



SABER IN ACTION: TUNISIA

STRENGTHENING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD)

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As Tunisia emerges from the Arab Spring, its new constitution explicitly recognizes the rights of the child and the responsibility of both the State and parents to act in the child's best interest to guarantee dignity, healthcare, protection, and education.

In accordance with these guarantees, the Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family, and Childhood (MFFE) has utilized the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) diagnostic tools to analyze policies and programs that affect young children in Tunisia. Through this SABER-ECD collaboration with UNICEF and the World Bank, MFFE has used policy recommendations to develop its own multisectoral strategy to improve early childhood development (ECD) for Tunisia's children.

Creating a Favorable Environment for ECD

A supportive environment is essential for the design and implementation of effective ECD policies. Per the SABER-ECD framework, key components of an enabling environment are: the existence of an adequate legal and regulatory framework to support ECD, coordination within and between institutions to deliver services effectively, and adequate fiscal resources with transparent and efficient allocation mechanisms.

While national laws and guidelines in Tunisia promoted a number of essential health, education, and protection services for young children and pregnant women, SABER-ECD found that they left out some important aspects of ECD. Namely, Tunisia had yet to establish an explicit multisectoral policy to govern the provision of integrated ECD services. This hindered service delivery-level coordination. Furthermore, when distributing ECD funds, the government used some transparent criteria for resource allocation in the education and social protection sectors, but not in the health and nutrition sectors.



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Overall, SABER-ECD found that Tunisia's level of ECD funding was inadequate, especially in the education sector. To improve ECD in Tunisia, SABER-ECD recommended expanding and enhancing laws and regulations to provide more resources to improve early healthcare, learning, nutrition, and overall well-being of pregnant women and children.

Implementation at a Large Scale

Large-scale implementation refers to the scope of ECD programs available, the extent of coverage, and the level of equity in the provision of ECD services. Effective ECD systems have established programs in all key sectors and ensure that all children and pregnant women have guaranteed access to the essential services and interventions they need to live healthy lives.



Tunisia had partially accomplished this: it offered programs in all key sectors and ensured that all children and pregnant women have access to the essential services and interventions they need to live a healthy life. Nonetheless, SABER-ECD found that more attention is needed to promote an expansion of interventions in the education and nutrition sectors in Tunisia. In addition, the level of equity in access to some early education interventions required improvement. Despite the government's efforts to ensure access to essential education services for all children, levels of coverage remained low, especially for children from disadvantaged families.

SABER-ECD recommendations included expanding the provision of ECD services in all sectors to ensure universal coverage so that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Surveillance and Quality Assurance

Monitoring and quality assurance are achieved via information systems which monitor children's access to ECD services and outcomes, standards for ECD services, and systems to monitor and comply with these standards. Ensuring the quality of ECD interventions is essential; when programs are low-quality, the impact on children can be negligible or even detrimental.

Tunisia had quality standards for infrastructure and service delivery for early childhood education institutions, but SABER-ECD found that compliance with these standards was not systematically monitored by the government. To solve this problem, SABER-ECD recommended that the government improve the inspection and surveillance mechanisms of these institutions so that it may better monitor their compliance with well-defined official standards.

Furthermore, SABER-ECD found that data can inform policy choices about the volume and distribution of public funding, recruitment and training of staff, program quality, compliance with standards and efforts to target the neediest children. Thus, it recommended that data collection be made more accurate, comprehensive and timely in order to more effectively promote policy development in Tunisia.



SABER-ECD in Action

The SABER-ECD process and findings were well-received, providing the MFFE with a strong evidence base to launch policy dialogue with national stakeholders across the policy goals. Specifically, the MFFE has focused on the gaps identified in the report: insufficient intersectoral coordination, weaknesses in ECD legislation, and wide regional disparities in access to early education.

SABER-ECD results have also formed the basis for contributions to the country's five-year development plan (2016-2020). Building on SABER-ECD and other inputs, Tunisia is currently developing its own national multisectoral ECD strategy that will lay out the country's vision, mission, and strategic priorities for providing high-quality and equitable early childhood development for Tunisia's children.