



Republic of Mauritius



Association for the
Development of
Education in
Africa

Change the Future for Africa: Investing in our Youngest Children



**Inter Country Quality Node for
Early Childhood Development
2017 - 2019 Strategy Plan**



I. Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
AAU	Association of African Universities
ADEA	Association for Development of Education in Africa
AfDB	African Development Bank
AU	African Union
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ELP	Early Learning Partnership
ICQN ECD	Inter Country Quality Node- Early Childhood Development
SABER-ECD	Systems Approach for Better Education Results- Early Childhood Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WGECED	Working Group for ECD

II Key Definitionsⁱ

- ❖ **Early child development (ECD) services** are all services that promote or support the development of young children. These range from infrastructural provision such as water and sanitation, social security, birth registration and health services to safe and affordable daycare, opportunities for children to learn together in structured programmes, and preparation for formal schooling.
- ❖ **Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) services** are services and programmes that provide care and developmentally appropriate educational stimulation for groups of young children in centres and/or in community- or home-based programmes.
- ❖ **Comprehensive services** refer to a range of services for pregnant women, mothers and young children across infrastructure, health, education and social services.
- ❖ **Parents:** 'Parent' or 'parents' are defined as a person or persons with parental authority or responsibility including mothers, fathers, grand-parents, aunts, uncles or others who act in this capacity, it is not limited to biological or legal parents, large number of children are raised by people other than their parents.
- ❖ **Parenting** refers to how parents and caregivers execute their roles and is about the relationship between the child and caregiver or others acting in loco parentis in order to raise children.
- ❖ **Family:** 'Family' is defined in its widest sense to include: parents, those acting in loco parentis, siblings, grandparents and extended family members. It is used in a broad way to include kinship, marriage, adoption of choice.
- ❖ **Family support** is interpreted here as a set of (service and other) activities oriented to improving family functioning and grounding child-rearing and other familial activities in a system of supportive relationships and resources (both formal and informal).
- ❖ **Parenting support** is a set of (service and other) activities oriented to improving how parents approach and execute their role as parents and to increasing parents' child-rearing resources (including information, knowledge, skills and social support) and competencies.

Foreword

“Our goal is nothing less than breakthrough impacts for children facing adversity. We believe that dramatic improvements in lifelong learning, behaviour, and health are not only achievable but also absolutely essential for a thriving and sustainable society.”ⁱⁱ

Early childhood is a time of hope and possibility for young children and their families and for nations as a whole. It is universally recognized today that ensuring a healthy start for every child, ensuring they survive and thrive, sets them on a path of wellbeing for life where they are able to develop their potential and contribute positively to the world.ⁱⁱⁱ In the same vein, supporting the early development of children offers an opportunity to address inequality, unlock poverty traps and improve long-term health and wellbeing.^{iv} Such a recognition inevitably begs a commitment to act today and to place them at the centre of our political, economic and social endeavours.

Our children are not just the future, they are also today.

No doubt, parents are the most significant early childhood development force in the life of young children. However, in circumstances where their capacity to provide is compromised, governments must act as duty bearers, supporting their role while protecting the rights of the child to development, care and protection.

This responsibility for policy shapers and makers to make that a reality is now universally recognized.

The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda approved by 193 Member States of the United Nations in 2015 recognises the opportunities manifest in young children and the current loss of this potential. This explains the call for universal “access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education” by 2030, seeking specifically to accelerate provision for marginalised children and families.

The African Union (AU) equally adds to this call for action, prioritising universal access to early childhood education in the Africa 2063 Strategy.

For its part and as an advocate and activist for early childhood development (ECD) on the African Continent, the ECD Inter-Country Quality Node (ICQN) of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) is committed to advancing the rights of young children to care and services.

This document sets out the strategic intention of the ICQN to contribute to change for young children on the African Continent, explaining why ECD should be a priority for every parent, organisation and government. It provides an overview of ECD as a potent development game changer. Mapping the context of childhood on our Continent, it draws “inspiration and strength from the foundation of Africa’s rich cultures and enduring traditions of childcare.”^v It also provides an overview of the actions the ICQN will take to advance an ECD agenda.

As Minister of Education, I am all too aware of the need for the ICQN ECD to become a platform for collaboration and partnership with all who have a heart for our youngest children. We all also recognise that our failure to act will only perpetuate cycles of inequality, locking children, their families and even nations into perpetual cycles of economic, social and political hardship.

This gloomy perspective can be and will be changed. We owe it as much to our children as we owe it to our Continent.

Minister of Education of Mauritius

Chairperson of the ICQN Steering Committee.

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

¹ Heckman, James J., and Dimitriy V. Masterov. "The productivity argument for investing in young children." *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy* 29.3 (2007): 446-493.

¹ Sayre, R. K., Devercelli, A. E., Neuman, M. J., & Wodon, Q. (2015). *Investing in Early Childhood Development: Review of the World Bank's Recent Experience*. World Bank Publications

¹ Pence, A. and Nsamenang, B. (2008) A case for early childhood development in sub-Saharan Africa. Working Paper No. 51. The Hague, The Netherlands: Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Chapter 1

BACKGROUND TO THE ICQN ECD

Prior to the nineties, other than in sectoral health and nutrition policies and strategies, young children from birth to five were almost invisible in African policy documents. With the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO 1990), a new impetus was given to an agenda for young children. Early Childhood Development (ECD) has since been firmly on the agenda stimulating dialogue and action globally. African leaders have played a central role in these advances, noted as amongst the earliest and most enthusiastic supports for the CRC.^{vi}

In 1993 the Donors to African Education (now the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, ADEA) established a special focus group within the Female Participation Group of ADEA (now FAWE) on ECD. By 1997, this had morphed into a fully operational Working Group for Early Childhood Development (WGECD), which ADEA formalised. Focused on the mobilisation of political and public as well as multilateral support for the adoption of an integrated approach to the development of the young child in Africa, the Working Group's (WG) overall goal was to ensure that African children survived, thrived and had a good start in life. The WG made some important contributions to policy dialogue, reform and knowledge building on ECD on the Continent.

As the WG found its feet, it was able to participate in and contribute to the growing global and continental take-up of ECD as a critical issue for human development.^{vii} The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was ratified in 1999 and, in 2001, at the Pan-African Forum for Children, Governments affirmed their commitment to an Africa Fit for Children: The African Common Position. The ECD agenda was further advanced at the Dakar World Education Forum where delegates committed to "expanding and improving early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children."¹

As part of ADEA's strategic development approach, its Working Groups were set to morph into independent bodies once they were well established; FAWE is a case in point. This was initially the idea for the WGECD as well. However, ADEA in pursuit of a more sustainable model, began building its Inter Country Quality Node strategy, which rested on countries in Africa that had track records of investment and delivery on critical education and development issues. One such priority area is ECD.

Thus the ICQN ECD was launched in 2015, its purpose, being to act as an inter-Governmental agency, mandated to work towards advancing the ECD agenda on the African Continent. It sets out to provide strategic direction and thought leadership, contributing to the capacities of African governments to respond positively to the opportunities presented by early investment and mitigate the significant challenges posed to the Continent as a whole and its children in particular.

