Together for Early Childhood Evidence Teams convene in Mauritius

Using data to inform decision-making in early childhood care and education

ECD Measure was pleased to partner with USAID and the Association for Development of Education in Africa Inter-Country Quality Node-Early Child Development (ADEA ICQN) to convene Together for Early Childhood Evidence (T4ECE) task force teams in October 2022 as a side event to the ADEA 2022 Triennale in Mauritius. This meeting convened forty T4ECE Task Force members from Liberia, Rwanda, Malawi, South Africa, and Mauritius, as well as partners from USAID and Lego Foundation.

The goal of the workshop was to bring together people who gather and use early childhood data in their countries to discuss how we can collectively move towards more data-informed early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems in Africa. The meeting was held October 17-18, 2022, in Mauritius. ECD Measure serves as the convenor and technical lead of T4ECE.

Overall summary and key takeaways:

Over the course of the two-day workshop, participants had the opportunity to work within and across country teams to learn about country examples of early childhood data generation and use, identify where their countries are on the path of developing a data-driven ECCE system, and develop common country visions for moving forward. Each T4ECE country team is at a different stage and the workshop offered an excellent opportunity for teams to learn about best practices and examples of how others have approached early childhood data and measurement issues. For example, participants learned about the recently completed T4ECE early childhood research activities in Liberia, Rwanda, and South Africa, which fostered rich discussion on the challenges and opportunities to establish data feedback loops within early childhood systems.

A key benefit of the workshop was the opportunity for diverse stakeholders (government officials, researchers, USAID staff, and other partners) to come together around their shared interest in and commitment to using ECCE data. The workshop was designed to ensure that stakeholders learned from their peers in other countries, while also having the opportunity to come together with stakeholders from their own countries to generate shared priorities and brainstorm plans for moving forward. Common themes emerged as teams engaged in this work:

- Attendees from each country voiced strong commitment to ECE and improving the quality of the system in each country;
- There is existing and ongoing data work in each country that teams can build and leverage upon; Within the T4ECE task force teams there is significant experience and dedication in collecting and using ECE data to make system-level improvements.

Common challenges across countries also emerged including:

- There is a need for improved coordination and stakeholder engagement, particularly across ministries;
- Most countries need for capacity building in terms of data collection, management, and analysis; and
- There is inadequate funding for early childhood data and measurement initiatives.

Participants left the event committing to a broader regional movement within Africa to share experiences and collaborate to push the agenda forward towards data-informed ECCE systems.

Session Summaries:

Ms. Maya Soonarane, the Director of the ADEA Inter-Country Quality Node for Early Childhood Development opened the two-day event by emphasizing the continental priorities for strengthening early childhood education systems across Africa. After a round of introductions, the ECD Measure team kicked off the event by framing workshop goals. Rebecca Sayre Mojgani (ECD Measure) shared about the four years of progress working with T4ECE country teams in Ethiopia, Liberia, Rwanda and South Africa to promote data-driven decision-making. Since 2018, T4ECE has been working at the global and country levels with policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to promote measurement and monitoring of ECCE in sub-Saharan Africa. A common theme across countries has been data feedback loops (Figure 1), which look at how different types of stakehold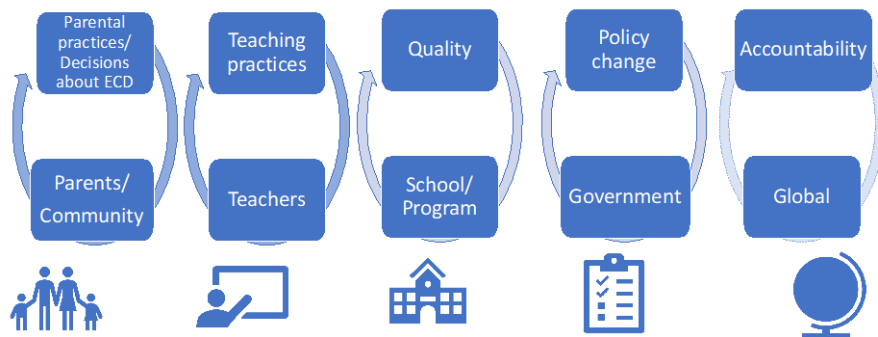ers use data to make changes and improvements in early childhood systems. In this introductory session, Dr. Marcia Davidson (USAID Africa Bureau) also highlighted the connections of early childhood education and foundational learning, which was one of the focus areas of the broader ADEA Triennale as well as a recent global priority at the UN Transforming Education Summit.

