PROFILING PROCESS REPORT
EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) CENTRES IN MBIZANA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY
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The public provisioning responsibility of Government, as outlined in the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2015), is to develop a publicly funded and rights-based national integrated early childhood development system which ensures universal availability of early childhood development services that secure young children’s rights and provides a continuum of quality care, early learning and protection.

However, a barrier to realising universal availability in South Africa is the lack of data regarding the scale of existing ECD provisioning in the country. In the absence of this knowledge, it serves to make national planning and budgeting speculative and it also means that we are not able to determine how far we are from achieving universal availability. Moreover, on a local level, not knowing the scale and geographical spread of ECD provisioning can lead to inefficient resource allocation and poor planning for local government, NGOs and donors.

In November 2019, The Nelson Mandela Foundation conducted site visits in Mbizana Local Municipality - a local municipality in the Alfred Nzo District Municipality in the Wild Coast Region of the Eastern Cape Province - with Impande South Africa (formerly known as NAG). Arising out of these site visits, the Foundation commissioned Impande SA to map and profile all Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in the Mbizana Local Municipality. This project commenced in January 2020 and concluded at the end of April 2020.

In terms of Impande SA’s experience in that municipality, they previously worked with the Mbizana Department of Social Development (DSD) and Environmental Health officials in 2017 as part of the Bhalisa Inkulisa Registration project; in 2018 they did work in the municipality as part of the National Pilot of the Conditional Registration Framework; and they also partnered with Mbizana ECD forum in 2019 to support them to develop ECD services in Mbizana.

Apart from getting a clearer idea around the spread and scale of ECD provisioning in the municipality, the aim of this project was also to use the data gathered to leverage more funding to the area and also for the Foundation to learn more about the processes involved in data collection.

Process overview

With Mbizana being vast, locating ECD centres was done on a per ward basis. This enabled the field workers and Impande SA staff to better control the accuracy of locating these centres. The field workers were sourced from the Youth Employment Service (YES) programme, which is a programme arising out of the CEO initiative to stimulate inclusive and sustainable growth in South Africa. YES is a flagship youth employment initiative led by business in collaboration with government. The initiative was launched in 2018 with the aim of placing one million youth into work opportunities over three years. In total, this data mapping project made use of 16 YES field workers and 3 Impande SA staff members.
Field workers were responsible for ECD centres that could be reached on foot, while centres that were further away and more geographically spread out were delegated to Impande SA staff members who accessed these sites by means of a bakkie.

Information was collected for each service, including information on staff members, as well as GPS co-ordinates. Pictures of each site that were related to infrastructure were also taken, and is currently all stored on google drive. In terms of how the information was collected, this was done by completing an ECD profile form per site.

The total number of sites that was visited and for which there is data, is 248. The site visits did take longer than anticipated due to a variety of reasons which will be outlined in this report.

The success of the project was made possible through a good working relationship between Impande SA and the ECD forum in the municipality as well as frequent communication regarding planning and site identification between site supervisors, the Impande SA team as well as field workers.

This profiling process report is aimed at giving other organisations and government departments wanting to engage in data collection an understanding of the process it entails, challenges experienced and aspects to consider in their own planning.

**Overview of data collection challenges**

**a) Geographical spread of sites:** Often, finding just one ECD centre meant driving an hour from one site to the next as the area is vast. On a good day, the field staff could locate up to four centres. When it came to tracking down the final set of centres, sometimes only one ECD centre could be located in a day as the rest of the time was spent driving in search of isolated centres only to find no access across a river or the road leading to the wrong community.
b) Poor signal: This project was dependent on communication and teamwork in locating sites, which meant that poor phone signal affected the team’s ability to communicate with each other. This translated into field workers relying on word of mouth and asking around regarding where centres are located. On a good day, field workers could ask about the whereabouts of centres and be accompanied by villagers to where it was or alternatively it took asking three to four people before eventually locating them.

c) Poor road access: Most roads that lead to ECD centres in the local municipality of Mbizana are very poor. Despite having a 4x2 bakkie, in some villages the team had to use one road for entry into the village and another to exit as the bakkie could not drive up steep hills as there was loose or muddy surfaces. Having to use alternative exit routes translated into additional mileage and travelling time. If the weather was overcast to drizzling, or after a heavy rain, the trips to ECD centres could not transpire as this meant that the field team would have to stay overnight in villages as road access would be affected by the weather. A 4x4 vehicle would mitigate some of these challenges but some roads would still pose a challenge for this kind of wet weather.
d) Site identification: It was often hard to identify from the outside whether a site was an ECD centre or not. Many centres are shacks that were built from corrugated iron sheets and when it is closed or there are no children outside, one cannot determine what purpose the shack serves. Even if one is able to look inside, there may not be anything inside indicating that it is an ECD centre as there are often no toys, furniture or other resources to indicate this.

