

Promoting Social Justice in Eritrea: The Role of an Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development Program



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This research paper by the veteran freedom fighter and writer Musa Hussein Naib was published on this website on June 16, 2016, and we are republishing it after the researcher's passing in the 26th of January 2026, as a tribute and remembrance.

Abstract

The Government of Eritrea launched the Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development program (IECCD) as a project in September 2000 with a fund of US D 49 million. The objective of the program was to promote the basic needs for a healthy growth and holistic development of children under six years of age, children in primary school age, and children in need of special protection, through the provision of services and support in health care, early education, cognitive stimulation and social protection and affection.

The research paper discusses the Eritrean concept of social justice and the IECCD program and explores the relation that exists between them. The discussion on social justice expands on the major components of this principle and defines the strategy of self-reliance. The deliberation upholds the view that the economic, social, cultural and biological benefits obtained from IECCD program can create a balanced and sustainable economic, political, social and cultural development as envisaged under the principle of social justice. It assists in the development of an equitable society through a fair start in life and leveling the playing field. The practical case for consideration under this paper is how IECDD programs can contribute to the attainment of the social justice in Eritrea. It argues that since Eritrea adheres to the principle of social justice, implementing IECCD program can facilitate the realization of this principle. The Eritrean experience in implementation of IECCD program for eight years demonstrates its viability and encourages further interventions to achieve the desired objective. The challenges confronted and lessons learned during the implementation are critically analyzed. Based on these findings the paper proposes a way forward for a sustainable IECCD program under community ownership.

ACRONYMS

CCG	Community Care Giving
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education for All
EPER	End of the Project Evaluation Report
EPLF	Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front
GMP	Growth Monitoring Report
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
GoE	Government of Eritrea
IECCD	Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development
Mo LHW	Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLG	Ministry of Local Government
NUEW	National Union of Eritrean Women
PAD	Project Appraisal Document
PFDJ	Peoples' Front for Democracy and Justice

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1. Introduction

This research paper has two objectives. First, it examines the Eritrean philosophy of social justice and the IECCD program, identify their relationship, and find out if an IECCD program can help to facilitate the implementation of the principle of social justice, the principle to which Eritrea adheres to. Secondly it reviews the eight years of Eritrean experience in the work of the first IECCD in order to draw lessons from

the challenges confronted and propose a sustainable IECCD program that can work for Eritrea, based on the previous experiences.

The methodology followed in this work is basically qualitative in approach. Literature review documenting the experience of different countries in IECCD program and its impact on child development interventions was carried out. A desk review of the previous Eritrean IECCD program documents was conducted. Different sources of information were utilized in the review process, including: different Eritrean proclamations and legal documents, government policy statements and guidelines, IECCD reports, program documents and some research work carried during the life time of the program as well as published and non-published books and materials on IECCD. The six years of work experience of the researcher in this program supported by the one year training for specialization certificate in the “International Child and Youth Care for Development” were a source of inspiration. . The research report is divided into four parts. The first deals presents the philosophy of social justice from the Eritrean perspective. The second is a discussion on the concept, components and significance of IECCD program in general. The third part covers a description of the Eritrean IECCD program, its achievements and challenges and the conclusion reached from the finding of the research. The last part is devoted to a new proposal for a sustainable IECCD program under the community ownership.

It is a firm conviction of the researcher that this study will have a humble contribution to the struggle that Eritrea is undergoing for the achievement of the principle of social justice. The implementation of a good IECCD program nationwide can serve as one strategy to achieve the desired result.

2. Social Justice in the Eritrean Context

A. Enacting Social Justice in Eritrea

The war of independence that the Eritrean people waged was also the struggle for a better future guided by the principle of social justice (EPLF, 1994). The Eritrean concept of social justice is well elaborated in the Eritrean National Charter. According to the Charter social justice signifies balanced and sustainable development and equitable enjoyment of the wealth of the country that satisfies the need of the majority and enhances their wellbeing. It also guarantees equitable participation and empowerment for all the citizens in the economic, political, social and cultural life of the country, and denounces discrimination and domination of any nature (EPLF, 1994). Social justice in the words of the Charter can be explained as “economic and social democracy... with equitable distribution of wealth, services and opportunities... and that special attention to be paid to the most disadvantaged sections of the society” (EPLF, 1994: 16).

The concept of social justice is also reflected in the Macro Policy of the Government. This policy document affirms that the sectoral orientation will be guided by the principle of social justice. It reads: “The guiding principle will be to have a development orientation that is human-centered and that ensures economic efficiency, social justice and is environmentally sustainable (GoE, 1994:17).”

