

National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development

Acknowledgements

DRAFT

Abbreviations and Acronyms

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPO	Child Rights Promotion Officer
CS	Children's Secretariat
DCC	District Coordination Committee
DO	Development Officer
Div. CC	Divisional Coordination Committee
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECI	Early Childhood Interventions
EFA	Education for All
FHB	Family Health Bureau
IEC	Information Education and Communication
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organizations
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MIS	Management Information System
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoH	Ministry of Health
MOH	Medical Officer of Health
MSEW	Ministry of Social Empowerment and Welfare
MWCA	Ministry of Women and Child Affairs
NCC	National Coordination Committee
NCPA	National Child Protection Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
PC	Provincial Councils
PCC	Provincial Coordination Committee

PHDT	Plantation Human Development Trust
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNISEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VCDC	Village Child Development Committees
WDO	Women Development Officer

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1. Introduction

Significance of early years as a period that lays the foundation for a child's future is well documented. Convincing evidence from neurological studies also show how early experiences play a pivotal role in the development of the brain. As the brain develops, children learn to cope up with the realities of the environment from a very early age. Therefore, the environment to which children are exposed during the early years is crucial for their development.

There is also a globally emerging realization supported by research evidence that investment in quality early childhood care and development (ECCD) programmes yield a high rate of return. As a result, ECCD is increasingly gaining prominence as an investment that promotes sustainable economic growth through human capital development. Awareness of the importance attached to ECCD has resulted in increasing services and programmes provided for young children.

ECCD encompasses all essential supports of health, nutrition, education, social services, care and protection provided to all children with special emphasis on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. The Government of Sri Lanka regards it as equally important in the development of social capital which contributes to the achievement of country's development goals. The National Policy introduced in the year 2004 which ensure support unities for every Sri Lankan child to learn and develop in a nurturing environment that supports him/her to reach maximum potential shows the Government's commitment to ECCD. The present National Policy on ECCD reaffirms the commitment expressed in the National Policy, 2004.

1.1. Background

Sri Lanka is an early achiever of most of the indicators in Millennium Development Goals¹ and is among the countries in the high human development category (Human Development Report, 2016). These achievements are outcomes of the provision of free education from grade 1 to university level, universal health care services and numerous other welfare programmes implemented in the country. Despite these impressive achievements various gaps could be found in relation to child development.

The population of children from birth to 5 years in Sri Lanka is 1,743,780 (Census, 2012). Prevalence of stunting, wasting and underweight (13.1%, 19,6% and 23.5% respectively) among these children indicate that malnutrition is a matter of concern². In relation to early childhood

¹Nanayakkara W. MDG Country Report, 2014, Institute for Policy Studies of Sri Lanka

²National Micro Nutrient Survey, 2012 https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/MNS_Report-28.02.2013.pdf

education, data show that the access to early childhood education (ECE) is lower than the access to formal education (97%³). Provision of access to center based ECE for children between 3-4

years and 4-5 years is 44.9% and 86.6% respectively (Department of Census and Statistics 2012⁴). Even though the figures between the ages 3-5 show that a 65% of the child population has access to ECE, irregular attendance has been identified as a concern. Poor parental awareness, terrain difficulties, poverty, and lack of early childhood intervention (ECI) services for children with special needs including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged have contributed towards most of these concerns. The quality of ECE also has been affected by issues such as inequality and inadequacy of resources, untrained teachers and failure to adhere to stipulated standards.

Policy Context

The constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka has stated that the State shall promote with special care the interests of children and youth, so as to ensure their full development, physical, mental, moral, religious and social, and to protect them from exploitation and discrimination (Chapter VI, Article 27[13]). Furthermore, Sri Lanka is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the General Comments No. 7 of the CRC (2006) specifically deals with ECCD. Subsequent to the CRC the Government introduced the Charter on the Rights of the Child in 1992 which indicates that, Sri Lanka, has recognized children as right holders. In addition, Sri Lanka has become a party to World Declaration for Education for All (EFA) Goals (1990) which was reaffirmed in Dakar Framework of Action (2000) and Moscow Framework for Action (2010), the Millennium Development Goals (MDG, 2000), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Colombo Statement on Children of South Asia (2010) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG, 2015) the new global development agenda officially known as “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

The first EFA goal directly focuses on the education of children in early childhood and the first three of the MDG goals are linked to mother and child. The SAARC Colombo Statement refers to inclusive child friendly family focused services integrating parental support systems, social justice to children with disabilities and their parents and better psychosocial development and adjustment to formal school. The SGD recognizes the role of quality early childhood care and development programmes and services in achieving at least seven of its goals on no poverty, no hunger, health, education, gender, water and sanitation, and reduced inequality.

³The World Bank Group 2016 <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.NENR?locations=SY>

⁴ TableA27: Population aged 3 to 34 years engaged in educational activities by single years of age, sex and sector

The National Policy on ECCD, 2004 is the first Government policy initiative that focused on the holistic development of children aged 0-5 years. This age range has been adopted based on the children's age of entry to formal education in Sri Lanka.⁵ Its vision was to ensure the right of every Sri Lankan child to start life healthy, be nurtured in a safe, caring and stimulating environment, that enables him or her to be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, socially competent and intellectually able to learn (Vision statement of the National Policy on ECCD, page 11⁶). The approach of the national policy on ECCD, 2004 is inclusive and the vision is holistic and integrated⁷.

Although not exclusively for ECCD, National Child Health and Maternal Policy, National Policy for Disability for Sri Lanka and Draft National Policy for Child Protection are supportive policy initiatives that also cover children in early childhood. In addition to the policy initiatives, there are numerous other government programmes and services related to health and nutrition of young children and pregnant mothers as well as care and protection of children in the early childhood. In the task of implementing ECCD related policies, programmes and services, the Government is supported by international agencies, international and local non-governmental organizations (INGOs and NGOs) as well as private sector organizations.

