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The Foundations First

Priority to Early Childhood

Of all the regions of the world, Africa has the youngest population. In 1993 the countries of sub-Saharan Africa had a combined population of 541.5 million: 20% of these (109 million) were children under five years of age and 47% were children under 14. This population explosion has greatly increased the demand for health care, protection, education and, in general, welfare services for this age group.

- But what are the prospects for young African children today?

The report of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, published on the recent occasion of the United Nations' special session on children¹, assesses the progress made since the 1990 World Summit for Children. The conclusions of the report are alarming. There has been little improve-

ment over the last decade. One African child in six is underweight at birth. If that child survives, he or she will have just over an 80% chance to live beyond the age of five, since the infant mortality rate² in Africa is the highest in the world. The child is likely to suffer from chronic malnutrition, along with over a third of African children under five. Since sewage treatment, health care, and vaccination services are inadequate (less than half of all children are vaccinated against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis), and access to drinking water is far from universal (in 2000 only 57% of the African population had access to drinking water), this child will be vulnerable to epidemics and in-

fectious diseases. He or she will probably not receive any Early Childhood Development (ECD) care, since such services are still very rare in Africa. To make matters worse, he or she may have to live in the midst of armed conflict, and the risk of becoming an AIDS orphan is considerable: of the 10.4 million AIDS orphans in the world, 90% live in sub-Saharan Africa, and, unfortunately, this figure is forecast to double by the year 2010.

It is the duty of African governments and development agencies to respond vigorously to this situation, not only because children are the largest and most rapidly growing segment of the population, but also because children are more vulnerable, and the

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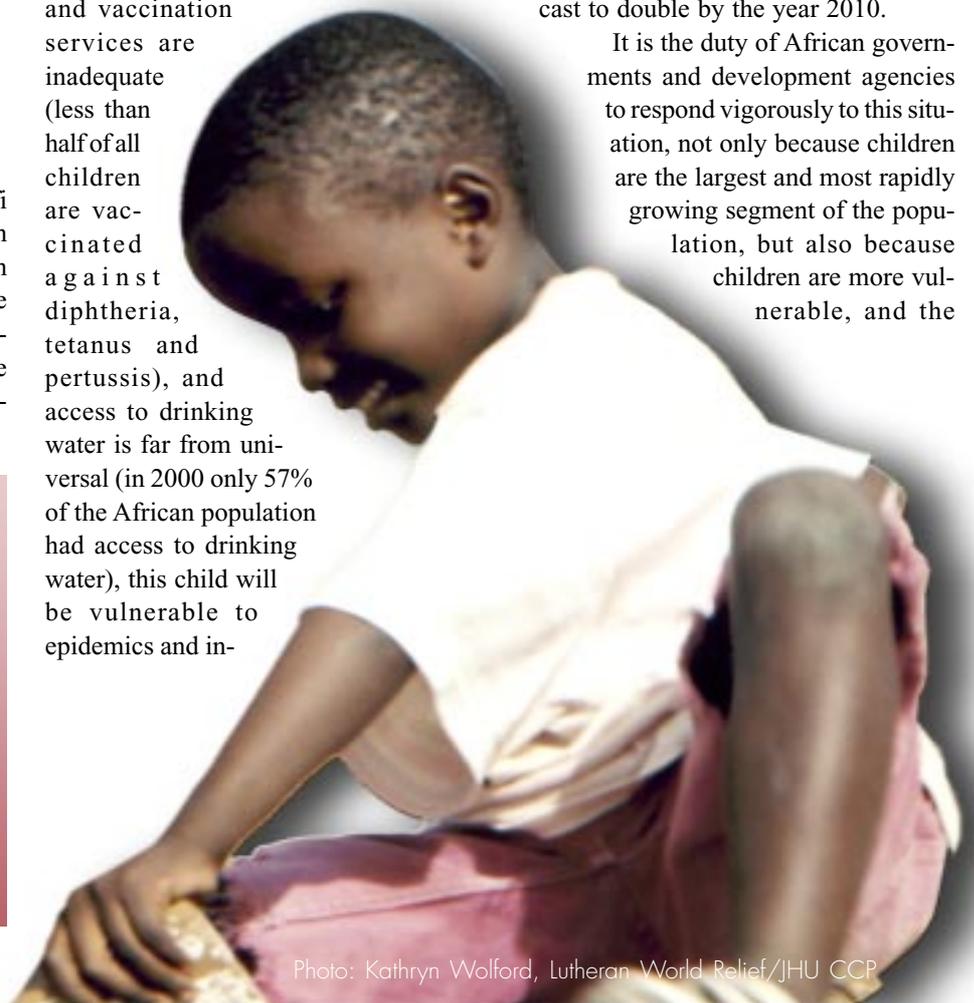


Photo: Kathryn Wolford, Lutheran World Relief/JHU CCP

future of African countries depends on their well-being.

- What are the challenges?

There are many. First, **stepping up efforts to sensitize the public about the importance of early childhood care.** As Judith Evans of the Bernard van Leer Foundation points out, *“evidence is there, from the fields of physiology, sociology, psychology and education, showing that the first years are crucial for the formation of intelligence, personality and social behavior.”* In particular, emphasis should be given to the impact of malnutrition on learning ability. Next, **developing cross-sectoral and comprehensive national policies that take into account the physical, psychological, social and educational needs that must be met for holistic development of the child.** These holistic approaches should dovetail with primary education policies, because ECD investments and the contributions made to child welfare, in terms of health, nutrition and psychological balance, help more children complete their basic education. Indeed, ECD programs reduce rep-

etition and dropout rates, thus increasing the effectiveness of primary education. Governments must also give consideration to this when they allocate funds among the various sectors and sub-sectors. It is also necessary to **increase funding and encourage governments to place early childhood development in their national budgets.** Kate Torkington, a consultant for the ADEA Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD), points out that only a few African countries allocate funds to ECD, and that these funds, where there are any, are pitifully small. She states that *“without the support of international donors, the fragile structure of ECD in Africa would collapse.”* **Implementing policies in a context of scarce resources and competing priorities will require imaginative strategies that elicit strong involvement on the part of both parents and communities and that strengthen the capacities of all stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels.** Several countries have shown the way: witness the efforts to develop and implement community-based approaches described in this issue (Mauritius, Namibia, Ghana). Lastly, **in**

view of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its impact on families and on society, solutions must be found to provide care for orphans and vulnerable children, who will be still more dependent on ECD programs to meet their physical and affective needs.

Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, and Graça Machel, UN specialist on child victims of armed conflict, recently issued the following appeal to policy-makers:

“The future of our children depends on our capacity for initiative and on the policy decisions of our leaders.”

This is the challenge facing our political leadership—a challenge which it is their duty to take up. ■

1. “We the Children: Meeting the Promises of the World Summit for Children.” The United Nations’ special session on children was held in New York, May 8-10, 2002.

2. The infant and juvenile mortality rate is the probability of dying between birth and the age of five years for every thousand births. In 2000, the rate for sub-Saharan Africa was 175 for 1000.

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Beginning on the Seventh Floor

Just as the construction of a building begins with solid foundations, children need basic care and initial learning from the very earliest age to support the development of their intelligence and personalities, as well as their integration into society. But what provision is being made for Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Africa today? What are governments and the international aid community doing?

Imagine a group of architects and contractors holding a meeting to determine how to begin constructing a multimillion-dollar building. One suggests that they begin by digging the foundation. This is quickly countered by someone who suggests it would be far more interesting (and a better investment) to create the highest floors, since they give the building its unique character. Another proposes that they begin with the seventh floor since that is where the contractor's experience lies, in terms of the kinds of materials to be used. They are very unsure what the inputs should be for lower floors and first wish to ensure that there are adequate funds to complete floors seven to thirteen, for which they are responsible.

This situation sounds ludicrous. Contractors would never imagine it possible to create a strong and sturdy building by starting on the seventh floor. They would ensure a solid foundation before beginning to construct even the ground floor. So why is it that we think about supporting children's learning only when they reach age seven? Learning does not begin when children reach primary school; learning begins at birth, and some would argue even earlier than that. An acknowledgement that learning begins long before children enter school was stated in the Jomtien Declaration: "Learning begins at birth. This calls for early childhood care and initial education. These can be provided through arrangements involving families, communities or institutional programs, as appropriate."

Early childhood care and development (ECD) is an important expansion of

the more traditional approach to basic education that sees education as beginning with entrance into school. In essence, the Jomtien Declaration and Framework gives international presence and sanction to early childhood care and development in a way that it had not enjoyed previously.

The benefits are clear

While ECD was acknowledged as an important foundation for education within the 1990 Framework for Action, there was not much buy-in by governments in investing in young children. Today, however, there is increasing interest in knowing more about ECD and what it can mean in the life of young children and their families. For one thing, there has been increased understanding of the importance of early childhood experiences in terms of their impact on later life. A few examples:

• The value of early attention to the needs of the child

Evidence from the fields of physiology, nutrition, health, sociology, psychology, and education continues to accumulate, indicating that the early years are crucial in the formation of intelligence, personality, and social behavior. Children are born with physical, social, and psychological capacities, which allow them to communicate, learn, and develop. If these capacities are not recognized and supported, they will wither rather than flourish.

• Early childhood programs promote social and economic equity

By providing a "fair start" to children, it is possible to redress socio-economic inequities. Children from families with few resources often fall quickly and progressively behind their more advantaged peers in their mental development and readiness for school and life.

The importance of ECD recognized by the Jomtien Declaration

Participants at the 1990 Jomtien Conference, recognizing "the diversity and complexity of the basic learning needs of children, teenagers and adults, as well as the changing nature of these needs", agreed that it is necessary to broaden and redefine the field of basic education. In this context, they emphasized the vital importance of expanding programs for young children.

