

# The **ADEA Working Group** for **ECD**

An Historical Perspective





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# ECD/ECCE: Africa on the move

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a right recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (articles 6, 18, 29 of the Convention of the Right of the Child, 1989).

**B**y definition, ECD is a comprehensive approach to young children's development that enhances their physical well-being, cognitive and language skills and social and emotional development.

EFA goal 1: *"Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children"*, a call to nations, civil society organizations and development partners to expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged (Dakar Declaration 2000).

Early years: a time of remarkable brain development that lays the foundation for later learning (State of the World's Children, ECD, UNICEF, 2001).

2007 EFA GMR recognizes that 'Early childhood programs are vital to offset social and economic disadvantage. ECCE is an instrument to guarantee children's rights that opens the way to all the EFA goals and contributes powerfully to reducing poverty, the overarching objective of the Millennium Development Goals (p. 6)'

Currently ECD programs have low priority in national budgets and most donors are yet to recognize ECD as a priority for investment.

2007 EFA GMR concludes "We will not achieve EFA or MDGs without early year's programs".

Recent reports on young child development

## Situation of the Young Child in SSA

- Millions of children still lack access to care programs, basic immunization, clean water, adequate food and early stimulation needed for their survival growth and development.
- 45% of the world's child deaths.
- 50% of maternal deaths.
- 90% of the world's children orphaned by AIDS.
- 38 million children out of school – 80% in rural areas.
- Drop out rates still high – due mainly to the fact that schools are not ready to receive young children and young children are not prepared for the school system.
- Poor quality ECD provision – poor quality of teaching staff.
- Access, school retention and completion continue to be major concerns.



## In sub Saharan countries in Africa, it is further noted that:

- pre-school services are mostly provided by the private sector,
- children most likely to benefit from ECCE programs – those most exposed to malnutrition and preventable diseases – are the least likely to be enrolled,
- staff is poorly trained and poorly remunerated,
- governments and most donor agencies give low priority to ECCE initiative – less than 10 per cent of what donors give for primary education is allocated to ECCE programs.

(EFA Global Monitoring Report, Strong Foundations: ECCE, 2007)



<sup>1</sup> Early childhood is defined as the period of a child's life from conception to age eight as it is currently used internationally.

Care is defined as a process that results in the creation of an "enabling environment" which can support the child's optimal development – it is embedded in the culture. It involves what adults, parents in particular, provide for healthy, safe, supportive, affectionate interaction, appropriate modeling, stimulation, protection and time... It is the integrated set of actions that ensure for children the synergy of protection and supports for health, nutrition, psycho-social and cognitive aspects of development and thus is an one of the key factors in the promotion of children's optimal development.

programs worldwide highlight that youngest children have been neglected. Almost half the world's countries have no formal program for children under three. Enrolment in pre-primary education has tripled since 1970 though coverage remains very low in most of the developing world especially in sub Saharan countries while most OECD countries have at least two years of free pre-primary education. (See box on left)

Referring to the [Dakar Declaration 2000](#) towards realizing the Millennium goals in basic education by 2015, one of the priority goals (Goal 1) concerns the development of programs that will ensure the realization of basic rights of children through focused actions addressed to satisfying their basic needs in [Early Childhood Care and Education](#) – vaccination, nutrition, stimulation, education and protection – with parental involvement and full community support, offered during the early years.

Since the Dakar Declaration, several forums have addressed issues related to ECCE in Africa. A series of [International Conferences on ECD in Africa](#) organized with support from ECCE/ECD sponsors (World Bank, ADEA, UN agencies, and several International NGOs (Plan International, Bernard van Leer, Save the Children, Aga Khan Foundation to name but a few...) brought together stakeholders – governmental and non governmental – to take a closer look at young child survival, development, education and protection. The first of these meetings held in Kampala, Uganda in 1999, were followed by other meetings held in Asmara, Eritrea three years later (2002) with the most recent one held in Accra, Ghana 20 May to 4 June 2005. The first meeting (Uganda) had for objective to share "good practices" on ECD in the region to demonstrate that it's possible to respond to the needs and rights of the young child in S.S.A region. The second one (in Eritrea) had for objective to share lessons learned, "what works and what doesn't". The theme of the third conference was to "Move ECD forward in Africa" by placing ECD on the political agenda of S.S.A countries.

