

**Knowledge Network  
Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation  
Research Brief #9**

*Early Childhood Development in  
Bong and Montserrado, Liberia  
- Part II*

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This brief is part of a series of research briefs of the DCR consortium. The purpose is to communicate lessons and corresponding recommendations for programme quality improvement. For information on the research methodology please refer to the full report, available upon request.

This research looks at the *key risk factors and success factors for sustainability of Save the Children's Early Childhood Education practice in Liberia and the way these can be mitigated/migrated*. The research was conducted by two researchers and divided into two parts. Part II (discussed in this research brief) will address the capacity of the Government of Liberia (GoL) to support ECD practices. Part I focussed on the impact of ECD on local level: on the children and community members. The research was conducted from November 2013 until April 2014 in Montserrado and Bong Counties. Data on the capacity of the GoL was obtained through analysis of ECD policy documents, focus groups and semi structured interviews. The findings of the second part of the research will be presented here.

Prior to 2011 ECD was not present in Liberia and is a relatively new education area of responsibility for the Government of Liberia (GoL) to allocate resources and commitment to. However, the GoL has illustrated its acceptance and recognition of the importance of ECD by providing ECD policy and implementation plans. Progress has been made to ensure that there is capacity to include ECD as part of the GoL's functions; these include the formulation of the Bureau of Early Childhood, training of master ECD trainers and essential ministry staff, ECD conferences for awareness and forward movement on decentralisation.

However, several risk factors have been identified for sustainability of ECD in Liberia. The risk factors that adversely affect the capacity of the GoL were examined under the themes of capacity of MoE, effective coordination of ministry partners and awareness of ECD policy by sector actors. There are capacity deficits at all levels of government involved in the ECD sector, there is limited coordination between the core ministries implementing ECD and the level of awareness of ECD is not at a satisfactory level to elicit positive and prolonged outcomes. Each of these areas impact on the capacity of the GoL to successfully deliver the ECD service independently and therefore they must be acknowledged and mitigated in order for the ECD to be sustainable and successful in Liberia.

### **Lesson 1: Prioritisation of ECD funding and resources from GoL is required**

Due to the many competing projects the GoL needs to fund, there may be difficulties in funding ECD as a priority over e.g. essential roads or health initiatives. The competition for funding by different Ministries may have led to the Ministry of Education (MoE) not approaching the Ministry of Finance (MoF) as they were aware of the limited resources

### **Recommendation**

- Assistant Minister ECD/Head of ECD Bureau of MoE to have monthly meetings with Head of Human Development pillar at MoF to inform on ECD projects and budgetary needs. Additional financial services and advice from the above. MoF contact to MoE contacts to be arranged and implemented in order that MoE is aware and meets MoF requirements for funding.

available to the GoL. There is an element of aid dependency due to the uncertainty of government funding and the subsequent anticipation that regular financing will come from donors or partners. In order to aid the MoF to be able to allocate finance to ECD and to cover any funding gaps, the current ECD projects and timeframes when the international funding will end need to be clearly and regularly communicated from MoE to MoF. The MoE would benefit from closer communication and cooperation with DCR and utilise their expertise in order that the requirements for funding are met.

### *Lesson 2: Capacity levels not sufficient in most levels of GoL*

The education system is still being rebuilt after the civil wars and it does take time to build lost capacity of those years back into the education system. As a result there are differing levels of capacity from ministry to ministry and unfortunately any deficit in capacity will adversely affect how effectively and efficiently the ECD system is operated. There is a valiant effort to make the most of the current capacity resources but this is stretching some staff resulting in less than optimal outcomes. There is a realisation that resources are scarce with people doing the best they can in the circumstances. There is also a culture of wishing not to be seen as not having enough capacity as well as pride and a desire that each ministry will be able to complete their ECD obligations even with limited capacity. The impact of capacity deficits in the MoE has a far reaching effect since they are the lead agency and as such must be able to take the prominent role in championing and implementing ECD. Save the Children and DCR can support the Government of Liberia by offering advice and consultation on education and education management.

### *Lesson 3: The level and extent of accountability and transparency is limited*

There is an understanding and acknowledgement of the importance of evaluating the ECD programme which bodes well for its future success. However at present there is no standardised, uniform M&E system being used by all ministries to assess the ECD sector. Each ministry involved in the ECD sector collects data on specific areas of interest and of relevance to their ministry and in most cases this information is not linked to ECD. M&E systems would be used to ascertain the level of sustainability in Liberia's ECD domain, to identify risk factors that may put its success in jeopardy and to seek solutions to mitigate these hazards. Effective and efficient M&E systems are one of the cornerstones of 'good governance' and tools to ensure that power and authority at local, national and government structures are accountable, transparent and include participation of affected stakeholders. DCR could play a role in the development of M&E tools by attending coordination meetings and allocating funding towards the development of these tools.