Similarly, a number of government proclamations that deal with the economic and social sectors are promulgated reflecting the components of the principle of social justice. Major among these are Proclamation 17/91 that deals with the programs of recovery and rehabilitation for a self-sustained growth; Proclamations 29/93 on the establishment of the

Red Sea Commercial Corporation, intended to provide essential consumable goods to the public and protect them from the market uncertainty and high prices that are unaffordable by the poor; Proclamation 30/93 that establishes the Grain Board to create a safety net from unforeseen national catastrophe and emergencies where the poor is most affected and to protect and support the farmer; Proclamation 137/03 forms the Martyrs' Survival Benefits, etc. These and other similar policies based on equity and targeting the poor are projected to facilitate the promotion of social justice.

According to the National Charter, the Eritrean future vision encompasses six basic goals and social justice is one of them (the other five are, national harmony, political democracy, economic and social development, cultural revival and regional and international cooperation). Moreover, the Charter explains six basic principles that guides the achievement of the vision, chief among them is the principle of self-reliance (see pp.12-18 of the Charter for the other principles). Hence, social justice is one of the pillars of the vision and selfreliance a strategy that guides towards the implementation of the vision. Therefore, it is imperative to define self-reliance, a guiding principle, before one endeavors to discuss the different political, economic, social and cultural aspects of social justice so that one can properly understand how each of these aspects are to be put into practice to guarantee the ongoing performance of social justice.

B. Self-reliance

The principle of self-reliance is defined and dealt with in the National Charter comprehensively. It says:

Self-reliance in all fields - political, economic and cultural - is a basic principle. Politically, it means to follow an independent line and give priority to internal conditions; economically, to rely on internal

capabilities and develop internal capacities; and culturally, to have self-confidence and develop one's own cultural heritage (EPLF, 1994:16).

The principle of self-reliance is the basis for a sustainable development. It is a mechanism for economic development, establishment of a modern political system, development of national culture, and the improvement of the social life of all the citizens. The ultimate objective is to serve the implementation of social justice (EPLF, 1994). According to this principle, all national political, economic, social and cultural programs must be planned based on internal experience and charted according to the national conditions. It is a principle that addresses challenges through a home grown solution that fits with the local conditions and rejects the imitation of foreign models. It emphasizes that one should rely on own abilities and expertise and give priority to develop one's own capabilities. The principle recognizes the importance of outside investment and assistance but underscores the fact that in order to benefit from such assistance it is central to develop internal competencies first. It gives significant importance for human development, as the greatest source of prosperity of the country (EPLF, 1994). No doubt this approach guarantees sustainable development on all fronts. .

The principle of self-reliance in Eritrea is not just rhetoric. The thirty years war of independence is characterized with self-reliance. This is fact is reiterated by Firebrace and Hollan where they witnessed: "Self-reliance is one of the watch-words of the Eritrean revolution ... During our visit we were witnesses to the fact that this is no empty slogan but is integrated to all economic activity of the EPLF" (1986:71). They further attested saying: "The EPLF is implementing a self-reliant development strategy... and... the main beneficiaries of such program will be the poorest and neediest (1986:142-43)."

With these few words on the concept of self-reliance and how it guides the implementation of the principle of social justice now let us proceed to see the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of social justice.

C. The Economic Aspect of Social Justice

Social justice implies economic democracy (EPLF, 1994). It is a just, strong, developed, balanced and sustainable economy that benefits all, through an equitable distribution of the wealth of the country. The Charter defines social justice as follows:

To narrow the gap in economic opportunities and wealth between the rich and the poor,...to ensure equitable distribution of national wealth among all citizens... to narrow the development gap between rural and urban areas, center and periphery... and ensuring balanced ... development in the whole country ... to create conditions, which enable people to reap the fruits of their labor, improve their living standards through work, and honor work... to ensure public participation at community and national levels in decisions on economic affairs and enabling the oppressed and voiceless majority to have a voice. (EPLF, 1994:25-26).

This is the vision of the future social order to be established in Eritrea. This economic system becomes the foundation for a just political system. In the words of the Charter “A just political system cannot exist without a developed and just economic system. And political democracy cannot have a foundation in the absence of social and economic democracy” (EPLF, 1994:24).

D. The Political Aspect of Social Justice

The Charter elaborates on the type of political system that is envisioned in Eritrea under the principle of social justice. It said:

It is a stable political system which respects law and order, safeguards unity and peace... guarantees basic human rights ... based on accountability, transparency, pluralism and tolerance... a political system that must have broad social basis, enabling participation of all ...in decision-making process... (EPLF, 1994:20-21).

The Macro Policy also reiterates similar principles that constitute the democratic order of the political system of the country. The policy document states that national development objectives “will be directed for the realization of a decentralized and democratic political system and ...a free and sovereign state where human rights are respected” (GoE, 1994:10-11).

