Long form version

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Toolkit

Enhancing ECCE Services for Sustainable Development

A guide for Ministers of Education to increase access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education services, using a multi-sectoral approach

The Commonwealth

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Toolkit

The Commonwealth

Contents

Foreword

High-quality and accessible Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) lays the foundation for healthy and well-functioning societies. Effective ECCE systems equip young children with the means to develop to their fullest potential during their formative years, in a safe and inspiring environment, nurtured by well trained professional teachers and carers.

The Nadi Declaration of the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM) held in Fiji in 2018, emphasised the importance of providing all children in the Commonwealth with access to quality early childhood education, and the need for a multi-sectoral approach to support and promote early learning and development. The Commonwealth Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Toolkit was developed to support countries achieve this shared vision.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for government ministries and educational institutions and all relevant stakeholders to work collaboratively to develop and sustain effective ECCE systems.

The closure of ECCE premises due to COVID-19 resulted in a worrying decline in access to quality early childhood education for pre-primary children across the world. This has had a disproportionate economic and social impact on the lives of women and mothers who have often had no choice but to pause their own jobs and livelihoods to compensate for persistent ECCE service gaps. Even before the pandemic, UNICEF had estimated that if no substantive and country-wide plans are made to address early years learning and skills development, by 2030, 420 million school-aged children will not have acquired the most basic skills and an estimated 825 million children will not be on track to acquire basic secondary school level education.[1]

These statistics provide a stark reminder of the need for urgent action by public, private, third sector organisations, and communities working together globally. The pandemic has, more than ever, reinforced the Commonwealth's strong commitment to assisting member countries in their provision of inclusive and equitable quality ECCE, within Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Specifically, SDG 4.2 which aims to 'ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education'.[2]

---

1   Commonwealth Secretariat. (2018). *20CCEM Nadi Declaration*. http://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/20CCEMNadiDeclaration.pdf

2   UNICEF. (2019). *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education Global Report*. https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-world-ready-to-learn-report/

The Commonwealth's ECCE Toolkit has been designed as a resource for Ministers of Education and officials to increase access to quality ECCE services, for ages 0 to 8 years, using a multi-sectoral approach. This toolkit outlines five features to support this approach, covering topics including conducting situational ECCE sector analyses, planning and implementing quality services, methods to expand access, and monitoring and evaluating ECCE systems. In addition, it aims to assist governments in ensuring these services are responsive to the rights, needs, and capabilities of children, their families and their communities.

The detrimental impact of COVID-19 on education systems worldwide in the past years reiterated the need to build forward better in the post-COVID era. The 'Big Change Starts Small' report by the Royal Foundation's Centre for Early Childhood[3] highlights the importance of creating awareness of early years; building a more nurturing and mentally healthy society; creating communities of support towards long-term and intergenerational change; the need for strengthening early years work force; and the need for better data for better understanding of babies and infants. Through developing strong partnerships and collaborations to work alongside stakeholders, including international partners, to provide both stimulating ECCE for pre-primary learning and engagement are essential to ensure a safe haven that nurtures the welfare of children in early education alongside a caring and enabling home environment. We hope this ECCE Toolkit will be resourceful and provide effective knowledge sharing in your own country's efforts to enhance early childhood services.

Dr Arjoon Suddhoo
Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

---

3   Royal Foundation's Centre for Early Childhood. (2021). *Big Change Starts Small.* https://assets. ctfassets.net/qwnplnakca8g/2iLCWZESD2RLu24m443HUf/1c802df74c44ac6bc94d4338ff 7ac53d/RFCEC_BCCS_Report_and_Appendices.pdf

Acknowledgements

List of acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BELDS	Better Early Learning and Development at Scale
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EAPRO	East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF)
ECC	Early Childhood Commission (Jamaica)
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECERS	Early Childhood Environmental Rate Scales
ECI	Early Childhood Intervention
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EU	European Union
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HMIS	Health Management Information System
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PPP	Public–Private Partnership
QA	Quality Assurance
RCP	Roving Caregivers Programme
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results (World Bank)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SitAn	Situation Analysis
TTF	International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030
UNCRC	United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Children
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

List of figures

List of tables

List of boxes

Introduction

Key messages

- Early childhood care and education (ECCE) addresses the phase of the lifecycle (birth to eight years old) when important growth, including brain development, takes place.

- All young children have a right to quality ECCE, arising out of Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- Responding to children's rights to holistic development and education at this early age requires multi-sectoral approaches and co-ordination in policy-making and service delivery.

- Increased investment in quality ECCE results in positive outcomes for young children across a wide range of indicators, including physical, emotional, social and cognitive well-being and development, and may support successful transition into primary school and lifelong educational achievement.

- Quality ECCE is an enabler of Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.2: *By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education.*

- ECCE is an essential part of a country's infrastructure.

This Toolkit is a resource for ministers of education and their officials in Commonwealth member countries. It aims to support multi-sectoral approaches to increasing access to quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) services that are responsive to the rights, needs and capabilities of children, their families and their communities in their local context.

The Commonwealth Toolkit is intended to be used alongside resources provided by other international organisations and agencies, for example the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Accelerator Toolkit published by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE).[4] It is meant to complement, not replace, other sources.

The Status Update Report on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 in the Commonwealth (2018)[5] revealed three key aspects for urgent consideration:

---

4 https://www.ece-accelerator.org/about/about-the-toolkit
5 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018) *Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the Commonwealth Status Update Report 2018.* London: Commonwealth Secretariat. http://www.20ccem.gov.fj/images/CCEM_TAB/17022018/CCEM(20)SDG4%20RPT.pdf

(i) a lack of appropriately trained ECCE teachers, especially in low- and middle-income Commonwealth member countries; (ii) less than 65 per cent participation of three to six year olds in at least one year of quality pre-primary education across many member countries, particularly in the Pacific and African regions; and (iii) limited reliable data as the basis for ECCE policy development and implementation for children aged from birth to eight years old.

UNICEF's 2019[6] global report *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education* estimates that, in the absence of substantive and country-wide plans to promote learning and skills development in the early years, by 2030 420 million school-age children will not have acquired the most basic skills and 825 million children will be off-track to acquire basic secondary-level education. Since the publication of the UNICEF report, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruption to services for young children and their families in all affected countries. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reports that 150 countries permanently closed their schools in 2020.[7] Available data on education includes the youngest children only insofar as they are enrolled in "pre-primary" education – that is, formal preschool settings one year before compulsory school age. Reliable information on early childhood settings and programmes for the youngest children (from birth to compulsory school age) is harder to come by.[8] However, the emerging picture is one of widespread disruption to early childhood services in all countries affected by the pandemic.[9]

From early on in the pandemic, the disruption to early childhood services manifested in several layers that mutually reinforced each other:

- Children lost not only a stimulating environment for learning and engagement but also, in many cases, a safe, caring and nurturing space outside the family home. Children from disadvantaged, marginalised and impoverished communities lost out on nutritious meals, access to basic hygiene and other vital facilities.

6   UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education*. Global Report. New York: UNICEF. https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-world-ready-to-learn-report/

7   UNESCO (2021) *Recovering Lost Learning: What Can Be Done Quickly and at Scale?* Paris: UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377841

8   Gromada, A., Richardson, D. and Rees, G. (2020) *Childcare in a Global Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on Work and Family Life*. Research Brief 2020-18. Milan: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1109-childcare-in-a-global-crisis-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-work-and-family-life.html

9   Kenny, C. and Yang, G. (2021) *The Global Childcare Workload from School and Preschool Closures During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Washington, DC: CGD. https://www.cgdev.org/publication/global-childcare-workload-school-and-preschool-closures-during-covid-19-pandemic

- Families lost access to reliable childcare, making it difficult to work and therefore adding to financial distress caused by the pandemic.
- Early childhood educators, already in precarious employment, often lost their livelihoods as a result of the widespread closure of services.

On a macro-societal scale, it quickly became apparent that the disruption to ECCE services had far-reaching consequences. For instance, the absence of childcare prevented frontline workers from fulfilling their crucial roles in health care, retail and other essential services.[10]

That quality ECCE should be a global priority is not in question. Compelling evidence, stretching back to the 1960s,[11] highlights that investment focused on supporting young children yields benefits for children, families, communities and countries; such evidence further warns of the negative effects of low-quality ECCE provision.[12] However, it is important to acknowledge that "quality" is a highly contested concept. What it entails, and for whom, has to be carefully considered in processes that negotiate universal and overarching orientations (i.e. each child's right to fulfil their full potential) with local and national contexts (i.e. children and communities' rights to locally and culturally appropriate ECCE services).

Benefits of ECCE: the investment argument

Summarising the reasons for making universal pre-primary education a "global priority", UNICEF's *A World Ready to Learn* highlights three vital justifications, presented here in Figure 1 as relevant reasons for Commonwealth countries to invest more in quality ECCE.

The Heckman Curve (2006, 2012, 2020,[13] see Figure 2) remains another key reference for the economic investment argument, illustrating that the greatest

10 Urban, M. (2021) "Common Good and Public Service. Crisis Lessons for the Future of Early Childhood Education and Care". In B. Mooney (ed.) *Ireland's Yearbook of Education 2020*. Dublin: Education Matters.

11 Barnett, W. S. and Nores, M. (2018) "Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Education and Care". In L. Miller, C. Cameron, C. Dalli and N. Barbour (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Early Childhood Policy*. London: Sage. Chapter DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526402004. n30Bassok, D. and Engel, M. (2019) "Early Childhood Education at Scale: Lessons from Research for Policy and Practice". *AERA Open*, January–March 5(1): 1–7.

12 OECD (2012) *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD. https://www.oecd.org/education/school/49325825.pdf

13 Garcia, J.L., Heckman, J.J., Leaf, D.E. and Prados, M.J. (2020) "Quantifying the Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program". *Journal of Political Economy* 128(7): 2502–2541.

1	• Quality ECCE provides a strong foundation for learning
2	• Access to ECCE makes education systems more effective and efficient
3	• Quality ECCE programmes reduce the wealth gap and promote economic growth
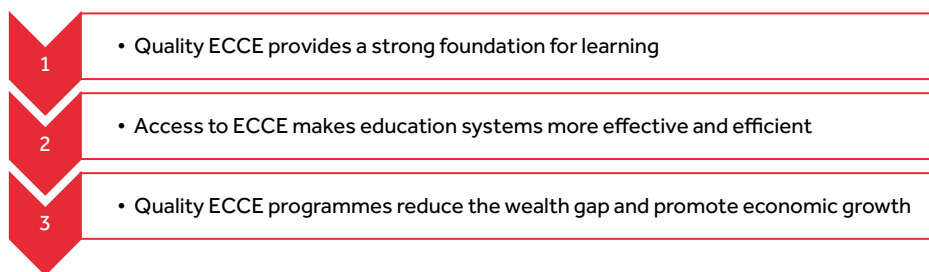
Figure 1 Why Commonwealth member countries need to invest more in quality ECCE

returns occur when countries prioritise the health, education and overall well-being of their youngest citizens and their families. As with all strong statements that allude to causality in complex social and cultural contexts, the "return on investment" claim must be viewed with caution. While convincing, and therefore potentially useful in the policy arena (i.e. to support ministries of education (MoEs) in budget negotiations with ministries of finance and donors), the underlying data is contested, and claimed effects may be exaggerated as a result of the context in which they originate (the USA).

ECCE as an obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Equally compelling justifications for investing in young children arise from the obligations of signatory countries to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), specifically to uphold children's right to education (Article 28) within caring communities that sustain their development (Article 29). While the original UNCRC (1989) makes no specific mention of

Heckman | Return on Investment
Economic impact of investing in early childhood learning.

LEARN MORE AT HECKMANEQUATION.ORG

ROI : RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Prenatal

Early childhood

Preschool

K-12 education

Job training

0-3 y/o   4-5 y/o   School age   Post-school age
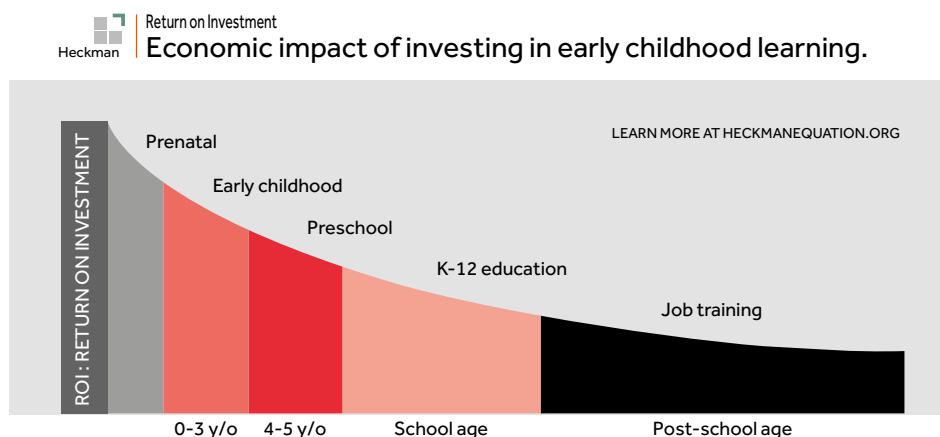
Figure 2 The Heckman Curve

ECCE, General Comment No. 7 (2005),[14] "Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood", points out that "young children are rights holders" (para 3) and that governments should have a positive agenda that positions young children as "social actors from the beginning of life, with particular interests, capacities and vulnerabilities, and requirements for protection, guidance and support in the exercise of their rights" (objective c). General Comment No. 7 recommends a "framework of laws, policies and programmes for early childhood" that would realise the four general principles of the UNCRC – universalism; the best interests of the child; the right to survival and development; and respect for the views and feelings of the child (Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12).

The Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 19 (2016), "Public Budgeting for the Realization of Children's Rights"[15] clarifies the financial and policy implications that flow from the Convention and provides a framework to ensure that national budgets are planned, enacted, executed and followed up.

ECCE as an enabler of the Sustainable Development Goals framework

The global consensus on the importance of early childhood development (ECD) and early childhood care and education (ECCE) services has been emphasised by the inclusion of Target 4.2 in the SDG framework under SDG 4:

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.[16]

While maintaining global momentum towards achieving SDG 4.2 is important in itself, there is also growing recognition that universal and equitable multi-sectoral early childhood services of high quality can be a central factor in achieving the entire SDG framework (see Section 1.1). The SDGs are mutually interdependent and as such provide a powerful argument for multi-sectoral approaches and co-ordination of ECCE policies within countries. Linking the expansion of high-quality, universal and equitable ECCE provision to countries' commitment to the SDGs can help policy-makers connect the economic and legal arguments with an ethical framework – that is, the shared responsibility for securing a sustainable future for the next generation.

The G20[17] has recognised this interdependence of sustainable development and has aligned its multilateral policy agenda with the SDG framework. It launched

14 Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) "Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood". General Comment No. 7.

15 Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) "Public Budgeting for the Realization of Children's Rights (Art. 4)". General Comment No. 19.

16 https://indicators.report/targets/4-2/

17 https://www.g20.org

a global ECD initiative at the G20 summit in Argentina in 2018. Since then, one of the G20's official engagement groups, the Think20,[18] has produced a series of policy briefs and recommendations focusing on integrated and multi-sectoral early childhood policies. These policy briefs, co-ordinated by the Early Childhood Research Centre at Dublin City University, Ireland, lay out evidence-based policy choices for decision-makers aiming at building *systemic* – that is, integrated and multi-sectoral – early childhood set-ups that respond to local needs and capabilities.[19]

ECCE as essential infrastructure in times of crisis

ECCE is already implemented at scale across many Commonwealth member countries (e.g. Australia, Malta, New Zealand, Singapore, etc.). The positive impact of high-quality ECCE provision on the development of these nations' human capital is not under debate. Beyond its general contribution to reducing the wealth gap and enhancing a country's economic well-being, ECCE provision is vital to female labour market participation, reducing gender inequality and contributing to better social outcomes for society at large. The closure of ECCE services during the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the extent to which ECCE services are essential to a well-functioning society; this has in some cases spurred member countries to introduce emergency financial support

---

18 https://www.t20italy.org/about/think20/

19 Urban, M., Cardini, A., Costín, C. et al. (2020) *Upscaling Community Based Early Childhood Programmes to Counter Inequality and Foster Social Cohesion During Global Uncertainty.* T20 Policy Brief. https://t20saudiarabia.org.sa/en/briefs/Pages/Policy-Brief.aspx?pb=TF4_PB5Urban, M., Cardini, A., Costín, C. et al. (2020) *Post-Covid-19 to 2030: Early Childhood Programs as Pathway to Sustainability in Times of Global Uncertainty.* T20 Policy Brief. https://t20saudiarabia.org.sa/en/briefs/Pages/Policy-Brief.aspx?pb=TF7_PB3
Urban, M., Cardini, A. and Flórez-Romero, R. (2018) "It Takes More Than a Village. Effective Early Childhood Development, Education and Care Services Require Competent Systems/Los servicios efectivos de desarrollo, educación y cuidado de la primera infancia requieren sistemas competentes". In A. Cardini (ed.) *Bridges to the Future of Education: Policy Recommendations for the Digital Age/Puentes al futuro de la educación: recomendaciones de política para la era digital.* Buenos Aires: Fundación Santillana.
Urban, M., Cardini, A., Guevara, J. et al. (2019) "Early Childhood Development Education and Care: The Future Is What We Build Today". In P.J. Morgan and N. Kayashima (eds) *Realizing Education for All in the Digital Age.* Tokyo: ADBI.
Urban, M., Guevara, J., Cardini, A. et al. (2021) *How Do We Know Goals Are Achieved? Integrated and Multisectoral Early Childhood Monitoring and Evaluation Systems as Key to Developing Effective and Resilient Social Welfare Systems.* T20 Policy Brief. https://www.t20italy.org/2021/09/20/how-do-we-know-goals-are-achieved/

20 As in New Zealand: MoE New Zealand (2020) "COVID-19 Update for Early Learning Services". 30 March. https://www.education.govt.nz/news/covid-19-update-for/

21 As in Australia: Hurst, D. and Karp, P. (2020) "Coronavirus: Scott Morrison Scraps Childcare Fees While Warning Australia to Brace for Six Months of Upheaval". *The Guardian*, 2 April. https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/apr/02/coronavirus-scott-morrison-scraps-childcare-fees-while-warning-australia-to-brace-for-six-months-of-upheaval

to ECCE services[20] or to abolish fees[21] to avoid closures. The role of ECCE as critical societal infrastructure during the pandemic has been underlined by T20[22]: Alongside Health and Social Welfare, Early Childhood Services have been identified as three critical factors in countries' ability to cope with the crisis.

Nonetheless, practical questions do remain, about how Commonwealth member countries might increase their investment in quality ECCE; what quality looks like in specific local contexts; how multi-sectoral programming can be enabled and developed; and how ECCE systems can be monitored and evaluated. It is also increasingly urgent that member countries put in place policy systems that support ECCE services to be resilient, responsive and sustainable in an increasingly challenging global context.

Toolkit development and structure

The development of the ECCE Toolkit feeds into the Commonwealth Secretariat's work programme on education, which is embedded in the Secretariat's 2021/22–2024/25 Strategic Plan, Strategic Outcome 2[23] – specifically Intermediate Outcome 2.4. The ECCE Working Group identified the content sections of the Toolkit during a roundtable meeting of ECD/ECE experts convened by the Secretariat in March 2019 (see Appendix A: List of Technical Experts). A smaller consultative technical team from the ECD/ECE Roundtable developed the structure and a "road map" for the process of constructing the ECCE Toolkit. In preparation, a Country Landscape Study of six Commonwealth member countries was conducted for the purpose of reviewing existing elements of good ECCE policy within each country that could illustrate progress across diverse contexts.

The Toolkit has been structured according to key policy phases identified by the experts: the framing, planning, implementing and expansion of access to quality ECCE and the monitoring and evaluation of ECCE service provision. Following a revision in February 2020, the Toolkit was piloted in Ghana and Kenya to obtain feedback on its usefulness and suggestions for further refinements. The current update responds to that feedback, refreshes and updates relevant content, and takes account of lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section 1: The Ministry of Education as lead agency in framing multi-sectoral ECCE policy

This section presents the rationale for multi-sectoral ECCE provision with the MoE as lead agency. It outlines the key advocacy functions that MoEs carry as

---

22 https://www.t20saudiarabia.org.sa/en/Communique/Documents/T20%20Communique-EN.pdf

23 Commonwealth Secretariat (2021) "Strategic Plan 2021/22–2024/25". London: Commonwealth Secretariat. https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-01/Strategic%20Plan%2021_25.pdf

lead agencies for ECCE policy and discusses strategies for a successful multi-sectoral approach to ECCE.

Section 2: Planning for quality ECCE service provision in the education sector

Focusing on how to engage in strategic planning for quality ECCE service provision, this section outlines the value of conducting a situation analysis (SitAn) to gather information about gaps and strengths within a national ECCE context. It discusses resourcing and costing for ECCE policy initiatives together with planning for a professional ECCE workforce.

Section 3: Implementing ECCE in the national education system

This section discusses governance mechanisms that are key to successful policy implementation, including the establishment of a co-ordinating body or forum for multi-sectoral ECCE policy. It discusses cross-sectoral and cross-ministerial partnerships, building sustainability and going to scale, as well as funding strategies. It also introduces the need for systematic data.

Section 4: Expanding access with quality and equity

Recognising the wide range of ECCE services operating in different jurisdictions, and the value-laden notion of "quality", this section outlines key structural and process variables that are amenable to policy intervention with the aim of expanding access while enhancing quality and equity of provision.

Section 5: Data, monitoring and evaluation for a quality ECCE system

Starting from the principled position that each child has the right to quality ECCE, this section identifies the need to ensure data, monitoring and evaluation systems combine diverse sources of information and are compatible across sectors and government departments in order to advance the goal of a systemic multi-sectoral approach to ECCE.

Section 1: The Ministry of Education as lead agency in framing multi-sectoral ECCE policy

Key messages

- ECCE refers to all those services that engage with children aged from birth to eight years and their families.

- "Keeping the child at the centre" is the core rationale for multi-sectoral ECCE policy and provision.

- To be most effective, ECCE provisions must be inter-sectoral, going beyond education to encompass health, nutrition and protection.

- As lead agencies in multi-sectoral ECCE policy and provision, MoEs need to:
  - Advocate for young children to be at the centre of social policy;
  - Take a leadership role in the identification of opportunities for collaboration;
  - Deepen the knowledge base on all aspects of ECCE provision;
  - Prepare to overcome barriers to multi-sectoral collaboration;
  - Prepare a plan of action with defined roles and accountability of sectors involved;
  - Engage in high-level meetings;
  - Ensure a co-ordination structure is in place.

This section addresses the issue of why, and how, MoEs should take the lead in framing and enacting multi-sectoral ECCE policy to achieve Target 4.2 of the SDG transformative agenda: that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education by 2030.

Action to meet this target is urgent, exacerbated by the wide-ranging consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.[24, 25] Pre-pandemic trends in access to ECCE indicated that, by 2030, only 43 per cent of children in low-income countries would have access to early education.[26] *The SDG 4 in the*

---

24 United Nations (2020) *The Impact of COVID-19 on Children.* Policy Brief. New York: UN. https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/160420_Covid_Children_Policy_Brief.pdf

25 Urban et al. (2020) *Post-Covid-19 to 2030.*

26 "Towards Competent Early Childhood Education Systems: A Conceptual Framework for a Pre-Primary Education Sub-Sector", 2018 Asia-Pacific Regional Early Childhood Development Conference, Kathmandu, 5–6 June.

Commonwealth Status Update Report (2018)[27] further noted that, while many small states were reporting over 90 per cent participation in organised learning (one year before the official primary entry age), this was not necessarily the case for small states in the Pacific. Also of concern was that many Commonwealth member countries in the African region, with the exception of some countries, such as Ghana, Mauritius and Seychelles, recorded levels of participation in one year of pre-primary ECCE of below 50 per cent.

Against the background of the ongoing pandemic, differences in access to and enrolment in ECCE between countries and inequalities *within* countries – such as between rural and urban populations and for children from marginalised groups – are indicated to escalate further through closures of ECCE services; increased levels of child poverty through parental unemployment; flow-on risks to child health; and heightened vulnerabilities for children living in institutions, migrant camps and refugee centres.

1.1 Defining multi-sectoral ECCE in the global context

In this Toolkit, the term ECCE (early childhood care and education) refers to all those services that engage with children up to age eight and their families, including pre-birth. There is great variation in the nature of these services across countries and geographic locations, cultures, and country institutional contexts.

UNESCO employs the term ECCE with an implicit understanding that it encompasses a variety of other terms used to refer to services and programmes for young children from birth to age eight:

> "ECD, ECCD, ECEC, ECED, IECD, IECCD and other terms that nations use to refer to multisectoral and/or integrated approaches to early childhood systems and services. Of these English terms for ECCE, the ones most frequently used throughout the world are ECD and ECCD."[28]

Examples of services include crèches; childcare services for children from birth to three and their families; family daycare; integrated child development centres; ECD programmes aimed at breaking cycles of poverty and malnutrition; and kindergartens, preschools and pre-primary services for the year before compulsory schooling (International Standard Classification of Education

27 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018) *Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the Commonwealth Status Update Report.*
28 Vargas-Barón, E. (2015) "Institutional Frameworks and Governance for Early Childhood Systems: Multi-Sectoral Coordination and Integration". Background Paper for EFA GMR 2015. Paris: UNESCO (p. 1).

(ISCED) 0) and (considering the age range birth to eight years) the early primary years (ISCED 1).

