
SITE VISIT: IMPILO PROJECT—Gauteng

Department of Education

Source: Beverly Minaar, Lorraine Foster. Presentation at ECCD Summer Institute. Windhoek, Namibia, 1997.

Introduction

The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) has prioritised Early Childhood Development (ECD) as a key building block in the transformation of the provisioning of education. Its aim is to develop a comprehensive, coherent and integrated policy for the young child, from birth to at least nine years old, through inter-sectoral collaboration.

Impilo is a mechanism for transforming the existing ECD provision by developing and testing new multi-functional models of ECD provision that take into account the specific historical and socio-economic circumstances of children. The assumption is that a new system of registering, monitoring and subsidising services is needed. Which should accommodate a variety of forms of provision for young children and adapt to the specific needs of children in different circumstances. Quality assurance would rely to a large extent on family and community involvement.

Impilo strives to co-ordinate the efforts of different ECD role players by enabling partnerships between government and non-governmental organisations. The new system should provide services for all children but target government funds to those in greatest need. Initially, therefore, the emphasis will be redress.

Previously government funds were directed only to centre-based services. Since it will never be possible to reach all children through this model alone, it is necessary to develop a system which supports family-based as well as centre-based services. The new term, “family-based” services refers to small, informal services in which children are accommodated within the family. The distinction needs to be made between centres that operate from homes, accommodating more children than any family could realistically accommodate. Multi-functional approaches to ECD need to be developed and tested to find new and innovative ways of provision and, in addition, spread to existing resources to places where there is a need.

GDE wishes to implement and build on the initiative launched as the National Early Childhood Development Education Pilot Project, which asked each Province to develop a plan for supporting children aged 5-6 from ultra poor and at-risk backgrounds through a system of per capita allowances and training of practitioners. GDE has accepted this task, but has incorporated it into a large and broader framework of “Impilo”.

In this case the national project will be extended to support children aged 3-6 from ultra-poor and at risk backgrounds in a variety of situations—centre-based and family-based—through per capita allowances and offer training of providers caring for and educating these children to enable them and the children to bridge the formal/non-formal divide in ECD. GDE will provide matching funding so that the national project can be extended in this way.

The per capita allowance system will be administered by DDOs (District Development Officers). The practitioners to be trained will primarily be the caregivers in sites selected for funding through per capita subsidies.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Data

- The total population of Gauteng was at least 8,255,000 in 1994.
- There are about 1 million children younger than 6 years of age in Gauteng.
- Research by the National RDP office has established that about 9% of the Gauteng households can be regarded as “poor” and 29% as “ultra-poor” (“poor” are those households that fall within the lower 40% of the income spectrum in South Africa; “ultra-poor” are those that fall within the lower 20%).
- The average rate of unemployment amongst mothers surveyed by Lategan (1996) with children under school-going age is 59%.
- About 8 out of 10 children under school-going age in Gauteng are not in any Early Childhood Education service-delivery programme.
- Those children that are in ECD services have an inequitable allocation of Gauteng Department of Education funds, with the 98 state-aided pre-schools (EX-TED) averaging at a per capita sum of R2,677 p.a..

The above statistics indicate that there was thus a need for a project that targeted children at risk and vulnerable families in order to bring more young children into the provision loop. This entailed the co-ordination of all subsidies and funding of children from whatever government source in order to achieve affordable and sustainable systems and modes of ECD delivery.

Gauteng is divided into 3 education regions and 18 administrative districts. In each district one or two District Development Officers (DDOs) have been appointed by the GDE whose task it is to develop ECD in each district. The pilot projects will be implemented in all 18 education districts. Each region has a slightly different number of districts. Three tenders will be awarded: One tender will be awarded to the South region, which has 5 districts, one tender will be awarded to the North Region which has 7 districts, and one tender will be awarded to the Central Region which has 6 districts.

In each of the 18 educational districts, between 35 and 50 practitioners have been selected for training. Contracts will be signed between the GDE and these practitioners in October 1997 and

training will begin in November. The practitioners will commit themselves to three years of training.

