

## DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

### Quality Working Group Webinar Enhancing Delivery of Quality in Early Childhood Education and Development: Spotlighting Learning through Play and Playful Parenting

Registration Link: [Click Here to Register](#)

#### 1.0 Introduction/Background

Investments in quality early childhood development interventions lay a strong foundation for health, well-being, learning and productivity and uphold the right of every child to survive and thrive. On the other hand, early exposure to extreme poverty, gender inequities, violence, neglect, poor mental health of caregivers negatively impact the developmental potential of the growing child, placing them at a distinct disadvantage, with lifetime lasting impacts to both child and society for generations to come. It is now known that young children require nurturing care (good health, adequate nutrition, security and safety, opportunities for early learning and responsive caregiving) to enable them to reach their full developmental potential.

The need for countries to expand opportunities for early childhood development is grounded in children's rights as guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter. ECD is considered as an essential tool for the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Indeed target 4.2 calls for the need to ensure that by 2030 all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. The African Union (AU) Agenda 2063<sup>1</sup> states that (Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) is 'the pillar' for future learning and identifies it as 'the next frontier if Africa is to realize sustained quality education and training'.

Across the African region, progress has been made in improving access to ECED services, because of increased regional and national advocacy promoting investment in ECED. Available evidence indicates that while only Mauritius and Namibia had established ECED policies in 2001<sup>2</sup>, the situation has improved tremendously over the last two decades (2001-2021), with over 60% of African countries having ECED policies that guide service delivery in the sub-sector (AfECN, 2021). With respect to early learning, a common policy position across the region has been the inclusion of at least one year of preprimary education into the formal primary school system across the region. This has resulted in rapid increase in access to early learning programmes in the region from an average Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of below 20% in 2000 to over 30% in 2017.

On the health front, aggressive campaigns across the region have resulted in remarkable progress in infant and child survival rates<sup>3</sup>. For example, substantive reduction in Under Five Mortality Rates (U5MR) have been realized across many countries on the continent. Evidence show that Africa reduced its under-5 mortality rate (U5MR) by more than 50% during the MDGs era<sup>4</sup>. by 2015, 12 SSA countries met their Millennium Development Goal (MDDG#4 target. Countries such as Liberia,

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000137564>

<sup>3</sup> [https://arifchereta.com/arif\\_media/2022/06/d38a7e47-abda-45ab-a358-8e5e3e624838.pdf](https://arifchereta.com/arif_media/2022/06/d38a7e47-abda-45ab-a358-8e5e3e624838.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Committing to child survival: a promise renewed. New York: Progress Report; 2015.

Rwanda, Malawi, and Madagascar all achieved a reduction of more than 60% compared to the 1990 baseline<sup>5</sup>. Similarly stunting levels among children decreased from 38.3% in 2000 to 30.3% in 2017<sup>6</sup>

Despite tremendous improvement on provision of ECED services, challenges persist characterized by low levels of access to early learning and stimulation services<sup>7</sup>, as well high rates of child malnutrition. It is estimated that approximately 66%<sup>8</sup> of children under-five are at risk of not reaching their full developmental potential due to poverty, malnutrition, and a lack of early stimulation and learning. The most at risk of exclusion are children in disadvantaged circumstances such as those living with disabilities, living in poverty, in conflict and crisis situations.<sup>9</sup> These calls for the need to intensify advocacy for critical issues including policy implementation, costing, and financing, workforce development, childcare, ECED and climate change, improved multisectoral coordination.

With many African countries expanding access to ECED, the need to improve quality has emerged as a priority, requiring urgent attention. Quality and access in the provision of ECED are interlinked. All children need to have access to ECED, but low-quality programmes reduce demand and have negative effect on child development including school readiness particularly for disadvantaged children. While there is no single definition of quality in ECED programmes, there are some overall elements of that are identified as critical to the well-being of children. These include:

- Access to good healthcare, adequate nutrition, safety, and good hygiene.
- A well-maintained, and safe environment with good hygienic conditions.
- An adequate caregiver who are sensitive and responsive to children.
- Opportunities for play and rest.
- Opportunities for developing motor, social, language and cognitive skills through play.
- Practices that support positive interaction between children and adults and amongst children themselves.
- Participation of, support for and communication with parents.
- Respect for diversity and difference, gender equality and inclusion of children with disabilities.

