



Western Cape Early Childhood Development (ECD) Community of Practice (CoP)

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS 09 June 2020

Meeting held, Online

Monitoring and Evaluation of ECD programmes

Presentations (links given in main report)

Title	Monitoring and Evaluation practices for early learning programmes
Presenter	Jessica Horler
Organisation	M&E Consultant
Title	Recent data released on ECD programmes in the country to better understand the ECD landscape in South Africa
Presenter	Dr Jan Schenk
Organisation	iKapaData
Key Theme	Showcase ECD Census 2021

Number of participants: 35

Useful Resources Shared

Findings from the recent Thrive by Five index which measured > 5000 children on the ELOM (and will continue to do so): <https://www.thrivebyfive.co.za/about/>

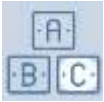
Study undertaken by Servaas to model maturation effects: <https://bit.ly/3QBcDA0>

ILifa Labantwana and Resep ECD Working Paper Series on funding and possibilities for e.g. vouchers, impact bonds, etc: <https://bit.ly/3n1huwL>

Real Reform For ECD website: <https://www.ecdreform.org.za/>

You can join Real Reform for ECD here: <https://bit.ly/3OoxAgI>; and can subscribe for updates here: <https://bit.ly/3beJRoT>

iKapa Data website: <http://ikapadata.com/>



SCENE SETTING

Kayin Scholtz, DG Murray Trust (ECD Resource Hub Manager) and iLifa Labantwana (ColImpact ECD Expansion Planning Lead), the facilitator for the Western Cape Early Childhood Development (ECD) CoP started the meeting by giving an overview of what the WC ECD CoP is about, which is a platform where everyone is seen as an expert in their field and are encouraged to discuss and share information regarding the sector. The focus of the CoP was on the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of ECD programmes. Participants were asked to introduce themselves and where they were joining in from. The session consisted of two presentations, one from Jessica Horler on M&E practices in early learning programmes and the second from Dr Jan Schenk who showcased the ECD Census 2021, focusing a bit more on data from the WC.



UPDATES FROM BRIDGE AND THE FLOOR

Thandeka Rantsi, ECD programme manager at BRIDGE gave a brief overview of what the organisation is currently working on in line with the ECD focus area:

BRIDGE currently has a national CoP where all 3 provincial CoPs, namely; Mpumalanga(MP), Western Cape (WC) and Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN), which are all very different come together. Thandeka went on to introduce Maurisa Moloto who is the new coordinator for BRIDGE in the WC. Maurisa is a social entrepreneur and the founder of Lefika Foundation, which is a social enterprise that focuses on education, social and community development. She then introduced Anniza De Wet who is the facilitator for the WC M&E CoP.

- The Real Reform for ECD (RR4ECD) campaign initiated as a result of the Children Amendment Bill urges organisations that are not yet members to join. A toolkit on how to get local government to integrate ECD into their Integrated Development Plan (IDP) is available [here](#)
- Upcoming National ECD CoP - 30 June 2022. Aims to look into training and development and the implications of recent findings from Thrive by Five and the ECD Census.



SHOWCASE: Jessica Horler, M&E Consultant - SmartStart Outcome Evaluation

Jessica took participants through some principles and ideas of M&E in early learning programmes, using an outcome evaluation by SmartStart as a case study. The evaluation was released a couple of years ago, conducted by the Early Learning Outcomes Measure (ELOM) team in partnership with Alacrity Development which is no longer in operation.

SmartStart is a national programme that was established in 2015 and uses a social franchise model with the national office/hub based in Gauteng. SmartStart essentially trains community based practitioners to run the SmartStart early learning programmes. They provide the training and licensing to practitioners, but outsource the operational management of the programme to regional NGO partners, which are referred to as franchisors. There are the implementing partners in each

To access Jessica's full presentation, [click here](#)

province/region. There are also clubs that serve as peer support groups for SmartStart practitioners. Practitioners are managed by coaches who in turn are managed by each franchisor to help supervise, support and conduct routine quality assessments. The SmartStart programme is delivered by practitioners in the form of play groups, day mothers or ECD centres.

