

JAPAN EDUCATION FORUM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (JEF FOR SDGS)
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, CULTURE, SPORTS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, TOKYO JAPAN

TITLE: EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMMING IN AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND LESSONS
LEARNT

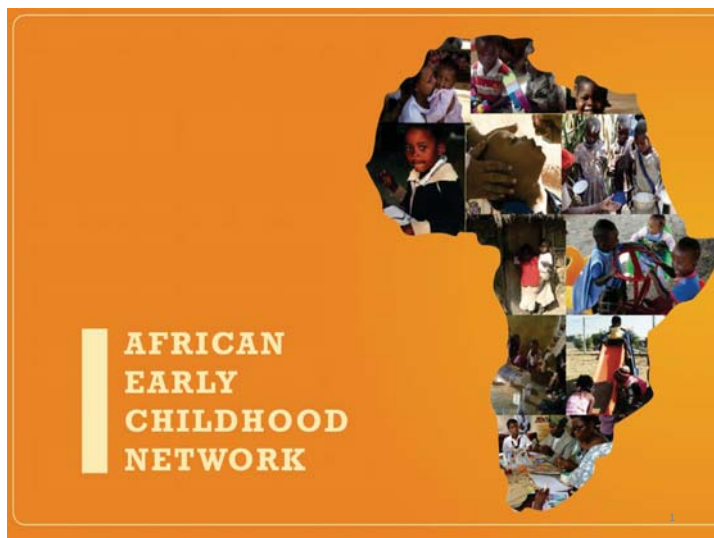
Lynette Okengo, PhD, Executive Director- Africa Early Childhood Network

Over the years, there has been much progress in ECD programming across the Africa region. Compared to the situation in 2010, just about 8 years ago, there is now greater awareness of the importance of the early years and increased government involvement and commitment to providing an enabling environment to support national programming. This can be seen in the number of countries engaged in policy development, planning and development of key national inputs for implementation and establishment of a variety of programmes targeting different aspects of children's development including early learning programs and implementation of programmes to support children's health and nutrition. Many more countries are now including young children in social protection programmes and specifically designing poverty reduction strategies to cushion families that have young children.

It is worth noting that programs exist that have been rigorously evaluated and have demonstrated impact on children. This is all positive but it has not been enough to deliver the step-change needed to improve outcomes for young African children. There is need for greater government investment, greater partnership and more focused and intentional effort by all partners to ensure integrated programming including health, nutrition and responsive caregiving, opportunities for early learning as well as safety and security. It is clear that the Africa region still has a very long way to go as a child from SSA is more than fifteen times more likely to die before reaching the age of five than a child from a high-income region and it is estimated that by 2020, 45% of the children who are malnourished in the world will be from SSA. SSA has the lowest access to pre-primary education rates of all world regions as approximately only 20% of children from SSA were enrolled in pre-primary education. Although this represents an increase in access for children aged 4-6 years that has resulted from the annexing of ECD programmes to primary schools, it is however contributing to the 'schoolification' of young children albeit with low achievement levels. Much more needs to be done to ensure that the 60% who are developmentally off track and unlikely to achieve their full developmental potential are put on a fundamentally different trajectory for growth and development.

A number of challenges have played a critical role in slowing down progress towards large-scale equitable access to quality ECD programmes for children in Africa that is needed to improve child outcomes. These include: Lack of high level political will to unlock adequate resources to support implementation of policies, weak governance and accountability, weak co-ordination and partnership across sectors and stakeholders. Further to this there has been limited knowledge and contextual evidence to guide effective practice including design of relevant quality improvement strategies and limited support to strengthen and scale up existing programmes.

The time is here to maximize critical opportunities for global and regional advocacy and increased investment for young children. With the inclusion of ECD in SDG's, prioritization of ECD by the G20, and the launch of the Nurturing Care Framework the global arena has been set that portend hope for young children globally. The launch of the African Union CESA 16-25 ECED Cluster also signifies an increasing regional focus on early learning and support to Member States to ensure all are well positioned to provide environment necessary for building better brains, strong foundations and ultimately strong economies.



Early Childhood Programming in Africa Challenges and Lessons Learnt

Presented at:
Japan Education Forum for Sustainable Development Goals (JEF for SDGs)

Held at:
Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Tokyo Japan

By:
Lynette Okengo, PhD
Executive Director- Africa Early Childhood Network

Child Development

Developmental domains

- Physical
- Cognitive
- Social
- Emotional
- Spiritual

All developmental domains are equally important. They are interrelated and interdependent

Risks to Child Development

- Poverty
- Nutritional deficiencies
- Food insecurity
- High-crime communities
- Low-quality resources
- Family stress
- Child abuse and neglect

Source: Lancet 2017

Contextual Factors

	Trend
GDP per capita average annual growth rate	↑
Proportion of population living below the poverty line	↑
Average annual rate of inflation	↓
Gender inequity (Gender equity index)	↓
Adult literacy rate: Females as a % of males	↑
Food insecurity	↑
% of under-fives suffering from underweight	↓
% of under-fives suffering from stunting	↓
Maternal mortality ratio	↓
Access to early learning services	↑

Is the situation of children really improving?

