

# Planning Policies for Early Childhood Development

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BY

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# Definition of Early Childhood Development

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ECD is the continuous process through which:

young children 0-8 years old grow and acquire skills and abilities in the domains of motor, cognitive, language, social and emotional development.

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The skill development in the different domains is integrated and depends on each other, and sets the foundation for:

Success in school

Career and income, health

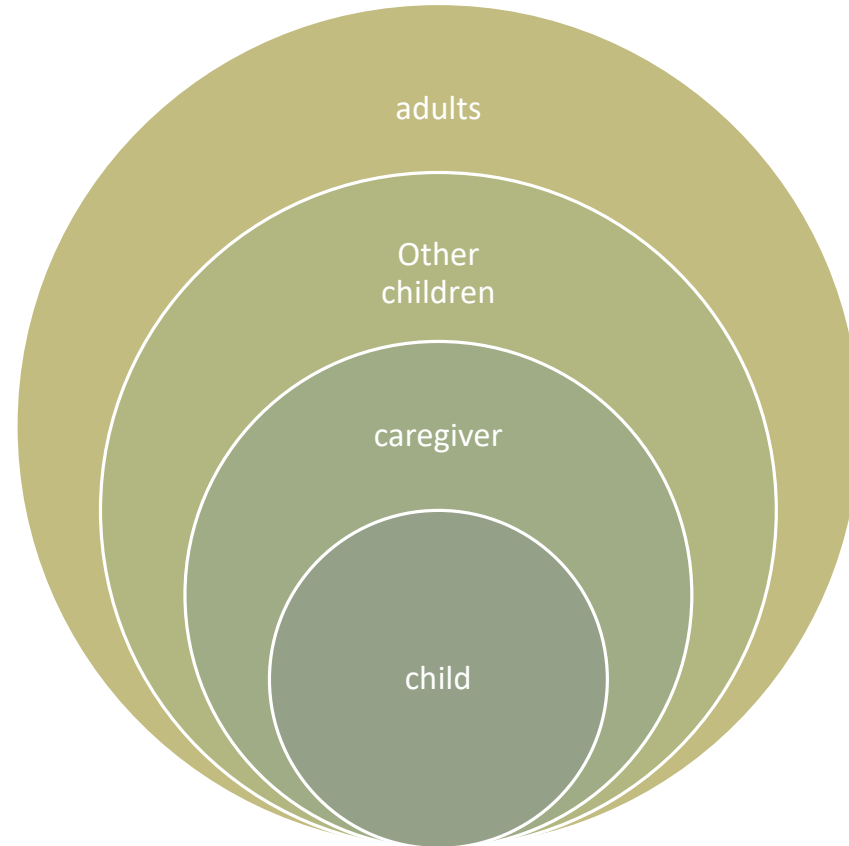
Well-being in adulthood.

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ECD occurs as a result of the interactions between the child and the environment.

