

Strengthening the system: Leadership and coordination

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The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECD Policy), adopted by Cabinet in 2015, clearly outlines the roles and functions of government departments and other stakeholders in the ECD system as well as the leadership and coordination structures needed to implement the Policy across all three spheres (national, provincial and local).¹ We have had a clear roadmap since 2015 – so why has there been such slow translation of the Policy into implementation?

In this chapter we will examine progress made in strengthening leadership and coordination of an integrated early childhood development (ECD) system (that includes health, social protection and early learning). It reflects on recent developments, the policy vision, challenges encountered to date, and opportunities to strengthen leadership and coordination following the recent shift in the leadership function to the Department of Basic Education.ⁱⁱ

History and recent developments

The NIECD Policy is closely aligned with the Children's Act of 2005, which called for the development of a “comprehensive national strategy aimed at securing a properly resourced, coordinated and managed early childhood development system”.¹ (p. 31)

This was followed by the National Development Plan (NDP) which outlines government’s commitment to provide universal access to early childhood development by 2030. This includes equitable access to age-appropriate, responsive, timely and quality services close to where children live.² But since the adoption of the NDP in 2012 there has been limited progress.

The approval of the NIECD Policy by Cabinet in 2015 was a significant milestone and many in the ECD sector, government officials and those in civil society thought it was a turning point in the delivery of a package of ECD services. However, nine years later there has been limited progress, and the Bureau for Economic Research³ indicates that there was no increase in access to early learning programmes for 0 – 4-year-olds between 2012 and 2019.

Capacity at all levels of government remains weak and unevenly distributed, with competing departmental mandates and a tendency to work in silos further hampering service delivery within and across departments. So, what is needed to get things to work for children in all communities? What further reform is required? How do we get leadership and guidance from national government with support from provinces to support delivery on the ground – at local government level?

These challenges are not new. Institutional arrangements were identified as a key challenge impeding the delivery of ECD services in the 2012 ECD Diagnostic Review⁴ and in the NDP, which proposed shifting the ECD function from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in order to strengthen the education component as well the leadership and coordination of an integrated ECD system².

In April 2022 the ECD function shifted with DBE taking over the role of lead department from the DSD, at both national and provincial level, and the responsibility for providing the vision and strategic direction for the sector as a whole. This shift in function, provides an opportunity to strengthen leadership and reinvigorate coordinating structures within and across different spheres of government, and between the public and private sector.

Recently there has been some significant developments. In March 2024, the DBE published South Africa’s 2030 Strategy for Early Childhood Development Programmes: Every Child Matters.⁵ In April 2024, the ECD IMC held its first meeting since the function was transferred to DBE, and in May 2024, the DBE published the draft Children’s Amendment Bill 2023⁶ for public comment. It is important that this law reform process is finalised as it will strengthen strategic planning and data collection. An evaluation of the NIECD Policy has also been completed and notes the lack of coordination between the three spheres of government and calls for their legislative and institutional mandates to be clarified.⁷

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ⁱⁱ Mastoera Sadan writes in her personal capacity. The views expressed in the chapter are not those of the NPC or the DPME.

What is the policy vision?

Chapter 7 of the NIECD Policy is titled “Leadership and coordination of the national integrated early childhood development system”. This title is apt in that coordination requires leadership. Coordination of the ECD system is essential as the responsibility for the delivery of ECD services is not limited to one department.¹ The different components of the comprehensive ECD programme are a concurrent national and provincial competence in terms of Schedule 4 of the Constitution. Hence, the responsibility for planning, coordination and implementation falls within the mandate of national, provincial and local government.¹ The policy also provides for intergovernmental relations to ensure planning across the spheres of government and mechanisms for the involvement of the non-governmental sector.

Chapter 7 of the NIECD Policy establishes the government’s responsibility to lead and coordinate the delivery of ECD services in the country. However, it remains unclear how coordination is best understood and managed in the early learning sector where government is not the sole or primary provider of services.

Leadership

The NIECD Policy states that “leadership is essential to develop and sustain a common national vision for early childhood development”,^{1 (p. 84)} and that to realise the Policy vision, there must be both political and bureaucratic leadership.

The Policy states that the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) supported by the National Inter-Departmental Committee (NIDC) is mandated and required to provide political leadership in realising the development of the vision, aim and objectives of the NIECD Policy. This includes, amongst others, providing technical support in programme development, monitoring services and overseeing quality improvement.

Coordination

The NIECD Policy defines coordination as the exchange of information and alignment of activities in order to work synergistically towards a common objective. The Policy views coordination not an end in itself, but rather as a means to strengthen:

- Leadership in order to develop and sustain a common vision for early childhood development;
- Planning, monitoring and evaluation to track progress and enhance service delivery and child outcomes; and
- Accountability for the realisation of the NIECD Policy vision, goals and objectives.