Situation of Africa's Children

THE LANCET

Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale

Response to Lack of Learning Opportunities

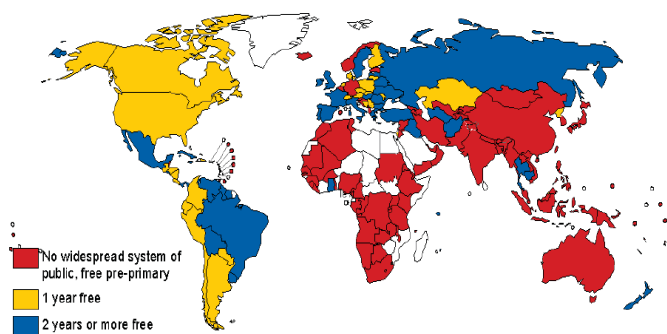
- SDG 4.2, Agenda 2063 & CESA 16-25
- Policy development - 60%
- Pre-primary now included as part of basic education
- Institutionalized capacity building programmes
- Scientific publications increasing
- Increasing number of programmes
- Diverse actors engaging
- Increased financing – GPE

Response to Lack of Learning Opportunities

- SDG 4.2, Agenda 2063 & CESA 16-25
- Policy development - 60%
- Pre-primary now included as part of basic education
- Institutionalized capacity building programmes
- Scientific publications increasing
- Increasing number of programmes
- Diverse actors engaging
- Increased financing – GPE

Impact ??

The problem is persistent....



THE LANCET

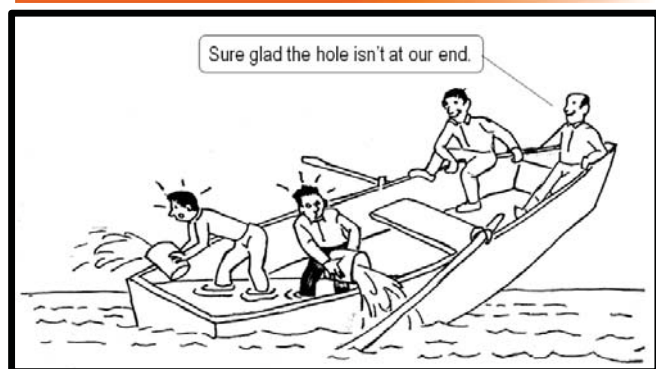
Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale

9

Possible Responses?



Possible Response?



11

Cost of Inaction

Early childhood risks

Poverty
Poor maternal health
Pregnancy & birth complications
Under-nutrition
Infections
Lack of learning opportunities
Exposure to violence

Family and public investments, interventions

Outcomes to age 2y
Growth, health, wellbeing

Outcomes to preschool
+ School readiness

Outcomes late childhood
+ School achievement

Outcomes adolescence, adulthood
+ Health, wellbeing, earnings

THE LANCET

Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale

12

Cost of Inaction

Early childhood risks

Poverty
Poor maternal health
Pregnancy & birth complications
Under-nutrition
Infections
Lack of learning opportunities
Exposure to violence

Family and public investments, interventions

Outcomes to age 2y
Growth, health, wellbeing

Outcomes to preschool
+ School readiness

Outcomes late childhood
+ School achievement

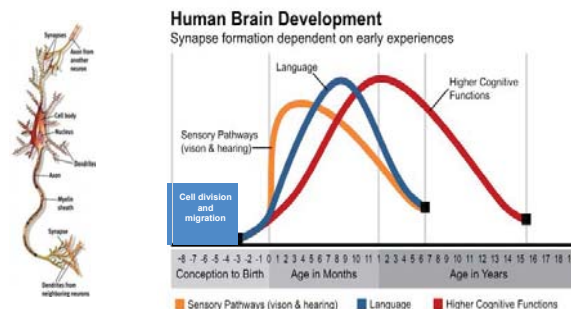
Outcomes adolescence, adulthood
+ Health, wellbeing, earnings

THE LANCET

Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale

13

Sensitive periods and the developing brain



THE LANCET

Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale

14

Those who start late lag behind....



Greater Response Needed...

- Activate and sustain interest, active engagement and **investment** at the highest levels incl. G20
- Strengthen political will to develop and **implement** appropriate policies
- Improve **allocation and efficient utilization** of resources
- Enhance **equitable access to contextually relevant and quality** programmes
- Intensified action to support **effective** workforce
- Strengthen **accountability**, effective governance and management of programmes
- Strengthen **co-ordination** and partnership
- Increase knowledge and contextual **evidence** to guide effective practice

THE LANCET

Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale

15

The Time is Right...

- Maximize the visibility provided by:
 - G20 initiative for Early Childhood Development
 - The SDGs,
 - Continental commitments incl. AU Agenda 2063, CESA 16-25 and AU ECED Cluster
- Strengthen strategic partnerships
- Harness opportunities provided by new and existing financing opportunities

17

The Time is Right...

- Join global and regional partnerships for stronger advocacy and impact at global, regional and national levels e.g.
 - Early Childhood Action Network (ECDAN)
 - Regional networks and coalitions
- Build upon existing government agenda, initiatives
- Strengthen synergies across stakeholders at all levels

18

“It always seems imposible until it is done”
Nelson Mandela

“If spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.”
Ethiopian Proverb

Asante Sana



19