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ECD Policy Development and Implementation in Africa

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ECD Policy Development and Implementation in Africa

I. Introduction[1]

Early Childhood Care, Education and Development (ECD)[2] is a topic whose time has arrived—in Africa as well as internationally. This monograph will briefly explore some of the broader international and African antecedents to that 'arrival,' before focusing more specifically on processes involved in the development and implementation of ECD policies in various countries of Africa. The monograph does not focus on the content of policies, but on activities associated with their development, promulgation or implementation.

The genesis for the monograph was work undertaken by members of the African Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU) as part of their applied web- and seminar-based post-secondary studies. The members of this pilot cohort were nominated by country committees, having demonstrated years of commitment to enhancing child well-being in their home countries. All are full-time employees in the broad field of ECD with eight to 25-plus years of service. Their ECD backgrounds are purposefully diverse, with responsibilities ranging from program development and implementation, through policy development, to ECD education, to name a few. The cohort participants share a common commitment to enhancing child development through leadership development, country and regional capacity building and network enhancement—the objectives of the ECDVU.

Each of the participants completed, in addition to applied coursework, a major project or thesis as a culminating activity of the three-year program (see http://www.ecdvu.org/ for a complete list of the countries, the participants and the major projects or theses completed by the participants as part of their involvement in the pilot ECDVU M.A. program). Each completed these studies while continuing with full-time ECD employment in their home country. The project and thesis topics were determined based on professional interests and 'on-the-ground' needs in each country. In some countries, ECD policy development or implementation were key foci of interest. It is that set of studies, plus the small number of other ECD policy development and implementation studies that have recently been undertaken in Africa, that forms the core of this monograph. Before considering those various studies, a brief international and a more detailed regional ECD context will be provided.

II. International Context

While ECD has a long history, with replicated early childhood group care and education programs moving across continents as early as the 1820s (Infant Schools), this monograph will take only a small slice of that timeline: international ECD since the UN adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child on November 20, 1989.

The period around 1990 marked significant changes for children and for ECD internationally. On November 20, 1989 the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was formally adopted by the UN General Assembly; signing commenced on January 26, 1990, and 61 countries signed the document that day. By September, 1990 20 countries had ratified the

[1] This monograph is dedicated to the hard work and commitment of the first African ECDVU cohort (2001-2004) and the ECDVU team, instructors and donors who made it possible. It is through them, and those who share their commitment, that the well-being of children in Africa will be advanced. Also, a note of appreciation to Judith Evans for having read and commented on an earlier draft of the monograph.

[2] Various acronyms are used to refer to the holistic intent embraced by early childhood care, education and development. Other terms include: Early Childhood Care and Education/ECCE (UNESCO), Early Childhood Education and Care/ECEC (OECD), Early Childhood Care for Development/ECCD (Consultative Group), and Early Childhood Development/ECD (World Bank, ADEA).

Convention, bringing it into international law. It had been "ratified more quickly and by more countries than any previous human rights instrument" (UNICEF, *We the Children*, September 2001, p. 1).

In March of 1990 the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) was held in Jomtien, Thailand, and at that conference the importance of early childhood development was underscored as a crucial part of basic education. The first four words under Article 5 provided ECD with a place at the table: "Learning begins at birth. This calls for early childhood care and initial education" (World Declaration on Education for All, Jomtien, UNESCO website). For many years ECD had been the 'invisible child,' hidden behind the 'education family,' disconnected from the recognition its 'older siblings,' like primary, secondary and tertiary education, had received as key components in international development. Through ECD recognition at Jomtien, the rapid ratification of the CRC, and the World Summit for Children held in New York on September 28 and 29, 1990, the early years began to move 'out from the shadows' to a place of recognition in its own right on the international stage.

Robert Myers' publication of *The Twelve Who Survive* in 1992 began to refocus international attention from issues of child survival to a more encompassing understanding of what the increasing percentage of children who survived required in order to thrive. Myers' seminal volume was an advocacy as well as a policy and programming tool.

In 1994 the Carnegie Institute's Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children opened another key front in efforts to better understand the needs and challenges of early development. With their report *Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children,* the importance of the early years as a key period of brain development became a central focus for discussions regarding child development. The World Bank was quick to pick up the implications of the Carnegie Report for international development: healthy child development as a key to broader social and economic development. In 1996 Mary Eming Young of the World Bank published *Early Child Development: Investing in the Future,* with the importance of brain development featured as a lead point. At approximately the same time, the first of what would become a rapidly growing set of loans for ECD development in various parts of the world were approved by the World Bank. By the late 1990s UNICEF was moving towards placing Integrated ECD as a centerpiece of its activities as well, with a strong focus on the CRC.

In less than ten years ECD had moved from the periphery of concern for all but a few international donors, such as the Bernard van Leer Foundation and a few others who had made significant contributions to ECD as early as the 1970s, to become a major topic on a significant number of donors' and international organizations' lists of priority issues.

An Education for All follow-up conference to Jomtien took place in Dakar, Senegal in April of 2000. At the Dakar World Education Forum the profile of ECD was further enhanced as the delegates committed themselves to a number of goals, the first of which was "expanding and improving early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children" (*New Global Commitment to Basic Education, p. 2,* World Education Forum 2000, UNESCO website).

A ten-year follow-up to the World Summit for Children was scheduled for New York in 2001, but was postponed as a result of the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center. The General Assembly's Special Session on Children took place instead in May, 2002 and resulted in the publication of *We the Children* (UNICEF, September 2001) and *A World Fit for Children* (UNICEF, 2002a, which contains a copy of the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs], Special Session on Children documents, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC]). *We the Children* summarizes much of the international work that had taken place during the intervening decade regarding children's developmental statistics. Sadly, it also notes the increasing challenges to achieving child well-being in many parts of Africa due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, civil unrest and wars, refugee situations, and other challenges.

III. Events and Context in Sub-Saharan Africa

In addition to a general ECD background and set of events impacting virtually all areas of the 'Developing'/Majority World, regions have their own more specific contexts. Sub-Saharan Africa will be briefly considered in this section, while the experiences and contexts for certain specific African countries will be developed in Section III. A brief list of key ECD events (Figure 1) will serve as a background for a limited elaboration of several of the themes and activities.

