TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
   1.1 Background to the Policy
   1.2 The Importance of Early Development
   1.3 Learning
   1.4 Situation

2. MISSION STATEMENT

3. POLICY
   3.1 Establishment of a system for children in Mauritius
   3.1 Establishment of a system for accreditation and quality improvement for child care
   3.1 Development of a training programme for personnel working in early child development
   3.1 Development of strategies for parental education and community awareness
   3.1 Development of a curriculum for 0-3 years
   3.1 Equity and access in the provision of early childhood services
   3.1 Development of the concept of integrated services for early childhood

4. ACTION PLAN
   4.1 Strategies and Activities
      4.1.1 Develop and implement a monitoring mechanism at the national level in cooperation with stakeholders - Child Care Advisory Committee
4.1.2 Develop supportive legal framework through the establishment and enforcement of regulation
4.1.3 Mobilization and allocation of resources
4.1.4 Establish a Child Care Accreditation Bureau
4.1.5 The Education of Child Care and Supporting Personnel: Capacity Building in ECD
4.1.6 Creating a Career Structure and Regulating Salaries of ECD caregivers
4.1.7 Educating and involving parents
4.1.8 Advocating and creating awareness about child care
4.1.9 Development of a curriculum framework for 0-3 years
4.1.10 Ensuring ECD programmes are available for children with special needs
4.1.11 Adopting an integrated approach and services for early childhood
4.1.12 Introduce a growth monitoring system
4.1.13 Setting up a child care resource centre
4.1.14 Expansion of centre-based and home-based day care facilities
4.1.15 Creating a database

5. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND TO THE POLICY

The Republic of Mauritius signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 26 July, 1990. Subsequently in June 1994 the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development devised a National Programme of Action (NPA) for the Survival, Development, and Protection of Children. In the same year Mauritius was selected as one of three case studies within the World Bank Regional Early Childhood Development Initiative. This study which started in May 1996 was completed in April 1998.

The participation of Mauritian women in the work force is not only a matter of social justice but, also one of economic efficiency arising from the necessity to effectively employ the important economic asset that Mauritian women represent. The increase of women’s participation in the labor force has risen from 24 % to 43.9 % over the period 1983-1995. It is forecasted that by the year 2020, workforce participation will rise to 700,000, with a sex-ratio of 143 males to 100 females, as compared to the current ratio of 2:1. This increased participation of women who are mothers of young children and who are in the labor force has generated an increased need for the provision of good early childhood services. Such services must be of good quality in order to meet the
developmental needs of the youngest citizens of Mauritius - children in the 0-3 years age range.

The Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development has an important, indeed critical role to play in order to achieve a high quality of life for families with young children. The Ministry is very aware that stresses felt by families have the potential to endanger the socio-cultural fabric of society. Such stresses include the demands of the work place coupled with the demands of caring for families in the home. Parents, for example, with children of different age groups, have problems in arranging transport for their children and their work schedules. Currently, the location of the services they need are widely dispersed making it difficult for both children and families. Care and protection of children must be a paramount concern for children must not be left unsupervised or with inadequate supervision.

1.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Child growth and development refer to all the complex interrelated changes which occur as the child’s physical, social, emotional and intellectual levels of functioning move from basic to highly complex levels. Development begins from conception and progresses in a sequential and orderly way. Development is a continuous process and in the early childhood years, from birth to eight, children’s development is progressing at its fastest rate. There are pre-determined stages that children in all cultures progress through, but the rate and extent of development differ with individual children.

The life chances of an individual child are determined to some extent before birth depending on the general health, nutrition and socio-economic status of the expectant mother. Equity forces then play an important role in determining the child’s future direction in life. After birth, the child’s development continues to be influenced by both nature (those biological factors the child is born with) and nurture (those environmental factors into which the child is born) and the way that these two forces interact. There are some developmental characteristics in children’s development which are universal and which occur in all cultures. These are often called developmental milestones and mark important stages in development.

