

ECD Aid effectiveness

Final Report



Submitted By: Ratidzai Ndhlovu

Cell: +263 778021542

ratidzain@yahoo.com

Acknowledgments

The consultant expresses her sincerest appreciation to TRANAC consortium members for the opportunity to undertake the ECD aid effectiveness study in Malawi, Eswatini, Lesotho, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Special mention goes to ZINECDA project staff and management for their unwavering support and coordination throughout the assessment process.

The ECD aid assessment would not have been possible without the fundamental contributions that the consultant received from the stakeholders namely, TRANAC consortium members, NGOs, INGOs, CSOs, and Government Ministries, who actively participated in the assessment process.

Lastly, special acknowledgment and thanks also go out to the vibrant team of research assistants who worked tirelessly together with the consultant throughout the assessment.

Acronyms

CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
GFF	Global Financing Facility
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MoGE	Ministry of General Education
MoPSE	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
NCF	Naturing Care Framework
NGOs	Non-Government Organisation
RFF	Rodger Federer Foundation
NECDOL	Network of Early Child Development of Lesotho
SNECD	Swaziland Network For Early Childhood Development
ZANEC	Zambia National Education Coalition
MoGCDSW	Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
AfECN	Africa Early Childhood Network
EOL	Education Out Loud
TRANAC	Transnational Network Advocacy Capacity
ZINECDA	Zimbabwe Network of Early Childhood Actors

Executive Summary

Introduction

Transnational Network Advocacy Capacity (TRANAC) consortium members through their secretariat, Zimbabwe Network of Early Childhood Actors, (ZINECDA) commissioned Ratidzai Ndhlovu to undertake the Early Childhood Development (ECD) aid effectiveness research in five countries namely, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, Eswatini and Zimbabwe. The research tracked the current aid channelled towards ECD by the donor community in the Southern African region from 2017-2022 and the expenditure of donor funds being channelled towards ECD by development partners and private sector. In addition, the research tracked existing gaps in relation to ECD aid. Furthermore, it assessed the effectiveness of the donor funds being channelled towards ECD programs in the region and informed Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) action and advocacy work to improve aid effectiveness in the region.

Methodology

The mixed methods design was adopted in assessing the effectiveness of donor aid for ECD in the five Southern countries namely (Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, and Eswatini). This type of design enabled the researcher to conduct the research using both primary and secondary qualitative data collection methods to collect qualitative and quantitative data. A literature review was conducted throughout the research process to allow for the collection and analysis of both primary and secondary data. In cases where data was not provided during the interviews, a follow up matrix was administered to donor agencies across the five countries to provide data on the source of aid, type of aid, focal areas and amount funded (USD) per sector from 2017 – 2023

Findings

ECD aid in Zambia

The Zambian Government was the biggest recipient of donor aid, with funding used for infrastructure development, curriculum development, and capacity strengthening of ECD teachers. It was also highlighted that there is a need for smarter and more coordinated aid to scale up equitable and quality ECD services in Zambia. Findings revealed that only UNICEF had an explicit multi-sectoral, holistic ECD approach and is the largest donor that provides ECD aid in Zambia. It also emerged that there is insufficient allocation of the national education budget to ECD, resulting in low school attendance and performance.

ECD in Lesotho

ECD donor aid received in Lesotho, covered early education, nutrition, safety and hygiene, and healthcare sectors. UNICEF provided the most aid, followed by World Bank and UK AID. Education was the most funded sector, followed by nutrition and healthcare. The ECD Unit of the Government of Lesotho received LSL2,000,000.00 from Global Partnership for Education for ECD reception year teacher salaries and children's feeding in 2018. Currently, the MOET allocates less than 1% of its annual budget to ECD, which is one of the lowest amounts in the world. In addition, the budget projection does not allow for additional growth to meet targets for programme expansion and improvement. Increased investment is urgently needed to expand and improve ECD services.

ECD Aid in Malawi

In Malawi ECD aid covered advocacy, administration, infrastructure, training of caregivers, and monitoring and evaluation. The World Bank provided most of the donor aid, with a focus on nutrition. ECD services have expanded in Malawi, with community-based care centres being the largest

component. However, the Government's commitment to ECD is insufficient, with most funds coming from donor funding. The Malawi Government allocation to ECD is only 0.05% of the total budget and 0.01% of GDP. Donor interest in ECD has been growing, with the Global Financing Facility Trust Fund and other donors providing support. Donor funding has resulted in improved infrastructure development and capacity strengthening of teaching staff. However, donor funding for nutrition programs remains unsustainably high, and development budgets for nutrition are heavily donor dependent.

ECD in Eswatini

Research findings showed that, in Eswatini, there is limited access to ECD, significant disparities in access, lack of integrated ECD policies, insufficient skills to support young children's development, and lack of government funded ECD programs. ECD funding in Eswatini is largely donor-funded, and there is no clear government budget allocation towards ECD. Private ECD centres charge high fees, and parents are required to cover various expenses. The lack of ECD funding affects the quality of teacher training and poses a risk to the sustainability of ECD programs. Donor support for ECD programs has been provided through USAID, UNICEF, and OSISA, but aid effectiveness is hampered by the lack of harmonisation and use of an integrated multi-sectoral approach to ECD funding and programming.

ECD in Zimbabwe

ECD in Zimbabwe, received a total of USD11.19 million being channelled towards different ECD sectors including education and nutrition. Zimbabwe received aid from various donors such as GPE, UNICEF, Roger Federer Foundation, World Bank, and BISCID (private sector). The findings indicated that ECD in Zimbabwe has gained around 10% of total global ECD funding, likely due to a more developed public policy dealing with early education and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) program. Out of the donors that were identified as funding ECD in Zimbabwe, Roger Federer was found to be the biggest funder with USD 6,500,000.00, followed by GPE with USD 990,000.00, UNICEF with USD 437,000.00, and World Bank with USD 40,000.00.

Effectiveness of donor funds being channelled towards ECD programs in the SADC region:

Alignment

Findings revealed that some donor programs are aligned with government priorities and community needs in the 5 countries as evident in the existing ECD policies, laws, and strategies. However, some donor programs are not adaptable to the context of the target communities and due to this inflexibility, some donor programs are not aligned to community needs.

Harmonisation

Some donors coordinate and collaborate with Governments to avoid duplication. Needs assessments are conducted to determine community needs. However, Government support is limited due to low budgetary allocations to ECD. In some countries, the Ministry responsible for ECD is understaffed and underfunded affecting coordination and oversight of donor funds.

Ownership

Findings revealed that the Governments and communities participate in the design and implementation of donor funded ECD programs thereby strengthening ownership. However, some donors implement pre-designed programs without much community participation thereby reducing ownership.

Managing for Results

Donors provide financial management systems and guidance to ensure accountability, cost effectiveness and efficiency. However, more can be done to strengthen the existing financial systems. High operational costs of some programs limit coverage in monitoring and evaluation. In some countries,

access to ECD is inequitable especially for children with disabilities and those living in vulnerable communities.

Existing gaps in relation to ECD aid funds:

Most donors do not meet the recommended 10% allocation to pre-primary education. As a result, ECD programs face funding shortfalls impacting quality, coverage, and comprehensiveness. Most donors and governments focus on specific sub-sectors of ECD like health or education. Few support an integrated approach as recommended in the Nurturing Care Framework. This results in some sub-sectors being overfunded while others are underfunded. It was also noted that ECD centres have dilapidated infrastructure which is unsafe and inappropriate for young children. There is little donor support for infrastructure development.

Not all children have access to ECD, especially marginalized groups. Long distances to ECD centres and lack of transport compromise children's safety. Little is done to address these issues resulting in weak access, safety, and protection. There is a shortage of trained ECD teachers in most countries understudy. Untrained volunteers are often used but they lack motivation due to lack of incentives. Access to ECD tends to favour higher income urban populations while marginalized groups like those in rural areas and children with disabilities have limited access to quality ECD. Although ECD is multi-sectoral, coordination across sectors and stakeholders is weak. Governments face challenges in coordinating across Ministries and other stakeholders including donors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a fundamental and central factor for fostering holistic child development, whose influence is noted not only in a child's social and intellectual development but reflects in a country's overall socio-economic outcomes. Being a critical element of child development, donor aid has been pivotal in pushing the agenda towards strengthening ECD programming in many developing countries, including in Southern Africa. While the ECD sector is funded by institutions such as UNICEF, the World Bank, USAID and FCDO among others, it is evident that there is grave need for increased ECD related donor aid to sufficiently address nutrition, health, safety and protection, early learning, and responsive caregiving, as key ECD components. Considering that the Governments of Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe commit little to no investment into ECD programming – averaging 0.68%¹ in 2020, a boost in ECD related funding would go a long way.

Given that all the target countries have existing policies and laws that are aimed at addressing issues of ECD, these policies and laws have ensured that donor aid is aligned with Government priorities, which has improved ownership of donor funded programmes locally. Ownership was also found to be strong in terms of implementing partners working together with local authorities, including community leaders and community members in the design and implementation of related programmes, which overall improves aid effectiveness. Key to effective and efficient management of ECD donor aid are the financial management systems that have been instrumental in tracking expenditure and ensuring accountability.

Although donor aid for ECD programming in Southern Africa is available, major gaps that hinder the full potential of ECD delivery across the target countries include, insufficient funding, lack of a holistic approach to ECD programming, inadequate ECD infrastructure, weak ECD access, safety, and protection, inadequate ECD trained teachers and incentives, as well as lack of equity in ECD

¹ Baseline Evaluation for the Transnational Advocacy Capacity Building Project (TRANAC) in Southern Africa, 2021

programming. The rigidity of some donor financial management systems was noted as placing hindrance to effective programming, and this highlights the lack of a consultative process for designing results-based, context specific grant management processes.

In conclusion, non-holistic and non-equitable approach to ECD aid, hinders effective delivery of ECD programmes and progress towards achieving the 2030 agenda of 'leaving no child behind', across the target countries.

Lessons Learnt

1. Conducting multiple studies concurrently, that target the same stakeholders, negatively affects stakeholder participation which in turn affects the data collection process.
2. Prior sensitisation of key stakeholders, including donor agencies, on the scope of the study and expectations, is needed to enable stakeholders to avail themselves and prepare for interviews.
3. For a study of this scope and magnitude, there is need to invest more financial and human resources for effective data collection.

Recommendations

1. Establish a Southern Africa ECD regional network to strengthen ECD advocacy as well as resource mobilisation efforts for improved ECD programming.
2. Establish a regional ECD donor platform through which to enhance harmonisation and alignment across the different donors.
3. Establish a country level ECD multi-sectoral basket funding system which is characterised by a coordination committee that comprises of representatives from each subsector (nutrition, health, early education, social protection, and responsive caregiving), led by Government, to ensure a holistic approach to ECD funding and programming.
4. Create a joint ECD fund where donor agencies pool resources together for teacher development and remuneration, as well as infrastructure development to ensure high-quality early care and education.
5. Advocate for donor/recipient joint development of tailor-made grant management processes to ensure contextual relevance and avoid bureaucratic and protracted processes that may negatively affect aid effectiveness.
6. Standardise the inclusion of the most marginalised children in the poorest, most remote, and vulnerable situations, including those with disability, in all Donor funded programmes to make certain that no child is left behind.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Acronyms	ii
Executive Summary	iii
General Context	1
Aid Effectiveness.....	2
Objectives and purpose of the research	3
Methodology.....	4
PHASE I: Inception	4
PHASE II: Data Collection.....	4
Key Informant Interviews.....	4
Qualitative Data Collection Mode	5
Literature Review	5
Data Quality Assurance (DQA).....	5
Ethical Considerations	5
PHASE III: Data Analysis and Report Writing	5
Findings	6
ECD aid and expenditure in the SADC region (2017-2022).....	6
ECD Aid in Zambia.....	6
ECD Aid in Lesotho	8
ECD Aid in Malawi.....	10
ECD Aid in Eswatini	11
ECD Aid in Zimbabwe	12
Effectiveness of donor funds being channelled towards ECD programs in the SADC region.	17
Alignment	18
Harmonisation.....	19
Ownership.....	20
Managing for Results.....	21
Tracking the existing gaps in relation to ECD aid funds.....	22

List of Tables

Table 1: Paris declaration on Aid Effectiveness.....	2
Table 2: Interviewed Key Informants.....	4
Table 3: ECD Aid in Zambia.....	7

