



A quick overview of the organisation and management of ECD services internationally

Across the world, the organisation of Government departments does not easily provide a coordinated response to the developmental needs of children. In South Africa, essential services for young children are spread across a number of departments, notably the Departments of Social Development, Health, Basic Education and Home Affairs. Recent reviews highlight ineffective institutional arrangements, insufficient inter-sectoral collaboration, poor coordination and service integration and limited accountability across sectors as major barriers to effective ECD service delivery in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2013); (National Planning Commission, 2011); (Richter, L. et al , 2012). The South African Integrated Programme of Action for ECD 2013 – 2018 has identified the setting up a coordination mechanism for ECD as a high priority (Department of Social Development, 2013). Without a single national structure responsible for early childhood development, we are unlikely to significantly improve nutrition, education and related social outcomes (Richter, 2013).

Despite widespread recognition that services for children should be better co-ordinated, no country has effectively mastered the integration of early childhood services (Brookings Institute). Countries have essentially adopted one of four approaches, namely:

- Designating specific responsibilities to line departments, and holding the respective departments to separate account;
- Co-ordinating the respective responsibilities of line departments through a central council or administrative secretariat;
- Integrating specific ECD activities (typically education and child care responsibilities) under a single ministry; or
- Creating a separate executive agency to manage key functions of early childhood development, working together with government departments that retain their core functions.

Table 1 outlines the pros and cons of the above options for country-level co-ordination and management of ECD.

Table 1. Country approaches to co-ordination and management of ECD

Approach	Country example	Pro's	Cons	Additional Comments
Designate responsibilities to key departments and account separately	China (UNICEF), where Ministry of Health responsible for nurseries and MOE for preschools	Clear lines of responsibility for specific activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All developmental needs of children unlikely to be met as departments focus on their area of expertise. Key ECD strategies that don't easily fit into departments' core functions tend to fall between the cracks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Split systems typically result in a weakly regulated child care system and a 'junior school approach' to early education. In the child care sector the quality of the learning environment is often poor because of weak state guidance and low staff qualifications and work conditions. The early education sector is typically directed toward academic goals and be characterised by high child: staff ratios and neglect of the child's natural learning strategies (through play, creativity & exploration).
Coordinate line department responsibilities through a central council or administrative secretariat	Many state-level councils in the United States Rwanda (ECD secretariat) (Ministry of Education, Republic of Rwanda, 2011) Cuba (UNESCO, 2007) Columbia (Vargas-Baron, 2005); Ghana (UNICEF, 2011),	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear lines of responsibility for specific activities Can be very effective, depending on political will and local structures (e.g. Chile, Colombia) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above Coordinated implementation relies on sustained political will Many plans not executed as joint accountability is usually difficult to enforce Involvement of some departments may be weaker than others e.g. in Ghana, the education ministry is strongest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination is more difficult and time consuming than if one agency was in charge. Ghana's National ECCD Coordinating Committee – membership includes representatives of ministries, higher education institutions, development partners, NGOs, and national association of ECCD providers. Regional and district ECCD committees have responsibility for advising local government bodies, advocacy, planning and monitoring of ECCD services and initiatives and coordination at their levels. Colombia's Institute for Family Welfare is a semi-autonomous intersectoral institute associated with Presidency, Health, Education and national Planning
Integrate under a single ministry	Jamaica, Sweden, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia (under education) and Finland (under welfare) (UNESCO, 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More likely to be seen as a public good, universal access Development of single professional pathway and qualifications, norms and standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More formal 'school-like' programmes, often inconsistent with how intrinsic learning takes place in young children (Gopnik, 2012) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This approach seems to be the evolution of education extending responsibility to younger and younger children, which has merit. However, in practice, it often translates as 'school for younger children'. Chile has the Ministry of Planning as the key convening ministry, because it is non-sectoral,

Approach	Country example	Pro's	Cons	Additional Comments
	Brazil (Evans D, 2012), Chile (Delpiano P, 2011), and New Zealand (Ministry of Health, New Zealand, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better transitions into schooling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be less focus on health interventions • Requires high level of co-operation across departments where dual responsibility is required 	and directs budgets to departments for service delivery.
Create an autonomous executive agency to manage key functions of early childhood development, working together with government departments that retain their core functions but which assumes responsibility for overall oversight and monitoring of the full ECD package of services	Oportunidades (Mexico) (Levy, 2006) Singapore (Ministry of Education, Singapore) Large-scale early child programmes in the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia (Jayaratne K, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear management responsibility for a discrete integrated package of child support services • Synthesis of child data across departments • Discrete programmes have been able to show improved nutrition, social, educational and cognitive outcomes (Jayaratne K, 2010) (Fernald L, 2008) 	Departmental fears of, and giving up of specific departmental functions, and 'mission creep' by agency (Levy, 2006)	A review of institutional arrangements in the republic of Korea concluded that, with sufficient autonomy, an autonomous agency could reduce the costs of developing policies and reaching consensus. The new agency could have advantages in developing stronger integration of care and education while improving the quality of both. This would depend on making best use of the existing people and other resources of the current parallel system and bringing them together in a new more unified vision. (Kaga Y, 2012)

It is now clear that the persistent fragmentation that typifies health, education and social development is contrary to child development, and that negotiating inter-departmental agreements and calls for collaboration are insufficient (Shonkoff, 2010). Internationally, many of the countries that have managed to make significant gains in ECD – Mexico, Canada, United Kingdom and the USA, for example, have created special agencies to drive the national programmes (working with the respective Government departments). The exceptions are some of the Latin American countries like Cuba, Columbia and Ecuador – which combine strong centralised Government departments of Health and Education with strong community structures for integration. Even in these countries, there is a challenge of integration, and their increasing liberalisation may require adaptation of their institutional arrangements. (Tinajero, 2010)

