
THE EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE ECD SECTOR

Rose September

Professor, Child and Youth Research and Training Programme

University of the Western Cape, Cape Town

rseptember@uwc.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The author reflects on the findings of a study commissioned by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC). A qualitative research methodology was used to explore the perceptions of service providers in the early childhood development (ECD) sector on job creation through government's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). The EPWP is aimed at drawing significant numbers of unemployed people into productive work by increasing their capacity to earn a sustainable income through training. In response, the national departments of Social Development, Health, and Education developed a Social Sector Plan (SSP) for EPWP in which the ECD sector was identified as one of the key areas for expansion. From a developmental social work perspective, both Early Childhood Development and productive employment are important strategies to alleviate persistent poverty. This article is intended to create dialogue, further research and action towards realizing the potential of the ECD sector to create more sustainable jobs in order to improve the quality of people's lives.

Key words: social development, expanded public work programmes, job creation, early childhood development (ECD), holistic and integrated social development.

INTRODUCTION

Although South Africa is now experiencing an economic growth phase, much still has to be done to accelerate the substantive and extreme levels of inequalities among its people. While a growing minority is benefiting from the economic growth the majority of South Africans are still deeply stuck in the second economy. The latter is characterised by persistent structural poverty. The impact of poverty is catastrophic for children. Statistics indicate that 11, 905, 147 (66%) children are living in poverty (Statistics South Africa, 2005). The devastating effects of the stubborn legacy of marginalisation, underdevelopment, exclusion and the destruction of family life are increasingly being felt on multiple levels and in all domains of society. These include high levels of crime and violence perpetrated in families and communities. These barriers to social development continue to threaten the gains made through economic growth strategies. Therefore, the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequality through interventions that facilitate access to jobs and basic social services such as social security, social welfare services, health, education, water, housing and sanitation must remain a high priority of the post apartheid government in the years ahead.

Within this context, the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) programme aims to create 450 000 new jobs per year to reach government's millennium development goal of halving unemployment by 2014 (Departments of Social Development, Education and Health, 2004). The premise is that government expenditure could be a key facilitator of job creation in sectors where government is a provider or procurer of services. The infrastructural and social services sectors were identified as priority sectors for the EPWP because both these sectors rely extensively on government resources and because of its relatively high employment coefficients and its ability to absorb a large proportion of unskilled and semi-skilled labour (Altman, 2004; Streak and Van der Weshuizen, 2004).

In February 2003, President Mbeki formally announced in his State of the Nation address that government has prioritised ECD, among other major poverty reduction strategies, as one of its core areas for the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). Subsequently, the departments of Social Development, Health, and Education developed the Social Sector Plan (SSP) which identified ECD and home/community-based care (HCBC) as the two priority areas for immediate attention through work and training

opportunities. The SSP describes a broad implementation strategy for the EPWP in the ECD sector (Departments of Social Development, Education and Health: Social Sector Plan, 2004. Hereafter SSP, 2004).

Currently there are about one million children between the ages of 0 and 5 benefiting from centre-based ECD programmes. The SSP proposal seeks to strengthen current delivery within the centre-based models but, more specifically, to increase the home-based care models by recruiting, training and deploying community workers to reach a further 3 million children to create 47 300 job opportunities (SSP, 2004).

These plans of the relevant government departments will be rigorously tested over the next few years as the sector collectively seizes opportunities to realise the goals set forth in the SSP of 2004. The challenge seems to be to mobilise, organise and coordinate a rather fragmented sector towards the design of appropriate programmes, accessing adequate resources, and to implement integrated implementation strategies coherently in an environment that facilitates mutual recognition and respect for the contribution of its diverse stakeholders.

The White Paper on Social Welfare defines social welfare as “an integrated and comprehensive system of social services, facilities, programmes and social security to promote social development, social justice and the social functioning of people” (Department of Welfare and Population Development 1997). In this regard developmental social welfare workers as leaders in the ECD sector are also challenged to create and utilise these critical opportunities.

The purpose of this article is to share the perceptions and expectations of ECD service providers regarding government’s intentions to expand job opportunities in the sector through its EPWP.

POVERTY, JOB CREATION AND THE PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME

Unemployment is a significant contributor to poverty and exclusion. The provision of access to quality employment is, therefore, an essential way of achieving sustainable livelihoods, which in turn is a crucial means of reducing poverty and inequality (May, 2000). Because the socio-economic position of parents always affects the achievements of their children, the most

powerful approach to better the chances of children to succeed is to improve the financial security of their parents. From this perspective, helping parents to access work and to succeed in the workplace is an important and basic developmental social welfare intervention.