The abovementioned specifics as well as issues related to quality aspects of the services delivered to children in early childhood and the global developments and agendas such as SDGs, local changes in the administrative sphere and gaps identified during the implementation process demand revisiting and upgrading the existing Policy on ECCD. Therefore, the National Policy on ECCD, 2018 is introduced envisioning a better integration of all services (health, education, social services, child care and child protection, children with disability) and all sectors (Government, INGOs, NGOs and Private sector organizations) related to ECCD to implement an improved operational mechanism at all levels.

⁵Definitions of early childhood vary in different countries and regions, according to local traditions and the organization of primary school systems. In some countries, the transition from preschool to school occurs soon after 4 years old. In other countries, this transition takes place at around 7 years old. In its consideration of rights in early childhood, the Committee wishes to include all young children: at birth and throughout infancy; during the preschool years; as well as during the transition to school. Accordingly, the Committee proposes as an appropriate working definition of early childhood the period below the age of 8 years; States parties should review their obligations towards young children in the context of this definition. Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/GC/7/Rev 1, 20 September 2006 page

⁶Ministry of Social Welfare and Women Empowerment (2004) *National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development*

⁷The World Bank Group 2014, *Laying Foundation for Early Childhood Education in Sri Lanka*. Human Development Unit South Asia Region,

Institutional context

The Children's Secretariat functioning under the Ministry of **Women and Child Affairs** (MWCA) is the key institution mandated for ECCD. The Children's Secretariat (CS) was established in 1979 to commemorate the International Year of the Child. At present it is mandated for formulation of policies and for conducting programmes for early childhood care and development with the objective of fostering a physically and mentally healthy child, coordinating activities with the provincial level committees and monitoring and follow-up plans.

Health services provided to children in Sri Lanka are free and implemented through the Ministry of Health (MoH) and provincial health services which comprise a network of medical institutions under Medical Officers of Health and Family Health Officers (Public Health Midwives). This network ensures the provision of quality child care services island-wide at both field and institutional settings. Sri Lanka has achieved relatively a high status of health care as observed by the low level of infant, child and maternal mortality and high immunization coverage⁸.

Family Health Bureau (FHB) and the Nutrition Coordination Division of the Ministry of Health are involved in ECCD programmes in the Health sector. FHB is the focal point of maternal and child health. It has an ECCD and Special needs Unit. Nutrition Coordination Division of the Ministry of health is geared to monitor all nutrition related activities in the country and carries out its own activities such as formulation of food based guidelines.

Among the Key national institutions related to education is EFA Branch of the Ministry of Education. It coordinates all the activities related to Education for All Goals of which ECCD is the first goal. The National Education Commission established under the National Education Commission Act No. 19, 1991 is mandated to make recommendations to the President, on educational policy which includes preschool education as well (Articles 2 [2] and 8 [a]). The National Institute of Education conducts preschool teacher training programmes.

The 13th Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka (1987) by Article 154G (1) has devolved the subject of preschool education to Provincial Councils (PCs). This has empowered the PCs to make necessary legislation for supervision and management of preschools. As a result, most of the Provincial Councils have passed statutes on preschool education/ECCD and all of them have established Authorities/Bureaus/Units for ECCD/preschool education. However, education provided to children in early childhood is primarily a private sector concern.

⁸UNICEF (2011) Annual Report for Sri Lanka. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/srilanka/SLCO_annual_report_2011.pdf

1.2. Scope

The National Policy on ECCD, 2018, primarily focuses on all children in Sri Lanka from conception to admission age to grade one in the formal school. The policy provides an overall framework for health and nutrition, education, social services, care and protection and services for all children within the age range stated above. ECCD interventions are multifaceted due to the nature of child development which consists of interdependent dimensions. Therefore, ECCD is a shared responsibility among Ministry In charge of the Subject Child Affairs and relevant key Ministries, Provincial Ministries, Departments and other state institutions involved with children in early childhood. The policy document consists of Guiding Principles, Vision and mission Statements Key objectives, Areas for action, Strategies and policy implementation framework. The content of the policy is expected to be incorporated within broader action plans of the public agencies and other development partners responsible for wellbeing of children in early childhood including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. The approach adopted in this policy is integrated and multi-sectoral.

1.3. Definition of the Key terms

Early childhood is internationally known as the period from conception to eight years of age. However, age range of this definition varies in different countries. This policy defines early childhood as the period from conception to the age of school admission in Sri Lanka which is 5 years.

Care is defined as integrated set of actions that ensure children's health, nutrition, protection, and their psycho-social and cognitive aspects of development.

Development is the process of qualitative change in the child that enables her/him to master increasingly complex levels of moving, thinking, feeling and interacting with people and objects.

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)

ECCD is defined as essential supports of health, nutrition, education, social services, care and protection provided to children in early childhood especially to most vulnerable and disadvantaged

Most vulnerable and disadvantaged children

Most vulnerable and disadvantaged children include children who are orphans, abused and neglected children, children without families, refugees, children with disability, street children

and children living in extreme poverty⁹. Children in the early childhood who live in prisons with their mothers also belong to this category.

Centre based early childhood education

Centre based early childhood education is defined as education that children in early childhood receive in a place organized to provide developmentally appropriate learning experiences. It focuses on holistic development of the child and promotes child's readiness for learning.

Child Friendly Spaces

Child friendly spaces are defined as temporary (provisional/ short-term) places designed and operated in a participatory manner, where children affected by natural disasters or armed conflicts can be provided with a safe environment, where integrated programming including play, recreation, education, health and psychosocial support can be delivered and/or information about services/supports provided¹⁰.

2. The National ECCD Policy

2.1 Guiding Principles

The National Policy on ECCD 2018 is guided by the following universally accepted principles related to child development.