"Learning begins at birth. Systematic development of basic learning tools and concepts therefore requires that due attention be paid to the care of young children and their initial education, which can be delivered via arrangements that involve parents, the community or institutions, depending on requirements." *World Declaration on Education for All, Article 5.*

• Investment in the early years leads to economic benefits for society

Children who participate in early childhood programs demonstrate a higher economic productivity over the child's lifetime. In some instances there are also savings in terms of reduced juvenile delinquency and reduced use of drugs. Benefits also accrue for women; ECD programs provide increased employment options for caregivers to earn and learn. In addition, childcare programs can greatly enhance women's opportunities to participate in the market economy.

• Early childhood programs promote gender equity

In most countries, there is virtual parity between boys and girls in attendance in ECD programs. (There are some exceptions. Nepal, Pakistan, India, the Maldives and Iran are cases in point. And, gender inequality also tends to be magnified in rural areas.) This gender parity in ECD programs is beginning to have an impact on girls' entrance into and performance in school. Girls who have had a positive learning experience as a result of an ECD program are more likely to advocate on their own behalf to attend school. And parents are beginning to see the value of education for girls and are thus encouraged to allow their girl children to enter primary school.

• ECD programs facilitate the transition into primary school and influence performance

Early childhood programs help children to cross the barrier between home and primary school. There is a much greater likelihood of children entering primary school, and being able to adapt to that context if they have had an early childhood care experience in the year prior to entry into primary school. Attention to children's "readiness" for school can also make educational programs more efficient. Children who receive appropriate early attention are less likely to repeat grades and less likely to drop out than peers without an early childhood experience.

The status of ECD programming since Jomtien¹

Since the benefits of ECD are proven, has this led to increased ECD provision over

the years? In preparation for the Dakar EFA Meeting in 2001, Robert G. Myers of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development examined country reports to assess to what extent there was increased ECD provision over the years. He also looked at the role of NGOs in supporting the development of ECD programs and the extent to which international organizations and government had increased their financial support for ECD.

There is a wide variation in the availability of ECD programs among developing countries.² Where countries have differentiated between coverage by age group, there is always greater coverage for children in the year immediately before entrance into primary school than for children under the age of three. In Chile, for example, according to 1996 data, 3.5% of children under two; 22% of children two to three years of age; 35.5% of children three to five years of age; and 83.0% of children in the five to six year age group were in ECD programs.

In a somewhat oversimplification of the data, it can be said that the extent of ECD coverage is related to the development of the primary sector. In 1990 in countries where there is a well-developed primary system, government investments in ECD were in the range of 20-30% coverage, and this has reportedly increased 10 to 15% since Jomtien.

Early Childhood Development in Africa

Unfortunately no African country submitted data on ECD coverage for the Dakar meeting. And, in general, there is little ECD provision in much of Africa. With some exceptions (for example Kenya, where it is estimated that there is about 30% coverage for children in the three-to-five age range), governments have paid little attention to ECD, which is viewed as the responsibility of families and communities.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a very important role in the development of ECD programs in Africa. These include direct services to children and their families, training of caregivers, curriculum development, ma-

terials development, and research in the context of family and community. Government policy has drawn on this experience, and it is projects such as those from the NGO sector that have encouraged the development of family and home-based policy for ECD. There is much interest, therefore, from funders and policy-makers in the community-based and family-focused approach that characterizes much of ECD programming in Africa.

Despite currently low levels of coverage, during the 1990s policies that support young children and families appeared in at least ten African countries (Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe).³

The Bernard van Leer Foundation's program in Africa

In 1963, when the Bernard van Leer Foundation began working in Eastern and Southern Africa, support for ECD had three characteristics: (i) support was for isolated projects; (ii) there was a lack of partnerships; (iii) the belief was that governments on their own could be the main players in delivery of ECD. Project focus was on the provision of pre-school education, as well as training and resource materials for pre-school educators. This reflected an emphasis on early learning services as prevention against educational failure. With the exception of Mozambique, which until 1975 unsuccessfully attempted to create a state-run kindergarten system along East European lines, ECD models in other countries in the region were largely rooted in Western ideals of childhood and child-rearing. The issues of parent and community participation were marginal; their inputs were only allowed in labor intensive and menial tasks such as building and cooking.

Over the years, the Foundation's partner organizations in South Africa have been among the pre-eminent institutions working with young children. Their collective influence has extended far beyond their contribution to ECD in their own country. "Educare" approaches have been disseminated throughout the region, and

both the concept and importance of educare were successfully “sold” to even the most impoverished and isolated communities, who saw education as the vehicle to give their children opportunities that they themselves never had. To this extent, the educare establishment has been insightful and positive. However, in a context of dwindling public resources and a changing environment for children, the vast majority of children cannot adequately be reached by the center-based programs, which are considered to be pockets of excellence and the only ECD option.

Demand is increasing

In the meantime, the demand for childcare has become even more acute, as parents continue to seek safe and affordable places to leave their children while at work or looking for work. The increased level of violence as a result of the legacy of apartheid, war, and poverty is reflected in an increasingly deteriorating environment, which threatens children’s development. As economies continue to

worsen, families settle in communities where basic housing, health, sanitation, water, and education-related services are utterly inadequate, and diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and cholera affect

Strengthening communities to cope with the increasing number of orphans and vulnerable children includes increasing support to extended families and child-headed households and exploring community-based fostering schemes to cater for children who are made orphans in rural and urban areas.

many. These conditions have a profound impact upon children, many of whom spend their formative years living in difficult circumstances.

Some of the basic precepts underly-

ing ECD have evolved over time, through experience in intervention projects for children. The greatest source of knowledge seems to reside at the local and community level. In many areas community-based responses are more cost-effective, but these are the least visible and are strained severely. The extended family is still the main absorber of orphans. However, there needs to be further assessment of the capacity of extended families. Many children are increasingly taking on adult roles, such as caring for younger children and trying to provide a family income.

Strengthening communities to cope with the increasing number of orphans and vulnerable children includes increasing support to extended families and child-headed households and exploring community-based fostering schemes to cater for children who are made orphans in rural, urban, and the commercial farm sector.

While strengthening the capacity of families and communities is of critical importance, it must go hand in hand with increasing resources and improving ser-

The difficult transition to primary school: the example of San children in Botswana

“Coming from a culture where children and adults interacted freely, where education was informal and a constant part of this interaction, and where physical abuse of children or harsh corporal punishment was unheard of, the San find it hard to understand the formal system of education. Children have difficulty adjusting to rigid class schedules and being enclosed in a classroom with groups of people. Lessons are taught in Setswana and English by teachers who have no understanding or appreciation of San culture or language.”¹

1. Willemien le Roux. *The Challenges of Change: A Tracer Study of San Preschool Children in Botswana*. Bernard van Leer Foundation (2002).

For all children, entry into primary school is an important transition stage between two environments. For those who enter primary school directly from their homes, the transition can be difficult owing to the effort required to adapt to new circumstances. Willemien Le Roux’s study of the San community in Botswana provides interesting insights into the situation of minority cultures and the problems children experience in coping with social expectations, contradictory norms and unfamiliar languages. They also face pressure from their parents, who mistrust the school system which “steals” their children.

The study shows that if schools cannot adapt to pupils’ previous circumstances, children must make tremendous efforts in order to succeed, and very few will be capable of doing so. Kindergartens that teach in children’s native languages should be provided, so that children can gradually become accustomed to the more rigid system of primary schools. Parents as well would be better placed to accept the formal system

vice provision, especially social welfare and education. The ability to devise creative programs that identify and assist needy families and to increase economic and emotional support to them by mobilizing existing services has become a critical component of ECD programming. Thus our partners are involved in a number of networks and lobby groups that advocate to governments and the business community for welfare reform and access to additional resources for children.

International support for ECD in Africa

At the beginning of the 1990s few international organizations operating in developing countries provided significant support to ECD. The Bernard van Leer Foundation gave assistance primarily within a child-centered community-based development framework. UNICEF funded a variety of projects through its field offices. Other organizations provided sporadic assistance for isolated projects. In general, the available financing was for pilot or demonstration projects, often with a training component included.

As noted in Myers' report, during the 1990s the picture began to change. Indeed, there is no doubt that the overall level of international financing available for ECD has increased a great deal since 1990. "The change was driven by a cer-

*tain level of success with child survival programs, leading to a need to respond to the question, 'Survival for what?', as well as by a search for something new."*⁴

The change was also driven by an increased knowledge of how children learn and of the value of early childhood programming, by a desire to prepare children better for school, in response to the increasing labor force participation of women, and by international advocacy efforts. Both the Jomtien Declaration and the Convention on the Rights of the Child provided new frameworks for attending to children and brought pressure to bear on signatories to provide greater attention to children defined more broadly than in health and nutritional terms.

Setting the foundations: The seventh floor is too late

The EFA platform provided the grounding for ECD work with the statement: "Learning begins at birth." This is obvious to anyone who spends a little time observing an infant's behavior, yet we seldom apply this understanding when we think about creating "education" programs. We tend to associate "learning" with "schooling," whereas we should look more closely at how to ensure that learning is supported in all contexts. Education for All is not only about primary and secondary education; it is about creating environments within which all people

can learn—from the youngest to the oldest.

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1. The following statistics have been gathered in relation to education primarily; coverage in terms of health programs is not included in these data.

2. The data cited on ECD coverage come from the report prepared by Robert G. Myers for the Dakar EFA meeting. Early Childhood Care and Development - A Global Review, 1990-1999 (2002).