Falling outside of the compulsory school sector and often embedded in grassroots community initiatives, or foreign aid and philanthropic programmes, ECCE services have typically had a fragmented policy history both within Commonwealth member countries and globally. Governance and funding arrangements have been split across multiple ministries and other institutions, and complicated through layers of central and local government management. Increasing recognition of the educational value of ECCE services has seen a growing number of countries[29] shifting overall policy responsibility for ECCE to education ministries,[30] with one Commonwealth member country, New Zealand, pioneering an integrated care and education policy structure in 1986[31] under the-then Department of Education.

1.1.1 What is multi-sectoral ECCE?

Across countries, a variety of multi-sectoral approaches to ECCE can be found, with differing levels of integration under distinct administrative units. The set-up in any one country depends on a number of factors, including, for instance, the structure and remit of government departments (ministries) and agencies, and the distribution of responsibilities between different levels of government (e.g. national, regional/territorial, local/municipal).

While undeniably complex, multi-sectoral ECCE policies are being implemented successfully in an increasing number of countries inside and beyond the Commonwealth.[32] In some countries, multi-sectorality is provided for in the structure of ministries or agencies, for example through combining health and protection and social welfare within the same ministry. Often, multi-sectoral co-ordination rests with a particular ministry because its overall remit includes, for example, responsibility for national implementation of the UNCRC.

---

29 OECD (2015) *Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264233515-en

30 Kaga, Y., Bennett, J. and Moss, P. (2010) *Caring and Learning Together. A Cross-National Study of Integration of Early Childhood Care and Education Within Education*. Paris: UNESCO. https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/caring-and-learning-together-cross-national-study-integration-early-childhood-care-and

31 For a detailed account of New Zealand's policy journey to achieve an integrated care and education sector under the remit of the minister of education, see Meade, A. and Podmore, V. (2002) "Early Childhood Education Policy Co-ordination Under the Auspices of the Department/Ministry of Education. A Case Study of New Zealand". Early Childhood and Family Policy Series 1, March. Paris: UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000110281

Box 1: What is multi-sectoral ECCE?[33]

ECCE policies and services are multi-sectoral because, to attain holistic child development, each child's health, nutrition, hygiene, development, education and protection must be given full attention, from pre-conception to transition to primary school. Therefore, ECCE requires the full participation of the health, nutrition, sanitation, education and protection sectors. At a minimum, ministries of health, education and protection must be fully involved in ensuring that comprehensive, continuous and well-co-ordinated services support child and family development.[5]

1.1.2 Why a multi-sectoral approach?

"Keeping the child at the centre" and meeting their developmental needs is the core rationale for a multi-sectoral approach. Co-ordinated, systemic multi-sectoral approaches to ECCE are consistent with the holistic nature of child development, where all aspects are intrinsically connected and influence each another.

Research has demonstrated that ECD interventions – particularly those aimed at children growing up in the most vulnerable communities, such as urban slums, remote rural areas, conflict zones and other emergency settings – are more effective when approached in a systemic multi-sectoral manner.[34,35,36] By linking across public health, child protection, social welfare and economic development, collaborative multi-sectoral approaches can utilise existing resources more holistically while enabling professionals to share their work and expertise. This avoids duplication of efforts, and resources can be utilised more efficiently.

The *Nurturing Care Framework* (2018)[37] expresses this accumulated research insight, and its implications for multi-sectoral ECCE policy, in this way:

---

32 "Several countries have established effective multisectoral coordination systems including Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Estonia, India, Latvia, Lesotho, Lithuania, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Senegal, Singapore and others" (Vargas-Barón, 2015, "Institutional Frameworks and Governance for Early Childhood Systems". In P.T.M. Marope and Y. Kaga (eds) *Investing Against Evidence. The Global State of Early Childhood Care and Education*. Paris: UNESCO p. 271).

33 UNESCO (2021) *Recovering Lost Learning.*

34 Ricther, L., Daelmans, B., Lombardi, J. et al. (2016) "Investing in the Foundation of Sustainable Development: Pathways to Scale up for Early Childhood Development". *The Lancet* 389(10064): 103–118.

35 Yousafzai, A. (2018) "Implementation Research, Practice & Partnerships: Informing a Multisectoral Approach for ECD". ARNEC Conference, Kathmandu, 5–7 June.

36 Lake, A. and Chan, M. (2014) "Putting Science into Practice for Early Child Development". *The Lancet* 385(9980): 1816–1817.

37 WHO, UNICEF and World Bank (2018) *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development: A Framework for Helping Children Survive and Thrive to Transform Health and Human Potential.* Geneva: WHO (p. 36).

> "Early childhood development is key to human development, and human development is in the interests of everyone in society. Since it has such broad effects, it makes sense that no sector can be solely responsible for it."

There are countries that do not have a national policy for children and where collaboration is essential to improve outcomes. Pakistan's policy environment, which was examined in 2019 in preparation for the development of this Toolkit, highlights why multi-sectoral collaboration is important.

Case study: lessons from the ECD and nutrition sectors in Pakistan

In Pakistan, ECD and nutrition, despite their overlapping agendas, have historically seen largely separate policy coalitions and actions. ECD was brought forward as an education programming issue, with a small team of actors confined to the education sector. Nutrition, on the other hand, has – since 2011 – comprised stakeholders from across the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food fortification, and community development sectors, which has helped in making progress and mobilising the nutrition agenda. Both sectors, however, have failed to mobilise the social protection sector, which has a large national cash transfer programme targeting low-income women.

Lessons learnt highlight three areas that have helped nutrition to progress: (i) being able to identify and manage policy windows; (ii) a clear and inclusive menu of actions; and (iii) availability of co-financing and structural platforms for catalysing co-ordination.[38]

Addressing inequities early in life through ECD interventions and other high-quality ECCE initiatives can convert a vicious cycle of inequality into a virtuous one.

ECCE also adds value to a range of strategic frameworks and partnerships working towards the SDGs, such as *Every Woman Every Child*, *the Global Partnership for Education*, *Scaling Up Nutrition* and *the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children*. The interconnections across these initiatives present both opportunities and challenges in policy-setting, planning, budgeting, programming and monitoring of outcomes for young children.[39]

---

38 Zaidi, M., Mohmand, S.K. and Hayat, N. (2013) "Nutrition Policy in the Post Devolution Context in Pakistan: An Analysis of Provincial Opportunities and Barriers". *IDS Bulletin* 44(3): 86–93.

39 UNICEF (2017) *Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Development.* Programme Division. New York: UNICEF.

Box 2: Why multi-sectoral ECCE is needed[40]

"… to be most effective, interventions must be inter-sectoral, going beyond education to encompass health, nutrition, and protection. The healthy development of a child's brain depends on multiple positive experiences. Nutrition feeds the brain; stimulation sparks the mind; love and protection buffer the negative impact of stress and adversity. And distinct interventions are mutually supportive, achieving the strongest results when delivered together."

Two examples of multi-sectoral policies in countries from different regions of the Commonwealth are presented in the case studies below. These are taken from the Country Landscape Study of six Commonwealth member countries conducted for the development of this Toolkit.

Case study: a multi-sectoral approach in Rwanda

In the African region, Rwanda adopted a multi-sectoral approach to policy for ECD, with specific outcomes under the heading of Improving the Quality of Life; this included quality health and quality education. The Rwanda National ECD Policy and its corresponding strategic plan (2011) promoted an innovative multi-sectoral approach to service delivery. This recognised that children developed holistically, and that it was not just the actions of one sector that would support children to achieve their full potential, but rather a co-ordinated effort between national and district levels. Initially, it was the MoE that was solely responsible for children. In recognition that, to thrive in education, children require supportive family environments that provide safety, protection and health promotion, responsibility for children was transferred to the Ministry of Gender and Families Promotion. The ECD Policy now recognises the key role that each sector plays in improving children's lives in Rwanda and includes programmes in the health sector and in the public school system (i.e. milk is provided daily to young children in ECD centres to prevent malnutrition and stunting). The government has positioned education as critical to the country's economic growth, and the provision of quality education has been credited for the steady growth in universal adult literacy by 2020.[41]

Case study: a multi-sectoral approach in Belize

Beginning in 2016, the Government of Belize has been engaged in a "whole-of-government" (multi-sectoral) approach to develop an "enabling policy environment" that fulfils the rights of all children. The Children's Agenda 2017–2030 notes that a multi-sectoral nature for the policy was promoted so as to achieve efficiency and effectiveness, and was based on lessons learnt from previous policy documents, such as the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents 2004–2015. Services for young children (up to eight years old) now come under multi-sectoral collaboration between the MoE, the Ministry of Health and the Environment, and the

---

40 Lake and Chan (2014) "Putting Science into Practice" (p. 1816).
41 https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/rwanda/overview

Ministry of Human Development. More recently, Belize produced a comprehensive ECD National Strategic Plan 2017–2021 to drive the enhancement of the ECD sector. Within this are three clearly defined areas for the ECD sector: (i) children remain safe and healthy; (ii) children can learn in a safe environment; and (iii) young children have skills and opportunities, each with clearly outlined sets of outcomes. To achieve the set outcomes, the work of the MoE is aligned with that of the two other ministries.

1.1.3 Education ministries as the lead agencies in multi-sectoral ECCE

Education ministries traditionally have not taken the lead in multi-sectoral co-ordination of ECCE, as a result of their focus on compulsory schooling from primary onwards. However, given the broad global consensus on the educational value and function of early childhood services, and the inclusion of ECCE in SDG 4, this picture is changing. As Figure 3 shows, SDG 4 cuts across several sectors involved in helping children reach their full potential and benefit from formal schooling.

As MoEs increasingly include ECE (ISCED 0) in their remit, new responsibilities and opportunities arise. Throughout Commonwealth member countries, strategic plans in different ministerial portfolios now take on board the following global targets aimed at achieving the best interests of the child (UNCRC Art. 2) and their right to education (UNCRC Arts 28 and 29) and ensuring their health and well-being:

- **Education** (SDG Target 4.2): By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education;

- **Health** (SDG Target 3.2): By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births;

- **Nutrition** (SDG Target 2.2): By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.

Figure 3 presents the SDGs and their respective targets. Additionally, it indicates the entry points for ECCE and the interconnections with SDG Target 4.2.

Taking the lead in multi-sectoral ECCE policy means that MoEs work collaboratively and in a co-ordinated manner across different sectors, thus also supporting the achievement of SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals).

Entry point to ECCE → 14 of the 17 SDG goals and its 143 targets directly or indirectly relate to young childrens' developmental needs and rights.

SDG 16 — **16** PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS — ECCE programmes can help in building community cohesion through shared projects, such as the creation of community centres to care and educate its youngest members. It can also help re-build communities focussing on the welfare of children.

SDG 5 — **5** GENDER EQUALITY — Gender equality can be delivered by offering good quality ECCE services so that mothers can engage in paid employment and can contribute to the income generation of the family.

SDG 4 — **4** QUALITY EDUCATION — Foundation to creating sustainable development, in particular target 4.2 which calls for all boys and girls to have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education.

SDG 3 — **3** GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING — Health and well-being can start by providing the gestating mother with appropriate health care and delivery in health facilities. By providing immunizations to all children and suitable and safe environments free of hazards and toxic stress.

SDG 2 — **2** ZERO HUNGER — Zero hunger only can be delivered by giving nutritious food to every child even from the time of gestation. This contributes to delivering healthy babies and preventing stunting that negatively affects brain development.

SDG 1 — **1** NO POVERTY — Ending poverty can only be delivered if every child is given opportunities to reach full developmental potential, to grow and develop and become a productive member of society.

Figure 3   SDGs – goals and targets most connected with ECCE

Box 3: Benefits of multi-sectoral co-ordination

Multi-sectoral co-ordination of services can bring together professionals from health, education and social services who work in their respective ministries towards improving the development of services for children.

Competent multi-sectoral co-ordination will result in more effective services for children, families and communities, and more efficient governance of the system.

1.2 Ministries of education as advocates for ECCE

As lead agencies in ECCE policy, MoEs carry the key role of advocating for children and for connected-up policy across relevant sectors.

1.2.1 Defining advocacy in ECCE

In ECCE policy, advocacy is about getting young children onto the social agenda. It is about ensuring that quality and equity of provision are always on the table as key principles in policy design, implementation and co-ordination.

With a focus on multi-sectoral ECCE policy, four functions are core to the MoE advocacy role:

1. *Deepening the knowledge base on all aspects of ECCE provision*: In particular, MoE officials responsible for ECCE need to be fully conversant with ECCE developments, discourses and rationales, nationally and internationally, and be prepared to engage with and inform those who make decisions that have an impact on the lives of young children and their families.

2. *Creating alliances and increasing the resource base*: Reaching out to people working in related sectors – such as staff in other ministries and officials at other levels of government, as well as civil society and the private sector – will build communication channels and collaborative networks among professionals, including across cultural boundaries, as well as extending resources. Similar alliances should be fostered with parents and parental advocacy groups, as well as with ECCE workforce organisations. This will also align understanding of children's needs with the delivery of services.[42]

3. *Influencing decision-makers to make better decisions*: By becoming informed about the agendas of key players and finding ways to dialogue with them, MoE can deepen understanding of the ECCE agenda, creating a receptive environment for collaborative multi-sectoral policy. Empowering decision-makers with clear plans is essential to achieve desired results and for effective quality assurance (QA) and monitoring.

4. *Positioning children at the centre of policy*: With SDG Target 4.2 in mind, MoE advocates need to strengthen practices that systematically position young children at the centre of actions and agendas. In so doing, advocacy not only helps enhance the quality for all children but also improves the performance of the organisation.

Beyond a set of functions and actions, advocacy is also a professional stance that needs to be cultivated at all levels of government – from the national level down

---

42 Larue, A. and Burke, K.B. (eds) (2015) *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Committee on the Science of Children Birth to Age 8: Deepening and Broadening the Foundation for Success. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

to the smallest community, and at the different stages of policy development. Advocacy often requires flexibility and the ability to grasp opportunities. Sustaining this important function over time involves active recruitment of ECCE advocates at each level of the system, together with ongoing professional support.

Advocacy is also dependent on good timing. Good advocates are skilled in recognising entry points and ground-breaking opportunities and are able to shift gears to stay attuned to the pace and interest of key partners. Advocacy, then, requires specific skills and attributes that are deployed strategically.

Box 4: Effective advocacy strategies

- *Codifying main ideas into key notes or easily grasped concepts – for example "Investing more in quality ECCE is a good investment";*
- *Co-ordinating vertical and horizontal efforts;*
- *Maximising internal and external opportunities;*
- *Convening and participating in internal and cross-sectoral meetings with influential people;*
- *Creating presentations and media aids to inform and persuade people;*
- *Positioning advocates strategically to ensure ECCE is represented in its appropriate context and with sufficient weight.*

1.2.2 Advocating for investment in ECCE

UNICEF's *A World Ready to Learn* (2019) noted that the first step towards SDG 4 was for countries to significantly increase their financing for pre-primary education, which the report recommended should be 10 per cent of the education budget.

Advocating for investment in ECCE with stakeholders from other sectors requires being prepared with convincing arguments. The Introduction to this Toolkit and Section 1.1.3 above mentioned some of the most important arguments; they are summarised below:

- Attendance at high-quality ECCE helps ensure children are nurtured in education and care environments that optimise their social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.[43]

- Together with significant physical changes, children who regularly attend high-quality ECCE provision will build their skills, knowledge and competency across curriculum areas, which in turn will nurture their self-confidence and independence.[44]

---

43 UNESCO (2007) *Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education*. EFA Global Monitoring Report. Paris: UNESCO.OECD (2012) *Starting Strong III*.

44 Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S. et al. (2002) "The Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years". Research Report RR356. London: Department for Education and Skills.

- Neurobiological research has highlighted that the first 1,000 days of life lay the foundations for children's learning and overall well-being, requiring a nurturing environment that is free from toxic stress[45] and rich in quality stimulation for healthy brain development.

- It has also been demonstrated that inequities begin before conception, but these can be reduced with timely interventions during the first 1,000 days.[46], [47]

Clearly, not only does it pay off to invest more in young children but also it is important to start investing early and through a multi-sectoral approach focused on holistic development. Holistic service delivery for young children includes the provision of adequate health and nutrition, nurturing care, safety and protection, and education.[48]

Box 5: Investing in ECCE

Investing more in ECCE is a sound social investment for the Commonwealth and globally.

In addition to the developmental imperative, and as the Introduction to this Toolkit noted, there is strong economic evidence that investing in ECCE programmes is "one of the smartest investments a country can make".[49] Such work can start by revisiting, for example, country spending on the Heckman Curve. Such examination can provide a clear view of the target and age groups benefiting from ECCE investment.

1.3 Making a multi-sectoral ECCE approach work

This section considers what a multi-sectoral approach might require in terms of planning, delivering and monitoring services for young children.

The *Nurturing Care Framework* offers the following succinct advice that is applicable for ECCE provision across the 0–8 age range:[50]

---

45 Center on the Developing Child (2007) "The Science of Early Childhood Development". Brief. National Symposium on Early Childhood Science and Policy. https://46y5eh11fhgw 3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/03/InBrief-The-Science-of-Early-Childhood-Development2.pdf

46 UNICEF (2017) *Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Development.*

47 Slomski, A. (2021) "Preventing Childhood Obesity in the First 1000 Days of Life". *The Harvard Gazette*, 29 July. https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/07/intervention-in-first -1000-days-of-life-may-halt-childhood-obesity/

48 WHO et al. (2018) *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development.*

49 https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/earlychildhooddevelopment

50 WHO et al. (2018) *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development* (p. 36).

"To facilitate a seamless continuum of care across sectors: plan together, implement by sector, monitor and improve together."

1.3.1 Steps for building multi-sector co-ordination

A key priority in a multi-sectoral approach to ECCE policy is to build a culture of collaboration and co-ordination across sectors. This requires active leadership, co-ordination and consensus-building. It requires connections among different sectors, across internal and external actors, and with all relevant stakeholders.[51]

An immediate step is for MoEs to identify the available opportunities in the education sector for co-ordination of processes with others involved in ECCE service delivery. The following list identifies possible areas for starting collaboration across ministries and service agencies:

- Programme co-ordination to ensure access for children and families across diverse geographical locations;

- Joint financial and technical support for ECCE projects hosted by diverse ministries or agencies;

- Deliberately adding a focus on factors influencing child development (i.e. promotion of healthy and nutritious meals) in all ECCE policy discussions and planning processes.

Central to the design and implementation of an effective multi-sectoral ECCE policy is the establishment of a multi-sectoral and integrated data, monitoring and evaluation system (see Section 5).[52]

Box 6: Making multi-sectoral collaboration work

For multi-sectoral collaboration to work, it is essential to establish formal inter-ministerial and inter-agency work agreements that clarify mechanisms and protocols to use in:

- Planning ECCE policy and provision;
- Providing services that support all aspects of ECD;

---

51 Stakeholders include members of the various ministries and government departments involved, as well as members of civil society, voluntary and philanthropic organisations, multilateral and bilateral organisations, the business community, and academic and research institutions. As stated in the Nurturing Care Framework, it is essential to involve all relevant stakeholders, including caregivers and families, communities and municipalities, service providers and sector managers, political leaders and civil society, and donors and the private sector.

52 Urban et al. (2021) *How Do We Know Goals Are Achieved?*

- Ensuring equitable and inclusive access for all children to multi-sectoral ECCE services and efficient use of such services;
- Making referrals among services (i.e. an educational service can refer a child to another service sector);
- Combining efforts to avoiding duplication and increase efficacy and efficiency;
- Conducting joint and co-ordinated monitoring and evaluation activities across sectors;
- Connecting and ultimately integrating different data, monitoring and evaluation systems (i.e. health management information systems (HMIS)/education management information systems (EMIS);[53]
- Working towards higher-level goals across sectors.

1.3.2 Challenges of working in a multi-sectoral approach

When moving towards a multi-sectoral approach, the lead agency (MoE) must consider possible challenges and determine strategies to minimise them.

Changing a "silo-ed", or a strict mono-sectoral, way of working requires fundamental change, including an ongoing stance of advocacy (see Section 1.2). Challenges can range from differing communication styles within different sectors and among partners, to diverse and embedded modes of policy and programme implementation and sectors, including in budget-setting. Other challenging areas include setting agendas, defining operational timelines, monitoring progress and building reliable evidence on progress. Often, moving towards multi-sectoral and co-ordinated policies is made difficult by a lack of data (i.e. disaggregated data about children from different populations) and by data systems maintained by different government departments (e.g. health, education, welfare) that are incompatible with each other.

While a large number of Commonwealth member countries still engage in predominantly mono-sectoral planning of ECCE service provision, multi-sectoral planning and co-ordination of services is progressively happening in some member countries, such as in Cameroon,[54] India[55] and Singapore,[56] to name a few.

53 UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn.*

54 Duke Global Health Institute (2016). More information; https://globalhealth.duke.edu/projects/evaluation-early-childhood-development-program-hiv-exposed-children-cameroon

55 World Bank (2014) *Stepping up Early Childhood Development: Investing in Young Children for High Returns.* Washington, DC: World Bank.

56 Acosta, P. et al. (2017) *Developing Socioemotional Skill for the Philippines' Labour Market.* Washington, DC: World Bank.

1.3.3 Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders

In a multi-sectoral approach to delivering ECCE, it is important to determine from the outset what the roles and key responsibilities of each sector are, and how these interact. Of utmost importance is the role of the lead agency in:

- Convening meetings of multi-sectoral professionals;

- Establishing and leading with a clear vision and strategic plan to achieve multi-sectoral goals;

- Monitoring actions and progress against measures that have been agreed across all sectors;

- Maintaining a stance of advocacy as discussed in Section 1.2.

1.3.4 Promoting collaboration

While in many countries, the MoE is already the lead ministry for ECCE, in others the leading role falls on the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Protection or the Ministry of Planning, or on combination ministries, such as a Ministry of Gender, Children, Community Development and Urban or Rural Development. The following example from Belize, taken from the Country Landscape Study, offers a view on how co-ordination can operate.

Case study: co-ordination on ECCE in Belize

Belize produced a comprehensive ECD National Strategic Plan 2017–2021 to drive the enhancement of the ECD sector. This defined three output areas for the ECD sector: (i) children remain safe and healthy; (ii) children can learn in a safe environment; and (iii) young children have skills and opportunities, with clearly outlined sets of outcomes. To achieve the set outcomes, the work of the MoE was aligned primarily with that of two other ministries: the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alienation.

The three ministries jointly produced the ECD National Strategic Plan 2017–2021, with support from an ECD technical working group established in 2015 and UNICEF. The Plan was underpinned by a 2010 ECD SitAn and a 2014–2015 ECD Programme Mapping. The draft Plan was shared widely with stakeholders, who provided feedback and comments. In 2016, the cabinet endorsed ECD Core Commitments prioritising strengthening existing programmes and service delivery within the three ministries with a focus on later expansion.

The Belize example illustrates four key lessons about how a MoE can take the lead in establishing and promoting inter-sectoral collaboration:

- Be proactive in identifying opportunities for collaboration;

- Prepare a plan of action with defined roles and accountabilities for each of the sectors involved;

- Engage in high-level meetings;
- Ensure a co-ordination structure is in place.

Box 7: Steps when the MoE is the lead agency

- *MoEs should take the lead in reaching out to other ministries to ensure their full involvement, particularly with ministries of health and social protection.*
- *MoEs should take the lead to involve ministries that provide educational and developmental services for infants, toddlers and parents (e.g. counselling offered to parents at health clinics).*
- *MoEs should take the lead in highlighting the connections between the education and other sectors in support of SDG Target 4.2. If not, other ministries are unlikely to fully collaborate.*
- *MoEs should take the lead in ensuring that high-quality and equitable ECCE provision reaches all children, especially the most vulnerable children.*
- *MoEs should take the lead in improving the internal efficiency of their education systems and establish desired outcomes with clear outputs.*

1.3.5 Keeping the child at the centre of the multi-sectoral approach

Strategies for keeping the child at the centre of the multi-sectoral approach are key to successful cross-agency work (see Sections 1.1.5, 1.2.2 and 1.3.1–1.3.4).

The purpose of keeping the child at the centre is not only to co-ordinate ECCE services for individual children and their families but also to create shared understandings of the interconnected nature of developmental processes that each sector may see only in part.

To ensure the child remains at the centre of multi-sectoral ECCE provision, it is essential to create policy environments that recognise that human development is an ecosystem: good outcomes for children require nurturing environments, and nurturing environments require the support of an infrastructure of sound policy.[57] Figure 4, taken from *the Nurturing Care Framework* policy tool,[58] offers a visual representation of how outcomes for children and families rely on the interaction of nurturing care with a supportive policy infrastructure. The Framework places the child at the centre of service provision with the five most important elements of nurturing care: adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security, opportunities for early learning, and good health.

---

57 Center on the Developing Child (2021) *Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families, 2021 Update.* https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/three-early-childhood-development-principles-improve-child-family-outcomes/
58 WHO et al. (2018) *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development.*
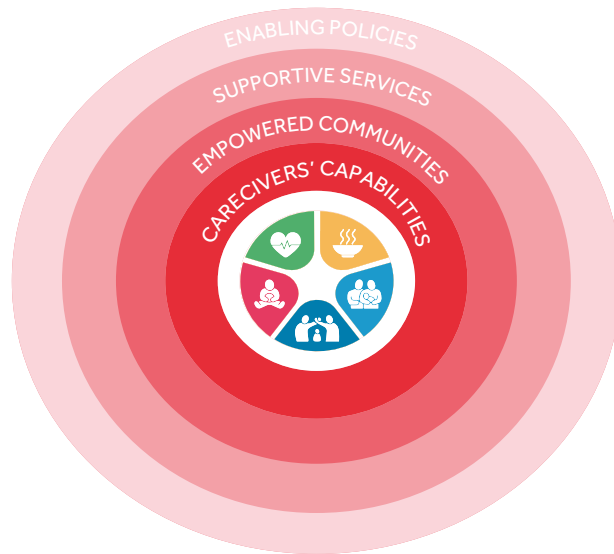
Figure 4   Enabling environments for nurturing care

The following case study from Jamaica, taken from the Country Landscape Study, demonstrates how a system of positive environments can be put in place, positioning the child at the centre of service provision.