In early learning setting, high quality ECED programmes is generally understood to have: i) broad learning and development goals for children, going beyond narrow academic aims like early literacy and numeracy to social, emotional, cultural, artistic, and physical goals; and ii) an approach that “lets children be children”, which means learning through play and experiencing a wide range of artistic, cultural, cognitive, social, and physical activities<sup>10</sup>. Quality early childhood education enables children to be school ready at the time of entrance into primary school which sets a strong foundation for learning, completion, and achievement. Key inputs in quality ECE provision are a developmentally appropriate, inclusive and child-centred curriculum; a professional and well-trained early childhood workforce; quality assurance systems and increased budgets for non-salary items, which would enable investment in quality related inputs.

---

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME). Levels & Trends in child mortality: report 2017, estimates developed by the UN inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation. New York: United Nations Children’s Fund; 2017

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.afro.who.int/news/strategic-plan-reduce-malnutrition-africa-adopted-who-member-states>

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME) 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Black, M. M., Walker, S. P., Fernald, L., Andersen, C. T., DiGirolamo, A. M., Lu, C., McCoy, D. C., Fink, G., Shawar, Y. R., Shiffman, J., Devercelli, A. E., Wodon, Q. T., Vargas-Baron, E., Grantham-McGregor, S., & Lancet Early Childhood Development Series Steering Committee (2017). Early childhood development coming of age: science through the life course. *Lancet (London, England)*, 389(10064), 77–90. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31389-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31389-7)

<sup>9</sup> Agbenyepa, 2017

<sup>10</sup> <https://findingqualitychildcare.ca/high-quality-child-care/what-is-quality>

## 2.0 Situating Learning through Play and Playful Parenting in the Delivery of Quality Early Childhood Education and Development Programmes

Play is a developmentally appropriate way for young children to learn, and it associates positive child's development outcomes. Play is engaging and motivating for young children, enhancing their ability to develop deeper knowledge, skills, and lifelong learning dispositions. Learning through play (LtP), is therefore central to the quality early childhood pedagogy and education. Play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills and nurtures their interest and intrinsic motivation for learning. Environments that promote play, exploration and hands-on learning are at the core of effective pre-primary curriculum & pedagogy and more likely to result in the desired child development & learning outcomes.

The role of teachers and other adults in the child's environment is to create opportunities for learning through play cannot be gainsaid. Teachers and early childhood educators are at the heart of delivering quality pre-primary services and therefore need to develop and apply appropriate skills in facilitating play-based learning. The teachers need to acquire and apply play and child-centred pedagogy in early learning, ensuring that play is integrated in pre-primary programs and to ensure developmentally appropriate practice within the educational setting.

Complementary to supporting learning through play at a center setting, playful parenting which involves opportunity for the caregivers and the child to engage in fun like and spontaneous activities at home i.e building blocks, pretend play, and solving puzzles together, helps children to develop critical thinking skills, language skill, and a love for learning that lasts a lifetime<sup>11</sup>. Promoting playful parenting is important since parents and primary caregivers have an important role to play in their children's development. Evidence from a range of countries shows that when caregivers engage in quality play and reading with their children, it can result in improved learning outcomes that persist throughout the life course; thus, promoting playful parenting within the home supports the LtP that takes place in pre-school programmes<sup>12</sup>. This also helps to ensure coherence and continuity of learning from home to school. Collaboration with families and communities in strengthening quality of pre-primary programs is therefore essential and helps in generating a shared vision for the role of play in early learning.

Across Africa, many countries are making effort to integrate play in pre-primary programmes, through review of curriculum, teacher capacity building, parental engagements, and inclusion of indigenous play concepts and activities in learning activities. These programmes aim at developing and scaling up impactful programs strengthen the capacity of play-based learning and promote playful parenting across the region.

