

CIVIL SOCIETY EDUCATION COALITION (CSEC)



Building vibrant and tolerant democracies



EFFECTIVENESS OF ECDE POLICIES IN MALAWI

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PUBLICATION PROFILE

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

CBCCs	Community-Based Child Care Centres
CBO	Community-Based Organizations
CSEC	Civil Society Education Coalition
CSCQBE	Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education
DENs	District Education Networks
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education For All
ESIP	Education Sector Implementation Plan
GoM	Government of Malawi
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MoAFS	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
MoEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
MoFEP&D	Ministry of Finance Economic Planning and Development
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoGCDSW	Ministry of Gender, Children, disability and social Welfare
NESP	National Education Sector Plan
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PMTCT	Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission
SNE	Special Needs Education
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preamble

Analysis of ECDE policies in Malawi was commissioned by the Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC) which is a non-profit alliance of 84 diverse independent and voluntary organisations (Non-Governmental Organisation, Community Based Organisations, Trade Unions, Faith Based Organisations e.tc.) which promote basic Quality Education in Malawi. The major strategic activities for the coalition include: government budget tracking and analysis; research on educational issues; policy analysis and advocacy; community mobilisation and sensitization; capacity building and networking, partnership and collaboration. This analysis was therefore commissioned to determine the effectiveness of ECDE policies by assessing the availability and level of implementation of ECDE policies as well as assessing the extent to which these policies have increased access and improved quality of service delivery of the program. The assignment was hugely a desk review of the EDC policy, all ECDE related policies and progress reports etc.

Key Findings

- The report notes that there is a level of commitment on the part of government in terms of policy direction on ECD services in Malawi. This is demonstrated through the development of the NESP which has singled out ECD as one of its key priority areas. Most importantly, government through the MoGCDSW developed an ECD policy which provides guidance on implementation of ECD services in the country.
- The Early Childhood Development sub sector in the MoGCDSW has been allocated a budget provision of Mk504 million in 2015/16 financial year which is a significant increase of about 908% from the 2014/15 fiscal year allocation of Mk50 million.
- At the level of coordination and management, the review has noted that the ECD sector has a very weak coordination and management mechanism. This is largely due to the fact that there is no mandated department for ECD at MoGCDSW and MoEST headquarters as well as local assemblies. Worse still, there is no observable linkage between the two ministries in terms of planning and activity implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- In addition, stakeholder coordination of ECD services is also very weak. MoGCDSW has attempted to spearhead this through the establishment of the National ECD network which draws membership from officials and experts from government and NGOs. Among others, the network is there to lobby for

increased funding towards ECD services in the country. However, activities of the network have been very intermittent over the years. This is mostly due to the fact that the network itself has no resources of its own, and its membership is drawn from professionals who though working on ECD related issues have own key commitments.

- The report further notes that access to ECD services in Malawi is very low. It is estimated that 68% of children between the ages 0-8 years do not have any access to ECD services (Status of ECD in Malawi, 2011). This is compounded by an acute shortage of ECD centres, especially in rural areas. In urban areas, accessibility is mostly hindered by high fees charged by most pre-schools.
- In addition, it is clearly shown that most ECD services in the country are provided by private and community stakeholders. Government has not established ECD centre in the country. Unlike private run ECD centres such as pre-schools or nursery schools, community run ECD centres are voluntary based. This means they are run on community good will. Eventually this has adverse effects on the sustainability and quality of the services offered.
- Related to the above, the study has noted that currently most ECD centres such as CBCCs are run by un-qualified staff. The Association of Preschool Playgroups in Malawi (APPM) offers tailor-made training for ECD educators in Malawi but its reach has been very limited especially in rural communities. This notwithstanding, the study also notes that the Association for Early Children in Malawi which is based in Blantyre offers training opportunities to some of these caregivers.
- A tremendous effort by various partners such as Action Aid International (AAI) made to build capacity of caregivers apart from the actual establishment of CBCCs as noted in the 2014 baseline survey which was commissioned by YONECO.
- Further, infrastructure in most ECD service centres is below par and child unfriendly. This is mostly common in CBCCs. Sanitation in most of these centres is not conducive for children.
- The study has also noted that while progress has been made to develop documents for standardization of ECD services, most principles outlined in them are not adhered to.
- ECD related policies have numerous stakeholders with clear roles and responsibilities but some have no institutional framework
- Most of the ECD related policies are inclusive in terms of ensuring accessibility, support and participation except in few cases where issues of other vulnerable children are not properly addressed

Key Recommendations

- Government should seriously consider establishment of an ECD department in the MoGCDSW as opposed to a unit with fully fledged staff at central and local levels otherwise feeling of all senior vacant posts under the Department of Child Affairs may also be helpful.
- The government needs to consider coopting ECD centres, specifically CBCCs, into MoGCDSW local structures with the hope of establishing clear support systems. Whilst this is done, government should ensure communities continue taking a principal role in the management of the centres.
- Whilst recognizing that planning, management and implementation of ECD activities requires a multi-sectoral approach, there is need for strong coordination at both policy and practice level between the different sectors. This will ensure efficiency and effectiveness of ECD programmes in the country.
- There is need for continued increased funding for ECD activities in the country. Over the past years, it is only this fiscal year (2015/16) that ECD program was allocated reasonable funding amounting to MK504 million. Furthermore, CSEC together with other stakeholders should increase lobbying activities for more funding for the ECD program.
- MoGCDSW needs to find innovative ways in which it would intensify supervision, coordination and monitoring of ECD activities in the country. One of the ways would be to partner with all key stakeholders at national and local levels, albeit in addition to its existing working structures on ECD.
- The MoGCDSW needs to enhance its efforts towards documentation of each stakeholder contribution to ECD services. For instance, as demonstrated in this report, it was quite challenging to establish total funding towards ECD by stakeholders other than government. Such documentation should also be made accessible to all interested stakeholders.
- It is also important to increase efforts in capacity building for care givers and educators in ECD centres. The capacity building exercise should include training on all key elements in ECD, including management as well as actual service delivery. The training should also extend to all government personnel involved in planning, management and implementation of ECD.
- The government should consider establishing a sound accreditation system of ECD training for care givers and educators in the country. In addition, support should also be extended to efforts currently being undertaken by the University of Malawi, Chancellor College, which is offering training in ECD.

- The Government should consider improving the infrastructure for ECD services. This should be both in terms of improvement in the existing structures and establishment of new ones particularly in rural areas. Stakeholders in ECD should consider lobbying for increased resource allocation towards the same.
- The Government should enhance coordination and enforcement of ECD national standards to harmonize quality of ECD services provided in the country, and this should be supported by an ECD statute.

CHAPTER I

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Research

Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC) is a non-profit alliance of 82 diverse independent and voluntary organisations (Non-Governmental Organisation, Community Based Organisations, Trade Unions, Faith Based Organisations e.tc.) which promote the right to quality inclusive education in Malawi. The major strategic activities for the coalition include: research; budget tracking and analysis; capacity building; Community mobilisation and sensitisation; Policy analysis and advocacy; Networking, partnership and collaboration.

CSEC therefore sought the services of a consultant to undertake a review of policies related to Early Childhood Education. The overall purpose of the analysis was to determine the effectiveness of ECDE policies by assessing the availability and level of implementation of ECDE policies as well as assessing the extent to which these policies have increased access and improved quality of service delivery of the program.

The assignment was hugely a desk review of the EDC policy, all ECDE related policies and progress reports etc.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of the consultancy is to assess the effectiveness of the ECDE policies in the country in order to inform advocacy on the issue.

The specific objectives of the assignment were:

- Assess the availability and level of implementation of the ECDE policies;
- Determine the extent to which the policies have increased access and improved quality of service delivery of the program;
- Identify actors and mechanisms that are currently utilised to enhance the effective implementation of the policies;
- Identify barriers to the effective implementation of policies;
- Assess the inclusivity of the policies;

1.3 Structure of the Report

The report is organized in four main Chapters. Chapter 1 gives the general introduction. It outlines the background information, the scope and limitations of the study. The

research methodology is provided in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 provides detailed analysis of the ECDE policies, other strategic documents and progress reports in line with the study objectives. Chapter 4 provides summary, conclusions and recommendations emanating from the study.

CHAPTER II

2. STUDY METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Design and Scope

The study was a desk review of literature on ECD policies; other strategic documents and progress reports produced for the past five years on programmes and activities related to Early Childhood development. Key literature consulted in the course of the study included policy and strategy documents; government budget documents; expenditure reports; project reports; and budget review reports.