Case study: putting children at the centre in Jamaica

The legislative framework for ECD in Jamaica comprises three key components: the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) Act 2003, which made provision for the establishment of a commission to govern the administration of early childhood care, education and development; the Child Care and Protection Act 2004, which promotes the best interests, safety and well-being of children across Jamaica; and the Early Childhood Act and Regulations 2005, which provide a comprehensive framework for all aspects of ECD, including regulations, policies and standards (organised as 12 categories) to govern early childhood institutions.

Since the establishment of the ECC, which has overall responsibility for child development from birth to eight years, Jamaica has been using an integrated approach to bring all policies, standards and regulations relating to early childhood care, education and development under one umbrella. The Government of Jamaica recognises that parents and caregivers need a facilitating environment of policies and legislation, services and community to support them in providing the children of Jamaica with the best start in life, so that they will achieve the required readiness and preparation for school progression. Among the country's social policies is the provision of a national minimum wage, which is aimed at mitigating the distribution of income and poverty, supporting parents, protecting children and encouraging unemployed parents to seek employment.

Jamaica's early childhood development scheme has a legal structure that encompasses policies, laws and a national strategic plan to protect children and their families and to promote high-quality service provision. The ECC acts as an organisational anchor and co-ordinates efficiently across sectors.

This section has introduced key concepts, rationales for investment and an outline of how ECCE policy is positioned on the global policy agenda as a multi-sectoral endeavour, as background to inform country-level goal-setting and planning to advance the SDG agenda and achieve SDG Target 4.2.

An essential step in moving forward is the planning process; this is addressed in Section 2.

Key resources

- *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education*. UNICEF global report (2019). https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-world-ready-to-learn-report/

- *The Lancet* Series: Advancing Early Childhood Development: From Science to Scale. https://www.thelancet.com/series/ECD2016

- The Heckman Equation: https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/

- The Nurturing Care Framework: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272603/9789241514064-eng.pdf

Section 2: Planning for quality ECCE service provision in the education sector

Key messages

- A key priority for MoEs is to make young children and ECCE "visible" within general education sector planning strategies and across ministries and agencies.

- Planning for quality ECCE service provision should be based on accurate and reliable country data; this requires a SitAn.

- Using accurate and up-to-date country data will result in a realistic strategic action plan with clearly delineated activities and roles for the different sectors involved under the leadership of the MoE.

- Working in a multi-sectoral approach enables the identification of synergies that may enhance programme and service quality and facilitate the achievement of priorities for specific target groups.

- Resourcing ECCE requires an estimation of figures in line with each country's individual administration procedures. In devolved administrative systems, the aim is to make the processes of planning and implementation less bureaucratic and more efficient.

- A quality ECCE workforce is of key importance to a quality ECCE sector and must be a key consideration in policy planning.

This section focuses on planning for quality ECCE provision as a multi-sectoral endeavour with the MoE as lead agency.

As Commonwealth member countries plan how best to meet SDG Target 4.2, a key priority in relation to ECCE is for MoEs to consider the extent to which young children from birth to age eight years, and the programmes and services to support them, are represented and "visible" within general education sector planning strategies. As outlined in Section 1 (see 1.2; 1.3.1), active leadership is needed to advocate for ECCE within the MoE as well as to build collaborative networks across ministries and agencies to bring various systems together.

Strengthening the position of ECCE within the planning process of the overall system of education requires the availability of reliable and up-to-date data and that data systems belonging to different sectors and government departments are compatible (e.g. EMIS/HMIS compatibility;[59] see Section 1). In most countries,

---

59 Urban et al. (2021) *How Do We Know Goals Are Achieved?*

conducting an in-depth analysis of the country situation and, in particular, an assessment of the impact that contextual issues may have on a specific sector, is considered the first step of the planning process. The tool most used to study the context is the SitAn.[60]

The next section outlines what is involved in a SitAn (see also Appendix A). Subsequent sections focus on how the findings of a SitAn can be used to inform strategic planning of ECCE policy, resourcing and costing of ECCE services, and workforce planning and development.

2.1 Conducting a situation analysis of the ECCE local landscape

Conducting a SitAn offers the opportunity to gather information and identify gaps in service provision, as well as strengths on which to build. The SitAn can identify the range of issues that need addressing as well as throw light on the specific detail of each issue. For example, it can clarify issues of access by determining actual demand for services, the number of educators and other staff required to cover the demand for integrated services, and the groups most needing ECCE services. The distribution and availability of material resources, physical environments, and parental expectations are among many variables that can directly affect the planning of services with quality and equity.

Box 8: A broad definition of a SitAn[61]

"A Situation Analysis is the process of assessing a complex situation within its wider context, systematically gathering information (data), identifying the main problems and needs within the population (adults & children), identifying the principal resources contained within that population, and analysing the information gathered in order to facilitate the process of planning in a systematic, strategic, integrated and co-ordinated manner."

When applied to ECCE, a SitAn differs from the narrower concept of needs assessment in that it has a broader scope by focusing on the wider context and identifying capacities and resources, as well as identifying the needs and challenges observed in the ECCE landscape.

The case study below provides an example of the Kenya 2017 SitAn[62] and highlights the aspects covered in such a comprehensive country assessment. It also explains how such a study can be useful in the policy planning process.

---

60 UNHCR (2015) "Tools: Situation Analysis". Action for the Rights of Children. https://www.unhcr.org/3f82da124.pdf

61 Ibid. (p. 3).

62 UNICEF (2017) "Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Kenya". Nairobi: UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/kenya/reports/situation-analysis-children-and-women-kenya-2017

Case study: conducting a situation analysis in Kenya

The Kenyan 2017 Situation Analysis of Children and Women provides a comprehensive overview of the key factors contributing to and hindering the realisation of children and adolescents' rights in the country. The report was launched at a critical time in terms of national planning for children: after the launch of the SDGs and while the government was in the process of finalising the Third Medium Term Plan (2018–2022) of the Vision 2030; the second generation of County Integrated Development Plans; and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2018–2022. The 2017 SitAn aimed to inform these planning processes by providing policy-makers with a current and comprehensive overview of the needs of children and women in Kenya. The findings were crucial for government and UNICEF Kenya in the planning of the 2018–2022 Country Programme Document, which identified key priorities for four years of collaboration and UNICEF support.

Given the availability of rich data on children in Kenya collected between 2014 and 2017, the SitAn report used secondary analysis of recent data on children and women complemented by key informant interviews with government technical departments, and technical input from the Kenya Bureau of National Statistics. The report highlighted the various policies, legislation, legal frameworks and interventions adopted by the government to strengthen the realisation of the rights of children, including adolescents. It also reviewed the most recent data and analysis on the status of women and children in terms of poverty, health and nutrition, HIV and AIDS, water and sanitation, education, protection, and inclusion in society and in emergencies, at both national and county levels.

The report indicated the government's commitment to providing an enabling legislative and policy environment for addressing women and children's issues. The finalised policies in key areas of children's rights included (i) the education curriculum reform; (ii) the ECD policy; (iii) the free secondary school scheme; and (iv) the female genital mutilation policy. The Children's Act is also being revised. The SitAn further noted that groups of children – particularly those living in the northern counties of the arid and semi-arid lands, those living in informal settlements within growing cities and many girls living within communities that practise harmful traditions – were being left behind in the realisation of their fundamental rights and the opportunity to thrive.

As the Kenyan case study shows, a SitAn of ECCE requires analyses using different lenses and foci – ranging from the situation of individual children through to that of families, the community and the whole system of support, as well as the wider social and political context of a country.

The "community perspective" focuses mainly on information derived from the family and community itself, while the analysis from the wider perspective requires a more macro approach, drawing on wider sources of information, and attempts to set the community within the broader country context. The SitAn will also serve as the basic reference for advocacy and strategy design purposes.

When conducting a SitAn of the ECCE landscape, reliable tools are essential for mapping the actors/stakeholders, resources and other contextual aspects relevant to strategic planning. It is important to highlight at this point the joint GPE and UNICEF *Better Early Learning and Development at Scale*[63] (BELDS) initiative, aimed at setting up a community of practice for countries wanting to plan for quality ECE that is systematically incorporated into the country's national education sector plan.

---

63 https://www.unicef.org/media/61181/file

2.2 Strategic planning for ECCE

As the lead ministry planning for SDG Target 4.2, the MoE must actively reach out to other sectors (including, e.g., the ministries of health, social protection and finance) to ensure their full involvement in strategic planning. While challenging, taking the lead role in a multi-sectoral approach (see Section 1) puts the MoE in a position to emphasise and promote the educational value of ECCE in an integrated system of early childhood development, education and care.

Strategic planning for ECCE should focus on the analysis of information yielded by the SitAn, with any identified data gaps noted and, where possible, further action taken to address them. Beyond joint activity with relevant ministries, input from other stakeholders and interest groups – such as grassroots community advocates and research experts – should be actively sought. This collaborative process builds ownership of the strategic planning process and a shared vision for the ECCE system. Collaborative strategic planning supports the positioning of ECCE as a priority within overall educational planning.

Figure 5 depicts the elements required for effective planning for improved ECCE outcomes. The four components are coordination, shared planning, shared
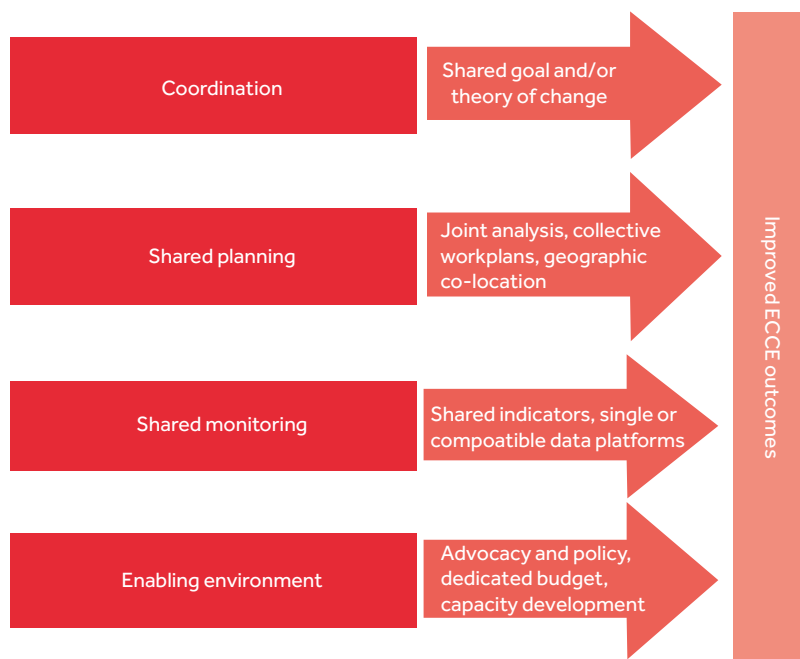
Figure 5 Components for successful planning for improved ECCE outcomes[64]

---

64 Adapted from UNICEF (2016) "Nutrition and WASH Toolkit: Guide for Practical Joint Actions". New York: UNICEF.

monitoring and establishing enabling environments. Estimating the costs and funding of ECCE policy implementation plans may be carried out alongside the planning process but the more accurate determination of cost occurs towards the end of this process.

2.3 Resourcing and costing for ECCE

Estimating the cost of an ECCE strategic plan can be a somewhat challenging task for MoEs. In high-income countries, a considerable amount of ECCE cost data has been collected, but unit costs can vary greatly across contexts and programme types. Moreover, since Commonwealth jurisdictions are very different, and vary in the quality of their available data, there is no single blueprint for structuring costs and financing. This, again, underpins the need to develop strong and reliable multi-sectoral data, management and evaluation systems (see Section 5).

In Kenya and Pakistan, two of the six Commonwealth member countries examined to inform this Toolkit, there is a devolved system of administration. The following case study explains what devolution means for processes of costing and funding allocation using the example of Kenya, taken from its 2017 SitAn.

Case study: devolution in Kenya

A 2013 constitutional shift in Kenya to devolve significant powers to 47 county-level governments was intended to enhance local participation and service delivery to the most deprived populations. With devolution, county governments have become highly strategic entities, controlling more than 4.5 per cent of Kenya's gross domestic product. County governments are now responsible for planning and delivering all devolved functions, including health, water, sanitation, urban services, ECD and other local infrastructure. Under Article 2013(2) of the Constitution, the central government sets aside at least 15 per cent of its revenue for distribution to the 47 counties according to a set of predefined criteria established by the Kenya Commission on Revenue Allocation. This "equitable share" allocation is intended to assist counties to fulfil their devolved responsibilities. The allocation formula includes a basic equal share to guarantee minimal funding for key services, and variable amounts based on each county's population, poverty index, geographical size and access to water, electricity and roads, and the extent to which it optimises capacity to raise revenue.

2.3.1 Estimating costings

Costings and costing models for ECCE are based mostly on estimations.[65] Since estimations are underpinned by assumptions and choices that vary across contexts, cost calculations for the same programme operated under different conditions will inevitably be different. For example, costs involved in the

---

65 Myers, R. (2008) "A Note on Costs and Costing of Early Childhood Care and Development Programmes". In E. Vargas-Barón and S. Williams (eds) *Coordinators' Notebook* 30: 29–32.

provision of an urban ECCE educational service will be different to those for an ECCE service in a rural area. Methods for estimating costs, however, are always based on the resources needed to implement a policy initiative or programme and typically include the following steps: [66]

> **Step 1:** identify programmes or policy initiatives for costing consideration;
>
> **Step 2:** determine the resources involved in each initiative;
>
> **Step 3:** estimate how much the identified resources will cost;
>
> **Step 4:** work out overall costs and unit costs per child to be targeted by the initiative;
>
> **Step 5:** determine who bears these costs.

Costs most commonly associated with ECCE programmes and educational programmes in general can be divided into three main categories:

1. **Overhead costs:** these include costs associated with upper-level management in government, specific design of programmes, expenses for start-up and evaluation costs.

2. **Direct costs:** these comprise infrastructure such as construction, teacher/educator salaries, staff training, feeding and nutritional supplements, uniforms, cash transfers to parents, classroom equipment and materials, playground set-up, direct administration and monitoring.

3. **Imputed costs:** these include volunteers' time and opportunity costs of buildings used, among others.

While programmes such as pre-school education services are best costed by the MoE, most ECCE programmes are varied and tend to have a more complex structure, requiring co-ordination efforts and costs.[67] Some ECCE programmes may comprise the full spectrum of services for children and families from conception to children's transition to compulsory schooling.

The complexity is a challenge for MoEs acting alone but will be mitigated through multi-sectoral collaboration and shared expertise between government agencies and non-government actors. Working on costings in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and other relevant agencies will help greatly in identifying budget sources and arriving at realistic estimations of costs. Officials from the Ministry of Finance need to be involved from the outset of planning to ensure that those responsible for the country's budgeting, and for education finance at large, understand the relevance and importance of ECCE.

---

66 Ibid.

67 Alderman, H. (2015) *Early Childhood Development: Does Bundling Services for Young Children and Their Families Reduce Costs?* Education Plus Development. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

2.3.2 Variables affecting costs

A number of aspects affect costings, including location of intended policy implementation; frequency and duration of an initiative or programme; human resources or personnel required; staff preparation, supervision and ongoing professional development; and size and scale of an initiative. The following sub-sections discuss these variables.

2.3.2.1 Location of policy implementation

The location of implementation for a policy or programme – for example in an urban or a rural area – can make a significant difference to costings. Implementation in rural areas may have higher unit costs, for several reasons: providers may serve fewer children; there may be higher transportation costs; and costs of transporting building or learning materials to remote locations may be higher. On the other hand, wage standards in urban areas may make programmes more expensive.[68] Place of delivery, for example in children's own homes – such as in the Jamaican Roving Caregivers Programme – rather than in purpose-built centres, also makes a difference: family homes require lower infrastructure costs even if transportation expenses may be high.

Regional or local variations in the implementation of a programme or policy also need to be taken into account. For example, a pre-school programme that targets malnutrition in one geographical area but not in another will have differential costings. Such local variations are necessary and welcome. They can be more effectively co-ordinated if distinct funding sources (e.g. health, nutrition, welfare, education) are combined into a single dedicated budget for integrated and multi-sectoral early childhood services. A comprehensive SitAn will help identify potential synergies to consider in the costing process.

2.3.2.2 Frequency and duration of an initiative or programme

The frequency and duration of services can vary dramatically from country to country, with impacts on budget estimates. For example, programmes in one country may run for one hour per week; in others, programmes may run for up to 10 hours per day. When targeting more vulnerable children, they may also require more extensive, and often costlier, services.[69] It is therefore important *not* to base estimates on assumed programme configurations (or donor preferences) but on careful analyses of needs and capability.

---

68 Putcha, V. and van der Gaag, J. (2015) *Investing in Early Childhood Development: What Is Being Spent, and What Does It Cost?* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

69 Araujo, M.C., Lopez-Boo, F. and Puyana, J.M. (2013) *Overview of Early Childhood Development Services in Latin America and the Caribbean.* Santiago: IDB. https://publications.iadb.org/bitstream/handle/11319/3617/BID_Panorama_ENG%20%28Web%29.pdf?sequence=2

2.3.2.3 Human resources and personnel

Adult-to-child ratios and staff remuneration levels also affect costings. Table 1 includes international recommendations from well-known advisory groups for group-based ECCE settings; similar recommendations exist for home-based or family daycare.[70]

The rationale for the ratios in Table 1 derives from substantial, and largely English-medium, research that has found adult-to-child ratios and group sizes

Table 1 Recommended adult-to-child ratios in group-based ECCE settings

Advisory group	Age group					
	0–2 years	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6–8 years
American Academy of Pediatrics, 2019[71]	**0–12 months:** 3:1 with group size ≤ 6 **13–24 months** 4:1 with group size ≤ 8	**24–35 months:** 4:1 with group size ≤ 8	7:1 with group size ≤ 14	8:1 with group size ≤ 16	8:1 with group size ≤ 16	10:1 with group size ≤ 20
National Association for the Education of Young Children Accreditation Guidelines, 2018[72]	**0–15 months** 4:1 with group size ≤ 8 **12–24 months** 6:1 with group size ≤ 12	**24–36 months:** 6:1 for group size ≤ 12 5:1 / ≤ 10 6:1 / ≤ 12 **30 months–5 years:** 10:1 with group size ≤ 20	**30-48 months:** 6:1 for group size ≤ 12 7:1 / ≤ 14 8:1 / ≤ 16 9:1 / ≤ 18 **30 months–5 years:** 10:1 with group size ≤ 20	8:1 for group size ≤ 16 9:1 /≤18 10:1 /≤20 **30 months–5 years:** 10:1 with group size ≤ 20	8:1 for group size ≤ 16 9:1 / ≤ 18 10:1 / ≤ 20 **30 months–5 years:** 10:1 with group size ≤ 20	**8 years:** 15:1 for group size ≤ 30
UNICEF Innocenti Report Card, 2008[73]		N/A	N/A	15:1 with group size ≤ 24	15:1 with group size ≤ 24	N/A

---

70 Garcia et al. (2020) "Quantifying the Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program".

71 American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association and National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (2019) Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety. Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs.4th ed. Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics.

72 https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/accreditation/early-learning/staff_child_ratio_0.pdf

73 https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc8_eng.pdf

to be predictive of the quality of provision and of developmental outcomes for children. The basic rule is that, the younger the child, the more adults are required, per smaller groups of children. In some countries, the use of trained volunteers, in the form of learning assistants, helps secure the appropriate ratios. However, in other countries, a trend is observed whereby the adult-to-child ratio is not just for reasons of compliance with health and safety but also, most importantly, to provide opportunities for meaningful interactions between adults and children. In reality, adult-to-child ratios vary considerably across Commonwealth member countries, not least because of highly variable availability of qualified staff, low levels of remuneration and high staff turnover. Staff wages likewise vary greatly across Commonwealth member countries.[74] The impact of ratios and staff salaries on costings thus needs to be tailored to local conditions.

The issue of (shortage of) staff and its effects on quality is examined in Section 2.4 and in Section 4 in relation to aspects of programme content and curriculum that impinge on quality. Opportunities for shared interactions and sustained shared thinking[75] between adults and children are particularly important for quality ECCE experiences for children.

2.3.2.4 Staff preparation, supervision and professional development

Staff preparation, supervision and continuing professional development (CPD) have been shown to be critical to programme impact. Expenditure in this area is often inadequate, with priority often going to other structural elements of quality (e.g. physical infrastructure and the condition of buildings housing the service), whose impact is easier to measure. Yet access to ongoing professional learning is crucial to the sustainability of high-quality provision.

2.3.2.5 Size and scale of an initiative

The size or scale of a programme also requires consideration. Small-scale programmes may have higher unit costs than large-scale programmes, as overhead costs are generally higher to cover fixed start-up costs. However, programmes beginning the process of scaling up, or at scale, may have higher unit costs because of the upfront investments required for system-building, and the additional costs of extending services to harder-to-reach populations.[76]

---

74 For example, see Cameron, C., Dalli, C. and Simon, A. (2018) "The Development of a United ECEC Workforce in New Zealand and England: A Long, Slow and Fitful Journey". In L. Miller et al. (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Early Childhood Policy*. London: Sage.

75 Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2009) "Conceptualising Progression in the Pedagogy of Play and Sustained Shared Thinking in Early Childhood Education: A Vygotskian Perspective". *Education and Child Psychology* 26(2): 77–89.

76 Bernal, R., Sirali, Y. and Naudeau, S. (2015) *Early Childhood Development: What Does It Cost to Provide It at Scale?* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

2.4 The ECCE workforce

The ECCE workforce plays a key role in the delivery of services to young children. It includes all professionals and paraprofessionals who are directly or indirectly involved in children's development and learning. Staff qualifications are considered crucial to the provision of quality ECCE and, together with adult-to-child ratios and group size, have been recognised since the 1970s as making up the "iron triangle" of quality[77] in early years settings.[78]

There is great variation across Commonwealth member countries in the levels of workforce preparation, training and qualifications, as well as in working conditions and career progression. In some countries, the ECCE workforce is highly professionalised – such as in New Zealand, where 68 per cent of all those working with those up to five years old in centre-based ECCE services hold a three-year diploma or degree,[79] and 100 per cent of primary school teachers working with five to eight year olds are fully qualified. By contrast, in many other Commonwealth countries, a great number of those working in the ECCE sector have a limited background of training – such as in Uganda, where lack of stable financing remains a threat to the training of ECD caregivers.[80] Others work on a voluntary basis in the community or may start working in ECCE when still at secondary and continue to do so after they finish school without undertaking further training. When any payments are made, these are mostly small amounts to cover expenses, such as travel.

Further variation is evident in Table 2, which shows the percentage of pre-primary teachers working with five to six year olds in the six Commonwealth

Table 2 Percentage of pre-primary qualified teachers in six Commonwealth member countries[81]

Country	%	Year
Belize	54.77	2017
Jamaica	100	2018
Rwanda	94	2018
Kenya[82]	91.51	2018
Pakistan	78	2018
Sri Lanka	85	2017

77 Ruopp, R. et al. (1979) "Children at the Center". Final report of the National Day Care Study. Cambridge, MA: Abt.

78 Bassok and Engel (2019) "Early Childhood at Scale".

79 https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/08-20201211-1243217-EODS-1000-BN-2020-ECE-Census-Results-Final-Redacted2.pdf

80 Government of Uganda (2020) *Planning for Increased Access to Early Childhood Care and Education*. Thematic Studies Report. http://www.npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ECD-Thematic-Study-NPA.pdf

81 https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.TCAQ.ZS

member countries where data was gathered to inform this Toolkit. Notably, there is significant variation between countries of the Caribbean region, whereas in Africa the percentages of qualified pre-primary teaching staff are more comparable.

Given that teachers are key enablers of good educational outcomes,[83] planning for a trained and qualified ECCE workforce, as well as appropriate working conditions, needs to be a key priority for MoEs across all Commonwealth countries and globally. In low-income member countries, a particular consideration is that, for most children in locations that are distant from urban centres, attendance in ECCE programmes may be the only access to education provision that they have. The International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (TTF) has noted the increased urgency for progress on these priorities to mitigate the downward generational effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.[84] The TTF has called on governments to:

1. Increase domestic and international funding to ensure qualified teachers reach all learners and for international donors to enlarge their levels of aid to meet the international benchmark of 0.7 per cent of gross national income;

2. Develop holistic teacher policies, cost them properly and implement them effectively, from recruitment to professional development, continuing education and career progression, working conditions, accountability, and supervision and support;

3. Invest in teacher capacity and autonomy to ensure innovation, creativity and sustainability within the workforce and the education sector at large. This includes strengthening bottom-up decision-making, inclusive processes and supporting teachers so they can focus on learning and teaching;

4. Invest in data and information systems to ensure investment in the teaching workforce is evidence informed.

Figure 6 shows the cause–effect relationship between appropriately qualified staff and children under their care.

