life-space. It is important to realize that human ecologies are not static and no two are alike.

Capacity building

This is yet another term we have heard a good deal of at the Asmara Conference, and it, like the others is complex, multi-faceted. At its core is an effort to help ensure, to help build the expertise and structures required to support the child in his ecology.

Partnership

The issue of partnership has been raised frequently in the Conference. There has been a constant reminder that that we can do more together than we can alone, but the process is seldom simple. There has been a tremendous change in the efforts at coordination of agencies, governments, and civil service organizations. However, we have learned that the process is initially time-consuming. Strategies such as developing a common vision and a common monitoring system have been shown to be effective.

Vulnerable children

Vulnerable Children are clearly of central concern in Africa, and the need to address vulnerability through our understandings and approaches to IECD is a significant task we face. Within vulnerable children, children affected by HIV-AIDS and those affected by conflict are of major concern, and the needs of these children must appear prominently in any IECD programme.

Education and Training

These and other challenging terms that appear so regularly in the Conference Recommendations, are associated with some long-standing, and some more recent activities that have been used to address them- education and training being foremost in these notes. But most often what was heard about education is the need for innovation—innovation that moves beyond prescriptive formulae to interactive and situationally embedded approaches.

Networking

One senses in the conversations in the Conference for a need to go beyond what has been attempted to date. Clarity of action plans and linkages with national and regional organizations figured in some of the notes, as well as an appreciation that a diversity of networks, at many geographic levels, can be a very healthy development.

Information and communication technologies (ICT)

ICT can be found in the recommendations, but perhaps not so much as one might expect this far into the 'information age'. Much more about ICT is however expected at the 3rd International Conference and most likely it will be linked, as it was here with education and training, with practice, Networking, and with community development.

These words and phrases that came out of the recommendations reflect a great appreciation for the complexity and diversity of life experiences globally and in particular across Africa, and they suggest numerous ways in which we might better support the well-being of the child living within such diversity. The Asmara Declaration and the Framework for Action is thus intended to serve this purpose.