The ICQN ECD emphasises a comprehensive and integrated approach to ECD through the promotion of policies and programmes that work synergistically to ensure the child's rights to health, nutrition, protection, a nurturing environment, early brain stimulation, cognitive, social and emotional development, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The several responsibilities of the WGECD have now migrated to the ICQN ECD hosted and led by Mauritius since 2015.

The ICQN also has a mandate over and above that of policy dialogue and advocacy and the generation of new knowledge on ECD. This new approach relies on a networking of African institutions and experts for the emergence of centres of excellence for capacity building, for peer learning and pooling of successful experiences and best practices that respond supportively to the varying contexts in which ECD programmes are implemented. On that basis, it is premised that progress towards the ECD goal in Africa would be both accelerated and sustained within the global SDG Framework.

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Chapter 2

2.0 STRATEGIC POSITION OF THE ICQN ECD

OUR VISION is that every African child has a good start in life through the implementation of quality ECD services and programmes.

OUR MISSION is to serve as a platform for collaborative action through sharing of innovative experiences, peer learning, building a community of practice, policy dialogue and advocacy, partnership and networking.

OUR POSITION: MORE THAN ABCs

The ICQN ECD emphasises a comprehensive approach to ECD recognising that it spans from the beginning of life at conception until the child is eight years old. It promotes holistic and multi-sectoral ECD efforts, advocating for an essential package of services and care that addresses nutrition, primary health care, protection from harm, parenting support and the opportunity to play and learn.

Mindful that responsibility for these inter-dependent areas of development is mostly shared across different sectors generally resulting in fragmented approaches to ECD policy and programmes which undermine its potential impact, the ICQN promotes cross-sector collaboration with a view to addressing the essential needs of all children and their evolving capacities in an age- and stage-appropriate manner.

This cross-sectoral nature of ECD allows for multiple entry points, education being one. Given its relationship with Ministries of Education via ADEA, the ICQN is well positioned to focus on early learning as a platform to play a thought leadership role in advancing early childhood activities within the education sector while advocating for an integrated multi-sectoral approach to ECD on the Continent.

2.1 OUR KEY PHILOSOPHIES

The strategy of the ADEA ICQN ECD is thus based on the following key philosophies:

1. Young children are the present and the future of every nation; having the best start in life is their right. Their needs, diverse identities and intrinsic worth must be recognized, respected and supported.

2. Early Childhood Development begins at conception calling for a life-cycle approach that ensures every child has access to the core essential provisions they need when they need them so they can thrive and reach their potential.
3. Early Childhood Development is shaped by both environmental and genetic factors; early experiences take place in relationships that are shaped through support to primary caregivers and parents.
4. All domains of early development are interdependent; provision for health, nutrition, education, and psychosocial support during the early years is essential for the future wellbeing of children, families, nations and the global community.
5. Early development is cumulative; early experiences and environment from conception are foundational to what follows, necessitating early intervention especially in the lives of vulnerable young children and families who are at risk.

2.2 OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The activities of the ICQN ECD are guided by the following principles:

- The ICQN ECD emphasises an integrated and holistic approach to child development based on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter for the Rights of the Child and other universally agreed principles and Conventions relating to the Child.
- The national ownership and operation of ECD is primarily the responsibility of member countries who are the best judge in contextualising policies, programmes and activities at their national levels.
- Quality improvement is only possible when the main actors in education in Africa are committed to the process.
- Participation, dialogue and respect for indigenous cultures are among the shared values that guide the working of the ICQN ECD.
- The ICQN ECD ^{will} carry out its undertakings within the basic principles of good governance, transparency and accountability.

2.3 THE ICQN ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The ICQN ECD is led by Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research of the Republic of Mauritius. Table 1 below presents how the various bodies are represented within its organisational structure.

Table 1: ICQN ECD organisational structure

Structure	Responsibility	Composition
ICQN ECD Steering Committee	Provide strategic direction and leadership to the ICQN ECD	The Steering Committee is chaired by the Mauritian Minister of Education & HR, TE & SR, and is composed of some Ministers of Member Countries, ADEA, RECs, Development Partners, CSO Representatives, Private Sector and Academia
ICQN ECD Coordination Committee	Coordinate strategic priorities and act as an advisory body to the ICQN Secretariat	The Coordination Committee shall comprise representatives of RECs, ADEA, Development Partners, CSO, Private Sector and Academia
ICQN ECD Secretariat	Facilitate all activities of the ICQN ECD	The ICQN ECD Secretariat shall comprise <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One Coordinator 2. One Deputy Coordinator 3. 2 Technical Assistants/Programme Officers and Project Managers to be recruited on a project basis
ICQN ECD Country Focal Points	Participate in ICQN ECD activities	Every member country will have an ECD Country Chapter and will designate a National Focal Person to act as liaison officer with the ICQN ECD Secretariat.

Chapter 3

3.0 EARLY CHILDHOOD: A TIME OF OPPORTUNITY

Neuroscience suggests “that the later we wait to support families with children who are at greatest risk, the more difficult (and likely most costly) it will be to achieve positive outcomes, particularly for those who experience the biological disruption of toxic stress during the early years.”^{viii}

ADEA as an education-focused forum provides a strategic platform for the ICQN ECD’s advocacy agenda on early childhood development and its primary focus on improving the capacity of children in Africa to learn, stay in school and finish secondary education successfully. The standpoint of the ICQN is accordingly through a lens of integration, given the interdependent nature of child development - poor nutritional status, for example, impacting learning capacity.

This interface, illustrated in Figure 1 below, touches on early learning and play, parenting and family support, health care and nutrition as well as social protection, acknowledging that together they constitute a key investment in early childhood that will lead to happier children who are ready for school, greater equity, better health, improved education outcomes and increased economic prospects for nations and the African Continent as a whole.

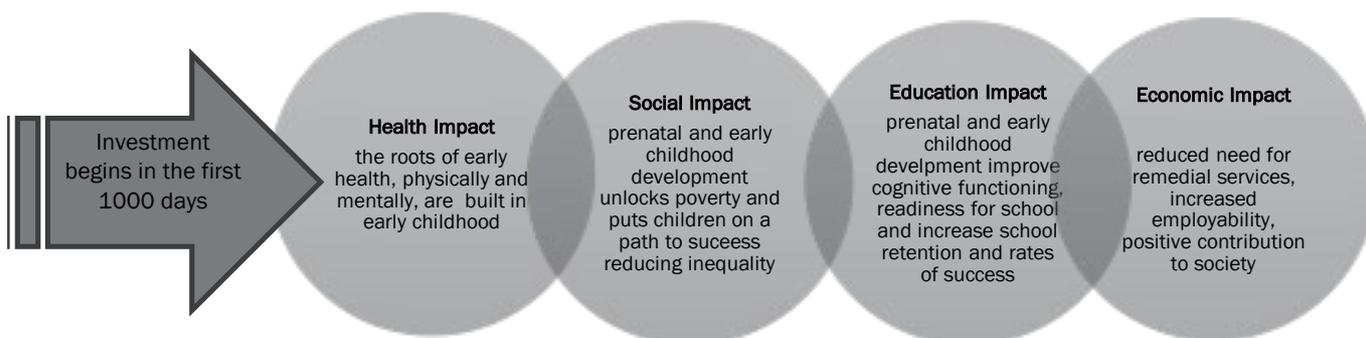


Figure 1 Early investment leads to lifelong returns

Evidence from the evolving science of early development is underpinned by the acknowledgement that this is not only an investment in the interests of economic and social development, but it is also the right of every young child. This is the basis of the ICQN strategy.