### *Recommendation:*

- DCR and Save the Children to initiate a meeting as soon as possible with ECD representatives of MoE and other core ministries to ascertain what they identify as areas that require capacity building. Use the outcomes of these discussions to formulate and implement appropriate and timely strategies to build capacity. Ongoing capacity meetings to be held every other month.
  
- DCR to appoint an M&E expert within 3 months to assist the MoE M&E specialists in the aim to improve the level of accountability and governance structures in ECD. Collaboration between DCR and all focal ECD ministry committee members is required to ensure M&E program design and implementation is consistent and data being captured is useful.

#### **Lesson 4: Investment of time, improvement of coordination between stakeholders and improved awareness of ECD is required in the Liberian ECD sector**

There is the political will and support behind ECD but it is a relatively new form of education in Liberia and as a result it needs time and a long term vision to be fully accepted into the Liberian education system. To aid in this goal it would be beneficial that investment of a greater amount of time is made in order to embed ECD into the Liberian school system and culture. There is a requirement from all sector actors to commit to a long term strategy, finances and level of support for ECD to take hold in Liberia. In Liberian politics, progress is 'small small' which means it takes time to exact change and for new concepts to be adopted and implemented. The long term attitude will need sustained political will to move ECD forward. There is also a need to bring pressure to bear on the members of the National inter-sectorial policy on Early Childhood Development (NIPECD) in order, for the coordination of members to improve and to be more effective. As for the matter of improving awareness of the ECD, the MoE is assisting with this issue by holding workshops and meetings with other ministries. This is one way in which they are engaging and convincing them of the importance of ECD and the need for other ministries to honour their commitments. Time, effective coordination and improved awareness are all required to increase the engagement level of the GoL and they all impact on the sustainability of ECD in Liberia. DCR could assist the Ministry of Education by allocating funding to the training of government officials or consultants who can assist the MoE in the improvement of the ECD policy. Save the Children could arrange advocacy events and create media-products like radio shows or radio commercials to ensure that, actions of DCR and Save the Children take effect as soon as practical. It may also be of benefit to all parties that a committee of DCR, Save the Children and MoE ECD officials meet once a month. These meetings would have the sole purpose of building relationships, and being proactive with problems. There would be a set agenda of tasks for each representative to complete in the preceding month and to report on in the next meeting. This would keep ECD at the forefront of everyone's consciousness and work priorities.

#### **Implication of research findings for DCR program implementation**

*By Emmanuel Goko, Education Project Manager DCR – Save the Children*

As part of renewed efforts to improve education delivery systems, the Ministry of Education officially launched the "Education Operational Plan" in May 2014. The theme of this plan is: "Quality Education for All: Redirecting Our Future". This three year plan (2014-2016) covers five priority areas, including Early Childhood Development/Education. This tends to boost SCI/ DCR's long standing advocacy agenda on ECCD policy. The plan has a budget of 180 million and shall be financed

#### **Recommendation**

- DCR to engage and support the MoE with their long, medium and short term strategies for the direction of ECD. DCR to advocate for each ministry to have a clearly designated ECD focal person and to encourage the free and efficient sharing of knowledge and information. Save the Children to evaluate the mediums and means of conveying ECD information to improve the awareness of ECD of sector actors.

through the Government of Liberia's Annual National Budget and Donors' contributions.

Meanwhile, the MoE is leading an inter-sectoral coordination committee on early childhood development, which comprises a number of line ministries; including Ministry of Health & Social Welfare, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education. Save the Children, THINK and other NGOs/INGOs are also part of this committee. Save the Children will emphasise the evolution of ECD management and supervision in this committee, at the county and district levels, as recommended by this study.

In 2014, the Ministry of Education also launched a web-based Education Management Information System (EMIS) with support from UNESCO. The web-based EMIS is meant to provide reliable and quality data to inform education planning and decision making. However, the lack of a uniform or standardized M&E system across the ECD line ministries poses a challenge for cross-ministry examination of inputs and results. Internally, Save the Children has stepped up its systems and currently engages the MoE to ensure harmonization, information sharing and joint monitoring and evaluation practices.

In the wake of the Ebola outbreak in Liberia, the Ministry of Education launched "Education in Emergency" in collaboration with UNICEF, USAID, Save the Children and other actors. ECD awareness with parents by radio is a key priority. Awareness is raised through more than fifty public and community radio stations across the country in English and in 16 other local languages. Save the Children will utilize this moment to heighten its engagement with the MoE towards increasing awareness. Especially at rural level there is a near-absence of ECD knowledge and awareness. In SC's national advocacy agenda, we will apply increased pressure on the members of the National inter-sectoral policy on Early Childhood Development (NIPECD) for the regularization of ECD coordination, networking and joint initiatives.