Building blocks of an effective early childhood development system

Part 1 of this issue of the *South African Child Gauge* unpacked the different services and interventions needed to support the health, care and stimulation of young children – including those in need of extra care.

In Part 2 we turn our attention to the essential building blocks of an effective early childhood development (ECD) system. This includes clear policies, adequate financial and human resources, effective leadership and coordination, effective delivery systems, and data to support monitoring, evaluation and quality improvement to ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. The function shift of the overall responsibility for early childhood development from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education, is an opportunity for assessing the effectiveness of the current system and making the appropriate changes.
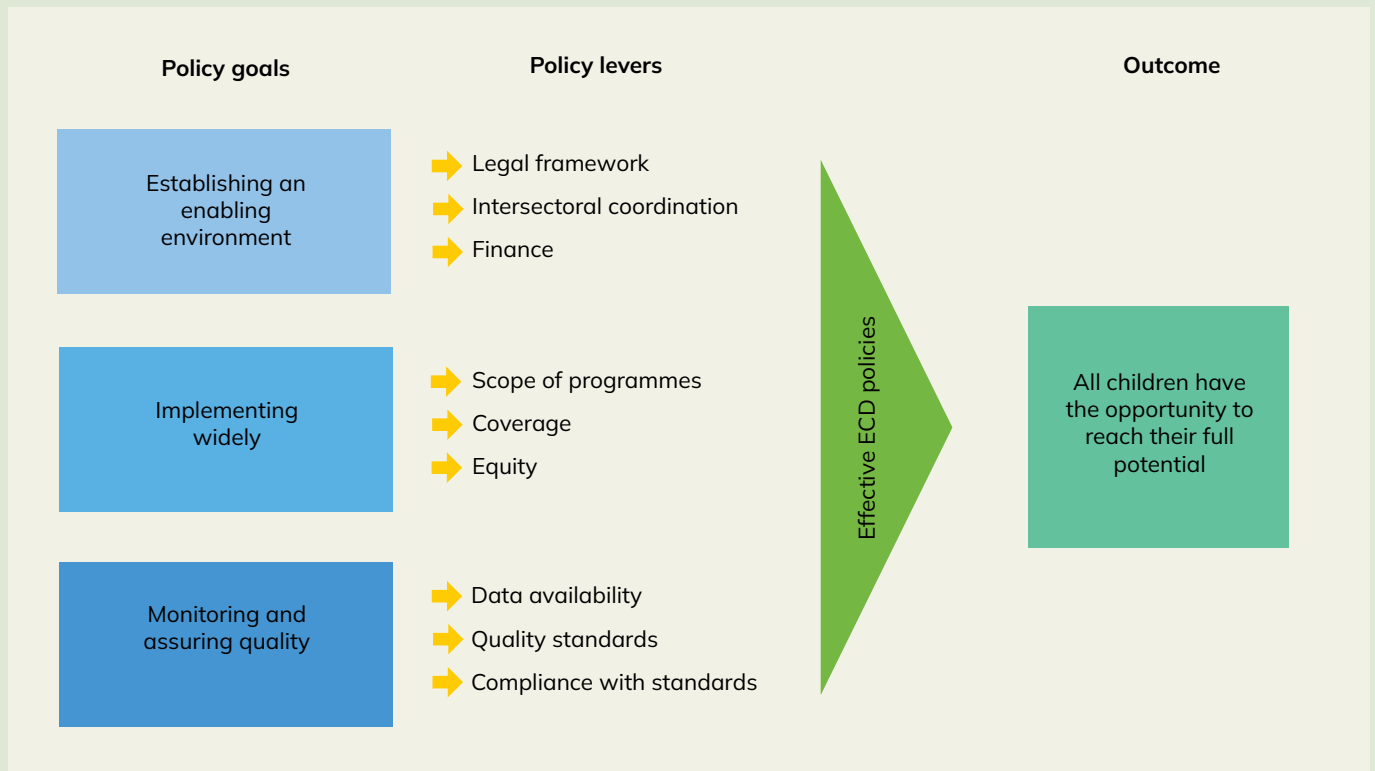
The SABER-ECD Framework[1] was developed by the World Bank to enable policy makers to identify gaps and opportunities to strengthen the ECD system. The Framework identifies three policy goals as key to establishing an effective ECD system – including creating an enabling environment, implementing widely, and monitoring to assure quality.