- a. All children have an inherent right for life, survival and development. All children deserve a healthy start and equal opportunities to grow and develop to become worthy citizens of the country.
- b. Every child is equally valuable. Therefore, children need to be protected from all forms of discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, language, religion, skin color, social origin, socio economic conditions and disability.
- c. Children should be treated equally but special attention is given to children in greatest need and at greatest risk so they can fulfill their potential, thus helping break cycles of poverty and vulnerabilities
- d. Decisions with regard to children should be made based on their best interest. Most appropriate decisions should be taken based on young children's physical, emotional,

⁹United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ,General Comments No 7,(2005).*Implementing Rights of the Child*. Accessed from <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/GeneralComment7Rev1.pdf>

¹⁰[https://www.unicef.org/protection/A_Practical_Guide_to_Developing_Child_Friendly_Spaces_-_UNICEF_\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/A_Practical_Guide_to_Developing_Child_Friendly_Spaces_-_UNICEF_(1).pdf)

social and educational needs as well as gender, age, family and social background. This principle applies to children who are unaccompanied, separated, adopted and those who live with their mothers in prisons.

- e. Child development is holistic and consists of interdependent dimensions. Therefore, a holistic integrated approach that addresses child's multiple needs should be adopted in all services for young children.
- f. Learning is an integral part of development. Children are ready to learn when they are physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally well-adjusted and socially competent
- g. All children are capable and competent, but each child develops at his/her own pace. Therefore, education provided to young children should be age appropriate as well as individual appropriate.
- h. Since interactions with people and objects in the environment are necessary for children to learn and develop, children's learning and development depend on the quality of environment provided to them.
- i. Children live within a context where the family, community and culture influence their development. In order to strengthen the family and community to improve young children's quality of life, it is essential to create awareness among parents, teachers and the community on child development.

2.2. Vision statement

An enabling environment that ensures every child's right for optimal development.

2.3 Mission statement

Optimal survival, growth and development of all children in Sri Lanka in early childhood through a protective, caring and conducive environment in the home and other settings, well supported by a comprehensive and integrated system of early childhood care and development services.

2.4. Objectives

The key objectives of the Policy are

1. To assure all children in early childhood including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, the best start in life by ensuring equitable access to quality ECCD services that promote child's right to life, survival and development
2. To empower parents, families and communities to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively in bringing up their children and ensure their optimal involvement in ECCD services and programmes

3. To promote investments in ECCD programmes including programmes for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children by ensuring mobilization, equitable allocation and effective utilization of financial and human resources
4. To establish an administrative mechanism for effective implementation of the policy and for monitoring and evaluation
5. To promote research to enable evidence based decision making and practice

3. Areas for Action

Strategies identified to achieve the objectives of the Policy are broadly categorized into following areas for action.

1. Health and nutrition
2. Early childhood education
3. Child care and protection
4. Parents, family and community
5. Investments in ECCD

In addition, the Policy proposes strategies targeting quality improvement of all ECCD services and programmes.

3.1. Area 1: Health and Nutrition

Specific Objective

Assure all children in early childhood including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, equitable access to quality health and nutritional services

Strategies

1. Strengthen relevant national and provincial authorities to ensure all children in early childhood have equitable access to all health and nutrition services at both field and institutional setting.
2. Facilitate and strengthen the quality of health and nutritional services provided by relevant national and provincial authorities
3. Promote advocacy and awareness to bring the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in to mainstream health and nutrition services
4. Strengthen and Facilitate relevant authorities to ensure that parents, families, youth groups, adolescence and communities are aware of available child care services, nutritional programmes and referrals.

5. Facilitate national and provincial authorities as well as non-governmental agencies to expand child care services to underserved areas and communities especially focusing on most vulnerable and disadvantaged.
6. Promote the provision of safe drinking water, sex and age appropriate sanitation and hygiene services especially in underserved and unserved areas.
7. Promote and facilitate relevant national and provincial authorities to ensure adequate child care services including nutrition during emergency situations
8. Facilitate capacity building of personnel involved in health and nutrition to deliver quality health and nutrition services for all children
9. Facilitate participation of development partners (NGO & private sector) in delivering quality services for children in early childhood.
10. Facilitate Implementation of appropriate mechanisms for early identification of disability and other special needs with a system of referrals.

3.2. Area 2: Early Childhood Education

Specific Objective

Assure all children in early childhood especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged have equitable access to quality early childhood education.

Strategies

1. Facilitate expanding spaces and procedures with essential facilities in un-served and underserved areas to improve equitable access to quality centre based early childhood education (ECE).
2. Promote expansion of ECE services focussed on essential support needed for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children through infrastructure development and positive discrimination measures.
3. Promote awareness of the importance of ECE for optimal development of the child and the impact of ECE on the development of human capital among policy makers, officials and the general public.
4. Promote and facilitate collaboration among public, NGOs and private sector organizations to expand centre based ECE.
5. Strengthen relevant national and provincial authorities to ensure the quality of centre based ECE to foster physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of children and smooth transition to the primary school through implementing developmentally appropriate (age appropriate as well as individually appropriate) practices.
6. Facilitate development of a national core curriculum/national curriculum guide.

7. Facilitate all national and provincial authorities to promote ECE centres to comply with standards related to structural and process features of centre based ECE as well as early childhood development standards¹¹.
8. Promote and facilitate capacity building and career development of personnel involved in ECE (Early Childhood Development officers/Assistants, other relevant officers and preschool teachers).
9. Promote and facilitate capacity building of personnel involved in centre based ECE to adopt inclusive practices in centres.
10. Promote and facilitate systematic use of valid assessment techniques to gauge children's learning, development, and readiness for schooling.
11. Promote mechanisms to safeguard the quality of professional development programmes offered to preschool teachers and other care givers.
12. Facilitate measures for early detection of children at risk of developmental delays and disabilities to ensure early interventions.
13. Promote and facilitate quality assurance mechanisms for educational materials and toys to ensure that they are developmentally appropriate and nurture children's learning and development.
14. Promote and facilitate interactions in mother tongue in centre based learning environments.
15. Promote community involvement in centre based ECE.
16. Promote and facilitate initiatives in capacity building of parents and families to improve home based learning environments.
17. Promote and facilitate programmes and services targeting families of children at risk due to multiple reasons (socio-economic conditions, illiteracy, migration, separation, disability etc.) to ensure favourable home environments for ECE.
18. Facilitate relevant national and provincial authorities to ensure that children in early childhood continue their education in emergency and disaster situations.