In South Africa finding effective ways of overcoming persistently high levels of unemployment is a significant challenge. The extensive rate of unemployment in South Africa is directly associated with deep poverty at household level, which affects large numbers of children who, as a result, suffer hunger, disease, lack of access to essential services, and orphanhood (Haarman, 2000; Streak and Van der Westhuizen, 2004; September, 2004). In 2004, the unemployment rate was estimated to be 41.2% if the broad definition of unemployment is used (including people who had given up looking for work) and 27.8% using the strict definition (Statistics South Africa, 2005). The highest unemployment rates tend to be concentrated in rural areas, and unemployment rates are highest among Africans, among women and the youth, and among those with no previous work experience. Moreover, the legacy of apartheid is still stubbornly entrenched, as is reflected in the structural and systemic nature of South Africa's poverty profile. Poor people, mostly black, face multiple problems of unemployment, low quality jobs and a skewed labour market that does not adequately provide for semi-skilled or unskilled labour (Bhorat and Hodge, 1999). The challenge is therefore not only to create jobs, but to create better quality and sustainable jobs in the semi-formal and informal sectors.

May (2000), provides a useful discussion of the South African labour market. He broadly describes the trends in terms of the formal and informal labour market sectors. The formal sector is further divided into primary and secondary labour markets. The primary labour market is regulated and characterised by higher wages and skills requirements, an organised workforce and opportunities for upward mobility. The secondary labour market is less regulated. Workers in this sector have lower skill levels, are paid less and have limited opportunities for further training and upward mobility. The informal sector comprises informal and casual labour, unpaid labour, domestic labour, and family labour. Poor people are often relegated to the secondary labour market and the informal segment of the market, and have difficulty moving into the primary labour market as a result of various barriers (May, 2000). It is also generally recognised that the kind of work required by the secondary labour market and the informal sector is done

mainly by women, and that the level of income generated by their activities tends to be low. In the ECD sector, women constitute the majority of the workforce. This is a sector which is essential for the economy and the maintenance and stability of families (Whitelaw-Downs, et al, 1996). This sector is also historically under-resourced and therefore mostly excludes children from poor households, especially single mothers who cannot afford to pay for day care. Consequently, two groups of women are set up against each other. The one doing a job for which adequate pay should be a right and the other in need of government subsidised child care to facilitate access to gainful employment.

The ECD sector offers professional career paths for youth. However, it is currently still predominantly skewed towards lower levels of formal education. With regard to job creation for the unemployed with low levels of formal education in both rural and urban settings (mostly comprising the long-term unemployed), May (2000) suggests three strategies. These include: strong growth and labour-intensive employment; support for informal sector activities; and intensive education and training for integration into the job market. He also suggests that in the interim, community-based public works programmes and adequate social safety nets are important interventions. In South Africa, young people below the age of 35 constitute the majority of the unemployed, hence an important group to be targeted for job creation. For unemployed youth with no labour-market experience May (2000) suggests creating more jobs, skills training and assistance with job searches. The ECD sector, if expanded, could provide thousands of job opportunities for youth. In these instances it will be crucial to build in adequate career pathing opportunities.

From a developmental social work intervention perspective, labour-market interventions on their own will not necessarily achieve all the objectives contained in the individual development plans of either individuals or families. Therefore, interventions should also include support services that address workers' life situations holistically, including issues that make it difficult for them to succeed and to remain employed such as substance abuse, childcare problems, transportation, housing, and health issues (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005). Clearly, an effective, successful process of poverty eradication requires coordinated government strategies and action from a diverse and integrated network of welfare, health, education, and other economic interventions. The overall well-being of people and the strength of

the economy are intertwined - for this reason, the goal of poverty-reduction programmes should be to promote the general welfare of communities instead of viewing the economic and social domains of people's lives as being in competition with each other.

Globally, the creation of public works programmes has emerged as a strategy with the potential to play an important role in delivering services and infrastructure to communities formerly excluded. Within Southern Africa the popularity of public works programmes seems to be increasing as a means of creating jobs, increasing the assets of the poor and of contributing to social protection and poverty alleviation (SALDRU, 2005). Conversely, international experiences of these programmes have largely been within the infrastructure sector, which has been criticised for its inability to produce significant numbers of sustainable job opportunities. In contexts of deep poverty, questions are therefore often raised about whether public works programmes can play a significant role in the long-term social protection challenges that many nations in the Southern African region face (SALDRU, 2005). The South African government's initiative to implement it in the social services field is therefore significant and should be closely monitored.

