

# The Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education

## Version 2.0, 2023



*A Multi-Sectoral Policy Document for all Partners and Stakeholders  
in the Early Childhood Care and Education*

*Developed and Published by  
Institute of Early Childhood Development*

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# FOREWORD



It gives me great pleasure to present Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023. This document maps the Government's policy direction for our children to achieve the best possible outcome. It builds on the transformational agenda which has characterised the rapid development of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Seychelles and strengthens our resolve to provide high quality provisions, programmes and standards for children in their early years.

Our vision is 'Winning for Children: Winning for All'. We value our children; we listen to their voices and we come together as a nation to ensure that they enjoy growing up, that they feel safe and that they have positive experiences at home, in care services, at school, and in the community. Guided by rights-based and child-centred principles we are determined to sustain our efforts to maximize the potential of every child for today, to become lifelong learners of tomorrow.

The goals and policy priorities in this Framework are of critical importance for our collective economic, human, educational, and social interest. Our children will thrive and develop holistically in a protective and inclusive environment with better preparation for active engagement in learning and schooling. Parents will acquire the knowledge and skills to enhance parenting practices; to organise a nurturing, stimulating home setting; and to access child care and family services. Partnership will be reinforced to mobilise national resources. It will be extended to interact productively with international organisations and expanded for global leadership and networking. Through professional workforce development, data management processes, funding arrangements, Seychelles will address the challenges for supporting a sustainable and resilient ECCE system.

A central theme of this Framework is the drive for implementation. An active national planning mechanism, centrally coordinated, has been well established to engender multi-sectoral collaboration, to connect with other agencies and partners to actively address the strategic priorities of the Framework. Moreover, within the Framework a robust monitoring and evaluation structure has been incorporated.

Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023 sets the Government's key commitments to children in Seychelles. In doing so, it seeks to provide a shared responsibility and accountability to deliver high quality ECCE for the benefit of the children, parents, families, communities, and society.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Wavel Ramkalawan'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

**Mr. Wavel Ramkalawan**  
His Excellency, President of the Republic of Seychelles

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>BFHI</b>	Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative
<b>BLM</b>	Blended Learning Mode
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>DA</b>	District Administrator
<b>DDST</b>	Denver Development Screening Test
<b>ECCE</b>	Early Childhood Care and Education
<b>ECD</b>	Early Childhood Development
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EMIS</b>	Education Management Information System
<b>IBE</b>	International Bureau for Education
<b>IECD</b>	Institute of Early Childhood Development
<b>IEM</b>	Inborn Errors of Metabolism
<b>IEP</b>	Individualised Education Programme
<b>ICT</b>	Information Communication Technology
<b>ISCED</b>	International Standard Classification of Education
<b>MLGCA</b>	Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs
<b>MYSF</b>	Ministry of Youth, Sports and Family
<b>MOE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MOH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NAEYC</b>	National Association for the Education of Young Children
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Plan
<b>NECCETF</b>	National Early Childhood Care and Education Trust Fund
<b>NCCOM</b>	National Coordinating Committee
<b>NDS</b>	National Development Strategy 2019-2023
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Government Organisation
<b>NRA</b>	Neighbourhood Recreational Activities
<b>NICU</b>	Neonatal Intensive Care Unit
<b>NSB</b>	National Bureau of Statistics
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PCHR</b>	Personal Child Health Record
<b>PO</b>	Project Officer
<b>PPBB</b>	Programme Performance-Based Budgeting
<b>RIF</b>	Risk Indicator Framework
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SA</b>	Social Affairs Department
<b>SABER</b>	Systems Approach for Better Education Result
<b>SELF</b>	Seychelles Early Learning Framework
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SF_ECCE</b>	Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care Education
<b>SITE</b>	Seychelles Institute of Teacher Education
<b>SOP</b>	Standard Operational Manual
<b>SQA</b>	Seychelles Qualification Authority
<b>TMR</b>	Tracking Monitoring Reporting
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>USD</b>	United States Dollar
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>WBTI</b>	World Breastfeeding Trend Initiative
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization



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# Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023

## SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

ECCE in Seychelles has undergone massive and rapid changes in the last ten years. This transformation from ‘Humble origins to a Best Practice Hub’ (Choppy and Mondon, 2017) has been powered by political ECCE champions, high level strategic directives, progressive institutional leadership, multi-sectoral collaboration, accelerated action planning, heightened policy dialogue through research, and a burgeoning monitoring and evaluation structure. The impact on the ECCE system has been highlighted with impressive maternal and child health indicators, very high pre-primary enrollment rate (ibid. 2017), preliminary school readiness assessment (IECD, 2022), and “Satisfactory Child’s Rights” Index (Humanium Child First Annual Report, 2020). The last decade has witnessed key milestones in policy actions with the establishment of the Institute of Early Childhood Development (IECD Act, 2014); the implementation of national action plans; the designation of IECD as a Best Practice Hub for ECCE by the International Bureau of Education, UNESCO (2017); the introduction of national quality standards for child care provisions (2016); financial assistance to support parents (2020); and the revision of IECD Act with the recognition of IECD as Category 2 Centre for ECCE, under the auspices of UNESCO (2021). These achievements are far-reaching and exert overwhelming pressure on an aspiring system of a small island nation

It is to be expected that Seychelles would face critical challenges to sustain the ECCE system and pursue the quest for quality. The *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* seeks to take up these challenges for added impetus to support and strengthen the ECCE system in Seychelles. It proposes the Government’s agenda and priorities in relation to children in the early years (0-7+) for the next 7 years. The aim of the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* is to instigate policy and programmatic development, and move service delivery towards excellence. It is intended to generate a whole Government response, attain a unifying policy focus in ECCE Ministries, and trace the progress needed to achieve expected outcomes. It builds on The Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care & Education (2011) which was the first strategic document advocating multi-sectoral collaboration to better serve children in their early years.

### **Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care & Education (2011)**

The Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care & Education (2011) (SF\_ECCE) was the country’s response to the Moscow Framework for Action and Cooperation (2010). At the first World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education, in Moscow in 2010, organised by UNESCO and the Russian Federation, the world’s decision to adopt a broad and holistic approach to ECCE for all children aged zero to eight years was ratified. It was emphasised that ECCE is an indispensable foundation for lifelong learning, with proven benefits in health, nutrition, improved educational efficiency and gender equity, greater employability and earnings, and better quality of life. In 2011, a multi-sectoral policy document was developed and adopted nationally as The Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care & and Education.

The Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care & Education (2011) is an overarching policy document which involves not only ECCE Sectors but also ‘all other stakeholders in ECCE’. It sets the united vision: ‘a winning start in life for all children in Seychelles: a shared commitment.’ It outlines the guiding principles of child-centeredness, collaborative work, active learning, and overall accountability. It identifies thematic priorities, namely, policy and programme review, equitable provision and expanded access, funding and investment, training and professional development, early detection and intervention, quality standards and service delivery, parenting education and community involvement, research and data collection. It places particular emphasis on expanding the provisions for children aged 0-3. Moreover, the SF\_ECCE also recommends a governance structure with a High Level ECCE Policy Committee, a central coordinating body

to lead ECCE nationally, and sectoral Technical Committees for implementation of ECCE. It emphasises monitoring and data management as necessary processes for successful implementation and effective reporting.

The SF\_ECCE has been widely implemented to sustain and improve the ECCE system in Seychelles. Leadership capacity has been augmented, collaboration has evolved and policy direction has been set. There have been publications to increase ECCE knowledge and establish good child development practices, and, as part of the advocacy campaign, showcase children's work. Research has been undertaken to address care and early learning issues. Four two-year action plans have been implemented: Major achievements in policy products, early intervention, child protection, special needs, and training and capacity building have been reported. Following such achievements and adjusting to the worldwide movement to increase the resilience and sustainability of ECCE systems and reinforce the multi-sectoral approach in the practical delivery of ECCE services, the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* has been developed with wide consultation across ministries and agencies related to children, and interested stakeholders.

### Policy Linkages

The *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* is linked to some of the major national changes and embraces current international notions and research to determine children's developmental and contextual needs. It considers the enabling policy environment, and legislative facilitation, institutional and programmatic framework, the monitoring and evaluation framework to extend and strengthen ECCE at system and institutional level, and in early childhood care and education settings. Whilst articulating the links between government plans, the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* is intended to clarify points of convergence that would establish an early childhood focus at high level. Notably, the *Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* has been developed amidst major changes in ministerial portfolios following a change in government and this has prompted a re-orientation of outlook to re-launch the economy after the COVID 19 health crisis and review the strategic planning process as the Results-Based Management Framework is being implemented.

The (Seychelles) National Development Strategy 2019-2023 (NDS) is premised on a "people-centred" approach to ECCE enshrined in the Constitution of Seychelles with the educational emphasis on "lifelong learning". This is in line with SDG 4.2 of Agenda 2030 which urges governments to attend to early childhood education as the foundation for learning. In the NDS a specific agenda to improve learning and development outcome through increased attention to pre-schooling transition is set out.

Nevertheless, efforts to improve outcomes for children are rooted in the Government's commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (signed in 1990, amended in 1992, 2005, 2020); and monitored through the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of the Child, (2022). Moreover, the accelerated implementation of the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care & Education (2011)* made major advancements in the Government's effort to improve outcomes for children in their early years whilst acknowledging the shared responsibility of achieving these results.

Thus the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* is taking a pro-active role in bringing ECCE to the forefront of provisions for children in the early years. The Ministry of Education's focus is shifting to a more seamless approach in the educational landscape (Education [amended] Act 2017) and this will facilitate transition from child care settings to pre- and formal schooling. While the Ministry of Health's (2022) statement 'to protect and improve universal health coverage' refers to the whole population, the *Seychelles Framework Early Childhood Care and Education 2023*, places emphasis on the population of 0-7+ year-olds and families. Complementarily, the Social Affairs Department, with the responsibility for the welfare of children, needs to refine policies that would be particularly targeted to children in their early years. With the Family Department promoting the quality of life in a family and community setting, the

shift in perspective is intended to lead to a policy centred on children and an interconnected view of family empowerment. One of the objectives of the Sports Department is to enhance the quality of physical education in schools and educational institutions. This promises a significant input in early childhood development. Finally, IECD, anchoring ECCE and coordinating the implementation of the Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023 will have the strategic and organisational responsibilities of engineering coherence in policy articulation and standardisation of ECCE provisions.

## Supporting ECCE

Advances in the science of brain development (synthesized, for example, 'In Brief / The Science of Early Childhood Development', 2021) in the early years provide ample evidence of the need to support the child's early stimulatory experiences through the home environment, caring interactive relationship, 'a balanced approach to emotional, social, cognitive, and language development', preventative intervention, and protection from 'toxic stress'. Investing in the support of the child's early experiences will determine the strength of the foundation for learning of the child's developing brain architecture

Seychelles has built a strong foundation for a resilient and an effective ECCE system. As shown in Figure 1, provisions are made in all Ministries - Finance, Social, Health, Sports and Family, Local Government and Community Development, Education - and in the private sector, to support ECCE. These provisions, programmes and interventions are established in all essential ECCE areas to serve pregnant women, young children, parents, and caregivers, as beneficiaries.

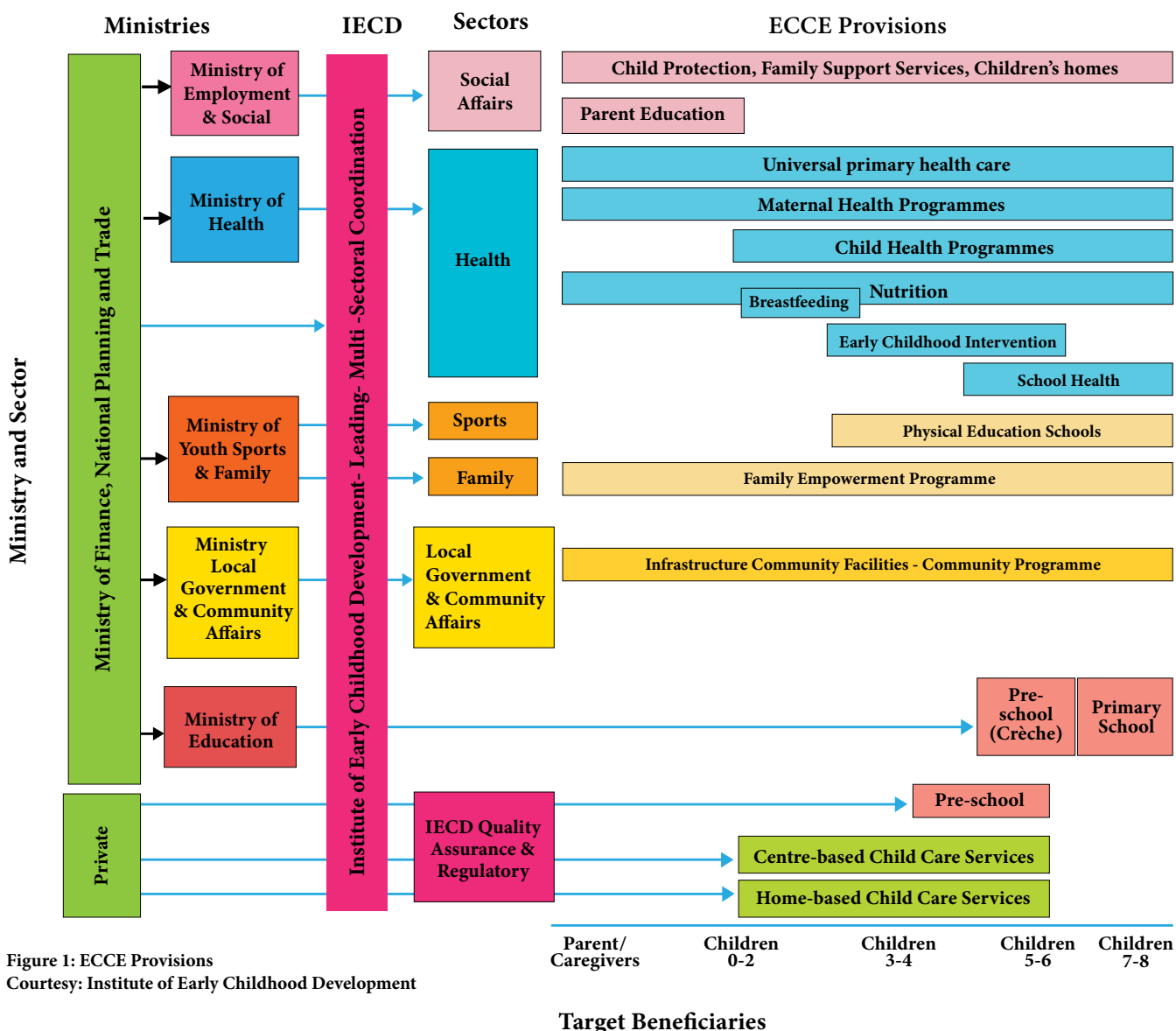


Figure 1: ECCE Provisions  
Courtesy: Institute of Early Childhood Development

*Finance* - The Ministry of Finance, National Planning and Trade makes budgetary allocation to ECCE Sectors through the relevant ministries. However, some ECCE provisions are also made by the private sector.

*Social* - The Social Affairs Sector provides services for vulnerable children such as foster care, guardianship, adoption, and residential care. The Sector is responsible for the social and legal aspects of Child Protection and links with other agencies to implement 'The Working Together Document for Child Protection' (1997).

*Health* - Seychelles has a comprehensive free health care system with specific ECCE programmes, namely, maternal and child health, nutrition and school health services.

*Education* - Seychelles had been praised for its free and compulsory education system with an enrollment rate of 100 percent. Also there are government-provided (crèche) and privately-provided pre-schools. Parenting programmes are also offered.

*Community* - The Local Government and Community Affairs Sector makes provision for centre-based childcare infrastructural facilities, provides access to community facilities and implements community programmes and recreational activities. Complementarily, the Sports Sector provides physical educational activities for children in their early years.

*Family* - The Family Department is concerned with the empowerment of families through diverse quality provisions and programmes.

*Special Needs* - The Ministry of Education has an inclusive education policy (2015) with the practice of mainstreaming learners with disabilities. However, special needs services are also provided and there are children following special needs programmes in the School for the Exceptional Child on Mahé (the main island) and the Centre for the Exceptional Child on Praslin (one of the inner islands). A Centre for Deaf Children of Seychelles has also been established recently.

Also, the Ministry of Health makes a range of special needs provision. The Early Childhood Intervention Centre caters for children experiencing developmental, behavioral and social problems. Moreover, a family counseling service is available for parents of children experiencing difficulties.