3. Communications from Margaret Kabiru and from the UNESCO office in Harare, as quoted in Robert G. Myers. Early Childhood Care and Development - A Global Review, 1990-1999 (2002).

4. Robert G. Myers. Early Childhood Care and Development - A Global Review, 1990-1999 (2002).

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The Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation created in 1949 and based in the Netherlands. It seeks to improve the living conditions of children under seven years of age from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

The Foundation operates in 40 countries and funds two types of projects: those which help to raise the quality of ECD programs or try to share the knowledge and know-how acquired in this field; and long-term, innovative and culturally appropriate projects concerned with children's development. The Foundation supports about 140 projects of the second type, aimed at young children who are excluded from the educational system and from other development opportunities owing to social, cultural and/or ethnic problems (children from urban shantytowns or isolated rural areas, children of teenage parents, etc.). These projects must have a lasting impact, either by becoming self-sufficient or by proposing replicable models. They must also adhere to the following four principles: a positive approach to children's development; the fundamental role of parents as children's first teachers; improving the circumstances of children; looking for solutions within the local community.

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Early Childhood Development in Africa: From Theory to Practice

Despite their positive impact, Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs are still allocated pitifully small budgets by African governments. Kate Torkington, a consultant for WGECD's Policy Study Project, analyzes the reasons for the gap observed between the theoretical acceptance of the benefits of ECD and the financial commitment that should go with it.

“The time of early childhood should merit the highest-priority attention when responsible governments are making decisions about laws, policies, programs, and money. Yet, tragically both for children and for nations, these are the years that receive the least.”

This quotation from UNICEF's *State of the World's Children, 2001*, focused on early childhood, stresses the crucial importance of early childhood and the lack of attention given to this stage of life by policy-makers worldwide, particularly in Africa.

The dedicated work of individuals and organizations (mainly NGOs) in ECD was given an enormous boost in 1990 at the World Conference on Education for All in Thailand. The Jomtien Declaration stressed the importance of ECD and the need for an expansion in ECD activities, concepts further reinforced at subsequent international EFA forums. The World Summit for Children, which was held later in 1990, called for expanded ECD activities and a drastic reduction in child deaths and malnutrition. International agencies, such as UNICEF, keep ECD high on their agendas. Bilateral organizations and governments, however, though they accept in theory the importance of ECD, have rarely translated it into committed investment and action. As Evans, Myers, and Ifeld assert: *“The regular budgets of governments have not been tapped at the level that is justified by the return on so-*

cial investment that we know will occur when quality early childhood programs are implemented.”

Why investment in ECD is important

The arguments to justify social investment in ECD are indisputable. The internationally accepted definition of ECD is *“the process of change in which the child comes to master more and more complex levels of moving, feeling, and interacting with people and objects in the environment.”* This definition encompasses the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development of the young child, all of which dimensions are interwoven and together comprise what is known as holistic child development. It is during the very early years of the child's life, from conception to about age eight, that the child is learning through doing, experimenting, manipulating objects, exploring rather than reasoning, that its capacity for and attitudes toward learning are determined. It follows that children will only develop to their full potential if, at the early childhood stage, their need for affection, interaction, and learning through play are fulfilled, and their need for protection, nutrition, and health care are satisfied.

Further compelling evidence for investment in ECD emerged in the 1990s from research on the development of the human brain. It showed clearly that the first three years of life are critical for brain growth and development and that, deprived of a stimulating environment, children's brains will be smaller than nor-

mal for their age.

The Global Affirmation made at a World Bank Conference on ECD in 1996 summarized the long-term benefits in investing in young children :

- Interventions designed to benefit young children can benefit the whole community and allow mothers to pursue earnings and educational goals.

African national governments are not giving enough support to ECD to ensure that provision for young children improves and expands. It is not putting it too strongly to say that without the support of international funders the whole precarious ECD structure in Africa would collapse.

- Investments in Early Childhood Development can modify inequalities rooted in poverty and social and gender discrimination.
- Improvements in nutritional, health and psycho-social well-being increase school enrollment, decrease repetition and dropout rates, and enhance school performance.
- Early childhood investments can reduce costs and improve the efficiency of primary schooling.
- Children who reach their full physical and mental potential will be more productive citizens.

Why accepted theory has not led to political action

The commitment to the theoretical arguments for investment in ECD has led to the development of many varied interventions worldwide focusing on the early childhood stage of development. These ECD interventions, however, have generally been initiated by international agencies and NGOs; rarely have they become rooted in government budgets and policies. International agencies and NGOs seem to assume that because governments and bilateral agencies do not know how to translate the theoretical value of ECD into practical programs, they themselves must lead the way.

There is now a great deal of information demonstrating that the fundamental problem of increasing investment in ECD has not been confronted. Holistic ECD does not fit comfortably into the compartmentalized organizations of governments, which either divide responsibilities for young children and their families and communities between the education, health, welfare, and women's affairs ministries or leave the responsibility to NGOs and the private sector. The result is that each sectoral ministry may claim to have an ECD policy, which may range from a sentence or two to a complete section of comprehensive policy documents, but which rarely carry budgetary commitment. This practice is reported in a 1997⁶ survey by Colletta and Reinhold of the expenditure on education within African government budgets and the percentage of the education budget allocated to ECD programs. The authors showed that out of 25 countries surveyed only four had any official allocation to ECD, and in these the ECD expenditure was miniscule [See Table opposite].

Under pressure to provide and improve primary educa-

tion, education ministers in developing countries argue that all their resources are committed to this end. Other social sector ministers have similar arguments. If a real commitment to ECD is to be secured, cross-sectoral policies and services, including joint budgetary provision, seem the only answer.

ECD in Africa

The broad picture of ECD in Africa, within which the ADEA Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD) is working, is one of piecemeal and uncoordinated action. There are many ECD projects in Africa, but because of limited funding few have developed into full programs and very few have governments' financial support. By far the most prevalent ECD model is center-

based, much of it run by private organizations and individuals and a great deal of it of poor quality, badly-equipped, unregulated, and unsafe. In one or two countries, the ministry of education, with support from international NGOs, is covering the costs of training ECD teachers to work in centers and sometimes the salaries of pre-school teachers. Within the centers, the emphasis is on the cognitive development of children and, in particular, on preparing them for formal schooling.

The WGECD Policy Studies Project [See article on page 10] confirmed several generally held beliefs:

- ECD in Africa is still equated with center-based provision (pre-schools) as a preparation for formal schooling.
- Home-based and parent education initiatives are rare.
- Health provision is frequently not

Public Expenditure on Pre-primary and Primary Education

Country	Education as % of Total Government Expenditure	ECD Expenditure as % of Total Ed. Expenditure	Primary as % of Total Ed. Expenditure
Angola	10.7	◆	96
Botswana	21	•	31
Burkina Faso	17.5	•	42
Burundi	16.7	•	45
Central African Rep.	N/A	◆	53
Chad	8	3.6	44
Comoros	25	•	40
Djibouti	10.5	•	53
Ethiopia	9.4	.02	61
Gabon	N/A	•	44
Gambia, The	11	•	65
Ghana	24.3	•	29
Lesotho	13.8	•	42
Madagascar	17	•	55
Malawi	10.3	•	48
Mauritania	22	•	30
Mauritius	11.8	.14	38
Mozambique	12	•	50
Niger	18	•	49
Rwanda	25.4	•	68
Seychelles	11.9	◆	29
Swaziland	22.5	.03	33
Tanzania	11.4	•	53
Togo	24.7	•	36
Zimbabwe	13.8	•	63

Note: • less than 0.005%; ◆ pre-primary expenditure included in primary level

Table from: N.J. Colletta and A.J. Reinhold, *Review of Early Childhood Policy and Programs in Sub-Saharan Africa*, World Bank, 1997. Sources: UNESCO Statistical Year Book 1994, UNICEF 1995, *African Development Indicators 1994-95*, World Bank.

even considered to be part of ECD.

The conclusion of the Synthesis Report on the Policy Project⁷, which is based on the findings of the survey, is that ECD is not viewed holistically in Africa.

The survey, conducted through a questionnaire to all education ministers in sub-Saharan Africa, concentrated particularly on issues of ECD policies and financing of ECD initiatives. It is clear that ECD stakeholders in many countries are striving to develop an ECD policy but are finding it difficult to hold on to the principle of holistic ECD in governments organized on sectoral lines. Several countries reported that they had developed specific ECD policies under the ministry of education, while others had used different lead ministries, such as the ministries of women's affairs and social security. Effective and powerful coordinating committees do not seem to exist, and provision of any ECD services seemed to remain strictly sectoral.

All countries are in agreement that the main weaknesses in relation to ECD are:

- Inadequate financial resources;
- Limited government funding negatively impacted by difficult socio-economic situations;
- The lack of clarity and/or transparency in departmental budgets about allocations to ECD.

On the other hand, the survey highlights positive factors concerning ECD in Africa:

- Community involvement and support;
- An increasing level of popular demand;
- Training programs in ECD;
- A high level of support from international agencies.

Nevertheless, the survey and the WGECD Policy Project as a whole showed that many young children in Africa are not receiving the ECD services they need and deserve. African national governments are not giving enough support to ECD to ensure that provision for young children improves and expands. It is not putting it too strongly to say that without the support of international funders the whole precarious ECD structure in Africa would collapse.



What needs to be done

The WGECD Policy Studies Project attempted to address the problems head-on. The principle that underpinned the setting-up of the project was that *“national government commitment is essential for the development and expansion of ECD policies and provision. Distinctive and cross-sectoral ECD policies based on a commitment to holistic ECD are likely to be the most effective.”*

In the three case studies conducted for the Policy Studies Project (Ghana⁸, Mauritius⁹, Namibia¹⁰), the authors describe honestly the difficulties these countries have faced in the process of developing and implementing distinctive and cross-sectoral ECD policies. The country experiences in this Newsletter describe progress made in these countries.

