

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Critical but Neglected Sector of Education

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Abstract

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has been expressed in a diversity of terminologies adopted by international agencies and academics. Furthermore, definitions associated with ECCE are contentious. Most definitions of ECCE are child-focused and stress the holistic nature of the concept, namely recognising the cognitive, emotional and physical needs of children. Research evidence suggests that new entrants into primary schools are better prepared for the school environment and that they make better use of school resources if they have been exposed to pre-school education prior to their entry into the regular school system. Notwithstanding the efforts to promote ECCE in Sub-Saharan African countries, access continues to be a significant challenge. Enrolment rates in pre-schools in the region are often below 10 percent, mainly on account of the limited facilities available, as well as because of poverty.

Introduction

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is a critical sector of education for the growth and development of the child, but it is an aspect that is neglected by most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This paper examines its concept and function, growth and objectives, as well as access and participation.

Concept and Function of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is open to a diversity of terminologies adopted by international agencies and academics. Moreover, definitions associated with ECCE are contentious. According to Penn (2000), ECCE is an umbrella term for a variety of interventions for young children and their carers/families, including health and nutrition, childcare, education and parental support. A distinction is usually needed, but not always made, between ECCE and pre-school education. Kholowa and Rose (2007), who cite the Bernard van Leer Foundation, note:

... It needs to be understood that early childhood development (ECD) is not synonymous with pre-school education... Early Childhood Development combines elements from the fields of child development, early childhood education, infant stimulation, health and nutrition, community development, parents and families support, women's development and economics. It combines all essential supports a young child needs to survive and thrive in life, as well as the supports a family and community needs to promote children's healthy development.

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Pre-schooling specifically, according to the international standard definition, is defined as a “centre of school-based, educationally oriented services for children of at least three years.” This highlights a more focused approach limited to the educational aspects of ECCE, which is based within a formal institution (rather than occurring within the home environment, for example, or other less formal institutions). ECCE, therefore, refers to the holistic approach to child development in the pre-primary school years. It is primarily concerned with those aspects of ECCE that occur within such formal institutions (Kholowa and Rose, 2007). Most definitions of ECCE are child-focused and stress the holistic nature of the concept, namely recognising the cognitive, emotional and physical needs of children. UNESCO prefers to use the term “early childhood care and education” (ECCE) in its Global Monitoring Report of 2007, which has the following definition:

ECCE supports children’s survival, growth, development and learning-including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development - from birth to entry into primary school in formal, non-formal and informal settings (UNESCO, 2006).

The World Bank, on the other hand, sees ECCE as “the provision of services that promote young children’s development. These services target children’s basic needs such as nutrition, protection, health care and interaction, stimulation, affection and learning” (Young, 1997).

Early childhood is often defined within the zero-to-eight years range, and thus includes the time from the child’s birth until the first years in primary school. Although this time is crucial for the child’s development, research has demonstrated that growth failure occurs almost exclusively during the intrauterine period and in the first 24 months of life (Martorell, 1997). In fact, the physical, cognitive and mental development of the child, especially during its intrauterine period and first years, are dependent on the parents’ understanding of and response to the child’s basic needs in terms of nutrition, health care, affection and learning. In terms of terminology, physical growth is often used as a proxy for child development, but it should be underlined that the concept of ECCE encompasses cognitive and mental developments, which are interrelated with physical growth and the general health of the child (Nordtveit, 2008).

Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa on child-rearing practices have shown that within traditional and community settings there are mechanisms for preparing and supporting children’s physical, emotional, social and intellectual development through traditional games, stories, toys, songs and ways of playing that are passed on from the older children to the younger children (Evans, 1994). The extent to which pre-schools utilise or adapt themselves to using some of the already existing practices to enrich children’s experience in the pre-school appears to be one of the most challenging questions. However, because of modernisation, ECCE is the logical replacement for traditional family and community-based ways of socialising the young. With the onslaught of Western culture, associated with increased social mobility and an expanding money economy, traditional socialising institutions have had to give way to new non-family child care institutions. Because many young parents are no longer able to live close to or count on the support of the extended family and the traditional neighbourhood, alternative forms of early

childhood care have developed. Some parents have resorted to hiring child-minders (*ayahs*), while others have turned to institutionalised collective care in the form of kindergartens, nurseries and day-care centres or pre-schools.