IECD plays a central role as the multi-sectoral hub for ECCE in its coordinating, advisory, standard-setting, regulatory and advocating capacity.

## **Investing in ECCE**

Investment in early childhood development is a social and economic responsibility and requires medium to long-term perspective. The experiences of the physical and emotional environment and the knowledge and skills acquired in the early years have major implications for later life. Furthermore, investment in early childhood has been shown to pay significant dividends. It is akin to a capital investment with significant returns and it should become an essential part of economic planning for long-term social and economic sustainability.

The Government of Seychelles has made significant investment in ECCE. Although the budget is not disaggregated for ECCE, there is direct funding of ministries and agencies. The Government funds ECCE through yearly budgetary allocations to ministries and agencies. In addition, other financial support mechanisms have been established for children and families in need such as Social Welfare Assistance for low-income families, "Dedicated Funds" (managed by the school) for children whose families cannot afford certain basic needs, cash transfer arrangements for parents with children in early child care services.

The case for investing in ECCE has been undeniably reinforced as research evidence has accrued over the years. Through longitudinal studies in many countries cost benefits for ECCE have been analysed with positive outcome. Consider the following examples:

Benefits-cost analysis results for US pre-school programmes have been estimated in the range of 4 to 14 USD for 1 USD (Heckman J. cited in Karoly, L. A., 2010).

‘For every £1 invested annually in ‘Action for Children’s’ services for targeted intervention social value benefits have been generated between £7.60 and £9.20.’ (UK) (Lawlor et al. 2009)

‘Every dollar invested in high quality early childhood education for disadvantaged children can deliver a return of 7-13%.’ (China) (UNICEF, 2018)

In cross-national surveys of learning outcome, returns on investment have been linked to increased student potential in secondary schooling (OECD, 2011, 2018).

No doubt, contentious discussion on the method of calculation (Karoly L. A., 2016), and, in some cases, quality of programmes have surfaced (Karoly, L. A. *ibid.*). For example, in a study of social investment in early childhood care and education in England, France and Germany, West et al. (2019) concluded that for ‘children between three and the start of compulsory education, social investment can be deemed to be broadly effective in France and Germany, but not in England’ since quality conditions in England had not been met. However, in the US the positive effects of early childhood high quality programmes on education, health, social conditions (Guerra, 2021) have been convincingly illustrated:

*Education* – Findings from studies tracking the performance of children who participated in high quality early childhood education programmes compared to peers who did not, showed a reduction ‘in future special education placement by 8.1 percentage points’, a decrease in ‘grade retention by 8.3 percentage points’, and an increase ‘in high school graduation rates by 11.4 percentage points’.

*Health* – Four cohorts of children were followed through in their adult life in a longitudinal study of the effects of a comprehensive early childhood and development programme on health indicators. The children were randomly assigned to the intervention programme during the first five years of their lives. Through the biomedical survey results at the age of 30, it was found that they had ‘significantly lower prevalence of risk factors for cardiovascular and metabolic diseases’ and that they ‘enjoyed better physical health .... with significant markers indicating better future health’. (Campbell et al., 2014)

*Economic performance and crime reduction* – he often cited Perry High/Scope Pre-school experiment favourably critique by Schweinhart et al. (2011) is an example of the long-term effect of early childhood high quality programme on economic activities and crime prevention. One hundred-and-twenty disadvantaged children were assigned to programme group and non-programme group. At the age of 40 it was found that those in the programme group surpassed their peers in rate of employment and level of earnings, and that there were significant reduction in ‘overall arrests and arrests for violent crimes as well as property and drug crimes and subsequent prison or jail sentences over study participants’ lifetimes - up to age 40’.

These studies of early childhood programmes implemented in the US have motivated evaluation studies of ECCE in European countries. However, studies have followed children up to their adolescent years. Studies of outcome of ECCE provisions in EU countries (Janna van Belle, 2013) have shown that length of attendance in centre-based ECCE setting is associated with language and skills development; there is ‘a link between the quality (acceptability) of preschool and the persistence of outcomes’; ‘the age and duration of ECCE are relevant factors for long term economic benefits’ such as increase in earnings and reduction in





drop-outs; there is evidence for example in Norway (Havnes & Mogstad 2011, cited in Belle, *ibid.*) that pre-school attendance increases labour participation.

These are convincing evidence - consistent across countries - of the growing necessity to improve ECCE provisions for economic and social change. The convergence of knowledge on the positive effect of early childhood high quality programmes have led to a global commitment to invest in ECCE. With the qualitative expansion of ECCE and the elevated international position of the ECCE system in Seychelles, The *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* urges the Government of Seychelles to outline financial policies in ECCE as part of its human capital investment in achieving and sustaining national goals and developing a nurturing and caring society.

## ECCE Provision Profile

The Government’s commitment to children in the early years has a collective, economic and social interest. In 2021, the estimated total population of children between the ages of 0-7+ was 9,349 or about 10 percent of the total population of Seychelles. There were 8,843 children attending child care, private pre-schools, state crèches, and the first two years of primary school. Enrollment in child care services in home facilities and child care centres was about 40 percent of the population of children aged 0-3. The Government, through IECD and Ministry of Education, regulates both services and finances state crèche (pre-school) and the first two years of primary school as part of the 10-year compulsory schooling provision for Seychelles (see Table 1).

The enrollment rate in pre-schools and Primary One and Two classes are generally very high. In 2021, the Net Enrolment Rate in Crèche was calculated at 88% and Primary One and Two at 87%. However, since the calculation is performed for school age 4 and 5 years for pre-schools and 6 and 7 years for Primary One and Two, some children have been excluded from the calculation as they would have been accommodated in child care facilities or in Primary One classes when calculation was made for the pre-school figures, and

Table 1: ECCE Provision Profile

Age	Provision	Number of facilities	Number of children
0-3	Home-based child care services	105	985
	Centre-based child care services	32	1284
4-5	Preschool ( Crèche) - Government	29	2705
	Preschool - Private	4	649
6-7	Primary school - (Year 1 & Year 2) Government	26	2639
	Primary school (Year 1 & Year 2) - Private	6	481

\*Source: IECD and Ministry of Education

other grades for the primary school figures. In 2021, 502 children were excluded from the calculation for pre-school enrollment and 528 for primary school. Otherwise, the Net Enrollment Rate would be 100% for both groups, pre-school and primary.

Recent legal and policy development has been concerned with expansion of child care service provision and increased access. Home-based child care services have evolved from an informal business into a successful regulated service. This is through a comprehensive programme which IECD has put in place, which includes development of ten quality standards, regulation, regular training and capacity building session for care givers. From 2016 to 2022, over 100 privately operated home-based child care services have been licensed by the IECD as the regulator (IECD Act 2014). From 2005, the Government has made considerable investment to increase coverage and to improve the standard of centre-based child care services. With the new legislation, the regulation of those centres that were previously undertaken by the Ministry of Education has been transferred to IECD (Early Childhood Development Act, 2022) in 2023 and a thorough review of the existing standards has been undertaken, in consultation with relevant ministries and partner agencies. In addition, crèches providing a formal early childhood education service and not subjected to quality assurance and formal inspection will also be regulated by IECD.

It is clear that there has been considerable progress in the provision for children in their early years. The aim of the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* is to consolidate and move beyond these achievements to strengthen the policy environment and actualise policy responses for improved children outcome.

## Method

The *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* was informed by a consultative methodology. A multi-strategic approach was adopted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the functioning of the ECCE system in Seychelles and to gain wider stakeholders' perspectives with regard to the implementation of the SF\_ECCE and specific situations of ECCE in Line Ministries, IECD and other organisations interested in ECCE. A documentary review was carried out which was used to guide workshop deliberations and interview processes. These sources of information were integrated to formulate the Framework.

### **Documentary review**

A comprehensive review (UNESCO-UNICEF, 2007) was undertaken to evaluate the SF\_ECCE and situate it within a historical context. Through critical analysis of the fast-paced development of ECCE in Seychelles since 2011 to date, the political and technical leadership, legal, institutional and programmatic enablers which have driven the ECCE agenda were highlighted and the need to sustain and strengthen the ECCE system was reinforced. Quality themes, principally: Governance, Access, Early Learning and Development, Families and Communities, Data Availability and Workforce (extracted from European Commission, 2014) and adapted to the local context provided analytic focus. The 'Review of The Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education' (2011) was an indispensable resource for the consultative processes and for guidance in shaping the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023*.

### **Stakeholder workshop**

The purpose of the Stakeholder Consultation Workshop was to provide forums to facilitate full engagement and broad participation of stakeholders with the aim of presenting a balanced perspective on ECCE policy issues. This would serve to inform decision-making system-wide, consider potential emerging initiatives that are absent or present at the national level, and explore potential avenues to propel the ECCE system towards excellence in the search for high quality provisions for the benefit of the children and the Seychellois society.

Thematic Working Groups were constituted to address the six areas identified through the literature review and adapted to reflect the Priority Areas in the SF\_ECCE as action focus to develop the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023*. Education experts, experts in ECCE and experienced policy makers were identified, briefed and assigned to the six thematic groups of stakeholders from government ministries and agencies, members of the community, service providers, and parents. Through independent working sessions the groups had to familiarise themselves with the documentary review of the SF\_ECCE, more specifically, with their respective themes. The Chairperson had the task of facilitating the group discussion to appraise achievements, generate ideas for sustaining and improving quality, make proposal for the way forward and produce a verbatim report on the group's deliberations.

The working group sessions culminated in a Whole Group Workshop where the verbatim reports were presented. The outcome of that workshop as well as those for individual group reports were used as evidence for the situational assessment of ECCE and for the improvement in the quality of ECCE and the support of children, their families and the community.

### ***Focus group interviews***

The ECCE Technical Committee members who are the core implementers of ECCE in the sectors were targeted for focus group interviews to add validity to the documentary review and workshop deliberations. It was a useful method to explore the experiences of key informants. This has stimulated reflection on and analysis of actions which may have become routinised and may have been taken for granted in policy implementation. The results of the interviews were particularly beneficial in the collaborative process to link sector actions with policy intentions.

The focus group interview included more specific questions around types of ECCE programmes, gaps that exist, and anticipated actions. Together with the key messages from the Whole Group Workshop, the information collected in the interviews helped to form a more balanced view of the different types of ECCE programmes in the sectors and policy areas that address the six policy themes adopted. The interview responses provided further understanding of the sector policy context and helped to ascertain the value of ECCE in the sector plan.

### ***Ongoing consultation***

Ongoing consultation was undertaken with key specialists and heads of organisations to gain in-depth knowledge of the ECCE services on offer and to check the direction of the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* in relation to their provisions. This approach helped to refine some of the policy-actions which had already been broadly addressed in the Whole Group Workshop and the Focus Group Interviews and provided further insights in the operations of specialists' services and their inclusion in the Framework.



## SECTION II – DOCUMENTARY AND SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The situational analysis has been conducted through the triangulation of sources of information from the documentary reviews and the consultative processes. The intention is to propose a framework which would reflect the aspiration and expectation of ECCE service providers in Seychelles and support policy makers in the development of excellence in all settings for the benefit of individual children and society.

The challenge has been to integrate the information in such a way as to identify measures which have led to achievements of outcomes both at system level, in individual ECCE settings and for the child; and to examine the links between monitoring processes and quality. There has been some contention about the link between quality outcome with reference to structural quality (such as physical resources, standards, benchmarks) and process quality (such as interaction, leadership, teaching and learning). However, there is significant evidence to show the positive association between high quality ECCE and positive children outcome (see, for example Karin I. et al, 2010; EU, 2016; UNICEF, 2020).

### Governance

The governance structure for ECCE in Seychelles evolved through a dynamic intensive process with key transformational **achievements**:

- The Institute of Early Childhood Development (IECD), a legal institution was created by law to provide leadership, and strategic direction for ECCE in the country. It coordinates ECCE nationally and promotes, advocates for, and carries out or commissions research in ECCE
- Its Board of Directors sets the strategic direction for policy alignment, multi-sectoral coordination, programme efficiency, and functional effectiveness
- A High Level ECCE Policy Committee ensuring an integrated approach to ECCE provision and effective implementation of the government's Framework on ECCE, and maintaining oversight of the ECCE system was constituted
- The National ECCE Trust Fund was set up to assist in promoting and supplying national ECCE programmes and projects and ensuring their sustainability for the development of ECCE
- Sectoral ECCE Technical Committees were appointed to implement the national framework and corresponding action plans, to support initiatives in ECCE and advocate for ECCE in their respective sectors.
- A management structure was sketched by IECD to describe the relationship between the IECD, High Level ECCE Policy Committee and Line Ministries
- Two-year National Action Plans has been formulated and coordinated by IECD since 2013, in collaboration with all ECCE Sectors, to accelerate implementation of the ECCE initiatives
- Advocacy programme has been developed and implemented by IECD to raise awareness, disseminate information and increase understanding of ECCE
- National Quality Standards for Childminding Services has been established for regulatory and quality assurance functions as part of IECD's mandate
- A diagnostic-consultative-monitoring research methodology to inform decision-making and improve the ECCE system has been adopted
- Seychelles became an international leader in ECCE and IECD was designated as a Category 2 Centre for ECCE under the auspices of UNESCO

### Critical Issues

The conception of a Centre for ECCE was a major national challenge. The disconnectedness of ECCE programmes and services, expected professional functioning, contending ministries for allocated responsibilities and level of independence were major impediments in establishing an institutional anchor for ECCE. Thus an overarching institution that would reflect the multi-sectoral characteristics of ECCE,

develop and sustain the ECCE system, and reach out to other partners and the community was critical. In 2014, IECD gained legal recognition as a “corporate body”, governed by a board, “to provide strategic direction and leadership in ECCE, promote the holistic development of children and establish a framework for Early Childhood Care and Education”. Early childhood development was legally defined as meaning and including “early childhood care and education and the holistic well-being of a child”. (IECD Act, 2014)

However, IECD as a newly-established leading institution had to adjust to the developing needs of the ECCE system and at the same time work towards a level of integration of ECCE provisions and programmes. Three main innovative strategies were selected and experimented with: research, coordination and advocacy.

Research power has been harnessed within the context of the ECCE system to instigate change. It has been used to clarify situations, to point to new directions, and suggest improvement strategies. Research has been a useful tool to strengthen coalition amongst sectors and other partners, and to reinforce monitoring and reporting

Within the first two years of its existence, the role of IECD was modified to address concerns with informal childminding arrangements and home-based child care services was formalised with IECD as the regulator. The seminal National Childminding Study in 2013 illustrates the policy research model of change. With the emphasis on improving ECCE provisions for the 0-3, and the prevailing situation where about three-quarters of the children in that age group were being catered for in home-based unregulated establishments, a research model was utilised to establish the status of the Childminding Services, diffuse the research findings through Policy Briefs (IECD, 2015) to engage relevant sectors and organisations in consultative dialogue. Through convincing evidence from the Policy Briefs targeting the relevant organisation or audience, it became possible to engage the diverse sectors in directly contributing to the development of the National Standards for Childminding Services which is a multi-sectoral and multi-agency document drafted as a statutory instrument under the IECD Act (S.I. 49 of 2016, IECD Act, 2014).

The model has been replicated for policy realignment to transfer the regulation of centre-based child care services from the Ministry of Education to IECD (Early Childhood Development Act, 2022). The diagnostic consultative-monitoring research model has become well established to provide policy direction, to propel ECCE related organisations into action, to be used as a monitoring instrument and to promote collaboration.

In order to build a more coherent system, a collaborative structure was engineered as crucial for the coordination of ECCE. Three essential factors facilitated the collaboration between sectors: political will, leadership of IECD and national action planning. The High Level ECCE Policy Committee (under the chairmanship of the Vice President from 2011 to 2016 and the Designated Minister from 2017 to 2020), which consisted of ministers of the leading ECCE sectors, affirmed the Government’s commitment and set the motivational example for sectors to become cognizant of professional relationship to engender a collaborative culture across sectors. Directed by the High Level ECCE Policy Committee, Sector-based Technical Committees were appointed (in 2012) and IECD (2012) was tasked with the development and monitoring of the National Action Plan for Early Childhood Care and Education which was a key instrument in strengthening the collaborative working process.