Therefore, one can clearly see from the Charter and the Macro Policy that the political aspect of social justice is basically people centered, inclusive, based on equity and participatory system of decision making.

Economic independence discussed above under social justice, gives the freedom to choose the best political system that fits to one's reality without any foreign interference. It is a political system that fosters the process of nation building, unity and harmony, guarantees the independence and sovereignty of a state and builds relationship based on the principle of mutual respect, interest and dignity.

E. The Social Aspect of Social Justice

Social justice demands equitable provision and distribution of all basic social services, favoring the disadvantaged, in order to create a level

playing field. This is well articulated in the Charter where it said, “To provide equal educational opportunity ... fairly distribute health services throughout the country... people should also receive fair distribution of water, shelter, sanitation and communication services ... (EPLF, 1994:33-34).” The objective is to transform the society to a better life style through various human development programs and secure their well-being.

The Charter reiterates the conviction of the PFDJ for the respect of the social rights of all the citizens in line with the implementation of the principle of social justice. It states:

We are striving to make Eritrea a country of justice and equality where dignity and basic human rights are respected...social rights of women, workers, children, refugees, the handicapped and others who deserve assistance, must be respected (EPLF, 1994:35).

The education policy also affirms its adherence to the principle of social justice where it is stated that one of the guiding principle of the education system is equity and social justice (MoE, 2010).

Therefore, respect for social rights are well entrenched in the legal instruments of the country.

F. Cultural Aspect of Social Justice

The National Charter defines and addresses in detail the culture that should be preserved, developed, and enriched in the Eritrean society. It advocates for the development of a new culture that builds upon the rich and diversified cultural heritage of the Eritrean society, the culture developed during the armed struggle and the international culture that fits to the Eritrean realities. This is characterized by “self-reliance, self-confidence... love of country and people...heroism and sacrifice... respect for humanity, solidarity between men and women, ... democratic culture

that rejects divisiveness, backward and narrow sentiments and chauvinism... ...commemoration of the martyrs... (EPLF, 1994:30-32). " These are some of the aspects of the national culture that needs to be inculcated in the society.

Hence, based on the discussions and arguments raised above it is submitted that the principle of social justice with all its political, economic, social and cultural aspects, supported with the strategy of self-reliance is well entrenched in the major legal documents of the country. It is a principle that guided the war of liberation and after independence it remains to be the basic principle that steers the development of the country.

3. Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (IECCD)

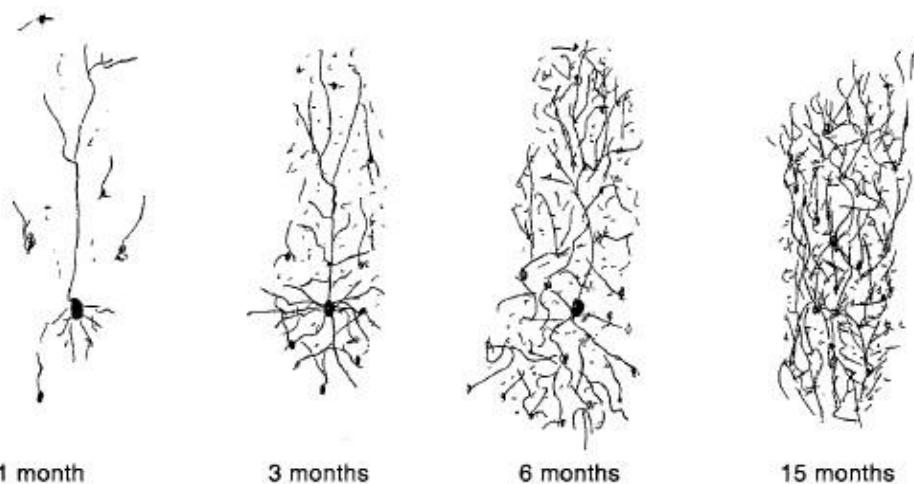
A. Understanding the Concept of IECCD

The IECCD concept refers to an all-inclusive, coordinated and holistic approach for the delivery of basic service necessary for the growth and development of a child at an early stage (Young, 2000). It is also extended to services rendered to parents and care givers. According to Hyde and Kabiru the services given under the IECCD program for children includes "...early socialization, education and readiness for school as well as the provision of basic health care, adequate nutrition, nurturing and stimulation within a caring environment...(2006:20)." They further explained that these services are of a multi-dimensional nature and that the sectoral barriers should be removed and all should work together to achieve the desired result. The objective is to safeguard the child's rights to develop to his/her full cognitive, emotional, physical and social potential. These interventions are made with the realization that the base for all human development is laid in this formative years and the

provision of these holistic services at this stage is considered as critical (Mustard, 2000).