The ultimate goal of coordination is to support the delivery of integrated ECD services on the ground – where integration is defined as “the effective coordination of policies, laws and programmes across and within sectors to ensure that young children and their families receive access to comprehensive early childhood development services and support in combinations to ensure their optimal development”.^{1 (p. 13)} For example, where health services identify children whose growth is faltering and refer them to SASSA so that they are able to access the Child Support Grant. But while the word integration is foregrounded in the title of the Policy and is clearly seen as fundamental to delivering comprehensive ECD services, this has been challenging to translate into practice.

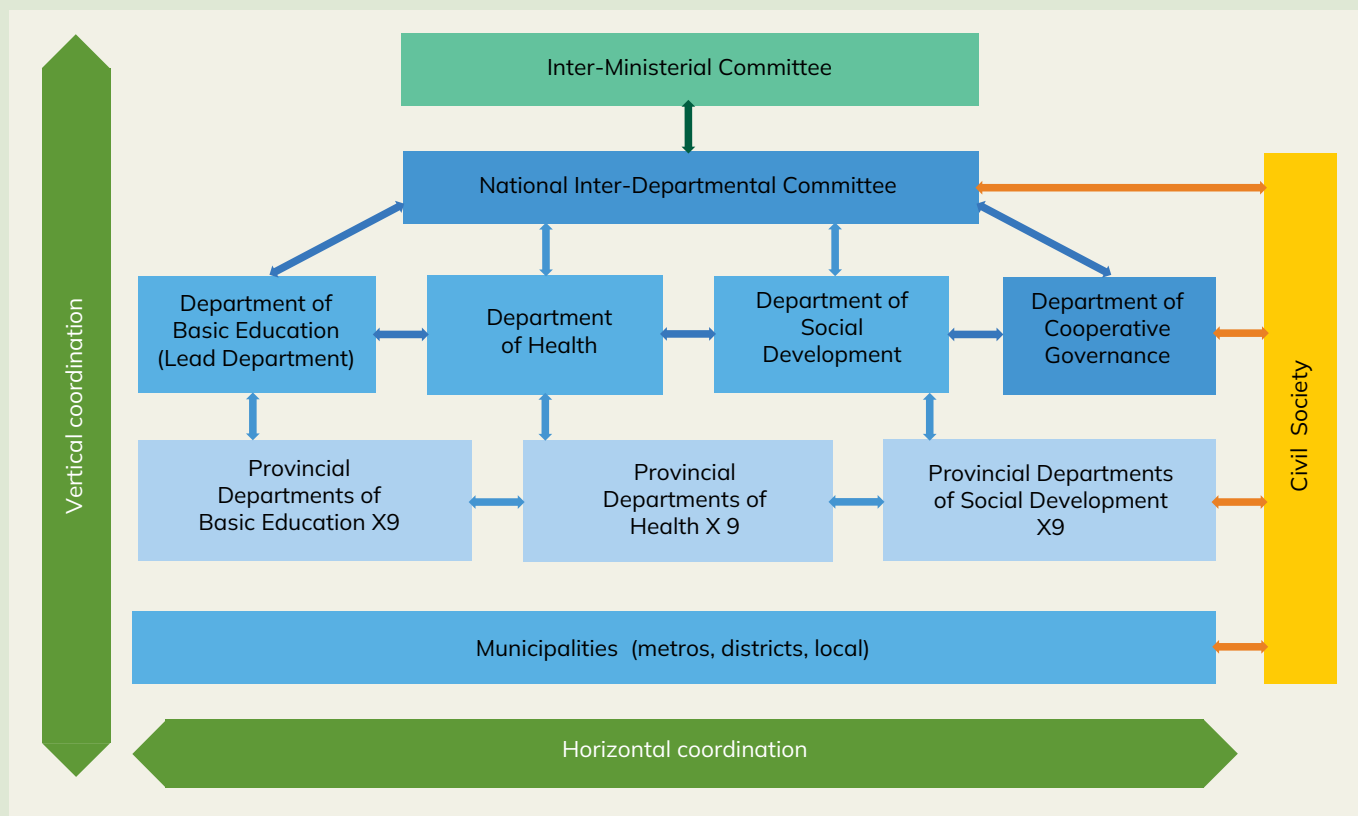
There are a wide range of both public and private role players in the ECD sector. Key departments include the departments of Basic Education, Health, and Social Development. The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs also has an important oversight role and a further 15 departments play a role in fostering early childhood development. While maternal and child health services are largely provided directly by government, early learning services are primarily offered by private providers in a market-led system, with limited government oversight and funding through the registration and subsidy system. Key civil society stakeholders include NGOs, NPOs, donors and the business sector as well as individuals who own early learning centres.

Coordination therefore has to be undertaken internally – within government departments; horizontally – across different government departments such as Health, Education and Social Development; vertically – across the different spheres of national, provincial and local government; and between government and civil society.

The Policy therefore provides for the establishment of coordination mechanisms at a political and bureaucratic level as well as across the different spheres of government, and between government and civil society. This includes the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on Early Childhood Development, supported by the National Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) for Early Childhood Development, which should be replicated at provincial level; and an Intersectoral Forum (IF) which includes representatives from civil society to enable seamless planning and implementation at national, provincial and local government level.

