

Policy Review Report: Early Childhood Care and Education in Kenya

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Abstract

The vision of early childhood development (ECD) The MOEST's mandate has been expanded to cater for the early care, development and education needs of young children. Awareness has been raised with regard to the importance of an integrated approach to the holistic development of the child. Yet gaps appear in practice. Services for children under three are not well developed, and the activities of ECD Centres focus heavily on teaching young children basic learning skills. Many stakeholders still view ECD as "early schooling". Parenting education could be a good strategy for enhancing the care and education of younger children, and training is needed for ECD teachers. ECD and Free Primary Education policy Since the introduction of the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy, poor parents have tended to keep their children at home until they reach the entitlement age for FPE. Consequently, ECD teachers, whose salaries are mostly dependent on parental contributions, are leaving their jobs, and ECD is reportedly on the verge of collapse. A proposal to provide one year of free ECD services for five-year-olds should be viewed with caution, as this could trigger a similar collapse of services for younger children within ECD. The problem of unprepared Standard One pupils should be handled and resolved within the framework of FPE, and ECD should be reserved as a place and time for the child's holistic development. The service structure for the care and education of younger children must be developed and reinforced in order to save the ECD system. Participation A major decline in enrolment occurred before the FPE policy was implemented, suggesting that FPE may not be the only reason for this decline. Access to ECD Centres is inequitable, with poor children from semi-arid, arid and urban slum areas less likely to enrol in them. A relatively large gap between gross and net enrolment ratios implies the presence of over-age and under-age children in ECD Centres. The presence of over-age children explains, in part, the heavy focus on pre-primary education. The presence of under-age children points to the difficulty of delivering quality ECD services. Equity should be a key policy objective. Workforce and resources The World Bank investment in training ECD teachers is at risk of being wasted as trained ECD teachers leave their jobs complaining of poor and irregular pay. Integrating ECD teachers in the Government pay scale determined by the Teachers Service Commission, though desirable, seems to be a financially difficult option. A minimum salary guarantee from the Government, supplemented by parental contributions, would be more feasible. In-service ECD training for primary teachers needs further support. Parental pressure for pre-primary education prevents ECD teachers from delivering pedagogically correct services; but there are innovative pilot initiatives that work and that can be implemented elsewhere. Data gap Data gaps are particularly pronounced in relation to the provision of non-formal and informal services, especially those focused on care and development. Financing,

inequity and impact are three policy issues requiring the most urgent data development, which must, however, be preceded by the conceptual clarification of various services. While research is needed on financing issues, the more urgent objectives are to make use of research findings in policymaking and to link the research community with policymakers. Recommendations ECD principles have been accepted, but action plans and strategies to implement the principles in the particular context of Kenya need further elaboration.

Key words: Policy Review Report, Early Childhood Care, Education in Kenya

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