



ECCE and Non-Formal Education: 'Widening the Reach to All Children'

Introduction

Tanzania's National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (2006-2010) outlines the government's commitment to "increase the number of young children prepared for schools and schools prepared to care for children". Two proposed steps to achieving this goal include (i) 'Expanding the primary education system to develop quality pre-primary programmes that link with existing early childhood provision – health, nutrition, parenting education; and (ii) Promoting community-based day-care/pre-school.'¹ To date, a number of challenges have limited progress, including the government's ongoing struggle with ensuring equitable access to quality primary school services. This brief outlines a recent proposal by government that in order to reach to *all* children, pre-primary provision should not be limited to school-based services only, but be realised through a diverse *network of support services*. The brief then discusses efforts by the Non-Formal Education (NFE) sub-sector to take up this challenge by integrating parenting education and early childhood care and education (ECCE) awareness-raising into community-based adult and youth education programmes.

The Challenges of ECCE in Tanzania

Thirty-six percent of Tanzanian households live under the basic needs poverty line, and seventy-seven percent live in rural areas where basic services and infrastructure are poor. Most rural families rely on subsistence agriculture to sustain them. With lower education levels than men, women are often left to carry the heaviest agricultural workload.² The demands on them to provide and care for their children are high, but government support is minimal.

Increasingly, many women feel that they are failing to adequately support their young children's development.³ As a result, a high proportion of young children suffer from developmental delay which sets them on a path of failure when they enter school. To date, the government does not provide community day-care services or directly support such community initiatives. While 36.8 percent of 5-6 year old children are enrolled in pre-primary services nation-wide, most of these are non-government, fee-paying services in urban areas. Although the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training's current plans (2007-2011) include the provision of pre-primary services for 5-6 year old children in all primary schools, the realisation of these plans is limited by ongoing challenges within

primary schools, especially in rural areas. For example, so long as the serious shortage of primary teachers in rural areas continues, the deployment of teachers for pre-primary is hindered. This can be seen by the fact that, in 2007-2008, there was a 13.66 percent decline in government deployment of pre-primary teachers. Where government pre-primary services exist, the quality is limited by the fact that teachers lack any specific ECCE training.

At the same time, long distances to primary schools in some rural areas already limits children's timely enrolment in Grade 1, and excludes disabled children's access completely (in 2008, 26 percent of children in Grade 1 were overage, 8-13 years old). Therefore, the addition of pre-primary classes for even younger children in such schools has little meaning. The poor quality of primary schools and the low levels of student achievement have become a matter of national debate in Tanzania. However, what is less discussed is the fact that children are already failing in the early grades. Over the past five years, the highest primary school repetition rate has been in Grade 1 (9.7 percent, 2007-2008), and in 2007, 21.8 percent of children failed Grade 4, especially girls.⁴

Towards a 'Network of Support Services' for ECCE

Recognising the ongoing challenges with primary services, the government has proposed an expansion of the concept of pre-primary education from school-based services only, to one that "...includes parent education, community-based pre-school / pre-primary classes and even home-based pre-schools, [which] can be viewed as a network of support services that widen the reach to all children."⁵ Whilst not ignoring the importance of formal pre-primary services for all children, this proposal opens up important opportunities for Tanzania to ensure that support for ECCE starts at the beginning and prepares children for success⁶ by also focusing technical and financial support towards families and communities.

Building on this opportunity, and its reach to poor rural communities, the Department of NFE has called attention to the significant role it can play in such an approach by integrating parenting education and knowledge about children's rights and development into its Integrated Community-Based Adult Education (ICBAE) and youth education programmes. Recently, it has called on non-government organizations (NGOs) and ECCE professionals to work in partnership in piloting programmes and resources designed to:

¹ United Republic of Tanzania (URT). (2005). National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP), 2006-2010, DSM.

² URT/RAWG. (2007). Poverty and Human Development Report. RAWG.

³ Croker, C. (2007). Young Children's Early Learning in Two Rural Communities in Tanzania: Implications for Policy and Programme Development. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of South Australia.

⁴ URT / Ministry of Education & Vocational Training. (2008a). Basic Education Statistics.