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Home



Community

School

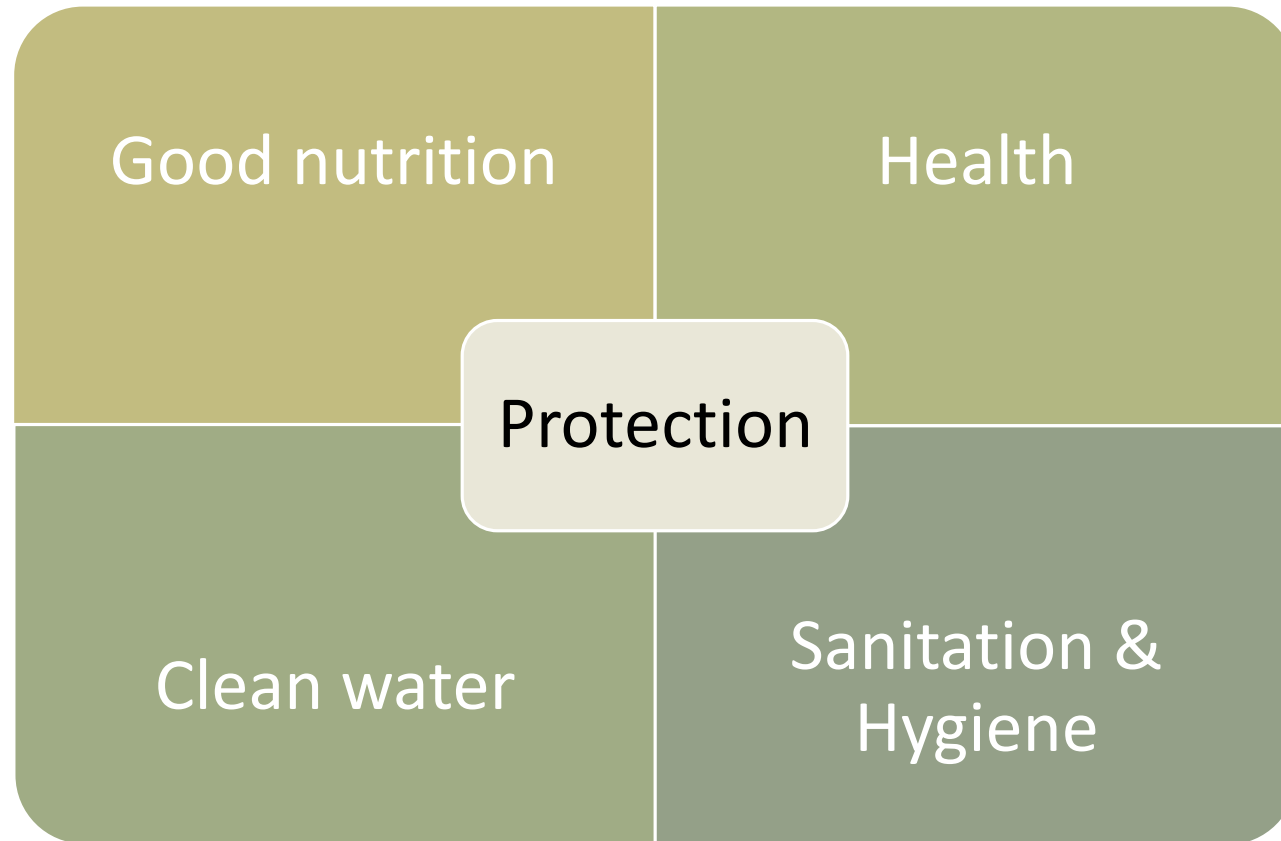
Nursary/preschool

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The “nurturing care” in the environment is crucially important for ECD.

# Nurturing care

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# Rational

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The justification of the policy is to **provide a framework for all stakeholders for coordination in planning and implementing** ECD services and interventions.



# Maine stakeholders

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- All relevant line ministries in regions,
- Communities,
- Families,
- Private sector providers,
- Non-Governmental Organizations, (NGOs)
- Development partners
- ...

# Children rights

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Another justification for this policy is reflected in The Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2007 that points out the responsibility of the State to provide **good guidance, care, assistance** and maintenance for the child and assurance of the child's **survival and development**.

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- The CRA advocates that a **disabled** child has a right to **special care, education** and **training**, wherever possible, to develop his maximum potential so as to be self-reliant.

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Promoting ECD and scaling up ECD services are smart investment for a country to promote **effective and sustainable, social and economic development.**

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- The global consensus is that ECD is one of the most cost effective ways to break the inter-generational poverty cycle

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According to the 2016 Lancet report on the "Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale",

Laws and policies can improve childhood development by increasing access to and quality of health and other services, as well as money and time for parents to provide nurturing care for their young children.

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Human development research over the past decade has provided solid evidence that **multi-sectoral interventions improve ECD.**

**Sectoral services** combined with the key elements of **nurturing care** can boost the developmental outcomes of children

The target of the services should be the **child** and **his/her family**, not just the child.

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In order to ensure that the necessary ECD services reach the child and family in an integrated manner:

it is critical for the different sectors to align their services within a **shared framework**, to guide planning and delivery of the sectoral services.

Providing such a framework is the main purpose of this ECD Policy.



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Five Phases that have been found to be common to successful processes for ECD policy planning:

Phase I: Preparation

Phase II: ECD Situation Analysis and Consultation Preparation

Phase III: Community, Regional and National Consultations

Phase IV: Policy Drafts and Consensus Building

Phase V: Policy Approval and Adoption



# Sierra Leone

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# Situation analysis

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## Health

Within the Sierra Leone context, gaps in Early Childhood Development (ECD) such as

- The high level of under-five mortality rate (UFMR),
- The current position in the Human Development Index (HDI),
- Tunting of children as a result of poor nutritional facilities

warrant access to equitable quality ECD programs, breastfeeding, and school feeding programs.

## Nutrition

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The 2014 Sierra Leone National Nutrition Survey (SLNS), which offers the most recent data on nutritional status of children under five, indicates that:

28.8 percent are stunted according to the 2006 World Health Organization (WHO) standards, while 12.9 percent are underweight and 4.7 percent, wasted.