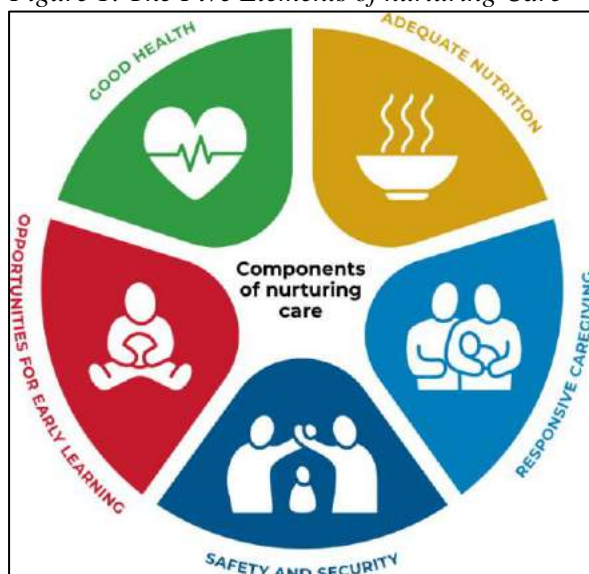
List of Figures

<i>Figure 1: The Five Elements of nurturing Care</i>	1
Figure 2: ECD Aid in Lesotho.....	9
Figure 3: ECD Donor Aid in Malawi	10
Figure 4: ECD Donor Aid in Zimbabwe	13
Figure 5: Overall ECD funding per program.....	26
Figure 6: Number of Trained Teachers	27

General Context

The term Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is used interchangeably with other terms such as Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), Early Childhood and Development (ECD) and Early Childhood and Education (ECE) across different countries in Southern Africa. This report used ECD to refer to these different terminologies. Early childhood development is influenced by the characteristics of the child, the family, and the broader social environment, which make up the 5 elements of nurturing care – adequate nutrition, good health, early education, social protection, and responsive caregiving as illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The Five Elements of nurturing Care



ECD is a fundamental building block in the formation of human capital. In order for children to reach their full potential, they need the five interrelated and indivisible components of nurturing care.

A wide body of research demonstrates the economic and social returns to investing in ECD. Although the benefits of investing in ECD are well established, competing demands for funding stretch available resources across many other social and economic priorities. As a result, countries face critical ECD finance shortfalls, which impact the quality, comprehensiveness, and coverage of ECD services. In addition, ECD financing is not simply about allocating more

resources, but also about using available funds more efficiently, effectively, and equitably.

The inclusion of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in four of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with very specific targets and indicators, represents global stakeholder convergence on the need to prioritise and scale up investment in ECD. Despite a strong case for investing in young children, current levels of financing for ECD fall far short of those necessary to provide access to high-quality services for all children from birth. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and specifically, target 4.2, confirms the importance of ECD within the global policy agenda. Despite this commitment, only a small number of international donors allocate any overseas aid to ECD.

Estimates suggest that annual costs for one year of high-quality pre-primary education alone, in low and lower-middle income countries, will need to increase nearly sevenfold compared to current cost estimates. This estimate does not reflect additional resources needed for a range of other ECD services that begin at birth.² International aid for ECD has grown in volume, but remains shockingly low, with only 2% of aid allocated to basic education and less for ECD. The UK and USA, two of the top three donors to basic education, have invested very little in ECD and growth in multilateral aid for ECD has primarily been driven by the World Bank.³ Domestic financing is critical to ensuring the sustainability of services, yet ECD is consistently underfunded – on average less than 0.1% of GDP – relative to need

² Vidya Putcha et al; Financing Early Childhood Development-An Analysis of International and Domestic Sources, 2016.

³ Results for Development: Financing Early Childhood Development: An Analysis of International and Domestic Sources in Low and Middle-Income Countries, 2016

and to other education levels.⁴ In comparison to other sectors and services, there is a greater mix of public and private spending on ECD, including significant household contributions.

There are diverse models for delivering and financing ECD, including public, private, or semi-private models that can take place in schools, community centres, or home environments.⁵ In most cases, public financing is the most important and sustainable mechanism to meet ECD objectives. However, aid for ECD encounters several challenges such as delays in the delivery of funds or competition between Government Ministries for limited resources. Within an environment of limited resources, financing for ECD faces competing priorities from other sectors and services within sectors, such as primary and secondary education. Contributing to these difficulties is a lack of political will to support or finance ECD services. ECD often falls behind other sectors and levels of education, partly because ECD outcomes are harder to measure and some of the economic benefits only accrue in the long-term – features that are unappealing to leaders who prefer short-term gains. Implementation of ECD policies and plans has been hampered, in part, by insufficient and/or ineffective domestic financing and there is an overall lack of clear information on how much countries spend on ECD. In order for ECD aid to be effective, it is important to consider all these challenges. In addition, it is important to identify, prioritize and cost the ECD ingredients and then assess how much aid is channelled for what and by who, as this will highlight the gaps and effectiveness of ECD aid.

Aid Effectiveness

The Paris declaration on Aid Effectiveness contains 56 partnership commitments organized around 5 principles that make aid more effective, as illustrated in table 1 below.

Table 1: Paris declaration on Aid Effectiveness

Ownership	Developing countries set that their own development strategies, improve their institutions and tackle corruption
Alignment	Donor countries and organizations bring their support in line with these strategies, and use local systems
Harmonization	Donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures, and share information to avoid duplication
Managing for Results	Developing countries and donors focus on producing and measuring results
Mutual Accountability	Donors and developing countries are accountable for development results

Through the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, countries committed to increase alignment of aid with partner countries’ priorities, systems, and procedures; help to strengthen their capacities; and eliminate duplication of efforts and rationalising donor activities to make them as cost-effective as possible. The declaration further committed to define measures and standards of performance and accountability of partner country systems in public financial management, procurement, fiduciary safeguards, and environmental assessments, in line with broadly accepted good practices and their quick and widespread application, to mention a few.

⁴ ibid

⁵ UNICEF; UNICEF global resource guide on public finance for children in Early Childhood Development, 2019

Objectives and purpose of the research

- i. To track the current aid channelled towards ECD by the donor community in the region from 2017-2022, including all active programs.
- ii. Tracking the expenditure of donor funds being channelled towards ECD by the donor community and private players in the region.
- iii. Gather information on the effectiveness of the donor funds being channelled towards ECDE programs in the region.
- iv. Track the existing gaps in relation to ECD aid funds.
- v. Inform CSO action and advocacy work to improve aid effectiveness in the region.

Methodology

The mixed methods design was adopted in assessing the effectiveness of donor aid for ECD in the five Southern African countries namely (Zambia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Malawi, and Zimbabwe). This type of design enabled the researcher to conduct the research using both primary and secondary qualitative data collection methods to collect qualitative and quantitative data. Specifically, key informant interviews were conducted in the data collection process. As an integral part of the data collection process, literature review was conducted throughout the research process to allow for the collection and analysis of both primary and secondary data. The research was conducted in three phases which were: (i) Inception (ii) Data Collection and (iii) Data Analysis and Report Writing. These phases are clearly articulated below;

PHASE I: Inception

This phase comprised of an inception meeting, development, and validation of the inception report and data collection tools. An inception meeting was conducted to discuss and agree on the methodology, management of the assignment, research timelines for data collection, and submission of the report. The development of the inception report and data collection tools was informed by a thorough review of literature retrieved online.

PHASE II: Data Collection

Data was collected through key informant interviews and a literature review. The research tools, methodology, and key informants that were targeted by the study were validated and approved by the TRANAC project consortium before data collection.

Literature Review

Literature review of ECD aid in the 5 countries⁶ under study included a review of policy documents, financial reports, relevant project documents, ECD aid reports in the respective countries, national budgets, and other literature. Information gaps identified during the literature review process was used to develop research tools as well as to develop the contextual background. The literature review also looked into the extent to which the donor funds and resources were used efficiently, effectively, and equitably.

Key Informant Interviews

Virtual in-depth interviews with purposively selected key informants were conducted in order to obtain data, opinions, and perspectives that informed the study. Information-rich individuals provided key perspectives on the effectiveness of donor funding on ECD. Key informants were selected with the help of the TRANAC consortium and partners to ensure key stakeholders were engaged. The interviewed key informants are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Interviewed Key Informants

	Target KII	Lesotho	Malawi	Zimbabwe	Swaziland	Zambia	Total
TRANAC project consortium	ZINECDA			✓			1
	NECDOL	✓					1
	ECD Malawi		✓				1
	SNECD				✓		1

⁶ (Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Eswatini, Mozambique and Lesotho)

	ZANEC					✓	1
Donors	Bilateral			World bank		Child Fund	2
	UN Agencies	UNICEF	UNICEF			UNICEF	3
Government	Focal Ministries	MoET	MoGCDSW	MoPSE		MoGE	4
Total		3	3	3	1	4	14

In cases where data was not provided during the interviews, a follow up matrix was administered to donor agencies across the five countries to provide data on the source of aid, type of aid, focal areas and amount funded (USD) per sector from 2017 – 2023.

Qualitative Data Collection Mode

The research was conducted virtually, and all discussions were recorded to facilitate verbatim transcription for analysis. Verbatim transcripts were instrumental in collecting direct quotations that present the voice of respondents in its pure form.

Data Quality Assurance (DQA)

The researcher ensured regular communication with the TRANAC secretariat and discussed concerns regarding data collection. Some of the data quality assurance measures included debriefs between the researcher and ZINECDA. Furthermore, the researcher corroborated data provided by the respondents with available literature.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical conduct during the study, the researcher adhered to the universal research ethics. As such, the research process ensured appropriate, safe, respectful, non-discriminatory participation of participants, including seeking consent and ensuring confidentiality.

PHASE III: Data Analysis and Report Writing

The thematic analysis technique was used in coding discrete units of meaning, charting the relationships among these units and describing the patterns seen in data generated from qualitative methods. Secondary quantitative data was analysed using trend analysis, and data was presented in the form of tables and graphs. Results from primary and secondary data sources were used in the development of the findings section.

Findings

The findings section is presented in response to the study objectives, i.e.

- I. ECD aid and expenditure in the SADC region,
- II. Effectiveness of donor funds being channelled towards ECDE programs in the SADC region.
- III. Tracking the existing gaps in relation to ECD aid funds.

One major finding throughout this study was that ECD is defined differently by different countries, with some countries referring to it as early childhood development (ECD), early childhood education (ECE), early childhood care and education (ECCE), or early childhood development and education (ECDE). However, ECD is a broad term that covers a child's holistic development and builds a foundation for the future in a number of sectors that include healthcare, nutrition, safety and security, early learning, and responsive caregiving. For the purposes of this report, ECD is used as an inclusive term that covers all the five early childhood development sub-sectors as stated above.

ECD aid and expenditure in the SADC region (2017-2022)

ECD-related programming is supported by a number of funding partners through CBOs, CSOs, NGOs as well as Government, who deliver ECD programs of varying scope. Considering that financing is essentially about funding the costs of inputs to produce a set of outputs, delineating the scope of what constitutes the 'ECD product' is crucial. What constitutes ECD services/programmes currently varies considerably from country to country with some countries having adopted integrated ECD policies and frameworks; others have policies focusing on early childhood care and education (ECCE), while some are creating national action plans to implement the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF)⁷, which aims to inspire multiple sectors, i.e. healthcare, nutrition, safety and security, early learning, and responsive caregiving, to work in new ways to address the needs of young children. A wide range of stakeholders including NGOs, religious organizations, and the private sector are involved in the provision of ECD services.

ECD Aid in Zambia

Based on the data provided by the development and implementing partners engaged during the study, up to USD75,390,000.00 was channelled towards the early education sector through donor aid in Zambia. The Government was the biggest recipient of donor aid while NGOs, local CSOs and CBOs also received some of the aid. It was also noted that most of the funding was used for infrastructure development, curriculum development and capacity strengthening of the ECD teachers. A total of USD 21,854,200.00 was provided by UNICEF and USD30 million was provided by the GPE during the period 2017 – 2022. However, other funding partners such as World bank and USAID also funded the ECD sector in Zambia. This is summarised in table 3 below.

