

AU CESA ECD CLUSTER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT WORKING GROUP

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.0 BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

A child's earliest years are the most critical period for development, and therefore children need access to supportive and stimulating environment during their early years. Evidence from a range of disciplines confirms that a child's earliest years are a critical time to invest in building foundational skills. Children's brains develop faster and are more malleable during Early Childhood Development (ECD) period especially within the first 5 years. In this regard, children need a range of inputs during this critical period, including nurturing care, which includes adequate healthcare and nutrition, protection from violence including stress, responsive caregiving and opportunities for early stimulation and learning (Black et al. 2017; World Health Organization 2018). ECD presents a window of opportunity for early identification and intervention for children with disabilities.

In demographic terms, Africa is the youngest continent in the world with 41% of the population being under the age of 15 years. The growing youthful population positions Africa well to provide a large, educated, and skilled workforce capable of meeting the brainpower demand of the global economy, as articulated in Agenda 2063. To maximize and take advantage of this opportunity, it is important to strengthen Africa's system of developing an effective, efficient, and productive workforce. Agenda 2063 emphasizes that human capital will fully be developed through sustained investments that must start from the earliest years and continue lifelong (*Aspiration 1: A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development*). It is also in view of this that Agenda 2063 aspires an Africa that puts "children first". This focus and commitment not only ensure a firm foundation but also reskilling through continuous learning that is becoming increasingly necessary.

Over the past few years, great progress has been made in improving Africa's workforce. Countries across the continent have developed policies, plans, resources, and programmes to strengthen and improve the knowledge and skills base of their youth. Africa as a region however has a very long way to go in ensuring an education system that will produce a workforce able meet the needs of a fast changing national, regional, continental, and global work environment. In developing its CESA 16-25, the AU emphasizes the need to "reorient Africa's education and training systems to meet the knowledge, competencies, skills, innovation and creativity required to nurture African core values and promote sustainable development at the national, sub-regional and continental levels". The need to focus on improved educational outcomes that are relevant to a fast-changing world cannot be overemphasized.

While much attention has been placed on improving the efficiency of the education system through curriculum reforms, continuous learning, strengthened capacity of teachers and improved infrastructure much less attention has been given to strengthening the foundations upon which an effective and efficient system must be established. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) was developed as a strategic intervention for realizing the African Union's (AU's) vision for education as articulated in Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. CESA's mission is to "reorient Africa's education and training systems to meet the knowledge, competencies, skills innovation and creativity required to nurture African core values and promote sustainable development at the national, sub-regional and continental levels".

Agenda 2063 calls for universal access to quality early childhood, primary and secondary education, ensuring that no child is left behind, and that the potential of every child is nurtured. CESA16-25 identifies pre-primary education as a neglected sub-sector that deserves special attention, in this: Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) is the pillar for future learning and is identified as the next frontier if Africa is to realize sustained quality education and training. To implement the continental framework (CESA16-25), the African Union Commission (AUC) adopted as an Implementation Platform, a Coalition of stakeholders covering all thematic areas in education and training as identified in the CESA Strategic Objectives. Clustering under thematic areas was recognized as an effective tool for enhancing coordination and strengthening partnerships around common themes. This ensures greater alignment and harmony among stakeholders and facilitates the identification and deployment of synergies in the attainment of the CESA strategic objectives. As of January 2019, twelve Thematic Clusters had been launched. The ECED Cluster was officially launched on 4th September 2018 to support the implementation of CESA 16 -25 objectives related to the early years.

2.0 CESA ECED CLUSTER OBJECTIVES

CESA 16-25 clearly states that ECED is ‘the pillar’ for future learning and identifies it as ‘the next frontier if Africa is to realize sustained quality education and training’. This cluster will therefore make ECED specific contributions to support the achievements of all key Strategic Objectives.