There is clearly an important relationship between the benefits of early childhood development and the strategies to reduce poverty and inequality. Unemployment is a primary cause of both poverty and inequality. The South African government has long recognised the importance of the ECD sector in its strategies to alleviate poverty and unemployment. Creating work within the ECD sector for semi-skilled and unskilled workers would not only result in greater social independence and greater social cohesion, but would also complement social welfare service delivery and decrease the need for safety net benefits (SSP, 2004).

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) SECTOR

It is widely recognised that what happens during the earliest years of a child's life, from birth to three, influences how the rest of childhood and adolescence develops (UNICEF, 2001). For this reason, the quality of early care and nurturing has a decisive and lasting impact on how children grow, learn, and develop their capacities into adulthood. Because child rearing does not happen in isolation but in families, communities and nations, it follows that

children cannot do well unless their families do well, and families do not do well unless their communities and nations do well (September, 2004). This however, often means that, children from poor and low-income families, compared to their better-off peers, are more likely to suffer from preventable diseases, fail at school, become involved in conflict with the law, and often become parents before they are ready to parent. These children often reach adulthood without the necessary tools to access jobs and to earn a decent living, and consequently, they become the next generation of the unemployed (UNICEF, 2001). In South Africa and other parts of the world, this situation is compounded by the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Young orphans in poor communities are usually taken in by extended families, adding further strain to the already meagre resources of these households.

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECD) have long been recognised as essential elements of sustainable development. The benefits of ECD for children and families include language, cognitive and social development and the promotion of the wellbeing of the whole child. Research also indicates that ECD programmes are especially beneficial for poor families who need support in providing a healthy, safe and stimulating environment for their children (Myers, 2000). Colletta, Balachander and Liang (1996), in a study on ECD in sub-Saharan Africa recorded the following benefits of ECD:

- Increased efficiency of primary and secondary school investments;
- Enhanced economic contribution of children to society;
- Reduced social inequity;
- Addressed the intersecting needs of women and children;
- Improved family literacy, health, nutrition and early stimulation synergies;
- Increased social connectedness and political awareness.

In South Africa, the Integrated Plan for ECD (IPEDC, 2004) describes it as: "A range of services that promote those conditions of care, socialisation and education in the home or community that enhance the holistic development of young children" (Department of Education, 2005). ECD is therefore considered to be more than a pre-school educational programme. The range of services provided includes formal ECD programmes at schools or community centres, in family homes, and mobile ECD providers. The service providers are mainly non-governmental organisations and informal paid or unpaid care arrangements between families. The Departments of Health, Education and Social Development have historically been involved in

the sector through interventions that were not necessarily coordinated. The Department of Social Development is primarily involved with the registration of ECD facilities, while the Department of Health is involved through the monitoring of children's health at the facilities and the Department of Education is primarily concerned with preschool education and the roll-out of the reception year programme (Grade R). In terms of the inter-departmental working agreement, the Department of Social Development is responsible for children under six years while the Department of Education is responsible for children from six to nine years (Department of Education, 2004). A primary aim of the IPEDC is to strengthen and coordinate the efforts of the sector towards more holistic intervention and to reach more children. The IPEDC (2004) also identifies a number of key challenges that must be addressed by the ECD sector. These are:

- The fragmented legislative policy framework resulting in uncoordinated service delivery;
- Limited access to ECD for some groups of children;
- Inequities in existing provisioning;
- Variable quality of ECD services;
- Lack of adequate human resources across departments and provinces;
- Lack of an interdepartmental track record of working together;
- Different geographical borders that determine service areas.

In addition, the data on ECD provision is outdated and therefore an urgent need exists to audit the provision of ECD services and its users. The last audit was conducted in 2001. Existing data suggests that some 16% of the 6.4 million children in the 0 - 6 age cohort in the country are in some form of ECD provisioning, with less than half of the 5 - 6 year age cohort being accommodated (413 000 out of an estimated 960 000) (Atmore, 2001; Biersteker, 2001; Department of Education, 2004).

THE AIM AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the ECD sector in relation to the EPWP about (i) its capacity to expand; and (ii) the possible implications of such expansion for future planning with regard to infrastructure, institutional arrangements, service-delivery mechanisms, including human resources, training and financial arrangements.