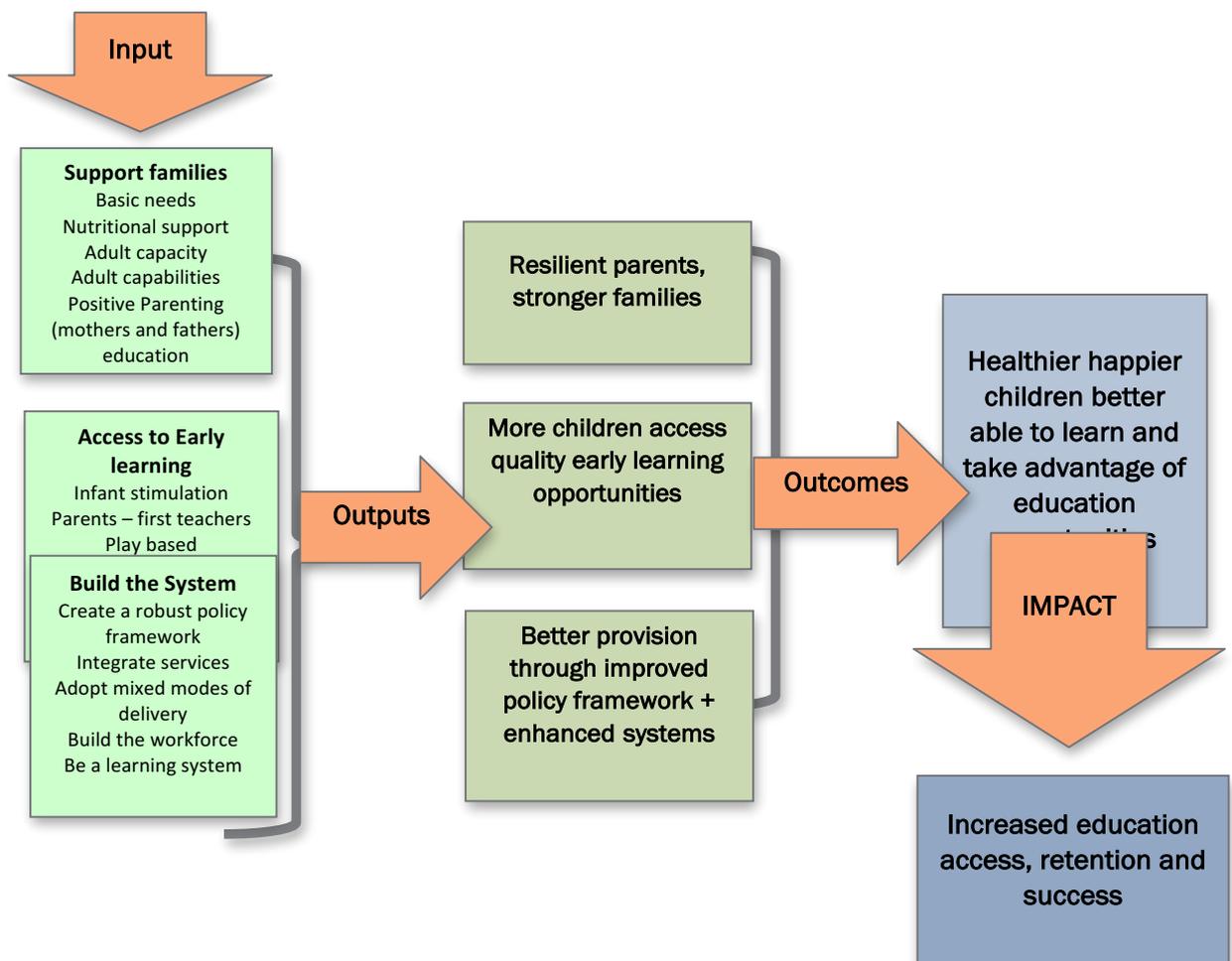
Chapter 4

A FRAMEWORK FOR ECD ACTIONS

Governments must recognise that effective investments in the early years are a corner-stone of human development and central to the successfulness of societies.”^{ix}

It is universally recognized that increased access to quality ECD leads to improved education outcomes. A game changer for ECD will then be the pioneering of pathways that cross the divide between multiple sectors to engage collaboratively with families, communities and systems of support and reach those children who are most at risk of not realising their potential. Governments in partnership with civil society actors can work together with families to provide equal access to strong nurturing environments. Figure 2 below shows the building blocks of an environment that enables and supports learning.

Figure 2: Our Theory of Change: How we see it happening



Chapter 5

ECD : AN ENABLER OF LIFE LONG LEARNING

The early years of life, particularly the first 1000 days are a time of immense hope and possibility; conversely, they are also a time of particular risk. Providing for young children, from the time of conception with the things they need to survive and thrive, ensures they are able to realise their potential, play a positive role in society thus enabling healthy societies and nations.

Indications are that primary education access in Africa has slowed and that learning outcomes, for many children who are in school, are poor.^{x xi} Lancet (2011) estimates in 2011 were that 99 million children of primary school age were not in school and that only 78% of those who were, would complete their primary schooling.

By far the majority of these children who live in sub-Saharan Africa are from resource poor and vulnerable communities.^{xii} Many of them started schooling at a disadvantage because they never received the input they needed from the start of their lives to develop the foundational skills and capacities needed to be ready to learn at school.^{xiii} It is then obvious then that holistic early childhood development intervention from the start of life, especially for vulnerable children, can be the game changer Africa needs.

5.1 THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS START AT CONCEPTION

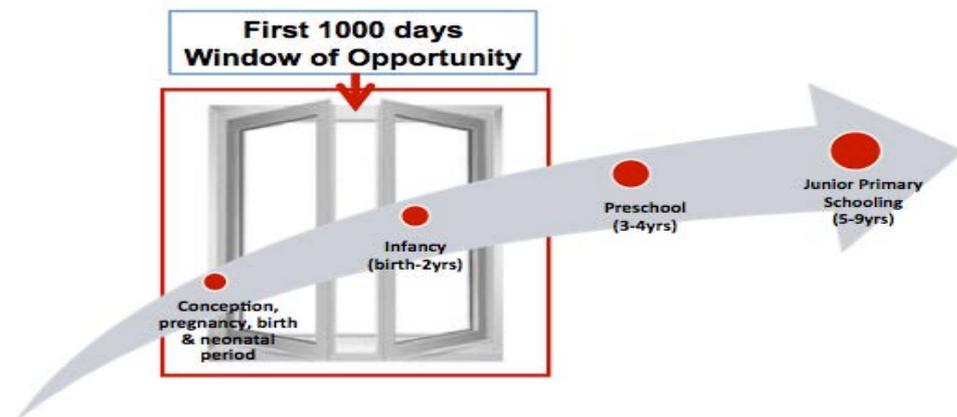


Figure 3: The first 1000 days a window of opportunity

When children are born, they are primed to learn with the most important development occurring during first thousand days of life beginning at conception (Figure 3). Hence making sure children get

the things they need so they have the best start possible from the beginning of their life has a greater impact than trying to repair damage done during this period of their lives.

