RESEARCH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

December 2021

Early Childhood Care & Education Quality Assurance Systems in Africa

ABBIE RAIKES, REBECCA SAYRE, JEM HEINZEL-NELSON ALVARENGA LIMA

This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of contract no. 7200AA18C00057, which supports the Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC). This report was produced by ECD Measure under the RTAC contract. The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of RTAC and NORC at the University of Chicago, and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Acknowledgments

This report was produced as part of the Together for Early Childhood Evidence Consortium, supported by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC). The authors are grateful to colleagues at the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) for their thought leadership and facilitation of our survey to ministerial representatives. In particular, we would like to thank Albert Nsengiyumva (Executive Secretary, ADEA), Maya Soonarane (Director, Inter-Country Quality Node for Early Childhood Development), Shem Okore Bodo (Senior Programs Officer, ADEA), Helene Charpentier (Senior Project Officer, ADEA), and Mamy Razafimahatratra (IT Officer, ADEA). We are also grateful to Kate Anderson and her team at Unbounded Associates for their partnership in the Together for Early Childhood Evidence Consortium. We would like to acknowledge the contributions made by country focal points who anonymously completed the survey as well as all participants from the September 2021 roundtable discussion on quality assurance systems co-hosted by ADEA and Together for Early Childhood Evidence. Thank you to Shirley Choppy (CEO, Institute for Early Childhood Development, Seychelles) and Abdeljalil Benzouina (Head of the Central Pre-School Education Unit at the Ministry of Education, Morocco), whose country quality assurance systems overviews are featured in the case studies in this report. We are grateful to Marc DeFrancis for his editorial support for this report. Finally, we'd like to thank Koli Banik (Senior Education Advisor, USAID Africa Bureau) for her technical oversight of the Together for Early Childhood Evidence Consortium.

ECD Measure

ECD Measure helps build better lives for young children around the world through data. We support professionals, governments, nonprofit organizations, and researchers with tools, resources, and connections to use data to achieve quality early childhood care and education for all. ECD Measure convenes the USAID-supported Together for Early Childhood Evidence Consortium.

Research Technical Assistance Center

The Research Technical Assistance Center is a network of academic researchers generating timely research for USAID to promote evidence-based policies and programs. The project is led by NORC at the University of Chicago in partnership with Arizona State University, Centro de Investigación de la Universidad del Pacifico (Lima, Peru), Davis Management Group, the Duke Center for International Development, Forum One, the Institute of International Education, the Notre Dame Pulte Institute for Global Development, Population Reference Bureau, the Resilient Africa Network at Makerere University (Kampala, Uganda), the United Negro College Fund, the University of Chicago, and the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Suggested Citation

Raikes, A., Sayre, R., and Heinzel-Nelson Alvarenga Lima, J. (2021). *Early Childhood Care & Education Quality Assurance Systems in Africa*. Report. Washington, DC: Research Technical Assistance Center.

Executive Summary

High-quality early childhood care and education can lead to long-term positive impacts on children's learning and well-being. Backed by strong scientific evidence documenting the value of early childhood care and education (ECCE) in supporting young children's development, many countries are making investments in ECCE provision. While such investments can lead to better outcomes for children, it is essential that basic quality standards be met. One path for ensuring quality across all ECCE is to invest in quality assurance systems.

This report reviews the status of ECCE quality assurance systems in Africa. Our recent survey of ministries of education in 14 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa ministries of education revealed the following.

- In most countries, some ECCE quality standards are in place for both public and private settings. Teachers do not always receive training in ECCE quality standards, however; only 25 percent of survey respondents indicated that not all teachers in their countries had been trained in them.
- In most countries, ECCE facilities are required to become registered. However, only 50 percent of survey respondents have a complete registry of public preschools and only 18 percent have a complete registry of private preschools.
- The exact purview of quality assurance agencies and roles of quality assurance officers varies by country. In general, public, government-run ECCE facilities receive more monitoring than private facilities. While health and safety tend to be the most prevalent aspects monitored, many officers are also monitoring children's access to materials and interactions between teachers and children.
- After ECCE monitoring data are collected from ECCE facilities, the data are used or shared by quality assurance systems (QASs) in a variety of ways. Feedback to schools to make improvements in ECCE quality is the most common way monitoring data are used, although feedback may not be going directly to teachers. In addition to feedback, other uses of the data include follow-up visits, inclusion of data in a national database or report, and registration of schools.
- When standards are not met, a range of consequences follow under different QASs, including follow-up visits, tailored support to schools, and transfer or redeployment of school managers. Some countries also penalize schools and teachers for poor performance by publicly sharing information about these schools, issuing the schools warning letters, carrying out disciplinary sanctions, or closing schools.
- Countries are employing various mechanisms to improve teacher and school quality. These measures include moving teachers to schools with the highest need, providing additional in-service training or mentoring, offering schools materials, school grants, or merit pay for teachers, offering honors to schools, and inviting parents to see good schools.

Common observations by stakeholders across ECCE QASs in Africa include:

- Investing in teachers is a top priority in nearly all countries, as they are the cornerstone for establishing quality ECCE.
- There is a need for better data systems, including regular data collection and the use of data for informed decision-making.
- A challenge to investing in QAS is limited resources within ECCE systems.
- Building synergies within countries and across the region can enhance advocacy and resource mobilization efforts to improve the quality of ECCE across Africa.

We outline several recommendations for governments and partners to consider continuing the momentum of building strong and sustainable QAS for ECCE.

- Defining approaches to building QAS across countries could be an important shared resource across countries.
- While tracking private ECCE settings can be challenging, including all ECCE settings – both private and public, and settings for children birth to age three as well as preschool-aged children – is an essential part of building high-quality early childhood settings for all children. Governments should consider strategies to include all ECCE providers in QAS, including private ECCE providers.
- In addition to providing feedback, the data that comes from monitoring can be valuable when aggregated across ECCE settings. National, local and school-level stakeholders are ideally able to use aggregated data to improve ECCE quality.
- In contexts where ECCE access is already limited, countries should consider strategies to help improve the quality of facilities that aren't meeting standards without penalizing facilities or closing them down.
- It may be helpful to take a closer look at what aspects of ECCE classroom quality are being monitored. Quality assurance officers or inspectors may need capacity building on age-appropriate quality for ECCE.
- Easy-to-use monitoring tools can be developed or adapted to capture the most important elements of quality, including play-based pedagogies.
- Synergies within countries and across the region can help identify and spread innovative solutions.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Key Definitions[1]

Early childhood care and education / early childhood education / pre-primary education

Early childhood care and education (*ECCE*) refers to services that support young children's development, through a range of program modalities including but not limited to school-based pre-primary education, community-based pre-primary education, and parenting support programs. The mix of available ECCE programs varies according to the country. ECCE goes beyond preparation for primary school, as it addresses the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs from birth to the start of primary school. *Early childhood education* (*ECE*) refers only to early childhood *education,* whether in formal or informal settings. *Pre-primary education* refers specifically to formal, school-based preschool programs with organized instruction.