The focus of the evaluation was on day mothers and the playgroup model with the target age for children being 3 to 5 years old.

SmartStart came with a pretty good idea of the questions that they wanted to ask for the evaluation. The three main evaluation questions included:

- To what extent do SmartStart programmes delivered by different franchisors improve the developmental outcomes of children who have participated for at least a year?
- What is the contribution of the following factors to programme outcomes: Factors of child outcomes-looking at the number of sessions reported to have been offered by each franchisor (as a proxy for attendance)? Child factors-like growth and height for age? Practitioner training? Support and supervision of practitioners? Structural features of franchisee early learning groups?
- What were the other factors, related to the running of playgroups and day mother groups, which were qualitative in nature and how did they influence on the implementation of these interventions?

Practical advice on how to prioritise questions before planning an evaluation:



It is important to whittle down questions to the most important issues, the slide above shows the three general ways in which one could do this for the purpose of an evaluation.

Another good planning strategy before starting your evaluation is to assess the evaluability of your programme, which is a worthwhile exercise that can be done with the programme team or evaluator. It will help you answer four questions on your programme goals:

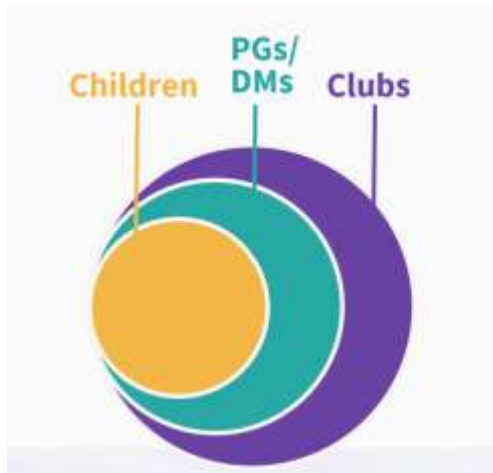
- Firstly, is there agreement on your programme goals, objectives, and underlying logic/theory?
- Are your goals and objectives plausible, realistic and feasible in light of your resources, informed by evidence and experience
- Has relevant data been collected over time and is it available for the evaluation?

- Have the evaluation commissioners/users agreed on how the evaluation findings will be put to use? This is especially important to ensure that your evaluation findings are useable.

Please see ELOM checklist on early learning programmes to assess evaluability, available on the following [link](#)

SAMPLING

SmartStart had identified the franchisors that they wanted to form part of the evaluation, looking at the highest rated. These were rated green in SmartStart terminology (based on quality assessment). This was done to test whether the programme was in line with the organisation's intended goals. The franchisors that took part were based in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal and Gauteng. After a power calculation it was decided that the evaluation needed about 330 children as a sample size for it to be appropriate for analysis.



The sampling strategy involved a multi-stage cluster sampling strategy, starting with the practitioner clubs, within those there were randomly selected playgroups and day mothers and within those randomly selected children.

As often the case with evaluation, your plans hardly work out as envisioned. It is almost guaranteed that the evaluation will be an exercise in problem solving.

Example of challenges encountered during the sampling:

- The practitioner database did not have the exact location of the practitioners and contact details, meaning local feasibility could not be determined.

Solution: SmartStart provided locations of randomly selected franchisees, which was then used as a selection criterion.

- Another challenge encountered during fieldwork was that some practitioners had dropped out, were inactive or they did not have children within the ELOM age range that the evaluation was looking for.

The solution was to look for convenient sampling to replace inactive practitioners; broaden child criteria to include children who had enrolled and extend age range to 47 - 61 months.

MANAGEMENT TOOLS

The tools that were used to collect the data were ELOM 4&5 in order to answer the questions that were concerned with the developmental outcomes of children within each franchisor attending a playgroup or day mother facility. The ELOM was done at the beginning of the year before the programme started and again at the end of the year in the end for a follow up assessment.