We also have to acknowledge that children grow and learn in a socio-economic context and in Mauritius the cultural context is very diverse. Not only is there a diversity of cultures but there is also the matter of language and language use. It could be asserted that, for the very young child, his or her world is a confusing place to be in with its many conflicting socio-cultural mores, behaviors, perspectives and acceptance of right and wrong. Despite all these conflicting issues, the child becomes acculturated and learns how to survive. The people responsible for the development of young children has to make this passage of survival as easy and supportive as possible.
1.3. LEARNING

Information from the many studies of child development continue to show us how critically important the early years are in the development of the child. Indeed, it is claimed that at 5 years of age the child has reached 80% of its intellectual potential for development. As the child interacts with his or her environment, learning occurs. In the early years, learning is a process in which the acquiring of knowledge, skills, habits and values are gained from direct experience. The child is not like an empty vessel into which knowledge is poured but is a highly active agent in the learning process. It is this being an active agent that is so important at all levels of education and development but even more so in early childhood when learning is more concrete than abstract. A prime example is the child’s learning of language. The child’s native language, whatever this might be, is the most important and effective medium of communication and to reject this in favor of some other language is to deny the child’s right to a basic education. It is also a rejection of the child’s socio-cultural heritage. Language is, indeed, the roots of a child’s identity.

Children learn best when they are part of a secure environment with a constant adult who cares about them. From approximately 6 months of age or earlier they are sensitive and respond to familiar people in their world. By approximately 9 months of age, many infants have some basic foundations of conceptual thinking. It is now realized that the infant and toddler are far more competent beings than we thought and, of course, there are wide variations in development at this period. However, the attachments that they form to family members and caregivers are critical, for attachments are the foundations of emotional stability. This is why an infant child who is cared for by multiple caregivers in an unstable environment may have poor emotional development.

We have sufficient knowledge that infants are capable of knowing, feeling, responding and enjoying their family and caregivers. They need the stability and regularity that a good home can provide. This enables us to assert that children experiencing child care need care giving with a constant adult as a primary care-giver who in interested in them and who cares about them. In addition, they need to be in a setting where there is the added security that comes from experiencing established routines. A good home and a good child care centre can provide this stability and constancy and thus assist the children to develop a positive self concept about themselves even at this early age.

There is a strong body of international research evidence that proves that good early childhood education and care for both advantaged and disadvantaged children have considerable ramifications for their future development especially in relation to (school) learning. This research evidence shows that children who have experienced a good early childhood programme are better able to cope with new intellectual demands (that is children do not fall behind), as well as develop positive attitudes about their own
achievements. It can be shown then, that early intervention has the effect of improving children’s ability to meet the intellectual, social and behavioural demands of their school. Involvement in an enriched childcare programme has the potential to effect the educational progress of these children in a very positive way. These findings are particularly important when considering appropriate intervention for disadvantaged children and children who are at risk for other reasons such as learning difficulties. However, it must be emphasised that the research also shows that young children are particularly vulnerable to poor environmental conditions especially in the early years of their development (0-3 years).

1.4. SITUATION

In 1985, the United Nations adopted certain strategies for the advancement of women. Among these, was the provision of child care facilities for working parents and setting up of a network of day care facilities. In Mauritius, the Government has shown special interest for the matter and has subsequently set up several day care facilities. This was followed by a significant increase in the number of day care centres by private individuals and institutions. Such initiatives were in fact, geared more towards involving women in the economic development and less attention was being paid to the development of the child.

Since 1991, the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development is mandated to cater for children with special attention to Early Childhood Development (ECD) and is responsible for children in the cohort of 0-3 years. ECD is a relatively new concept in Mauritius. With its enormous potential and distinctive role in promoting the active learning capacities and the overall well being and development of the child, it is still, to-date, poorly supported, not valued and less than basically resourced. Various studies commissioned have identified major constraints to establishing a national ECD framework of service providers such as: (i) absence of a regulatory framework; (ii) lack of inter-relationship and synergy among various levels of services in early childhood (health, education, social welfare) (iii) the unsustainability of various initiatives; (iv) limited professional capacity (v) dearth of appropriate data; (vi) poor and ineffective infrastructure; (vii) low parental involvement; (viii) non-affordability; (ix) mostly untrained personnel; (x) low salary of staff due to absence of uniformity in the condition of employment; (xi) non-standardisation of quality of services particularly in home-care; (xii) limited medical services coverage of centres.