The conclusion reached by the WGECD Policy Project, outlined in its Synthesis Report, is that if governments in Africa recognize the importance of holistic ECD programs, they need to develop policies that focus on the young child rather than on separate sectoral responses to different dimensions of the child's development. For this, they need:

- A lead ministry or agency committed to the development and implementation of a cross-sectoral policy;
- A strong, high-level coordinating committee, representing all relevant

sectors and key organizations;

- A common fund for financing joint ECD programs, with mandatory contributions from all sectors.

Such actions, which would demonstrate a clear national commitment to ECD, could attract earmarked funding from external funders. Through such partnerships, “the fragile and precarious structure” of ECD in Africa could be reinforced.

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POLICY STUDIES PROJECT

WORKING GROUP ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

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Assessing ECD policies in Africa

The Policy Studies Project of the WGECD

Without clear national policies, Early Childhood Development has little chance of being assured in African countries. Bearing that in mind, the ADEA Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD) made sure that one of the first tasks it tackled was to assess ECD policies in sub-Saharan Africa.

In 1999, WGECD launched a Policy Studies Project with the aim of assessing ECD policies in sub-Saharan Africa. The specific objectives of the project were:

- To select and support a certain number of countries in their analysis of their policy formulation and implementation processes;
- To build capacity for policy analysis in the countries selected;
- To reinforce national networking, partnerships, cooperation and policy dialogue among all ECD stakeholders in the countries;
- To identify areas for strategic initiatives to mobilize public and political support, attract resources and strengthen ECD capacities;
- To identify the requirements, the gaps to be closed and the obstacles to be overcome in the design and implementation of national ECD policies;
- To disseminate the project results in order to strengthen countries' commitment to ECD.

As part of the project, a survey on ECD policies was conducted in 1999, by means of a questionnaire sent to all education ministers in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, three case studies were produced, in Ghana, Mauritius and Namibia.

The survey on ECD policies

The survey revealed that a great many people had become involved in fostering Early Childhood Development (parents, communities, NGOs, public- and private-sector employees). Not enough children

benefit from ECD services, however, and the few who do are dependent on aid from the international community. African governments must therefore make an effort to improve and expand services for young children. In this respect, policy formulation and implementation play a fundamental role, which needs to be strengthened.

The case studies

The purpose of the case studies conducted in Ghana, Mauritius and Namibia was to collect information on the processes involved in the framing of an ECD policy and, if possible, on its implementation. They have enabled the countries to make progress in developing nationwide initiatives.

The Ghana case study caused a resurgence of interest in ECD, which has become one of the priorities in the government's program. In Mauritius, a working group was formed to study the recommendations of the case study and to propose a plan for reforming the country's ECD policy. In Namibia, the Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare is in quest of funding in order to review and improve its ECD policy. Since the case study appeared, UNICEF has started up a program of in-depth ECD training in Namibia.

The case studies have not merely contributed to progress in ECD in the three countries; they have also shown that projects can be built from the vital forces of a country, its people and its organizations.

Stepping up ECD activities

A consultative meeting of the WGECD provided an opportunity to consolidate the lessons drawn from the Policy Studies Project. December 10-12, 2001, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a meeting inviting 26 participants from French-speaking and English-speaking Africa, from international and bilateral organizations, and from African networks involved in ECD. Each country represented at the meeting gave a brief account of the national ECD policy. Main lessons are:

- ▶ ECD policy should aim for holistic development of the child;
- ▶ Cross-sectoral planning and cooperation are of vital importance if such holistic development is to be achieved;
- ▶ Strong cross-sectoral coordinating mechanisms need to be established;
- ▶ ECD should be included in anti-poverty programs;
- ▶ Adequate financial and human resources must be allocated to policy formulation and implementation;
- ▶ Unflagging political commitment is of paramount importance;
- ▶ It is essential that the broadest possible range of stakeholders be consulted at all stages and levels of the process;
- ▶ In Africa, ECD is provided primarily by central government departments. A cost-effective alternative that gets families and communities involved could make a substantial contribution to ECD and should be encouraged. ■

The three case studies on Ghana, Mauritius and Namibia as well as the synthesis report on the Policy Studies Project (See references on page 17) will be made available on the ADEA web site at the following address: www.ADEAnet.org

The ADEA Working Group on Early Childhood Development

What is WGECD?

The Working Group on early Childhood Development (WGECD) is ADEA's most recent Working Group. It was created in 1997 with UNICEF as the lead agency. In 1998 the leadership of the Group was moved to the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. WGECD is guided by a consultative group composed of representatives of African countries who have demonstrated interest in ECD and international agencies and sub-regional organizations with a strong commitment to ECD.

What are WGECD's objectives?

The goal of WGECD is to encourage and support national governments in Africa that commit to and invest in ECD. The Group's work is underpinned by the following principles:

- All aspects of a child's development are interdependent and of equal importance (holistic approach);
- The critical stage of ECD begins before birth and continues into the early years of formal schooling;
- ECD interventions respect the practices and cultural beliefs that are part of the development of children in each society;
- Involvement of parents and communities is crucial to the development of ECD policy and to the provision of ECD services;
- National government commitment is essential for the development and expansion of ECD policies. Distinctive and cross-sectoral policies supporting holistic ECD are likely to be the most effective.

WGECD activities

With these principles in mind, the Working Group initiated in 1999 a Policy Studies Project [See article on page 10]. Three countries—Ghana, Mauritius and Namibia—which have made steps toward a distinct and cross-sectoral ECD policy and which acknowledge the importance of holistic child development—carried out case studies analyzing the processes involved in the formulation and implementation of their ECD policies. WGECD and UNICEF offices in Africa provided financial and technical support. At the same time, the Working Group carried out a survey of ECD provision and policy in Africa, through a questionnaire sent to all African ministers of education.

On completion of the case studies and the survey, WGECD, together with the teams from each of the three countries, carried out a meta-analysis of the findings and produced a report that provides guidelines for African countries interested in developing their own ECD policies. The results of the Policy Studies project will be widely disseminated.

Future activities planned include:

- A manual will be produced to facilitate the formulation and implementation of ECD policies. WGECD will also lend its support to countries interested in developing an ECD policy;
- New policy studies on ECD in sub-Saharan Africa will be conducted in collaboration with other organizations;
- Countries will be encouraged to develop strategies to help young children affected by HIV/AIDS. WGECD will also build partnerships with other organizations working in this area.

Organization of the Working Group

WGECD is restructuring itself to involve a wider circle of partners in Africa. The Working Group also seeks opportunities to work with other ADEA Working Groups and to consolidate its relationships with international organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank. In the long-term, the Group intends to hand over its leadership to an African country, organization, or institution.

How to contact the Working Group

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Namibia

Moving towards Equity, Access and Quality

Namibia has an Early Childhood Development policy since 1996. Even though this policy acknowledges the need to adopt a cross-sectoral approach to include parents, communities, NGOs and various public services, in reality, establishing multi-sectoral coordination has proved to be difficult.

At Independence in 1990, the SWAPO-led government inherited a country that had been at war for more than twenty years and that had thirteen different ethnic groups receiving widely different levels of service.

faced with all the other pressing social inequalities, it decided that the government could not provide schooling for children below the primary-school age of seven years. In order to provide young children with a bridge to formal educa-

financial, material, and training support to pre-school education.

The process of developing a holistic ECD policy

In late 1992, the government, with UNICEF support, organized a National Conference on Early Childhood Protection and Development. Participants represented a broad base of government departments and NGOs actively involved in ECD. This laid the foundation stones for a holistic, cross-sectoral ECD policy, which recognized the need to re-inforce and support family and community responsibility for young children's develop-



Photo: Malempré, Georges/UNESCO

The previous apartheid regime had denied basic human rights to the vast majority of Namibians, who were vulnerable to chronic food insecurity, due to low grain production, drought, low incomes, and limited off-farm opportunities.

The new government adopted four goals in line with Education for All: access, equity, quality, and democracy. It acknowledged the importance of early childhood development (ECD), but,

tion, the government made a ten-week bridging syllabus part of the grade 1 syllabus.

Dating back to the early missionaries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have offered programs for young children in the form of kindergartens, pre-schools, day care centers, and crèches. Various churches including Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican, and, more recently, some locally based NGOs, have provided

ment.

A multi-sectoral task force was established and given responsibility for drafting an ECD policy. The task force spent several years debating the policy content before an external consultant was undertaken to develop a draft document. In a culturally diverse country with huge income inequalities, defining quality, setting standards, designing support structures, and defining roles and responsibili-

ties can be a long process. Consensus was finally reached, and the National Cabinet passed an Early Childhood Development Policy in 1996. We can proudly say it is regarded as one of the best holistic ECD policies in Africa.

Support structures for community-run ECD programs

One of the main principles underlying the policy is that the family has “*the primary responsibility for the support of a child’s healthy growth and development.*” The policy recognizes the need for a cross-sectoral approach involving parents, communities, NGOs, and various government agencies, with the lead coming from ministries responsible for community development, education, and health. It promotes a variety of approaches rather than one national model, while striving for equity and quality. It also highlights the coordinating mechanisms to do this cross-sectoral work, notably the inter-ministerial National ECD Committee, multi-sectoral regional ECD committees, and the appointment of ECD coordinators in the key ministries and participating NGOs.