National action planning was a dynamic mechanism in the implementation of ECCE. The National Action Plan became a binding, learning and enabling instrument. Facilitated by IECD, sectors jointly contributed plans, shared ideas, co-operated within their sectors and across other sectors. From a hierarchical goal-oriented structure for the first plan (National Action Plan 2013-2014 Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) the plan was reformed into a project-based instrument with strengthened accountability, result-oriented and research-driven strategic features (National Action Plan 2015-2016 ECCE, National Action Plan 2017-2018 ECCE, National Action Plan 2019-2020 ECCE, National Action Plan 2021-2022 ECCE).

The plan was also a tool to intensify the multi-level participatory professional culture which was being promoted and also a technical component of the extensive advocacy campaign for ECCE.

As global scientific and economic evidence accrued to demonstrate the developmental potential of ECCE, a dominant challenge has been to educate the general population, professionals and parents on the holistic concept of ECCE and to promote children's achievements. IECD has been a prolific national advocate for ECCE. It enlisted the support of print and electronic media to produce informational material (for example, The Seychelles Early Childhood Care and Education Directory (2015), IECD Newsletter (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021 and 2022), "Directory on Registered Childminding Services" (2018, 2019, 2020). IECD also used "billboards and posters with key messages about parenting, nutrition and other early childhood related issues"; Educational Television Spots for campaigns and programmes on "health-related aspects of child development", "national standards for home-based childminding services"; instructional and documentary videos (for example "Premye Pa" (First Step) (2020); "Data Management Project in ECCE in collaboration with the World Bank" (2019) and "Recognition of Prior Learning Approach" (2021); and interpersonal communication strategies for caregivers, such as information sharing and training workshops. IECD hosted and participated in national conferences (2013, 2015) and international conferences (2017, 2019) and webinars for staff and personnel in ECCE in collaboration with World Bank, IBE-UNESCO, among other international partners (2014; 2015 etc.). All the promotion and advocacy initiatives were also disseminated through IECD's official social media channels to share information and educate the parents and population about ECCE, as well as stay connected and engage with its relevant partners.

In addition, IECD convened national ECCE and educational forums for professionals to keep abreast of new developments, for example, presentation of and discussion on the results from the "National Childminding Study" (2014); "Assessment of the quality of Day Care Services" (2019); "Evaluating the implementation of the National Standards for Childminding Services" (2019); "Assessment of Early Learning Readiness" (2019, 2020, 2021); "Workshop on Data Management and Dissemination of Results in Health, Education and Social Affairs" (2016, 2020, 2022) and "Evaluation of the National Action Plan" (2018, 2020, 2022).

As part of its advocacy strategy IECD has produced publication of children's work, childminding services, and research findings. The institution has organized developmental activities for children and published children's stories, poems and drawings such as "Early Childhood Islanders Aspirations 2020+: Letter to the President" (2016), and "I Love Seychelles: Through the Eyes of Early Childhood Children – A collection of poems" (2017). Moreover, IECD has adopted easily accessible publication format such as Directory on Registered Childminding Services (2018, 2019, 2020); Policy Briefs (2014) and Factsheets (2019, 2020) to disseminate research results (for example, findings from the study of resources in pre-school setting, 2018), day care service provision, and early learning of children commencing crèche and pre-school (2019, 2020, 2021).

### **Funding**

Funding and financing for ECCE became rather complex due to the multiplicity of sources and specificity of criteria. Budgetary allocation from central government for the ECCE Sectors was already in place although (except for the Education Sector at a later stage) it was not disaggregated for ECCE. Just the same, major capital was made available for infrastructural projects such as the building of Day Care Centres. Also, IECD as the lead institution also received funds centrally for its operation and programmes and, in addition, within its mandate, it could mobilise funds for ECCE. A range of fund raising enterprises were undertaken which included the production of promotional materials, advocating for financial and material resources from private and governmental organisations, and accessing funds from international organisations. As a result of the imminent necessity and determination to implement the National Action Plan Programme, IECD and ECCE Sectors had to resort to some of these funding arrangements.

In parallel, the National ECCE Trust Fund was launched in 2011 as the first financial mechanism for ECCE. It has a legal framework and is administered by a Board of Trustees under the Ministry of Finance, which comprises representatives from all ECCE Sectors, and non-governmental organization (Public Finances Act SI 02, 2011). The aim of the Fund is to promote, support and mobilize funds for projects and programmes for early childhood development in the country. The Fund provides grants for projects to upgrade facilities, purchase toys and educational material, and to conduct training and professional development activities for professionals and practitioners working in ECCE sectors.

The multiple funding sources have opened up avenues for financing ECCE and have had marked impact on the implementation of early childhood programmes, projects and the delivery of early childhood services. However, the issue of arriving at a national cost for ECCE and devising a coordinated funding system still remains critical.

### ***International leadership***

As the governance structure in the country was being mapped out, international organisations showed a marked interest in the development of ECCE in Seychelles. The World Bank ranked Seychelles very high in the region and quite high internationally (SABER-ECD, 2013). The report concluded that Seychelles has implemented “some important programmes and policies” in ECD and can build on these achievements. In 2017, in the First International Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education, Dr. Mmantsetsa Marope, the Director of the IBE-UNESCO commended Seychelles for its transition “to a resilient ECCE system” and designated IECD Seychelles as ‘a Best Practice Hub for ECCE’. Strong national, political and technical leadership were amongst key enablers which led to this regional success. A feasibility study carried out by the UNESCO in 2019 recognised the international leadership capacity of IECD and recommended “admittance of IECD to Category 2 Centre for ECCE under the auspices of UNESCO”. Following approval of the Cabinet of Ministers, an agreement was signed between the UNESCO (April 2021) and the Government of Seychelles (June 2021) which was expected to lead to subsequent modification in the IECD Act 2014 to expand IECD’s mandate and include its international leadership role. In December 2022, the Early Childhood Development Act, assented by the President of the Republic of Seychelles, provided IECD with the legal authority to operate as an International Centre for ECCE as part of the UNESCO’s global network of institutions of excellence in ECCE and Education. This high level achievement is consistent with the obligations of UNESCO Category 2 Centres and, furthermore, increases recognition of the regional and international leadership credentials of the Republic of Seychelles and the Institute of Early Childhood Development.

### **Policy Suggestions**

The governance of ECCE has evolved through a dynamic process. A number of factors that has had an influence on its effectiveness can be identified. These factors revolve around the political will to honour the Moscow Agreement, the institutional focus established, the collaborative planning and collective policy responsiveness, the promotion of ECCE as the foundation for early learning and development, the high profile and vast advocacy strategic actions, and the global recognition of successful ECCE leadership.

The driving impetus has been the political commitment to establish a High Level ECCE Policy Committee that can bring Line Ministries together and appoint sectoral Technical Committees empowered by a well-rounded term of reference. This supervisory authority has had tremendous impact on the direction of and momentum for change. Sectors are thus accountable for their actions and progress. It was noted in the First International Biennial Conference in ECCE that ‘High level political endorsement has been identified as the first move to advance the ECCE agenda’ in Seychelles (IECD, 2017). Choppy and Mondon (2017) considered ‘political leadership as the most important factor’ in setting the course towards best practices.



It is recommended that:

*A High Level structural arrangement which has been very effective in steering ECCE and in reinforcing the accountability and reporting process must be consolidated. At the same time, with changing political leadership and ministerial portfolio, policy advocacy for ECCE at high level need to be strongly programmed.*

The transforming force generated by IECD as an innovative institution has had overwhelming influence on the national perspective of ECCE, on the strategic journey to be taken, and the programmatic delivery of ECCE initiatives. Through an array of well-designed advocacy programmes and projects, child development issues and the importance of ECCE have permeated the whole of the society (IECD Advocacy Survey Report, 2017, 2019, 2021). Through ECCE Sector coordination and leadership, IECD has maintained consistency in the implementation and monitoring of the National Action Plan (Evaluation of the National Action Plan in ECCE, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022) which has been one of the key instruments in the improvement of ECCE. IECD has adopted a multi-sectoral coordinated approach and research-based consultative working method in addressing ECCE issues and in the development and refinement of the ECCE system. To top it all, IECD's international status has been confirmed as a consequence of its exemplary and outstanding achievements as an organization and in ECCE.

It is recommended that:

- *Advocacy programme and promotional activities has to remain central to IECD's mandate*
- *Collaborative National Action Planning has to be sustained and reinforced*
- *Application of the consultative research model should be promoted for policy development*
- *IECD engages in global leadership and initiatives in ECCE as a UNESCO Category 2 Centre*
- *Acknowledging the national and international leadership prominence of IECD the Government commits to supporting the governance and autonomy of IECD to discharge its roles the establishment and full operationalisation of the Category 2 Centre*

In spite of the success in sustaining and improving the ECCE system, financing ECCE has met with many impediments (Feasibility studies report, 2019; IECD Annual Report, 2021) funding has been uneven across sectors (NAP Evaluation Report, 2020), implementation of action plans had to resort to multiple funding strategies including soliciting funds from private organisations, applying for financial support through the NECCETF and receiving grants from funding organisations (NAP ECCE 2019 – 2020, for example). A more coherent system of funding ECCE would be preferable and would facilitate the implementation of the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023*.

The following policy suggestions should be considered:

- Firstly, financing of ECCE should reflect the government's commitment to ECCE through the fiscal budget. *Therefore, financial advocacy with the Ministry for Finance National Planning & Trade would be a key enabling factor. The advocacy programme should marshal research evidence on the economic benefits of ECCE and present some of the achievements and gaps in the funding of the National Action Plan*
- Secondly, the multi-sectoral approach which is been effectively adopted in ECCE needs to be reflected in the allocation of funds. *Within the Programme Performance Based Budget (PPBB) being implemented, all ECCE Sectors should have a Programme dedicated to ECCE.*
- Thirdly, *tthe Financial Sector, in collaboration with IECD and the assistance of other partners, including international technical expertise, would need to appoint a committee to develop a system to cost ECCE in each sector and increase the national budget allocation dedicated to ECCE, and establish an inter-sector coordinating funding mechanism*



## Quality Access

Seychelles has been commended for its excellent record of educational access for all. However, there was limited access for children, in the 0-3 age group, to child care facilities not only in terms of number but also quality, such as infrastructural, standard-setting, and programmatic. Moreover, there was a need for quality access that would 'address the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantage children.' (SF\_ECCE, 2011) The following are notable **achievements**:

- Regulatory functions have been established for the registration of home-based child care services through a legislation (IECD, National Standards for Childminding Regulation, 2016)
- By 2020 the Government has built four new child care centres and upgraded three others. Moreover, an audit was undertaken in all centres to establish level of functioning and review standards
- An inclusive Special Needs Programme has been implemented to equip children in their early years with adaptive aids
- Individualised Education Programme has been trialled within mainstream classes
- Financial support has been provided to parents with children in early child care services in 2015 using a means-testing approach and was reviewed to cover all children enrolled in registered child care services in 2020.

## Critical Issues

### *Regulating early child care services*

Because of the overwhelming demand for early child care services, a proliferation of diverse childminding settings had arisen. Home-based child minding services were small business enterprises spread all over the three main islands. They were operated informally and not controlled by any organisation. This presented a daunting challenge in setting up a regulatory system.

IECD, mandated to regulate home-based child minding services, experimented with its diagnostic-research-consultative model. Information from district administrators, regional and local government officers were gathered to identify and locate childminders. A research project was designed to study the conditions and quality of child minding services in Seychelles. Observation and questionnaire data were collected from 147 Childminders (the whole of the population of child minders caring for 4 or more children), parent questionnaire were administered to 763 parents whose children were enrolled in those child minding establishments, supplementary data was obtained from 52 Assistant Childminders and focus group interviews of childminders, parents and partners from key sectors. The findings from the research created a platform for policy consultation and led to the multi-agency collaboration in the development of standards for home-based child care services. Guided by the legal framework and the Board of Directors, IECD successfully set up the regulatory and coordinated implementation mechanism, including the relevant instruments and documentation. This model has been adapted for centre-based child care services.

### *Infrastructural standards for child care centres*

The Community Development Sector (as previously named) had the mandate to increase the number of centre facilities at community level, and substantial budgetary allocation had been made. However, with increased awareness of quality access it was important to establish infrastructural standards (SABER Country Report 2013). In a recent study (SEED Institute, 2019) it was noted that many centres need 'basic improvement in infrastructure'. IECD (2019) in its assessment of the characteristics of child care centres identified three types of facilities: 'Rented Private Facilities', 'Owner Private Facilities' and 'Government Facilities' with less than half of those facilities being government-owned. This makes it even more pressing for the government to set infrastructural standards for child care centres that would be mandatory for private organisations.

The Community Development Sector in collaboration with IECD and international partners produced a Standard Day Care Centre Building Design. It took into consideration site and community issues, interior design and space, external design and play elements, architectural design and child-friendly facilities. This was a breakthrough in the construction of such centres. The design was meant to be used as a guide to support the development of facilities that are child and family-oriented, environmentally safe and secure, that would promote healthy growth, that are aesthetically pleasing, functional in their design, and cost effective to operate.

### ***Special education needs and disabilities***

In 2013 the Rehabilitation Services of the Ministry of Health conducted a survey to collect representative statistical data on children aged 3½ - 8 years with special needs in the country. It was found that about 48 percent of the children were having difficulties at school. These range from specific academic learning problems to sensory, perceptual, communication and attention problem. It seems evident that there should be increased delivery of special needs programmes.

Providing access to specialised aids and adaptive equipment for children became a priority concern for the Rehabilitation Services. They surmounted the procurement and financial challenge, partnered with the Ministry of Education and implemented the Special Aids Programme for the forty children from the School for the Exceptional Child, mainstream schools, and home. Special Needs Teachers were trained, and participating parents were sensitised and supported. An evaluation of the programme provided personalised positive results of improved performance in communication and daily life activities.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education initiated a monitoring programme to trace children's progress in reading and mathematical literacy for all pupils attending primary and crèche education. An intervention plan which included Individualised Education Programme (IEP) was devised in consultation with class teachers for pupils performing below the set target. Five thousand children participated and intervention was programmed. The results indicated that through the intervention, improvement in performance has been recorded for a group of children who were performing below target. One of the limitations of the programme was the delayed Special Needs Education specialist input and the inconsistencies across classes in implementing the IEPs.

### ***Equitable support***

With the free education system, schemes to support the social needs of children in formal schooling have long been institutionalised. With reference to early childhood, this would apply to children in crèche (government pre-schools) and the first two years of primary schooling but not to children in child care services. To facilitate participation in early child care settings a Government Financial Assistance Programme using cash transfer system (a recommendation of the World Bank, SABER-ECD Seychelles Report, 2013), managed by IECD was reviewed and established. The programme included two financial schemes: to support provisions in childminding establishment and to support parents with children in child care services. The assistance to childminders will be discussed as the workforce conditions are examined later on in this analysis.

The support to parents consisted of a monthly cash investment of SCR750 for each child in registered child care services and the transfer was made directly to the manager of the service. The sum was deducted from the fees parents paid for the service thus making early child care services more affordable. This marked a major step in Government's investment in non-formal education and extending access to ECCE. The number of beneficiaries increased exponentially from 480 children in 2019 to 2473 children in 2022 (IECD Annual report, 2022).

## Policy Suggestions

The establishment of standards for home-based early child care services has been a major accomplishment in the improvement of services for children in the 0-3 age group and the financial assistance has had a positive influence on accessibility. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- *The research-diffusion-collaborative-multiagency approach that has become an example of good practice to assure high quality ECCE through the regulatory environment should be consolidated*
- *The financial assistance programme which has a direct impact on the child care service should be maintained and expanded as it can contribute significantly in accessing quality early child care services*

Targeted Special Needs Education strategy has included two groups of children. The successful implementation of the Special Aids Project has been encouraging especially since it was systematically assessed with very good results. On the other hand, the Individualised Education Programme has encountered implementation difficulties. It is proposed that:

- *The Special Aids Project is extended to increase participation and to maintain the monitoring and reporting system established*
- *The Ministry of Education appoints a consultative committee to ensure implementation of the special education programme in crèche (pre -school). This will include supervision, teacher-support, monitoring and reporting*

Universality of quality access has been expanded by investing in all children in registered child care facilities. It is recommended that:

- *Increasing participation in the non-formal sector of education is pursued to promote equity.*

## Early Learning and Development

The importance of creating a stimulating nurturing early learning environment cannot be overemphasised considering the wealth of scientific evidence which has accrued over the years. From the Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (2011), strategic programmatic, diagnostic and preventative actions have ensued. Specific major achievements can be listed:

- The Seychelles Early Learning Framework (SELF) was produced as the guiding curriculum document
- Early Learning Programmes (in English and the Mother-tongue) for early child care services have been developed and implemented
- Early Learning Readiness Assessment for pre-schooling have been designed and implemented
- A Suitability Check Programme for home-based early child care workers has been instituted
- The Risk Indicator Framework has been implemented
- Selected early diagnostic assessment in healthcare has been introduced

## Critical Issues

### *The Seychelles Early Learning Framework*

With the growing interest in early stimulation and early learning and the limited coverage in the National Curriculum Framework (2013) the Ministry of Education carried out extensive consultancy work to draft The Seychelles Early Learning Framework. It has been developed within the educational policies and educational context of Seychelles. Inclusion, Special Needs Education, family and community participation have been addressed. Five chapters have been devoted to the concept of early learning and the facilitation of early learning activities and programmes. The nine learning areas of the National Curriculum Framework have been reconstituted as six learning areas: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communication and Language Development, Early Mathematics, Arts and Creativity, Knowledge and Understanding of the World, to provide a comprehensive framework for early learning from conception. It is a key instrument for the realisation of learning programmes and for the convergence of knowledge on child development, pedagogy, learning resources, training of early childhood care workers, and early learning assessment of children.

