

REPORT ON THE 3RD AFRICA CONFERENCE ON THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

By

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Introduction

The 3rd African International Conference on Early Childhood Development took place Accra, Ghana from May 30 – June 3, 2005, with the theme “Moving Early Childhood Development Forward in Africa”. The 3rd conference was a follow up to the first conference which was held in 1999 in Kampala, Uganda and a second in 2002 in Asmara, Eritrea.

The focus of the Accra Conference was on three important priority action areas that are necessary to move the ECD agenda forward in Africa –

- Ensuring effective caring practices within the family and community
- Ensuring access and use of quality basic services and
- Ensuring a supportive policy environment

The conference was structured in such a way that there were three-days of technical workshops based on the three (3) action areas indicated above and a one and a half day Ministerial meeting under the leadership of the Vice President of the Republic of Ghana. The outcome of the conference was expected to draw increased political commitment to early childhood development in Africa, facilitate accelerated action at country levels and also feed into other development processes including PRSPs, EFA, SWAps and NEPAD plans.

The Conference was being organised through a partnership between the members of ADEA’s Working Group on Early Childhood Development which include UNICEF, the World Bank UNESCO, the WHO, the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU) and the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care for Development (CGECD), in collaboration with the Government of Ghana.

The conference attracted 300 participants drawn from 39 African countries, 29 African Ministers and high level representatives of UNICEF, the World Bank, UNESCO and the WHO.

Zambia’s Participation

Zambia’s participation was through 4 members of the delegation, one from UNICEF, one from the Government and two from civil society. The deputy Minister for Education Hon. Guston Chola joined the delegation during the Ministers meeting.

My own participation in the conference was both in the plenary and the parallel meetings as shown below.

Day 1

1. Rinos Simbulo: A1 and A17
2. Evelyn Simfukwe: A4 and A6
3. Mildred Chuumbwe: A3 and A6
4. Margaret Akinware: A9 and A16

A1

Title: *A Rights based perspective on ECD: Right, roles and responsibilities*

Abstract: *The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a tool that can be used for the purposes of advocacy to increase support for policies and programmes that have a positive impact on young children and their families. Presenters will discuss the ways in which the CRC provides support to increasing investment in programmes for young children and their families and how the CRC has been used to increase such support.*

A17

Title: *Standards and Indicators on Early Childhood Development: Ghana's Experience*

Day 2

5. Margaret Akinware: B 6
1. Rinos Simbulo: B3
2. Mildred Chuumbwe: B1
3. Evelyn Simfukwe: B7 and B14

B3

Title: *Roles and responsibilities of Government/ NGOs/CBOs, FBOs/, civil society and the private sector in the provision of services*

Abstract: *Presentations will provide descriptions of the ways in which roles and responsibilities have been allocated to/taken up by different ministries, organizations, agencies and the community in relation to the provision of services for young children and their families. This will include descriptions on the process of defining appropriate roles and responsibilities, reflecting on experiences where the process has either been handled well (and describing how), or not handled appropriately (and describing the consequences). There will then be an open discussion of lessons learned.*

Day 3

1. Mildred Chuumbwe: C9
2. Evelyn Simfukwe: C9
3. Rinos Simbulo: C9
4. Margaret Akinware: C1

C9

Title: *HIV & AIDS Policy and financing related to ECD*

Abstract: *In recent years a number of mechanisms have become available through which countries are able to apply for funding to support families and children affected by HIV and AIDS. Country presentations will provide an overview of activities under the Multi-Sectoral AIDS Project (MAP) and describe the ways in which they have been able to access funds, and the ways in which the funds have been used.*

On the third day there was also a regional meeting for the Southern African delegates whose objective to consult on key issues on ECD issues in the region with the view to come with recommendations for the ministers' present from the SADC.

The following were the recommendations to the SADC.

- Urgent need to have policy formulation and implementation, increased resource allocation for implementing the ECD activities;
- Need to develop a SADC ECD protocol;
- Increased funding of ECD programmes;
- Design system and structures for coordination, communication and collaboration at national and regional levels;
- A working group was established with representation from each country in the SADC Region consisting of members present.

Other Meetings

The Zambian delegation held a meeting with ADEA on 3rd June 2005 whose objective was to explore ways of strengthening collaboration between Zambia and the activities of ADEA in so far education in ECD is concerned. The meeting was mainly on information sharing.

The following were identified as some of the issues Zambia's Participation in the ADEA:

- Meeting in Jan- Feb 2006 – Minister's meet to review the status of ECD in countries and the implementation of the recommendations made during the 3rd Africa Conference on ECD under the theme: Moving ECD Forward.
- Preparatory meeting for the above in to take place in September 2005 in Maputo, Mozambique.

The second meeting that the delegation held was the one with the UNICEF – Head of ECD UNICEF Headquarter Ms. Patrice Engle. The following were the issues that came out of the meeting:

- The need for IMCI activities to be included in ECD programmes;

- Capacity building for stakeholders (e. Health workers) in other identified ECD interventions;
- Identification of IGAs for parents/guardians and support of ECD programmes;
- Inclusion of ECD Specialist in stakeholder meetings at the MOE.

Lessons Learnt

- Clearly defined ECD interventions are necessary to responding to the specific needs of children;
- Policy development, implementation and adequate resource allocation are key to successful ECD programmes;
- Collaboration, communication and coordination at local, national, regional and international levels for ECD stakeholders are key to effective ECD programmes;
- Programmes aimed at economically empowering parents and communities are more successful and sustainable in ECD implementation;
- Stakeholders play a major role in a child's transition from one level to another such as from home, to an ECD facility and into entry to formal education.

Way Forward

1. Immediate activities

The immediate activities will start with the debriefing of stakeholders on the conference and its outcomes to the following stakeholders:

- MOE Permanent Secretary and Directors;
- Line Ministries (GID, MCDSS, Agriculture, Local govt, MYSCD, MoF);
- NGOS (NAC, ZNAN, ZANARA, CRAIDS, CHIN, CRS, ZANEC members, In-Country team on HIV/AIDS;

Implementation of Annual Work plans for 2005, IDF Proposal and ECD HIV/AIDS proposals.

2. Medium Term Activities

- Establishment of ECD Office in the MOE;
- Consultative meeting with all stakeholders;
- Resource mobilisation by ECD implementers;
- Facilitation of ECD policy development.

3. Long Term Activities

- Establishment of an ECD Council in Zambia;
- Research, Monitoring and Evaluation;
- Policy on ECD /HIV/AIDS.