- The ELOM is a reliable and age-valid tool that is available in all South African languages.
- It is a population level tool, which means that we do not use it to assess individual children, but is used to assess groups of children. The evaluation looked at children between 50-59 months, and 60-69 months.

- The assessment can only be done by an assessor who has been trained to deliver the ELOM with sessions being around 45 minutes +/-.
- The ELOM assesses children's development in five domains: Gross Motor Development; Fine Motor Development and Visual Motor Integration; Emergent Numeracy and Mathematics; Cognition and Executive Functioning; and Emergent Literacy and Language.

The really nice thing about the ELOM is that the team already developed performance standards when they were developing the tool. These standards help determine what ELOM scores children aged 4-5 years old achieve in programmes and compare them to the standards. The team can then determine whether groups of children are achieving the standard, falling behind or are at risk of developmental delays according to each ELOM domain.

In the SmartStart evaluation data, ELOM data was collected on children's social and emotional functioning. This was done using the ELOM Social Emotional Rating Scale, which involved a short interview with the child's teacher. The assessment was done at the end of the year during follow ups, which gives the teacher and child enough time to get to know each other. There was also data collected on the children's growth status to identify any incidences of stunting (height for age).

To answer the second question that can contribute to the child's programme outcomes, the team wanted to establish what the programmes looked like, what the playgroups and day mothers looked like. What experience/qualifications the practitioners have, what resources they had access to, structural features like group size, whether they had assistants or not. To measure all this, field workers conducted quantitative practitioner's interviews, quantitative because there were no open ended questions, it was simply yes/no or rating things on a scale like how satisfied they were with the support that they received from their coaches etc.

Lastly, to answer the final evaluation question which was all about implementation, qualitative semi-structured interviews with franchisor staff and coaches were conducted. This was generally about their backgrounds and general experiences with managing the programme.

Why qualitative data on implementation?

This was done to address the black box of evaluation, which is a metaphor used where one has programme/inputs on the one end and results on the other, with an opaque box of explanatory factors sitting in the middle, which is going to explain why you are seeing the kind of results that you are seeing. It is really important that we do not just ignore this area, but that we use qualitative or implementation data to open the black box in order to understand why we are seeing certain patterns in the data.

Other options of ELOM tools to use if you are planning to do an evaluation for a programme are:



Targeting Tool
5-item version of the ELOM to quickly identify children in a programme who need support.

Programme Quality
Observation tool for early learning programmes.

Home Learning Environment
A brief interview with primary caregivers on learning resources in the home, activities done with the child, and time spent with the child.

elom
ELOM Assessment Request Form

Once the evaluation design was done, with sampling measurements and implementation tools all ready to go, the team then went into the field to conduct their evaluation. What is critical for ECD programmes is to know that a lot of the work also falls on the programme team’s shoulders, which might cause bottlenecks during the process because the team does not anticipate the amount of work that needs to go into the process. The team needs to dedicate time for the initial design of the evaluation, putting out their terms of reference, conducting inception meetings and reading conception reports. This also includes administrative work like printing and distributing consent forms, ensuring that historic data is clear and up to date as well as locating and sharing this data.

FINAL SAMPLE ATTRITION:

With all the data has been collected and now the inevitable part of the process is attrition. You are guaranteed that you will lose a sizable amount of your sample before you even do follow ups. By the end line of the SmartStart evaluation, 37% of the playgroups’ sample was lost and 23% of the day mothers sample. Typically, this is due to factors beyond anyone's control e.g. a child being relocated to a new region, practitioners closing down their operations or families not being able to afford fees etc.