In addition to desk research, key stakeholder consultations were also done to augment and authenticate the data collected. Stakeholder consultations were done with key officials from the Ministry of Gender, Children & Community Development (MoGCDSW). The respondent was a key person entrusted with policy, program and project formulation and implementation and hence was in a position to provide full range and depth of information needed.

2.2 Data Analysis & Report Presentation

The study collected substantial information mainly from the desk reviews much as some information was obtained through interviewing the desk officer of ECD at the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW). The collected information was synthesized, validated and subsequently grouped into relevant chapters and in the five sections as provided by the Terms of Reference.

2.3 Study Limitations

One of the key limitations of this assignment was that of the unavailability of key progress reports on the implementation of ECDE policies and hence the researcher provided detailed analysis for the reports that were made available.

CHAPTER III

3. ANALYSIS OF THE ECDE RELATED POLICIES

The Chapter provides a detailed analysis of the ECD policy and selected policies related to ECD such as Gender Policy; Education policy; Orphans and Vulnerable Children policy. The analysis generally focuses on how each of the above policies are going to effectively address ECD related challenges in the country. To a certain extent, the section/chapter attempts to provide a critique of the policies in view of prevailing ECD related challenges in the country.

3.1 General Background

The 2008 Population and Housing Census revealed that Malawi's population of 13.6 million is largely youthful and characterized by a huge proportion of children (NSO, 2008). The Constitution of Malawi defines a child as a person who is 18 years and below. It is reported that there are close to seven million children in Malawi who are 18 years and below. Within this bracket close to 37% are children who are below eight years of age (National Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Development, 2009). As will be learnt in subsequent paragraphs, this is the population bracket for Early Childhood Development (ECD).

One of the most generic definitions of Early Childhood Development (ECD) is probably one which is provided by the World Bank Factsheet on ECD released in 2010. The factsheet defines ECD as the 'physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development of a child from the prenatal stage up to age eight,' (World Bank, 2010). The paper further indicates that ECD takes place in a number of settings which include homes, schools, health service facilities as well as community based child care centres. This therefore implies that a wide range of players are involved in the provision of ECD related services.

Locally, the National Policy on Early Childhood Development defines it as a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to eight years of age, their parents and caregivers,' (National Policy on Early Childhood Development, 2006). This encompasses the provision of education, health, education, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation as well as a range of social development stimulation activities.

It is evident that it is in the early years that the fundamentals of children's emotional, intellectual, social and physical development are laid. Without good parenting, health, nutrition and education, developmental delays can occur that rarely can be corrected later.

For too long, children's early years have been the sole responsibility of their parents and extended family. In today's societies poverty, disease, malnutrition, civil strife and the breakdown of traditional structures place major constraints on parents and communities. The development and safety of children are jeopardized on a daily basis. Parents, families and communities under stress may not be able to respond adequately to the needs of young ones.

Many early childhood development (ECD) programmes, particularly in rural and poor urban areas, aim to address these challenges. However, programmes are often limited and unevenly distributed. Wide differences exist in programme quality, and many suffer from inadequate funding, poor co-ordination, and unsustainability. In light of increasing interrelationships between individuals' needs and rights and national development processes, especially for poverty reduction and economic growth, governments are assuming greater responsibility for ensuring the needs and rights of young children are met.

Governments play a particularly crucial role in creating enabling environments that allow children to develop into healthy, well-balanced and responsible adults. Governments develop National ECD policies or policy frameworks as important tools for creating such enabling environments and advocating for adequate funding of large-scale ECD interventions. Integrated and participatory approaches to ECD policy planning are of key importance to achieving successful policy development and implementation. The holistic nature of child development requires the involvement of multiple partners across ministries, parents, communities, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders.

ECD Policies and Policy Frameworks aim at addressing critical issues such as ensuring equitable and high-quality ECD services are accessible to parents and vulnerable children. They can give priority to parent education and support. Policies often include provisions for building effective co-ordination systems for maximizing the use of resources. They usually call for integrated approaches to ECD training, curricula and methods.

3.2. Availability of ECD Related Policies

3.2.1 Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS II)

This has been the country's overarching medium term policy framework for socio-economic development. The MGDS had six key priority areas, which included social development. Under this key priority area, the policy highlighted several issues related to ECD. Some of the issues included: expansion of infrastructure for education, including at

pre-school level; as well as increased support for health and nutrition so as to reduce child morbidity and mortality.

However, the MGDS did not aptly indicate the importance of ECD as a key entry point into a child’s education. At best, commitment at this level would have been clearly demonstrated through singling it out as a key theme under the education sector as a whole. In addition, this would have also shown seriousness on the part of government in terms of human capital investment over the long-term.

3.2.2 National Education Policy

The current national education policy framework is guided by the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) which was developed in 2008 and will run up to 2017. The sector plan has placed considerable emphasis on the provision of ECD services in the country. This plan has a number of priorities and strategies on ECD and further highlights seven key principles to guide implementation of the three priority areas and their strategies. These principles mostly border on increasing access to ECD services through expansion and development of new centres; increasing the number of ECD educators; as well as development of ECD support structures at community and district levels, (NESP, 2008). Refer table 1 below:

Table 1: NESP KEY STRATEGIES AND INDICATORS

PRIORITY AREA	KEY STRATEGIES	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<i>Access and Equity</i>	<i>Promote stimulation-learning activities at an early life for all children</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>80 percent of the children (including special needs) are reached by 2017</i> • <i>Ratio of caregiver to</i>
	<i>Promote early detection, intervention and inclusion for children with special health and education needs</i>	
	<i>Promote early childhood care for orphans and vulnerable children</i>	

<i>Quality and Relevance</i>	<i>Improve quality ECD services for children in Malawi</i>	<i>child is 1:20 by 2017</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ratio of helper to child is 1:40 by 2017</i> • <i>Increased expenditure for ECD by 3 percent of total education budget by 2017</i>
	<i>Design a curriculum for children with disabilities</i>	
	<i>Improve training of ECD teachers/educators/trainers</i>	
<i>Governance and Management</i>	<i>Develop ECD data base including on SNE and gender segregation</i>	
	<i>Strengthen the institutional framework for the delivery of ECD services</i>	
	<i>Promote the profile of ECD</i>	
	<i>Develop an ECD Act</i>	
	<i>Improve implementation of ECD policy</i>	
	<i>Provide parental education and support groups on early childhood</i>	

Source: NESP, 2008

3.2.3 National ECD Policy

The Malawi Government through the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) developed a national policy on ECD in 2006. It is pleasing to note the Ministry is in the process of reviewing the policy to incorporate some emerging issues and revise targets to be achieved in the next five years. However, the overall goal of the current ECD policy is ‘to promote a comprehensive approach to ECD programmes and practices for children aged 0-8 years, to ensure fulfillment of the rights to fully develop their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive potential,’ (GoM, 2006). The major objectives and strategies outlined in the policy are summarized in table 2 below.

Table 2: ECD KEY STRATEGIES AND INDICATORS

KEY OBJECTIVES	KEY STRATEGIES
Promote the provision of quality antenatal and postnatal care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sensitize families and communities on the importance of providing supportive and enabling environment to pregnant mothers• Encourage men to take an active role in PMTCT issues
Promote the best start and early stimulation in life for all children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage timely introduction of complementary foods• Make birth registration available and affordable for all children in Malawi
Enhance the provision of psychosocial care for holistic development of the children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage positive cultural practices such as carrying a baby at the back• Train caregivers using standard curriculum
Expand high quality early learning and stimulation services for young children in Malawi	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build capacity of ECD personnel and structures• Build the capacity of institutions in the field of ECD• Make available ECD operational materials for use
Strengthen ECD partnership, networking, collaboration and coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish an ECD coordinating body• Produce ECD quarterly newsletter for information sharing• Establish and maintain ECD resource centres at National and District levels• Sensitize the Parliamentary Committee on Women and Children
Facilitate the provision of acceptable standards of care and support, early learning and	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and implement national operational guidelines for all ECD interventions• Provide all ECD child caregivers with appropriate training

development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an inspectorate of ECD programmes within the national ECD Coordinating body
Address the negative socio-economic factors that affect early childhood development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research on socio-economic factors affecting childhood development • Eliminate all negative cultural practices
Facilitate the provision of adequate resources for ECD activities at family, community and institutional levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government to establish a separate budget line for ECD • Government to lobby with donors and private sector for increased funding to ECD activities
Promote the protection of children against any forms of abuse and discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop mechanisms for eliminating any forms of child abuse and discrimination • Review the existing Acts protecting children from physical, emotional and mental abuse • Rehabilitate children and mothers who are suffering as a result of abuse • Undertake continuous studies to assess the situation of child abuse in the country
Strengthen the protection and safeguarding of children in difficult circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and advocate legislations that deal with issues concerning children in difficult circumstances • Provide basic education and vocational skills training to children in difficult circumstances • Provide and develop adequate professional staff to provide efficient and effective childcare, protection, and development services
Reduce malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and improve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness on growth monitoring and nutrition education • Strengthen surveillance mechanisms to monitor

food security	iron, iodine and vitamin A deficiencies
Promote access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide adequate knowledge n how to have access to and control over safe water sources • Safeguard and rehabilitate the environment and natural resources from undue pollution, contamination and physical degradation

Source: National ECD Policy

As can be seen in the figure above, the policy attempts to provide a holistic approach towards the provision and management of ECD services. It is also worth noting that the policy touches on the very critical issues affecting ECD services in the country. For instance, the policy calls for increased resource mobilization to improve existing ECD services as well as increased capacity building for caregivers.

