



HIGH-LEVEL POLICY DIALOGUE ON CHILDCARE AS A FUNDAMENTAL FOR HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

DIALOGUE REPORT

Wednesday 15th May 2024
Protea Hotel, Kampala

Table of Content

Introduction	4
Background and Rationale	5
The Welcome Session	7
Official Opening	7
Opening Statement from the Minister of State for Youth and Children Affairs' opening statement.	9
Keynote Presentation	9
Key insights from Dr. Jacklyn Makaaru's presentation on Facing Forward & Building Foundations: An Agenda for Childcare in Uganda.	11
Panel Session One	15
Discussion on Childcare Policy	16
Panel Session Two	20
Expanding Access to Quality Childcare	21
Matrix of Critical Issues Identified and Recommendations Opening Session	22
Panel Discussion on Childcare Policy	23
Panel Discussion on Expanding Access to Quality Childcare	24
Next Steps	25
Consensus on the development of a Child Care Implementation Plan.	19
Agenda for Future Research on Childcare	24
Data Collection and Analysis	24
Models of Childcare Provision	25
Best Practices in Childcare Quality Improvement	25
Parental and Community Engagement in Childcare	25
Policy and Systems-Level Research	26
Longitudinal Studies and Follow-Up Research	26
Dissemination and Knowledge Translation	26
Strategies for coordination and implementation of childcare services	27
Conclusion and Call to Action	30



Introduction

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, in collaboration with the Ace Policy Research Institute (APRI) and Early Years Count Uganda (EYC), successfully held the Inaugural High-Level Policy Dialogue on Childcare as a Fundamental for Human Capital Development on Wednesday, May 15th, 2024,

at Protea Hotel, Kampala. This high-level dialogue brought together key stakeholders to deliberate on the importance of quality childcare, identify existing gaps, share successful practices, and deliberate on policy recommendations to steer the implementation of childcare friendly policies and service delivery.





Background and Rationale

Childcare is pivotal in both social and economic progress for nations. Access to affordable and high-quality childcare services not only enables greater workforce participation, thereby fostering economic growth, but also lays the foundation for the early development of children, preparing them for more productive futures.

The benefits of expanded quality childcare services extend beyond the immediate to potentially yielding multi-generational impacts by bolstering women's economic empowerment, enhancing child development outcomes, improving family welfare, boosting business productivity, and ultimately driving overall economic growth.

Numerous families in Uganda lack adequate childcare options, hindering women's employment opportunities, productivity, and income. This situation also compromises women's empowerment and well-being while exposing many children to unsafe and unstimulating environments.

The government has shown commitment to enhancing childcare services through policy and legal frameworks, although there are challenges in implementation. These challenges have led to fragmented efforts across various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, NGOs, development partners, and community-based initiatives. Addressing the challenges, complexities, and interconnections within Uganda's childcare

policy implementation necessitates a multi-sectoral approach, alignment of policies and cohesive strategies across different ministries and organizations.

The inaugural high-level policy dialogue was as a crucial initial step to convene diverse stakeholders, to lay the groundwork for a coordinated approach to advance childcare and early childhood development (ECD) in Uganda.

The high-level policy dialogue aimed to provide an opportunity to bring together stakeholders to initiate and elevate the discourse on childcare in Uganda.

Specifically, the dialogue had the following objectives:

- i) Facilitate a deeper understanding of the importance and challenges of childcare delivery in Uganda.
- ii) Provide a comprehensive analysis of the status of childcare service provision, identifying gaps and areas for improvement.
- iii) Create a platform for policy engagement and advocacy for childcare.
- iv) Facilitating discussions on policy recommendations and reforms and offering strategic direction for the implementation of childcare policies and service delivery, ensuring coordinated efforts towards tangible outcomes.

The dialogue was structured in four sessions in three parts designed to address different facets of childcare: Part I: Welcome Remarks and Setting

Expectations; Part II: a) a key note address delivered by the Minister of Gender, Labor, and Social Development; b) a technical presentation on childcare as a fundamental for human capital development; Part III: a) two panel sessions on policy and practice; b) a plenary session for stakeholders to envision what agenda Uganda should pursue to enhance quality and affordable childcare.

The dialogue registered a diverse group of participants from Government departments and agencies, academia, civil society organizations, private sector, parents, caregivers, and development partners. The diversity in backgrounds and expertise contributed to rich and meaningful deliberations.

This dialogue was co-convened by the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development, Ace Policy Research Institute, and Early Years Count Uganda.



Part I: Welcome Remarks and Audience Expectations



‘There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.’

Nelson Mandela

Moderated by Mr. Mondo Kyateka, the Assistant Commissioner Youth and Children at MoGLSD, this session highlighted several critical themes and objectives, reflecting on both achievements and gaps within Uganda’s childcare system. As a technical officer in the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development, Mr. Kyateka articulated his vision for childcare through a poem entitled ‘I Dream of a Candlelight Dinner’.

Mr. Kyateka emphasized the critical need for adequate investment and quality assurance in childcare, to ensure that foundational resources and standards which are critical for effective childcare systems are provided for. Inadequate funding and poor-quality services can lead to sub-optimal developmental outcomes for children. Therefore, Government and partners must prioritize financial allocations and establish robust quality control.