Quality in ECE does not have a universal definition. However, some common elements of quality can be thought of in two dimensions: *process* quality and *structural* quality:

> **Process quality** relates to the quality of interactions between children and their teachers as well as among their peers. Process quality is often characterized by the degree of emotional support, engagement, and scaffolding for learning that is provided by teachers.
>
> **Structural quality** comprises the laws, policies, regulations, and other influences that originate outside of the classroom but affect process quality, including teacher qualifications; provision of physical spaces and supplies for ECCE; and expectations for the content of ECCE curricula. These structural supports help set the stage for interactions between teachers and children (Cryer et al. 1999; Raikes, Neumann & Burton 2019).

Quality assurance is the process of monitoring ECCE settings to assess and ensure the quality of children's experiences (Raikes, Neumann & Burton 2019). This is typically undertaken by governments, either at national or subnational levels. To monitor the quality of ECCE programs, a government must first set service quality *standards*.

Service quality standards are government guidelines on the practices and experiences children should be exposed to in ECCE settings. Other standards, such as standards for staff (including what types of education and training they require) and curricula (the expectations for what children learn) are related, but they are different from service quality standards (Raikes, Neumann & Burton 2019). Service quality standards are the foundation of a QAS, as they describe the ideal characteristics of early childhood settings in a country and provide guidelines for facilities to comply with.

[1] Many definitions are drawn from *Guide on Early Childhood Education Quality Assurance Systems for Africa*

Background

Strong science demonstrates the value of investing in quality ECCE for later learning. Quality early learning environments, which include safe spaces, trained teachers, access to toys and learning materials, and play-based curricula and pedagogy, are associated with better learning outcomes for young children (Anderson et al. 2017; Britto et al. 2017; Gove et al. 2017; Rao et al., 2017).

Even though access to ECCE has increased over the past decade, we now face the notable challenge of ensuring quality ECCE for all children, especially considering COVID's negative impact on ECCE and children's learning more broadly. Scaling quality learning begins with developing quality standards for ECCE service delivery (UNICEF 2019) that promote play-based learning, which places a larger emphasis on social and emotional learning, creativity, and psycho-motor skills (Jensen et al. 2019). Although there are few systematic reviews, observations from stakeholders indicate that some countries increasingly recognize the importance of play-based learning and have integrated these principles into quality standards, while others are beginning the process of writing or revising standards (Anderson et al. 2017). Research has generated several preschool interventions that integrate play-based learning into typical ECCE settings and lead to positive child outcomes (e.g., Tayari in Kenya; see Piper, Merseth & Ngaruiya 2018).

Even when standards do exist and models of effective interventions have been developed, scaling these models across ECCE settings is challenging, due to the lack of ongoing professional development, inadequate resources, and overcrowded classrooms as well as highly decentralized systems (Yoshikawa et al. 2018). And even when quality early learning practices are included in national learning standards, research from several countries demonstrates that play-based pedagogy, including the use of materials to facilitate young children's learning, allowing children freedom to explore, and the use of rich and stimulating dialogue, is not consistently implemented (Bidwell & Watine 2014; McCoy & Wolf 2018; Raikes et al. 2020).

While the content and design of each country's QAS may be unique, an effective QAS is essential for maintaining and improving quality early learning practices by (1) clearly setting standards for quality; (2) providing ongoing training and support for ECCE settings to reach quality standards; and (3) monitoring ECCE settings to determine whether quality standards are being met and adjusting training and support as needed to improve uptake of quality ECCE practices (e.g., Yoshikawa et al. 2018; UNICEF 2019).

The role of QAS in promoting ECCE quality has been well-documented: QASs have figured prominently in high-income countries' efforts to improve ECCE quality (i.e., OECD 2015) and serve as the bedrock for reaching quality at scale by creating standards and quality improvement mechanisms for both public and private ECCE providers. Although systematic information is limited, a recent review by UNICEF suggests that some countries may have ECCE standards in place, but no monitoring, while other countries have monitoring tools but have not updated standards. Critically, few countries have routine monitoring *and* systematic support for training and supporting ECCE professionals to adopt new practices (Raikes, Neumann & Burton 2019). In some cases, there may not be inspectors at all, and if there are inspectors, they may not be trained to look beyond minimum health/safety compliance or they may have only limited time and resources available to spend with each site.

QAS can potentially play an essential role in promoting ECCE quality. A first step in QAS is defining quality, since a common definition is needed to drive quality improvement efforts. The process of defining quality, particularly integrating locally relevant definitions of quality into science-based findings on the environments that promote child development, is an important part of building a shared vision of ECCE quality (Myers 2004), especially to understand how to integrate ideas such as play-based learning in culturally relevant ways (Avornyo_& Baker 2018). Once standards are set, there are several possible pathways by which QASs could aim to affect quality, for example:

- Through government-supported coaching for ECCE professionals;
- By designing and implementing quality monitoring tools to routinely collect data on quality and access to ECCE to target ECCE facilities in need of greater support;
- By providing incentives for ECCE settings that adopt quality practices;
- By penalizing ECCE facilities that do not meet standards; and
- By generating publicly available government ratings of ECCE facilities to encourage movement to higher-quality ECCE settings.

Some QASs have also begun integrating assessments of child development and learning, so that a QAS can also include monitoring of children's learning and can be used to determine if ECCE facilities are meeting standards. However, not all QAS mechanisms are equally effective: for example, research from the United States has suggested that QAS incentives have mixed results on quality and child outcomes (Elicker & Ruprecht 2019). Positive impacts have been shown for QAS-related on-site technical assistance in the United States (Tang et al. 2020), while an evaluation of the Colombian government's quality improvement system demonstrated negative impacts (Andrew et al. 2019).

QAS can play an especially important role in promoting gender equality, equity, and inclusion. Ensuring quality provision across all types of services is the building block of equity, beginning with standards that outline equitable and inclusive practices and following through with professional development and monitoring. When monitoring tools are appropriately designed to include information on children's experiences of ECCE based on gender, special needs, and other factors, monitoring systems can capture essential data for evaluating ECCE's role in promoting equity and inclusion.

Little research to date has addressed the role of QAS in scaling quality ECCE in Africa, where both the context and the mechanisms for improving quality may be different from elsewhere. This lack of information comes at a high cost. Resources for QAS are often limited (GPE 2019), necessitating careful consideration of which mechanisms are most likely to lead to changes in ECCE quality. But because so little evidence is available, there is limited guidance for countries on possible routes to improve the effectiveness of ECCE QAS.

This report is intended to start to fill the existing evidence gap of ECCE QAS in Africa. While infrequently studied as a mechanism for ensuring ECCE quality at scale, many African countries have some elements of QAS in place. We review the status of ECCE QAS in Africa and explore how countries can continue to strengthen their systems.

Early Childhood Care and Education Quality Assurance System Survey

Limited systematic information is available on the status of ECCE QASs in Africa. ECD Measure recently conducted a survey of ministries of education to understand and gather information on existing quality standards and the mechanisms for quality assurance in their respective countries.

The survey was distributed by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) to ministries of education in 20 countries. Twenty-eight respondents from 14 countries completed the survey. The responding countries were Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Eswatini, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Morocco, Mauritius, Seychelles, South Africa, Togo, and Uganda. Respondents included assistant ministers, directors, and officers of ECCE divisions/departments in ministries, commissioners of basic education, heads of registration and teacher professionalization, inspectors, and teacher trainers.