3.2.4 National Policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children

This policy notes that HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to tragically claim many lives in the productive age group of 15-49 thereby leaving behind young orphans to fend for themselves. To this end a number of key strategies are outlined in the policy document aimed at guiding and directing efforts of different stakeholders implementing OVC activities (Refer Table 3)

Table 3: Key strategies in the OVC policy

KEY OBJECTIVES	KEY STRATEGIES
To set standards and guidelines for various stakeholders designing and implementing care programmes to create a conducive environment for the care, support and protection of orphans and other vulnerable children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage caregivers to recognise existing policies that affect children in the course of discharging their roles and responsibilities • Establish revolving loan schemes for order orphans and guardians caring for OVC
To facilitate the coordination, integration, and harmonization of activities for the care, protection and support of OVC at all levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a national directory of stakeholders involved in the care of OVC • Design a website on the situation and care of OVC
To provide the institutional and legal framework within which	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidelines for the establishment, suspension or closure of support groups

<p>services for the care and protection of OVC in order to meet their social, familial and basic necessities</p>	<p>organisations, NGOs and other institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidelines for identifying, placement and withdrawal of OVC from individuals and foster families abusing their rights • Facilitate the enactment and amendment of children’s Act • Establish special mechanisms for inspecting institutions caring for OVC to ensure their compliance with the requirements for child protection and security • Facilitate the provision and accessibility of legal aid services related to children and the youth especially OVC • Take legal action on individuals/organisations obtaining resources for personal gains under the guise of assisting OVC
<p>To strengthen the capacity of families and communities to cope with the burden of and provide adequate care and support to orphans and other vulnerable children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train and empower caregivers with knowledge and skills for working with OVC for their proper growth and development • Encourage CBOs, NGOs, FBOs etc to provide educational support to OVC to increase their opportunity for self-reliance

3.2.5 National Gender Policy

The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare developed the first National Gender Policy which came into effect in 2000. The implementation of the Policy (2000-2005) resulted in increased efforts on promotion of gender equity and equality. The purpose of this policy is to mainstream gender in the national development process so as to enhance participation of women and men, girls and boys for sustainable and equitable development for poverty eradication. The analysis notes that in terms of the achievements recorded, there is no single mention of any achievement that pertains to Orphans and Vulnerable Children. Furthermore, it has been observed that in the current reviewed policy document there are only very few strategies that aim at promoting the rights of OVC. Table 4 outlines the major objectives and strategies that touch on OVC.

Table 4: Key OVC Strategies in Gender Policy

KEY OBJECTIVE	KEY STRATEGIES
To reduce poverty among women and other vulnerable groups (Orphans, widows, PLHA, persons with disabilities, the elderly) through economic empowerment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lobby for the creation of a special fund by government to financially support women and other vulnerable groups businesses• Promote capacity building of women and other vulnerable groups in entrepreneurship
To ensure women, men, boys and girls sexual and reproductive health rights, and HIV AIDS status are improved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocate for the modification and elimination of harmful cultural practices affecting reproductive health of women and girls and other vulnerable groups

National Education Policy

The Country has not had any policy to guide stakeholders in the provision of education services and this has adversely affected learning outcomes at all levels, ECD inclusive. Due to the absence of this well-defined education policy, different key players in the education sector have not been well coordinated since Malawi attained independence. Additionally, their roles and responsibilities have not been clearly defined thereby prompting non-conformity to set standards among stakeholders. It is pleasing therefore to note an effort has been by the Government to develop this important national education policy.

The National Education Policy is linked to other relevant policies in that it is designed to respond to the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi which recognizes that all persons are entitled to education. It also aligns itself to the Education for All (EFA, 2000) goals and the current National Education Sector Plan (2008). The NEP is also closely linked to the National Gender Policy, National Policy on Early Childhood Development (ECD) and the National HIV and AIDS Policy.

One of the priority areas in the national education policy is to ensure quality, accessibility and equitable basic education which include among others Early Childhood Development (ECD). Specifically the policy aims at ensuring that ECD services are promoted in accordance with the National Policy on Early Childhood Development (ECD).

On the other hand, analysis of the current Education Act reveals that issues concerning early childhood development are not addressed in the Act. Realizing the important role that the Education Act plays, it is recommended strongly that the Government makes a deliberate effort to ensure that this Act is reviewed accordingly.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is noted that there are a number of policies that have elements of ECD related components that if properly implemented better ECD services will be accessed by children in the ECD bracket age group. Furthermore, an effort should be made to incorporate ECD issues in the Education Act. However, it is common practice to develop such good policies but implementation has always been a challenge. The next chapter therefore will analyse the effectiveness of these policies in improving accessibility and quality ECD services.

Chapter IV

IMPACT OF ECDE POLICIES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at progress made in view of the implementation of the ECD policies studied. Mainly, the chapter looks at the extent to which implementation of the said policies has led to increased access of ECD services in the country by children. Secondly, the chapter looks at how the said policies have led to improved quality of ECD services currently being delivered. While it is difficult to directly attribute current levels of access or quality of services to the said policies, albeit without studies or research done on the same, the overarching framework of analysis is that the achievements or challenges being discussed herein have been witnessed in the context of the said policies.

4.2 Trend of ECD Centres

Early Childhood Development (ECD), as already outlined in the foregoing chapter, is an important foundation for achieving cognitive skills and brain development in the early years of the learning cycle. Following the development of the national ECD policy the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare through funding from Government sought to establish ECD centers country wide.

The analysis notes that since the launch of the National ECD Implementation plan in 2006, the numbers of ECD centres that have been constructed or rehabilitated across the country have been increasing (refer Figure 1).

Figure 1: Trend of ECD Centres



Source: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare.

From the above figure, it is noted that early childhood centres increased from 8,933 in 2012/13 fiscal year to 11,114 in 2015/16 financial year thereby registering a 24 percent growth rate. The growth of ECD's in this period have an average annual growth rate of almost 8 percent resulting in more ECD centres established than the set targets. This implies that the Ministry continues to make a remarkable progress in terms of improving access of early childhood development to all children in Malawi. However, geographical reach of these ECD services remains a big challenge that deprives children to access these services. Some reports, such as baseline survey on ECD (2003) and CBCCS national mapping (2008), indicate uneven distribution of the same, with other areas having less ECD centres particularly in rural areas.