Specific objectives of CESA ECED Cluster

- 1. Intensified action to improve equitable access to quality ECED programmes and services.** This objective contributes towards the achievement of: CESA 16-25 SO 2: Build, rehabilitate, preserve education infrastructure, and develop policies that ensure a permanent, healthy, and conducive learning environment in all sub-sectors and for all, to expand access to quality education).
- 2. Revitalize the ECED workforce to ensure quality and relevance.** This objective contributes towards achievement of i) CESA 16-25 SO1: Revitalize the teaching profession to ensure quality and relevance at all levels of education ii. CESA 16 -25 SO
- 3. Increased advocacy to strengthen political will for policy development and sustainable implementation.** This objective contributes towards achievement of CESA 16-25 SO1: Formulate appropriate policies conducive to expansion of ECED
- 4. Strengthened partnership and collaboration across all key stakeholders including state and non-state actors.** This objective contributes towards achievement of CESA 16-25 SO12: Set up a coalition of stakeholders to facilitate and support activities resulting from the implementation of CESA 16-25.
- 5. Knowledge generation and sharing to support improved efficiency, effectiveness, and relevance.** This objective contributes towards achievement of

CESA 16-25 S09: Revitalize and expand tertiary education, research, and innovation to address continental challenges and promote global competitiveness) and CESA 16-25 S011: Build and enhance capacity for data collection, management, analysis, communication, and improve the management of education system as well as the statistic tool, through capacity building for data collection, management, analysis, communication, and usage.

3.0 STRUCTURE OF ECED CLUSTER

The Cluster is chaired by the African Union Commission, with the Government of Mauritius, which is also the Coordinator of the Inter Country Quality Node on Early Childhood Education as the Co-Chair. The African Early Childhood Network (AfECN) acts as coordinator and Secretariat to the Cluster. To operationalize the cluster and further streamline operations, during the Cluster's first technical committee, held in Mauritius, four working groups were formed namely: i) Policy, advocacy, and communication; ii) governance and accountability; iii) access to quality ECED services; and iv) knowledge generation and dissemination. Each working group has a Member State serving as chair and a development partner as the convener. The chairs and conveners of each working group as well as AUC, AfECN and Inter-Country Quality Node (ICQN) together form the technical Committee.

4.0 QUALITY IMPROVEMENT WORKING GROUP

Access for all children, to quality Early childhood Education and Development is critical to sustainable development due to its multiplier effects not on child development but also on socio-economic development of a country. However, expanding access without quality may not realize positive child outcomes. This calls for concerted efforts targeted at expanding access with quality.

BOX 1: Objectives of the Quality Improvement Working Group

Objective 1: Intensify action to improve equitable access to quality ECED programmes and services. Realization of this objective contributes to achievement of:

- **CESA 16-25 Sub Objective 2:** Build, rehabilitate, preserve education infrastructure, and develop policies that ensure a permanent, healthy, and conducive learning environment in all sub-sectors and for all, to expand access to quality education.
- **CESA 16-25 Sub Objective 5:** CESA 16 -25 SO 5: Accelerate processes leading to gender parity and equity.

Objective 2: Improve Quality of ECED systems, programmes, and services.

Realization of this objective contributes to achievement of:

- **CESA 16 - 25 Sub Objective 1:** Revitalize the teaching profession to ensure quality and relevance at all levels of education.
- **CESA 16 - 25 Sub Objective 3:** Harness the capacity of ICT to improve access, quality and management of education and training systems.
- **CESA 16 - 25 Sub Objective 4:** Ensure acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills as well as improved completion rates at all levels and groups through harmonization

processes across all levels for national and regional integration.

- **CESA 16 -25 Sub Objective 7:** Strengthen the science and the math curricula and disseminate scientific knowledge and the culture of science in the African Society.
- **CESA 16 - 25 Sub Objective 5:** Accelerate processes leading to gender parity and equity.

Figure 1 provides a flow chart of structure of the ECED Cluster including the leadership of the Access to Quality Working Group.