The policy clearly spells out the roles and responsibilities of the various actors. The Directorate of Community Development in the lead Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare (MWACW) is responsible for the registration of facilities, guidelines, standards, regulations, community mobilization, and parent committee training. The Ministry of Basic Education, Sports and Culture is responsible for training ECD care-givers, developing curriculum guidelines for a variety of ECD programs, certifying NGO training institutions involved in ECD training, and developing training materials. The Ministry of Finance will play a lead role in creating a structure for the allocation of funds to ECD programs.

Main achievements

Namibia’s ECD policy is an important achievement in itself, as two ministries and other partners have committed human resources to implement the policy. Government has promised to provide two

national ECD coordinators, six ECD trainers, and many community activists, who will help implement the policy.

Communities have been mobilized, and more and more parents are aware of the importance of ECD, to the extent that over 3,000 ECD facilities have been established across the country. Several new approaches have been piloted and evaluated, and ECD care-givers and families have been able to use these. Community activators are using the guidelines for establishing and registering ECD centers. A manual for ECD care-givers, consisting of 11 modules across the spectrum of ECD topics, including HIV/AIDS, is the basis for a six-week training program. In the last two years alone, the government has trained more than 320 ECD caregivers, while NGOs have trained 439 ECD caregivers, largely with funding from UNICEF.

Lessons learned and perspectives

Although individual ministries and NGOs continue to contribute to ECD, there are not yet any coordinated implementation plans with objectives, targets, and activities against which progress could be monitored and plans adjusted. For example, the Ministry of Basic Education, Sports and Culture has no coordinated plan to train the increasing numbers of ECD caregivers who have opened ECD facilities, often as an income-generating ac-

tivity. Such plans are important, because low-quality ECD programs are ineffective and can even be harmful to young children.

Funding mechanisms to support the development of quality community ECD programs are not yet sufficient to meet the need. This is partly due to a major disruption in 1999 and 2000, when responsibility for ECD was transferred to a newly created ministry—the Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare. This move was overall beneficial, because before it took place, ECD had to compete with government’s major decentralization program, but ECD has had to slow down its activities while its new ministry establishes offices, priorities, and resource allocations.

The ECD policy did not specify the appointment of an ECD Coordinator from the Ministry of Health and Social Services, and consequently input from this ministry has lagged behind the others. Considering health and nutrition for the birth-to-three age group is particularly critical, this oversight needs to be corrected. The new government-UNICEF program has recognized this emphasis and has merged Early Childhood Care and Development under a larger umbrella program: Young Children’s Health, Care, and Development.

In practice, multi-sectoral coordination is proving difficult to implement. Agencies implementing the ECD

Namibia (2000)

Area	824.300 km ²
Population (million)	1.7
Population growth rate	2%
Urban population	30.9%
Rural population	67%
Infant mortality	62.5 /1 000
Life expectancy at birth	54 years
Fertility rate	5.4 births/woman
GDP	3.5 billion US\$
GNI (per capita)	2,050 US\$
Child malnutrition	26%
Access to potable water	75%
Net primary enrollment	91.2%
Illiteracy rate, adult male	17.2%
Illiteracy rate, adult female	18.8%

Source: World Development Indicators Database, April 2002 – (World Bank); Namibia ECD Case Study 2001

policy have continued to operate sectorally, communicating vertically between national, regional, and local levels within line ministries. Hence ministerial and NGO service providers at the various levels have found it difficult to work as a team and to share resources such as transport and funds.

Although it had been given the responsibility of overseeing the development and implementation of the policy, the National ECD Committee did not have a strong secretariat. As the Committee had no plans or budgets to discuss and monitor, most ministries sent only lower-level representatives to meetings; these individuals had no decision-making power. The MWACW has recognized the need to make this committee an effective, coordinating body, and it is now aware that it must play a stronger role in leading and coordinating the other stakeholders.

Decentralization to regional government is progressing. The thirteen Regional Councils in Namibia are increasingly expected to coordinate multi-

sectoral, rural development programs. The coordination of the delivery of services and support to ECD facilities is one of many such programs. Linkages between monitoring and evaluation and supervision need to be made more explicit and strengthened. Multi-sectoral report-back mechanisms to improve program accountability across all sectors need to be established. This needs to take into account the limitations caused by the current linear organization of responsibility within some ministries, which are not conducive to multi-sectoral implementation.

Future priorities

There is a growing awareness in the key ministries that a shift has to be made from unregulated ECD provision by communities to government efforts to improve the quality of programs. This realization is a major step forward. The need for effective data collection and use at the local level in planning, coordinating, and monitoring programs has been recog-

nized.

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, having focused for eleven years on primary and secondary education, must re-examine its responsibilities towards ECD and, at the very least, present a budget to address the need for better access to training and quality ECD provision.

While there have been achievements, Namibia is now facing the impact of HIV/AIDS on Namibian society. Children are losing parents, siblings, guardians, and caregivers. The government and NGOs are losing skilled personnel. The ECD sector has to find ways of coping with more and more orphans and vulnerable children, who will increasingly depend on their ECD facility to meet their basic emotional and physical needs.

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The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development

The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (CGECCD) was formed as a result of discussions, beginning in 1982, among a number of members of international organizations concerned with the survival, protection and development of children under 6 years of age in developing countries.

The group is a diverse consortium of agencies, donors, NGOs and foundations that works to develop links with regional networks for the protection and development of young children. Its members are of two types:

- A consortium of agencies that currently includes the Aga Khan Foundation, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, the Christian Children's Fund, the Academy for Educational Development, UNICEF, PLAN International, UNESCO, USAID and Pueblito. Twenty-three other organizations have also participated in the Consultative Group's activities. Today, the network comprises about 2,800 individuals and institutions in 120 countries.
- Regional representatives, each representing broader networks of planners, practitioners, researchers and decision-makers in the field of early childhood education. Eight regions are currently represented: Latin America, the Caribbean, the Arab countries, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Southeastern Africa, West Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The CGECCD Secretariat, in partnership with the other members of the consortium and the regional networks, is working to find new partners as well to identify needs, critical situations and possible new areas for action.

The objectives of the Consultative Group's activities are to:

- synthesize, critically review and share the lessons, results and impact from practice and research across regions;
- continue to strengthen the regional networks;
- strengthen and/or establish more effective links with other stakeholders working in the fields of health, social welfare, community development, adult literacy and basic education.

For further information, see the Web site: www.ecdgroup.com

ECD in Mauritius

An Evolving Vision of ECD

In Mauritius, the notion of Early Childhood Development has evolved over the years. It initially focused on ensuring young children's survival. Today, the perspective is much broader and encompasses the holistic development of young children. In accordance with this holistic approach, the country will soon be setting up more efficient coordination mechanisms.

The International Year of the Child, celebrated in 1979, enhanced public awareness of children's developmental needs as well as government's commitment to create the necessary conditions for their survival, protection, and development. In spite of economic constraints and high unemployment rates, the Mauritius government, with the support of international agencies, took energetic action to extend maternal and child health services, increase immunization coverage, improve nutrition, and provide universal access to free public health and education. As more and more women found work in the newly established export processing zone, facilities for children under the age of five became a practical necessity. Thus the priority given to the preschool sector in the 1980s had both a pragmatic and a moral basis.

Mauritius was among the first African countries to ratify the Convention for the Rights of the Child and to adopt a national plan of action for the World Summit goals, one of which was "the expansion of early childhood development activities, including appropriate low-cost family and community-based initiatives." Subsequently, preoccupation with the cognitive development of preschoolers gave way to concern for the integrated and holistic development of all young

children.

Profile of the ECD sector

The ECD sector, at present, can be described as a two-tier system, one for preschool and the other for daycare. The preschool sector, which is under the respon-

to primary schools. The sector is governed by the Preschool Regulations of 1997. Efforts to expand and upgrade facilities at first concentrated on teacher training, which has recently been structured and formalized by the *Mauritius Institute of Education* so that all preschool teachers may now have access to certificated

courses. Moreover, the Mauritius Institute of Education has, in collaboration with the *Mauritius College of the Air*, launched an innovative distance education program leading to a Certificate of Proficiency in ECD for more than one thousand preschool teachers. Caregivers working with infants to three year-olds will be included in the next cohort.

Another interesting experiment in the preschool sector is

the **Unified School project** in Rodrigues. In a unified school, three or four teachers work together, in the same building, sharing teaching materials, equipment, and other facilities. These teachers used to have classes in their own homes, but because space was very limited, they could only take in a few children and could not apply the new methods imparted in the training programs. Moreover, they were in competition with other teachers in the village who faced the same problems. The Unified School project gave them the opportunity to replace competition by cooperation. It was launched and managed by an NGO, the *Association des Ecoles*



Photo: Harvey Nelson/IHU CCP

sibility of the Ministry for Education and Science, caters for three to five year-olds. The daycare sector falls under the Ministry for Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare and caters for infants to three year-olds. Underpinning this structure are the health, family welfare, and social security services.

The **preschool sector** caters to 38,111 children, or 93.5% of the three to five year-old population. Government grants a monthly subsidy for four to five year-olds. The sector is 83% private, while government, through the Preschool Trust Fund, manages the remaining 17%, consisting of 175 preschool centers attached

Maternelles de Rodrigues and is a good example of a low-cost, sustainable community-based initiative.

