

FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA
NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD GROWTH,
DEVELOPMENT, CARE, AND EDUCATION POLICY

DECEMBER 2020

ADDIS ABABA

PART ONE

1.1 Introduction

Definition and Significance of Early childhood

1.1.1 Early Childhood

Early childhood covers the period before birth up to 7 years. It is a period when fast physical, mental, psychological, social, and emotional developments take place. In early childhood different developments occur that are foundational for the success of children. Particularly significant are the first three years of a child when the brain grows very rapidly. Therefore, we have to focus and diligently work on early childhood because it is a period when healthy, productive, capable, ethical, and responsible citizens are nurtured.

In order to have a healthy growth, children in early childhood should have not only safe and comfortable environment but also appropriate health services, adequate and balanced diet, opportunities for a pre-school education and responsive care. To fulfil all this, it is necessary to have the cooperation and integration of different sectors/stakeholders.

1.1.2. The Significance of Investing on Education during Early Childhood Development

Care and support activities during early childhood have more positive impact than those during other stages of development. Especially, child programs availed during the first three year before birth are more effective and efficient than those implemented in later years. Some of the importance of investing on early childhood development and education are the following:

- It helps to timely identify and quickly support children with special needs who are prone to risks so that the children will get better opportunities in improved situations,
- It helps to avail access to pre-school education and justifiably improve participation in primary education,
- Ensuring access to quality programs for early childhood has great economic importance. Healthy and well-developed children will grow to be effective in their education and productive in their professional pursuit,

- It helps to reduce expenses at family and national levels. Children who are well-taken care of are healthy and educationally successful which is reflected in reduced dropout and repetition rates,
- Children who passed through quality programs in early childhood will have better job opportunity and improved standard of living. Hence, investing on quality programs in early childhood ultimately reduces poverty,
- It helps to ethically shape the children who will ultimately strengthen their capacity as well as the capacity of their family and society at large.

1.2. The Framework of Nurturing Care

Early childhood nurturing care framework is an international framework globally used in many countries. The framework helps to ensure improved health, food, safety and security, responsive care and support as well as pre-school education for children. Early childhood nurturing framework contains the different programs which should be implemented by parents, communities, and service providing stakeholders to realize the proper care and growth of children.

Early childhood nurturing care includes five frameworks. The objective situations in each sector are indicated below.

Health

In order to effectively implement early childhood care, it is necessary to ensure the nurturing care of children and the mental health of parents/caregivers. Different programs and strategies are in place to realize the health of children and parents/caregivers through prevention and cure of diseases.

According to mini-EDHS (2019), 73% of pregnant mothers are able to get pre-natal services. Pregnant mothers who deliver in health facilities and those who continue to get post-natal services account for 49.8% and 34% respectively. Ethiopia was able to reduce the death of children below 5 years of age ahead of the schedule set in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, many child health programs are focused on the life, physical wellbeing and development of children so much so that nothing substantial has been done on the social, psychological, mental and communications skill development of children.

Balanced Diet

Ethiopia has drafted a national nutrition program, supportive protocols and guidelines to mitigate the nutrition problems of mothers, children and youth. Productive safety net programs have also been launched in urban and rural areas to ensure food security and emplace a national nutrition system. Nevertheless, since the safety net programs are being implemented in specific situations, they are not accessible to all.

Mini-EDHS (2019) shows that there is a severe lack of balanced diet for Ethiopian children. About 37% of children below the age of five are stunted. Only 58% of infants who are 6 months old are breastfed. Moreover, challenges such as lack of adequate food at household level and lack of feeding skill, infections, lack of hygiene, lack of balanced diet for mothers, and absence of personal and environmental hygiene further compounded the problem. Often, mothers do not have the time to appropriately feed their children.

Safety and Security of Children

Safety and security of children is essential for their holistic nurture; and it requires the integrated efforts of all stakeholders. Activities that are intended to realize the safety and security of children include: birth registration, protection of children rights, supply of clean and potable water, environmental protection, and prevention of pollution.

Child birth registration has been implemented since 2016, but only 3% of children born in 2019/20 are being registered. Factors for less achievement are lack of due attention to institutional set up and lack of awareness among the community on the importance of birth registration.

