

National Early Childhood Development Community of Practice Meeting Highlights 14 August 2018

Meeting held at Sasol, Sandton



Setting the scene

CoP facilitator Zarina Khan welcomed CoP members into the session, noting the range of participants and welcoming government representatives from Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Departments of Social Development (DSD).

Vuyiswa Ncontsa as CEO of BRIDGE described the ECD CoP as entering a transition period. ECD Project Manager Kaley le Mottee, who has managed the CoP with leadership and professionalism since 2014, has left BRIDGE (but not the sector) to join Ntataise, and Vuyiswa thanked her for her contribution to the growth and development of the CoP. Vuyiswa went on to introduce Thandeka Rantsi who has taken over Kaley's role. Thandeka was previously a programme manager at Tshikilulu Social Investments, and is very familiar with the ECD sector. Another transition in the offing is the departure of Zarina Khan who would be facilitating her last ECD CoP: Zarina has guided us through many contentious debates, and will be missed.

"Change is scary and uncomfortable but provides opportunities for innovation so please bear with us as we navigate our way forward. We are a learning organisation after all."-
Vuyiswa Ncontsa



Vuyiswa thanked the government representatives for joining us at this CoP in order to share information with the sector, and reflected on the CoP as a learning organisation rather than a finger-pointing space. She also noted that BRIDGE will soon be expanding ECD CoPs into other provinces such as the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga. She reminded participants that these CoPs are created in order to avoid duplication in ECD as we need to collaborate with each other and not compete with each other – our communities of practice are about building knowledge together in order to benefit the sector.

The CoP is reminded of BRIDGE's knowledge management role. All meetings, presentations and discussions are captured and shared on BRIDGE's Knowledge Hub, as are any other specific knowledge products relevant to ECD. [Here](#) is the link to this.



Provincial ECD CoP Reflections: Looking back over 2017-2018

Kwa-Zulu Natal ECD CoP

Patsy Pillay (Director at New Beginnings) is the ECD Champion for this CoP. New Beginnings trains ECD practitioners and advocates and lobbies for ECD; through her work in this context, Patsy noted a lack of coordinating structures and forums for collaborative work. The CoP was launched in 2017, inviting participation from representatives from training organisations, universities and NGOs. The CoP has had six meetings to date, with numbers averaging about 25 participants. BRIDGE's knowledge dissemination is generally appreciated.

Major themes discussed at the KZN CoP include:

- Collaborating with partners, including government
- Learning more about fundraising
- Creating a Knowledge Hub
- Showcasing best practices
- Keeping up-to-date with issues such as qualifications.

Challenges include sharing information on key developments. For example, many practitioners are still in the dark about developments in relation to new QCTO and PIECCE qualifications. Rural and poorer communities often don't have access to this type of information or to various government policies. Other knowledge needs identified include information on inclusive education, such as methodologies for children with barriers to learning. Other challenges include logistical issues such as costs and transport for people to attend CoP meetings.

“Attendees enjoy the fact that there is sharing of national and provincial developments, they value making contacts through networking and the mutual help this provides.”

Western Cape ECD CoP

Carol Harington from Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU) is now the ECD Western Cape CoP champion, but has been involved in this CoP since its inception in 2015. This CoP has always aimed at being a learning space where issues could be debated, problems could be shared in a safe, non-judgemental space, and participants can get help with issues they are facing.

Major themes discussed at the Western Cape CoP include:

- Examining technology in ECD, looking at what is working and what is not working
- Updates on PIECCE Project as a standing agenda item
- Approaches to training
- Tracking DSD's strategy of outsourcing registration support for centres to different NGOs is also a standing agenda item. All ECD centres are supported by an allocated NGO - this is easy for some NGOs but not for others. The CoP will play an important role in helping these NGOs to understand different approaches and share insights.
- Continuing alliances with organisations such as BRIDGE and NECDA

- The CoP is also very interested in the social impact bond funding model as it evolves in the Western Cape under both the Department of Health and under DSD.

