

TRANAC advocacy boosts awareness about ECDE and attracts increased financing

The TRANAC baseline report had indicated that in all the countries sampled in Southern Africa, there was no specific information gathered on ECDE. Stakeholders were only using information gathered for primary education by ministries of education and other information system platforms.

Apart from being a clear sign of limited awareness on ECDE issues, this state of affairs also undermined advocacy efforts around it. Beyond this, the TRANAC budget analysis of all the 6 countries (*Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Malawi, Eswatini, Zambia and Mozambique*), revealed that an average of 1.57 percent of education budget went into ECD education.

Following the implementation of the Transnational Network Advocacy Capacity (TRANAC) project in 2021 aimed at pushing for prioritisation of ECDE recognition, financing, and empowerment of critical ECDE partners, there is evidence of change.

For one, respective countries have already increased their budgets. For instance, Malawi has increased its ECDE budget allocation from 2 to 5 percent of total education budget with the goal and commitment of increasing it to 10 percent and Zimbabwe, has increased its ECD budget from 14% to 16% of total education budget, committing to increasing it even further. There is a commitment by TRANAC project countries of Zimbabwe, Malawi, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zambia and Mozambique to increase ECDE financing from 1 to 5 percent of education budget, which is also being considered at SADC level. Increasingly, different stakeholders are paying more attention to ECDE resourcing; providing appropriate resources, and materials enhancing ECDE investment recognition.

In Lesotho, a Global Partnership for Education (GPE) multiplier fund of USD 5 million initially intended for other aspects of education has been reallocated to ECDE. The grant is arranged in such a way that the recipient country must match it. Already, owing to increased attention on the significance of ECDE, the Roger Federer Foundation, through the School Readiness Initiative supporting 6 countries, is contributing \$2.5 million as part of the funds required to match the GPE multiplier grant meaning that only USD 2.5 million is remaining for the grant to be matched, and can come from any source. Once this is done, there will be \$10 million for ECDE in Lesotho. A key stakeholder has observed that *“clearly there is a lot of momentum in regards to ECDE financing and this is expected to increase”*.

Apart from this, Southern Africa governments, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho have committed to include ECDE qualified teachers (mentors) on the

government payroll. These teachers are selected from community led early childhood centres, to mentor and supervise other centres and mentor other caregivers. Specifically, in Malawi, 2000 ECDE caregivers/ mentors are paid honorarium equivalent to 20 USD, with plans to scale up to 5000 caregivers this year and a goal of 8000 by 2026.

With the exception of Zimbabwe which already has 11 teachers training colleges, and Malawi one, respondents indicated that plans are underway to establish and increase ECDE teachers training colleges in Malawi, Eswatini, and Lesotho by 2026 – 2027 in order to provide fully trained teachers as opposed to using volunteer community caregivers.

In addition, most governments in the SADC countries have now recognized the need for equipping ECDE centres with appropriate resources such as infrastructure, furniture, scholastic materials and learning aids. Discussions around exempting taxes on infant learning aids are happening in the different forums, especially in Lesotho.

ECDE curricula have been developed and disseminated in community ECDE centres and plans to roll them to private led ECDE centres are underway especially in Zimbabwe.

As part of the SADC ECDE agenda 2022, TRANAC Coalition members have committed to hold discussions around pushing SADC countries to have ECDE as a public agenda. Subsequently, some countries like Lesotho and Zimbabwe have added a foundation class to primary schools to prepare infants from poor families who were not able to undergo ECD Education for primary school. In addition, some countries such as Malawi, Zimbabwe and Lesotho have been pushing for drafting a law on making ECDE mandatory by 2030.

After gathering data to ascertain the status of ECDE in the SADC region, TRANAC project implementers used multiple strategies to influence policy change.

Capacity building for Coalitions: The advocacy plan and reports reviewed, indicated that TRANAC started with improving the capacity of coalitions including ZINECDA, NECDOL, and the ECD Coalition of Malawi to push governments to implement ECDE activities in a more transparent and effective manner. Specifically, TRANAC carried out a capacity assessment of the leadership, followed by internal and external audits. After identifying gaps, TRANAC implementers worked towards strengthening governance systems for each coalition involved in the project. This enabled the organisations to develop internal policies and processes, namely; human resources, finance, administration, procurement, child safeguarding and whistleblowing, anti-corruption and fraud, plus risk register. The coalitions received capacity building on education diplomacy and language, which were lacking. ***The coalitions have earned a lot of benefits from strengthening their standard operating procedures, drawing confidence from donors and partners.***

TRANAC leveraged their diplomatic leadership skills, and increased confidence in advocacy and visibility, to create national technical working groups that helped to extend ECDE issues to the SADC level. In general, TRANAC built strong relationships with these strategic groups especially those that push agendas to ministerial meetings and the heads of state¹. For Instance, ZINECDA's two subcommittees met for the first time and also held a board meeting approving all policies.