The importance of these crucial years for child development is supported by medical and educational research. Young (1996) refers to Bloom (1964) where he clarified the fact that half of all intellectual development potential of a person is formed at the age of four. She also refers to 'Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children' (1994) indicating the following finding from their studies:

Inadequate nutrition before birth and in the first years of life can seriously interfere with brain development and lead to such neurological and behavioral disorder as learning disabilities and mental retardation... There is considerable evidence showing that infants exposed to good nutrition, toys, and playmates had measurably better brain function at twelve years of age than those raised in a less stimulating environment (Young, 1996:5).



Schematic picture drawing from a photomicrographs of the connections between neurons (Penn, 2008:79)

A study conducted by the World Bank in the significance of nutrition for growth and eradication of poverty supports the above stated view. It

says that “Malnutrition slows economic growth and perpetuates poverty (World Bank, 2006:1).”

There are different ways of delivering the services to the children under this program. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that it has to be child-friendly, family-focused, community-based and nationally backed by laws and policies that are of multi-dimensional nature and delivered holistically in an integrated manner (Hyde and Kabiru, 2006; UNESCO, EFA, GMR, 2007). The provision can be made in different forms and at various places such as center or home-based, informal focusing on family and community childcare environment, non-formal or formal on organized context (such as IECCD centers) and includes parenting enrichment. The holistic approach advocates for the total development of a child including his/her physical, cognitive, social and emotional aspects (Caag, 2000). This program also looks into mother’s health and nutrition issues as well as parenting education programs (The GoE, 2005).

Increasing access to antenatal and post-natal care and support, reducing maternal mortality and nutritional adequacy during pregnancy and breast-feeding are very essential intervention of the program. These activities are critical for the birth of a healthy child and his/her development (The SoE, 2005; Government of Malawi, 2006; Republic of Ghana, 2004). Laura (2004) emphasizes the importance of regular exercise, high-quality nutrition and emotional-wellbeing for pregnant women. The program educates parents and caregivers and informs and persuades the public of the importance of and strategies for proper upbringing of children. Other objective of the program is to care for disadvantaged or vulnerable children in the society to level the playing field.

B. The Advantages of investing in IECCD

There are many advantages for a country to invest in IECCD programs. Some major economic, political, social, and cultural benefits of the program will be highlighted.

i. Economic Advantages

Investing in IECCD contributes to the sustainable economic development of a society. A child who is well developed physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally is more likely to be employed in a more productive work and to contribute to his/her society's economic development (Young, 2000). Further, by enabling mothers to send their children to day care and to preschool centers, the program frees women from domestic work and helps them to benefit financially and be productive members of the community (Young, 1996). Finally, investing in early childhood reduces the need for and costs of health care, remedial classes, social welfare later in the child's life; and it reduces the costs associated with juvenile delinquency (Hyde and Kabiru, 2006; Fraser, 2000; Mustard, 2000) Iglesias and Shalala (2000:363) point that "Investing in early childhood is essential for nations and regions trying to eradicate mass poverty." Studies indicate also that, investing in IECCD result in "...increasing preschool enrollment rates to 25%, could yield an estimated US\$ 10.6 billion through higher educational achievement, while a 50% increase could generate \$33.7 billion" (WWW.thelancet.com.Vol 378, October 8, 2011).

ii. Social Advantages

Investing in IECCD can attain several social goals, including equity, human development and the protection of the rights of children. Firstly, IECCD programs meet a child's basic human right to live and enjoy a healthy development without any discrimination and to have proper care and

upbringing that attends to all his/her basic needs. Targeted IECCD programs can offer poor, disadvantaged and hard to reach children health, nutrition, water and sanitation, social protection, and a healthy environment; and can give them a 'fair start' in life and a 'level playing field' to enable them to live a decent life (UNESCO, EFA GMR, 2007). Further, IECCD programs prepare young children for school by promoting early learning, stimulation and developmental readiness (Adriana, Jaramillo, Alain and Mingat, 2008; Hyde and Kabiru, 2006).