The next phase of work includes looking at the monitoring and evaluation element of ECD, following on from a presentation on the Early Learning Outcomes Measurement (ELOM) tool presented at the previous national ECD CoP.



Implementing the National Integrated ECD Policy (2015): Panel Perspectives

The CoP was privileged to have two key government representatives joining a panel discussion to share their perspectives on the rollout of the National Integrated ECD Policy of 2015, reflecting on both challenges and achievements. They were joined by a third panellist who shared a view from the NGO sector. The panel presentations were extremely informative and the subsequent discussions ranged over a number of implementation issues.

PANEL MEMBERS

- Marie Louise Samuels (Director of ECD at the Department of Basic Education)
- Isabella Sekawana (Chief Director of ECD and Partial Care at the Department of Social Development)
- Rex Meshack Rantsope Molefe (Director at Motheo Training Institute Trust)

Marie Louise Samuels (Director of ECD at the Department of Basic Education)

Marie Louise's presentation not only focused on the challenges of implementing the policy, but also gave some perspective in terms of the background of the policy. While working for society, government departments have to work within the legislation, understanding clearly what the legislation says about different roles and responsibilities. The National Integrated Policy is complex, and deals with up to 24 different government departments. These multi-perspectives mean that implementation challenges have to be worked out jointly between departments.

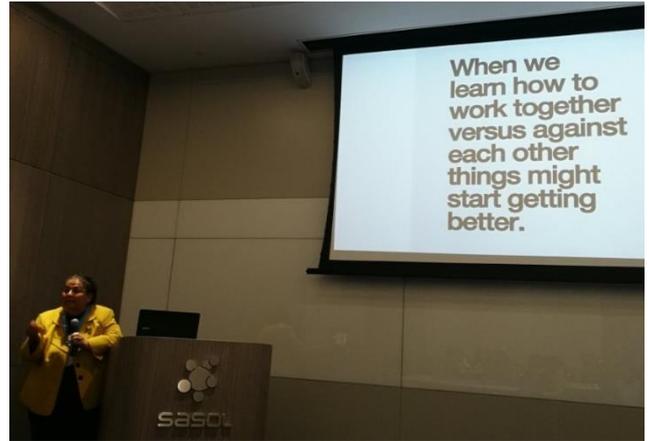
To see the full presentation click [here](#)

Marie Louise outlined the **legislative framework** that impacts on ECD. The Children's Amendment Act is where we are all involved as government and as civil society: the constitution gives everyone the right to education, and DBE and DHET are responsible for ensuring that it is provided. The South African Schools Act deals specifically with schools, but ECD is affected by the issue of admission age – a challenge to be discussed another day.

The National Integrated ECD Policy of 2015 gives the DBE specific responsibilities in relation to curriculum, implementation and training. Curriculum is a particular challenge in relation to making sure that there are ECD insights in the school curriculum, and a smooth transition between ECD and formal schooling.

Progress so far

- The Birth to Four National Curriculum Framework has been developed and is aligned to the National Curriculum Statement, because Grade R curriculum finds expression in the Foundation Phase.
- National and provincial departments are involved in two kinds of training in the birth to 4 space: (i) training towards a level 4 qualification; and (ii) in-service training on the NCF.
- The technology space has been explored through an online course which helps people look at learning through play. A target of 42 000 ECD practitioners was set, and DBE is close to reaching this. If all those enrolled finish the course, the target will be exceeded.