I Dream of A Candlelight Dinner

*I had a dream, a dream of a candlelight dinner,
A dinner celebrating the thriving and blossoming of
children of Africa,
A dream of child geniuses scattered around Africa,
A dream where African parents would learn to love,
nature, feed, care and protect children.
A candlelight dinner to celebrate a society that is free of
corporal punishment, malnutrition and child neglect
A dream where parents would be true parents again and
not just in name
A dream that the best interest of a child principle would
be the fundamental principle in childcare.
I had a dream of a candlelight dinner,
A dream in honour of the rebirth of the old African adage,
that it takes a village to raise a child.
A dream where all actors gathered at the dialogue would
make meaningful contribution ensure that childcare
becomes the fundamental to Human Capital
Development.*

[A Poem Recited by Mr. Mondo Kyateka.]

mechanisms to ensure that childcare services are both accessible and effective. The roles of each actor including parents, policymakers, and community in nurturing children must be articulated to promote the development of community-based childcare solutions and to encourage societal engagement and support systems to enhance child welfare.

Ms. Daisey Muculezi, the EYC Board Chairperson, emphasized the importance of quality childcare,

recognizing it as a public good and human right which elevates the issue to a matter of national and moral importance. Childcare as a public good ensures that vulnerable families and the most at-risk populations receive the support they need, addressing issues of equity and social justice. She reiterated EYC's commitment to innovation, partnerships and forward-thinking approaches that seeks engender new and effective ways to address longstanding issues in childcare.

Audience Expectations

There was a myriad of expectations among the dialogue participants, although the need to fast-track childcare policy implementation was prominent. A sample of interests focused on positioning childcare within the framework of the Fourth National Development Plan (NDP IV), embracing sustainable childcare strategies in the context of 'leave no child behind', benchmarking of achievements and lessons learned, and creating an enabling policy environment. Other interests related to exploring national and international best practices on childcare, identifying concrete policy actions on childcare, knowledge and understanding of childcare as well as strategies to support refugee

children. Overall, expectations can be categorized under the following broad themes:

- a) Laying the foundation for comprehensive, evidence-based childcare interventions in Uganda.
- b) Developing and implementing an enabling policy framework on childcare, safety, and protection.
- c) Generating concrete policy ideas and recommendations through participatory discussions.
- d) Charting a roadmap of implementation of the policy framework in Uganda.

Part II: Welcome Childcare as a Development Perspective

a) Keynote Address by the Minister for Gender, Labour and Social Development.



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“Parenting is the number one job for mothers”

Hon. Betty Amongi

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Hon. Minister Betty Amongi, the Minister of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, gave the keynote address and officially opened the Inaugural National High-Level Dialogue on Childcare with a comprehensive address underscoring the vital role of childcare in Uganda’s development. She announced the recent Cabinet approval of the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy, a significant milestone in

formalizing childcare as a national priority, and a commitment at the highest levels of government. Her remarks provided an all-round view of the significance of childcare from a personal, as well as a policy perspective. A motion was moved to declare Hon. Betty Amongi as a Champion for Childcare in Uganda, in recognition of her leadership and dedication to childcare service delivery. The insights from the Ministerial keynote address are presented below.



a. Effective childcare is critical during the first 1,000 days.

The rapid developmental milestones within the first 1,000 days of a child's life underscore the urgency and importance of effective childcare during this formative period. This scientifically backed emphasis aligns with global understanding of early childhood development and reinforce the need for targeted interventions during this period as a foundation for human development. . Additionally, childcare is linked to parents' contributions to the national labor force, and hence national development, which implies that investments in childcare are not only beneficial for individual families but are also strategic for national economic growth and development. During this period, what is therefore of strategic importance are; parental/primary caregiver engagement; providing opportunities for early learning in pre-primary; and provision of a regulatory framework for quality care in childcare facilities.

b. Effective childcare requires cohesive action and strengthening coordination and existing legal frameworks.

Strengthening coordination among various stakeholders, including government entities, non-profits, and private sector, ensures coherent efforts and optimization of resources. Enhancing legal frameworks provides the necessary regulatory backbone to enforce quality standards and protect children's rights.

c. iii) Collaboration with religious and cultural institutions and communities

to support childcare initiatives ensures a broad-base acceptability and access to childcare service delivery.

Engaging religious and cultural institutions acknowledges the influential role these bodies play in communities. Their involvement can facilitate widespread acceptance and adherence to childcare policies, leveraging cultural values and norms to promote best practices in childcare.

d. iv) Acknowledge the role of private sector in providing innovative approaches for the expansion of childcare.

The private sector can provide valuable resources and innovation, particularly in under-served areas. Encouraging private sector involvement can lead to more diverse and scalable childcare solutions. Emphasizing innovation and technology suggests a forward-thinking approach to childcare, recognizing that modern solutions can address contemporary challenges faced by working mothers.

e. v) The childcare policy implementation approaches should address the diverse needs of children, caregivers, and cultural education, while preserving children's heritage.

A broad policy scope ensures that various aspects of childcare are considered, from the needs of children and caregivers to the importance of cultural education. This holistic approach acknowledges that effective childcare is multi-dimensional, encompassing health, education, and cultural

preservation. Emphasizing cultural heritage ensures that childcare practices are culturally relevant and respectful, fostering a sense of identity and continuity in children's lives.

b) Facing Forward and Building Foundations for Quality Childcare

This presentation was made by Dr. Jacklyn Makaaru Arinaitwe, Founder & Director at Ace Policy Research Institute. The purpose of the presentation was to frame childcare as a fundamental for human capital development in Uganda, while recognizing global perspectives, national challenges, and opportunities for the future. The following are the insights from this presentation.