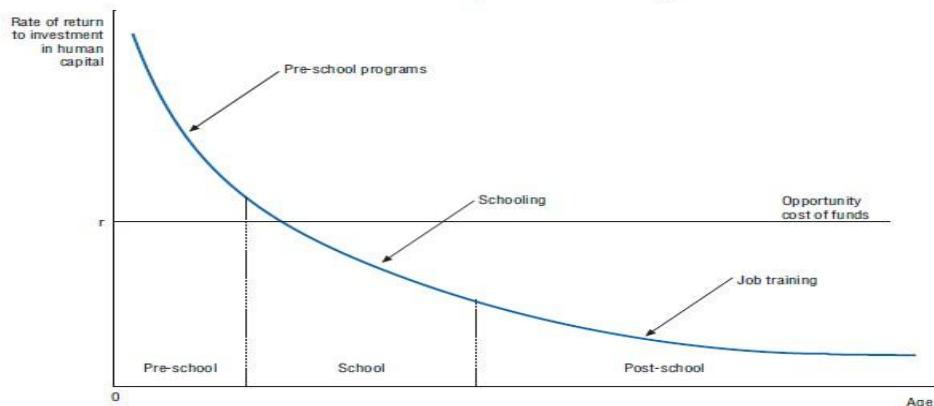
IECCD is strongly related with human development. This point is well illustrated by Gaag (2000:63) when he said: "Early childhood development (ECD) and human development (HD) are closely linked". Hence, investing in IECCD can contribute to human well-being (Evans, Myers, Robert G.Ilfeld and Ellen M. 2000; EFA GMR, 2007; Young, 1996).

iii. Cultural Advantages

The IECCD educational programs deals with proper upbringing and care for children and creates societal transformation. This sensitizes communities and the children for a modern and progressive life style in the community. The program teaches families how to care for pregnant and lactating mothers, how to raise happy, healthy, well-fed, socially secure, self-confident children who interact with their neighborhood and community; and it makes families aware that lack of affection towards children can restrict their cognitive, emotional and physical development. It is through children that the values of culture of a society is conveyed and perpetuated. These values begin in preschool years and can be advanced through early childhood programs more effectively (Evans, Myers and Ilfeld, 2000).

iv. Political Advantages

The early childhood period is considered a political issue and any intervention made will have political implications (UNESCO: EFA GMR, 2007). The program can play significant role in addressing some of the political challenges a nation may face. IECCD program helps to level the playing field enabling the people to share equally the wealth and political power. This will create peace and stability in the country and will protect and promote human rights (EPLF, 1994).



Rates of return to human capital investment (Cunha et al. (2005) cited in OECD, 2005: 38).

4. IECCD Policy and Practice in Eritrea

A. Policy Document

Eritrea came up with a Draft IECCD Policy in 2005 after a five years' experience of IECCD work. The policy document sets the institutional arrangement and the diversified approaches to facilitate the realization of the set goals and objectives. The document indicated that the activities be integrated and coordinated at all administrative levels through unification or convergence. The program is headed by the IECCD Policy Steering Committee consisting of ministers of LHW,

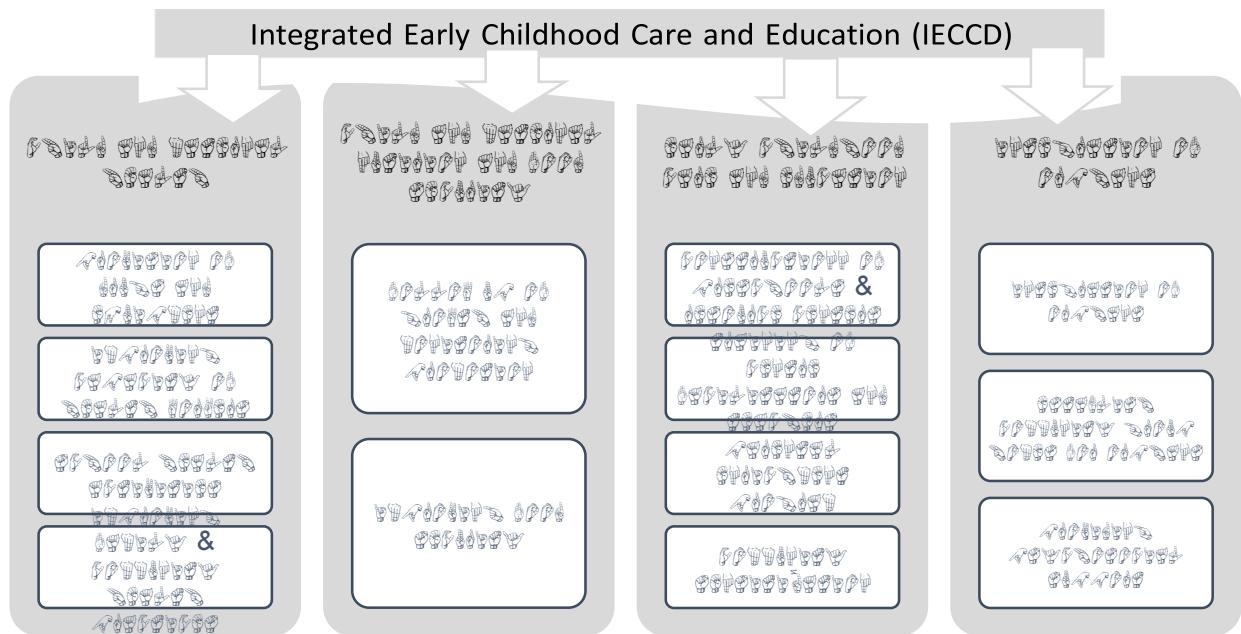
Health, Education, National Development, Local Government and Finance chaired by a minister designated by the office of the President. Their duty is mainly to advise the Government on IECCD policy matters; provide general guidelines and to supervise the progress of the work. The IECCD institution is strengthened by a National IECCD Policy Technical Support Committee consisting of the Director Generals of the above mentioned ministries and the general manager of the program (chaired by the researcher). It is responsible for the development of implementation plan, monitoring and evaluation, and ensures effectiveness of the diversified approaches to facilitate the realization of the program. There is the National Management Team that follows the day to day activities and coordinates the tasks of the regional, sub-regional, community and village level committees and working groups. These institutional arrangements and structures reach the targeted villages. In the selected beneficiary villages there is the village working group consisting of the representatives of the stakeholders' ministries working as an integrated institution and it is chaired by the village administrator (GoE, 2005). These are some of the major highlights stated in the policy document.

