

Sustainability of early childhood education in Kenya: Where are we at the beginning of sustainable development goals?

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Abstract

Sustainability of Early Childhood Education (ECE) resulting from various investment efforts can be assessed from progressive synergistic efforts by multiple partners in ECE in specific contexts. Therefore, to appraise the achievements so far attained in ECE in Kenya, we assessed these achievements as part of focusing on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the lens of specific stakeholders, identified efforts which helped to steer the then Millennium Development Goals, turned SDGs from 2015. Through the review of literature, this paper traces some of the milestones that have shaped ECE education in Kenya, focusing on efforts by development partners and national government in advocacy, policy making, curriculum development, capacity building, and teacher training. More critically, the paper explores the foundations laid by these partnerships in developing sustainable ECE, while reinforcing the value of partnerships in strengthening ECE. Overall, the purpose of the paper is to provide a critique about some of the achievements in ECE in Kenya through development partners and the lessons learned relevant to a sustainable development framework.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Kenya, Development Partners, Sustainability

Introduction

Much is written about Africa today, and much of it is not hopeful. Daily, the world hears stories of disease, despair, and death. Such a litany of misery is not unfounded—but there are also stories of hope, promise, and potential. They too are a critically important part of the complex story of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in the first years of the 21st century. Just as multiple stories exist, so are multiple perspectives needed to understand, envision, and plan a hopeful future for Africa's children. (Pence et al., 2008, p.1)

This quote exemplifies some stories we hear about early childhood education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Winthrop (2010) notes that, “a focus of early years is particularly important in Africa, where children face a multitude of disadvantages before they can enter the school yard. More than a third of the deaths worldwide of children under five years old occur in Africa” (p. 193), and “nearly all of the children lack access to early childhood education” (p. 193). In addition, according to UNESCO, “after close to half a century of public investments in education, health and welfare, African countries are still characterized by large populations that are mostly illiterate or poorly educated, sick, income poor, knowledge and technology poor, malnourished or undernourished” (UNESCO Office Dakar, 2010, p. 3). Further, “in sub-Saharan Africa, millions of children enter school each year with learning difficulties due to malnutrition, health problems, poverty, and lack of access to pre-primary education,” (UNESCO Office Dakar, 2010, p. 25).

Much has been written about many aspects of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Kenya (Kipkorir & Njenga, 1993; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008; Nusia, 2010; Harris, 2012), but less on how it connects with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Before we connect SDGs to ECE, we first must differentiate between Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and SDGs. After conceptualizing these terms, we justify the connection between SDGs and Education in general,

before providing a nexus between ECE and SDGs. This will be followed by an evaluation of the role of ECE partners in the Kenya context and the challenges and lessons drawn from such partnerships for sustainable development. We examine the growth and sustainability of ECE in Kenya. We discuss some of the achievements in ECE in Kenya through development partners, potential challenges of such partnerships and lessons that can be drawn to inform a sustainable development framework. The paper is presented in three sections: 1) the development of ECE in Kenya; 2) how efforts of ECE development partners generated sustainability of ECE in Kenya; and, 3) sustainability of ECE in Kenya post funding from development partners.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In September 2000, the United Nations (UN) meeting in New York initiated the UN Millennium Declaration committing nations to a new global agenda to eradicate extreme poverty by end of 2015 through eight strategic areas (see Table 1 for MDGs).

Table 1: *The Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger 2. Achieve universal primary education 3. Promote gender equality and empower women 4. Reduce child mortality 5. Improve maternal health 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases 7. Ensure environmental sustainability 8. Develop a global partnership for development
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Source, World Health Organization (2020): Millennium Development Goals

A constituent body, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), capture the origins of the concept of sustainability succinctly, as described in the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability is a paradigm for thinking about a future in which environmental, social and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of development and an improved quality of life” (UNESCO, 2012, p.5). All the three components, environment, social and economic are intricately linked to how well a nation is educated. Directly, education impacts the earnings of a population, while its effects on an individual level influences how one thinks in relation to his or her environment. Globally, however, the concept of sustainability could no longer be considered separate from the three components, but rather as parts of a whole (UNESCO, 2012).