DATA ANALYSIS

The team used two approaches in analysing data that was collected:

- Descriptive approach: looking at SmartStart children's performance (average scores in each domain) and how they compare to ELOM standards?
- Statistical approach (multilevel modelling): How does each franchisor perform, in terms of ELOM scores, which is essentially able to control various influential factors, isolate the programme effect and also establish the extent to which these factors are influencing the child outcomes and how strong those relationships are
 - Checked the correlation between the variables and ELOM outcomes
 - Those with significant relationships were included in multilevel modelling analyses
 - Multilevel modelling allows one to nest data. Data could be nested in one child and the franchisor

Slide below shows the average total scores across the different programmes:

Programme	Programme Type	Baseline Total Score (based on ELOM profiles for children 50-59 months) ¹²	Endline Total Score (based on ELOM profiles for children 60-69 months) ¹³	Extent of Change
All Programmes¹⁴		39.9	61.4	21.5
PG 1 (Baseline n = 32; Endline n = 33)	Playgroups 2 – 5 sessions per week	33.3	50.6	17.2
PG 2 (Baseline n = 18; Endline n = 19)	Playgroups 5 sessions per week	37.2	65.7	28.5
PG 3 (Baseline n = 45; Endline n = 32)	Playgroups 2 – 5 sessions per week	33.9	47.7	13.8
DM 1 (Baseline n = 19; Endline n = 21)	Day mothers 5 sessions per week	48.6	61.7	13.1
DM 2 (Baseline n = 50; Endline n = 53)	Day mothers 5 sessions per week	46.5	81.4	35.0

The colour of the cell pertains to the ELOM standard achieved

IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS:

- There was no clear distinction between playgroups and day mothers in terms of sessions delivered and group sizes.
- Most franchisees exceeded group size requirements (but had assistants).
- Nearly a third of franchisees reported that their learning materials were inadequate.
- Finding an appropriate programme space was challenging.

EVALUATING EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMMES: Closing Thoughts

- Ensure that the programme is evaluable-have a look at the ELOM evaluability checklist for this
- Ensure that monitoring data is accurate & up-to-date e.g. enrolment records, practitioner databases etc.
- If possible, have ECD expert/s on the evaluation team.
- Include an implementation component.
- Ensure sensitivity to the programme context; are some sites more rural than others? How does this affect scores?
- Consider taking a socioecological approach not just focusing on the child and the practitioner but other factors including parental involvement, community resources, etc.
- Participate! No one knows your programme better than you. It is really important that the rich and contextual insights make it into the evaluation findings and the interpretations of the findings



QUESTION & ANSWERS

Q. How realistic is it for smaller organisations to undertake an evaluation of this nature?

A. Funding was not as limited as it would have been if this was a smaller programme, but that is not to say that summative evaluations are not possible. The ELOM can be done and has been done with much smaller organisations, and with a small sample size being 15 children. When it comes to cost, there are certain trade-offs that need to be made. Interviewing parents probably would not make it as it would require more fieldwork time. This means zoning in on the most critical variables, using the

ELOM and implementation done at a very low cost like long interviews and google surveys which are a lot more economical.

Q. Would early implementation include pilot studies?

A. The SmartStart evaluation did not have enough time to do pilot studies, the home learning environment was not piloted, but there was testing in validity and viability done using the data. It is however recommended if there is time and budget to pilot the instruments especially when using qualitative interview schedules or less standardised instruments.

Q. How did you decide which programmes received green status?

A. SmartStart runs annual or biannual quality assessments with their practitioners and the data collected was used to determine who received green status.

Q. Could multilevel modelling be used to drill down on individual learners' outcomes? If so could you perhaps give an explanation of how this can be used?

A. The ELOM scores can only be analysed at a group level, they are not used to understand individual learner outcomes.

Q. Were the changes more related to the programmes or the natural maturation of the child?

A. Because the ELOM is age bracketed, the evaluation only looked at children within the 50-59 months' bracket or slightly expanded baseline, analysing the results in that bracket and again at the end line. Age however cannot be completely ruled out as it was the biggest indicator and played some kind of role. Using the ELOM age bracket is a really useful way to get around that. The multilevel modelling helped to isolate the programme effect, for it to be available to all programmes and evaluations which might be expensive in expertise. Multilevel modelling helps to control influential and explanatory situations.

Q. Do we know whether resourcing is independent of other variables that might have similar effects as it being dependent on whether a child comes from a wealthy background?