## Early learning

Progressive efforts have been made to design early learning programmes for centre-based and home-based child care services. For centre-based services the programme was reviewed in line with the SELF. For home-based services a preliminary programme consistent with the Early Learning and Interaction Standard and SELF was outlined. This subsequently led to mounting a comprehensive early learning programme.

### Programme for centre-based early child care services

In 2016 the Ministry of Education piloted an Early Learning Programme based on the SELF in all centre-based early child care services and managers of those services and their assistants (82 altogether) were trained. It was found that early childhood workers were positive about the design, content and clarity of the programme although there were interactive instructional difficulties expressed for the pre-mathematics learning areas. At the same time, a profile containing information on the Early Learning Development Areas was devised for each individual child and an early learning assessment tool and guidelines to facilitate the transition of children to pre-school (crèche) were tentatively proposed.

Table 2: Percentage of children demonstrating attitude, knowledge and skills as per five early ELDA

Year	Well-being	Identity & Belonging	Communication & Language Development	Pre-Maths	Art & Creativity
	%	%	%	%	%
2017	90.2	81.8	76.0	60.0	72.0
2018	95.0	84.7	81.7	71.2	81.3

\*Source: Ministry of Education

In 2018, The Early Learning Programme was implemented in all centres. This programme has proved to be quite successful in improving the quality of early learning. In an evaluation of the programme it was found from the change data that there has been improvement in children's performance on the five Early Learning and Development Areas (ELDAs) addressed in the SELF (Table 2) and there were more children who had reached the highest level of performance in 2018 than their counterpart in 2017 (Table 3).

Table 3: Percentage of children by level in day care centres

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
	%	%	%
Day Care 2007	13.0	45.7	41.4
Day Care 2008	11.1	35.3	53.6

\*Source: Ministry of Education

#### Note: Achievement levels:

Level 1- Children begin to develop a sense of belonging and identity, and communication and language skills, along gross and fine motor skills

Level 2 - Children begin to develop pre- numeracy skills and more complex communication and language skills as well as engaging in arts and creative activities

Level 3 - Children's understanding of pre numeracy and their artistic and creative skills become more complex

### Early learning readiness

IECD embraced the technical, methodological, administrative and partnership arrangements associated with this evaluation of the Early Learning Programme to institutionalise early readiness assessment for children not only in non-formal early childhood institutions but also in home settings with parents, guardians or other caregivers (IECD 2021). This is a major step in attending to the transition of children to crèche (pre-school) or formal early childhood education.

The results of the readiness assessment for the three consecutive years have been presented in Table 4. It can be seen that, on the whole, over eighty percent of children are performing at level 2 and 3. Moreover, the number of children performing at the highest level has increased by about twenty-three percent with a reduction of about half of the children performing at Level 1. This could be a sign that some of the early learning intervention and other initiatives put in place, have been remarkably effective but, more importantly, it provides definite evidence of crèche (pre-school) readiness of the large majority of children (levels 2 and 3).

Table 4: Percentage of children at different levels of readiness

<b>Levels</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>7.4</b>
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>38.9</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>14.5</b>
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>49.1</b>	<b>69.5</b>	<b>72.8</b>

Source: Institute of Early Childhood Development

Note: the levels have been defined as follows:

Level 1 - Emergent

Level 2 - Transitional

Level 3 - Advanced

### Programme for home-based child care services

In 2021, IECD embarked on a major project to produce a programme for home-based early child care workers. This programme, in line with the SELF and parallel to the Early Learning Programme in child care centres, is aimed at providing early stimulation for children and using developmentally appropriate material to promote learning. Educational materials have been developed and early child care workers have been trained to implement early learning activities and more important still to adopt a child-centred pedagogical and play-based approach. This project in collaboration with UNESCO under the Participation Programme has the potential to revitalise early learning and has contributed to the excellent readiness results described above. Moreover, it has motivated early child care workers to engage children in developmental activities (National Action Plan ECCE 2021-2022).

### Early learning environment in crèche (pre-school)

The learning environment in crèche was also an important pre-occupation. In the Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (2011), the limited resources and manipulative materials in pre-schools were noted and the need to develop and revise core standards was advocated. The setting up of the early learning environment is one of the key practices elaborated in The Seychelles Early Learning Framework (2014) as the fundamental baseline for education activities, wellness of the child and a boost for relationship and experiences. IECD partnered with the Ministry of Education to undertake a research

study to clarify the provision of facilities and resources associated with the early learning environment in pre-school settings.

This was a ground breaking study. An elaborate checklist to encompass the whole of the early learning environment and questionnaires to seek the views of teachers and school leaders on the quality of their early learning environment were piloted. The main study was undertaken in 108 classes in all 24 crèches. The results indicated that urgent redress concerning the physical environment and the availability of core learning resources was necessary. The results were shared with Ministry of Education although some of the recommendations have yet to be implemented.

### **Early detection and intervention**

The detection of developmental difficulties and early prevention of health and social problems have received considerable attention. Two ECCE Sectors, Health and Social have designed projects and made concerted efforts at implementation.

The Health Sector sought to strengthen the maternal child health through the introduction of early health assessment tests: universal acoustic emission screening (NAP ECCE 2013-2014) and pulse oximetry, for early detection of critical congenital heart disease in new born (2017-2018); implementing health screening for children enrolling into crèche (pre-schools) (NAP ECCE 2015-2016); re-introducing universal neonatal screening for Inborn Errors of Metabolism (IEMs) (NAP ECCE 2017-2018, 2019-2020, 2020-2021).

Moreover, monitoring of developmental outcome and the promotion of healthy practices has also been part of preventative measures. The study of the nutritional status of children in the first 1000 days of life and oral health status of early childhood children (0-8) (NAP ECCE 2017 -2018) have provided valuable information for follow-up actions. The design of a profiling system from birth onwards that can be shared with parents (NAP ECCE 2013- 2014, 2019-2020) could be useful for parental information on the health status and developmental progress of their children. In addition the Personal Child Health Record (PCHR) Booklet which links children, professionals and parents to developmental information on individual children promises to be an effective resource in the maternal and child health programme.

Two child protection tools, the Risk Indicator Framework (RIF) and Suitability Check, have been developed. RIF is as an early detection mechanism to work towards the prevention of child abuse, ill treatment and other factors impinging on the development of the child. Suitability Check is intended to prevent children from being exposed to early childhood workers who pose unjustifiable risk. The RIF initiative which was launched in 2014 and reactivated (NAP 2015-2016 ECCE) to increase its use through the commitment of partner agencies is being implemented. On the other hand, the Suitability Check mechanism has been effective and by 2016, "The Working with Children Suitability Check" was institutionalised for childminders as a key prevention and monitoring system in the Child Protection Services.

### **Policy Suggestions**

In the Childminding Study (IECD, 2013), it was found that the provision for early learning was inadequate with poor educational resources and learning environment. The neuroscience of early stimulation in child development and the importance of creating a facilitative environment occupied much of the discussion in the First International Biennial Conference on ECCE (IECD, 2017). SEED Institute (2019) commented on the lack of curriculum direction in child care services.

Thus learning programmes for specific early childhood institutions need to be scaled up. It is recommended that:

- *With the expected rolling out of the early learning programme in child care services the early readiness assessment (which has become established) can be used as a system for programme monitoring*



- As the regulation of centre-based child care services is being undertaken by IECD, the curriculum in those establishments will need revisiting
- IECD as the new regulator for crèche (pre-school) will need to engage the Ministry of Education and Private Schools to address issues related to the early learning environment, learning resources and the setting up of learning centres

Child protection services include foster care juvenile courts, residential care facilities, guardianship, child and family support. Through the expansion and successful implementation of procedural standards such as the RIF and Suitability Check system for early childhood workers, it is recommended that the Sector engages in programmatic action for Child Protection and promote child rights by:

- Enhancing child-friendly environmental facilities (NAP ECCE 2018-2019)
- Monitoring standards in children's residential facilities (NAP ECCE 2020-2021)

The Maternal and Child Health Services deliver a range of programmes for the child and parent. Pertinent indicators on child and maternal health can provide some useful pointers for discussion

Table 5: Child Health Indicators

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Immunisation rate (HB3, DP, measles %)</b>	<b>98.0</b>	<b>99.0</b>	<b>99.0</b>	<b>97.0</b>	<b>99.0</b>
<b>Neonatal mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>8.4</b>
<b>Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>11.4</b>
<b>Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>13.2</b>
<b>Low birth-weight babies (% of birth)</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	--	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Prevalence of overweight (% children under 5)</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>9.7</b>	--	<b>8.8</b>
<b>Prevalence of stunting (% of children under 5) 5</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>7.4</b>	--	<b>7.6</b>

Source Ministry of Health, Seychelles: Annual Health Sector Performance Reports, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022  
Available at: <http://www.health.gov.sc/index.php/reports/>

### Child health

The figures in Table 5 present a very good picture of the health status of children. In fact Seychelles has been acclaimed for its high early child development health performance (IBE-UNESCO, 2017, for example). Except for the prevalence of overweight which is almost twice the global WHO comparison figures averaging 5.7%, all the other figures have been reported by the Ministry of Health as having met the SDG target (MOH, 2020) with almost 100% immunisation rate far overreaching. However, for neonatal, infant, and children mortality rates although the figures are decreasing from 2018 to 2020, it has been reported that the National Health Service target has not been reached. This would suggest that efforts are being made to continue to improve the child health service.

Just the same, the growth monitoring and developmental screening which forms part of the Well- Baby Clinic may need further attention. In a pilot study (NAP 2017-2018 ECCE) anthropomorphic measurement was calibrated to meet WHO requirement. In spite of the small sample size concerns were raised about the number of children who were stunted and obese in this group of children (6 to 24 months) attending well-baby clinics. Also, as for developmental screening through the use of the Denver Development Screening Test (DDST), in the Monitoring Study of child outcome, concerns were expressed about the conditions,

proficiency and recording in the administration of the DDST. Moreover, these data were not compiled for analysis to track children developmental outcome.

It is suggested that:

- *In strengthening the child health programme, special attention is given to monitoring growth, wellness, and child development outcome*

### Maternal health

The data on maternal health in Table 6 can be viewed from a qualitative perspective. ‘Antenatal coverage’ (99%), ‘Birth attended by skilled physician’ (99.5%), ‘Coverage of prevention of mother-child transmission of HIV’ (89%) are indicators which provide evidence of good basic maternal health care. The rise in ‘Maternal mortality ratio’ was noted as “a direct consequence of the severe COVID-19 infection” (MOH, 2020). Nevertheless, the last three indicators referring to the nutritional aspect of maternal health may need further elaboration.

Table 6: Maternal Health Indicators

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)</b>	<b>60.6</b>	<b>121.2</b>	<b>62.3</b>	<b>64.4</b>	<b>120.1</b>
<b>Birth attended by skilled health staff (%)</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>98.4</b>	<b>98.8</b>	<b>99.5</b>	<b>99.0</b>
<b>Antenatal coverage (4+ visits) (%)</b>	<b>99.0</b>	<b>99.0</b>	<b>99.0</b>	<b>99.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Coverage of prevention of mother-child transmission of HIV (%)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>83.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	--
<b>Mother exclusively breastfeed babies for 6 months (%)</b>	<b>32.2</b>	--	<b>20.9</b>	--	--
<b>Prevalence of anaemia amongst pregnant women (%)</b>	<b>27.3*</b>	<b>27.4*</b>	<b>27.5*</b>	--	--
<b>Attendance of nutrition session for pregnant women (number)</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>409</b>	--	--

Source: Ministry of Health, Seychelles: Annual Health Sector Performance Reports, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

Available at: <http://www.health.gov.sc/index.php/reports/>

\* Source World Bank - Humanitarian Data Exchange

Available at: <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/world-bank-health-indicators-for-seychellesAA>

### Breastfeeding

In 2012 as part of the World Breastfeeding Trend Initiative (WBTI), available data indicated that exclusive breastfeeding rate was 2%. By 2013 through a promotion campaign as part of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), the rate had gone up by 15 percentage points (IECD NAP 2013- 2014 Evaluation Report). As it can be seen in the Table 5, by 2017 the rate had almost doubled (32%). Unfortunately, there seemed to be a downward trend - at least 10 percentage points by 2020. Moreover, recent information from the presentation in the ceremony “Launching of the Breast Feeding Week” (October, 2022), it was indicated that the six month exclusive breastfeeding rate has been drastically reduced.

The Seychelles Food-based Dietary Guidelines (2020) emphasised the benefits of six months exclusive breast feeding. More information is needed to understand the breastfeeding situation. It is suggested that:

- *A study to promote, support and monitor breastfeeding practices should be initiated*

### Anaemia

The rate of anaemia amongst pregnant women is considered high in relation to WHO standards and it seems to be increasing. In a study to develop indicators in the Health Sector (NAP 2017-2018) it was found that the proportion of anaemic pregnant women were as high as 57.4%. It has been reported that over 500 patients attended nutrition sessions in 2021 (MOH, 2021). The trend from the last row of figures in



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Table 6 would suggest that about 80 percent of the clients are pregnant women. This is commendable. It is suggested that:

- *An informative study of the nutritional status of pregnant women and access to supplementation and nutritional intervention is undertaken.*

From the evidence that have been gathered it is becoming apparent that the clinical aspect of the service is very good but the nutritional and psychological aspects may need more attention. It is recommended that:

- *The Maternal Health Programme is strengthened with best practice inputs for the following components:*
  - Nutritional support and intervention, including breastfeeding
  - Counselling, educational, and psychological support

## Families and Communities

The involvement of parents and the community is at the heart of ECCE and has received considerable attention in the SF\_ECCE (2011). Strategic actions to support parents and families and ‘establish enabling environments in households and communities’ has been emphasised in the Tashkent Declaration (2022). Specific **achievements** in community provisions and programming, and parenting initiatives have been noted:

- Community-based programmes have been developed to complement institutional curricular activities
- Innovation to provide diversified community facilities to meet the expectation of children and parents have been introduced
- A parenting programme has been renewed and evaluated

## Critical Issues

As part of the multi-sectoral feature of ECCE, the Community and Sports Sectors (previously, as part of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Community Development and Sports) recognised the importance of extending children’s learning experiences through the delivery of services and programmes through formal and informal modes. On the other hand, the Social Affairs Sector responded to the educational challenge of improving parental practices, giving parents adequate information on early childhood, and supporting parents in child rearing. Considering the necessary engagement of parents, families and the community those sectors have made deliberate contributions to the enhancement of ECCE provisions.

The Community Life Programmes has been extended to ensure participation of children in the early years. This has involved three main sub-programmes: “Neighbourhood Recreational Activities” (NRA) with a range of options to provide for the 5-15 age group children; “Kids Gathering” Project to support home-based child care programmes by increasing children’s accessibility to quality learning and developmentally appropriate district-based facilities; the “Baby Gym” Programme designed for children aged 4 months to 9 years who are taught the fundamentals of movement and physical activity by physical movement experts. Moreover, the Community Sector has been engaged in projects to provide access to children and parents, and to upgrade outdoor play areas.