Children are exposed to different abuses and exploitations. For instance, corporal punishment, neglect, sexual entice, murder, beggary, and physical exploitation (compelling to work for more hours or beyond their capacity) can be mentioned as common practices child abuse. Furthermore, there are various traditional harmful practices which may have lasting physical, social, and psychological damages and even death to children.

Among children in difficult situations, those in early childhood are more exposed to difficult problems than the others. Although efforts have been exerted to mitigate the problems of the children, it has become very difficult to fulfil their basic needs and sustainably support their development. Moreover, there is no integration among stakeholders and hence, results are visibly less successful. Appropriate environment is required for holistic development of children and it has very high impact on their growth. However, places for recreation, play

games, day care and other services are not easily available. Schools and other service providing institutions seldom fulfil the needs of children.

Responsive Care Giving

It is necessary that parents/caregivers provide care to their children to fulfil their needs. Infants cannot explain what they want in words, but they use signs. Therefore, caregivers should understand what the infant needs and quickly and adequately respond to it. This type of response will have positive impacts on the future nurture of the child.

In Ethiopia, awareness and skills on child rearing are not well-developed yet. Day care centres are not easily available. Consequently, many children do not get adequate and proper care as their parents/caregivers are engaged in household chores and other duties.

Early Stimulation/Opportunity for Early Learning via Play

Since birth, children need to have mental and physical stimulation. They should have opportunities to play, learn, and communicate. However, there are no institutions that offer or consult on the services. Instruments or teaching aids to enhance children's mental and physical stimulation are not available. Consequently, early stimulation and opportunities for early learning through play are not integrated in early childhood programs.

In Ethiopia, pre-school education has gotten due attention since 2011. In relative terms, some commendable achievements have been registered. All kindergartens and primary schools have pre-grade one ('O' class). In areas where there are no kindergartens, a child-to-child learning program is emplaced. There also is another scheme called "Accelerated School Readiness Program" whereby children will be able to obtain pre-school education. Accordingly, general participation in pre-school education has reached 44.2% although problems of access and quality still remain rampant.

All in all, different activities have been carried out to realize early childhood development and education through health, education, and security services. However, due to the challenges stated above, results are not up to the required level. Therefore, it is imperative to carry out multifaceted and integrated activities to speed up the physical, mental, emotional, and social development of children as adequately as possible.

PART TWO

Policy Revision Imperative, Vision, Mission, and Goals

2.1 Rationale for Policy Revision

In Ethiopia, the National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy framework, strategy, and protocol was prepared in 2013. Now, it is envisaged to revise the policy to streamline it with the current national and international early childhood development and education as well as with the national economic and social development. The purpose of revising the policy is to include new and basic policy issues (which had not been included earlier) and stakeholders in order to initiate improved and integrated implementation. Moreover, revising the policy will enable to widen the accessibility of quality early childhood development program.

2.2 Basic Concepts of the Policy

Ethiopia has accepted the International Children's Rights Convention and the African Children's Rights and Security Charter. Both documents are duly incorporated in the Ethiopian constitution. On the bases of the International Convention and the Continental Charter, the Ethiopian government made legal revisions, developed policy frameworks, and initiated different programs which help to benefit children. The following can be major instances:

- Children's Rights Convention (1989): The convention enacts that children should get the necessary protection by law, social services and education.
- Sustainable Development Goals (2015): Goal 3, sub-section 3.2, and goal 4, sub-section 4.2 state that all children have the right to grow healthy and get quality care and pre-school education.
- Agenda 2063: States that there is an agreement among all African countries to avail and create access to quality early childhood development and education services.
- The Ethiopian Constitution (1994): Article 36 emphasizes the respect for children's rights. Article 90 also enshrines the rights of children to get education, health, and social services. Article 41....

- The National Social Protection Policy (2015): The policy indicates a direction to solve children's economic and social problems and thereby reduce their vulnerability.
- The National Children's Policy (2017): The policy supports the proper nurture and development of children and stipulates the necessary care and protection for children from social, economic, and political problems. It also specifies care, support and rehabilitation services for children in difficult situations.
- Education and Training Policy (2004): Indicates that pre-school education should focus on the holistic development of children so that they will get prepared for formal education.
- The National Health Policy (2019): It gives particular attention to mothers and children.
- Food and Nutrition Policy (2019): It gives particular attention to improve the nutrition of mothers and children.
- African Children's Rights and Security Charter (.....):

2.3 Vision

The policy envisions to see all Ethiopian children to get access to early childhood care and education and grow to be responsible, healthy, and productive citizens of good character.