While we received responses from across the African continent, these survey results are not from a representative sample. Further, in many cases, multiple respondents answered from the same country and responses did not always directly align with one another. This suggests that even within one country, there may not be agreement about features of QASs. The results presented below summarize the 28 responses we received.

Existence of Standards

ECCE quality standards differ from standards on children's development and learning, sometimes referred to as Early Learning and Development Standards. We asked survey respondents to share whether they had quality standards for ECCE. We were interested in understanding whether standards have been established, to which facilities they apply, and whether teachers have access to and are well-informed about the standards.

In 13 of the 14 countries, some ECCE quality standards have been established. Seventy-seven percent of respondents reported that quality standards apply to children ages three to five (i.e., preschool age), 35 percent said they apply to children ages zero to three, and 23 percent said they also apply to children aged six and older. All respondents indicated that quality standards exist for both public and private facilities, and for most (71%) countries, the same standards apply to public and private. However, 14 percent of respondents reported that there are different standards for public and private ECCE facilities (13% did not respond).

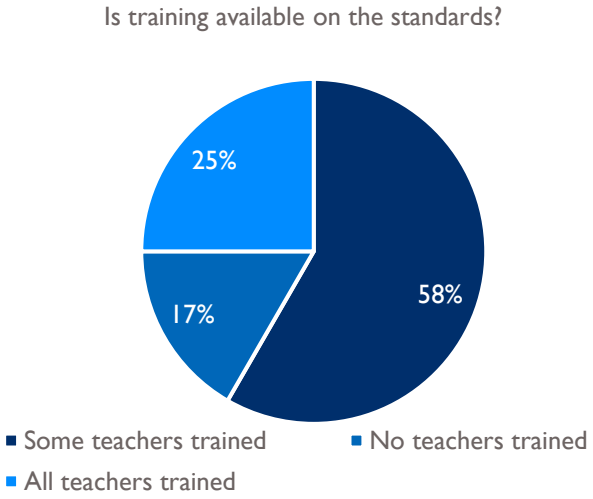
The content of quality standards is critical for ensuring that learning environments are developmentally appropriate for young children. Table 1 presents the details of standards shared by respondents. In most cases, quality standards exist but are not publicly available online.

Table 1: Details on Existing Quality Standards

Country	Quality Standard
Burkina Faso	Integrated strategy for the strengthening of pedagogical supervision (SIREP) and the integrated strategy for the continuing training of teachers and pedagogical supervisors (SIFCEEP)
Gabon	Law No. 10/84 on the definition and general organization of Preschool Education; Decree No. 000081 / PR / MASCNSSBE. Establishing the modalities of application of Law N ° 10/84 of July 30, 1984; Law N ° 21/2011 on the general orientation of Education, Training and Research of February 14, 2012
Kenya	The National Pre-Primary Education Policy Standard Guidelines provide quality standards on: infrastructure, food handling, teacher-child ratio (regular and special needs classes), pre-primary school service providers, teacher management, curriculum and pedagogy, pre-primary education teacher training and quality assurance. In addition to the policy guidelines, Kenya has a curriculum-based assessment, the Kenya School Readiness Assessment Tool, and competency-based curriculum designs.
Liberia	• Global rating of the environment (GROW) focuses on the physical learning environment (measure for quality) • Early Learning and Development Standard provides guidance on children's learning and development outcomes • Professional Development Framework for the ECE Teacher focuses on the different levels of teacher development • National Early Childhood Curriculum provides instructional guidance for teaching and learning to schools/centers • Inclusive and Gender-responsive Child Protection Protocol provides guidance focused on the child well-being, safety, and protection.
Morocco	• ECCE Curriculum Framework • Guidance toolkit and reference documents for preschool age 4-5
Seychelles	• There are currently 10 standards for home-based child-minding services, which are in the form of a regulation. • Work is underway to formulate a regulation based on a framework for national standards for center-based services. These are currently in draft form, comprising 12 areas: staffing, two administrators, training, physical planning and development, infrastructure, safety, public health, child health, nutrition, child rights and protection, early learning and interaction, community engagement.
South Africa	There are infrastructure and safety quality standards, as well as standards for practitioner qualifications. However, there are no quality standards that relate to quality instruction and expected learning outcomes yet.
Togo	Quality standards are set at the regional level. Regional committees ensure compliance with infrastructure standards and children's access conditions.
Uganda	Ministry of Education and Sports Early Learning and Development Standards for 3–5-year-old children

Defining quality standards is just the first step to establishing a QAS; there also must be mechanisms to sensitize teachers and schools on the quality standards. Forty-six percent of survey respondents reported that quality standards have been shared with all teachers and schools; 36 percent reported that they have been shared, but not with all ECCE facilities; and 4 percent reported that standards had not been shared. Of those who reported there were standards, only 25 percent reported that all teachers have access to standards and have received training; 58 percent reported that some teachers have received training on standards, and 17 percent reported that no teachers have been trained (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Standards training availability

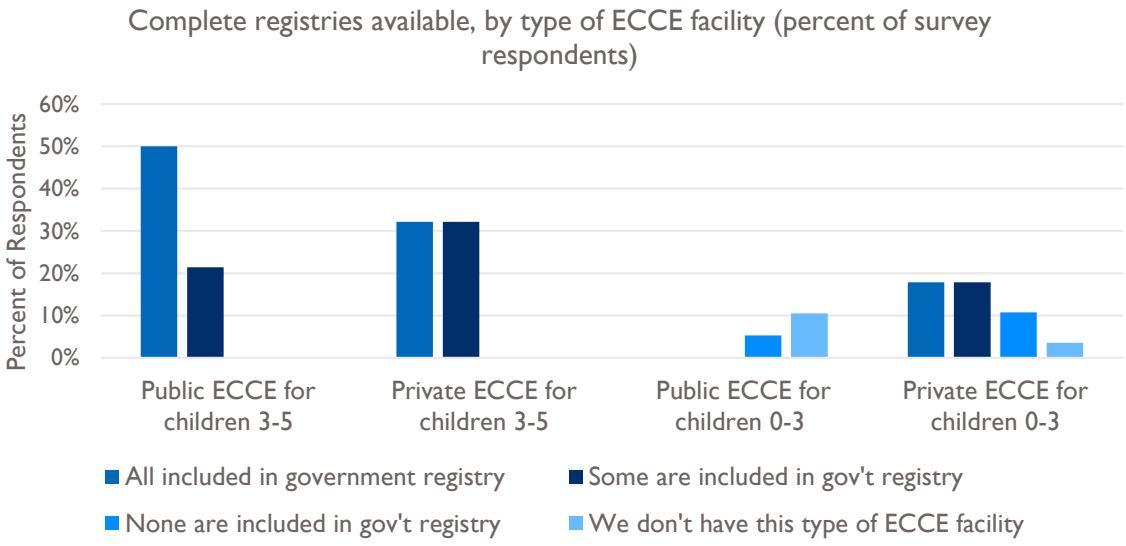


Monitoring System

In addition to the existence of standards, it is important to understand a country's capacity to monitor the standards. Effective monitoring systems have a registry of all ECCE facilities, quality assurance officers/inspectors who have capacity and time to monitor facilities in their purview, and a system for capturing quality information and providing feedback. We asked survey respondents to share how their governments monitor existing quality standards.