Figure 1. Brief Overview of Key ECD Events in Africa

Brief Overview of Key ECD Events in Africa

- 1971: Bernard van Leer Foundation (BvLF) supports development of ECD in Kenya through the Kenya Institute of Education.
- 1970s: BvLF supports Educare in South Africa, offered through NGOs.
- 1970s and 80s: Other donors and INGOs come forward in various African countries.
- 1990: Many African countries are quick to sign the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Mali President Traore is co-host for the Summit, and Senegalese President Diouf is also a key figure in promoting the Summit.
- 1993: EFA International Forum in New Delhi puts ECCD on the agenda. The development of ECCD in Kenya is presented as a case study.
- 1993: October Meeting of the Donors for African Education (now the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, ADEA) created a Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD). The WGECD was first under the leadership of UNICEF, then the Government of the Netherlands.
- 1994: The Early Childhood Development Network in Africa (ECDNA) begins.
- Mid-1990s: World Bank credits in Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria [limited], Eritrea).
- 1994: Joint Training Initiative, Bernard van Leer Foundation.
- 1996: Ouagadougou Regional Seminar on Early Childhood in Francophone Africa – UNESCO.
- 1996: Creation of Reseau Africain Francophone Prime Enfance (Early Childhood Francophone African Network) through UNESCO and UNICEF.
- 1996: Setting the Pace for Lifelong Learning: Priorities and Strategies for Africa – Mauritius (attended by 55 African countries). Part of EFA follow-up. Outcome document: *Guidelines Towards the Development of ECD in Africa*.
- 1997: Regional ECD Training Institute held in Namibia. UNICEF support with University of Victoria and University of Namibia co-organizing.
- 1997: Colletta and Reinhold (World Bank) assessment of the expenditure on education in Africa and the percentage of education budgets allocated to ECD (only 4 of 25 had any expenditure and those 4 had minimal expenditure).
- 1998: Seventh Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States (MINEDAF VII) accepts recommendation noting that "clear policies be formulated to promote early childhood education and development" (Report of the VII Conference, April 1998).
- 1998: UNESCO and UNICEF-Cote d'Ivoire fund and help facilitate a networking meeting in Francophone Africa.
- 1998: Regional ECD Training Institute held in The Gambia (UNICEF with University of Victoria and the World Bank).

- 1999 to the present: African International ECD Conference series (1999-2005):
  - 1999: 1st African International ECD Conference, Kampala, Uganda
  - 2002: 2nd African International ECD Conference, Asmara, Eritrea
  - 2005: 3rd African International ECD Conference, Accra, Ghana
- Late-1990s: UNICEF shifts to greater ECD emphasis (IECD).
- 2000, January: Funding received from the World Bank, Norwegian Educational Trust Fund to develop the ECDVU program. Delivery (with multiple donors) commences August 2001.
- 2000, April: World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal (10-year follow-up to Jomtien Conference and EFA initiative). "Dakar EFA goals are intended as an "education wing" of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations, also adopted in 2000" (NEPAD Education Sector Framework, draft, February 2004, p. 9).
- 2000-2001: ADEA-WGECD policy case studies carried out in Ghana, Namibia and Mauritius, plus a questionnaire sent out to 49 African countries (33 responses=70%).
- 2001, May: Cairo, *Africa Fit for Children* document. Pan African Forum for Children, Africa Common Position, Cairo Declaration and Plan of Action.
- 2001: NEPAD. "NEPAD is the merger of two initiatives: Millennium Partnership for Africa's Recovery Programme (MAP), associated with President Thabo Mbeki of RSA, and OMEGA Plan, associated with President Abdoulaye Wade. Much of the intellectual and policy work behind NEPAD was done by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)."
- 2002, September: Second African International ECD Conference held in Asmara, Eritrea. Produces *Asmara Declaration*.
- 2002, December: MINEDAF VIII held in Arusha, Tanzania.
- 2002-2003: ADEA-WGECD Project to Support National Policy Planning for ECD in Three Countries of West Africa (Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mauritania).
- 2003: The *Young Face of NEPAD: Children and Young People in the New Partnership for Africa's Development*.
- 2004: 27 of 30 ECDVU participants from 10 African countries complete the full three-year program.

As with international ECD events, there are diverse strands that historically have influenced the shape and nature of ECD in Sub-Saharan Africa generally, as well as in specific sub-regions and countries. Rosely N. E. Chada quotes from Gelfand (1979) in her introduction to a chapter on Child Care and Policy in Zimbabwe (Cochran, 1993):

> There were no professional schools or teachers in the traditional villages, nor any formal teaching except perhaps in morality. The child learned from various members of the family as he grew, mostly without realizing that he was being taught. Most often he learned from his grandparents, his mother and father, frequently sitting next to his grandfather or father in the evening at the fireplace or in the open fields, at the cattle pen or wherever a male activity was being pursued (Chada, citing Gelfand, 1979, p. 219, in Cochran, 1993, p. 604).

Gelfand's description is not atypical for many other parts of Africa. Also common across most of Africa is the experience of colonization by European powers. ECD as a part of colonization activities has a much longer timeline in Africa than many have noted, with records of the Infant School Society of London documenting their promotion in the 1830s as "agents of moral and social rescue and training…" (Anning, 1991, p. 2, in Prochner & Cleghorn, in press). From South Africa came the report that "there is no community upon earth in which the infant

school system is not of the highest importance, but in our attempts to raise savage … tribes, it is a discovery of inestimable value" (Woodbridge, 1832, in Pence, 1980, p. 48).

In the post-WWII period a key dynamic across virtually all of the continent has been an interaction between colonial ECD structures, typically established to serve only the colonizing population, and post-independence efforts to establish systems and services for all, sometimes in the face of intense civil disruption. The colonial structures of preschools, nurseries, crèches, kindergartens and other programs bearing European names are familiar from their European origins, and they did not look greatly different in their African settings. The challenge faced by newly independent governments was that of trying to address the much larger child care and development needs of the overall country with very limited financial resources and in the face of state building.

In many cases services that may have been publicly supported (for the minority) could no longer be carried by the state with its expanded obligations. An example is ECD services in Zambia and Namibia being moved into a private or non-governmental provision status. In many African countries faith-based organizations had played a key role in addressing ECD needs before independence, and most continued to do so after independence.

Kenya, one of the earlier, newly independent countries of Africa (1963), followed a route that many other African countries would also take, identifying early childhood services as a key component of local development, particularly in the rural areas. The Kenyan 'Harambee' (let us pull together) preschools were informally organized and typically had one of the local mothers identified as the 'teacher' (Kipkorir, p. 339). Kenya became an independent country and a leader in ECD development in Africa at a time that many other countries in Africa were still moving towards independence. Kenya achieved ECD visibility partially through interaction with what would become another key strand in the African ECD fabric—support from the international donor community, in this case the Bernard van Leer Foundation. In 1971 the Kenyan Ministry of Education and the Bernard van Leer Foundation launched the Preschool Education Project at the Kenya Institute of Education, which was to become, arguably, the best known ECD project in Africa for many years. The focus of the collaboration was on three objectives: 1) preparation of a cadre of officers who could assume the role of promoting and supervising nursery schools; 2) documenting the educational and social gains of children experiencing the programs; and 3) establishing a number of 'demonstration' programs suitable for training purposes (Kipkorir, p. 342).