Jem Heinzel Nelson Alvarenga Lima (ECD Measure) introduced the

Figure 1: Data Feedback Loops

Data feedback loops:
How does data lead to change within ECCE systems?

T4ECE country projects in Liberia, Rwanda, and South Africa. Between 2021-2022, T4ECE supported country-level measurement activities to promote data-driven changes within ECCE systems. Dr. Cecelia Cassell (University of Liberia), Gabriel Nelson (Adara Research & Management Consultancy), Jestina Sartee (Ministry of Education, Liberia) and Alphonso Wright (University of Liberia) presented on the joint work of the Ministry of Education and University of Liberia to map ECED centers in 3 counties in Liberia. Noella Kabarungi and Paulin Ndahayo (Save the Children, Rwanda) presented on Save the Children's recent work to collect and use data on the quality of pre-primary classrooms in Rwanda. Sonja Giese (DataDrive 2030) presented on South Africa's Thrive by Five Index, which provides baseline nationally representative data on preschool children's learning and development outcomes.

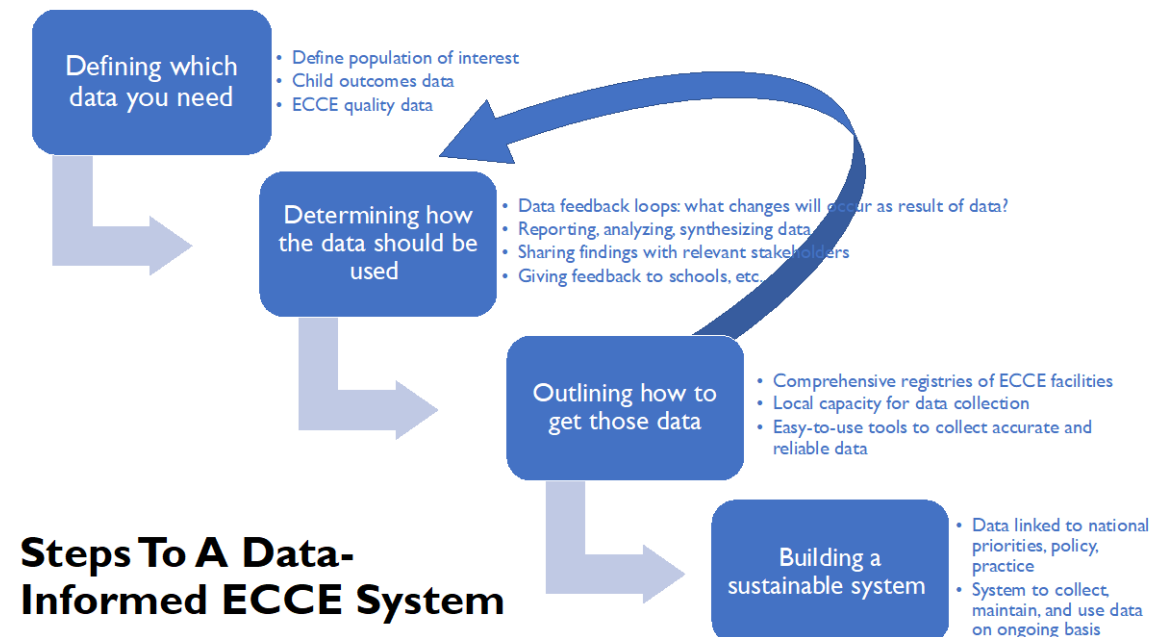ECD measure   USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE   ADEA Inter-Country Quality Node Early Childhood Development

Following a deep dive into country-level activities, Dr. Abbie Raikes (ECD Measure) walked participants through the steps to building data-informed ECCE systems through measurement of both ECCE quality and child development outcomes. Dr. Raikes shared Quality Assurance Systems (QAS) as one example of how countries build data-informed systems to measure ECCE quality and shared recent results from ADEA and ECD Measure's recent research on ECCE QAS in Africa. While ECCE quality standards exist in most countries, regular monitoring of these standards varies. Our research highlighted some critical areas to address in QAS in Africa, including human resources to monitor quality, having accurate registries, sharing annual data, linking QAS to a professional development system, and building user-friendly national data systems. Dr. Raikes also discussed the opportunities and challenges of measuring and reporting on child development and shared some examples of tools and ECD data.