A qualitative methodology was followed to facilitate the explorative and descriptive purpose of the study. The research methods included interviews, focus groups and a round table discussion. The interviews were conducted with the directors and staff of six ECD facilities. Two sites in the Western Cape, two in the Eastern Cape, one in Gauteng and one in Kwa-Zulu Natal were included in the study. On the basis of these interviews six case studies were compiled. The interviews were guided by semi-structured questionnaires. In addition, four focus groups were conducted. One in each of the following provinces: the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal. The participants of the focus groups included between 12 and 25 provincial representatives covering a range of ECD models and locations. These ECD service providers were recruited by the researchers through the main networks in the sector. The round table discussion was conducted in Pretoria with the members of the national ECD reference group, which is presently convened by the national Department of Social Development. The reference group includes representatives from the relevant government departments: the departments of Social Development, Education and Health, a representative from the Office on the Rights of the Child (ORC) located in the Presidency; and a representative from the Social Policy Unit in the Presidency and UNICEF.

The selected ECD representatives and facilities were included on the basis that they worked within the ECD profile targeted by the EPWP, i.e. previously excluded, low-income, rural and urban individuals and communities.

In terms of the research process, the researchers conducted the on site interviews first, analysed this data; then conducted the focus groups. The round table discussion with the reference group was conducted last. This strategy provided the researchers with the opportunity to probe, triangulate and engage further in-depth discussions on issues raised and where further exploration or clarification was needed.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: IMPLICATIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF EXPANDING THE ECD SECTOR THROUGH THE EPWP

The main findings of the study include the perceptions of the respondents on the expansion of the ECD sector through government's EPWP.

Coordination, joint planning and coherent implementation

In general, the government's intention to expand the sector is viewed with enthusiasm and anticipation. Primary concerns raised by the stakeholders were the lack of communication and the fragmentation within governmental and non-governmental efforts in the sector. There appear to be a number of potentially related initiatives being introduced in the sector by different parts of the government sector. Compounding this is the fact that different government departments often work with the same stakeholder groups in the sector, but each only focuses on specific parts of the ECD agenda. This contributes to a diversity of interpretations and conflicting perceptions about the EPWP; the learnerships offered via the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs); and the Integrated ECD Plan. The study found that there are different perceptions about the EPWP in relation to the work already being done by the various departments. For the Department of Social Development's respondents the EPWP's initiative was only one element of their broader ECD mandate, which included, their obligation to monitor the quality and standards of facilities through registration and regulation. The Department of Health saw their primary contribution as taking care of the health aspects of ECD; while the Department of Education was focussing on the educational programmes of the facilities, primarily with regard to Grade R.

There was a general lack of understanding about the actual implementation and roll- out of the EPWP (ECD) expansion strategy. Discussions in this regard indicated some of the difficulties associated with how government designs and implements integrated national strategies. Although there may be direction from the national government departments on national goals and priorities, this does not automatically mean that these are being executed at the provincial levels. For example, the current fiscal procedures that government departments must follow do not always facilitate integrated service delivery. It was suggested that although the National Treasury may increase the ECD budget, the national gross allocation may look significantly different when it is broken down into proportional shares for the different provinces because such allocations form part of the provincial equitable shares. Furthermore, provinces have the power to decide how their budgets are spent. This means that the relevant provincial departments may not have the resources to execute the plans indicated by a national department. The allocation finally provided depends largely on how strongly the relevant government departments bid for it at provincial level. Some participants

argued that for these reasons conditional grants managed from national level for certain intergovernmental flagship projects work best. Others maintained that conditional grants interfere with the autonomy of provincial governments.

Although all the participants agreed that the development of integrated strategies (in this case the Integrated ECD Plan) is imperative for government to reach its goals, they felt that the government has several important challenges that it must address. The respondents emphasised that there must be a clear and realistic understanding, about what these nationally driven strategies can achieve. In this regard they said that policy makers at a national level must appreciate that they cannot implement the policies, but in the absence of clearer national implementation norms, standards and guidelines, there will always be differences in the way that these policies are translated into provincial and local level actions. In addition, it was argued that the pressure that usually accompanies these national “flagship projects”, means that these programmes often become the exclusive focus of departments while other important work gets neglected. These programmes are usually also the priorities of political principals and constitute the basis on which their performance is measured. Officers therefore feel compelled to concentrate mainly on these programmes.