The 2013 issue of the *South African Child Gauge* was developed concurrently with the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECD Policy), and identified the following building blocks[2] that are needed to create an ECD system that translates the policy vision into effective local services:
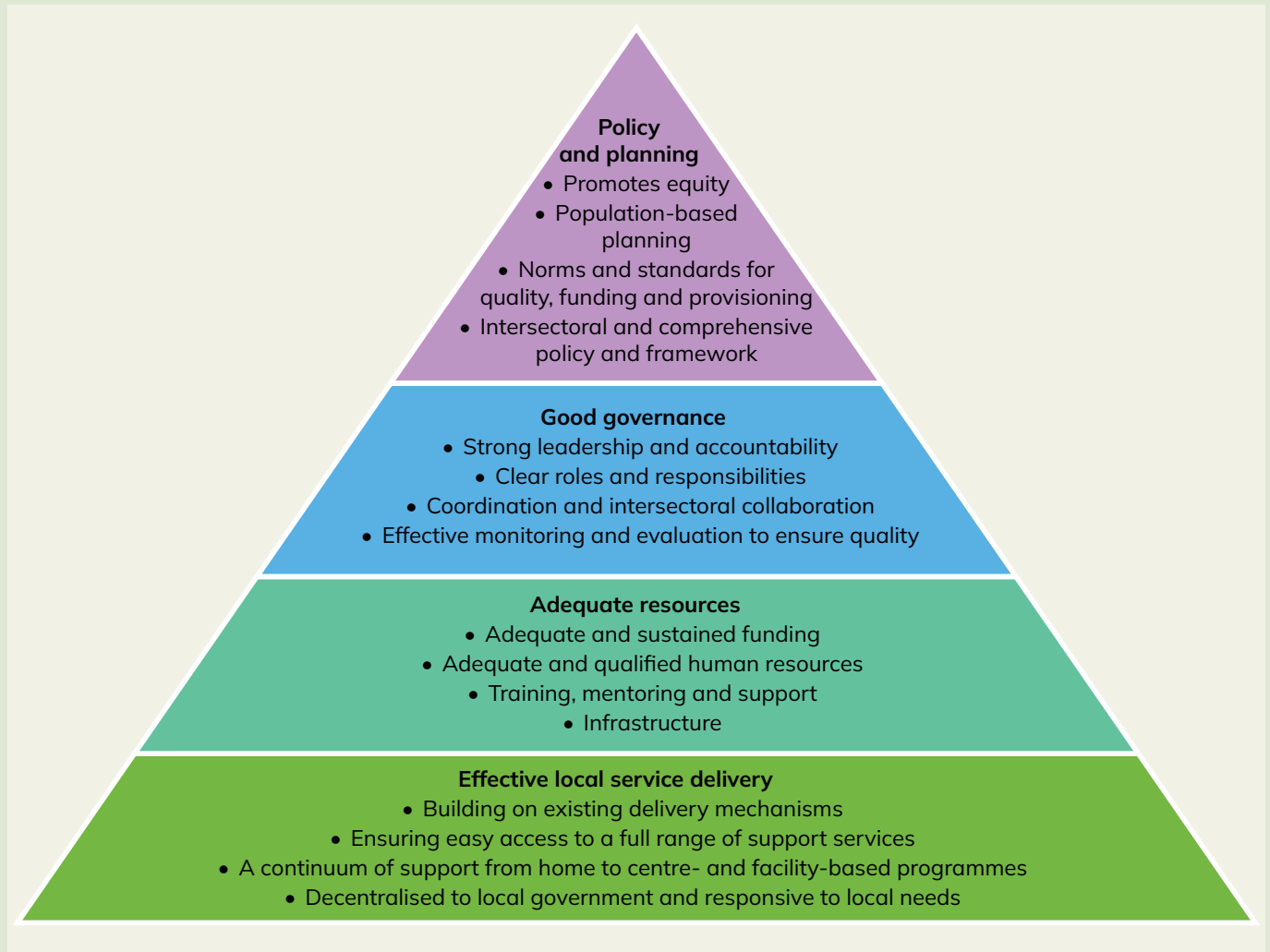
- An ECD policy to provide a comprehensive approach to programming and ensure the provision of an age-differentiated package of services, address governance issues, institutional arrangements and resourcing strategies.
- Effective government leadership that outlines roles and responsibilities for different sectors and spheres of government and provides clear lines of accountability. A national coordinating structure – with the ability and

