Early Years

Bulletin of the Centre for Early Childhood Development

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"As we approach the end of 2025, in just over four years we will arrive at the year 2030. As ECD non-profit organisations we should now be thinking about what our organisation will look like and be doing in 2030. This is likely not being done.

For those organisations that want to still be around in 2030, there is still time to think about this and to plan for it. So, what should be done to sustain our ECD NPOs to 2030?

One major responsibility is to ensure that we have sufficient resources to deliver critically important ECD programmes leading up to 2030 and beyond. To ensure this, a strategy and plan must be put in place long before 2030 arrives.

First, we need to know what our ECD organisation will look like in 2030. Will we still be providing the same ECD programmes as we do in 2025 or will we change. If we are going to change, how will we be changing. These are critically important questions to answer.

Once we know what we want to do, we need to set our budget and record the amount of funding that we will need each financial year, to 2030.

How we perform with regard to fundraising will determine our existence in 2030. If we are not prepared we will no longer be around., and will join the 75 ECD NPOs that have closed over the past two decades.

As part of our strategy towards 2030 and beyond, our organisations require a big ambition that drives our work. Once this big ambition is agreed upon, everyone in the fundraising team (and the organisation) needs to commit to this.

The first stage of growing fundraising income is getting everyone on the team on board.

We need to start with our big, long-term ambition and then set our financial aspiration. Short-term fundraising thinking does not work. Our fundraising strategy must be recorded and our fundraising plan must be based on our financial (budget) aspirations. Long-term thinking is vital in our fundraising.

We must determine what funding we need up until and during the year 2030, and then we have to set in place a plan to achieve this.

To meet donor needs, our fundraising team must have the very best communications, content, materials, and insight into the donor world. Our field teams must deliver.

The organisation leadership, together with the fundraising manager, must lead the fundraising team towards the funding target required.

We must also review our fundraising progress regularly.

If we think about our organisation's future now and start to plan for it, then we will most likely still exist in 2030. If we do not, then we will close down.

Enjoy reading this edition of EARLY YEARS.

ERIC ATMORE

Director

CELEBRATING UNSUNG HEROES THIS WOMEN'S MONTH

~ Onyinye Nwaneri

Every morning, while most of the country is still asleep, a quiet army of women is already at work. They sweep classroom floors, set out tiny chairs, colouring books and crayons, and arrange toys and learning aids that will spark curiosity and wonder.

In township backyards and rural kitchens, they pull on aprons, stir porridge pots and eventually greet small, sleepy faces with love and warmth that makes them feel welcome and at home.

Many of these women are gogos caring for grandchildren so that their own adult children can catch early taxis to jobs miles away. Others are employees and volunteers at early learning centres. All spend every day holding the hands that will one day hold our nation's future. They are seldom, if ever, in the news – but their work is nothing short of heroic.

The scale of this quiet army of ECD educators, carers and entrepreneurs is larger than most people realise. The last national ECD Census, completed in February 2022, counted over 420 000 early learning programmes serving about 1.66 million enrolled children, and staffed by nearly 200 000 people.

These figures have undoubtedly risen in the past three years. Current estimates by Ilifa Labantwana suggest that around 250 000 people (mostly women) are employed in the sector, and the vast majority of them earn below minimum wage.

Behind this 'formal' ECD system is an even bigger layer of unpaid care. Stats SA reports that about 6.7 million grandparents live with around 9.7 million children. Nearly 70% of those grandparents are grandmothers who are caring for their grandchildren while their own children go to work. That's a massive invisible workforce that is enabling millions of people to participate in the economy.

Women's Month is an appropriate time to recognise this network of female carers, ECD practitioners and micro entrepreneurs for the essential role they play in South Africa's development story. However, we need to go beyond praising these women to catalyse meaningful action to support and enable them.

The imperative for this becomes patently clear when you look at the data on our nation's smallest citizens.

According to the 2024 Thrive by Five Index, fewer than half of four- to five-year-olds in early learning programmes are meeting the full set of milestones that prepare them for school. Only 43% are on track in both healthy physical growth and early learning skills like language, problem-solving and motor development.