Research evidence suggests that new entrants into primary schools are better prepared for the school environment and that they make better use of school resources if they have been exposed to pre-school education prior to their entry into the regular school system (Myers, 1992). This is probably not unexpected as such exposure would have prepared the new intakes for the “world of school” because of the similarities between pre-school and the regular school environment. Pre-school education is known to foster the development of some basic social skills, and young learners lacking such skills risk “peer rejection” and academic failure (Knight and Hughes, 1995). It has been observed, for example, that pupils with pre-school experience tend to feel much more at home than their counterparts without such experience during their first few days in school. Furthermore, most of them seldom cry and demand to go back home with their parents on their first day in school. Evidence abounds in the literature to support the view that pre-school education engenders a supportive climate for fast adjustment to the classroom environment in the primary school. This is known to result in the smooth transition from the “social world” of the home to the somewhat “formal world” of the school (Taiwo and Tyolo, 2002; Adams and Sandfort, 1992; Myers, 1992; Smith and James, 1975).

A number of studies in some African countries seem to have reached similar conclusions. One of the most notable studies was by Otaala et al (1989), which was intended to gauge the impact of day-care programmes in Botswana. The evaluation study concluded that the products of the programmes were better prepared for the primary school environment and enjoyed a smoother transition to the primary school classroom environment. Similar conclusions were reached on the impact of the Child-to-Child programme. This was a programme in which older children from the first three grade levels of the primary school helped prepare younger children, mainly their siblings, for school entry the following year. In turn, they improved their cognitive development. An international survey of the Child-to-Child programme in 70 countries established that the Botswana programme, among others, was quite effective in preparing children for primary school education (Government of Botswana, 1994).

Similarly, a more recent similar study established that pre-school education equips pupils so exposed with the prerequisite skills for learning in the primary school (Taiwo and Tyolo, 2002). It was these skills that accounted for the superior performance of pupils with pre-school education experience in selected tasks in English, Mathematics and Science over their counterparts without such experience. Generally, it has been observed that pre-school education appears to have a positive effect on its recipients in the early years of primary school, as pupils with such exposure demonstrate superior academic attainment at this level. Consequently, children without such a background performed significantly worse in this study than their counterparts with such experience because they lacked some of the basic skills and knowledge that their counterparts bring with them from their pre-school classes. As a result, pupils without a pre-school education background tend to adjust much more slowly than their counterparts

with such exposure to the school environment, at least during their early days in primary school (Taiwo and Tyolo, 2002).

Growth of Early Childhood Care and Education

Despite the efforts to promote ECCE in Sub-Saharan countries, access continues to be a significant challenge (UNESCO, 2004; Penn, 2000; Woodhead, 2000). Enrolment rates in pre-schools in the region are often below 10 percent, mainly due to the limited availability of facilities and widespread poverty. Whereas there seems to be common agreement on the need to increase access to pre-schools, tensions and dilemmas, including who should provide pre-schooling and how it can be financed, prevail. Some historical perspective provides an explanation for the present state of ECCE programmes in many countries. Indeed, the issues of access and quality of the programmes have roots in the past.

Unlike formal primary education that has existed in many parts of Africa since the turn of the twentieth century, ECCE programmes can be traced from the early 1950s when some pre-schools were opened. In countries with large white settler populations, the first pre-schools were mainly private, catering for European children, and were mainly located in urban centres. There were also pre-schools catering for Asian children in countries such as Kenya, which had a large Indian population. It is largely in the early 1960s that pre-schools catering for Africans started to emerge in earnest in some urban centres on a self-help basis. These were mainly organised by the church and welfare organisations. The neglect of pre-school education, just as of other levels of education, was embedded in the racist practice that discriminated against Africans. In big towns such as Nairobi, racism was camouflaged behind the lame excuse that Africans were not regarded as permanent residents of the town, and, therefore, not technically entitled to any services including education until the early 1950s (Wawire, 2006). In many African countries, the early 1960s were also a time when governments joined private entrepreneurs, self-help groups and welfare organisations in sponsoring ECCE programmes in the aftermath of the attainment of independence. Their participation was mainly through local authorities.

