

International ECD Institutes and Conferences

To promote ECD capacity building and networking

To promote interactive learning for ECD program and policy development in Africa

To promote African leadership and information sharing in support of the well-being of African children

To identify and build on strengths in African ECD, showcasing exemplary practice and innovation

Sites:

2002: International ECD Conference, Asmara, Eritrea (planned)

2001: International ECD Conference, Dakar Senegal (planned)

2000: International ECD Conference, World Bank, Washington, D.C.

1999: International ECD Conference, Kampala, Uganda

1998: Regional Institute, Banjul, The Gambia

1997: Regional Institute, Windhoek, Namibia

1995: International Institute, Victoria, B.C., Canada

1994: Conference and Institute, Victoria, B.C., Canada

To help develop and sustain African leadership capacity for ECD policy and program development, a series of regional training seminars and conferences were initiated to bring together key organizations and professionals working in the sector. This has promoted synergy across initiatives and encouraged a shared vision and learning culture while preserving sensitivity to regional and local contexts in undertaking innovations in African ECD. Importantly, the process has provided countries with grounded expertise through peer review and technical assistance. Africans help fellow Africans build on existing strengths and networks, reinforcing and extending investments in ECD.

Initiated in conjunction with a 1994 International Child, Youth, and Family Conference held at the University of Victoria, Canada, the four ECD Institutes (also referred to as seminars or summer schools) brought together ECD leaders from across Africa for periods of two to three weeks to interact with each other and with international ECD experts to more effectively plan and promote ECD policy and program options for their countries. From the first event in 1994, participants have recommended that the ECD Institutes become part of an ongoing structure that would allow them to create a continuing “community of learners and leaders” committed to promoting children’s well-being in Africa. Toward that end, regional institutes were held in Africa in 1997 and 1998, and an Africa-wide ECD conference was mounted in 1999.

UNICEF, in cooperation with the University of Victoria, was the lead agency in promoting the ECD institutes. The 1995 institute covered a broad range of topics

to identify potential content for a graduate-level ECD program. It was designed to provide a training and sharing opportunity for ECD trainers and senior-level program officers from around the world. After the participants' recommendation that the international institutes be augmented with regional training, a first African ECD institute was held in Namibia in 1997, jointly organized by the University of Namibia and the University of Victoria, Canada. The Namibian institute was fully subscribed with more than two dozen students from 11 African countries. The first week of the institute focused on background issues of planning frameworks and child development from an African perspective, and the final two weeks were devoted to developing integrated programming for each participating country.

The Namibia institute was followed by a similar activity in The Gambia in 1998, for which UNICEF and the World Bank contributed core funding and technical assistance. The Gambia institute drew some three dozen government, NGO, and UNICEF personnel from 12 West and Central African countries and was hosted by the government of The Gambia through its Department of State for Education. It was organized by the ECD Network for Africa (ECDNA) in collaboration with staff from Côte d'Ivoire and The Gambia. At both the Namibia and The Gambia institutes, many ECD partners provided funds to support their own staff in attending the training. Training focused on multisectoral, integrated approaches to ECD. Emphasis was placed on defining policies and legal frameworks and on analyzing mechanisms that would be effective at both the central and decentralized levels, including partnerships with communities, NGOs, and the private sector.

In 1999, the Uganda government and the World Bank initiated a request to explore a third African Regional ECD Training Institute, to be held in Uganda. After consultation, the decision was made to create a two-tier structure of training: a reasonably large, 130–150-person, Africa-wide ECD conference, followed by a Uganda-focused training workshop specific to Uganda's program needs for implementing a nationwide ECD project.

In the same way that the ECD institute series had been made possible through broad interorganizational and intersectoral support, the Kampala conference asked ECD partners to cooperatively plan and facilitate this next major step: the first large-scale international ECD conference to take place in and focus on Africa. The Planning Committee included representatives from government ministries, the World Bank, UNICEF, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the Aga Khan Foundation, Save the Children Fund, ECDNA, Makerere University, the University of Victoria, and others. These partners participated in a decentralized organizational process, contacting those programs with which they were associated. Typically, the partner organization also covered the expenses for those programs' participation in the conference, contributing to sharing the "core" costs covered by the World Bank.

Under the conference theme "Innovations in Early Childhood Care and Development in Africa," the conference showcased a broad variety of creative and innovative approaches to ECD across the Africa Region. Drawing from the list of organizations that had long supported the attendance of their own people at earlier institutes and that were themselves involved in ECD program development throughout Africa, more than 170 delegates from 19 African countries attended the event, rep-

representing governmental and nongovernmental agencies, the private sector, and partner organizations. Session titles included “Advocacy for Children in Uganda,” “Madrasa Programs in East Africa,” “Innovative ECD in Nigeria,” “Building NGO ECD Capacity in Burkina Faso,” “ECD Development in Ethiopia,” “ECD Innovations in Mauritius,” “The Pillars of South African ECD Policy—Building on Children’s Rights,” and “Innovations in ECD Training in Kenya.”

Good practice in program development and management were key features of the conference, with the purpose of learning from African experiences. The presentations and discussions were characterized by enthusiasm, energy, and a commitment to networking and sharing. To help meet the increasing demand for information on ECD programs in Africa and beyond, the conference also featured new technologies of knowledge dissemination, including the CD-ROM “Early Childhood Counts,” the ECD Virtual University initiative, and accessing and creating resources on the Internet. These were introduced as important tools for training, information sharing, and program development.

The Uganda ECD training workshop followed the one-week international conference and built on aspects of the work presented the first week. The major focus of the seminar was support of local and regional NGOs in Uganda to carry forward the goals of the Nutrition and Early Childhood Development Project (NECDP) to the local level.

Building on this series of events, the World Bank has confirmed its commitment to supporting other African governments in hosting future international ECD conferences. As governments increasingly seek investment in ECD, the international conferences provide an important source of information and inspiration about policies, procedures, and practices, as well as an opportunity for countries to calibrate their experiences against good practice. It has become apparent that, as countries move further into program implementation, their ECD leadership has professional development needs that cannot be met through one-off workshops of one or two weeks’ duration, but must be complemented by longer-term efforts for building in-country capacity. The ECD Virtual University and the IMPACT project, described in the following section, are responses to those needs.

A Summary Report of the Kampala Conference, including brief biographic statements and contact points, is available at ecdvu@uvic.ca.