

Key note address by Minister of Social Development, Ms Bathabile Dlamini, at the launch of the South African Child Gauge 2013, Cape Town

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Ladies and gentlemen;

Good evening,

Firstly I would like to thank the Children's Institute and the University of Cape Town for giving me the opportunity to address this important occasion of the launch of the South African Child Gauge, 2013 edition.

The work that you do to monitor the status of children in our country is an important contribution to the work we are all faced

with to guarantee a prosperous future for our country by investing in the development of our children.

The theme of this year's Child Gauge report is of particular interest to us because it focuses on essential services for young children, which the Department of Social Development prioritises highly under its promotion of ECD's agenda!

Ladies and gentlemen

You will recall that the ruling party, the African National Congress, took a decision in 2007 at its Polokwane Conference to develop a comprehensive strategy on early childhood development. In 2012, taking its cue from the findings of the Planning Commission's Diagnostic Report, the ANC took a resolution in its 53rd National Conference to accelerate the implementation of the Comprehensive Early Childhood Development Programme.

Further, and most important, the 53rd National Conference resolved that we must ensure a universal provision of essential services for the first 4 years of the young child's life. The Department of Social Development was tasked to take a lead in this area of work.

The Department of Social Development has over the years worked and consulted with a number of stakeholders to take forward these resolutions. In March 2012 we hosted the National Conference on Early Childhood Development which resolved, in line with the ANC resolutions, to universalise the provision of early childhood development services in South Africa.

In April 2012, the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation coordinated the Diagnostic Review of the Early Childhood Development. The Diagnostic Review report made key policy findings on early childhood development and helped to further shape the work of government in delivering early childhood development services.

We have also, together with our stakeholders, undertaken a review of the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development.

Through all these efforts, we have developed the South African Integrated Programme of Action for Early Childhood Development – Moving Ahead (2013-2018). The key aim of the integrated plan is to bring greater synergy and coordination to current government programmes undertaken by various departments in the area of early childhood development. The

integrated plan is primarily aimed at giving the children of our country the best start in life by building a solid foundation of physical, emotional, psychosocial, cognitive, and healthy development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Within the South African context, early childhood development has the potential to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty and inequality and enhance the country's development trajectory. Current discrepancies in access to and quality of early childhood development need to be addressed by prioritising services for children living in poor urban and rural communities, and those with disabilities.

In order to support the functions of the existing National Inter-departmental Committee for Early Childhood Development, I am in a process of establishing the Forum of Deputy Director-Generals to provide strategic guidance and oversight for the implementation of the ECD Action Plan.

As part of implementing the ECD Action Plan, the country will have a new ECD Policy and programmes to scale up the delivery of quality services. The new ECD Policy will provide guidance on removal of service delivery bottlenecks,

particularly in the area of human resource development, funding and institutional arrangement.

The early childhood development programmes will prioritise accelerated delivery of a package of essential services for the first 1,000 days of life as well as for children up to the school going age.

The Department of Social Development is in the process of establishing mechanisms for all stakeholders to contribute to the preparation of this new policy and programmes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Appropriate funding models for ECDs are important because greater investment in infrastructure and human resources is needed to ensure quality and equitable access. Government currently subsidises ECD centres at a rate of R15 per child per day. Fifty percent of the R15.00 is utilised for nutritional needs of the child, 30 percent contributes to the salaries of the ECD practitioners and support staff and 20 percent is utilised for stimulation material and administrative costs

During the 2012/2013 financial year the Department of Social Development and its numerous partners increased the number of children accessing early childhood programmes up to school-going age by 15%. In accordance with the Children's Act We will endeavour to double our efforts in the coming years.

To this end, the Department of Social Development is currently conducting an audit of early childhood development centres to obtain information on the nature and extent of early childhood development provisioning, services, resources and infrastructure in order to inform and support on-going policy and planning initiatives.

We must stress that the purpose of audit is not to close down any centres, but to assist those that do not meet the required norms and standards through capacity building

Dear stakeholders

We urge you, especially in those of you in the private sector, to join hands with us by adopting an ECD centre and secure the needed resources through the "Adopt-an-ECD" Campaign run by the National Development Agency. Our aim as government

is that every ward in the country must have at least one early childhood centre.

Programme Director

As I conclude, allow me to stress that provision of early childhood development services requires a common understanding, shared commitment, and united action across public and private sectors as well as civil society.

The government of the ruling party chooses to prioritize universal provision of early childhood development services. We do so, because we understand that the maximisation of livelihood of the human life cycle requires a heavy investment in the early childhood phase. Such an investment guarantees a better start in life which can translate to improved health, proper nutrition, early learning and improved cognitive development.

We can thus further our vision of improving the quality of our services to young children knowing that we are creating a society that facilitates human development. In doing so we need to let pessimism give way to optimism, despair give way to hope, services for a few give way to services to all our young children.

I thank you.