5.2 POSITIVE PARENTING BUILDS CAPACITY FOR EARLY LEARNING

Young children experience their world through relationships, which when tuned in to their unique personality and needs, promote healthy brain development and emotional wellbeing.^{xiv} This ‘ordinary magic’ is created by the bond between caregiver and infant and has the power to build resilience that will last a lifetime.^{xv} Talk and play interactions between parent and child create a safe space for learning and development,^{xvi} stimulating exploration, self-confidence and competence.^{xvii} Parent’s day- to-day interactions are the early ‘stimulation’ every child needs if they are to develop well cognitively.

5.3 THE CAPABILITIES OF PARENTS’ IMPACT ON EARLY LEARNING

In the African context, it is estimated that over 50% of women aged 25 and above and 30% of 15 -24 years old are illiterate.^{xviii} The children of these women are less likely to go to school and, once in school, will not perform as well as their peers.^{xix} Improved parental education, especially for mothers, is linked to improved child outcomes.

5.4 HEALTH AND NUTRITION ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO EARLY LEARNING

Evidence points to malnutrition as a lead factor in infant mortality, poor long-term health and low levels of school retention^{xx}. A life cycle approach to nutrition support which includes good nutrition during pregnancy and which supports exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, has numerous benefits, including,

- protection against childhood infections;^{xxi}
- promotion of bonding and healthy emotional development;
- advances in cognitive development;^{xxii} and
- increased readiness for learning which translates into improved education outcomes.

Together these improve children’s health and contribute to raise their earning levels as adults later.^{xxiii}

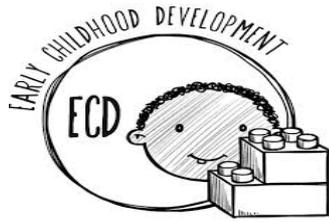
Considering that about two thirds of African preschool children suffer from anemia and about 40% who enter schooling are affected by malnutrition, hence compromising their ability to learn, the challenge is to address malnutrition so as to enable positive school outcomes.^{xxiv}

5.5 PLAY IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF EARLY LEARNING

Play is how children experience their world, test their ideas and learn. It is a 'serious' activity for young children and it has strong links to cognitive development and emotional wellbeing,^{xxv} building concentration and problem solving skills^{xxvi}. It is central to unlocking quality experiential learning opportunities at home and in other early learning environments.

CONCLUSION

Learning begins well before the door of formal schooling opens. The challenge is therefore for authorities to prioritise the first 1000 days of life. This critical period is an enabler of healthy brain development which is foundational to cognitive, motor and socio-emotional capacity throughout childhood and adulthood.^{xxvii} The true power of early intervention can only be realised through the structured provision of access to quality ECD services with attention to a good nutrition, dynamic infant stimulation and early learning component.



IN SUMMARY KEY ECD BUILDING BLOCKS

Start early *“Learning starts in infancy, long before formal education begins, and continues throughout life. Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success, just as really failure breeds later failure”^{xxxviii}*



Relationships matter *“When adults interact with children in a caring, responsive way, they help build and reinforce neural connections in a child’s brain that support the development of important cognitive, social, and language skills. If an adult’s responses are consistently unreliable, inappropriate, or simply absent, children may experience disruptions to their physical, mental, and emotional health.”^{xxxix}*

Nutrition counts *“Nutrition during pregnancy and in the first of a child’s life provides the essential building blocks for brain development, healthy growth and a strong immune system, in fact, a growing body of scientific evidence shows that the foundations of a person’s lifelong health – including their predisposition to obesity and certain chronic diseases – are largely set during this 1000 day window.”^{xxx}*



Seek holistic integrated solutions *“The multiple threats to the survival and well-being of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children are not neatly divided by sector. The enormous challenges that affect them – conflicts, climate change, extreme poverty and more – are all closely interconnected. The multiple deprivations that children suffer are also overlapping and all too often mutually reinforcing. So solutions must intersect as well.”^{xxxi}*

Chapter 6

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE ECD SYSTEM

Historically, ECD service delivery in Africa depended on the work of civil society organisations. As a result, services are often uncoordinated, reach only pockets of the population, are donor-dependent and frequently of insufficient quality. Achieving universal access to quality and integrated ECD services requires the intervention of governments. This means undertaking a number of key actions necessary to the advancement of the right to development for every young child and family.

The key elements of a strong system of support are touched on in this section.

6.1 ASCERTAIN INTEGRATION AT SYSTEMIC LEVEL

Given the ‘collection’ of inter-related essential needs young children have across the ages and stages of their development, an effective ECD strategy at national level must be multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral. This requires at the very least a guiding framework outlining how government agencies will collaborate and at best a clearly defined single system for children and families. An approach that provides access to health, nutrition, opportunities to learn, social protection and parental support simultaneously is more likely to ensure that children are resilient, healthy and are ready to learn.^{xxxii} Managing such an integrated ECD system requires high levels of collaboration from policy makers through to administrators and implementers. Evidence points to significant advances in ECD in countries “that have developed and implemented a coherent inter-sectoral, multi-level policy that is broadly understood and supported”.^{xxxiii}

6.2 PROVIDE POLICY SUPPORT TO ENABLE FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The establishment of conducive environments for ECD provision and enabling adequate funding provision can be advanced by robust National ECD policies or policy frameworks. As already noted, the holistic nature of child development calls for an integrated approach to service delivery. It follows that policy planning should be inclusive of various role-players, partners and stakeholders across ministries, parents, communities, non-governmental organisations, and others. “The policy planning process often promotes the expansion of national and international investment in ECD, including private sector resources. Finally, most policies establish ECD indicators, databases, evaluation and monitoring systems and action research programmes.”^{xxxiv}

6.3 SUPPORT RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICES

While there is seeming consensus about what children need and how we cater for these needs, much of this growing science of early development has evolved outside of the African context. In

response, discourse critiquing the universalisation of childhood raises the importance of recognising the particular realities of children, raising the importance of diverse contexts in which children are born and grow as key features of the definitions of childhood.^{xxxv} The Lancet (2011) stresses the need for further research to increase our ability to promote early child development in low-income and middle-income countries. They note in particular the fragmented nature of existing research with findings that often do not converge. Indigenous research presents an opportunity for African thinkers, researchers and early childhood specialists to expand international discourse to include multiple understandings of childhood. Furthermore, there is a dearth of relevant and important information on African young children and their wellbeing. The collection of statistics and stories that include the voices of children from within countries on the Continent warrants focus. Data is a key resource for action: it provides an evidence base for advocacy, policy formulation and targeted intervention.

6.4 USE A MIXED-MODE OF DELIVERY

It is a fact that, on the African Continent NGOs, private businesses and donors have been in the forefront in the provision of early childhood care and education programmes with governments setting up the policy environment and providing some, though mostly, not enough funding. Paying attention to the mechanism of service delivery for children is key to the realisation of an appropriate package of early childhood services of good quality.