Defining Childcare

- Childcare refers to a service with the primary objective of caring for children while parents are working (or otherwise unavailable).
- Quality childcare should ensure children are safe and have opportunities to learn and develop positive relationships with caregivers and peers.
- Childcare provision mostly caters to children from birth up to primary-school-entry age (typically up to age 5-6) but can include after-school care.
- Childcare can be provided in different settings and financed through various modalities.
 - (i) **Center-based care** (e.g. daycares, nurseries, crèches, etc.);
 - (ii) **Home-based care** (either care by someone in the child's own home or care provided for a group of children in a caregiver's home);
 - (iii) **Family and other informal** arrangements (which may or may not be remunerated).

Ref: World Bank

1. Childcare is a multidimensional domain crucial for the development of children, particularly those aged 0-3 years, therefore, it is imperative to create safe and nurturing environments for the youngest members of society. Children, especially those aged 0-3 require environments that ensure their safety and promote

the formation of secure relationships with caregivers. These early years are critical for brain development, socialization, and emotional well-being.

2. Childcare services encompass a broad range of settings and arrangements, each catering to the unique needs of children and their families. Employer-supported and work-based



childcare centers provide a structured and often high-quality environment for children while allowing parents to maintain employment. These centers offer the dual benefit of early childhood education and care, fostering developmental milestones while supporting the economic stability of families. Additionally, home-based childcare and informal arrangements, facilitated by private actors, community-based organizations, NGOs, churches, and mosques, are vital in regions with limited access to formal childcare facilities. These arrangements are often more flexible and culturally attuned to the needs of local communities. They play a crucial role in providing care where formal systems are lacking or inaccessible.

3. The structure of Uganda's populations presents a critical demographic factor which necessitates investments in childcare. Approximately 16% of Uganda's population is under the age of four. This statistic underscores the significant demand for effective and widespread childcare services. Given this substantial young demographic, proactive planning and investment in childcare infrastructure and services are imperative for Uganda's socio-economic development. This demographic factor has presents three major implications for policy and planning in Uganda. Firstly, there's a pressing need for substantial investment in childcare infrastructure

to accommodate the significant population of young children. This involves both formal setups like employer-supported centers and bolstering informal community-based care facilities. Additionally, acknowledging the critical role of informal caregivers, policies should extend support and resources to entities such as NGOs, religious institutions, and community organizations that facilitate home-based childcare.

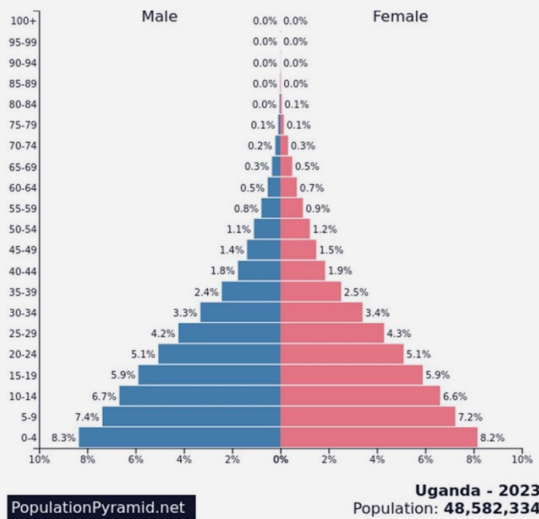
Secondly, adopting a holistic approach in childcare programs is paramount. Beyond ensuring safety and meeting basic needs, these programs should prioritize early education, emotional development, and social skills. Such comprehensive initiatives not only nurture children effectively but also lay the groundwork for their future success. Moreover, promoting public-private partnerships can significantly augment the scope and quality of childcare services, particularly through collaborations involving government, private sector, and civil society entities.

Thirdly, prioritizing data-driven planning through accurate data collection and analysis is crucial for informed decision-making and resource allocation in the childcare sector.

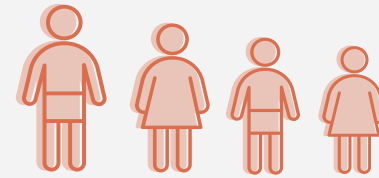


Why Should we care about childcare

Have you seen the structure of our population?



16.5% of our population are under 4 years of age



14.6% of our population are 5 – 9 years of age

Presentation slide highlighting the importance of childcare in early childhood development.

- There are numerous and significant benefits of quality childcare, including its positive impact on children’s development and women’s labor productivity, contributing to national development. The Nurturing Care Framework’s presents components requisite effective childcare: good health, adequate nutrition, security and safety, opportunities for early

A Dive Into the Nurturing Care Framework

- Good Health**
 - Physical and emotional health
 - Protection from danger
 - Hygiene to minimize infection
 - Preventive health services
- Adequate Nutrition**
 - For pregnant mothers
 - For children's wellbeing
- Security and Safety**
 - Protection from extreme poverty, low income, air pollution, unsafe environments, harsh punishment and violence.
 - Social and child protection services are necessary.
- Opportunities for early learning**
 - Recognize that learning begins at conception
 - After birth, skills acquired through contact, touch, singing, imitation, play, etc
- Responsive Caregiving**
 - Observing and responding to the child.
 - Enrich their learning, builds trust, and social relationships.

learning and responsive caregiving. Nurturing care conditions enable communities and caregivers give children the right start. There are however, challenges, domestic and global, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which continue to stymie access to quality childcare and depict a childcare crisis. Globally the need for childcare is even more apparent. Pre-pandemic and the post-Covid-19 effects require a doubling effort to improve childcare. Before the pandemic, childcare was unaffordable. Nearly 350 million children (40%) globally need childcare but have no access, with many hosted in unsafe, and unstimulating environments

In Uganda, these challenges include high child mortality rates, inadequate parental leave policies, and the disproportionate burden of childcare on women, particularly in the context of cultural norms. It is imperative for Uganda to develop a robust childcare agenda through comprehensive reforms in Uganda's childcare policy and legal framework to ensure affordability, accessibility, and quality standards, drawing on evidence-based interventions and global best practices. This agenda should prioritize the needs of children, caregivers, and women in the workforce to foster inclusive and sustainable development.