Figure 22 illustrates the institutional arrangements to facilitate coordination within and across national, provincial and local spheres of government and with civil society.

Figure 22: Institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms



What have been the challenges to date?

Since the adoption of the NIECD Policy in 2015 there has been very little translation of the policy reform prescripts into programme development. The NDP Review⁸ ascribes this to limited capacity and poor leadership in the DSD who were responsible for the ECD function until March 2022.

The IMC

The Policy proposed that at national level the IMC, led by the Minister of the lead department, should meet four times a year to provide strategic direction. The NIECD Policy envisaged that the Presidency would support the ECD IMC to reinforce the national importance of early childhood development.¹ Ideally the IMC should demonstrate political will and commit the time, energy and human and financial resources needed to realise government’s commitment to early childhood development as a national priority. A functioning IMC would strengthen policy direction in the system,⁹ across spheres of national, provincial and local government i.e. vertical coordination and across departments i.e. horizontal level coordination within a sphere of government. However, the IMC had not been functional for some time, even prior to the function shift from DSD to DBE. Subsequent to the function shift in April 2022, it took some time for the Minister of Basic Education to constitute the IMC.

In a significant development the ECD IMC met in April 2024, however this was just before the end of the sixth Administration. Nonetheless, this development should be welcomed as it provides a springboard for the seventh Administration.

The NIDC

The National Inter-Departmental Committee (NIDC) was envisaged as body that would to provide technical support to the IMC and drive implementation. The Policy identifies twelve core departments and an even larger group of departments as co-opted members. The NIDC is meeting regularly, however it has been reduced to a quarterly meeting of mostly junior level officials from a large number of departments. This cumbersome structure is not viewed as an effective coordination structure,⁹ as it has failed to provide strategic direction for the sector. Key departments did not attend on a regular basis or were represented by relatively junior officials who did not have any decision-making power. Furthermore, a series of sub-committees were set up to deal with functions that were strategic in nature, for example developing data systems, which should ideally have been undertaken by the lead department, rather than being outsourced to a sub-committee. Another limitation of the NIDC is that it largely focuses on the challenges in the early learning sector, rather than it’s broader ECD mandate.

Planning has remained department specific with no real attempt to coordinate planning across sectors, although there have been improvements since DBE assumed responsibility for ECD, for example an ECD Census in 2021. This Census 2021 provides both the Departments of Health and Social Development with the number and spread of ECD early learning centres to plan for the provision of health services and child protection services.

Intersectoral Forum

The NIECD Policy states that the South African Intersectoral Forum (IF) should be established to serve as a national platform through which the government and the non-government sector could engage. The IF consists of a range of NGOs, NPOs and donors, and has met regularly and is viewed as somewhat more effective than the NIDC.⁹ The IF has provided technical support from NGOs and donors including research, for example, the ECD Census undertaken in 2021,¹⁰ and operational support for the Vangasali Campaignⁱⁱⁱ. The forum brings together a broad range of civil society and donor organisations with different objectives, a concern has been raised that the forum is too large and that this hinders substantive engagement and that it mainly focuses on early learning programmes.⁹ It may be useful to explore different mechanisms for different interest groups to facilitate substantial engagement. In addition, the IF has largely focused on centre-based early learning programmes, as the civil society representatives largely come from this sector. Greater effort should therefore be made to strengthen engagement with civil society partners in the health and child protection sectors to ensure that the IF addresses the full spectrum of ECD services.

Provincial Level Coordination

Provincial government is responsible for the delivery of key components of ECD services including basic education, health and social services. At provincial level the NIECD Policy envisaged that the Premiers would play the role of “reinforcing early childhood development as a provincial priority, ensuring sufficient resources, and inter-departmental commitment and collaboration”.^{1 (p. 86)} The NIECD Policy prescribes that a structure similar to that of the NIDC be established at provincial level. Given that the national coordination structures have not been functioning optimally, it has been difficult for good practices to filter down to provincial level.⁹ There has been limited implementation of these structures across the provinces. To date only the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal have set up provincial coordination structures.⁹

Local Government

The local government level is responsible for amongst others the provision of basic services including water and sanitation; health care services; the development of policies and laws governing childcare facilities and the provision of land and regulation of land use.¹ These functions are crucial for ensuring child well-being across the different facets of early childhood development, for example health and early learning. The World Bank Group’s 2023 review of public expenditure and institutional structures for coordinating, managing, monitoring and delivering ECD services in South Africa notes that “there appears to be weak coordination and collaboration between national level and local municipalities”.^{9 (p. 127)}

From coordination to integrated service delivery

Integrated service delivery has proven to be very difficult in practice, largely because there hasn’t been a clear strategy that articulates how integration of services could work. Coordination mechanisms which should drive the strategy have not been functioning optimally which raises questions around political will and government’s commitment to deliver ECD services. Yet even with optimal coordination, there would be a number of significant factors militating against integrated service delivery: including sector fragmentation, the significant role of non-state actors with different lines of accountability, systemic under-funding, and the inadequacy of the overarching legislative scheme.

What are the challenges and opportunities moving forward??

