
Sector and Strategy Work

The Africa Regional ECD Initiative 1996–98

The Africa Region's present commitment to support ECD programs has its genesis in two parallel actions. One was the operations work in Kenya and Nigeria, reported in Section II of this volume. The second was an Africa Regional ECD Initiative launched in 1996 by the former technical unit (AFTH) of the Region.

The objectives of this Regional Initiative were:

- To acquire better understanding of the emerging needs for ECD services in the context of the changing conditions of African mothers and children
- To develop an indigenous research base and capacity in the areas of care giving and ECD
- To influence and support country and donor policy, financing structures, programming, and implementation for integrated services of health, nutrition, early education, and wider family and community support services.

The first objective was achieved through a series of desk reviews complemented by individual country case studies. Results of the regional sector work were summarized in the two publications, *The Condition of Young Children in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Colletta, Balachander, and Liang 1996) and *Review of Early Childhood Policies and Programs in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Colletta and Reinhold 1997). The first title analyzed the condition of young children in Africa and pointed to the benefits of ECD in increased efficiency of primary and secondary school investments, children's enhanced economic contribution to society, and the reduction of social inequity. The second publication presented a series of case studies and good practice examples of ECD programs in Africa initiated and implemented by international nongovernmental ECD and national governmental agencies.

The country case studies focused on Kenya, Mauritius, and South Africa. These countries were given active policy and program support to ECD and were widely considered to illustrate good practice upon which other countries could draw. The policy work for Mauritius is reported in this section. The study on South Africa was undertaken by the Early Learning Resource Unit, an associate member of the South African Congress for Early Childhood, and it directly contributed to the formulation of a new policy in the sector (Biersteker 1997). The Kenya case studies com-

prised the economic and sector work (ESW) for project preparation of the World Bank co-financed Kenya ECD project also described in this volume.

Focusing on capacity building for the sector, the Bank's Africa Regional ECD Initiative, in collaboration with the Bank's Human Development Network, Education Sector (HDNED) and the World Bank Institute, instigated work on two projects: (a) a CD-ROM for ECD to offer access to wide-ranging materials that would include international references, latest research, and experience from a broad array of countries as well as substantial detail on program development experience on a step-by-step basis; and (b) an African Regional chapter of the World Bank's ECD web site, which evolved into the IMPACT project reported in Section V of this publication. The Regional Initiative brought in international expertise and worked through the Africa Region's ECD Affinity Group in collaboration with HDNED to develop indicators for operations impact assessment of ECD programs that follow an integrated approach of early education, health, and nutrition.

The ECD Initiative supported government and development partner investments in ECD by working with World Bank task managers and forging partnerships with different organizations and professionals worldwide who had particular strengths in ECD. These included UNICEF, the Aga Khan Foundation, Bernard van Leer Foundation, Save the Children U.S., U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Consultative Group for Early Childhood Care and Development, African researchers, educators, NGOs, women's groups, and government ministries. Joining forces with UNICEF, the Aga Khan Foundation, and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the Initiative helped create, in 1997, an ECD Working Group for the ADEA.

In 1998, the ECD Initiative, initially launched by Nat Colletta (Manager, Post-Conflict Unit [SDVPC]) and managed by Susan Opper (Senior Education Specialist, AFTH4) with the support of a Swiss trust fund, was folded into the operations work of the Human Development Network of the Africa Region (AFTHD) when the Africa Region's ECD Team was created.