Challenges

- Within these specific areas of responsibility, DBE has been the least successful in the integration of key messages/communication regarding pregnancy and parenting into the school curriculum. It is very difficult to put something into a curriculum that some suggest is already overloaded. Much more will need to be done in this area.
- What is our impact? Research still suggests that many children are not ready when they go to school. What should we do better in order for these statistics to change? It's not only about access, but also about the quality of what we are doing to ensure school readiness.
- We also need to question our own readiness to work in an integrated way: there are great policies in place, but are we really ready as a country to take on a policy that requires us to work together, collaborate with one another and integrate services provided from under different departmental umbrellas? For example, we need to ensure that there is integrated data management, so that from the time of birth information is available on all aspects of a child's life, and different departments such as health, local government DSD can all access this easily. Currently we seem to have separate pockets of information existing in disconnected ways. Another example is the fact that we have policies and plans for reaching vulnerable children, but no systematic way of identifying these children.
- In addition, there are 'concurrent functions' at national and provincial levels, which are sometimes challenging in that national needs sometimes to negotiate with provincial levels.
- Competing priorities are a major challenge: for example, priorities that exist within the departments are mainly infrastructure, schooling and finances. ECD is still a new programme and it didn't come with new funding or capacity to deliver. There were no services for children below schooling age until 1997, when Birth to Four was added on to the Foundation phase. So addressing ECD is not only about funding and human resource gaps, but also about competence in the Birth to Four space.
- The ideal of integration and of working together is not front-of-mind in many government departments. Services are delivered in silos. For example, we could consider how many other services could be

provided when children go for immunisation; however, for the most part we don't have that kind of mind set.

"What does it require to enable collaboration so that effective integration of services can happen?"

Isabella Sekawana (Chief Director of ECD and Partial Care at the Department of Social Development)

Isabella set the context by providing the CoP with some statistics:

- 8.2 million children 0-6 years of age
- 60% live in the poorest households
- ±80% coverage of child support grant
- 602 655 poor children receiving ECD subsidy
- Weak quality, data and infrastructure systems
- Not enough funding allocated to ECD

To see the full presentation click [here](#)

*Note

Due to poor data systems these statistics can only account for children subsidised by DSD.

When ECD was prioritised, the National Development Plan noted that resources should be allocated to this. While there is some funding from Treasury it is still not enough: these funds have to focus on the expansion of existing infrastructure, so there is no funding for ECD expansion. ECD provision in mud houses with no infrastructure is still commonplace.

Progress so far

The presentation reflected on some successes so far in coordinating and collaboration.

- There is a political commitment to collaboration, as evidenced through the establishment of the following committees which are involved in policy implementation.
 - Inter-Ministerial Committee
 - National Interdepartmental Committee
 - South African Inter-Sectoral Forum for Early Childhood Development

A number of sub-committees that fall under these include: National Training and Curriculum Sub-Committee, Policy and Legislation Sub-Committee, Infrastructure and Registration Sub-Committee, Monitoring and Evaluation Sub-Committee, Communication and Advocacy Sub-Committee and ECD Donor Sub-Committee.

- National interdepartmental meetings have good attendance.
- The establishment of the Inter-Sectoral Forum is aimed at bringing the voices of civil society into the mix.

Challenges

While these structures reflect political will, Isabella noted that we need to ask whether these committees are sufficiently representative, and whether or not they have concrete outputs. Sub-committees need to reflect policy goals and there needs to be tracking of progress towards these goals. Given these questions, DSD is currently engaged in reflecting on the nature and efficacy of these structures, and their terms of reference. In addition, it is recognised that there is a need for such structures at local level. DSD is planning to undertake an audit of what structures are available at local and provincial levels, and how can these can be supported.

DSD as the lead department in implementing national policy needs to find the balance between access and quality. While the current emphasis is on centre-based ECD, the need (dictated by contextual realities) to move towards a mixed model of delivery is understood, and DSD is currently investigating what this might look like (see slide). However, as there are no funding norms for non-centre based sites, issues such as norms and standards for these and for registration of their programmes need to be reviewed. For example, is the Western Cape model of outsourcing registration support a 'good practice' model that could be replicated? HR issues also need to be explored, and DSD is trying to understand the implementers in the sector in relation to identifying potential partnerships in areas such as coaching, mentorship and monitoring and evaluation.

Other challenges noted include:

- Sufficient funding for addressing the magnitude of demand; it also needs to be noted that many practitioners are still earning below minimum wage.
- Social mobilisation, advocacy and lobbying. Parents themselves sometimes seem unaware of the need for ECD.
- Insufficient capacity: this is why DSD is looking into alternative delivery models, re-engineering human resources, and potential public/ private partnerships.
- Lack of credible data with cross validation across different departments. Here again partnerships will be key. Ilifa Labantwana is assisting DSD in this regard.