A change of leadership

In April 2022 the ECD function shift from DSD to DBE came into effect, this was initially proposed in the NDP² and subsequently announced in the State of Nation Address in 2019.^{11, 12} While the function shift cannot address all the challenges faced in the ECD sector, it does present both opportunities and risks. As the lead department, there is the risk that the DBE could focus narrowly on their component of the ECD system i.e. centre-based early learning programmes. Ideally DBE should use this as an opportunity to adopt a broader view of early childhood development and lead on the strategic vision, goals and objectives needed to implement the NIECD Policy and reform the ECD system. This includes working with the Department of Health to improve the quality of services in the first 1,000 days of children’s lives, as the evidence shows that investing early in life has the most impact across the life course (see page 44). The DBE has the capacity to reform the registration and subsidy systems for early learning programmes, and has

iii The Vangasali Campaign, run in collaboration with the Nelson Mandela Foundation, aimed to increase the number of registered ECD centres.

Case 11: Transforming ECD services at local level – PPT’s experience in eThekweni Municipality

Mark Misselhorn¹

Project Preparation Trust (PPT) is a non-profit organisation established in 1993 to assist with pro-poor change and transformation in South Africa. Amongst other focus areas, PPT has been working collaboratively with stakeholders at a metro, provincial and national level since 2013 to develop a scalable and programmatic ECD response model.

This collaborative effort has culminated in the development of a ground-breaking ECD Strategy for eThekweni Municipality, the first of its kind in South Africa. The Strategy was developed in close cooperation with multiple municipal, provincial and national departments (including those dealing with Basic Education, Social Development, Health, and Cooperative Governance), the South Africa Local Government Association (SALGA), and various civil society formations. Much can be learned from this experience to help other municipalities in South Africa.

Initiating programmatic collaboration in eThekweni

PPT’s efforts to develop a programmatic ECD response model achieved traction in eThekweni Municipality largely due to its long-standing relationship of mutual trust and cooperation with the Municipality across a range of sectors including human settlements, infrastructure and informal settlement upgrading.

The presence of large numbers of vulnerable children in informal settlements and peri-urban communities was jointly identified as a key issue more than a decade ago. Most official data sets do not adequately cover informal settlements which can be challenging to survey. In these areas, most children are being cared for in poorly built, unsafe, under-resourced and

mainly un-registered ‘crèches’ or informal daycare. Others are left at home with friends and relatives and can often be seen roaming unattended during the day.

Municipal support has been key to the strong progress made and was obtained at the outset via two Council Resolutions in 2017 and 2018 which prioritised the development of a programmatic ECD response. The resolutions mandated the Human Settlements and Safer Cities Units to play an initiating role, and established a Memorandum of Agreement with PPT to undertake initial work including surveys to obtain data, and infrastructure assessments and improvement plans with a view to improving existing facilities to acceptable standards.

The ECD collaboration was initiated via eThekweni’s Human Settlement’s Unit, with whom PPT was already working closely given its central role in the planning of more functional human settlements and the critical importance of ECD as an essential service in low income communities.

Field surveys to gather data

The initiative commenced with field surveys of ECD centres in informal settlements, townships and peri-urban communities, most of which were informal and unregistered falling outside the current system of state oversight and support. The data gathered was invaluable in better understanding the characteristics and prevalence of ECD services in these under-served communities. 657 ECD centres providing for 24,796 children were surveyed between 2015 and 2019 to establish the number and ages of children, ECD and NPO registration status, physical



i PPT

infrastructure, and the governance and capacity of centres. The survey found that: most informal ECD centres have the potential to provide acceptable education and care if they receive state assistance; poor infrastructure is a major challenge, posing health and safety threats to children and preventing partial care registration with government; most centres are unregistered for partial care and not receiving state assistance including ECD operational grants. In addition, regulatory flexibility is required in respect of formal zoning and building plans (noting that there are no approved planning layouts, land use schemes or approved building plans in informal settlements and rural communities).

A programmatic response model

A programmatic ECD response model was collaboratively developed in 2015/16 and included the following key elements: ECD data gathering and sharing; infrastructure improvements for under-resourced centres; support to achieve partial care registration; population-based planning; and multi-stakeholder coordination.

The initial phases of work were undertaken in collaboration with diverse stakeholders including the national and provincial departments of Social Development, Basic Education, and Cooperative Governance, the University of KwaZulu Natal, Training and Resources in Early Childhood Development (TREE), Ilifa Labantwana, and the Hollard Foundation amongst others. Key municipal departments, including those dealing with Human Settlements, Health, Development Planning, Safer Cities and Community Participation, were involved throughout. Funding was provided by eThekweni Municipality, the European Union via the Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation's Programme to Support Pro-poor Policy Development (PSPPD) and the DG Murray Trust / Ilifa Labantwana.

A municipal-level, multi-stakeholder ECD Steering Committee was established in 2015. Representation has expanded over time including alignment with the District Development Model and One Plan for eThekweni in 2021.

