



Early Childhood Development: What's Government Doing?

1. Introduction

It has been demonstrated by a host of studies that early childhood development (ECD) programmes do not benefit only the child, but also families and communities. ECD interventions have been known to contribute to higher school enrolment; reduced drop-out rates and grade repetition; higher nutrition and health status; improved social and emotional behaviour; and better verbal and intellectual development.

According to the 2011 General Household Survey released by Statistics South Africa, South Africa had just less than 64% of its 0 – 4 year olds participating in ECD activities. It is estimated that only 35% (of the 64%) are enrolled in registered ECD centres (day-care centres, crèches, playgroups, nursery schools and pre-primary [other than Grade R] schools), while the majority are receiving their ECD stimulation at home.

ECD is a multifaceted topic that cuts across several departmental programs. However, this paper is of limited scope and will highlight only the policy and legislative framework; the ECD sub-programme of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP); and funding.

2. What is Early Childhood Development?

Early childhood development is an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to nine years of age grow and thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially. ECD services should be understood as a foundation stone in the delivery of services for children and their families.

“Compelling research evidence shows that ECD services are a critical area for government intervention. Different kinds of ECD services are a key intervention in support of young children’s rights to survival, development, protection and full participation in society”.¹

3. The Policy Framework

The government’s commitments to children flow from the Bill of Rights in South Africa’s Constitution and from South Africa’s ratification of international child rights conventions such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. Children’s rights to ECD provision are also implied through a number of other constitutional rights.²

Several government departments are responsible for providing ECD services in South Africa; however, the lead departments are those of Education (DoE), Social Development (DSD) and Health (DoH). There are numerous laws, policies, white papers and plans that form the policy framework of ECD service-provision.

3.1. White papers referring to ECD

ECD was first addressed in the *Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (1996)*, which referred to the broad framework for ECD that the 1995 *White Paper on Education and Training* had sketched. ECD services were also provided for in the 1997 *White Paper on Social Welfare*, while in 2001 the Department of Education’s *Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development* identified a number of critical areas to be

addressed in an integrated ECD strategy. The *White Paper 5* envisaged universal access to Grade R for five year-old children by 2010. Ordinary public schools were to house 85% of government-funded reception year services, with the remaining 15% in accredited community-based sites or through independent provision.³ The *White Paper 5* also called for:

- an inter-sectoral strategic plan that would target appropriate and integrated services and programmes for children younger than five years;
- an improvement in the quality of pre-Grade R programmes, inclusion of health and nutrition, appropriate curricula and practitioner development and career-pathing.⁴

3.2. The National Integrated Policy for ECD

The main aims of the NIPECD (2005-2010) are to provide access for all young children to a range of services and programmes to support their development; and to provide extra support to especially vulnerable children such as orphans, children with disabilities, children in child-headed households, children affected by HIV and AIDS, and children from poor households and communities. The NIPECD recognises a variety of sites of care - at the home level, at community level and in formal settings.

3.3. The Children's Act⁵

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 provides for an ECD focus predominantly on children 0-4 years old. It places an obligation on the Minister for Social Development to develop a comprehensive national strategy aimed at securing a properly resourced, co-ordinated and managed early childhood development system⁶. The Act details norms and standards for ECD facilities and programmes and compliance with these norms and standards is a requirement for DSD registration and funding. However, there is no obligation on the state to fund ECD services that meet the prescribed requirements of the norms and standards. The Act states further that ECD services should be prioritised in communities where families lack the means of providing proper shelter, food and other basic necessities of life to their children; and that ECD programmes must be made available to children with disabilities.

4. Funding Sources⁷

The main sources of funding for the provision of ECD services are via the provincial Departments of Social Development and of Education. Other funding sources include the national Department of Public Works' Expanded Public Works Programme, and the National Development Agency.

4.1. Departments of Social Development

The provincial DSDs provide their funding through subsidies⁸ provided to registered ECD centres. These subsidies are calculated per child per day⁹ (currently R15) for children 0-4 years whose caregivers pass an income means test. There is also programme funding for non-profit organisations (NPOs) in respect of ECD programmes, mostly non-centre based. When first introduced, the subsidies were meant to help provide for nutrition and other basic needs of the children and were not intended for salaries. In practice, however, part of the subsidies was generally used to pay salaries of practitioners. Provinces now have a discretion to specify how to split the subsidies for different purposes. For example, in the Western Cape 50% of the subsidy is specified for nutrition, 30% for salaries and 20% for equipment. The Eastern Cape specifies a 40-40-20 split in respect of nutrition, administration including stipends, and stimulation programmes.

While the funding for ECD centres has progressively increased over the past decade - from less than R335 million in 2003/04 to more than a billion rand in 2011/12 - much less is allocated for non-centre based ECD than for centre-based.