Generally, the pre-school movement was generally slower in the rural areas than in the urban centres, but emerged to provide custodial care for children whose mothers worked on large tea, coffee and sugar-cane plantations. Eventually, the establishment of Day-Care centres spread to other parts of the countries as their need became more evident in the light of the changes in socio-economic and family structures. The custodial role played by the extended family was transferred to the day-care centres. The extended family unit was not only weakened by the movement of people to new locations, such as towns or emerging settlement schemes, but also by the societal shift towards the formation of nuclear families. Moreover, more and more women were at that time taking up formal employment, hence serving as a major contributory factor to the growth of many day-care centres (Wawire, V. K. 2006). At this stage, the older siblings of the young ones had already joined formal primary schools and hence could not give a helping hand in the provision of such care.

As the dual role of pre-school centres, as custodial care providers and educators, spread from urban to rural areas, amidst the early 1960s of independence euphoria about the role of education in development, pre-schools came to be perceived by communities as avenues through which their children would get a ‘head start’ in the competitive and examination-oriented education systems. Consequently, most pre-school centres placed more emphasis on the academic aspects of ECCE, by concentrating more on the teaching of the alphabet and number work, a practice that has continued to the present. This particular situation was reinforced by the expansion of the pre-school sector in many countries, which occurred with minimal government control, hence undermining the quality and relevance of the education provided. Some ministries, charged with the responsibility of inspecting pre-schools to ensure children’s safety and health, did not even address the issue of supervising the educational services on offer. Also, many of the pre-school centres—especially those in urban areas—were serving a cognitive function by giving instruction in academic subjects in addition to custodial care. This helped to establish a strong tradition of using formal methods of instruction and content in the pre-school sector that has become increasingly difficult to break (Wawire, 2006).

In some countries, pre-school was shuffled between ministries not directly concerned with education since it was as any other social service outside mainstream education. It was often shifted from ministries such as health and home affairs, to social services and local government. The neglect of the pre-school sector by many sub-Saharan governments explains not only the failure to include it in key legislation, but also its exclusion from the main expansion efforts evident in the growth of the primary and secondary school sector in the post-independence era. Nonetheless, pre-school education continued to grow through self-help community efforts. In the rural areas, pre-schools were developed more or less autonomously by each community relying on its own ideas and resources. Community members collaborated and made contributions to set up buildings, hire teachers and appoint committees to plan and make policies governing these centres (Anderson, 1973). Most pre-schools in rural areas were self-help projects, except for a few private ones, which served areas where white or other emigrant groups resided. In contrast, the greatest sponsors in the large urban centres were the local authorities, supported by a few private enterprises, churches and voluntary organisations.

As the pre-school sector expanded, the national policy of many Sub-Saharan countries was not only minimal but also unclear. As in other similar cases, it was not uncharacteristic for a social service to precede planners and legislators’ rationalisation of a social service. As a result, it was only after the massive expansion of the pre-school sector was observed nationally that governments realised the need to institute some policy to guide its operations. These belated interventions, on the part of governments, had some serious implications for the quality and relevance of the pre-school education offered. In fact, the intervention was exacerbated by the decisions made by some governments to assign various ministries to manage different aspects of pre-school education. For example, the health ministry was assigned to inspect health matters as other ministries handled registration and educational matters. In view of the differences in the interest and approaches by different government agencies, a clear division of responsibilities was needed as well as some agreed modes of co-ordination. Due to the

multiplicity of roles taking place without the guarantee of quality and relevance, there was also a need for a single ministry to take up the overall responsibility of supervising the pre-school sector (Wawire, 2006).

Concern for ECCE has generally heightened since the 1970s, with key meetings taking place, which focused mainly on the sector in the Sub-Saharan region (Pence, 2004). These developments culminated in the growing awareness, recognition and embracing of ECCE as a field in its own right by many governments. However, before 1990 young children, especially from birth to five years, were nearly invisible in most African policy documents, except in sectoral health and nutrition policies and strategies. The international impetus given to children and ECCE in 1990, especially by the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), also stimulated official action in Sub-Saharan Africa. The first EFA target set in both the 1990 Jomtien Conference and the Dakar Framework for Action was related to expanding early childhood care, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. However, in the two conferences, there were differences in the targets and the major focus on access. The concern was on expansion through development activities, including family and community interventions. There was a need not only to consider access, but also to improve the quality of provision, especially shifting from a more informal, community-based approach to ECCE, to one that recognised the sector as important and integral in its own right.