ECD Categorisation and prioritisation framework

A key component of the ECD response model was the development of a framework to categorise ECD centres, based on their infrastructure, registration status, institutional capacity and potential. Centres with the greatest potential for infrastructure assistance, investment and improvement were prioritised in order to unlock registration and access to ECD operational grants. Additional criteria included

centres with 20 or more children and those which had been operating for at least five ten years.

eThekweni ECD Strategy

eThekweni's ground-breaking ECD Strategy is the outcome of more than six years of collaborative work, and is significant because, for the first time, it sets out a programmatic, multi-stakeholder and integrated ECD approach which is evidence-based and can optimise ECD outcomes amidst constrained resources. It can also serve as a resource to assist other municipalities who may want to develop ECD Strategies of their own. Key strategic thrusts include:

1. **Effective, programmatic ECD coordination, planning and budgeting**, including: quarterly meetings of the ECD Steering Committee; assignment of dedicated personnel to perform municipal-level ECD functions; establishment of annual ECD project pipelines and MTEF budgets.
2. **Improved infrastructure for ECD facilities**, including: improvements of existing centres with potential as the top priority; affordable new builds where required using affordable national standard designs; defining clear eligibility requirements for infrastructure support; availing under-utilised municipal buildings for ECD; prioritising ongoing operating and maintenance sustainability.
3. **Expanded capacity to deliver acceptable quality ECD services**, including: determining an optimal mix of ECD service types (e.g. ECD centres versus playgroups); training and skills development for ECD service providers; mentoring and support for child minders (home carers); evaluating the potential to support private operators in under-serviced communities; evaluating the potential for playgroups, toy libraries and safe outdoor play parks.
4. **Streamlined registration of ECD facilities, playgroups and childminders**, including regular infrastructure assessments; compliance inspections by municipal environmental health practitioners and registration inspections of ECD centres and child minders by the KZN Department of Basic Education and the municipality.
5. **Enabling regulatory flexibility**, including establishing an enabling ECD bylaw and more flexible land use arrangements (e.g. simplified land use application processes); relaxing land use conditions (e.g. parking requirements); help desk services; addressing building plan barriers; waiving or reducing rates and tariffs.
6. **Improved health, food and nutrition**, including regular visits by KZN Department of Health for health advice, monitoring of child health, immunisation etc.; training

of ECD practitioners / childminders / mothers to screen children for malnutrition; food supplementation; nutritional training and guidance relating to food safety, hygiene and communicable diseases.

7. **Improved ECD data, data management and data co-ordination**, including facilitating access to the national online ECD Registration Management Tool; collecting, capturing and analysing ECD and infrastructure data; collecting and reporting on provincial ECD indicators.

8. **Adequate ECD funding (capital and operational)**, including engaging with the Department of Basic Education and National Treasury regarding possible funding for the maintenance of ECD facilities owned by the Municipality and more adequate provision of capital funding for ECD infrastructure improvements.

Key achievements in eThekweni

Overall strong progress has been made since 2015 including:

- Multi-stakeholder ECD collaboration and cooperation including the metro-level ECD Steering Committee which has been running since 2015;
- A comprehensive field survey of 657 ECD centres serving 24,796 children in underserved communities;
- Identification, categorisation and prioritisation of ECD centres for investment;
- Assessment of infrastructure and development of improvement plans;
- Establishment of an ECD infrastructure support and improvement framework with initial funding allocations;
- Accredited training for 160 ECD practitioners facilitated by the eThekweni Municipal Academy;
- Simplified and more affordable municipal land use processes to facilitate ECD partial care registration (e.g. neighbours consent instead of rezoning);
- Population-based services modelling by the Municipality to identify and prioritise the most-underserved areas for long-term strategic planning;
- A situational analysis of demand and supply of ECD services;
- Development of eThekweni ECD Strategy and draft ECD Sector Plan, and integration of ECD into eThekweni's One Plan from 2021.

Cross cutting barriers to scaling up ECD

Several key barriers continue to constrain the scaling up of ECD services in a programmatic manner:

- Insufficient consensus across the spheres of government (hence the need for municipal-level ECD strategies and plans which enjoy multi-stakeholder buy-in);
- Insufficient priority given to early childhood development (despite national policy-level recognition);
- Funding constraints and fiscal limitations (not only for ECD operating grants but also for infrastructure improvements and local-level coordination);
- Statutory and regulatory inflexibility (e.g. making it difficult if not impossible for less-formal ECD centres to comply with land-use and building regulations);
- Difficulties in responding in working effectively with informality (rather than attempting to eradicate it);
- Inadequate ECD planning and coordination (including a lack of local-level integrated plans and strategies);
- Poor infrastructure (including buildings and basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity);
- A lack of capacity to respond to ECD at local level (which necessitates better coordination and cooperation and the assignment of additional personnel);
- No coordinating structure for ECD at municipal level (in eThekweni the absence of a suitable Unit or Department with the required capacity and resources to take the lead, has delayed the adoption of the ECD Strategy and implementation of upscaled ECD responses).

