

Recommendations

Workshop #1:
Working Group on Integrated Early Childhood Development
Policy, Planning and Research

Second International Conference on Early Childhood
Development

*Early Childhood Intervention:
What Works and Experiences Learned*
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We recommend that every nation:

Policy development

Establish a national policy framework for Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) that requires and guides the preparation of comprehensive annual operational plans to ensure the good development of all children, and especially children in difficult circumstances.

Conduct a highly participatory national policy planning process that is country-driven, not donor-driven.

Promote IECD as a national security issue and as a tool for poverty eradication and socio-economic development.

Design, adopt and implement IECD policy frameworks as rapidly as possible because children cannot wait and annual operations plans permit program revision over time.

Expanded investment in IECD

Prioritize and establish targets for greatly expanding national and international investments in IECD, through:

- Developing compelling policy arguments and advocacy;
- Establishing effective and credible national IECD policy frameworks;
- Conducting public expenditure reviews;
- Building effective legislation for children's rights, development, protection, and support;
- Linking requests for increased resources to program accountability and evaluations that demonstrate program effectiveness, and
- Embedding early childhood policies in other policies (e.g., EFA Plans, PRSPs, SWAPs, debt reduction plans).

Emphasize advocacy to increase investments in IECD for:

- Ensuring good early brain development of children 0 to age 3 years of age as a basis for balanced mental and socio-emotional development throughout life;
- Eradicating poverty and achieving development goals;
- Preparing children for success in school, and
- Preventing high human and financial costs related to school attrition and repetition, disability, developmental delays, and physical and mental illness.

Establish collaboration between governments and donors to protect and expand social budgets for education and health for IECD and for children affected by HIV/AIDs, especially in nations with high levels of poverty.

Continuous services for child development and family strengthening

Ensure IECD policy frameworks provide strategies for each of the periods of pre-birth to age 8, establishing a systemic approach for promoting IECD within all basic and adult education, health, nutrition, sanitation and protection programs, and linking those investments at all levels.

Place special emphasis upon the prenatal/perinatal period, 0 to age 3, as well as from 3 to 6, and 6 to 9 years of age (or a similar breakdown) in order to ensure:

- Provision of continuous program planning and child tracking;
- Placement of emphasis on IECD -- not just child care and preschool education;
- Development of programs for parent education and community support, especially for pregnant women and the mothers and fathers of infants and toddlers, and
- Identification and placement of priority on rapidly assisting children with developmental delays, malnutrition, chronic ill health and high-risk family or community circumstances (e.g., community wars, HIV/AIDs, extreme poverty, family violence, disabilities, and other difficult circumstances).

Community participation in policy planning

Ensure that communities participate fully in:

- Conducting needs assessments;
- Preparing local resource maps;
- Developing strategies for policy frameworks;
- Planning and designing culturally derived and fully integrated local programs (e.g., infant/child stimulation and education, parent education, health services and education, nutrition services and education, sanitation, rights advocacy and other pertinent areas);
- Coordinating, implementing and serving in community-level programs, and
- Evaluating, monitoring and revising those programs to achieve local and national targets for access, quality and equity.

Engage communities and institutions of government and civil society all levels in policy planning for IECD in order to:

- Achieve a common understanding of IECD;
- Identify baseline information, needs, concerns, strengths, capacities, resources and visions for the future development of children;
- Forge consensuses on strategies, programs, objectives, cross-sectoral and sectoral indicators and targets, and financial, material and human resource needs for successful policy framework implementation, and
- Build consensus and support for the rapid adoption and implementation of the policy framework.

Training and capacity building

Plan and provide training and institutional capacity building addressing:

- Concepts and methods on how to integrate activities for IECD at all levels: community, district, provincial, and national;
- Participatory policy planning processes at all levels;
- Strategies for adopting and implementing the IECD policy framework;
- Policy advocacy and social communications, and
- Systems for training members of communities to become teachers, facilitators, health and nutrition educators, evaluators, and other direct service and leadership roles.