3.3. Area3: Child Care and Protection

Specific Objective

Assure all children in early childhood especially those who need care and protection from violence, abuse and neglect equitable access to quality care and protection.

¹¹ National Early Childhood Development standards are learning standards that indicate "what children should know and be able to do" at a certain age

Strategies

1. Promote and facilitate nationally and provincially available care and protection services and interventions specific for children in early childhood to ensure equitable access.
2. Promote and facilitate referral pathways specific to care and protection services and interventions tailored to children in early childhood and their families.
3. Promote and facilitate expansion of existing care and protection services initiated by national and provincial authorities to reach children who have no voice (children in early childhood are too small to protest) and pregnant mothers.
4. Promote and facilitate alternative child care mechanisms such as family based day care centres and neighbourhood play groups that enable parents to leave their young children especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in safe environments.
5. Strengthen relevant national and provincial authorities to ensure the quality of care and protection services offered to children in early childhood including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.
6. Promote and facilitate prevention networks to protect children in early childhood from violence, abuse and exploitation.
7. Promote and facilitate regulatory measures to protect children in early childhood from all forms of exploitation.
8. Strengthen relevant authorities to provide care and protection to children in early childhood during disaster situations.
9. Facilitate national and provincial authorities to professionalise child care and protection services through capacity building of personnel involved in care and protection services.
10. Facilitate all programmes implemented for care and protection of children in early childhood to comply with National guidelines¹²for Child protection.
11. Strengthen and facilitate strategies adopted by relevant authorities to promote safety and resilience in children in early childhood.
12. Promote and facilitate planning, developing and operating child friendly spaces in emergencies and special circumstances.

¹²Retrieved from http://www.childprotection.gov.lk/?page_id=2211

3.4. Area 4: Parents, families and community

Specific Objective

Capacitate parents, families and communities to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively in bringing up their children and ensure their optimal involvement in ECCD services and programmes.

Strategies

1. Facilitate capacity building of parents and families to adopt best practices of child rearing that promote care and protection and psychosocial stimulation for all children including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the home environment.
2. Promote advocacy and social mobilisation to ensure safe environments free of violence and negligence for all children in early childhood including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged within the family and community.
3. Promote and facilitate programmes to create awareness among parents, families and communities on child's right to play, recreation and cultural participation.
4. Promote and facilitate community based disaster risk reduction planning. The strategy requires capacity building of communities and local authorities on disaster prevention and preparedness activities.
5. Promote and facilitate community driven ECCD programmes that uphold cultural values and meaningful involvement of all sections of the community.
6. Facilitate community to establish well-equipped outdoor spaces to promote children's physical wellbeing, social interactions as well as learning through play.

3.5. Area 5: Investments in ECCD

Specific Objective

Promote investments in ECCD services and programmes and assure equitable allocation and effective utilization of financial resources.

Strategies

1. Strengthen public investments at national and provincial level to promote equitable access to quality ECCD programmes for all children including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.
2. Facilitate investments in poverty reduction programmes that target quality water sanitary and health interventions and housing facilities to make a change in the lives of children in early childhood.

3. Promote and facilitate more investments for health and nutrition programmes providing continuum of care from pregnancy, child birth through to age 5+ years.
4. Facilitate community mobilisation as well as mobilisation of resources in communities to promote ECE for all children in early childhood including most vulnerable and disadvantaged.
5. Promote equitable allocation of sufficient human and financial resources to all administrative areas with special attention to areas with un-served and underserved regions.
6. Promote investments in national and provincial level research related to ECCD. (Development partners [Local and International NGOs and Private sector] can play a crucial role in this task).

3.6. Strategies Targeting Quality Improvement of All ECCD Services and Programmes.

The Policy proposes following strategies to improve the quality of all ECCD services and programmes

1. Strengthen the Children's Secretariat with technical expertise to guide and support initiation and implementation of ECCD services and programmes.
2. Promote and facilitate the study of early childhood development as an area in which professional qualifications can be obtained by all personnel involved ECCD.
3. Promote research on child development including longitudinal research and strengthen links between policy, research and practice. Facilitate universities, development partners and other research institutes to carry out research studies to provide sound data to guide planning and management of ECCD services.
4. Facilitate dissemination of research and evaluation providing a wider coverage to promote best practices.
5. Promote and facilitate procedures to establish ethical standards for research to ensure maximum protection for children in early childhood who participate in research.
6. Strengthen Government initiatives to create a data base on ECCD and maintain it regularly.