Research: TRANAC conducted a number of researches such as the TRANAC baseline assessment, Budget tracking in Southern Africa, Age effectiveness for ECD in Southern Africa, Status of SDG 4.2 in Southern Africa, Cost of educating an ECD child, Status of disaster risk and resilient management for ECD, and Status of ECD policy frameworks within Southern Africa. The research also revealed insights in terms of how best the member states of the SADC community could be encouraged to advocate for inclusion of ECDE in Southern Africa. This thrust towards the technical research on the budget allocations, have built the empirical evidence that has been used to meaningfully lobby. TRANAC has been able to strengthen their lobbying for policy through the evidence-based approach in addition, sharing resources between TRANAC and Education Coalitions has been beneficial for all parties. A key respondent said:

“Education Coalition of Zimbabwe has been able to share resources with the TRANAC project, and together, have broadened the terms of references for studies, conducted analysis, and came up with very concrete information, that has been tabled to ministers, parliamentarians through co-facilitated workshops”.

In addition, the partners' consultations and dialogues have also led to the development and submission of position papers on education including ECDE to SADC Secretariat in June 2022. Indeed, data reviewed indicates TRANAC is on track with its strategic issues of increasing ECDE access, ECDE financing, government accountability to ECDE, and enabling member states of the SADC community to advocate for the inclusion of ECDE in the Southern African region.

Budget Analysis: The TRANAC annual reports indicate that different learning sessions with Southern African Parliamentary Support Trust (SAPST) have aimed at capacity building of civil society organizations to engage parliament meaningfully on ECD. The engagement with CSOs has focussed on unpacking public finances with education committees in order to understand how to prioritize the resourcing towards education and lobby for a socially inclusive approach to Public Finance Management (PFM) within parliament. This process has also engaged in tracking whether there has been appropriate expenditure through analysis of audit reports that come out on public financing. A key respondent said highlighted:

“TRANAC's capacity in the area of PMF has been strengthened, especially on ECD. Whereas the majority of TRANAC project implementers are mostly child rights or education experts, the appreciation of PMF could have been at a lower

¹ TRANAC quarter 3 Report, July, 2021.

level at the beginning.

TRANAC's strategy has also contributed to advocacy efforts aimed at getting countries to increase their budgets. A correspondent noted:

"Our strategy aimed to get 5% of financing from the national education budget to go into ECD. We are now involved in doing national budget analysis workshops. Right from pre-budget, we influence what is supposed to be included, and conduct a post-budget analysis."

In line with these efforts, ZINECDA hosted Permanent Secretaries (PSs) and Chief Education Officers (CEOs) from respective countries in Zimbabwe as part of consultations to assess, validate as well as make commitments to increase ECDE financing. In addition, the National Education Coalitions of Malawi, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Zambia, Eswatini and Mozambique now carry out annual analysis of the budgets to influence what goes to education.

Continuous engagement with stakeholders in all the 6 countries: As part of its capacity building agenda, the TRANAC project ensured that selected parliamentarians from SADC parliamentary portfolio and officials from the SADC Secretariat are invited to attend induction and capacity building trainings by implementers. At the training sessions, the significance of ECDE has been severally highlighted. The presentations made about the status of ECDE in respective countries and issues of limited ECDE financing in the region have challenged leaders to think deeply about how to address these gaps.

Capacity building for media practitioners: For visibility and appropriate portrayal of the ECDE agenda, media practitioners were inducted on the available ECDE policies and declarations, trained on how to report ECD issues identified in the six countries and at regional level, as well as equipped with skills to sensitise the communities on the same.

It is clear that TRANAC has succeeded in influencing early childhood education financing to fruition.

One stakeholder said: "What takes ages for others to achieve their fruits, TRANAC has achieved in only two years for it to taste the fruits of their labour. TRANAC made a very strategic plan of working together as a team/consortium, from three countries Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Malawi and scaled up to engage Eswatini, Zambia and Mozambique making it a team of 6 countries that has formed the solidarity and other three countries have expressed their wish to join the team".

Another stakeholder added that "the achievement of the TRANAC Project is 80% because of the knowledge itself. Everyone is in agreement that we are supposed to do something, the investment that has been done in terms of shifting the understanding of people towards ECD has been immense."

Key documents reviewed revealed that teamwork and subsequent cross-pollination of ideas from different countries and actors employed by TRANAC explain the project's success so far. The experienced leadership of ZINECDA that was selected on merit as well as research conducted by TRANAC that provide data for evidence-based advocacy have also been noted.

This case shows how the TRANAC project's objective 1, to strengthen the capacity of ECDE national coalitions on areas of internal governance, advocacy and research in order for them to effectively hold governments accountable and demand transparency in the formulation and implementation of ECD policies and strategies related to SDG 4.2 and GPE at transnational level by December 2023. (Capacity Building), has already been achieved.

In conclusion, ECD education financing has been embraced and its importance has been recognized by SADC countries as seen from the several results of the project. These include increased budget for ECDE and putting ECDE teachers on public funds payroll in the form of honorarium and soon transitioning them into salaried professionals. Equally important has been the increased recognition that ECDE centres must be equipped with appropriate resources, the Malawi ECDE law under draft as well as increased funding for ECDE initiatives by different national, regional and international organisations. In addition, there is increased positive portrayal of ECD education in mainstream media and social media platforms. All these results show that for advocacy to come to fruition, actors must not work in isolation and must lay strategies for collaboration and take well-packaged information rather than work in isolation and being confrontational.