2.4 Mission

1. Provide comprehensive, integrated, quality services that are congruent to the developmental stages of children and their environment to ensure their holistic development,
2. Develop the potential capacity of children in a way that respects the culture and language of all children,
3. Ensure the respect of the rights and security of all children,
4. Ensure the provision of quality services to children from all stakeholders

2.5 Objectives of the Policy

The policy aims to ensure that all Ethiopian children (between pre-birth and 6 years of age) will get quality early childhood development and education through effective partnership and

capacity building programs so that their physical, psychological, mental, and social development will be realized.

2.6 Early Childhood Development and Education Policy Principles

1. Priority to children's need and safety
2. Equal service
3. Integrated and multi-sectoral response
4. Play-centred services
5. Services commensurate with children's interests and developmental stages
6. Participation of children, parents and the community
7. Quality and cost-effective service
8. Protect national cultural values

2.7 Scope of Policy Implementation

This early childhood development and education policy focuses on and serves for children between pre-birth and 7 years of age.

PART THREE

Policy Focus Areas and Implementation Modalities

3.1 Health, Nutrition, and Early Stimulation Services (from pre-birth to 3+ years)

The health sector has developed various programs to cater services for mothers and children, teen-agers and youth and persevered to avail food and nutrition services for all members of the society. The health sector has also given particular attention to mothers and children whereby it offers integrated health, food, and nutrition services for parents and infants from pre-birth to 3+ years.

In order to effectively address the focus areas, parents/caregivers should get counselling services from health professionals on how to play and talk with their children as well as on how to take care, handle, and up bring them. There should be a playing ground and playthings in the health facilities or service centres where the counselling services are provided so that children can play with their parents or among themselves. It is, therefore, necessary to attentively work for the success of early childhood program at family and society level in addition to the services of health professionals at the health facility level. The following objectives and implementation modalities are developed to address the prevailing gaps.

3.1.1. Objectives

- Based on early childhood development and education policy, ensure the integration of quality and comprehensive early childhood development services with the health, food and nutrition and other related programs for mothers and children and guarantee its accessibility,
- Enable the provision of strong and quality food and nutrition services focusing on early childhood development services,
- Support parents/caregivers to have adequate knowledge, and understanding about early childhood development so that they can properly care for their children,
- Aware the society about early childhood development so that it will have better understanding and skills as well as self-confidence to decide on issues of child upbringing and fulfil its responsibilities.

3.1.2. Implementation Modalities

- Capacity building programs for health professionals will be implemented to integrate the health, food and nutrition programs of mothers, children and youth with early childhood development services so that quality services will be provided,
- Early stimulation and responsive care services will be included in the current health, food and nutrition programs of mothers, children and youth so that activities will be designed to ensure quality service provision and accessibility,
- The necessary budget will be allotted and inputs will be fulfilled to make health facilities child-friendly to provide early childhood development services,
- Awareness creation and skill development programs will be jointly designed with stakeholders (relevant government sectors) and duly applied to create conducive atmosphere for the implementation of early childhood development programs so that children will grow up in clean and comfortable environment,
- Developmental milestone screening service will be provided in health facilities as well as in home-to-home health services,
- A referral system will be designed for children who have mental retardation problems,
- Counselling services will be provided for parents/caregivers on the importance of early childhood development so that they provide appropriate child care and handling accordingly,
- Activities will be identified and implemented to enable the society to have awareness and skills on early childhood development,

3.2. Early Childhood Education (4-6 years)

Early childhood education is designed for children between 4 and 6 years old. Early childhood education is play-focused and its curriculum is finetuned with the local situation and provided in and outside schools. The fundamental purpose of early childhood education is to prepare children for primary school education.