A. Resources come up all the time as being an important quality issue and almost impossible to run programmes without. Most of the children sampled for the evaluation were sampled in low quintiles, where you would find that franchisors were really helping to improvise with equipment or were getting resources from the library



PRESENTATION: Dr Jan Schenk, iKapaData - ECD Census 2021

Jan took participants through the ECD census data, which is responsible for mapping out the scale of early learning programmes in the country. The presentation was on how to run an insanely difficult project during a pandemic, Jan noted. The data produced is going to be used for M&E purposes in the sector, which will help to get a sense of the main results.

To access Jan's full presentation, click [here](#)

The first part of the presentation focused on the nuts and bolts of how to run a census during a pandemic and the second part on the key results, with a little bit more focus on the WC. Like all projects, there was a lot of preparations to be done before going to the field and one was the development of the data capturing instruments. Two instruments were prepared-one being

interviews with the ECD principals and the other an observational tool used by the fieldworkers who were going through the Early Learning Programmes (ELPs) for the rest of the implementation process. Three weeks were spent piloting these instruments which were developed in collaboration with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Lego Foundation, with sector experts and practitioners also providing inputs. Instruments were changed quite a bit after piloting. The programme recruited 340 fieldworkers and 26 regional coordinators. The project tried to hire people with a background in working with children, background checks were done on everyone who was part of the project which actually filtered out quite a few people. 11 training workshops were conducted across the country, with no more than 50 persons at a training due to the Covid regulations at the time.

The way the programme was approached from a logistical point of view is by ward and structured fieldwork. For every ward, there was a structured fieldwork portal, which was a customised fieldwork portal that could be accessed through a tablet which had the address and contact details of each known ELP. This was preloaded onto the database. The idea was that fieldworkers were not allowed to leave a ward unless they had visited all known ELPs, with a GPS capturing to show that they actually had been there and were verified. On average, a ward was visited on 4 different days across all provinces with more than 240 000 GPS locations captured by the end of the programme.

Avenues used for finding ELPs:

The project did not rely on driving around to find ELPs by chance, it also used the Vangasali dataset to find a lot of the already existing ELPs in the beginning, working with ECD forums asking for lists, consulting with local DSD officials, ward councillors, local clinics which was not part of the list in the beginning but proved to be a rich data source. Platforms used included Community leaders/members, advertisements in community radio stations asking ELPs to get in touch or help fieldworkers when they are at their doorstep, Word of Mouth and WhatsApp lines for self-identification or to find out more about the census.