------

82 Data for Kenya retrieved from KNBS (2021) *Economic Survey 2021.* https://www.knbs.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Economic-Survey-2021.pdf

83 Council of the EU (2019) *High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems.* Recommendation of 22 May 2019, 2019/C 189/02. Brussels: Council of the EU. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2019.189.01.0004.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2019:189:TOC

84 TTF (2020) "Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak". Call for Action on Teachers, 27 March. https://teachertaskforce.org/sites/default/files/migrate_default_content_files/ttf_covid19_call%20to%20action_27mar2020_1.pdf

TTF (2021) "Call for Greater investment in Teachers and Teaching". 21 July. https://teachertaskforce.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/Call%20for%20greater%20investment%20in%20teachers_EN_TTF%2021July21_0.pdf

Figure 6 Cause–effect relationship between staff and children[85]

Another aspect that needs planning attention is that the ECCE workforce is a highly feminised one, with attempts to promote gender balance proving difficult to implement. Some of the difficulty in recruiting males into the ECCE workforce relate to traditional conceptions of the nurturing component of ECCE work as akin to mothering, thus positioning the role as women's work. This perception has historically led to a tendency to overlook the intellectually demanding competences and skills that are required to promote learning, health and well-being in secure and safe environments, and with them training. Such traditional views of ECCE work, together with its uneven pay and other issues related to working conditions, often involving long working hours, act to maintain the work as low status and unattractive to men, especially in contexts with entrenched traditional gender roles.

The issues of low pay and lack of professionalisation also have a negative effect on women's career prospects. Studies conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO)[86] have looked at these questions. As employers of a mostly female workforce, MoEs and other ministries could consider working with other relevant ministries, such as employment and/or social affairs, to set up family support and family-friendly policies. This consideration should have in mind investments in on-the-job training and in provisions that enable staff to gain or upgrade their qualifications once in employment. Provisions for parental leave and for appropriate incentives for staff to return to the paid workforce when they themselves become mothers/fathers should also be planned since this will help avoid having to retrain new staff and reduce high turnover of staff.

---

85 Adapted from European Commission (2014) "Proposal for Key Principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care". Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care.

86 ILO (2014) *Policy Guidelines on the Promotion of Decent Work for Early Childhood Education Personnel*. Geneva: ILO.

2.4.1 First steps in ECCE workforce planning

A first step in workforce planning is to consider the evidence on the status of the ECCE workforce, assess its composition and evaluate how these factors affect the drive to provide quality ECCE to young children. Across many countries, those working in ECCE often:

- Have limited or no qualification;

- Have not kept up to date with their professional learning;

- Are unable to access learning support because they work in distant communities;

- Have no time for professional learning and development;

- Cannot access training material and resources in their local language, making it difficult to keep up to date and improve their practice.

These conditions require creative solutions that respond to the local context and thus are best explored through the involvement of on-the-ground personnel, workers' advocacy groups and grassroots community members who have local knowledge and will understand the local issues – such as the types of training incentives most likely to be attractive to those at whom they are aimed. Such work can be led by specially appointed advisory groups made up of key ministry officials and representatives of the relevant agencies, possible funding bodies and researchers. The size of advisory groups will differ but should strike a balance between including all interested parties and being of a size that is able to progress decision-making. If the number of people is too large to make a workable advisory group, then a reference group with a wider constituency might be possible, depending on the local context.

2.4.2 The value of professionalising the ECCE workforce

In terms of the qualifications landscape for ECCE, some Commonwealth member countries (e.g. New Zealand and Australia) have made much progress to advance the status of the workforce. In contrast, there are other Commonwealth member countries, such as Sri Lanka,[87] where few opportunities exist for career progression. MoEs should consider plans for the professionalisation of the ECCE workforce so that entrants can see a viable and sustainable professional career for themselves in the sector, for example through a stepped career ladder within a national qualification framework. Such co-ordination of the education sector (with national qualification frameworks) and the social protection sector (through family-friendly policies) would allow

---

87 Warnasuriya, R., Sosale, S. and Dey, S. (2020) *Integrating Early Childhood Care and Education in Sri Lanka: From Global Evidence to National Action.* International Development in Action. Washington, DC: World Bank.

ECCE staff to combine the role of parent with being part of a trained workforce, while also improving the overall quality of ECCE provision in a country.

The rationale for having appropriately qualified staff working in the early years sector is based on sound research findings. Key messages to bear in mind are as follows:

- Higher levels of initial education and specialised training are associated with better quality and child outcomes.

- Pre-primary teachers with more formal education and specialised training are better equipped to provide more stimulating, warm and supportive interactions.

- Both initial pre-service teacher education and in-service training in the form of CPD are important to develop knowledge, skills and competences to work with children aged from birth to eight years.

- The content and methodology of initial pre-service teacher education and CPD matter.

- CPD should be tailored to the needs of the staff and be available to all types of personnel working with young children and families.

- Newly recruited staff should benefit from mentoring and supervision during their induction period. Mentorship could be in the form of pairing with a more experienced colleague with whom new teachers can have regular meetings.

- All personnel should have the opportunity to join regular in-house professional development activities and be able to access pedagogical support.

- Effective CPD initiatives are embedded in a pedagogical framework that nurtures reflective practice or the skills to think back and learn from experiences; such CPD activities also help the personnel develop and use transformative practices that respond to children and families' needs.

- Appropriate child-to-teacher ratios and group sizes are associated with quality service delivery.

- Appropriate salaries and wages paid on time are also important factors of job satisfaction and motivation for better performance.

- Competent pre-primary teachers make competent pre-primary systems, which also have effects on retention and progression in the teaching profession.

2.4.3 ECCE teachers' competency frameworks or teaching standards

In some Commonwealth member countries where ECCE has been aligned within the system of education, there are in operation ECCE teachers' competence frameworks or teaching standards (e.g. Australia,[88] New Zealand,[89] Singapore[90]). An ECCE teacher competency framework defines the professional requirements for quality delivery of learning experiences. It provides clear descriptions of the knowledge and professional and personal skills development required of ECCE teachers. MoEs of Commonwealth member countries should bear in mind the usefulness of an ECCE teachers' competence framework, particularly when the provision of ECCE teacher training is shared between the public and the private sectors. A framework can complement and support all components of existing guidelines and/or provide further guidance for developing national frameworks. MoEs should consider this as a tool to enhance the quality of ECCE that is central to improved outcomes for all children. Figure 7 below illustrates the elements that contribute to a quality early childhood programme, highlighting the key role played by those who work with children.

Box 9 presents key considerations when making decisions about the development of a national ECCE teacher' competence framework.

Box 9: An ECCE teachers' competence framework

- Provides MoEs and all those involved in ECCE with a benchmark of expectations for those working in ECCE;
- Helps Commonwealth member countries determine minimum standards and qualifications for those entering the ECCE profession;
- Ensures all graduates leave teacher training institutions with a threshold level of knowledge, skills and competences required to effectively implement quality ECCE programmes;
- Raises the status of ECCE and enhances opportunities for career paths for ECCE teachers;
- Allows other professionals and staff in education, including head teachers, to understand, appreciate and support the work of ECCE teachers, including their work with families;
- Encourages teachers to reflect on their practice and engage in CPD throughout their career.

Figure 7 shows the rationale for areas of competence included in an ECCE Teacher Competency Framework in Southeast Asia (2018),[91] as developed by UNESCO East Asia and the Pacific. Development of the framework involved

---

88 https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/ojlqqk2

89 https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Code-and-Standards/Standards-for-the-Teaching-Profession-English-two-pages.pdf

90 https://www.nie.edu.sg/docs/default-source/nie-files/te21_executive-summary_101109.pdf?sfvrsn=2

91 UNESCO (2018) *Pursuing Quality in Early Learning. Vol. 1: Early Childhood Care and Education Teacher Competency Framework for Southeast Asia.* https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265271
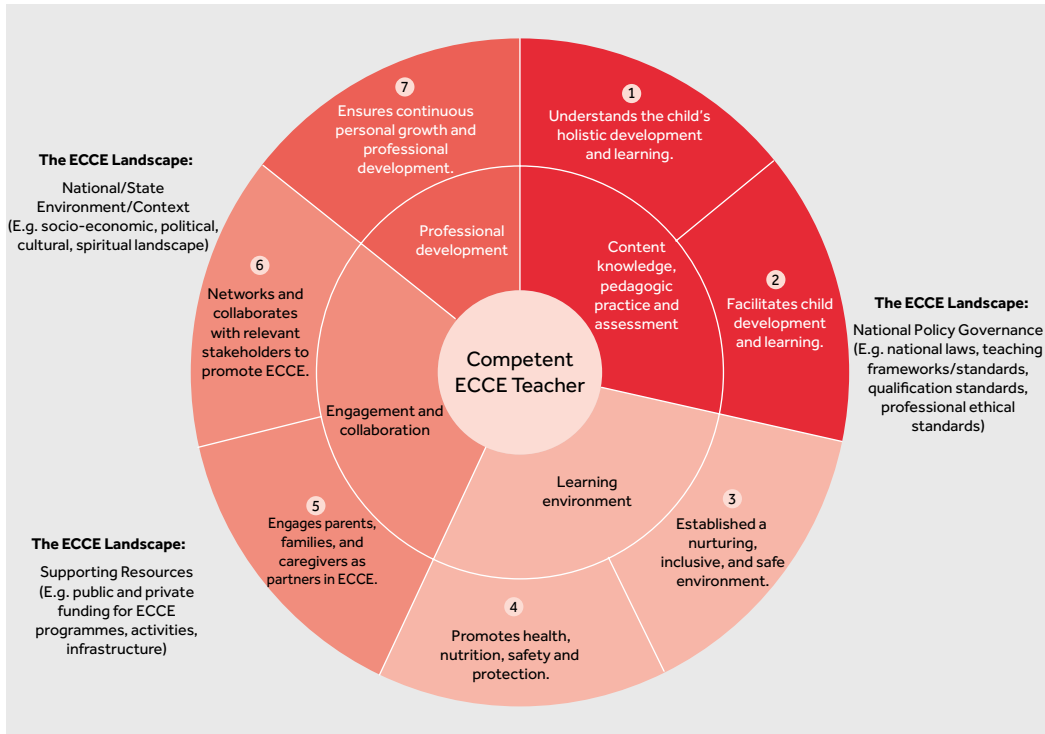
Figure 7 The ECCE Teacher Competency Framework for Southeast Asia

26 countries of the region, including eight Commonwealth member countries from the Pacific region: Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The development strategy used regional inter-governmental platforms for South–South co-operation to ensure high-level policy support and buy-in and regional/national ownership (the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization and the Pacific Regional Council for ECCE).

At the centre of this model are the teachers, who have to develop competence in four areas to deliver a quality learning experience: (i) content knowledge, pedagogical practice and assessment; (ii) the learning environment; (iii) engagement and collaboration; and (iv) professional development. The outer circle in the figure represents observable and measurable competences that teachers should acquire from their training. These competences can also be used to monitor quality and determine needs for professional development, especially for newly qualified teachers.

Use of the UNESCO competence framework in Commonwealth member countries is suggested as a measure of good practice. Several countries of the Commonwealth already have pre-primary teacher frameworks in operation. The UNESCO framework does not intend to replace these. Rather, it is a

tool to supplement, or to rethink, existing frameworks. It can also be used as a base from which Commonwealth member countries can develop their own frameworks that consider their unique country conditions and ECCE landscapes.

Some Commonwealth member countries still prepare the ECCE workforce through on-the-job training. In these circumstances, people running community learning centres may not have formal ECCE qualifications, and may operate with only basic training on topics related to child development and play for learning. In some cases, ECCE training is supported by international organisations concerned with training and quality services, such as the Aga Khan Foundation, Save the Children and Plan International, among others.

Case study: the madrasa pre-school training programme in Kenya[92]

For more than 20 years, the madrasa pre-school programme in Kenya has trained and supported women from the local community to work as teachers in community early childhood centres. The training encourages them to employ child-centred approaches and use locally available materials in pre-schools.

Quasi-experimental evaluations in 2008 found that such less formal training programmes resulted in better quality experiences for children compared with children attending pre-schools directed by more traditional teachers. Participating children performed better on cognitive assessments.

It is important for Commonwealth member countries to determine the needs of trained personnel and the skills levels of the workforce, including gathering data on serving caregivers/facilitators, so as to be able to prepare plans for training to support staff to upgrade their qualifications and access ongoing professional development.

Currently, in many countries of the Commonwealth, the demand for teachers to work with young children is urgent, and it is unrealistic to assume that it will be possible to fill the gap through availability of qualified candidates. It is therefore important to recognise that the workforce is already in place and to build on this, bearing in mind that the child at the centre of ECCE requires high-quality provision. UNICEF's *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education* (2019) notes that, while the demand for teachers is great, it will be necessary to build on existing resources to meet this urgent need.

The following case study on Sri Lanka provides some points for reflection and options to consider when planning for human resources to have an impact on quality.

---

92 Neuman, M., Josephson, K. and Chua, P.G. (2015) *A Review of the Literature: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Personnel in Low- and Middle-Income Countries.* ECCE Working Paper. Paris: UNESCO.

Case study: human resource options in Sri Lanka[93]

Teacher salaries in Sri Lanka are relatively low and these have an impact on the quality, motivation and retention of good teachers. In an environment of limited fiscal space, increasing teacher salaries may not be an option in the medium term, particularly as teachers represent the largest share of the public sector wage bill. However, over the long term, salaries for the teaching profession could be better aligned to attract, motivate and retain bright and capable young staff. The government could also consider incentives, such as attendance-based financial incentives, to attract teachers to difficult area schools. These could be combined with appropriate teacher transfers and fixed-term appointments to schools in less popular regions.

The importance of planning for a quality ECCE workforce cannot be overstated. It is also essential that MoEs keep accurate data about the ECCE workforce so that they can produce accurate projections about prospective entrants for training institutions, thus enabling the country to have a fit-for-purpose ECCE sector (see also Section 4.2.2).

This section has provided a succinct consideration of the planning process for quality ECCE provision. As countries move to increase ECCE access with quality, strategic planning is high on the agenda to achieve a clear road map for advancing the SDG agenda and specifically SDG Target 4.2. Section 3 addresses the implementation process.

Key resources

- The Standardized Early Childhood Development Costing Tool: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/standardized-ecd-costing-tool.pdf

- Better Early Earning and Development at Scale (BELDS): https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/better-early-learning-and-development-scale-belds-flyer

- UNESCO ECCE Teacher Competency Framework for Southeast Asia (2018): https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/early-childhood-care-and-education-ecce-teacher-competency-framework-southeast-asia-sea

- UNESCO ECCE Teacher Competency Framework for Pacific Small Island Developing States (2018): https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/early-childhood-care-and-education-ecce-teacher-competency-framework-pacific-small-island

---

93   World Bank (2014) *Sri Lanka: Investment in Human Capital*. Discussion Series 69. Washington, DC: World Bank.See also Raju, D. (2016) *Public School Teacher Management in Sri Lanka: Issues and Options*. Policy Research Working Paper 7651. Washington, DC: World Bank. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/483901468193734005/pdf/WPS7651.pdf

Section 3: Implementing ECCE in the national education system

Key messages

- It is key to position ECCE and pre-primary education at the centre of education sector plans, policies and budgets.

- A co-ordinating body needs to be set up to bring sectors together and leverage strategic partnerships for ECCE and pre-primary education.

- Clear norms for co-ordinating governance processes across sectors need to be established and maintained to sustain system functioning.

- Having robust communication and governance structures will facilitate decision-making during periods of unexpected national crises, thus enabling recovery.

- Governance facilitates the distribution of resources – including funding from private actors – in line with policies and action plans.

- Systematic data-gathering supports implementation and further planning.

Policy implementation is affected by, and affects, multiple policy actors, the more so in a multi-sector policy environment. This is the phase of the policy process at which decisions are put into action, leading to the success or otherwise of the policy design process.

Clear strategies for ECCE governance are key to successful policy implementation. Governance refers to all efforts by different levels of government and other agencies to administer and operate ECCE policies and services. It comprises practices, processes and policies for implementing, monitoring and evaluating ECCE initiatives as well as the establishment of lines of accountability.

3.1 Governance as the "glue" in multi-sectoral ECCE systems

The purpose of governance is to develop a good system and sustain its functioning; as such, it is more a tool than an end in itself. Governance takes effect through the structures that enable the allocation of resources to execute the roles, responsibilities and operations specified in policy action plans and mandates. The administration of human and material resources, as well as establishment of the responsibilities and accountabilities of staff across all levels of the ECCE system, is also part of governance structures. When using a

multi-sectoral approach, a comprehensive understanding of all factors involved in system governance is of paramount importance to ensure the effective use of shared plans and resources to achieve co-ordinated outcomes for quality ECCE and equity of access. In this way, governance may be conceptualised as the "'glue' that holds the pieces of the early childhood system together".[94]

3.2 Governance in action

ECCE governance structures vary greatly across countries based on existing services, geography, and human and financial resources, as well as political will. However, most countries will have an ECD or ECCE committee, which serves as an advisory group for the formulation of ECCE policy and programmes. Within a multi-sectoral approach to ECCE policy, this advisory group needs to reflect the different sectors, branches of scientific knowledge and policy activity (e.g. health and social services) across which the MoE needs to work. In general, an ECCE advisory committee will work with a degree of autonomy across management lines within the MoE to provide policy recommendations and to support co-ordination efforts for ECCE service delivery.

For ECCE governance to achieve SDG Target 4.2 through quality implementation of policies, it is important to establish clear norms for co-ordinating institutional processes within the MoE and for guiding collective planning, decision-making and actions across multi-sectoral agencies. Aligning ECCE with the system of education requires a clear, coherent and structured approach that clarifies responsibilities, forms of authority and accountabilities. Governance approaches also need to be able to break down silos to enhance cohesion of services to benefit children and their families.[95]

Box 10: Benefits of ECCE governance[96]

Effective ECCE governance can:

- Bring together vision-setting bodies that can align country goals;
- Increase efficiency and determine whether or not services meet quality standards, are affordable, meet local demand and achieve equity goals;
- Increase public–private partnerships (PPPs);

---

94 Neuman, M. (2005) "Governance of Early Childhood Education and Care: Recent Developments in OECD Countries". *Early Years* 25(2): 129–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/09575140500130992

95 https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-early-care-and-education-governance/

96 Atchison, B. and Diffey, L. (2018) "Governance in Early Childhood Education". *Education Trends*, 12 December. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. https://www.ecs.org/governance-in-early-childhood-education/
Neuman (2005) "Governance of Early Childhood Education and Care".

- Bring coherence to policy-making across MoEs and other government sectors and align services at national, provincial and local community level;
- Help match supply of ECCE services with the needs of different types of families;
- Initiate support and establish an infrastructure that improves quality outcomes for all children;
- Reduce duplication of efforts;
- Increase responsiveness;
- Maximise fiscal and human capital resources.

Sources: Governance in Early Childhood Education in Education Trends, Education Commission of the States;

As Commonwealth member countries re-examine their ECCE governance structures with SDG Target 4.2 in mind, the following five aims can help streamline ECCE governance:

1. **Co-ordination** – connecting the various parts and programmes of the ECCE system, reflecting its comprehensive nature;

2. **Alignment** – providing coherence across system-wide tasks, including data collection, quality standards and outcome measures, and breaking down silos associated with the administration of funding and oversight of programmes;

3. **Sustainability** – withstanding political and administrative changes and accounting for the full range of ECCE programmes and services that are part of the ECCE system;

4. **Efficiency** – allocating resources wisely, reducing duplication of effort and providing a significant return on investments;

5. **Accountability** – holding programmes and services responsible for quality, equity of access and outcomes, under national systems of education and across different levels of government (e.g. municipal, territorial, national).[97]

Two examples of governance structures within the Commonwealth – from Kenya and Jamaica – are presented below for examination.

Case study: governance in Kenya[98]

Following the devolution reforms of 2010, early childhood education in Kenya is administered at county level. According to the MoE, this has led to significant improvements in facilities, teachers and meals for children in pre-school education. Decentralisation has created space for counties to allocate more resources to services

---

97 Adapted from Atchison and Diffey (2018) "Governance in Early Childhood Education".
98 UNICEF (2017) "Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Kenya".

and explore innovative ideas, such as engaging with private providers and establishing model pre-school centres. The central government retains authority for pre-school policy, standards, curriculum and assessment. Counties are responsible for implementing policies, developing programmes, training staff and providing infrastructure.

Case study: governance in Jamaica[99]

In 2003, the Government of Jamaica established the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) as an official agency to govern the administration of ECD in Jamaica (ECC Act 2003). Operating under the MoE, the ECC is responsible for advising the MoE on ECD policy matters. It assists in the preparations, as well as monitoring and evaluation, of ECD plans and programmes, acting as a co-ordinating agency to streamline ECD activities, manage the national ECD budget, and supervise and regulate early childhood centres. It includes a governance arm comprising the officially appointed executive director, a Board of Commissioners and seven sub-committees representing governmental and non-governmental organisations. It also has an operational arm that provides support to the board and sub-committees. The ECC is designed with representation of all sectors, including education, health, local government, community development, labour, finance, protection and planning.

3.2.1 Policy and governance instruments

Governance enables the implementation of policy decisions and action plans. This process is rarely straightforward, and often involves revisiting earlier stages of the policy-making process, clarifications to the original policy aims and further negotiations between levels of government and across collaborating sectors and organisations about how the policy aims can be made to work in specific local contexts. Policy implementation can thus also be understood as a form of network governance, involving collaboration between organisations and attempts to secure co-ordinated efforts.[100] National laws, by-laws, regulations and standards are governance instruments that can be deployed to achieve policy aims.

It is helpful here to reiterate the differences between policies, strategic action plans, national laws, and by-laws and regulations:

- National policies provide an overall structure for planning and management. They contain the vision, mission, goals, core concepts, objectives and strategies for a national ECCE sector in line with a country's national development plans.

99   Denboba, A., Hasan, A. and Wodon, Q. (2015) *Early Childhood Development and Education in Indonesia: An Assessment of Policies Using SABER*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

100 Hill, M. (2014) *Studying Public Policy*. Bristol: Policy Press.

- National ECCE strategic plans are operational action plans to guide the development and implementation of ECCE policies.

- National ECCE laws establish national standards for the sector as a whole.

- By-laws, regulations, decrees and standards support national laws with detailed guidelines on the requirements for the operation of ECCE services across a range of circumstances. These often play an important role in implementing policies.

3.2.2 Co-ordination mechanism for multi-sectoral approaches to planning and delivery

In social policy generally, a co-ordinating mechanism is a body that plays the role of bringing all sectors together. An example of such a co-ordinating mechanism for ECCE policy is the National ECCE Committee in Jamaica (see case study presented in Section 3.2.1).

The co-ordinating mechanism could be a forum through which a government, at different levels, either formulates common ECCE actions or co-ordinates its multi-sectoral approaches. MoEs being the lead agencies in ECCE policy development, they can co-ordinate the establishment of a formally constituted forum comprising representatives of all interested parties and sectors to advise on all aspects of policy development and implementation. The regulatory role would be separate from the co-ordination mechanism and is frequently retained by the MoEs.

Policy co-ordination is one of the oldest challenges for governments but has become even more important as the problems confronting governments change.

For example, in Sri Lanka (see Figure 8), ECCE is co-ordinated by a body with responsibility for convening all parties involved in ECCE and for synchronising its implementation, including through regulations.

3.2.3 An ECCE regulatory mechanism

The nature and role of an ECCE regulatory mechanism is different from those of an ECCE co-ordinating mechanism. In the field of public policy, regulations are used to ensure the successful implementation of the principles and aims of laws and specific policies. Regulations cover aspects such as standards of provision and performance that must be met and criteria that will be used to effect the implementation of a policy. Regulations serve as the basis for
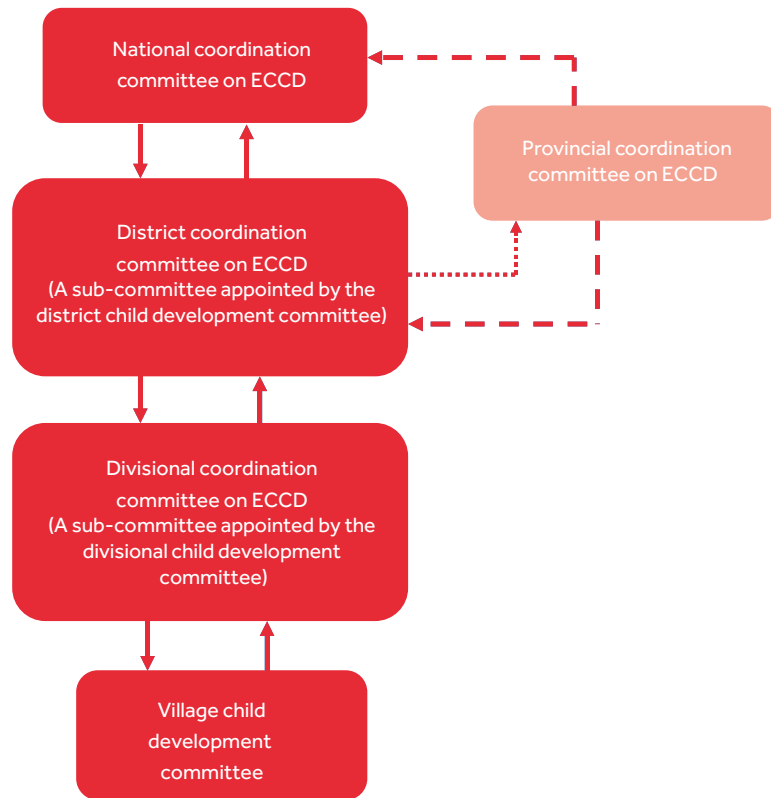
Figure 8   ECCE policy co-ordination in Sri Lanka[101]

licensing and are typically supported by mechanisms to incentivise, enforce and monitor compliance. ECCE regulations are typically developed by MoEs and implemented by agencies at different levels of government. The regulatory body can also be a separate body, organisation, committee or bureau that the government has given for promoting, co-ordinating and ensuring correct policy implementation.

