PLAY AND RESILIENCE: A CHINA-AFRICA COLLABORATION PROJECT FOR BUILDING A PEACEFUL AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

PROGRESS REPORT IN AFRICA

DR. BINYAM SISAY MENDISU
DR. MAGGIE KOONG
DR. MAMI UMAYAHARA
The State of Early Childhood Education in Africa

*Africa* is the continent with the world’s *youngest population* (41% of the population is under the age of 15yrs)

As the continent with the *youngest population*, the demand for ECCE services in Africa is huge and the *coverage is the lowest* in the world. As it stands, *less than 12%* of African children has access to ECCE services (UNESCO, 2017)
BACKGROUND (CONT’D)

Aligning the Project with Regional and Global Goals and Initiatives

Agenda 2063 of African Union envisages the development of a large, educated and skilled workforce over the coming five decades.

By way of strengthening the foundations of education, ECCE has particular relevance to enhance:

- *school success* and life long learning
- *adult income* and *productivity*, thereby reduce poverty
- its particular benefit to *disadvantaged children*
The need to provide particular attention to improve quality and expand access of ECCE services in Africa are highlighted in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in regional initiatives such as, the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) that is a ten year plan of Agenda 2063.

In particular, CESA 16-25 of the AU identifies the particular importance of early learning and calls for a serious attention to be provided to the sector.

“Pre-primary education is the pillar on which future learning and training are grounded. However, it is a neglected area in terms of policy and investment.”
TARGET GROUPS & GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS OF THE PROJECT

The target children are:

- Children traumatized due to economic crisis and insurgencies resulting displacements
- Children affected by worsening economic crisis leading to higher rates of poverty and lack of choice for ECCE program
- Displaced children due to negative effects of climate change

10 communities are selected from three countries in Africa, namely in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Nigeria
A total of 10 communities selected from:

- **Nigeria** (Numan and Guyuk in Adamawa State; Ohaozara and Onicha in Ebonyi State) – internal displacement as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency as well as herdsman and community clashes;

- **South Africa** (Mashamba, Gumbu and Gunda) – predominantly rural groups that inherited former apartheid homelands with high incidence of child poverty and child- or female-headed households;

- **Zimbabwe** (Manicaland, Masvingo and Matabeleland North) – a high number of deprived, disadvantaged and vulnerable children with particularly limited access to quality early childhood services.
UNESCO collaborates with relevant government offices at the national and local levels in the three countries, so as to complement their existing efforts through capacity development and material production.

It will involve policy advocacy to increase awareness on the values of play in developing resilience in children and advocate for establishing safe play areas in communities and all ECCE centres.

The project will also ensure knowledge and awareness building among parents, caregivers, child-minders and ECCE practitioners regarding the right to play and the importance of recreation and cultural activities for young children’s learning and development.
MAJOR ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED

• The **needs and baseline assessment** completed in all the three countries

  Major recommendations include:

  - The Play and Resilience project needs to boost the teachers’ and parents’ capacity to promote the ECD children’s resilience through play

  - The teachers’ skills to promote learning through play in ECD need to be enhanced since play is going to be the medium for promoting resilience in children.

  - The concept of resilience still needs to be mainstreamed into the ECCE policies so that it gains focused attention it deserves.

  - There is need to strengthen the home system in building resilience through play.

• **Stakeholder sensitization workshops** conducted in the three countries endorsed the major recommendations that came out of the assessment;
• **Training materials** for teachers/caregivers/school administrators prepared in Nigeria and Zimbabwe;

• **Training materials** for parents prepared in Nigeria and Zimbabwe;

• Draft **consolidated training manual** for teachers/caregivers and parents prepared;
MAJOR ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED (CONT’D)

• **Training** of teacher educators, administrators and early years teachers conducted in Zimbabwe; (90 Teacher educators, teachers and school leaders and 32 parents trained)

  ![Training Image 1](image1.png)  ![Training Image 2](image2.png)

• **Video footage of play activities** being collected for the production of a documentary;
A peer review meeting among the Chinese and African teams was successfully organized by UNESCO-International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) from 6 to 7 February 2018 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The main aim of the meeting was to provide the opportunity for the different countries to learn from each other and harvest good practices based on the review of the baseline assessments and the resource materials developed;
MAJOR ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED (CONT’D)