⁵ URT/MOEV. (2006). Education Sector Development Programme: Primary Education Development Plan II (2007-2011). BEDC, MOEV.

⁶ CGECCD – Four Cornerstones to ECCD.

1. strengthen and expand community parenting education;
2. empower communities to establish and manage their own day-care centres and pre-schools; and
3. support greater understanding between families, communities, service providers and local officials about ECCE.⁷

Linking ECCE and Non-Formal Education

A recent study⁸ in two rural communities in Tanzania investigating local knowledge and beliefs about young children's learning showed that even though families and communities were struggling to adequately care for and educate their young children, (i) they held a rich body of knowledge about how their children best learn, and (ii) they had made initial efforts to address their challenges by establishing their own community pre-schools. Rather than call on government to provide formal pre-schools services for them, what they wanted was (i) specialists to work with them to help them develop their programmes within their community context, and train their 'teachers;' and (ii) government commitment to contribute some funding to support their programmes. To date, there are no government systems in place for providing such support, and the only model of education service provision these communities have known is that of formal school services provided by 'outsiders,' which they have little or no say in, in terms of content or approaches.

In contrast to formal education, however, NFE programmes are based on the REFLECT methodology which "...aims to improve the meaningful participation of poor and marginalized people in decisions that affect their lives, through strengthening their ability to communicate."⁹ Therefore, NFE adult and youth education programmes are designed to be flexible, in content and approaches, and responsive to local needs and interests. Linking community ECCE issues with such an approach can empower communities by developing their confidence (i) to find local solutions for improving the quality of care and early education of their young children, and (ii) to demand their rights to equitable access to quality services and support for their children.

While community ECCE initiatives are often built on a spirit of volunteerism, with little or no support, it is very difficult for poor communities to sustain them over time. As an alternative model, NFE programmes are facilitated by trained para-professionals nominated by communities themselves, who receive a monthly allowance from government. These programmes are coordinated by Local Government Authorities, who also provide training for facilitators. By integrating ECCE issues into these systems, the NFE sub-sector is well placed to develop greater understanding of ECCE among families, communities, service providers and local officials,¹⁰ and ensure more

support to community-based ECCE initiatives through local government plans and budgets.

Like all social service sectors in Tanzania, the NFE sub-sector faces significant challenges. However, due to the declining literacy rates in Tanzania, the government has re-prioritised NFE to be strengthened and expanded through building new partnerships beyond community-based literacy education to include income generation, vocational skills, health, nutrition, sanitation, as well as life skills. In this context, opportunities for forging strong partnerships between the NFE sub-sector, NGOs, ECCE professionals, and development partners creates significant new pathways for improving the quality of ECCE at the family and community level in Tanzania, especially for the most vulnerable children.

Conclusion

The NFE community empowerment approach in Tanzania seeks to nurture stronger links with ECCE, and has the potential to switch the focus of efforts toward parents and communities as the main agents of change in improving the care and education of young children. Such an approach has the potential of strongly complementing formal pre-primary and primary services, and to influence broader change for young children in three ways:

1. At the family level – by providing access to child development information and parenting education programmes as well as improving women's literacy levels;
2. At the community level – by supporting local capacity development to establish, manage, and run quality community child-care arrangements; and
3. At the local and national government level – by empowering poor communities to demand their rights to quality services and support in the care and education of their young children.

If well supported, the NFE sub-sector could play a significant role in the proposed network of support services for young children. At the same time, families and communities could be significantly empowered to call for "children's concerns ... [to be recognised] as state responsibilities, not overlooked nor relegated only to domestic, private affairs to be supported by charitable, non-state actors with off-budget external assistance."¹¹

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⁷ URT/MOEVT. (2008b). The Importance of Parenting Education on Child Care Practices: A Case of Tanzania. Conference paper. Arusha, 18-22 February 2008.

⁸ Croker. *ibid.*

⁹ www.reflectaction.org. Accessed 1 February 2009.

¹⁰ URT/MOEVT. (2008b). *ibid.*

¹¹ Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), (2008). Child poverty and disparities in Tanzania. Dar es Salaam. REPOA.

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