Implications and lessons for municipal collaboration

Municipal-level ECD collaboration is inherently challenging but it is possible for ECD support organisations to play a valuable role at municipal level in promoting cooperation and meaningful change. It is however important that they establish a relationship of trust and cooperation with all three spheres of government and are prepared to sustain their support over time as patience and endurance are required.

Significant trade-offs and compromises will inevitably be required if change at scale is to be achieved, so it is also beneficial to adopt a programmatic mind-set and to identify those interventions and responses which are most necessary, cost effective and potentially scalable.

Perhaps most challenging, is the need for all stakeholders to adopt new approaches and move outside of their historical comfort zones. This includes a willingness to work with and not against informality in its many facets, including the statutory and regulatory flexibility this unavoidably entails. Achieving meaningful ECD improvements can only be realised if we are prepared to work in ways which are more incremental, flexible, evidence-based and partnership-orientated.

particular strengths in developing and managing data systems. However, it must be noted that the government is operating in a fiscally-constrained environment.

The DBE should also revive the moribund coordination structures as set out in the NIECD Policy. Currently the NIDC meets quarterly, but the DBE has not made any significant changes to the way in which it operates. The Intersectoral Forum has continued to meet quarterly and collaborates reasonably well with the DBE but as noted earlier – it needs to expand its focus beyond early learning programmes.

Challenges with regard to capacity and technical expertise remain, even though this was highlighted in the NDP Review.⁸ This was not adequately addressed in the function shift as a limited number of posts were transferred from DSD to DBE at both national and provincial level, and this has an impact both in operational terms as well as the on the capacity required to undertake coordination tasks. Furthermore, there also seems to have been inadequate planning by DBE, for example, a director-level post has not been filled for the past two years).⁹ The transfer of posts and officials from DSD to DBE also raises the matter of different work cultures in the respective departments, and the 2023 Public Expenditure and Institutional Review proposed that the DBE should develop a comprehensive and intentional change management process to address this.

Currently the DBE is undertaking a review of the NIECD Policy. This presents an opportunity for the DBE in consultation with other government departments and stakeholders to enhance the functioning of the coordination structures. For example, the DBE has re-established the IMC and could potentially strengthen support from the Presidency by inviting the DPME Minister in Presidency to play a more active role in leading the IMC.

The challenge of coordination

Coordination of functions across government departments is a challenge for governments across the world,¹³ hence this is not a challenge that is unique to South Africa. While the NIECD Policy has outlined the roles and functions of the key departments, the role of DBE as lead department is crucial to provide strategic leadership and direction for the ECD sector. This includes building and steering the coordination structures to work effectively towards a common goal, in this instance towards universal availability of – and equitable access to – quality early childhood development services¹ including health, nutrition, care, protection and early learning.

Schedule 4 of the Constitution assigns roles and responsibilities to the three spheres of government. Ideally mechanisms to address intergovernmental relations should

work effectively, with cooperation as the basis for achieving national development goals. However, in practice, setting up, leading and managing coordination structures is both complicated and complex. Complicated, as it involves both vertical coordination (across different spheres of government – national, provincial and local government) and horizontal coordination (across departments at provincial level, at municipality level and with civil society), as well as coordination with civil society organisations. This has been a particular challenge in the early learning component of ECD. It is also complex as it operates in a complex web of systems, such as data, human resources and budgets as well as a network of contested and competing relationships within and across government departments and between government and civil society, multilateral and donor organisations.

Coordination is a function of strategic management and requires human resources with the requisite expertise and high-level skills to build relationships, manage conflict and negotiate solutions.

Nationally, the coordination structures for ECD are in a relatively weak state, either not functional or when functional, not very effective. While the President has mentioned early childhood development in his State of Nation Address over the last few years, there has been insufficient follow-through. It would seem that there is a lack of political will to translate the NIECD Policy into practice and to drive the building of an effective ECD system across government departments. The NIECD Policy clarifies the roles and functions of each government department. Within government departments, Deputy Director Generals (DDGs) would have ECD as part of their job function. Given that the IMC has met and a committee of Directors General has been set up to provide technical support to the IMC, we should see some progress in the seventh Administration.

The National Planning Commission has published an ECD Advisory¹⁴ which deals with coordination challenges in the ECD sector. It spells out in great detail the different institutional mechanisms proposed in the NIECD Policy and shows how convoluted the coordination structures are for the delivery of ECD services. While the Advisory raises the vexing matter of child hunger, it largely focuses on the early learning component of ECD. Furthermore, the Advisory shows the complicated structures that are set out in the NIECD Policy and highlights the ambiguity created by local government legislation which has a negative impact on implementation, as there isn't consensus on roles and functions.⁹

The Advisory makes practical proposals with regard to coordination between provincial and local government and notes that ECD issues should be raised through existing

structures such as the intergovernmental forum that exists in different forms across the provinces. While some attention has been given to coordination at national level, both across government departments and with civil society organisations, few resources and attention have been provided at the provincial and local government level. The Constitution assumes cooperative intergovernmental relations across the spheres of national, provincial and local government, but in practice this has been quite challenging.