Next, country teams comprised of Ministry of Education officials, researchers, and USAID staff from Rwanda, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritius, and South Africa worked to start discussing where their countries currently were in building a data-informed early childhood system (Figure 2). Teams reflected on opportunities to influence quality ECCE in their countries and discussed ways that ECCE data could leverage these opportunities. In Liberia, the team would like to leverage the recent ECED BEQI pilot data collection/mapping to continue to build its quality assurance system. In Malawi, there is a strong policy framework and an opportunity to be more data-driven to look at ECE implementation, including the coordination between the Ministry of Gender (under which ECE currently sits) and the Ministry of Education. In Mauritius, there is a strong institutional framework, but the need to have a centralized mechanism for data sharing across institutions. In Rwanda, the government is already prioritizing ECE and there is an opportunity, especially within the USAID Schools and Systems program, to institutionalize ECE data collection and use. In South Africa, the recent shift of ECD responsibility from Department of Social Development to Department of Basic Education as well as the recent comprehensive dataset on young children offers an important opportunity to piggyback the overhaul of systems to track young children across interoperable data systems, which will facilitate improved coordination and collaboration.

Figure 2: Data-Informed ECCE Systems

Steps To A Data-Informed ECCE System

Defining which data you need
- Define population of interest
- Child outcomes data
- ECCE quality data

Determining how the data should be used
- Data feedback loops: what changes will occur as result of data?
- Reporting, analyzing, synthesizing data
- Sharing findings with relevant stakeholders
- Giving feedback to schools, etc.

Outlining how to get those data
- Comprehensive registries of ECCE facilities
- Local capacity for data collection
- Easy-to-use tools to collect accurate and reliable data

Building a sustainable system
- Data linked to national priorities, policy, practice
- System to collect, maintain, and use data on ongoing basis

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We then had an opportunity to place data in context by doing a deep dive into the ECCE system in Mauritius. Ms. Caroline Arekion, the Director of the Mauritian Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (ECCEA), within the Ministry of Education, provided participants with an overview of the ECCE system and Quality Assurance System in Mauritius. In Mauritius, there are several supervision tools that gather data on ECCE schools and children. The ECCEA is responsible for supervising public and private ECCE classrooms in Mauritius and various standard supervision tools, which align with the Mauritian quality standards. Ms. Arekion reflected that the greatest strengths of the Mauritian QAS are all of the existing frameworks and tools in place to monitor and measure quality. She noted the greatest challenge the system now faces is implementing these tools at scale. There are currently inadequate staff and lack of training for the supervisor cadre to ensure effective data-driven quality monitoring.

On Day 2 of the T4ECE workshop, participants had the opportunity to visit three different private preschools in Mauritius. Participants spoke to preschool directors to get a school-level perspective of the quality assurance system and understand how the system can support schools using data. We observed that schools use standard forms to collect data and that schools seemed very organized in documenting children's work. At the same time, as discussed previously by Ms. Arekion, there is room for improvement on the QAS system to be more data-driven, with limited existing capacity to provide extensive feedback from classroom observations.

Following school visits, with leadership from Maya Soonarane and Abbie Raikes, participants had an opportunity reflect on regional needs and potential next steps as a continent. There was agreement that continuing to build a community of practice where countries can come together to share and learn from each other is needed. One priority area for cross-country collaboration in the continent is a venue to share measurement tools and experiences using tools. Some suggestions for the community included: having information in accessible digestible way, sharing successes as well as failures, sharing experiences with decisionmakers using data from tools, and sharing ideas on how countries leverage private support and costing of measurement initiatives.

