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ACTORS**

DEAR READER

Welcome to the 12th issue of the Zimbabwe ECD Voice, our first publication for the year 2024. We are excited to embark on this year's journey with you and anticipate a year filled with success and meaningful progress in early childhood development (ECD).

The year has already begun on a high note, and we are thrilled to share the noteworthy achievements made in the first quarter. Among these accomplishments, ZINECDA actively participated in the Eastern Southern Africa Conference, contributing valuable insights and forging collaborations in the region, played a significant role during the launch of the Zimbabwe National Early Learning Policy, a significant milestone in shaping the future of ECD in our country. Furthermore, the draft model Bill aimed at influencing Early Childhood Education financing has been finalized, offering a promising framework for sustainable investment in ECD. These achievements demonstrate our commitment to advancing ECD in Zimbabwe.

In this issue, the ECD Voice continues to serve as a platform for sharing new knowledge and insights in the field of early childhood development. We are pleased to highlight one of the completed research studies, which focuses on the status of Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 (SDG4) and the development of a tracking tool in Southern Africa.

This study explores the implications of SDG4.2 on ECD and highlights the progress made by four out of six member states (Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, and Zimbabwe) in achieving at least 75% of the required indicators for SDG 4 target 4.2. Specifically, the study focuses on participation rates and enrolment ratios in ECD. However, it reveals data gaps regarding readiness for primary school and home learning environments. These gaps will be further explored to seek solutions and improvements.

To our esteemed ZINECDA membership, we express our heartfelt gratitude for being our voice in the corners of Zimbabwe that we may not reach directly. Your dedication and support are instrumental in driving positive change and ensuring that ECD is prioritised at all levels, from grassroots to provincial and national levels.

Thank you for your continued support, and we trust that you will find this issue of the ECD Voice both informative and inspiring. Together, let's make a lasting impact on the lives of children in Zimbabwe.

Warm Regards,



Marceline Kahlari: DIRECTOR



MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

NATIONAL EARLY LEARNING POLICY

ZINECDA actively participated in the National Early Learning Policy launch in Kadoma on February 12-14, 2024. This significant event aimed to address the issue of fragmented policies and circulars previously utilized by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Therefore, the launch marked the establishment of a comprehensive policy aligned with global and regional assessment models.

During the official launch, the Deputy Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, Honourable Angeline Gata, emphasized that the National Early Learning Policy would greatly contribute to improving the quality of early learning. She stated that the policy aims to provide equitable and inclusive early learning opportunities for all children. Its key elements include quality teaching and learning, children's health, nutrition, and care, family and community support, financing and resource mobilisation, emergency management, research and monitoring, and evaluation. The overarching goal of the policy is to ensure that no child is left behind.

The launch event was attended by various development partners working in the education sector in Zimbabwe. Through discussions, it became evident that although the Zimbabwe Early Learning Policy (ZELP) had been enacted with an implementation costed budget, there was a lack of sufficient financial resources allocated to support its implementation. Additionally, ZINECDA observed a lack of proper multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms in place, which could lead to fragmented efforts and hinder the holistic implementation of the policy.

As a result of the discussions held during the ZELP launch meeting, the following recommendations were made:



MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

NATIONAL EARLY LEARNING POLICY

- Allocate additional financial resources to ensure the availability of necessary infrastructure, learning materials, training programs, and resources for quality early learning experiences.
- Develop effective coordination mechanisms, such as inter-ministerial committees or task forces, to facilitate collaboration among relevant ministries, departments, and stakeholders involved in early childhood development.
- Implement strategies to address the shortage of qualified teachers, which may include recruitment and training initiatives, incentives to attract and retain educators, partnerships with teacher training institutions, mentorship programs, and professional development opportunities.





MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

EDUCATION TRUST FUND MODEL BILL

ZINECDA, in collaboration with partner organizations successfully completed the development of a draft model bill that prioritizes the establishment of a dedicated fund for Early Childhood Development (ECD) and education in Zimbabwe. The objective of this draft model bill is to create a statutory fund that will allocate a specified percentage of funds specifically for education in the country. The development process involved commissioning a consultant to create a framework and draft bill, with support from ZINECDA.

The completion of the draft bill is a significant milestone as it holds the potential to greatly improve the quality of the learning environment for early learners in Zimbabwe. By ringfencing funds for ECD and education, the bill aims to guarantee that sufficient resources are allocated to support the development and advancement of the education sector. Subsequently, this will contribute to enhancing the learning experiences and outcomes of young children.

Moreover, the development of the draft bill presents an opportunity to influence the School Financing Policy in order to align it with the provisions outlined in the bill and framework. By advocating for coherence between the bill and the policy, ZINECDA and its partners can work towards creating a comprehensive approach to education financing that supports the goals and objectives of the model bill.





MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

PARLIAMENTARIANS SCHOOL READINESS SENSITIZATION MEETING

ZINECDA along with partner organisations, held a sensitization meeting with Members of Parliament from the Portfolio Committee on Primary and Secondary Education, Budget and Finance, Caucus on Child Rights and Local Government Public Works and National Housing on the 14 of March 2024. The primary objective of this workshop was to engage new parliamentarians of the 10th session of the National Assembly on the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) and school readiness, while seeking parliamentary support and commitment to advocate for the allocation of more resources to ECD. This objective was achieved by emphasising the role that parliamentarians play in advancing ECD initiatives and advocating for policy changes. The participating parliamentarians discussed key issues for follow up and some recommendations:

- **Budget Increase:** It is essential to prioritize increasing the budget allocation for Early Childhood Development (ECD), as outlined in the Tashkent Declaration, which recommends allocating 10% of the National Education Budget to ECD.
- **Infrastructure in Resettlement Areas:** The School Readiness Intervention (SRI) program should extend its scope to include resettlement areas and address their specific infrastructure needs. Ensuring equitable access to quality education in these areas is crucial.
- **Teacher Resources:** To enhance the intrinsic motivation and effectiveness of teachers, it is vital to provide them with adequate resources, including competitive salaries and improved working conditions. This will contribute to the overall quality of early learning experiences.



MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

PARLIAMENTARIANS SCHOOL READINESS SENSITIZATION MEETING

- **Capacity Building:** Ongoing capacity building programs should be conducted to educate community members, including parents, school heads, teachers, and community leaders, about the value of infrastructure development using locally available materials. This will empower communities to actively participate in and support the growth of ECD.
- **Focus on Disability and Early Learning:** Emphasizing the importance of inclusive education, there should be a specific focus on children living with disabilities. Launching a campaign on early learning that promotes their inclusion and provides necessary support will contribute to their overall development and well-being



MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS



JOINT MONITORING VISITS/ MISSIONS

ZINECDA actively participated in a Joint Monitoring Visit exercise led by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Mashonaland East. The primary objective of the visit was to advocate for the prioritization of early childhood development (ECD) and to enhance access to ECD teaching and learning materials. During the visit, several key findings were identified, which led to the following recommendations:

Addressing High Learner-Teacher Ratios: It has been observed that the learner-teacher ratio in certain ECD classes is excessively high, with as many as seventy-five children per class, in contrast to the recommended twenty children per classroom. To mitigate this issue, the team has advocated for changes in the allocation of teachers, aiming to ensure that each child receives adequate attention and support within their early learning environment.

Ensuring Qualified ECD Teachers: During the monitoring visit, it was noted that there were unqualified teachers in the ECD sector. As a result, the delegation put forward recommendations to address this issue. These recommendations include providing additional training opportunities for unqualified teachers and promoting professional development programs to enhance their skills and qualifications.

Follow-Up Mechanism for Joint Monitoring Visits: To ensure that the issues raised during Joint Monitoring Visits (JMV) are effectively addressed and the recommended actions are implemented, it was agreed to establish a robust follow-up mechanism. The District Office of Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education was given the responsibility of tracking and monitoring the progress in implementing the recommendations.



Eastern Africa Regional Early Childhood Conference

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS:

ZINECDA PARTICIPATES IN TANZANIA'S REGIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD CONFERENCE

ZINECDA actively participated in the East African Early Childhood Development (ECD) Conference held in Tanzania from March 11th to 14th, 2024. The conference served as a platform for educators, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners from across East Africa to convene and discuss the importance of early childhood development. It provided an invaluable opportunity to exchange insights, experiences, and best practices in the field of ECD. During the conference, key panel discussions covered a wide range of topics, including early literacy, play-based learning, parental involvement, nutrition, and inclusive education. The focal points of these discussions were as follows:

Early Literacy and Language Development: Participants explored effective strategies for promoting early literacy and language development among young children. The discussions emphasized the importance of early exposure to books, storytelling, and interactive activities that enhance language skills and fostering a passion for reading.

Play-Based Learning: The panel on play-based learning delved into the numerous benefits of play in early childhood education. Participants shared best practices and innovative approaches to integrating play into the curriculum, highlighting its crucial role in promoting cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Parental Involvement in ECD: This panel discussion focused on the vital role of parents and caregivers in supporting children's early development. Participants exchanged ideas on how to engage and empower parents through effective communication, parenting programs, and community involvement, recognizing that strong parental involvement is key to fostering optimal early childhood development.



INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS:

ZINECDA PARTICIPATES | TANZANIA'S REGIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD CONFERENCE

Nutrition and Early Childhood Development: The discussions in this panel centred on the critical link between proper nutrition and optimal early childhood development. Participants explored the importance of providing nutritious meals, addressing issues of malnutrition, and promoting healthy eating habits to support children's growth and cognitive development.

Inclusive Education for All: This panel discussion revolved around inclusive education practices for children with diverse abilities and backgrounds. Participants shared inclusive teaching methodologies, adaptive technologies, and policy frameworks that ensure equal access and participation for all children in early childhood settings. The discussions highlighted the importance of creating inclusive environments that celebrate diversity and provide tailored support to meet the unique needs of every child.





