



Republic of Mauritius

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION CULTURE  
& HUMAN RESOURCES

**Early Childhood Care**  
*and*  
**Education Authority**



Association for the  
Development of  
Education in  
Africa

**Working Group on Early  
Childhood Development**

## **Concept Note**

### ***Mauritius – Africa Initiative***

***within the framework of the UNESCO Basic Education in Africa Programme***

***and the Plan of Action of the ADEA Working Group on Early Childhood  
Development***

**Building Capacity on Early Childhood Care  
and Education/Development in Sub-Saharan Africa**

**South/South – North/South Collaborative Programme**

## ***“ECCE/D laying the foundation of human development and life chances”***

***Early Childhood Care and Education*** supports children’s survival, growth, development and learning, including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth to entry into primary school in formal, informal and non formal settings (UNESCO Education For All - Global Monitoring Report 2007).

The early years represent the most vulnerable time in the individual human development. It is of course, the best time for ensuring “strong foundations” for later learning and life chances.

Early Childhood Care and Education/Development (ECCE/D) is the foundation of:

- a) Social inclusion and equality in life chances;***
- b) Cognitive, social, physical and emotional development of the individual***
- c) Respect of the basic individual human rights.***

ECCE/D is a basic human right that has to be guaranteed to every single child no matter of his/her social, economic, ethnical, religious condition.

ECCE/D programmes have a strong track record in improving learning achievements, enhancing health and nutrition status as well as reducing gender disparities. Furthermore, early childhood interventions narrow structural and inherited socio-economic inequalities, and significantly contribute to poverty reduction and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. ECCE/D provision is therefore a cost-effective preventative measure with high socio-economic returns, a key factor to promote stability and social cohesion.

There is wide consensus that early childhood intervention programmes play a key role in development. This has brought about its integration into the United Nations global agenda and strategy, since the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) Jomtien, Thailand, 1990 with its “*Learning begins at birth*” (article 5), and a more specific reference ten years later in the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) where the first EFA goal reads: “*Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children*” thus providing a basis for the realization of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

Furthermore, 2009 has celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and endorsed by 192 nations. It is of timely importance to put the African child and his unique features on the development agenda, consolidate efforts to build capacity and develop initiatives in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries on child’s rights throughout Early Childhood Care, Education and Development.

## **ECCE/D in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Matter of Urgency**

At present, major global disparities in ECCE/D provision continue to divide the world's richest and poorest children. Recent studies show that by taking the example of pre-primary education services coverage, rates are lowest for precisely the poor and disadvantaged.

Pre-primary Gross Enrolment Ratio in 2006 averaged 79% in developed countries and 36% in developing countries. The situation is particularly worrisome in the Sub Sahara Africa (SSA) region, where only 18% of eligible children have access to pre-primary education services. In half of the SSA countries studied, less than 4% children are enrolled in pre-primary education (data from UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007).

This reflects the general status of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals throughout the region, in particular high poverty levels, inequality in income distribution and access to education and social services, constant decrease in human development index. In Sub-Sahara Africa, the issue of inherited inequalities in life chances is rather important, in view of the historical background of the colonialism, a socio-economic system characterized by social and cultural exclusion. According to the United Nations Development Programme – International Poverty Centre Focus Report 2004 *“Children and Poverty”*, 65% of children in Sub-Sahara Africa live in absolute poverty.

Major features undermining efforts to bust ECCE/D in the Sub-Sahara Africa region are the lack of financial support, negatively affecting infrastructures, staffing and programme implementation; limited capacities in strategizing and implementing ECCE/D policies and programmes by policy makers and practitioners; lack of institutional support as well as multi-sectorial coordinated strategy among national development partners.

### **A Response to the Urgency: The “Mauritius – Africa Initiative”**

At the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) bi-annual meeting held in 2006 in Gabon, experts and representatives from Ministries of Education together with Civil Society Organizations, highlighted the need for more comprehensive ECCE/D regional approaches and policies at Sub-Saharan Africa level.

In response to that, Mauritius has invited representatives from Sub Sahara Africa countries, in April 2007, to convene at a regional workshop on the EFA Global Monitoring Report *“Strong Foundations”*.

Participants from Indian Ocean Commission Members (Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles), African Central Republic, Botswana, Chad, Republic Democratic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal; with participation of UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (BREDA), UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (IRC), Norwegian and Danish experts, have produced a first concept note entitled *“Towards a New Partnership for a global ECCD/E initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa – 2007-2010”*, which expressed the need to focus efforts on capacity building for strategy and programme design and implementation. Moreover, participants have identified Mauritius to serve as a regional “knowledge hub” for capacity building and practices sharing.