The responsibility of formulating policies, designing, implementing and co-ordinating a national ECD programme rests in the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development in collaboration with other Government ministries, institutions, NGO’s etc. In this respect community participation and regular consultations were held with ECD
stakeholders, local as well as international, the outcome of which is the formulation of this desired policy.

2. MISSION STATEMENT

The mission is to introduce and adopt an integrated and holistic approach to ECD, an approach which will emphasise the child’s overall development - intellectual, physical, emotional, social well-being, initiative and self-esteem. In addition, it takes into consideration the child’s diverse skills and need for autonomy and independence. The approach thus focuses on the social, physical, economic and cultural environment including the family and community in which the child is embedded.

The challenge of ECD is a powerful investment in the future both socially and economically. What is done or is not done for children in their first years when their intellectual potential, personality and social behaviour are being developed will determine not only their own future but quite significantly the future of humanity in the coming millennium. This Policy is a commitment to the cause and welfare of children and the future they represent. As such the objectives of the Policy are:

- To deal directly with the issue of young children’s development as well as with the importance of ECD programme with a view to ensuring an improved and coordinated planning and execution process.
- To define roles and responsibilities to Government and non-Governmental institutions, NGO’s, the private sector, communities, and families for the welfare of children and to establish positive relationships amongst them.
- To foster inter-relationship and synergy among the various sectors involved in ECD programme through a well designed national framework.
- To develop a monitoring mechanism and strategies which will ensure that quality gains achieved for ECD will be strengthened and long-lasting.
- To develop a supportive legal framework, programmes and activities related to ECD which will serve as guidelines and standards for ECD caregivers.
- To mobilize and allocate resources for ECD programmes available within government and obtained from donor agencies.
- To enable every child to evolve in an affective and materially secure environment.
- To provide systematic and comprehensive parental/community awareness and support focusing on child development.

3. POLICY

Policy Statement 1:
Establishment of a system for child care in Mauritius

Each of the commissioned Reports recommended the establishment of a centralised Unit within the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development to manage the licensing, standard-setting and supervising of all child care services. This recommendation has emerged for it is obvious that there needs to be some structure which will create a focus for improving and expanding the provision of quality child care.

The Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development is inclined not to establish too large a management structure for two reasons:

(i) Management tends to become too bureaucratic and this could work against desired objectives. Also given that the child care service is largely in the hands of the private sector we have to rely on the good-will, understanding and co-operation of the many private providers of services;

(ii) A large bureaucracy tends to be costly while the aim is to invest into provision of quality services rather than into centralised management.

Obviously there is need to put existing licensing practices into better order and to establish an appropriate set of Regulations and Standards for centre-based and home-based care. These Standards will become the minimum requirements to be met by all providers of child care, both centre-based and home-based. Therefore, the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development will review its central support team and procedures.

As said earlier, because the child care industry is largely in the hands of private providers, the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development will establish a Child Care Advisory Committee with view to establishing a sound working relationship amongst the providers, parents/community, and governmental institutions.

Policy Statement 2:

Establishment of a system for Accreditation and Quality Improvement for Child Care

When considering the whole matter of licensing, accrediting and quality improvement within the child care industry, the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development will design a system which places the responsibility for maintaining quality back on the industry itself. In so doing besides the costs had to be kept to a minimum, it is felt that system be accepted by the industry.
Quality improvement is based on a growing professionalism within a service. Government believes that commitment to quality improvement has to be embraced if it is to be effective and long-lasting. Where it is enforced it usually lacks commitment and is less effective. When standards have been established jointly with the people working in the service they are more likely than not to be accepted by the service.