Three main approaches have been identified as being viable ways of supporting children.

- i. **Facility-based interventions** (such as clinics, community-based ECD facilities and formal preschools);
- ii. **Community-based interventions** (such as mobile clinics, community playgroups, toy libraries and day mother programmes); and
- iii. **Home-visiting programmes** (aimed at providing home based parent-child support access to a comprehensive package to children not in ECD programmes).

These programme approaches are known to be particularly effective when offered in age, stage and context appropriate ways.

6.5 ADDRESS PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION AS PART OF A LEARNING CONTINUUM

Preprimary education, established as part of the continuum of formal schooling, is the first stage of structured learning to which children are exposed. As part of a comprehensive approach to early childhood development, it can be a time where the gains of the first four years of life are consolidated and children prepared for their entry into primary school. The desired characteristics of

quality pre-primary education are that it will include: (i) highly skilled teachers; (ii) small class sizes and high adult-to-child ratios; (iii) age-appropriate curricula and stimulating materials in a safe physical setting; (iv) a language-rich environment; (v) warm, responsive interactions between staff and children; and (vi) high and consistent levels of child participation^{xxxvi}. While many governments have introduced a preschool year into their education systems, most are far from this level of quality.

6.6 BUILD AND RETAIN A SKILLED ECD WORKFORCE

“Research tells us that stimulating environments and high quality pedagogy are fostered by better-qualified staff, and better-quality pedagogy leads to better learning outcomes ... (this applies) not only to preschool teachers, but to home visitors, social workers, community health workers, and others providing broader services to young children and their families”.^{xxxvii} Unfortunately, the care and early learning of youngest children tends to receive the least priority and is often placed in the hands of the least qualified, poorly paid and lowest status workers. To get enough of the right services of quality for young children when they need them, a capable and skilled workforce made up of qualified professionals together with paraprofessionals able to offer a range of contextually appropriate early childhood services is needed. Building an ECD workforce that is fit for purpose requires attention to career pathing, training and qualifications. Retaining that workforce will depend on employment conditions including recruitment and remuneration.

6.7 COLLABORATE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

Consultation and collaboration in ECD is an important platform for advancing the child’s rights and wellbeing. As already noted in this strategy, parents are the first ‘educators’ of their child: enabling them to provide what their children need is a core element of service delivery. At the same time, the key understanding that it takes a village to raise a child reminds us that parents do not do this important work alone. Communities are able to provide ‘surround’ support for families, they know and understand the complexities of context based needs and often have important resources that can be mobilized as part of any early childhood endeavour. At the same time, community based organisations and other civil society actors including donors have been part of the fabric of ECD advocacy and provision. In resource-constrained countries, it is unlikely that governments will be able to take forward an agenda for the universalisation of ECD from conception alone. Retaining and expanding support through strategic public/private partnerships can be a significant means to advancing services of quality to young children.

CONCLUSION

In this section, we have noted the need to establish an integrated system of provision that activates access to a comprehensive package of services for children. It is clear that to advance ECD on the continent we need to change systems, we need strong political support which means leaders with vision for early investment as a game changer. Motivating movement in the right direction is “bigger than any one person or institution. Its success depends on the shared vision and work of individuals, organisations and systems. When leaders align their agendas, networks, and resources in support of a shared goal, they have the power to make lasting significant improvements in the lives of children and families.”^{xxxviii}

Chapter 7

ECD: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

This section highlights the current status of ECD service delivery on the Continent. Big data is used highlighting that some progress has been made but the gaps and disparities are wide. The key message is that to change the outlook for Africa, we must make robust strides toward addressing the needs of our youngest children.

7.1 POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Ideal for support to ECD is a policy framework that addresses the needs of children and mothers from conception and cuts across sectors to offer an integrated model of provision. Some success toward framing ECCE as a policy priority was noted in 2012 by ANCEFA reporting that 26 countries had included ECCE in their sector or national development plans and at least 76 per cent of countries in Africa were engaged in ECCE policy planning or implementation (19 countries had developed ECCE policies and 20 were engaged in planning process). At that stage, no country in Sub Saharan Africa had adopted a compulsory pre-primary education policy. Despite these indications that ECCE was awarded greater prominence, in the same year, UNESCO reported that less than 12 per cent of African children had access to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) services.^{xxxix} A major challenge for policymakers on the Continent has been to identify ways to enhance systems efficiencies and reduce inequity through the effective allocation and use of financial and human resources^{xi}.

7.2 EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

It is true that the complexities and multiple risks for poor development including war, poverty, poor health and inadequate nutrition affect the childhoods of too many of our youngest children, seriously undermining their learning potential. Estimates are that there are about 127 million children on the Continent who are of school-going age with at least half of these children reaching adolescence without having the basic skills they need to advance their education, hence trapping them in intergenerational poverty.^{xii} Even though the evidence telling us that it is the most disadvantaged children who will benefit most from early childhood education, indications are that the children from the poorest quintile are the ones who are least likely to have access.^{xiii}

Table 2 highlights the varied ages at which ECCE services are provided in a selected group of Sub-Saharan African countries. Angola fares exceptionally at 104% access for 5 year olds, while most

other countries are well below 50%. There could be a number of interrelated reasons for the alarmingly low rates of provision. Amongst them is the fact that what happens before pre-primary education is not yet seen as crucial to the big picture of education even though the evidence tells otherwise. Even when it is understood, translating it into action is challenging.

In addition, ECD service delivery has yet to be formalised and systematised in many countries and is most commonly in the hands of NGOs or private organisations with fragmented or insufficient support from government and little available data or at least coordinated data collection. Lastly, the common siloed approach to ECD means that reporting takes place within specific sectors with little cross-pollination or cross-reporting, i.e. little is done as yet to relate early nutrition and health indicators to early learning.

The 2008 Global Monitoring Report made the point that early learning and care programmes for children under 3 was a neglected area and only found in 53% of countries in the world, largely, North America, Western Europe, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean with organised policy, programmes supported by data collection. These levels of poor provision are further compounded by the idea that it is a private matter that parents or families should address rather than a State concern. Unfortunately, given that it is largely the wealthy and middle classes who can afford to pay for these services, the equalising power of ECD is lost in this approach.