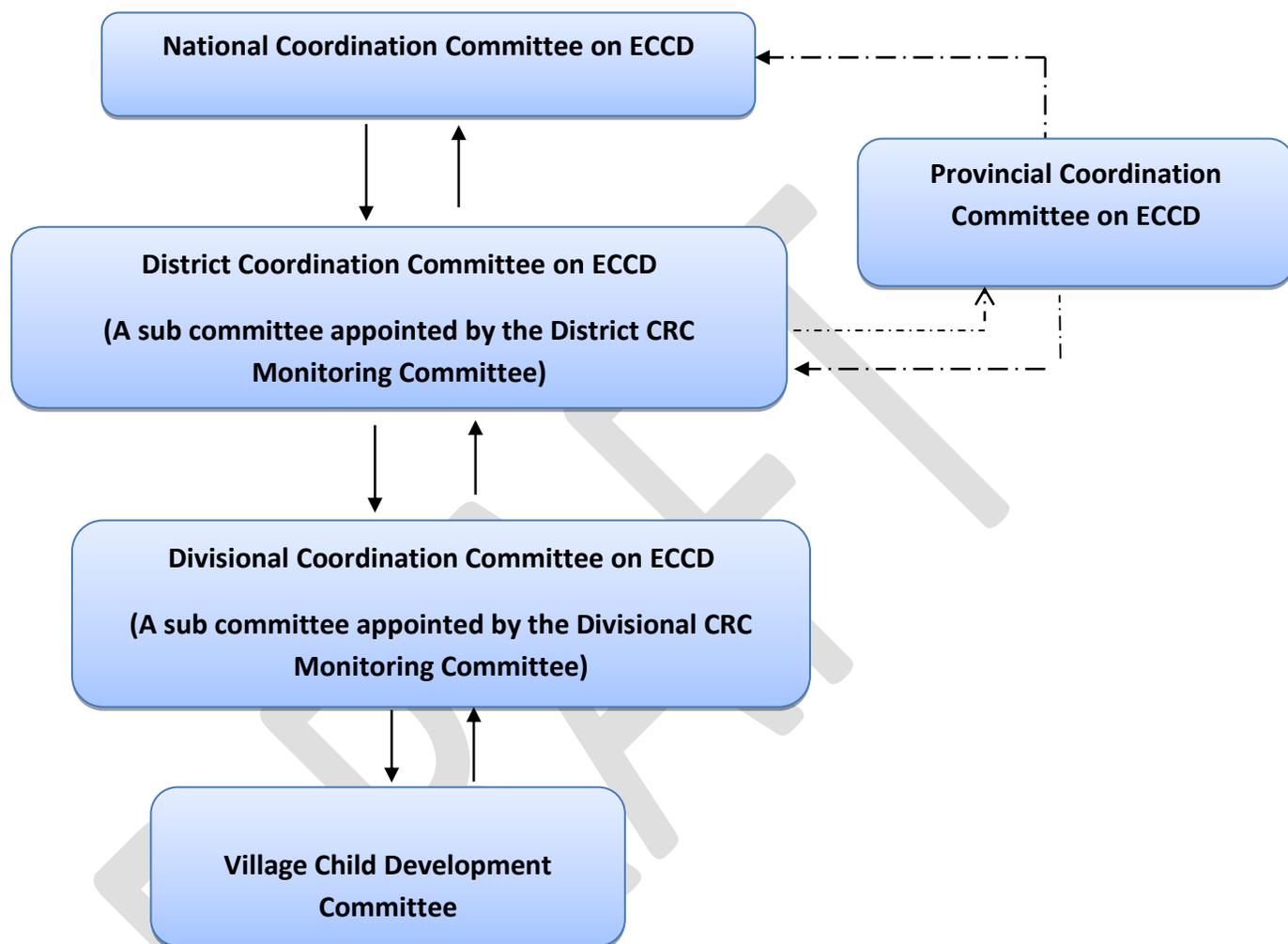
4. Implementation Mechanism of the Policy

The implementation of the national Policy on ECCD will be coordinated through committees established at different levels of governance linking the central government at ministerial level, with lower tiers. The proposed mechanism adopts a multi sectoral approach and reporting system from national to grass root level and vice versa for effective implementation of the policy.

- The National Coordination Committee (NCC) is the national level body that oversees the implementation of the policy and making adjustments when deemed necessary. It will ensure multi sectoral collaboration from national to grassroots level in developing and implementing action plans and ECCD related activities.
- The NCC has the power to appoint technical committees consisting relevant expertise related to areas for action stated in the policy when deemed necessary.
- The overseeing of the implementation of the policy at provincial level shall be carried out through Provincial Coordination Committees (PCC). Similarly, the PCC has the power to appoint technical committees consisting relevant expertise related to areas for action stated in the policy when deemed necessary.
- At district and divisional levels subcommittees shall be appointed from the existing CRC Monitoring Committees in the Districts and the Divisional Secretariat Divisions to oversee the implementation of ECCD policy. Representatives of Preschool/ECCD Authorities/Bureaus, Provincial Departments and Local Authorities shall be members of these subcommittees for smooth implementation of the Policy.
- At village level Village Child Development Committees established to monitor child rights will be strengthened and expanded to initiate/support village based ECCD programmes and services.

Roles and responsibilities of each of these committees are annexed.

The Implementation structure of the National Policy on ECCD



4. 1. Composition of the Committees

4.1.1. National Coordination Committee on ECCD

The National Coordination Committee (NCC) on ECCD will function under the patronage of the Minister responsible for the subject Child Affairs. The Secretary responsible for the same subject will act as the chairperson of the NCC. The Children’s Secretariat will function as the Secretariat of the NCC and will be responsible to operationalize the recommendations of the NCC.

The NCC shall consist of representatives of the following categories

1. Secretary, MWCA (Chairperson)
2. Director, Children's Secretariat (Secretary)
3. Executive level officers appointed by the Secretaries of the Ministries responsible for the following subjects
 - I. Health,
 - II. Education,
 - III. Social Services,
 - IV. Policy Planning and Economic affairs,
 - V. Justice/Law and Order
 - VI. Local government and Provincial Councils
 - VII. Home Affairs,
 - VIII. Disaster Management
4. Director, Family Health Bureau or an executive level officer appointed by the Director
5. Commissioner of the Department of Probation and Child Care or an executive level officer appointed by the Commissioner
6. Chairperson, Child Protection Authority or an executive level officer appointed by the Chairperson
7. Heads of Provincial entities established in the provinces for ECCD/Preschool education or a relevant executive level officer appointed by the Provincial Chief Secretary.
8. Director General, Plantation Human Development Trust or a relevant executive level officer appointed by the Director General.
9. Two members to represent NGOs/INGOs/UN agencies and private sector organization who offer ECCD services.
10. Two experts in the field of ECCD who possess academic qualifications as well as research in the field of ECCD.

NCC members of the first six categories are appointed as ex officio members. Other members are appointed for a period of three (3) years by the Secretary of the Ministry responsible for the subject Child Affairs. NCC will meet on quarterly basis and the quorum shall be more than 50% of members.

4.1.2. Provincial Coordination Committees on ECCD

Provincial Coordination Committees (PCC) on ECCD will function under the patronage of the Chief Minister of the Provincial Council. The Chief Secretary of the Province shall be the chairperson of the committee. The establishments instituted for monitoring and supervision of

ECCD/Preschool education shall function as the secretary of the PCC. The committee shall consist of the following officers appointed by the chief secretary of the province.