From the perspective of the child care service providers, some form of incentive is needed if they are to recognise and accept the need for quality improvement. Such incentives could take the form of government subsidies for children deemed to be in special need, or for work-based financial grants etc. Such incentives are important especially in the early stages of implementing an accreditation system until a degree of professionalism penetrates the service. Where centres are ranked against established criteria it is obvious the higher the ranking the more attractive that centre would be to families seeking child care services. This alone is a particularly powerful incentive to upgrade quality in a user-pays, competitive market.

An accreditation system has two elements - standards and ranking. Accreditation means that a centre or home-based service meets at least all minimum requirements according to the standards set. The rating given indicates how far beyond minimum standards the service has reached. In this respect it is desirable that while the regulation and standards will be enforced by the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development, the Accreditation will be administered by an Accreditation Bureau set up for the purpose.

The accreditation system to be introduced will have the following elements:

- the centre proprietor, staff and parents work collaboratively in upgrading the centres services. This is a process of self-study based upon reflection
- the centre’s self-study is reviewed by a peer currently working in child care to ascertain rating reliability
- the self-study and review are moderated so that a national system and national standards can be maintained
- accreditation can be granted for a specific period of time
- a further period of accreditation is contingent upon subsequent process of self-study and review
- where accreditation is not granted, the centre is encouraged to continue to work towards achieving accreditation
- self-study is based on a set of indicators and standards established and approved by the Accreditation Bureau

Policy Statement 3:
Development of a training programme for personnel working in early child development

The education and training of personnel to work in child care needs organising and formalising. It is important that this be done, and done systematically for a workforce is only as good as the training its workers achieve. There is sufficient evidence world-wide to confirm that early childhood is, indeed, the period in children’s lives when they are most vulnerable, but also it is the period when they need the best care and developmental stimulation possible if they are to succeed in later life. Failure for many children begins in infancy. Good child care is demonstrably more than baby-minding. Therefore those people working in child care must receive the best preparation possible.

As at June 1996, approximately 65,000 children were in the age-range of 0 to 3 years. In the Report prepared by an UNICEF Consultant in September 1997 mentioned is made that currently 4000 child care workers are engaged in formal or non-formal commercial child care centres. Of these, about 1000 persons working in formal commercial centres seem to have received some form of training. The remaining 3000 workers are untrained. The Consultant further observed that over the next five-year period the forecast is that an additional 36,000 children will need some form of child care with 6,000 additional workers in approximately 3,280 child care centres of varying size, administrative structure and location. This is a frightening scenario given today’s standards of service and the lack of formalised training.

The training needs in child care are threefold

(a) a full-time course of pre-service preparation for school leavers who wish to be employed in child care settings

(b) a part-time course of in-service education and training for those persons already employed in child care but who are untrained or less than optimally trained

(c) a part-time course of in-service education for those persons already trained but who wish to progress to higher levels of responsibility within the workforce.

This training programme will lay emphasis on the capacity building of child care personnel with focus on the age range 0-3 years which will enable the care giver a good development perspective of child growth and individual differences thus facilitating the transition from day care to pre-school.

It is desirable, because of the number of different training programmes existing in Mauritius and the rather confusing pattern of training done in the past, that any course
devised, builds into it Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) which is itself an acceptable practice world-wide. In this way recognition can be given for skills already developed and knowledge gained.

In addition to the formal pre-service training course development which will include distance education modes, refresher programmes will be organised on a regular basis.

**Policy Statement 4:**

**Development of strategies for parental education and community awareness**

There is an urgent need to raise parental and community awareness about the importance of early childhood development and care. This awareness can be achieved in many ways but one most effective is to involve parents and the community in the management of centres so as to have as much positive parent and community participation as is possible. The type of participation will vary according to the needs, availability and skills of the parents. However, one important aspect is to assist parents and the community to understand what a valuable resource they can be to the children and in some instances to management committees. Through this active involvement there arises a greater understanding of what the goals and objectives of early childhood development are and how good child care services can contribute to development. Staff of centres and providers of home-based care need to be sensitive to the specific needs and availability of parents, particularly those using extended hours of care in centres. Parental involvement is a key element in the proposed accreditation system for child care and will be monitored as part of that system.