As for the **daycare sector**, its development has followed a phased process of assessment, analysis, consultation, policy formulation, implementation, and review. The Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare was given the mandate for child development in 1991, a year after the World Summit for Children and the Jomtien Conference on Education for All. In 1995, a Child Development Unit was created, incorporating an ECD section. In 1996, following the Amman EFA mid-decade review, Mauritius hosted a regional workshop on ECD, convened by UNICEF and the World Organization for Preschool Education. A key conclusion of this workshop was: *"The way forward implies promotion of low-cost community-based approaches; definition of national policy; setting up of an ECD task-force to act as a planning and coordinating mechanism; capacity-building at national, district and community levels and advocacy using media and other channels."*

Mauritius had already started to prepare the ground for its ECD policy: A case study was initiated on daycare and home care programs in Mauritius in the context of the World Bank's Regional ECD Initiative. The main findings of this comprehensive study, published in 1997, are the following:

- Out of 65,000 children below the age of three 40% were cared for by their mothers, 42% by home care givers, and 18% in formal daycare centers, mostly in urban areas;
- Few centers were registered, and there was no regulatory framework;
- Most of the caregivers had not received any training;
- The demand for daycare was likely to increase.

These findings confirmed an analysis of the situation of women and children, carried out in 1994, and pointed to the need for a national ECD policy.

The national ECD policy

The national ECD policy focuses on the infant to three year-old age group. It was

developed in consultation with major stakeholders with input from external consultants on key aspects, such as rationale, program sustainability, and quality assurance. The mission statement of the ECD policy is formulated as follows: *"The mission is to introduce and adopt an integrated and holistic approach to ECD, an approach which will emphasize the child's overall development—intellectual, physical, emotional, social well-being, initiative, and self-esteem. In addition, it takes into consideration the child's diverse skills and need for autonomy and independence."*

Seven objectives constitute the backbone of the policy:

- Establish a system of childcare in Mauritius;
- Establish a system of accreditation and quality improvement;
- Develop a training program for ECD personnel;
- Develop strategies for parent education and community awareness;
- Develop a curriculum framework for infants to three year-olds;
- Ensure equity and access in child care;
- Develop the concept of integrated services in ECD.

Strategies proposed center on:

- Capacity-building and staff development;
- Creating the required legal and administrative framework;
- Mobilizing resources;
- Educating and involving parents and

the community;

- Providing for children with special needs;
- Quality assurance.

The National ECD Policy Paper, officially presented in 1998, gave a new impetus to the development of the sector. An ECD coordinator was recruited, and an intensive training and parental sensitization program, supported by UNICEF, was implemented by two core educators, who had been trained under the Joint Training Initiative for ECD Trainers in sub-Saharan Africa, sponsored by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, Save the Children, and UNICEF. People trained include: 6 trainers of trainers, 24 early child care trainers, 16 parenting education program trainers, 2230 sensitized parents, 3680 parents reached through peer-to-peer programs, 30 resource persons and 100 caregivers inducted in accreditation norms and procedures, and 34 caregivers inducted in program guidelines for ECD. Other outputs include the production of an ECD trainers' guide, program guidelines, manuals on accreditation, and resource books and audio-visual cassettes for parenting education.

At the same time regulations governing the operation of daycare centers were introduced, making registration mandatory, and structures were created to regulate, develop, and upgrade facilities.

Two years later, the national ECD policy was examined in the context of the Policy Studies Project launched by

Mauritius (2000)

Area	1,865 km ²
Population (million)	1,187
Population growth rate	1.1%
Urban population	41%
Rural population	59%
Infant mortality	19/1,000
Life expectancy at birth	71 years
Fertility rate	2 births/woman
GDP	4.5 billion US\$
GNI (per capita)	3,800 US\$
Child malnutrition	15%
Access to potable water	100%
Net primary enrollment	97.6%
Illiteracy rate, adult male	12.2%
Illiteracy rate, adult female	18.7%
Literacy rate (total population)	83%

Source: World Development Indicators Database, April 2002 – (World Bank); Mauritius ECD Case Study 2001

ADEA's Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD). The analysis revealed the need for a coordinating mechanism to ensure an integrated approach to holistic child development. The analysis also recommended that the policy be reviewed within the framework of a National Policy for Children (from birth to 18 years).

Lessons learned

Lessons learned from the Mauritian experience may be summed up as follows:

- A national ECD policy is an indispensable tool to speed up progress in the ECD sector.
- National commitment, political will, financial provision, and community involvement are in fact needed to create services that are sustainable, adapted to the environment, holistic, and child-centered. In contrast, sectoral organization and approaches hinder progress.
- External inputs are valuable catalysts, particularly with regard to capacity building, advocacy, and research.
- In a context where services are provided mainly by the private sector, it is unnecessary for the public sector to

try to take on overall provision. The state must, however, take its responsibility as specified in the Convention for the Rights of the Child.

- Investing in parental empowerment and community sensitization yields immediate returns.
- Staff development is a priority. Training programs should be certificated, as this motivates staff.
- Quality assurance is a sensitive and challenging issue in a predominantly private sector. The participation of parents and service providers is crucial.
- Attempts to re-organize and professionalize the sector should not unwittingly obliterate the caring and affective core of ECD.
- Research is not a luxury. Sound policies are not formulated and implemented in a vacuum. Networking at a local, regional and international levels is therefore vital.

Challenges ahead

The main challenge will be to create a powerful coordinating mechanism to ensure that the ECD policy is implemented effectively. A funding mechanism will be

required next year, when Mauritius will no longer benefit from UNICEF's regular resources. Other challenges will be:

- To replace the two-tier system with more flexible structures that facilitate cross-sectoral communication and cooperation at all levels.
- Service providers, parents, and the community need to be equipped to become active partners in quality improvement and quality assurance.
- Capacity building, advocacy, and research are on-going challenges that will require sustained investment. Distance education and resources offered by information and communication technologies could be tapped.
- Networking within and outside Mauritius must be facilitated to stimulate research and development.

In a world beset by uncertainties, the ECD challenge is no child's play; yet it will need all the involvement and creative spirit that a child puts into play if it is to be fully addressed.

MEDHA DEVI MOTI

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MAURITIUS

For more information on ECD...

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ECD in Kenya: www.siup.sn/ecdkenya/

Ghana: The Final Stages of Policy Formation

Although Ghana was the first member country to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, the country is only now about to finalize a nine-year process of comprehensive policy formation for the development of children under eight years old, who comprise about 28 percent of the population.

In Ghana, the need for developing a policy for Early Childhood Development (ECD) was prompted by a vision of young children growing into mature citizens, the desire to enforce laws protecting the rights of children, the influence of international agreements and conventions concerning children, and the poor situation in which many children find themselves.

In 1998 the situation of young children was the following:

- Out of every 1000 infants born, 68 died before the age of one.
- In rural communities, the number of infant deaths was as high as 154 per 1000 live births.
- Almost 60% of children under five were underweight, with 8% of these severely malnourished, more than half stunted, and more than 40% emaciated.
- About 90% of young children, especially those from rural and/or poor areas, did not have access to early childhood services.
- The majority of young children were at risk of malnutrition, disease, insecurity, and inappropriate developmental practices.
- Many young children from poor or disadvantaged families did not attend school, or if they did enroll, did not complete the ten years of basic education.

This assessment of critical areas for the development of young children—survival, nutrition, health, education and social welfare—show that many children do not have a fair start in life, especially those who are born in rural communities. The

policy on child development is expected to address these inequities.

Raising awareness of the importance of a national commitment to ECD

The most significant event to create public awareness of the importance of holistic ECD was the first National Seminar on Early Childhood Development held at the Teachers' Hall in Accra on November 25-28, 1993. It was organized by the Ghana Education Service, the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), and the Danish National Federation of Early Childhood and Youth Education (BUPL) and supported by UNICEF. The goal of the seminar was to prepare a national plan to make available community-based early childhood care and development services to at least a third of Ghanaian children below six years of age by the year 2002.

Outcomes of the national ECD seminar

Two major outcomes of the national ECD seminar were the Accra Declaration of 1993 and the formation of a task force to operationalize plans for Early Childhood Development programs. The Accra Declaration stressed, perhaps for the first time, issues of cooperation among the various stakeholders, multi-sectoral strategies, recommendations for a national ECD policy and commitment within two years, specific action plans, development of community-based programs, and a vision of holistic development of the young child.



Photo: Keating, Rex/UNESCO

The process of developing ECD policy in Ghana

The ECD Policy Task Force accomplished the following tasks:

- It undertook preliminary surveys of the plans, problems, and expectations of the participating agencies;
- It prepared draft ECD policy statements for discussion at a forum;
- It conducted research on ECD institutions and practices in Ghana;
- It organized a workshop to decide on crucial issues such as age limits, and roles and responsibilities;
- It recommended that the Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC) be the coordinating agency for ECD policy.

The GNCC, with support from UNICEF also organized several activities:

- A four-day capacity-building workshop in Accra on policy development writing. Several issues were discussed at this workshop, such as the roles and functions of key stakeholders, mechanisms that support ECD, structure of the policy document, timeframe for the completion of work, and submission to appropriate authorities of the final draft.
- Supervised the preliminary drafting of the policy document.
- Disseminated the preliminary draft

policy throughout the country at regional fora for regional and district stakeholders to collate views and recommendations.

- Presented the project at a National Consultative Workshop in Accra.
- Presented the draft ECD policy to Cabinet in 1999. The draft received feedback for final review in 2000. A change of government necessitated a review of the draft policy.
- Organized a national workshop in Accra to provide an agenda for ECD development.
- Brought together experts in Aburi to prepare an ECD Program Development Action Plan.

Mechanisms for implementation

Mechanisms for implementing the draft policy include the following:

- Creating an institutional framework for implementation by setting up national, regional, district, and community ECD steering committees;
- Assigning roles and responsibilities to the various ministries, departments, and agencies that will be charged with the implementation of the policy at all levels. These roles are varied, and range from advice and training to costs and financing;
- Creating a conducive environment for developing the program, through advocacy and sensitization of key decision-makers, communities, parents, and other stakeholders in ECD. Avenues for networking will also be promoted;
- Promoting integrated services that take care of the holistic needs of the child;
- Encouraging the establishment of conventional and unconventional ECD systems for all children;
- Training care givers;
- Broadening parent participation;
- Providing quality ECD services;
- Building the capacity of existing institutions to sustain ECD systems;
- Organizing regular research, monitoring, and evaluation to improve all aspects of ECD systems;
- Mobilizing resources for implement-

tation of ECD programs.