B. The Eritrean experience

The Government launched the IECCD program in September 2000. The project had a total of USD 49 million, which was partly a loan from the World Bank (USD 40 million), grant from the Italian Cooperation (USD 5 million) and Government contribution (USD 4 million). The objective of the program “is to promote the basic needs for a healthy growth and holistic development of children under six years of age, children in

primary school age, and children in need of special protection, through the provision of service and support in health care, early education, cognitive stimulation, protection and affection..." (GoE, IECCD PIM, 2000:1).

The project had four major components. The first was the child and maternal health which included interventions such as the provision of essential drugs and equipment, improving the skills of health workers and their performance in case management, school health activities, improving family and community practices etc. The second was the child and maternal nutrition and food security. This component included follow up of growth and monitoring promotion, improving food security etc. The third was the early childhood education that took care of construction of preschools and resource centers, training of facilitators and teachers, parental enrichment program, community sensitization etc. The fourth component was focusing on integration of orphans, establishment of community group homes for orphans for children in difficult circumstances and providing psychosocial support etc. (GoE, PAD, 2008).



Components of Eritrean IECCD

These interventions were initially implemented in 419 villages and later on a decision was made to select and focus on 116 villages only, where an integrated intervention can be made. This move was taken after learning some lessons from implementation and realizing the benefits of integration on the growth and development of the child. The integrated approach was introduced with the aim of maximizing the impact of the intervention. This approach also had the advantage of reaching wider coverage in the target group of 0 to 6 years and children in difficult circumstances.

C. Assessment of the Integrated Services

The integrated package delivery was implemented in parallel with the activities carried in the 419 villages established at the beginning of the program. The selection criteria for the 116 villages took the GMP sites as

an entry point and also considered the existence of at least two other IECCD interventions in that village (ECD Five Year Report, 2000-2005). The GMP sites were considered to be point of departure since they were related to health and nutrition services that are essential for the growth and development of the child. Once the villages were selected, the integrated packaged deliveries were secured in these villages in addition to the separate interventions in the remaining villages.

The project lasted for eight years and made commendable achievements, including against each component's set indicators. First, the indicator for the Child and Maternal Health component was Case Fatality Rate for the five illnesses combined (Malaria, Diarrhea, Acute Respiratory Infection, Measles and Malnutrition) having a target of 20% reduction. At the end of the program the result achieved was 53.4% reduction, well above the intended goal. The second is Early Childhood Care and Education and the indicators were repetition and dropout rates between grades 1 and 2. The target set was 20% reduction and the result obtained was 36% reduction in dropout rates and 30% reduction in repetition rates. The third was support for children in need of special protection measures and the indicator was reunification of orphans with close relatives. The target was 32,000 orphans to be reunified and the result attained was the reunification of 31,556 orphans that is 98.6% of the target was achieved. The fourth component was the reduction of 20% in the prevalence of underweight children less than 3 years of age. This did not meet the designed target due to the prolonged drought that lasted four years from 2002 to 2005(GoE, PAD, 2008) .