As other African states achieved independence, the shared dynamics of colonial legacy, political uncertainty, financial and other limitations of a new government, NGO and private participation in the provision of care, and donor involvement and influence presented a complex vortex of forces. The need to establish ECD policies, regulations and regulatory structures, training, supervision, and the provision of rural as well as urban services, typically took a backseat to other government priorities in most newly independent countries.

While ECD was seldom identified as a priority in post-independence African countries, most new governments were not unaware of the importance of ECD and the opportunities it could afford the country-building process. As the Minister of Education for Zimbabwe noted in 1989 (nine years after independence): "The school system is very constraining as we can not move away very far from the models we inherited . . . [however] in pre-school we are in virgin territory . . . and I think this gives us possibilities for very innovative approaches at the same time ensuring we have the highest quality" (Fay Chung, 1989, in Chada, p. 614).

As other African states achieved independence, many moved through the dynamics of recognizing both the challenges and opportunities afforded by ECD described above. Given these challenges, it is interesting to note the readiness of many African leaders to play key facilitative roles in recognizing the Rights of the Child. Early in 1989 the potential for mounting a successful World Summit for Children was still very much in doubt. However, at the Francophone Summit in Dakar in May 1989, Presidents Traore of Mali and Diouf of Senegal "put their weight behind a resolution stating that Africa wanted a World Summit for Children." (Black, 1996, p. 27). A similar statement from the Organization for African Unity (OAU) followed in July. At the World Summit itself, held in September 1990, President Traore co-

chaired the session with Brian Mulroney, Prime Minister of Canada. Many African countries were early signators to the Declaration.

It is against this African backdrop of government interest in child-related issues but balanced against enormous challenges related to structural, financial and often civil disorder and, more recently, in the context of broader international support for ECD amongst donors and international organizations, that most African states have pursued advances in ECD.

IV. ECD Policy Development in Selected Sub-Saharan Africa countries

Information regarding ECD policy development and implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa is relatively scarce. While virtually all African states have policies or legislation that impact young children (those from birth through school entry), quite often such policies and legislation are sectoral in nature and typically little coordination exists across sectors. There are only a handful of recent projects that provide information in some detail. These include:

- African International ECD Seminars (1997, 1998) that led, in turn, to the development of the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU 2001-2004). ECDVU documents include initial proposals from 11 country committees identifying key ECD goals (submitted in 2000), 10 participant-generated country reports (2001), and several final projects focused on policy development or implementation issues.
- Association for the Development of Education in Africa – Working Group on ECD (ADEA-WGECD) Policy Studies Project. (Decision to create the Project, March 1999; data collection from August 2000 to May 2001; final reports, June 2001.) This project includes the only continent-wide survey, as well as three case studies of ECD specific policies (Ghana, Namibia, Mauritius).
- ADEA-WGECD Project to Support National Policy Planning for Three Countries of West Africa. (Data collection from June 2002 to December 2003; final report, February 2004.) This project engaged in policy planning activities with three Francophone countries (Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mauritania).
- World Bank sub-sector analysis of ECD as part of broader education and training performance in Namibia.

The two ADEA-WGECD policy-related projects (Torkington, October 2001, and Vargas-Baron, February 2004) represent the most in-depth and the only quasi-comparative studies of ECD policy and policy development to have been undertaken in Sub-Saharan Africa. The two projects provide reasonably detailed information on six countries and construct a useful, broader context for consideration of the more focused work undertaken by several ECD leaders participating in the ECDVU program. For this reason the ADEA-WGECD policy projects will be considered first, then the ECDVU projects. An overview of findings from these sets of studies will be considered in light of more recent observations in Namibia.

ADEA-WGED

"The Working Group on ECD is guided by a consultative group composed of African countries and international agencies with strong commitments to ECD" (Volgelaar, 2004, overview provided at WGECD meeting in Accra, Ghana, June 2004). The Working Group on ECD (WGECD) was created in 1997 with UNICEF as the lead agency; in 1998 the leadership of the Group was shifted to the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

1. ADEA-WGECD Policy Studies Project (2000-2001)

In 1999, "against a backdrop of renewed international commitment to ECD as an important part of Basic Education," the WGECD initiated an ECD Policy Studies Project. The project focused on the issue of national government commitment to ECD and on ways in which the WGECD could encourage and support such a commitment, particularly in relation to policy development (ADEA-WGECD handout at MINEDAF VIII, December 2002, Arusha, Tanzania).

The ADEA-WGECD ECD Policy Project had two main activities:

1) Case studies were conducted, led by in-country teams, in Ghana, Namibia and Mauritius in the period 2000-2001. "The selection of the three countries was based on the grounds that all three had set out to develop a distinct ECD policy, separate from the ECD sections in the sectoral policies of education, health, social welfare and women's issues, and were committed to an holistic approach to ECD" (Torkington, October 1, 2001).
2) "A survey …. of ECD throughout Africa was conducted to provide a wider context for the case-studies. Its focus was on policy issues and included a questionnaire that was sent to all Ministers of Education in Sub-Saharan Africa" (handout at MINEDAF VIII meeting, December 2002). In October 2000, 49 questionnaires were sent out and a total of 33 were returned by July 2001 (Torkington, October 1, 2001).

The three case studies are somewhat uneven in quality and character. The Namibian report (Namibia Resource Consultants, June 2001) is a surprisingly candid account of a policy and system that looks good on paper but was quite problematic in reality. At the time of the report's authorship, government had shifted responsibility for the policy (a quite progressive and visionary document) from its initial 'home Ministry' (Regional and Local Government and Housing) to a newly formed Ministry, the Ministry for Women Affairs. Advances that had been made in the initial period, following Cabinet approval in 1996, were beginning to slip away, including provision of country-wide training via a training of trainers model. Virtually all of the concerns raised in the 2001 report were confirmed in a 2004 review of ECD and ECD policies in Namibia undertaken by the author.

While the Namibia report was refreshingly candid, the Ghana report (Boakye, Adamu-Issah & Etse, March 2001) was more opaque, providing less insight into the relationship between policy, policy formulation processes, and activities underway on the ground. The Ghana situation had the potential to explore what happens when a government encounters extreme delays in policy approval. The National Seminar that produced the Accra Declaration in 1993 is considered a turning point in creating a holistic policy statement—the type of statement finally approved 11 (!) years later in 2004. Questions that arise in such a protracted process involve not only 'why did it take so long' (this issue is explored, but lacks critical insights), but how did this overly-long process impact the provision, regulation, funding, and related issues regarding ECD in Ghana? On these important issues the report is largely silent.

