Understanding the ECD Landscape in Southern Africa

Results of a Regional Study

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About the Study

On behalf of the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), the American Institutes for Research (AIR) conducted an evaluation of UNICEF's implementation of its ECD Framework for Action.

- The study covered all 21 countries served by the ESARO.

- The study was cross-sectoral in nature.

- It included 106 stakeholder interviews with UNICEF ESARO and country office staff, regional- and country-level ECD partners, and government counterparts.

- Data collection took place in 2020.

In addition to guiding UNICEF, this study yielded information on ECD programming that is relevant for other stakeholders in the region.

The Enabling Environment for ECD

- Only six countries had a national multisectoral ECD policy and an action plan (but more were working on it).

- ECD was very underfunded across the region.

- Challenges making holistic (cross-sectoral) progress on ECD.

- Bottlenecks included high government staff turnover, lack of funding for collaboration, lack of a coordinating body.

- Only ECE consistently monitored. Severe lack of data hampered oversight and evidence-based decision making in other subsectors.

Image source:
https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2016/12/15/13/52/nursery-1908942_1280.jpg

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Reaching All

- ECD efforts tended to be either universal (national) or directed toward the lowest-resourced regions/areas/communities.

- Directed approaches tended to leave out communities that were not quite at the bottom in terms of ECD resources (but still had real needs).

- Regional/community focus can leave behind families who need ECD supports but live on the wrong side of a regional or local border.

Image source:
https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2016/08/02/22/02/child-1565202_1280.jpg

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Use of the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF)

- The NCF was emerging as a valuable resource to catalyze cross-sectoral thinking and collaboration at the regional level and at the national level in many countries.

- However, there was often difficulty integrating the NCF holistically into service delivery platforms.

- The NCF was least used in the places it was needed most: in fragile/crisis contexts and places where there was a strong focus on survival.

- Many stakeholders were unsure of how to define or support "responsive caregiving."

Image source:
https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2018/08/23/10/21/sky-3625590_1280.jpg

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Scaling and Sustainability

- Across the region, there were many examples of success in scaling and sustaining ECD programming.

- Scaling and sustainability were much more challenging where government systems were weak, and/or in humanitarian contexts where nearly all efforts were directed toward meeting immediate needs.

- Multinational organizations and NGOs often introduced programming that was too expensive for a government to ever take on and sustain.

Image source:
https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2018/07/10/21/30/south-africa-3529674_1280.jpg

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Recommendations

1. In countries where national or regional cross-sectoral collaboration is in place, work on better bringing this integration into service delivery platforms (including through use of the NCF).

2. Shift from siloed to cross-sectoral and holistic approaches in fragile/crisis contexts.

3. The region should take a hard look at how approaches that focus solely on the neediest and/or are based on geography leave many families behind.

4. Invest in the data systems needed for holistic and sector-specific oversight and evidence-based decision making.

Image source:
https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2014/02/28/21/50/massai-277239_1280.jpg

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