⁷ <https://nurturing-care.org/>

Table 3: ECD Aid in Zambia

Source of Aid	Type of Aid	Recipient	Type of Recipient	Focal Areas	Period covered	Amount funded (USD)
USAID	Bilateral	Education Development Centre/Sub-VVOB	Government	ECE interventions teacher instructional capacity development, teaching & Learning materials development	2019 - 2022	6,792, 177.00
UNICEF	United Nation	MoGE/CDC/ECZ, Child Fund, ZOCS, FAWEZA, ZANEC, Restless Development, VVOB, JPAL, Save the Children, Plan International, Research Institutions (IPA, UNZA, AIR etc.)	Government/CSO	ECE curriculum, pedagogies, ECD policy/framework development, low-cost delivery option, district, and community capacity building,	2016 - 2021	21,854, 200.00
UNICEF	Bilateral	MoGE, other CSOs (TBC)	Government	Learning contents for ECE, Primary, and lower secondary, remote learning support for teachers, Back to school campaigns and TLM support to vulnerable learners, remedial/catch up learning, and COVID-19 prevention including WASH in schools.	2020 - 2021	10,000,000. 00
World Bank	Multilateral	MINISTRY OF GENERAL EDUCATION	Government	(i) Improving equitable access to early childhood education; (ii) Implementing early childhood education quality standards; (iii) Enhancing delivery of quality early learning and care; and (iv) System strengthening, project management, monitoring and evaluation, and communication	2021 - 2025	39,800
Roger Federer Foundation	Foundation	MoGE, other CSOs (TBC)	Government	Education		6,700,000. 00
GPE	Bilateral		Government	infrastructure to expand the delivery of ECD through community centres	2021	30,000,000. 00
TOTAL						75,390,000. 00

Source: Primary Data

Scaling up equitable and quality ECD services in Zambia requires donors to give more aid and to give much smarter. Many of them are doing too little, with only a few standing out in one or more ECD subsectors which hampers ECD aid effectiveness.⁸ UNICEF, for instance, spends one-third of its Zambia ODA portfolio on ECD interventions while the rest of them spend very little on ECD, for example, Germany spends less than 1% of its ODA portfolio in Zambia on ECD.⁹ When ODA disbursements are broken down into ECD sub-sectors –healthcare, nutrition, safety and security, early learning, and responsive caregiving – healthcare continues to dominate. Looking at the 2020 ECD donors in Zambia (for example Canada, USA, EU, Germany, Belgium, and the UK), healthcare received 92% of all ECD ODA funding combined, while nutrition accounted for 6%. Insufficient harmonization and coordination among donors have a negative impact on aid effectiveness as it over-funds certain ECD sectors, while neglecting others. Very few donors have programmes in place that are part of an explicit multi-sectoral ECD approach with a focus on nurturing care. Only UNICEF has clear ECD objectives with related outcomes hardwired in their country framework or strategy.

In 2019, 0.13% of the national education budget was allocated to early childhood education (ECE).¹⁰ This trend implies that children are enrolling in Grade 1 with no ECD experience resulting in low school attendance and performance. In 2019, the UNICEF Budget Brief report indicated that nationwide, 32% of the Grade 1 entrants had gone through ECD, which is quite low compared to other countries in the region.

ECD Aid in Lesotho

A total of USD3,490,496.10 was channelled towards ECD in Lesotho and this covered Early education, Nutrition, Safety, and hygiene, as well as Healthcare sectors. As revealed by a key informant, ECD aid expenditure in Lesotho covered training of teachers, review of the ECD curriculum and Early Childhood education sub-sector analysis. Furthermore, the aid supported Village Health Workers (US\$457,266.45), Child Health (US\$211,465.05) and Birth registration (US\$209,925) from the year 2020 to 2022. The Ministry of Education and Training under the Government received a greater proportion of the total aid. This is summarised in figure 2 below.

⁸ Jo Walker et al; Zambia, Leaving No Child Behind-Investing in Early Years, 2020

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ UNICEF; Education Budget Brief, 2019

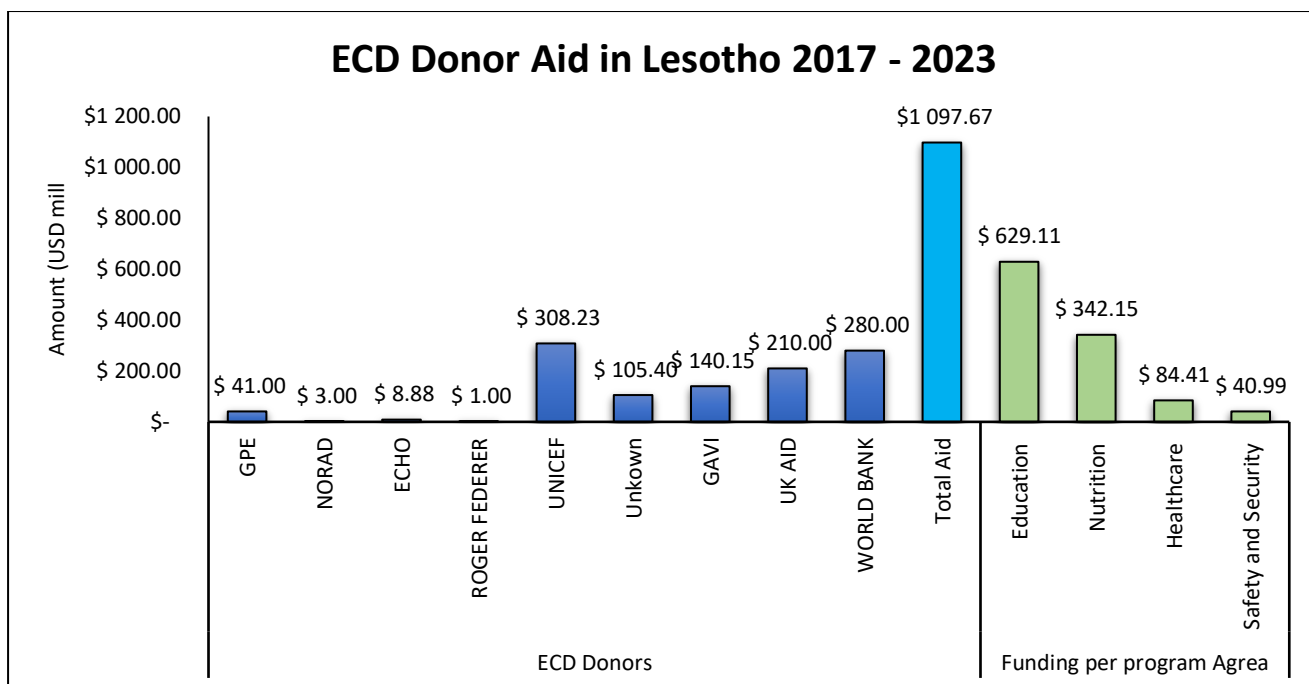


Figure 2: ECD Aid in Lesotho
Source: Primary Data

Of the eight identified donors that provide funding towards ECD in Lesotho, UNICEF provided the most aid (USD308,230,000.00), followed by World Bank (USD 280,000,000.00) and UK AID (USD 210,000,000.00). Education (USD 629,110,000.00) was the most funded sector followed by nutrition (USD242,150,000.00) and healthcare (USD 84,410,000.00).

In 2018, the ECD Unit of the Government of Lesotho was given LSL2,000,000 from Global Partnership for Education (formerly called the “Fast Track Initiative”) for ECD reception year teacher salaries and children’s feeding in Lesotho which brought the ECD revised investment budget to a total of LSL7,532,509 (US\$394,702.80). The Global Partnership funds were paying for recurrent expenses, and urgently needed to be absorbed into the regular budget.¹¹ This budget projection does not allow for any additional growth to meet targets for programme expansion and improvement. Currently, most of the MOET funding dedicated to early childhood education is for the reception year programme.¹² Very little has been allocated to other forms of preschool education (such as community-based and home-based preschools) or to supervision and training. Nothing has been allocated as yet to parent education and day care improvement for children from birth to 36 months of age. To date, communities, civil society, and private sector organisations have been supporting most services for early childcare and development, parent education and preschool education. However, the private sector mainly serves well-to-do urban families who can afford to pay high school fees; therefore, support for vulnerable children falls to the public sector and a few NGOs that cannot fully compliment MOET efforts and ensure that all children, and especially all vulnerable children, learn and develop well in Lesotho. Under current projections, the MOET appears to be planning to decrease funding for early childhood education. In light of prevailing needs and demands for expanded and better quality ECD services, greatly increased investment is urgently needed. MOET currently allocates only less than 1% of its annual budget to ECD, one of the lowest amounts in the world.

¹¹ Kingdom of Lesotho. 2018. National strategic development plan II. Maseru, Government Printing.

¹² Ibid

ECD Aid in Malawi

In Malawi, the World Bank funded the ECD Coalition Malawi with a budget worth USD404,285,000.00 for advocacy, administration, infrastructure, and training of caregivers as well as for monitoring and evaluation from 2022 to 2023.

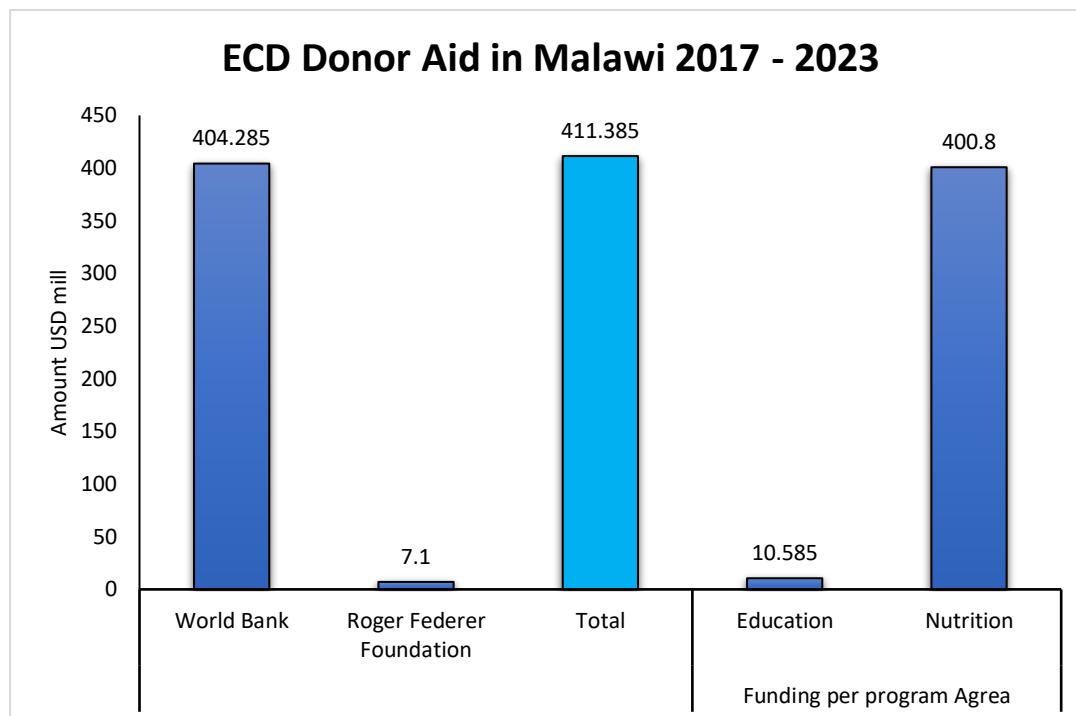


Figure 3: ECD Donor Aid in Malawi
Source: Primary Data

Findings illustrated in Figure 3 above shows that of the ECD aid, which was channelled in Malawi, World bank provided most of the aid summing up to USD404,285,000.00. Of the total amount, which was provided by World bank, most (USD400,800,000.00) of the funds were channelled to Nutrition.