This case study from Jamaica depicts a possible approach to the process of ECCE regulation.

Case study: ECCE regulation in Jamaica[102]

The Early Childhood Commission (ECC) was established by the ECC Act 2003, in keeping with the strategic goal of the Government of Jamaica to improve the quality of early childhood care, education and development within the early childhood sector.

---

101 Government of Sri Lanka (2017) "National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development".

102 https://ecc.gov.jm/about-us/

The ECC, which is an agency of the MoE, co-ordinates all activities, development plans and programmes within the early childhood sector. This integrated approach is critical, as it serves to reduce fragmentation and duplication and has placed under one institutional umbrella the regulations, standards and policies that govern the sector.

The operations of the ECC are undertaken primarily by three departments – Regulation and Monitoring, Sector Support Services and Cross-Sectoral Co-ordination – which seek to ensure the effective implementation of policies and programmes within the early childhood sector.

The Regulation and Monitoring Department has responsibility for the registration of early childhood institutions, and monitors their operations, to ensure compliance with the regulations and standards governing the sector. The Sector Support Services Department provides developmental support to early childhood institutions and early childhood practitioners. The Cross-Sectoral Co-ordination Department collaborates with government ministries and sector partners to co-ordinate ECD programmes, as well as to provide support for community intervention initiatives.

Currently, there are just under 2,800 early childhood institutions in operation in Jamaica. Under the Early Childhood Act 2005, such an institution is defined as any place that cares for four or more children, under the age of six, for up to six hours per day. This includes nurseries, daycare centres, basic schools, kindergartens, infant schools and infant departments.

The Early Childhood Act and the Early Childhood Regulations 2005 describe the requirements that an early childhood institution must meet in order to be registered by the ECC as a legally operating institution. The laws ensure that all ECIs provide the services that children need to grow and develop well. To guide compliance with the Act and Regulations, the ECC has developed a detailed document called "Standards for the Operation, Management and Administration of Early Childhood Institutions", which is distributed to early childhood institutions upon registration.

3.2.4 Cross-sectoral and cross-ministerial partnerships in policy implementation

Partnerships across sectors involve engagement in shared work and programme co-ordination to implement action plans for ECCE. This involves vertical (from the leading sector to others involved) and horizontal co-ordination (across sectors at the same level of authority/responsibility). Vertical co-ordination is related to elements of compliance with rules and regulations within the leading sector (i.e. the MoE). Horizontal co-ordination is most relevant to implementing multi-sectoral plans. When a ministry takes the lead in the ECCE co-ordination, for example the MoE, it needs to ensure collaboration and shared plans horizontally across sectors. Cross-ministerial partnerships are key to the alignment of shared plans and action.

Figure 9 depicts vertical and horizontal co-ordination in Jamaica.

3.2.5 Building sustainability and going to scale

As Commonwealth member countries implement plans to achieve SDG Target 4.2 and ensure access to quality ECCE and pre-primary education for all children, they are tasked with considering how best to build sustainable services

Honorable minister of education

Chairman

Board of Commissioners

| Executive director (*only ex-officio member*) | Opposition party | Ministry of education, youth, and culture | Ministry of health | Ministry of local government and community development | Ministry of labour and social security | Ministry of finance and planning | Child development agency | Planning institute of Jamaica | 7 qualified ECD practitioners |

Subcommittees

| Audit | Finance | Human resource | Legal and regulatory affairs | Parenting and community intervention | Public education | Research and data management | Training and development |

Operational arm

Figure 9 Multi-sectoral governance of ECCE in Jamaica[103]

103   World Bank (2013) *Jamaica Early Childhood Development: SABER Country Report.* Washington, DC: World Bank.

and programmes and to scale up with a degree of success, as well as enabling equitable access for groups of children who need it most.[104]

Sustainability refers to the capacity of MoEs to maintain service delivery even through political and administrative changes and through periods of unexpected crisis, such as natural disasters or pandemics. As has become evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, such crises require rapid decision-making, for example to contain outbreaks of disease and the rapid spread of infection. In multi-sectoral ECCE governance structures, this can put decision-making arrangements under stress, with the potential for creating confusion for services.[105] The robust communication and governance structures discussed in earlier sections are thus essential to the ability of jurisdictions to make management and recovery decisions throughout periods of crisis.

Discussing scaling-up in ECCE is complex. Clearly, some Commonwealth member countries already run large-scale services such as national ECCE programmes for five- to six-year-old children (e.g. pre-primary classes in Pakistan attached to public primary schools). In other cases, it cannot be assumed that a service or programme that works well in one, often controlled, small-scale setting will necessarily produce similar outcomes when implemented on a larger scale or in a different context. Being clear about the extent to which going to scale will improve children's experiences and outcomes is essential, together with identifying the potential levers for scaling-up. In this respect, reliable data is needed to understand the conditions under which specific ECCE programmes yield positive and consistent results,[106] as well as data to understand local needs and the best provisions that would meet them.[107] Political will and financial investments also need to be in place. Scaling up implementation further needs to consider the depth of organisational capacity available, and the existing leadership and strategic partnerships that are in place, or possible, within government, and with civil society and the private sector (Table 3).[108]

3.3 Finance

Development of a high-quality ECCE system to meet SDG Target 4.2 requires appropriate resourcing. Commonwealth member country governments allocate

104 Stansbery, P. (2018) "Translation of Evidence to Practice to Promote Early Childhood Development". *Programs Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1419: 23–25.

105 EU (2021) "Early Childhood Education and Care and the Covid-19 Pandemic. Understanding and Managing the Impact of the Crisis on the Sector".

106 Bassok and Engel (2019) "Early Childhood Education at Scale".

107 Urban et al. (2020) *Upscaling Community Based Early Childhood Programmes to Counter Inequality and Foster Social Cohesion During Global Uncertainty*.

108 Cavallera, V. et al. (2019) "Scaling Early Child Development: What Are the Barriers and Enablers?" *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 104: 543–550.

Table 3 Recommendations for ECCE scaling-up[109]

Context and content	• Build in capacity to adapt project content and delivery strategy to context at every scaling phase.
Contact point	• Include service components that fit the capacities of the contact point selected for delivery, rather than attempting to "include everything". • Co-ordinate across sectors and build approaches to "holistic" solutions taking into account local implementation capacity.
Cadre	• Promote a sense of self-determination and professional development among front-line providers. • Focus on motivation, including the desire to serve the community and to see benefits for children.
Counting outcomes	• Recognise that monitoring and evaluation needs intentional design to serve project implementers, major stakeholders and researchers. • Bring project leaders, researchers and implementers together early in the design cycle to ensure alignment and allocate roles.
Coverage and quality	• Adopt simple metrics to track coverage in an appropriate way for each phase of the scaling process with an emphasis on defining and meeting quality and equity objectives to effectively reach the underserved.
Course corrections	• Recognise that scaling-up is a non-linear, adaptive process; build in capacity for multiple course corrections at every phase, including an implementation culture that spots, reports and responds to problems. • Carefully document on-the-ground experiences, including negative ones, and make them available for learning within the project and more broadly.
Counting money	• Aim for long-term financial sustainability. • Consider partnering with both the public and the private sectors for financial and technical support, recognising the differing requirements of each.
Community partnerships	• Phase implementation timing to leave room to build community buy-in and enable community engagement in quality control and adaptation. • Develop communication materials and capacity tailored not just to central government but also to intermediate jurisdictions and community members.

a budget to education as part of fiscal policy, to be managed by the MoE. Yet, despite increasing global recognition that investing in young children's education and well-being has a positive impact on human capital development, consistent and adequate funding for ECCE services continues to be a challenge, with spending on ECCE remaining low relative to primary and secondary education.[110]

Differences in the proportions allocated to the ECCE sector across Commonwealth member countries can also be substantial. For example, in some

---

109 Cavallera, V. et al. (2019) "Scaling Early Child Development: What Are the Barriers and Enablers?" *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 104: 543–550.

110 Barnett, W. et al. (2016) *The State of Pre-School 2015: State Pre-school Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

lower-income Commonwealth countries, expenditure on pre-primary education is 2 per cent of the overall funding in education.[111] In countries where ECCE programmes are not compulsory, and thus discretionary, such programmes and services are susceptible to underfunding, making access to quality services for all children challenging. Lack of service providers, or of physical spaces to house services, also inhibits additional government investments.

When examining how to maximise the use of existing resources, and drawing up financial plans, Commonwealth member countries may need to have clear short-term targets to reflect more immediate returns (e.g. children's sustained enrolment and participation in primary and secondary education, disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background and other measures/mothers' participation in education and training/improved health and well-being measures including nutrition, stunting/improved social cohesion and community resilience). Having a stepped plan on how to increase financial investment in ECCE, including marshalling support from cabinet colleagues at budget time, is another key strategy; this relies on internal government advocacy skills and may require high-level interdepartmental leadership and co-ordination (e.g. by the Department of the Prime Minister).

3.3.1 Advocacy for domestic resources

Given that ECCE services and programmes are often underfunded, and governments may not have the revenue to create or invest in new programmes, cross-sector advocacy by the MoE for domestic resources is essential. As noted in Section 1.2, advocacy in this context is a set of organised activities aimed at influencing the policies and actions of executive decision-makers, to increase the financial resources needed to accomplish SDG Target 4.2. To summarise key points made in Section 1.2, the following key elements of domestic advocacy are worth highlighting:

- Advocacy is about influencing government practices, attitudes, resources and the political enabling environment.

- Advocacy aims to achieve lasting and positive outcomes in children's lives.

- Advocacy is strategic and planned.

- Advocacy is not an end in itself.

- Advocacy draws legitimacy and credibility from knowledge and experience (evidence based).

Important frameworks on which advocacy for domestic resources can be based are SDG Target 4.2, the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents'

---

111   UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn.*

Health 2016–2030, the WHO Nurturing Care Framework and country-level ECD policies, ECD development plans and strategies. Nurturing an enabling environment for ECCE policy and for strategic action plans (see Section 1.3) is one key factor that will facilitate funding and contribute to the success of implementation.

Having specific plans developed with expected deadlines and clear accountabilities will help enable a more effective choice of advocacy strategy to access domestic resources. This is a particular consideration for countries with a devolved administration system where there might be a different (or no) understanding at the central or provincial level of the on-the-ground impact of the proposed action plans. Advocacy progress – that is, success in moving forward from a starting point – can be monitored (see Section 5) and as such can often be one of the first concrete indicators of progress on ECCE implementation.

3.3.2 Public–private partnerships

It is important to consider the development of formal partnerships between the public and the private sectors. In many countries, participation of the private sector in the delivery of ECCE services and the training of personnel is very high (e.g. Kenya).[112] A key feature of PPPs is collaboration between public and private actors; the mode of commitment, however, may differ. Public actors mainly comprise the country's government (at the national or sub-national level). Private actors can mostly be divided into for-profit and not-for-profit types and can be inclusive of private or commercially driven organisations, philanthropic associations, local or international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations and community-based organisations.[113]

Private sector investors face different incentives for funding ECCE services to those available to the public sector. They may be motivated by fulfilling corporate responsibility activities or the goal of generating positive public relations within the country in which they are operating, in line with their organisation's vision and mission statements.

The degree of effectiveness and realisation of potential benefits of PPPs in the delivery of ECCE services is dependent on the partnership design between public and private actors (Figure 10). While PPPs have the potential to expand access and quality, a poorly designed and implemented initiative could equally have a negative impact on services. Table 4 presents key factors and policy levers for effective PPPs.

---

112 Many non-state pre-schools are run by faith-based or non-governmental organisations and include low-cost private centres (UNICEF, 2017, "Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Kenya").

113 Gustaffson-Wright, E., Smith, K. and Gardiner, S. (2017) *Public-Private Partnerships in Early Childhood Development: The Role of Publicly Funded Private Provision.* Washington, DC: Center for Universal Education at Brookings.
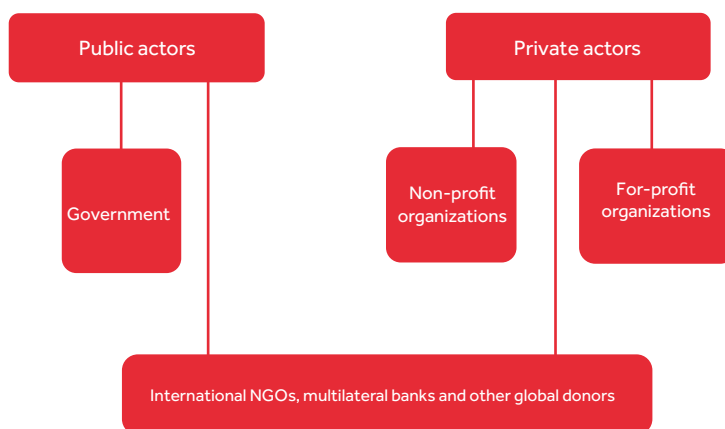
Figure 10 Scope of actors engaged in public–private partnerships[114]

Table 4 Factors that contribute to the success of PPPs[115]

- Detailed and clear guidance on the role of private actors in policy documents, appropriate to the country context;
- Equitable funding between public and private systems;
- Transparent provider selection processes;
- Government capacity to establish policy frameworks and evaluate providers' selection;
- Regulatory frameworks with clear standards;
- Monitoring based on clear and achievable outcomes;
- Government capacity to monitor providers and manage contracts;
- Stable and timely funding for private providers;
- Autonomy of private providers in management decisions.

While equitable access to quality ECCE has increased over the past two decades,[116] large gaps remain, and the achievement of SDG Target 4.2 will require a concerted effort among actors from the public and the private sector. Increasingly, the role of private actors and, in particular, PPPs in this effort is worth exploring by Commonwealth member countries. However, any PPP initiative should be subject to public accountability, oriented by public policy guidance and generally in support of countries' strategies to realise their overall responsibility for providing

114 Gustaffson-Wright, E., Smith, K. and Gardiner, S. (2017) *Public-Private Partnerships in Early Childhood Development: The Role of Publicly Funded Private Provision*. Washington, DC: Center for Universal Education at Brookings.

115 Gustaffson-Wright, E., Smith, K. and Gardiner, S. (2017) *Public-Private Partnerships in Early Childhood Development: The Role of Publicly Funded Private Provision*. Washington, DC: Center for Universal Education at Brookings.

116 UNESCO (2016) *Education for People and Planet: Creating Sustainable Futures for All.* EFA Global Monitoring Report. Paris: UNESCO.

accessible and equitable ECCE services and programmes. PPPs that are dominated by donor or private sector interests are not conducive to this aim.[117]

3.3.3 International financing, including international donor/partner engagement

Key international organisations working in countries can support and advocate for international financing. This is particularly the case in low-income countries, where most international organisations work to support achievement of the SDG targets. In these contexts, it is advisable for the international development section of a country MoE to work in close collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs (or equivalent) to build protocols for collaboration and joint planning.

Additionally, some countries have international partnerships with academic organisations, financial institutions and donors to support capacity-building and improving the scaling-up of initiatives in country.[118]

Evidence from multi-sector collaboration and engagement with international donors and partners indicates the following practical aspects for leveraging financial support:

- Dedicated financing must be in place to implement ECCE programmes and show results that can be used to scale up initiatives. Showing results generates more funding.

- When advocating with donors, aim for longer funding cycles so that results (especially those that take a longer time to realise, such as quality ECCE components and capacity development) can be consolidated for full evidence of impact. Use evidence to influence donors and governments to increase funding for ECCE; generating data is always an important task during implementation. In many cases, funding streams for ECCE come separately from donors that have different goals and restrictions, and are administered in separate sectors.

- Monitor plan implementation and the use of resources closely for accountability.

- Take the opportunity, when appropriate, to trial different funding arrangements.

- Leverage additional resources for knowledge management and dissemination to contribute to the evidence base for actions. Budget

---

117 UNESCO IIEP (2010) *Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction*. Paris: UNESCO.

118 A group of partners including the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO), UNESCO, UNICEF and GPE jointly developed and launched in 2019 a five-week massive open online course aimed at strengthening ECCE planning as part of the broader education sector planning (http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/mooc-mainstreaming-early-childhood-education-education-sector-planning-4918).

in person-time to synthesise results and lessons learnt through the development of case studies and peer-reviewed articles.

- Document the costs of initiatives that represent good collaboration and integration of sectors. This information can be a tool for effective advocacy to governments and donors.

3.4 Data management

As countries move towards scaling up ECCE provisions and programmes to reach SDG Target 4.2, experiences from smaller programme pilots become important. Such experiences are gained through systematic data collection during the whole life of the smaller programme.

Having accurate data can help identify what works effectively, and the factors that can support the achievement of milestones nominated in costed action plans. This then guides administrative and fiscal decisions.[119]

Multi-sectoral approaches to ECCE policy and practice must be underpinned by multi-sectoral data, monitoring and evaluation systems. In reality, however, data systems belonging to specific sectors (e.g. health, education, welfare) are often incompatible. The lead agency (i.e. MoE) is responsible for establishing a functioning data system. Multi-sectoral data systems are most efficient where they connect horizontally across sectors (e.g. combining HMIS and EMIS) and vertically to link data collection to participatory evaluation and vice versa.[120]

Analysing data is also helpful to identify bottlenecks in the education system or in another collaborating sector to inform smoother down-the-line plans for larger implementation.

Data can also support a country's wider national development strategy by enabling demonstration of the benefits of social investment in young children and of the efficiency of the education system. This can help in advocating for increased resources, further strategic planning and development of a research and evaluation agenda to analyse what fully works in a country and to understand variations in input and impact under different circumstances. To this end, three types of implementation data can help MoE officials:

1. Data analysis of programme elements to consider when scaling up, since there may be competing elements with cost implications that should be explored for relative effectiveness (e.g. staff, costs, numbers);

---

119   Lombardi, J. (2018) "What Policy Makers Need from Implementation Evaluations of Early Childhood Development Programmes". *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1419: 17–19.

120   Urban et al. (2021) *How Do We Know Goals Are Achieved?*

2. Data on differences in target populations, which can help in understanding the impact that policies and programmes have on different populations of children and families (e.g. what actually works for children with disabilities and families with differential incomes);

3. Data on infrastructure support needed at scale to contribute to programme quality and sustainability (e.g. a co-ordination mechanism across sectors, training and technical support and financing mechanisms).

As the world moves to increase ECCE access with quality, Commonwealth member countries need to consider the following strategic directions:

- Position ECCE as a key strategy to deliver access and equity in learning.

- Move from project delivery to system-strengthening.

- Allocate responsibility for ECCE to nominated personnel in the MoE so they can provide technical support and engage consistently with other sectors involved in ECCE delivery.

- Encourage practical entry points and leverage them with a view towards sustainable ECCE systems.

- Ensure the strategic use of funds (often very limited).

- Build partnerships at regional, national and sub-national levels to deliver on ECCE goals.

- Engage MoE chief executives with the ECCE sub-sector.[121]

This section has provided an overview of implementation processes for ECCE within national MoEs, focusing on governance and finance as central to a multi-sectoral style of working.

Section 4 covers the steps involved in moving forward and expanding access.

Key resources:

- *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education*. UNICEF global report (2019). https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-world-ready-to-learn-report/

- Education Commission of the States (2021): https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-early-care-and-education-governance/

- *What Matters Most for Early Childhood Development: A Framework Paper*. SABER Working Paper (2013). https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20174

---

121 Borisova, I. (2019) Presentation at EAPRO ECD-Nutrition Regional Meeting, September.

- Measuring the Quality of Early Learning Programs. Early Learning Partnership (August 2016). http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/474431473958525937/pdf/108285-REVISED-PUBLIC-ELP-GN-MeasuringQuality-CEP.pdf

- "Reaching Expert Consensus on Training Different Cadres in Delivering Early Childhood Development at Scale in Low-Resource Contexts". Pearson et al. (2018). https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs/reaching-expert-consensus-on-training-different-cadres-in-delivering-early-childhood-development

- "The Nuts and Bolts of Building Early Childhood Systems through State/Local Initiatives". Ponder and Ames (2021). https://buildinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NutsandBolts2021_final1.pdf

- Public–Private Partnerships in Early Childhood Development: The Role of Publicly Funded Private Provision. Gustafsson-Wright et al. (2017). www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ecd-public-private-partnerships-20171227.pdf

- *Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction.* UNESCO IIEP (2010).

- *How Do We Know Goals Are Achieved? Integrated and Multisectoral Early Childhood Monitoring and Evaluation Systems as Key to Developing Effective and Resilient Social Welfare Systems.* Urban et al. (2021). https://www.t20italy.org/2021/09/20/how-do-we-know-goals-are-achieved/

Table 5 Publicly financed and privately provided ECD services – types of PPP models[122]

Type of engagement	Type of service contract	Ownership of ECD facility	Target of Payments	Scope of private actor responsibilities	Activity types Initiative description
Inputs	**Private management of public programs**	Public	Facility-based	Management activities only	Private financial and human resources management of public ECD programs. Private actors receive a set fee for management responsibilities or a child-based fee. Non-management personnel and wider operations are not covered by these contracts. Private actors are responsible for outcomes or determined performance measurements.
	Private support services for public programs	N/A	N/A	Support activities only	ECD support services for public ECD programs including meal provision and transportation to facilities, and facility maintenance
	Professional services	N/A	N/A	Support activities only	Staff training, curriculum and program design, textbook delivery, quality assurance, and supplemental services
	Facility availability	N/A	N/A	Support activities only	infrastructure and building maintenance
Outputs	**Voucher and voucher-like initiatives**	Private	Recipient-based	Comprehensive management and service delivery	School-level contracting to enroll and secure placement of specific children in existing private ECD programs. Voucher and voucher-like initiatives are distinct from service delivery initiatives in that the public sector does not purchase 'bulk' or large-scale placements for children at determined schools. The structure of voucher programs varies, and some provide the option for private providers to charge user-fees in addition to the cost covered by government provided vouchers. [Voucher and voucher-like programs can particularly be utilized to target marginalized or disadvantaged populations.]

122 Gustaffson-Wright et al. (2017) *Public-Private Partnerships in Early Childhood Development* (adapted from Patrinos et al., 2009; LaRocque and Lee, 2011).

Service delivery Initiatives	Private	Facility-based	Comprehensive management and service delivery	Contracting with private providers for the delivery of ECD services. Government/public sector purchases bulk placements for children in private ECD programs. Demand-based payments linked to the level of enrolment Programs cannot charge recipients above the determined subsidy revel. Private providers are held accountable for program outcomes.
Process				
Private operation of public programs	Public	Facility-based	Comprehensive management and service delivery	Private sector contracted for broad responsibilities for comprehensive operation of public ECD programs, including education of students, program delivery for children, financial and human resource management, professional services, and building maintenance. [Operational programs are used to target marginalized or disadvantaged populations.]

Section 4: Expanding access with quality and equity

Key messages

- Expanding access with quality is an achievable goal for countries that already have pre-primary in place.

- Realising the right to equitable education for all is a question of social justice.

- Investment in children and families with targeted support is of paramount importance to secure social and human capital development.

- An "equity first" approach requires education systems to mobilise a wide range of partners, including the private sector.

- Complementing the public pre-primary model with additional programme approaches will make the universal target achievable.

- Working with parents as partners is essential to understanding their needs and supporting them in their role as first nurturers of their children.

- Quality ECCE is associated with a play-based pedagogy as the basis of curricula in the early years.

- Assessment *for* learning has a powerful impact on teaching practice, and assessment *as* learning builds learner identities that can set children up for success at school.

This section looks at how Commonwealth member countries can best expand access and grow quality ECCE service provision for all young children.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 175 million children globally were known not to benefit from pre-primary education.[123] UNICEF reported in 2020[124] that, while the global rate of enrolment in pre-primary education had increased from 32 per cent in 2000 to 50 per cent in 2017, half of the world's pre-primary age children still did not have access to any type of early education programme. In low-income countries, only two in 10 children were enrolled in pre-primary education and, globally, those least likely to attend early learning programmes were children

---

123   UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn*.
124   UNICEF (2020) *Build to Last: A Framework in Support of Universal Quality Pre-Primary Education*. New York: UNICEF.

from poor and vulnerable families. Of those children affected by emergencies, only one in three were enrolled in pre-primary education programmes, and data from many countries further revealed major gaps in financing and quality of available services, even when expansion to pre-primary education services was underway. The pandemic is likely to have exacerbated these figures.[125,126] Figure 11 presents global projections regarding the achievement of universal enrolment in pre-primary education by 2030, based on 2018 data.
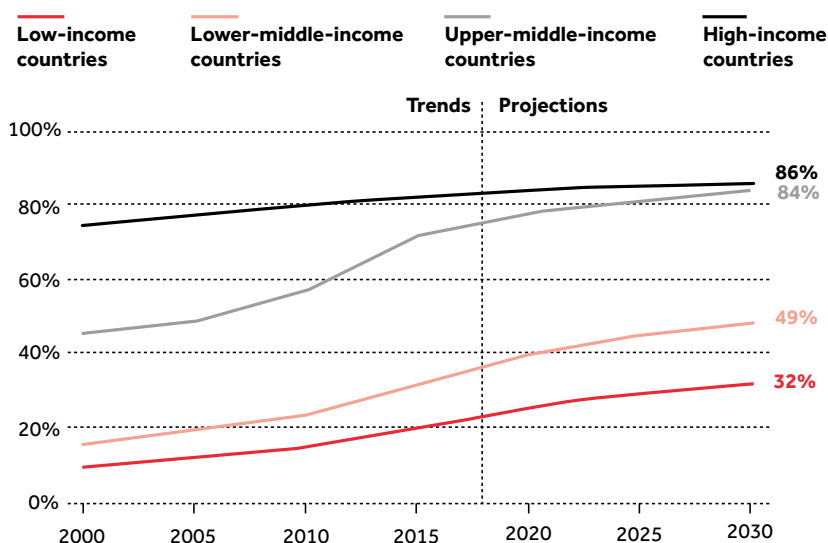
Figure 11 Global projections regarding universal pre-primary enrolment by 2030[127]
Source: Computations by UNICEF, based on data from the UIS global database, 2018.