4.2. Departments of Basic Education

Funding for community-based ECD from education departments comes primarily through the payment of salaries for Grade R practitioners at ECD centres registered as independent schools; through subsidies per child in Grade R at these centres; via payment for training of ECD practitioners; or as funding for educational materials.

The amount of the per capita learner subsidy is based on the number of learners enrolled in Grade R at the centre, and the quintile ranking of

the school. ECD centres are categorised in quintiles in line with the public ordinary schools closest to them (the process does not assess parental income, as the DSD means test does). The subsidy amount ranges from R5 per child per day for Quintile 5 (well-funded schools) to R17 per child per day for Quintile 1 schools (serving the poorest communities) and is paid in respect of 200 school days per annum.

4.3. The Expanded Public Works Programme

The EPWP was introduced in 2004 as a five-year programme (in 2009 a further five-year EPWP II was introduced) to create low-paid, temporary employment opportunities. The EPWP social sector programme focuses on two areas, namely ECD and home-and-community-based care (HCBC). The ECD EPWP encompasses three components: increasing the number of registered ECD centres; increasing the number of children subsidised by DSDs; and increasing the training of ECD practitioners, with a focus on provision for children aged 0-4 years.

There was no new budget in the first five years for the EPWP; instead existing government budgets were used to fund labour-intensive job creation projects. Although the ECD EPWP was identified as one of the APEX national priorities by the Mbeki government, it was not until 2011 that conditional grants were made available for the ECD EPWP. In the absence of conditional grants for ECD, additional money was added to the equitable shares of each of the provinces. Because the money was given as part of the equitable share, each province had discretion as to whether they allocated the money to ECD; and while the provinces did allocate the money to ECD, sometimes it was not all allocated in the year in which it was added to the equitable share, but only later.

With the commencement of the EPWP II in 2010 several changes were introduced with respect to ECD:

- The focus of EPWP ECD training was expanded beyond practitioners working with children in the 0-4 year age groups. The decision to expand beyond 0-4 seems to have been motivated largely by the need to create more jobs. This need has also resulted in non-teaching staff such as

gardeners and cooks being included as ECD job opportunities.

- The ministerial determination for public works programmes gazetted in November 2010 for the first time set a minimum stipend level.
- The Department of Public Works introduced incentive grants which were provided on a quarterly basis. These were provided to entities that had created at least 35% of their target number of EPWP jobs. At least 80% of the grant must be used to pay stipends, while the remaining portion can be used for strengthening management of implementing agents.

Funds are also made available through the Community Works Programme (CWP), a component of the EPWP, but one which works differently. Unlike the EPWP, these work opportunities are not linked to major municipal or infrastructure projects; instead, they consist of activities that have been identified by a community reference group, and which are intended to contribute to the common good of the local community. The reference group comprises councillors; municipal officials; and community leaders. The CWP sites are run by NGOs and communities, rather than by municipal officials. Examples include planting and maintaining food gardens; the creation of community gardens; home-based care for the elderly; and assistance in classrooms.¹⁰

The CWP cannot fund ECD centres directly, but it can fund ECD-related activities that are carried out by community members. Examples of the types of ECD-related activities that can be supported through the CWP include provision of food to ECD centres; developing and maintaining food gardens for ECD centres; landscaping of gardens and playgrounds; building repairs and maintenance; construction of toilets; and cooking and administration services. Where this happens within a centre setting, the CWP then indirectly subsidises the costs of the centre.

5. Conclusion

It is often said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. ECD is that first step in contributing to addressing the many challenges in South Africa's education system that are failing

thousands of children each year. It is encouraging that government recognizes the benefits and importance of ECD, however more needs to be done to ensure universal access to quality ECD.

Kenny Pasensie
Researcher

¹ Law L (2011): *The Children's Act: An ECD perspective*. CPLD Briefing Paper No. 270

² The Presidency (2009): *Situational analysis of children in South Africa*.

³ *ibid*

⁴ Giese S, Budlender D, Berry L, Motlatla S, Zide Hombakazi (2011): *Government funding for early childhood development: Can those who need it get it?*

Available online: <http://www.ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/themes/ilifalabantwana/uploads/Government-Funding-for-ECD-can-those-who-need-it-get-it.pdf>

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Children's Act (38 of 2005): *Section 92*

⁷ This section is largely based upon the research report: *Government funding for early childhood development: Can those who need it get it?*

⁸ The subsidy was introduced in terms of regulation 38 of the Child Care Act of 1983.

⁹ The maximum number of days in 2010/2011 ranged from 171 days per year in the Eastern Cape to 264 in the Western Cape.

¹⁰ Pasensie K (2011): *The Expanded Public Works Programme: Chipping away at unemployment*. CPLD Briefing Paper No. 274

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