The Project—Training of Caregivers for ECD

Given the indirect way in which practitioners will be identified, there will probably be a wide range in the level of skills and expertise in the group of practitioners to be developed. There might be some with no previous training, others who have only participated in a basic introductory course, and still others with formal college qualifications. The intention is to provide innovative modular training that is adapted to the specific needs and abilities of each practitioner in the group. Qualified practitioners might need re-orientation to equip them for new roles in new provision models. Practitioners with non-formal certificates or limited previous training will be seeking recognition of their qualifications of prior learning.

The Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development sets out the curriculum framework for the training. All training must meet the requirements of this framework and contribute to the process of developing new national standards that remove the existing distinction between “formal” and “non-formal” training. Once new standards have been established, all training programmes and organisations, including NGOs, Colleges and Technical colleges, will need to meet these requirements for accreditation. For this reason, the pilot assumes a high level of participation from organisations that are awarded tenders and others that have other sources of funding for their work.

In addition, as explained above, the training requirements are complex and multi-faceted and the scale of each tender is extensive. A single organisation is unlikely to have the range of expertise and capacity to undertake a single contract on its own. Organisations have been encouraged to form partnerships to enable the best possible combination of skills and expertise to deliver training. Consortiums that include one or more governmental organisation that will not necessarily benefit financially from the contract will be regarded favourably.

Aims and Objectives of the Training Project

The intention of the Impilo project is to rethink the aims and appropriateness of training for those working with young children, in line with the curriculum framework contained in the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development, Department of Education, 1996, pages 15-25. The training should be offered on a modular basis to allow for flexibility and variety according to the needs and levels of the trainees.

Aims:

- To develop and test new national standards for: ECD practitioner qualifications and quality assurance for ECD services.
- To ensure the improvement of training for community-based ECD providers serving ultra-poor groups of children.

- To improve the status of practitioners by enabling them where possible to be accredited for the training undertaken.
- To ensure the involvement of stakeholder participation by involving the following through the consortium or in other ways:
 - District Development Officers
 - Resource and training organisations
 - ECD practitioners from the formal school system and the “non-formal” sector
 - All government departments involved in ECD—especially Health and Welfare and Local Government
 - Families and parents

Scope of the Project

The practitioners to be trained have been identified by the GDE through the district consultative processes. The majority of trainees will be responsible for children in those pilot sites identified to receive per capita subsidies. The number of trainees per regional tender will depend first on the number of districts in that region and second, on the quality and quantity of previous training of the trainees.

The main criteria for identifying pilot sites was the need of children rather than the training requirements of the caregivers. Consequently, it was not possible in advance to assess the extent of training required by the group. For example, there might be a large or small number who have had previous training. Once the main group has been assessed, it will be possible for the provider to negotiate the final size of the group to be trained.

The two fiscal interventions, namely subsidies for children and contracts for ECD providers, form only part of the scope of the Project. The scope includes providers not contracted to the Department, together with the contracted providers, to develop policy for ECD, to develop accreditation standards, to contribute to the development of National Qualifications Framework (NQF), to build provincial capacity, to develop learning programmes for ECD practitioners and programmes for children from birth to the end of the Foundation Phase.

The Project will thus include the technicians, technical colleges, Department of Manpower providers, universities, colleges of education, and NGO providers in all deliberations about ECD policy, accreditation, NQF development, capacity building, learning programmes for ECD practitioners and programmes for children. At the very least, these institutions will need to evolve their programmes for practitioners along the guidelines in Appendix 2 of the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development.

In addition, school-based practitioners will be invited to participate voluntarily in the conditional accreditation process.

Building Capacity within the Department

The Department will provide the funding for its officials to work with the Interim Accreditation Board and its Secretariat in order to build capacity in assessment of practitioners, recognition of prior learning, training in new assessment procedures, and assessing ECD training providers to ensure the inclusion of the interim guidelines in their learning programmes.

The Department will further create an enabling environment for all ECD providers and practitioners, both those contracted and those not, to participate in the research undertaken by the national research team. The intention is to provide data and to receive feedback on the findings of the research team. The research team will document the Project as well as services within the formal sector.