The program had very impressive outcomes and impacts. The Child and Maternal Health component was assessed to have achieved exceptional results due to the “synergetic effect of the IECCD program with the intervention of other maternal and child health programs within the

Ministry of Health" (EPER, 2007: XI). One of the success of the program in the Child and Maternal Nutrition component is believed to be "the positive attitude and behavioral change" due to the "sensitization, counseling and exposure of the mothers and the community" in general to the frequent follow-up of their children's growth and health (Ibid, p. XII). It is stated in the report that the exclusive breast-feeding at six months was raised to 80% from what has been reported in 2000 to be 52%.

The Integrated Management of Childhood Illness together with GMP, a pilot project, revealed 28% reduction in malnutrition (The State of Eritrea, Project Appraisal Document, 2008). At the end of the project the Bank's testimony was: "...The implementation was satisfactory and project objectives were largely achieved. Of the three selfstanding IECCD operations of this kind in Sub-Saharan Africa recently, Eritrean IECCD stands out for the commitment shown by the Government and other development partners in achieving satisfactory results" (GoE, PAD, 2008:8).

The educational component of the program had an influence on access and equity. Preschool centers increased by more than 400% and enrollment by 300%. 97% of these centers were built in rural areas demonstrating equity. As a result, the 4.5% net enrollment at the base year increased to 19% at the end of the project.

Similar achievements were also observed in the Support for Children in Need of Special Protection component. The evaluation report revealed that "97% of the reintegrated orphans were doing well in their educational performance, ...and 65% of the children were prize winners in their class by ranking 1st to 3rd while the rest stood in the ranks between 4th and 10th" (GoE, PAD, 2008: XVI).

In the concluding remarks the project was assessed in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. It is stated that in terms of relevance “the intervention addresses community demands and fulfill the child’s needs in line with the felt development objectives of the Government”; with regard to effectiveness “Implementing sectors and partners are satisfied with the achievement of the project” and in terms of efficiency it is testified that “all project imputes are well utilized and the planned activities were accomplished within the given time (Ibid, P.XIX).”

C. Challenges and Lessons Learned

These achievements were not without challenges. The coordination of the different interventions was not an easy task. At the beginning the stakeholders were inclined to work sectorally or to give priority to their respective intervention rather than looking into a holistic approach. Secondly, no baseline survey was conducted in the beginning of the project. Thirdly, problems associated with turning off, transfer and assigning of new employees also affected continuity in the work progress and follow up of performance (IECD EPER, 2007). Finally, once the project was over the financial sustainability of the program was at risk and the service delivery could not continue as it began in a holistic approach.

D. Conclusion

It is concluded that the Eritrean ICECD program had very impressive outcomes and impacts and encourages further interventions, considering the lessons learned. From the discussions made and the investigations carried it is submitted that the IECCD program shares five major goals with social justice.

First, social justice promotes equity and IECCD programs provide a “fair start” that may in the long run help to create a just society by leveling the playing field.

Secondly, social justice demands equitable human resources development, and this can easily be achieved by an effective IECCD programs that call for early intervention to the holistic needs of the child and the mother at a very crucial age.

Thirdly, social justice demands the provision of equitable quality education. The IECCD preschool program is an effective and efficient early intervention that can lay the foundation to achieve this result.

Fourthly, the concept of social justice includes the right of children to live decent life and to develop to their full potential. These are also some of the cardinal principles of IECCD program as discussed above under the social advantages of IECCD.

Finally, the principle of social justice aspires for a well-developed culture characterized by self-reliance, self-confidence, respect for humanity, equity, mutual respect, caring, commitment to family, love of country, social responsibilities etc. IECCD is a good early intervention strategy to convey and perpetuate these values.

Therefore, since IECCD is a strategy for achieving equitable human and social development for a country implementing this program can facilitate the promotion of social justice in a society.

5. The Way Foreword: A Sustainable IECCD Program under Community Ownership

The Provision of Community based Services

This new proposal can benefit from the previous IECCD experience in many respects and can build on the experience gained. The infrastructures built, various studies such as the indigenous knowledge on children conducted, awareness raising materials prepared and the human capacities developed under this program are among the major assets that can facilitate the implementation of this new proposal.

To guarantee the sustainability, relevancy and effectiveness of the program the intervention is suggested to be owned and guided by the community with the support of stakeholders and implemented in a cost-effective manner. The issue of sustainability needs to be considered in its two dimensions namely, sustainability of outcome and financial sustainability.

i. Sustainability of the outcome

The outcomes need to be sustained at individual, family and community level. This refers to the positive behaviors that impact on maternal and child nutrition, health and psychosocial and cognitive development of young children. The outcome can be considered sustained if the target groups maintain the appropriate behavior

ii. Financial Sustainability

The interventions can be considered financially sustainable if the continuity of the program is guaranteed to produce sustained outcomes. This can be certain if the project is financed by government budget and community contributions. All the stakeholder institutions will include in their regular budget the component of the IECCD agenda that their

sector will deliver. Each sector will look for a cost effective approach of service delivery that will maximize outcome.

