

Madrasa Early Childhood Development Program: Making a Difference

Peter Mwaura and Bishara T. Mohamed

Abstract

The Madrasa Early Childhood Development Program is a regional initiative in East Africa that began in the 1980s. From its beginning in the Coast Province of Kenya in 1986, the program has resulted in the establishment of quality, affordable, culturally appropriate, and sustainable preschools among the socioeconomically disadvantaged Muslim communities in East Africa. It expanded to Zanzibar's two islands, Pemba and Unguja in 1990 and to Uganda in 1993. Although the program is similar in the three countries, each country works within its own context to meet the specific needs of its main partner, the communities.

The overall goal of the Madrasa Early Childhood Development Program is to improve the well-being of young children from marginalized communities through ensuring a supportive religious, cultural, and learning environment in their early years. More specifically, the community-based Madrasa Early Childhood Development Program aims to provide Muslim children in underprivileged communities with access to high quality, culturally relevant, and affordable early childhood programs that will ground them in Islam and increase their readiness for, access to, and success in later schooling.

The responsibility for the development and management of the Madrasa preschools lies with the communities who own and operate the schools. The process of creating and implementing Madrasa preschools is focused on building the capacity of community members, including teachers, members of school management committees (SMCs), parents and others, to provide quality services and create responsive and supportive educational institutions that are technically, financially, and organizationally sustainable.