Having a registry of providers is a building block to a well-functioning monitoring system. Seventy-one percent of respondents reported that ECCE facilities in their countries are required to become registered. When asked about whether the government had a complete list of different types of ECCE facilities, 50 percent of survey respondents said they have a complete registry of public preschools; 18 percent had a complete registry of private preschools; 18 percent had a complete registry of private facilities for children 0-3; and no one reported a complete registry for public facilities for children ages 0-3 (Figure 2.)

Figure 2. Availability of complete registries



Most countries have some components of a monitoring system in place for their ECCE facilities. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents reported having a system for monitoring ECCE**.** Table 2 outlines examples of departments or agencies within the government that are responsible for monitoring ECCE quality.

The exact purview of quality assurance agencies and quality assurance officers (or inspectors, monitors, etc.) varies by country. The workload of quality assurance officers/inspectors varies by country. Twenty-nine percent of respondents reported that each quality assurance officer in their country has more than 20 ECCE facilities to visit per month. Twenty-five percent of respondents reported that each quality assurance officer has fewer than 10 facilities to visit on a monthly basis. The person visiting classrooms and monitoring quality also varies by country and by type of ECCE facility. In public settings, this may include government officials, school principals, education officers/advisors, public health officials, heads of educational administrative zones, community leaders, and/or parents. In private or community-based ECCE facilities, this may also include church or community leaders.

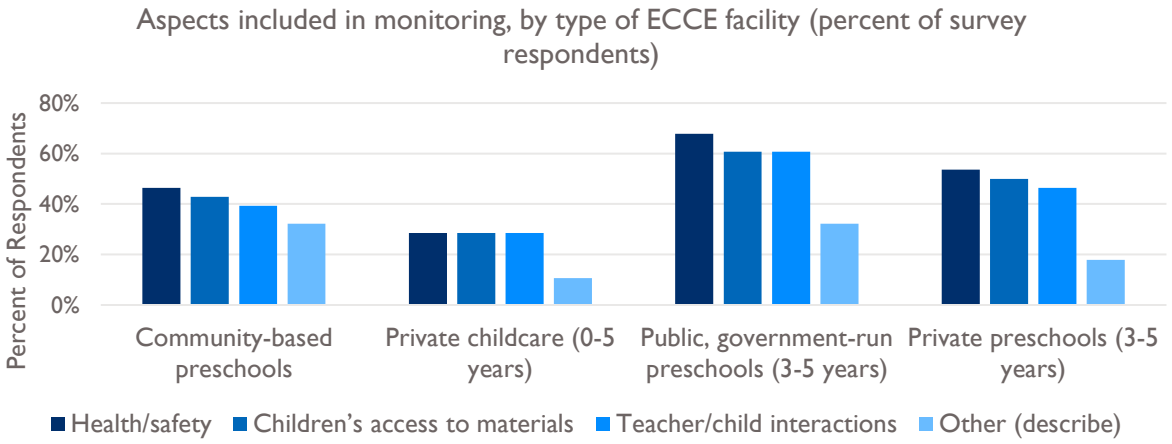
Table 2: Departments or agencies responsible for monitoring ECCE quality

Country	Department or agency
Burkina Faso	Department of pedagogical supervision and initial and continuing training
Central African Republic	Government Inspectorate General of National Education
Gabon	School districts. Within these spaces, the educational advisors and inspectors supervise the related activities
Kenya	Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards, Directorate of Early Childhood Education, State Department of Early Learning & Basic Education
Liberia	Ministry of Education Department of Planning, Research & Development
Madagascar	Ministry of National Education Directorate of School Support and Pedagogical Inspection: ensuring the quality of education; Ministry of National Education Department of Basic and Early Childhood Education: responsible for ECE
Mauritius	Early Childhood Education Care Authority
Seychelles	Ministry of Education/Institute for Early Childhood Development
Togo	General Education Inspectorate (IGE); Inspection of preschool and primary education
Uganda	Directorate of Education Standards, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; and Department of Basic Education of Ministry of Education and Sports

Public, government-run ECCE facilities receive more monitoring than private facilities. Seventy-five percent of respondents reported that public preschools are monitored; 61 percent reported that private preschools are monitored; 32 percent reported that private childcare (for children 0-5) are monitored; and 50 percent reported that community-based preschools are monitored. Most respondents reported that facilities are monitored one to four times a year; but public preschools seem to be monitored more frequently than other facilities.

Figure 3 displays what is monitored in different types of ECCE facilities. While health and safety (i.e., structural quality) tend to be the most prevalent aspects monitored, many are also monitoring children's access to materials and interactions between teachers and children (i.e., process quality). Respondents also reported monitoring other aspects, including disability and inclusion, administration and governance, staff qualifications, and curriculum implementation.

Figure 3. Aspects included in monitoring

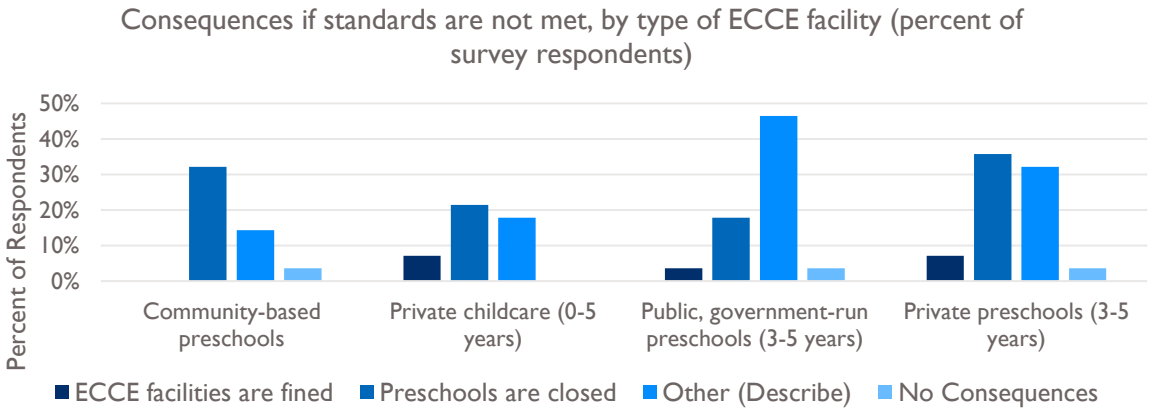


Quality Assurance

In addition to understanding how ECCE settings are monitored, it is important to understand what mechanisms are in place in QASs to use monitoring data. To strengthen accountability, there may be rewards in place for ECCE facilities that meet/exceed standards or consequences in place for those who do not. It is also important to look at how monitoring systems share data with parents or other stakeholders to hold facilities accountable for meeting quality expectations.