PANEL SESSION ONE

a) Childcare Policy and the Role of the MoGLSD

Panel Session One featured a discussion on childcare policy, aimed at providing an overview of policy options, implementation status, and existing gaps in childcare provision.

Mr. Rogers Golooba, a Senior Probation and Welfare Officer at the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD), amplified opportunities for childcare within the Ministry's broad mandate. The Ministry is exploring several opportunities to improve childcare. There is room to scale up on government interventions through evidence-based research, expand the target populations, fast-track policy implementation, scale-up service provision, facilitate community-based childcare models, and improve regulation through setting and enforcement of guidelines and standards. In terms of implementation, the Ministry will pursue a participatory approach that leverages strategic partnerships with all stakeholders involving parents and communities at the core.



“At the end of the day, parents have the responsibility to care for children and Government does not want to take that responsibility away”.



Rogers Golooba

Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development.

To scale up efforts, the Ministry targets six categories of the population for childcare interventions. These include all children and the vulnerable, adolescents and youth, women, the working population, the elderly. Gender-leaning strategies will aim to achieve a distribution the childcare burden between men and women. Under the working population category in formal and informal sectors, focus will be placed on women who account for a bigger share of the labour force in agriculture. The elderly are also a target given their unrecognised role in childcare - about 40% of the pension is spent on childcare.

The following are the critical issue points from Mr. Golooba's presentation.

i) The significance and timeliness of the new Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy framework in guiding policy interventions and the need for evidence-based interventions, adequate monitoring systems, and stakeholder engagement platforms. The new ECCE Policy framework has created other opportunities critical in guiding and coordinating all national interventions in childcare. As a childcare service provider MGLSD is looking into way of improving access and quality issues for children in foster/ alternative care, children without parental care or those at risk.

ii) The alarming statistics such as the 24% teenage pregnancy rate, which underscores the importance of affordable childcare for effective gender transformation. Additionally, sectors with high female labor participation have insufficient childcare support and therefore there is need to address this gap universally. The Ministry is committed to support the working population in formal and informal sectors, and focus will be placed on women who account for a bigger share of the labour force in agriculture. Within the legal framework, the Employment Act for 2022 presents another strong opportunity for the Ministry to fast-track the implementation of pending childcare interventions under NDP III, such as employer-supported childcare.

iii) The elderly persons' significant role in childcare and the importance of including them as caregivers. Their role in

childcare is generally unrecognised, and yet, statistics show that approximately 40% of the pension payouts to the elderly is spent on childcare.

iv) The need to understand men's perspectives on childcare and establishing monitoring systems, creating learning hubs, and gathering sufficient evidence to inform childcare policies effectively. Gender-leaning strategies will aim to achieve a distribution the childcare burden between men and women.

v) The importance of minimum standards and a quality assurance framework in childcare services to enhance service providers' capacity through mentoring and guidance. MGLSD has made progress in establishing a framework for quality assurance focusing on early learning through developing standards children and monitoring tools of centres. A lot remains to be done for the 0-3 years in standards setting. MGLSD will adopt a multi-stakeholder participatory approach to implement planned interventions. the successful realisation of these interventions will be a collective action of parents, communities and religious leaders.

vi) There is a pressing need for a more inclusive approach to childcare needs, one that acknowledges and addresses the diverse challenges faced by different age groups. It is crucial that the government embraces gender-sensitive policy-making, aiming to foster equitable caregiving responsibilities and promote gender equality across society. Moreover, there is an urgent need to address gender disparities in the workforce by providing universal childcare solutions, especially in sectors characterized by high female labor participation but

lacking adequate support. To achieve this, a comprehensive approach to childcare policy-making is required, one that considers multiple dimensions of societal well-being, encompassing health, education, gender equality, and economic empowerment.

b) Childcare from a National Planning Perspective

Dr. Hamis Mugendawala, Director, Research and Innovations at the National Planning Authority (NPA), underscored the pivotal role of childcare in labor productivity and human capital development. He observed that while Vision 2040 articulates important aspirations on childcare, the reality does not mirror these aspirations. Only 38% of the children in Uganda, are able to reach their potential according to the Human Development Index. From a planning perspective, the country loses about 62% of productivity for every adult. Over 56% of the children are multi-dimensionally poor, lagging in several development indicators. This can be attributed to limited investment in childcare.

The National Planning Authority designed interventions to address childcare gaps around the lifecycle from conception to old age. Uganda has made significant progress in interventions at pre-conception, conception, and infancy. Access to antenatal services has greatly improved. At infancy, access to fortified foods remains constrained by lack of a national policy on food fortification. Unfortunately, national performance on neo-natal, mortality and child nutrition indicators have stagnated. A recent midterm review of NDP III revealed that neonatal mortality

has stagnated at 24% to 30% of the children. There is a growing trend of child stunting not only in poor families but also in well-to do households owing to unhealthy feeding habits. While NDP IV encapsulates interventions to improve access to fortified foods, this will be an uphill task given the lack of a national policy. On a positive note, Uganda has been a lead performer in immunisation.