All the attention given to ECD development at regional level over the last years seem to have resulted in greater awareness at national level about the importance of ECD: while by the end of the 1990's only three countries were having an ECD policy, in November 2006 it was reported that 22 of 53 countries in sub Saharan Africa have firmly engaged in informed policy dialogue and are actually developing ECCE/ECD policies. Eleven of these countries have now clear objectives and plan of action to achieve ECCE with a view to ensuring Education for All ("Learning begins at birth", Jomtien, Thailand, 1990).

# ECD Networking in Africa



Most of the work presented at the various forums and at the Ghana meeting has been supported by the **ECD Working Group of the Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)** in collaboration with other sponsors including UN agencies (UNICEF, UNESCO), several International non-governmental organizations (Save the children, Aga Khan Foundation to name but a few) and the World Bank.

Since 1998 when the Government of the Netherlands took over the coordination of the WG-ECD from UNICEF, it promoted collaboration and networking amongst the different players in ECD in Africa in order to enhance a more coherent approach at different levels, building on the experiences and existence of other networks in the region.

Over the past twelve to fifteen years, several attempts were made at developing **Networks of professionals ECCE/D workers in Africa**. The Early Childhood Development Network for Africa (**ECDNA**) took off in 1994 with the Calamar

Declaration which sets out the role and function of such a network which was established with the support of eleven countries from the Eastern and Southern African region gathered in Mauritius to address integrated programming in ECCE/D within an EFA perspective. This Network was coordinated by a Secretariat based at the Institute of Education in Nairobi, Kenya, over the period 1995-1999. It operated with the support from several agencies – multilateral, bi-lateral and national –, carried out a series of events including contributing to the organization of Summer Institutes, workshops in Southern and Western Africa, translation of booklets, monitoring and evaluation exercises, consultations in several of its member countries. The Network supported an initiative addressing HIV-AIDS in Eastern and Southern Africa with four studies carried out in RSA, Namibia, Swaziland and Uganda which went on till 2005.

Over the period 1999-2004, the **Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU)** based at the University of Victoria, B.C., Canada, contributed to the development of a Network that regroups all those who followed the Summer Institutes over the period 1996-1999 and subsequently those who registered for the Masters degree course in Youth and Child Development completed a couple of years ago. It has been active with publication of papers, booklets, and sharing of information amongst its members. It is called upon to play an active role in the North/South-South/South collaborative program if and when it gets going over the next two years.

Several other networks in Western Africa were developed with the assistance of the UNICEF Regional Office and support from UNESCO-BREDA (Abidjan, Ivory Coast, and in Cameroun). Others have been active under the coordination of a French based NGO, the **FICMEA**, which over the past six years have conducted a series of training programs (“Methodes actives”) for professionals in the field of Young Child Development and Education in selected countries in Africa. The last training program was organized in Madagascar two years ago and it will be bringing together representatives from Indian Ocean countries next November in Antananarivo addressing Parents Empowerment.





# The ADEA/Working Group for ECD/ECCE

Established in 1993 initially as a special group within the Female Participation Group of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (now FAWE): The history of the WGECD takes us back to 1993.

During the DAE Task Force meeting in Angers, France (Oct 1993) an interest group session on ECD was included on the agenda that received quite some attention from representatives from Ministers and donor agencies. An interim working group was established following a UNICEF workshop on ECCD/Parenting, held in Mauritius in 1994, as a special group within the Female Participation Group of the ADEA. In the meantime (March 93) UNICEF conducted an Inter-Agency Policy Review "Towards a Comprehensive Strategy for the Development of the Young Child" which led to the "Challenge and Opportunity" series with its videos and ECD Facts for Child Development posters circulated widely within the "Facts for life" Initiative.

