

MAURITIUS

**“Analysis of Early Child Development in Mauritius—Day Care and Home Care Programs: Quality, Cost, and Accreditation”
(7 volumes with individual titles)**

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Mauritius has been at the forefront in the Africa Region in recognizing the enormous potential and distinctive role of ECD as a contributor to the economic and social welfare of a country over the long term. In the mid-1990s, the government reviewed the potential advantages of programs targeted at either preventing or dealing with social problems early to avoid costly interventions later. Zero-to-three early childhood development was one such program.

Full employment in Mauritius was also raising the need for day-care facilities for young children as mothers engaged in greater numbers in paid employment. Particularly in the Export Processing Zone (EPZ), at least two-thirds of the employees are female. To provide day care for young children, the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare, and Child Development initiated five day-care centers sponsored by the EPZ Labor Welfare Fund, the Sugar Industry Labor Welfare Fund, and the ministry. Workers, employers, and government contribute to the fund.

Building from this base, the government articulated a national program of support through which it facilitates the provision of affordable, high-quality care for children in the age group zero to three years. Technical expertise and ESW contributed by the World Bank (World Bank 1998), in active partnership with UNICEF, assisted the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare, and Child Development in crafting a National ECD Policy Paper that was approved by Parliament in June 1998. The government’s major policy objectives are to:

- Establish a system of integrated services for ECD by defining roles and responsibilities of government and nongovernmental institutions, the private sector, and communities.
- Support a newly created national accreditation system for quality and improvement of child care in which peer review and self-study play a large role.
- Support and expand education and training of management personnel and ECD workers.
- Promote parental education and community awareness and investment in ECD.
- Develop a flexible curriculum framework for the care of children zero to three years old.
- Promote equity in access to ECD services, with emphasis on affordability of care and on strategies to reach children with special needs.

Additional technical assistance from the World Bank supported the Ministry of Women to prepare the complementary Implementation Plan for the policy paper

that was approved by Parliament in August 1999. The plan sets out a sequence of two phases. The first gives priority to establishing a national advocacy and communication strategy for ECD, developing a supportive legal framework for the ECD sector, and strengthening mechanisms of service provision particularly to pilot models for ECD service delivery in deprived areas. During the second phase of the Implementation Plan, center-based and home-based ECD facilities will be expanded while monitoring, evaluation, and research capacity for the sector are reinforced.

The government's commitment to implementation was immediately seen in provisions in the national budget 1999–2000 to exempt all pedagogical materials and equipment for day-care centers from customs duty; to provide a 50 percent increase in the grant to the EPZ to enable an increase in its number of day-care facilities; and to provide incentives to other factories, enterprises, and parastatal bodies to set up day-care facilities for workers at or near their workplace.

Source: World Bank. 1998. *An Analysis of Early Childhood Development—Daycare and Home Care Programs: Quality, Cost and Accreditation* (7 volumes). Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

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