An analysis of secondary literature indicated that ECD services expanded substantially in Malawi over the past decade. While ECD is provided in various formats, the largest and most salient component of this expansion was the proliferation of community-based care centres (CBCCs). This expansion contrasts with underinvestment in ECD on the part of the Government of Malawi (GoM).¹³ As such, the establishment and operations of CBCCs has been championed and financed mostly by communities.¹⁴ The Government commitment to ECD of MK669.73 million in fiscal year (FY) 2018/19 is equivalent to only MK409 per each of the 1.6 million children accessing ECD services per year, which is insufficient to provide high-quality services. In the same fiscal year, the World Bank committed MK2.85 billion to ECD to be channelled through the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) under the auspices of the ‘Investment in Early Years Project’.¹⁵ ECD received 5% of the total education budget in FY 2020 but it should be noted that the vast majority of these funds come from donor funding and the GoM’s contribution remains persistently low with almost three-quarters of the budget going to primary and tertiary education, and 17% going to secondary education.¹⁶ The Malawi Government allocations to ECD almost stagnated in 2021. As a

¹³ Sajid Sheriff; Universal ECD in Malawi: A cost-benefit approach, 2021

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ UNICEF; ECD Budget brief,

share of the total budget and GDP, the allocation to ECD stood at 0.05% and 0.01%, respectively.¹⁷ With the introduction of program-based budgeting (PBB), a few Local Authorities started to include ECD in their annual budgets. Examples of District Councils which allocated resources for ECD in FY2018/19 include Chikwawa (MK340,000), Phalombe (MK340,000), Ntchisi (MK3.8 million), and Nsanje (MK2.2 million). In some districts, Nsanje for example, the allocations to ECD (MK2.2 million) in FY2018/19 was lower than the previous year (MK5 million).¹⁸

In Malawi, donor interest in ECD has been growing since the release of scientific evidence on new ECD approaches, as well as advocacy efforts for an integrated approach towards ECD. In addition, Malawi is one of the 26 countries worldwide that received financial and technical support from the Global Financing Facility (GFF) Trust Fund, that approved investment into the Early Years/ECD project. Other ECD donors in Malawi for 2021 include: Africa Early Childhood Development Network (AfECN), Open Society Initiatives of Southern Africa (OSISA), Rodger Federer Foundation (RFF), and Education Out Loud (EOL) OXFAM IBIS.¹⁹

ECD focused donor funding has resulted in improved infrastructural development, with new classroom blocks being erected, and dilapidated ones being rehabilitated. For instance, the World Bank funded the ECD Coalition in Malawi for infrastructural development and the training of caregivers, with 0.8 billion Kwacha from 2022 to 2023. Not only have target communities benefited from infrastructural development, but learners and teachers alike, have also benefited from the capacity strengthening of teaching staff that continues to be done through the delivery of different capacity building programmes.

Donor funding for nutrition programmes remains unsustainably high, with the World Bank-funded Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Programme contributing up to 93% of the total nutrition specific budget for 2022/23. Development budgets for Nutrition also continue to be heavily donor dependent. However, the nutrition budget is skewed towards development, another factor that threatens sustainability of the programme, especially since Government's own resources are largely used for operational functions for the Department of Nutrition, HIV and AIDS (DNHA) within the MoH. Compared to 2021/22 budget, the nutrition development budget had declined by 34% due to closure of some bigger components of donor funded projects. The Government's own contribution to the ECD budget has increased to reach its highest level of MK1.27 billion in 2022/23. As a share of the total education budget, the ECD budget has increased from 3.8% in 2021/22 to 4.3% in 2022/23. This is a welcome development, which should be sustained and broadened to also include financing development spending. However, the World Bank remains the largest financing source for ECD in Malawi, through the Investing in Early Years Project (IEYP) whose budget for 2022/23 of MK20.5 billion is slightly lower than the 2020/21 allocation of MK20.8 billion.

ECD Aid in Eswatini

In Eswatini, early childhood development (ECD) is just beginning to be acknowledged as a critical contribution to building the country's social capital. Bottlenecks include lack of integrated ECD policies, limited awareness among parents/caregivers on the importance of early childhood development and insufficient skills to support the development of young children, and this is exacerbated in the case of children living with disabilities.²⁰ Only 21.6 % of preschool children have access to early childhood education, and there are significant rural-urban, geographical and wealth

¹⁷ Sajid Sheriff; Universal ECD in Malawi: A cost-benefit approach, 2021

¹⁸ UNICEF; ECD Budget brief

¹⁹ Promoting Quality ECD in Malawi, 2021

²⁰ Saber; Swaziland: Early Childhood Development, 2013

disparities in access.²¹ Of those who are enrolled in ECD programmes, enrolment is 48.4% for children from the wealthiest households, and only 27.7% for children from the poorest households.²²

Even though ECD is an important pillar of the Education Policy (2018) in Eswatini, the GoE is yet to introduce publicly funded ECD programmes to ensure that all children who enter Grade 1 under the Free Primary Education (FPE) Act, have a solid footing for learning and success in their school life.²³ Appropriate budget allocations are lacking to equitably meet the needs of all children and mothers. In Eswatini, there is no clear Government budget allocation towards ECD as the ECD sector is largely donor funded.²⁴ A Government report clearly stated that preschools are privately owned and thus they charge exorbitant funds and that most children are from poor backgrounds and they cannot afford the fees charged in the ECD centres.²⁵ Parents are required to pay fees in both public and private ECD centres for tuition, matriculation, uniform, meals, assessment, desks, teacher salary, parent teacher association, and transportation.²⁶ The lack of ECD funding is affecting the ECD teacher training at tertiary level, posing a risk on the sustainability of ECD programs in Eswatini.²⁷ Only 22% of the 2019 Grade 1 cohort had attended a preschool delivering good quality ECD.²⁸

Eswatini's community ECD centres are consistently challenged by teachers' lack of educational qualifications and experience and inability to access up to date ECD information, resources, or basic learning materials; high staff turnover as a result of the volunteer structure typical of most local centres; and low community and parent involvement and ownership.

Donor support for ECD programs has been provided through USAID, UNICEF and OSISA. However, aid effectiveness is hampered by the lack of harmonisation and use of an integrated multi-sectoral approach to ECD funding and programming.

ECD Aid in Zimbabwe

A total of USD11,190,000.00 was channelled towards the different ECD sectors in Zimbabwe by donors that include Multilaterals (UNICEF, World Bank), Foundations (Roger Federer) and Private sector (BISCID), as illustrated in the figure 4 below.

²¹ Ministry of Education and Training; Swaziland Early Childhood Development, 2021

²² Saber; Swaziland: Early Childhood Development, 2013

²³ ESEPARC; Early Childhood Care and Education in Eswatini (no date)

²⁴ ZINECDA; Baseline Evaluation for a Transnational Advocacy Capacity Building Project I Southern Africa, 2021

²⁵ Ministry of Education and Training; Swaziland Early Childhood Development, 2021

²⁶ Saber; Swaziland: Early Childhood Development, 2013

²⁷ ZINECDA; Baseline Evaluation for a Transnational Advocacy Capacity Building Project I Southern Africa, 2021

²⁸ ESEPARC; Early Childhood Care and Education in Eswatini (no date)

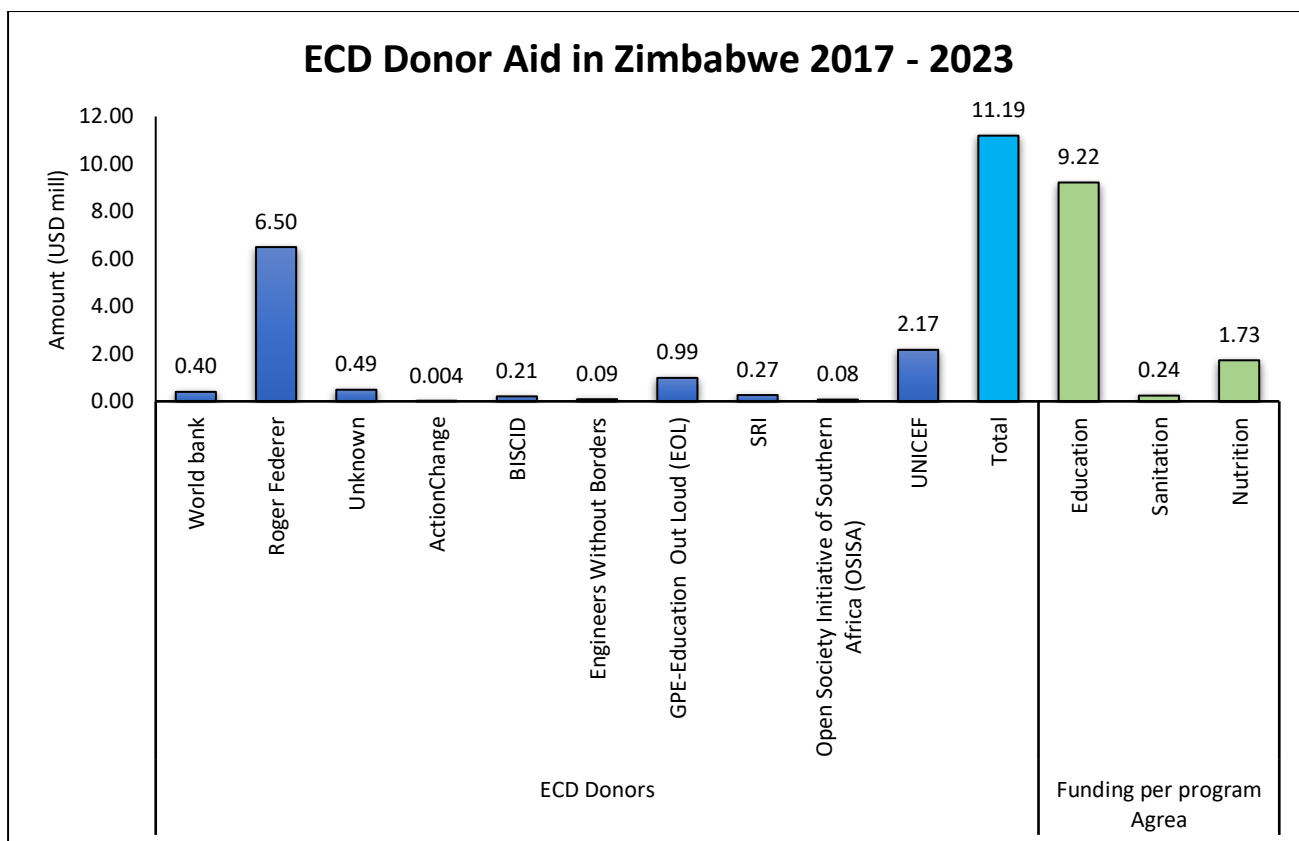


Figure 4: ECD Donor Aid in Zimbabwe
Source: Primary Data

Out of the ten donors that were identified as funding ECD, Roger Federer with USD 6,500,000.00, was found to be the biggest funder, followed by UNICEF with USD2,170,000.00, GPE (USD 990,000.00), and World Bank with USD 40,000.00. The Roger Federer Foundation funded a local CSO – the Youth Volunteers Association Trust, for infrastructure development and capacity building for 60 schools with funding worth USD500 000.00 from 2016 to 2019. The Youth Volunteers Association Trust supported ECD in 60 schools and out of the 60 schools, 50 were rehabilitated with an allocation of USD 2,000.00 per school, while 10 schools were constructed with an allocation of USD 5,000.00 per school. In addition, Action for Change, BISCID & Barnabas Aid funded the Youth Volunteers Association Trust for literacy and numeracy at ECD level and nutrition with budgets worth USD 4,000.00 and USD 210,000.00 respectively. It was also found that the Engineers without Borders funded the Youth Volunteers Association Trust for developing schools` infrastructure for 4 schools and for drilling as well as solarisation of boreholes for nutrition gardens, with budgets worth USD 55,000.00 and 32,000.00 from 2020 to 2021, respectively.