Table 7: Holiday Special Activities Organised by District (April and August 2013)

District	Activities Organised	No. Participants	EC. Participants
Anse Aux Pins	No activities organized		
Anse Boileau	Craft and Cooking Ateliers, Educational & Spiritual activities, Sports and Indoor Games	60	40
Anse Etoile	No activities organized		
Anse Royale	Discover your District, Educational Games, Sports, Drawing & Reading, Exchange inter District	40	5
Anse Cap	No activities organized		
Baie Lazare	Flower making atelier, Sports, Educational Games	60	None
Beau Vallon	No activities organized		
Bel Air	No activities organized		
Bel Ombre	Flower making atelier, craft, Traditional Dance, Discover your District	60	8
Cascade	Visit, Informative talks, outings	60	10
English River	Moutya Atelier, Art & Craft, Picking of shells on the beach, Exchange visits	50	5
Glacis	Visits, Craft Atelier	25	None
Grand Anse Mahe	Visits, Tree Planting, Swimming, Cooking Atelier, Sports	40	10
Grand Anse Praslin	Visits, Nature Walk, Traditional Dance & Cooking Atelier, Tree Planting	50	None
La Digue	Camping, Environment Activities	80	5
Les Mamelles	Cooking Atelier, Indoor Games, Exchange visits, Swimming	50	10
Mont Buxton	Film show, Educational Talk, Picnic, Visits	55	10
Mont Fleuri	Sports & Educational Activities, Swimming, Exchange visits, Cooking Atelier, Glass Painting, Camping	110	12
Perseverance 1	Sports, Tree Planting, Excursions, Visits	40	None
Perseverance 2	Visits, Cooking Ateliers,	60	10
Plaisance	Sports, Craft Atelier, Talk by Social Worker, Visits, Story Telling, Reading	50	8
Pointe Larue	Craft, Visits, Reading, Story Telling, Games	70	10
Port Glaud	Craft Atelier, Indoor & Educational Games	40	3
Roche Caiman	Visits, Cooking Atelier, Indoor Games	60	None
St Louis	No activities organized		
Takamaka	Sports, Camping, Educational & Spiritual activities	40	15

Source: Ministry of Social Affairs, Community Development and Sports (2013)

### ***Neighbourhood Recreational Activities (NRA)***

The NRA Programme for April and Aug 2013 has been reproduced in Table 6 to show the range, coverage and participation. It can be gleaned from the table that an array of activities was on offer for children. They included Arts and Crafts, Sports, Dance, Cooking, Indoor Games, Environmental Activities, Spiritual Events, Flower Making, Educational Visits, Film shows, Cooking, Educational Games, Story Telling, Talks, and Excursions. Almost 90 percent of the 27 “districts” were making provisions for those activities and the participation rate was very good averaging to about 50 – 60 children for each district (NAP Evaluation Report, 2013-2014).

### ***“Kids Gathering”***

A project entitled “Kids Gathering” was piloted in 6 districts. It entailed negotiating with district personnel to support home-based early child care workers to allow children free access to a variety of developmentally appropriate learning materials and toys in the District Community Centre. It was implemented in two districts and three child care workers and a total of 40 children accessed the service on a weekly basis.

An evaluation of the project was carried out. Early childhood workers expressed satisfaction with the level of support from the District Administration Offices. They noted positive effects: they observed that “some children were able to grasped objects more effectively, played well together and learned to share; understood and arranged puzzles and had lots of fun to the extent that they did not want to leave the centre and looked forward to going there every week.” (NAP Evaluation Report, 2015-2016)

### ***“Baby Gym”***

In this programme activities are specifically designed for gross motor development, to increase flexibility and strength, muscle control and coordination, balance and rhythm. Moreover, the specialised instructional methods and lively peer interaction also has personal and socialisation benefits for the children. The programme covered 11 pre-school establishments in Central, South and North Region of Mahé, and it has been introduced on Praslin (one of the inner islands). In 2014, about 350 children in their early years in private early child care centres and 150 children from state institutions attended the sessions (NAP Evaluation Report 2015- 2016).

In 2017, the facilities were upgraded and a monitoring structure was set up. One hundred-and-twenty children from five pre-school and one home-based early child care worker participated in the programme. It was reported that post assessment on the five basic skills, namely, “jumping”, “balancing”, “crawling”, “rolling” and “scaling” at the end of 2017 showed that there has been an improvement in performance with over 95 percent of children rated as “Good” or “Very Good”. Also information gathered from 30 parents who participated with their children indicated that parents were very satisfied with the programme (NAP Evaluation Report, 2017- 2018).

### ***Providing community-based outdoor play facilities***

This has been a community project with the aim of promoting the use of safe and child friendly district playgrounds. Playgrounds have been constructed or upgraded and refurbished. Thirteen playgrounds have been made accessible to children and their parents. A range of activities targeting community, school or child care institutions have been organised. It has been reported that over three-hundred children have made use of the playgrounds (NAP Evaluation Report, (2019-2020).

### ***Parenting education***

In 2013, the Social Affairs Sector in collaboration with the Health Sector developed an ante-natal parenting manual for trainers and parents with the aim of preparing parent-to-be for the arrival of the new baby or babies in the family. The manual addresses some of the psychological impact of pregnancy and having a baby; the importance of nutrition and the dangers of certain substances. It also addresses issues of

budgeting, stress management, communication and bonding, and preparation for hospital. It suggests active participatory adult learning methods and the manual was intended to be used as a reference and resource material. The programme has been quite promising with a good level of participation and an attendance of 873 females and 212 males.

In 2015 the programme was extended with a post-delivery parenting manual. The following topics were highlighted

- Communicating between parents, babies and other family members
- Changing responsibilities and relationships, skills on decision making
- Physical and emotional changes, reactions to birth and motherhood & support
- Facts about Feeding and weaning
- Gender
- Abuse
- Child safety
- Coping with a new baby, approaches to baby care (patterns of behaviour & routines)
- Role of father

Table 7: Comparison between the group attending complete sessions and those attending partial session

Behaviours	Groups	
	Complete	Partial
	%	%
<b>Play with my children</b>	<b>87.3</b>	<b>82.9</b>
<b>Listen more to my children now</b>	<b>88.6</b>	<b>99.3</b>
<b>Breastfed my child</b>	<b>88.6 ns</b>	<b>82.9ns</b>
<b>Avoided alcohol when breastfeeding</b>	<b>82.6</b>	<b>79.1</b>
<b>Discuss issues openly with my partner</b>	<b>75.2</b>	<b>66.7</b>
<b>Budget and manage my expenses well</b>	<b>84.6</b>	<b>80.0</b>
<b>Prepare simple nutritious meals for the family</b>	<b>85.6</b>	<b>74.3</b>
<b>Balance in my everyday life</b>	<b>76.5</b>	<b>70.5</b>
<b>Take care of me mentally</b>	<b>79.2</b>	<b>72.4</b>
<b>Realise that i am connected to others</b>	<b>86.6</b>	<b>81.9</b>
<b>Protect my child from all types of abuse</b>	<b>86.6</b>	<b>84.8</b>
<b>Use other punishments rather than beating</b>	<b>70.5</b>	<b>74.3</b>
<b>Take care of my children</b>	<b>89.9</b>	<b>82.9</b>
<b>Have FEWER accidents at home</b>	<b>86.6</b>	<b>77.1</b>

N=401

Source: Social Affairs Sector (2013)

An attempt was made at monitoring the two programmes (Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, 2021). A convenient sample of 98 parents who attended the parenting sessions and represented the 5 geographical regions was drawn. Individual interviews, self-administered questionnaire and observation were carried out. Analysis of the pre and post test results pointed to change in knowledge and perception of the participants, particularly on the use of alcohol, use of drugs and medication, and the importance of communicating with the unborn child (NAP Evaluation Report, 2017- 2018)

In 2020, a more systematic monitoring and evaluation structure to gauge the effectiveness of the Parenting Education Programme which had been operational since 2013 was undertaken by retrospectively assessing the life situation of participants and that of their children. A comparative survey model was implemented on a sample of 400 parents who had either participated fully or partially in the programme and a control group of non-participants who had children of the same age as those of the participating parents. Participants responded to questions on knowledge and skills acquired through the programme, their experience of the programme, and their current child rearing practices. Non-participants responded to the latter only. Contact details of parents were recorded and individual interviews were carried out in the home.

Substantial evidence was found to show that the programme had been fairly effective. Participants recalled about two-thirds of the topics covered in the programme, almost all of them admitted that they “enjoyed” the sessions, and they would “recommend the sessions to others”. Seventy-five percent of the respondents felt that their parenting skills had improved as a result of the programme and, over ninety percent said that the sessions have helped their partners to be better persons. Comparative data (Table 7) indicated that parents who followed the programme were better prepared for parenthood and were able to create a nurturing environment for their children.

### Policy Suggestions

Concerted efforts have been made and partnership has been built to involve families and communities in ECCE. This is a reflection of national commitment to community-based programmes and the crucial role of parents in the care and education of children. The implementation of these programmes is a definite step taken to improve the quality of ECCE.

The Community Sector has introduced holidays and after school programmes for children to support play-based learning activities for childminders, encourage NGO’s and parental participation, and promote the use of child-friendly zones in the community. However, implementation has been limited due to: facilitation support, district level knowledge and awareness of ECCE issues; interaction and consultation between lead agency and partners; and management of facilities and monitoring of activities.

It is suggested that consideration should be given to:

- *Formalising a committee of administrators and facilitators at district level to re-launch the NRA Programme and encourage children especially those in the early years to enrol*
- *Strengthening coordination between the sector, district administration and service providers such as early child care service providers and teachers and reviewing the “Kids Gathering” Programme*
- *Planning, implementing and assessing a variety of community engagement strategies and facilities, and building on what has been achieved so far*
- *Exchanging information regularly with the community, service providers and parents on programme development and progress*

The Sports Sector has successfully implemented programmes for early stimulation and physical development. This is an excellent specialist programme that would broaden children’s experiences and engage parents. However two issues need to be addressed: increase participation and monitoring. It is recommended that the Sports Sector form a Technical Committee to:



- *Review the role of the programme in ECCE, its sustainability, the implications of decentralisation for expanded access and more equitable delivery*
- *Design a systematic monitoring system to document the effect of the programme on the physical and personal development of children and the engagement of parents in the development of their children*

From the evidence thus far, the Parenting Education Programme promises to be a major programmatic instrument to support early childhood development, promote mother and child health, recognise the father's role, improve child rearing practices, empower parents and strengthen family relationships. However, there are implicating issues which have been very well captured in this timely evaluation of the programme with recommendations which have been adopted in this review.

**Salience** – The programme has been operating since 2013 and from the high participation rate in 2013, the rate dropped dramatically by 2019. It was noted that the sampling list contained very few participants who had attended the programme in 2019. Moreover, the reason for non-attendance was related to lack of information. *This programme needs to be given a very high profile. On-going advocacy campaign using Television, print and electronic media should be launched and continuously updated to increase the visibility of this programme.*

**Linkage** – It was noted that the programme complements the ante and post-natal programme in the Health Sector. Since it has been revealed that there are gaps in that programme, it is not clear how the two programmes link with one another. *It is suggested that the two sectors, and perhaps with other partners such as NGOs, faith-based organisation should collaborate to develop an integrated programme.*

**Monitoring** – Gathering evidence on the effectiveness of a parenting programme can be quite daunting. However, operating a programme without specific monitoring structure can lead to routinised delivery with no attention to outcome. *It is recommended that a systematic monitoring structure should be set up to document the effectiveness of the programme and to strengthen parenting capacity by helping parents to achieve the knowledge, attitudes and practices necessary for child rearing.*

**Collaboration** – The programme is led and coordinated by the Social Affairs Sector in collaboration with the Health Sector delivering the programme. With some of the recent changes, *it is suggested that a multi-disciplinary committee from the Health, Social Affairs and Family Sectors and other partners should be set up. Policy forum would be organised to discuss the findings of the survey with a view to develop a national framework for parenting education. The framework should build on existing programmes, enhance their quality and connectedness and take into consideration some of the recommendations from this review.*

## Research and Data Availability

The availability of ECD data has been flagged as a weakness in the ECCE system in Seychelles (see Seychelles SABER\_ECD country report, 2013, for example) and tremendous efforts have been invested by IECD to set up a data management system for ECCE. In parallel with that research has become one of the essential tools in developing the ECCE system Seychelles. The following **achievements** highlight the progress which has been made:

- The central positioning of research methodology has been instrumental in developing and sustaining the ECCE system
- A data collection and management system has been established and is being diffused

## Critical Issues

Research has helped to advance the ECCE agenda. It has traced policy directions for home-based early child care services (IECD, 2013). It has generated policy dialogue, for example, in establishing development milestone of children in the early years (Ministry of Health, 2016), assessing the learning environment in

crèches (Ministry of Education, 2018), evaluating the parenting programme (Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, 2021).

Research has become an indispensable strategy in monitoring and reporting. Research methodology has been an integral part of the quality assurance process in developing standards for home and centre-based early child care workers (IECD, 2016, 2021), monitoring standards in children's home, (Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, 2022), and assessing early learning readiness (IECD, 2020-2022). Technical research strategies have been adapted to construct WHO growth indicators and initiate a nutritional study to provide preliminary information on early dietary habits of children (Ministry of Health, 2018). A pre-post research design to measure positive change in dental health intervention programme has been utilised (Ministry of Health, 2020). Research surveys have been undertaken to evaluate the impact of advocacy programmes (IECD, 2017, 2019, 2021) and to promote community participation (Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs, 2022).

### **Data management system**

The need to improve information sharing and information structures has given rise to the design of a data management study in all ECCE Sectors. The processes of situational analysis, development of Indicator Framework and Procedural Manual, standardising procedures for data collection at the point of service delivery, centralising the data and building capacity to collect and analyse the data has been piloted and successfully implemented in the Health Sector (2016).

This project conceived by IECD was a welcome initiative which demonstrated fruitful international collaboration with effective national results. IECD received technical assistance from the World Bank to seek financial support and to implement the project. The success of the project was shared in the second international conference on ECCE theme 'Big Data for Small Children' (2019). Moreover, the model is being replicated in the Education (2021) and Social Affairs Sector (2022).

Collaborative research is crucial for Seychelles to have credible data in ECCE and to be on par with other countries when comparing the country's early childhood development system against evidence based global standards using detailed information on ECCE. Moreover, it will enable Seychelles to earmark areas in ECCE that need immediate attention, and to identify opportunities for further development.

### **Policy Suggestions**

The importance of data to support, report on, improve, and sustain the ECCE system cannot be overemphasised. Concerns had been expressed about the lack of available data and Seychelles had a moderate rating (World Bank SABER, 2013). It is clear that great strides have been made to carry out research activities, generate or use data to set baseline, assess plans, communicate important status information, measure ECCE development outcome, and expand on indicators of quality.

It is recommended that:

- *There is a strong investment in adequate technological tools to collect, process and analyse data*
- *The pace of research is maintained. It may be necessary to increase research capacity within sectors and at IECD and to extend research partnership*
- *The data management project is sustained. It may be necessary to devise follow-up plans to ensure systematic data collection and deepened analysis*

## Workforce

Effective ECCE provision is dependent on a workforce ‘with the right combination of skills attitudes and behaviour, and characteristics that functions within a supportive environment’ (National Research Council, 2012). The ‘recruitment, qualifications and working conditions of’ of early childhood workers coupled with a regulatory framework is strongly emphasised in the ‘Tashkent Declaration’ (2022) as a means to strengthen ECCE systems. In Seychelles, policy action and specialised programmes to expand and support early childhood workforce has been a progressive challenge from training and professional development, certification and professionalisation. This has been supported by an effective quality assurance service to monitor level of compliance. Major **achievements** can be summarised as follows:

- Pre-registration and sensitisation training programme and continuous professional development sessions have been introduced by IECD for home-based child care workers
- A certificate programme for child care workers has been developed by SITE and IECD, and accredited by the Seychelles Qualification Authority (SQA)
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Mode for the delivery of the programme has also been established
- A diploma programme to upgrade early childhood teachers have been introduced
- Support to improve working conditions of early child care workers has been provided

## Critical Issues

Primarily, as part of the national advocacy campaign to promote the national standards, an experienced-based training model was developed and adopted by IECD to run a pre-registration and sensitization training programme with collaborative partners. Around three-hundred child care workers and their assistants were trained in the implementation of the ten national standards for home-based services since 2016. By 2020, a certificate programme in ‘Child Care and Development’ had been developed conjointly by IECD and SITE, accredited by SQA, and is being delivered by SITE. The aim of the programme is to: develop the necessary skills and competencies of child care workers; provide essential knowledge in child development, early learning and teaching strategies to cater for the rapid development needs of children in their early years; and enhance their developmental experiences. The programme has been offered on part time and full time, and an RPL mode has been introduced for in-service workers in home-based child care services. It is the first step towards the professionalisation of child care workers.