Looking at the data presented in Figure 11, it is apparent that, while the challenges of inequitable access are present in all regions of the Commonwealth, children in low-income countries are the most vulnerable in this regard.[128]

As noted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in *Starting Strong* (2018),[129] children's participation in high-quality ECCE has been shown to have multiple benefits, but lack of quality can be

125 Kenny and Yang (2021) *The Global Childcare Workload from School and Preschool Closures.* UNESCO (2021) *Recovering Lost Learning.*
126 UN (2020) *The Impact of COVID-19 on Children.*
127 UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn.*
128 UNICEF (2020) "Don't Let Children Be the Hidden Victims of COVID-19 Pandemic". Statement, 9 April. https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/dont-let-children-be-hidden-victims-covid-19-pandemic
129 OECD (2018) *Engaging Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care.* Paris: OECD.

detrimental to children and will not be effective in closing the existing early learning gap. Expanding provision, therefore, means that education systems need to ensure that increased access means access to quality ECCE.

Across the world, common hurdles that inhibit the participation of children in early learning emanate from inherent conditions of poverty and disadvantage, specifically lack of family income and low levels of maternal education. UNICEF's *World Ready to Learn* report (2019) highlights that, in low-income countries, children from well-off families are seven times more likely to access ECCE programmes than those from the poorest families; in middle- and high-income countries children are four times more likely to attend and benefit from ECCE (Figures 12 and 13).[130] The figures below show the global situation in 2019 on key equity dimensions for ensuring access to ECCE.

Poverty

Richest children are 7 times more likely to attend ECE programmes than

Poorest children

Mother's education

Children of mothers with secondary education and above are 5 times more likely to attend ECE programmes than

Children of mothers with primary education and below
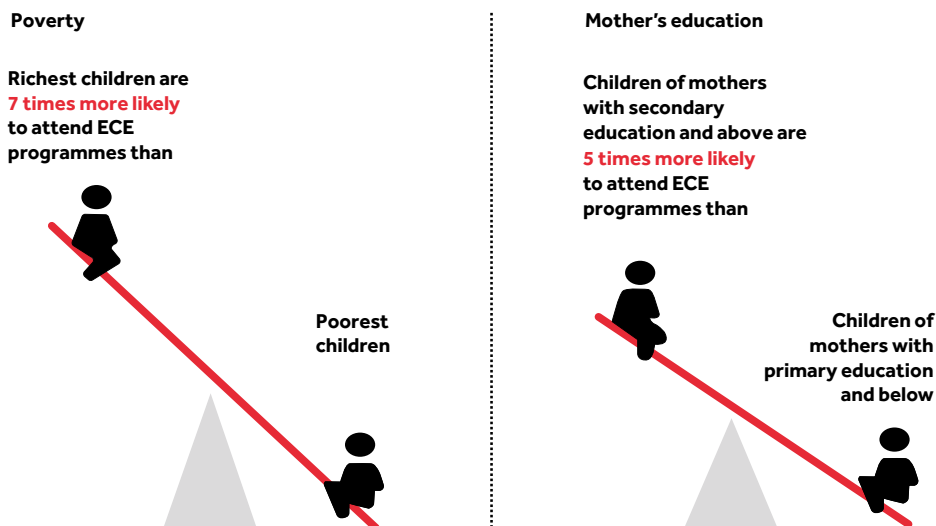
Figure 12 Key equity dimensions – poverty and mother's low education levels[131]
Source: Computations by UNICEF, based on available data from UNICEF MICS global databases, 2010–2016.

As such, access is not limited to the provision of more places but interacts with many societal factors that need to be taken into account in MoE planning and resourcing. Responsiveness to local conditions needs to be a key consideration.

4.1 Models of ECCE service delivery

Current ECCE models vary by sector focus, target age range and delivery platform.

---

130   UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn*.
131   UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn*.

Residence

Children living in urban areas are **2.5 times more likely** **to attend ECE programmes than**

Children living in rural areas

Sex

Equitable attendance in ECE programmes among

Boys

Girls
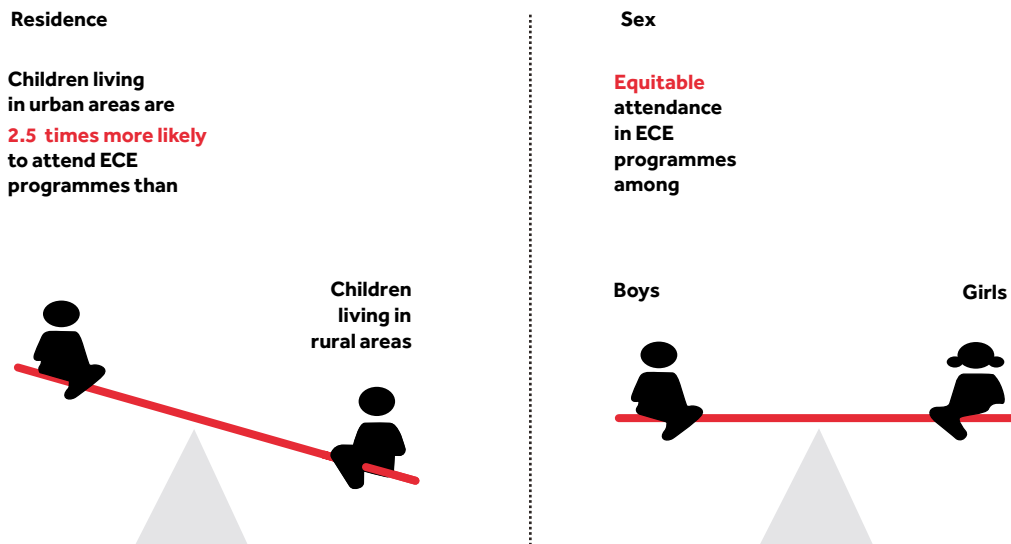
Figure 13 Key equity dimensions – residence and gender[132]

Recent years have seen rapid growth in the availability of ECCE services for children aged from birth to two years.[133] Such programmes have a focus on providing nurturing care,[134] promoting the health and nutrition of the mother and the child in an environment that is safe and free of toxic stress, and providing opportunities for early learning. The emphasis is on securing the best development of the child during the first 1,000 days of life.

ECCE programmes targeted at three to six year olds aim to create playful learning environments that will prepare children for the transition into more formal education.

Many of these initiatives are supported by private philanthropic organisations and have the additional goal of improving children's living conditions, including through creating healthier environments in terms of housing and WASH; ensuring basic safety and child protection; and enabling children's primary caregivers with the resources, time and capacities to support development. Governments have partnered with many such initiatives, providing subsidies for childcare places, modifying employment laws and instituting parental leave programmes, and through social protection measures.

---

132   UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn*.

133   OECD (2021) "Enrolment in Childcare and Pre-school". PF3.2. OECD Family Database. Social Policy Division, Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs. Paris: OECD. https://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm

134   WHO, UNICEF and World Bank (2018) *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development.*

However, in many cases, such PPPs are no longer enough to meet the increasing demand for services. They have also been criticised for their role in undermining public education.[135] More recently, not least because of experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic, governments have been urged to take more hands-on responsibility for early childhood, for example by the G20.[136] Responses from the public sector have included the provision of free access to at least one year of pre-school education for all children.

Access to pre-school services varies across nations, but in the majority of countries the education system provides a final year of pre-school at age five to six years. In some cases, the final year of pre-school can be at a younger age, as in the case of England, where children can enter the reception class (the year prior to the first year of compulsory school) at the age of four years.

Figure 14 shows how different ECCE models might be brought together coherently in a multi-sectoral approach to ECCE. The UNICEF framework helpfully identifies how goals and objectives for ECCE may be addressed via intervention packages sponsored by different sectors through their various delivery platforms: health and nutrition services; education services; community-level programmes; and social protection initiatives such as home-visiting and social welfare provisions. The framework also highlights a range of implementation strategies that are discussed elsewhere throughout this Toolkit.

4.1.1 Examples of multi-sectoral initiatives in practice

Numerous countries have undertaken multi-sectoral packages through different service delivery platforms. The following case study, from the Country Landscape Study carried out in developing this Toolkit, explains the Roving Caregivers Programme (RCP) in Belize, which combines early learning and protection by working with young children and their mothers.

The next case study, again from the Country Landscape Study but looking at Pakistan, describes the *katchi,* which is a pre-primary class for children aged three to five years. *Katchis* were introduced as following promulgation of the National Education Policy 1998–2010, which called for the formal introduction of such a pre-primary class in primary schools, extending primary education to a six-year programme.

---

135 Klees, S.J., Smoff, J. and Stromquist, N P. (2012) *The World Bank and Education. Critiques and Alternatives.* Rotterdam, Boston, Taipeh: Sense Publishers.

136 Think20 (2019) "T20 Summit 2019 Communiqué". https://t20japan.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/t20-japan-2019-communique-eng.pdf

UNICEF goals

All young children, from conception up to the age of school entry, achieve their developmental potential in equitable inclusive care environments, programme and policies, including in humanitarian setting

Objectives

Children up to the age of school entry receive essential services
Children up to the age of school entry, including children with disabilities and children in fragile contexts, have equitable access to quality child care, health, nutrition, protection and early learning services to address their developmental needs

Parents and caregivers practice nurturing care
Parents engaged in services to address their developmental needs parenting and stimulating and learning activities

Multisectoral intervention packages

First 1,000 days

Early learning and protection

Caring for the caregiver: Multigenerational nurturing care

Family support and strengthening

Service delivery platforms

Health and nutrition
• Health centres/clinics
• Nutrition counselling centres
• Hospitals

Education
• Preschools
• Schools

Community
• Child care centres (health, child protection and education)
• Work place

Protection
• Social protection platforms
• Home visiting
• Social welfare system

Implementing strategies

Cross-sectoral and multisectoral programming

Policy and systems strengthening

Behaviour change and community engagement

Communication

Advocacy

Data and evidence

Public finance for children

M and E measurement, learning and accountability

Figure 14 UNICEF ECD Programme Framework[137]

---

137 UNICEF EAPRO (2019) Presentation at Regional Nutrition/ECD Meeting, September.

Case study: Roving Caregivers in Belize

In 2012, Belize implemented the RCP, first developed in Jamaica, with the aim of offering support to parents of children below the compulsory school age of five. The RCP hopes to ensure that the children receive better quality care and stimulation together with attention to nutrition, health and well-being.

The RCP is an informal early childhood education programme that seeks to reach children up to three years old who do not have access to any formal early childhood education in their communities.138 This is very much in line with national objectives to support better parenting, as per the objectives of Horizon 2030 and the Children's Agenda 2017–2030.

Programmes like the RCP are particularly relevant to supporting early development and readiness for school progression. The practitioners, called "rovers", work with parents individually or in small groups, offering support on basic skills and information on child development, health and nutrition, and how to stimulate children through play.

The RCP is implemented by the Department of Human Services in the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation. It targets children in disadvantaged conditions with the objective of having a direct impact on children's overall development resulting in better performance in pre-school and their future education.

Case study: katchi classes in Pakistan

Pakistan's National Education Policy stated that at least one year of pre-primary education was to be provided by the state, with universal access to ECE to be ensured within the following 10 years. Following this, there was a noticeable increase in the gross enrolment rate for ECE, despite a high number of children still being unreached by pre-school services. The recognition and strengthening of katchi classes as part of the formal public education system undoubtedly represented an advance in the provision of access.

To address issues of poverty and lack of financial means to cover expenses, such as for uniforms and school textbooks, which were leading families to remove their children from ECE, financial and food support was to be made available for children.

Furthermore, and to improve the delivery of quality of learning, there was a commitment to improving the qualifications of teachers with the introduction of two-year pre-service training for ECE teachers based on the existing National Curriculum for ECE.

4.2 What is ECCE quality?

Decades of research on how to ensure quality in ECCE have identified that both structural and process elements of the early childhood environment are necessary to enable good outcomes for children.[139] There is also wide acceptance

---

138 UNICEF (2018) *Caribbean Early Childhood Development Good Practice Guide*. New York: UNICEF.

139 Cameron et al. (2018) "The Development of a United ECEC Workforce in New Zealand and England".Siraj-Blatchford (2009) "Conceptualising Progression in the Pedagogy of Play".

of the view that the notion of quality is value-laden, culture- and context-bound, and thus relative, open to debate and in need of ongoing problematising.[140] A discourse of programme effectiveness as an indicator of quality is also widely accepted; in this frame of reference, "quality" is that which makes a demonstrable difference to children's developmental outcomes.[141]

4.2.1 Structural and process elements of quality and their effectiveness

From a policy perspective, quality in ECCE is understood to be determined through the interaction of structural features of the early learning environment with process elements, all of which are embedded in a socio-cultural context. Structural features include those elements that are most amenable to policy interventions, such as staff qualifications, adult-to-child ratios, group size and environmental conditions (e.g. size and configuration of buildings, inclusion of both indoor and outdoor space, regulation of aspects such as noise levels). Process elements, on the other hand, derive from aspects such as the responsiveness of staff, and their engagement with children in well-designed learning experiences and opportunities for what in ECCE has been termed "sustained shared thinking".[142] This is when two or more individuals (e.g. adult and child and/or child and children) work together to contribute and clarify ideas and concepts, solve problems and evaluate activities to extend understanding. The availability of curriculum guidance and professional development and training, together with leadership and the philosophical orientation of a provision, also contribute to process quality. Both structural and process elements need to be sustained by a supportive policy infrastructure[143] that includes monitoring and auditing against quality standards.

Figure 15 presents components of ECCE quality proposed by UNESCO in which human resources play an important role in securing quality outcomes.

Across the Commonwealth and globally, many countries have undertaken some key developments aimed at ensuring children benefit from quality ECCE provision. Figure 16 demonstrates how Sri Lanka built a quality framework for the ECCE sector with an emphasis on the quality of pedagogical processes, or the ways in which teachers plan and facilitate learning opportunities for children.

The following case study from Sri Lanka, taken from the Country Landscape Study, offers an insight into how issues of equity in relation to quality have been addressed through a facilitating policy environment.

---

140 Dalli, C. (2014) "Quality for Babies and Toddlers in Early Years Settings". TACTYC Occasional Paper 4. http://tactyc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Occ-Paper-4-Prof-Carmen-Dalli.pdf

141 Melhuish, E. (2001) "The Quest for Quality in Early Day Care and Preschool Experience Continues". *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 25(1): 1–6.

142 Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) "The Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years".

143 Ibid.
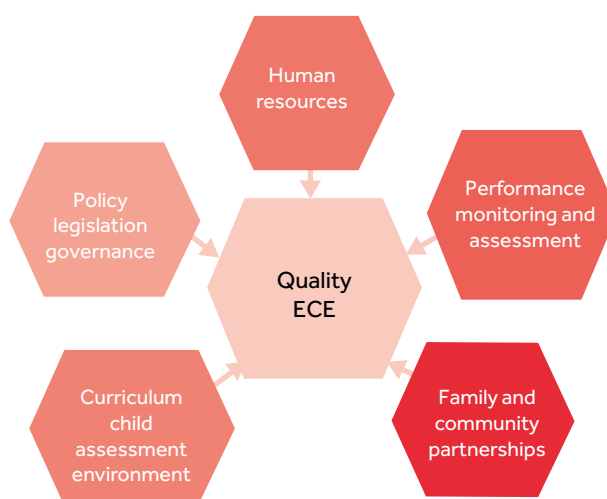
Figure 15 Components of ECCE quality[144]
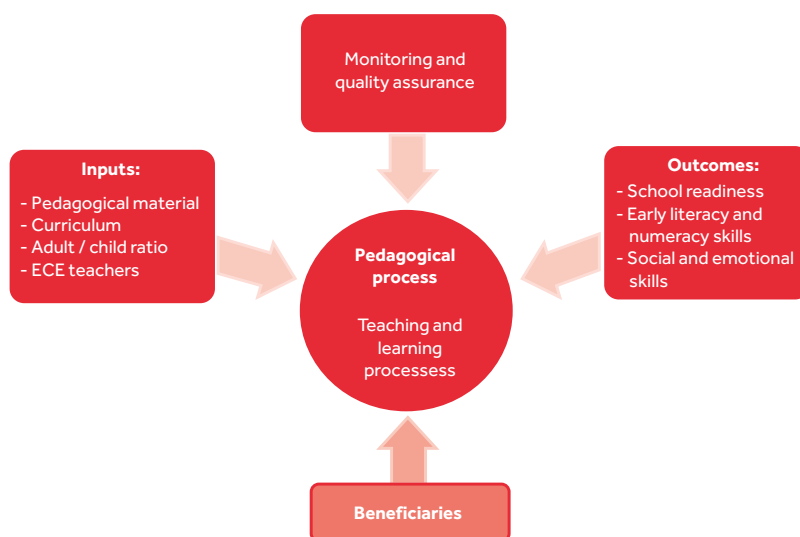
Figure 16 Components of quality in Sri Lanka[145]

Case study: expanding with equity in Sri Lanka

As the ministry responsible for the provision of quality education services to all children, the MoE developed a Preschool Development Plan aimed at creating a quality "child friendly" pre-school system based on equity principles and with a focus on provision for the most disadvantaged groups in society. This included provisions to upgrade the physical facilities of pre-schools; lift the professionalism of pre-school teachers; and ensure a common approach in every pre-school in Sri Lanka. In order to ensure achievement of SDG Target 4.2, the

144   UNESCO (2018) *Pursuing Quality in Early Learning.*
145   World Bank (2014) *Sri Lanka: Investment in Human Capital.*

Government of Sri Lanka incorporated several strategies within early childhood education policy, including the following:

1. *Facilitate the expansion of services in unserved and underserved areas to improve equitable access to quality centre-based ECCE.*

2. *Take a positive discrimination approach in promoting the expansion of ECCE services focused on essential support for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.*

3. *Promote awareness of the importance of ECCE for optimal development of the child and the impact of ECCE on the development of human capital among policy-makers, officials and the general public.*

4. *Promote and facilitate collaboration among public, non-governmental and private sector organisations to expand centre-based ECCE.*

5. *Strengthen relevant national and provincial authorities to ensure the quality of centre-based ECCE to foster physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development of children through implementing developmentally appropriate (age-appropriate as well as individually appropriate) practices.*

6. *Facilitate development of a national core curriculum/national curriculum guide.*

7. *Facilitate the ability of all national and provincial authorities to promote compliance by ECCE centres with standards related to structural and process features of centre-based ECCE as well as early childhood development standards.*

8. *Promote and facilitate capacity-building and career development of personnel involved in ECCE (early childhood development officers/assistants, other relevant officers and pre-school teachers).*

9. *Promote and facilitate capacity-building of personnel involved in centre-based ECCE to adopt inclusive practices in centres.*

10. *Promote systematic use of valid assessment techniques to gauge children's learning, development and readiness for schooling.*

11. *Promote mechanisms to safeguard the quality of professional development programmes offered to pre-school teachers and other ECCE staff.*

12. *Facilitate measures for early detection of children's developmental delays and disabilities to ensure early interventions.*

13. *Promote and facilitate QA mechanisms for ECCD information, education and communication materials to ensure they are developmentally appropriate and nurture children's learning and development.*

14. *Promote and facilitate interactions in the children's first language in centre-based learning environments.*

15. *Promote community involvement in centre-based ECCE.*

16. *Promote and facilitate initiatives in capacity-building of parents and families to improve home-based learning environments.*

17. *Promote and facilitate programmes and services targeting families of children at risk for multiple reasons (socioeconomic conditions, illiteracy, migration, separation, disability, etc.) to ensure favourable home environments for ECCE.*

18. *Facilitate relevant national and provincial authorities to ensure children in early childhood continue their education in emergency and disaster situations.*

4.2.2 An example of strengthening structural quality: the physical environment and space

In Belize, interest in understanding quality processes and how the environment – a structural element of quality – can enable meaningful interactions gave rise to research using the Early Childhood Environmental Rate Scales (ECERS)[146] instruments to enable them to become more fit-for-purpose within the local context of Belize.

Case study: the ECERS in Belize[147]

The research giving rise to this case study describes the status of pre-school education in Belize using three methods of data collection: survey, observations and interviews. A national survey described the education, qualifications and experience of pre-school teachers and directors/principals. Three instruments – the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Extension (ECERS-E) and the Caregiver Interaction Scale – were scored in 41 pre-schools to describe the physical environment, curriculum implementation and teacher–child interaction, respectively. A modification of the ECERS-R and ECERS-E, named the Early Childhood Environment Rating for Belize (ECERS-B), was created to ensure the items in the scale were made to be relevant, easily recognised and readily understood in the local context, as well as matching the difficulty level of the original item. The modified version is an instrument that is compatible with the culture of Belize. The results showed that, while the quality of pre-schools' physical environments scored at the low end of the scale (owing to lack of financial and physical resources), there was evidence of positive teacher–child interaction. Using a one-way statistical analysis of variance (ANOVA), results indicated that teachers with education qualifications higher than a high school diploma had higher scores on the ECERS-B.

Finally, four major stakeholders were interviewed on their perceptions of ECE in Belize. Belize has implemented initiatives to improve the quality of ECE. It is making a conscious effort to promote and provide safe, healthy and attractive learning environments for young children, and to ensure pre-school education will continue to develop to the point that it is of comparable quality with the standards of pre-school programmes in other countries.

4.2.3 How structural and process quality interact: focusing on qualifications and training of the workforce

Training and professional development of teachers (structural elements of quality) have the potential to improve the quality of provision experienced by children and their home adults (process quality). This is recognised in evidence-based policy frameworks that can be found in numerous global regions.[148,149] It is therefore of the utmost importance that MoEs can plan how best to support their ECCE workforce in ways that respond to the local context.

146   Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2006) *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Extension (ECERS-E)*. Stoke-on-Trent and Sterling, VA: Trentham Books.

147   August, A.L. (2012) "Preschool Education in Belize: Research on the Current Status and Implications for the Future". *Scientific & Academic Publishing* 2(7): 231–238.

148   Council of the EU (2019) *High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems*.

149   OECD (2018) *Engaging Young Children*.

Despite evidence of the relevance of the positive impact of qualified staff on ECCE practice, current literature on the ECCE workforce indicates that, in most contexts, ECCE staff are affected by low pay, low levels of education and high turnover.[150] In such contexts, the delivery of ECCE may not provide the engaging and supportive interactions and quality experiences that children need to succeed.

When planning for sustainable quality in the ECCE sector, it must be borne in mind that staff require:

- Time for professional learning;
- Financial support to engage in professional learning;
- Collegial networks within a professional community;
- Incentives for retention and opportunities for career progression;
- An equity consideration for professionals working in isolated or remote areas.[151]

The following case study refers to an in-service training initiative for ECCE teachers in Rwanda, reviewed in the Country Landscape Study carried out in developing this Toolkit. The initiative aimed to update teachers' knowledge as well as provide them with skills to effectively support learning by children with special educational needs.

Case study: in-service training in Rwanda

A specific initiative to strengthen pre-service teacher education and the school system in Rwanda was conducted by Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in partnership with UNICEF between September 2014 and 2017. A specific focus of the initiative was to train ECCE teachers to enhance the quality of provision. Between September 2014 and July 2015, the project trained 360 educators on learner-centred methodologies. The educators worked at different levels of the ECE system and included head teachers, teachers, tutors and Teacher Training Centre students. More than 1,000 teachers were trained in January 2016 to make learning and teaching aids using the VSO handbook. By the end of the initiative, VSO had provided training on how to engage with children at home and support children with disability to 54 sector education officers, 24 parents, 52 head teachers and 78 teachers at a national level.

4.2.4 Quality standards

Quality standards are sets of indicators that enable the identification and measurement of good practice. In many Commonwealth countries, recognition of good practice and accreditation of personnel are well established. In countries where quality standards are yet to be devised, the MoE should begin by revisiting

---

150   Bassok and Engel (2019) "Early Childhood at Scale".
151   Larue and Burke (2015) *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8*.

the specific vision and objectives for the education system. Quality standards provide comprehensive descriptions of the structural elements of quality (class size, ratios, minimum resources, furniture) as well as process elements (i.e. dispositions ECCE teachers exhibit in interactions with children). Standards can describe the benchmarks of quality that ECCE service providers must meet in order to be licensed to operate; these are often enshrined in regulations. When quality standards are about teacher/workforce competences, they are often part of teacher competence frameworks (see Section 2.4.3); in some Commonwealth countries (e.g. New Zealand), professional bodies monitor these frameworks.[152] In this way, quality standards also act as part of the policy infrastructure that sustains quality of provision. The following case study, taken from the Country Landscape Study, describes how quality standards operate in Jamaica.

Case study: quality standards in Jamaica

In Jamaica, passage of the Early Childhood Act and the Early Childhood Regulations 2005 rise to the development of standards documents, containing 12 quality standards with correspondent performance criteria. The standards are grouped under the following headings:

1. *Staff;*
2. *Programme;*
3. *Behaviour Management;,*
4. *Physical Environment;*
5. *Equipment & Furnishing;*
6. *Nutrition;*
7. *Health;*
8. *Safety;*
9. *Child Rights/Protection;*
10. *Parent Participation;*
11. *Administration; and*
12. *Finance.*

The statement of standards specifies that the early childhood staff need to have training, knowledge, skills and attitudes that promote positive behaviours and reduce difficult and challenging behaviours in children.

