



NDA

National
Development
Agency



ECD INFRASTRUCTURE

POLICY BRIEF

OCTOBER 2016



Introduction

The centrality of early childhood development to the developmental initiatives to which the Government is a party (such as the Sustainable Development Goals and EFA goals) is founded on an ever-growing body of evidence which confirms that a nation's development depends on the extent to which it can unlock the potential human capital inherent within its very youngest population. This in turn depends on the extent to which Government secures or provides the conditions necessary for the realisation of the right of every infant and child to develop "his or her potential to the maximum extent possible, to become physically healthy, mentally alert, socially competent, emotionally sound and ready to learn – cognitively, socially, emotionally, physically and psychosocially – to their full potential".

The realisation of these rights is dependent on the quality of the biological, social and economic environment in which the foetus, infant and young child develops, especially whilst in utero and in the first two years after birth – a period commonly referred to as the 'first 1 000 days'. If the foundational development of the brain and skills is flawed in these earliest days, later developments that build on earlier circuits

and skills will be inherently limited. The first 1 000 days thus offer a unique and invaluable window of opportunity to secure the optimal development of the child, and by extension, the positive developmental trajectory of a country (*National Integrated ECD policy, 2015: 15*).

Infrastructure

According to Education for All (EFA, 2015) report Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) is very imperative as the early years set the basis for life. This is so because those years have huge influence on children's readiness for primary education and transition to secondary education. In order to give the best care and education to children in the 0-4 year age group, there must be provision of infrastructure such as classrooms, toilets, outdoor play environment and safety and security. Infrastructure plays a dire role in creating a learner friendly environment, mostly in schools and classrooms where there are children with special education needs which have to be put into consideration.

It has been observed that in many countries across the world most Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres suffer social exclusion where learners with special needs have been excluded from

enjoying fully the mainstream benefits despite increase in government investment in ECD (Davids, Theron & Maphunye, 2009). This was so because most ECD centres have poorer infrastructure and management (Motala, 2010). This makes most children with special needs not to receive the required level of care and inspiration which are needed to offset the deprivation they experience at home and in the community (Biersteker, 2012).

Most recently, China has started to place more emphasis on establishing a system to support preschool children with disabilities after achieving increased infrastructure in compulsory education for school-age children with disabilities (Zheng, Maude & Brotherson, 2015). The promotion of the development of early childhood intervention programmes in inclusive settings was first announced in the year 2010 by the Chinese government (State Council, 2010). This gives room for inclusivity and to cater for children with special needs.

Little (2015) notes that outdoor play environment is imperative for the learning and development process of the children. In the framework of early childhood education, the outdoor and its environs have for decades acknowledged as essential element of the curriculum (Little 2015). The learning environment for

children must be clean and spacious enough to enhance free movement for them to move and play around.

Research studies have showed that most young children acquire knowledge in ways that are significantly different from the way older children learn. It was revealed that they learn by manipulating, exploring and experimenting with objects (Murundu, Indoshi, & Okwara, 2010). Brooker and Woodhead (2013) note that play creates an important contribution to all aspects of children's development, and many early skills and competencies can be acquired through play. This actually calls for proper infrastructure in terms of outdoor facilities which pave way for children to have enough space to play with each other. Thus, planned play in preschools has been encouraged by parents and educators who are keen to promote all aspects of children's development: their physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development.

Consequently, the significance of appropriate hygiene practice is accentuated by Rabie and Curtis (2006) as essential in pre-schools. It is essential for all ECD centres to have good toilet facilities for the children. It was also perceived that installation of hand-washing stations in schools along with provision of training in hygiene improve children's health and

hygiene practices. Mooijman (2012) notes that young children have the utmost occurrence of different forms due to the fact that they are not so mature to help themselves to maintain proper hygiene. Thus, sanitary and hand-washing facilities are very essential for the hygiene and health of the child in order to lessen transmission of diseases and infections. Sitati, Ndirangu, Kennedy and Rapongo (2016) echoed that majority of the public schools do not have separate sanitary facilities for the ECE children, thus posing a health hazard to the young children in such centres

Australian Government Department of Education (2014) states that increasing numbers of children spend substantial amounts of time in formal preschools with approximately 72% of children attending for twenty or more hours per week. This calls for making available adequate infrastructure for learners which will make the time they spend in preschools a fulfilling one. In the same vein, it was noted that in Australia, it has been observed that 22% of birth to 2 year olds, 54% of 2-3 year olds and 85% of 4-5 year olds attend some form of early childhood education centre. Therefore, these settings create an important environment for children to engage in physical activity by providing time that expedite physically

active play thus helping children meet the recommended levels of physical activity (Little & Sweller, 2015). It is expected that children are active when they have adequate infrastructure to support their learning activities.

