

## CDS supports development and dissemination of South Africa's new National Integrated ECD Policy

### CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT (CDS)

The CDS project (2014-2019), funded by USAID/South Africa, contributes to the goal of mitigating the impact of HIV, STIs and TB by providing capacity strengthening to civil society organizations and the South African Government, increasing their effectiveness in achieving expanded and high-quality services.



(from left to right) first row: Ivy Rapoo and Musa Ngcobo-Mbere, DSD; second row: Louise Erasmus, FHI 360, Marie-Louise Samuels, DBE, Mpho Papale, DSD, Rebhone Ntsie, DOH; third row: Andre Viviers, UNICEF

South Africa has approximately 8.2 million children under seven years old.<sup>1</sup> More than 65% of these children live in poverty, contributing to relatively high rates of under-five mortality, malnutrition and stunting. Only one in three children are exposed to an early childhood development (ECD) program. These factors limit children's opportunities to meet their full development potential and affect their long-term cognitive, emotional and social capacity.

In response to these challenges, South Africa developed its first National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy and conducted capacity building workshops on the policy in all provinces in 2016 to facilitate provincial and local-level implementation. A total of 1,051 participants from the Departments of Social Development, Basic Education and Health attended these sessions, as well as representatives from other departments and the non-profit sector.

### WHY THE PROCESS MATTERS

Those who have not been involved in policy development tend to underestimate the significant amount of time and effort required to ensure it incorporates input from a wide range of relevant sectors and is as comprehensive as possible. Louise Erasmus, the Technical Advisor on Early Childhood Development seconded to the Department of Social Development under the USAID-funded Capacity Development and Support

<sup>1</sup> South Africa's Department of Social Development. *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy*. 2015. Available at: <http://www.gov.za/documents/national-integrated-early-childhood-development-policy-2015-2-aug-2016-0000>

## COUNTRY OVERVIEW

For more than 25 years, FHI 360 has been working as a strategic partner to the Government of South Africa and South African civil society. We have implemented a wide range of technical assistance projects at national, provincial and community levels to strengthen policies and programs that prevent the transmission of HIV, provide high-quality HIV care and treatment, strengthen nutritional assessment and counselling and support, improve reproductive health, increase access to family planning, and strengthen partners' technical and organizational capacity.

### About FHI 360

FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. Our staff includes experts in health, education, nutrition, environment, economic development, civil society, gender, youth, research, technology, communication and social marketing – creating a unique mix of capabilities to address today's interrelated development challenges. FHI 360 serves more than 70 countries and all U.S. states and territories.

(CDS) program, has been part of the policy development journey in various capacities since 2012, when it emerged as a key area of concern following a national ECD conference. Louise is part of a small team under the Chief Directorate of ECD which coordinated the numerous processes to develop the policy, including:

- Consolidating findings from multiple ECD assessments, such as a diagnostic review of ECD and an evaluation of the National Integrated Plan on ECD 2005-2010
- Holding consultations in each province with government and civil society stakeholders, including experts in disability and other relevant sectors
- Incorporating feedback received after the public gazetting of the document

Louise emphasizes that each of these steps was necessary to ensure that the policy is evidence-based and responsive to current conditions, is supported by all key stakeholders, and is robust, addressing all aspects of child development. She recalls sacrifices that the team made, including working over public holidays and weekends to complete requirements such as a detailed social economic impact assessment. They were rewarded for their efforts when the policy – the first policy on ECD for the country – was approved by Cabinet on December 9, 2015.

## SUPPORTING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

After approval of the policy, the team began a process of dissemination and capacity building to ensure its implementation. They facilitated two-day, interactive workshops in each province to provide participants with a uniform understanding of key provisions in the policy and empower them to use the policy to review and improve their daily ECD practice. In 2017, the team plans to continue this process, providing mentoring and training for provincial representatives who will serve as champions leading their own teams to ensure the policy content is integrated into their planning and activities within various sectors and at all levels.

## A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

Louise acknowledges that the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy is a long-term investment which may only display results in 20 years, when the next generation of children are grown. However, she is confident that an integrated response will yield significant but gradual change, transforming child development and performance, and consequently the nation's future capacity.

The policy has four essential components: nutrition and health, early learning, parent empowerment and child protection. What makes this policy different, Louise says, is an entire section on the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, including parents/guardians/caregivers, multiple government departments, and civil society. Each person has a circle of influence, she states, and is able to play a part in ensuring South Africa's children are equipped with everything they need for a bright and promising future.

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## CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT PROGRAM

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