

Informal early childhood development centres

A new area-based approach for improved and up-scaled ECD services for the urban poor

Background

Currently, most children living in informal settlements in South Africa are cared for within less formal, unregistered early childhood development (ECD) centres, which generally provide insufficient stimulation and care by untrained caregivers. However, such centres do not fall on the official 'radar' of government, form part of the 'system', or benefit from related support programmes. This leaves these children highly vulnerable and disadvantaged, and the centres which care for them without meaningful support.

Objectives

The short-term objective of the project was to initiate and roll out a new ECD support programme in eThekweni Municipality for less formal, unregistered ECD centres. In the medium term, it also sought the acceptance and mainstreaming (at provincial and national levels) of a new evidence-based, systematic framework and method for rapidly assessing and categorising all ECD centres at area or municipal level and on this basis, extending structured funding and support to enable improved infrastructure, care, and learning.

Methodology

The research was undertaken in 14 informal settlements in Amaoti, one of the largest informal settlement precincts in Durban containing more than 14,000 households, where 42 under resourced centres servicing 2,542 children were surveyed. Parallel work of a similar nature was undertaken in certain informal settlements within Umlazi as well as within five rural municipalities, where a further 474 centres servicing 17,053 children were surveyed.

Key findings

- The need for a new ECD response model was clearly demonstrated
- The efficacy of the new ECD response model was proven
- Most existing centres have potential and can improve, provided they receive support, including infrastructure investment and training
- Improving existing centres is approximately six times more cost-effective than building new ones
- There are several key preconditions for scaling the model up: If these are not addressed, then the new model cannot be successfully implemented
 - A greater fiscal allocation for ECD is necessary
 - State funding instruments for ECD infrastructure need strengthening
 - More effective institutional coordination and funding mandates are necessary
 - Efficient procurement/partnership arrangements and ECD infrastructure delivery models are needed
 - Appropriate flexibility is necessary to include ECD centres with potential in the system of state support



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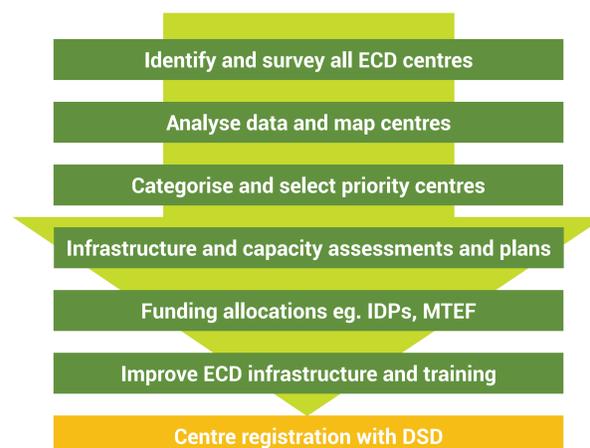
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ECD response model



Conclusion

This project successfully piloted and refined a new and scalable ECD response model that can achieve substantial population coverage, while at the same time optimising limited fiscal resources. The primary focus is on identifying and supporting, in a structured fashion, large numbers of under-resourced ECD centres which have the potential to improve and provide acceptable ECD services. These centres form the backbone of the ECD services provided to young children in under-served communities, but are currently substantially outside of the system of state support. Given the success and value of the response model, a logical next step is to develop a user-friendly operational manual to assist government and non-governmental stakeholders with implementing it.



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