The question to ask then is how we can link the historical development and the role of partners in ECE development in Kenya to the concept of sustainability. In September 2015, at the end of the MDGs time frame, the international community, Kenya included, converged again at the United Nations in New York to review achievements made to date. Upon this review, the appraisal noted that not only had the eight MDG goals been barely achieved, but also the development gaps between the developed and developing regions widened in favor of the developed world, while reinforcing intra-in country inequalities in the developing world. Moreover, against the backdrop of global warming, there was a new global concern about the threat caused by the increased global human population against the diminishing human resources, which was not commensurate to the renewal of natural resources.

Therefore, the global leaders' meeting in New York 2015 endorsed SDGs as a new global development agenda to end extreme poverty, reduce inequality, and protect the planet by 2030 (see Table 2 for SDGs).

Table 2: *The Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

1. No poverty	10. Reduced inequalities
2. Zero hunger	11. Sustainable cities and communities
3. Good health and wellbeing	12. Responsible consumption and production
4. Quality education	13. Climate action
5. Gender equality	14. Life below water
6. Clean water and sanitation	15. Life on land
7. Affordable and clean energy	16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
8. Decent work and economic growth	17. Partnerships for the goals
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure	

Source, United Nations Foundation (2020): Sustainable Development Goals

Within the SDGs framework, 17 goals were outlined, but primarily, our connection to SDGs links with the fourth goal, which seeks to ensure inclusive and sustainable education for all. While it might appear that the global overview of the SDGs is remotely related to sustainability in ECE as the primary endeavor of this paper, the fourth SDG goal justifies our quest. While SDGs generally aim at focusing the global community towards common ideals that support thriving human life, one avenue to ensure and improve the quality of human life intricately connects to the quality of ECE.

Investment in ECE and SDGs

In this paper, we argue that investment in ECE and the interest on Early Childhood Curriculum Development (ECCD), connects to sustainable development because quality education, which is founded on a strong ECE bolsters individual, social, economic and environmental quality. Therefore, ECE as a priority ought to increasingly become an emerging global progressive approach to bolstering all spheres of human existence, both at the national and international levels. Otherwise, poverty, arising from little or poor quality education, can create inequalities detrimental to individuals from disadvantaged or less resourced families or national contexts (Walker et al., 2011). Walker et al. (2011) succinctly state, “more than 200 million children younger than 5 years from low-income and middle-income countries were not attaining their developmental potential, primarily because of poverty, nutritional deficiencies, and inadequate learning opportunities” (p. 1325)

Specific to ECE focus, developmental psychology affirms the critical role of the early childhood period as a time of both great opportunity and considerable risk and its influence can extend over a lifetime (Shonkoff, 2010, p. 365). For both men and women, Nikolopoulou et al. (2010), acclaim the value of education as a means of capacitation of personal growth:

Education is an indispensable means to give to all women and men in the world the capacity to own their own lives, to exercise personal choice and responsibility, to learn throughout life without frontiers, be they geographical, political, cultural, religious, linguistic, or gender. (2010, p. xi)

However, a realization of this promise of education cannot be achieved without the synergy and collaboration with other nations in the global community. Thus, given the value of an interdependent and an interconnected globalized community, nations currently acknowledge a

collaborative endeavor towards the attainment of the SDGs for human equity and social justice across nations. Whether these expectations are valid, justified or attainable given the divergent resource availability across contexts, remains debatable. However, given the international community's pronouncements on their commitment to SDGs, there is an emerging global interest for equity of human existence through the provision of quality education for all.

To focus on education as part of bolstering human existence across nations, is to acknowledge the inherent value of education for all humans, regardless of different levels of national resources. Pushing the boundaries of the concept of sustainability further to justify our connection between sustainability and overall human wellbeing, UNESCO reminds that “the ideals and principles that underlie sustainability include broad concepts such as equity among generations, gender equity, peace, tolerance, poverty reduction, environmental preservation and restoration, natural resource conservation, and social justice” (2012, p.5).