The Mauritius report (Bassant & Moti, December, 2000) fell somewhere between the other two in terms of clarity and critique. The Mauritian situation was somewhat similar to Namibia insofar as Mauritius was relatively early in its implementation process following publication of the policy by government in 1998 (Namibia's policy had been approved by Cabinet in 1996 and was published the same year). In the Namibian and the Mauritian cases the span of time from initial workshop/conference to explore the development of an ECD policy and the promulgation of that policy was from two to four years (Namibia: 1992-1996; Mauritius: 1996-1998). The Mauritius report highlights two major achievements in the one- to two-year interval between the policy being established and commencement of the ADEA-WGECD study. These include: a) capacity building (primarily a range of training activities) and b) advocacy (includes parent education, sensitization of ECD managers, raising community awareness of ECD, and so on) (Bassant & Moti, p. i). But the report also includes eight items for 'remedial action' and 12 'recommendations on a future course of action' (pp. ii, iii). The Mauritius report, in comparison to the two other reports, provides the clearest 'road map' for future action.

In 2002 an overview of the WGECD Policy Studies Project was prepared for the MINEDAF VIII meeting that took place in Arusha, Tanzania. The handout identifies the major findings of the Project and includes: a) recommendations from the case studies, b) recommendations based on the survey, and c) final recommendations.

The recommendations based on the survey, and the final recommendations drawn from both the case studies and the survey, are quite general in nature. However, some of the recommendations from the case studies are more specific and could provide an interested government with 'steps to take,' for example:

A. Formulation of an ECD policy:

- hold an initial national conference…with suitably high level representation (#2)
- ensure consultation with all ECED stakeholders at every stage of policy development (#4)
- establish a task force to produce the policy document with meticulous recording (#5)

B. Contents of an holistic ECD policy:

- spell out with absolute clarity the roles and responsibilities of key players, particularly government departments (#2)
- create a coordinating body, such as an inter-Ministerial committee (#3)
- members of the coordinating committee should be at a high enough level to make decisions without reporting back (#4)
- a lead Ministry or an organization answerable to government is necessary for the policy to be represented in parliament (#5)
- the funding of the policy is the most crucial issue and must be addressed explicitly in the policy, in particular the necessary contributions from government departments (#6)

C. Implementation issues:

- monitoring and evaluation of the policy and its implementation should be formalized (#2)
- apart from government funding, other sources of funds should be explored (#4)
- decentralized funding to local governments and/or NGOs as the main implementers of policy should take high priority (#5)
- government sectors are likely to retreat to the sectoral approach to ECD, and safeguards must be developed (#6)

The points excerpted above represent useful guidelines that emerge from the three case studies. For the most part these points are not uniquely based on the case studies' experiences (for example, the Namibian policy, developed in the period 1995/96 with CG assistance, also raised most of the points noted above). Nevertheless, they are useful regardless of when or how they came to be identified, and they are particularly appropriate for consideration in the African context. That being said, there is far more to ECD policy development and implementation in Africa than is addressed in these points, or in the 2002 ADEA-WGECD *Summary of the Policy Studies Project (Volgelaar, 2002).* The second ADEA-WGECD project will be considered next with an eye to how that work represents a further elaboration of complexities encountered in the policy planning, designing and implementing process in Africa.

2. ADEA-WGECD Project to Support National Policy Planning for ECD in Three Countries of West Africa

In December 2001 the WGECD held a consultative meeting to discuss the results of the Policy Studies Project. "This discussion led to expressions of interest for support to draft IECD Policies on the part of three Francophone countries: Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Senegal" (Vargas-Baron, February 29, 2004, p. 5). On June 15, 2002 this second, significant ECD policy-related study commenced and was concluded by the end of November 2003, with a final report dated February 29, 2004. While the objectives of the second WGECD project were not the same as the first, there is considerable congruity between concerns raised in the first set of reports and the recommendations contained in the second study.

Vargas-Baron, the consultant hired by ADEA-WGECD to undertake this second ADEA-supported ECD policy-oriented project, identifies six inter-related sets of challenges to achieving comprehensive and participatory national IECD policy planning in the three countries. These six sets (with a total of 25 items) represent a daunting list of challenges and,

while not all are present in all parts of sub-Saharan Africa, or to the same degree of intensity in all parts of Africa, most are. The list is sobering:

- Institutional challenges
- Environmental challenges
- Health, nutrition and sanitation challenges
- Education challenges
- Conflict challenges
- Prevalent challenges for children

With the above-noted challenges as context, and with several general positives added to the picture (i.e., "…highly dedicated to their children, hard-working, skilled in specific professional areas, and very collaborative"; Vargas-Baron, p. 7), the Project undertook to address four objectives:

- To support selected countries in conducting their policy planning processes and to assist them to prepare their policies for future implementation.
- To strengthen national networking, partnerships, cooperation and policy dialogue among practitioners, communities, NGOs, trainers, activities, government representatives and other stakeholders in IECD.
- To enhance methodological and analytical skills for policy development and analysis in the field of IECD and thereby strengthen the institutional capacity within the government and other institutions.
- To identify strategic areas of action in the fields of advocacy, mobilization of public and political support, capacity building and resource mobilization for IECD in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Project had only 17 months to address the four objectives (June 2002-November 2003). The selection of the active verbs in the list (*support*, *strengthen*, *enhance* and *identify*) was critical to arriving at a determination that the "four main objectives and most of the sub-objectives have been achieved"; however, the author is not misguided in noting "…from the view of the 'bottom line': policies completed, adopted and implementation begun, more work remains to be done" (p. 10). As is clear in reviewing the earlier case studies of Ghana, Namibia and Mauritius, progress, or at least a sense of progress, is certainly achievable, but delivering on the 'bottom line' is far more challenging. We are reminded that Ghana took over a decade to move from a completed ECD policy to adoption by government, and Namibia has yet to achieve effective implementation of an exemplary policy eight years post-adoption. Seventeen months is a very short period of time in the context of ECD policy evolution in Africa.

Vargas-Baron identifies 15 'major lessons that have been learned' as a result of the three-country policy planning project, with sub-point elaborations under each lesson. Each of the points and sub-points is useful in better understanding the challenges faced and how this initial phase of the policy process might effectively move forward. A theme that runs through many of the points is the importance of working intersectorally and multi-organizationally within country (many stakeholders) and of working towards achieving enhanced synergy and cost-effectiveness by involving several countries in the process at the same time. This finding is consistent with the experiences of the ECD Seminars (1995-1999) and the ECDVU program delivery (2001-2004) discussed in the next section.