The two EFA conferences (Jomtien and the Dakar Framework) seem not to have enhanced the cause of ECCE much because, unlike specific targets set for primary schooling, gender parity/equality and adult literacy, the ECCE targets are neither time-bound nor do they specify intentions regarding the extent of expansion. This was a serious omission because, given the extremely low starting points for ECCE programmes in many Sub-Saharan African countries, the chance of attaining anything approaching universality by 2015 is most unlikely. It is bound to take many years for these countries to reach pre-school enrolment rates of 50 percent, based on current trends. Furthermore, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are not explicitly concerned with ECCE (Kholowa and Rose, 2007). Although ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC of 1989) and actively participating in the World Summit for Children, many African countries have only just begun to integrate children's issues more clearly in sectoral policies. Ghana, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia and Uganda established ministries or national commissions responsible for children. Other countries focused on children under ministries of family and social affairs (Garcia et al, 2008).

In 1998, the Seventh Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States expressed a specific political commitment to promoting ECCE policies (UNESCO, 1998). The conference accepted the recommendations of the Regional Consultation of non-governmental organisation (NGOs). One of the key recommendations was that all African countries should formulate clear policies on promoting early childhood and development. One of the challenges for these countries was having the capacity to formulate culturally appropriate and effective integrated ECCE policies and funding (Garcia, et al, 2008).

The involvement of key development partners such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank in ECCE promotion and funding was important to secure government support in a number of the countries. UNICEF, for example, supported programmes for children's rights as ECCE intensified in most countries. From the mid-1990s, the World Bank provided funding for countries such as Eritrea, Kenya and Uganda. With overwhelming research evidence for the positive returns of investing in ECCE, the Bank substantially increased its funding for child-care, health, nutrition and education (Young, 1997; Kholowa and Rose, 2007).

The Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD) of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) established in 1997 made a significant contribution to ECCE policy development. In 1999, WGECD identified support for policy development as the major way in which partners could contribute and make a difference collectively to sustainable programmes for holistic child development in Africa (Torkington, 2001). The WGECD Policy Projects combined assessment and capacity building. The first project activity involved case studies of ECCE policies in Ghana, Mauritius and Namibia as well as a survey of ECCE policy issues. The second project activity provided extensive technical support for national ECCE planning in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Senegal. Further support for ECCE resulted from Africa-wide meetings held in Uganda (1999), Eritrea (2002) and Ghana (2005) of African and international specialists, policy and decision-makers and funding agencies that helped to galvanise interest in ECCE on the continent, which led to more comprehensive policies and programmes. Subsequently, most countries developed and adopted national ECCE policies (Kholowa and Rose, 2007; Garcia, et al, 2008).

Objectives of Early Childhood Care and Education

From the outset, it is important to mention that in many Sub-Saharan countries, pre-school education is not part of the formal education system. Nevertheless, governments appreciate the value of pre-school education as manifested by the inclusion of the sector in official policy documents. In some countries, there are specific national policy documents on pre-schools or day-care centres. Such documents normally contain goals and objectives which are expected to serve as guidelines for the nature of activities to be undertaken by ECCE centres. In this regard, a general analysis of goals and objectives provides a deeper understanding of the operations and activities. An examination of official policy documents from many countries reveals that goals and objectives are clearly stated and are generally similar. They define the goals and objectives of ECCE centres as offering non-formal education aimed not only at providing for the all-round development of children, but also preparing them for formal education.

The development of goals and objectives of ECCE has been cross-fertilised by thinking at the international level. Of particular importance in this respect have been the Conference on the Rights of the Child (1989), the World Summit for Children (1990), the World Conference on Education for All (1990), and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000). At these and similar forums, views were expressed that ECCE programmes should: (a) cover children aged 0 - 3 years in addition to the pre-school age of 3 - 5 as practised in many countries, and (b) include

maternal education, child survival and development and socialisation, as well as community participation in the provision of health, nutrition and care.

