



Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Capacity Building Approaches for Gender Responsive Early Childhood Education in Zambia

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

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3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

European Commission - Directorate General for International Partnerships

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

Capacity building, early childhood education, gender equality, gender mainstreaming, gender transformative education, pre-service and in-service continuing professional development, holistic integrated ECE, programming approaches, Zambia

6. What makes it a best practice? *

The capacity building approaches outlined below exemplify evidence-based, locally appropriate solutions for transformative early childhood education and gender equality programming. They respond to the need for adaptable, context-sensitive approaches to supporting teaching and learning in the early years using low-cost materials, while ensuring close collaboration with partner governments and sustainable engagement with sub-national education authorities. Elements of the approach have been replicated successfully in multiple country contexts, confirming validity and effectiveness.

Description of the best practice

Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

Capacity building interventions aimed at addressing the quality of early years educational provision and gender inequality have the potential to transform societies when planned and delivered with consideration for the context in which they take place, benefitting partner governments and learners alike.

The early childhood education context in Zambia is one of very limited and low-quality provision, low enrolment and low attendance particularly in rural areas. Quality early childhood education remains a privilege for a minority of children. Non-government early childhood education centres are mainly found in urban and peri-urban areas. Communities with untrained volunteer teachers operate these centres, sometimes with unsafe or inappropriate environments for young learners, and in a broader country context of gender inequality and high prevalence of gender-based violence.

The European Union in its support to the education sector in Zambia over several years has taken a pragmatic and innovative approach to capacity building for gender sensitive early childhood education provision. This has included:

- 1) Capacity building for early childhood education teachers using best-practice continuing professional development techniques;
- 2) Support to implementing partners for early-stage development of a Gender Responsive Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education (GRP4ECE);
- 3) Using evidence, lessons learnt and local knowledge to inform future programming for integrated ECD provision and in-service training;
- 4) Engagement with regional initiatives to develop teacher capacity.

By drawing on the positive experiences and lessons learned from these approaches, future EU country programming will be pragmatic, relevant, and evidence based as it supports gender transformative ECD in Zambia.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

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The continuing professional development approach taken during the EU funded QEECS project in Zambia (2015-2017), implemented by the Belgian non-governmental organisation VVOB in collaboration with the local NGO Zambia Open Community Schools, is a strong example of high-quality gender sensitive in-service training for early childhood educators. Key elements of the approach were strong Ministry of Education (MoE) engagement and leadership, cluster-based training workshops led alongside national and regional MoE staff, peer-to-peer learning through classroom observations and communities of practice and ongoing coaching and mentoring for teachers. Training content included gender responsive pedagogy (see GRP4ECE below), child assessment, play-based learning and the development of low-cost teaching and learning materials. A team of experts from the MoE and local trainers accompanied training participants through the training period and encouraged reflective teaching practice and pro-active engagement not only with young learners but also with parents and community members.

One of the key elements of the QEECS capacity building approach was the introduction of a Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) for Early Childhood Education. This approach to the theory and practice of teaching and learning actively addresses the effects of unequal and stereotypical gender norms, roles, and relations, during the critically important period of early childhood development. The approach was formalised into the Gender Responsive Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education Toolkit (GRP4ECE) at the end of the project by VVOB and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) to become an Open Educational Resource available for use in in-service continuing professional development programmes globally. The toolkit contains practical, playful, and reflective training materials that focus on gender-responsive lesson planning and delivery, organisation of the teaching and learning environment and learning materials, and interactions and use of language in early childhood settings. The toolkit also contains resources for school leaders, as well as classroom activities for use by teachers, and can be used as self-study material, or as the basis for face-to-face or online facilitated professional development programmes in schools and in communities of practice as demonstrated during the QEECS project. An essential element of the GRP4ECE approach is contextualisation to ensure that it is appropriate and addresses the needs of the local environment in which it will be used.

