A plan to achieve **universal coverage** of **EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT services** by **2030**

This document is presented for discussion by Ilifa Labantwana, Kago Ya Bana, and their funders, as a contribution to a social compact for early childhood development (ECD).
A plan to achieve *universal coverage* of **EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT services** by 2030

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If children are loved, nourished and protected; if they are spoken with, read to and allowed to be curious, they will learn well and be well – and the country will thrive. That is early childhood development.

The Priority

ECD is the source of human capital to drive education, jobs and growth.

“Early childhood development is the most powerful investment in human capital that a country can make.”

› ECD builds the intellectual, physical and emotional scaffold for all future investments in human capital.
› In effect, it largely determines the rate of return to schooling, technical and vocational training and university education. For every Rand invested in quality early childhood development, South Africa will get at least R10 back.*

*See sources at the end
ECD is a national priority

The National Development Plan (NDP) and the National ECD policy of 2015 commit to ensuring that every child in South Africa has access to the full range of ECD services by 2030. President Cyril Ramaphosa’s Government supports these goals.

A social compact for ECD

The NDP recognises that this goal will only be possible with innovative public-private partnership. While some goals in the NDP might seem unlikely to be reached, this one can be achieved. All the ingredients needed are already available; with collective and focused effort we can achieve this vital goal for equity. Because ECD has so many aspects to it, every sector of society needs to play its part. Many pieces are already in place, but there are still some big gaps that can be filled. Now is the time to put in place a powerful social compact for ECD.
The Problem

“Our children are the rock on which our future will be built, our greatest asset as a nation. They will be the leaders of our country, the creators of our national wealth who care for and protect our people.”
- Nelson Mandela, 3 June 1995

Failure to invest properly in ECD services for our young children has meant that patterns of education and employment have not fundamentally changed. As a result, we have missed an opportunity to build and redistribute our national wealth. We cannot look back in 20 years’ time and say that we have still failed our children. We know how to change their future – and together, we can.

Big gaps in service provision

An essential package of ECD consists of five elements, rated here in terms of how adequate services are, in terms of coverage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An essential package of early childhood development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From conception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal &amp; child primary health care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOOD &gt;80% Coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 79% Coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;50 % Coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;50% Coverage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the main reasons for the gaps in service provision is that many programmes for young children need to be provided in the home or in community facilities – the obvious exception being clinic-based healthcare. While these services are largely publicly financed, they are provided by local non-profit organisations or micro-enterprises. While this is an appropriate and affordable format for localised delivery that builds on and enhances social capital and local jobs, it is not scalable unless organised and supported. In the absence of organisational mechanisms for scale, there has been little capacity to grow supply, absorb and use new funding efficiently, or to enable quality delivery. These platforms for scale now need to be built.

No central agency to co-ordinate and drive programmes for young children

Countries that have made good progress with programmes for children have almost all had a central coordinating agency driving the main national programmes that fall across the responsibilities of different government departments and social sectors. Without this agency, we are unlikely to significantly improve nutrition, education and related social outcomes.¹ The South African Integrated Programme of Action for ECD 2013-2018 has identified the establishment of a coordination mechanism for ECD as a high priority.²

Serious under-resourcing

“South Africa spends only 1-2% of its total education budget on early learning programmes – not enough to power better educational outcomes.”


The result of these system weaknesses is that there is little positive pressure on the public fiscus to resource key areas of ECD adequately, especially early learning and language development, and support for good nutrition and parenting. Currently, roughly 5% of national expenditure (1.5% of GDP) is spent on early childhood development. That’s R75-billion. Two-thirds (67%) goes to primary healthcare for mothers and children³ and a further quarter to childcare grants (27%).⁴ Only one-sixteenth (6.5%) is spent on early learning, nutrition support and responsive parenting and early intervention.⁵ (Note that child welfare services are excluded from this calculation.)

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The Opportunity

South Africa is looking for greater returns on investment in education, to drive employment and economic growth. Early childhood development – nutrition and early learning in particular – are likely to boost returns significantly over the next 30-40 years.

› There is now the political will to invest properly in young children.
› There is a willingness to design a system of service delivery that is fit-for-purpose.
› There are now existing programmes of nutrition support and early learning that are designed for scale, which can achieve coverage targets by 2025.
› The nation is committed to job creation – and the ECD sector can stimulate large numbers of jobs and micro-enterprises.
› There are private and social sector partners – in implementation and co-financing – that are ready and able to work with Government in creating an effective public-private partnership.
The Goals

2030 goals for children

It is time to put in place the large-scale programmes and management systems for ECD that will achieve the goals of the NDP. The added benefit is that meeting this goal would generate at least 390 000 new jobs, most of these in micro-enterprises funded by a blend of user fees and public subsidies, and predominantly employing women. We must commit to specific goals for ECD:

- All pregnant women receive high-quality antenatal care to reduce low birthweight from 13% to <8%.
- Zero-stunting of all children under two years of age.
- All 3-4 year olds participate in high-quality early learning programmes.
- All children ready to read and count by the time they go to school.
- All children who are especially vulnerable (through family circumstance or special needs) linked into professional and social networks of support.