As a result of the findings of the workshop, the Government of Mauritius, supported by the UN System and bi-lateral partners, notably Norway, has proposed the entitled programme "*Mauritius – Africa Initiative*". The Mauritius – Africa Initiative conceptual framework has been outlined during a first workshop organized in May 2007 at UNICEF IRC, followed by the seminar "*Investing in Early Child Development: a Matter of Urgency*", organized by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) in April 2008 in Oslo.

The ADEA Working Group on Early Childhood Development (ADEA WGECD), met in Dakar in September 2008, has strongly encouraged Mauritius to pursue the initiative's programme.

### **The MAI Start Up phase 2009**

The pilot phase has begun in April 2009, with a 15 days intensive study/exchange visit to Norway, undertaken by a team of 5 Mauritian policy makers and cadres responsible for ECCE/D national policy implementation (ECCE National Authority, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women Rights, Children and Family Welfare, Mauritius Institute of Education).

The programme has been organized by NORAD, Statped Vest (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training), UNDP Mauritius, Government of Mauritius, and UNICEF IRC, both technical and financial support.

The intensive exchange/study programme has included seminar, workshop, visits in Oslo and Bergen, involving policy makers and practitioners from Ministry of Children, Youth and Family Welfare, Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Health and Care Services, Ombudsman for Children, University of Oslo and Municipality of Oslo, Statped Vest, Child Watch International, NOVA (Research Institute), University of Bergen, local authorities for children and family affairs.

The aim of the study tour was firstly to test the effectiveness of the capacity building formula through exchange experience and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing North-South, customized with reference to the particular capacity building needs of ECCE/D sector Mauritius, notably the reinforcement of coordination instruments of the national ECCE Authority in common programming and implementation of multi-sectorial strategies.

The results were definitely encouraging. The team of Mauritian policy makers have been able to work on the development of a) a national action plan mechanism for ECCE Authority programme coordination and b) a concept note for the setting up of the knowledge hub on ECCE/D in Mauritius, grouping national institutions, extending its services to the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

UNDP Mauritius and UNICEF IRC have facilitated programme activities and worked on the partnership building side, with specific reference to the institutionalization of the cooperation framework with national Norwegian institutions.

After the success of the pilot of April 2009, the programme has now reached a turning point in terms of activities design and implementation as well as partnership building. Following ADEA Fourth African International Conference on Early Childhood Development (, November 2009): *From Policy to Action: Expanding Investment in ECD for Sustainable Development*; the Mauritius – Africa Initiative has been fully integrated into the ADEA WGECD plan of action and the UNESCO Basic Education in Africa Programme (BEAP).

### **The ADEA Working Group on Early Childhood Development**

The Working Group on Early Childhood Development (ADEA WGECD) of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa has been established in 1993, initially as a special group within the “*Female Participation Group*” of the ADEA (now FAWE).

The special group was driven by committed professionals coming from 11 Sub-Saharan Africa countries, leading integrated young child development programming at national and regional level, with the support mainly of Bernard Van Leer Foundation, Aga Khan Foundation, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID and World Bank, and backed by the Consultative Group on ECD. The aim of the special group was to enhance the debate on Early Childhood Care Education and Development in the region as well as reinforce the professional ECCE/D network.

The ADEA WGECD functions as a regional network, linked to the global Consultative Group on Early Childhood Development (CG). The WGECD works in concert with the global network of ECD advocates, program and policy analysts to ensure the young children in Africa benefit from resources and frameworks found beyond Africa. The WGECD has adopted the CG four cornerstones approach but will adapt them for the Africa context. The four CG cornerstones are:

- (a) Start at the beginning (prenatal to age 3 years);
- (b) Get ready for success (3 to 6 years);
- (c) Improve primary school quality (6 to 8 years)
- (d) Include early childhood in policies (ECD and multi-sector policies, plans, legislation, standards and guidelines).

The WGECD focus on:

- a) Advocacy and mobilization of political and public support;
- b) Contribution to the knowledge base on ECD in Africa by facilitating research, capacity and knowledge building, dissemination and exchange;
- c) Stimulating policy review, development, implementation and monitoring;

- d) Motivating partnership building and networking;
- e) Strengthening its administrative base.

Since 2007, the ADEA WGECD is chaired by the UNESCO BREDA in Dakar and the Secretariat is based at Save the Children US.

The Working Group's members are representative of international agencies active in ECD in Sub-Saharan Africa, national ECD focal points and ministerial responsible, experts. The ADEA WGECD is governed by the Steering Committee representing diverse membership profiles. The Secretariat operates in linking different partners and members.