The community has to decide on what costs to meet and how to meet. They could support the community volunteers in cash or kind as an incentive to encourage them to perform their duties in the best way they can. It is an established fact that activities carried and supported by the community guarantees success (see UNICEF, 2015; Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2007: no.109).

The provision of community based services will be discussed under three headings, namely the institutions that will carry the services, the type of intervention needed and the mechanism for delivery.

A. Organizational set up for the Provision of Services

The Ministry of Local Government shall take the responsibility to lead and coordinate the IECCD program in the community. In each locality the administrator of the community or the village will lead the task. All the institutions mandated with cognitive development, care, health, nutrition, protection and promotion of the child and the wellbeing of the mother shall team up together as one entity to deliver a coordinated and integrated services for the target group. These shall include the MoLG, Health, Education, LHW, Agriculture, Information and the NUEW.

B. The Type of Services to be provided

All the stakeholders shall perform the preparatory work together to initiate the program. This will include among other things, selecting the target groups, based on the principle of equity and social justice, conducting need assessment, setting goals and objectives, establishing

mechanisms for evaluation, preparing general guidelines and framework for action etc. The services to be delivered in each community shall be coordinated and delivered in an integrated and holistic manner under the auspices of the MoLG.

The following will be some of the crucial components of the IECCD that can be delivered in each community based on the need assessment made in each locality and the availability of the human, material and financial resources. The type of interventions under each component basically will be similar to the above discussed Eritrean experience.

- i. Child and Maternal health- This will be the responsibility of the Ministry of Health
- ii. Child and Maternal nutrition and Food Security- The focal ministries are health and agriculture. They can involve other relevant institutions such as the Ministry of Fishery.
- iii. Early Childhood Education and Care and Parenting Education including Adult Education- The MoE will carry this task. In the areas of early identification and support for children with special needs the task can be done in cooperation with the relevant ministries such as LHW and health.
- iv. Child Protection- The focal institution will be the MoLHW and they can involve other relevant institutions whenever needed, like the Ministry of MoLG in matters such as birth registration and the Ministry of Justice in pertinent legal affairs.
- v. Media Communication and Awareness Raising Campaign- This is the duty of the Ministry of Information and they can be assisted by the MoLG, the National Cultural Troops, etc. The materials and the information to be disseminated can be collected from the stakeholder institutions and previous IECCD documents where an excellent work has been conducted nationwide in this area.
- vi. Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Environmental Protection- The

focal Ministry will be the MoH and they will coordinate the work with the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment and in areas related to school health with the Ministry of Education.

- vii. Women Empowerment and Support- The main institution responsible is the NUEW.
- viii. Monitoring and Evaluation of the project- This will be carried by all the stakeholders jointly under the auspices of the MoLG and individually by the concerned sector.
- ix. Income generation- The community shall be supported to create income generating activities to improve their livelihood and pay their contribution for activities carried by the community volunteers. This could be commonly owned by the community or in a form of an individual family support for the neediest members of the society. The MoLG shall coordinate these activities with the support of all the stakeholders.

C. The Mode for Service Delivery

The manner of the delivery of these services could vary according to the age, need of the children, their families, the community and the particularity of each situation which makes it imperative to be as flexible as possible to guarantee the success of the intervention. The following could be some of the means for the delivery of the IECCD interventions:

- i. Interventions at wider scale- There are certain interventions that need to be taken at sub-regional, regional or nationwide level from the beginning of the program. These might include interventions such as advocacy, women empowerment, food security etc. and can take different forms. Moreover, whenever convenient and at any stage of development or scaling up the program a wider approach of service delivery could also be adopted. Whatever approach is used the bottom

line is that the active involvement, participation and ownership of the people of each locality or region involved need to be guaranteed.

ii. Home visits- This will be conducted by community volunteers and professional community workers focusing on children below three years of age and their family members. They will audit the situation of the children and make the necessary interventions and also support the family members.

iii. Community based interventions. All children in the community will be brought to the community center to get the services needed. The community workers representing the various government sectors together with the community volunteers will carry their respective tasks. Children above the age of three will benefit from pre-school in a form of the CCG or Kindergarten and other services pertinent to their age. All family members of the child shall profit from the interventions in different forms based on their need such as health, nutrition, education, sanitation, awareness raising, food security etc. The task may start as a small project and can scale up.

The community based center can serve as multipurpose hub. It can serve as training center for the community volunteers, as an assembly hall for conducting seminars and awareness raising campaign, resource center, can be an entry point for research works, monitoring and evaluation and any other activities related to the community.

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