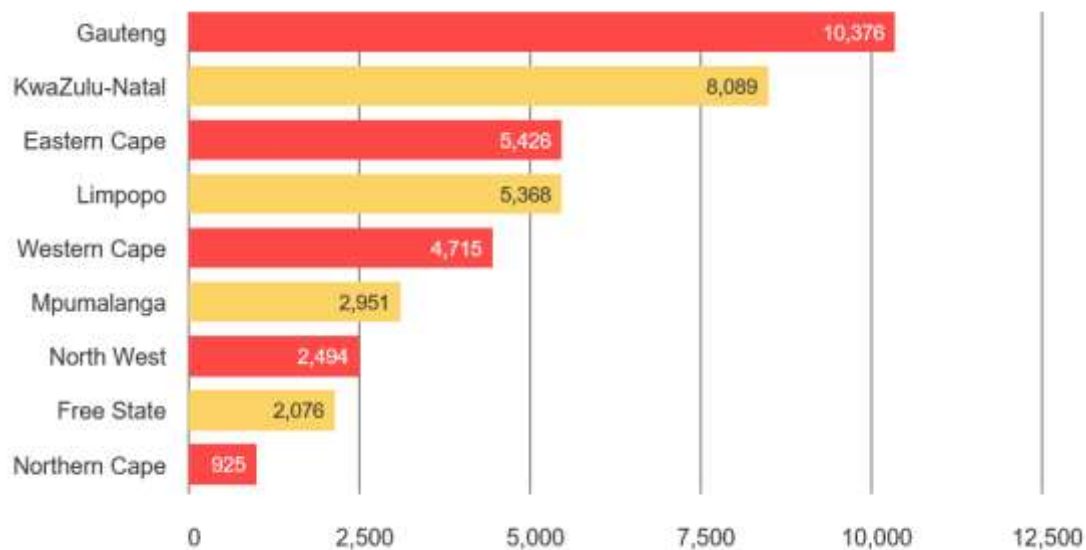
DATA COLLECTION & QUALITY CONTROL

The reliance on technology was quite crucial in making the process efficient seeing that there was only a narrow window due to the strict deadline set by Covid.

All data was collected in real time and could be verified on the go. Field work was done in August to December 2021 and mop ups in early 2022 between January and February. There was a fieldworker portal for every ward and a dashboard for the client.

After data cleaning the census had covered 42420 programmes. The data was broken down by province, see slide below based on population ratios, with the most ELPs found in Gauteng and the least in the Northern Cape looking at a 1000 children per ELP, which is an analysis that was not possible before.

ELPs per Province

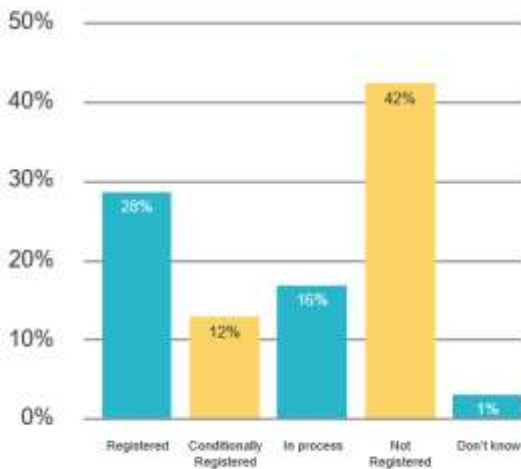


Because the census was counting children, one measure was enrolment, using actual registers to see how many children were enrolled which was around 1,7 million compared to the head count on site which was around 1.14 million. If there was a discrepancy, the ECD practitioners were then asked if that would be a head count (number of children present at the time of the count by the fieldworker) for a normal day or not, if not then they would give an estimate of how many children would usually attend based on how many children were attending before Covid-19. It is important to note that the census happened when the ECD sector was heavily impacted with parents still very cautious and tight Covid-19 regulations still in place and the head count was a reflection of that. Overall, the figures are relatively low compared to how many children are estimated to be in ELPs. Other figures looked at staff count with nearly 200 000 staff members counted including the support staff, meaning on average there are 5 staff members per programme, with around 39 children in each programme.

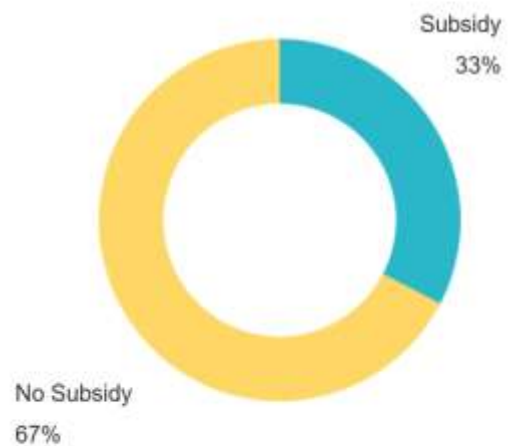
KEY RESULTS

The below slide looked at programmes registered with the DSD which include partial care and ECD programme registration:

Registration with DSD



ELPs Receiving DSD Subsidy



The primary source of funding in general were fees, with only 27% being from the government and 4% from fundraising and donations. There is quite a huge reliance on fees. In the WC, reliance on fees is around 80% which is much bigger than nationally. On average the monthly fee is R509 with the average for the WC being R835, which varies a lot based on quintiles and is a reflection of social structures.