If we look at early learning skills alone, the figure rises slightly to 45.7%, but that still means that more than half of SA's children are starting their schooling years already behind. These figures remind us that consistent, nurturing care in the early years is a national priority, not a side issue.

Fortunately, there was some good news on the funding front recently, when the Minister of Finance confirmed an additional R10 billion for ECD over the medium term, effectively raising the centre-based subsidy from R17 to R24 per child per day (the first increase in six years) and expanding access to 700 000 more children.

But it is still not nearly enough to meet the growing need. The new R24 per day rate still falls short of the estimated per-child cost of a basic quality programme, and only about a third of eligible children currently receive that subsidy.

Clearly, there is much work, and funding, still to be done. The R24 subsidy needs to be assessed and increased every year, and structures and processes need to be put in place to ensure that money actually reaches the ECD centres on time and with a minimum of red tape.

It's also vital that the Department of Basic Education's 2030 Strategy for ECD gets the full support it needs to bring more community and home-based sites into the formal system.

Registration backlogs keep many programmes outside the subsidy net, but there are efforts underway to rectify this, like the eCares platform and the Bana Pele registration drive – a call to action to put children first and an encouragement to all micro entrepreneurs and ECD practitioners to register and get the support the need to give children the development and stimulation they deserve.

This work mirrors the national call that emerged from the G20 Education Indaba to move beyond scattered pilot projects and instead prioritise quality foundational learning and accelerate the registration of ECD centres. These aren't just policy goals; they are the practical steps needed to ensure that vital support and funding reaches ECD classrooms and informal centres across the country.

Of course, while much attention rightly must be given to raising awareness about the good work being done by educators, ECD practitioners and entrepreneurs, as a country, we need to also recognise the millions of women working as cleaners, childminders, homemakers and au pairs.

This Women's Month, they deserve to be acknowledged and celebrated in the same way that we do our nation's female lawyers, doctors, engineers and CEOs.

Ultimately, we need to recognise and support the entire network of care that underpins our early childhood development ecosystem and thank the women who tach first songs, soothe first tears and open the gates to learning at dawn – because they are building the future of our country.

Dr Onyinye Nwaneri, Managing Director of Sesame Workshop International South Africa.

Article first published and is available at:
www.capetownetc.com/opinion/celebrating-unsung-heroes-this-womens-month/

BASIC EDUCATION PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE CALLS FOR REVIEW OF BELA ACT REGULATIONS

~ Mayibongwe Maqhina

The Basic Education Portfolio Committee wants the department to review the recently published regulations of the Basic education Laws Amendment (Bela) Act and also finalise the outstanding regulations as soon as possible.

This comes after Basic Education Minister Siviwe Gwarube gave the public until September 5 to comment on two sets of the Bela regulations that deal with language and school capacity after the new law was passed in December 2024.

Speaking to the media on the activities of the committee on Thursday, Basic Education Portfolio Committee Chairperson Joy Maimela said they have expressed discontent with the published regulations as the portfolio committee.

"The first issue is the fact that there are only two sets of regulations that are released out of eight. Our view is that releasing these regulations in such a manner is to create confusion because the regulations speak to each other and should correlate to each other," she said.

Maimela said releasing only two regulations was trying to derail the implementation of the Bela Act in its totality and also creates confusion.

"Moreover, the department missed the deadline for the release of the regulations. The deadline was June, and they released only two."

She called on stakeholders to engage with the regulations released for public comment.

Maimela observed that the regulations refer feeder zones as per demographics and education needs of surrounding communities to determine admissions when the Act gave the responsibility on admissions to the head of the department.

"We believe that is not in line with the essence or principle of the Act. That potentially reinforces demographic homogeneity contrary to inclusivity the Act intended."

She also said prior to the release of the regulations, the department had tried to publish guidelines for the Bela Act.

"In our discussions and a meeting with Provincial Education Department (PEDs), eight out nine indicated that this is creating confusion," she said, adding that this view was shared by other stakeholders.