In the Early period (1993-1997) the working group was driven by a group of committed professionals from 11 countries in sub-Saharan Africa that had already set their agenda for Integrated early child development and integrated programming as an important feature for their EFA strategy. They work with the support of Bernard van Leer, Aga Khan, Save the Children, UNICEF and USAID to name but a few and had the backing of the Joint Consultative Group on ECD (Robert Myers and Cassie Landers).



Became fully operational in 1996 following the mid-term evaluation of EFA held in Amman, Jordan, where the slogan "Eight is too late" was introduced by the JCG/ECD. End 1996, a workshop was held at Innocenti Centre, Florence, Italy attended by representatives from countries in sub-Saharan Africa, ECD donors for Africa and the Secretariat of the ADEA, who submitted that the Working group should be formally established. UNICEF who had been in the driver's seat of the W.G set up the budget proposals to which subscribed most of the donors present in Florence, Italy, proposed that a Secretariat be established (Kenya Institute of Education was the location of the first secretariat) and developed a work program 1996-1999 with a budget to which subscribed several donors present in Florence, Italy.

At a meeting of the ADEA (Cotonou, Benin) end of 1997, UNICEF formally requested that the chairmanship of the WG/ECD should be handed over to other partners interested in the promotion of the Young Child in sub-Saharan Africa. Several countries expressed interest to promote the newly created working group. These included Ghana, Namibia, Finland and The Netherlands. The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs pulled it off, and took over the responsibility of coordination the work. It proposed an update of the ECD Working Group agenda, ran a consultation of ECD Policy reviews in sub-Saharan Africa, discussed the results in Amsterdam and published the results (Kate Torkington's report) leading to the setting up of a Secretariat driven

## Structure

- WG members: International agencies active in ECD in Africa, national ECD focal points, ECD ministerial champions, ECD experts.
- Steering Committee: a representation of the WG members from international agencies, national Governments and ECD experts.
- Secretariat (virtual): the working group operates as a virtual secretariate, linking together different institutions. To facilitate and ensure continuity, a coordinator has been contracted to follow-up on agreements made in the steering committee, and to enhance communication and exchange amongst WG members.

## Goal and main objectives of the ADEA-WGECD

The rationale for the WG/ECD is rooted in the recognition that the early years are crucial to the further development of a child. The WG is promoting and supporting the holistic development of young children on the S.S.A region by building bridges between different actors involved in ECD both regional and national level to facilitate a coherent and co-coordinated response to the challenges facing early childhood development around Africa.

The overall goal of the WG/ECD is: **to ensure that the African child survives and thrives and has a good start in life.**

Main Objectives are to function as a catalyst and facilitator to:

- mobilize continuous political and public support at regional and national level
- motivate enhanced partnership building and networking,
- facilitate research, capacity and knowledge building and exchange,
- stimulate national policy review, development, implementation and monitoring.

by the Netherlands with a revised program that focused on Policy dialogue and policy development in countries that had already set ECD as a major feature of their EFA initiative.

A turning point: in 2003, the WG is at a turning point: the second African/International Conference in Asmara (2002) identified the WG as initiator/ catalyst for follow-up.

Since then, the Secretariat of the Working Group has promoted a networking process and developed a strong partnership between lead countries in the sector of young child development in sub-Saharan Africa and has turned into a real partnership including both international agencies and Government representatives who carry ECD in their heart and promote the further development of ECD in Africa.