There was broad agreement that the expansion of the sector cannot work unless there is a uniform implementation plan designed and implemented by a joint national team informed by broad consultation with the NGO sector. It was also suggested that the budget for the expansion must constitute a separate pot of resources that is allocated for this purpose and the process should be managed by a single lead department.

The aim of the Integrated ECD Plan seems to be an attempt by government to remedy the fragmentation and to facilitate synergy and coordination among government programmes in the sector. The plan explains the leading role of government in formulating, implementing and monitoring policies and programmes on early childhood development. It also includes the important role of non-governmental organisations (Department of Education, 2005:4). However, the Integrated ECD Plan is silent on the actual implementation strategy for the expansion of the sector through the EPWP.

Target beneficiaries and recruitment strategies for the EPWP (ECD)

There seemed to be existing opportunities through which people (especially younger people) could access ECD learnerships. These learnerships, however, were not necessarily linked to jobs in the ECD sector. There was therefore extensive discussion in the focus groups on how people were recruited, what the contents of the learnerships were, who the service providers of the learnerships were and how the learnerships were linked to sustainable jobs within the ECD sector.

Learnerships offered through the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) were identified as the current vehicle through which the EPWP has created opportunities to increase people's employability. There was general agreement among the participants that although these learnerships are closely linked to the EPWP and would most certainly be part of them in the future, these learnerships had been developed through a different national strategy and through separate implementation systems. These include the National Skills Development Strategy, the South African Qualifications Framework and the SETAs. ECD learnerships were advertised in newspapers and delivered by ECD training providers registered with the Education and Training SETA (ETDP) as the facilitating body for ECD training programmes. The SETA worked mainly with the Department of Education in identifying service providers. The problem is that a number of ECD facilities are only registered with the Department of Social Development and vast numbers are not registered at all (Department of Education, 2004). These training opportunities were not linked to or developed in consultation with the ECD service sector. This was the situation before the advent of the EPWP. According to the government participants of the round table discussion, it is expected that the ETDP SETA will continue to be a primary partner in the roll-out of the EPWP for the ECD sector and that it will continue to use the current learnership implementation strategy.

Participants suggested that careful consideration must be given to the recruitment and selection of candidates who are included in training programmes. They made the following comments about the recruitment and selection of potential trainees: It is not acceptable that advertisements constitute the only form of recruitment of people into the sector. The sector involves working with vulnerable children, therefore individuals who wish to work in the sector must be carefully screened and selected. People with

previous behaviours (including child abuse and exploitation) that may put children at risk must be excluded from entering the sector.

Concern was also expressed that the learnerships facilitated through EPWPs are usually attached to short-term jobs. The general consensus was that this would not work in the ECD sector. Because relationships with children are the basis of the work done, it will be unacceptable to initiate relationships with children that would be frequently disrupted or terminated. For this reason, the job opportunities created must be sustainable for at least two years or longer. Participants felt strongly that the EPWP strategies employed in this sector should be appropriate for the specific needs of the sector. The workforce selected must have distinct qualities and must be placed in jobs that the existing facilities are able to sustain.

Regarding the age of candidates, it was agreed that age should not be a stand-alone criterion, but that it should be included with a range of other important criteria. It was agreed that there should be enough flexibility to include both youth and older experienced people who are already in the sector. Priority should be given to those already volunteering or earning a low income while working at an existing facility. It was also suggested that to avoid confusion the definition of “unemployed” should be used as referred to by the Department of Labour and the National Skills Fund which includes the under-employed.

In terms of gender there were mixed feelings about the recruitment of male trainees. While some suggested that men should be excluded because of the difficulties of keeping children safe from abuse, others suggested that all people who work with children should be screened as child abuse is perpetrated by both men and women. It was also argued that such biased positions were often based on people's underlying assumptions about sexuality and that policy should be based on factual indicators of deviant sexual behaviours rather than on gender or sexual orientation.

Regarding the minimum criteria for educational levels for inclusion, it was suggested that there should be a continuum of different options, programmes and levels of qualifications that provide for low-income, semi-skilled, unemployed as well as professional levels of ECD education. It was felt that the primary considerations should be about where these people would work,

what they will be required to do and whether their positions could be sustained.