On the other hand, centre-based child care workers present a more complex training situation. Centre managers have diverse professional human services background such as teaching, nursing, social work. Although three-quarters of them had management training in child care management and operations, most of their assistants have not had professional training (IECD, 2018). Moreover, about eighty percent of staff claimed that they had received ‘no in-service training in the last year’ (ibid. 2018). SEED Institute and IECD (2019) concluded that ‘the day care centres have inadequate professional staff to deliver good quality early childhood programme...’ This is an issue which will need to be addressed in the new regulatory and quality assurance arrangement under the recent Early Childhood Development Act (2022).

In addition to the above, the Ministry of Education has experienced difficulties in the teaching workforce for early childhood. In a study of the early learning environment in government pre-schools (IECD, 2018), it was found that none of the crèche teachers had completed a university degree although two teachers reported that they had “some university education”. About one-third of the teachers had completed secondary education only. The Ministry of Education has been well aware of the lack of graduate teachers at early childhood level - the scheme to train early childhood teachers is on-going. However, it also became evident that about one-fourth of crèche teachers did not have a teaching qualification, about half of the teachers were qualified to certificate level, and only one-third had a diploma which is the set requirement. Recently, the Ministry of Education jointly with SITE has introduced a course in blended learning mode (BLM) which combines tutorials, online sessions, project documentation and class instructions. Two cohorts

of in-service early childhood teachers have graduated in 2022 and 2023, and a third cohort of in-service teacher assistants are following the programme.

In building a competent workforce not only is training necessary but it is essential that workers are supported financially, in-kind and in the provision of core resources. The working conditions of the workforce in ECCE have been widely studied (see OECD, 2012, for example) and the positive association between staff well-being and quality of ECCE has been intensively analysed (OECD, 2018). It has become evident that supporting early child care workers is an important aspect in providing high quality ECCE. This is reiterated as a major action in the 'Tashkent Declaration' (2022).

Concessionary measures for educational equipment, construction materials and other learning resources are in place for licensed educational institutions (see, Value Added Tax (Amendment of Schedules) Regulations, 2014). However, with the exigencies of implementing the national standards in home-based settings the financial burden has become somewhat heavy. Results from the Childminding Study (IECD, 2013) showed that most home-based establishments were either breaking even or running at a loss. As part of the Government Financial Assistance Programme, previously quoted, financial support for childminders consists of a one-time grant and a monthly cash transfer to pay for the salary of employees and for the procurement of educational resources and toys in compliance with the demands of national quality standards. This has been a real breakthrough in Government's investment in the 0-3 child care service and sub-sector.

The working conditions in crèche have been a subject of some concern. The study of the early learning environment (IECD, 2018) assessed not only human resource capacity but also the physical aspect of the classroom, and especially classroom resources. It was concluded that "the quality of the physical environment was not up to standard" and "resource provision was deceptively deficient." It has been reported that a procurement and distribution action plan is in place. The Minister for Education has also made a pronouncement on infrastructural needs in crèche settings.

## Policy Suggestions

As Seychelles continues to develop its ECCE system, enlarging and extending its human resource capacity must remain relevant in the pursuit of quality. Emerging data from recent research is showing that well qualified child care providers are of crucial importance in ECCE and children who attend high-quality child care services are better prepared to be successful in school and in future careers.

It is recommended that:

- *Continued improvement in the quantity and quality of the ECCE workforce, through certification, training, professional development, supervision, and the review of effective practice should be relentlessly pursued*
- *Focused attention is given to the working context of early child care workers and early childhood teacher: avenues to improve working conditions and to provide targeted assistance, support and incentives must be explored*



## SECTION III - POLICY QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* is structured around the six ECCE themes within the policy context based on research, documentary and situational analysis, and stakeholder engagement. It sets the direction, refocuses on priorities and principles to meet expectations. This Framework serves as a platform for coordination, collaboration and partnership, advocacy, and research to deliver high quality ECCE that will contribute to the physical and developmental health of children in the early years, provide positive experiences in a safe, stimulating environment, and prepare them cognitively, emotionally, and socially for school. High quality ECCE benefits not only the children but also the parents, the family, the community and ultimately the whole of society. The Framework will inform Government's progress towards the sustainable development goals 2030 to 'ensure that all boys and girls have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.'(SDG 4 Target 4.2)

### Vision

Winning for children: winning for all

### Mission

To work together to support the holistic development and wellbeing of children

### Principles

The implementation and monitoring of the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* will be guided by the following principles. These principles are at the core of ECCE. They have been extracted from international documentation and have been contextualised for national application.

#### *Rights-based*

The rights of children as specified by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are respected and adhered to. It must be acknowledged that children have developmentally, age-appropriate needs. They are vulnerable and largely dependent on adults for their care and safety. Children need supportive policies, programmes, services and experiences from the very start of life. This must take into consideration the best interest of the child. A rights-based approach recognises the child as an individual as a member of a family and community.

#### *Child-centred*

The centrality of the child in interactions and relationships is given focused attention. The child's developmental needs remain at the centre of ECCE provisions. The child is recognised as an active participant in his or her own learning. A "whole child" perspective is adopted that accounts for the physical, psychological, social, emotional and spiritual dimensions of the child and the immediate and broader environments in which the child is developing, learning and growing. The child is supported through inter-sectoral participation of a range of services and agencies and early child development policies.

#### *Play-based*

The importance of play in early learning has been overtly emphasised in ECCE. Play-based learning has been promoted as 'one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills'. (UNICEF, 2018) Play is described as an essential strategy for learning with the following characteristics: "meaningful", "joyful", "actively engaging" "iterative" and "socially interactive". Many obstacles have been identified such as lack of understanding, misconception, rigid curriculum, lack of teacher professional development. An enabling environment is proposed in order to make play a "core aspect of early childhood education programme."

### ***Family-engaged***

Parents have the most significant influence on a child's life and the family is recognised as 'the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children' (UNICEF, 2006). It is acknowledged that parents have the primary responsibility for their child's upbringing and development. It is primarily the responsibility of the family to create a safe nurturing environment that meets the child's development needs. However, parents and families have to be knowledgeable and sensitised about the benefits of ECCE to ensure they create a safe, healthy environment for the child to thrive. Parents will be assisted in fulfilling their child-rearing duties, and families will be empowered with the necessary intervention in their supportive role and considered as partners in the development of the child.

### ***Community-involved***

The community provides the wider context of family life in contributing to the development of young children. Community involvement describes the relationship or the connection between the ECCE services and 'all forms of input and contribution by community services' to ECCE. These inputs can involve providing child care facilities, and supporting the home environment or organising family communities and network, including parents, in planning and decision-making and identifying services and resources (OECD, undated). The community has an important role in identifying and responding to the culturally diverse and unique needs of families and young children.

### ***Outcome-oriented***

One of the key aspects of quality is defined in terms of outcome: outcomes on children, parents and the system. It is recognised that good quality ECCE maximizes the potential of children. Indicators relating to health, socio-emotional functioning, cognitive functioning, and learning readiness have been identified, special attention is also given to marginalised or disadvantaged groups. The quality of ECCE services that supports the parents and families in providing a safe and nurturing environment, and workforce participation choices of parents is also an important outcome. The Framework represents national determination for results-based planning to improve ECCE outcomes.

### ***Evidence-led***

To be effective the delivery of quality ECCE must be evidenced-led. The needs of children are placed at the centre of decision-making. Policies, services and programmes for children and their families are based on identified needs, informed by evidence and knowledge and focused on achieving results to acceptable standards. These ECCE provision will be grounded in research based on best practice. They will benefit from on-going quality improvement, innovation and strengthening of ECCE.

### ***Prevention-focused***

Consistent with the multi-sectoral characteristic of ECCE, implementing prevention measures need a multi-dimensional approach centred on the individual child. Thus prevention includes risk factor identification, protective actions and early detection of physical, physiological, socio-emotional, nutritional, and learning problems. Through the Framework, there will be attempts to integrate these preventative measures to promote the overall development of children in their early years. Programmes and services will be prevention-focused and promote the overall health, wellbeing, social, emotional and learning competence of young children and families.

### ***Accountability-driven***

Strategic plans, assessment structures and accountability mechanism are in place to drive the implementation. Clear lines of responsibilities are established for effective delivery. Accountability assumes that data is available for analysis and reporting and to track performance, and that there is

a quality assurance arrangement with supervisory leadership. Moreover, a strong monitoring and evaluation system ensures transparent accountability processes.

### ***Inclusion***

The diversity of background, abilities and experiences of children is acknowledged and reducing inequalities is promoted. Inclusion strategies are implemented in the early years to increase participation, especially in early child care services and to establish inclusive practices. All children in need have equality of access to and participation in quality public services. ECCE programmes, services and support must be available to every child and must meet the needs of all children and families. Special efforts are made to provide additional support for those most in need and those who may have been excluded. Hence, the Framework seeks to inspire inclusivity in policy and action.

### **Goals**

To deliver high quality ECCE, a number of cross-cutting themes that require strengthening have been identified. These are strategic goals expected to maintain the momentum for the national advancement of the ECCE agenda. The seven goals which are further elaborated are motivational drivers for integrated action:

#### ***1. Enhanced quality of ECCE programmes, services and support for children and their families***

The strengthening of existing programmes and the development and implementation of innovative programmes is at the heart of quality ECCE. These programmes will address curriculum, health, nutrition, protective issues and facilitate the empowerment of children and their families. Responsive community provision and services addressing the full range of children's needs in a nurturing setting will ensure the stimulatory and interactive experiences in a caring environment. Emphasis will be placed on parent and family involvement. Parents are the primary care givers of children and the family environment provides the developmental context for the child's well-being. Supporting and resourcing parents is central for children to realise their full potential.

#### ***2. Increased participation in ECCE programmes sustaining continuity with special emphasis on inclusivity***

A characteristic of quality ECCE is that all children and their families are involved. It is anticipated that more children and their families will be included in the ECCE process. This is to ensure that ECCE is accessible and affordable to all, that it promotes equal opportunities for children to attend and participate in learning and social activities, and creates strong linkages with families and the community as partners in child development and learning. Special attention will be given to disadvantaged groups. This will take the form of special needs education provision in the home, in child care settings, in the school and where necessary in specialised institution. However, these activities will be informed by a universal mainstream provision to effectively meet the needs of disadvantaged groups.

#### ***3. Strengthened ECCE workforce capacity and increased supportive conditions***

The quality of ECCE daily provisions depends significantly on the individuals who comprise the Early Childhood Care and Education Workforce. The educational and professional characteristics of early child care workers and early childhood teachers, the context in which they are trained, the pedagogical and working environment in which they operate shape the quality of the workforce. Evidence to substantiate the association between the qualification of early child care educators and improved child development outcome may need to be undertaken to underline the effectiveness of quality workforce. These issues will receive due attention to elevate the image status of the early child care workers, to explore career pathways, and to build the profession in ways that ultimately benefit children and their families.



#### ***4. Reviewed financial processes for funding in ECCE***

The financing of ECCE requires a shift from the traditional funding paradigm to a more connective system that links ECCE to services and programmes. The Government needs to be guided by the whole body of research which documents evidence that high quality ECCE has a positive effect on the lives of children and their families and has a significant role to play in fostering social cohesion. Whilst recognising the need to attract investors from the private sector funding organisations, and community partners, central to this Framework is the review of direct government funding allocation that will allow for the costing of ECCE in the country and tracking on medium to long-term returns of investment for the benefits of children, families and the society. This will strengthen the governance capacity in the efficient use of resources and improve satisfaction amongst parents and professionals working together to place the child at the centre of ECCE provisions.

#### ***5. Extended data system and deepened analysis focusing on measurable outcomes and impact***

To achieve evidence-based policy-making and measurable outcome, data specific to ECCE need to be collected, organised and managed in a coherent and coordinated fashion. A comprehensive data system is a powerful management tool not only for government but also for ECCE institutions, local administrators and international partners. Within this Framework data collection will be harmonised with the goals of achieving high quality ECCE. It will gather information to develop measurable indicators for child development outcome, and structural and standards processes. Deeper analysis strategies will be promoted to study the more interactive relationship between variables. This will reveal intersecting impact on selected goals of the ECCE system, introduce more rigour in programming for children in their early years and provide reliable information on salient influential environmental features.

#### ***6. Renewed collaboration at all levels of the ECCE system***

The evolving coordinating and collaborative processes has been a distinct quality feature of the rising ECCE status. Whilst anchored in a central institution, the Framework recognises the policies and programmes of ECCE sectors, other ministries and agencies and has the flexibility to engage with multiple stakeholders and service providers. The process reflects dynamic, ongoing interactions: it implies building partnerships, adopting a participatory approach, fostering inter-institutional collaboration, coordinating ECCE initiatives and resource allocation. The remit of the collaboration and coordinating process is to reduce traditional barriers in the provision of ECCE and maintain a child and family perspective. Added value in the implementation of the Framework will be derived from greater cross department interagency coordination and collaboration both nationally and internationally.

#### ***7. Engaged internationally in quality ECCE development and strengthening ECCE systems***

The Institute of Early Childhood Care and Education established as a UNESCO Category 2 Centre will provide global leadership support for ECCE. Professional partnership will be built and networking connections will be made to share knowledge and expertise to identify key elements that would promote quality ECCE. Best practices and effective developmental models will be shared for policy guidance and standards setting. Exemplary strategy for capacity building and curriculum development will be strengthened for dissemination and flexible adaptation. The Framework will present a platform for advocacy, promotion, monitoring and evaluating ECCE to enhance the quality of services, programmes and systems for the holistic development of children in their early years.



## Strategic Policy Priority

The overarching design of the conceptual framework (Figure 2) is indicative of the complexity in delivering high quality ECCE. The outer areas denote the four main policy orientation and strategies that influence children and their environment: recognising that children has a right to have a voice in decisions which affect them both individually and collectively; engendering partnership so that children are supported holistically; developing an efficient ECCE system with quality provision; establishing a monitoring and evaluation structure to assess outcomes and assure quality. The delivery of high quality ECCE (the inner circle) is framed by six thematic strategic policy priorities the implementation of which will benefit all children.

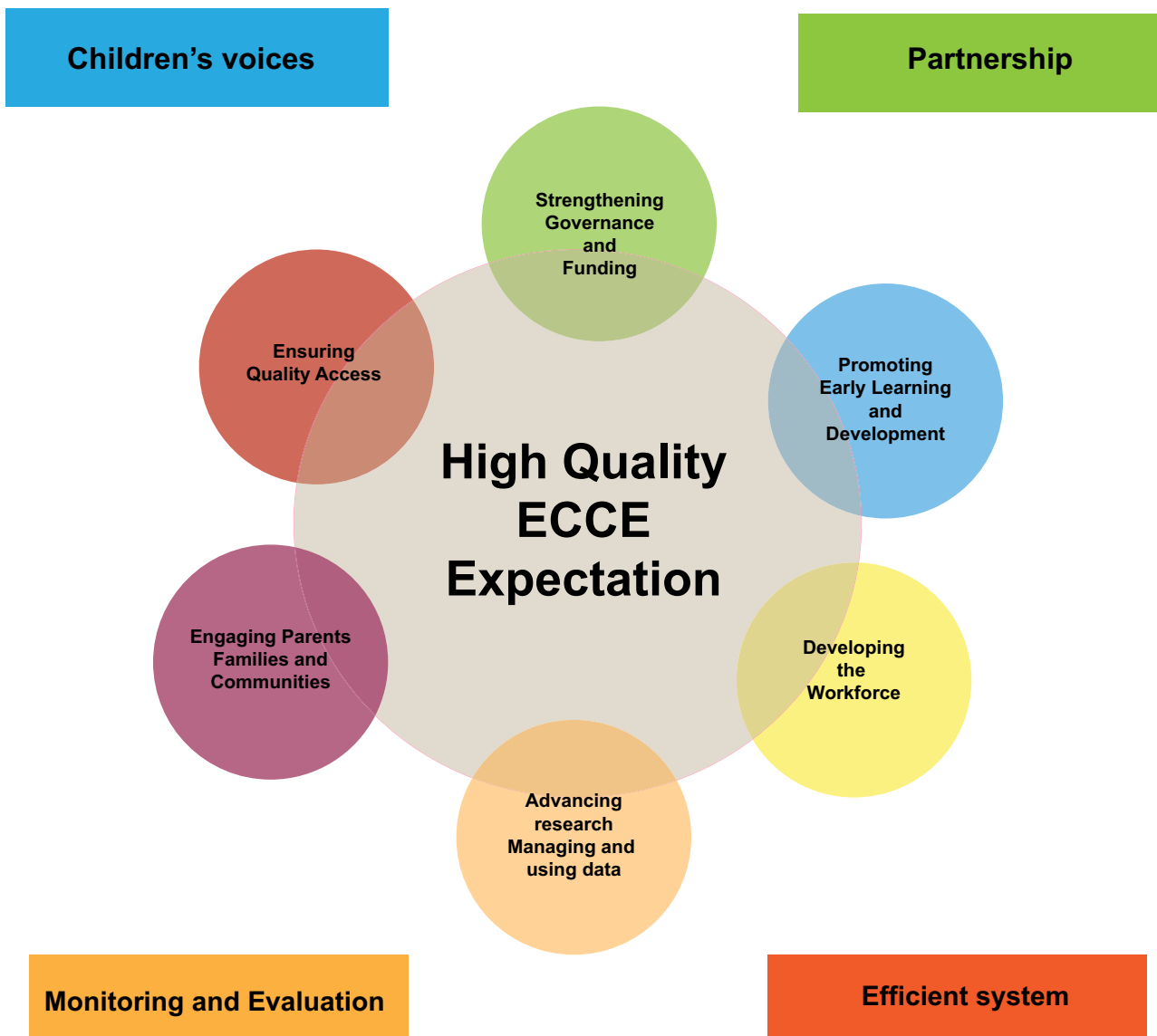


Figure 1: Quality Framework Structure

Adapted from European Commission (2015): Proposal for a quality framework on early childhood education and care

### 1. Strengthening Governance and Funding of ECCE

As the legal framework is being reviewed and expanded to include an international dimension and with the revision of policies, focused action and strong leadership is required to prioritise ECCE in governance, planning, and financing.