The present stage of the draft policy

The minister of the new Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs is studying the draft policy, which needs to be revised to incorporate the current institutional and directional changes. Two workshops, will be organized this year to finalize the project.

Lessons learned

The following lessons can be learned from the policy formulation process:

- Awareness of the unsatisfactory situation of young children was crucial in starting the ECD policy development process.
- The 1993 National Seminar on ECD harnessed efforts of different stakeholders working towards the common objective of young children's development.
- Joint efforts of government, non-governmental organizations, and development partners in initiating ECD policy development yielded fruitful results.
- The roles played by the task force and the GNCC were crucial in the development process.
- The dissemination of the draft policy

document ensured a participatory process and brought in relevant revisions.

- Though there was political will, constraints like the long period needed for writing and revising, and indecision about a coordinating body caused delays.
- The Ghana National Commission on Children has been assigned a crucial role of coordinating ECD in the country, and it needs all the planned resources to perform its work.

Conclusion

Ghana was the first member country to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and it would certainly want to be among the first to develop a holistic ECD policy. The country has made efforts to formulate an ECD policy, strategies, and implementation mechanisms. These show government's commitment to the welfare of young children in Ghana. However, the process has been long, and everyone hopes that the policy will be finalized soon. The young Ghanaian child can wait no longer.

J.K.A. BOAKYE

ECD POLICY STUDIES PROJECT CONSULTANT
GHANA

Ghana (2000)

Area	238,537 Km ²
Population (million)	19.3
Population growth rate	2.3%
Urban population	33%
Rural population	67%
Birth rate	44.66/1,000
Death rate	12.52/1,000
Infant mortality	57/1,000
Life expectancy at birth	58 years
Fertility rate	6 births/woman
GDP	5.4 billion US\$
GNI (per capita)	350 US\$
Child malnutrition	25%
Access to potable water rate	64%
Gross primary enrollment	79%
Literacy rate (total population)	60%
Illiteracy rate, adult male	19.7%
Illiteracy rate, adult female	37.1%

Source: World Development Indicators Database, April 2002 – (World Bank); Ghana ECD Case Study 2001

The ADEA Steering Committee met April 2-4, 2002 in Chantilly, France. Two days of the meeting were dedicated to reflection on the future of ADEA with respect to the context in which the Association operates. The Steering Committee examined several initiatives: the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), G8 initiatives, poverty reduction programs, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt relief initiative and sector-wide approaches. The next issue of the Newsletter will discuss the implications of these initiatives for ADEA.

NEPAD

NEPAD is an initiative of African leaders aimed at resolving the problem of under-development, endemic poverty and Africa's exclusion from the 21st century. It is a program that takes a holistic, integrated approach in order to resolve development problems through concerted action. The NEPAD was presented by the heads of state of South Africa, Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria and Senegal in July 2001.

The desired outcomes are as follows:

- ◆ Economic growth and development and increased employment;
- ◆ Reduction of poverty and inequality;
- ◆ Diversification of productive activities, enhanced international competitiveness and export growth;
- ◆ Enhanced African integration.

NEPAD will establish partnerships for more effective dialogue with the developed countries and international institutions. It will also seek to strengthen the dialogue among African leaders and favor African cooperation and integration.

African leaders have made a commitment to:

- ◆ Strengthen conflict-prevention mechanisms;
- ◆ Promote and protect democracy and human rights;

- ◆ Restore and maintain macroeconomic stability;
- ◆ Establish transparent frameworks for financial markets and auditing;
- ◆ Reinvigorate and extend education, technical training and health services;
- ◆ Increase the capacity of the state to establish, enforce and maintain law and order.

The implications for education: human resource development, which is a central part of the NEPAD strategy, must tackle the fight against poverty, the education gap (which needs to be closed) and the brain drain (which needs to be reversed). Special attention will be given to combating poverty among women and to bringing self-sufficiency to the poorest groups. Educational quality is a major concern. Efforts will be made to broaden access to new information and communication technologies (NICTs) at all educational levels. Efforts to counter the brain drain will focus on the development of socio-economic conditions and policies capable of reversing this trend and attracting investors. Africans living in developed countries will provide the expertise for delivery of NEPAD-related projects. ☐

For further information, see www.nepadsn.org

Sector-wide approaches

In the last few years development cooperation has witnessed a shift from cooperation based on individual projects to a more holistic, integrated vision of development. This process is expected to foster genuine partnerships that will put an end to the fragmentation we see today and reduce the growing burden linked to aid provision. Sector-wide approaches have the following characteristics:

- ◆ Constant dialogue at all stages of cooperation;
- ◆ Agreements on funding "baskets" to replace the allocation of targeted funding;
- ◆ The adoption of common, consensus-based procedures for planning, implementation and reporting by all parties involved;
- ◆ Priority to national policies and strategies, which are placed at the core of the cooperation process;
- ◆ External resources to finance these national policies and strategies;
- ◆ The development of common results indicators;

- ◆ Long-term cooperation based on mutual trust.

What results has this new approach brought?

- ◆ The sector-wide approach has gained the favor of ministries;
- ◆ Transaction costs have not fallen in the initial stage;
- ◆ The sector-wide approach promotes greater transparency;
- ◆ The implications for institutions have been more far-reaching than expected, although the harmonization of rules and procedures is a painstaking task that will take time;
- ◆ Little information is available yet as to the impact of sector-wide approaches on poverty reduction;
- ◆ Long-term commitments and the establishment of trust are the key factors for success.

It is important that these new development cooperation experiences be the subject of very candid and open exchanges among the partners of educational development in Africa. ADEA has an important role to play in this respect. ☐



Poverty reduction programs

Four decades of development assistance have shown that, contrary to the generally accepted notion, there was no link between aid, economic growth and human development. Throughout this period, aid—sometimes provided in massive quantities—had little effect on the living standard of the most disadvantaged social groups. This failure to reduce poverty may certainly be attributed to low rates of growth, but also to an inability to redistribute the benefits of growth. Growth of national output is no longer an end in itself. It is admittedly indispensable, but it must be combined with redistributive policies directed to the poorest. In particular, higher priority must be given to the budgets of the social sectors. Educational development is not only a factor of poverty reduction but also a vital instrument for economic growth. Moreover, any policy for providing free access to basic education for the poorest groups has a redistributive impact that makes it an effective tool for reducing inequality.

Poverty reduction programs work through Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which are national policy frameworks that integrate all activities aimed at equitable development and ensure consistency between macroeconomic and sectoral policies. The implementation of PRSPs has the following implications:

- ◆ Governments are fully responsible for the education policies formulated in consultation with the partners and beneficiaries of the school system.

- ◆ Preference will be given to a sector-wide approach, which provides a comprehensive view of the education system. This approach encourages the development of links among sectoral analysis, strategy formulation, plans of action, spending programs and monitoring of results.
- ◆ By situating sectoral policies in their macroeconomic context, the PRSP places emphasis on the financing of these policies. Budgetary trade-offs are decided on the basis of efficiency in public spending, thus ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of the education policies undertaken.
- ◆ Structural reforms are required in order to make unit costs compatible with the sustained development of the education sector.
- ◆ In the case of the least developed countries, emphasis should be placed on basic education, which has the greatest impact in terms of growth and poverty reduction.

Once these policies have been negotiated and adopted, they are placed under the responsibility of the national authorities for implementation, and constitute the general framework for all action by the donor community. □

For further information, see

www.worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/index.htm

G8 initiatives

The G8 initiatives have two components:

General support to NEPAD through the “Action Plan for Africa” in the following areas:

- ◆ Democracy and political governance;
- ◆ Conflict prevention and reduction;
- ◆ Human development (investment in health and education to fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, notably through the Global Fund established to combat these diseases);
- ◆ Information and communication technology;
- ◆ Economic and corporate governance;

- ◆ The fight against corruption;
- ◆ Encouragement of private investment in Africa;
- ◆ Increased trade within Africa and between Africa and the rest of the world;
- ◆ Combating hunger and improving food security.

Support to Education for All goals outlined in the Dakar framework. The G8 heads of state decided at the Genoa Summit to form a working group on education, which will work with the G8’s Africa working group. □

The HIPC Initiative

The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, launched by the World Bank and the IMF in 1996, is aimed at reducing the debt of countries that follow sound economic policies to sustainable levels, in order to ensure that the burden of their debt does not compromise their reform efforts. To be eligible for the initiative, countries must meet three criteria: have a low level of income, which makes them eligible for borrowing under the highly concessional terms of the IDA; have an unsustainable debt burden, even after making full use of all available debt-relief mechanisms; pursue a policy of adjustment and reform. In addition, they must:

- ◆ Have an acceptable democratic context;
 - ◆ Have reached a minimum level of macroeconomic stability;
 - ◆ Have produced a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).
- To date, 24 African countries have reached the “decision point”. The resources freed up by debt relief are directed to the education (39%) and health (25%) sectors, as well as to other priority activities (combating HIV/AIDS, rural development, provision of drinking water). □

For further information, see

www.worldbank.org/hipc/

WG on Books and Learning Materials

With financial support from the World Bank, the Working Group on Books and Learning Materials organized the second workshop on strategic planning issues in book sector programs for three francophone African countries (Benin, Chad and Niger) in Niamey, Niger (April 15-18, 2002). The first workshop took place in Dakar, Senegal, in September 2000. Strategic planning of textbooks and the development of textbook policies are important issues for both ADEA and the World Bank. WGBLM is a strong advocate of closer dialogue between government and the private sector for the growth of national publishing industries in Africa.