Goals of the Project

The following goals have been undertaken for the project:

- To ensure the improvement of quality of provision for all children in the participating ECD services—as evident in observation in the participating ECD services.
- To ensure the improvement of training of ECD providers by the participating training organisations.
- To ensure the involvement of stakeholder participation in the Project as measured by the numbers involved and the quality of the involvement of the following components/ participants:
 - resource and training organisations
 - ECD practitioners from the formal school system and the “non-formal” sector
 - governing councils from the services
 - government departments involved in ECD—Health and Welfare and Local Government
- To ensure that providers and practitioners have an awareness of and a positive attitude towards the NQF and that an outcomes-based assessment is developed.
- To show evidence of an accreditation system for practitioners in practice in Gauteng at the end of three years.
- To ensure that ECD providers and practitioners have a critical understanding of the Policy, particularly the Learning Areas for children and the Accreditation guidelines, and incorporate these categories into their practice.

Aims of the Project

- The Project aims to develop and test, by means of a pilot test conducted over three years, affordable and sustainable systems and models of ECD delivery to meet the needs of all children under school age. This will entail the critical examination of systems and models currently supported by the Gauteng Department of Education in relation to other models and systems, as well as those that may evolve through the Project.
- The Project aims to refine the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development over a period of three years, and to give effect to it, particularly by enabling dialogue between “formal” and “non-formal” provision in order to reach consensus about outcomes for the sector.
- In order to achieve the above, the Project aims to bring together all the Provincial and Local Government role players concerned with the care and development of children from birth to the end of the Foundation Phase, to develop a holistic policy for meeting the needs of young children through the coordination of services into a single new system which registers and monitors services support and involvement with the community. This will include the Departments of Education, Health, Safety and Security, Sport, Recreation and Culture, Welfare and Population Development.
- The Project aims to put in place over three years an accreditation system within the National Qualifications Framework that will contribute to the debate on standards for ECD practitioners, both in the formal and the non-formal sectors, and to the establishment of quality control-both at service sites and in practitioner training.
- The Project aims to effect redress in the funding of ECD by targeting children at risk in community-based services sites, and those training providers who were historically disadvantaged, both in terms of funding and resources.

Project Beneficiaries

Short-term:

- Participating community ECD services;
- Practitioners in the community ECD services agreeing to participate in the interim conditional accreditation; and
- ECD training providers contracted into the Project.

Long-term

- All children of ECD age through improved quality education, structures and systems evolved and tested in this pilot project;

- ECD practitioners who, through the accreditation process, will be able to access a recognised career and training path within the context of the NQF;
- All ECD training providers who will be able to draw from the unit standards registered with SAQA in order to provide accredited learning programmes;
- All ECD services that will benefit from a cost-effective, sustainable subsidy model for all ECD provision;
- The Gauteng Department of Education which will have structures in place to administer the accreditation system, ensure quality control and assist community ECD services;
- The Provincial Government Department role players concerned with the care and development of children from birth to the end of the Foundation Phase that will have developed an integrated, comprehensive and multi-disciplinary approach to the welfare and development of children.

Problems/Challenges

In order to ensure the best possible chance for success for these pilots, it is necessary to consider the contexts of the pilots within the broad framework of the communities. The GDE had to take into account the perceptions of people in the communities with regards to these interventions, the possible problems that will impact on the pilot sites and their neighbours, and the practical and creative ways we can pre-empt problems through thoughtful planning.

The advantage about pilots is that they are small, manageable interventions that can work reasonably fast and flexibly, and can test new innovations for future application. The disadvantage is that they can raise unrealistic expectations, can cause jealousy, conflict and division within the community they are supposed to serve and ultimately can be completely derailed. If the process of granting financial aid is not a vehicle for empowerment, then we also could be creating dependencies which might not necessarily be cared for after the pilot has ended. Lastly, it is an incredible challenge to develop, monitor and assess a pilot in informal settlements where the mobility of people is a constant factor; these surely are the most needy and obvious places for the majority of the sites. We need to involve the families in this process in such a way that they are constantly aware of what is happening in the centres and also actively participating in the centres activities. So, for example, each family could agree to help in the site at least once a month. In this way we could envision the possibility of community quality assurance.

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Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.
CD-ROM. The Consultative Group on ECCD. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1999.