Complementary to the Zimbabwe fiscal budget which stood at ZWL\$17.96 billion (US\$169,965,666.18)²⁹ in 2022, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) received a budget worth USD 400,000.00 from World Bank for infrastructure development and capacity strengthening of teaching staff. ZINECDA also received a total of USD1,329,000.00 from several donors including from Roger Federer foundation and Education Out Loud, which was used for capacity building, knowledge generation and advocacy. Interestingly, in terms of global donor trends, ECD in Zimbabwe has gained around 10% of total ECD funding. This may be as a result of a significantly more developed public policy dealing with early education. Zimbabwe`s focus on early education in its sector plan has helped attract donor funding, which is strengthened by the Global Partnership for Education

²⁹ Zimbabwe ECD Voice, March 2022, <https://www.zinecda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Issue-6-of-Zimbabwe-ECD-Voice.pdf>

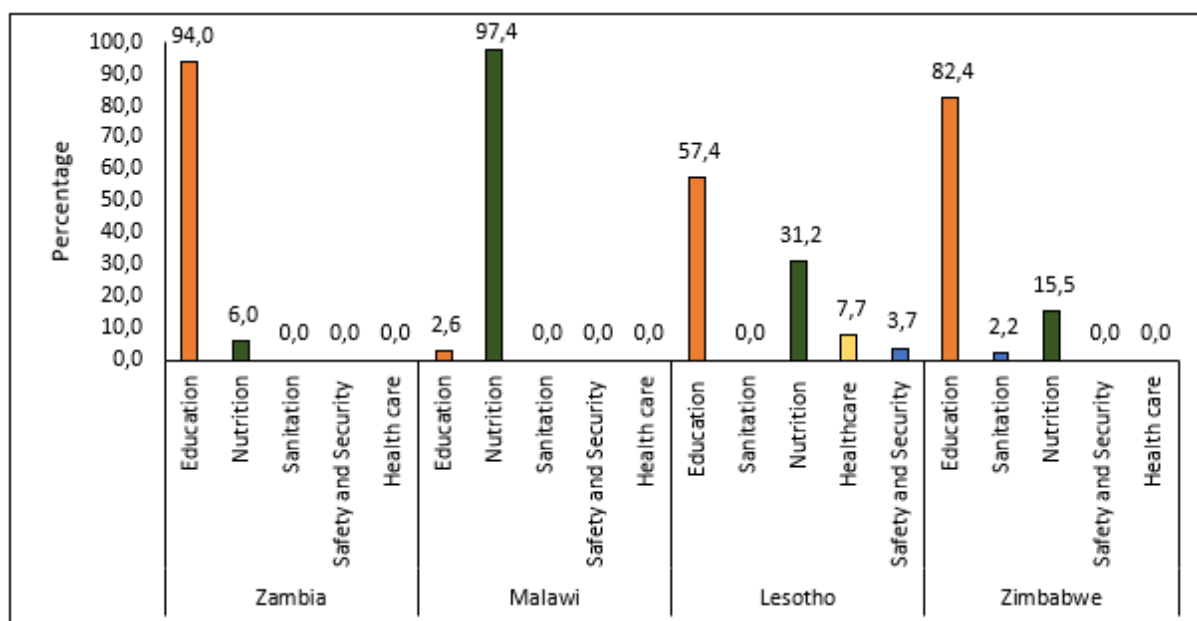
(GPE) programme. This initiative is a key mechanism for donors to coordinate and support countries' education systems with their funding. This and the willingness of donors to fund early education more broadly may hopefully support the government in scaling up its ECD efforts.

While many donors are directly and indirectly active in one or more ECD sub-sectors, few are explicitly supporting nurturing ECD interventions. According to the Zimbabwe Leaving No Child Behind report, UNICEF stood out in providing a holistic approach to ECD, which underlines its mandate as a child-focused organisation and demonstrates a strong organisational commitment to a multi-sectoral Nurturing Care Framework.³⁰ In education, UNICEF supports ECD centres, including paraprofessional training, at the same time as assisting the MoPSE in designing “home-grown school feeding programmes”. In line with this, the agency is in the process of developing a comprehensive ECD package that tackles food security and malnutrition among young children and infants, as well as looking at solving problems associated with poor access to clean drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene. Besides UNICEF, the UK Government, through FCDO, is also playing a significant role in supporting Zimbabwe's ECD sector. Its contributions are most significant in child and maternal health and nutrition, community-based sanitation, and social protection in support of the national Child Action Plan. FCDO also provides 62% of the USD59,000,000.00³¹ needed for the Education Development Fund from 2020-2025.

Regional ECD Funding distribution in Southern Africa

While there is a wide range of donors funding ECD in the SADC region, the funding levels differ from country to country and from donor to donor, with education and nutrition receiving the most funding. An analysis of secondary data revealed that “health” is the most funded subsector, inclusive of nutrition, child health, sanitation and hygiene as detailed in the 2016 World Bank study on “Improving the Quality of Early Childhood Development Services in Africa”, covering Sub-Saharan Africa. However, findings from this study show Nutrition and Education as defined in the Nurturing Framework, are the most funded sub-sectors in the SADC region. Within the education subsector, infrastructure as well as safety and security receive the least funding. Overall, sanitation, safety and security and healthcare are the least funded ECD subsectors in the region. This is illustrated in Figure 5 below.

Funding distribution per country (%)



³⁰ Jo Walker et al; Zimbabwe, Leaving No Child Behind-Investing in Early Years, 2020

³¹ Jo Walker et al; Zimbabwe, Leaving No Child Behind-Investing in Early Years, 2020

Figure 5: Funding distribution per country

Based on data collected during the study, the largest portion of ECD funding in Zambia (94%), was allocated to education. A smaller portion, 6% of the funding, was dedicated to nutrition-related programs. However, no funding was allocated to sanitation, safety and security, or healthcare areas, highlighting gaps in addressing these critical aspects of early childhood development. In Malawi, 97.4% of ECD funding, was channelled towards nutrition while 2.6% of the funding, was allocated to education. Similar to Zambia, no ECD funding was designated for sanitation, safety and security, or healthcare subsectors in Malawi. Education receives the largest share of ECD funding in Lesotho, accounting for 57.4% of the total. A significant portion of funding, 31.2%, was dedicated to nutrition programs. ECD healthcare subsectors receive 7.7% of the funding, while safety and security initiatives account for 3.7%. No ECD funding was allocated to sanitation programs in Lesotho. In Zimbabwe, the majority of ECD funding (82.4%), was directed towards education programs while, 15.5%, was allocated to nutrition-related initiatives. A minimum percentage, 2.2%, was designated for sanitation programs. However, no ECD funding was allocated to safety and security or healthcare programs in Zimbabwe.

Based on the data gathered from primary and secondary sources, an analysis of donor aid distribution in the five target countries was conducted and findings are presented in a matrix that captures the source of aid, recipients, type of recipient, and amount of aid from 2017 to 2022, for Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, as shown in table 4 below.

Table 4: ECD Donor Aid Distribution

Country	Education	Health & Sanitation	Nutrition	Safety and Security	Amount funded
<i>Lesotho</i>	629,110,000.00	84,410,000.00	342,150,000.00	40,990,000.00	1,096,660,000.00
<i>Malawi</i>	10,585,000.00	0.00	400,800,000.00	0.00	411,385,000.00
<i>Zambia</i>	75,390,000.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	75,390,000.0
<i>Zimbabwe</i>	9,220,000.00	242,000.00	1,730,000.00	0.00	11,192,000.00
Total (USD)	724,305,000.00	84,652,000.00	744,680,000.00	40,990,000.00	1,594,627,000.00
% of Total	45,42	5,31	46,70	2,57	

ECD Aid per Child

The data on ECD aid provides valuable insights into the support received by four different countries: Lesotho, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Based on data collected during this study, the findings shed light on the investment made in early childhood education and development for children from 2017 to 2022, Table 5 below shows the average distribution of ECD aid per child per year.

Table 5: ECD Aid per Child

Country	Total ECD enrolment	Total Aid per child – 2017 – 2022 (USD)	Average aid per child per year (USD)
<i>Lesotho</i>	297,000.00 ³²	3,692.46	738.49
<i>Malawi</i>	524,893.00 ³³	783.75	156.75
<i>Zambia</i>	145,307.00 ³⁴	518.83	103.77
<i>Zimbabwe</i>	655,132.00 ³⁵	17.08	3.42

³² <https://www.unicef.org/media/136136/file/Lesotho-2022-COAR.pdf>

³³ <https://www.unicef.org/malawi/early-childhood>

³⁴ https://www.unicef.org/zambia/media/3496/file/UNICEF%20ZAMBIA%20Budget%20brief_Early%20Childhood%20Development%20Brief%202023%20Final.pdf.pdf

³⁵ <https://mopse.co.zw/sites/default/files/public/downloads/2022%20Annual%20Education%20Statistics%20Report.pdf>

In Lesotho, a total of 297,000 children are enrolled in ECD. This indicates a considerable commitment to providing education and care for young children in the country. The data reveals that Lesotho receives a substantial amount of aid, with an average of \$3,692.46 allocated per child over the five-year period. On an annual basis, this translates to an average aid amount of US\$738.49 per child. In Malawi, the data shows that 524,893 children are enrolled in ECD. The total aid per child in Malawi stands at US\$783.75 for 5 years, with an annual average aid amount of US\$156.75 per child.

In Zambia, the findings reveal that 145,307 children are enrolled in ECD which indicates a smaller enrolment compared to Lesotho and Malawi. The total aid per child in Zambia is US\$518.83 for the five year period, with an annual average aid amount of US\$103.77 per child. Lastly, the data highlights the situation in Zimbabwe, where 655,132 children are enrolled in ECD. The average aid per child is significantly lower compared to the other countries, standing at \$17.08. This translates to an average aid amount of \$3.42 per child per year. Based on the available data, the lower aid per child suggests a potential need for increased support and resources in Zimbabwe's early childhood education sector.

The findings on ECD aid per child provide valuable insights into the investment and support received by Lesotho, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe in early childhood education and development. While Lesotho and Malawi demonstrate a higher average aid per child, Zambia and Zimbabwe could benefit from additional resources to ensure quality and equitable early childhood education and development opportunities for their respective populations of ECD learners.

Donor ECD aid distribution

The data provides information on the contributions made by different donors to support early childhood development in Zambia, Lesotho, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. These findings shed light on the financial assistance provided by various donors towards the development of early childhood education and care as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Donor ECD aid distribution

Donor	Country				Total	%
	Zambia	Lesotho	Malawi	Zimbabwe		
World Bank	39,800.0	280,000,000.0	404,285,000.0	400,000.0	684,724,800.0	42,9
UNICEF	31,854,200.0	308,230,000.0		2,170,000.0	342,254,200.0	21,4
UK AID		210,000,000.0			210,000,000.0	13,2
GAVI		140,150,000.0			140,150,000.0	8,8
Other		105,400,000.0		490,000.0	105,890,000.0	6,6
GPE	30,000,000.0	41,000,000.0		989,000.0	71,989,000.0	4,5
Roger Federer	6,700,000.0	1,000,000.0	7,100,000.0	6,500,000.0	21,300,000.0	1,3
ECHO		8,881,579.0			8,881,579.0	0,6
USAID	6,792,177.0	,			6,792,177.0	0,4
NORAD		3,000,000.0			3,000,000.0	0,2
SRI				265,000.0	265,000.0	0,016
BISCID				210,000.0	210,000.0	0,013
Engineers Without Borders				90,000.0	90,000.0	0,006
Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA)				75,000.0	75,000.0	0,005

Action Change				4,000.0	4,000.0	0,000 3
Total	75,386,177.0	1,097,661,579.0	411,385,000.0	11,193,000.0	1,595,625,756.0	

Based on the data collected for the period 2017 – 2022, World Bank emerged as the highest ECD funder (42.9%), with a substantial contribution of US\$39,800.00 in Zambia, US\$280,000,000.00 in Lesotho, US\$404,285,000.00 in Malawi and US\$400,000.00 Zimbabwe. Lesotho was the most funded country with a total of US\$1,097,661,579.00 while Zimbabwe was the least funded country, receiving a total of US\$11,193,000.00 in total. Zimbabwe's funding is comparatively lower than the other countries, which signifies inequity of ECD donor aid distribution across countries.

Donor Aid distribution by sector

The data provides information on the sectors that different donors support towards early childhood development in Zambia, Lesotho, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. These findings shed light on the financial assistance provided by various donors per sector towards the development of early childhood education and care as shown in Table 7 below.

Donor	Sector				Amount funded
	Education	Health & Sanitation	Nutrition	Safety and Security	
Worldbank	283,924,800.00		400,000,000.00		683,924,800.00
UNICEF	328,086,235.00	242,000.00	12,000,000.00		340,328,235.00
UK AID			190,000,000.00	20,000,000.00	210,000,000.00
GAVI			140,148,644.00		140,148,644.00
GPE	71,989,000.00				71,989,000.00
Roger Federer	7,600,000.00				7,600,000.00
ECHO	8,881,579.00				8,881,579.00
USAID	6,790,000.00				6,790,000.00
NORAD	3,000,000.00				3,000,000.00
SRI	265,000.00				265,000.00
BISCID			210,000.00		210,000.00
Engineers Without Borders			32,000.00		32,000.00
Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA)	75,000.00				75,000.00
ActionChange	4,000.00				4,000.00
Total	710,615,614.00	242,000.00	742,390,644.00	20,000,000.00	1,473,248,258.00

Across the countries under study, WorldBank was the highest funder with the majority of funding going towards education and nutrition. Furthermore UNICEF was the second highest ECD donor funder with financial support going towards nutrition, education and healthcare and sanitation. However, Donor agencies such as Roger Federer foundation did not explicitly allocate their aid against the 5 nurturing care framework sub-sectors, but allowed the grant recipients to decide which ECD sub-sector to fund.