Evidently, the sustainability of these goals relies on a well-educated human resource-base at all sectors of the economy, but which begins rightly and strongly in ECE. A strong ECE synergistic framework translates to long-term benefits, both for the individual and for the society. The development of ECE in Kenya, as an example of synergy in development is a primer for SDGs attainment; if efforts so far could be bolstered at higher levels of learning, beyond ECE.

Unquestionably, an educated population is a return on investment, as it is a major driver of the SDG goals. According to the United Nations (UN), among the greatest challenges facing many countries today are inadequate human capital investment and high unemployment rates among youth, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where there are still low literacy rates. Within a globalized economy, education plays a critical role in all the spheres of the SDGs, social, economic and environmental; yet an “inadequate investment in the health and education of young people limits their ability to reach their full productive potential and to contribute to economic development” (United Nations, 2015, p.2). A well-founded education begins in early childhood, and the reason we trace the emergence and sustainability of ECE efforts in Kenya.

To support and justify investment in ECE, previous decades of research have secured scientific evidence about the long-term value of mindful Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) benefits for families and nations (Belsky et al., 2007; Centre on the Developing Child, 2007; Shonkoff, 2010). Landmark longitudinal studies have established the long-term effects of early childhood experiences on the development of children as well as their development later as adults. Such studies include the popular Carolina Abecedarian Project of 1972 designed to explore whether a stimulating early childhood environment could prevent the development of mild mental retardation in disadvantaged children (cited by Campbell et al., 2014, p. 1478), suggesting the effects of quality ECE can last into adulthood. Regardless of inter-regional variability of outcomes, generally, like many others before, Save the Children (2012, p. 2) persuasively justify investment in ECE due to the following reasons, it:

1. Remains critical to achieving Millennium Development Goals 2, 3, 4 and 5 and SDGs.
2. Helps governments achieve equity in education from children's early years.
3. Ensures that parents value education from children's early years onwards.
4. Guarantees all children a strong developmental foundation.
5. Is one of the best investments countries can make to improve children's lives, ultimately bringing high returns in investment.

In this paper, we attempt to examine the importance of investing in ECE in Kenya and to further understand the role that ECE plays in SDGs. Indeed, investment in ECE is a worthy cause; it not only results in quality education but also sustainable development that impacts individual, social, economic and environmental quality.

Methodology

A review of literature for this paper involved a search of relevant documents from the Ministry of Education in Kenya and three key international partners that played a role in development of ECE in Kenya. These partners were Bernard Van Leer Foundation (BVLf), The World Bank and The Aga Khan Foundation. The documents for review were selected based on the relevance of the content to the history of the partnerships, ECE programs and initiatives established at the national and district levels, and source of funding for the programs. The documents were also selected based on the relevance of information on institutions for capacity building and sustainability of ECE in Kenya that arose from the partnerships. Finally, two legal documents, the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and Kenya Education Act (2012) were selected for review as they contain laws pertaining to roles of the national government and counties in the devolved system of government.

The following key terms were used in the search: History of ECE in Kenya, BVLf and ECE in Kenya, Aga Khan Foundation and ECE in Kenya, sustainability of ECE in Kenya, roles of National government and counties in ECE. Criteria for literature search included;

1. Documents from the Ministry of Education in Kenya related to ECE from 1970-2010.
2. Documents on ECE partnerships between BVLf and the Ministry of Education in Kenya.
3. Documents on funding of ECE in Kenya by the World Bank.
4. Documents on ECE partnership between Aga Khan Foundation and Ministry of Education.
5. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) and Kenya Education Act (2012).

The search results produced forty relevant publications out of which twenty-five that met the criteria for selection were reviewed for this paper.

The documents were public records found online and on websites of the entities. Documents about ECE in Kenya were in the public domain and were obtainable without the author's permission. In addition, the documents provided names of personnel who facilitated the ECE partnerships and details of the ECE outcomes of implementation of the partnerships.