Country	Age group	Percentage who have access to ECD services	Year
Angola	5	104	2010
Botswana	3-5	19	2010
Burundi	4-6	9	2010
Comoros	3-5	22	2010
Eritrea	5-6	14	2010
Ethiopia	4-6	5	2010
Kenya	3-5	52	2010
Lesotho	3-5	33	2010
Madagascar	3-5	9	2010
Namibia	5-6	33	1999
Rwanda	4-6	11	2010
South Africa	6	65	2010
Swaziland	3-5	23	2010
Uganda	3-5	14	2010
Tanzania	5-6	33	2010

Source: AU Outlook on Education database , 2014

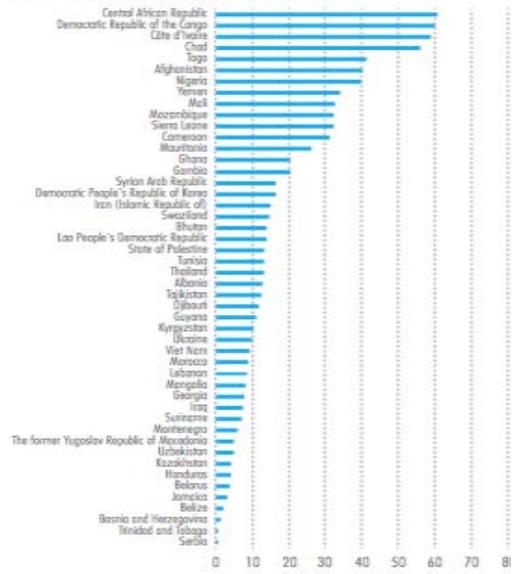
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Table 2: Overview of Service Provision for children 0 - 5 in selected African countries

Data from the UNICEF 2014 statistical snapshot Table 4 alongside, indicate that large numbers of young children under 5, when they are most geared for learning and also most vulnerable, are not adequately cared for. It follows that they would also be missing out on other key development provisions and so are seriously at risk of not realising their potential. As has been argued in this strategy, “the first years of life are important, because what happens in early childhood can matter for a lifetime”^{xliii}.

In the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, than half of children under age 5 were left in inadequate care in the previous week

Percentage of children aged 0 to 59 months left alone or in the care of another child under 10 years old in the past week



Note: Data for the Islamic Republic of Iran differ from the standard definition. Source: UNICEF global databases, 2014, based on MICS, DHS and other nationally representative surveys

7.3 HEALTH AND NUTRITION OUTLOOK

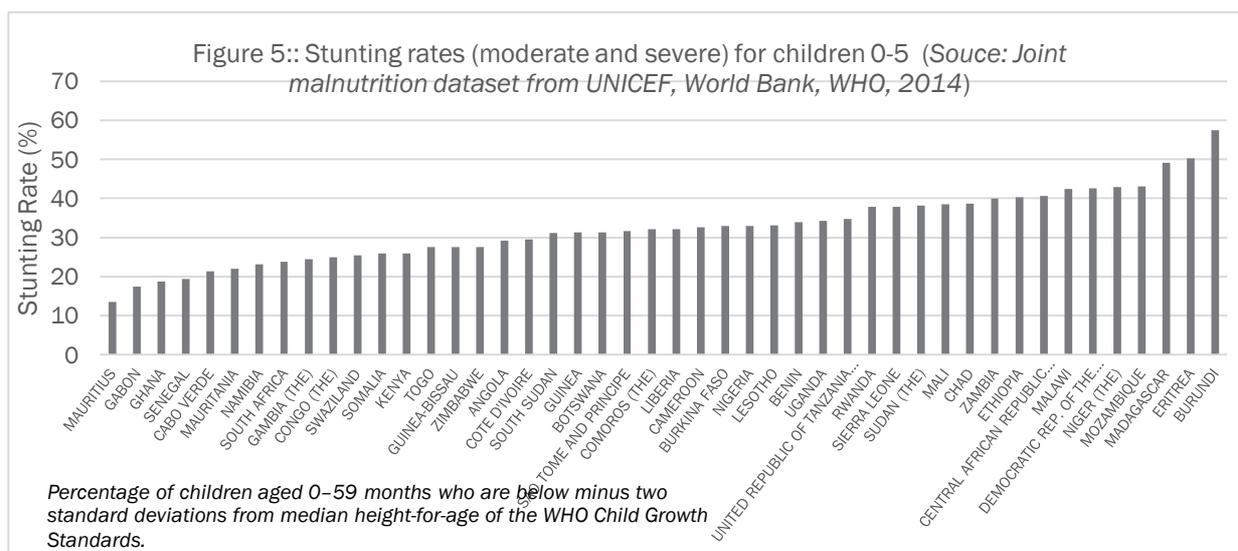
How we treat 0-2 year-olds shapes their brains,

their lives – and ultimately our societies. It follows that early learning, health and nutrition in early development are a priority. Research (and common sense) tells us that they are inter-related, one does not happen well without the other. Yet provision of holistic care and support for young children is seriously lacking for large numbers of vulnerable children.

Table 4 Levels of care for children under 5 in selected Sub-Saharan countries

- Infant mortality remains a concern for Africa with nearly half of the world’s deaths of children under-five occurring here (WHO, 2013). Preventable causes such as pneumonia, malaria, and diarrhoea, account for about 40% of these under-five deaths (WHO, 2014).
- Nearly half of births in Africa are not attended to by a skilled health worker (UNICEF, 2014).
- At least one in three African children younger than five was stunted in 2011. As displayed in Figure 5, stunting rates range widely by country. Within countries, there are significant disparities between the richest and poorest.
- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), only 37% of children in Sub-Saharan Africa are exclusively breastfed during 0-6 months.^{xliv}

Persistent poor healthcare, food insecurity, malnutrition and stunting continue to plague our Continent, undermining the learning capacity of our youngest children, their long term wellbeing. We cannot address and improve the capacity of young children to learn and succeed at school without attention to these inter-related issues.



7.4 EARLY CHILDHOOD AND DISABILITY

Children with disability who are more vulnerable to development risks than their peers are frequently overlooked in mainstream programmes and services for early childhood development. This cohort of children often faces discrimination, is not prioritised in formal programmes and is often struggling to overcome the barriers to accessing needed services. Tragically, many disabilities or development delays are the result of preventable causes such as malnutrition, and childhood illnesses, lack of sanitation and clean water and preventable accidents. For children who experience disability, early childhood is a critical period in which to ensure access to supportive interventions which can help them reach their full potential. ^{xiv} Ensuring that we collect sufficient data and prioritise the needs of all children, is critical to enabling the successful implementation of programmes of support.

CONCLUSION

Africa is a vast, diverse and complex Continent. When talking about children and their lives in generalised ways, we run the risk of losing sight of this diversity and the specific childhood experiences and needs of young children across the Continent. What does however stand out as generic in this landscape is the destructive power of poverty, discrimination and violence. Often inter-related and present together, they constitute a milieu of multiple deprivation and impede the capacities of children to develop and of parents to provide for that development. Governments must prioritise poverty reduction and address the multiple factors that inhibit children’s pathways to success.

Chapter 8

ICQN ECD STRATEGY (2017 – 2019)

The ICQN ECD is committed to ensuring an “integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena”^{xlvi} through the realisation of early childhood development in all its fullness for every African child. The ICQN ECD therefore, grounds itself on African soil with a strong commitment to practices that place children at the centre of policy actions.

The ICQN ECD aligns its strategic intentions and activities with those of ADEA and its strategic plan. It upholds the right to universal access to quality education for every African child, recognising ECD intervention from conception as a right in itself as well as enabling to the realisation of this right to learn and develop. This strategy is built around the attainment of

- ✓ the SDGs, 4.2 in particular which calls to ensure that by 2030 all girls and boys will enjoy access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education, and
- ✓ the African Agenda 2063 in particular, Aspiration 1.14 which states that “Africa’s human capital will be fully developed as its most precious resource, through sustained investments based on universal early childhood development and basic education.”^{xlvii}

8.1 OUR STRATEGIC FOCUS

Within this positioning, the ICQN will pursue its agenda to impact on the way in which ECD is understood and acted upon on the Continent, advocating for urgent, immediate, integrated responses from conception to age 8 for every child. The ADEA platform as a policy dialogue forum provides a strategic base and home for this approach. While the ICQN ECD recognises this agenda calls for multi-sectoral engagement, it is also mindful that ECD by its inter-sectoral nature allows for multiple entry points.