Effectiveness of donor funds being channelled towards ECD programs in the SADC region.

For the purposes of this report, the definition of aid effectiveness was guided by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, hence the effectiveness of ECD donor aid was assessed against the principles of aid effectiveness which are ownership, alignment, harmonisation, and managing for results.

Early childhood development is a pivotal period of human development that holds significant influence on an individual's overall learning, health, behaviour, and extent of economic productivity. Investment in early childhood development remains a critical aspect that shapes a country's prosperity and creates human capital for economic growth. Despite the fact, the SADC region is characterised by low Government commitment to ECD budget financing, averaging 0.68%³⁶ in 2020 for Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Regardless of the low Government financing of ECD in the 5 countries, donor aid has been instrumental in bridging the funding gap and strengthening ECD delivery within the region.

Alignment

Donor countries and organizations bring their support in line with national strategies, and use local systems

The Governments of the five countries under study have developed national policies, laws, strategic plans, and operational guidelines to guide service delivery in each of the relevant ECD sectors. Some of the policies and strategies that have been developed include the National Policy Statement on Education (1999) and the Swaziland National Constitution (2005) in Eswatini; the Malawi Education Act (Act No. 21 of 2013) and the National Policy on Early Childhood Development (2017) in Malawi; the Zambia Focus on learning policy (1992) and the 'Educating Our Future' Zambia policy (1996); the National Strategic Plan for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (2017-18) and the National Policy on Early Childhood Care And Development, in Lesotho (1999), the Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 and the Education ACT, in Zimbabwe, among others. Given that all the target countries have existing policies and laws that are aimed at addressing issues of ECD, these policies have ensured that donor aid is aligned with Government priorities, target population needs, as well as ECD related issues.

In addition, the existence of structures that harness ECD related issues is an effective mechanism that has been adopted by some countries to ensure that donor aid is aligned with Government priorities. For example, in Malawi, at national level, there is an ECD forum for stakeholders that is coordinated by the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, where the donors and implementing stakeholders meet and discuss issues affecting the ECD sector. In Zambia, the Ministry of Finance uses the integrated financial management system that was established in 2018, which helps in monitoring the use of funds, including donor funding, as well as the early learning initiative meetings that are conducted yearly or quarterly to strengthen ECD delivery. These strategies have allowed for a comprehensive delivery of ECD related interventions, as well as ensuring that donor aid is effective and remains in-line with Government priorities and the needs of the community. However, like many other less developed countries, Zambia continues to face major challenges in creating a favorable environment for thriving ECD. These challenges include a fragmented ECD related policy framework and programming, limited investment in ECD-related research, weak monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and limited awareness among parents and key stakeholders of the importance of ECD.³⁷

Despite the existence of policies and laws in the target countries which ensure that donors are aligned with Government priorities and the needs of the people, findings from the study revealed that some philanthropist programs and processes are rigid and not adaptable to the context of the target

³⁶ Baseline Evaluation for the Transnational Advocacy Capacity Building Project (TRANAC) in Southern Africa, 2021

³⁷ Mitsuki Nishi; Re-engineering Early Childhood Development, 2018

communities, which in turn affects aid effectiveness. Complementing this was a key stakeholder who was quoted saying.

“You know, with some donors, they tell you what they want, and they have a way of how they want things to be done...” (KII with TRANAC partner)

Thus, the inflexibility of some donor programs and projects hinders the maximum gains of aid effectiveness as some of the programs do not meet the priorities of the country and the needs of the target communities.

Harmonisation

Donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures, and share information to avoid duplication.

Harmonisation of donor funding with Government priorities is a common goal that guides many donor funded programmes. While harmonisation is a noble notion that strengthens the delivery of social development interventions, it is important to note that, poor harmonisation is likely to be counter-productive in promoting locally initiated responses to development challenges.

Findings from the study revealed that conducting needs assessments before project implementation is a mechanism that has been adopted by most donors in order to remain harmonised with Government priorities and the needs of the communities. For example, Terre des hommes (TDH), in partnership with the Nhaka Foundation, a local CSO in Zimbabwe, conducted a needs assessment with caregivers, school authorities, as well as district workers in Mutare and Seke, where they engaged with the target communities in order to understand what was really needed before project implementation. The evidence-based approach that has been adopted in the design and implementation of some donor funded programs has been instrumental in enhancing the relevance of social development interventions and addressing the needs of target communities.

From the desk review conducted, Ministries that coordinate ECD vary across the five countries; Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) coordinates ECD in Malawi.³⁸ The Ministry works with other line Ministries, such as the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), the Ministry of Health (MoH), and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MoLGRD)³⁹. In Zambia, the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) is the lead Ministry for ECD and collaborates with other Ministries such as the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS), the Ministry of Health (MoH), and the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development (MYSCD).⁴⁰ The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) is the lead Ministry for ECD in Lesotho and coordinates other Ministries and stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), the Ministry of Health (MoH), and the Lesotho Council of NGOs (LCN).⁴¹ ECD in Swaziland is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). The Ministry works with other Ministries, such as the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), and the Ministry of Tinkhundla Administration and Development (MTAD).⁴² In Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) is responsible for the implementation and coordination of the ECD programme.⁴³

³⁸ Stakeholders Vouch for Increased Domestic Funding for ECD in SADC Countries.

<https://www.zodiakmalawi.com/nw/national-news/65-news-in-central-region/5656-stakeholders-vouch-for-increased-domestic-funding-for-ecd-in-sadc-countries>.

³⁹ ECDC - Early Childhood Development Coalition Malawi. <https://ecdcmw.org/>.

⁴⁰ Zambia Early Childhood Development Project (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2018/04/19/zambia-early-childhood-development-project>)

⁴¹ [Lesotho Early Childhood Care and Development Policy] (<http://www.moe.gov.ls/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ECCD-Policy.pdf>)

⁴² Swaziland Early Childhood Care and Education Policy] (https://www.unicef.org/esaro/Swaziland_ECCD_Policy.pdf)

⁴³ Zimbabwe's Early Childhood Development (ECD) Education Programme: A... <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/680641539108140040/pdf/Oct-2-S3b-Zimbabwe.pdf>.

There is no harmonisation on the Ministries that coordinate ECD as well as other Ministries that collaborate on ECD programming.

A well-coordinated ECD programme with participation from different influential sectors that include health, nutrition, education, social and child protection, among others, is better placed to succeed. This especially includes the Government, NGOs, civil society, and private sector companies. Engagements with different funding and implementing partners shows the existence of consistent collaboration and coordination between the Donor and the Governments of the countries under study. In Zambia, Child Fund works with Government as part of a multi-sectoral team where the Government is kept abreast of project plans and activities. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in Lesotho also provides learning materials for the training of caregivers, while WFP provides food in support of the school feeding programme. NGO-Government collaboration plays a fundamental role in ensuring that all donor-funded programmes remain within the confines of national priorities and address the needs of the communities.

However, this is not without its challenges. Findings from the reviewed literature revealed that Government support is generally limited as highlighted in the relatively low fiscal budget allocations across the five countries. For example in 2020, Government support to ECD in Swaziland was at 0%, Lesotho at 0.2%, Malawi at 0.2%, Zambia at 1% and Zimbabwe at 2%. ECD is a multidisciplinary program that deserves a multi-sectoral approach involving all the key stakeholders. However, in Malawi, these stakeholders are brought together by the MoGCDSW. The problem that has been observed is that the Ministry does not have a robust and visible ECD department, rather this important service is under the Department of Child Affairs, which is understaffed and underfunded. As such, the ECD section is unable to carry out its leadership and coordination roles effectively. Finally, it has been found that a number of development partners support the ECD program, but their efforts and resources are not fully coordinated because the Ministry has no control over how partners allocate their resources. This leads to duplication of efforts and a concentration of aid and services in some areas over others.

Ownership

Developing countries set their own development strategies, improve their institutions, and tackle corruption

More often than not, ownership gives aid-recipient countries more control over donor-funded programs – a circumstance that enhances the extent of aid effectiveness. Partner ownership, be it by the host country or by the implementing partner, is one that has over recent years, received greater focus in a bid to strengthen the outcome of social development interventions. Being a central education sector, often funded by institutions such as UNICEF, the World Bank, the Global Partnership on Education (GPE) and the Roger Federer Foundation, among other funding partners, ECD is one that places lifelong benefits to not only the child, but also to a country's economic development as well.

In light of this, evidence from engagements with Donor representatives, Government representatives and CSO/NGO representatives revealed an exceptional level of ownership of donor aid for strengthening ECD delivery in the target countries. Donor agencies and implementing organizations alike, such as in Zimbabwe, work closely and together with the Ministry of Education through the district schools' inspectors and the education inspectors, as well as through local Government and local councils. This alone strengthens ownership at both national and community levels. A TRANAC partner representative was quoted saying;

“As we get into communities, we conduct combined needs assessment activities as a team with community leaders and local Government authorities...” (KII with TRANAC Partner)

Considering that Ministries of Education conduct their own routine school assessments, they are already furnished with information regarding schools in need of certain types of support, such as nutrition, water, sanitation, and/or infrastructure. When combined with the technical capacities and guidance from donor agencies, and implementation knowledge of implementing organizations, as well as the indigenous knowledge of local groups, the design and implementation of donor-funded projects and programmes are more likely to be successful. This allows for consensus building, co-creation, and co-implementation of strategically designed programmes that will, in turn, strengthen relevance, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. Although so, some donors come with predesigned programs which in turn reduce the extent of ownership by the target beneficiaries.

Engagements with different development actors whose focus and mandate align with the national agenda on enhancing the delivery of quality ECD, also increase. This notion was supported by a TRANAC Partner representative who was quoted saying;

“...as more engagements were being made with the Ministries of Education and Gender, as well as with the responsible ECD Directorates, more action has been made to increase investment in ECD.” (KII with TRANAC Partner)

A Government representative also spoke to this saying;

“...the donor funded ECD projects then become programs and once they are programs they are funded by the Ministry. For example, the project piloting ECD curriculum is from donor funds, but the monitoring and support is done by officials in the Ministry.” (KII with Government Official)

In Malawi, the curriculum was developed with guidance from the line Ministry and involved all relevant stakeholders, which subsequently increased the extent to which there is national ownership of the programme.

Programme ownership has also been realised in some SADC countries such as in Zambia where Education financing has increased from 13 billion Kwacha to 23 billion Kwacha, which through decentralization, sees each constituency receiving 27 million Kwacha. This improves service delivery in the education sector at large, including the ECD sector in the country. Complimentary to the monitoring and support provided by Government to donor funded interventions, is the central management of funds by the Ministry of Finance through the integrated financial management system which has seen a reduction in misappropriation of funds in Zambia. Although so, some funding partners, such as the World Bank, prefer to manage procurement directly without disbursing funds directly to the Government in order to ensure financial accountability.

However, it is important to note that donor funding was highlighted as one that is poorly coordinated, such as in Zambia, as one partner noted this saying “*they (donor agencies) work where they choose to*”. Of note is that UNICEF works in the eastern province of Zambia, whereas Zambia comprises 10 provinces, all of which require ECD development interventions that UNICEF can support.

Managing for Results

Developing countries and donors focus on producing and measuring results

Strategic planning and performance monitoring are critical components of an effective performance management system that aids developing countries and donors in tracking the extent of programme effectiveness. Performance monitoring informs decision-making for improved implementation and ensures accountability for results attained by all respective players.