Another theme that emerges across the 15 lessons is to proceed with flexibility and sensitivity regarding where each country is at in terms of its readiness for policy planning and implementation activities. This includes, among other indicators: the availability of 'baseline' information available regarding the current situation facing children and families; familiarity with many of the structural concepts being promoted, including understanding of an integrated approach and its implications for established government systems; and familiarity with the ideas and literature regarding, for example, the importance of the early years. Each of these 'readiness' elements can require years of development activity. The ECDVU approach is one

that is based on a longer-term engagement with and support for advancing country-identified priorities in ECD, and the pilot of that work will be discussed in the following section.

Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU)

The ECDVU grew out of a series of two- and three-week seminars requested by UNICEF Headquarters in 1994 to promote ECD in the 'Developing'/Majority World. The first of these international 'Institutes' (as they were then known) was held at the University of Victoria in Canada in 1995 with follow-up Regional Seminars in Southeast Asia/Pacific (1997) and in Africa (1997, 1998). The Seminars brought together ECD leaders from each region as part of a highly interactive network-building and knowledge-sharing process. Following the 2nd Seminar in Africa (The Gambia, 1998), the World Bank requested support in mounting an African International ECD Conference for the purpose of reaching greater numbers of African countries interested in promoting ECD. Seminar participants from the first two African Seminars had requested that the organizer seek funds for an ongoing set of linked seminars that could also serve as a vehicle for receiving graduate level academic credit. The result was a proposal to the World Bank to fund the development of an Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU) (Pence, 1999).

Participation in the ECDVU is through a country application process wherein a knowledgeable ECD country committee is created to: 1) identify key intersectoral goals for ECD over a 5- to 8-year period, and 2) identify an appropriate intersectoral, multi-organizational 'team' of ECD leaders committed to addressing the country agenda for ECD. (Funding for the development of the ECDVU program was received from the Norwegian Educational Trust Fund and the World Bank; funding for the delivery is through a consortium of international donors, UNICEF, UNESCO, Bernard van Leer Foundation, and CIDA, plus local employers of nominated participants.) The names of the first African cohort of ECDVU participants (10 countries participated), background information on the ECDVU, and copies of papers and reports produced by the participants are located at http://www.ecdvu.org/.

An initial assignment for each country team was to develop a comprehensive report on the current status of ECD; additional assignments addressed individuals' specific interests and/or employment-related activities regarding advancing ECD, and each participant completed a final major project or thesis under the supervision of an in-country and out-of-country committee. These works by the 27 participants who completed the full three-year program (30 individuals commenced the program in 2001), provide an additional data base for a study of ECD policies in Africa. Of particular interest for this report are the several major projects that focused most specifically on policy-related issues.

These studies, in many cases, provide the opportunity for a closer examination of particular aspects of policy development and implementation dynamics than can be found in the preceding ADEA-WGECD documents. Materials from the following projects will be briefly considered in this section: George Kameka, Tanzania, *Improving Multi-sectoral Cooperation and Coordination in Support of ECD Programmes;* Margaret Amponsah, Ghana, *Assessment of the Current Coordination and Supervision of ECD Programmes in Ghana*; Francis Chalamanda, Malawi, *Coordinating the Development and Implementation of Malawi's National Plan of Action (NPA) for Survival, Protection and Development of Children.* In addition there will be some reference to the work of Hilda Nankunda, Uganda, *Policies and Programmes in Support of Child Care for Working Families: A Case Study of Data Sets and Current Activities*; Abeba Habtom, Eritrea, *Reaching the Hard to Reach: Training of Trainers for Parenting Enrichment*; and Asha Mohammed Ahmed, Tanzania, *Building Community Leadership for Quality Sustainability in Madrasa Preschools*. Also included are four HIV/AIDS-focused studies: Susan Sabaa, Ghana, *Development of an Alternative Orphans and Vulnerable Children Care Model*; Olive Akomas, Nigeria, *Assessment of the Caring Practices in Two Motherless Babies' Homes in Abia State, Nigeria and the Development and Delivery of a Nutrition Training Program to the Staff of These Homes to Improve Nutrition of Children in Their Care;* Margaret Akinware, Zambia, *Adaptation of an Established Measure to Assess the Quality of Orphanage Child Services: The Inclusive Quality Assurance Model;* and Lydia Nyesigomwe,

Uganda, *Strengthening the Capacity of Grandparents in Providing Care to Children Less than Eight Years Old Affected by HIV/AIDS*.

The first three projects (Kameka in Tanzania, Amponsah in Ghana and Chalamanda in Malawi), address key aspects of policy development and/or implementation. Insofar as each of these projects took at least nine months to complete (and some were a focus throughout much of the three years of participants' involvement in the ECDVU program), they illustrate the amount of time and energy that is required to move forward even fairly discrete elements of policy development and implementation processes.

Tanzania

George Kameka, Commissioner for Social Welfare in the Ministry of Labour, Youth Development and Sports, focused his major project on the challenges one faces in attempting to achieve a higher degree of intersectoral cooperation and coordination across diverse Ministries, each with 'a piece' of ECD. At the same time Kameka was addressing this topic he, his ECDVU colleagues, and a key NGO, AMANI (under the direction of founder Chanel Croker), were also involved in promoting the development of an ECD Network in Tanzania. To a certain degree, Kameka's project and development of an ECD Network were complementary activities as each involved information sharing, consultation and networking, one with a primary focus within government and the other, the ECD Network, looking at government as one of the key ECD stakeholders. Both issues, networking across key stakeholders in a country and working within government to promote intersectoral cooperation, coordination and communication, were identified as critical in the ADEA-WGECD Case Studies Project and the Francophone Policy Planning Project.

The idea for a Tanzanian ECD Network grew out of ECDVU's request to AMANI to organize an intersectoral, multi-organizational ECD Committee. "Following a series of meetings to discuss Tanzania's participation in the ECDVU programme, the Tanzanian ECD Network was formed in December of 2000 to coordinate the development of an active national ECD coalition…" (Tanzanian ECD Network Newsletter, June 2003, 1.1.2). Approximately 18 individuals from 11 organizations attended the first meeting in August 2000, and subsequent meetings led to the completion of a proposal to join and the nomination of the four individuals to participate, one from government (Kameka) and three from INGOs – Leoncia Salakana with PLAN International, Asha Mohammed Ahmed with the Aga Khan Madrasa programs, and Ben Missani, initially with Save the Children but completing with the INGO Basic Needs UK.