DSD is engaging in mapping the skills in the sector and will be calling for partnership proposals.

Rantsope Meshack Molefe "Rex" (Director at Motheo Training Institute Trust)

Rex noted that the ECD CoP itself had contributed to the formulation of this policy; one proposal had been for the establishment of an ECD agency housed within the Presidency in order to facilitate coordination and integration, but this was not accepted.

Progress so far

Rex also cited the establishment of the Inter-Ministerial Committee, and the national inter-departmental committees, as examples of political will towards integration and cooperation. The South African Inter-Sectoral Forum for ECD is particularly important, as it provides a space for expression by the ECD sector as civil society. Vital concerns such as registration, infrastructure, curriculum and qualifications can be debated through this forum, and there has been progress on some of these issues.

Challenges

- Some of the sub-committees have become dysfunctional, and Rex said he would endorse the need for an audit and a review of existing terms of reference as suggested by Isabella.
- Policy demands provincial structures, and these have been lacking. Previously vibrant provincial structures are no longer communicating with civil society to the same extent.
- There are challenges from some by-laws that date back to the 1950s in some municipalities: these impede the implementation of the policy. In Ekurhuleni a review is being undertaken.
- The policy is unknown at many ECD centres at grassroots level. The people on the ground are the target of this policy, yet it is not reaching them.
- There is a lack of funding for training and development to capacitate implementers, especially at NQF Level 4.



Plenary Discussion on Emerging Implementation Issues

Points made from the floor, in discussion with panellists and through some group reflection processes include the following:

➤ DATA

The issue of data is constant in the ECD space and there are organisations working together with government on this. Stats SA is assisting in terms of getting population figures and the figures of children accessing ECD, but this is broad information at a population level and not at the level of detail required. The Department of Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) is involved in the policy and the CoP would be interested in learning more about its role.

A way of integrating data across departments is needed. We want to be able to trace a child on his or her journey through the system from when he or she is born, so that factors such as age and access in relation to the number of ECD centres can be considered. No child should fall through the cracks. Tracking of the delivery of the integrated package of services required by policy is vital in order to understand the enablers and barriers to implementation of the policy. However, due to weak data systems there is no accurate data on which children are registered or immunised, we are not able to say which children are receiving the correct stimulation through an ECD centre, and we are not able to say that children with disabilities are correctly catered for. There is no system for pooling this kind of information and linking information coming from multiple streams in relation to distribution of the package of services. Isabella noted that DSD has been mandated to take on a coordinating role to ensure that each department plays its role. DSD is considering compiling an annual report to integrate all reports on the efforts of different departments involved in ECD in a coordinated way in relation to the policy as a whole.

➤ PROFESSIONALISATION PATHWAYS

How do we attract youth into the ECD sector, and into ECD-related education studies in Higher Education, especially considering the low salaries in this sector? The following points were discussed.

- We need to distinguish between ECD as including Foundation phase and above, and Birth to Four. We do not want to encourage Birth to Four practitioners to migrate into formal schooling.
- Noted that there is still no clear legislation in relation to Grade R practitioners, how they are defined as 'educators', and who their employers are. This in turn impacts on salaries.
- Why have a lower qualification for dealing with younger children? Historically this has been the case, but initiatives such as PIECCE illustrate a change in this approach.

- DBE itself has challenges in relation to salary structures, where notionally HR provision should not exceed 80% of the budget and the other 20% is allocated to other needs. Teachers as departmental employees need however to be paid, and sometimes the 80% has been exceeded. Registered teachers with a qualification and a designated post take priority. There has been insufficient funding allocated to ECD HR needs. DBE is currently engaging with Treasury around these pay and salary scale issues.
- It should also be noted that we need to pay more attention to career pathways for qualified ECD personnel within government departments themselves.
- We need to view ECD as instrumental in job creation. A study on employment options in the sector may generate more funding provision.