An all African network: since the Ghana conference (2005), the WGECD has started to grow

## WGECD: Specific Achievements since 1997

- ECD Policy project (1 & 2) and support to policy development in several African countries: this particular initiative has been an important contribution of the W.G in the past years. In 1999 at his annual meeting the W.G identified the support to policy environment as a key element to go forward in the region: it makes an overview analysis of what have been done in different countries (Ghana, Mauritius and Namibia) with the support of two consultants (K.Torkinton and Margaret Irvine, report in 2001.) Based on the recommendations made in this report a "Policy project" has been launched to support the process of policy elaboration in three countries: Mauritania, Senegal and Burkina Faso in 2003-2004, with the support of one consultant (Emily Vargas Baron, report in 2004). The lessons learned from all these countries have been shared with all West and Central Africa delegates. A "Guide for action" has since been developed.
- ECD-HIV/AIDS project: strengthen national HIV/AIDS responses to the needs of young children in five countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Creating a forum for information sharing and networking: ECD regional conferences & its impact at both regional and national level (Uganda 1999, Eritrea 2002, Ghana 2005) (See below for more details on the Ghana Conference).
- Positioning ECD on Education agenda of Africa (ADEA Biennale 2003 – ECD exhibition – 2006 Special Session on ECD).
- Contribution to 2007 EFA Global Monitoring Report on ECCE.
- Strategic framework for ECD in Africa (2006-2010) based on outcomes of 2005 Accra conference, 2006 ADEA Biennale and recommendations from 2007 EFA GMR on ECCE.
- Creation of a website for sharing information on ECD in Africa.  
[www.ecdafrica.com](http://www.ecdafrica.com)
- Maintaining a data base of national ECD focal points.
- Regular e-mail update/information to WG members/network.
- WGECD publications.  
[www.adeanet.org](http://www.adeanet.org), [www.ecdafrica.com](http://www.ecdafrica.com)



into an all African network for ECD which has resulted in the transfer of its management to an African based institution in 2007.

Links with ADEA and the Consultative Group on ECD: born out of ADEA, the WGECD aims to keep its political links with ADEA. At the same time, it has developed strong relationship with the global Consultative Group on ECD as its regional Africa network.

## The Third African International Conference (Ghana, 2005) “Moving Early Childhood Development Forward in Africa”



- more than 300 participants,
- representing 35 African countries including 50 ministers from various sectors.

If the Young Child is the center of our attention, we know that to be able to develop his/her full potential he/she needs 3 levels of support: the first focus for action is his/her family and community environment, the second is the availability of qualitative basic

services to respond to his/her needs and rights and the third one is a political supportive environment. That is why **The Third African International Conference on Early Childhood development** was organized around three main themes:

- 1) ensuring effective caring practices within family and community,
- 2) ensuring access and use of quality basic services,
- 3) ensuring a supportive policy environment.

The report of the meeting highlight that “One result of the Accra meeting is expected to be increased political commitment to early childhood development in Africa that will facilitate accelerated action at country level and promote integration of ECD into other developmental processes like PRSPs, EFA, SWAPs and NEPAD planning” (Foreword).

All these themes have been developed by several researchers and implementers based in Africa and elsewhere and helped to assess the situation in the region and the basic key recommendations to go forward.





This has been the basis for the WG to develop, for the first time (2006), a “Regional Strategic Plan of action” with 5 Strategies:

- 1) advocacy at Political level,
- 2) regional Communication Strategy,
- 3) networking and Partnership building,
- 4) capacity building,
- 5) national policies support.

These strategies are linked with various activities, which are implemented by the Secretariat, the Steering Committee and the partners at national level.

Following the Ghana meeting, the WG has succeeded in its advocacy (beginning at the ADEA Biennale in 2003 in Mauritius) to have a Special ECD session at the ADEA Biennale in 2006. Following are some of the challenges identified by Ministers of Education and Ministers responsible for Child development, family welfare, for Child’s rights when they met in Libreville, Gabon, March 2006:

- poor physical and social condition of young children in sub-Saharan Africa,
- obstacles to Children’s overall development exacerbated by the HIV pandemic and emergencies both man-made (conflicts in Darfour) and natural disaster like cyclones and droughts (in Madagascar and Niger),

- lack of access to quality basic services for young children especially in disadvantaged communities (sub-urban, rural),
- limited capacities for parents living in poverty and conflict situation to respond to basic needs of their children; parents own negative experiences within the education system,
- difficult transfers from home and pre-primary services, where they exist, to primary schools,
- high drop-out rates,
- large class size,
- language of instruction,
- limited school/community links,
- limited parental involvement and limited community participation.