Coordination at provincial and local government level

Some provinces such as the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Gauteng have some level of functionality and some structures exist, however there is a question of whether these operate optimally^{9, 15}. While the NIECD Policy envisages that provinces would replicate the NICD, some provinces have opted to combine the provincial interdepartmental committee with the provincial intersectoral form.¹⁶

An often-neglected element of coordination is intra-departmental coordination. An example of good practice at provincial level is the First Thousand Days (FTD) transversal project implemented by the Western Cape Provincial government (see case 12). This FTD project was adopted as an apex priority in the Provincial Strategic Plan (2019–2024) which indicates high level political support. Furthermore, operational governance structures were set up to support the integration of services. This is a good example of what is possible when there is political support and capacity to implement ECD policies and programmes at provincial level.

The District Development Model

Government also introduced the District Development Model (DDM) in 2019, which aims to support the vertical integration of plans across the three spheres of national, provincial and local government. The DDM is meant to break down silos in terms of planning, budgeting and implementation at the district and metro level⁹ in order to develop a plan that cuts across the three spheres. However, the DDM is unlikely to succeed when overlaid on a weak and dysfunctional local government sphere. Moreover, metros tend to have more capacity than districts and rural municipalities both in terms of government resources and services delivered by civil society organisations, which could further entrench inequalities.

There has been some success at building coordinating structures at local government level. The eThekweni Metro has been working with an organisation, the Project Preparation Trust (PPT) for a number of years (see Case 11). PPT has

been assisting municipalities to develop an ECD infrastructure support model, focusing on informal settlements. PPT has established multi-stakeholder committees in every municipality in which it has worked, providing support to guide the development of ECD strategies, infrastructure and municipal plans. The Project Steering Committees (PSC) typically include a range of municipal departments such as environmental health as well as the provincial departments of Basic Education, Social Development and Health. The PSCs then undertake a range of functions including planning, and communication both within and between municipal departments, and engagements with national and provincial departments.

Civil society structures

Civil society organisations contribute substantially to the ECD sector at a variety of levels. Donor organisations and their donor intermediaries, such as Ilifa Labantwana, and multilaterals, like UNICEF, provide material or systemic support at national, provincial and local level. Donor networks such as the National Association of Social Change Entities in Education (NASCEE) and Independent Philanthropy South Africa (IPASA) work together to ensure a coordinated approach to funding ECD initiatives. Real Reform for ECD is a broad-based advocacy movement focusing on regulatory reform. In addition, there are in excess of 140 not-for-profit ECD Resource and Training Agencies which provide non-centre-based programmes, and practitioner training and capacity building. Many of these are members of national structures such as the National ECD Alliance (NECDA) and the Ntataise Network which support them, develop materials and advocate with government and donors on their behalf. The ECD Census noted in excess of 40,000 early learning programmes that constitute the largest stakeholder in civil society. These include for-profit microenterprises and NPOs. Local ECD Forums play a significant coordination role^{iv} and act as a conduit for consultation, information sharing, capacity building and sharing of resources. The South African Congress for ECD advocates on behalf of ECD workers, provides skills programmes and has a provident fund and funeral policy scheme for ECD staff.

Building capacity

Additional human resource capacity with the requisite skills sets – both expertise as well as strategic management and relationship building skills – is required to provide strategic leadership (stewardship) and to manage coordination. Coordination goes beyond the administrative function of scheduling a meeting, it requires the provision of strategic direction and the building of relationships through building

iv Deep Dive study – 80% of respondents were part of an ECD Forum

a 'guiding coalition' across different departments.¹⁶ There is important work that must be undertaken between monthly or quarterly meetings.

Coordination structures work when the different government departments work towards a common goal and barriers between government departments and professions are broken

Case 12: Strengthening services and support in the First 1,000 Days: An apex priority in the Western Cape

Hilary Goeiman & Nicolette Henney

The Western Cape province has recognised the first 1,000 days (FTD) of life as a provincial priority and that investment in the health and wellness of pregnant women and infants is essential to enable children to thrive and reach their full potential.

The FTD was officially launched February 2016 as a transversal project and became an apex priority in the provincial strategic plan (2019 – 2024). Internally the Department of Health identified FTD as a priority in the life course and started to integrate the key building blocks in services and in the Western Cape Government strategic and Health annual performance plans. A situation analysis and intersectoral theory of change were developed to identify gaps and inform planning processes.

The GROW, LOVE and PLAY icons were developed to depict the key building blocks of the project and this branding is prominent in all communication materials. The project has also evolved in response to the emergence of new national and international policy, strategy and evidence and is closely aligned with the Nurturing Care Framework.

Operational governance structures were established to support the integration of health services, intersectoral collaboration and communication. The executive committee oversees the project – monitoring progress, identifying and responding to challenges, managing internal and external stakeholders and ensuring their participation throughout the implementation process. The exco then feeds back to management in the Department of Health and Wellness and through the provincial transversal management system.

FTD interventions are now integrated into health services at all levels of care including the delivery of facility- and community-based services; the training, support and mentoring of staff; drawing on lessons learned to drive quality improvement and systems strengthening. Partnership and collaboration with stakeholders have been a key component moving the initiative forward across the whole of government and whole of society.