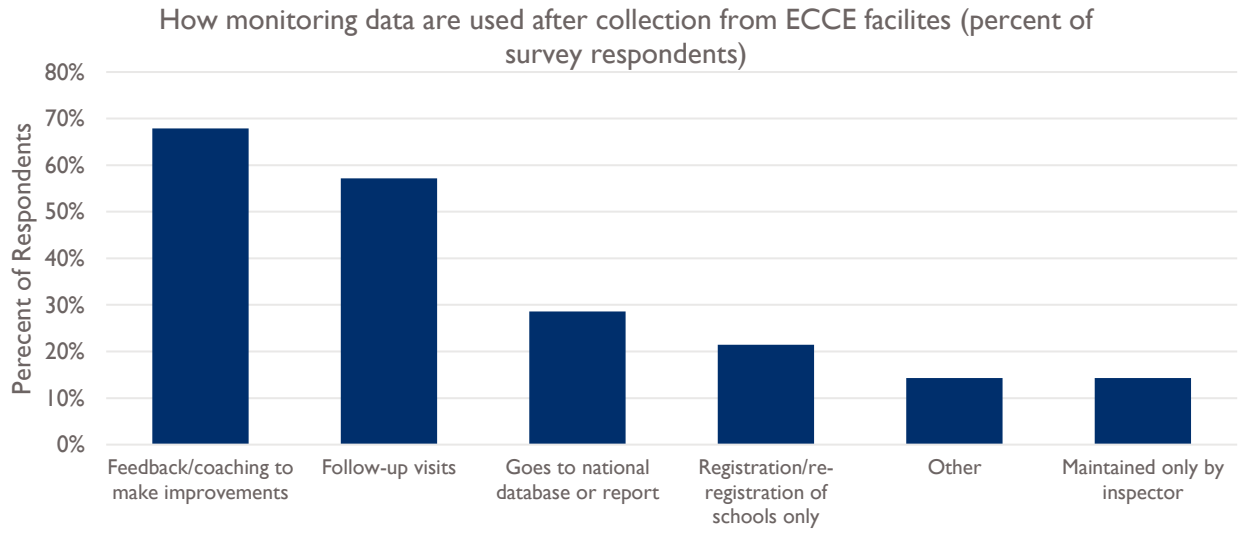
When standards aren't met, there are a range of consequences taken in different QASs. The most common consequence of not meeting standards is the closing of facilities. As displayed in Figure 4, when standards are not met, 18 percent reported that public preschools are closed, and 36 percent reported that private preschools are closed. There are a range of other actions taken when public or private preschools are not meeting quality standards, including follow-up visits conducted to see if problems have been corrected, transfer/redeployment of managers, disciplinary and administrative sanctions, and tailored support to schools.

Figure 4. Consequences if standards are not met



After ECCE monitoring data are collected from ECCE facilities, the data are used or shared in a variety of ways (Figure 5)**.** Sixty-eight percent of respondents reported that feedback or coaching is provided to make improvements in facility quality; 57 percent of respondents reported that follow-up visits are made based on monitoring data; 29 percent reported that monitoring/inspection data go to a national database or report; 21 percent reported that data are only used for the registration/re-registration of schools; and 14 percent reported that the data collected are maintained only by the inspector/quality assurance officer. Respondents also reported that in some cases, data are sent back to central level for analysis, decision-making, and national planning.

Figure 5. How monitoring data are used after collection



Feedback to make improvements is reported as the most common way monitoring data are used, but feedback might not be going directly to teachers. While two-thirds of respondents reported that feedback is provided to make improvements in facility quality, feedback is often only given to administrators or heads of school. In very few cases did respondents report that feedback was provided directly to teachers. Table 3 displays how school-level feedback is provided in some countries.

Table 3: School-level feedback: Who provides feedback and to whom do they provide feedback? (for selected countries)

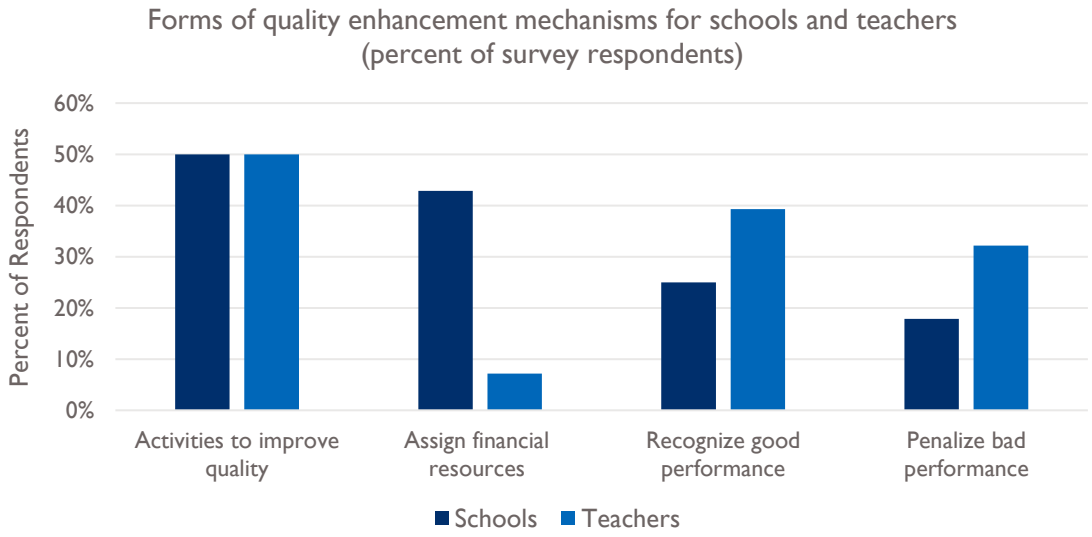
Country	School-level feedback
Burkina Faso	Inspectors give feedback to the school principal and educational supervisors
Gabon	Heads of school districts provide feedback to the technical departments of the Ministry (case of National Education)
Kenya	Quality assurance officers and field education officers provide feedback to Boards of Management, schools administrators, ECDE teachers, early childhood field coordinators
Benin	Supervisors who make visits provide feedback to teachers or school principals

Liberia	The supervisors for specific schools of areas of coverage provide feedback
Mauritius	Supervisors provide feedback to the zone coordinator, and the zone coordinator provides feedback to the school director
Seychelles	Monitoring and compliance officers of the regulator provide feedback to registered childcare providers
Togo	Inspectors/educational advisors give feedback to the head of school (school principals or founders of private facilities)
Uganda	Inspectors of schools and community leaders provide feedback to the ECD head caregivers and proprietors

Countries are employing various activities to improve quality. Figure 6 displays the types of quality enhancement mechanisms survey respondents reported their countries have for both schools and teachers. Of our respondents, 50 percent reported that their countries have activities to improve quality at both the school and teacher level. Mechanisms to improve quality include moving teachers to schools with the highest need; providing additional in-service training or mentoring to teachers and principals; and offering books and other materials.

At the school level, 43 percent of respondents reported that financial resources are used as quality enhancement mechanisms and 25 percent reported that they recognize schools' good performance. This may include offering honors, inviting parents to see good schools, and providing grants for schools to improve facilities, teacher training, and other uses as needed. Some countries provide financial resources to the best performing schools, while others provide to the lowest performing.

Figure 6. Forms of quality enhancement mechanisms for schools and teachers



At the teacher level, 7 percent of respondents reported assigning financial resources and 39 percent reported recognizing good performance. Some examples of rewards respondents shared include merit pay, recognition from teacher service commissions, being appointed as champions/trainers, and promotions or other rewards.

Some countries also penalize schools and teachers for poor performance. In our survey, 18 percent of respondents reported that they penalize bad performance in schools and 32 percent that they penalize bad performance in teachers. Respondents said that school penalties may include sharing the information about the school publicly, reassigning students to other schools to reduce the teacher/student ratio and closing schools. For teachers, sometimes warning letters are given or disciplinary sanctions or transfers are conducted.