Findings

After reviewing the literature, the following were found to be critical to our study: first, role of partners in development of ECE in Kenya; second, efforts of development partners in sustainability of ECE in Kenya, and third was the sustainability of Kenya's ECE post funding from development partners. These findings are discussed in the section that follows.

a.) Role of Partners in the Development of ECE in Kenya

The efforts seen in the structural, multi-sectoral approach to ECE in Kenya arose from multiple partners working to initiate ECE programs. These partners include; World Bank, Bernard Van Leer Foundation, Aga Khan Foundation, and the Kenyan government among others, that synergized at different levels to establish formal ECE in Kenya.

Role of Bernard Van Leer Foundation and World Bank in ECE in Kenya

Today there is no country in Africa like Kenya in terms of the reach of [Early Childhood Development]. That system exists today because of the work of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. (Garcia - The World Bank, cited in Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2019, p.1)

Initial concerted efforts between the World Bank and Bernard Van Leer Foundation (BVLf) led to the first formal approach to ECE for all children in Kenya. Prior to independence, formal preschools in Kenya were established for children of the White settlers and Asian communities (May, 1997). The preschool model varied over time, beginning with the infant school,

and later adding ideas from the kindergarten, and the nursery school in the 20th century (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008). At that time, there were informal child sectors set up for mothers working as laborers in colonial plantations. The first daycares started in the 1940s by and for the exclusive use of the European and Asian communities confirm the long tradition of preschool education in Kenya (Kipkorir & Njenga, 1993). Later, daycares were developed in African locations in urban areas and in coffee, tea and sugar plantations, and were expanded throughout the country after independence in 1963.

Post-Independent Kenya mainly focused on primary school education, with little focus toward ECE development. However, in the 1970's, BVLf partnered with KIE to establish formal ECE in Kenya (Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2019). The increasing number of students were taught by untrained teachers, creating a need to structure the approach to ECE. Kipkorir and Njenga (1993) wrote:

To address the situation presented by the ever-increasing numbers of preschools and the lack of appropriate support for them, in 1991 the Kenya government, with assistance from the Bernard Van Leer Foundation created the Preschool Education Project, based at the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE). The objective of the project was to improve the quality of preschool education through the development of viable training systems, and the creation of curriculum and other support materials for use by trainers, teachers and children. (p.1)

BVLf interest in Kenya followed prior ECE initiatives in Jamaica. BVLf were looking for a partner in Africa and may have chosen Kenya due to its similarities to Jamaica in language, political and historical factors. Kenya obtained independence from Britain in 1963, almost the same time as Jamaica's in 1962 and both countries did not have an established ECE program. Thus, with experiences previously gained from Jamaica, BVLf was looking for an opportunity in Africa to support similar initiatives.

The Foundation had gained experience supporting early childhood education in Jamaica and was looking for an African country to pioneer similar work in a new context. The collaboration with the government of Kenya that started in 1971 would endure for four decades. (Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2019, p.1)

BVLf invested a substantial amount of time and money in ECE in Kenya. "From 1971 to 2010, the Foundation invested over 30 million Euros in Kenya" (Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2019, p.1). The funding from World Bank was instrumental in BVLf's work in Kenya including, development of a systematic approach to ECE curriculum, needs assessment, curriculum development, material production and teacher training. Additionally, BVLf established the National Center for Early Childhood Education (NACECE), tasked with providing leadership, disseminating knowledge on the needs of young children and families, training teacher trainers, developing curricula and learning materials, and establishing a decentralized network of ECE across the country through the District Centers for Early Childhood Education (DICECEs).

Role of World Bank in ECE Development in Kenya

The work initiated in ECE in Kenya by BVLf gave visibility to the need to attract more attention to its development, within the then limited resources and priority to ECE. The World Bank acknowledged this need by providing a loan of \$28 Million to fund Kenya's ECE. This financial support expanded access to preschools to 60% of the population (Bernard Van Leer Foundation,

2019). In addition, the Ministry of Education formally accepted responsibility for providing early childhood education, although this remained at the policy level until the promulgation of the new constitution in 2010 that gave impetus to ECE funding through the newly devolved county governments.

