A systems-based approach to promoting early childhood development through health and nutrition services in Ethiopia and Kenya

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The conceptual framework

Promoting early childhood development (ECD) through health and nutrition services requires a systems-based approach that emphasizes government ownership and long-term sustainability.

**Integrate ECD content into national and subnational policies, guidelines, plans, and strategies**

**Strengthen coordination and resourcing of ECD-supportive interventions**

**Reinforce ECD content in workforce capacity-building curricula (both pre- and in-service)**

**Integrate relevant indicators into surveys and government reporting systems**

**Build capacity of service providers through training and mentoring**

**Social and behavior change communication through interpersonal and mass media**

**Improved caregiving practices and child development outcomes**

**Government buy-in and ownership**
Integrate ECD content into national and subnational policies, guidelines, plans, and strategies

• Key health and nutrition guidelines, and tools have modified to integrate previously missing ECD content—e.g., the National Guideline for Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition in Kenya, Integrated Management of Newborn and Childhood Illness (IMNCI) booklet and training modules in Ethiopia, and the implementation guideline on the Expanded Program on Immunization in Ethiopia

• Foundational policy documents have been developed or revised to include ECD promotion as a core policy pillar—e.g., the Early Childhood Care and Education policy framework, the National Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Development, and the National Child Survival and Development Strategy in Ethiopia; and the Neonatal, Child, and Adolescent Health Policy in Kenya

• In Kenya, the Integrated ECD Policy is being revised to incorporate meaningful content on ECD for children 0–3 years and the role of the health sector in delivering such services

• The Mother & Child Health Booklet in Kenya has been revised to incorporate developmental monitoring and counseling as a key component of routine well-baby services
Strengthen coordination and resourcing of ECD-supportive interventions

• **ECD technical working groups** have been established at national (Ethiopia and Kenya) and subnational (Kenya) levels

• Promotion of developmental monitoring and counseling as part of routine health and nutrition services has been **included in government budgets and work plans** at national and subnational levels

• In Kenya’s Siaya County, Smart Start Siaya—an innovative **multisectoral effort led by the Governor and First Lady**—has brought together relevant ministries and implementing partners to harmonize planning, coordination, implementation, and monitoring of services that promote ECD

• The **County First Ladies Association** in Kenya has identified ECD as a priority area and individual county first ladies are spearheading efforts to promote ECD through health, nutrition, and other services in their respective counties
Reinforce ECD content in workforce capacity-building curricula (both pre- and in-service)

- Developmental monitoring and counseling has been included in the Integrated Refresher Training materials for health extension workers in Ethiopia.

- In Kenya, a new child development module has been incorporated into the standard pre-service/in-service training curriculum for community health volunteers (CHVs).

- In Kenya, efforts are underway to develop and pilot child development module(s) for inclusion in pre-service training curricula for facility-level health service providers.
Integrate relevant indicators into surveys and government reporting systems

• In Kenya, a new indicator—number of children with suspected developmental delays—has been integrated into several standard government reporting tools, thereby ensuring that child development is tracked as part of health management information systems

• In Ethiopia, data reporting registers for antenatal care, postnatal care, immunization, HIV, IMNCI, nutrition, and neonatal intensive care have been revised to include ECD content

• In Ethiopia, for the first time, the ongoing Demographic & Health Survey will include ECD content—e.g., portion of children with playthings at home, portion of children experiencing violent discipline, portion of children receiving adequate care, etc.
Build capacity of service providers through training and mentoring

- A training of trainers approach is used to strengthen capacity locally and promote ECD through routine facility- and community-level health and nutrition services.

- ECD content integrated into each service area typically includes: monitoring child development, counseling the caregiver on responsive caregiving and age-appropriate stimulation, making a referral in case of any suspected developmental delay, and (optionally) screening and counseling for caregiver mental health.

- In addition, playbox sessions in health facility waiting areas make them more child-friendly and provide an additional opportunity to counsel caregivers.
Developmental monitoring and counseling through routine health facility services

Photo: Conrad N. Hilton Foundation/Joop Rubens
Developmental monitoring and counseling integrated into home visits

Photo: Conrad N. Hilton Foundation/Joop Rubens
Play sessions in health facility waiting areas

Photo: PATH
All health facilities and CHVs in Kenya’s Siaya County and half of all health facilities in Addis Ababa are providing integrated ECD services—reaching an unprecedented level of scale.
Social and behavior change communication through interpersonal and mass media

- Simple materials such as posters and short sets of counseling cards are designed to allow for seamless integration of developmental monitoring and counseling into existing health and nutrition touchpoints.

- Radio spots (Ethiopia) and community-produced videos (Kenya) have been used to promote responsive caregiving and age-appropriate stimulation.
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A pyramid approach ensures appropriate dosage and targeting of ECD support at different touch-points

- **Increase in dosage and intensity of ECD content**
  - Developmental monitoring and light-touch ECD counseling for general population
- **Decrease in client volumes**
  - Specialized support for children with confirmed delays
  - More intensive support and referrals for children at risk
  - Physiotherapy, mental health services
  - Community-based rehabilitation through CHWs or disability organizations
  - PMTCT/HIV-exposed infant services
  - Management of acute malnutrition
  - Sick child visits
  - Pediatric ward
  - Home visits and parenting groups (targeted)
  - Antenatal and postnatal care
  - Well-baby clinic (growth monitoring and immunizations)
  - Waiting room play sessions
  - Home visits (general)
  - Mass media (video and community radio)