➤ POLICY

- Some people still find it difficult to get hold of print versions of the National Curriculum Framework book. Marie Louise noted that it has been distributed to the provinces as well as some of the agencies. It is in all the official languages and in braille. Marie Louise can be contacted directly should anyone require this document. Her email address can be found on her [presentation](#).
- In relation to the proposed ECD Agency mentioned, Marie Louise noted that a feasibility study was done. This found that it would have been unrealistic to expect different departments to be under instruction from an agency.
- One of the factors that would contribute to the successful implementation of the integrated policy would be to foster a multi-disciplinary approach in ECD professionals; educators, health professionals and social workers tend to work in silos. A multi-disciplinary qualification in ECD could assist in breaking down these silos.
- An area of concern was raised about not being aware of the different government departments that are involved in the policy. Last year there was an ECD CoP meeting which included a panel of people from different departments to do with registration issues and local municipalities such as building and health etc. To see the meeting highlights for this panel discussion in August 2017 click [here](#).
- Centre registration is always a hot topic, as lack of registration has so many implications in relation to accessing public ECD services. Without registration, centres don't qualify for a grant; at the same time, it is generally the most marginalised and poorest ECD sites that have the greatest difficulty in getting registered, and yet need they the grants and support the most.
 - The ECD CoP discussed the issue at length in the August meeting of 2017, and received an update from the Inter-Sectoral Forum on ways of addressing this challenge. (Click [here](#) for the report from this forum at the CoP meeting).
 - The KZN ECD CoP meeting highlights include a link to a presentation by Network Action Group (NAG) on Centre Registration. Click [here](#) to view this.



CoP members in group discussions in response to panel presentations.



Open sharing session

ECCE Articulation Roundtable Discussion

Melissa King from BRIDGE reported on the Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) Articulation Roundtable Discussion hosted jointly by BRIDGE and NECDA on 4th June 2018. This had come about as a PIECCE initiative, in order to explore the continuing issue of articulation between the ECD practitioner occupational qualification at NQF Level 4, provision of qualifications and programmes at NQF Level 5, and entry into higher education for a diploma or degree. SAQA, DHET, DBE, ETDP SETA and various other stakeholders attended the Roundtable. Click [here](#) to read the report.

NECDA Strategy Meeting Report Back

Rex Molefe in his role as a NECDA Board member reported that NECDA, BRIDGE and other NGOs held a strategy meeting on 5th June in order to begin to craft a collaborative strategy, to set goals as a sector, and to influence policy. The next NECDA strategy meeting will be on 29th August 2018: this follow up meeting will finalise the strategy document in relation to accountability and the terms of reference.

PIECCE Update

For those unfamiliar with the PIECCE project, Sheila Drew in her role as project manager of PIECCE gave a brief description of the project. Click [here](#) to read more about the project. She highlighted the following:

- This is a collaborative project involving higher education institutions, NGOs and TVETs in considering conceptual issues in the design of a programme framework for a diploma and a degree for Birth to Four educators. Key factors include consideration of how to move practitioners from an occupational space into a professional space,
- PIECCE has an ongoing mission to collaborate with others in the sector so that any higher education offerings on Birth to Four are informed by practice on the ground, and the experience of NGO training providers in this space. Universities have not fully engaged in birth to four previously as their focus has been on later education stages. In the context of PIECCE, an NGO will be offering PIECCE university consortium members a seminar and site observation opportunities in

Bloemfontein in September. This is a prime example of the kinds of collaborative support, mutual benefits and partnership opportunities between different players in ECD that PIECCE is generating.

- The next phase involves considering what kinds of materials university lecturers need to offer relevant programmes.

General Announcements

- The cross-cutting Monitoring and Evaluation CoP meeting was held on 21st August 2018 at Tshikululu Social Investments; a number of ECD CoP members attended this. Click [here](#) for the meeting highlights.
- The next National ECD CoP meeting is scheduled for 23rd October 2018 at Sasol.

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