The approach to early childhood education is play-focused. Its aim is to ensure the comprehensive development of children, i.e. their physical, mental, social, emotional, and

ethical development so that children will have upright character development. In early childhood education, children learn basic education skills (primaries on reading, writing, numerating, calculating), social skills (communication, self-expression, working together, mutual respect), emotional skills (self-control, concern for others, mutual respect), and skills to develop their body. These basic education skills are interrelated and integrated with local situations and delivered through trained teachers in an appropriate, comfortable, and secure institution or set up.

Therefore, in order to effectively implement early childhood education program, focus will be given to budget and resources allocation, curriculum design, training and assigning of teachers, caregivers, facilitators, and sector managers, participation of parents and the community at large, quality education, access and equity.

3.2.1. Objectives

- Through pre-school education, children will be physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, ethically, and culturally nurtured to be ready for primary education,
- Children between 4 and 6 years of age will access to equitable, inclusive and quality education which is related to the local objective situation,
- Effective planning, resources mobilization, and distribution system will be emplaced for pre-school education,
- A pre-school curriculum, which takes in to consideration the holistic development, interest, culture, and culture of children, will be developed,
- Pre-school institutions will be strengthened and expanded so that teachers, education administrators, caregivers, and facilitators will get the necessary education and training,
- The training in higher education will be developed and implemented in such a way that it will be in line with the pre-school curriculum,
- Parents and the community will be made aware of early childhood care and education so that they will actively participate,
- Pre-schools will be made comfortable and attractive for children,

- Children with special needs will get adequate and quality education together with their peers in any pre-school in their locality with no discrimination,
- Pre-schools will have a school feeding program, clean and potable water, rest rooms, and first-aid services linked with nearby health facilities,
- Support will be given to faith-based and community-based organizations that are engaged in pre-school education,

3.2.2 Expansion Modalities

- Emplace a one-year pre-school education program which is free and compulsory,
- Initiate awareness raising/strengthening programs on the importance of early childhood education and the rights and security of children,
- Ensure the Early Childhood Education sector allocates the necessary budget for the program,
- Establish comfortable and risk-free pre-schools in localities,
- Coordinate the efforts of the government, the community, and partners to avail quality pre-school education in all neighbourhoods,
- Organize standard training and on job training for teachers so that they will have the required knowledge and skills to identify children with special needs,
- Establish and strengthen teaching aid centres that help to identify and support children with special needs,
- Support teachers training institutions to initiate on job training programs for pre-school teachers,
- Standards will be prepared for pre-schools and their implementation will be monitored and supported,
- Prepare indicators to evaluate the capacity and performance of pre-schools,
- Include a training framework for sign language, brail, touch tile, and other communication formats in standard pre-school training and on job training programs,

3.3. Strengthen Children's Rights, Safety and Security

Early childhood requires maximum care for the safety and security of children because of their immaturity. However, the majority of Ethiopian children are found in difficult situations and they are exposed to different types of abuses and harmful traditional practices.

These abuses result in negative impacts on the physical, mental and social developments of children. One of the focus areas of the policy will be the elimination of those difficult situations and abuses through effective protection system which helps to ensure the overall development of children.

3.3.1. Objectives

- All children will have birth certificate so that they will get age related services like vaccination and age-focused education; and protected from harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and child labour exploitation,
- Appropriate education and training will be provided and timely monitoring and supervision will be conducted so that all children in the age of early childhood, who live in their family, day care homes, child care centres and the like, will grow up in a conducive environment where their physical and mental development is well protected,
- A strong child protection system will be emplaced to support neglected children and those exposed to difficult situations so that they get early childhood education and protection from risks and abuses,
- Legal, health and rehabilitation support will be provided to abused, harmed and neglected children,

3.3.2. Implementation Modalities

- Awareness raising activities on the importance of birth registration will be carried out and the registration service will be integrated with other stakeholders and it will be made easier and convenient to clients
- A program will be designed and implemented whereby parents/caregivers get trained to appropriately support children with special needs and actively engage to

avail a clean and safe play space where children freely move around and see things by themselves,