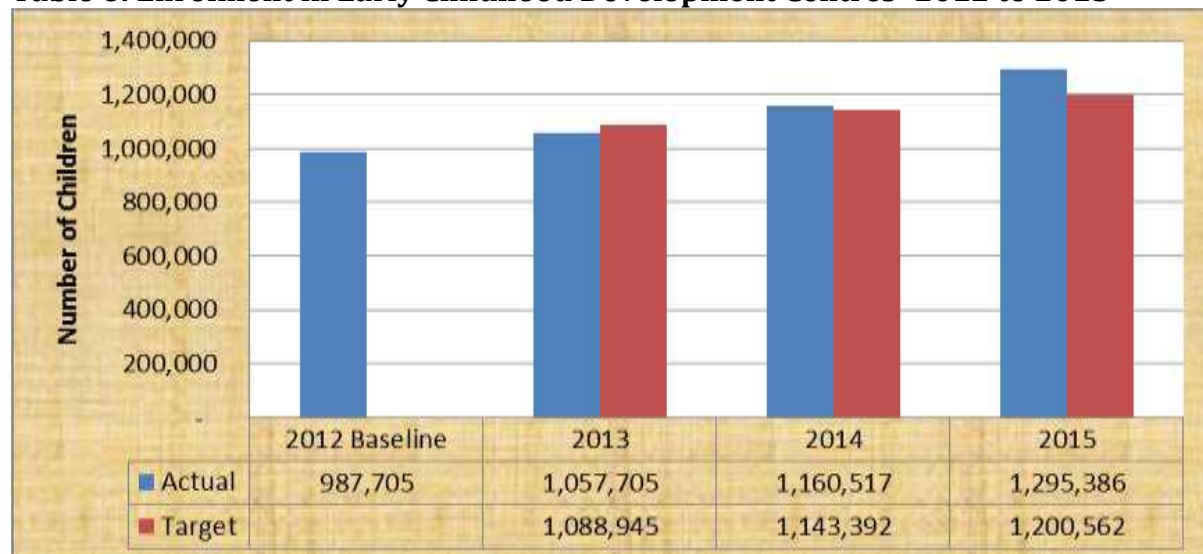
4.2 Enrolment in Early Childhood Development Centres

4.2.1 General enrolment

One of the key strategies as outlined in the ECD policy is the promotion of early childhood development education so as to ensure that parents, guardians and the community at-large are aware of the advantages of early childhood development services. Such campaigns if properly conducted have a positive impact on the enrolment of children to ECD centres. The current analysis notes that the number of children attending ECD has increased from

987,705 in 2012/13 fiscal year to 1,295,386 in 2015/16 fiscal year thereby representing a growth rate of about 31 percent. It is therefore evident that the increase in of ECD centres has gone hand in hand with the growth in enrolment of children attending early learning. Figure 2 shows how the ECD sub-sector has grown in-terms of enrolment of children in the ECD centres since 2012/13 to 2015/16 financial years.

Table 6: Enrolment in Early Childhood Development Centres- 2012 to 2015



Source: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare

The analysis observes that the annual enrolment has been growing above the set targets for each year. For instance gross enrolment rate increased from 66 percent in 2012 to 77 percent in 2015 implying that the gross enrolment rate increased by almost 11 percentage points in the four year period. The results show improvements in-terms of accessibility of the ECD-age population to ECD centres.

However the analysis noted that the current M&E framework used by government on ECD does not place much emphasis on measuring retention of children in CBCCs (it is not as comprehensive as EMIS in education). In light of this there is need to measure progress beyond enrolment and also focus on retention. Furthermore, there will be need improve the current M&E system to be able to capture data related to retention otherwise it will

forever be a challenge in terms of designing appropriate programmes so that evaluation of ECD programmes is easily done.

4.2.2 Gender Parity in enrolment

The analysis further examined accessibility of early learning by gender and notes that there was more accessibility to early childhood development centre for girls than boys in 2015 unlike in the previous years where more boys were getting enrolled than girls. Refer figure 3 below.

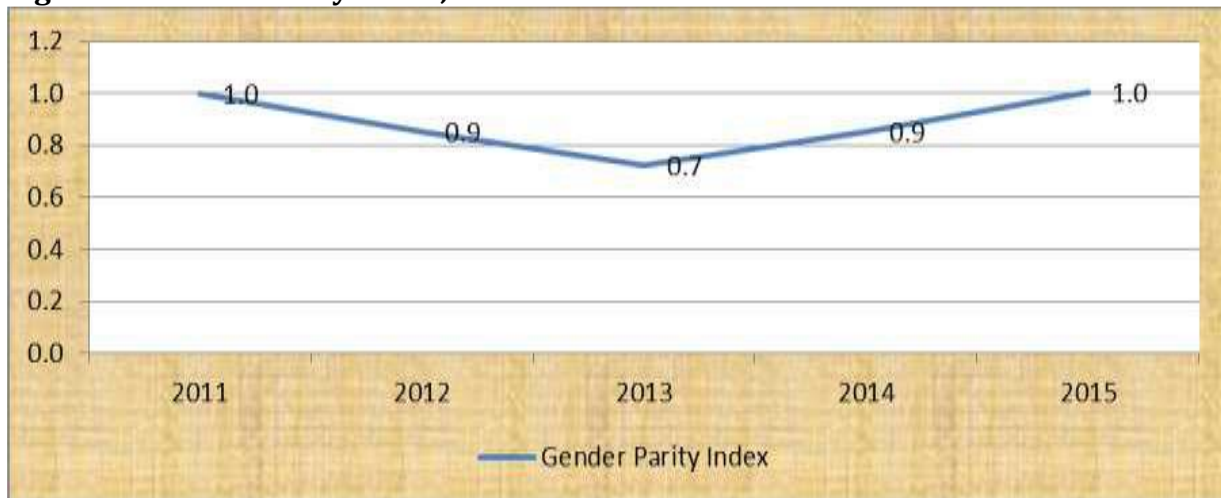
Table 3: Gross Enrolment rate for ECD; 2012- 2015



Source: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare

It has been noted in figure 3 above that the number of female learners attending ECD has been increasing from 2013 to 2015. The gender parity index for 2013 was 0.7 and 1.0 in 2015. A gender parity of one indicates equality and an index of less than 1 indicate that there are relatively fewer girls enrolled in the system compared to boys.

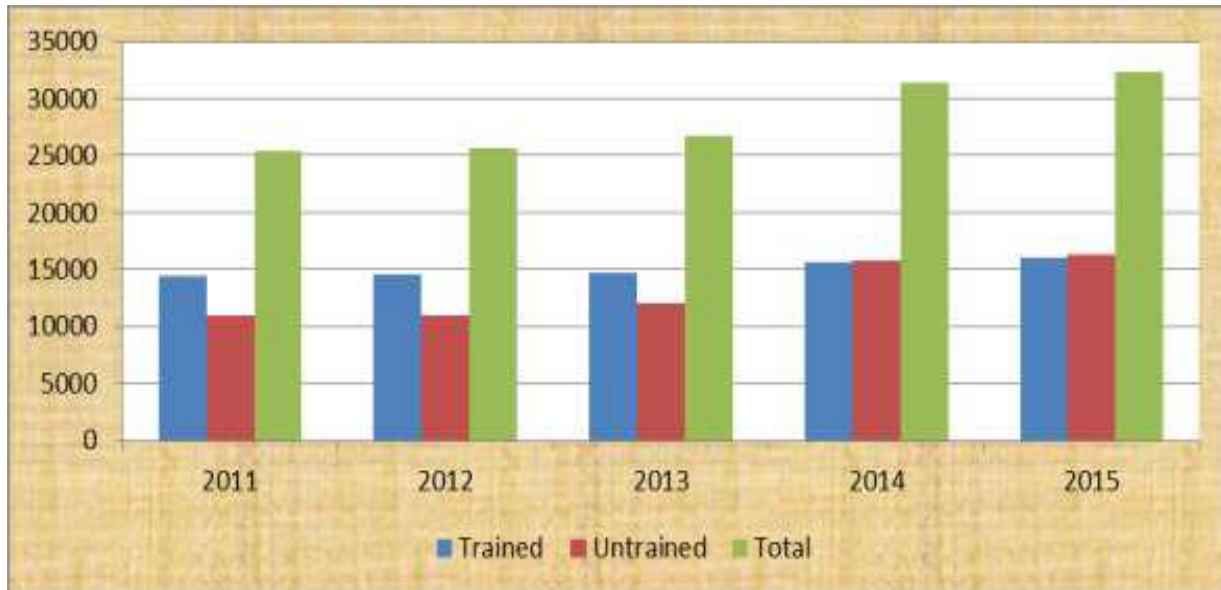
Figure 4: Gender Parity Index; 2011 - 2015



4.3 Number Of Trained And Untrained Care Givers

It is pleasing to note that over the years the number of ECD centers and the enrollment in such centers have been rising as observed in table 1 and 2. However, it is sad to note that there has been a growing number of untrained care givers in these centers which has negative effects on the quality of early childhood development. Figure 5 below shows that in 2014 and in 2015 the number of untrained care givers was almost the same and this shows that there is no progress with regard to training of the caregivers. This consequently lead to a situation where pre-primary education is likely to be one factor contributing towards poor learning outcomes in the main primary school education.