The ICQN will therefore position its strategy within the early learning space, mindful that learning begins at birth, that the pathways for learning capacity are activated from conception through the wellbeing of the mother and that nutrition, health, parenting support, child protection and learning opportunities underpin good learning outcomes. Our emphasis within this framework is to strengthen the opportunities for early learning, and so build the pathway for lifelong health and

wellbeing, across a continuum of provision through the ages and stages of the growth of the child with the following tenets:

- ✓ What happens **from conception** impacts on early learning and so maternal education and support is critical to a good start for every child,
- ✓ For the biggest impact on school success, early stimulation should **begin at birth until around two years old**, provided primarily through the primary care giver, necessitating a focus on parent education and support,
- ✓ As children grow, they become ready to learn together through play, creating opportunity for care and learning for young children **between 3 and 4** forms a critical part of their learning continuum,
- ✓ Preparation for formal schooling through access to pre-school **from 4** is a priority and an essential element of the learning process started at birth

8.2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE ICQN ECD

The Strategic Objectives of the ICQN ECD are to

- i. **Serve as a forum for advocacy and policy dialogue to translate evidence into effective policies**
- ii. **Act as a regional platform for capacity building, peer learning and innovative endeavours**
- iii. **Facilitate knowledge sharing and dissemination, peer learning and partnership building.**

8.3 STRATEGIC ACTIONS

The following core strategic actions will guide the work of the ICQN ECD over the next three years.

8.3.1 Strategic Objective 1: *Serve as a forum for advocacy and policy dialogue translating evidence into effective policies*

- (i) **Conduct advocacy campaigns among ECD stakeholders**

The ICQN ECD will convene regional/international meetings and contribute to other fora to advance issues relating to early years care, health, protection and education including parent education thus building political support for countries to invest in ECD, prioritising the first 1000 days of life and the provision of an essential package of ECD services.

(ii) **Be the voice of ECD on the Continent**

Strong pieces of analytical work are being produced in and for Africa. ICQN-ECD is well-placed to partner with, contribute to, and disseminate these pieces of analytical work. ICQN-ECD will seek on-going analytical work that can serve as strong advocacy tools for increased investment in and attention to ECD in Africa.

8.3.2 Strategic Objective 2: Act as a regional platform for capacity building, peer learning and innovative endeavours

(i) **Create training platforms to promote critical ECD knowledge, skills and qualifications**

Capacity building efforts for various levels of an ECD system, from national ECD leaders to practitioners, varies significantly by country and is often fragmented. ICQN-ECD can serve as a regional platform to support countries in shifting mind-sets around capacity building and in developing their own training programs based on regional norms. Developing a clear framework will identify training needs for policymakers, technicians, practitioners, and other key stakeholders and serve as a tool that can be adapted by countries. The framework will be informed by regional and international good practices and universities across Africa will be encouraged to develop ECD training programs.

The ICQN ECD will engage with international and regional partners, including donor groups, bilateral organizations, and international non-governmental organizations so as to catalyse such training opportunities.

(ii) **Promote African-led solutions to address national and regional early children development needs.**

The ICQN ECD will hold annual meetings with focal points of Member Countries to strengthen national evidence on ECD initiatives. This will create opportunities for peer-learning as well as solution-driven initiatives to common implementation challenges. Such a platform will also make space for innovative ideas and approaches.

8.3.3 Strategic Objective 3: Facilitate knowledge sharing and dissemination, partnership building, and celebrating African successes within the regional community of practice

(i) Create different fora inclusive of on line platforms for a regular dissemination of ECD research findings.

The ICQN ECD will help feed research and evidence -based knowledge in policy formulation for greater authenticity such that a new era in policy and practice is catalysed.

ICQN ECD will equally contribute to further enhancing the dissemination and uptake of ECD-related knowledge, especially with regards to indigenous knowledge.

With a view to strengthening partnerships, the ICQN-ECD will compile an inventory of regional and national ECD experts/individuals, structures, and initiatives so that the community of practices is informed of existing organizations and networks exist and the activities they are currently engaged in.

(iii) Celebrate success of ECD efforts in Africa

Celebrating best practices and achievements in Africa is an important strategy to encourage African-driven initiatives. ICQN-ECD will facilitate the celebration of success in Africa through two main activities.

First, ICQN-ECD will support awards in tribute to Cyril Dalais, an ECD leader from Mauritius who had committed his life to advocating for ECD in Africa. In commemoration of Mr. Dalais' contributions to the field of ECD in Africa, the Award will recognize outstanding working and innovations in the field of ECD in Africa.

Second, ICQN-ECD will support an ECD flagship day across Africa. Member countries will be encouraged to participate and lead national activities to celebrate achievements in the ECD sector and advocate for early childhood.

2017 – 2019 ICQN ECD Results Framework

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: Serve as forum for advocacy, and policy dialogue to translate evidence into effective policies

OUTCOME: An increased number of countries develop integrated and holistic ECD policies and robust institutional frameworks

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1.1 Conduct advocacy campaigns among ECD stakeholders at major regional/international meetings

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES	ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME	INPUTS	OUTPUTS	RESPONSIBILITY/ PARTNERSHIP
Host a Pan-African ECD Conference in 2019	Establish planning team to take initiative forward	June 2017	Coordinator for ICQN ECD Team committed to initiative from stakeholder groups	Report on ECD Pan-African Conference	ICQN-ECD Secretariat and ADEA Secretariat UNICEF World Bank, others?
Host 2 side events per annum at relevant International/regional meetings beginning in 2017 – build up to 2019 conference	Identify two strategic events for 2017	April 2017	Input from key stakeholders including UNICEF, ADEA steering committee, WB	ECD expertise input on meetings/(World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, universities)	ICQN-ECD Secretariat and ADEA Secretariat
	Develop ECD advocacy kit	July 2017	Consultant specialist in ECD	Toolkit ready for dissemination + training	
	Planning, logistics and meetings hosted and reported against	First event before end 2017	Financial resources to enable hosting of meetings	Countries commit to initiate actions at country level for ECD policy dialogue	
STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1.2: Be the voice for ECD in Africa					
Support and endorse analytical work on ECD jointly with partner organisations, as advocacy tools for increased focus on ECD	Review existing documents, including <i>The Africa Union Education Outlook Report: Early Childhood Development:</i>	October 2017	Consultancy resources Resource/review team	Present document(s) to AUC for further	ICQN-ECD Secretariat and partners