As much as the official goals and objectives emphasise the total development of the child and are in line with the official national and district educational structures involved in the supervision of the delivery of ECCE programmes, parents' expectations of pre-schools greatly deviate from the policy of their respective government, thus impacting negatively on the actual practice in relation to quality and relevance. Parents' general expectation of pre-school education is quite narrow, as it mainly centres on the ECCE role of preparing children for formal schooling. Parents expect pre-schools to focus more on numeracy and literacy skills to give them a head start in the competitive examination-oriented systems in most countries. This perception is further reinforced by the competitive class/standard one entry examinations, where advanced work is required to determine who enters primary schools from pre-schools (Wawire, 2006).

In some parts of Sub-Saharan countries, especially those in arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL), which heavily rely on feeding programmes, where the ECCE programme is associated with feeding and health care projects, many parents perceive ECCE mainly in terms of immediate material benefits rather than its long-term overall nurturing of their children. Thus pre-school enrolments often fluctuate with the presence or absence of feeding and/health care programmes. The existence of such different and often conflicting expectations makes government efforts to encourage an ECCE programme with broad goals and objectives a difficult task. Rather than promoting the ideals of governments, teachers in ECCE centres, many of them inadequately qualified, feel obliged to respect the wishes of the parents and bodies which remunerate them.

From the stated objectives, the concern for ECCE goes beyond preparation for future learning, and, indeed, most protagonists view it as important not to link ECCE activities directly with training for primary schooling. Regardless of whether the purpose of ECCE is considered to be a preparation for the next stage of schooling or is valuable in its own right, there is general agreement by international agencies that, to have the desired effect, ECCE programmes should not be in the form of an academically-oriented pre-school programme. A programme overly focused on formal skills is considered detrimental, as it can lead young children to depend on adults with a lack of confidence in their own skills which, at times, can lead to "a fall in literacy ability in primary school" (UNESCO, 2004).

Access and Participation

From the above analysis, there is a compelling case for more and better ECCE programmes. Because of the critical nature of early childhood as regards physical and mental development, ECCE programmes help to reduce existing and future disadvantages faced by many children, through addressing their nutritional, health and educational needs. In fact, ECCE participation reduces the prevalence of malnutrition and stunting in addition to improving cognitive development and contributing to enhanced school participation, completion and achievement.

ECCE, therefore, has become the guarantor of children's rights and can open the way to achieving all the EFA goals (UNESCO, 2007).

Generally, early childhood care and education in Sub-Saharan is a very diverse area of learning, encompassing the stages from formal pre-primary education, which is integrated with national education systems through kindergartens, where care, play and education are included, to more formal and often home-based activities (UNESCO, 2003). Access and participation are assessed in terms of the enrolment rate in school, which is measured using the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER). The GER is derived by expressing total enrolment irrespective of the age of the pupils as a percentage of the total population of the eligible age group (for the ECCE, three to five-year-olds). The NER, on the other hand, is the percentage of the eligible age-group actually enrolled in school. It is the most reliable indicator as it excludes under-age and over-age pupils.

Data on the participation of children in ECCE programmes is generally difficult to verify. It is also difficult to establish the full extent of enrolment as such figures exclude some care and education groups. In fact, data collection systems that focus largely on state or state-regulated providers may not cover non-formal care and educational activities administered by other state authorities or private entities for children aged 3 and above. An important part of assessing ECCE provision is determining how well programmes reach the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. This has become feasible with the greater availability of household survey results that allow for the disaggregation of participation data by gender, household wealth and rural or urban residence. In Sub-Saharan Africa, national ECCE systems vary considerably in terms of the age-group served, number of years provided and content. However, in most countries, participation is not obligatory and children may start programmes at any age. In some cases, programmes can take only one year, whereas in other cases, they can take up to four years. The most common duration is three years, typically serving ages 3 to 5 or less frequently 4 to 6 (Hyde and Kabiru, 2003).