Through the efforts of partnerships between BVLf, World Bank and the Kenyan government, there currently exists a very robust ECE national curriculum. This ECE framework was abrogated to the county governments when the new constitution was adopted in 2010 (National Council for Law Reporting, 2010). In addition, many Universities in Kenya now offer ECE degrees at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. It could then be argued, rightly, BVLf and the World Bank gave Kenya's ECE a formalized, conventional approach that acknowledged its role as a strong foundation to schooling. Hence, Kenya has advanced its ECE development in Africa as a result of its long-term partnership with the Bernard Van Leer Foundation and the World Bank.

Role of Aga Khan Foundation in ECE development in Kenya

The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) in Kenya is another indispensable partner that has contributed in various ways to the development of ECE. AKF, an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) has been engaged in provision of education in Kenya for almost 100 years. The first Aga Khan High School was opened in Mombasa in 1918 and programs have continued to expand from ECE to University levels (Aga Khan Foundation, 2018a).

Kenya's ECE benefits from AKDN through its focused initiatives of helping parents and communities to provide a strong foundation to children's wellbeing and development. It runs a preschool program "*Madrassa*" to support locally initiated early childhood centers in Kenya. Currently, the Aga Khan Education Services has several nursery schools within Kenya, as they aim to support quality educational experiences for children. These services are anchored on contextually relevant teaching, promote best practices, and integrate families.

Through the initiative of His Highness The Aga Khan, "The *Madrassa* Program was first implemented in 1986 in Mombasa, after Muslim leaders from Kenya's Coastal region requested assistance in improving the overall level of educational achievement of their children" (Aga Khan Foundation, 2018b, p.1). Thereafter, four other pilot schools were established in consultation with local educators, community leaders and parents to create pilot *Madrassa* pre-schools in Mombasa. These pilot schools later expanded to support students, teachers and community members, not only from amongst the Muslim community, but also from other faiths. These *Madrassa* modeled schools are the basis of sustainability of ECE in the coastal region.

Thus, "since its inception, the Program, anchored by Madrasa Resource Centers (MRC), has assisted poor communities to establish, manage and support sustainable quality pre-schools offering holistic development opportunities to young children" (Aga Khan Foundation, 2018b, p 1). Some initiatives of the program are training of teachers and school managements, sensitizing the community on the importance of ECE and engaging government and other stakeholders in robust processes of policy generation (Aga Khan Foundation, 2018b). The various efforts from the AKDN have contributed tremendously to ECE in Kenya.

Since 1986, Madrasa Resource Centre in Kenya (MRCK) has trained over 500 Madrasa community pre-school teachers and has benefited nearly 7,800 students. MRCK has trained over 675 school management committee members (47% women) and more than 125 community resource team members (69% women). As of 2007, MRCK was working with over 75 community pre-schools throughout Kenya with nearly 2,900 students enrolled (48% girls). The program's integrated curriculum has influenced national policy and practice and

has trained and supported over 2,000 pre-school teachers. Through its whole-school approach, the Foundation has supported over 1,050 community-based pre-schools attached to public primary schools, benefiting over 350,000 children. (Aga Khan Foundation, 2018b, p 1)

In conclusion, Aga Khan Foundation has played a critical role in ECE in Kenya, in capacity building, family and community empowerment with the overall goal of establishing sustainable ECE frameworks that benefit not only the current but also future generations.

b.) Efforts of ECE Development Partners and Sustainability of ECE in Kenya

The efforts of ECE partners led to establishment of Kenya Institute of Education (now Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development [KICD]), NACECE, and DICECE. These three became the foundational structures for ECE administration, expansion, building of physical structures, curriculum development, teacher training and capacity building. These structures were also instrumental in generating sustainability of ECE in Kenya at the end of the partnerships.

Sustainability of ECE in Kenya through Capacity Building

Efforts of ECE development partners in capacity building focused on the following areas that are key in quality and sustainability of ECE: a) quality teacher training, b) informed curriculum development, c) development of ECE learning centers and classrooms, and d) enrolment of children in ECE centers. These initiatives gave impetus to the practice and enhanced the significance of ECE programs for children.