4.3 Providing quality with equity

Commonwealth member countries have committed to ensuring the provision of inclusive and equitable quality education and to promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Equity is based on the human rights framework, which

---

152 https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Code-and-Standards/Standards-for-the-Teaching-Profession-English-two-pages.pdf

positions access to quality education as a right all children have.[153] Equity is achieved when the distribution of ECCE services is determined through principled planning and allocation of resources rather than reliance on the fiscal capacity of the locality or state.[154] Fundamentally, realising the right to equitable education for all is a question of social justice.

Commonwealth countries' governments, indeed all governments, have the responsibility to ensure equity for all children, regardless of their background, across all levels of the education system. Therefore, a focus on quality can be meaningful only where rights, diversity, equity and inclusion are understood as key constituents of quality. Across Commonwealth member countries, MoEs face the challenge of planning multi-sectoral and integrated ECCE services for increasingly diverse populations. These populations include (but are not limited to):

- Children from rural and urban populations;
- Girls and boys;
- Children from diverse indigenous, ethnic and cultural groups;
- Children experiencing violence, displacement or forced migration;
- Children experiencing poverty, malnutrition, and physical and emotional marginalisation;
- Children with additional and special educational needs according to their physical or mental abilities.

The remaining part of this section addresses this issue in more detail. However, it is important for MoEs to note that the above diversities and inequities intersect and are mutually reinforcing. For instance, being born a girl in a marginalised community may result in worse levels of disadvantage compared with those facing boys in the same community. Children from migrant or refugee populations in urban environments may experience exacerbated exclusion compared with those facing established populations.

What follows examines the concept of equity provision in ECCE and hurdles that inhibit the participation of children in early learning (i.e. disability or development delays, special needs, living in an emergency or conflict zone, urban poverty). It explains how MoEs can plan effectively for equity, to contribute to achieving SDG 4, with special attention to Target 4.2.

---

153 Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) "Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood".

154 Noguera, P.N. (2016) *Race, Equity and Education*. Amsterdam: Springer.

4.3.1 Inclusive education and equity

Inclusive education means that different and diverse students learn side by side in the same setting. This is an approach to education that values diversity and the unique contributions each student brings. In a truly inclusive setting, every child feels safe and has a sense of belonging; students and their parents contribute to setting learning goals and take part in decisions that affect them; and school staff have the training, support, flexibility and resources to nurture, encourage and respond to the needs of all students.[155]

Within a systemic approach to inclusive education, the focus is on what the educational setting needs to do to provide fairly for all children, rather than seeing differences as a deficit in the child and the family. Inclusive education offers many opportunities for multi-sectoral collaborations at all phases of policy planning and implementation. This means that ECCE settings need to be explicit about allocating responsibility for planning for diverse populations in the community, for operationalising inclusive plans for all children, and for how all children and parents are welcomed, valued and enabled to contribute to the ECCE community.

4.3.2 Early Childhood Intervention as an equity issue

Across many Commonwealth countries, a system of Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is already in place for children under school age. ECI is defined as a specialised support service for infants and young children with a disability and/or developmental delay, and for their families. Developmental delay is understood to exist when a young child is not achieving new skills within the expected age range. Disability is a physical, sensory, intellectual or behavioural impairment that affects development.

The aim of ECI is to ensure parents and other important adults in the life of the child are supported to provide experiences and opportunities that help young children with disability and/or developmental delay to gain and use the skills they need to participate meaningfully in their everyday lives.

ECI is a part of ECCE and, although it is a separate intervention programme tailored to the individual needs of a child, it should be entirely integrated within ECCE service delivery. Specialists in education, health, nutrition, WASH, and child/social protection, rights and welfare can all be involved in an ECI programme.

ECI needs to be an essential part of a national system of services for ECD. According to the *Global Survey on Inclusive Early Childhood Development and*

---

155 Open Society (2019). https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/explainers/value-inclusive -education

Early Childhood Intervention Programs,[156] ECI programmes are now found in over 98 countries, and several of these countries – but not all – have nationwide services.

4.3.3 Equity and children with special educational needs

An aspect of inclusive education in ECCE relates to the identification of special educational needs. The term "special educational needs" refers to issues that hinder learning and require additional support so that children can overcome such difficulties. A special need can be permanent or temporary, and a child may have special needs at any given point of their educational career.

The spectrum of special needs includes those based on physical and intellectual disabilities, sensory impairments, communication disorders (including autism spectrum disorders) and behavioural difficulties (including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).

The basic premise of the inclusive education approach is that all children can learn with support. This means that all curriculum planning must include specific plans for any child with particular needs.

4.4 Emergencies, conflict zones and education system resilience

An emergency is a situation that threatens the lives and well-being of large numbers of a population and requires extraordinary action to ensure their survival, care and protection.[157] In emergencies, the lives of children and families are severely disrupted by relocations, displacements, loss of family members and the associated trauma. Education and access to ECCE services can be compromised, as well as access to food and WASH and health services.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, there is a growing need to strengthen the resilience of education systems.[158] The inclusion of crisis prevention and peacebuilding measures in educational policy and planning is one mechanism for achieving this. To achieve the SDGs, conflict, disaster risk reduction and pandemic preparedness must be embedded in sector policies, plans and budgets to reduce the impact of such adversities on education systems and education communities. These plans need to be periodically revisited

156 Vargas-Barón, E. et al. (2019) *Global Survey of Inclusive Early Childhood Development and Early Childhood Intervention Programs.* Washington, DC: World Bank.
157 UNICEF (2009) "Programme Policy and Procedure Manual: Programme Operations". New York: UNICEF.
158 UNESCO (2019) "Data Collection and Evidence Building to Support Education in Emergencies". NORRAG Special Issue 2, March.

and strategies to deal with such events re-evaluated. Delayed actions can have significant negative effects on families and communities. For example, there are real dangers in not having plans for schooling or vaccinations at a refugee camp, or not having access to nutritious food during the first three years of life.

It is advisable that MoEs have plans in place for action, implementation and monitoring, and work in a multi-sectoral approach with partners and with international agencies. Planning resources are readily available from international agencies.[159]

If a country does not have such protocols in place, it will be necessary to plan ahead and to review and monitor such protocols as circumstances change.

4.5 Urban children living in poverty

Children growing up in cities are increasingly facing a lack of safe physical environments and spaces to play and have fun. This reality is even more dramatic for urban children living in poverty who may not have access to sanitation or clean water, and in areas where there may be poor air quality and high levels of contamination from waste disposal.

Children who live in such conditions may be affected by high levels of stress as well as toxicities that affect their concentration and ability to learn. For MoEs, this offers an opportunity to map out multi-sectoral collaborative action plans to minimise the effects on learning. The principles of equity ECCE services create an imperative to think creatively about how to provide safe and sustainable environments in which children can thrive and learn.

4.6 Working with parents as partners in ECCE

Ensuring equitable access means that Commonwealth member countries should plan to meet the needs and circumstances of all families and children. Parents are key stakeholders in ECCE and play an important role in the lives of children. Parents and caregivers provide the first nurturing environment for children. Caring, loving and nurturing parenting will secure social and emotional development. Conversely, when families are labouring under the negative effects of stress and malnutrition, lack of nurturing care and stimulation are common, with detrimental effects on children and on school communities.

Much of the evidence to date about social policy for families stems from developed and middle-income countries. Much less is known about the drivers of social policy in less developed countries and how the provision of family

---

159   UNESCO IIEP (2010) *Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction*.

and parenting support affects the well-being of the child in such contexts. In Commonwealth countries such as Kenya, effective policies are in place aimed at supporting vulnerable parts of the community (e.g. cash transfer policies for orphans and vulnerable children, for older persons and for persons with severe disabilities).[160] Thus, MoE officials need to consider what the equity issues are that drive social policy for families in their country, and the entry points for co-ordination and joint initiatives to ensure quality inputs for the system.

Taking into consideration the uneven contexts for parenting that exist both within countries and across them, governments that are signatories to the UNCRC (1989) and are engaged in reaching SDG targets, are increasingly drawing attention to investing in families as a matter of securing social and human capital development, with the message that targeted support to children (and families) is of paramount importance. The family, and support for the parental role, is progressively being recognised as an integral part of social policy-making and social investment linked to the SDGs. Families can play an integral role in reducing poverty, decreasing inequalities, increasing social cohesion and promoting family and child well-being.

4.7 Parenting support as part of quality ECCE provision

Parenting support can be defined as a set of activities oriented towards improving how parents approach and execute their role as parents and increasing parents' child-rearing resources (including information, knowledge, skills, and social support and competencies). In order to ensure that parenting support is fit-for-purpose, it is of utmost importance that the needs of parents and families are properly canvassed when developing planning and implementation documents.

There is strong new evidence of what works in terms of family support. One example is the programme Nobody is Perfect, implemented by the Ministry of Health in Canada. This aims to improve participant parents' capabilities to maintain and promote the health and well-being of children from birth to five years old. Parents work in groups with a trained facilitator in a non-judgemental manner using an experiential model of learning. This has proven a more effective way of reaching out to parents than the traditional model of parent classes/education.[161] Another effective strategy has been the use of technology and social media to reach parents, especially young parents, with specially

160 Inclusive Futures and IDS (2020) "Disability Inclusive Development". Kenya Situation Analysis, June 2020 Update. https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/15508/DID%20Kenya%20SITAN_June%202020.pdf?sequence=1

161 See, for example, Nadarajah, T. (2016) "A Performance Measurement System for Nobody's Perfect Parenting Program". MPA thesis, University of Victoria, Canada.

created messages such as the UNICEF Masters Class video clips and the Internet of Good Things, with short and concise messages for parents.

Parenting support initiatives tend to focus on the relationship between the child and the parent or caregivers, with research highlighting the importance of:

- The programmes being adequately funded and supported;
- The use of up-to-date resources for modelling and social learning;
- Programmes being based on parents' own experiences and having the key aim of generating better outcomes for children;
- Facilitators being adequately trained and supported;
- Strengthening child-rearing orientation, skills and competences in the praxis of parenting;
- Ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of the programmes.

4.8 Learning and development outcomes

Reducing hurdles to participation and improving the quality of ECCE services will contribute to positive outcomes for children's learning and development.

Learning outcomes are statements of valued learning often defined in curriculum documents in terms of knowledge, skills/competences and attitudes.[162,163] Several Commonwealth member countries have adopted outcomes-based models of education that emphasise skills for lifelong learning. ECCE curricula are aimed at laying the foundation for such skills. The case study below shows how Rwanda has incorporated the pre-primary year into its general system of education and made provision for teaching and learning for three to six year olds in its Competence-Based Curriculum.

Case study: the Competence Based Curriculum in Rwanda[164]

In 2012, the MoE provided financial subsidies to 30 districts in Rwanda to support the development of infrastructure for one model ECD centre per district; it also started advocating that the existing "basic education" schools should each open a pre-primary section.

162 For example, see *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum. www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/ELS-Te-Whariki-Early-Childhood-Curriculum-ENG-Web.pdf

163 Malta Learning Outcomes Framework for the Early Years. www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/early-years

164 MoE Rwanda (2015) "The Curriculum Framework". https://reb.rw/fileadmin/competence_based_curriculum/pre_primary_syllabuse.html

In addition, and to strengthen delivery of quality ECCE, the training of teachers specialising in the early years was introduced as a career option in training colleges of education. This official recognition aimed to attract people to ECCE training.

To complete the review of all elements impinging on the quality of ECCE service delivery, in 2015 the MoE conducted a full revision of the ECD curriculum framework with the intention of incorporating important concepts, such as going beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge to focus also on the development of competences, such as literacy and numeracy, as well as thinking skills. The Competence-Based Curriculum, issued in 2015 by the Education Board, now covers the range from pre-primary to secondary education.[165]

By the end of pre-primary education children should be able to:

- *Explore and discover their surroundings and show awareness and respect for the environment;*
- *Demonstrate basic mathematical skills through different educational games and songs;*
- *Demonstrate sensory ability, physical co-ordination, and fine and gross motor skills;*
- *Demonstrate self-care skills and good health habits;*
- *Participate in and enjoy expressing themselves through a variety of creative arts;*
- *Demonstrate social skills, interact peacefully with others and work in a team;*
- *Express themselves in Kinyarwanda including using a vocabulary appropriate to their level.*

4.8.1 Quality and play-based learning in ECCE

Play is widely viewed as children's way of learning about their world, and most ECCE curriculum frameworks position a play-based pedagogy as an essential element of quality. Article 31 of the UNCRC (1989), to which Commonwealth member countries are signatories, states that all children have a right to play and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.[166]

Play is not just a physical phenomenon. It can involve cognitive, imaginative, creative, emotional and social aspects. Play is the medium through which most children express their impulse to explore, experiment and understand. Children of all ages play.[167]

Children's participation in all levels of the education system allows them to learn those things that adults deem important, as well as to access to important opportunities to develop peer relationships. This social dimension of educational settings is a very important part of the curriculum, including in the early years.

165   MoE Rwanda (2011) "Early Childhood Development Policy". White Paper.
166   UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/
167   Brown, F. (2003) "Compound Flexibility, the Role of Playwork in Child Development". In F. Brown (ed.) *Playwork: Theory and Practice*. Buckingham: Open University.

Box 11: Purposes of play and reasons for valuing
its contribution in ECCE settings

- Play is a natural activity for children and part of childhood.
- Play with others helps children understand their social world.
- Play allows children to explore and observe their world, contributing to their cognitive development.
- Play supports children's communication skills providing the impetus to talk and listen.
- Play helps children cope with their feelings and fears and manage their emotional states.
- Play develops positive dispositions towards challenge, change and self-initiation.
- Play allows children to develop, build and enhance executive function skills, such as working memory, by managing information, inhibitory control for concentration, and regulation of emotions and mental flexibility to adapt to new demands and change perspectives.

All play experiences are influenced by the physical resources available, the people involved and the context. When planning for play in ECCE and primary settings, it is helpful to consider the balance of child and adult input in play. Free play is generally understood to encompass play experiences that children choose for themselves and that involve minimal adult intervention. Structured or guided play, on the other hand, refers to play experiences in which the adult has more of an input, either in initiating the play, controlling the resources available, or intervening or participating during the course of play. In structured play, ECCE teachers will have a fairly clear idea about the aim and may have specific learning intentions planned.

In a quality ECCE learning environment that uses a play-based pedagogy, the following points need to be taken into account:

- The learning environment is planned with children's development and interests in mind. For example, babies remember physical landmarks and need stable room organisation to help them learn basic cause-and-effect relationships, whereas toddlers need space to roam freely and explore.

- There is a balance between open and closed spaces, allowing for different levels of mobility.[168]

- Space is planned with well-defined activity areas that encourage children to discover, create, improvise, imagine and solve problems.

- Children can choose from a range of materials and equipment and initiate their own play.

---

168 Gonzalez-Mena, J. (2013) "What Works? Assessing Infant and Toddler Play Environments." *Young Children,* September: 22–25.

- Resources are within the children's reach and are sufficiently plentiful for the number of children present.

- The learning environment offers children opportunities to play by themselves, in small and large groups.

- The learning environment supports movement, comfort, competence and a sense of control,[169] while providing opportunities for children to learn new and interesting skills in a safe and supportive environment.

4.9 Assessment and learning

The purpose of assessment is to gather information on learning, whether this is for a diagnostic, formative or summative intention. Assessment plays a critical role in the quality of ECCE provision: it has a powerful impact on teaching practice as well as on the development, attainment and identity of learners.

A range of theories inform current thinking about assessment in the early years, making it helpful to distinguish between assessment *of* learning, assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning.[170]

4.9.1 Assessment *of* learning, assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning

Assessment *of* children's learning can be carried out using a range of approaches, including traditional normative assessments that rely on tests and checklists. Normative assessments tend to focus on comparisons against established norms and across different learners and are s normally carried out for record-keeping. Standards-based assessment practices similarly compare individual performance against externally set standards, which are sometimes mapped onto national curriculum documents or other mandatory or advisory policies. Other assessment practices compare the current achievements of a learner with their earlier performance, with a clear focus on describing progress. This third type of assessment *of* learning (sometimes called ipsative assessment) is considered the most helpful in motivating learners to improve their performance as it traces a learning journey that can strengthen children's learning identities.[171]

---

169   Olds, A.R. (2001) *Child Care Design Guide*. New York: McGraw Hill.

170   McLachlan, C. et al. (2013) *Children's Learning and Development. Contemporary Assessment in the Early Years*. Sydney: Palgrave Macmillan.

171   Crooks, T., Grima, G. and Carr, M. (2016) "Assessment for Learning: Promoting Children's Rights and Social Justice". In C. Dalli and A. Meade (eds) *Research, Policy and Advocacy in the Early Years*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Assessment *for* learning is when teachers gather evidence of children's learning as the basis for their curriculum planning with the goal of extending children's current level of understanding and performance. Assessment *for* learning is therefore closely associated with ipsative assessment and is characterised by five principles:

- The assessment practice describes a learning journey, monitoring progress over time.

- In order to describe a learning journey, assessment should take cognisance of the educational environment and have some consistency across ECCE and schooling.

- Self-efficacy is a desired consequence of assessment.

- Assessment is a shared process with learners and their families.

- Assessment for learning requires effective feedback and guidance in a trusting atmosphere.[172]

Assessment *as* learning is when children have the opportunity to reflect on their own learning and use this to plan what they would next like to do. As with assessment practices *for* learning, this type of assessment relies on teachers observing and documenting a child's experiences in an ECCE setting, thereby accumulating a record of the child's learning and development.

Assessment *for* learning has a powerful impact on teaching practice, and assessment *as* learning builds learner identities, which can set children up for success at school. Both approaches are considered highly powerful pedagogical tools.

Box 12: Key purposes of assessment

Assessment:

- Provides a record of learning and development;
- Helps ECCE practitioners make decisions about teaching and learning;
- Can identify children who may need additional support and determine if there is a need for intervention or support services;
- Provides a common ground between teachers and parents for collaborative actions to support children;
- Helps children reflect on their learning and plan what they do next.

---

172   Adapted from Crooks et al. (2016) "Assessment for Learning".

4.9.2 Authentic assessment

Contemporary theories of learning and development emphasise that learning happens in the context of children's social and cultural experiences. Such views highlight that there is no one right way for a child to learn. In ECCE, there has been a move away from normative assessment practices and an increasing focus on authentic assessment, where the focus is on finding out what children know and can do in natural settings. Authentic assessment in ECCE is defined as "the use of assessment strategies and approaches that seek to determine the real understandings and ideas that children have of their learning".[151]

Applied in early intervention settings[173] (as opposed to ECCE settings with a predominantly education and care focus), authentic assessment is distinguished from testing approaches through six dimensions:

1. It involves the systematic use of **structured recordings**, using field-validated schedules, of the extent to which skills and social behaviours are fully acquired, emerging, absent or problematic in a child's repertoire.

2. **Observations of developmental competencies** are based on hierarchies of functional competencies, most of which can be mapped onto early learning standards. The competencies reflect teachable and applied skills reputed to predict school success (e.g. early literacy, social skills, self-control behaviours. pragmatic communication);

3. **Assessment is an ongoing activity** carried out at various times of the day, on different occasions and with input from home adults;

4. Assessment focuses on identifying children's **natural competencies** in familiar situations and routines.

5. Assessments are carried out by **people with whom the child is familiar** and who engage with the child on a regular basis – such as ECCE educators, teachers, parents, and grandparents – rather than by strangers.

6. Observations are made in the context of everyday routines.

4.9.3 Assessment tools

Across all types of ECCE settings, methods of assessment can be informal (e.g. conducting authentic pen-and-pencil observations in naturally occurring situations; collecting samples of children's work for portfolios, including photos or video records) or somewhat more formal, through the use of educator ratings on prepared observation schedules and other instruments. Both types of observations can be made with minimal or no intrusion into children's activities,

---

173   Bagnato, S. (2007) *Authentic Assessment for Early Childhood Intervention*. New York: Guilford Publications (p. 30).

allowing teachers and other ECCE staff to observe all areas of development, learning and their own practice on a regular basis.

The main purpose of observations is to understand the uniqueness of each child and assess their learning progress. For example, by making records of how children participate in a particular activity or create a play scenario, teachers can monitor how children use their time, their particular interests and any gaps in their experiences. The information gained is then used to plan a balanced curriculum that considers children's strengths, interests and needs.[174]

Learning stories are narratives with a credit view of what a child can do.[175] The stories focus on the process of learning rather than simply providing an account of what a child can do; they include context and background as well as the teacher's interpretation and reflection of what the child might next be interested in. In this way, they are formative in nature.

Portfolios are a record of the work children have produced over a period of time, and of their learning stories. The collection clearly shows the progress of a child's learning and development. Portfolios can be an important tool in helping facilitate a partnership between teachers and parents.

Educator ratings are useful in assessing children's cognitive and language abilities as well as their executive functions. These ratings can be linked to other methods of assessment, such as standardised testing or other assessment tools.

Parent ratings integrate parents into the assessment process. Parents who are encouraged to observe and listen to their child can help detect and target important milestones in their child's development.

Standardised tests are tests created to fit a set of testing standards. These tests are administered and scored in a standard manner and are often used to assess the performance of children in a programme.

Different tools serve different purposes. Below are some general guidelines that can be helpful in ECCE programmes:

- **Assessment methods should align with learning goals and approaches.** Given that different types of assessments have different purposes, it is important first to determine what needs to be assessed and why; the choice of assessment methods will naturally follow.

- **The assessor knows the child.** The adult conducting the assessment of a child's learning or development should have a pre-existing relationship with the child. Ideally, the assessor is the teacher.

174 Neaum, S. (2016) *Observing and Assessing Children's Learning and Development.* London: Sage. https://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/Neaum%2C%20S.%20%282016%29%20Observing%20and%20Assessing%20Children%27s%20Learning%20and%20Development.%20London%2C%20Sage._.pdf

175 Carr, M. and Lee, W. (2019) *Learning Stories in Practice.* London: Sage.

- **Assessment is "authentic."** Assessment should take place in a child's normal setting. The assessment should reflect everyday relationships and experiences. It should be conducted in familiar contexts and settings (such as the ECCE setting).

- **Observations are ongoing and diverse.** For a comprehensive assessment, observations should be made of a variety of children's activities and be ongoing in order to fully see the progress of a child.

- **Assessment is a cycle.** Although specific methods and assessment tools vary, the process is cyclical and should inform next steps. The cycle allows teachers to make changes to their curriculum to better serve children in their programme.

This section has examined how education systems can increase ECCE access with quality and with a focus on equity. It has outlined structural and process elements of quality in ECCE, considered issues that pose barriers to the participation of children and looked at how education systems can implement and assess learning in ECCE services that strive for equity and quality.

The following section examines processes related to data-building, monitoring and evaluation as tools for quality ECCE systems.

Key resources

- *Recovering Lost Learning: What Can Be Done Quickly and at Scale?* UNESCO (2021). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377841

- *A Toolkit for Measuring Early Childhood Development in Low- and Middle-Income Countries.* Fernald et al. (2017). https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29000

- Resource: ECEQAS Quality Survey Instrument Measuring the Sufficiency and Quality of Inputs and Processes.

- *Engaging Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care.* OECD (2018).

- Council of the EU Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2019.189.01.0004.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2019:189:TOC

- Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Resource Pack. UNESCO (2016). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246050

Further reading:

- "Laying the Foundation for Early Childhood Education in Sri Lanka". World Bank. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/srilanka/publication/laying-foundation-early-childhood-education-sri-lanka

- *Children's Learning and Development. Contemporary Assessment in the Early Years*. McLachlan et al. (2013).

- Further reading of other examples of Commonwealth member countries (e.g. Australia). https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard

Section 5: Data, monitoring and evaluation for a quality ECCE system

Key messages

- Building integrated and multi-sectoral data, monitoring and evaluation must be centred on a rights-based and common-good approach to quality ECCE.

- The purpose of integrated and multi-sectoral monitoring and evaluation systems is to establish and improve the quality of the ECCE system.

- As lead agency for ECCE policy, the MoE must ensure data, monitoring and evaluation systems combine diverse sources of information and are compatible across sectors and government departments.

- Systematic collection of data is crucial to understanding and improving system performance at every level.

- Systematic monitoring of all aspects of ECCE services requires careful selection of indicators at all levels of the ECCE system.

- Indicators to monitor ECCE systems quality are based on elements of structural quality, process quality and ECCE governance, with a focus on policy input, outputs, outcomes and impact;

- QA processes and tools must be culturally appropriate to validly monitor and evaluate outcomes across the ECCE system.

This final section overviews key concepts and processes related to data-building, monitoring and evaluation as integral to QA within a systemic multi-sectoral approach to ECCE.

5.1 Children's rights as a shared orientation towards quality

Building integrated and multi-sectoral data, monitoring and evaluation is not merely a technical task. To be successful it needs to rest on a principled orientation, shared by all stakeholders, that every child has the right to achieve their full potential, and that children's holistic development is a common good and a shared responsibility.

> **Box 13: A rights-based and common-good approach to quality ECCE**
>
> *Every child has a right to achieve their full potential.*
>
> *Children's holistic development is a common good and a shared responsibility*

Establishing this rights-based and common-good approach as the compass to quality, while developing roadmaps towards more effective early childhood systems, is crucial, and a central task for MoEs as lead government agencies.

5.2 Systematic and continuous data-gathering

Systematic collection of data is crucial to understanding and improving system performance at every level; data helps establish facts, trends and evidence on how Commonwealth member countries are progressing towards achieving all early childhood-related aspects of the SDGs (see Section 1). As lead agencies in creating multi-sectoral and integrated ECCE systems, MoEs have a particular responsibility to ensure data, monitoring and evaluation systems combine diverse sources of information and are compatible across sectors and government departments. Sector-specific data systems are often referred to as "management information systems" (e.g. HMIS or EMIS). In a multi-sectoral ECCE approach, the task is to integrate these into one multi-sectoral data, monitoring and evaluation system.