In this context, the ADEA WGECD had organized the Fourth African International Conference on Early Childhood Development (ECD in Dakar, November 2009): *From Policy to Action: Expanding Investment in ECD for Sustainable Development*. It was sponsored by 19 partners of the Working Group who are dedicated to ECD in Africa. The gathering also celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of holding African International ECD Conferences.

The Conference was remarkable for its high level of African leadership, participation and spirited discussions. Enthusiasm for African ECD achievements and innovations clearly demonstrated that Africa is now placing great emphasis on young children's improved development, and ECD is on the map of decision makers throughout Africa.

One major impact of the conference is the adoption by the African Union of ECD as a new goal of the action plan for the education second decade.

### **The UNESCO's "Basic Education in Africa Programme (BEAP)"**

The BEAP has been conceived and initiated in 2008 by UNESCO as an integrated instrument to implement the goals of the "AU Second Decade of Education for Africa" (September 2006), the "Kigali Call for Action" (September 2007) and the outcomes of the ADEA bi-annual meeting at Maputo (May 2008), with the assistance of development partners.

The Kigali Call for Action is an action plan that resulted from a high-level UNESCO Regional Seminar on basic education held in Kigali in September 2007, looking especially at the concerted and commendable efforts of African countries to achieve EFA targets and the MDGs throughout a democratized vision for basic education based on the principles of social justice, equity and social inclusion; one which provides an ample range of learning opportunities and outcomes for a broader range of students, and one which enhances the capacities of all students to contribute to stable, peaceful, equitable and prosperous societies.

The achievement of the EFA Goals and the MDGs implies the provision of education that is inclusive and adequately responds to the diverse learning needs of all students. As noted in UNESCO's "Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education" (2009):

*Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve EFA.*

However, evidence suggests that a substantial number of students remain excluded from regular school activities for a wide range of reasons related to economic, intellectual, linguistic, physical, gender, emotional, health and other factors.

The BEAP seeks to provide a framework for enhancing comprehensive approaches in basic education reform aiming at improving quality, relevance and equity in education throughout the increase of the responsiveness of education to the expectations and diverse needs of learners and society.

The BEAP framework provides instruments to:

(a) Extend basic education to a minimum of 9-10 years duration, thus including Early Childhood (ECCE/D) and Lower Secondary Education.

(b) Develop the basic education cycle in a holistic perspective, ensuring that it is inclusive, coherent and seamless.

(c) Promote skills- and competency-based curriculum framework relevant to the needs of children and youth in Africa as a basis for lifelong learning.

In this connection, the IBE (International Bureau of Education), UNESCO's institute specialized in developing Member States capacities to reform curriculum for achieving "quality education for all", has been playing an active role in supporting BEAP. With a global mandate, the IBE's assets include field-oriented activities and close collaboration with UNESCO field offices, Ministries of Educations and academic institutions for evidenced-based and contextualized interventions. Its comprehensive working approach addresses education/curriculum policies, advocacy, curriculum development, implementation and monitoring and evaluation, assessment and linkage with teacher training.

### ***Mauritius Africa Initiative/BEAP/ADEA WGECD: Programme Objectives***

The Mauritius – Africa Initiative aims at contributing to the achievement of the EFA Goals and MDGs in the Sub-Sahara Africa as well as strengthening of the Convention of the Rights of the Child by setting up a regional programme of capacity building on Early Childhood Care Education and Development, in line with major axes of intervention of regional and international development partners and institution in the referred field.

The programme is conceived as a peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, based on South-South/North-South cooperation partnerships, identifying Mauritius as a knowledge hub or centre of excellence on capacity building in ECCE/D policy making at regional level.

The initiative intends to represent an innovative development cooperation programme, focusing more on knowledge sharing than traditional aid provision, via South-South cooperation and partnerships with the "North", as well as the support of the United Nations system.

Moreover, the programme focuses on holistic, inclusive and multi-sectorial approaches towards Early Childhood Care Education and Development, adopting the framework of the BEAP for the education sector and the MDGs and EFA Goals as the basis to encompass early interventions into national development and pro-poor strategies as well as within a comprehensive basic education path aiming at quality, social inclusion and equality in life chances. This specific feature is reinforced by policy dialogue and advocacy initiatives aiming at consolidating institutional support towards inclusive and equitable ECCE/D, and accompanied by a United Nations common vision and coordinated strategy, within the framework of the ADEA Working Group on ECD.