In a study conducted by Reilly (2010) on levels of infrastructure in child care centres, it was revealed that most children in child care engage in low levels of infrastructure. He further suggests that there may be recognizable and adaptable features of the environment that can be targeted to promote higher levels of infrastructure. This implies that the level of the environment that determine the different infrastructure in terms of classrooms, toilets, outdoor space and design that can be put in place.

Sitati, Ndirangu, Kennedy and Rapongo (2016) note that the yardstick of a quality early childhood development education programmes are mainly based on provision of adequate physical facilities, outdoor play equipment, learning materials and trained staff. These facilities are important to give good and quality early foundation to children. Barnett (2009) states that children who do not receive good and quality early childhood education are not likely to succeed in primary school and mostly in subsequent levels of education

as the quality of education at the foundation stage is paramount.

In the report of the task force on the alignment of education sector to the constitution of Kenya in 2010, it was stated that infrastructure and teaching equipment are poor in most Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) schools. Moreover, greatest part of the ECDE infrastructures is unplanned and inappropriate for teaching and learning at the ECDE level (Republic of Kenya, 2012). Some studies showed that the government does not help in construction of learning facilities (Sitati et al., 2016). As a result, a number of pre-schools do not have permanent building. Teaching and learning are held outdoors under trees or stones. The inadequacies of these physical facilities hampered the normal learning and teaching process.

In South Africa according to National Integrated Early Childhood Policy (2015) it was stipulated that an adequate and accessible physical environment and infrastructure is mandatory to support scaled-up and effective delivery of inclusive, quality early childhood programmes and services. *It was further stated that a sufficiently quantity of an adequate* early childhood development infrastructure is determined by three overarching principles:

- Health and safety: internationally, constitutionally and in terms of domestic laws such as the Children's Act, all children have the rights to survival, dignity, and a healthy and safe environment. This requires that the environment in which they access early childhood development services ensures the protection of their and their caregiver's health and safety.
- Equity of physical access: early childhood development facilities and programme infrastructure must be within physical reach and physically accessible to all children, including those living in remote and/or underserved areas and those with disabilities.
- Quality: the environment and infrastructure supporting the delivery of early childhood development services is a key determinant of the quality of the service provided. There is a link between poor and inadequate infrastructure and the provision of poor quality early childhood development services (RSA, 2015:87).

Infrastructure is important for provisioning of quality and equal access to ECD facilities for all children and disadvantaged

children. However, in South Africa like other developing countries, ECD services have been disadvantaged by poor infrastructure in centres within under-resourced areas (Richter et al., 2012). The national audit on ECD centres (RSA, 2014) reveal that most facilities remain unregistered with the Department of Social Development (DSD) due to the fact that they fail to meet the standards presented by the department. For an ECD to be registered which is the infrastructural condition should be according to the established standard requirements of the department. The expected standards range from location of the ECD centre, quality of infrastructure, management and running of ECD facilities. The department guidelines require that ECD centres must have quality infrastructure that offers children with a safe, healthy learning environment which includes access to sufficient water, proper sanitation, electricity and a secured area away from hazards. Similarly, food must be cooked away from the children's play areas (Atmore, van Niekerk, & Ashley-Cooper, 2012).

In a study conducted by Sotuku, Okeke and Mathwasa (2016) in rural Eastern Cape communities, it was revealed that all early childhood education centres sampled had fences and gates which were locked during the school hours. This simply gave

the impression that the children are safe and the school environment is secure for them. However, the study found that most of the centres had dilapidated buildings and the toilet facilities were not in a good shape which could in turn affect the health of the children. The nature of the classrooms and other facilities do not cater for children with special needs as thus, they cannot be accommodated with such facilities.

Typologies of ECD Centres

The Shack in the Yard (SITY)

This category of centre is a small operation, generally operating out of one room. The principal is an entrepreneur who owns the property.

The Home-Based Centre

The progression of a SITY into a HBC is a natural one, and the defining differences between them are that a HBC is registered. The size of these centres varies between serving 30 and 70 children

The Edutainer

Edutainers are shipping containers that have been converted into long narrow classrooms.

The Evening Star

Usually very nice and well kept buildings that stand out from a sea of shacks.

The Established Centre

Formal building, foreign donations or facilitated by a local NGO. Accredited and trained practitioners – large numbers of children. Private sector.

Services could include play groups (few hours), preschool, creche (full day care), mother and toddler groups etc.



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**Layout & Design: Nthabiseng Kraai
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