

# Communiqué: A Call to Action

## Fourth African International Conference on Early Childhood Development

10 – 12 November 2009  
Dakar, Senegal

Over 500 Delegates from 44 countries of Africa and other world regions participated in the Fourth African International Conference on Early Childhood Development (ECD). Participants included the Presidents of Senegal and Mali, the First Ladies of Senegal, Cape Verde and Zanzibar, Ministers of finance, education, health and social protection, and ECD leaders and specialists. The Conference featured economists, educational planners, neuroscientists, physicians, nutritionists, psychologists and researchers who affirmed that ECD is the foundation for enhancing learning, national progress and productivity.

Drawing from the recommendations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference on ECD held in Accra, Ghana in May 2005, it was noted that although many African countries had developed ECD policies, urgent challenges remain: few services exist for pregnant women and vulnerable children birth to 3; parenting education and support services are limited; and pre-primary education cannot be accessed by most vulnerable children. The 4th Conference was premised on 'Education for All' Goal One and the Second Decade of Education of the African Union. The main theme for the conference was **From Policy to Action: Expanding Investment in ECD for Sustainable Development**. Panels and plenary sessions were presented on 4 sub-themes: 1) expanding ECD investment and assessing costs in a world of economic, food and ecological crises, 2) implementing and strengthening ECD policies and plans, 3) increasing access to quality ECD and going to scale, and 4) expanding services for vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS, war and severe poverty.

Studies were presented documenting ECD's positive impact on improving outcomes for education, health, social and economic development in Africa. Delegates noted the high rate of return on investment to ECD and discussed short, medium and long-term results from providing quality ECD services. The conference underscored research findings and recommended that quality ECD services should be from preconception and pregnancy through the first 3 years of life and up to age 8, targeting especially the most vulnerable children as the most cost-effective strategy for helping governments attain the Millennium Development Goals, EFA and Poverty Reduction Strategy targets. Conference participants reiterated that pre-primary education was essential for preparing children for success in primary school, noting in particular that vulnerable children and children from poor and rural backgrounds derive greater benefits from quality pre-primary programmes.

### The Call to Action

The Delegates of the Fourth African International Conference on ECD, **cognisant** of the current global challenges and crises, called upon all African Presidents, First Ladies, Ministers, civil society actors, the private sector, donor community, ECD leaders and stakeholders to promote holistic and integrated ECD services for all children and to increase investments for the attainment of quality ECD services for sustainable social and economic development and growth. In particular a special appeal was made to:

1. Heads of Governments and First Ladies who attended to serve as "Champions for ECD" and to encourage all African leaders to rapidly expand investments in ECD.
2. The President of the Republic of Senegal, His Excellency Maitre Abdoulaye Wade to request the African Union Heads of governments to organise a **Special Summit for Young Children in 2011**.

3. African governments to develop child-responsive public policies and budgeting, targeting especially vulnerable children and mothers in rural areas and urban slums, and to report annually on their investments in ECD by age groups and across all sectors, with the goal of achieving greatly expanded ECD services by 2015.
4. Focus on developing and expanding high-quality, integrated community-based ECD services that embrace and value local cultures, languages, knowledge and life skills, and ensure parents participate in programme development, management and oversight.
5. Encourage each country to develop by 2015 i) nationwide integrated services from preconception to age 3, including early child hood intervention services and parent education; and ii) universal pre-primary education of 1 to 2 years, with classes attached where possible to primary schools.
6. Identify, map and share good practices, lessons learned and research results through regional networking activities of the ADEA Working Group on ECD and its partners.
7. Provide support for researchers in African institutes and universities to address Conference topics and provide the evidence required to promote ECD in Africa.
8. Revisit the Millennium Development Goals with the aim of ensuring ECD is fully included within reviews for 2010 and is adopted as the foundation for goal attainment in Africa.

Endorsed by the delegates who attended the 4<sup>th</sup> African International Conference on ECD, 12 November 2009 in Dakar, Senegal.

## **Annex to the Dakar Communiqué**

*African countries are encouraged to conduct the following activities in order to rapidly improve and expand integrated ECD services for holistic child development:*

### **Expand Investment in ECD**

- Expand national investment in ECD in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) devoted to the education, health, nutrition and protection of infants and young children.
- Encourage Ministries of Finance, Education, Health and Social Protection and development partners to invest a far greater proportion of their annual budgets by 2015 in ECD for a) infants and children from birth to 3 years of age to improve brain and social-emotional development, and b) pre-primary education services to prepare children for success in school.
- Develop cost studies and simulations in each African country to project future investment needs for sectoral and integrated ECD services and maximise the use of all resources.

### **Develop and Implement ECD Policies or Policy Frameworks**

- Encourage all countries without a comprehensive and intersectoral ECD Policy or Policy Framework and Strategic Plan for integrated ECD services to develop and adopt them, to create or strengthen an intersectoral Council for ECD, and to establish an effective ECD operational unit as the “motor” for policy implementation and annual reporting by 2010.
- Ensure that relevant sectoral and intersectoral policies in each country include sections and indicators for ECD and intersectoral ECD coordination at all levels.
- Promote the formal adoption of key ECD legislation, standards, regulations and inter-agency agreements for ECD services that are conducted by public, civil society and private sector organisations.

### **Take Promising, High-Quality and Integrated ECD Services to Scale**

- Identify and evaluate promising, comprehensive and integrated ECD programmes from preconception to age 3, through embracing programme diversity and considering the highest quality programmes for rapid expansion.
- Encourage the development of partnerships among public, civil society and private organisations to help promising ECD programmes prepare the curricula, teaching and learning materials, methods, and training, monitoring and evaluation systems required to improve quality and expand services.
- Provide quality pre- and in-service training for ECD providers, combined with linked supervision, monitoring and evaluation activities, and build collaborations among national, sub-regional and regional training services for professionals, paraprofessionals and volunteers for quality ECD services.

### **Develop and Expand Services for Infants and Young Children, Starting with the Most Vulnerable and Disadvantaged**

- Develop services and programme components for integrated, individualised and holistic early childhood intervention from birth to age 3 that will ensure the early identification, assessment, and improvement of children with developmental delays, malnutrition and disabilities.
- Ensure HIV/AIDS policies and services include infants and young children infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and their parents, caregivers and grandparents.
- Create “zones of peace and justice” for young children, their mothers and other caregivers affected by war or community violence; promote the use of curricula for early childhood education for peace; and combat child trafficking and abuse.
- Give priority to serving young children, mothers and fathers living in severe poverty in rural and urban areas, refugee and displaced persons camps and communities, or in marginalised ethnic or linguistic groups, and ensure all pre-primary education services are fully inclusive, promote gender equality, and use home languages.