

INCREASING ENROLLMENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD): *HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?*

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Many crucial stages of human development occur in early childhood. Lack of opportunities and interventions, or poor quality interventions, during early childhood can therefore significantly disadvantage young children and reduce their potential for success. Early childhood development (ECD) - a comprehensive approach to policies and developmental programs for children from birth to six years of age – has a pivotal role to play in ensuring that children lead full and productive lives. Moreover, ECD has also been recognized internationally as one of the most powerful tools for breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Vision 2030 envisages that all 0 – 6 years old Namibian children should have opportunities for ECD. The Namibian government has also shown great commitment towards the wellbeing of children by being a signatory to the Convention on Children’s Rights as well as having ratified several international conventions and treaties on the wellbeing of children. Nonetheless, ECD participation in Namibia not only exhibits stark regional inequalities, but also remains low overall, particularly among children between the ages of 0 and 4. NDP 5 has identified key strategies to be implemented in the next five years regarding ECD which include upgrading the curriculum for 0 - 4 years old children and aligning it to the revised pre-primary curriculum. These strategies will ensure that about 40 per cent of 0 - 4 years old children access ECD services. One of the programs identified in NDP5 is the Integrated Early Childhood Development, with the objective of improving the management and quality of ECD. A total of about N\$11,459 mil and N\$123,651 mil is planned for this program as developmental and operational costs, respectively.

The ministry of Gender and Child Welfare is responsible for ECD programs of the 0 – 4 years old, while the Ministry of Education Arts and Culture takes care of the children between 5 – 6 years old. The responsibility for pre-primary education was transferred from the Ministry of Education to local communities under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Regional, Local Government and Housing in 1995.

To strengthen the capacity of all Ministries responsible for ECD UNICEF has been committed to support the movement of the mandate of coordination for integrated ECD service delivery from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. UNICEF and partner non-governmental organization, PACT, supported this transition process whilst still maintaining the comparative advantage of each Ministry in delivering quality ECD services. A framework and costed plan

were developed in 2014 and an ECD unit is being established within the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture where none had existed before. The ECD unit will play a key leadership role in the sector, while the costed plan will be used to leverage resources and inform advocacy to scale up ECD services in the country.

In order to formulate and implement appropriate interventions for improving ECD provision and ECD outcomes, it is crucial to understand the current nature and extent of ECD participation in Namibia. This brief therefore provides an overview of national and regional ECD participation rates among 0 – 4 years old children. In planning for ECD, there is a need to quantify how many ECD centers are in each region as well as how many children are attending. It is for this reason that this brief highlights the state of ECD in the country. Currently ECD centers are community based; owned by the communities or individuals. Government however subsidizes 1260 out of 2916 ECD educators countrywide. Findings by Naanda and Engelbrecht (2008) revealed that early childhood education in Namibia is primarily the responsibility of communities (72.8%), followed by churches (13.8%) and 12 % are privately run.

KEY FINDINGS

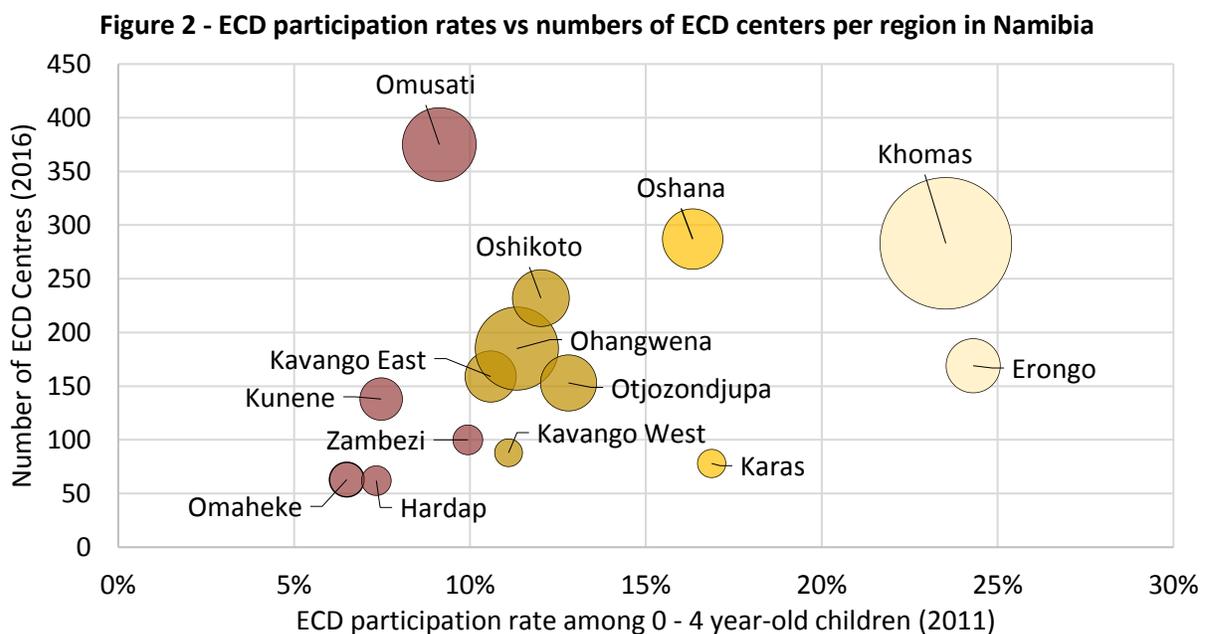
Table 1 - ECD participation among 0 - 4 years old children in Namibia (2011)