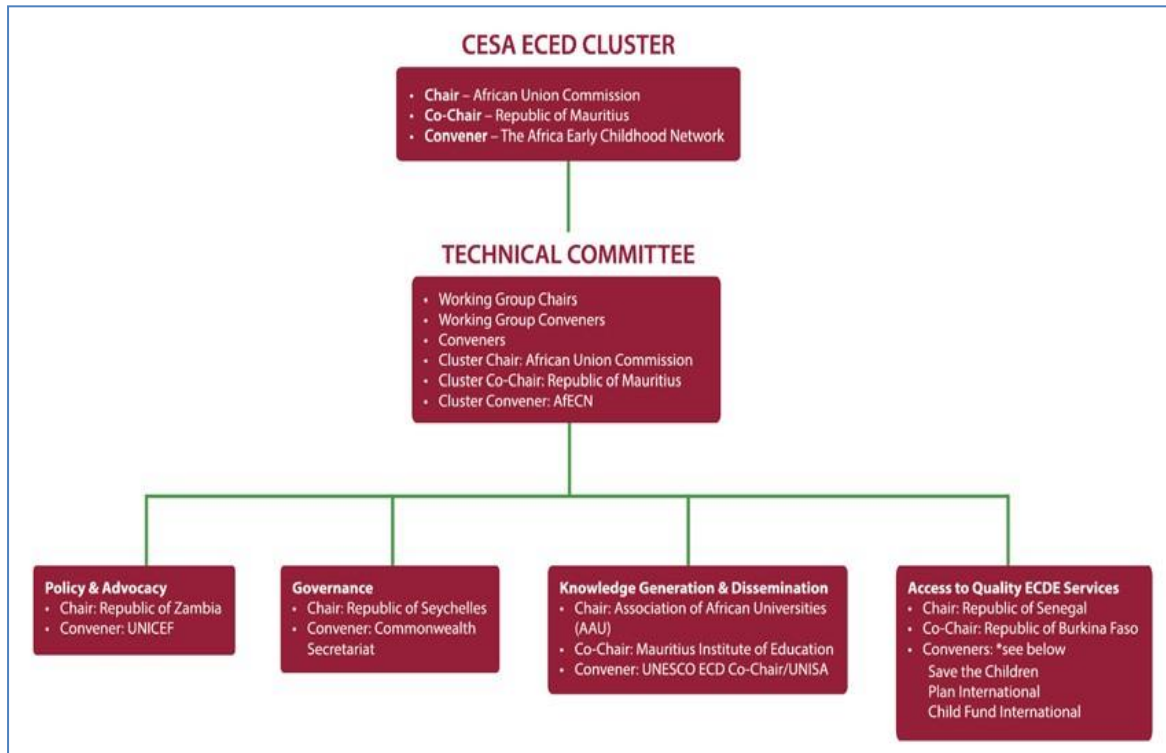


Figure 1: ECED Cluster Organogram

5.0 DISABILITY COMMITTEE

Disability does not necessarily imply limited wellbeing and poverty. However, there is growing evidence that approximately one billion people with disabilities face attitudinal, physical, and institutional barriers that result in multi-dimensional poverty, exclusion, and marginalisation¹. Out of one billion people with disabilities, between 93 and 150 million are children under the age of 14. Children with disabilities are often excluded from ECED services. These children are reported to face cultural, economic, and social barriers from within and outside the

¹ <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/The-win-win-of-disability-inclusion#the-win-win-of-disability-inclusion>

education system that directly or indirectly impact their ability to benefit from high-quality services including education. These barriers can be categorized into two (2) groups²:

- a) **Supply-side barriers:** Physical accessibility of school buildings, classrooms, and toilets as well as their neighbourhoods; transportation means to get to school; inaccessible learning materials, inflexible curricula, teaching methods and examinations; teacher and educator knowledge on inclusive teaching practices; discrimination based on disability.
- b) **Demand-side barriers:** Stigma and attitudinal barriers; internalized parental and family misconceptions about children's ability to learn; family resources and caregiving dynamics; financial supports; welfare provisions and eligibility criteria.

Addressing the myriad of individual, community, and system-level barriers to disability-inclusive education requires a comprehensive ecosystem approach towards the design and implementation of Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Development. In this regard and as part of its role of promoting access to quality ECDE services to all children including children with disabilities, the established Disability Committee will advocate for and advance issues of Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Development (IECED). To enhance the inclusion of children with disabilities to quality ECED services, a Disability Committee was set up under the Quality Improvement Working Group of the ECED Cluster.

5.1 Rationale for Disability Committee

Inclusive ECCE services respect and celebrate diversity; remove barriers to and promote equal opportunities for learning and developing. These services create strong linkages with parents/caregivers and welcome their involvement and participation to meet the unique needs of individual children. The committee will make efforts to consolidate the work done at regional and national levels to generate knowledge on evidence-based interventions targeted improved quality of IECED programmes in the region.

5.2 Roles and functions of the committee

- a) Generate knowledge by carrying out landscape analysis on the trends, achievements, and challenges regarding disability inclusion services for young children in the region. This will include expanding evidence base on IECED by identifying and documenting promising strategies, interventions and models that promote inclusion of young children with disabilities.
- b) Convene and participate in knowledge exchange events and coordinate sensitizations on disability inclusion in ECD including disseminating knowledge through various platforms such as policy and knowledge briefs, recommendations for programmatic and policy change, fact sheets, blogs, webinars, educational videos, and social media platforms.
- c) Advocate for the development, implementation, and evaluation of Inclusive ECCE policies and related guidelines at national and regional levels.

² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability/brief/disability-inclusive-education-in-africa-program>

- d) Collaborate with various AU CESA ECED Cluster working groups and key stakeholders to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and relevance of inclusive ECD service delivery.
- e) Mobilize and enhance partnerships between government and non-government players, communities and development agencies to improve access to quality ECED and ECI for children with disabilities.

5.3 Membership

The criteria for admission into the disability committee shall be determined by the leadership and members of the Quality Working Group. The current membership of the Disability Committee outlined in the chart below:

	NAME	ORGANIZATION
1.	Pholile Dlamini	Swaziland Network for Early Childhood Development
2.	Ronah Lubinda	Mulumbo Early Childhood Care and Development Foundation
3.	Given Daka	Africa Early Childhood Network
4.	Maserame Mtshali	Swaziland Network
5.	Mandinda Zungu	Catholic Development Commission in Malawi
6.	Charles Odol	SightSavers Kenya
7.	George Kayange	Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled
8.	Georgina Navicha	The Malawi Council for the Handicapped
9.	Dolorence Were	Uganda Society for Disabled Children
10.	Spiwe Chakwa	Chiedza Child Care Centre
11.	Colani Magongo	The Swaziland Church Forum
12.	Flavio Fernandes	Wona Sanana

5.4 Leadership and Management

Team leader

- Chair ECDE working group meetings
- Ensure adherence to the overall strategic direction of the working group
- Support alignment of working group activities with priorities of ECED Cluster
- Promote working group activities
- Support resource mobilization to realize working group objectives.
- Report progress made by working group to Quality Working Group and the ECED Cluster

Co-Team Leader

The co-team leader supports leadership responsibility to safeguard the cohesion, reputation and effectiveness of the Working Group and will support the chair as delegated or in the absence of a chair. The co-team leader will always ensure adherence to the overall strategic direction of the Working Group towards achievement of the stated goals and objectives.

Secretary

The secretary will support the implementation of the key actions as articulated in the the Working Group annual plan. Provide administrative and technical advice and support to all Cluster operations

- Support and coordinate the development of working group's strategy, roadmap, and annual work plans
- Ensure effective co-ordination and engagement with working group members on achievement of objectives
- Consolidate and analyse data into reports for dissemination to all members.
- Support the compilation and production of annual report to highlight progress of the committee to the Working Group
- Document committee meetings and sessions
- Serve as the point of contact for general enquiries and as a communication conduit between the members and coordinating team
- Co-ordinate communication to and from the committee to the working group

Members

- Attend committee meetings including annual review and planning meetings.
- Participate in the development, adoption, and implementation of annual workplan.
- Report on the progress of activities for which each member is responsible according to agreed upon templates.
- Participate in knowledge generation, sharing and dissemination activities.
- Support working group activities within agreed work plan.

6.2 Meeting Procedures

Specific sub-cluster meetings will be anytime during a given year as may be needed and agreed upon by the members.

1. All meetings will be chaired by the team leader or co-team leader, or any appointed the team leader in the absence of the two.
2. Meeting quorum will be one third of the partner members.
3. Decisions will be made by consensus and in cases where consensus will not be possible, the team leader of the meeting will make the final decision.
4. The secretary will prepare the meeting agenda, notes, or any other information regarding meetings.
5. The secretary will take minutes during the meetings and compile a report for approval by the Chair of the meeting.
6. The secretary is responsible for receiving agenda items and the distribution of the minutes of the within 14 days of the meeting date.
7. The secretary will develop a draft agenda for approval by the team leader one-month prior to the meeting.
8. Every partner member can suggest or place an item on the meeting's agenda. These shall be received no later than six weeks to the next meeting.
9. Communication and Reporting Framework

10. All official communications will be managed through the coordinator to ensure consistency and accuracy of the information.
11. Members are encouraged to communicate among each other on matters of interest as deemed fit.
12. Partner members will report on a semi-annual basis against the agreed upon activities and indicators for each of the activities using an agreed upon standard reporting template.

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7.0 PERIOD

The Disability Committee is one of the Ad hoc committees of the Quality Working Group. It shall therefore continue to exist for the period agreed upon and established by the members of the Quality Working Group.