- Support will be provided for parents/caregivers to develop skills to ensure their own physical and mental wellbeing and overall stability so that they will have positive contribution to their children and the society at large,
- Pre-school education programs will be improved and expanded in different places at different levels. For children in difficult situations, child care centres that are clean, conducive, well-equipped, and safe will be availed. This program will also be implemented in an integrate manner among safety net communities,
- Children will be able to get adequate social security services,
- Social support services will be provided for families/caregivers to protect them from severe poverty,
- Children will be protected from abuse, harm, and exploitation. Justice and psycho-social support will be given to abused children,
- More focus will be given to family and community-based supports than institutional based supports to children,
- Data on physical, mental and sexual abuses of children will be included in all health and social researches. Also included will be data on the situation of neglected children,
- Peaceful and legal methods to resolve conflicts will be designed and implemented in conflict-prone areas so that the safety and security of children will be protected,
- Gaps in the legal code which impede the protection of the rights and security of children will be redressed,

3.4. Responsive Care Giving

Parents and caregivers have great impact on the growth of their children. During early childhood the mind of a child develops so fast that any problem that occurs on the child will have a lasting impact. Parental/caregivers' love and protection of children is very important for the development of children's life skills, self-confidence, and good character. Therefore,

parental/caregivers' awareness and skills on overall development of children requires due attention.

Many of the Ethiopian parents do not have the capacity and the time to fulfil what is expected of them about early childhood development due to various problems compounded by poverty and lack of awareness. Consequently, due attention has not been given to recognize the needs of children and respond accordingly. The lack of attention at the tender age during early childhood resulted in the neglect of children who will be exposed to a number of behaviour problems such as lack of self-confidence, isolation, loneliness, unabashed self-centredness, irresponsibility, and lack of stability.

Therefore, the policy will continue to focus on conditions that help to increase the economic capacity of parents/caregivers as well as enhancing their awareness, skills and attitude towards child care and upbringing.

3.4.1. Objectives

- Parents/caregivers will be supported to obtain awareness and skills so that they will be able to offer responsive care to their children as timely and appropriately as possible,
- Children will get timely and appropriate responsive care from their parents/caregivers,

3.4.2. Implementation Modalities

- Wide range awareness raising activities will be carried out to initiate community-oriented movements on the importance of responsive care and early childhood stimulation while involving prominent individuals and groups (such as faith-based organizations, women's organizations, *idirs*, individual role models, etc.),
- Training topics on responsive care and early childhood stimulation will be included in all training programs organized at all levels for health professionals, members of women development army, social services providers/social workers so that they will have the capacity to impart the required skills to the community,
- A system will be emplaced to create access to responsive care and early childhood stimulation services for children in difficult situations and those who are exposed to different abuses,

- Health Extension Workers (HEWs), nurses, midwives, and physicians will provide counselling services to parents/caregivers while they visit health facilities, day care centres and households,
- Relevant federal ministries and their branches at woreda, zone, and region levels will coordinate all stakeholders to carry out continuous activities on the importance of responsive care and early childhood stimulation, and monitor the implementation,
- Well-organized and well-equipped play spaces will be organized for children in hospitals, health centres and day care centres to carry out early childhood stimulation activities. Adequate personnel will be assigned to the institutions and an appropriate monitoring system will be emplaced.

PART FOUR

Policy Implementation Frameworks

4.1. Strengthen Institutional Capacity

The necessary manpower, infrastructure, technology, finance, and other inputs will be fulfilled to all institutions in the health, education, women and children, agriculture, and justice sectors to strengthen institutional capacity and fulfil the policy vision and mission.

4.2. Operational Framework

Strategies, programs, and action plans will be prepared to implement the policy. This framework will be prepared and implemented in a coordinated and integrated manner involving all stakeholders at all levels.

4.3. Finance Source

All sectors which work on early childhood development and education will get adequate and reliable budget (based on the national objective situation and economic development) from government, private, and international sources. Financial resources can be administered and used jointly or independently by sector institutions in accordance with the government rules and regulations. Moreover, the community will financially support the policy implementation and also participate in monitoring program effectiveness and efficiency.

4.4. Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Activities

A strong monitoring and evaluation system will be emplaced to ensure policy effectiveness. Accordingly, sector strategic plans will also have a monitoring and evaluation framework. Joint forums will be organized to facilitate the participations and operations of stakeholders and enable them timely responsive.

International indicators will be customized to national situations and will be used to measure the monitoring and evaluation process. Sectors offices will prepare and present their periodic reports on early childhood development.