Training and capacity development in the ECD sector

The training and education theme solicited intense discussions. It was agreed that the training needs of the sector are varied, including the capacity to provide training, geographical spread of the facilities and the multiple levels of the training and capacity needed to reach the EPWP targets. The respondents suggested that all of these important capacity realities must be the subject of broad consultation and, finally, a coherent implementation plan. A primary consideration in the planning and design of an implementation plan should be the fact that the roll-out and context of the EPWP in the ECD sector will be profoundly different to the implementation of EPWPs in the infrastructure sector.

It was accepted that further capacity development in this sector must take into consideration the differences in emphasis between the broader goals of the EPWP and the purpose and goals of the comprehensive ECD sector, as indicated in the Integrated ECD Plan. While the EPWP focuses on increasing the numbers of trained ECD caregivers and their ability to access jobs, the comprehensive ECD sector focuses on its training and capacity-development mandate, which includes developing the capacity of management and the provision of adequate infrastructure and resources for effective operations. Moreover, the latter also includes the ongoing monitoring and quality assurance at site level. Another element that is in the overall ECD sector goals and not the EPWP, is the development and publication of uniform training manuals and the appointment of mentors which, are critical ways of ensuring ongoing capacity development in the sector.

The respondents felt strongly that the training and development strategies of the sector should be aligned to the specific conditions of ECD practice. Distinction was also made between the management level capacity needs and specific training of development staff to deliver high quality child centred ECD practice competencies. A key consideration must therefore be the types and numbers of jobs that can be sustained by the ECD sites and programmes in the long term. Serious concerns were expressed about the sustainability of the jobs created through learnerships. The EPWP (SETAs) considers a

learnership a job opportunity. After the learnership has been completed, however, the job opportunity ends. Learnerships as currently designed and delivered do not necessarily provide long-term job security as an outcome. It was suggested that careful attention should be given to exit strategies from these learnerships to assure longer-term employment opportunities. Linking practice placements to the learnerships should therefore be a planned and coordinated endeavour in the sector and should not be left to individuals or to chance.

Training institutions expressed concern about the training that they provide, which is sometimes not implemented because of a lack of management capacity, and facilities and resources, such as training materials and equipment. Another perspective on the same issue was whether the training that is provided is appropriate for the context and settings in which the caregivers operate. It was also cautioned that training, equipment and facilities provided for poor children and their communities should never be of inferior quality just because these children live in disadvantaged environments.

The ECD sector depends heavily on the delivery of adequate and appropriate levels of quality training. There is therefore a need for ongoing training and support in this field. Additionally, ECD work is often difficult and draining. Professional ECD providers are especially needed in rural areas. Because working conditions in remote areas are often difficult with respect to transport and accommodation, not many professional ECD workers are prepared to work in these harsh conditions. Attention needs to be given to making life easier for ECD workers in deep rural areas.

There was broad consensus that there must be greater control and monitoring of the training content and quality. A suggestion for a national task team to develop minimum standards and quality assurance guidelines for the sector was made. Although suggestion was made for another task team to develop an ECD training strategy with built-in career pathing for ECD qualifications, this could be one task team with both foci.

Infrastructure and adequate systems for implementation

A theme that surfaced in many guises in the study was the inadequate and low level of current state provision for young children and the consequent

undervaluing of early education as an educational concern in the minds of the general public. There is also hope that the proposed expansion and the appropriation of adequate resources for the sector through the EPWP will happen as a matter of urgency. Such expansion is deemed essential in the light of the increasing demand for ECD services to accommodate and augment other services required at community level for children, families and communities that are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

The study found that in general, there are huge capacity and infrastructural differences across the sector with regard to the type of facilities and geographical location. The larger urban based non governmental (NGO) type of facilities with strong management and governance structures do better than the smaller community based facilities and those child minder programmes that run as small private businesses. The present lack of resources and capacity was clearly identified as the main barrier towards expansion. Serious resource difficulties were experienced in providing ECD opportunities for low income families and sustaining good quality programmes. This is particularly in the case of rural ECD organisations, where there are now further demands on them to extend their efforts to include more community development services and services to families affected by HIV/AIDS.

Families living in poverty are usually in double jeopardy because many of them are chronically unemployed and cannot afford to send their children to early childhood development programmes. This exclusion means that these children are less likely to succeed at school and find productive employment. In addition, the poor state of ECD facilities that operate in poverty-stricken environments affects the effectiveness of the ECD sector in a number of ways. For example, it seems particularly difficult to provide ECD services to scattered homesteads in poor rural communities. In a context where basic needs such as nutrition, clean water, sanitation, health and other services are still inadequate, ECD and education are often not seen as priorities.