Other HCD interventions articulated in NDP III and NDP IV focus on strengthening the family unit to reduce domestic violence, childcare deprivation, abuse and child labour. However, the pushback from parents hinders implementation efforts in homes where children are bread winners. Child labour remains endemic in regions with commercial plantations.

He further emphasized the critical importance of childcare from a planning perspective, citing Uganda's vision for human development and the current state of childcare provision as follows.

- i) Provision of childcare significantly influences the labor potential and human capital development, as indicated by the Human Development Index, revealing that Ugandan children achieve only 38% of their potential due to limited investment in healthcare and education.
- ii) The vision for childcare falls short of expectations, with over 56% of children experiencing multidimensional poverty and lacking essential facets for proper growth and development. childcare is still a complex and unregulated area with a multiplicity of actors. A combination of factors is needed for government to invest

in childcare. Important to note that government is indirectly investing in ECD, albeit without an enabling legal framework. 82% of government primary schools are operating annexed childcare centres. While this is already ongoing, government has not clearly pronounced itself on this approach given the growing need for childcare services. Strategies on how to adopt ECD in primary schools without compromising the standards will go a long way. Continuous engagement to inform government investment strategies will be key.

iii) There is an urgent need for concerted efforts to prioritize and increase investment in healthcare and education as fundamental components of comprehensive childcare initiatives. This requires not only financial commitments from government and other stakeholders but also strategic planning and implementation of policies and programs aimed at improving access to essential services for all children, especially those living in poverty. By addressing these gaps and investing in the holistic development of children, Uganda can lay a solid foundation for a brighter and more equitable future for its youngest citizens, ultimately contributing to the country's overall socio-economic progress and prosperity.



Dr. Hamis Mugendawala makes a case for integrating childcare into national planning strategies, emphasizing its crucial role in societal development.

To position childcare as a pillar for human capital development, NDP IV has identified about six gaps to be addressed. First is the regulatory gap. Currently, childcare services are highly unregulated with no supervision and monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance. Childcare centres are replete with stories of poor, unsafe and even abusive practices. Second, is the national human resource deficit – a much bigger challenge. Training of caregivers is not streamlined with a multiplicity of frameworks/ curricula which create varying qualifications and standards. This makes it difficult to ensure compliance with standards and map out existing human resource capacities and gaps. Third, is the financing challenge. While the sector receives a lot of development support, funding is largely ad-hoc, uncoordinated and difficult to account or plan for. Fourth, is the family justice gap. The current family justice system is not child friendly. Fifth, is the widespread child labour driven by endemic poverty. To address this, strategies that seek to improve livelihoods, increase household incomes are more effective in improving access to quality childcare. Sixth, is attitudes around family planning. Negative parenting attitudes towards unplanned children are partly attributed to child neglect especially in the rural areas. There is need for sensitization around family planning.

c) Childcare as A Global Priority

Drawing on a decade of experience, Mr. Shawn Powers noted that childcare is a policy priority for the World Bank's International Development Association initiative. At least 15 countries (including Uganda) have been identified for support to improve access to childcare. There is growing donor interest in childcare and opportunities for collaboration. The World Bank's extra-budgetary support under the multi-donor Early Learning Partnerships (ELP) fund focuses on providing technical assistance, partnership building for knowledge generation, policy dialogues and advisory services.



“Childcare is a win, win, win”.

Shawn Powers, World Bank

On-budget resources target demand-driven government projects such as the Generating Growth Opportunities and Productivity for Women Enterprises (GROW) project. The project seeks to increase opportunities for women entrepreneurs in productive activities.

Citing a recent report, Better Jobs and Brighter Futures, Mr. Powers highlighted three key messages which are instructive of where efforts should be intensified.

- i. Globally, the unmet demand for childcare remains huge. 40 % of children under school-going age lack childcare (about 150 million children worldwide) of which 80% are in low- and middle-income countries.
- ii. Childcare is a win-win-win. The first win is to the children where

there is provision of quality services. The second win is for parents who are enabled to engage in productive economic activities while the third win is the business opportunities in childcare service provision.

- iii. There are several models for providing childcare services. Based on other country experiences, childcare services can be cost-effective through leveraging available human resources and community structures. Global experiences demonstrate several low-

cost, innovative models. In some countries childcare training has been adopted into the vocational training and business support programmes for young women. The provision of childcare can be very flexible with diverse models including community based, mobile crush centres which are cost-effective.

A well-trained human resource remains key to all childcare models. Overall, it was emphasised that quality is paramount in childcare service provision.

Evidence-based policy recommendations become important in transforming the national childcare landscape. The World Bank's ongoing research efforts involve analytical studies to inform policy reforms. Currently there are two ongoing studies under the ELP grant; one seeks to analyse the policy and legal gaps, while the other is to study demand and supply dynamics of childcare. The later study seeks to identify different cost-effective models that can be implemented through the GROW project. World Bank is also involved in the review of the HCD programme of NDP IV. Stakeholders to consider these opportunities to strengthen collaborations with the goal of addressing access needs in childcare.

➤ PANEL SESSION TWO

The panel discussion on expanding access to quality, affordable childcare in Uganda featured insights from various speakers who are childcare service providers and practitioners.

It should be noted that striking a balance between affordability and accessibility to quality childcare remains a challenge. Childcare services are not affordable to most parents. Approximately 70% of household incomes goes to child support, including childcare. Regarding quality nutrition, there is a misconception and a lack of agreement between parents and service providers on what quality childcare entails.

Mrs. Manuela Mulondo, proprietor of the Cradle Childcare Facility, shed light on the significant financial burden that childcare places on families. She underscored the necessity for both community and national dialogues concerning the quality of childcare, particularly within modern and affluent families.