Figure 5: Number of Trained and Untrained Care Givers; 2011- 2015

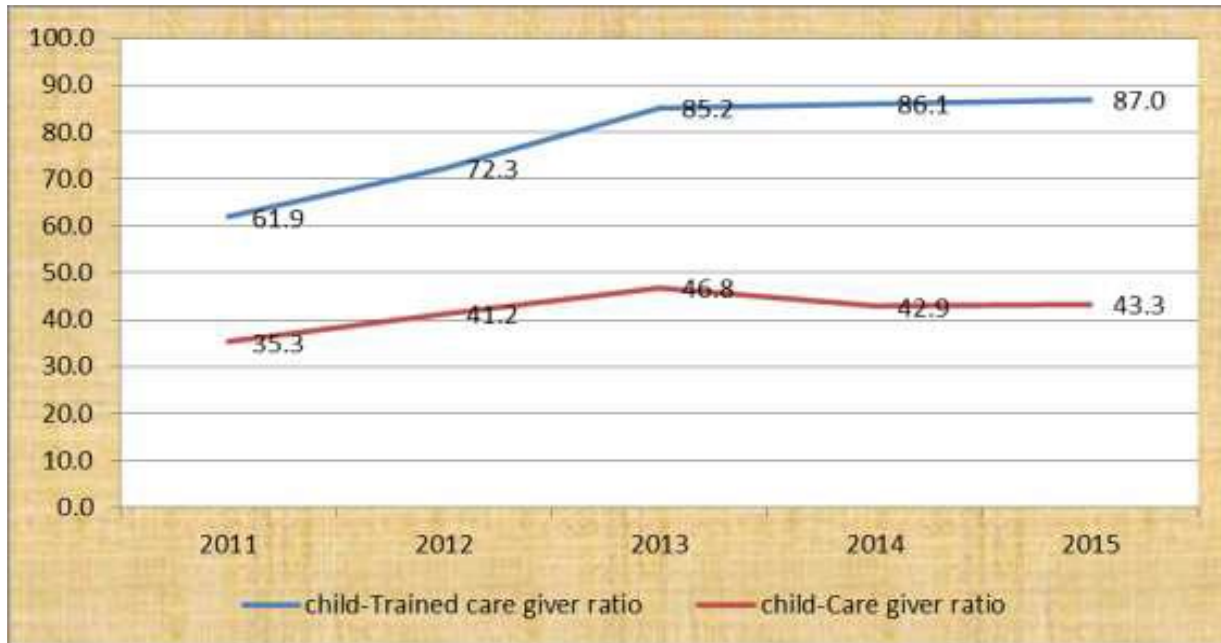


Source: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare

4.4 Child Care-Giver Ratio

The national ECD implementation plan emphasises on improving access and quality of early grade learners in Malawi. Though quality is measured in various dimensions, one of such proxy measures is the child-care giver ratio. The child –trained care giver ratio has been increasing overtime consequentially increasing the number of children per trained care-giver. The child-care giver ratio marginally increased from 35 in 2011 to 43 in 2015. The results in Figure 6 show the number of children per trained care giver has been increasing from 2011 to 2015. However the increase in number of learners is not proportional to the number of trained care givers.

Figure 6: Child care giver ratio 2011- 2015



4.5 Progress achieved on Key Indicators in the ECD Strategic Plan

In 2013/14 fiscal year, the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare undertook a joint sector review on ECD related activities and had a number of key indicators to be achieved. It is sad to note that all the indicators for all the areas of focus were not achieved an indication that probably the ECD program did not get adequate funding and/or does not have the capacity to realize the set targets, refer table 5. The overall implication of not realizing the set target despite receiving the required support from various donor partners, Government inclusive will discourage the possible donor partners to support Early Childhood Development interventions which will lead to further deterioration in terms of performance of the ECD learners.

Table 5: Progress on key Performance Indicators
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AREA OF FOCUS	INDICATOR	TARGET	TIME FRAME	PROGRESS
Develop , print and distribute Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS)	ELDS developed, printed, distributed and in use	15,000	Nov 2014 to Nov 2015	Printed 5,000 ECD guide
Train ECD caregivers, mentors, supervisors and ECD coordinators	Number of caregivers, mentors supervisors and managers trained	22,000	Nov 2014 to Nov 2016	Trained 880 caregivers and mentors
Introduce remuneration package for caregivers, mentors, supervisors and ECD Managers	Number of caregivers mentors, supervisors and ECD Managers, on government Payroll	30,000	Nov 2014 to Nov 2017	Not yet introduced
Construct and renovate model ECD centres	Number of model ECD classes constructed and renovated	900	Nov 2014 to Nov 2018	28 model ECD centres across the country
Train parenting facilitators and parents in child care and support practices for early maths and literacy	Number of parenting facilitators and parents trained in child care and support practices for early maths and literacy	5,000	Nov 2014 to Nov 2019	60 parenting Education facilitators and home visitors in parenting education and support
Monitor and supervise regularly ECD centers and parenting education activities using vehicles and motorcycles.	Number of vehicles and motorcycles procured and being used for monitoring and supervision	40 vehicles; 11,105 centres supervised	Nov 2014 to Nov 2020	No vehicle, 1,100 ECD centres supervised

4.6 Progress on implementation of key indicators in the NESP

This section provides a summary of progress made in the implementation of the Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP II) ECD policy programmes between the baseline year of 2011/12 to 2014/15 fiscal year. Just like was the case with the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, analysis of implementation plan for the Ministry of education also shows that most of the targets sets have not been achieved. Table 7 shows that of the 9 indicators, the Ministry managed to achieve two indicators only representing 22 % level of achievement.

Table 7: assessment of implementation of key indicator in the NESP

Policy Reform	Indicator	Baseline 2012	2015 Target	2015 Actual	Remarks/Comments
Ensure 50% of Children Reach std. 4 Literacy & Numeracy	Number of pilot schools with ECD involved in cluster system	0	18	0	Not achieved
	% of Children Enrolled in std.1 with prior ECD experience	30%	34%	32%	Almost achieved
Improve Access to Early Childhood Development	Number of CBCCs	8,933	10,733	0	Not achieved
	ECD total enrolment in CBCCs	1,037,090	1,200,562	1,400,965	Over achieved
	ECD gross enrolment ratio (GER) for	106.00%	111.40%	77.4%	Not achieved

	all pupils				
	ECD gross enrolment ratio (GER) for boys	114.30%	115.90%	76.3%	Not achieved
	ECD gross enrolment ratio (GER) for girls	97.70%	106.90%	78.6%	Not achieved
	ECD teachers in CBCCs (currently not state paid)	25,665	32,887	32,970	Achieved
	Unit cost per child in public ECD centre pupil	9,282	17,623	0	Not achieved

Conclusion

It has been noted in the proceeding chapter that a number of progress has been registered in the ECD sub-sector despite experiencing some challenges. For instance it has been found that number of ECD centres that have been constructed and/or rehabilitated have been increasing over the years. Furthermore, number of ECD age going children have been registered an indication that many parents and guardians appreciate the important role that ECD plays. This notwithstanding, there is a general observation that most of these ECD centres continue to be established in urban areas thereby depriving the majority of children that are in rural areas and hence a need to establish some in such areas if we are register meaning progress in the Early Childhood Development sub sector.

Chapter V

ROLES OF KEY ACTORS

5.1 Introduction

Successful implementation of any policy including all ECD related policies on Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Malawi is largely dependent on the political will as well as commitment by all key stakeholders. At national level, the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) is the major policy holder on ECD related programs.

At implementation level each stakeholder is responsible for the development of its own expected results for each of the policy objectives and these results are expressed, measured and reported regularly through a number of performance assessment process. Key stakeholders and their respective roles for each the ECD related policies are detailed in this chapter.

