



MAKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORK FOR ECD

On 24 March, Real Reform for ECD hosted a webinar titled *Getting ECD into Integrated Development Plans (IDP) is possible: lessons from the sector*. The objective of the webinar was to learn from people in the sector who have already had some success in working with local municipalities to prioritise Early Childhood Development (ECD) in local government Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and budgets.

This document is a summary of some of the key lessons learned during the webinar, with the addition of insights from Jacqueline Saaiman from Lima Rural Development who was interviewed separately. The common themes which emerged from the experiences shared were; the importance of collaboration between all stakeholders, education of municipal officials about the importance of ECD and their role, building long-lasting relationships with municipal officials, utilising the legal framework to prioritise ECD and setting up multi-stakeholder forums and task teams.

These lessons and common themes can be repurposed as learning material for ECD forums, ECD practitioners or organisations working towards getting ECD in IDPs or wanting to work with municipalities.

1. Project Preparation Trust (PPT)

PPT is an organisation that specialises in developmental projects and initiatives for disadvantaged communities and special needs groups. It works closely with communities, government, donors and civil society organisations to prepare and manage projects at scale, develop policies and strategies and to innovate based on real-world experience.

PPT assists municipalities with area based surveys, the assessment of Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres, improvement plans to address health and safety hazards and / or unblock centre registration challenges. It facilitates multi-stakeholder collaboration, assists municipalities with ECD infrastructure pipelines for inclusion in the Integrated Development Plans (IDP) and budgets, assists with the roll out of national ECD infrastructure programmes, the adoption of a more developmental approach in dealing with ECD bylaw, land use / town planning matters and the development of a typical ECD sector plan for municipalities.

Liesel Du Plessis - Project Manager for PPT - said the organisation has worked closely with eight municipalities over four years. In explaining why it is important to partner with municipalities, she said municipal involvement creates a sense of ownership and longevity beyond the impact that NGOs can make. It is more sustainable to work with local governments.

Furthermore, Du Plessis said local governments allow for the legal environment to do the work that is required. She said local government is mandated by the Constitution and the municipal legislation to perform four key functions:



MAKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORK FOR ECD

1. Multi-stakeholder coordination
2. Planning and budgeting
3. Infrastructure
4. Regulation and compliance issues

These functions are critical for the development of ECD. She said municipalities are autonomous when it comes to these four functions, which means national and provincial governments have little say. It would not be helpful to direct programmes or advocacy to the national and provincial government.

That being said, Du Plessis emphasised that in order for local governments to understand their roles and responsibilities, national and provincial governments need to give them a mandate. Despite ECD being a national priority, Du Plessis said many of the local government officials do not know this or do not know the role that they need to play because there has been no direction from the national and provincial government on ECD.

Another important aspect of getting local governments to prioritise ECD is to form long lasting relationships with municipal officials, said Du Plessis. She said PPT first started by identifying the key role players in the municipality who were responsible for ECD and introducing the organisation to the municipal managers and other relevant officials.

After establishing these relationships PPT was able to assist the municipality with surveys, reports and presentations that helped them to understand the ECD sector with supported data. She used an example of a report in 2017 that PPT helped put together for eThekweni municipality and in the process, PPT was able to request specific resolutions to be taken. The report was done in collaboration with the municipality and allowed PPT to continue working with their full support.

Another avenue PPT used was the district municipality multi-stakeholder ECD forums that are set up by the Department of Social Development (DSD). All stakeholders are represented on this forum including NGOs, ECD forums and government departments. But Du Plessis said these forums could consist of up to 100 people which means there isn't an opportunity for deep and meaningful discussions with the government. In eThekweni, Du Plessis said a municipal multi-stakeholder steering committee was set up to address this issue. This is a smaller, more workable committee.

The biggest challenge that PTT has faced is not having access to municipal officials that have decision-making power which often frustrates and slows down the process. The other issue is that municipal officials are not clear on their roles and responsibilities pertaining to ECD.

PTT conducted the first assessment of 53 IDPs and none of them mentioned ECD being a national priority or the ECD policy. Du Plessis said most municipal officials do not know these policies exist which makes it difficult to convince them that ECD is important.



MAKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORK FOR ECD

If more education and direction came from national and provincial governments, municipal officials would be aware of these policies.

Following PTT's assessment of the IDPs, Du Plessis said the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) has taken over the yearly assessment of IDPs, recognising that it is a national priority. Other reforms proposed are scrapping the need for an architect for building plans of ECD centres and waiving fees for land use by ECD centres.

Du Plessis advised Real Reform for ECD (RR4ECD) to keep an eye on the national ECD sector plan and ensure that it is implemented as part of its advocacy.

2. Grassroots Educare Trust

Grassroots Educare Trust (Grassroots) is a 40-year-old training and development non-governmental organisation that provides accredited training to qualify as educators and fully fledged teachers. The organisation currently has ten training programmes developed with 250 principals who are registered with the Department of Social Development (DSD). This training is aimed at empowering women in the ECD sector. The organisation works in informal settlements, towns and farms in the Western Cape. The education districts it works in include West Coast, Metro North, Metro East and the Cape Winelands.

Mareldia Tape, the Executive Director of Grassroots, shared the organisation's experience with partnering with local governments. She said the objective of working with local governments is to ensure compliance regarding safety of children, teachers and parents as well as registration of ECD centres so they can access the child subsidy. Working on both of these issues ensures that both the organisation and local governments' objectives in the ECD sector are met.

Tape said the first step was to establish who the responsible municipal officials for ECD were and introduce Grassroots and the team to them. She said the organisation had joint meetings with relevant stakeholders in the municipalities that deal with ECD such as town planners, land surveyors and ward councillors, among others. These meetings were important to establish and understand each individual's role and keep the boundaries clear. This also helped in sharing the responsibility and creating a sense of ownership from all parties involved.

Tape emphasised the importance of building strong relationships with local government officials. Part of this process of relationship building includes face-to-face meetings with officials as opposed to telephonic conversations. These relationships need to be based on respect, communication, transparency, adherence to timeframes and punctuality.

She used an example of how Grassroot's strong relationships with municipalities allowed them to step in and provide a database of ECD centres for food and PPE distribution to ECD centres during Covid.



MAKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORK FOR ECD

Municipal officials also need to have direct access to ECD practitioners and centres to hear their needs and concerns. Tape said this can be done through setting up ECD forums that municipal officials can be a part of. The numbers of children affected if municipalities do not come to the party can be made clear by ECD practitioners.

Tape said the biggest challenge was the slow turn around time of municipalities. She said by the time progress has been made, children have left ECD centres and have not received the nutritional support they need. She said the interpretation and understanding of the legislation differs from one municipal official to the next which also slows down the process.

A hindrance to forming long-term relationships with municipal officials is that officials are constantly being replaced or moved to different departments.

Tape advised RR4ECD to be knowledgeable about the information in the IDPs and filter this information down to ECD centres as they are not getting this information from their municipalities. She also said ECD practitioners should be encouraged to become members of ECD forums.

3. Ubunye Foundation/Real Reform 4 ECD

Real Reform for ECD is a movement advocating for holistic, well-funded, inclusive and quality early childhood development services for all children. The focus is to ensure an enabling legal, policy and regulatory environment for the provision and expansion of ECD services. The second phase of the Make Local Government Work For ECD campaign focused on getting ECD into the municipalities' Integrated Development Plans (IDP).

Mzi Badi, Programme Lead for Ubunye Foundation and member of the RR4ECD Steering Committee, gave some insight into the strategies used to work with local governments. Badi said RR4ECD developed a toolkit that provided ECD forums and practitioners on the steps to take to get ECD into municipalities' IDPs. RR4ECD proceeded to go around the country to various ECD forums and train ECD practitioners on this toolkit. Badi said the ECD forums had a generally positive response to the toolkit workshops and found them to be helpful in learning how to make submissions into their municipality's IDP.

In some instances, RR4ECD made verbal and written submissions with the ECD forums on the IDPs. He made an example of a submission made at Ngqushwa Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape. He said the engagements with the local municipalities were not always easy because officials did not understand the importance of ECD and often thought it was not their mandate. In one of the IDP meetings, the Chief Financial Officer of a municipality said it would not consider ECD to be included in the budget because they were not given a mandate.