For many countries, the basic building blocks are in place, but there is still much room for improvement to achieve effective QASs. We asked respondents what they saw as the greatest strength in their country's ECCE QAS. The box below summarizes what they reported.

What survey respondents viewed as the greatest strengths and greatest challenges in their country's ECCE QAS

Greatest strengths

- Standards in place
- Decentralized systems allowing each area to create its own approach
- Strong national system with highly trained staff
- Buy-in on importance of ECCE at the highest government levels
- Multi-sector coordination and monitoring, evaluation, learning in place
- Legal frameworks in place

Greatest challenges

- Lack of resources and coordination within countries
- Inadequate ECCE QAS staff
- Poor enforcement of standards across *all* schools
- Standards not in place or do not cover all aspects of quality
- Not all ECCE facilities registered
- Inability to benchmark across countries and share best practices

Case studies

Morocco

Institutional structure. In Morocco, preschool is intended for children between 4 and 6 years; children's enrollment in preschool is often spread out over two years. There are a range of providers in Moroccan preschools, including private and public.

Goals and priorities. Morocco has several goals for the preschool system, beginning with making preschool available to all, and addressing the quality of preschool settings through a focus on teacher training and support and ensuring that preschools are available in rural and peri-urban settings. The long-term goal is to integrate preschools into primary schools. Morocco intends to focus on increasing the rate of enrollment of preschool over the next years, followed by adding three-year-old children into preschool by 2028. Morocco has identified three priorities as part of a logic model for improving preschool, each with specific indicators for tracking progress:

1. Ensure that preschool is equitable and inclusive
2. Guarantee adequate levels of quality across all types of preschools
3. Assure efficient governance and long-term financial sustainability of preschools.

Focusing on the QAS, the country has three primary goals for the near-term:

1. Establishing norms for quality standards, which are presently supported by documents outlining teacher competencies and pedagogical practices.
2. Designing mechanisms and tools for tracking quality practices, which is now underway with supervisors in action and an evaluation in process.
3. Defining mechanisms for improving quality, in partnership with several universities and other organizations.

Challenges. Representatives from Morocco have identified several challenges in reaching their goals, including: (1) lack of resources; (2) difficulty attaining stability in the early childhood workforce; (3) creating cohesive and integrated systems for training teachers; (4) need for effective and sustainable engagement of civil society organizations in preschool delivery; and (5) challenge in ensuring financial resources over time.

Seychelles

In Seychelles, early childhood education encompasses all children ages 0 to 7 years. Early childhood programs are divided into the following subgroups: in-home childcare services (childminding) for children ages 0–3; daycare centers for children ages 0–3; preschools (both private and public) for children ages 4–5; and Primary 1 and Primary 2 (both which include ECD-related programmatic elements) for children 6 and older.

Institutional structure. Seychelles' ECCE QAS is well established and can serve as a point of reference or opportunity for shared learning for other countries in the region interested in pursuing

such a system. There are two key agencies for monitoring the quality of ECE in Seychelles: The Institute of Early Childhood Development (IECD) and the Seychelles Qualifications Authority. The IECD works under the Ministry of Education and provides coordination, leadership, and strategic direction and ensures quality assurance for ECD at the national level. In particular, the IECD sets standards, grants registration to ECD centers, monitors compliance, provides short trainings for childminders, and acts as a coordinating entity to bring together different sectors. The SQA works with Primary 1 and Primary 2 facilities and is responsible for developing and implementing the qualifications framework for the national education system.

Policy dimensions. Several relevant policy dimensions within the Seychelles' ECCE QAS include the following.

- ***Legal frameworks*** that cover the various ECD subgroups:
  - Institute of ECD (IECD) Act (2014): Covers informal ECE quality assurance for ages 0 to 3;
  - Education Amendment Act (2017): Currently covers informal ECE quality assurance for ages 4 and 5; there is ongoing discussion as to which entity will be responsible for quality assurance for this age group in the future;
  - Seychelles Qualifications Authority Act (Revised 2021): Covers formal ECE quality assurance for ages 6 and 7 (PP1 and PP2); and
  - Seychelles Framework for ECCE (2011): Serves as a multisectoral policy document for all ECCE stakeholders.

- ***Quality standards***. These exist for:
  - 0-3 in-home childcare services (IECD Regulation on National Standards for Childminding (2016))
  - Daycare centers (Framework on National Standards for Center-based childminding services (2021))
  - Preschool (Non-formal ECE Centre Regulation (2005) and Guidelines on minimum facility standards for Education) *Being updated
  - P1 and P2 (National Qualifications Framework Regulation (for P1 and P2))

- ***Quality ECE programs*** and ***key documents*** have been developed to help guide the focus on quality, including these:
  - Seychelles National Curriculum and Assessment Framework;
  - The Seychelles Early Learning Framework (SELF) (2015);
  - Early Learning Programme for Day Care Centers (2018); and
  - Pilot Early Learning Programme for Home-based Child-minding Services (2021).

- ***Training and qualifications.*** The training and qualifications of providers, teachers, and childminders are a key part of the ECE QAS in Seychelles. There are multiple initial and ongoing programs and certifications to support this profession, according to the age groups of the children to be taught, including these:
  - Accreditation of Training by the Seychelles Qualifications Authority;
  - Certificate in Childcare and Development (0-3-year-old children);
  - Certificate in Education for Teacher Assistants (4-7-year-old children);

    - Advanced Diploma and Diploma in Early Childhood Education (4-7-year-old children); and
    - Ongoing professional development for childcare providers and teachers led by IECD and the Seychelles Institute of Teacher Education.

- ***Monitoring and evaluation.*** Monitoring and evaluation are key to measuring and ensuring the quality of ECE services. The Quality Assurance Authorities have developed monitoring inspection tools, and there is a strong collaborative effort among partners to make sure there is a strong emphasis on data management and the availability of data, including an assessment of children to make sure they have they needed skills to start primary school.

Challenges. Representatives from Seychelles have noted several challenges within their ECE QAS, including: (1) limited training and availability of qualified staff; (2) lack of systematic approach to collecting data; (3) a need for improved quality standards for ages 4 and 5 and for continuity between the standards for ages 0 to 3 and those for ages 4 and 5 and into early primary; (4) lack of financial resources; and (5) unregistered childcare services. Some of these challenges are currently being addressed. For example, the country is working on establishing a national ECD database to link all partners and improve data use to inform policy and programmatic elements.

Vision going forward. In moving forward, Seychelles has a vision for ongoing improvement to their QAS, which includes:

- Harmonizing the regulation and registration of all ECE services (both formal and informal);
- Establishing improved quality standards and inspection mechanisms for preschools (ages 4 and 5);
- Improving training and capacity building for ECCE professionals;
- Ensuring a common understanding of QAS at all levels (policy makers down to parents) and a shared commitment by ECCE sectors and partners to promote children's holistic development;
- Improving parental sensitization on the importance of accessing ECE;
- Developing an effective and easily accessible data management system;
- Using technology for monitoring tools, registering service providers, tracking financial assistance programs, and attaining the overall digitalization of processes;
- Achieving 60 percent of districts with well-equipped facilities to improve access;
- Achieving 75 percent of childcare providers and teachers trained in childcare; and
- Achieving 75 percent compliance with national standards across all centers (formal and informal).