Dr. Koli Banik (USAID) and Rebeca Martinez (USAID) presented on USAID's recent work in the pre-primary sector. They shared the USAID's preprimary advocacy video and USAID Guidance for How to Develop High Quality Pre-Primary Programs, which provides guidance to USAID Education mission staff and other program planners in understanding the pre-primary landscape and identified opportunities for USAID to engage in the sub-sector. They shared USAID's pre-primary measurement priorities including: (a) Number of learners in pre-primary schools or equivalent non-school based settings reached with USG education assistance; (b) Percent of pre-primary learners targeted for USG assistance who are developmentally on track; and (c) Percent of pre-primary learners targeted for USG assistance with an increase of at least one early learning and development level in early learning skills.

Finally, building on their work started on Day 1 and the discussions from across the two days, country teams came together again to develop mini-action plans to continue the process of building data-informed early childhood systems in their countries. The table below summarizes their goals and immediate steps to work towards these goals.

Country action plans for building data-driven ECCE systems

	Rwanda	Malawi	South Africa	Liberia	Mauritius
Big picture goal	Population of young children with integrated early learning and development opportunities in an informed empowered and responsive community	Use data to formalize ECD in Malawi	Track young children over time through different data system by having interoperable systems	Build a comprehensive ECE registry and EMIS system	Build capacity for data collection and sharing research
1 year goal	Integrate access, child development, quality data, and data use into existing systems	Establish data systems in ECD	Scoped out plan-proof of concept	Start to build comprehensive ECE registry and EMIS system	Set up research task force
Activities	1. Reviewing existing data systems to map the gaps and areas of improvement (missing features) 2. Develop new data systems or upgrade the existing ones (MoE's SDMS, CAMIS; NCDA's ECD Dashboard; MoH's HMIS) 3. Develop data collection and analysis approach that clarifies data collection tools; data collection agents; when to collect data; required reports 4. Capacity strengthening of education actors and stakeholders on the entire data systems 5. Learning from data, adapting to necessary changes	1. Stakeholder engagement (including coordination btw MoG and MoE) 2. Development of ministry information system for ECD (need EMIS, existing district data) 3. Development of key indicators- adapt tools (need financial resources, tech expertise) 4. Pre-testing and administration of tools 5. Evidence-based ECD programming	1. Presidential/Inter-ministerial committee (IMC) mandate for data sharing 2. Map-out existing systems and describe the characteristics/ content of each (including current identifiers)- each system collecting info on individuals but do it separately 3. Identify good practices and lessons learned from previous efforts 4. Present multiple options for tracking and data sharing/ sequencing 5. Plan for proof of concept (pilot in one province)	1. Disseminate findings of pilot research to create awareness on findings 2. Advocate for need to expand research to increase geographical scope to ensure representative sample 3. Update tool/develop training materials, train enumerators 4. Conduct comprehensive research 5. Develop costed strategy on where to go next	1. Capacity building to collect data 2. Engage in action research

	Rwanda	Malawi	South Africa	Liberia	Mauritius
Leveraging existing resources, challenges, etc.	Human resources: experts in data systems, data to define system There is existing data system under the ministries, however for ECE/ECD the data is missing, there is gov't will to integrate ECE into existing system Challenges: insufficient human resources	Technical expertise, financial resources, need to coordinate between MoGender and MoE	Could piggy-back as part of other process (part of DSD>DBE shift)- there is already overhaul of systems Risks: data security, data sharing, how to get departments to buy-in (could embed within KPIs)- show how there is shared value		Challenges: Funding, human resources, political challenges

Next Steps:

The workshop provided the opportunity for diverse stakeholders to come together and work on a plan for advancing the development of a data-informed ECCE system within their own countries. It is our hope that T4ECE task force teams build on this momentum and continue working and strategizing together as they return to their home countries. In early 2023, we will share a survey with country teams to understand ongoing needs and priorities for a regional Community of Practice around early childhood data and measurement. ECD Measure will also organize follow-up calls with each country team to discuss plans for moving forward with each country's respective action plan and identify potential ways in which support/technical guidance may be provided (some of which may be contingent on additional funding). The T4ECE Consortium will continue to be a platform for sharing and facilitating cross-country learning on how pre-primary systems can better use data to improve young children's early learning experiences.