5.3 A systemic approach to monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring is understood as the process of systematically tracking aspects of ECCE services with a view to accountability, and enhancing effectiveness or quality.[176] Monitoring involves the careful selection of indicators on a range of dimensions, including implementation of programmes; improvement of practice and child outcomes; employment conditions and performance of the workforce; increase in access with equity (targeting underserved groups); and overall strengthening of the ECCE and the education system.[177] Information on structure and process indicators contributes to increased knowledge on the level of quality provision.

---

176 OECD (2015) *Starting Strong IV*.

177 OECD (2018) "Data and Monitoring to Improve Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care". in OECD (ed.) *Engaging Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.

> **Box 14: Policy recommendations provided to the G20 in October 2021[178]**
>
> Resilient early childhood programmes require systemic approaches and enabling environments. Unfortunately, a lack of integrated, relevant, available and disaggregated early childhood codification systems and data across populations, regions and government sectors and levels undermines the responsiveness, breadth, effectiveness and scope of sustainable early childhood programmes. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the problem, the fragmentation and the lack of ECCE data. In countries with fragmented or non-existent data, the responses of monitoring and evaluation systems to crises and disruptions are slow, limited and often ineffective. Without multi-sectoral and/or integrated systems, lack of access may mean marginalised young children and their families are not adequately reached and well supported, even when resources are available.
>
> ECCE data, monitoring and evaluation systems contribute directly to establishing and maintaining effective and resilient social welfare systems – but only if they are well designed, appropriately resourced and competently governed. Sectoral systems of monitoring and evaluation rarely provide adequate overviews of the holistic needs of children and families. For instance, education and health data may be quite strong but data dealing with children's rights and protection is often lacking. Sectoral systems make it difficult, if not impossible, to bring all the data together in a common database to prepare analyses for the purposes of programme planning, reporting and budgeting.

Data on the demographic and family background and pre-school characteristics of beneficiaries of ECCE services are helpful for further analysis of programme effects on target groups and for up-to-date situation analyses of the country context or region of the world. Figure 17 provides an illustration comparing gross enrolment and net enrolment rates around the world, which may be useful for monitoring progress and to make projections. While keeping track of rates is a central aspect of the ECCE monitoring system, it is important to note that "enrolment" does not necessarily equate to meaningful participation. In addition, enrolment figures in ECCE programmes and services must be complemented by a wider set of key variables (see section S5.5).

5.4 Quality assurance

As indicated in Section 4 and elsewhere in this Toolkit, the starting point for achieving a quality ECCE system is a clear definition of what quality means. Given the widely diverse contexts of Commonwealth member countries, these definitions need to be fit-for-purpose in their local cultural context while also taking account of global discourses and established indicators of structural and process quality. The understanding that quality is a dynamic notion that incorporates the potential for ongoing improvement is another aspect that should be part of definitions of quality. This view of quality makes discussions of monitoring and evaluation in ECCE necessarily complex.

---

178   Urban et al. (2021) *How Do We Know Goals Are Achieved?*

GER   ANER

Latin America
and the Caribbean
74%

95%

N orth America
71%

93%

East Asia
and the Pacific
81%

87%

Euraope and
Central Asia
75%

87%

Middle East
and North Africa
31%

48%

West and
Central Africa
30%

43%

Eastern and
Southern Africa
33%

43%

Southern Africa
23%

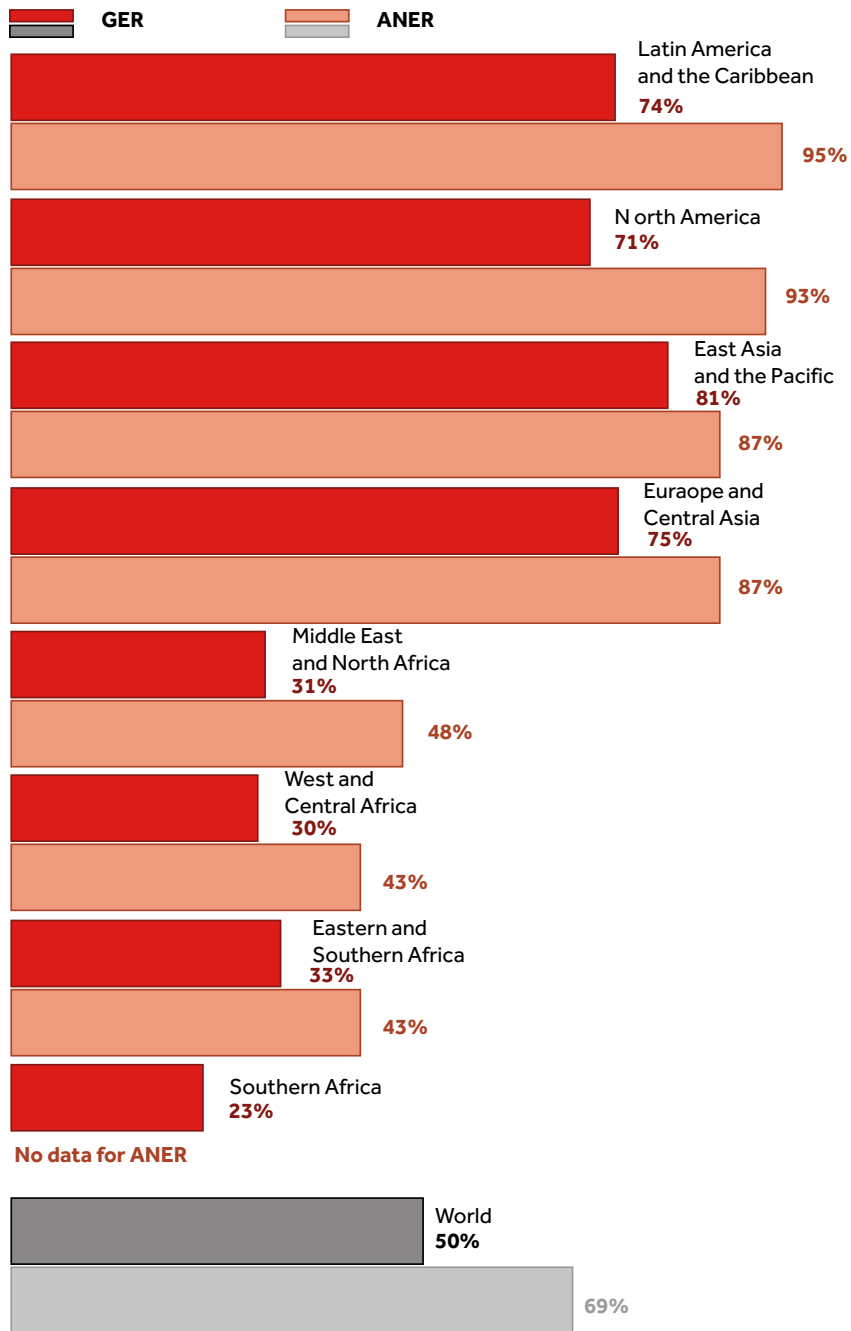**No data for ANER**

World
50%

69%

Figure 17 Comparison of gross and net enrolment rates across UNICEF
regions one year before official primary entry age[179]

179   UNICEF (2019) *A World Ready to Learn*.

Another issue for consideration is the assurance of quality in scaling-up processes. In some countries, the public system alone will not be sufficient to reach all children to meet SDG Target 4.2 and there is often a complex mix of public, NGO and private provision. In such contexts, MoEs, as lead agencies, carry the responsibility for establishing QA processes (e.g. regulation, licensing, evaluation, inspection) that may be instigated and implemented by the MoE itself (e.g. regulations) or other agencies external to the MoE. For example, in New Zealand, the Education Review Office is the government external review agency that evaluates and reports on the education and care of children across schools and early childhood services.[180]

To gain understanding of which ECCE programmes are effective and efficient, Commonwealth member countries must employ culturally appropriate and reliable tools to measure the quality of ECCE at system level. Overall, approaches to monitoring and evaluation should be:

- Strategic and needs-based;

- Effective, focused on outcomes;

- Dynamic, aiming at continuous improvement;

- Participatory, proactively involving the views of all stakeholders;

- Accountable.

The purpose of integrated and multi-sectoral monitoring and evaluation systems is to establish and improve the quality of the ECCE system. They should not be used to measure or test children's performance.

Monitoring and evaluating quality of early childhood education programmes is important for identifying trends and the potential needs for policy interventions and supportive measures. But monitoring should not serve as a high-stakes assessment that may exclude children who are not "ready".[181]

5.5 Whole-systems indicators

Indicators are statements used at different levels of the ECCE system to determine if a goal or objective has been met. Selection of an indicator depends on the purpose for which it is to be used in the context of the overall monitoring and evaluation system. In this respect, ECCE indicators to monitor quality are based in either elements of structural quality or elements of process quality of the system, or both. As discussed in earlier sections, elements of structural

---

180   https://ero.govt.nz/
181   UNESCO (2019) *Migration, Displacement and Education: Building Bridges, Not Walls*. EFA Global Monitoring Report. Paris: UNESCO.

quality are articulated as standards of provision (i.e. standards and regulations for ECCE centres regarding physical space, facilities and resources; staff qualifications), whereas elements of process quality are articulated as standards of teaching practices.

With reference to SDG Target 4.2, indicators should aim to determine the extent to which the ECCE system enables ALL children to fulfil their full potential. Indicators of quality can be applied at the national, regional/provincial and communal levels of the ECCE system. At the national level, indicators can be used to assess how well the system achieves its overall aim of ensuring equity and social justice for all children. This would include, for example, indicators that reflect the number of available places in early childhood education for children from diverse backgrounds and communities (see Section 4) so as to accurately monitor equitable access to, and meaningful participation in, quality ECCE across age groups from birth to compulsory school age.

Table 6 provides an example of indicators used to monitor how the ECCE system is performing in terms of policy inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact.

Input indicators are used for monitoring an enabling policy environment in the country, and to account for the allocation of adequate resources. Output, outcome and impact indicators are used to evaluate the results, effectiveness and impact of policies and their implementation. Accurate and relevant data analysis can also help identify bottlenecks and develop contingency plans to overcome obstacles on the road to a rights-based, universal and equitable ECCE system. It will also help identify trends that can be supportive in advocacy campaigns and the mobilisation of resources.

Table 6 Types of indicators and what they measure[182]

Indicator	What it measures
Impact	SDG Target 4.2 of improved access to quality pre-primary for all children with special reference to the most disadvantaged groups of the country
Outcome	Improved parenting practice and measures data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey Child outcome scales: Caregiver Reported Early Childhood Development Instruments, International Development and Early Learning Assessments Resources: World Bank assessment book
Output	HMIS, EMIS, Clinical Patients Management Information System WHO et al. Nurturing Care Framework National policy frameworks
Input	Funding for ECCE, investment benchmarks developed in country context, profile of the workforce

---

182 Adapted from OECD (2017) *Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care.* Paris: OECD.

Integrated and multi-sectoral data, monitoring and evaluation systems for ECCE should include a wide range of key variables that reach across departmental and professional or disciplinary boundaries. Box 15 lists some examples, taken from the 2021 policy recommendation to the G20.

Box 15: Key variables for a multi-sectoral monitoring and evaluation system[183]

A wide range of key variables for a multi-sectoral monitoring and evaluation system include but are not limited to:

- Children's births (live births, low birthweight, pre-natal services, maternal mortality);
- Children's living conditions;
- Children's right to health (access to health services, child mortality rate, low height, obesity, malnutrition, compulsory vaccination);
- Children's right to social protection (access to social services, children under the poverty line, national identity cards, beneficiary of social protection programmes, grassroots organisations working in ECCE);
- Children's right to well-being and holistic development (including access to ECD services);
- Children's right to education and care (access to ECCE services; characteristics of ECCE settings: quantity, location, infrastructure, resources, type of provision considering owner, provider, funder, regulatory agent;* age range covered; unsatisfied demand for ECCE services; qualifications and CPD of staff);
- Systems-level information, including disaggregated information on socioeconomic and socio-cultural diversity of children, communities and the early childhood workforce;
- Systems-level information about children and families' transitions into and through the early childhood system, including parental leave policies and transition to the compulsory school system.

* Other key aspects related to quality of provision (such as programme structure, curriculum and delivery) should be regulated by an integrated policy framework that provides a common ground for all services targeting young children and their families.

In addition, each national system, according to its characteristics, internal diversity and stratification, should consider adding other key data to support monitoring and evaluation. However, in doing so, it is important for the MoE to keep in mind the usefulness of the information for the country's ECCE policy purposes:

"… it is important to consider the needs of all the groups that will rely on the information, including central ministry planners, officials of other national ministries (for example, finance), regional and district education officials, donors, and NGOs. *Ultimately, for [Management Information Systems] to be effective as a planning and management tool, national needs, not donor requirements, must be the primary force behind the development of the system*" (italics added).[184]

---

183 Adapted from Urban et al. (2021) *How Do We Know Goals Are Achieved?*
184 UNESCO IIEP (2010) *Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction*.

Key resources

- *How Do We Know Goals Are Achieved? Integrated and Multisectoral Early Childhood Monitoring and Evaluation Systems as Key to Developing Effective and Resilient Social Welfare Systems.* T20/G20 Policy Recommendation. Urban et al. (2020. https://www.t20italy. org/2021/09/20/how-do-we-know-goals-are-achieved/

- Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes tool. https:// unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248053

- *Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction.* UNESCO IIEP (2010). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/ pf0000377841

Measure of Early Learning Environments

- "Measuring the Quality of Early Learning Programmes". Early Learning Partnership Guidance Note (2016). http://documents. worldbank.org/curated/en/474431473958525937/pdf/108285- REVISED-PUBLIC-ELP-GN-MeasuringQuality-CEP.pdf

- National Quality Standard, Victoria, Australia. https://www. education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/regulation/ NQSDescriptorTable.pdf

- "Quality Education for Confident Futures". Malta. https://ncfhe.gov.mt/ en/services/Pages/All%20Services/qa.aspx

Appendix A: List of technical experts

No.	Name	Designation	Organisation
1	Christin McConnell	Early Childhood Education Specialist	GPE
2	Charlotte Bergin	Education Adviser	Save the Children
3	Dorothy Kamwilu	Education Attaché	High Commission of Kenya to UK
4	Elizabeth Lule	Executive Director	Early Childhood Development Action Network
5	Jacqueline Vanhear	Director, Quality Assurance Department	Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta
6	Karlene Deslandes	Executive Director	Early Childhood Commission, Jamaica
7	Leja Burrows	Senior Education Officer, ECE	Ministry of Education, The Bahamas
8	Lynette Okengo	Executive Director	Africa Early Childhood Network
9	Lynn Ang	Professor of Early Childhood	University College London Institute of Education
10	Mayadevi Soonarane	Director, Strategic Planning and International Relations/Coordinator of ADEA ICQN ECD	Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, Mauritius
11	Oliver Liang	Head, Public and Private Services Unit	ILO
12	Pablo Stansbery	Senior Regional Adviser, ECD	UNICEF
13	Rosie Flewitt	Co-Director, Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy/Head of Research in Department of Learning and Leadership	University College London Institute of Education
14	Sue Dale Tunnicliffe		Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Educators
15	Tiny Ntshinogang	Senior Technical Officer	Ministry of Basic Education, Botswana
16	Verity Campbell-Barr	Chair of the Board of Trustees	British Association for Early Childhood Education
17	Yoshie Kaga	Programme Specialist	UNESCO
18	Nasir Kazmi	Education Adviser	COMSEC
19	Atiba Johnson	Programme Officer	COMSEC
20	Michelle Callander	Project Manager	COMSEC

Appendix B: Tools for planning a situation analysis

Example from UNICEF (2017) ECD Situation Analysis guidance

Based on the overall programming guidance on developing a SitAn, the following are specific guidelines to be taken into consideration when analysing the early years of a child:

1. Using qualitative and quantitative data, systematically examine the status and trends of realising young children's right to achieve their developmental potential in the country. Identify the inequality in child development outcomes between various population groups and geographic regions within the country, specifically the bottom quintile, children with disabilities, girls and children affected by the humanitarian context.

2. Analyse the patterns of inequities that affect young children's right to development, including the immediate, underlying and structural causes, as described in the ECD conceptual framework (UNICEF's Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Development).

3. Provide policy and programmatic recommendations to address the shortfalls and disparities, with particular reference regarding access to multi-sectoral packages of interventions for ECD, and accelerate progress towards the results. The SitAn should identify strengths and areas of improvement at institutional level to promote cross-sector accountabilities for the delivery of integrated packages of intervention.

Illustrative questions to guide the analysis:

1. How do outcomes and trends differ across sub-groups of young children and caregivers (e.g. pregnant adolescent mothers, children in institutional care, young children living in mono-parental families), by income quintile, geographical area, during humanitarian action and in development contexts?

    a. Who are the most vulnerable groups of young children, at greater risk of exclusion from ECD services and not fulfilling their right to achieving development potential?

    b. Who are the most deprived caregivers in charge of young children and where are they? What are the specific barriers they face in accessing support?

2. What are the major bottlenecks and barriers perpetuating inequalities in the realisation of developmental potential of young children,

at immediate, underlying and structural levels? (See conceptual framework in UNICEF's Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Development.)

    a. To what extent are caregivers of young children aware of the importance of ECD and the existence of services and programmes to respond to their parenting needs?

    b. To what extent are caregivers of young children unable to practice nurturing care and positive parenting for ECD because of existing harmful social and cultural practices, and beliefs?

    c. To what extent are specific needs of young children addressed by existing strategies and programmes in accordance with their age and vulnerabilities?

3. Does the government have a multi-sectoral ECD policy with an allocated budget and governance mechanisms that articulate solid strategies and outputs needed for implementation within a clear timeframe?

    a. What capacities (financial, technical and institutional) exist at national, sub-national and community levels to respond to the developmental needs of children and caregivers?

    b. To what extent are ECD services appropriately equipped to deliver quality services to caregivers and their children? Are standards for ECD services in place and adequately monitored across sectors?

Data sources:

To analyse the situation of young children, Commonwealth member countries should draw upon quantitative and qualitative data on ECCE. These can be found at:

Nurturing Care Framework (WHO, UNICEF and World Bank):

https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/child/nurturing-care -framework-rationale/en/

The datasets are quite comprehensive and organised according to the dimensions of care, enabling policy environments and threats to child development. Demographic data and social indicators are included.

The rapid assessment tool is a part of an overall strategy developed by WHO that aims at reducing the disease burden caused by poor health care waste management through the promotion of best practices and the development of safety standards

Rapid Assessment Tool (WHO):

https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/facilities/waste/hcwmtool/en/

Glossary

Access	The right to enter, approach or use available provision; admittance to quality early education.
Accountability	Taking or being assigned responsibility for something that an individual or an organisation is to be answerable for in the achievement of goals associated with a role, organisation or institution.
Advocacy	The act of speaking or writing on the behalf of or in support of another person, place or thing.
Age range	A range indicating the upper and lower ages considered suitable for a specified classroom or educational programme such as ECCE.
Caregiver	A person who looks after children under five and school-age children, for example when parents are at work. A caregiver can be a relative of the child as well as a person who has undertaken such a role on a voluntary or a paid basis.
Conceptual framework	A conceptual framework provides the philosophical structure and vision for a project and its underpinning theory and methodology. A clear conceptual framework is essential to drive the development and implementation of an ECCE programme, ideally rooted in the theoretical tenets of ECD.
Conflict zone	An area marked by extreme violence.
Continuum of care	Care that begins from preconception and is uninterrupted throughout a child's formative early years.
Cross-ministerial	Based on the principle of co-operation and co-ordination among various governmental ministries.
Cross-sectoral	Based on the principle of co-operation and co-ordination among diverse workforce sectors and various stakeholders. In ECCE, for example, this might involve education, physical and mental health, social services and care professionals.
Domestic resources	Refers to an individual country's generation of savings from internal resources and their allocation to economically and socially productive investments. Such resource allocation can come from both the public and the private sectors.
Duty bearer	Individuals (e.g. parents), local organisations, governments, private companies, aid donors and international institutions who have a particular obligation or responsibility to respect, promote and realise human rights, including the rights of children.
ECCE	Early childhood care and education: usually indicates the primacy of the education sector within a multi-sectoral approach to children's policy and services, i.e. health, nutrition, sanitation, child protection and juridical protection.
ECD	Early childhood development: usually reflects a balanced strategy, including multi-sectoral and/or integrated approaches for achieving holistic ECD from preconception to school transition.

ECE	Early childhood education: usually refers to a sectoral approach for the education of children from birth to six years old.
ECI	Early Childhood Intervention: provides specialised support and services for infants and young children with disability and/or development delay and their families, and usually involves following planned procedures that have been found to be effective in bringing about change for the better.
Emergency	A sudden and usually unforeseen event that calls for immediate measures to minimise its adverse consequences.
Entry points	Strategic entry points for ECD programmes: (i) centre-based ECD programmes that focus on school readiness; (ii) home-based ECD programmes for behaviour change in health, nutrition and parenting; (iii) communication/media campaigns for families with young children; and (iv) conditional cash transfers for families with young children.
Equality	Equal and fair status, rights and opportunities. For example, the same access and funding for all students.
Equity	Equity is a more flexible measure of fairness than equality, as it allows for equivalence rather than "sameness". However, the concept of equity has been critiqued as it implies that others make judgements about what individuals need to achieve successful outcomes.
Gender	The socially constructed roles and behaviours that a society typically associates with males and females.
Global trends	A general development or change in a situation that affects many countries in different regions of the world.
Governance	The processes of decision-making and actions of a body of people involved in the creation or reinforcement of institutional and social norms, for example the processes that underpin how a school, ministry, department or country is run.
Human rights	Rights that are inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more.
Inclusion	Refers to the states of individuals from vulnerable groups with full participation in society or in situations when the removal or lowering of barriers for their participation in society is made.
Inclusive education	All students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate mainstream education in their own neighbourhood schools, where they receive high-quality education, interventions and support that enable them to learn and achieve success in the core curriculum.
Leadership	The activity of leading a group of people, an organisation or institutions with clear vision, and sharing that vision with others so they will identify with it and work together to achieve shared goals. Effective leadership involves providing the information, knowledge, motivation and methods to realise that vision.

Learning assessments	Learning assessments gather information on what children know and what they can do with what they have learnt, as well as offer critical information on the process and context that enable learning, and on those factors that may be hindering learning progress.
Learning outcomes	Could be seen as both statements or achievements that summarise the knowledge or skills students/children should acquire by the end of a particular assignment, class, course or programme, and help students/teachers/practitioners understand why such knowledge and skills will be useful to them.
Legislation	A law or set of laws suggested by a government and made official when passed by parliament or a law-making body.
Management	The organisation and co-ordination of the activity of e.g. an organisation, business or country. Effective management is underpinned by a set of shared principles that determine how physical, financial, human and informational resources are used efficiently and effectively to achieve organisational goals.
Multi-sectoral	In the case of this report, the inclusion of education and other sectors (such as health, nutrition, sanitation and child protection) in services for pregnant women, young children and parents through informal or formal coordination.
Outcomes	Specific statements to describe precise changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours expected to occur as a result of the activity or services provided by ECE/ECD programmes.
Partnership	Implies a formal arrangement between two or more parties to manage and operate an organisation, institution or activity. In ECCE, often involves a wide range of stakeholders from government, national and international NGOs, United Nations agencies, community and local organisations, and individual families; to promote investment in ECD.
Policy	A ratified statement of principles, values or intent that guides decisions and actions, or (more usually) determines the decisions and actions to achieve a service's goal.
Public–private partnerships	Involve collaboration between a government agency and a private sector company that can be used to finance, build and operate projects, such as ECD programmes.
Qualifications	The result of having achieved success in an examination or the official completion of a course, for example achieving status as a recognised ECCE practitioner.
Quality	Degree or level of excellence.
Quality assurance	In ECCE, includes all policies, measures, planned processes and actions through which the quality of ECCE is maintained and developed. At national level, QA systems contain arrangements for the systematic evaluation of establishments and study programmes.
Quality standards	Guidelines and specifications to be met. The development of quality standards needs to go alongside the development of tools for measuring and rating the quality of programmes, learning and caregivers.

Regional trends	Changes in events over time, which relate to a particular area of a country or of the world, such as changes in the well-being of children and their parents.
Regulation	Regulation is the official controlling of an activity or process, usually by means of rules which may be legally binding.
Regulatory mechanisms	Separate body, organisation, committee or bureau that has been given responsibility by the government for promoting, co-ordinating and ensuring correct implementation of ECE programmes.
Rights holder	People who hold rights. Children are rights holders, owing to their entitlements granted by the UNCRC (1989). Educators and workers can also be rights holders.
Situational analysis	The systematic collection and evaluation of past and present economic and social data, aimed at the identification of internal and external forces that may influence an organisation's performance and choice of strategies; and assessment of the organisation's current and future strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
Stakeholders	Those people affected by, and who can affect, the services, actions, objectives and policies of an institution or organisation.
Strategic planning	An organisational management activity used to set priorities, focus energy and resources, and strengthen operations to ensure that all ECCE/ECD stakeholders are working toward common and achievable goals.
Sustainable Development Goals	A collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 for the year 2030. The SDGs are part of Resolution 70/1 of the United Nations General Assembly, the 2030 Agenda.
Systems	A set of principles and procedures/elements/components that are organised for a common purpose.
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	A United Nations human rights treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. Defines a child as any human being under the age of 18.
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	A milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, it was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.
Workforce	Total number of workers (usually excluding the management) in a given sector.

The Commonwealth