She advocated for a comprehensive breakdown of quality and accessibility standards in childcare services to address these concerns effectively. Additionally, she emphasized the importance of initiating vital discussions surrounding childcare.

She particularly highlighted the importance of addressing healthy nutrition, especially within affluent families, and stressed the need to categorize quality in childcare services. She

emphasized that quality encompasses not only the provisions but also the educational content provided to children and the competence of their educators.

Mr. Etedu J.J, Assistant Commissioner and Project Coordinator at MATIP-MoLG, provided insights into the challenges faced by local governments in implementing childcare standards, particularly in rural areas.

He emphasized the need for interventions aimed at supporting mothers to afford quality childcare, highlighting collaborations with the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD) to establish paid childcare and daycare centers.

However, he acknowledged the implications of such initiatives on affordability and quality. He underscored the widening gap between population growth and income levels as a significant barrier to achieving quality childcare

“37% of children under five years are left alone for more than one hour with a caregiver who is below 10 years” UDHS, 2016

standards.

Additionally, he recognized the substantial contribution of women in markets towards meeting childcare needs and suggested government intervention in childcare service provision to effectively address existing challenges.

Ms. Daphine Mugizi, the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Manager at UNICEF, emphasized the importance of family-friendly policies to enable parents to engage in economic activities while ensuring the protection of expecting mothers.

She advocated for flexible working arrangements and universal access to childcare services, citing statistics that revealed 37% of children under five are left alone for more than five hours with caregivers under five years old, indicating a pressing need for childcare services.

She called for expanded public financing for childcare to make it accessible to all, suggesting government subsidies for those unable to afford it. She also highlighted the challenges faced by children with disabilities, noting the high cost of specialized care and the need to ensure their inclusion in childcare services.

She emphasized the importance of viewing childcare as an investment to attain long-term benefits. She emphasized the interconnected ecosystem surrounding childcare, underscoring the need for holistic approaches to address the diverse needs of children and families.

Ms. Hope Rita Aciro, the Executive Director of UWONET, addressed the critical intersection between childcare and human capital development, emphasizing the need to recognize childcare as an integral component of societal progress. She emphasized that childcare should not be viewed solely as a biological responsibility but as a collective obligation, involving both mothers and fathers. She questioned the level of government investment in childcare and highlighted the burdens of unpaid care on mothers and caregivers, which can significantly impact the quality of care provided. She drew attention to the socio-economic and political conditions of caregivers, noting that their well-being directly influences the quality of childcare. She expressed concerns about the fragmentation of development efforts and highlighted the correlation between violence against women and the quality of childcare. She raised gendered aspects of childcare, addressing disparities between boys and girls and advocating for equality in caregiving. She further proposed recommendations to reduce,

redistribute, and recognize unpaid childcare to alleviate burdens on caregivers. Additionally, she emphasized the importance of access to technology, essential services like electricity and water, and investments in infrastructure and the social sector to enhance productivity and support childcare. She called for direct investment in childcare as a vital step towards holistic societal development.

Expanding quality childcare in Uganda is vital for children's holistic development, enabling them to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. It also empowers parents, particularly women, to pursue employment and education opportunities, boosting economic productivity and reducing poverty. Additionally, quality childcare promotes societal well-being by fostering engaged citizens and safer communities. By prioritizing investments in early childhood education and care, Uganda can ensure a brighter future for its children and contribute to long-term social and economic prosperity.



Part III: Envisioning Quality Childcare for Uganda

Plenary Session

During the plenary session stakeholders made several proposals, recommendations aimed at improving the childcare landscape in Uganda. Key among these was the need to treat childcare as a public good; develop clear guidelines, standards; quality and cost-effective services are possible based on other country lessons and the need for MGLSD to play a more visible role in coordinating all stakeholders.

i. A clear Implementation Roadmap:

Strategies for the implementation road map should adopt a multi-sectoral approach with the MGLSD at the helm of coordinating all stakeholders. To implement the approved ECCE policy awareness will be important.

ii. Evidence-based interventions:

To improve the policy framework a research agenda around childcare is necessary to generate data, models, lessons to inform interventions. Suggested areas include the cost-benefit analysis of childcare in Uganda, comparative studies with other countries in the region and

impact of market-based childcare services.

iii. Building political buy-in:

Childcare should be treated as a public good which benefits everyone. Research should go into the direction of understanding the cost benefit analysis of childcare to inform advocacy efforts. Understanding around the cost of inaction is needed. Redesign and rephrase the whole aspect of care. A change in the narrative around childcare is needed given that childcare is not only a social issue but also a political issue.



iv. Balancing the gender roles:

Advocacy and sensitization efforts are much needed around gender and childcare. A shift from the traditional and cultural beliefs where the responsibility of childcare rests with women should be demystified. The role of men in childcare is equally important for several reasons. Balancing gender roles should start at planning, policy and budget levels and trickle down to the grassroots interventions. Current interventions are biased towards the women, such as care centres within women's working places alone.

