

**Address of Hon (Mrs) L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun
Minister of Education and Human Resources,
Tertiary Education and Scientific Research**

EXPERT CONSULTATIVE Meeting

6-8 June 2017

**Expand the African ECCE Services of Quality by
Strengthening the Workforce**

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

Welcome to all of you to this Consultative Meeting on Strengthening the Capacity of the Workforce engaged in the provision ECCE Services in Africa. A special welcome is obviously extended to our foreign participants. Thank you for taking precious time off your busy professional schedules so as to be with us here in Mauritius.

I am really delighted that, so soon after the first Steering Committee meeting of the ICQN – ECD held during the 2017 Triennale of ADEA in Senegal, we are today in a position to embark on one important strategic activity related thereto.

You will agree that, globally, there is a fast growing acceptance of the vital importance of Early Childhood Development. Many countries that typically concentrated on formal schooling as from the primary level onwards are today adding preschool education in their education system.

In fact, there is a heightened policy interest in ECD and this was recognized by all participants in the recent Triennial. Small wonder then that the Declaration by African Ministers at the ADEA Triennial gives priority to the expansion of early learning opportunities on the Continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished Guests,

There is a growing body of international evidence that reflects the huge benefits that accrue from investment in ECD to society as a whole.

It is agreed that high-quality child care experiences are consistently related to better outcomes for children in general, and especially for low-income children. These experiences have long term effects on children's later schooling and their social-emotional adjustment.

Establishing early childhood as a solid foundation thus results in economic prosperity, responsible citizenship, and the growth of healthy communities. In fact, a World Bank Report goes as far as to state that every dollar spent on preschool education earns between 6 and 17 USD of public benefits, in the form of a healthier and more productive workforce – and with fewer wrongdoers.

The reality is therefore that the situation related to ECD in many of our countries needs to be urgently addressed – otherwise, the negative influences on a child's early development can turn out to be irreversible.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is where a workforce properly trained in the provision of ECD quality services comes in.

You all know that ECD encompasses different developmental stages with different developmental needs, each of which requires a different skill set.

And it is the ECCE workforce and the individuals within that workforce who will make all the difference.

Take the pre-school, or again the nursery, for example. It is not just a matter of children attending these settings. Unless children get the *right kind of attention*, they are little better off than those who stay at home.

Of course, the task is momentous.

I must pause here, ladies and gentlemen, to say hats off to a large number of Civil Society Organisations that have committed themselves to a series of intervention actions that are giving fantastic results. The remarkable thing about these CSOs is that they are at the ground level; they know what works and what doesn't; they are instrumental in having designed some programmes that have had a most positive and telling effect. Their work therefore has to be recognised and celebrated. Nonetheless, that being said, we also realise that getting the entire ECD workforce to concentrate on the panoply of needs is an immense task. It is also a tricky proposition because the ECCE workforce is exceptionally varied.

Illustratively, at one end of the spectrum, we have individuals with little or no training who provide mainly custodial care without attention to educational goals. At the other end are individuals with specialized postgraduate degrees providing carefully planned educational experiences.

I believe you and I will all agree that ***professionalization has to be the new name of the game.***

The ECCE workforce should be supported to achieve the relevant qualifications. These qualifications will equip them with the skills, knowledge and competencies, but also values and attitudes to do a number of things. I'll just refer to three of these:

First, to deliver high quality, enriching early childhood care and education experiences;

Two, to work effectively with parents in a mutually supportive partnership towards achieving positive outcomes for children; and

Three, to engage in professional development to support the delivery of quality in the early childhood services.

But the whole process has to be properly planned.

And hence, we come to this Consultative Meeting.

You are definitely familiar with the very purpose of this Meeting which is to prepare a capacity building programme focused on accelerating ECCE workforce development in selected countries on the Continent.

As Experts from major universities, training organisations and Ministries, your expertise in early childhood education training and career pathing in an African context would be very much an asset in the venture we are embarking upon.

As Chairperson of the ICQN ECD, I will make a plea to you.

Do come forward with a coherent and collaborative action plan that will focus on strengthening and upskilling the African ECCE workforce.

Make no mistake about it: I'll take this roadmap to the Steering Committee of the ICQN ECD and to my colleague Ministers on that Committee. I am relying on your expertise that will help us, policy makers, to translate your action points into reality.

But I will also add a word of caution here. This is a Planning Meeting and it will brook no rush job, no haphazard kind of proposals. I would want you to be very selective with regard to your intervention actions. If these are well-thought-through, they will have the much-needed impact that we are looking forward to.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,

I certainly cannot end my address to you without having a special word of appreciation for the absolutely magnificent collaboration of the African Early Childhood Network (AfECN) and the ADEA in making this Meeting possible.

Unfortunately, neither Lynette nor an ADEA representative could be here today. But I will request my services to convey my heartfelt thankfulness to both organisations for their support.

Let me therefore wish you all very fruitful deliberations. After all, this meeting is an important step in our journey towards ensuring that all our young children have positive and enriching experiences in whatever ECCE settings they attend.

I thank you for your attention.