	Total		Attending ECD		Not Attending ECD	
2011 (Census)	281 162	(100%)	37 789	(13.4%)	243 373	(86.6%)
2016	321925	(100%)	74 061	(23%)	247864	(77%)

Source: Authors' own calculations using the 2011 Namibian National Census

ECD participation in Namibia is low: Based on the most recent available nationally representative data (Census 2011), only 13% of all 0 – 4 years old children in Namibia were attending ECD in 2011. While data from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW) suggest that there has been a national drive to increase and improve the provision of ECD since 2011. Using the 2016 population projections and actual data of children enrolled in ECD obtained from the MGECW, enrollment in ECD has increased to 23% in 2016.

suggests that regions with the highest numbers of ECD centers do not necessarily have the largest populations of 0 – 4 years old. This also means that there is considerable variation in the ratio of 0 – 4 years old children to ECD centers across regions. For every ECD center in Omusati, for example, there are roughly 83 0 – 4 years old children. By contrast, there are around 238 0 - 4 years old children for every ECD center in Omaheke. Despite these differences, the numbers of ECD centers per region and the ECD participation rates among 0 – 4 years old children are only weakly correlated: regions with the most ECD centers do not always have the highest ECD participation rates. This implies that a large number of ECD centers in a region do not necessarily translate into a large percentage of children attending ECD.



Source: Authors' own calculations. The size of each bubble represents the estimated number of 0 – 4-years old in 2016 as estimated using the 2016 Namibian Labour Force Survey. ECD participation rates calculated using 2011 Namibian National Census data. Numbers of ECD Centers per region in 2016 obtained from MGECW

POLICY CONCLUSIONS

ECD participation is strongly linked with participation in pre-primary school and subsequent school readiness in children. Children who attend ECD may face far smoother transitions into and through the schooling system than their peers and, by extension, experience significant advantages in later life. In light of this, the low ECD participation rate among 0 – 4-years old children in Namibia is cause for concern. Improving ECD outcomes in Namibia requires policy interventions that will not only ensure sufficient opportunities for ECD, but also increased awareness of the importance of ECD. Based on the analysis presented here, three broad areas warrant attention:

Increase investment in ECD, especially in the poorest communities and most rural regions: There appear to be substantial differences in the opportunities for ECD across regions in Namibia. Efforts need to be focused on ensuring that there are sufficient numbers of accessible, quality ECD centers in each region, particularly in rural and remote areas. This investment can be in the form of government subsidies and training of educators as well as from developmental partners and private sector.

Increase awareness of the importance of ECD: To increase participation in ECD, parents, guardians, and communities must be adequately informed about the importance of ECD and of the available opportunities for ECD in their area.

Improve ECD evaluation and monitoring systems: In order to understand and monitor changes in ECD participation over time and evaluate the effectiveness of specific ECD interventions, there is a need for a more systematic approach to capturing and analyzing data on enrolments in ECD and integrating this data with other available sources of population data.

Further extensive research: After highlighting the status of ECD participation in the country, with regard to participation rate as well as investment pace, there is need for further investigation. Areas for further research should include but not limited to finding the reasons and causes for lower participation, as well as other means of enhancing investments in ECD in order to ensure quality service delivery. This will inform effective decision making.

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