The initial teacher training programs for ECE were done on a consultancy basis, by the steering teams from the BVLf, World Bank and the Ministry of Education. The Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) was tasked with leading this systematized approach to ECE. Included in the teacher training package initiated by BVLf and the World Bank was the development of culturally appropriate materials. These efforts yielded a systematic approach, and also led to increased enrolment by 60% of the school-going children nationwide (Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2019; Kipkorir & Njenga, 1993).

Increased enrollment led to demand for more ECE teachers, therefore, the training of teachers in this area was decentralized to District levels. DICECEs were established to synergize efforts towards professionalizing the practice of teaching children. Before this time, teaching at preschool level was considered a low wage job. Consequently, teaching at this level could only attract high school dropouts or high school graduates with the lowest grades and without formal qualifications. Nevertheless, this formal teaching contributed to more children transitioning to school. Prior to then, young children were cared for predominantly in community childcare approach. Children were watched by a volunteer adult as they played, while their parents worked on farms or pastoral fields. Prochner and Kabiru (2008, p.125) reflect:

Community members ensure that the caregiver is supplied with food, water, firewood, and other requirements. Similar care arrangements, known as *loipi*, were also found among the Samburu in Kenya. Children were left in a group under the care of grandmothers, aunties, or neighbors when the mothers were away. The caregivers ensured that when hungry, the children took their milk from the gourds left by their mothers.

The Aga Khan Foundation also played a key role in the sustainability of ECE in Kenya. Through MRCK, connections between gender and financial stability have been weaved into the ECE

model, with increasing financial stability for more women and resulting in more proceeds towards sustainability of ECE. Currently, through the Kenya Graduate Association an endowment fund was established to provide dividends to member communities and to provide or improve quality of education. “The Madrasa Resource Centre in Kenya has also linked communities to credit facilities such as the Kenya Women Trust Fund and the Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance, which help successful applicants start up income-generating activities in the agriculture and retail sectors” (Aga Khan Foundation, 2018b).

Since the initial efforts of BVLf, World Bank and later Aga Khan Foundation, there has been a concerted effort to build competence in the ECE human resource base, from the initial efforts of teacher training commenced by BVLf and the World Bank. In addition, the involvement of consultants from the higher education sector, particularly faculty in the department of Educational Psychology at Kenyatta University, one of Kenya’s institutions of higher learning, became the launchpad to high quality teacher training for early childhood education. This has been the work of the Early Childhood Department (since the mid 1990’s) and has seen early childhood professionals trained at the Masters and Doctoral levels. Capacity to develop policy-related to ECE was part of the initial initiatives of BVLf and World Bank as reflected by the many official documents developed during co-sponsored workshops. It is these multi-dimensional approaches to capacity building in Kenya that have become the sustainability cornerstones for ECE.

Development of a National ECE Curriculum

Increasingly through the reviewed functions of the early years related curriculum, NACECE was established as a center within KICD headquarters. NACECE is still alive to its functions as listed in the KICD website thus: “over the years, the role of the Institute has expanded to respond to emerging needs including, the development and strengthening of DICECE and projections to develop and establish a modern NACECE Resource Centre to respond to the increasing national and international training needs” (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2020, p.1). These centers are positioned to cascade the emerging trends in childhood care through the ECE learning approaches, curriculum development and enhanced supervision through the quality assurance officers who are mainly hired to support quality teaching in primary schools.

c.) Sustainability of Kenya’s ECE Post Funding from Development Partners

This section attempts to answer the question: Where are we going? Most of the funders have since ended the bulk of the ECE fundable projects. This is the time to assess the situation for the milestones made so far in readiness for the focus on sustainable development goals. We examine how ECE in Kenya is going to be sustained after the funding from development partners run out. We also discuss the steps that are being taken to actualize and implement the SDGs in Kenya.

Devolution of ECE to County Governments

Kenya adopted *The Constitution of Kenya*, in 2010 (National Council for Law Reporting, 2010). The hallmark of this new Constitution was the devolution of government and resources from the Central government to county governments. Notably, the new Constitution entrenched the education of the child as the core mandate of the Kenya government and devolved ECE to the 47 county governments. In addition, the right to free and compulsory basic education enshrined in *The Constitution of Kenya, 2010* (National Council for Law Reporting, 2010). *Article 53 (1) (b)* states “every child has a right to free and compulsory basic education” (p. 36). *Article 55 (a)* stipulates “the State shall take measures, including affirmative action programs, to ensure the youth access relevant education and training” (p. 37). Clearly, the inclusion of these articles on the rights of the child to

education in the new Constitution is a result of repeated emphasis of the value of an appropriate and quality educational endeavor.