The availability of financial management systems that guide the flow of donor funds helps to track programme related expenditure, which further allows for assessing cost effectiveness. Discussions with

development partners from the target countries showed that donor agencies often provide predesigned financial management systems that implementing organisations adhere to. For example, Child Fund has a zonal and community level system that is used to track and ensure that the intended beneficiaries receive the benefits of the donor funds. Similarly, other donor organisations also provide guidance on financial management to ensure transparency, cost efficiency, and effectiveness, as well as accountability of donor funds. One TRANAC partner reiterated this saying;

“You know with the donor funds, they will tell you what they want, and because of this, funds are used effectively. The mandate towards fund management is effective...it is based on time frames and stuff like that.” (KII with TRANAC partner)

A World Bank representative also confirmed the effectiveness of financial management structures that ensure programme efficiency when he said;

“I would say there has been efficiency because resources have been utilised based on what was proposed on paper” (KII with World Bank)

Thus, the availability of financial structures has given organisations a platform from which to track and ensure cost effectiveness, which in turn strengthens the delivery of programme interventions. However, a problem with these practices as defined by Moynihan and Pandey (2010) in their article on *‘Why Managers Use Performance Information?’*, is that performance information is often poorly linked to accountability measures, thus compromising the effectiveness of performance management.

Strategic planning and performance monitoring is also strengthened by conducting evaluations that help to measure broader programme performance, without which, it would be difficult to ascertain. Typically, most donors have expectations on the need and structure of evaluations to be conducted, with many requiring baseline, midline, and end line evaluations, often assessed against the six OECD/DAC criteria – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and coherence. For example, in Zimbabwe, the World Bank conducted a pre-post-test assessment for ECD school leadership training which tested knowledge levels before and after the training so as to assess the difference and impact of the training.

A contributing factor that is strengthening aid effectiveness is equitable use of resources to benefit the most vulnerable and underserved rural communities, which ensures that both rural and urban school children are at the same level. However, the need is somewhat greater than the available aid, especially in light of the limited Government funding towards ECD. Although some programs receive donor funding worth as much as USD39,000,000.00, administrative grant management costs (+/-8 million) and other operational costs consume a large fraction of the aid which limits the extent of aid effectiveness, particularly in terms of coverage.

From the reviewed literature, it was also noted that, access to ECD services in Zambia is inequitable and not inclusive. Higher income urban populations and children without identified developmental delays or disabilities, tend to have better access than those from poorer rural areas and those living with disabilities.⁴⁴ Only UNICEF and the Belgian Government target children with disabilities in their support for ECD services. The quality remains a major challenge as only a small minority of ECD teachers are properly qualified and they are teaching in urban government ECD centres. Thus, it comes as no surprise that rural schools are particularly lagging behind in offering quality ECD services.

Tracking the existing gaps in relation to ECD aid

⁴⁴ https://www.licht-fuer-die-welt.at/app/uploads/sites/8/2021/09/leave_no_child_behind_country_case_study_zambia_english.pdf

In many of the poorest parts of the world, a significant number of vulnerable children are being “left behind” because of gaps in ECD funding. An analysis of a wide range of these gaps in Southern Africa revealed that some are country specific while others are a result of donor preferences. Below are some of the key gaps identified during the study.

I. Insufficient Funding

Although the benefits of investing in ECD are well established, competing demands for funding stretch available resources across many other social and economic priorities. COVID-19 has also exerted intense pressure on public finances across the Globe, including in Southern Africa, leading to widening of funding gaps across sectors. ECD spending has not been spared. As a result, countries face critical ECD finance shortfalls, which impact the quality, comprehensiveness, and coverage of ECD services. Aid spending on pre-primary education is far below the recommendation from the Incheon and the Paris Declarations’ commitments that 10% of total education aid should be spent on pre-primary education. Only UNICEF and the GPE met this target in 2019. As a result of this ECD under-funding, the Tashkent Declaration called for new measures to increase funding for ECD through increased public expenditures and well-regulated partnerships, including with the non-profit, private, and social sectors.⁴⁵

Funding is one of the major gaps in ECD programming with ECD getting an insignificant percentage of the total education budgets in the majority of Southern African countries as indicated in the TRANAC baseline data of 2021 in the table 5 below.⁴⁶

Table 7: Government funding towards ECD

Malawi	Zambia	Lesotho	Zimbabwe	Swaziland	Average %
0.2%	1%	0.2%	2% ⁴⁷	0%	0.68%

The average percentage of the Government contribution to ECD budgets for the five countries, Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland, is less than 1% . In 2019, only 0.4% of the education budget was allocated to coordinate, manage and strengthen Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Lesotho, and by 2021 the percentage had dropped to 0.2%.⁴⁸ In Mozambique, less than 1% of education-related donor funding was spent on ECD in 2017 with higher education receiving more than 14 times the amount of donor funding reserved for ECD in the same year.⁴⁹ Five donors that were surveyed in Swaziland had spent less than 1% of their total education budgets on early education in 2017, with the EU spending only 0.3% of its total education budget on early education and, unfortunately, this percentage has declined in recent years. These trends have been consistent throughout subsequent years. All this reflects the lack of prioritisation of early learning interventions amongst both Government and donors in Southern Africa.

The ECD sector in Zimbabwe is underfunded due to weak prevailing economic conditions; most funds for education are allocated to salaries, leaving less than 3% for infrastructure and professional development. Similarly, Zambia faces major challenges that include limited funding to ECD in the national budget, limited coverage, and access to ECD, particularly in rural areas, poor quality of ECD

⁴⁵ <https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2022/11/tashkent-declaration-ecce-2022.pdf>

⁴⁶ Government ECD budgets as a percentage of Government Education budgets

⁴⁷ Zimbabwe’s 2% include budget for Grades 1 and 2.

⁴⁸ Roger Federer Foundation; The School Readiness Initiative, ND

⁴⁹ ECD Financing, Leave no one behind, 2020.

services, poor nutrition and feeding related practices, weak child protection systems, limited child registration, and limited access to clean drinking water and sanitation, among other challenges.⁵⁰

II. Lack of a Holistic Approach to ECD Programming

To help children thrive, now and later in life, requires investing in their access to healthcare; proper nutrition; adequate, quality early learning and stimulation interventions; responsive caregiving; as well as emotional and physical safety and security from the moment they are born. However, there is a serious gap in ECD practitioners and donors' appreciation of the multi-sectorality of ECD, with some defining ECD only as early learning. While many donors are directly and indirectly active in one or more ECD sub-sectors, few are explicitly supporting nurturing ECD frameworks and interventions. FCDO is playing a significant role in supporting Zimbabwe's ECD sector, even if its approach does not explicitly align with the Nurturing Care Framework.⁵¹ Its contributions are most significant in child and maternal health and nutrition, community-based sanitation, and social protection in support of the national Child Action Plan. It is reported that FCDO also provides 62% of the USD 59 million needed for the Education Development Fund over the next five years.⁵² This was supported by a key informant who said,

“Children are not being helped holistically and they are not getting the full support they require. We are not putting the child at the centre, and they are not getting everything they need in order to stimulate their development.” (KII with TRANAC Partner)

The siloed approach to ECD interventions has negative consequences on the child's development and learning. In addition, this can lead to donors excessively supporting some ECD sub-sectors, leaving other sub-sectors with insufficient support.

III. Inadequate ECD infrastructure

An ECD facility is a partial care facility that provides an early childhood programme that encompasses early learning and the development of children before they start formal schooling. Most of the ECD infrastructure is in poor state and in some cases, inappropriate for young children. Many of these centres are characterized by poor ventilation, dusty rooms, poor lighting, temporary dilapidated structures, and the absence of child friendly sanitary facilities⁵³, which affects children's health. There is a serious ECD infrastructure gap in most Southern African countries. This was supported during interviews with both donors and practitioners who said,

“There is a serious infrastructure gap. It is only in areas where UNICEF and Save the Children operate that you find proper ECD structures.” (KII with a donor)

“The largest area of need is infrastructure which affects children's learning capabilities and teachers are not motivated to teach in schools with poor facilities (dilapidated). Donors look at schools and their enrolment but do not look at the state of the learning facilities” (KII with an ECD practitioner)

“Donors do not like supporting infrastructure in our country due to the terrain which makes it more expensive. There is really no donor support in ECD infrastructure apart from teacher training and learning materials. There is a serious gap in terms of donor aid” (KII with a TRANAC Partner)

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ ECD Financing, Leave no one behind Zimbabwe report, 2020.

⁵² ECD Financing, Leave no one behind Zimbabwe report, 2020.

⁵³ Sajid Sherif; Universal ECD in Malawi: A cost-benefit approach, 2021

In Zimbabwe the ECD learner to classroom ratio (LCR) decreased annually from 72 in 2017 to 54 in 2021 and the ECD LCRs for all the provinces are above 20, the recommended LCRs for ECD.⁵⁴

Within the SADC region, Governments are working towards attaining the SDG goals including, SDG 4.2 on ensuring that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. Lack of and poor infrastructure at ECD facilities does not only present significant health and safety risks to children using these facilities but can also point to poor quality ECD service provisioning. Increasing investment in ECD infrastructure development would enhance the ability of ECD facilities to provide high-quality early learning and ECD services.

IV. Funding for ECD Health and Nutrition programmes

Donor preferences of the sub-sector to support is partly determined by the country context and hence differs from one country to another. A key informant in Swaziland indicated that donors are mainly interested in immunization, antenatal and prenatal care as well as other health issues, with very little support to early learning. In 2018, Zambia announced the scale up of access to quality child health care services, access to clean drinking water and sanitation and nutrition. This announcement was backed by the introduction of a Government grant of 400 Zambian Kwacha for every vulnerable child under the age of five.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, the intervention was not implemented in the 2019 budget due to debt servicing constraints. According to one estimate, nutrition-related programmes represent approximately 0.1% of Zambia's national budget.⁵⁶ Consequently, poor access to quality child healthcare services coupled with poor nutrition, inadequate feeding related practices and limited access to clean drinking water and sanitation, among other things, are adversely impacting Zambia's early childhood development levels, especially in poor, rural, and marginalised communities. The Government of Zimbabwe used to support the schools with grain before COVID 19 and this has been discontinued in many schools since 2019 in spite the fact that some children have one meal a day and have to walk long distances to and from school from as early as the age of 4 years.

V. Weak ECD Access, Safety and Protection

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly agreed to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. Unfortunately, not all children have access to quality early childhood development, creating an access gap, especially for the poor, vulnerable and marginalized children. For example, only 46% of Basotho children have access to early education that provides opportunities for early learning and healthy development, as well as increases their readiness to start primary school.⁵⁷ Less than half of pre-primary aged children (46%) have access to ECD in Lesotho.

In Zimbabwe, ECD access gaps continue to exist and equitable participation in ECD programmes remains patchy, with the gross and net enrolment rates for ECD A and ECD B classes currently standing at 56% and 32% respectively. Reasons include long distances to early learning centres especially in rural areas, a lack of parental demand and awareness of the importance of early childhood education as well as high school fees, especially in private schools in urban areas. Early learning centres, usually attached to a primary school, can be situated far from where people live, and most rural residents do not

⁵⁴ EMIS report 20221

⁵⁵ Republic of Zambia. Education and Skills Sector Plan 2017-2021.

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ Roger Federer Foundation; School Readiness Initiative in Lesotho, ND

have transport. Many parents are unable to walk their children to school and are uncomfortable having their children walk for long distances on their own. This was supported by a key informant who said,

“...and the young learners (4 years old) have to travel 7kms and because of their age, parents end up not sending their kids to ECD” (KII with a donor)

Having ECD learners walk long distances is linked to a serious gap in children’s safety and protection. Village or community-based ECD centres are being created, but these struggle to attract pupils because they are not attached to a primary school. This also means they do not have a supervising head teacher and the quality of the service is questionable. The environment at the early learning centre has to provide safety and security because when a child feels safe, that child is able to take the risks necessary to be in relationships, explore, try new things, and learn. Research has shown that children, who feel insecure, play, and explore less, and have more difficulty with peer relationships. Unfortunately, there is a significant donor funding gap for improving the ECD safety, security, and protection sector across the targeted countries as illustrated in Figure 6 below.