1. The Chief Secretary of the Province (Chairperson)
2. Head of the establishment instituted for monitoring and supervision of ECCD/Preschool education in the Province (Secretary)
3. A responsible officer from the Provincial Ministry of Health/Director, Provincial Health Services
4. An executive level officer from the Provincial Ministry of Education/Provincial Director of Education
5. Provincial Probation Commissioner
6. Provincial Director, Social Services
7. Commissioner, Local Government
8. An executive level officer from the Police Department
9. A representative from the Plantation Human Development Trust (if applicable)
10. A staff officer from the Children's Secretariat, ECD Officers/Assistants of the relevant districts.
11. In addition to the above members, three members appointed by the Chief Secretary of the Province to represent NGOs and Private sector organizations involved in ECCD

PCC members of the first ten (10) categories are appointed as ex officio members. Other members of the PCC are appointed by the Chief Secretary for a period of three (3) years. The committee will meet on quarterly basis and the quorum shall be more than 50% of the total number of members.

4.1.3. District Coordination Committees on ECCD

District CRC Monitoring Committee shall appoint a subcommittee to function as District Coordination Committee (DCC) on ECCD to implement the National Policy. The DCC shall be chaired by the District Secretary or his nominee. District ECD Officer shall function as the Secretary to the committee. The committee shall consist of the following members.

1. District Secretary (Chairperson)
2. Director, District health services
3. An executive level officer to represent Provincial institutions established for ECCD/Preschool education
4. Additional Director of Education
5. Assistant Commissioner Local Government
6. Senior Superintendent of Police
7. Assistant Commissioner Samurdhi
8. District ECCD Officer/Assistant (Secretary)
9. District Officer in Charge of Probation and Child Care

10. District Social Service Officer
11. District Child Rights Promotion Officer
12. District Counselling Officer
13. District Women Development Officer
14. District Psychosocial Officer
15. District Child Protection Officer
16. An officer representing provincial entities established for monitoring and supervision of Preschool Education and
17. In addition to the above members three others appointed by the District Secretary to represent NGOs and Private sector organizations involved in ECCD

All members of the DCC are appointed for a period of three (3) years. The Committee will meet on quarterly basis and the quorum shall be more than 50% of members.

4.1.4. Divisional Coordination Committees on ECCD

Sub committees appointed by the Divisional CRC Monitoring Committees established in each Divisional Secretariat Division are the Divisional Coordination Committees (Div.CC) on ECCD that coordinate the Policy at Divisional level. The Divisional Secretary shall be chair the Div.CC. The ECD Officer/Assistant attached to the Divisional Secretariat shall function as the secretary to the Committees to the Divisional Coordination Committees on ECCD.

1. Divisional Secretary (Chairperson)
2. Divisional Medical Officer of Health
3. Zonal/Divisional Directors of Education
4. Commissioner or a higher level officer to represent Local Government Authorities in the Division
5. ECD Officer(Secretary)
6. Probation Officer
7. Social Services Officer
8. Manager, Samurdhi
9. Officers attached to MC/UC/PS Preschools
10. A Officer attached to relevant Provincial institution established for ECCD/preschool education
11. Child Rights Promotion Officer
12. Counselling officer
13. Child Protection Officer
14. Women Development Officer
15. Grama Seva Niladharis
16. Police officer representing Women and Child Desk
17. In addition to the above members three others appointed by the Divisional Secretary to represent NGOs and Private Sector organizations involved in ECCD.

All members of the Div.CC are appointed for a period of three (3) years. The committee shall meet at least twice a year and the quorum shall be more than 50% of members.

4.1.5. Village Child Development Committees

Village Child Development Committees (VCDC) shall coordinate the implementation of the Policy in Grama Niladhari Divisions. The Early Childhood Development(ECD) Officer/Assistant, Child Rights Promotion Officer (CRPO)/ Assistant, Women Development Officer (WDO), Counseling Officer (CO) and Child Protection Officer (CPO)/Assistant appointed by the Ministry in charge of the subject Women and Child Affairs and attached to Divisional Secretariat Divisions are responsible for the implementing the policy through VCDC. The membership of the VCDC will be expanded to carry out ECCD activities.

The existing members of the VCDC are

1. Grama Niladhari/ Samurdhi Niladhari
2. Agriculture research Officer
3. Public Health Inspector
4. Religious dignitaries
5. School Principal
6. Head of the Samurdhi
7. Preschool teachers
8. Children between 5-18 years

Following members will be appointed to the committee for ECCD activities

9. ECD Officer/CRPO/DO/CPO
10. Public Health Midwife
11. Representatives from mother groups
12. Representatives from Preschool Cluster Management Committees
13. Two voluntary members

Chairperson and the secretary are appointed by the committee itself

According to the guidelines¹³ specified by the Department of Probation and Child Care the VCDC meets once a month. ECCD shall be made an item in the agenda of every fourth meeting. All the members appointed for ECCD should be present at these meetings. The Secretary shall handover minutes of the meetings to the CRPO and the CRPO shall share the minutes with the ECD Officer in the Division.

¹³ National Guideline for Village Child Development Committees,2016, Department of Probation and Child care Services, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs.

4.2. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Policy shall implement a well-developed monitoring and evaluation framework to cover full spectrum of services under ECCD. Relevant ministries shall be required to maintain a data base and carry out monitoring and evaluation in relation to ECCD services and programmes under their purview. A comprehensive management information system (MIS) needs to be established in the Ministry in charge of the subject Child Affairs for ECCD data collection, compilation and analysis. Impact evaluations should be conducted on programmes and services to measure the outcomes, identify gaps and improve the performance.

5. Roles and Responsibilities of Key Stakeholders

Child development is multifaceted and a multi-sectoral approach is required in implementing the national policy. Therefore, following ministries, agencies and organizations are identified as key stakeholders of ECCD. The roles and responsibilities of each key stake holder are presented below.

5.1. Ministry in Charge of the subject Child Affairs

Currently, the MWCA is responsible for formulation of policies, programmes and projects, monitoring and evaluation regarding the subjects of women and children. The MWCA also has been mandated to formulate policies and programmes for early childhood care and development aimed at bringing up a physically and mentally healthy child, coordination and liaison with provincial level committees and monitoring of activities¹⁴. The Child Protection Authority, Department of Probation and Child Care Services, Women's Bureau and the Children Secretariat function under this Ministry. Since the Department of Probation and Child Care Services is responsible for children who need care (vulnerable children) it shall play an important role in identifying and providing care needed for children in early childhood.