**v. Better coordination and collaboration:**

Lack of coordination has led to the duplication of efforts in childcare. Coordination of efforts is key to avoid duplication and improve service delivery. This can be through joint advocacy campaigns with government taking lead among target populations.

vi. Quality and affordable childcare enhanced by government:

Quality and affordable childcare can be realised with government taking policy choices in subsidizing service provision or through partnerships with private sector. There is high demand for market-based childcare centres, spaces that are owned by government are very exorbitant prices. Government should subsidise childcare spaces and infrastructure.

vii. Building on existing models:

Lessons from other countries demonstrate that it is possible to have quality and cost-effective models of childcare. It is possible to have both quality and affordable childcare through public-private partnerships between government and private sector. Kidogo franchise in Kenya is a good example of affordable and quality childcare services.

viii. Sustainability of approaches:

Existing childcare models should be scaled up to rural areas to increase access in highly marginalised communities where private sector is not willing to invest. Special attention is needed in refugee settlement areas, poor regions or places most affected by natural disasters and conflict. Explore sustainable approaches to childcare that are community driven including creating accountability mechanisms within the community and local government to ensure compliance with standards.

ix. Capacity Building:

It is important to streamline training of teachers and build a uniform curriculum. Outside institutions, training can be implemented within existing local government structures, childcare community centres, churches and religious institutions. This should be supplemented with providing the enabling infrastructure provision of infrastructure, amenities, localised play materials. Provision of needs-based training or context specific skilling are key. Understanding what type of childcare is needed for a particular community including the social cultural norms of the community will go along way.

x. Building partnerships:

Partnering with non-governmental actors, religious institutions and local councils,

ensuring cost cutting measures, community made play materials, children engaged in care materials. Utilise the opportunities within the homes, communities.

xi. Localisation of childcare service delivery:

xii. Government was advised to work with existing childcare centres and local government structures rather than build new centres.



Childcare should be treated as a public good which benefits everyone. Research should go into the direction of understanding the cost benefit analysis of childcare to inform advocacy efforts.



PART IV: The Roadmap

a. Strategies For Coordination And Implementation Of Childcare Services

1. Interagency Collaboration and Partnership

- Foster collaboration: Establish formal mechanisms for government agencies, NGOs, CBOs, and private sector stakeholders to collaborate on childcare initiatives. This could include regular meetings, joint planning sessions, and shared decision-making processes.
- Formalize partnerships: Develop MOUs or partnership agreements outlining the roles, responsibilities, and contributions of each stakeholder. These agreements should clarify expectations, resource sharing arrangements, and dispute resolution mechanisms.
- Establish working groups: Create interagency working groups focused on specific areas of childcare, such as early education, nutrition, health, or family support. These groups can facilitate coordination, share expertise, and leverage resources effectively.

2. Integrated Service Delivery Models

- Implement integrated centers: Establish integrated service centers where families can access multiple services in one location. These centers may offer childcare, healthcare, nutrition support, parental education, and other essential services.
- Coordinate service provision: Develop protocols and referral pathways to ensure seamless coordination between different service providers. This includes sharing information, coordinating appointments, and following up on referrals to ensure families receive comprehensive support.
- Tailor services to community needs: Customize service delivery models to meet the unique needs and preferences of local communities. Engage community members in the design and implementation of services to ensure cultural relevance and responsiveness.

3. Community Engagement and Empowerment

- Facilitate community involvement: Organize community meetings, focus groups, and outreach events to engage residents in discussions about childcare needs and

priorities. Solicit input from diverse stakeholders, including parents, caregivers, community leaders, and local organizations.

- Empower community members: Provide training, capacity-building workshops, and leadership development opportunities to empower community members to advocate for their childcare needs. Support the formation of parent committees or advisory groups to ensure ongoing community participation and feedback.
- Promote ownership and sustainability: Foster a sense of ownership and investment in childcare initiatives among community members. Encourage community-led solutions, resource mobilization efforts, and sustainable practices that build resilience and self-reliance.

4. Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

- Establish quality standards: Develop clear, evidence-based standards for childcare services related to safety, hygiene, nutrition, education, and child development. Ensure that these standards are regularly updated and aligned with best practices and regulatory requirements.
- Conduct regular assessments: Implement mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of childcare services to assess compliance with

quality standards and identify areas for improvement. Conduct regular site visits, inspections, and quality assessments to ensure accountability and transparency.

- Provide support for improvement: Offer technical assistance, training, and resources to childcare providers to support continuous quality improvement efforts. Provide feedback, coaching, and mentoring to help providers address deficiencies and implement best practices effectively.

5. Workforce Development and Support

- Invest in training: Provide comprehensive training programs for childcare professionals, including educators, caregivers, and administrators. Offer courses on child development, early education, health and safety, cultural competence, and trauma-informed care.
- Ensure fair compensation: Advocate for fair wages, benefits, and working conditions for childcare workers to attract and retain qualified professionals. Address disparities in pay and recognition between different roles within the childcare workforce.
- Promote professional growth: Offer opportunities for career

advancement, professional development, and ongoing learning for childcare workers. Support the acquisition of credentials, certifications, and advanced degrees to enhance skills and expertise.

6. Data-driven Decision Making and Evaluation

- Establish data systems: Develop robust data collection and management systems to track key indicators related to childcare access, utilization, quality, and outcomes. Collect demographic data, service utilization data, outcome measures, and feedback from families and stakeholders.
- Utilize data for decision making: Analyze data regularly to identify trends, patterns, and disparities in childcare provision. Use data to inform resource allocation, program planning, policy development, and quality improvement efforts.
- Evaluate program effectiveness: Conduct regular program evaluations, impact assessments, and cost-benefit analyses to measure the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of childcare interventions. Use evaluation findings to make evidence-based decisions and improve program performance over time.