It is Seychelles' vision that these elements will lead to overall improvement in the quality of ECE service provision, with the ultimate aim of at least 90 percent of children with the early learning skills needed to succeed in primary school.

Themes from Discussion With Stakeholders in Africa

We recently had the opportunity to share the results of the ECCE Quality Assurance System Survey and to learn from stakeholders across the African continent about emerging ground-level issues in this area. At a roundtable event co-hosted by ADEA's Inter-Country Quality Node on Early Childhood Development and Together for Early Childhood Evidence, nearly 100 representatives from governments, donors, NGOs, and research institutions across Africa joined to reflect on how countries can build effective QASs. The floor was opened for discussion to all participants so they could discuss their top priorities and areas needing support in establishing ECCE QAS within their own countries. Common themes that emerged were as follows.

Establishing Legal Frameworks is Critical

Countries are in different stages of establishing ECCE QAS. Some countries are still in the initial phase of convincing policy makers of the importance of investing in ECCE; others are establishing curriculum frameworks; others are in the process of professionalizing the ECCE workforce; while still others are more advanced in developing standards, quality assurance frameworks, and monitoring systems. It was a common understanding among discussants that the establishment of legal policies and quality frameworks by governments are key to move this agenda forward. Without legal frameworks in place—including standards, monitoring systems, and tools—QAS cannot be fully established and enforced in countries.

Training and Supporting Quality Teachers are Central to Quality

The need for investing in teachers was noted by almost every country representative as the top priority. Trained and motivated teachers are paramount for establishing quality ECCE. Country representatives noted the importance of establishing ongoing teacher training for ECCE teachers to ensure that they have the knowledge, skills, attitude and empowerment to be able to deliver quality ECCE. They shared suggestions for helping to improve teacher quality, such as developing internship programs or online "certification" programs (such as the one offered in Lesotho) – which would be easier to complete and achieve than a formal diploma process.

Country representatives also discussed the need for proper incentives and adequate pay to keep trained teachers in the workforce. In some countries, becoming an ECCE teacher is often perceived as a last resort when there are no other job opportunities available; when other choices are available, teachers leave due to the low salaries and little support and resources provided. Government representatives and other stakeholders were interested in learning from each other on the professionalization and incorporation of ECCE teachers in the workforce as well as establishing professional growth paths for teachers to keep them motivated to stay in the career.

Prioritizing Improvement Over Punitive Measures

Country representatives discussed the pros and cons of taking punitive measures when providers or centers do not meet the minimum standards. In contexts—such as in many African countries—where access to ECCE is already limited, taking the stance of punishing teachers or closing centers for not meeting the standards runs the risk of decreasing access even further (by discouraging families to send their children to preschools that eventually close and creating additional barriers for teachers- beyond the low pay most already receive.) Country representatives expressed that by only creating and enforcing standards, without providing adequate resources, materials, and teacher trainings, countries are not putting teachers and ECCE programs in a position to succeed. Countries need to find a balance, ensuring that quality standards are met without discouraging people from taking part in ECCE. They can do this by looking into incentives and coaching programs rather than punitive measures to meet quality assurance standards.

Building Data Systems as Part of QAS Can Result in Data to Inform Decision-making

Countries are at different phases of collecting and using ECCE data. Many countries are still figuring out how to register ECCE facilities and understand which services are being provided and where, especially given the informal landscape of ECCE provision in Africa and multiple private providers. Some countries have ECCE standards in place but no monitoring, while other countries have monitoring tools but have not updated standards. In many countries, data is not collected beyond minimum infrastructure health/safety compliance. Countries discussed the need for regular data collection, with a focus on quality-related data, and using data for informed decision-making. Government representatives and other stakeholders recognized that this is a long-term process and that it can take years to successfully establish these types of data systems and feedback loops.

QAS Investments Compete for Limited ECCE Funding

The establishment of ECCE QAS is not possible without adequate funding. Even when standards, curriculum, guidelines, and monitoring tools have been developed at the central level, without adequate funding, it is impossible to train on and use these resources and tools in the field as a means of improving quality. Many country representatives noted the lack of funding for ECCE, particularly when it comes to developing and implementing teacher training (noted as key to improving quality of ECCE) and including ECCE teachers in government teacher payroll.

Synergies Within Countries and Across the Region Help Identify and Spread Innovative Solutions

There is a need to bring together stakeholders within countries to better understand who is doing what and to better promote the ECD agenda. Stronger coordination between partners can result in enhanced advocating for governments to increase resource and funding mobilization and allocation for improving the quality of ECCE.

In addition, country representatives voiced the need and desire to learn from other countries; to continue building from the roundtable to share documents and resources on QASs. It is the goal of ADEA and ECD Measure to continuing building on this work to help encourage these relationships and collaboration within the region.

Recommendations: Way Forward

A strong QAS is essential for countries to ensure comprehensive and equitable learning and development in early childhood. Countries in Africa have made great progress in recent years in building their ECCE systems, but there remains much to be done to continue assuring quality of all ECCE facilities. Reflecting on the findings from the survey and the rich discussion with stakeholders across Africa, we outline several recommendations for governments and partners to continue the momentum of building strong and sustainable QAS for ECCE.

1. Ensure all stakeholders are clear on the content and structure of the QAS

It is important for all country stakeholders to engage in the content and structure of their QAS. Interestingly, in our survey, there were sometimes varying perspectives within countries about what did or did not exist in a country's own QAS. For example, one government representative would say that there was an existing system for monitoring, while another representative from the same government would say there is not. Agreeing on clear definitions about QAS components and the goals for a particular QAS is an important foundation on which to build.

2. Consider ways to include all ECCE providers in QAS.

Survey respondents noted the challenge in including all providers, especially private facilities. Establishing a registry with all providers can be a considerable undertaking, but is an essential building block of a functioning QAS. Liberia is conducting a pilot mapping exercise of ECCE facilities in selected counties, which will hopefully eventually be scaled to a nationwide registry of all public, private, community, and faith-based ECCE facilities in the country. Basic information on teachers, school, and a brief observational data on classroom quality will be collected through a partnership of the University of Liberia and the Ministry of Education. In South Africa, the government is conducting the first national ECD Census to develop a national database and understand the early childhood landscape across the country. In addition, South Africa has launched the Vangasali Campaign to crowdsource information about registered and unregistered ECD programs to feed into a national registry; the campaign uses a WhatsApp bot that allows programs to submit their data to the database. These efforts to establish registries of all types of ECCE providers in Liberia and South Africa are commendable steps in setting up a strong QAS.

3. Create tight data feedback loops between policy and practice.

Data can be used at each level of an ECCE system to influence change in behavior or decision-making. To effect change, monitoring data must be actionable and accessible at all levels:

- **National data feedback loops**. Less than 30 percent of survey respondents reported that monitoring/inspection data goes to a national database or report. At the national level, government ministries need ECCE monitoring data to understand the overall status of the system, track progress over time, and prioritize investments to areas most in need.
- **Data feedback loops with teachers.** When asked about how monitoring data were shared, very few survey respondents reported that monitoring data were provided directly to teachers. Yet, in the roundtable discussion, everyone agreed that QAS need to center around teachers. Countries should continue to think about ways to better support teachers within QAS. Empowering teachers to reflect on their practices by sharing quality monitoring information with them may be a good place to start. Countries can explore coaching models and other data-driven professional development approaches that support and empower teachers to improve their teaching practices.