Between August 2000 and 2004 the Tanzanian Network became a reality. In June of 2003 the Network held a well-attended ECD Forum focused on Tanzania's ECD EFA Action Plan for 2003-2015. The success of that work led to others: in 2004 the Network undertook official registration as an NGO and appointed an interim secretariat and steering committee; district level ECD Networks became functional; and the Network played a key role in supporting a planning meeting for National ECD and HIV/AIDS that took place in April of 2004. A key learning from this particular story is that while a call for such a network takes only a few seconds to utter or write, achieving a sustainable, dynamic and inclusive network typically takes years and is filled with complexities—and potentials.

Achieving greater coordination, cooperation and communication across Ministries responsible for various aspects of ECD is no less time-consuming and complex. Kameka chose to focus his project activities largely on information-sharing activities, based in part on his own experience as a senior government official whose own orientation towards the importance of intersectoral cooperation had been modified as he came to more fully understand the holistic purpose and intent of ECD. Through approaching other senior officers in other Ministries with 'ECD sensitization' materials, Kameka not only served as a conduit for information sharing but also served as a role model for cooperative work across sectors, placing the interests of the child ahead of sector foci. How successful such sensitization activities will be in increasing intersectoral cooperation remains, in Kameka's words, "to be seen," as the time for implementation was relatively short (approximately nine months at the time of report drafting).

Ghana

Margaret Amponsah is the National Coordinator for ECCD within the Basic Education Division, Ghana Education Service (GES), Ministry of Education. While Kameka, from his more senior position, focused primarily on 'reaching across' Ministries and sectors, Amponsah focused on her own Ministry and the degree to which ECCD was well understood amongst her own division heads, as well as 'down the line' to service delivery. Her work highlights additional key impediments to realizing quality ECD care and education in an African context. As with Kameka, staff exposure to well conceptualized IECD information is part of the problem, but the governmental system dynamics themselves pose additional problems, within Ministries as well as across.

Amponsah's research highlights important gaps in her Ministry's handling of ECD including "the absence of policy statements regarding the coordination and supervision of ECCD programs" (Amponsah, p. 60). In addition, division head familiarity with ECD generally, with the need for coordination of planning and services and with provisions in the draft policy, is weak As a result, in the districts surveyed, "there is the absence of a comprehensive operational plan and a systematic training program for ECD coordinators, head teachers and teachers of preschools.…" As Amponsah notes: "Because ECD was relegated to the background some years back, most of the regional coordinators were withdrawn and reassigned to handle other schedules, which has also impeded the smooth running of the program within the public sector.…" (Amponsah, p. 61). The picture that emerges is that of a program that has been marginalized within the system, lacking visibility, priority and coordination from more senior levels (Divisions within the Ministry) through to the delivery of services on the ground. In addition, basic data regarding enrolment numbers were difficult to collect, further impeding future planning efforts.

The very recent (August 2004) approval of the long-awaited Ghana policy on ECD may provide the impetus for reformation of the ECD systems in the country. But Amponsah's study of ECD in one Ministry indicates how fundamental and systemic those challenges will be.

Malawi

Francis Chalamanda, National Coordinator for ECD based in the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services (formerly the Ministry of Gender and Community Services), entered the ECDVU program at a time when the government of Malawi was considering enacting a National Policy on Early Childhood Development. That policy, and a policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children, were approved by Cabinet in February 2003 and officially launched March 1, 2004. The focus of Chalamanda's major project was supporting the coordination and implementation of a *National Action Plan (NAP) for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in Malawi from 2003 to 2013*.

Chalamanda's work focuses on an essential key to forward movement in ECD in African countries: not only must policies be developed, but action plans must be developed, coordinated, monitored and updated as needed in order for the intent of the policies to be realized.

Malawi's 2004 NAP is the second in its history (the first one was referred to as an NPA). The first was developed in 1992 for the period 1992-2002 *(National Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection of Children in the 1990s*). Progress on the implementation of that plan was reported to the UN General Assembly in 2002 ,and the nine main challenges to implementation formed the background for the 2004 NAP, along with a UNICEF 2002 Situation Analysis to assess the implementation of the 1997-2001 Programme for Children and Women (Chalamanda, p. 9).

Chalamanda saw the NAP as central to the future of ECD in Malawi and chose it as the focus of his major project in order to:

- identify strategies that facilitate implementation of the ECD and OVC policies and other sectoral strategic plans;
- outline mechanisms, processes and strategies for coordinating the development and implementation of the NAP; and,

- outline operational linkages and networks between the two policies and other existing child care policies, sectoral strategic plans and institutions. (Chalamanda, p. 3).

Towards the completion of his major project work, Chalamanda flagged the following as some of the significant challenges he faced in his coordination work:

- Limited number of committed partners taking part in the development of the NAP
- Limited capacity of some partners to follow systematically the agreed-upon framework
- Achieving synergy across the 12 thematic areas of the NAP is challenging
- Some partners are challenged by the role of children and caregivers in the process of developing the NAP
- Inadequate resources in terms of funds, transport, books, stationary and computers to be used by the partners in their work

The challenges noted in Malawi have a familiar ring: a small nucleus of concerned, committed and informed individuals; bureaucratic challenges to working across sectors; inadequate resources of various types; inadequate knowledge in the public domain regarding the importance of ECD; marginalized importance of ECD within government. At the same time, there is progress across countries: a growing, inter-organizational critical mass in Tanzania; approval of ECD policies in Ghana and Malawi; the potential for greater resources for ECD in some jurisdictions; efforts to link and coordinate ECD with related movements, for example with OVC in Malawi; increasing clarity regarding bureaucratic impediments; and heightened awareness of international and African literature linking ECD with social and economic development, with the MDGs, and with PRSPs. While the challenges are great, the indicators of progress are not bleak.

The work of several other ECDVU participants feeds and supports these inter-related policy-associated advances.

Eritrea

Abeba Habtom is the Section Head for Early Childhood Development and Special Needs in the Ministry of Education in Eritrea. Under Habtom's leadership, the last three years have seen the finalization of a curriculum for both formal and non-formal community-based children's programs, linked with an outreach services model reaching all Zobas (districts) in the country (the curriculum has been translated into eight mother-tongue languages). In addition, she has sought to address long-term community capacity building through the implementation of a multi-media Parenting Enrichment Strategy utilizing a training of trainers model.