In comparative terms, as shown Table 3.1, the islands of Mauritius and Seychelles have the highest GER of 100 and 95, and 109 between 1999 and 2005 respectively; followed by Kenya with 44 and 52; Ghana with 40 and 55; and Zimbabwe with 41 and 43 during the same period. Other countries with a reasonably high GER are: Lesotho with 23 and 33, Sao Tome and Principe with 27 and 31; South Africa with 20 and 37 and the Gambia with 20. Although these countries' gross ECCE enrolments range between 20 and 55 percent, they are, however, still below the world's desired average of 70 percent. In terms of NER, as Table 3.2 illustrates, Seychelles and Mauritius had the highest with 96 and 85 in 2005, respectively; Cameroon with 51; Ghana 36; Sao Tome and Principe 32; the United Republic of Tanzania 30; Kenya 29; Lesotho 27; and South Africa 17. Private institutions account for a large proportion of total pre-primary enrolment in the region (UNESCO, 2007).

On the whole, most Sub-Saharan African countries as well as other developing countries show low participation levels, often below 10 percent and, in some cases, with sharp declines. Most of

them belong to the heavily indebted poor countries' group and are generally affected by the HIV and AIDS pandemic and high levels of poverty. They face the greatest challenge when it comes to achieving the good care, health, education and development of young children. In some countries, the impact of the implementation of free primary education on pre-school enrolment has yet to be conclusively evaluated, as most ECCE institutions attached to public primary schools are normally supported through community contributions. However, there are indications that the figures may have dropped as parents opted to put their children in Standard I, where education is free rather than in pre-school where they have to pay some levies (UNESCO, 2007).

Gender disparities in enrolment at national levels, as tables 1 and 2 illustrate, are not significant. In fact, gender disparities in pre-primary education are less marked than at other levels of education, probably because children at this level tend to come from more affluent groups, where gender biases are less pronounced, than among the poor. The proportion of girls enrolled in ECCE in the high and low enrolment countries compares favourably with that of boys, but was slightly higher in Mauritius, Seychelles, Sao Tome and Principe and Ghana. Participation rates in the ECCE programmes are considerably higher for urban children than those in rural areas. Countries with participation rates higher than the average have minimal differences between urban and rural areas. In addition to gender and urban-versus-rural participation, millions of children who belong to disadvantaged groups and live in vulnerable settings do not have access to ECCE, despite evidence of considerable benefits accruing from their participation.

Table 1: Gross enrolment ratio (GER) in pre-primary education (percentage)

Name of country	Gross enrolment ratio 1999			Gross enrolment ratio 2005		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Botswana	2	2	2	2	2	2
Congo	2	1	2	6	6	6
Cote d'Ivoire	2	2	2	3	3	3
Eritrea	6	6	5	12	12	12
Ethiopia	1	1	1	2	2	2
Gambia	20	20	20	20	20	20
Ghana	40	40	40	55	55	57
Kenya	44	44	44	52	52	52
Lesotho	23	23	24	34	33	35
Mali	1	1	1	3	3	3
Mauritius	100	99	101	95	95	96
Namibia	19	18	21	29	27	30
Sao Tome and Principe	27	26	28	32	31	33
Senegal	3	3	3	8	7	8
Seychelles	109	107	111	109	110	109
South Africa	20	20	20	37	37	38
Togo	2	2	2	2	2	2
Uganda	4	4	4	4	4	4

Zimbabwe	41	40	41	43	43	43
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Source: UNESCO, *Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?* Paris: UNESCO Publishing and Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 272-274.

Table 2: Net enrolment ratio (NER) pre-primary education (percentage) - 2005

Name of country	Total	Male	Female
Benin	3	3	3
Cameroon	51	51	51
Cape Verde	2	2	2
Congo	6	6	6
Cote d'Ivoire	3	3	3
Eritrea	8	8	9
Ghana	36	35	37
Guinea	6	6	6
Kenya	29	28	29
Lesotho	27	26	28
Mauritius	85	85	86
Niger	0.9	0.9	0.9
Nigeria	12	12	12
Sao Tome and Principe	32	31	33
Senegal	4	4	5
Seychelles	96	97	95
South Africa	17	17	17
Swaziland	13	13	13
Togo	2	2	2
Uganda	0.9	0.9	0.9
United Republic of Tanzania	30	29	30

Source: UNESCO, *Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?* Paris, UNESCO Publishing and Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 272-274.