In an attempt to respond to some of these challenges, participants did highlight a number of priority strategies which they would like to see developed over the next five years, building on the success stories and best practices developed so far in several countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

They believe that a new generation of Africans is in the making. It has to face so many new challenges in a fast developing world, with HIV and AIDS and more man made disasters alongside natural ones. Africa needs to move forward quicker while relying on a set of activities it has started developing over the past three to four decades.



They note with interest that twenty two countries have expressed interest. And eleven of these, including some of the poorest of the world (Chad and Niger), have set up policies and are developing strategic plans to address early childhood care and education for several millions of their children population aged 0 to 8 years who are amongst the most vulnerable in any given national programs.

They have identified five major strategies:

- 1) advocacy, mobilization and participation for sustained development,
- 2) capacity building of institutions and of staff working therein through training and development of supportive material,
- 3) monitoring and evaluation for informed policy dialogue and policy development,
- 4) action research for testing and developing more efficient and effective ways of serving young children,
- 5) resource mobilization.

## WGECD

### Outlook in coming Years

#### The Regional Strategic Action Plan (2006-2010)

- Continue advocacy to mobilize political and public support to position ECD on the development agenda of Africa and African countries.
- Enhance partnership building and networking.
- Support and Strengthen emerging national ECD networks.
- Facilitate research and knowledge building and exchange.
- Mapping of Universities delivering ECD programs in Africa.
- Continue to support ECD capacity building initiatives.
- Continue to stimulate national policy review, development, implementation and monitoring.
- Identify an institution in Africa to provide an administrative base for the WG.

## New Base, New Steps

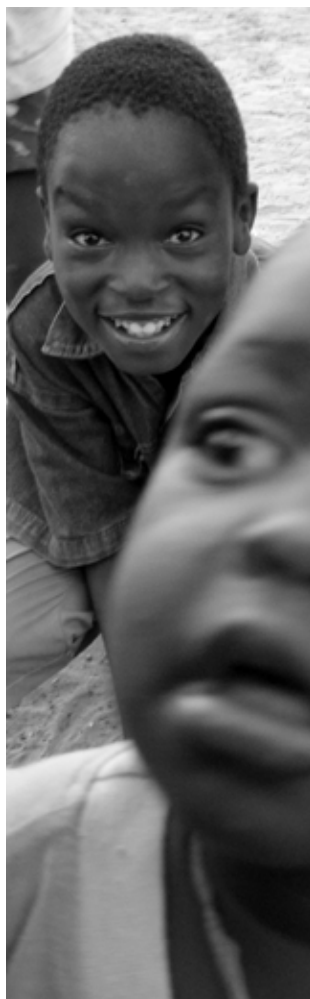
The 2006 annual meeting of the W.G have decided that, regarding the strengths of the network by that time, it's the time to think about 2 important new steps:

- 1) to become independent of the ADEA as a Working- group: the main reasons is that, by being independent, we are highlighting the fact that the ECD approach is multisectoral and do not deal only with ministries of Education. Of course we are keeping the relationship with this organization, as this is our better link with all Education ministers in Africa,
- 2) to have a real (no longer virtual) Secretariat, based in Africa and a new Chair for the W.G: To be able to accomplish this new step, TOR for the new base have been shared with all members of the network, and the choice have been done based on a participatory process where the Steering Committee have chosen **"Save the children, US"/regional body based in Nairobi as Secretariat and a New Chair: UNESCO- Breda, based in Dakar.** This choice ensure that both West and Central Africa Region and South and East Africa Region will be represented by the two bodies, as well the anglophone and the francophone countries of both region.

These choices have been approved at the 2007 Annual meeting, held in Mombasa (Kenya), in November and constitute an important step in the history of the WG.







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