• A study visit to China has been undertaken with representatives from UNESCO-IICBA, Zimbabwe and South Africa from 20-25 May 2018.
MAJOR ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED (CONT’D)

Main **Objectives** of the visit were:

- Get an appreciation of the use of play in the learning and development of ECD children
- Promote horizontal learning on the implementation of the Play and Resilience Project
- Draw lessons that could be used to improve the implementation of the ECD curriculum in the diverse countries.
- Meet with the strategic partners in the project: Victoria Charitable Fund (Donors), OMEP China, UNESCO and East China Normal University

Major **Lessons Learnt** from an eye-opener visit were:

- The need to adapt what had been learnt to our different country contexts instead of trying to copy and paste
- The need to start small and gradually upscale the project informed by lessons learnt and observed success
MAJOR CHALLENGES

• **Nigeria:** the key challenges are high expectations of community members of the project such as provision of toys and honoraria. Moreover, one of the project sites in Adamawa State witnessed an escalation of herdsmen-farmers conflicts and built up tension, resulting in 150 people dead, many more wounded and displaced. Another challenge is the large number of institutions involved in the project and the population to be covered, given the small operational budget.

• **Zimbabwe:** the political leadership changes in November 2017 caused the delay in project implementation as the project team could not travel to the field. The planned training activities are thus postponed to January 2018 and we expect similar delays as fresh elections are scheduled for July 2018.

• **South Africa:** the formation of project teams at the local levels took a long time, which delayed the finalisation of the needs and baseline assessment, however all is set now with a new arrangement.
MAJOR LESSONS LEARNED

• The project creates a critical mass for enhancing the quality of ECD through promoting resilience through play by working with the policy makers, teacher educators, teachers, school leaders, parents and community leaders. Notwithstanding this, its potential impact would be greatly enhanced if it was for a longer period to allow for sufficient capacity development and if its coverage is unscaled.

• The need to further strengthen ongoing collaboration and buy-in of relevant government institutions which will give the project the needed recognition and impetus for scaling-up. The importance of working with government for sustainability and effectiveness is well noted.

• Both the ECD Teachers and Teacher Educators found the interactions in the Play and Resilience trainings very beneficial and expressed the need for an ECD Professional Learning Community.
MAJOR LESSONS LEARNED (CONT’D)

• Resilience is also a broad concept. There is need to create strong synergies with the relevant Ministries at school level to provide Integrated ECD. The Ministry of Health and Child Care could address health issues and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare could address child protection issues. This would ensure that ECD issues are holistically addressed.

• The study visit to China was so important and an eye-opener to project members and it has already created a lot of inspiration and enthusiasm.
MAJOR RESULTS

• **A peer-review workshop** has been successfully conducted. Best practices and challenges were shared and discussed. In addition, the consolidated training manual for teachers and parents were presented and reviewed. The *workshop report* is currently available on UNESCO-IICBA website.

• **Draft training manuals for teachers and parents** is prepared and it is being piloted in the three countries. Later on, it will be published.

• In Zimbabwe, **12 Teacher Educators, 78 Teachers and school leaders and 32 Parents and community leaders** were trained were trained to promote children’s resilience through play and address risk factors in the home and community that undermine the children’s resilience.
MAJOR RESULTS (CONT’D)

• The project’s approach to work closely with government and community is clearly paying off. In South African, for example, in one of the communities i.e. Limpopo Province, the project is well-received and owned by one of the local Kings, King Mashamba. The involvement of the local King has created a lot of ownership among community members and this definitely contributes to sustainability of project outcomes. Additionally, in Nigeria some of the initiatives of the project are included in the Universal Basic Education Commission 2018 work plan.

• The study visit to China conducted from 20-25 May 2018 was very productive and an eye-opener for many of the project participants from Africa. It gave the opportunity to members to see first-hand how play-based curriculum is implemented in China and how the curriculum and resources are locally-adapted. The visit has created a lot of enthusiasm and inspiration among project members to go back home and effect changes.