Habtom's work in Eritrea provides useful insights into ways in which in-ministry dynamics can become more supportive of ECD activities and, through such support, have greater impacts at regional and local levels. The parenting enrichment strategy is designed to enhance local-level awareness of the importance of the early years, providing at the same time a stronger and more informed 'social will' supportive of ECD issues.

Tanzania

Asha Mohammed Ahmed is the Project Director for Zanzibar's Aga Khan-supported Madrasa Resource Centre (ZMRC). Her project focused on capacity building for Madrasa Preschool Program's (MPP) Community Resource Teams (CRTs) in Zanzibar. The MPP had gone through two phases with the aim of supporting poor communities to establish, manage and own quality preschools. During this time, there had been capacity building for different sectors of communities. However, there was no support system. This project describes the process of empowering CRTs who will be responsible for ensuring that the existing technical expertise in communities is sustained. Ahmed's major project describes training and support given to CRTs in order to affect these objectives. This includes centre- and site-based training for CRTs, monitoring and evaluation, as well as developing support materials for use by communities and CRTs.

Uganda

Hilda Nankunda focused her major project work on an analysis of extant policies and programs designed to address the child care needs of working families in Uganda. Nankunda's work represents a seldom-seen focus for ECD research in Africa, but one that will undoubtedly become more common in the years ahead as labour laws advance to address a changing labour force dynamic. Nankunda reviewed collective bargaining documents, trade union and worker association materials, and laws related to employment in both the private and public sectors and conducted a number of interviews with key individuals and opinion leaders. Her findings support that "existing policies and programs are inadequate to support working families with quality child care, [and] there is limited awareness of international and national provisions in support of working families" (Nankunda, p. ii).

HIV/AIDS-impacted children in Zambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda

Margaret Akinware is a Project Officer in charge of education for UNICEF-Zambia. She has had a well recognized career in African ECD, having worked for many years with UNICEF in her home country of Nigeria. Akinware's focus for her thesis research was on assessing the quality of care for HIV/AIDS-impacted children. In Zambia the very large numbers of HIV/AIDS-impacted children has overflowed the capacity of extended families to provide care and led to the growth of 'children's homes' provided by non-relatives of the children. Akinware's interest in better understanding the nature and quality of such care and implications for longer-term development led her to adapt a qualitative assessment instrument, designed to incorporate the perspectives and 'voices' of children in care and their caregivers in an assessment process for use in Zambia. The revised tool worked well from the perspectives of the children, the caregivers and the committee that approved Margaret's work.

Susan Sabaa, National Coordinator of the Ghanaian NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child (GHCRC), developed a strong interest in various caregiving approaches for HIV/AIDS-impacted children in one of her first ECDVU assignments. That interest (which led to the production of a videotape exploring such care in Ghana) also became the focus of Sabaa's final project report. In that report Sabaa examines the rationale, structure, dynamics, and 'life in' three different programs making recommendations that should be considered in the development of orphan care programs and policies in Ghana and beyond.

Olive Akomas, Deputy Director and State Nutrition Officer for Abia State in Nigeria, focused her work on an assessment of caregiving practices in two motherless babies' homes, facilities caring primarily for children impacted by HIV/AIDS. Akomas combined practices specified in the "Family and Community Practices that Promote Child Survival, Growth and Development" with practices identified by WHO to construct a 14-item assessment instrument. Following the assessment, she developed and delivered a one-day nutrition training program for staff of the two programs.

Lydia Nyesigomwe, Director of Action for Children Uganda, was deeply involved in HIV/AIDS orphan care throughout most of the period of the ECDVU delivery period. Following the advice of the community with which her NGO was working, Action for Children initiated a one-year pilot program designed to support grandparents providing care for their HIV/AIDS-impacted grandchildren. The initiative focused on promoting "small Grandparents Action Support (GAS) groups for social and emotional support," providing basic training regarding ECD and HIV/AIDS, locally supported food provision, and in other ways responding to the voiced needs of the grandparents (p. ii). The pilot proved successful and Nyesigomwe has received funds to extend the approach to other communities in Uganda.

Observations from Namibia and broader perspectives on ECD policy motivation, development, implementation and program delivery in Sub-Saharan Africa

In August of 2004 the author had the opportunity to examine closely the interaction of policy motivation, development, implementation and program delivery in Namibia. As part of that work, the African references noted above were consulted. The following pages draw on a variety of sources to identify challenges and opportunities facing many African countries as they move to more effectively address the needs of young children.

Policy Motivation

As Maggie Black noted in the opening lines of her history of UNICEF (1996) "times have changed" in regards to ECD appearing on national and international agendas. Prior to 1990, an auspicious year for children internationally with initial signatures on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, hosting of the Education for All Conference in Jomtien, Thailand and the World Summit for Children in New York, young children, particularly those from birth to school-entry age, were largely invisible in most African policy documents, subsumed within broader designations of 'children' or 'families.' Since 1990 young children have been 'reborn,' reconceptualized as citizens in their own right.

Prior to 1990, care and education for pre-grade one children appeared in African policy documents rarely, and largely by reason of a kindergarten/nursery school attached to certain schools and typically limited to the children of colonial powers (Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa are examples), or through the efforts of faith-based, non-governmental (many examples across Africa), or donor groups animating policy engagement (Kenya as an example). Post-1990 one can see more diverse impulses including initiatives coming from governments, sometimes as a result of engagement with the CRC (Ghana, Senegal and Namibia as examples), the EFA (both the Jomtien and Dakar Conferences), or engagement with various international organizations or donors.

Times changed, both in terms of an increasing number of 'ECD animators' and in terms of government receptivity to such animation. With the engagement of the African Branch of the World Bank in promoting the importance of ECD in the mid-1990s, very significant funding flows became possible as well (Kenya, Uganda, Eritrea).

Policy Development

Most recent observers recommend, and many countries have held, initial country-wide conferences to launch ECD policy initiatives. Typically, key objectives include engaging government with the broader ECD stakeholder community, commencing a cooperative 'visioning' process, and initiating activities that can lead to useful policy and program developments and outcomes. Drafting, consultation and review activities are usually identified as the 'next steps' to be taken. It is at this point, rather than the conference stage, that African paths begin to diverge.

In Ghana the path from Conference (1993) to policy approval by government (2004) took 11 years, in Namibia four years, and Mauritius two years. But perhaps more significant than the years taken are the dynamics that begin to be visible 'behind' the process. Sometimes these dynamics play out before a policy can be approved, and sometimes after; certain similarities between the ECD experience in Ghana and in Namibia are instructive and will be considered across the policy development and policy implementation comments below.

The Ghana experience is exceptional, but the reasons behind the lengthy delays are not:

- a change in government;
- debates over which Ministry and what group within which Ministry would lead; and,
- a lack of a superordinate decisioning mechanism to resolve such differences.