7. Policy Advocacy and System Strengthening

- Advocate for supportive policies: Engage policymakers, legislators, and advocacy groups to prioritize childcare as a fundamental right and public good. Advocate for policies that support access, affordability, quality, and inclusivity in childcare provision.
- Strengthen regulatory frameworks: Advocate for robust regulatory frameworks, licensing requirements, and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with quality standards and safeguard children's rights. Address gaps and inconsistencies in existing regulations to improve accountability and oversight.
- Promote policy coherence: Advocate for cross-sectoral policies and initiatives that address the systemic barriers, inequities, and gaps in childcare provision. Encourage collaboration between government agencies, departments, and ministries to promote policy coherence and alignment.

b. Agenda for Future Research on Childcare

Data Collection and Analysis

- Conduct comprehensive surveys and interviews with caregivers, childcare providers, and stakeholders to gather data on childcare needs, challenges, and preferences.

- Utilize quantitative methods such as randomized control trials and longitudinal studies to assess the impact of different childcare models on child development outcomes, parental well-being, and socioeconomic indicators.
- Employ qualitative research techniques such as focus groups and case studies to explore the experiences and perspectives of diverse communities regarding childcare access, affordability, and quality.
- Develop standardized tools and instruments for measuring childcare quality, including observational checklists, caregiver assessments, and child development assessments, to facilitate cross-study comparisons and benchmarking.

Models of Childcare Provision

- Evaluate various childcare models, including center-based care, family childcare homes, community-based initiatives, and informal arrangements, to identify their respective strengths, weaknesses, and suitability for different contexts.
- Explore innovative approaches to childcare delivery, such as mobile childcare units, workplace-based childcare programs, and integrated services combining healthcare, education, and social support.
- Investigate the role of technology in enhancing childcare services,

including online platforms for parent-child communication, virtual learning environments, and telehealth consultations for child health and development.

Best Practices in Childcare Quality Improvement

- Investigate evidence-based interventions and strategies for enhancing childcare quality, including staff training programs, curriculum development initiatives, and quality rating and improvement systems.
- Examine the effectiveness of accreditation programs, quality standards, and licensing regulations in promoting positive child outcomes, caregiver professionalism, and program accountability.
- Identify promising practices for promoting inclusivity and diversity in childcare settings, including culturally responsive pedagogy, language support services, and accommodations for children with special needs.

Parental and Community Engagement in Childcare

- Explore effective approaches to engaging parents and families in childcare decision-making, program governance, and advocacy efforts, including parent education workshops, parent advisory councils, and community

organizing initiatives.

- Investigate the impact of community-based partnerships and collaborations on childcare access, affordability, and quality, including joint ventures between childcare providers, schools, healthcare providers, and social service agencies.
- Examine the role of cultural competence, family-centered practices, and strengths-based approaches in fostering positive parent-provider relationships and promoting children's socio-emotional development.

Policy and Systems-Level Research

- Assess the impact of childcare policies and regulations on access, affordability, and quality of services, including subsidy programs, tax incentives, and workforce development initiatives.
- Analyze the economic implications of investing in high-quality childcare, including cost-benefit analyses, return on investment calculations, and comparative studies of different funding models.
- Explore cross-sectoral collaborations and integration efforts aimed at aligning childcare systems with other social services, education programs, and workforce development initiatives to support children and families comprehensively.

Longitudinal Studies and Follow-Up Research

- Conduct longitudinal studies tracking children's development trajectories from early childhood through adolescence and beyond to assess the long-term effects of early childcare experiences on academic achievement, socio-emotional well-being, and economic outcomes.
- Follow up on previous research findings to assess the sustainability and scalability of successful childcare interventions, identify emerging trends and challenges, and inform ongoing policy and practice efforts.

Dissemination and Knowledge Translation

- Prioritize knowledge translation activities to ensure that research findings are accessible, relevant, and actionable for policymakers, practitioners, and the general public.
- Disseminate research findings through diverse channels, including academic publications, policy briefs, practitioner toolkits, public presentations, and digital media platforms, to reach a wide audience and promote evidence-informed decision-making in childcare policy and practice.

Conclusion and Call to Action

In her concluding remarks, Dr. Jacklyn Makaaru emphasised staying focused on the critical first 1000 days of a child's life, from birth to three years old. The importance of this foundational period for child development was underscored, urging continued attention and investment in early childhood care and development.

The Board Chair of Early Years Count Uganda highlighted the rapid growth of children and proposed considering their perspectives by asking what they want, emphasizing the need for empathy and understanding in childcare provision. She urged participants not to wait for future dialogues but to take immediate steps towards improving childcare services and support. She also expressed to all participants for their commitment and engagement in the conversation, with wishes for safe journeys home.

The Hon. Davinia Esther Anyakun, Minister of State for Gender, Labour, and Social Development, expressed her appreciation for the insights, passion, and commitment shown during the High-Level National Dialogue on Childcare. She emphasized the critical role of quality childcare in human capital

development, highlighting its benefits for early childhood development, gender equality, and economic growth. Hon. Anyakun thanked the panellists for their valuable contributions, acknowledging their expertise and dedication to improving the lives of children and families in Uganda. She reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to developing and implementing the National Childcare Roadmap, calling for continued strategic partnerships and collaboration. Quoting Nelson Mandela, she underscored the importance of how society cares for its children as a reflection of its soul, and encouraged ongoing efforts to make a difference in the lives of Uganda's children and working-age population.

The high-level policy dialogue provided a platform for robust discussions and insights into the state of childcare and early childhood development. There was a strong recognition of childcare as a critical aspect of societal development, impacting not only individual families but also broader economic and social outcomes. The dialogue underscored the importance of prioritizing Child Care as a fundamental building block for future generations' well-being and societal progress.

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