

Malawi launches early childhood education week ^[1]

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Source: Malawi News Agency

Format: Article

Publication Date: 11 Sep 2012

EXCERPTS:

Deputy Minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, Jennifer Chilunga on Monday said early childhood education was vital for a child's development.

Chilunga was speaking when she launched the 2012 National Early Childhood Development Awareness Week.

During the week, the ministry will carry out activities aimed at promoting Early Childhood development (ECD).

Speaking during the launch at Namanje FP School in Blantyre, Chilunga said Children who had gone through ECD were ready for school, excel in class, and had higher chances of completing their school and become successful in life.

Chilunga said the ECD awareness week gave the country an opportunity to understand the importance of ECD and renew the commitment to concerted effort for the care and protection of children in Malawi.

She said the National ECD Awareness week was one of the best practices in the implementation of the ECD projects not only in Urban but also in rural areas.

"Realizing the importance of the early years in the child's development, government has made tremendous efforts to raise the profile of ECD services in the country.

"Outstanding among the efforts was the launch of the National ECD Policy in 2003. Since then, great strides have been made to improve the quality of ECD programme which is provided to young children in the country," Chilunga said.

She said Malawi now had a well defined implementation structure at community, district and national levels.

ECD is a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to eight years of age, their parents and caregivers. ECD aims to protect and promote the child's rights to develop his or her fully, emotional, social and physical potential.

Chalizamudzi Matola, Action Aid ECD Coordinator, said the National ECD Network was fully functional and providing a forum for networking, collaborating and partnership between various stakeholders such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children, World Food Programme (WFP), and Action Aid, among many other organizations who have supported this year's ECD Awareness week.

Matola said as partners, they were committed to complementing government efforts on ECD Programme.

Since the National ECD Policy was adopted in 2003, the number of children in ECD Centers has increased from 30 per cent 2008 to 35 per cent in 2012.

The increase has been attributed to the availability of the policy to regulate the work of ECD service providers, the availability of well trained caregivers and improved coordination at all levels.

However, due to limited ECD service providers, low funding and challenges in the delivery of services, only 9,300 centers are providing the services to 850,000 children across the country.

Despite making progress, at least 65 per cent of the children in the country are not accessing ECD services.

To increase public awareness and lobby for more funding for ECD services, government and its partners developed the National Advocacy and Communication Strategy in 2009 called 'M'mera Mpoyamba.'

The policy emphasizes the importance of investing in the early years of the child.

The theme for this year's National ECD Awareness Week is 'Early Childhood Development for Every Child, Everywhere'.

-reprinted from the Malawi News Agency

Region: Africa ^[2]

Tags: child development ^[3]

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