Among the main functions of the Children's Secretariat is formulating national policies on ECCD and acting as the implementation machinery. Therefore, the Ministry in charge of the subject Child Affairs will be the focal ministry for implementing the National Policy on ECCD. The Children's Secretariat of the Ministry shall function as the executive agency of the NCC. The Director Children's Secretariat shall function as the secretary of the NCC.

The responsibility of coordinating ECCD related activities among different departments of the Ministry and different ministries involved in ECCD activities lies with Children Secretariat. It will also function as the coordinating body for all ECCD activities conducted by INGOs, local NGOs and private sector organizations. It will liaise with the provincial and local government authorities and initiate efficient mechanisms to implement the national policy. The Ministry shall work to ensure a legal basis for the operations of the Children's Secretariat with regard to

¹⁴Gazette extraordinary no.1933 9th September 2015

ECCD activities and implementing decisions taken at the NCC meetings. At the same time Children's Secretariat will be strengthened with necessary technical expertise. The Ministry shall focus special attention on investing for programmes and services targeting most vulnerable and disadvantaged children including children of economically weaker segments of the society and children with disabilities.

5.2. Ministry in Charge of the Subject Health

The Ministry of Health (MoH) plays an immensely important role in uplifting health and nutrition status of Sri Lankan children in early childhood. The National Policy on Maternal and Child Health introduced by the Ministry in 2012 covers women during pregnancy, delivery and post-partum period, and newborns, infants and children up to 18 years. Its goals 2, 3 and 4 are related to children below 5 years of age¹⁵. With regard to the implementation of the National Policy on ECCD the Ministry in charge of the subject Child Affairs shall work closely with the MoH in matters concerning health, nutrition and psychosocial development of young children.

5.3. Ministry in Charge of the subject Education

The 13th Amendment to the constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, has given the right to Provincial Councils for supervision of the management of all preschools. However, the Constitution states that the Ministry of Education (MoE) will retain the right to inspect and supervise the management of schools (schools include preschools as well) in order to ensure standards. Recognizing that child development consists of integrated and interdependent dimensions (physical, social, emotional and cognitive), and education is closely linked to child's maximum right to development¹⁶, the MoE will closely work with the Ministry in charge of the subject Child Affairs in formulating policies for preschool education. Such collaboration will support the National Policy on ECCD to deliver all inputs in an integrated manner, optimize resource utilization and prevent duplication of services and programmes offered to children in early childhood.

5.4. Ministry in Charge of the subject Social Empowerment and Welfare

Ministry of Social Empowerment and Welfare (MSEW) has a significant role to play in ECCD to achieve equity. MSEW has a Social Services Department which has an island-wide network. The department has a child guidance center in Colombo which serves as model facility and a resource center. It carries out staff and preschool teacher training. For ECCD efforts to be successful state based interventions should be in place for children who are placed in most vulnerable and disadvantaged situations. Therefore, poverty alleviation as well as children

¹⁵ National Policy on Maternal and Child Health, Ministry of Health

¹⁶United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comments No 7, (2005). *Implementing Rights of the Child*. Accessed from <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/GeneralComment7Rev1.pdf>

placed in other disadvantaged situations such as disability is one of the priority areas of the Policy. Since ECCD is a “shared operational concept” the Ministry in charge of the subject Child Affairs will work closely with the MSEW in activities and programmes for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families as well as such marginalized communities.

5.5. Provincial Councils

Provincial Councils (PC) have the mandate for supervision of the management of all preschools in their respective province. Most of the PCs have established authorities/ units/ departments/bureaus for ECCD/preschool education. The PCs have an active role to play in increasing equitable access to all ECCD programmes and services and in the process of monitoring and evaluation. The PCs will closely work with the Ministry in charge of the subject Child Affairs and MoH to implement the National Policy on ECCD effectively at provincial level.

5.6. Plantation Human Development Trust

The Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) implements social development programmes to enhance the quality of life of the plantation community in the estates managed by the Regional Plantation Companies. Among the responsibilities of PHDT is planning and implementation of ECCD activities in the estate sector. PHDT will closely work with the Ministry in charge of the subject Child Affairs, MoH and Provincial Councils in implementing the National Policy on ECCD.

5.7. Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-Governmental organizations (NGO) play a significant role in ECCD activities in Sri Lanka. Their support is extended from infrastructure development, capacity development of ECCD personnel including care givers to policy development. Their services are invaluable in the implementation of quality programmes and in mobilizing parent involvement and support.

NGOs have a role to play in defining community needs and developing community based solutions. The Ministry in charge of the subject Child Affairs and the PCs will closely work with NGOs in implementing the policy from national level to grassroots level.

5.8. International Multilateral and Bilateral Organizations

International organizations and donor agencies have been collaborators and partners for ECCD activities at National and Provincial level in Sri Lanka. They have supported many ECCD initiatives and their continuous technical and financial support is required to implement ECCD programmes.

5.9. Private Sector Organizations

Private sector organizations as well as individuals have played a significant role in ECCD activities in Sri Lanka. The Government of Sri Lanka considers the involvement of business

establishments in ECCD activities as a positive step towards the development of social capital in Sri Lanka. Therefore, such involvement is encouraged under proper guidance and regulation at the appropriate administrative level. Private sector options can be leveraged to strengthen quality services for young children and their families

Private individuals and institutions also play a significant role in the ECCD activities particularly in the provision of preschool and day care centre facilities. A large number of these institutions functions under private management. In addition, there are private sector institutions/organizations that provide ECCD services either for the children of their own employees or others who require assistance.