**Policy Statement 5:**

**Development of a curriculum framework for 0-3 years**

The reports submitted by various Consultants on ECD programmes have mentioned the urgent need to develop a sound, flexible curriculum framework for caregivers and parents to use in their respective centre and at home. This is a particular concern of the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development given the large number (some 3,000) of untrained workers who are working in the child care sector. This curriculum framework will be developmentally based so that it enhances the overall development including language, physical (both gross and fine motor), social/emotional and cognitive development. It will also give sound directions on caring and teaching approaches. The overall approach, however, will emphasize the importance of play-based learning and be child-centred in thrust.

**Policy Statement 6:**
Equity and Access in the provision of early childhood services

It is unfortunate that in 1997 equity and access in the provision of early childhood services in Mauritius is still lacking. There is a stark contrast in the quality of services available to children from families who can afford to pay for the best care and those who cannot. This, in effect, means that for many children (and their families) inequity commences at the child care level and certainly continues through the schooling period with the gap widening progressively. One only has to compare a centre which has 30 plus children to a group, with 2 untrained staff, working in a substandard building, with inadequate space and materials, offering a programme which can only be described as baby minding with another, more affluent centre, which has 2 trained staff to a group of 12 to 15 children in a setting with superior resources. There is hardly any equity here. It is believed that equity and access is an urgent matter needing speedy attention. Besides there is concern for children with special needs and efforts will be made to integrate children with special needs into regular centres.

Policy Statement 7:

Development of the concept of Integrated Services for early childhood

Mauritius is too small a country for services to be segmented or duplicated. Early childhood development is family development and services need to work together in order to provide the best possible service for children and families. There is also the issue of scarce financial and human resources, so that working collaboratively across Ministries and disciplines is more productive and effective. In models available from other countries, early childhood services are delivered through cooperating Ministries and provision and effectiveness of services has thus improved immensely. The terminology for this type of service varies from an Integrated Services Centre to a One Stop Shop. At such a centre families can have their baby immunised and have health checks done, have one child attending in a child care group, while another one is in a pre-school group in the same building. These types of services also have toy libraries where toys can be borrowed for a specified time and taken home and, as well, a parent library where parents can borrow magazines and books about children’s affairs. Parents, themselves, in such centres often take responsibility for the conduct and maintenance of these services.

4. ACTION PLAN

For the purpose of the preparation of this Policy, an Action Plan has been developed. The recommendations of various commissioned Reports and a subsequent commissioned Discussion Paper have been given due consideration. This methodology has been adopted
to ensure that the proposed Policy is in line with these recommendations and also within the general policy and priorities of the Government. The Action Plan now translates the proposed Policy into programmes and activities. The collaboration of Governmental institutions, NGOs, the Private Sector and International Agencies are in fact crucial to the success of the Ministry’s goals. Expectations are described in the following strategies, projects, programmes and activities.

4.1 STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

Policy Statement 1: Establishment of a system of child care in Mauritius

4.1.1 Develop and implement a monitoring mechanism at the national level in cooperation with stakeholders

Initially a Child Care Advisory Committee will be set up at the Ministry with representatives from the Ministries of Education and Human Resource Development, Health and Quality of Life, and Social Security and National Solidarity, NGOs and Private Institutions. The functions of the committee will be:

- To advise on an improved and more informed and coordinated planning and execution process of ECD programmes.
- To assist in the identification of training needs of child care providers.
- To recommend on the development of appropriate curricula for the sector.
- To advise on the setting up of an appropriate accreditation system to ensure provision of quality service in the child care sector.
- To ensure linkages among different partners of the State involved in ECD programmes including local authorities, communities, NGOs and the private sector.
- To ensure continuous, uninterrupted and holistic child development including learning.
- To advise on appropriate mechanism and strategies for a strengthen ECD programme.
- To advise on any study/survey, evaluation exercise to be undertaken.
- To advise and assist on any other specific matters related to child care.
- At a later stage the Committee will have a status of a Board.