These challenges are not unique to Ghana, although the timing of their impact certainly influenced the time required to approve an ECD policy.

Namibian movement from an initial Conference in 1992, through drafting and consultation processes, and on to Cabinet approval (1996) was not delayed by a change in government or protracted debate over which Ministry would take the lead. Namibia also benefited through having a sufficient number of ECD specialists available, for example, a key ECD trainer within the Ministry of Education, an excellent field person from UNICEF, strength in the faith-based and NGO communities, access to training of trainers support from South Africa, and access to the Consultative Group for ECCD all helped form the critical mass necessary to create and move forward an exceptionally progressive, integrated ECD policy statement. In short, the dynamics that blocked forward movement in Ghana were not obstacles in Namibia, and Namibia was able to approve an exceptional policy statement in a reasonable period of time—but Namibia would encounter its own significant challenges as it moved into policy implementation (see policy implementation and program delivery discussion below).

Briefly considering Tanzania, one can see in the quite exceptional work of AMANI, the ECDVU participants, and other organizational and individual advocates of ECD in Tanzania the creation of a foundation that should serve ECD extremely well in the future—a broad, multi-districts base of ECD support and understanding that was not present, to the same degree, in either Ghana or Namibia as each of those countries moved forward in the early 1990s. In Tanzania one also has the presence of a government that has already moved past its founding president and, in doing so, has maintained a good level of political stability (even given the more complex political structure of Zanzibar and Tanzania). The work initiated in attempting greater coordination and cooperation across Ministries (Kameka's project) should benefit future efforts, as will a growing critical mass of ECD leaders (partially through the ECDVU) both within and outside government. The comparison between Ghana and Namibia demonstrates the importance of timing, and one hopes that Tanzania will take advantage of its emergent strength to advance a strong policy agenda. Recent interactions with international groups and donors, as well as strengthening of ECD within UNICEF Tanzania, contribute to the potential for Tanzania at this time.

Malawi, one of the very poorest countries in the world, is moving towards a leadership role for ECD in Africa. Catherine Mbengue, UNICEF Country Representative during the launch period of the ECDVU program, was a strong advocate for ECD. UNICEF support for ECD generally, and the intersectoral participants in the ECDVU program more specifically, has significantly advanced the visibility and effectiveness of rural ECD, supported government's efforts to prioritize ECD in national policies, and advanced post-secondary support for ECD at Chancellor College, University of Malawi. The challenges noted by Chalamanda in his Report are largely ones of advancing capacity through educational and informational activities. Malawi finds itself in 2004 at the cusp of policy development moving into policy implementation with the benefit of a number of key partnerships in place (government, UNICEF, NGO and college/university). Nevertheless, overall capacity is still very limited in Malawi, and vigilance will be required to assure that appropriately trained individuals assume key roles from front-line training through government policy support.

Policy Implementation and Program Delivery

On paper, Namibia should be well down the road of policy implementation, having approved (in Cabinet) its ECD policy in 1996. As noted earlier, the policy itself provides a compelling and comprehensive vision (indeed, a model for consideration by other countries) of what ECD could be in Namibia—but is not.

The reasons for the shortfall go to the heart of the ECD challenge in Africa, which are fundamentally about capacity: individual and organizational. And, while funding is very often in short supply, in cases where money has been accessible, many of the central problems still persist. Throughout the ECDVU reports, in the ADEA reports and in closer observations in Namibia, the fabric for ECD support is precariously thin and the social and governmental structures fragile. At one point in time one can find very encouraging, cooperative work taking place and foundations for future work being established, only to return several years later and find much of that promising work has vanished.

The ADEA Report for Namibia (2001) describes such a situation where Cabinet approval of the ECD Policy was followed within two years by a *Guidelines for Programs* and a strong training of trainers program that had reached all of the districts and was working cooperatively with related Ministries. However, with the creation of a new ministry in 1998 and a shift of the ECD unit to the new ministry, many of the advances were lost or compromised. Intersectoral and interorganizational relationships that six years earlier appear to have been relatively effective, supportive and productive, were characterized by mistrust and inaction by 2004. Amponsah describes a similar situation in terms of government priorities shifting and knowledgeable staff shifting to other positions, leaving knowledge and communication vacuums in their wake. In Ghana, as well as in Namibia, Tanzania and Malawi, there are key staff at various levels who have no familiarity with relevant policy or program documents or the philosophies and purposes that lie behind such documents. Where there is such experience still in place, program and policy efforts appear to be much stronger.

In some countries, it does not seem to matter a great deal if the country has been successful in approving an ECD policy, for there is virtually no 'take-up' on the policy, no effective implementation by those who should be leaders, for example, District Officers with ECD responsibilities who have never even seen the policy, and in at least one country the policy itself, over eight years old, had never been translated beyond its initial English production. An exception to what could be a general pattern across much of Africa is the strong district (Zoba) ECD work underway in Eritrea, with translation of program and policy materials into eight official languages.

As noted earlier in this report, Vargas-Baron (2004) describes the very considerable challenges that faced "achieving comprehensive and participatory IECD policy planning" in three Francophone countries of West Africa. Those challenges, "institutional, environmental, health, nutrition and sanitation, education, conflict and special challenges for children," often continue, as we have seen in other reports, beyond the promulgation of policy impacting implementation as well. A great challenge in many African countries, particularly in the southern and eastern regions, is HIV/AIDS and the dramatic impact it is having across all levels and facets of society. Education systems, health systems, governance systems are all weakening, in some countries dramatically so, under the relentless onslaught of the pandemic.

Nevertheless, there are signs of growth and strengthening in ECD in Africa. Vargas-Baron's recent report is not a pessimistic account—quite the contrary –and the 27 project and thesis reports produced by the ECDVU pilot group are filled with a sense of moving forward in support of new and strengthened policies, programs, training, and support for both urban and rural communities across Africa. From the ECDVU accounts we see innovative approaches to old challenges, for example: the interorganizational commitment to building a viable ECD Network in Tanzania is impressive, and on that foundation a host of complementary initiatives can be built; the strategies that can be found in Malawi's Plan of Action, following approval of their ECD policy suggests a realistic assessment of the considerable challenges that lie ahead; Eritrea's successes in reaching rural and remote communities with a program that recognizes and supports local knowledge while respectfully introducing additional ideas; Ghana's success in finally realizing government approval of an ECD Policy on the cusp of hosting the 3rd African International ECD Conference in May 2005 gives hope, not only for Ghana but for the 25+ other African countries expected to attend. These are but a few stories out of Africa that give us hope for the future.

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