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**Implementing Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy in South Africa: strengthening institutional capacity for evidence use.**

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**Objectives/aims**

The Programme to Support Pro-poor Policy Development (PSPPD) a research and capacity building programme, which is located in the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) initiated an intervention in the Department of Social Development (DSD) in the Eastern Cape. The main objective of this intervention was to strengthen the institutional capacity of the DSD to improve the implementation of ECD services. To achieve this, a secondary objective was to improve the use of research evidence and data in the planning and implementation of ECD thereby improving service provision.

**Methods**

The key method that was used to improve the capacity of government officials to be aware of what information and data they needed was training interventions. The PSPPD was running a generic training programme on Evidence Based Policy Making for senior government officials. The team from the Eastern Cape DSD attended this training programme which advocates and raises awareness on the use of evidence in policy making. The team also attended a training course on Poverty and Inequality which located their ECD work within the broader context of South Africa. In addition to these activities the niche learning interventions were designed which had a specific ECD focus. For example a learning exchange was arranged with another province in South Africa, where the team learned about a business process to expedite ECD centre registration. Another learning exchange was arranged with the Chile Crece Contigo, both where Chilean colleagues’ visited South Africa and a team from the Eastern Cape went on a visit to Chile. Furthermore, workshops were organised with research organisations where they learnt about demographic data, indices of multiple deprivation, spatial poverty and inequality.

**Main findings**

The main results from this intervention is that evidence and data use can be improved over time through working with key individuals who are part of a team. Their understanding of the importance of the use of evidence shifted the culture in the team. They integrated the use of evidence into their Annual Performance Plans showed that skills building is key to the increased utilisation of evidence. Another significant outcome from this intervention is that the individual government officials expressed the view that they felt supported and were therefore invested in improving their performance. This reflects the importance of building relationships, which in turn enabled the building of trust. Understanding the context, both in terms of the politics and culture of the organisation is key to building institutions. Moreover understanding the demands on officials and being mindful of the pressures they work under is fundamentally important. Therefore you have secure the buy-in of senior management so that officials are able to participate in the intervention.