	Formulate policy documents to advocate for AU Agenda 2063 and the Continental Strategy on Education for Africa wrt ECD	2018		collaboration/direction	
Use ICQN platform to share resource materials, including newsletters produced elsewhere and databases	Develop ICQN-ECD communication strategy (include dissemination or research, social media at events, website support)	July 2017	Consultancy services for elaboration of a communication strategy	Communication plan including advocacy outputs	ICQN-ECD, ADEA WG COMED
	Produce a biannual ECD newsletter to be distributed to all African Ministries	Starting 2018	Coordinator	2 newsletters PA x 2 blogs PA	
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: Act as a regional platform for capacity building, peer learning and innovative endeavours					
OUTCOME: Strengthened capacity at national level to improve the design, development and implementation of ECD policies that adopt a multi-sectoral, lifecycle and rights-based approach					
Strategic Initiative 2.1 Create training platforms to promote critical ECD knowledge, skills and qualifications					
STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES	ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME	INPUTS	OUTPUTS	RESPONSIBILITY/PARTNERSHIP
Develop a regional framework for capacity building with a view to expanding ECD training programmes at university level	Seek partnerships with existing government and civil society initiatives and leading training institutions to address capacity building needs in countries	Mid 2017	I	Concept note and TOR for landscaping Partnerships in place	ADEA-ICQN, ADEA WG COMED, UNICEF, WB,
	Landscaping to Identify local/regional needs/opportunities and provision, formal and non-formal (qualifications)	By early 2018	ICQN-ECD and resources for consultant/Coordinator	Study completed and published	
Undertake ECD leadership training and capacity building for senior cadres in countries for effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of integrated and holistic	Establish partnerships with other existing training initiatives	June 2017		MOU with strategic partners for training of ECD leadership in identified countries	Mauritius Institute for Education and ICQN-ECD Secretariat, WB initiative, AfCEN, IICBE

ECD policies	Develop materials in partnership with identified regional partners, designed in keeping with qualifications framework recommendations	2018	Curriculum development costs Product design including layout and editing	Training package	
	Conduct training in collaboration with existing training initiatives		Travel and training costs	Report on participation and training	
Advance a comprehensive ECD qualifications framework appropriate to 0 – 5 year olds	Draft Concept note and source funding	2018		Consultant appointed	ADEA ICQN, World Bank, Appropriate ADEA working groups, AU, AfECN, UNICEF
	Review qualifications framework for ECD provision through a comparative analysis from different countries	2018		Mapping exercise completed	
	Develop an ECD qualification framework appropriate to an African context (mixed mode delivery, professional + paraprofessional)	Released end 2018	Consultant costs	Draft framework prepared for consultation	
	Framework shared with launch of landscaping for input from wider audience	2019	Consultant costs	Framework finalized based on input	
	Build capacity to support policy provision, planning and implementation for effective ECD workforces in African countries	2019			
Strategic Initiative 2.2 Promote African-led solutions to address national and regional early childhood development needs					
STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES	ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME	INPUTS	OUTPUTS	RESPONSIBILITY/ PARTNERSHIP
Country focal persons and ICQN strategy team meet annually (x 3 meetings 2017, 2018 and 2019)	Strategise for planned meetings with focal points	October 2017	Consultant/ Coordinator to organise event Financial resources to facilitate event	Work plan for 2017 with approved budget	ICQN-ECD Secretariat and ADEA Secretariat

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: Facilitate knowledge sharing and dissemination, partnership building, and celebrating African successes within the regional community of practice

OUTCOME: Expertise in ECD made accessible through a regional community of practice

Create platforms for cost effective, innovative ideas and approaches to solve common implementation challenges	Conduct national surveys on implantation challenges and novel approaches in dealing with them	Jan 2018	Financial resources to facilitate event	Consultant report	Coordinator and Partners
Promote and strengthen a culture of indigenous research to generate innovative and contextually-relevant solutions	Use studies undertaken to build effective partnerships with appropriate institutions and define research gaps to inform a research agenda	Ongoing	Research reports 2017/2018	policy briefs on indigenous research in ECD in Africa produced	UNICEF/World Bank ECD partnership; ECDVU; Global Leaders in Africa Program; Association of African Universities; EAC universities World Bank's existing eLearning ECD course; Aga Khan Foundation-Science of ECD course, Harvard Center on the Developing Child; Fundação Maria Cecília Souto Vidigal (Brazil) ECD
Compile an inventory of regional and national ECD experts/individuals, structures, and initiatives as a referential base	Conduct mapping exercise	Ongoing	Active participation of member states and other players	Database established and constantly updated	
Celebrate success of ECD efforts in Africa through the setting up of an Award and the annual commemoration of an ECD Flagship Day in recognition of endogenous African-driven initiatives	Develop guidance note on documenting and sharing of good ECD practices	Concept Note with criteria and selection criteria developed in 2016	Technical assistance (WB & UNICEF) Information/data from partner organizations Existing information from WGECD and partners	Consolidated information easily accessible for the African community of practice	
	Compile inventory of existing initiatives, structures, and individuals working on ECD	Jan 2018			
	Identify good practices to be awarded the Cyril Dalais Award, including definition of target group and selection criteria				

APPENDIX A: BUDGET 2017/18

EXPECTED EXPENDITURE	2017	2018	TOTAL
1. MANAGEMENT OF THE ICQN ECD	USD	USD	USD
Coordinator		84 000.00	84 000.00
Equipment		2 500.00	2 500.00
Administrative Costs	1 000.00	5 000.00	6 000.00
2. ANNUAL MEETING OF ICQN ECD			
Travel	5 000.00	16 000.00	21 000.00
Contracted supplier services (Accommodation)	5 000.00	16 000.00	21 000.00
Knowledge sharing		2 500.00	2 500.00
Administration	500.00	5 000.00	5 500.00
3. COMMUNICATION STRATEGY			
Consultant/technical expert		15 000.00	15 000.00
Content development		6 000.00	6 000.00
Publication of Reports		6 500.00	6 500.00
Web Development	2 500.00	12 000.00	14 500.00
4. DEVELOP DATABASE OF REGIONAL EXPERTS, ORGANISATIONS,			
Coordinator/consultant time		10 000.00	10 000.00
5. HOST 2 SIDE EVENTS IN 2017			
Travel		8 600.00	8 600.00
Contracted supplier services (Accommodation)		12 500.00	12 500.00
Knowledge sharing	1 000.00	4 000.00	5 000.00
Equipment		1 000.00	1 000.00
Administration		2 000.00	2 000.00
6. LANDSCAPING FOR QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK			
Consultant Services		12 000.00	12 000.00
Publishing costs (editing, layout, design)		7 000.00	7 000.00
Travel		5 000.00	5 000.00
Dissemination		3 000.00	3 000.00
7. SURVEY OF REGIONAL TRAINING ORGANISATIONS ENDORSE			
Consultant Services		12 000.00	12 000.00
Publishing costs (editing, layout, design)		7 000.00	7 000.00
Travel		5 000.00	5 000.00
Dissemination		5 000.00	5 000.00
8. SUPPORT AND ANALYTICAL WORK			
Meeting with AU (Travel related costs)		6 500.00	6 500.00
Consultant Services		15 000.00	15 000.00
Consultation re draft report (meeting)		10 000.00	10 000.00
Publishing costs (editing, layout, design)		7 000.00	7 000.00
9. ECD AWARD			
Communication and Administration		3 500.00	3 500.00
TOTAL			321 600,00

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