

WEBINAR OUTCOMES

Background

There are nearly 240 million¹ children with disabilities in the world. These children often face attitudinal, physical, and institutional barriers that result in multi-dimensional poverty, exclusion, and marginalization. Both supply and demand side barriers lead to exclusion of these children from services, with the situation being much worse for young vulnerable children as they miss the window of opportunity to build a strong foundation for their future. Promoting inclusive ECED services is the preferred approach, as this respects and celebrates diversity; aims to remove barriers to and promote equal opportunities for learning and developing for all children.

The Webinar

On 26th January 2023, AFECN in collaboration with the African Union, Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) Cluster and Regional ECD Network for the Asia Pacific Region (ARNEC), held a joint knowledge exchange event in the form of a Webinar. The Webinar held under the theme; “**Delivering Quality Inclusive Early Childhood Development (IECD) Services in Africa and Asia Pacific Regions**”, brought together 188 people consisting of experts, field level practitioners, researchers, government policy makers, development partners and other stakeholders. The collaboration with ARNEC enabled the sharing of experiences across the two regions of Africa and Asia Pacific.

The Webinar had 3 main objectives:

- i. Disseminating findings from the Africa Region Disability Landscape Analysis Report.
- ii. Sharing implementation/field experiences from Africa & Asia Pacific regions and drawing on best practice in delivering IECD programmes and services to children with special needs.
- iii. Identifying key issues in relation to inclusion for future research, innovations, policy advocacy, and strategy formulation and programme implementation by various stakeholders.

Mr. Tenguella Ba, the Chair of the ECED Cluster, Access to Quality Services Working Group provided opening remarks; appreciated the efforts undertaken to organize the webinar and welcomed all participants to engage in the discussions on “Delivering Quality Inclusive Early Childhood Development (IECD) Services”. He reiterated the need for all stakeholders to work together to ensure no child left behind. Additionally, Mr. Hambani Masheleni, Acting Director, Department of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation at the African Union Commission, in his welcoming remarks, highlighted the importance of Inclusivity in ECED provision in the context of AU-Agenda 2063. He called on stakeholders to act and draw lessons from the Africa and Asia Pacific experiences to formulate policy and strategies that ensure that people/children living with disabilities are given an opportunity to live an active and useful life.

To **set the scene**, a parent of a child with a disability, shared their life experiences. She highlighted challenges of non-acceptance, stigma and the inadequate support for disabled children and their families. This parent called on more targeted support for children living with disabilities and their families.

Prof. Alecia Samuels, a researcher on the Disability Landscape Analysis for the Africa Region, highlighted gaps in disability statistics; inconsistencies in definitions and measurement instruments, during her presentations. The landscape analysis showed that there are several instruments in place some of which have been ratified by countries; however, there is variable progress in translating these instruments and signed protocols into meaningful reforms that can benefit children with disabilities. The landscape analysis highlighted, as a challenge, the underfunding that exists in the provisions for children with disabilities and the inadequacies of the Nurturing Care Framework when dealing with children with disabilities.

Dr. Vibha Krishnamurthy ‘s presentation on the Guide for Monitoring Children with Disabilities (GMCD) tool emphasized that children do not develop in isolation but within the context of families and communities and that ECD is a continuum. Therefore, monitoring Child Development must go beyond mere screening but must include assessment of risk factors in the environment and the ability to provide continuous support. The

¹ As above

presentation highlighted that the GMCD tool is a conversational approach between the care provider and the caregiver and is community and family centered. Community Health Workers can use the tool easily. The presentation highlighted prospects for training in the tool and the participants of the webinar showed interest in learning more about the tool. There were opportunities for online and face-to-face training on the GMCD.

The presentations were followed by a Panel **Discussion** that included experts and field level practitioners. This session provided an opportunity to share experiences from implementation and practice. An overview from UNICEF Uganda, highlighted Interventions for Disability in Early Childhood (IDEC) Project. This intervention aims at establishing a service delivery model for early identification of children with disabilities aged 0-3 years, linking them and their families to development interventions and promoting social behavioral change communication to reduce stigma & discrimination. Webinar participants wanted to know how the IDEC initiative ensured a balance between the assessment and early identification side with the intervention/ECD services side.

Another panelist Lina Mutua, an Inclusive Education expert, shared her experiences in promoting inclusive education through the implementation of differentiated instruction for students with disabilities. She emphasized the importance of creating an Individualized Educational Plan, to meet specific needs of each child with learning disabilities. Further, Dr. Vibian Angwenyi, a researcher from the Institute for Human Development, Aga Khan University, shared on the SPARK initiative, which is a project that aims to improve the wellbeing and mental health of children with developmental disorder and their caregivers, by developing and evaluating a model of care with and for local communities. The SPARK initiative teaches caregivers strategies to help them support their children with developmental disabilities and for enhancement of their own mental health.

In the **closing**, Professor Seth Opong, from the AUC CESA ECED Cluster Knowledge Generation Working Group, provided the way forward and next steps. Prof Opong summarized the key issues raised in the webinar and highlighted the need to look at the cultural assets from communities, in addressing certain issues like getting fathers involved in the care of children with disabilities. He highlighted the need to ensure that all the interventions are integrated in the communities for sustainability, which includes institutionalizing the interventions.

Webinar resources including recording is available [here](#)