Major lines of intervention:

- Knowledge sharing programme targeting high cadres/policy makers/technicians from SS Africa, aiming at reinforcing capacities in the design and implementation of multi-sectorial, inclusive and equitable ECCE/D policies at national level. The knowledge and practices sharing programme is based on cooperation South-South.
- Research and policy dialogue aiming at enhancing strategic thinking and advocacy initiatives to strengthen the perspective of Early Childhood Care Education and Development as a comprehensive and holistic education and socio-economic policy, representing the key factor for equalizing life chances, contributing to poverty reduction and social inclusion (with MDGs and EFA as references) and promoting basic social-economic, cultural and human rights in the Sub-Sahara African.
- Strengthening the existing ECD Focal Point network in Sub-Sahara Africa (national and sub-regional), promoting knowledge capacity building exchanges and advocacy events.

As a result, following actions are identified to meet the above:

- Setting up of a system of accreditation for the accelerated knowledge sharing and exchange programmes, in the form of “Intensive Diploma” co-awarded by a Norwegian Institution together with the Mauritius Institute of Education, facilitated by other national institutions and agencies in both Mauritius and Norway.

The exchange programme will target policy makers/leaders and technicians of ECCE/D sector from Sub-Sahara Africa and will be piloted within a first group of countries of the Indian Ocean sub-region.

The approach will be holistic and multi-sectorial, focusing mostly on practical feature rather than academic.

Moreover, the programme will be demand-driven and customized referring to participants capacity building needs and national priorities. Participants will work in close cooperation with hosting institutions in Norway and the Mauritius Hub, with the assistance of the UN system, to formulate specific assignments related to national priorities and subsequently develop the exchange module.

- Establishment of the regional ECCE/Development “knowledge hub” or “centre of excellence” in Mauritius for a) capacity building/knowledge sharing; b) research, documentation, policy dialogues and advocacy.

Furthermore, the Mauritius-Africa Initiative ECCE/D “knowledge hub” intends to operate in cooperation with the “*Regional Multi-Disciplinary Centre of Excellence Mauritius*”, a regional initiative driven by the Government of Mauritius throughout the Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment, financed by the Government of Mauritius and international/bilateral donors, aiming at promoting capacity building, research, technical support in the field of macro-economic management, trade and transit, cross-border finance, business development and investment, common sectoral policies, serving the Sub-Sahara Africa region.

- Setting up of an “*Advisory Committee*”, composed by UN partners and academia, promoting research, documentation, policy dialogue and advocacy initiatives focusing on the approach ECCE/D as key feature to equalize life chances and promote inclusive social and human development.

The MAI-BEAP is currently supported by the UNDP Mauritius, UNESCO BREDDA and Dar es Salaam Cluster Office, ADEA Working Group ECD, UNESCO IBE, Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources Mauritius, Early Childhood Care and Education Authority Mauritius, the Regional Multi-Disciplinary Centre of Excellence Mauritius, Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, as well as national agencies and institutions in both Mauritius and Norway.

## ***Annex: the Mauritius Knowledge Hub or Centre of Excellence***

Mauritius has shown to put ECCE/D at the centre of its national agenda since the 1970s by focusing on pre-primary education services and enrolment (3 to 6 years old), together with various social schemes for the period of age 0 to 3. Moreover, pre-school education figures prominently in the 1991 national *“Master Plan for Education”* (which is still considered as a “model” for developing countries) reinforced in the new *Strategy for Education 2008* aiming at reaching free and universal education for all children of 3 years old by 2020, and targeting primarily vulnerable children.

In addition, recent efforts have been made to consolidate initiatives on ECCE/D by following more holistic approaches and multi-sectorial strategies, integrating ECCE/D into the overall socio-economic development and poverty reduction paradigm aiming at reducing inequalities in life chances and promoting social inclusion. As a result in 2007, the Parliament unanimously voted to establish the ECCE Authority, as the coordinating body of ECCE-related Ministries (Ministry of Education; Women’s Rights, Children Development and Family Welfare; Finance and Economic Empowerment; Health and Quality of Life; Social Security; Local Administration). The establishment of the ECCE Authority has been followed by the setting up of an extensive scheme called Eradicate Absolute Poverty programme by the Ministry of Finance, targeting poverty alleviation throughout access to ECCE/D services for vulnerable children and families.

The presence of several other institutions working on ECCE-related matters naturally facilitate the constitution of the “knowledge hub”. It might be mentioned: the Mauritius Institute of Education, the Mauritius College of the Air and the Mauritius Qualification Authority for training, the National Children Council for 0 to 3 years childhood care, the Join Child and Health Programme (international research project based in Mauritius since 1970s, lead by University of Pennsylvania), the Ombudsperson for Children and diverse active national private institutions and NGOs.