In most Sub-Saharan countries, ministries and departments in charge of ECCE programmes try to ensure that they provide quality education by providing policy guidelines in areas such as curriculum and staff development. In curriculum development, for example, emphasis is placed on providing guidelines which are expected to ensure that certain basic standards are maintained in accordance with national goals and objectives and to be the basis for curriculum development at the local level. This is similarly the case with professional staff development. Through the use of national guidelines, supervisors and tutors trained at the national level are expected to train teachers and other professional staff at the local level, as locally-based training should take into account the cultural and social context in which ECCE centres operate. The guidelines generally incorporate the expanded concept of ECCE, which embraces health care, nutrition, immunisation and the development of pre-school children.

Whereas ECCE programmes in many Sub-Saharan countries have made considerable progress as a result of policy strategies and guidelines, the quality of many programmes remains unsatisfactory, especially community-based ECCE centres. The key contributory factors include the policy which makes parents and local communities responsible for the development and recurrent costs of such ECCE centres. As a result, many unregistered institutions with very poor facilities have been sprouting. Many of these unregistered facilities operate at a sub-standard level, especially with regard to physical facilities, teaching and learning materials as well as teachers. Furthermore, the supervision and inspection of ECCE centres is, on the whole, quite inadequate. Most of the field school inspectors, who combine their duties with inspection of these institutions, are not all that conversant with ECCE objectives and standards. They are also overburdened and lack basic facilities such as transport to enable them to carry out their duties efficiently. Consequently, most ECCE centres do not get the necessary professional guidance for implementing their programmes. This reality also applies to ECCE centres attached to primary schools as head teachers generally lack relevant training and experience in early childhood activities. Due to the low priority some governments accord ECCE, many officers charged with the responsibility of managing and guiding ECCE programmes at the national level are not only inept for the task, but also lack the requisite training in such programmes. Above all, despite most governments' commitment to ECCE programmes, the constraints in making public budgetary allocations to these programmes have severely undermined their quality (Hyde and Kabiru, 2003).

Summary and Conclusion

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is open to a diversity of terminologies adopted by international agencies and academics. Moreover, definitions associated with ECCE are contentious as most ECCE definitions are child-focused and stress the holistic nature of the concept, such as recognising the cognitive, emotional and physical needs of children. Research evidence suggests that new entrants into primary schools are better prepared for the school environment and that they make better use of school resources if they have been exposed to pre-school education prior to their entry into the regular school system. On the whole, despite efforts to promote ECCE in Sub-Saharan African countries, access to such facilities continues to provide a significant challenge. Enrolment rates in pre-schools in the region are often below 10 percent, mainly due to limited facilities and poverty. Although there seems to be common agreement on the need to increase access to pre-schools, tensions and dilemmas on who should provide pre-schooling and it how can be financed remain unresolved. A historical perspective provides an explanation for the present state of ECCE programmes in many Sub-Saharan countries where such programmes are generally a post-independence development, having been seriously limited by the colonial regimes. Although pre-school education is not part of the formal education system in many Sub-Saharan African countries, governments appreciate its value, with the sector included in official policy documents. An examination of official policy documents from many countries reveals that goals and objectives are clearly stated and are broadly similar. They define the goals and objectives of ECCE centres as offering non-formal education aimed at both providing for children's all-round development and preparing them for formal education.

Whereas ECCE programmes in many Sub-Saharan African countries have made considerable progress as a result of policy strategies and guidelines, the quality of many of these programmes is still unsatisfactory, especially when it comes to community-based ECCE centres. The policy requiring parents and local communities to be responsible for the development and recurrent costs of ECCE centres has been identified as one of the contributory factors. In consequence, many unregistered institutions with very poor facilities have emerged as parents and communities seek cheaper alternatives. Unfortunately, many of these unregistered institutions operate at a sub-standard level as they generally have shoddy physical facilities, and face a shortage of teaching and learning materials as well as qualified teachers. Nevertheless, there is a compelling case for more and better ECCE programmes to be established, as they have proved that they can help to reduce the existing and future disadvantages faced by many children in Sub-Saharan Africa by addressing their nutritional, health and educational needs. Indeed, ECCE participation reduces the prevalence of malnutrition and stunting, improves cognitive development and contributes to increased school participation, completion and achievement. In short, ECCE has become the guarantor of children's rights and can pave the way for the achievement all the EFA goals in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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