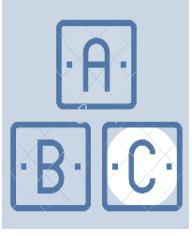


Western Cape Early Childhood Development Community of Practice Meeting Highlights 21 May 2020

Virtual Meeting

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION




The Western Cape Early Childhood Development CoP convened (via Zoom) on 7 May 2020 to unpack the current status of the ECD sector amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown. The initial meeting brought to light many areas of concern that needed to be addressed, particularly the mapping of resources in the Western Cape. Those meeting highlights can be found [here](#).

The meeting that took place on Thursday 21 May was a follow up to the initial Western Cape ECD CoP meeting. The aim of this follow up meeting was to narrow down areas of concern, with particular focus on the reopening of schools. The meeting was facilitated by Carol Harrington and attended by ECD practitioners and NGOs working in the sector.

In addition to feedback from the National CoP, the CoP discussion was guided by the following 5 pertinent questions:

1. **Do you think ECD programmes should commence?**
2. **What is the biggest challenge for reopening?**
3. **Are protocols required doable?**
4. **If yes, what are the costs and how do we afford it?**
5. **The practical side of disinfecting centres**

FEEDBACK FROM NATIONAL COP



The National ECD CoP convened on 20 May 2020, Thandeka Rantsi (BRIDGE) explained that the CoP looked at the reopening of ECD programmes but to the perspective of refocusing the thinking of what ECD will look like post lockdown. The sector is also very frustrated by the lack of communication from the National Department of Social Development, which has hampered their ability to do anything to prepare for the reopening of ECD programmes. CoP members that joined the National CoP also shared some stand out points.

Pam Picken from the Do More Foundation echoed the frustration of CoP attendees by mentioning that the National DSD is inconspicuous by their silence and lack of guidance. Every provisional DSD should have paid the subsidies to ECDs even if it may be less than what they are used to.

Funding remains an even bigger issue for unregistered ECD sites.

A standout take away point was that the ECD sector needs to embrace non-centre based ECD programmes such as toy libraries, play groups, day mothers and so forth.

In terms of the provisioning of ECD in its holistic form, community participation needs to take place - NGOs cannot go into communities and dictate how they should solve their challenges. In addition, children need to be put at the centre of a new 'ecosystem' in communities and the ECD sector needs to think differently about how spaces and people in communities are used to ensure the wellbeing of children.

Full meeting highlights of the National CoP can be found [here](#).

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.



DISCUSSION

In an attempt to streamline areas of concerns, five questions guided the discussion, below is the feedback received from CoP members:

1. Do you think ECD programmes should commence?

- CoP members agreed that ECD programmes should commence because the children and caregivers need the services given the scientific evidence that young children are at very little risk and the need for childcare facilities for many working parents. The CoP also admitted that there is hesitation due to the lack of preparedness of ECD programmes to adhere to and cope with hygiene standards and social distancing.

2. What is the biggest challenge for reopening?

- Meeting the **safety protocols** required and the costs associated with these
- **Protecting staff** as they are more vulnerable to Covid-19;
- **Overcrowding** and resultant infections spreading to vulnerable family members;
- Maintaining social distancing in ECD programmes that do not have the infrastructure to allow for social distancing measures.
- Advantaged and privileged ECD sites will be open as they would be able to cope, however government intervention would be needed to provide support for ECD sites operating in poor communities
- **The availability of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to ECD sites.** The PPE to the education system has come down to 25L barrels of 'Jik' bleach and a pack of face masks. There is no clarity on whether this is a once off or whether it will be replenished.

3. Are protocols required doable?

- Not all the protocols are doable. There needs to be a careful look at how necessary they are with very young children.
- There has to be a standardised protocol that can be applied in most ECD settings
- Protocols are doable if programmes can be changed/rearranged so that fewer children are in any one area at any time. This of course may not be possible for all ECD sites.
- Protocols are doable but staff needs to understand how to minimize risk by doing what is essential. Basic hygiene will need to be addressed first.
- We need more evidence on whether or not young children are at risk and what the risks of infection from the children to the adults who care for them are. We have many reports about the research on whether children are carriers and our country's situation is unique so we cannot make blanket statements supporting the notion that children are not carriers or that they do not get ill from Covid-19.

4. If yes, what are the costs and how do we afford it?

Affordability

- In terms of affordability, a great concern was around who will carry the cost of implementing protocols? Can ECD programmes afford to close down for two weeks at a time when a positive case is found? Will they be able to cover the cost of disinfection?
- We need to also look at consequences of not opening ECD programmes because if parents go back to work, they will need to leave their children in the care of someone who may not be suitable to care for them.

Social Distancing

- Social distancing will not be possible for many ECD sites.
- Children may be agitated by wearing masks. They might constantly fidget with them posing an increased risk of infection.

5. The practical side of disinfecting centres

CoP members felt that an initial deep cleaning is important with all toys, books and high touch surfaces to be sanitized daily.

Rethinking ECD during COVID-19

A reflection from the discussion was the idea of rethinking ECD during COVID-19 for children who cannot be accommodated by social distancing. An example is to put more resources into supporting parents who can home-school their children, to reduce the number of children at ECD sites. CoP members agreed that early learning during COVID-19 needs to be re-conceptualised.

The way forward

The ECD sector needs a minimal criterion of the things that will be required to fulfil the needs of protocol and who will cover the cost thereof. To date this has not been made available by the Department, the Western Cape CoP will request a meeting with the Department of Social Development to address concerns and distil questions. Carol and Thandeka will brainstorm how to direct the conversation with DSD.

Participants

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