"We warned, as the portfolio committee, that the executive should not utilise enacting of the regulations to try to win certain things they could not win during public participation. There are certain items that are introduced in these regulations which were rejected during the public process."

Maimela said it was the view of the committee that the executive was using the regulations to get other things through the backdoor.

"We urge stakeholders to engage with regulations thoroughly."

She added that the Grade R infrastructure and funding were also critical issues since this class was compulsory in terms of the new law.

Maimela said engagements with the department on the readiness to implement Grade R as a compulsory grade has revealed that there were serious concerns with infrastructure backlog, budget availability, and teaching personnel.

"You have a lot of teachers who have been teaching Grade R but they don't have the necessary qualifications. When we looked at plans of PEDs to capacitate these teachers, we raised concern about the pace and ensuring the Act is actualised in capacitating Grade R and teachers," she said.

"We make the call to the PEDs and the department to make sure that they finalise the last set of regulations as soon as possible, but we also call for the review of the two regulations that they gazetted to ensure that they are in line with the Act as passed by Parliament," added Maimela.

Article first published and is available at:
www.iol.co.za/news/politics/2025-08-21-basic-education-portfolio-committee-calls-for-review-of-bela-act-regulations

CECD CONFERENCE FAST APPROACHING

~ Centre for Early Childhood Development

An important national early childhood development (ECD) conference is taking place from 30 September to 2 October 2025, hosted by the Centre for Early Childhood Development

(CECD), in partnership with the College of Cape Town (CCT). The conference, titled *Quality Early Childhood Development in South Africa: Celebrating three decades of ECD in South Africa*, will bring together ECD professionals, activists, academics, researchers, government, policymakers, non-profits, children's organisations, donors and business to reflect on the past, assess the present, and envision the future of ECD in South Africa.

The conference Keynote Speaker is one of the world's most influential humanitarian leaders, Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, founder and chairman of Gift of the Givers. The work of Dr Sooliman champions practical support, deep empathy, and unwavering commitment to human dignity – importantly including the well-being of children, which is central to his mission.

The conference programme is now available! Sessions at the conference, taking place over three days, will consist of four panel discussions, 35 breakaway sessions, and our quick-paced 'Khawuleza' plenary event. Khawuleza means "Go quick!" in isiXhosa, and speakers in this dynamic session will showcase their work and tell their story within six minutes. Among the topics of these Khawuleza presentations are playgroups as an equalizer, supporting fathers, technology for ECD, safe sanitation, disability inclusion, and research as a tool for justice. The breakaway sessions further explore the conference themes of effective ECD programmes, policy, research and practice, leadership and management, and causes and calls to action – exploring lessons from the past, quality ECD in the present, and opportunities to shape the future.

The panel discussions will engage speakers from various sectors including government, research, legal, and non-profit organisations, as well as delegates, in key dialogues around the situation of children in South Africa, early literacy and language, the role of local government, and investment in ECD. These panel discussions are:

- Gauging Progress and Advancing Early Childhood Development
- Laying the Foundation: 30 Years of Building Early Literacy and Language in South Africa
- The Role of Local Government in Advancing Quality ECD in South Africa
- Let's Talk ECD Budget: Exploring Public and Private Investment in Early Childhood Development in South Africa

CECD also invites publishers and organisations to display their work on exhibition during the three-day conference in the main plenary hall – with access to all the plenary sessions. Among the exhibitors the conference will host are Little Zebra Books, Grow ECD, The Reach Trust, Africa Reggio Emilia Alliance (NPC), ECD Connect, The Learning Initiative, College of Cape Town, Starting Chance and Uhambo Foundation trading as Shonaquip Social Enterprise.

Limited to just 200 delegates, this conference offers a unique opportunity for networking, learning and growth in the ECD sector. Register and pay for the conference by 12 September 2025 to secure your seat!

To find out more - register to attend, exhibitions, programme and key speakers - please visit www.qualityecdconference.co.za or contact conference@cecd.org.za.