What will it take?

1. Finances: The immediate priority is to find another R7 billion for ECD interventions in the next three years, then a further R11 billion by 2025, and another R16.3 billion by 2030 (At 2018 prices).

2. Human resources: 210 000 more trained ECD practitioners (playgroup facilitators, trained childdminders or those based in early learning centres), and a further 140 000 assistants, to achieve universal coverage of early learning.*

3. Programmes: Large-scale programmes that mobilise parents and support early learning and language development, nutrition, and children with disabilities.

4. ECD Agency: A central agency to coordinate and drive large-scale cross-cutting programmes for children.

5. ECD Index Systems in place for an ECD Index to track children’s progress, milestones and outcomes at municipal, provincial and national levels.

* Assuming, on average, 69% of children 0-5 years of age are in centres, 9% receiving home visiting, 16% in childdminding programmes, and 6% in playgroups. This is an aggregate number, as the service mix varies by single-year age group. The modelling is based on current population size.
1. Finances

THE GAP

› R7-billion more public funding in the next three years
› R11-billion more by 2025
› A further R16.3-billion by 2030 (at 2018 prices)

THE OPPORTUNITY

› Government is committed to scaling up ECD over the next decade to achieve the goals in the National Development Plan (NDP).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2025</th>
<th>2030</th>
<th>What extra funds will buy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthy pregnancy grant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 million pregnant women get a conditional cash grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early learning</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>2 million more 2-5 year olds participate in quality early learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting &amp; care (incl. disability)</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>290 000 vulnerable children &lt;2 years reached through home visiting and 130 000 children with disabilities accessing an ECD service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition support</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Conditional vouchers for 300 000 pregnant women to participate in mother &amp; baby classes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Human resources

What the workforce for young children looks like:

THE HR GAP - WE STILL NEED...
› 10 000 playgroup facilitators and 90 000 trained childminders.
› 110 000 more centre-based practitioners and 140 000 assistants.
› Half (15 000) of the current ECD practitioners are unqualified and need training.
› 20 000 community health workers (roughly one-third) need to be trained and directed towards maternal and child healthcare.
› Clear career progression path for all practitioners.

THE OPPORTUNITIES
› Resource & training organisations (RTOs) are ready to work with TVET colleges to create seamless links between training and work experience.
› Large programmes like SmartStart and Nal’ibali have already shown how the Community Work Programme & Expanded Public Works Programme can be used to train and support first level ECD workers.
› SETA funding can be directed towards large-scale programmes.
› An ECD Enterprise Incubator is already in place to support ECD micro-enterprise.
› Companies involved in the Youth Employment Scheme can fund placement of young people to work in large-scale early learning programmes.
Critical constraints in the workforce for ECD (Quintile 1-3)

The figure for social workers is the total human resource gap for all social services (not just for children), as no further breakdown is available.

**TIME TO ENGAGE ALL THE PARTS OF AN EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE!**

**VIA BLE ECD ENTERPRISE**  
(Day mother, playgroup or centre)

- ECD practitioner
- Enterprise development training
- Level 4 and Level 5 training
- Playgroup facilitator
- Reading mentor

- YES Programme placement of interns
- Enterprise incubator (Enterprise development funding)
- ETDP SETA learnerships
- Provincial funding for ECD training (equitable share allocation)
- Registered training institution:  
  - TVET College
  - ECD Resource & Training Organisation (RTO)
- Public Work Programmes (CWP & EPWP)
- ETDP SETA funding
- Early learning social franchise
- Work-seeker preparation and recruitment

**YOUNG WORK-SEEKER**
3. Large-scale programmes

Estimates of child participation in home, playgroup & centre programmes (Quintile 1-3)

- **Early Learning 3-5 Yr Olds**: Full provision
- **Playgroups/Childminding for 2 Yr Olds**: 80% provision, 20% service gap
- **Home Visits for 0-2 Yr Olds**: Full provision, 0% service gap
- **Home Visits for 30% of Pregnant Women**: 30% provision, 70% service gap

**THE GAP**

- 30% of pregnant women (300,000) to be reached through antenatal classes or home visiting.
- 290,000 more children under two to be reached by home-visiting programmes (so that the most vulnerable 20% of under twos are supported).
- 150,000 more 2 year olds to participate in early learning playgroups or childminding programmes.
- 1,300,000 more 3-5 year olds to attend early learning centres or playgroups.
THE OPPORTUNITIES