Badi said he had to be assertive about the roles and responsibilities local government is supposed to play by drawing on the legal framework.



MAKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORK FOR ECD

He said it was the duty of organisations in the ECD sector to educate officials about the importance of ECD and the legal framework that provides for it.

That being said, Badi said the relationship needs to remain amicable as we need municipal officials to become champions of ECD. He said the impression that we are against municipalities should not be created - instead we need to form working and functional relationships.

He advised anyone in the ECD sector wanting to work with local governments to familiarise themselves with the legal framework and ECD policies because municipal officials often do not have this information.

4. Lima Rural Development

In 2019, Lima Rural Development was appointed as an implementing agent for the Do More Foundation (DMF) in the Breede Valley Municipality in the Western Cape. Lima forms part of a multi-disciplinary team that runs workshops that introduce the concept of the First Thousand Days (FTD) and supports Early Childhood Development (ECD) through skills development for ECD practitioners and on-going information sharing, as well as supporting the distribution of nutrition and early learning resources.

Jacqueline Saaiman is a Development Practitioner for Lima Foundation. Speaking about the work the organisation has done in the community particularly around ECD, she highlighted the importance of collaboration across all relevant stakeholders in the ECD sector, including the municipality. In Breede Valley, Saaiman said there were three main points of collaboration with the municipality namely the Young Child Forum, the ECD Task Team and the First 1000 Days Forum.

The Young Child Forum consists of about 60 - 80 people including representatives from NGOs, the municipality's Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Social Development (DSD) and ECD principals. The focus here is to get ECD centres DSD compliant, prioritise infrastructure development and capacity building for ECDs and the municipality.

The ECD Task Team was set up in 2019 and consists of representatives from grassroots NGOs, the municipality's DOH and DSD, Fire Department and the Community Development Unit, amongst others. The task team was established to ensure that ECD is prioritised in the municipality and it is constantly on the radar. Saaiman said the focus of the task team shifted at the beginning of the pandemic to food and PPE distribution and it has been difficult to shift the focus back to ECD. That being said, Saaiman said the relationship with the municipality still remains strong.

The First 1000 Days forum is a smaller forum consisting of 22 people and is co-convened by the municipality's DoH.



MAKE LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORK FOR ECD

The forum was created to identify gaps in the first 1000 days and provide support to fill these gaps. One of these gaps identified is to provide more sustainable and nutritious food for young children.

Saaiman said getting the involvement of the municipality, and in some cases getting it to play a leadership role, was possible because of the relationship that was built over time. She said relationship-building with staff in the municipality was key and part of this was ensuring that the municipality is consistently informed about what the organisation is doing and the progress it has made.

She said it is important to note that the municipality has very little capacity to cover the amount of work it needs to do. In Breede Valley, Saaiman said there are only two operational units to address everything which means they are often overwhelmed and understaffed. This is why it is important to view it as an opportunity for partnership rather than solely the municipality's responsibility.

Saaiman said the recent success of getting ECD included in the Breede Valley's 2022 - 2027 IDP was testament to the importance of collective action through Real Reform for ECD's Make Local Government Work for ECD as well as the partnership with the Do More Foundation. Through the campaign, they collectively mobilised the candidate who was running for councillor to think more about ECD. She said it was helpful that they could leverage the elections to bring ECD to the forefront.

The biggest issue around ECD in the municipality was access to land. The IDP acknowledges that making space for ECD is the municipality's responsibility and says that a process of identifying plots/land for ECD must be done across all wards and communities in conjunction with DSD and the ECD Forums. The IDP also says the application form must be designed to speed up the process. It says an education/awareness drive must be done in communities on how to start an ECD centre and an ECD summit must be held annually.

Saaiman said these inclusions in the IDP would not have been possible without the various departments who sit on the forums, the NGOs, campaigns, ECD practitioners and principals and other stakeholders who have worked collaboratively for years before this. She said it is necessary for all these stakeholders to work together and support each other to get ECD included in municipalities IDPs.