Integrated team development

Create various types of integrated teams at all levels that work together to:

- Identify problems and needs;
- Assist with policy planning processes;
- Design cross-sectoral programs with components representing all areas for integrated child and family development, including parent education as a function of adult education, and
- Establish community-based field teams with district and provincial level support teams that ensure integrated programs are developed.

Partnerships for creating policy for IECD

Build partnerships at all levels, as appropriate, between government agencies, communities, non-governmental organizations, religious groups and other institutions of civil society involved in IECD, such as universities, institutes, associations, unions and others.

Identify innovative religious and culturally based programs, such as the Madrasa Resource Center, that derive program activities from local cultures and create effective synergies with other private and governmental early childhood development programs.

Key policy planning processes

Achieve consensus on structures, roles and responsibilities at community, district, provincial and national levels for:

- Participatory policy planning;
- Policy implementation;
- Policy monitoring and evaluation;
- Policy advocacy and social communication;
- National leadership of donor coordination, and
- Annual operational planning.

Place special attention on conducting systems analyses on relationships between preschool and primary education to:

- Prepare children for school and schools for children and parent involvement;
- Reduce school attrition and repetition, and
- Assess the learning outcomes of children who received preschool education.

Conduct continuous monitoring, evaluation and research at community, district, provincial and national levels for policy planning and program development to:

- Obtain baseline statistics and studies, and
- Achieve program improvement over time.

Establish strong social communications strategies in the policy framework that address communities, national policy makers, public and private institutions and donor partners.

Children and their caregivers affected by HIV/AIDs

Declare HIV/AIDs as a “silent war” that is an emergency situation especially as it relates to young children, according it a priority place in policy frameworks for IECD.

Include in each IECD policy framework, a detailed plan for children affected by HIV/AIDs, either through infection or abandonment, that calls for all programs for children to include activities addressing HIV/AIDs issues and needs at the community and family level, with institutional care as the last resort due to cost, sustainability and potential negative impact on good child development.

Build the political will to make increased financial commitments and conduct coordination activities that meet the needs of young children and their caregivers affected by HIV/AIDs through:

- Clearly designating a ministry or other central body as the main coordinating agency as well as a

- public/private and intersectoral steering committee for serving HIV/AIDS affected children;
- Forging effective partnerships between communities, NGOs, governmental agencies and donors;
 - Building on the existing strengths, capacities, resources and other assets of communities while supporting them in their hour of need;
 - Sensitizing policy makers and leaders and personnel of legislative, regulatory and law enforcement agencies, including them in national and international meeting on early childhood development and HIV/AIDS.

Review existing national policies and legislation, including especially public health laws, to ensure children affected by HIV/AIDS and their caregivers are protected with regard to their rights, inheritance, education, health, nutrition and care.

Develop new policies, legislation and laws, as needed, and design and implement systems for accountability, including monitoring and enforcement.

Focus on supporting community-based organizations to expand and improve their programs through training and capacity building workshops and inter-program exchanges.

Provide training and capacity building at all levels, from national to community levels, including support for caregivers and replacement caregivers, as need arises, to avoid institutional care.

Develop policies for ensuring children, parents and caregivers with HIV/AIDS receive the medicines, goods and services they require.

Networking

Contribute to planning and building sub-regional centers for improving national institutional capacity to achieve IECD.

Develop national networks IECD that include partnerships with communities.

Ensure national, sub-regional and regional networks are based on shared goals and needs (e.g., policy advocacy; capacity building and training; experience, knowledge and skills sharing; meetings and conferences; dissemination activities, etc.).

Encourage IECD networks to develop action plans with objectives, implementation strategies and a budget.

Urge networks to secure membership support through in-kind and financial donations, seek external funding for special activities, and develop strong Internet communications networks with frequent newsletters and membership communiqués.

Improve the quality of networking through instituting a framework for the annual monitoring of network effectiveness and providing training on networking and partnership building.

Participate actively in building sub-regional, regional and global networks for IECD and assist them to build linkages with other regional bodies and networks (e.g., SADEC, ECOWAS, OAU, MINEDAF, and others).

Education begins at birth:

From ECE to IECD