5.2 Key Stakeholders and the Specific Roles

Analysis of most of the ECD related policies reveals that the main stakeholders in the ECD program are: Ministry of Gender; Children, Disability and Social Welfare; Ministry of Education, science and Technology; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Agriculture and Food security; Religious Institutions; Ministry of Local Government and Rural development; NGOs,FBOs,CBOs, Human rights Organisations; Communities; Development Partners; Households

5.3 Role and Responsibilities of Key Stakeholders

5.3.1 Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare

The Ministry , as an ECD policy holder, plays a number of roles and responsibilities and the notable ones are:

- ✓ Registration and accreditation of ECD services;
- ✓ Protection of the rights of children;
- ✓ Enactment of ECD Body and Networks;
- ✓ Develop and review ECD Act of Parliament;
- ✓ Develop minimum standards for ECD activities;
- ✓ Ensuring the development of ECD curriculum in all education institutions; and
- ✓ Develop capacity of partners, civil society and departments on professional ECD services

Analysis of the progress reports that were accessed shows that the Ministry managed to facilitate introduction of birth registration; enact wills and heritance laws; establish child protection committees; by-laws have been formed by communities; ECD management committees have been established which are monitoring activities of ECD centres; Only operational Standards have been developed though they have not been fully disseminated to stakeholders. The analysis noted however that there is limited sensitization of communities; social Welfare officers have no skills to handle child abuse cases; limited studies/researches have been conducted on child abuse; there are few reformation centres; officers have limited skills writing court social reports; and most importantly there is no ECD Act to guide ECD activities.

5.3.2 Ministry of Health

The Ministry of Health has important responsibilities in as far as the development of ECD is concerned. The key roles are as follows:

- ✓ Screening of minor illnesses for both children and caregivers
- ✓ Monitoring of trends in ECD centres;
- ✓ Establishment of community based health programmes;
- ✓ Reduction of morbidity and mortality rates among children;
- ✓ Provision of antenatal care and counselling for expectant mothers;
- ✓ Promotion of exclusive breast-feeding by lactating mothers;
- ✓ Provide information of PMTCT and VCT on HIV/AIDS and STIs;
- ✓ Provide information on appropriate nutrition and nutrient levels

Analysis of the reports from some ECD centres and from the Ministry headquarters revealed that the Ministry of Health has never gone to ECD centres with a primary purpose of screening illnesses of children and caregivers let alone monitor trends in such centres. However, there was enough evidence to show that the Ministry undertook activities to promote exclusive breast-feeding as well as provision of information on HIV/AIDS and

PMTCT. For instance the Ministry has managed to establish 14 community based health programmes in around 14 ECD centres.

5.3.3 Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

The Ministry of Education, science and Technology recognizes that the provision of early childhood development is an important pillar to education for all. In light of this it has the following roles to play:

- ✓ Assist to make ECD part of their curricula in learning institutions;
- ✓ Develop ECD learning and teaching materials for all learning institutions;
- ✓ Include ECD concepts on teacher training programmes;
- ✓ Mainstream ECD in education institutions and learning resources.

The study has noted, through analysis of progress reports, that the Ministry of Education has not to-date made or indeed mainstreamed ECD in the training curricula. It is further sad to note that the Ministry has not developed the required ECD learning and teaching materials such that most of the materials used in ECD centres are either donated from donor partners or are locally made at community level.

5.3.4 Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security

- ✓ Training caregivers and the community on food storage, processing and consumption;
- ✓ Raise awareness on nutrition for children;
- ✓ Promote food security and subsistence farming

Analysis of annual progress reports in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security revealed that there is no single caregiver or community that was trained on food storage let alone food processing. According to these reports, it was noted that the Ministry over the past three years has been trying to put some programmes that promoted food security among the poor people some of whom keep children that attend ECD services. Some of these programmes include the fertilizer and Input Subsidy which over the years has been benefiting at least 1 million people.

5.3.5 Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development

- ✓ Establish ECD subcommittees within their assemblies;
- ✓ Formulate by-laws to regulate ECD activities; and
- ✓ Mobilise and channel resources for ECD services.

The analysis established that a number of ECD sub-Committees have been established in almost 15 assemblies even though the majority of them are weak and hence not operational. In addition there is no single District council that has formulated by-laws that would have been regulating ECD activities at council level.

5.3.6 NGOs, FBOs, CBOs, Human Rights Commission

- ✓ Provide opportunities for networking among implementers in the community;
- ✓ Develop and review ECD instructional materials;
- ✓ Build capacity for care-givers, parents committees, and communities;
- ✓ Open childcare and development centres in the community; and
- ✓ Conduct supervision of ECD centres.

It is pleasing to note that there are a number of NGOs and CBOs that are supporting ECD activities by coordinating some ECD implementers at the local level. Some of these NGOs have opened childcare as well as development centres though in selected communities.

5.3.7 Development Partners

- ✓ Support and augment the efforts in the implementation of ECD programmes;
- ✓ Support implementation of ECD guidelines;
- ✓ Provide resources for ECD activities;
- ✓ Enhance networking among ECD implementers

There are a number of development partners that support ECD activities in Malawi in a number of ways. For example, the UN Agencies such as UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA have provided both technical and financial support in the development and review of an ECD policy, ECD strategic plan, ECD operational standards and provision of ECD teaching and learning materials among others.

5.3.8 Communities

- ✓ Establishment and management of ECD centres;
- ✓ Develop early stimulation and learning materials from locally available resources;
- ✓ Provision of food and volunteers;
- ✓ Protection for the children; and
- ✓ Disseminating information on ECD activities

The analysis found that the major role that communities are playing is the provision of volunteers that work in the ECD centres. The reliance on volunteers however continues to compromise the quality of ECD services that are offered to children. Most of the communities have not developed early stimulation and learning materials even though there are locally available resources they could use.

5.3.9 Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning

- ✓ ensure that ECD programme is adequately funded; and
- ✓ ECD activities are mainstreamed

Analysis of the national budgets revealed that over the years the Government has been increasing the budgetary allocation made to the ECD programme. For instance in the 2014/15 fiscal year the ECD programme was allocated K25 million while in the 2015/16 financial year the ECD budget has been revised to K504 million.

Overall critique of the roles in ECD service delivery

It is evident from the foregoing that there are indeed a number of stakeholders that have various roles to play in an effort to achieve the required results in the ECD sub-sector. However, much as their respective roles are clearly stipulated in various policy documents, it is sad to note that most of these stakeholders are not discharging their roles as expected. For instance the Ministry of Finance has over the years been allocating very few financial resources to this sub-sector and yet one of its important roles has been to ensure that ECD programmes are adequately funded. It is only in this fiscal year that the sub-sector has been given a reasonable budgetary provision of K504 million.

As already alluded to, ECD is a multidisciplinary program that deserves a multi-sectoral approach involving all the key stakeholders. These stakeholders are supposed to be brought together by the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare. However, the Ministry does not have a robust and visible ECD department let alone capacity to facilitate stakeholder consultative meetings. It is not surprising therefore to note that the ECD miserably fails to carry out its leadership and coordination roles. Furthermore, the

national ECD network which provides opportunities for networking and collaboration between ECD implementers has neither the mandate nor its own resources to steer ECD activities or to bring its plan into operation thereby reducing its effectiveness. ECD coordination and networking structures at community and district levels are very weak and inadequate hence low implementation levels.

It is worth noting also that the ECD component is under the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social welfare and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has fighting for this component to fall under its control even though these Ministries have their respective roles outlined in the respective policy documents. Over the years MoEST has been getting more resources than the MoGCDSW to implement ECD activities and yet the program falls under the jurisdiction of the former. For example in 2014/15 fiscal year, MoGCDSW was allocated Mk30 million whilst MoEST was allocated Mk54 million and yet the convers should have been the case. This notwithstanding, the draft National Education Policy whose MoEST is a policy holder defines ECD as one of its priority areas as if the ECD component is under its control and this demonstrate a fact that the MoEST would like to assume full responsibility of the component and all this is happening in the full knowledge of Government authorities. There is an urgent need for the Government to clearly state whose mandate is the ECD component and start allocating adequate resources to the ECD parent Ministry.

A transition to primary education baseline survey done in 2014 commissioned by YONECO noted that one that mostly there is no formal and functional relationship/collaboration between CBCCs and Primary Schools. This was the case despite the closeness of these two institutions observed in some areas. The study noted that Primary Schools conduct their business under the mandate of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), following their curriculum with a focus on subject knowledge i.e., literacy and numeracy competencies. On the other, CBCCs conduct their business under the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW), following their curriculum with a focus on holistic development of children, i.e., cognitive, physical, social, emotional, moral and spiritual development. Not only are the two curricula not synchronized, but the

practitioners (caregivers and teachers) and managers (CBCC committee and Parents, Teachers Association (PTA)) of the two institutions do not collaborate with each other in any meaningful way. This leaves all children that transit from CBCCs to Primary Schools without any institutional support at a most critical period in their education; a period requiring huge adaptation to a rather more structured and highly competitive environment. Consequently, challenges that children face as they transition from CBCCs and homes to Primary Schooling remain largely unnoticed and unresolved.