## **WASH**

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Most children (0 – 8 years) live in poor households and communities, impacted by food insecurity, limited WASH facilities, poor health and child protection/social welfare services.

The absence of school clinics especially in the rural areas is a major concern.

WASH facilities: A large number of schools lack toilets and clean water.

Children in these schools are often not provided with hygiene lessons

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This situation needs to be improved as safe water and sanitation are essential to protect children's health and ability to learn at school.

The availability of clean water, adequate sanitation and hygiene education is directly related not only to physical, mental and social health, but ultimately to economic and political development.

According to WHO 2017 report, One out of three people using safely managed drinking water services (1.9 billion) lived in rural areas.

# Early Stimulation

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Furthermore, most children living in rural environments experience poor early stimulation and few early learning opportunities.

There is a steady increase in street children and orphans the limited available ECD services are fragmented rather than integrated, and they are only available to affluent families living in urban areas.

## Early Learning

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The paucity of preschools countrywide is a factor that has prompted the establishment of an ECD program.

Some children (0 – 8 years) especially in rural areas do not attend school.

These children are usually found in the streets or serving as food vendors as early as 5 years old.



# Child Protection

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There is a shortfall in the availability of services for orphans and vulnerable children.

There are also concerns in the implementation of policies to protect rights of children with special needs, and to promote their participation and access to ECD services.

These areas are addressed in the policy.

# POLICY STATEMENTS

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Every child shall have good parenting care, including exclusive breastfeeding for at least the first six months of the child's life.

Every child shall have the appropriate vaccinations from birth to 5 years.

Every child shall have the opportunity to early socialization and learning and age- appropriate play materials.

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Every care-giver in nursery schools shall have the requisite training in ECD.

Every child shall attend pre-school either in a formal setting or non-formal community-based setting.


A pre-school shall be attached to every primary school.

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Every teacher in a pre-school shall be a trained ECD teacher.

In every community -based pre-school, parents shall be a part of the management of the school.

Parents should provide the appropriate nutrition for all children 0-8 years.



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Rural communities shall provide land for the construction of community-based ECD centers and preschools

Free health-care should be provided for all children 0-8 years

Social workers shall pay regular monitoring visits to nursery and pre-schools.

# Stakeholders, Roles and Responsibilities

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This ECD policy will be adopted and implemented in collaboration with the stakeholders, whose roles and responsibilities are outlined.

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Critical steps in the strategy include:

Setting up national and subnational ECD administration and coordinating bodies

Clarifying key partners' roles and responsibilities

Devising mechanisms for decision making and information flow

Devising ECD emergency preparedness and response plans and mechanisms



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A major initiative in this area is regrouping the National ECD Steering Committee to strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration among related ministries; this involves the:

Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE),

Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS),

Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA),

Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED),

others.



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It is also important for these ministries to promote:

an appreciation of children's rights, of the value of ECD for individual children, family, and nation, and of the elements and qualities that define good ECD by conducting awareness campaigns and social mobilization at both the national and sub national levels

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Moreover, the government should ensure that all children under age eight are registered at birth and receive:

Regular health care and timely immunization,

Adequate nutrition and nurturing, and infant stimulation,

Community-based parent education,

Support and collaboration in the provision of WASH facilities,

Upgrading of child protection services.

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Each line ministry and key development partners such as UNICEF, WB, and WHO will identify an ECD focal person with a deputy ECD focal person to participate in the National ECD Steering Committee, which will serve as the national level coordination body for improving and implementing ECD related policies.

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All line ministries and key development partners are encouraged to make ECD mainstreamed in to their policy and program work, to ensure that their policies and programs are friendly towards the young children and their families, with a focus on the vulnerable groups.

# The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE)

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The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) will:

Appoint a National Focal Person to coordinate the National ECD Program, including policy improvement and implementation

Strengthen the Pre-primary Education Unit with necessary staff and resources

Advocate for adequate public financing (10% of education sector budget) for scaling up formal and non-formal pre-primary education (early learning) services

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Implement ECD Minimum Standards and ECD Curriculum;

Lead public advocacy and communication to raise awareness about the importance of ECD and good child rearing practices among the general public, especially the caregivers

Demonstrate and identify effective and sustainable pre-primary education (early learning) service models

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Coordinate with the TSC in planning and conducting training on providing quality pre-primary education (early learning) for pre-school/nursery teachers, administrators, School Management Committees and other relevant personnel, through regular in-service courses

Develop developmentally appropriate, cost effective and contextually relevant materials and resources for ECD (early learning)

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Support pre-schools/nurseries/ECD centres with appropriate and adequate learning materials and resources;