To contribute to ongoing efforts targeting scaling up of learning through play and playful parenting across the region, the Quality Working Group of the AU -CESA ECED Cluster plans to host a Webinar on LtP. This will provide a platform for key stakeholders to take stock of where the region is, with respect to the use of LtP approaches and to share knowledge and lessons learned from research and practice to inform policy options.

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/eap/blog/power-playful-parenting>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/UNICEF-Lego-Foundation-Learning-through-Play.pdf>

### 3.0 About the LtP Webinar

The webinar to be convened by the Access to ECED Cluster Quality Working Group will be held on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023, under the theme: *“Enhancing Quality of Early Childhood Education & Development: Spotlighting Learning through Play”*.

#### 3.1 Objectives of the Webinar

- Spotlight the role of LtP and Playful Parenting in strengthening Quality ECED programmes in the region:
- Share implementation/field experiences with the LtP and Playful Parenting Approaches in Africa and draw lessons for policy & practice in innovative approaches and best practice in delivering quality ECED.
- Identify key issues for future research, innovations, policy advocacy, strategy formulation and programme implementation by various stakeholders.

#### 3.2 Expected Outcomes:

The expected outcome of the webinar is increased knowledge amongst the key stakeholder on (i) existing models of scalable learning through play and playful parenting in the region; ii) documentation of policy advocacy options and intervention strategies to support national scale up LtP and playful parenting.

#### 3.3. Methodology:

The Webinar will be held through virtual means and consist of power-point presentations, panel discussions and plenary/question and answer session.

There will be keynote speakers from global, continental and country level who will share research findings on LtP and share experiences from practice. A panel of discussants comprising of a researcher, policy maker, subject matter experts, and early childhood practitioner will follow the keynote presentations.

#### 3.4 Participants:

The Webinar on Learning through Play and Playful Parenting will bring together members of the Access to Quality Working Group and other ECED Cluster Working Groups, government policy makers, researchers, experts, NGOs, field level practitioners and development partners.

#### 3.5. Agenda:

The programme for the Webinar will be as follows:

DAY /TIME	ACTIVITY	SPEAKER
11 <sup>th</sup> October 2023		
3.00– 3.05	<b>AfECN Advocacy Video</b>	AfECN
3.05 – 3.10	<b>Welcome Remarks</b>	<b>Tenguella Ba</b> , Chair, AU CESA ECED Cluster’s Access to Quality Services.
3.10 – 3.15	<b>Opening Remarks</b>	AUC

3.15 – 3.45	<p><b>1. Setting the Scene:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global trends in implementation of Playful Parenting Programmes – UNICEF HQ LEGO Programme.</li> <li>- Research evidence on Learning through Play from the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Initiative: (Presentation from IDRC)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Moderator:</b> Damaris Wambua, Co-Convener, AU CESA ECED Cluster’s Access to Quality Services</p>
3.45 – 4.00 pm	<p><b>2. Country Experiences with Scalable Models for Implementation of Playful Parenting &amp; LtP Programmes.</b></p> <p>Panel Discussion:</p> <p><b>Nigeria:</b> Integrating learning through play in early learning curricula and how workforce is being supported: The Regio Emilia Curriculum Model.</p> <p><b>Gambia:</b> Experiences in the Implementation of the GOAL Curriculum in strengthening learning through play.</p> <p><b>Kenya:</b> Incorporating LtP in early learning: Experiences from the Tayari Model in Kenya.</p> <p><b>Zambia:</b> Approaches in enhancing Communication for LtP and Playful Parenting: Experiences from Zambia.</p>	<p><b>Moderator:</b> Josephine Ferla, Convener, AU CESA ECED Cluster’s Access to Quality Services</p>
4.00 – 4.20	Q & A Session	<p><b>Josephine Ferla,</b> Convener, AU CESA ECED Cluster’s Access to Quality Services</p>
4.20 -4.25	Reflections on way forward	AfECN
4.25 – 4.30 pm	Closing Remarks	<p><b>Hien Lucien,</b> Co-Chair, AU CESA ECED Cluster’s Access to Quality Services</p>