WG on Higher Education

The Working Group on Higher Education (WGHE) has taken a great step towards moving its coordination closer to the ground. A new coordinator, Alice Lamptey, has just taken over the coordination of the WG from William Saint of the World Bank. Ms. Lamptey is based at the headquarters of the Association of African Universities (AAU) in Accra, Ghana. ADEA welcomes Ms. Lamptey and thanks Mr. Saint for twelve years of hard work entirely devoted to the development of higher education in Africa.

WG on Distance Education/Open Learning

The Working Group on Distance Education/Open Learning (WGDE/OL) has just completed two reports, which review distance education projects and programs in both anglophone and francophone Africa. These reports will be published shortly.

A new lead agency will take part in the management of the WGDE. A memorandum of understanding between the Mauritius Ministry of Education and Scientific Research and the UNESCO regional office for Africa (BREDA) in Dakar is about to be signed.

Prospective Stock-Taking Review

The second phase of this activity aims at reinforcing ministries' capacity for research and analysis. Following a case study that it contributed for the ADEA Prospective Stock-Taking Review of Education in Africa in 1999, Namibia has taken a step further to analyze the Education Management Information System (EMIS) it developed. The Ministry of Education of Namibia has been working with a consultant recruited by the ADEA Secretariat to evaluate this activity. The evaluation phase has now been completed and a program of activities for enhancing the use of EMIS has been developed. Implementation of the program will begin in the very near future.

WG on the Teaching Profession, fs

The Working Group on the Teaching Profession, francophone section (GTPE/sf) will soon be publishing the first issue of its revamped newsletter, *Le Partenaire*. The publication was entirely re-designed to increase the visibility of the Working Group and improve its overall communication.

WG on the Teaching Profession, as

The Working Group on the Teaching Profession, anglophone section (WGTP/as) organized two self-evaluation workshops for seven countries in Southern Africa. These workshops trained school directors, teachers and other education workers in techniques for evaluating learning methods and school management. A similar workshop for Eastern Africa is planned.

WG on Finance and Education

The WG on Finance and Education (WGFE) has a new coordinator: Dr Cherif Mohammed Diarra has just been recruited to replace Dr. Coffi Noumon. He is based in Dakar, Senegal, and works from the headquarters of CODESRIA.

ADEA thanks Dr. Noumon his excellent work over the last five years, which has allowed WGFE to become a reference in the field of financing of education in Africa. Dr. Noumon is presently a program specialist at the African Foundation for Capacity Building in Harare, Zimbabwe.

COMED

The Communication for Education and Development (COMED) program organized a national training workshop in Abuja, Nigeria, February 3-9, 2002. Twenty-five journalists from the Nigerian press and twelve communication specialists from the Ministry of Education and ministry-related groups were present. A major component of the COMED program is the training of African journalists who cover education and communication officers of ministries of education.

Africa Education Journalism Award

The jury of the Africa Education Journalism Award will meet in Cotonou, Benin, from May 29-30, 2002. Four winning articles (two in English and two in French) written by African journalists and published in the African press will be chosen to receive the award.

Early Childhood Education: Need and Opportunity

David P. Weikart

This publication, which embraces methods of Early Childhood Education (ECE) rather than holistic Early Childhood Development (ECD), presents pre-school education settings in a number of developed and developing countries. This is useful reading on pre-school programs that contribute to quality primary schooling.

The introduction of Early Childhood Education in the national agenda can only be effective if it adheres to high quality norms. Early childhood care and education services have increased dramatically in recent years. The movement of women into the paid workforce has driven much of the expansion, and much-needed research on the impact of out-of-home care and education of children has been conducted to evaluate outcomes. Recent studies indicate that high-quality programs produce better workers and better citizens, and this finding has helped to bring more attention to investments in early childhood education programs.

This publication summarizes the effects of the opportunities offered by ECE programs. It presents well-documented evidence of lasting benefits for everyone but especially for those children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The author clearly demonstrates the short- and long-term effects of early childhood education and points to issues that need to be taken into account when planning these kinds of programs.

Following a short history of early childhood education, which began as early as the eleventh century BC in China, the author presents the extent and type of services used in several countries and describes the approach and context used in elaborating several pre-school programs. He also devotes an entire chapter to what teachers and families expect children to learn in their out-of-home programs. Other issues tackled range from how children learn to the impact of pre-school education programs.

The fifth chapter stresses the devel-

opmental aspects of the child's growth and looks at the different teaching and learning strategies that are required to meet these needs. Although the choice of a curriculum model is an important factor in determining the quality of early childhood education, high quality active learning programs, which give children the opportunity to develop their choices, is more productive than didactical teaching.

Chapter 6 focuses on criteria for selecting and using an effective curriculum model: "Use those curriculum models that are based on child-initiated learning supported by adults rather than ones that consist of adult-structured lessons." Why? Because they are focused on process rather than content. Not only is this approach the most effective, but it also supports a desirable public policy goal: "to engage professionals, families and communities in the care and education of children in ways that allow each group to implement its own ideas and objectives."

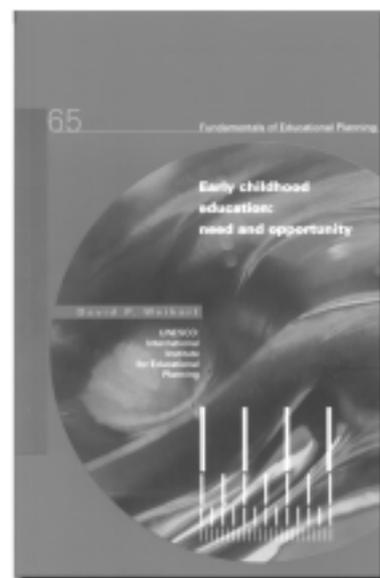
In the final chapter the author looks at issues involved in planning and operating effective Early Childhood Education programs. He proposes several criteria for a successful program:

- Use a curriculum model that has been extensively validated;
- Provide a systematic in-service training program with ongoing supervision by a trainer knowledgeable in the model employed;
- Use validated assessment systems to judge children's progress within the program;
- Make active parent involvement an essential part of the program;
- Programs need sufficient resources

and good administration to operate effectively.

This booklet draws attention to some of the questions and concerns that countries need to face, and provides factual elements for facilitating decision-making.

The principal message in this publication is that the effectiveness of early childhood education programs can be guaranteed when they are implemented with respect to standards of the highest quality. ■



Early Childhood Education: Need and Opportunity

By David P. Weikart, UNESCO, International Institute for Educational Planning, 2000.

87 pages. Can be consulted at the following address:

<http://www.unesco.org/iiep/english/pubs/recent/rec13.htm>

Calendar

ADEA Activities

May 20-25, 2002

Communication for Education and Development Program (COMED) National Training Workshop for journalists and communication officers
Monrovia, Liberia

May 29-30, 2002

Africa Education Journalism Award Meeting of the jury
Cotonou, Benin

June 3-8, 2002

WG on the Teaching Profession, anglophone section
Training Workshop for Newly Appointed School Inspectors
Zanzibar, Tanzania

June 4-5, 2002

WG on Higher Education
Meeting to review the WG's organizational structure and identify priorities for the 2003 work program
Accra, Ghana

June 12-14, 2002

WG on Nonformal Education
National Seminar
Creation of a country WG
Maputo, Mozambique

July 2002

WG on Early Childhood Development, in collaboration with UNICEF
First meeting to launch the Policy Studies Project in three Francophone countries: Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mauritania.
(date and venue to be determined)

September 2002

WG on Education Statistics
Policy Dialogue Seminar: "Application of Quantitative Methodologies in Policy"
Steering Committee Meeting
(dates and venues to be determined)

September 2-11, 2002

Africa Education Journalism Award
Winners' study tour
Paris and London

October 29, 2002

ADEA
Bureau of Ministers Meeting
WG Leaders and Coordinators Meeting
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

October 30 - November 1, 2002

ADEA
Steering Committee Meeting
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Other Activities

May 8-10, 2002

UN Special Session on Children
United Nations
New York, USA

May 20-22, 2002

International Colloquium on Basic Education for All in Francophone Countries
Study group on education in Africa (Gretaf)
Paris, France

May 23, 2002

Statistical Workshop for National EFA Coordinators in French-speaking Africa
Organized by UNESCO
Madagascar

June 24 -27, 2002

Parents' Role in Girls' Education: Experience Sharing between Parents from the North and Parents from the South.
Organized by the Burkina Faso National Union of Secondary School and University Student Parents' Associations (UNAPES-B) in collaboration with the International Federation for Parent Education (IFPE)
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

July 29 - August 2, 2002

Open Learning: Transforming Education for Development
Commonwealth of Learning Forum.
Durban, South Africa

August 26 - September 4, 2002

World Summit on Sustainable Development
United Nations
Johannesburg, South Africa

October 1-2, 2002

Education for All: Towards Equality, Quality, Accessibility and Excellence in Literacy
International conference organized by UNESCO in collaboration with Kebangsaan University
Selangor, Malaysia

October 28-31, 2002

2nd Early Childhood Development International Conference Integrated Early Childhood Interventions: What Works and Experiences Learned
Organized by the State of Eritrea, in collaboration with the World Bank and UNICEF.
Asmara, Eritrea

Dates and venues may change. For more information please consult the ADEA web site (www.ADEAnet.org)

The views and opinions expressed in authored articles of the ADEA Newsletter are those of the authors and should not be attributed to ADEA or to any other organization or individual.



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