

CABINET MEMORANDUM

BY

MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS

SUBJECT : Early Childhood Care and Development Policy for Ghana

Cabinet is respectfully invited to consider and approve the draft Early Childhood Care and Development Policy for Ghana attached as Appendix 'A'

2. BACKGROUND

The need to develop such a policy has been felt for some time now by both public and private early childhood care service providers. The World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, in 1989 which discussed the importance of expanding early childhood development activities, as well as the signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 further brought the issue into sharper focus.

In response to this a National Task Force was formed in May 1991 to collate adequate data and make recommendations for the formulation of an Early Childhood Development Policy. Toward this end, workshops and conferences have been held, in the production of a draft ECCD Policy in 1997. In 1999, in response to global emphasis on the holistic development of the Child, the Ghana National Commission on Children undertook a review of the draft policy. The revision incorporated inputs from consultations with district, regional and national actors in ECCD delivery. The comprehensive approach, which emphasises the 'care' of the child, is globally referred to as Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) or Early Childhood Care for Survival, Growth and Development (ECC-SGD).

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

Institutionally, various ministries, departments and agencies have been responsible for various aspects of early childhood care and development. These include the Ministries of Education, Health, Employment and Social Welfare and the private sector. What has been missing is a clearly defined role for these actors, lack of collaboration and effective co-ordination of their activities. These have adversely affected the delivery of early childhood care and development services, with the result that many young children do not have access to these services.

The Policy has the broad objective of promoting the survival, growth and development of all young children through the following strategies:-

- Expand ECCD programmes for survival, growth and development of children, especially those in rural and poor communities;
- Promote nutrition and household food security;
- Reduce high infant and under 5 mortality rates;
- Promote pre-school education'
- Enforce existing laws to reduce all forms of child abuse and socio-cultural practices which are detrimental to the well-being of the young child;
- Ensure equity and quality in the delivery of services;
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of Government institutions, donors, parents and other ECCD service providers in the country;
- Provide guidelines and standards for service providers; and
- Establish mechanisms for collaboration and co-ordination and monitoring of services for young children.

4. FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION

To translate the goals and objectives into programmes at the national, regional, district and community levels, the policy outlines an institutional framework for its implementation. Co-ordination will be done at all levels. Implementation will, however, be focused mostly at the district and community levels, in consonance with the decentralization policy.

At the apex will be a National Steering Committee, comprising all the key institutions involved with ECCD. Committees will also be formed at the regional and district levels. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs with its mandate to co-ordinate all essential services for children in the country, will be required to establish an ECCD Unit to co-ordinate and monitor all ECCD activities.

5. COST IMPLICATIONS AND FINANCING

It is recognised that promotion of early childhood care and development requires a massive investment of resources at the national, district and community levels. The main costs to be incurred in the implementation of the policy include provision of infrastructure and logistics, research, advocacy, capacity building, training of caregivers, implementation of specific projects, co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation.

It is further recognised that, even though parents have the primary responsibilities for their children, the support of Government, the private sector and the donor community is essential. The financing of programmes for achieving the policy objectives will, therefore, be spread among all these key actors. The broad financial roles of these actors are outlined, within the framework of the policy to ensure that responsibilities are clarified.

6. CONSULTATIONS

We wish to emphasise that in the formulation of the draft policy, the views of stakeholders at the District and Community levels were sought and obtained and these have been duly reflected in the document. In addition the Ministries of Education, Manpower

Development and Employment have been consulted and are agreeable to the terms of this memorandum. Furthermore, UNICEF, Save the Children Fund (UK) and the World Bank provided both technical and financial support towards the development of the draft policy.

7. CONCLUSION

Early childhood care and development has been placed on the global agenda and is one of the ten objectives set in the Declaration and Plan of Action on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, which was adopted at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in May 2002. This objective provides that children must have the best possible start in life in order to enable them be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, socially competent and able to learn. This is required to provide the essential foundation for the human development of this country.

The policy provides an opportunity to develop the country's human resource base in a sustained manner as well as provide the direction needed to accelerate service delivery and increased access to ECCD services for our young children.

Cabinet is therefore invited to consider and approve the policy as requested in paragraph 1 above.

HON. MRS. GLADYS ASMAH
MINISTER

(NOVEMBER 2002)