



# SABER IN ACTION: EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

NURTURING HEALTHY CHILDREN TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

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A country's long-term development potential depends on how well it nurtures the healthy growth and development of its youngest children. The crosscutting issue affects sectors such as education, health, nutrition, and child and social protection. Addressing early childhood development (ECD) requires a comprehensive and integrated national system supported by multi-sectoral policy design and implementation.

SABER-Early Childhood Development allows policymakers to take stock and analyze existing ECD policies and programs. Through the application of evidence-based tools, SABER identifies gaps and areas needing policy attention to promote healthy and robust development for all children. As of March 2015, over 20 countries applied SABER-ECD tools and another 20 are underway. Of the 40 countries engaging with SABER-ECD, about half are in Africa.

## Establishing a Framework for Investing Early

The SABER-ECD tool assesses a country's ECD system along three policy goals:

- Establishing an Enabling Environment entails developing a legal and regulatory framework to support ECD provision, ensuring coordination within sectors and across institutions for effective service delivery, and providing adequate resources to finance ECD programs. This is the foundation of effective ECD systems.
- Implementing Widely refers to the scope of existing programs, how widely they reach target populations and the extent to which access to programs is equitable and children's holistic development is addressed. A robust ECD system should include policies that support programs in essential sectors and target all beneficiary groups, particularly children from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds and those with special needs.
- Monitoring and Assuring Quality refers to the availability of data and a country's system to monitor ECD outcomes, as well as the development of quality standards and a compliance mechanism for ECD service delivery. Under



political and budget pressures, policymakers may expand access to ECD services at the expense of quality. In many countries, a large proportion of ECD services are provided by the private sector. Therefore, well-defined and enforced monitoring and quality assurance systems are critical to ensure that standards for service delivery are met.

While each country is free to use its SABER<sup>1</sup> findings to support national initiatives, the World Bank draws on best practices in comparable settings to suggest policy options for improving ECD systems. Governments typically adapt options that reflect their key policy priorities and budget constraints.

## SABER-ECD in Action

In Jamaica, SABER helped the government take a comprehensive look at the achievements of its existing early childhood development system, validate policies under implementation, identify gaps and learn from global good practice. SABER findings were well-received by government counterparts at the Early Childhood Commission Board of Commissioners which has oversight of ECD policies. Findings and recommendations from SABER informed the revision of the national ECD Strategic Plan for 2013-2018 which is supported by the Bank through a project aiming to improve parenting, care, and school readiness for children ages 0-6 while also focusing on screening and early stimulation for children at risk.



<sup>1</sup> The Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) produces knowledge on education policies and institutions based on global best practice, with the aim of helping countries systematically strengthen their education systems to achieve learning for all children and youth.



**“SABER analysis has proven to be a critical benchmarking exercise. It has helped to expose major structural weaknesses in government planning systems for young children and has identified enormous gaps in program coverage.”**

In the Russian Federation, SABER informed the preparation of new standards for children benefiting from ECD programs. In particular, the SABER analysis was used to strengthen the framework for quality assurance, make the standards child-centered, emphasize the interagency nature of ECD/ECE, and create conditions to improve efficiency in the system. SABER also informed the preparation of the Sakha Yakutia project on Innovative Development of Preschool Education, which includes infrastructure modernization, rigorous teacher training, and management reform.



In the Kyrgyz Republic, SABER identified gaps in legislation on sustainable financing mechanisms, weaknesses in maternal-childcare provision, and the lack of a system for tracking child development. The findings helped reshape the government’s priorities by expanding access to targeted low income groups while raising the quality of the programs through new standards and capacity building. The analysis also informed the design of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) financed Kyrgyz Early Education Project that increases access to pre-school services, school readiness, and teacher training on early diagnosis of learning disabilities.



In Uganda, SABER analysis was used to inform a review of the ECD policy in a bid to introduce reforms aimed at improving the enabling environment for access to pre-school programs and an instructors training program focused on enhancing the delivery of quality ECE programs. These government initiatives are supported by the Uganda Teacher and School Effectiveness Project (UTSEP) financed through GPE which is responding to SABER findings regarding shortfalls with respect to access and quality of ECD services.

In Bulgaria, SABER identified shortfalls in nutrition and pre-primary education programs, barriers to access for traditionally marginalized Turkish and Roma minorities, and a lack of comprehensive child development monitoring and tracking. A national ECD planning conference in 2014 prominently shared SABER findings and key government ministers praised the SABER analysis, pledging to redress the planning and program gaps identified. Findings were also used by Bulgaria in a World Bank supported social inclusion program focusing primarily on neglected minorities.



## Looking Ahead

SABER began applying evidence-based tools to analyze ECD in 2012, and in just two years, around 40 countries have either completed their analysis or are preparing to. Findings from SABER ECD work is also being analyzed and synthesized on a global scale. Governments increasingly understand the importance of investing in the potential of children in their earliest years. SABER's methodology for ECD highlights the need for governments to adopt a comprehensive multi-sector approach to policy planning and program development and to implement a wide range of essential interventions for young children.