Perhaps, the most notable policy impacting ECE is the *Kenya's Education Act* (National Council for Law Reporting, 2012), which acknowledges early learning as the basis for school preparation. In addition, the current attachment of a pre-primary school, as part of the primary school facilities, ensures that children who would otherwise be excluded in participating in ECE have a chance to enroll in pre-primary education in their communities. This is in contrast with the predominant approach where most preschools were community or privately owned, requiring a token fee payment for the running costs of the schools, which included salaries that were not previously included in the government expenditure. With the emergence of the devolved governments, the prerogative of budgets for ECE were given to the county governments. Increasingly, this has focused funding for running of preschools as part of the budgetary provisions of the government. Researchers and stakeholders in education will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of devolved governments in attaining the sustainability and development of early childhood education in Kenya.

Community Involvement in Sustainability of ECE in Kenya

Whereas the role of international partners has been discussed broadly in this paper, it is also important to describe the role of the community as anchorage for ECE in Kenya. Way before the international partners came to Kenya to support ECE, communities all over the country were responsible for the establishment and sustainability of ECE. Community energized by the *Harambee Spirit* (pulling together), mobilized resources through churches, mosques and other faith based or community based institutions. These resources were used to purchase land, build ECE centers, employ teachers, purchase school supplies, and for daily running of ECE centers.

As described earlier, a history of ECE in Kenya paints a picture of privilege for the first urban preschools established for the children under age five in the 1940's (Harris, 2012). It is widely believed that the first schools in Kenya were established in urban areas exclusively for the young children of European colonialists and Asian communities. On the contrary, in 1952, the colonial government introduced pioneer preschools in rural areas, mainly for custodial care and security for the forced farm indigenous laborers. Later after independence in 1963, with the then President Kenyatta's popularized notion of "*Harambee*" (meaning 'let's all pull together), more preschools were built by communities pulling together resources in the spirit of *Harambee* - a resource mobilization rallied by the leadership of the time for the sake of self-reliance (Harris, 2012). Clearly, these initial preschools emerged out of a desire for self-reliance, especially considering it was soon after independence. This *Harambee Spirit* has continued to sustain ECE in Kenya to this day.

Discussion and Conclusion

As the nation of Kenya seeks sustainability of ECE, an important question is whether it can also maintain the quality of ECE. Qualities of effective Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Kenya are described in *The National ECD Policy Framework* (Republic of Kenya, 2006a) and *ECD Service Standard Guidelines for Kenya* (Republic of Kenya, 2006b). The qualities include: a) class size, b) minimum acreage for Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) centers, c) furniture and furnishings, d) play and learning environments, e) sanitation, f) outdoor play space, g) teacher-child ratio, and g) curriculum and pedagogy. These guidelines aim to ensure that ECD services for children are equitable, of high quality, relevant and affordable. These policies control the provision of ECE services and ensure maintenance of high quality standards.

Despite these guidelines, quality of the provisions in ECE in Kenya remains to be a concern that has arisen with the public participation in ECE. The quality concerns triggered a special interest by the consumers of ECE to seek private school provisions perceived to be more prestigious, and of competitive value for money. Private schools in contrast to public schools are considered better prepared to support children with competencies to transition to elementary school successfully. Most of the teachers in these private schools graduate from privately run teacher training programs that have mushroomed all over the country to compete with the government run DICECE and NACECE institutions. Although these schools focus on the 3 Rs, reading, writing and arithmetic, considered broadly, they are limited from a quality perspective, which should provide holistic experiences to support children's growth beyond acquiring the skills for transition.