The study observed that with the situation above, there is need for an urgent intervention in a form of policy statement by the two line-ministries directing the establishment and formalization of a functional linkage between the CBCCs and Primary Schools with clear procedures that would help smoothen the transitioning of children. Among others, the synchronization of the two curricula, the documentation and sharing of children's records/information, exchange visits and joint activities, are some of the key activities that can be developed is supporting children's transitioning between the two institutions.

As outlined in the national ECD policy, parents have their own responsibilities to undertake in an effort to support the proper functioning of the ECD program at various levels. The survey referred to above noted that at CBCC level, for caregivers to work effectively as volunteers, they were constantly being supported by parents. For instance parents took turns in preparing porridge for children at the centers, fetching of firewood and working in the CBCC garden where they cultivated maize for the CBCC. However it is reported in the survey report that some parents failed to escort their children to the centers and therefore absenteeism was very common at some CBCCs. This happened more often where children were young and coming from a distance from the center. Caregivers also lamented that some parents were reluctant to contribute by molding/making clay toys for children to play with where such resources were low. The study found out that record keeping at this level to track children that did not attend school regularly and eventually dropping out was

a challenge. This point out to the issue raised herein that not much has been done in terms of community mobilization and sensitization and this is one other area that requires the interventions of all the various stakeholders in the Early Childhood Development sub-sector.

Chapter VI

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

6.1 Introduction

Even though there are a number of ECD related policies in Malawi, the analysis notes that implementation of such policies has not been sufficient to address the ever-growing problems of children 8 and below. There a number of strategic issues that needed to be addresses if the implementation of these policy instruments is to bear fruits and some of them are discussed in the following sub sections.

6.2 Legal and institutional framework

The researcher notes that there is no specific legislation to guide and regulate the provision of ECD services in Malawi apart from the existing ECD policy which is currently being reviewed. As a result the ECD related policies have not been fully implemented and it will continue getting low priority on the national development agenda. In the absence of this specific legislation, the ECD program relies on other relevant legislation such as the Education Act, the Health Act, and Water and sanitation Act. It also draws its mandate from the national ECD policy and other related policies and cabinet directives. In light of this it is recommended to have a clear legal and policy framework that will guide ECD implementation at national and local levels alike to ensure sustainability.

6.3 Poor ECD infrastructures

ECD services are in most offered through CBSSs, rehabilitation centers, nutrition rehabilitation units etc. Access to these services is limited due to a number of factors namely: there are few ECD service delivery points; unavailability of appropriate ECD services; cultural barriers to suing ECD services; poor quality services; geographical barriers as well as limited capacity of service providers.

It has further been noted that most of the ECD centres that are operational lack adequate facilities. Most of the ECD infrastructure is in poor state and in some cases inappropriate for young children. Many of these centres are characterized by poor ventilation, dusty rooms, poor lighting, temporary dilapidated structures and the absence of child friendly sanitary facilities. These are some of the critical issues that need to be given due consideration if the ECD policy and all mother related policies are to be seen to be making a positive impact on the national socio economic development of the nation.

6.4 Lack of enabling systems and standards

The research has noted that the country does not have an accreditation system with commissioned training institutions. The implication is that even if the care givers are trained, most have attended courses of no longer than a fortnight which is far inadequate for the development of productive competencies.

It is pleasing to note that the country has ECD standards that border on quality and relevance of ECD services. However, these standards are not being reinforced because there is no enforcement system that the service providers are not adequately coordinated or regulated. Analysis of progress reports finds that there have been some ad hoc parenting, education and support programs which have not been properly designed or implemented. In view of the fact that there are no resources, the whole ECD system relies heavily on unqualified or indeed under-qualified volunteers thereby compromising on quality of the services being offered.

6.5 Low Profile and Visibility

The analysis observes that low visibility is one key factor hampering the delivery of ECD services and this probably is due to the fact that much as the policy has been in existence for many years now, not much has been done in terms of dissemination and hence only few Malawians appreciate the importance of ECD in the country's development. The level of awareness on ECD is very low throughout the country translating into low levels of support for this important development intervention. To address this problem an effort should be made to develop a communication strategy that should lead to public awareness on the

importance of the early childhood years and hence the value of investing in ECD at all levels.

6.6 Weak leadership, partnership and coordination

It is a fact that ECD is a multidisciplinary program that deserves a multi sectoral approach involving all the key stakeholders. These stakeholders are brought together by the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare. The problem that has been observed is that the Ministry does not have a robust and visible ECD department but rather this important service is under the Department of Child Affairs which currently is understaffed much as there a desk officer within this department responsible for the ECD program. As such the ECD section is unable to carry out its leadership and coordination roles. Furthermore, the national ECD network which provides opportunities for networking and collaboration between ECD implementers has neither the mandate nor its own resources to steer ECD activities or to bring its plan into operation thereby reducing its effectiveness. ECD coordination and networking structures at community and district levels are very weak and inadequate hence low implementation levels.

Finally, it has been found that a number of development partners support the ECD program but their efforts and resources are not fully coordinated because the Ministry has no control over how partners allocate their resources. This leads to duplication of efforts and a concentration of services in some areas leaving other areas poorly serviced. Basket funding of ECD services and good coordination mechanisms would go a long way in providing quality ECD services to the children.

6.7 Lack of an ECD management information system

ECD is an evolving discipline which is also peculiar to each specific environment. In light of this, a constant research is needed if ECD services are to be improved and also availability of effective monitoring and evaluation system. These activities provide the basic information for evidence-based decision making and for designing demand driven ECD programs. The Ministry should consider to develop a management information system for ECD.

Conclusion

The foregoing chapter attempted to look at some of the factors that might have hindered the effective implementation of the policies related to Early Childhood Development in Malawi. For instance it has been found that there are no specific legislations to guide and regulate ECD services, there are poor ECD infrastructures, no systems or mechanisms to enforce the standards that are in place and most importantly the parent Ministry lack capacity both in terms of staff and finances among others. The Government need to consider filling the vacancies under the Child Affairs department which currently oversees the implementation of ECD programmes in the country.

Chapter VII

INCLUSIVITY OF THE ECD RELATED POLICIES

7.1 Introduction

Early childhood policy is said to be inclusive when it embodies the values and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. This implies that the desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities, other vulnerable children and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships. Thus the defining features of any policy inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports. The study analyzed two major policy documents namely: national ECD policy and the National Education Sector Plan to assess how inclusive they are and below are some of the notable findings.

7.2 Inclusivity in relation to accessibility of ECD services

An inclusive policy should ensure that there is provision of access to a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments. Inclusion in this case can take many different forms and can occur in various organizational and community contexts, such as homes, child care, faith-based programs, recreational programs, preschool, public and private pre-kindergarten through early elementary education, and blended early childhood education/early childhood special education programs. In many cases, simple modifications can facilitate access for individual children. Furthermore inclusive policies put in place principles and practices that help to ensure that every young child has access to learning environments, to typical home or educational routines and activities, and to the general education curriculum. In addition they should incorporate some technologies

which can enable children with a range of functional abilities to participate in activities and experiences in inclusive settings.

The national ECD policy has a number of policy statements and one of such statements states that no child shall be discriminated or abused on the basis of age, sex, race, tribe, health, economic status, religious or political affiliation in the provision of ECD services by any organization. In fact the overall policy objective of the national ECD policy is to promote a comprehensive approach to ECD programs and practices for children aged 0-8 years to ensure fulfillment of the rights to fully develop their physical, emotional, social and cognitive potential. One of the strategies in the national ECD policy is to sensitize the public on gender issues, vulnerability and special needs of children. It is therefore evident from the policy objective and statements as well as the strategies that the national ECD policy is inclusive in the sense that all children irrespective of status have their needs addressed.

The National Education Sector Plan (NESP) has three priority areas and one of them relates to access and equity. Under this priority area, the plan sets out strategies that aim at promoting early detection, intervention and inclusion for children with special health and education needs. The other strategy that shows how inclusivity the plan is pertains to the one that promote early childhood care for orphans and vulnerable children. However, the plan does not have specific activities that are to be implemented in relation to these strategies to enable the researcher determine if indeed issues of accessibility will adequately be addressed.

7.3 Inclusivity in relation to Participation

It is argued that even if environments and programs are designed to facilitate access, some children still need additional individualized accommodations and supports to participate fully in play and learning activities with peers and adults. Adults promote belonging, participation, and engagement of children with and without disabilities in inclusive settings in a variety of ways. Depending on the individual needs and priorities of young children and families, implementing inclusion involves a range of approaches from embedded, routines based teaching to more explicit interventions and participation for all children.