Figure 20: The SABER-ECD policy goals and levers

Policy goals	Policy levers		Outcome
Establishing an enabling environment	Legal framework / Intersectoral coordination / Finance	Effective ECD policies	All children have the opportunity to reach their full potential
Implementing widely	Scope of programmes / Coverage / Equity		
Monitoring and assuring quality	Data availability / Quality standards / Compliance with standards		

Figure 21: Core components of an effective ECD system

Policy and planning
- Promotes equity
- Population-based planning
- Norms and standards for quality, funding and provisioning
- Intersectoral and comprehensive policy and framework

Good governance
- Strong leadership and accountability
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Coordination and intersectoral collaboration
- Effective monitoring and evaluation to ensure quality

Adequate resources
- Adequate and sustained funding
- Adequate and qualified human resources
- Training, mentoring and support
- Infrastructure

Effective local service delivery
- Building on existing delivery mechanisms
- Ensuring easy access to a full range of support services
- A continuum of support from home to centre- and facility-based programmes
- Decentralised to local government and responsive to local needs

Adapted from: Viviers A, Biersteker L, Moruane S. Strengthening ECD service delivery: Addressing systemic challenges. In: Berry L, Biersteker L, Dawes A, Lake L, Smith C, editors. *South African Child Gauge 2013*. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town; 2013.

authority to oversee activities, foster collaboration, and monitor implementation against set targets.

- A resourcing strategy to ensure adequate resources for scaling up of essential services and support. This includes increased investment in human resources and training across all sectors as well as adequate funding models to support service delivery across a range of services and platforms from clinics and ECD centres to home- and community-based programmes.

- Effective local delivery including the targeting of vulnerable young children through population-based planning, and stronger integration of services at the point of service delivery.

Yet, 10 years later, a series of systemic barriers continues to retard effective delivery of ECD services as outlined in Table 25.

In the following chapters we reflect on current challenges and opportunities for systems strengthening across each of the building blocks of the early childhood development system.

Policy and planning

An effective ECD policy should provide a clear vision, legal framework and comprehensive strategy for delivering a range of services that are differentiated to meet the needs of specific age groups. Policy development, service provisioning and coordination should involve all government departments responsible for the different aspects of ECD service delivery. Such an enabling policy should establish clear norms and standards for service provision and funding, and provide for monitoring and evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of implementation. The policy chapter provides a reflection on progress and current challenges in policy and planning.

Leadership and coordination

Good governance requires the participation of all stakeholders in the planning, implementation and monitoring of services. The intersectoral nature of a comprehensive programme of support

for young children therefore requires the 'clear delineation of roles and responsibilities of different government role departments in provisioning'[3] and effective mechanisms for coordination and intersectoral collaboration.