Promote inclusive pre-primary education by exploring ways to include vulnerable children such as children with disabilities in early learning settings

Undertake early detection and assessment of disabilities in children and provide appropriate interventions through referrals;



# Teaching Service Commission

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The Teaching Service Commission will:

Serve as an advisory body to the Minister on all matters pertaining to ECD educators;

Ensure that all ECD educators are registered and licensed

Advocate for teacher professional development in Early Childhood Education

Advise the Minister on the pre-service training of Early Childhood educators

Develop and review standards and codes of professional ethics

# Ministry of Health and Sanitation:

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The Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS) will:

Collaborate with MEST in designing and implementing a comprehensive health and age appropriate education program;

Provide safe motherhood initiatives;

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Monitor and promote growth and provide immunization services;

Integrate the management of neonatal and childhood illness and sickle cell anemia;

Intensify programs on infant and young-child feeding;

Develop the health and nutrition (including breastfeeding, nutritious food complements) content of the ECD curriculum;

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Establish school clinics in each preschool

Advocate for an allocation to ECD in the health sector budget, and

Promote environmental sanitation, including safe drinking water sources

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Collaborate with key stakeholders in the early detection of disabilities in children and provide appropriate interventions;

Design age-appropriate food menu that is healthy and diverse, suitable for children's growth and development

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## **Ministry of Finance and Economic Development**

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED) will ensure that ECD activity costs in relevant ministries are accommodated in the national budget.

# Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) will:

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Develop advocacy guidelines on ECD;

Develop minimum standards for ECD operations in children's institutions and foster homes;

Mobilize resources for research, advocacy, monitoring and coordination;

Submit a comprehensive sectorial annual report on ECD programmes to the National Coordinating Office.

# Ministry of Justice:

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The Ministry of Justice will:

Facilitate the interpretation of the Child Rights Act and other legal instruments as they affect ECD;

Prosecute those who violate children's rights.



# Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment

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The Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment will

Ensure the adequate provision of land for all ECD programs and activities;

Ensure that the environments are conducive for ECD activities;

Collaborate with other line Ministries to develop basic minimum standards for the establishments of preschools

# Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development

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Provide the technical direction in which the Local Councils (LCs) can be engaged in promoting the goals in the ECD policy

Promote and coordinate community involvement in health issues;  
protect children 0-8 years by working with other sectors;

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Ensure access to safe drinking water, peri-urban water supply, environmental health care,

Ensure integration of ECD programs in Plans and Budgets of all local governments

Monitor the implementation of the IECD Policy at local government level

Ensure availability of land for establishment of ECD centres and recreation facilities for children at local government level

# Concerned Families, Parents and Guardians

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The contributions of families, parents and guardians are crucial in the following areas:

Feeding children at school and home:

Sanitation, hygiene and medical care;

Shelter;

Clothing;

Parental love and care;

Protection and security;

Supporting learning through play at home.

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Private proprietors and ECD partners will be encouraged to:

Provide equality in ECD services and follow guidelines set up by the national, regional and district level early childhood development committees.

# Implementation Strategies

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Promoting cross-sectorial communication, coordination and collaboration in ECD programming

Mobilizing human and financial resources, especially public financing, for effective implementation and scaling up of ECD services and interventions

Capitalizing on and strengthening the existing service providing platforms/systems for implementing and scaling up ECD services and interventions

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Advocacy and communication to cultivate political commitment, build partnership and promote ownership for ECD policy improvement and effective and sustainable implementation

Supporting caregivers and communities to improve their ECD knowledge and child-rearing practices.

Improving research and monitoring data for promoting integrated ECD

Advocating for and acquisition and ECD services.

# Costing

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## Government and Non-Government Coverage

ECD costs in Sierra Leone will be covered by public financing and contributions from other stakeholders.

These costs will stem from the work needed to do the necessary research, policy formulation/review, advocacy, capacity building, empowerment of parents, and implementation of projects, coordination and evaluation.

Fully funded ECD programming will need fiscal support at many levels with government enforcing of funding mechanisms equitably.



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## National Level Costs

At national level the main costs stem from the following:

Support to relevant MDAs to perform their ECD functions:

Support to ECD training institutions to enable them to train ECD educators/caregivers

Development of sector capacity in their new roles

Development of training modules for comprehensive ECD programs

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## Local and Community Level Costs

At local or community level, costs will stem from the following:

Infrastructure provision and maintenance

Sponsoring of educator training

Provision of locally produced materials and equipment

Provision of food for children

Training of community ECD committee members, and

Transportation and salaries for educators

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**Thanks for your attention**