- Reaffirm the central reference of action planning as the national process in the implementation of the Framework and engage in the systemic development of the national action plan
- Provide systematic professional support to ECCE sectors and leverage resource provision to design, construct and implement multi-sectoral action plan
- Promote the diagnostic-consultative-monitoring research model to address gaps in the ECCE system and to find effective solutions
- Undertake a study on the costs and benefits of ECCE and seek partnership arrangement with external agencies or organisation such as the World Bank to provide technical assistance and other supportive measures
- Use research evidence to show the crucial (fundamental) importance of ECCE and advocate for government funding in relevant sectors to show clearly the funds allocated for ECCE programmes and projects in the respective sectors
- Incentivise potential investors, employers (work places) and other operators with the aim of increasing the provision of ECCE services
- Maintain, strengthen and, where needed, extend schemes to improve access to and the provision of ECCE services including the National ECCE Trust Fund, the salary subsidy of child minding assistants, the cash transfer support to parents with children enrolled in early child care services
- Reinforce the development of standards in early child care services, review standards in pre-schools, support early learning and the development of resources, and ensure quality standards
- Target campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of ECCE, the impact of the early years, and the role of parents and professionals who work with children, and make use of innovative medium and technology to reach out
- Optimise multi-sectoral coordination and collaboration; extend and galvanise multi-stakeholder partnership and international cooperation
- Develop plans for systematic linkages, best practice networking, professional and technical support, knowledge sharing initiatives with international partners, and contribute to ECCE/ECD academia

## **2. Ensuring quality access**

Comprehensive and equitable access has been highlighted as essential in the provision of quality ECCE. Quality access refers to high resourcing level, including infrastructural, structural, and interactive. The support and services address the full range of needs of children in their early years and they are delivered effectively, in child-friendly settings with an approach that make them accessible to all children.

- Research the needs to set targets for equitable access to early child care services and to develop strategies to meet these targets such that all children have equal opportunities to attend quality ECCE regardless of residential location, family income, parental employment status or special educational needs
- Increase the quantity and distribution of early child care infrastructural facilities referenced to international norms to assure quality access
- Develop an infrastructure management plan to address infrastructural challenges in upgrading maintaining, adhering to standards requirements, and finding appropriate locations for early child care centre development
- Adopt an evidenced-based and consultative approach to include all partners in the review and strengthening of national standards for early child care services

- Improve access conditions, learning experiences, and learning progress of early childhood learners targeting those at risk of educational disadvantage or with special needs, and build interagency supporting network to meet their specific needs within an inclusive policy environment
- Up-scale programme for children in need of adaptive aids, and maintain a monitoring mechanism to support their participation and progression, and to assess impact

### **3. Promoting early learning and development**

Early learning programmes, and protective and health care have a significant impact on the developmental outcome of children. Complementarily, early detection and intervening at the onset of difficulties or at vulnerable moments in children's lives such as school transition facilitates the learning process and has beneficial effects on the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development of children. Moreover, health and developmental screening are essential provisions in the ante natal and post natal mother-child monitoring and health promotion services. This must also be linked with parental nurturing care. For high quality ECCE it must be acknowledged that all these areas of health, protection, learning, and development are interconnected and they should be delivered in an integrated way to focus on the child.

- Support the review, development, improvement and monitoring of child development, early learning, programme organisation, and quality service standards
- Develop international referenced standards (including infrastructure and learning environment) and early educational resources and promote active participation, social interaction and play, as a strategy for development, well-being and learning
- Build on the maternal and child health programmes in all health centres to enhance the quality of service with special reference to home visits, nutrition (including breast feeding), psychological and educational support for mothers
- Expand evidenced-based programmes aimed at improving oral health and nutrition for children in their early years as part of health promotion campaigns, healthy food choices and obesity reduction
- Consolidate the collaborative school readiness assessment in transiting children from child care settings to pre-schools and in connecting with teachers and educators on performance levels and parents with pre-school provisions to set children on learning progression trajectory
- Harness research evidence to expand and monitor child protection programmes to promote child rights especially for disadvantaged children, children at risk, and vulnerable children to promote safe and child friendly environment referenced to international standards, and build capacity of parents, teachers, guardians and other early child care workers to fully support and protect children to fulfill their right

### **4. Engaging parents, families and communities**

Parents are the primary care-givers of children, the family is the first social-emotional growth and learning setting, and the community extends the social network and support children in their engagement in the society and the world around them. Supporting positive parenting is a primary, universal need along the continuum of family support. Complementarily, effective strategising of programmes and systems in engaging families and communities is a necessity in strengthening child-focused partnership and relationships.

- Guided by international best practice and national research evidence create a multi-sectoral, intra-agency, and multi-disciplinary working group through a lead ministry to develop a national framework for parenting education

- Devise specific family engagement programmes or interventions for active facilitation of nurturing, responsive, and stimulating interactions and early experiences to support families to provide positive home environment that stimulates children’s development
- Increase community-based green space provisions and play facilities for quality out-of-school and collaborative community programmes and activities for children and their families that encourage participation and promote social cohesion
- Expand the specialised baby gymnastics programme in all regions to increase participations of children from early child care settings and pre-schools and introduce a systematic monitoring system to document the effect of the programme on the physical and personal development of children and the engagement of parents in the development of their children

### **5. Advancing research, managing and using data**

Research is a powerful tool in the ECCE system. The diverse application of research within the context of ECCE to identify challenges, clarify issues, initiate change, test out strategies and search for efficient solutions cannot be overemphasised. In addition, systematic procedure to collect and provide consistent and comparable information on ECCE is necessary for deepening analysis, for monitoring and reporting. For high quality ECCE, research remains central and continued efforts are made to establish a data management system.

- Encourage and support ECCE Sectors to adopt research-based methodologies in the development of programmes, to carry out illuminating and service satisfaction surveys, to develop instruments and measurement methods, to experiment and pilot new initiatives, to reflect on practice and also to use existing research findings to inform good practice
- Improve data quality and availability in the ministries responsible for children in the early years at national and global levels to report on international indicators, to fill data gaps in statistics on early childhood, to provide baseline and also serve as comparative measures
- Strengthen data management processes in the collection, analysis and dissemination of data on the physical, cognitive and social-emotional development of children in the early years and the services they receive, addressing service gaps and improving and expanding the ECCE system
- Actively engage with experts and practitioners to establish a central national database for ECCE, promote its use and provide technical assistance to exploit the database for research, reporting and monitoring

### **6. Developing the workforce**

The professional competence of staff is a significant indicator of ECCE quality especially process quality. Effective early childhood workers and teachers nurture children’s development by creating a stimulating and interactive early learning environment, valuing children’s participation in the learning process, and sustaining cognitive initiatives to extend their learning opportunities. It has been convincingly stated that the ECCE workforce ‘is the major factor in determining children’s experiences and their outcomes.’(European Commission, 2014). Staff training and supporting working conditions are key enablers for staff to fulfill their professional roles leading to improved child outcome.

- Promote recruitment strategies with well-defined qualification and competency profile criteria to attract participants for initial training and carry out advocacy campaign to sensitise potential candidates on the importance of child care workers and early childhood teachers, and valorise the evolving professional status of early childhood workers
- Increase the supply and quality of the workforce through a range of training modalities, including pre-service, initial training, and Recognition of Prior Learning, introducing mentorship system, leveraging digital technologies

- Implement effective and flexible in-service training programme including other pathways to qualification and initial training and evidence-based programme for continuing professional development that will motivate early childhood workers, sustain their professional well-being, encourage their personal development and influence their decision to stay in the profession
- Engender interagency and inter-ministry collaboration to raise qualifications of all ECCE staff working with children including specialised staff for higher level training and academic advancement
- Support the working conditions of ECCE child care workers and teachers and the environment in which they operate by considering the financial viability and resourcing of the service , career prospects within the service or institution, and professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection on practice, planning interventions, committee work and networking, and linking with parents

## Implementation

The implementation of the Framework in delivering high quality ECCE in the six strategic policy areas will be realised through the institutional organisation mechanism, leadership quality, inter- and intra-agency coordination, and collaborative actions at the institutional and national level.

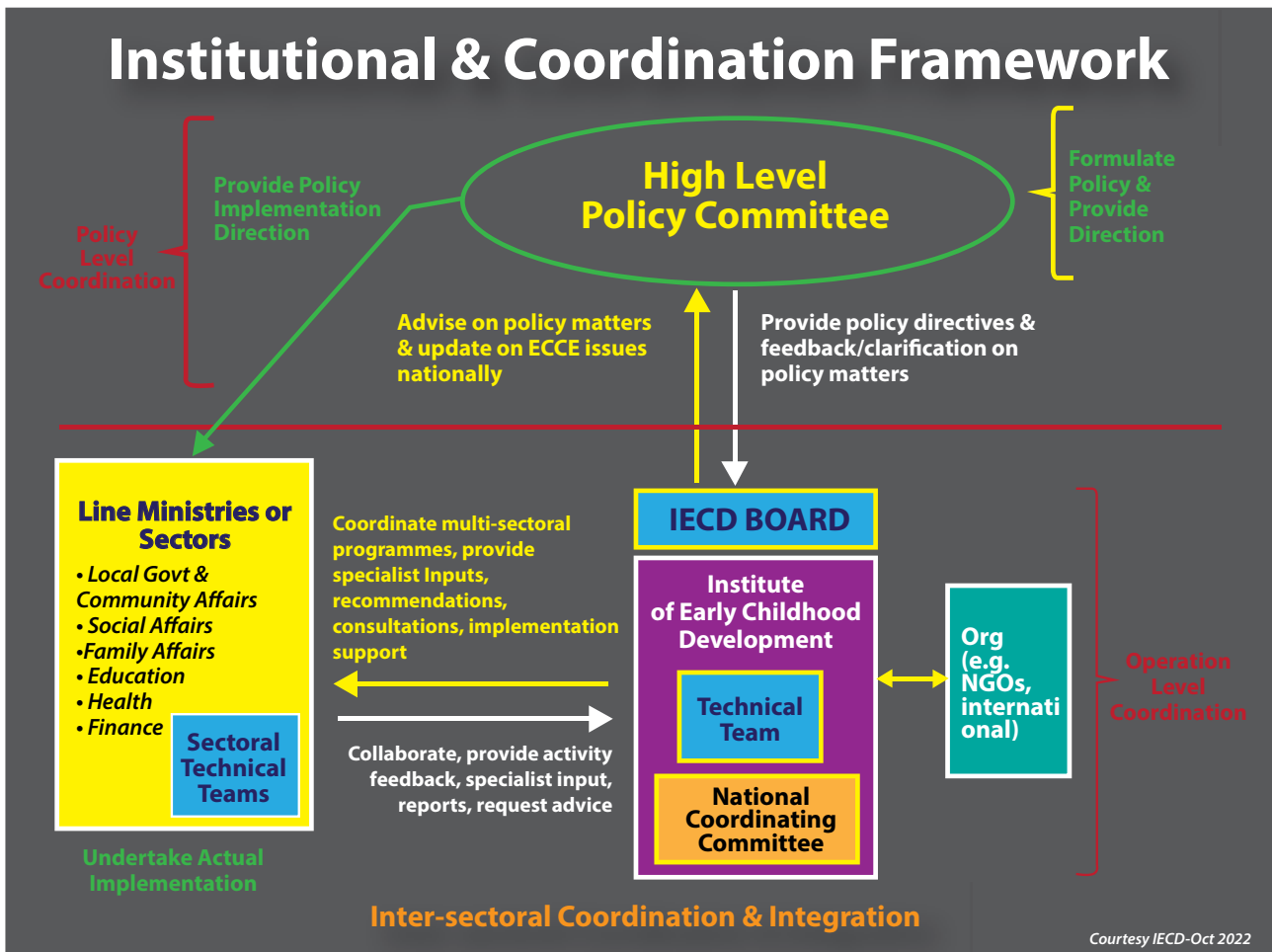


Figure 2: Institutional arrangements

Courtesy: Institute of Early Childhood Development

### ***Implementation Structure***

The institutional arrangement which has evolved and is being established provides a dynamic picture of the inter-organisational relationships. Figure 2 presents a diagrammatic view of the inter-organisational relationship. It can be noted that relationship in most cases is symbolised by two-way arrows. IECD receives policy direction from the High Level ECCE Committee, through its Governance Board. Yet, at the same time, in assessing and evaluating ECCE issues, IECD can provide clarifying feedback and make policy suggestions. Also, IECD works very closely with Line Ministries in the implementation of the Framework and engages with other partners and agencies - thus working towards more integration whilst maintaining coherence in the implementation of the Framework.

### ***High Level ECCE Policy Committee***

This committee gives overall strategic directions to the development of policies in ECCE in the country and oversees the implementation of the Framework. Of prime importance in driving the implementation is the political leadership. Effective implementation is dependent on the shared responsibilities amongst Line Ministries and significant collaboration and coordination across Government and between sectors, agencies, and other organisations. This committee reports directly to the Cabinet of Ministers; it is chaired by a high level member of the Cabinet or a designated member. The Chair has the capacity to guide the implementation process across key ministries with shared responsibilities. The committee ensures adherence and commitment to the ECCE vision and the contribution of key ECCE sectors to the implementation of the Framework. A rolling action plan will be used throughout to address priority issues and report on progress. The committee will appraise the progress made, identify bottlenecks, raise concerns and propose solutions.

### ***Institute of Early Childhood Development***

The Institute of Early Childhood Development is the anchor for ECCE and the guardian of the Framework. One of its predominant roles is to coordinate the implementation of the Framework nationally. In honouring the commitment of the Framework, IECD must sustain and consolidate four characteristics of its institutional leadership:

- Transformational: specialist, technical, innovative, professional
- Accountable: outcome-based, result-oriented methodological approach
- Integrative: synergetic, supportive, facilitative
- Collaborative: engendering and managing inter-organisational relationships

In implementing the Framework, IECD will mobilise resources to focus on improving the quality of child care services, reinforcing collaboration, and supporting the expansion of child care facilities including the establishment of a global hub for ECCE. Legislative, regulatory framework will be established which will lead to policy action for quality assurance of child care services. Sector collaboration and multi-stakeholder co-operation will be strengthened to facilitate effective implementation through action planning, coordination, and monitoring. Advocacy and supportive initiatives to increase child care facilities and develop the Institute as an international centre will be intensively pursued.

Moreover IECD as a Category 2 Centre will have the functional mandate for knowledge production, information sharing, capacity building, standards development, and technical assistance. An international Governing Board will oversee the Centre to approve programmes and work plan, to monitor progress and accountability reports, and decide on regional and international participation in the work of the Centre.



### ***Roles and Responsibilities of Ministries***

Succeeding in the implementation of the Framework demands the participation of multilateral Government Ministries and other partners and organisations with an interest or a stake in ECCE. Nevertheless, there is an active ECCE focus in the following key sectors with roles and responsibilities to accelerate the implementation of the Framework.