e) No school days: There are certain days in a month when schooling does not take place in communities of Mbizana, which is from the 31st of the month to around the 2nd or 3rd, depending on which days these dates fall on. This is owing to teachers in unfunded centres during this time period going into town to collect their social grants, which for most villages is two taxis away and requires the entire day.

f) Limited practitioners: ECD centres in Mbizana often only have one practitioner or two at most - and rarely three. This meant that during the site visits, fieldworkers would be asking data collection questions from one practitioner while children were running around in the background. This added to the amount of time it took to do data collection as the practitioner also had to keep an eye on the kids.

g) Consistency across data collectors: While using local unemployed youth assists a lot in cutting down transport and site identification challenges, their limited training and limited experience in ECD and community work brings with it challenges of data quality and consistency. Challenges were also experienced with respect to the sending of the data collected from the youth field workers to the Impande SA office. Whatsapp was utilised for sending GPS, photos and paper based data collection forms which creates a capturing challenge to download, store and match photos and locations to a crèche name and data set. Youth experienced technology challenges in storing and sending relevant information and sometimes had to redo work previously done.

Moreover, a long data set meant that enabling consistency across answers was even harder as people had different understandings and opinions regarding the meaning of certain data fields which impacts data consistency across the sample. In future, a reduced data set will be used and more time allocated to training in order to get greater consistency.

Areas for improvement

There are various facets that need to be improved upon in order to improve access to quality ECD services in the municipality, which are outlined below:

a) Access to nutritional support: Most of the sites are not funded by the Department of Social Development and have no means of providing nutritional support to children enrolled. Some of these unfunded sites have started to be supported through a partnership that Impande SA has with Zero2Five, and hopefully more sites can be added to the list which would greatly benefit poor children in the municipality.

b) Practitioner capacitation: Upon enquiring about the status of ECD practitioner qualifications, it was noted that some teachers are not qualified to be looking after the educational development of children in these centres. There is a need for more engagements with government and ECD training providers to fill this gap and provide skills to practitioners that will enrich children’s minds and give them a fair chance in life to thrive.

c) Infrastructure support (buildings including toilets): Most of the centres in Mbizana have poor infrastructure. The classrooms are mostly built from corrugated iron sheets and sometimes painted in interesting colours. These structures provide poor insulation against harsh environmental conditions as they get too hot in summer and too cold in winter. A lot of them have leaks in the roof as most of these corrugated iron sheets are recycled and donated by community members who used them previously.
Toilets do not exist in some sites and this is a health hazard to children. In cases where they do exist, they are often home-made pit toilets and they make use of very dangerous wooden planks – with these planks being the only thing preventing collapse into the pit. Appropriate sized seats for young children are almost non-existent.

The floor in most of these centres are kept neat by weekly cow dung polish (Fig 7) that is collected from livestock in the area. According to EHP guidelines, cow dung is not hygienic but yet one finds many ECD centres using it.
d) Learning material support: Most of the ECD centres that were visited in Mbizana had little to no learning material support. The children learnt by using hand written material for counting, learning colours as well as shapes, drawing on the creativity of practitioners in these centres.

In some ECD centres there would be charts of how to clean water, invader plants and other unrelated ECD material because there was nothing else available to use.

e) Indoor and Outdoor play equipment support: At most ECD sites you will not find any form of equipment, be it indoor or outdoor. This indicates that there is no stimulation material to assist the practitioners when they facilitate early learning with children.

![Figure 8: There was generally no outdoor play equipment](image)

f) Registration as partial care facilities including compliance capacitation: Practitioners in Mbizana as well as centre managers still lack knowledge regarding registration and what this entails. There is a common misconception that once sites register as Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) and get this certificate, this then means that they are registered for everything else and that other certificates such as Partial Care Registration and Programme Registration are not needed. This is often addressed during the monthly ECD forum meetings but the centres still need more capacitation regarding registration requirements.

2 CONCLUSION

ECD Centre profiling in Mbizana provided insight into the kinds of interventions needed in the municipality, in order to improve the quality of ECD services that children have access to. To enable the proper development of children in ECD Centres, the holistic development of children needs to transpire which requires proper infrastructure, learning material, nutrition programmes, teacher capacitation as well as parent involvement. If these different areas are catered for, it would enable the Eastern Cape to improve on its academic results in the long term as children would be better prepared and equipped to thrive.