At present there are significant institutional constraints that are conceived by the sector as serious barriers to the possible expansion of the ECD sector. These include the lack of coherent coordinating structures at governance levels; the lack of minimum standardised service systems; the lack of role clarification among stakeholders; and the lack of adequate resources. ECD provision is generally seen as the responsibility of parents, government,

NGOs, and the corporate sector. In South Africa, NGOs and faith-based organisations (FBOs) have historically played a crucial role in the provision of social and community services, including substantive work in the ECD sector. The ECD sector also depends heavily on volunteers at various levels. Volunteer jobs usually include serving on governing bodies, maintaining buildings, preparing meals, and caring for children. In the South African context of high unemployment, volunteerism is often seen as a route towards paid work opportunities. Volunteer opportunities also often lead to skill and knowledge acquisition, which has the potential to make the transfer to paid employment easier.

The current lack of consultation between the government decision makers and the NGOs about the expansion of the ECD sector through the EPWP was a consistent theme throughout this study. The study highlighted the importance of linkages and coordination of interventions among the stakeholders involved in the delivery of ECD services.

Funding of ECD programmes

Government funding for ECD programmes (0 – 4) has traditionally been provided through service-level agreements with the NGO sector or through direct department budgets for core services, such as monitoring and evaluation of service providers. There are no existing models for national-level integrated and inter-sectoral ECD programming for children under five. The implementation of the Grade R model, which was driven by the Department of Education, is an example of a national programme that has been implemented at provincial and local levels. Funds from the departments to implement specific programmes are allocated in small amounts on a discretionary basis, relative to the real demand. The expansion and maintenance of the ECD programmes will rely heavily on substantial and continuous funding.

At the local level, community ECD sites are mainly dependent on fees paid by parents. Because of poverty and unemployment, current services cannot reach the children who need additional care the most. Similarly, home-and community-based programmes, which rely on donations and external donors are often unable to support elderly or very young caregivers. One of the most critical problems in the sector is the lack of adequate remuneration for ECD workers. This has an impact on the sector's ability to retain trained staff, the

numbers of children that can be reached and the quality of the services provided.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The respondents felt optimistic and agreed that the expansion of the sector holds major opportunities for community development generally and particularly for the enhancement of social capital. ECD sites naturally bring together different interest groups in a community. Many sites already provide venues for a number of community enterprises, such as adult education classes, social clubs for pensioners, community food gardens, craft centres, and other community activities. These joint activities and the sharing of resources have the advantage of also sharing costs. The innovative work being done within the ECD sector with regard to HIV/AIDS is an important example of how ECD providers have already started to incorporate and extend their services to meet broader community needs. According to the respondents, some programmes are beginning to indicate that ECD workers with their basic training in childcare are well placed to assist families trying to cope with the additional financial burden of looking after orphaned children. In addition, these children may have special problems, which are the result of a traumatic bereavement, moving to another home (sometimes several moves), and rivalries with the biological children of the same caregiver. Training programmes on childcare therefore increasingly seem to incorporate material applicable to meeting the needs of children who are in difficult circumstances as a result of the AIDS epidemic.

Monitoring and evaluation

There is a need for a national follow-up audit on the sector that could provide baseline information to inform planning of services in the sector. The development of an ongoing strategy to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the EPWP in the sector, including impact assessment, should be an important and central element of the Integrated ECD Plan.

The respondents suggested that the Department of Social Development in collaboration with the other departments, such as health and education, contracts external service providers to conduct a broad based evaluation of the sector. Information on sustainable employment in the sector is, for example, crucial if this is a measure for the success of the EPWP in the ECD sector.

CONCLUSION

The study indicates that for the EPWP to work in the ECD sector, well-designed implementation strategies, which take into consideration the elements of recruitment, assessment and screening of candidates; job readiness training; sector readiness; and orientation, placement and retention, should all be in place long before the individuals begin the training. Such a strategy would require the sector and the relevant government departments and NGO partners involved to work together as a team at multiple levels. The ECD sector has historically been neglected as a field of social development. The renewed commitment of government on various levels could facilitate further engagement with social work professionals about unlocking some of these opportunities.

Early childhood development is essential and requires direct government investment and leadership if society is to reap the multiple benefits that the sector offers. The EPWP initiatives in the sector must therefore result in a better coordinated, systematic and organised ECD sector.

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