› A rich network of organisations, large and small, committed to ECD.
› Ambitious social franchise initiatives (like SmartStart early learning playgroups and childminders, and Flourish pregnant mom & baby classes) show how programmes can be taken to scale, monitored and funded.
› Strong systems support initiatives (Ilifa Labantwana and Kago Ya Bana) committed to universal coverage of ECD services.
› Strong nodes of innovation for early learning (e.g. Innovation Edge and workplace social franchise models).
› Corporate-backed initiatives like The Unlimited Child now provide quality support to over 1 500 early learning centres.
› Grow Great zero-stunting campaign aims to build the power of community health workers as champions for children.
› Growing willingness by companies to use their core commercial platforms for ECD support at scale.
› Use of mobile technology – zero-rated for the user – to enable ECD practitioner training and support, and to empower parents.

PROGRAMME TARGETS BY 2025

These are the programme targets required to achieve universal coverage by 2030.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme target</th>
<th>Human resource target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All low birth weight babies followed up monthly to one year of age</td>
<td>Half of community health workers (30 000 of 60 000) trained to monitor child growth and refer babies who fail to thrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stunting among 0-5 year olds halved (from 28% to 14%)</td>
<td>As above 15 000 franchisees of mother &amp; baby classes (Flourish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One million more 3-4 year olds have access to early learning programmes All 4-5 year olds have access to quality full-time early learning programmes</td>
<td>100 000 more first-level practitioners (franchise playgroups and trained childminders) 110 000 more centre-based ECD practitioners trained 140 000 assistants in centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half of all school entrants (525 000) ready to read by the time they go to school</td>
<td>25 000 reading promoters trained and supported through public work programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most at-risk 10% of children &lt; 2yrs and mothers (200 000) connected into social networks of support</td>
<td>Civil society networks used to create networks of support and opportunity to 100 000 infants and mothers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TARGETS BY 2030

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Human resource target</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All low birth weight babies followed up monthly to one year of age</td>
<td>All community health workers trained to monitor child growth and refer babies who fail to thrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero stunting among 0-5 year olds halved (i.e. &lt;3% of 0-5 year olds below -2SD for height-for-age)</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 3-4 year olds have access to early learning programmes All 4-5 year olds have access to quality early learning centres</td>
<td>Target to be reached by 2025 Target to be reached by 2025 (over time, many of the playgroup facilitators will progress to 5-day programmes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90% of all school entrants (900 000) ready to read by the time they go to school</td>
<td>45 000 reading promoters trained and supported through public work programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most at-risk 20% of children &lt; 2 yrs and mothers (400 000) connected into social networks of support</td>
<td>Civil society networks used to create networks of support and opportunity to 200 000 infants and mothers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. ECD Agency

Those countries that have made great strides have implemented a concerted national programme under the direction of a central agency.

THE GAP

› No central mechanism to drive cross-cutting programmes for children i.e. nutrition support, early learning & language development, responsive parenting and enabling children with disability to reach their full potential.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

› Government interest in designing an efficient and effective system of ECD support.
› A coalition of funders of ECD, who – together with academics and implementing partners – would get behind Government in the design, development, implementation and funding of a national agency for ECD and its functions.

PROPOSED INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE FOR ECD AGENCY

MINISTRY

Department

ECD Agency

› Public communications
› Programme planning & monitoring
› Programme support: early learning, language & reading, nutrition support, parent engagement & inclusion of children with disability
› Early learning programme administration & financing (centre- and non-centre-based programmes)
› Inter-departmental collaboration

Private Sector Partnership
5. Data system for an ECD Index

THE GAP

› No centralised data on the state of young children, and services to them.
› Very little data to monitor programmes outcomes.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

› New monitoring tool, validated for South Africa, to evaluate the impact of early learning programmes (Early Learning Outcomes Measure).
› Systems support initiative (Ilifa Labantwana), working with Government, to improve data systems.
› Mobile innovations to track child participation in programmes.
› Corporate support for an Early Learning Index, as the first step towards an ECD Index at national, provincial and local level.
OPPORTUNITY TO GROW HUMAN CAPITAL AND JOBS AT THE SAME TIME

Even in our resource-constrained environment, there is opportunity to bring together several major initiatives spearheaded by Government, the business sector and civil society to grow young children and jobs at the same time (see diagram below).
Sources of information

THE PRIORITY


HEADLINE STATE OF CHILDREN


Literacy: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (2017). This international comparison study measured literacy levels between 2011 and 2016 and scored South Africa last in reading of the 50 participating countries.

FUNDING, HUMAN RESOURCE AND PROGRAMME GAPS