In South Africa, the fragmenting effects of apartheid and relatively weak institutions at local level have made effective co-ordination extremely difficult. The Review of the National Integrated Plan (2005 – 2010) found that the institutional arrangements were “one of the weakest aspects of the implementation of the NIPECD”. (Department of Social Development, 2013). Giese’s (2008) review of cooperative governance structures relevant for children in South Africa noted the inherent challenge of the need for a single department to take the lead and associated reluctance of one government department to be ‘dictated to’ by another. Structures whose mandate is drawn from policy or law tended to be more effective (including greater authority to act on decisions, higher level political buy in, better budgetary allocation and improved accountability). (Giese S, 2008) At the same time, representation from civil society was found to be valuable and the review of the NIP recognises that the capacity of civil society to participate in decision making processes needs to be strengthened. Currently, a Terms of Reference for an Intersectoral forum for ECD have been published for public comment. While this proposed advisory structure may strengthen public-private interaction, it does not replace the need for an integrated national ‘programme driver’

Given the national realities, it is highly unlikely that an intensification of coordinating structures will provide an effective platform for universal implementation of an essential package of ECD services. Rather, enabling existing departments to fulfil their core functions, and consolidating critical aspects of child development that are currently tangential to these core functions (and consequently under-provided) under the ambit of a single dedicated agency, will yield far greater success.

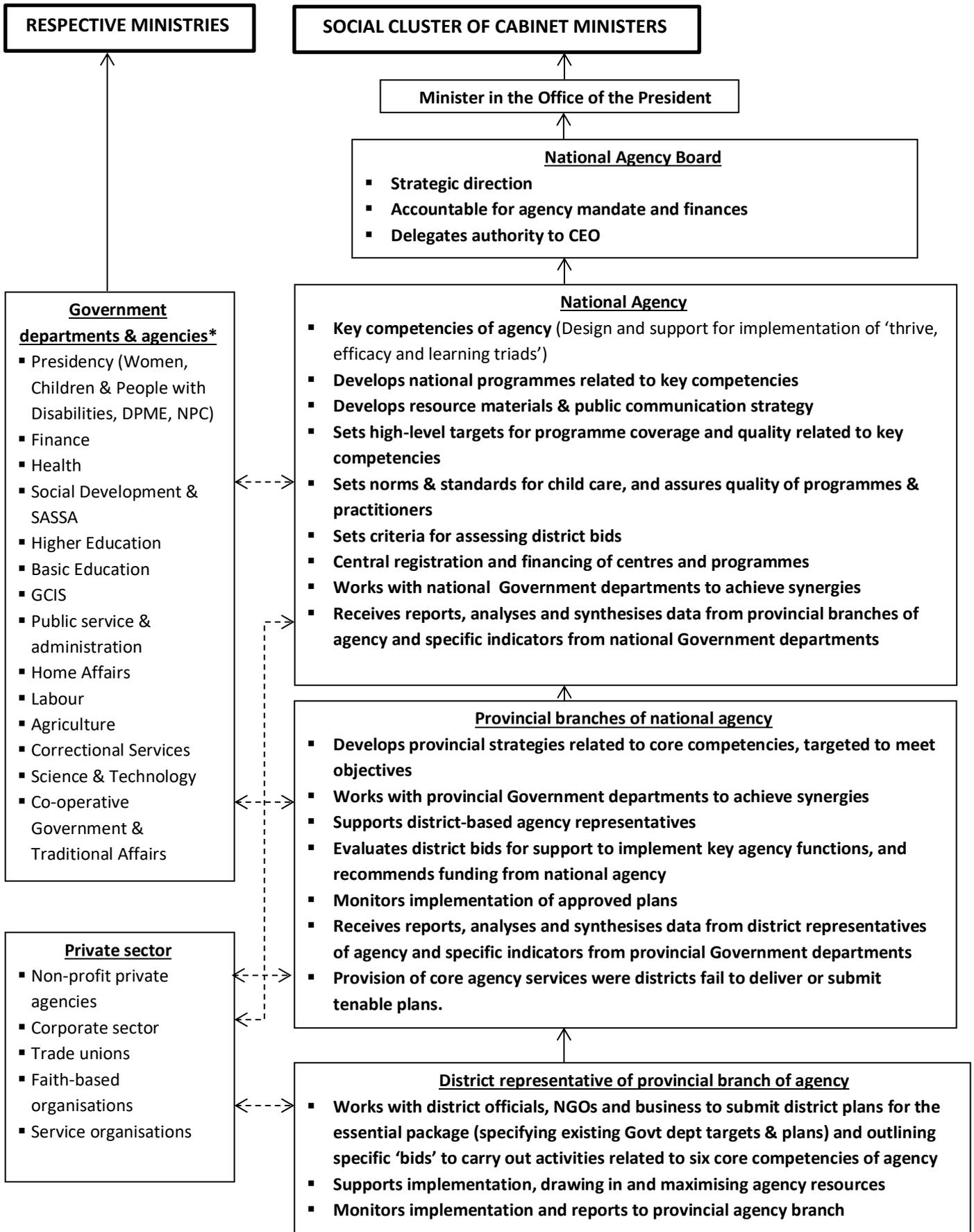
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APPENDIX 1

Structure and functions of a national ECD agency



* Government departments carry out their core mandates with respect to ECD, but are required to submit specified indicators of early childhood development to the agency on annual basis

APPENDIX 1 Outline of institutional arrangements