#### ***Ministry of Education***

The Ministry of Education is the principal advisor to the Government on education matters at the level of early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary education and training. The Ministry is also the main steward of the education system in that it:

- a) maintains a clear focus on the long-term health and performance of the system, ensuring that all leaders strive to make achievement possible and worthwhile;
- b) creates contexts for all parties in the system to deliver and fulfil the major intents of the government in relation to education and;
- c) creates links and platforms for other sectors of the community, including the private and public, to network meaningfully towards facilitating achievements of all learners in Seychelles.

The system is designed to enable all learners to perform and succeed with minimum disruption. The design also permits the building of networks from all sectors and potential agents of the society. This Ministry works across boundaries both locally and internationally.

As such the Ministry's on-going engagement to modernize the education system and provide a platform for newer conversations in and about education in the context of a changing society is reflected in the Strategic Plan 2021-2024. The plan is based on the premise that a new approach to organising the business of education is required in order to instigate new drive and synergy across the system. The focus is on developing a cost-effective and long-term educational system that pushes learners to excel through a course of study that allows for their full development as future citizens of the country. Technology-enabled learning will be a critical component of this endeavor, and one of the tools that will move the educational modernisation process forward.

#### ***Ministry of Health***

The Ministry of Health, with its vision that 'all people in Seychelles to attain the highest possible level of physical, social, mental and spiritual well-being, free from disease or infirmity', plays a significant role in the life and development of children in Seychelles. The Maternal and Child Health Care Services is part of a well-established and functional National Health Care System that works towards this vision.

The Maternal Health Care Programme aims at providing an effective continuum of accessible quality care before (Pre-conception care) and during Pregnancy (Antenatal Care), Childbirth (Intrapartum Care), and the Postnatal Period. Women and their families are provided with preventive screening tests and appropriate information and advice for a healthy pregnancy, safe childbirth and postnatal recovery, in order to improve pregnancy outcomes, thus reducing the risk of infant and child death.

The Child Health Programme focuses on the importance of the fundamentals of children aged 0-4 years and the right of each child to receive the services on offer at the health care center. The services offered are growth monitoring, developmental screening test, hearing test, administration of childhood preventable vaccinations and post-natal home visits upon discharge from hospital. The programme's priority is to deliver a holistic care approach towards children and family, thus promoting early identification and interventions



of children who are at high risk, including child abuse prevention, and preventing complications that may be fatal to the health and well-being of the child.

Upon enrollment in preschool, children are registered for the School Health Programme, which provide a continuation of preventive care services, which includes health screenings, immunization, and referral to appropriate agencies, and health promotion activities such as talks / sessions with children, teachers, and parents. The program aims at allowing all school-aged children in Seychelles to attain the highest level of education by being physically, socially and mentally healthy consequently to safe, secure, hygienic, and health-promoting school environments. Integrated within the school health programme are school dental services, which provide oral health care services to school-going children.

The expanded programme for immunisation (EPI) coordinates administration of childhood vaccination in collaboration with the child and school health programmes. Upgrades of current vaccines and introduction of new childhood vaccines are planned for the coming years

To complement the preventive and curative aspects of child health services, the Ministry of Health engages in a variety of child health services to deliver specialized care. The Early Childhood Intervention Centre (ECIC) is mandated to serve children with developmental delays aged 0-5 years. Other early childhood intervention services include Physiotherapy, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Audiology Services, Nutrition Services and Dental Services.

There are universally accessible medical care services available across all government health centres, free at point-of-use. Specialised (Paediatric) services are available in outpatient and in-patient basis, including Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)

### ***Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs***

The Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs is mandated to oversee the affairs of the district, empower local communities and ensure good governance with transparency and accountability, through citizen engagement, inclusiveness and empowerment towards development.

One of the underlying roles of this Ministry is to contribute to early childhood care and education provisions. It facilitates the construction and maintenance of child-friendly infrastructures such as Early Child Care Centres, Community Centres, and play and outdoor spaces; it designs out-of-school programmes and educational activities to engage parents, early child care workers and the community. The Ministry is instrumental in maintaining the linkages between central and local government, building an effective local government system, and promoting a progressive environment for community participation, community ownership, and sustainable development. .

### ***Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs***

The Social Affairs Department of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs has statutory responsibility under the Children Act (1982) to assume a coordinating function in the protection of children. This requires close collaboration with all partners. The Social Affairs Department offer child protection services to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children and their families. These services, mostly preventative and educational, are usually decentralized (operating from local centres) and they are undertaken by Social Workers through case management and court investigation. One of the responsibilities of the Department is to seek alternative care, organise after care services, and operate the Children Helpline. The Department is mandated to set standards in children's home and screen professionals working with children. The Department also runs parenting and life skills programmes.

### ***Ministry of Youth, Sports and Family***

The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Family's Strategic Plan is focused on the principles that education, empowerment and embracing diversity is of necessity to improve quality of life. The Ministry's vision is 'Empowering families to improve quality of life' and its mission statements are to 'Enrich the lives of Families; Empower youths to maximize their full potential and Promote and embed sports in the Seychelles culture'.

The Ministry's goal and strategic principle that embrace the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) framework are the provision of diverse and quality services for families and the strengthening of Public Private Partnerships (PPP) to support and promote projects in developing the capacity of children and their families to lead a good quality of life.

The Family Department's mandate is to empower and strengthen families through the provision of preventive, developmental and remedial programs and services. Working collaboratively with a range of stakeholders - including NGOs and the private sector - individual, group and family counselling, and psychological interventions and support are provided for children and families.

The National Council for Children (NCC) works in partnership with the Family Department and the Sports Sector. A range of educational programs and training, including sensitisation campaigns and workshops on matters that impact on family functioning has been implemented. On the other hand, the Sports Sector has developed a specialised physical education programme for early childhood. The Baby Gym program is well established and will be promoted and decentralized in community-based facilities and the inner islands with the support of The National Sports Council.

The Family Department of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Family seeks to "empower families to improve quality of life" and intends to develop interactive programmes with families in the community. The Family Department's Research and Policy Planning Division conducts research and analysis of matters pertaining to the family, gender and population. The National Family Policy of 2016 is being reviewed and a National Parenting Education Framework needs to be developed.

### ***ECCE Technical Committee***

The ECCE Technical Committee is at the heart of the implementation of the Framework. Each Ministry as well as IECD appoints a committee of designated members responsible for ECCE. The committee progresses with their commitments but, additionally, they are responsible for collaborative action planning derived from the Framework, in line with the mandate of their sectors. Driving implementation and ensuring monitoring and accountability, the committee participates in the development of the plan, mobilises ECCE network, shares information, manages projects, and reports on progress. They may also carry out research or other analytical tasks. The committee is headed by a Chairperson with added management and administrative responsibilities to ensure effective operation of the implementation structure, through coordination, guidance, support, and an efficient communication channel with senior managers.

### ***National Action Plan for ECCE***

The active implementation mechanism will be a two-year rolling multi-sectoral fully-funded national action plan. Through central coordination and sectoral consensus, priority areas will be identified and collaborative action will be detailed out. The action plan is intended to have significant impact on the lives of children in their early years through the improvement of programmes and services. Families as primary care givers have a critical role in leading and extending service provision. Through the implementation of policy research and standards setting, an enabling environment will be created for the delivery of high quality ECCE.

The plan will be contextualised within a project-based methodology linking outcomes to objectives, outlining strategies that would result into specific outputs, and designing tools to measure level of achievement

of expected outcome. Accountability will be intra-sectoral - reporting to the ministry's leadership; inter-sectoral - linking to central coordination for monitoring; political - endorsement through high level government leadership; and public - through dissemination of results and publication.

However financial accountability will require a more specialised system which will be negotiated as the funding of the plan is explored in consultation with the Ministry of Finance, National Planning & Trade. The method of funding the two-year plan needs to remain consistent with Government's budgetary allocation and funding structures for ECCE. At the same, it may necessitate coordinating public investment with private and, even, international funding sources. Just the same, the process of tracking expenditure in relation to the plan will be established.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

An effective monitoring and evaluation process is essential in the delivery of quality ECCE. It documents progress and helps to identify strengths and weaknesses; it can provide the impetus for change and supports initiatives that respond to the needs of children, their families and the community. Systematic and periodical data collection, data analysis and reporting on achievements and standards, and continuous assessment are necessary processes to promote high quality ECCE provision. Regular and ongoing review and use of data will guide continuous programme improvement and inform policy planning and good practice. Commissioned evaluation of the action plan will demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness

The monitoring and evaluation system has evolved during the 10-year implementation of the previous framework. It has reached a point of maturity to be established in this Framework as a constructive method in tracking progress during the 7-year time frame of the *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023*.

### Structure

The monitoring and evaluation structure is an integral part of the national action plan and requires intra and inter-sectoral approaches and wider participation to do justice to the multi-dimensionality of the Framework. The monitoring and evaluation processes begin as the action plan is being developed through the implementation phase to culminate in an independent evaluation. All three phases are linked to professional reflection and development.

### Monitoring through the development phase

This process is described as formative monitoring. A multi-sectoral interactive approach is adopted where sector plans and initiatives are developed collaboratively and facilitated through centre coordination. This provides opportunities for knowledge enhancement, reflection on practice and professional dialogue.

### Monitoring in the implementation phase

There are four structural processes for monitoring: a) monitoring through field surveillance b) monitoring through a central coordinating committee c) monitoring through annual progress report d) monitoring standards.

- *Field surveillance* – This involves regular visits to track activities, review progress and provide support. Implementation plans are examined and performance is checked.
- *Central committee* – This Committee, chaired from the centre, is comprised of the Chairperson of the ECCE Sector Committees. The purpose of the committee is to drive implementation by providing feedback and establishing a forum for problem-solving.
- *Progress report* - An analytical National Progress Report is produced highlighting performance on the implementation of the plan. This is presented at High Level for approval, to be forwarded to the Cabinet of Ministers.

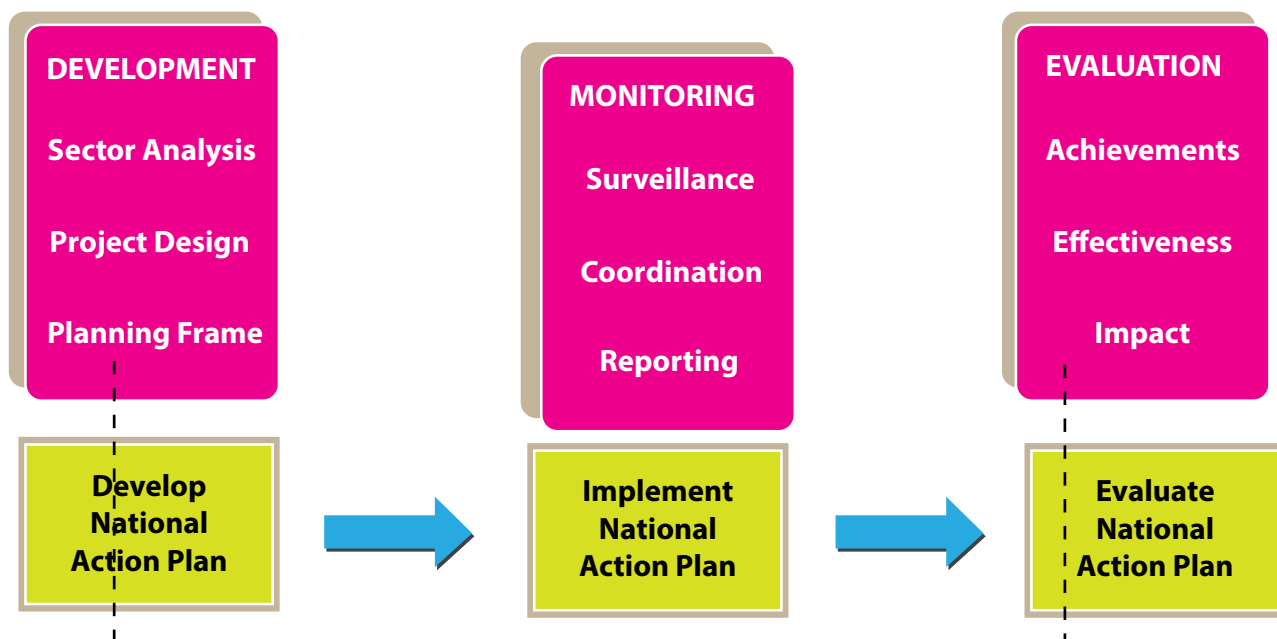


Figure 3: Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

- *Monitoring standards* – The quality standards established for early child care services is used to monitor compliance. A participatory approach is adopted to include data collected from early child care workers and parents.

### Evaluation

An independent review process of evaluating the national action plan is undertaken. Consistent with the demands of the Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023, a result-based method is proposed to factor in inputs to the plan and analyse the accumulated evidence from the compiled reports. This will enable the achievement of outcome in relation to the planned strategies to be assessed using documented information and additional data collected from specifically designed research instruments to include self-assessment, thus maintaining the participatory, professional dialogue. Ultimately, the plan will be evaluated for effectiveness, efficiency, and impact. The Evaluation Report as the final documentation of performance and results is presented at High Level for endorsement and then submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers.

### Public accountability

There is growing interest in viewing evaluation practices as a public accountability process which engages stakeholders, professionals, administrators, parents, and the public in general. Building on the wide-ranging national sensitisation advocacy drive which dominated the implementation of the previous framework, it is proposed that this is consolidated in this Framework to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation reports and associated information are made available. As it has been the case, print and electronic media are used. Reports are available online, specific research findings are published through a format which is easily accessible, and forums are convened to disseminate results of research studies, effect of programmes, and quality of provision.

### Global monitoring

In addition to monitoring and reporting on the specific commitments of this Framework, it will be useful to devise a more generalised measure of progress in some key indicators with international comparison. These indicators in health, education, social protection are being piloted and established in the life course of this Framework. It is anticipated that by 2030, it will be possible to measure progress in key areas of ECCE over the seven years of the Framework. In the meantime driving the implementation requires commitment to ensure that strategic policies are meaningfully implemented in practice.

Moreover, it will be possible to measure achievement of the SDG targets, in particular SDG 4, specifically, the SDG 4.2 which aims at ensuring equal 'access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education' in readiness for primary education. In addition, other Goals such as SDG 2 (target 2.2) which aims at 'reducing stunting and wasting for children under five years of age', along with the SDG 3 (target 3.2) that demands to reduce child mortality can be monitored. Finally, there will be alignment with SDGs 5 which promotes gender equality and 16 (target 16.2) which aims at ending all forms of violence and abuse against children (United Nations, 2020).

## Conclusion

ECCE provision in Seychelles has changed considerably in the last 10 years. Increased emphasis on its importance has led to a major shift in institutional and national perspective. The implementation of the Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care & Education 2011 has infused the system with renewed momentum to expand and strengthen ECCE provision. There has been major policy alignment, considerable achievements, and notable international recognition. Although the financing of ECCE has remained a challenge, it is anticipated that convincing empirical evidence has shown the effectiveness of ECCE in promoting positive changes in the lives of young children and enhancing their potential for social cohesion.

Early Childhood Care and Education provision are far-reaching and wide-ranging and developing fast. With political will and support, the governance of ECCE has become a transformational force which is integrative, collaborative, and dynamic: there has been increased access to quality early child care services with new or reviewed standards; increased workforce capacity and supportive conditions; well-being, protection, and early development have been placed at the core of ECCE through policy discourse and pragmatic action; family and community involvement has been encouraged through innovative child-friendly facilities, community-based programme, and parental education; data collection processes and research activities has been bolstered through inter-sectoral coordination. Increasing understanding through relentless advocacy initiatives at national government level and commitment to advance the ECCE agenda of the Moscow Framework for Action has instigated meaningful changes and considerable improvement in the ECCE landscape.

The *Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2023* has prioritised six policy strategies necessary to progress towards the winning vision. Based on research, best practices and stakeholder engagement, this 7-year Framework has been produced in the quest for excellence. The overarching message from our mission is the collective commitment to collaboration, partnership and multi-lateral cooperation across government and external agencies. Through the development of detailed action plans, these thematic policy areas will be addressed, supported by specific actions, deliverables, and timelines, buttressed by robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms. The Framework offers guidance for engagement and commitment to consolidate achievements and to take ECCE in Seychelles to the next level. Moreover, within IECD's international leadership role this national framework can be recommended regionally and globally as a guide to promote best practices and outline ECCE priorities.

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