Social-emotional development and behaviors that facilitate participation are critical goals of high quality early childhood along with learning and development in all other domains and these must all be addressed in the national ECD related policies.

Analysis of the national ECD policy shows that it has numerous objectives and strategies that provide different support to children for them to effectively participate in the learning activities. For instance, one policy objective aims at reducing malnutrition, the burden of micronutrient deficiencies and improve food security both at household and community levels. The other important objective of the policy is to protect and safeguard children who are in difficult circumstances by developing and advocating for legislations that deal with issues affecting such children.

Similarly, a simple analysis of the National Education Sector Plan reveals that on quality and relevance, there are two strategies that facilitate the effective participation of all children aged 0-8 in ECD activities. The first strategy aims at designing curriculum for children with disabilities whilst the second one ensures that ECD teachers/educators/trainers are trained in different skills on how to manage and support children for them to participate in all the activities related to ECD. It is however noted with concern that the NESP has no clear activities to show that indeed the required support is provided to all children under ECD.

7.4 Inclusivity in relation to Provision of Support

In addition to provisions addressing access and participation, an infrastructure of systems-level supports must be in place to undergird the efforts of individuals and organizations providing inclusive services to children and families. For example, family members, practitioners, specialists, and administrators should have access to ongoing professional development and support to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to implement effective inclusive practices. Because collaboration among key stakeholders (e.g., families, practitioners, specialists, and administrators) is a cornerstone for implementing high quality early childhood education, resources and program policies are needed to promote multiple opportunities for communication and collaboration among

these groups. Specialized services must be implemented in a coordinated fashion and integrated with general early care and education services. Blended early childhood education/early childhood special education programs offer one example of how this might be achieved.

One of the key policy statement in the national ECD policy states that the Government of Malawi aims at providing high quality services in early childhood care that ensure his/her survival, growth, protection and development that would lead to his/her active participation in national development. This will be achieved by empowering the household, the community, institutions and organizations to effectively provide the required basic and essential early childhood development services that will uphold human dignity.

From the forgoing paragraph, it is clear that the national ECD policy is inclusive as it acknowledges the important roles played by various stakeholders. Furthermore the policy has outlined roles and responsibilities of each one of these stakeholders in addition to ensuring that strategies aimed at capacitating them are provided. However what is missing is the fact that the policy does not outline measures that may enable these stakeholders to mobilize resources for them to effectively undertake their roles and responsibilities.

Just like the national ECD policy, the National Education Sector Plan has some strategies on governance and management some of which provide an opportunity for some stakeholders to effectively paly their roles in the ECD related work. For instance, the plan stresses the need to promote the profile of ECD; develop an ECD Act; and most importantly the need to strengthen the institutional framework for the delivery of ECD services as well as the provision of parental education and support groups on early childhood. Sadly though, the plan does not provide a list of the key stakeholders and their roles in ECD related programmes and this is a serious anomaly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the findings on the analysis of the two policy documents, it is noted that both of these documents are to a large extent inclusive in that almost all the

fundamental principles of an inclusive policy are ably addressed except in few areas where there are no explicit activities to support the realization or implementation of the outlined strategies. This is more evident in the National Education Sector Plan and therefore the national ECD policy is more inclusive than the National education Sector Plan.

CHAPTER VIII

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following chapter provides summary of key findings, conclusions and recommendations for the analysis.

Key Findings

- The report notes that there is a level of commitment on the part of government in terms of policy direction on ECD services in Malawi. This is demonstrated through the development of the NESP which has singled out ECD as one of its key priority areas. Most importantly, government through the MoGCDSW developed an ECD policy which provides guidance on implementation of ECD services in the country.
- The Early Childhood Development sub sector in the MoGCDSW has been allocated a budget provision of Mk504 million in 2015/16 financial year which is a significant increase of about 908% from the 2014/15 fiscal year allocation of Mk50 million.
- At the level of coordination and management, the review has noted that the ECD sector has a very weak coordination and management mechanism. This is largely due to the fact that there is no mandated department for ECD at MoGCDSW and MoEST headquarters as well as local assemblies. Worse still, there is no observable linkage between the two ministries in terms of planning and activity implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

- In addition, stakeholder coordination of ECD services is also very weak. MoGCDSW has attempted to spearhead this through the establishment of the National ECD network which draws membership from officials and experts from government and NGOs. Among others, the network is there to lobby for increased funding towards ECD services in the country. However, activities of the network have been very intermittent over the years. This is mostly due to the fact that the network itself has no resources of its own, and its membership is drawn from professionals who though working on ECD related issues have own key commitments.
- The report further notes that access to ECD services in Malawi is very low. It is estimated that 68% of children between the ages 0-8 years do not have any access to ECD services (Status of ECD in Malawi, 2011). This is compounded by an acute shortage of ECD centres, especially in rural areas. In urban areas, accessibility is mostly hindered by high fees charged by most pre-schools.
- In addition, it is clearly shown that most ECD services in the country are provided by private and community stakeholders. Government has no established ECD centre in the country. Unlike private run ECD centres such as pre-schools or nursery schools, community run ECD centres are voluntary based. This means they are run on community good will. Eventually this has adverse effects on the sustainability and quality of the services offered.
- Related to the above, the study has noted that currently most ECD centres such as CBCCs are run by un-qualified staff. The Association of Preschool Playgroups in Malawi (APPM) offers tailor-made training for ECD educators in Malawi but its reach has been very limited especially in rural communities. This notwithstanding, the study notes that the Association for Early Children in Malawi which is based in Blantyre offers training opportunities to some of these caregivers.
- A tremendous effort by various partners such as Action Aid International (AAI) made to build capacity of caregivers apart from the actual establishment of CBCCs as noted in the 2014 baseline survey which was commissioned by YONECO.
- Further, infrastructure in most ECD service centres is below par and child unfriendly. This is mostly common in CBCCs. Sanitation in most of these centres is not conducive for children.
- The study has also noted that while progress has been made to develop documents for standardization of ECD services, most principles outlined in them are not adhered to.

- ECD related policies have numerous stakeholders with clear roles and responsibilities but some have no institutional framework
- Most of the ECD related policies are inclusive in terms of ensuring accessibility, support and participation except in few cases where issues of other vulnerable children are not properly addressed

Key Recommendations

- Government should seriously consider establishment of an ECD department in the MoGCDSW with fully fledged staff at central and local levels otherwise feeling of all senior vacant posts under the Department of Child Affairs may also be helpful.
- The government needs to consider coopting ECD centres, specifically CBCCs, into MoGCDSW local structures with the hope of establishing clear support systems. Whilst this is done, government should ensure communities continue taking a principal role in the management of the centres.
- Whilst recognizing that planning, management and implementation of ECD activities requires a multi-sectoral approach, there is need for strong coordination at both policy and practice level between the different sectors. This will ensure efficiency and effectiveness of ECD programmes in the country.
- There is need for continued increased funding for ECD activities in the country. Over the past years, it is only this fiscal year (2015/16) that ECD program was allocated reasonable funding amounting to MK500 million. Furthermore CSEC together with other stakeholders should increase lobbying activities for more funding for the ECD program.
- MoGCDSW needs to find innovative ways in which it would intensify supervision, coordination and monitoring of ECD activities in the country. One of the ways would be to partner with all key stakeholders at national and local levels, albeit in addition to its existing working structures on ECD.
- The MoGCDSW needs to enhance its efforts towards documentation of each stakeholder contribution to ECD services. For instance, as demonstrated in this report, it was quite challenging to establish total funding towards ECD by stakeholders other than government. Such documentation should also be made accessible to all interested stakeholders.
- It is also important to increase efforts in capacity building for care givers and educators in ECD centres. The capacity building exercise should include training on all key elements in ECD, including management as well as actual service delivery.

The training should also extend to all government personnel involved in planning, management and implementation of ECD.

- The government should consider establishing a sound accreditation system of ECD training for care givers and educators in the country. In addition, support should also be extended to efforts currently being undertaken by the University of Malawi, Chancellor College, which is offering training in ECD.
- The Government should consider improving the infrastructure for ECD services. This should be both in terms of improvement in the existing structures and establishment of new ones particularly in rural areas. Stakeholders in ECD should consider lobbying for increased resource allocation towards the same.
- ECD related policies need to be reviewed to ensure that they are all inclusive in all the areas of interest and that they have well defined institutional framework

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