4.1.2 Develop Supportive legal framework through the establishment and enforcement of Regulations

A National Children’s Council Act and A Child Protection Act are currently enforced. Regulations for Centre-based Day-care and Home-based Day-care will be made under the
Child Protection Act which will set minimum standards for day-care centres and home-based care to ensure quality of services for young children. All centre-based and home-based day-care providers will be required to be registered. After satisfying the minimum requirements as established in the Regulations, such centres will be provided with a permit or license for their operation. The enforcement of these regulations will be the responsibility of the Ministry.

4.1.3 Mobilization and Allocation of Resources

At present the Government is subsidising the participation of four-year old children in pre-primary programmes. At this stage this policy can not be adopted for children of 0-3 years. The feasibility of creating other mechanisms for providing assistance to children 0 – 3 years will be explored. The Ministry in collaboration with providers and other relevant professionals will design programmes and cost them. Funding by Government, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, the private sector and NGOs will be sought.

Policy Statement 2: Establish a system of Accreditation and Quality Improvement

4.1.4 Establish a Child Care Accreditation Bureau

Quality improvement is based on a growing professionalism within a service. Commitment to quality improvement has to be embraced by service providers if it is to be effective and long-lasting. Good quality care must also draw from a social base of knowledge about Early Childhood Development and the characteristics common to children at different age groups. The Bureau established will develop and implement an accreditation system based on the principles and standards established for quality child care including health and nutrition. The Bureau will be established to ensure that children in day care centres have stimulating, positive experiences and interactions that foster all aspects of their development. For this purpose a fund will be created within the Bureau so as to provide incentives to service providers to enable them to seek assistance in their work towards quality improvement and its sustainability.

Policy Statement 3: Development of a training programme for personnel working in ECD

4.1.5 The Education of Child Care and Supporting Personnel: Capacity Building in ECD

A training programme based on a participative approach developed by Bernard Van Leer Foundation is already in operation. Through this programme called "Enhancing the Skills of Early Childhood Trainers" a pool of child care trainers has already begun to be established. This training will be continued and expanded with a view to providing basic
training in early childhood development to all local authorities and NGO’s which have responsibility for the development of quality child care services.

The collaboration of the Mauritius Institute of Education and University of Mauritius will be sought to design and introduce courses in ECD based on modular approach with designated levels (level 1, 2, 3). Such courses should articulate and lead to a sub-professional award of Certificate, which itself could lead to sub-professional award of Diploma. The University of Mauritius will be requested to consider introducing ECD components in its existing courses such as social work, gender studies etc. The possibility of introducing Distance Education on child care will be explored with the Mauritius College of the Air.

It is planned three categories of training in child-care will be developed:

- Full-time pre-service course for school leavers;
- Part-time, initial course for in-service training;
- Part time, Advanced Training for in-service.

4.1.6 Creating a Career Structure and Regulating salaries of ECD care-givers

There is recognition that in order to attract more care-providers in the ECD sector and to provide efficient and quality services to children, it is necessary to review the salaries of the care-givers. The Ministry will collaborate with of the Ministry of Labour and NRB to develop new industrial conditions and recommend and regulate a salary scale for care-givers at various levels of responsibility.

Policy Statement 4: Development of strategies for parent education and community awareness

4.1.7 Educating and Involving Parents

A parental education programme is already in operation. This programme aims at educating parents and other family care-givers in ways that will enhance the quality of their children. It focuses on the quality of the interactions between parent/caregiver and the child so as to enrich the immediate home environment. It provides access to child development, knowledge, training and participation opportunities. This programme will be pursued and extended to the community at large. In addition, the involvement of parents in the activities of child care centres will be encouraged and this involvement will be monitored through the child care accreditation process being established.