The most common providers of meals were ELPs themselves, with parents at 48%, government at 17% and NGO/NPO/Other at 3%. When it came to transport only 19% in the Western Cape which is the highest compared to national at 9% said they provide free or low fee transport to children.

Looking at water and sanitation, most ELPs said they use taps with more than half exclusively using bowls and buckets or tippy taps. Flash toilets were only available at 60% of ELPs, with the most common one after potties being pit latrines which is still used by 33% of ELPs.

For the education of practitioners around 50% of them have officially recognised qualifications, with another 26% with some relevant skills programme and 22% saying they do not have any relevant qualification.

This being a Lego foundation funded project, there was also a question on learning through play in regards to the time allocated for free play as part of the daily programme and outdoor play. About half in both instances said only 30 minutes or less was allocated to free play, interestingly more time was allocated for free play in the higher quintiles. Around 34% do not have access to an outdoor playground with suitable equipment, with 56% who have access to age-appropriate books, with the percentage of having books in general being higher.

Fieldworkers had a list of 22 learning materials/toys on their checklists, with 14 of those found at subsidised ELPs and 11 found at non-subsidised ELPs.

The full report with some provincial profiles will hopefully still be made available within this month (June), with the dataset itself made public through DataFirst from UCT.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. When it comes to practitioner's qualifications what skills programme do they have that constitutes a qualification?

A. An example would be an NGO administered programme to support ECD practitioners, it is not officially recognised but has some kind of exposure in working with children and training. Unfortunately, there is no qualitative data that answers what kind of qualification they got, but certain that they have not done an NQF course. This does not mean that they do not have any qualification, just not an ECD relevant qualification.

Q. When it comes to nutrition, what does it mean when the results say that most of the meals are provided by ELPs, is it the learning programmes or caregivers themselves?

A. The report does not really highlight nutrition properly. The 84% receiving nutrition means that children receive their meals at ECD/ELPs, therefore, this shows where the meals are coming from. It could be that they are having lunch at the ELP but the provider of the breakfast is the parent. Looking at the graph from the presentation could be misleading.

Q. Thoughts on the difference in materials available to subsidised and unsubsidised ELPs?

A. ELPs have to be separated on a higher and lower quintile. The ones on the higher quintiles do not need to be subsidised but will have more materials. It is important to separate the ones that are not subsidised but should be subsidised and need it, then do the comparison there. It is also important to do a subsidy related analysis, looking at programmes not subsidised by choice and the other being because the system is failing them.

Q. I'm actually taken aback by the number of practitioners that were identified and considering that they are serving a small portion of children in need of early learning services, what is the implication for increasing access? What is really the number of practitioners and ECD programmes that we need, sounds like we need a whole lot more than 42 000 ELPs and more than the close to 200 000 practitioners that were identified?

A. Ilifa Labantwana has some expansion modelling work regarding ELPs needed at a national level, based on 2019 General Household Data, think this might need to be updated when access to this is received. The census can help identify the gaps in terms of density and what is needed when it comes to ELPs for ECDs. That will help answer the question on capacity.

Q. Will the census be expanded to learner level?

A. The plan is to have the same system for ECD's as there is for schools where data can be uploaded. The EMIS can track learners and keep learner level information, not sure how realistic that is for ECDs when it is already difficult to implement for 16 000 schools, even with a more formalised system.

Q. Was any information on children with disabilities collected?

A. No data was collected for disabled children but there was data collected on water and sanitation regarding disabled children. It included ELPs catering for disabled children. This was because the census needed to be very economic about the instrument used, which meant that not much information was collected on disabled children. What was most important was to have a very top level set of data, unfortunately that meant certain information had to be excluded



CHECK OUT

Kayin closed off the session by thanking participants for their time and emphasised the importance of coming together as a community to deepen our understanding of the sector. The next CoP will be on 25 August 2022.

The CoP is reminded of BRIDGE's knowledge management role. All meetings, presentations and discussions are captured and shared on BRIDGE's Knowledge Hub. To view, follow this [link](#).