5.10. Parents and Community

Parents and communities are key stakeholders in planning and implementation of ECCD activities. For ECCD services to become truly effective planning and provision of services need to be initiated after assessing and analyzing the situation with the participation of the community. Participation and mobilizing communities in all activities is essential to make an impact on children's development. Community can partake in programmes to ensure child rights. VCDC can play a leading role in involving of parents and communities in poverty alleviation programmes and other interventions such as provision of child friendly spaces in emergencies to make a positive change in the lives of their children. The need for communities to take up ownership and management of community based programmes is of paramount importance for the success and sustainability of ECD programmes.

Annexure 1

Responsibilities and functions of the Committees appointed to implement the Policy

National Coordination Committee

- Identify roles and responsibilities of ministries for implementation of the national policy.
- Develop mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the policy and evaluate the functioning, effectiveness and relevance periodically.
- Introduce necessary legislation for effective implementation of the national policy
- Ensure coordination among ECCD service providers.
- Ensure coordination of ECCD related activities between provincial, district, divisional secretariats and grassroots level bodies.
- Take policy decisions in keeping with contemporary needs.
- Appoint technical committees consisting relevant expertise related to areas for action stated in the policy when deemed necessary.
- Facilitate existing mechanisms (for example, nationally established standards and indicators of early learning and development, minimum standards for centre based ECE and standardized assessments) and introduce mechanisms where necessary for monitoring, evaluating and managing the quality of inputs provided for ECCD programmes.
- Ensure national core curricular/curriculum guide for centre base ECE are/is established and implemented.
- Facilitate capacity building of personnel involved in ECCD and awareness raising programmes for parents.
- Monitor programmes and services related to professional development of ECCD personnel.
- Seek out and secure funding required for ECCD programmes.
- Report to the subject minister any decisions, proposals or recommendations regarding ECCD matters of special importance.
- Advise the subject minister on matters related to ECCD.

Provincial Coordination Committees

- Coordinate the implementation of the National Policy on ECCD in the respective province.
- Introduce necessary legislation for supervision and management of preschools in the province.
- Ensure equitable access to all ECCD services in the respective province.
- Ensure the quality of all ECCD provisions in the province.
- Appoint technical committees consisting relevant expertise related to areas for action stated in the policy when deemed necessary.

- Ensure the quality of all ECCD provisions for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in the province.
- Introduce ECCD programmes appropriate for the province.
- Monitor the ECE programs functioning in the province.
- Mobilize and supplement resources available to the district and local government authorities.
- Implement national early childhood development standards and standards formulated for preschools and day care centres to ensure quality of centre based programmes.
- Implementation of national core curricular/curriculum guide for ECE as appropriate for the province.
- Accommodate requests from the community for technical and financial assistance for ECD.
- Mobilize and encourage NGO and private sector initiatives related to ECE in the province in conformity with national ECD centre standards.
- Promote and facilitate streamlining different programmes and services offered to children in early childhood and their parents.
- Ensure that quality child care services are available to children in need. The Committee shall bring to the notice of relevant authorities where care provided to children do not conform to UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Evaluate programmes and services delivered to parents and children periodically.
- Facilitate capacity building of ECCD personnel.
- Maintain a data base related to ECE.
- Ensure accurate reporting and documentation of service delivery.

District Coordination Committee

- Coordinate implementation of the National Policy on ECCD at district level
- Implement decisions taken at national level with regard to ECCD.
- Ensure all children including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the district have equitable access to ECCD programmes.
- Promote and facilitate strategies to increase centre based ECE enrolments especially of most vulnerable and disadvantaged.
- Ensure the quality of all ECCD provisions in the district.
- Ensure that quality child care services are available for children in need. The subcommittee should bring to the notice of relevant authorities where care provided to children do not conform to UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Ensure that social services are available for children, parents and families in need.
- Support, maintain and monitor ECCD programmes including programmes for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in the district.
- Facilitate capacity building programmes for all personnel involved in ECCD.
- Facilitate programmes for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and communities.

- Facilitate awareness raising programmes for parents and community.
- Mobilize and encourage NGO and private sector initiatives related to ECCD in the district in conformity with national ECCD standards.
- Ensure accurate reporting and documentation of service delivery.
- Review progress of ECCD services and programmes in the district and report periodically to PCC and to the Children's Secretariat.

Divisional Coordination Committee

- Promote and facilitate the Implementation of the ECCD policy in the division.
- Coordinate and monitor the delivery of ECCD services in the division.
- Ensure equitable access for all children including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged to ECCD services in the division.
- Initiate and facilitate programmes specifically designed for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and communities.
- Facilitate and provide support to communities in developing ECCD programmes.
- Ensure parents and the community understand the importance of ECCD.
- Ensure parents and families including the parents and families of most vulnerable and disadvantaged are aware of the best practices in childrearing.
- Promote and facilitate poverty alleviation programmes to support parents and families living in poverty.
- Ensure the availability of outdoor spaces in communities.
- Ensure the availability of support required for children with disabilities.
- Ensure the availability of child friendly spaces in emergencies.
- Mobilize and encourage private sector and NGO initiatives to support ECCD programmes and services for parents and children.
- Maintain a data base related to ECCD.
- Ensure accurate reporting and documentation of service delivery.
- Review progress of ECCD services in the division periodically and report to the DCC and to the Children's Secretariat.

Village Child Development Committee

- Promote and facilitate the Implementation of the ECCD policy in the village.
- Coordinate and monitor the delivery of ECCD services in the village.
- Ensure equitable access for all children including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged to ECCD services in the village.
- Initiate and facilitate programmes specifically designed for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and communities in the village.
- Provide support to communities in developing ECCD programmes.
- Ensure parents and the community understand the importance of ECCD.
- Promote and facilitate best practices in childrearing.

- Promote and facilitate poverty alleviation programmes to support parents and families living in poverty.
- Promote outdoor spaces for in communities.
- Promote supports required for children with disabilities.
- Promote child friendly spaces in emergencies.
- Mobilize and encourage private sector and NGO initiatives to support ECCD programmes and services for parents and children.
- Maintain a data base related to ECCD.
- Ensure accurate reporting and documentation of service delivery.
- Review progress of ECCD services in the village periodically and report to the Div.CC and to the Children's Secretariat.

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