4.1.8 Advocating and Creating an awareness about child care
There is a general lack of awareness in the community of the importance of child care. The public at large needs to be sensitized to valuing the early childhood years. Parents need support as they develop ways of interacting with children that support each child’s development. The service providers also need to develop ways to help parents become more meaningfully involved with their child. In these concerns aggressive IEC campaigns will be developed and carried out through TV, radio, video, newspapers, posters and pamphlets with a view to sensitizing the community and promoting awareness of the needs of young children. In addition parents as well as care-givers will be provided with specific information on child-care and child development.

Policy Statement 5: Development of a curriculum framework for 0-3 years

4.1.9 A flexible, yet carefully constructed curriculum guide based on the domains of children’s development is needed.

This guide when completed will give professional assistance to the large numbers of caregivers currently working in centres. Such staff have had no training or minimal training to guide their practice.

There are some personnel in the Ministry who have begun preliminary work on a curriculum guide. These efforts will be further developed by allocating some resources and by setting target dates for the completion of the curriculum guide. On completion the guide will be piloted in 10 centres and modified accordingly after piloting.

Policy Statement 6: Equity and access in child care

4.1.10 Ensuring ECD Programmes are available for children with special needs

Many children are currently excluded from ECD programmes and do not have access to basic and essential services. At present the provision of such programmes for children with disabilities is very restricted. The Ministry is concerned to see that children with special needs will be included in all ECD programmes. Child-care centres will be encouraged, through an incentive scheme, to integrate these children in their programmes. The assistance of the Ministry of Social Security and National Solidarity will be sought to support NGO’s, child-care centres and parents of children with special needs.

Policy Statement 7: Development of the concept of integrated services in ECD

4.1.11 Adopting an integrated approach and services for early childhood
At present different Government agencies, child-care centres and NGO’s provide a variety of child care services. In the main these are segmented with very little cross-referencing or co-operation. Indeed, there are problems of duplication of services in some areas. It has become clear that an integrated, holistic approach to ECD should be adopted for the proper utilisation of human and financial resources so as to provide the best possible quality services to children and their families.

All governmental and non-governmental child care services should be aware of the services being provided in their immediate vicinity. They should be encouraged to collaborate with each other so as to complement and supplement their child care programmes. It is essential, especially in the case of capacity-building, that there should be involvement of different partners. In-service training programmes organised by an institution should be available to staff from other child care providers especially those in the local vicinity. Where this is done a form of collegial expertise will develop with the result that early childhood services will be delivered more effectively. Through a concerted effort on the part of the Ministry in co-operation with other relevant Ministries, current child care providers, NGO’s and other organisations, the provision of an integrated child care service will be made available to all children of Mauritius.

4.1.12 Introduce a Growth Monitoring System

The Infant Mortality Rate and the Under 5 Mortality Rate were 19.6 and 26.6 per thousand life birth respectively in 1995. The primary cause of low birth-weight babies (29.7%) and the high rates of malnutrition among the young population is associated with declining tends in breast feeding, poor weaning practices, and poor dietary patterns. Malnutrition is reflected by the relative high prevalence of underweight, stunting and wasting among children as well as anemic conditions of both children and pregnant women.

The Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development will work in collaboration with the Ministry of Health to ensure that children of day-care centres are provided health screening. Regular visits to day-care centres by trained nurses or medical officers will be effected. The Ministry of Health will be encouraged to introduce growth monitoring for children 0-3 years in child-care centres and to assist in the training of child-care staff on health, nutrition and related matters.

4.1.13 Setting up of a Child-Care Resource Centre

As one aspect of adopting an holistic approach to developing integrated services for early childhood, an Early Child-Care Resource Centre will be set-up with the participation of Government, NGO’s and parents. This resource centre will be a place where pedagogical toys, books and magazines related to child care and development can be borrowed by
child care centres and parents. It also will assist in the inservice training of personnel for care services.

**4.1.14 Expansion of Centre-based and Home-based Day-care Facilities**

It is observed that day-care and home-care services are more or less an urban phenomenon. Rural areas, currently, are deprived of these facilities and services and as a result there is a disparity in terms of provision of services for children.