Leadership and political will are essential to translate the vision of a comprehensive package of ECD services into practice. This includes clarifying responsibilities at every level of government, ensuring adequate resourcing and holding the multiple stakeholders accountable for delivering on their service mandates. Coordination and accountability structures need to include political as well as departmental leaders, and to be responsive to input from beneficiaries[4]. Oversight and coordination structures need to have an adequate secretariat and the authority to convene the relevant stakeholders to ensure they function efficiently. For departments where services to young children and their families crosscut many directorates or where young children benefit as part of wider community development, an ECD focal point person is essential. The leadership and coordination chapter provides an overview of status of governance across the broad suite of ECD services, while the data chapter reflects on how we can strengthen current data systems to enhance planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Finance

ECD programmes and services will only improve child wellbeing and development outcomes if services are of sufficient quality. This requires adequate funding for the staffing and operational costs of implementing the ECD service package. Resourcing needs to be sufficient to enable universal access to services from pregnancy to pre-Grade R, and prioritise support for vulnerable groups including the poor and children with disabilities to ensure equitable outcomes.

Government is accountable for mobilising the funds necessary to meet its obligations to young children. Health and social services are public services, but early learning services are provided by private operators and non-profits. Funding must be sufficient and secure so that local implementors are able to gain momentum and improve the outcomes for children and families. An adequate funding model should also provide for the waiving of fees which pose an access and quality barrier in poor communities, and cover the full range of programme modalities including parenting support and education, playgroups, childminders and centre-based early learning programmes. Alternative funding sources such as the Community Works Programme and Social Employment Fund are utilised for stipends for non-centre-based early learning programmes but do not encourage stable longer term service provision. Funding allocations are also needed to cover infrastructure and start-up costs especially in poor communities. Local government funding from the Municipal Infrastructure Grant requires a clearer mandate. The finance chapter discusses the current funding of ECD priority areas and projects the costs of service expansion.

Table 25: Systemic barriers to effective service delivery in South Africa

Policy and planning	Limited integration across policies Fragmentation and uncoordinated planning for young children Uneven quality of information systems and data A significant gap between policy and practice Limited population-based planning and geographical coverage
Good governance	Poor institutional arrangements, insufficient intersectoral collaboration, coordination and service integration Limited accountability at all levels and across sectors
Resources	Inadequate funding and inappropriate funding models Absence of coordinated multi-stakeholder funding, training and support strategy Limited, undertrained human resources Insufficient infrastructure Austerity, inflationary pressures and budget cuts
Delivery	Unequal access and quality of services within and across sectors (poor targeting mechanisms) Limited monitoring and support to ensure quality Delivery skewed towards older children and urban and centre-based services

Sources:
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Human resources

Human resources for early childhood development include a diverse range of practitioners in health, education and social services among others. All these services require sufficient numbers of appropriately trained staff including frontline staff responsible for service delivery as well as management. Post provisioning for early learning staff is essential for quality improvement and sustainability, as is an adequate supply of accessible training and upgrading opportunities to support career development and professionalisation. The human resources chapter unpacks some of the successes and outstanding challenges.

Data

Tracking progress against policy goals and specific objectives is essential for improving access to and quality of ECD services. This needs reliable and regular data from all stakeholders to inform the population-based programming needed to ensure appropriate interventions for equitable and inclusive services, prioritising the most vulnerable, to track progress and service impact. The multisectoral nature of ECD service delivery requires

the integration of data and data to track the effectiveness of coordination and implementation at the different levels of government. The data chapter assesses what information is available to enhance the planning, monitoring and evaluation of ECD services, highlighting gaps and proposing solutions.

Ensuring effective local delivery

To reach universal access, service delivery must be state-led, responsive and flexible to contextual priorities, and draw in a range of public, private, civil society and community stakeholders. South African civil society and the private sector are key service providers of many services for young children and delivery systems need to coordinate these and public sector efforts. Coordination of services that cover the full range of young child needs is key to effective local delivery. This can be achieved through using existing service points or practitioners as a conduit to link each child to whatever services are needed as early as possible. The critical role of local government and a variety of promising initiatives that facilitate effective delivery are featured in the chapter on local delivery systems.

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3. Republic of South Africa. *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy.* Pretoria. 2015.
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