RESEARCH STUDIES

SDG4 TARGET 4.2 STATUS AND TRACKING TOOL IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

ZINECDA, in collaboration with regional partner organizations, has undertaken a comprehensive study on the status of SDG4.2 and the development of a tracking tool. The study aimed to assess the implementation of SDG 4.2 in six Southern African countries, namely Zimbabwe, Malawi, Lesotho, Zambia, Eswatini, and Mozambique. The primary objectives of the study were to evaluate the progress made in enacting legislation, implementing policies, and establishing information systems that support the achievement of SDG4 target 4.2. Additionally, the study sought to gather organized information that could be utilized to influence informed policy formulation, implementation, and oversight related to SDG 4.2.

The findings of the study revealed that four out of the six member states (Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, and Zimbabwe) have reported at least 75% of the required indicators for SDG 4 target 4.2. These countries have made commendable progress in tracking and reporting on various aspects of SDG 4, particularly pertaining to early childhood participation rates and enrolment ratios.

However, the study also identified data gaps in relation to readiness for primary school and home learning environments across the member states. These gaps emphasize the need for enhanced data collection and monitoring efforts to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in early childhood education. By addressing these data gaps, policymakers and stakeholders can make informed decisions and develop effective strategies to improve the readiness of children for primary school and create supportive home learning environments. Below are the recommendations made from the study:

At regional Level (SADC)

- 1) SADC should focus on coming up with sustainable strategies on how to enable transitional environments for governments and civil society advocacy as well as coming up with the best route towards the adoption of ECD policy frameworks at regional (SADC) level.



RESEARCH STUDIES

2) Develop a SADC ECDE policy to guide SADC countries in the development and implementation of national-level ECDE policies and programmes, to address government financing commitments to ECD; set regional standards for ECD related issues; promote research that specifically targets ECDE.

At Country Level

3. Target the hardest to reach children

To close significant equity gaps, programmes and resources must be targeted to the hardest to reach children and families especially the very poor or most marginalised or likely to be discriminated against i.e. girls, those with disabilities, and those geographically far from services.

4. Create national level whole child strategies

National level ECD policy, funding, strategy and programming must be a priority. Ministries must work together across sectors to create national strategies which detail funding requirements and ensure a whole child approach. Community services must address all of the needs of the youngest children.

5. Improve quality standards for ECCD programs
Ensure Early Learning Development Standards are vetted by all stakeholders and adopted. In addition, have modern infrastructure to enable effective learning environment and cognitive development. Invest in in-service training for teachers across program types and ensure training of the ECD personnel in pedagogy and child development.

6. Create whole child strategies for donor aid.

Governments must create strategies across sectors and agencies to better target the comprehensive needs of children. Programmes in particular across the health and education sectors should be integrated in approach, acknowledge the importance of the earliest interventions, build on what is working well, and encourage integration among donor partners.

7. Improve monitoring and reporting

Data on ECDE sector should be captured and reported in yearly statistics in order to improve on implementation and tracking of milestones including those of the marginalised groups.

8. Prioritise Increase of ECDE Funding And Disbursements

Governments should increase their funding towards the ECDE sector and budget allocations should be publicly prioritised.



ZINECDA MEMBER PROFILE: PRINAT PRAISE NURSERY

Prinat Praise Nursery School is an early childhood development (ECD) center located in Gweru, Midlands. It was established in 2023 with the goal of providing quality education to ECD learners from diverse backgrounds, including those with special needs. Currently, the school has an enrolment of 30 learners in both ECDA and B levels.

One of the notable achievements of Prinat Praise Nursery School is its inclusive approach to education. The school has successfully accommodated learners with hearing and speech impairments, ensuring that they receive the necessary support for a smooth transition to junior education. By creating an inclusive environment, the school promotes equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

Prinat Praise Nursery School places a strong emphasis on play-based learning activities within its curriculum. The learners are engaged in various activities such as dance, karate, and swimming. These activities serve multiple purposes, including promoting physical

development, fostering creativity, encouraging social interaction, and enhancing cognitive skills.

Looking ahead, Prinat Praise Nursery School has a strategic goal of increasing its enrolment while maintaining the quality of learning. The school recognizes the importance of providing access to education for more children, while also ensuring that the educational standards and expectations are met. By striking a balance between enrolment growth and quality education, Prinat Praise Nursery School aims to create a nurturing and enriching learning environment for all its learners.





ZINECDA READING CORNER: SANKOFA: APPRECIATING THE PAST IN PLANNING THE FUTURE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, CARE AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA.

In this quarter; ZINECDA invites individuals and organizations to read Sankofa a publication that aims to elevate Early Childhood Education (ECE) by sharing compelling stories from an African perspective. As the publication explains: It seeks to address longstanding concerns and inequities by amplifying the voices, data, and knowledge that have been missing from the discourse on ECE in Africa.

Sankofa brings together a remarkable group of 34 experts and scholars, with 85% of them being African citizens. This diverse group examines the field of ECE through African lenses, offering valuable insights that can guide future policies and practices. It recognizes that the authentic, comprehensive story of early childhood care and education is yet to be fully written and told. Sankofa represents a significant step toward achieving that goal.



HAPPY READING

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