4. Consider strategies to help improve the quality of facilities that aren't meeting standards without penalizing facilities or closing them down.

ECCE access and equity issues are still prevalent in most African countries. Given this, countries need to think about how to continue to support, rather than penalize, all ECCE facilities, as they may offer the only affordable childcare options for parents and be located in areas that are hard to reach.

5. Build capacity in quality assurance officers/inspectors on age-appropriate pedagogies and what "good quality" looks like for ECCE.

While there tends to be a common understanding of the structural aspects of quality included in QAS, there may be more variation about what good *process* quality is. It may be helpful for countries to continue to explore whether those who are monitoring (inspectors, quality assurance officers, education advisors, supervisors, etc.) are trained specifically in ECCE. In some cases, inspectors or quality assurance officers who are in charge of monitoring ECCE may not be specialized, and they may also be responsible for monitoring primary or secondary classrooms. It is important to keep in mind that "good" quality ECCE will look different from "good" quality primary or secondary. Inspectors or quality assurance officers should be trained in age-appropriate elements of process quality, including play-based teaching and learning, which leads to the best developmental outcomes for children. In short, ECCE quality looks different from quality at later educational stages, so inspectors need to be trained in a different way.

6. Develop easy-to-use monitoring tools that capture the important elements of quality.

Our survey indicated that in government preschools, 60 percent of respondents' countries are monitoring teacher-child interactions as well as children's access to materials, both of which are related to evidence-based practices that promote young children's learning. It may be helpful to dig deeper and understand exactly what and how these elements are being monitored. Effective QASs rely on observational tools conducted by outside observers who are trained to reliably administer tools in the same way. When designing monitoring tools, countries should consider measures that are feasible at

scale and capture specific evidence-based practices that are linked to improved learning and development for children. Tools like ECD Measure's Brief Early childhood Quality Inventory (BEQI)[2] may be a good resource. BEQI includes a checklist of evidence-based practices and is designed to be easy to train and amenable to monitoring systems.

7. Continue to exchange knowledge across countries within the region.

The recent roundtable discussion experience provided an opportunity for country delegations to learn from each other and exchange ideas about how to build strong QAS in their respective countries. There is a wealth of knowledge and varied experiences in Africa. The Together for Early Childhood consortium and ADEA provide outlets for collaboration among governments and partners in Africa to continue the collective momentum to build effective ECCE QAS.

[2] https://www.ecdmeasure.org/beqi/

References

Anderson, K., Raikes, A., Kosaraju, S., & Solano, A. (2017). *National Early Childhood Care and Education Quality Monitoring Systems.* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

Anderson, K., & Soonarane, M. (2021). *Guide on ECE Quality Assurance Systems for Africa.* Policy brief. Washington, DC: Research Technical Assistance Center.

Andrew, A., Attanasio, O., Bernal, R., Sosa, L. C., Krutikova, S., & Rubio-Codina, M. (2019). *Preschool Quality and Child Development.* Paper no. w26191. Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Avornyo, E. A., & Baker, S. (2018). The role of play in children's learning: the perspective of Ghanaian early years stakeholders. *Early Years*, 1-16.

Bidwell, K., & Watine, L. (2014). *Exploring Early Education Programs in Peri-Urban Settings in Africa*. New Haven, CT: Innovations for Poverty Action.

Britto, P. R., Lye, S. J., Proulx, K., Yousafzai, A. K., Matthews, S. G., Vaivada, T.,... & MacMillan, H. (2017). Nurturing care: Promoting early childhood development. *Lancet 389*(10064), 91-102. doi:10.1016/s0140-6736(16)31390-3

Cryer, D., Tietze, W., Burchinal, M., Leal, T., & Palacios, J. (1999). Predicting process quality from structural quality in preschool programs: A cross-country comparison. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 14(3), 339–361.

Elicker, J., & Ruprecht, K. (2019). Child care Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). In y. In C. P. Brown, M. B. M., & N. File (Eds.), *The Wiley handbook of early childhood care and education* (pp. 515-536). Wiley Blackwell.

GPE (Global Partnership for Education). (2019). *Strengthening Early Childhood Care and Education*. Washington, DC: Global Partnership for Education.

Gove, A., Brunette, T., Bulat, J., Carrol, B., Henny, C., Macon, W., Nderu, E., & Sitabkhan, Y. (2017). Assessing the impact of early learning programs in Africa. *New Directions For Child and Adolescent Development*, *2017*(158), 25–41. https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20224

Jensen, H., Pyle, A., Zosh, J. M., Ebrahim, H. B., Zaragoza Scherman, A., Reunamo, J., & Hamre, B. K. (2019). *Play Facilitation: The Science Behind the Art of Engaging Young Children.* White paper, the LEGO Foundation, DK.

McCoy, D. C., & Wolf, S. (2018). Changes in classroom quality predict Ghanaian preschoolers' gains in academic and social-emotional skills. *Developmental Psychology 54*(8), 1582. doi:10.1037/dev0000546

Myers, R.G. (2004). Search of quality in programs of early childhood care and education. Background paper for *Education for All, Global Monitoring Report 2005.* Paris: UNESCO. www.unesco.org/education/gmr_download/references_2005.pdfS

OECD. (2015), *Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care.* Paris: OECD Publishing. doi:10.1787/9789264233515-en.

Piper, B., Merseth, K. A., & Ngaruiya, S. (2018). Scaling up early childhood development and education in a devolved setting: Policy making, resource allocations, and impacts of the Tayari school readiness program in Kenya. *Global Education Review 5*(2), 47-68.

Raikes, A., Koziol, N., Davis, D., & Burton, A. (2020). Measuring quality of preprimary education in sub-Saharan Africa: Evaluation of the Measuring Early Learning Environments scale. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly 53,* 571–585.

Raikes, A., Neumann, M., & Burton, A. (2019). *Quality Standards and Quality Assurance Systems for Pre-Primary Education*. New York: UNICEF.

Raikes, A., Sayre, R., & Davis, D. (2021). Mini-review on capacity-building for data-driven early childhood systems: The Consortium for Pre-primary Data and Measurement in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Frontiers in Public Health* 8, 595821.

Rao, N., Sun, J., Chen, E. E., & Ip, P. (2017). Effectiveness of early childhood interventions in promoting cognitive development in developing countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Hong Kong Journal of Pediatrics 22*(1), 14-25.

Tang, J., Hallam, R. A., Francis, J., & Sheffler, K. (2020). Exploring the relationship between quality rating and improvement system supports and global quality in family child care. In *Child & Youth Care Forum* (Vol. 49, No. 6, pp. 893-914). Springer US.

UNICEF (2019). *Defining, Monitoring and Improving Quality: Guidelines for Stronger Quality Assurance Systems in Early Childhood Education*. New York: UNICEF.

Yoshikawa, H., Wuermli, A. J., Raikes, A., Kim, S., & Kabay, S. B. (2018). Toward high-quality early childhood development programs and policies at national scale: Directions for research in global contexts. *Social Policy Report 31*(1), 1-36.