Key deliverables include:

- A baseline survey to identify the predictors and drivers of stunting in the Western Cape
- Integration of risk screening tools into routine services
- A pilot of the Blanket Projectⁱⁱ to enhance parent and infant relationships
- Integration of book-sharing parent-caregiver package
- Geographically targeted interventions to address nutrition challenges and support ECD
- Monitoring and evaluation by applying an FTD lens when reviewing data across sectors
- Sensitisation of colleagues across a range of government departments to obtain buy-in, foster collaboration and facilitate the integration of the FTD agenda.

Key ingredients for success

- **Political will** is essential in driving the implementation of new initiatives and securing collective buy-in from key stakeholders.
- **Leadership** is needed to transform the environment, ensure sustainability (articulating goals and objectives) and facilitate adaptation (developing realistic action plans within available resources) while maintaining and improving service delivery.
- **Robust governance structures** are essential for project management, clear decision-making, effective risk management, efficient resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, compliance and accountability, alignment with organizational goals, transparency, reporting and continuous improvement to achieve the desired outcomes.
- The development of new initiatives is a **dynamic process** which requires agility, flexibility, adaptation and innovation.
- **Integration** is essential for optimal use of resources and sustainability.
- **Investing in relationships** is critical to develop a shared vision and foster collaboration.

i Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness

ii For more information, see: <https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/project/ibhayi-lengane/>

down.¹⁶ But the current system disincentivises working across departments, as individual departments are only responsible for their respective mandates and the indicators and targets in their departmental Annual Performance Plans (APPs), which has largely resulted in a culture which is compliance driven and risk averse. For example, officials will set indicators and targets where they have control, rather than set an indicator which requires collaboration with another department, as there is a risk that the collaborating department does not undertake what they had committed to and there is a risk that targets will not be met. This results in a tick-box exercise rather than a cooperative and collaborative culture where working towards achieving a common objective is central.

The current manner in which planning is undertaken and budgets allocated does not support intersectoral coordination and collaboration. For example, APPs are department specific and there is no mechanism to undertake cross-departmental or cross-sectoral planning. Coordinating planning and budgeting across sectors is a challenge across countries. To address this challenge Chile, through its 'Chile Crece Contigo' (Chile Grows with You) has built incentives into the ECD system, where the national government has allocated funds, similar to South Africa's conditional grant mechanism, for the position of a coordinator at the local level,¹⁷ based on the understanding that the coordination role requires dedicated capacity.

In South Africa, we may want to think about a support structure at the national level that will provide technical and organisational development support to build coordination structures at provincial level, especially where these are weak or do not exist. This should also be replicated at local level, but we may want to think about doing this in both a phased and differentiated manner as there are some structures already in place in some metros.

Coordination structures can also be used as an opportunity to showcase work of a specific department and to build a common understanding of different roles and functions and how different contributions can best complement one another.

What are the conclusions and recommendations?

The recent changes in institutional arrangements are a step in the right direction. In addition to the operational responsibility for early learning programmes, the DBE also has the responsibility for leading the broader ECD system within government. This needs to be undertaken in partnership with the Department of Health which remains responsible for the delivery of maternal and child health services and the Department of Social Development which remains responsible for child protection services as well as engaging with other relevant departments.

- The new Minister of Education should be given some time to get a sense of what the priorities are in early childhood development. She then needs to work with the Presidency to set up the next meeting of the IMC and set out the key priorities of the IMC in the seventh administration. It is further proposed that the DPME Minister in the Presidency should play a more active role in supporting the IMC, as outlined in the NIECD Policy.
- The evaluation of the NIECD Policy has been completed and it points to a disjointed approach to early childhood development across sectors and spheres of government. Hopefully this review process has built ownership of the Policy within DBE and coordination structures will be revisited to improve effectiveness. In revising the structures for improved coordination, the matters of intergovernmental coordination across the spheres (vertical coordination) should be prioritised.¹
- The NIDC structure requires some changes to become more effective, for example, introducing an NIDC Executive Committee, comprised of senior level government officials from each of the three key departments, Basic Education, Social Development and Health,⁹ which meets monthly. These senior-level officials should focus on strategic issues and have the authority make key decisions or be close enough to the executive management of the department they represent so that they can enable reforms in the ECD system. This is where political will can play a constructive role, given the demands on the time of senior government officials. A second tier NICD which includes high level representatives of the other relevant government departments should meet bi-monthly or quarterly.
- There is also room for improvement in the functioning of the IF, as it has a lot more potential than has been realised. In particular, civil society partners in the health and the child protection sectors should be included. Also, given the different interests and needs of the varied stakeholders, it may be an opportune time to revisit the role and structure of the IF and its related powers and functions, by establishing a separate donor forum.
- An ongoing challenge has been the capacity required to manage the coordination function at all levels of government and coordination with civil society. As part of the DBE strategy, the resources required for this function should be identified and costed. This may be an area where the government can partner with civil society, and donors and the private sector could play a role.
- With regard to integrated services provision this should be long-term goal and is worth striving towards over time.

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