Lessons learned from past experience such as QEECS, and current good practice and evidence have directly informed the EU Delegation's social sector programming approach with the Government of Zambia to improve education and health outcomes. As a result, a cross-sectoral and holistic approach has emerged which aims to support some of Zambia's most vulnerable citizens - with a focus on young children, school-aged mothers, and children with special needs. The delegation, together with the government of Zambia are developing this new programme under the human development priority of the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) which frames the EU-Zambia partnership for the years 2021-2027. It focuses, amongst other things on:

- 1) Poor quality and limited access to ECED. This will be done through capacity building, infrastructure development for early childhood centres (either integrated into community primary schools where space exists, or as standalone institutions) and support for learning and teaching materials;
- 2) Limited access of vulnerable students to education and adolescent health (i.e., girls at risk of gender-based violence, school-aged mothers). This will be done through support to technical and vocational education and adolescent sexual and reproductive health provision. In both cases, a holistic approach to integrating early childhood education, nutrition and health services (using t

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

Results from the different approaches to capacity building are encouraging, and still emerging. The final evaluation of the QEECS capacity building approach noted that the project had an inclusive, open and participatory approach, which made it easy for stakeholders from both government and community schools to engage actively. The evaluation showed that most teachers exhibited confidence and above average levels of engagement with their learners, and that they kept lesson plans and frequently used learning corners to consolidate learning through play - an essential element of early childhood pedagogy. Importantly, community schools participating in the project reported increased monitoring by zonal and district coordinators, as well as strong evidence of greater engagement from the MoE.

Following QEECS, the GRP4ECE toolkit has gained traction with development partners and NGOs internationally. Research from a VVOB Zambia evaluation of the toolkit showed that teachers trained in the GRP approach became aware of conscious and unconscious gender bias and were able to recognise and challenge stereotypes in their classroom and school environments and organise classroom space and materials to be gender responsive. In turn, school leaders were able to reflect on their role in creating a positive enabling environment for gender responsive pedagogy. As a result, they began to focus on improved teaching, gender-responsive school budgeting, and improved communication with parents and the community to challenge unequal gender stereotypes. The GRP4ECE toolkit has since been localised in both South Africa and Vietnam, where it has become the basis for in-service professional development programmes for teachers, school leaders, and ministry of education staff. Plan International are in the process of creating a training programme around the toolkit for their global programming. As the toolkit is being used and adapted, a structured framework for professional development of gender responsive pedagogical approaches is also emerging.

Results from the EU Delegation's good practice and evidence-informed programming approach will emerge during the coming period of new programme development and implementation. These should contribute to building and improving ECE teachers' capacities based on sustainable, proven and gender responsive approaches, as well as supporting the MoE in strengthening the education system to be inclusive, resilient and efficient.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

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11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

A context-driven and local evidence-based approach to strengthening gender responsive early childhood education, working alongside partner governments, must drive early childhood education teacher capacity development. When integrated with local government strategies and systems, results will be sustainable, and ultimately education and health outcomes will improve.

In Zambia, close partnership with the MoE at both national and local level and an innovative approach to in-service teacher training led to positive results, and lessons that have informed future EU country programming, as well as the development of a toolkit that has since gained traction internationally.

Gender responsive pedagogical approaches like GRP4ECE directly address the improvement of teaching and learning, which are at the centre of the learning crisis as well as gender inequalities that deny equal opportunities to girls and boys. When localised, innovations like these have the potential to transform education outcomes anywhere.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

Technical Brief: Gender Responsive Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education
 Toolkit: Gender Responsive Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education (GRP4ECE)
 Project Summaries:
 Quality Early Education in Community Schools (QEECS), Zambia
 Gender Responsiveness in the Early Years (GRP4ECE), South Africa
 Gender responsive teaching and learning in the early years (GENTLE), Vietnam
 Supporting early childhood teachers on play-based learning pedagogies (STEEL), Zambia