Local Authorities and NGO’s will be encouraged and assisted to establish day-care facilities in rural and deprived regions and provide funds for ECD programmes. District Councils and Municipal Councils will also be responsible for the commercial registration, control and monitoring of centre-based and home-based child care programmes.

Loan facilities and other incentives to NGO’s and private individuals offering or wish to offer day care facilities will be pursued and extended.

**4.1.15 Creating a Database**

At present there is a dearth of data available to guide policy implementation. Under this Policy baseline data will be collected so that there is a database available for assessment of access and quality. Regular surveys, studies and evaluation strategies will be carried out with a view to improve the quality and coverage of all child care services.

**5. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK**

The Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development is the implementing and coordinating agency for all programmes of ECD and, with the collaboration of other agencies, will be responsible for the overall implementation and monitoring of this Policy, its programmes and activities.

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<tr>
<th>Strategies and Activities</th>
<th>Responsible Institution</th>
<th>Time - Frame</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Establishment of a system of child care in Mauritius</td>
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<tr>
<td>(i) Develop and implement a monitoring mechanism at national level in co-operation with stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td>(ii) Setting up Child Care Advisory Committee/ Board</td>
<td>Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development</td>
<td>April 1998</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(ii) Develop Supportive legal framework through the establishment and enforcement of Regulations

(iii) Mobilization and Allocation of resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry of Women, F.W. &amp; C.D.</th>
<th>Ministry of Finance</th>
<th>MEDRC</th>
<th>UNICEF</th>
<th>Bilateral &amp; Multilateral Donor agencies</th>
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</table>

### 2. Establish a System of Accreditation and Quality of Improvement

(i) Establish a Child Care Accreditation Bureau

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development</th>
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### Strategies and Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
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#### Strategies and Activities

<table>
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<tr>
<td>The Education of Child Care and Supporting Personnel: Capacity Building in ECD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
<td>Ministry of Education &amp; H.R.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIE</td>
<td>University of Mauritius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Social Security &amp; N.S.</td>
<td>Ministry of Local Government &amp; E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>EPZLWF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Authorities</td>
<td>NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day-Care Centres</td>
<td>Home-based Centres</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(ii) Creating a Career Structure and Regulating Salaries of ECD Care-givers

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ministry of Women, F.W. &amp; C.D.</th>
<th>Ministry of Labour &amp; I.R.</th>
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<tr>
<td>N.R.B.</td>
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<td>Educating and Involving Parents</td>
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</table>
|   |   | Ministry of Education & H.R.D.  
|   |   | Local Authorities  
|   |   | UNICEF  
|   |   | NGOs  
|   |   | Day Care Centres  
| (ii) | Advocating and Creating Awareness an Child Care | Ministry of Women, F.W. & C.D.  
|   |   | Ministry of Health  
|   |   | Ministry of Education & H.R.D.  
|   |   | Ministry of Social Security & N.S.  
|   |   | Ministry of Local Government & E.  
|   |   | Local Authorities  
|   |   | NGOs  
|   |   | MCA  
|   |   | MBC/TV  
|   |   | Media Trust  
| 5 | Development of a curriculum framework for 0-3 years |   

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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Equity and access in child care</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
| (i) | Ensuring ECD Programmes for children with special needs. | Ministry of Women, F.W. & C.D.  
|   |   | Ministry of Social Security & N.S.  
|   |   | NGOs  
|   |   | Day-Care Centres  
|   |   | June 1998  
| 7 | Development of the concept of integrated services in ECD |   |   |
| (i) | Adopting an integrated approach and services for early childhood |   |   |
| (ii) | Introduce a Growth Monitoring System. | Ministry of Women, F.W. & C.D.  
|   |   | Ministry of Health  
|   |   | NGOs  
|   |   | Day-Care Centres  
|   |   | May 1998  
| (iii) | Setting up of A Child Care Resource Centre | Ministry of Women, F.W. & C.D.  
|   |   | Ministry of Health  
|   |   | Ministry of Education & H.R.D.  
|   |   | Ministry of Local Government & E.  
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