In addition, the introduction of free primary education in Kenya led to overcrowded classrooms in public schools, hence many parents now prefer private schools, a situation that has led to a phenomenal increase in these enterprises. As private schools in Kenya continue to expand more rapidly, their enrollments also continue to rise while those in public schools stayed the same or declined. Similar trends have been observed in other countries such as United Arab Emirates, Chile, Slovakia and Jamaica. Of all of the countries surveyed, Kenya had the greatest increase in private school provision (Manji & Arnold, 2015, p. 7).

This raises another important question in ECE in Kenya. What outcomes should quality ECE candidates have to successfully transition to grade school? Researchers and scholars in education have identified six dimensions of primary school readiness: cognitive, language, socio-emotional, adaptive, physical and motor and approaches to learning (Janus, 2007). Thus, though many ECE programs focus on preparing children to succeed in reading tests, research studies show there are many other factors that affect their smooth transition from preschool to primary school which influence primary school readiness. Some of these factors are: a) pre-school physical environment, b) teaching/learning resources, c) language used as a medium of instruction, d) teacher-child ratio, and e) attendance duration (Nusia, 2010). According to Morrison (2007), quality of teacher-pupil interaction is a major factor that impacts school readiness. Children who have more positive interactions with staff in high quality programs tend to be more ready for primary school. In addition, quality of parental involvement influence school readiness (Morrison, 2007).

In this paper, we examined the growth of Early Childhood Education, ECE, in Kenya. We traced the growth and development of ECE in Kenya through partnerships with Bernard Van Leer Foundation, the World Bank and the Aga Khan Foundation. As these partnerships come to an end, the torch has been passed to the Kenyan government. The structures developed by these partnerships will continue the implementations of ECE in Kenya, such as KICD, NACECE, and DICECE. Finally, a major milestone in ECE is the change in Kenya's constitutional framework to the decentralization of government and devolution of some government functions, including early childhood education to counties. The implementation sustainability of ECE is now in the hands of county governments, but their effectiveness will continue to be examined.

In addition to the constitutional framework, the practice of ECE in Kenya has the following sustainability measures: *first*, its anchor in the African philosophy of *Community as strength*, engendered sustainability. Where there have been limited resources, the mobilization of resources through the *Harambee* spirit (pulling together) has been germane in the provision of educational infrastructure of communally owned preschools, even in situations where the government offered some financial support to ECE. *Secondly*, the promulgation of the constitution gave impetus to the legal mandate by governments to spare resources for the development of ECE. *Thirdly*, capacity building: through the initial efforts of BVLFF together with the World Bank, the Kenya government has spawned into a strong ECE practice and established a clear policy framework on teacher training,

forged the establishment of preschools and material development, which is synergized at KICD, an arm of the Ministry of Basic Education. In addition, the ownership related to reform in ECE was supported by a robust policy review and capacity building of the Ministry of Education officials as the drivers of the ECE reform agenda. Overall, capacity exists at multiple levels of ECE practice: at the Ministry level through policy, at the legal safeguard levels to support legal sanctions where necessary, at the curriculum development review level, and at the implementation and management levels through the NACECE and DICECEs. *Lastly*, structured development and management of the ECE curriculum. The existence of a national coordinating body as NACECE ensures parity of approach of the ECE curriculum. This synergizes any support needed to engage with ECE stakeholders.

Limitations and future directions

Although this paper attempted to provide a conclusive critique of ECE in Kenya, we acknowledge that there were several limitations. First, the review included contribution of only three international partners, Bernard Van Leer Foundation, World Bank and the Aga Khan Foundation, in the growth and sustainability of ECE in Kenya. There are many other entities that have contributed to the success of ECE in Kenya that are not covered in this paper; including the Government of Kenya, other non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations and charities, district boards of education, local communities and families. Secondly, this paper is limited in scope as it only addressed the growth of ECE in Kenya from 1970-2010. This paper does not address the state of ECE after 2010 when the country adopted devolved system of government where ECE was deferred to the 47 county governments. Access to most current data on ECE from all counties presented a logistical challenge. Since this paper has provided a history and sustainability of ECE in Kenya prior to the devolution of ECE to county governments, it is recommended that future research be conducted on growth and challenges of ECE in Kenya under the devolved system of government.

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