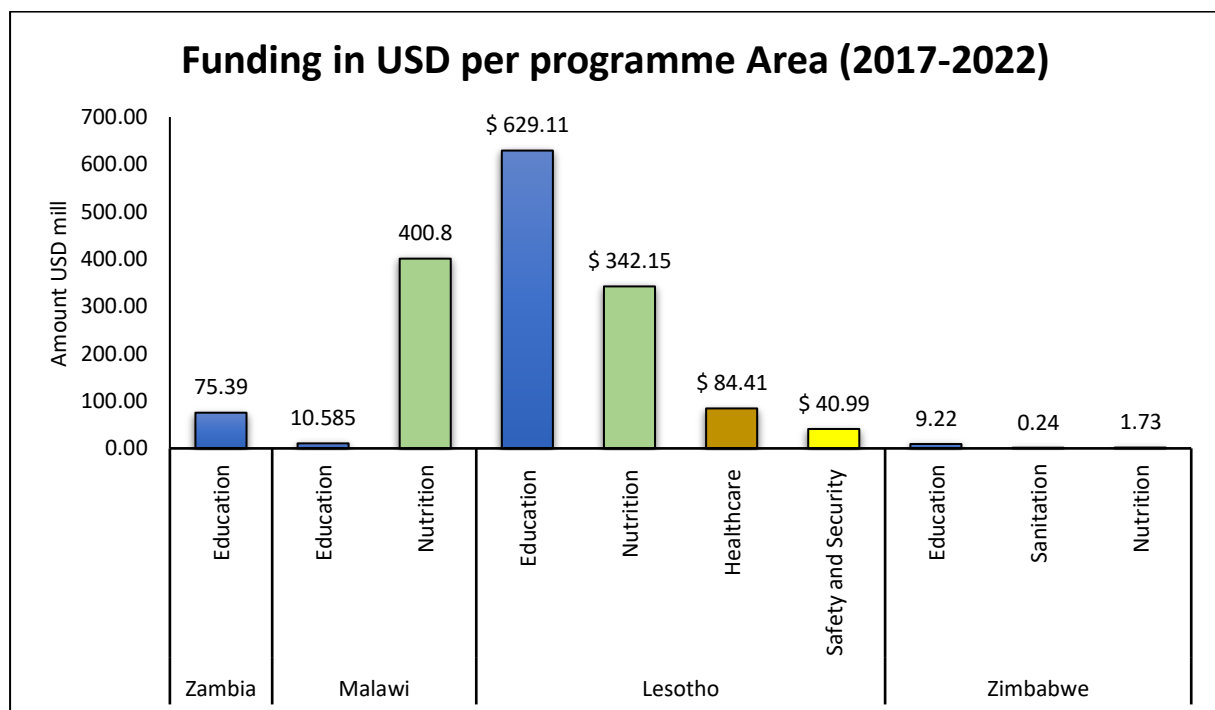


Figure 6: Overall ECD funding per program
Source: Primary Data

VI. Inadequate ECD trained teachers and incentives.

Poor availability of trained ECD teachers is a major gap in almost all the Southern African countries engaged for this research. Zambia highlighted a gap in trained ECD teachers with the country resorting to Volunteers who tend to leave the sector due to lack of incentives. Use of untrained volunteers has an impact on the quality of early education that children receive as supported by a key informant who said,

“The volunteers need training in how to handle young ECD children who are in their tender, delicate age of development” (KII with a Donor).

In Lesotho, only 20% of ECD teachers are qualified professionals from the Lesotho College of Education. In Malawi, approximately 48% of all ECD caregivers are trained.⁵⁸ However, most ECD teachers in Malawi have attended courses of no longer than a fortnight which is far inadequate for the development of productive competencies. Besides training, volunteers lack motivation in the absence of any incentive. The Government of Malawi introduced an incentive for ECD volunteers in the 2021 and 2022 budgets. Although Zimbabwe is one of the few low-income sub-Saharan African countries that provides formal training interventions for ECD teachers, it still experiences gaps in trained ECD teachers as it cannot hire all new ECD teachers due to budgetary constraints. In Zimbabwe, the ECD sector has about 655,132 learners (328,610 males and 326,522 females) taught by 17,937 ECD teachers, (13,198 trained and 4,739 untrained),⁵⁹ as illustrated in Figure 7 below.

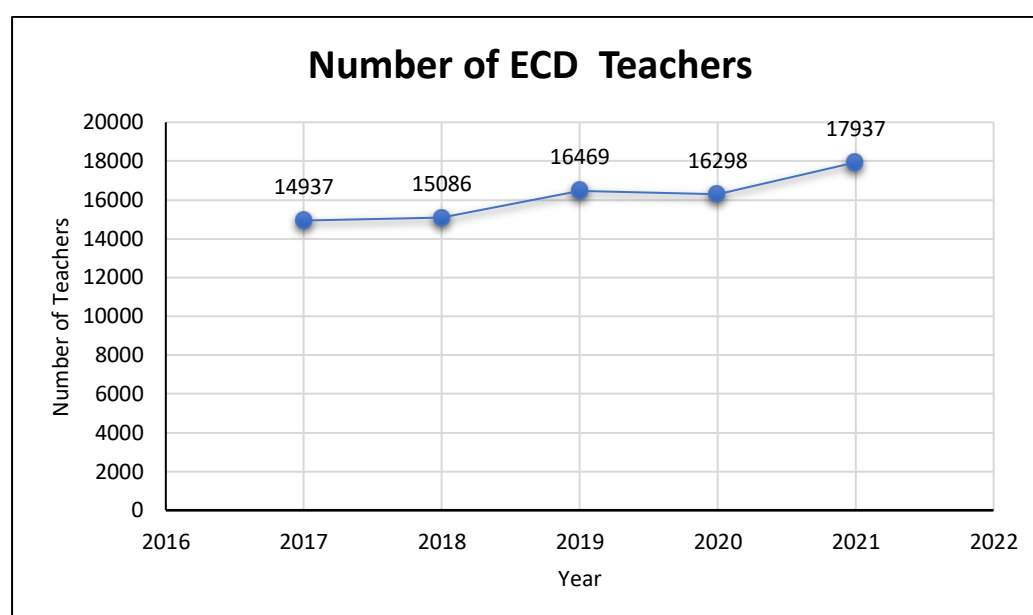


Figure 7: Number of Trained Teachers
Source: EMIS Report

It is pleasing to note that Zimbabwe has ECD standards and policies that focus on quality and relevance of ECD services within the education sector. However, these standards are not being reinforced because there is no enforcement system that adequately coordinates or regulates service providers. Most caregivers do not receive monetary compensation, making it difficult to attract and retain qualified caregivers. In Malawi, it is reported that, 76% of caregivers receive no pay at all, and among those who are compensated, they receive between 3 to 14 USD a month.⁶⁰

VII. Lack of equity in ECD programming

In early childhood settings, there is need to provide high quality education and care to diverse learners. However, each child has a unique learning and development trajectory that may require individualised or additional support for them to be fully engaged and for them to reach their full developmental potential. Not all children get the equality of opportunity that provides all children with a fair and equitable start in life.

⁵⁸ ibid

⁵⁹ EMIS report 2021

⁶⁰ Sajid Sherif; Universal ECD in Malawi: A cost-benefit approach, 2021

ECD provision in Zambia remains highly inequitable, for example, the sector is dominated by private and for-profit providers in wealthier areas, as well as NGOs and churches. Children who have regular access to ECD services, particularly better-quality services, are usually from richer urban households. The poorest and most marginalised children, who need more and better developmental support, tend to have little or no access to ECD centres. If they do receive support, it is often via charities or churches, often for shorter periods, and the quality of the provision of care is highly variable.⁶¹ Higher income urban populations and children without identified developmental delays or disabilities tend to have better access than those from poorer rural areas and those living with disabilities. Only two donors, UNICEF and the Belgian government, target children with disabilities in their support for ECD services. Similar situations prevail in other Southern African countries including in Swaziland.

Most Southern African countries, with the exception of Zimbabwe, have gaps in the provision of inclusive training for ECD teachers, commitments to the early screening and identification of special needs, support for disabled children by making their ECD classrooms accessible with ramps and rails, and availability of specialised schools or early learning centres for children with severe disabilities. However, donor support for learning materials and equipment for children with disabilities is almost non-existent in all Southern African countries in the TRANAC project. Zimbabwe is grappling with the gap created by inequitable distribution of trained ECD teachers with the majority of trained ECD teachers deployed in urban areas.

VIII. Insufficient Coordination

Considering the multi-sectoral nature of early childhood development, coordination becomes central in ensuring holistic childhood development. Unfortunately, multi-sectoral ECD coordination is a major gap in most SADC countries, and neither does it get donor support as it is expected to be a Government responsibility.

Most efforts to address Zambia's ECD challenges, until now, have taken a siloed or sectoral approach, despite the government's approval of an integrated multi-sectoral Early Childhood Care and Development Education Policy. The Ministry of Education was given the task of hosting Zambia's ECD mandate but because this was not accompanied by any additional budgetary or institutional financial support, the Ministry focused on developing the early education component only rather than carrying the entire ECD mandate in collaboration with other relevant Ministries. Implementation of ECD programmes has been hampered by poor coordination mechanisms in support of cross-ministerial action. Both donors and ECD implementing partners expressed frustration and disappointment at the gap in multi-sectoral coordination across relevant Ministries as stated by one donor who said,

“We are ready to support the Government, but we need an effective coordination system led by the Government. We need to be less fragmented in our approach and work together with one multi-sectoral plan” (KII with a donor)

Given the benefits that can be because of a multi-sectoral approach towards successful implementation of ECD programmes, the coordination between Government departments, ECD institutions, private sector companies, donors, communities, and caregivers, provides optimal results for children.

⁶¹ ECD Financing-Leave no one behind, 2020

Conclusion and Recommendations

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a fundamental and central factor for fostering holistic child development, whose influence is noted not only in a child's social and intellectual development but reflects in a country's overall socio-economic outcomes. Being a critical element of child development, donor aid has been pivotal in pushing the agenda towards strengthening ECD programming in many developing countries, including in Southern Africa. While the ECD sector is funded by institutions such as UNICEF, the World Bank, USAID, Roger Federer, GPE and FCDO among others, it is evident that there is grave need for increased ECD related donor aid to sufficiently address nutrition, education, health, safety and protection, early learning, and responsive caregiving, as key ECD components. Considering that the Governments of Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe commit little investment into ECD programming – averaging 0.68%⁶² in 2020, a boost in ECD related funding would go a long way.

Given that all the target countries have existing policies and laws that are aimed at addressing issues of ECD, these policies and laws have ensured that donor aid is aligned with Government priorities, which has improved ownership of donor funded programmes locally. Ownership was also found to be strong in terms of implementing partners working together with local authorities, including community leaders and community members in the design and implementation of related programmes, which overall improves aid effectiveness. Key to effective and efficient management of ECD donor aid are the financial management systems that have been instrumental in tracking expenditure and ensuring accountability.

Although donor aid for ECD programming in Southern Africa is available, major gaps that hinder the full potential of ECD delivery across the target countries include, insufficient funding, lack of a holistic approach to ECD programming, inadequate ECD infrastructure, weak ECD access, safety, and protection, inadequate ECD trained teachers and incentives, as well as lack of equity in ECD programming. The rigidity of some donor financial management systems was noted as placing hindrance to effective programming, and this highlights the lack of a consultative process for designing results-based, context specific grant management processes.

In conclusion, a non-holistic and non-equitable approach to ECD aid, hinders effective delivery of ECD programmes and progress towards achieving the 2030 agenda of 'leaving no child behind', across the target countries.

⁶² Baseline Evaluation for the Transnational Advocacy Capacity Building Project (TRANAC) in Southern Africa, 2021

Lessons Learnt

1. Conducting multiple studies concurrently, that target the same stakeholders, negatively affects stakeholder participation which in turn affects the data collection process.
2. Prior sensitisation of key stakeholders, including donor agencies, on the scope of the study and expectations, is needed to enable stakeholders to avail themselves and prepare for interviews.
3. For a study of this scope and magnitude, there is need to invest more financial and human resources for effective data collection.

Recommendations

1. Establish a Southern Africa ECD regional network to strengthen ECD advocacy as well as resource mobilisation efforts for improved ECD programming.
2. Establish a regional ECD donor platform through which to enhance harmonisation and alignment across the different donors.
3. Establish a country level ECD multi-sectoral basket funding system which is characterised by a coordination committee that comprises of representatives from each subsector (nutrition, health, early education, social protection, and responsive caregiving), led by Government, to ensure a holistic approach to ECD funding and programming.
4. Create a joint ECD fund where donor agencies pool resources together for teacher development and remuneration, as well as infrastructure development to ensure high-quality early care and education.
5. Advocate for donor/recipient joint development of tailor-made grant management processes to ensure contextual relevance and avoid bureaucratic and protracted processes that may negatively affect aid effectiveness.
6. Standardise the inclusion of the most marginalised children in the poorest, most remote, and vulnerable situations, including those with disability, in all Donor funded programmes to make certain that no child is left behind.