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Promoting Children's Sustainable Access to Early Schooling in Africa: Reflections on the Roles of Parents in Their Children's Early Childhood Care and Education

Jacob Marriote Ngwaru

Abstract

Sub-Saharan Africa has predominantly rural populations unable to offer children sustainable access to early literacy and childhood care and education. Children's literacy development starts very early in life through participation and experiences in the home and preschool. My research in rural Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania shows that the transition from home to school is compromised by acute barriers such as lack of parental participation, lack of encouragement and support from teachers, and unavailability of learning materials. However, rural homes and communities are well endowed with a stock of practices, knowledge, and skills relevant to the promotion of literacy development. In this chapter, I reflect on how to empower parents to draw on knowledge and resources within the local context to become better involved in their children's education while also empowering teachers to better recognize and take advantage of local knowledge and resources to enrich instruction and enhance meaningful learning. © *2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.*

Education is critical to the world's attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), more so for Sub-Saharan African countries aiming to get their economies into middle-income status by 2025. Two of the eight MDGs pertain to education—the goal of universal primary completion and the goal of gender parity in primary and secondary schooling—and are important benchmarks to align educational aspirations in Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, education for girls, especially, has a direct and proven impact on the goals related to child and reproductive health and environmental sustainability (UNESCO, 2010). However, the universal primary completion goal is at risk of not being achieved as long as children have no sustainable access to schooling in the first place.

The situation of poor schooling is still dire in Sub-Saharan Africa where literacy is the most neglected of the basic educational goals, as most children are unable to comprehend grade-level texts. In East Africa, for example, UWEZO Tanzania (2011) reports that only one in ten Standard Three pupils could read a basic English story, and even at Standard Seven the majority were far from achieving functional comprehension of simple prose. This has direct implications for achievement in all areas of study and by extension development (Colette, 2008). The challenges of low literacy rates are widely recognized to be greatest in Sub-Saharan Africa where both access and quality remain critical problems. The region has the highest proportion of out-of-school children, the greatest gender disparities, the highest ratio of pupils to teachers, and the lowest primary completion rates in the world (UNESCO, 2008).

The World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) underscored the importance of early childhood care and education (ECCE) as part of a comprehensive approach to achieving Education for All (EFA) by declaring that learning begins at birth. Early literacy development, therefore, has to be seen as one of the cornerstones of sustainable development for social transformation in low-resourced communities. This is consistent with the World Education Forum's (UNESCO, 2000) target of "expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children" (Goal 1, p. 15). The positive effects of ECCE programs on school readiness and performance have been documented in research studies and syntheses in the West (Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 2003; Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006) but not in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Parental involvement in children's early literacy development at home and school emerged as a missing element in a set of studies in the

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Southeastern subregion of Africa (Ngwaru, 2010; Ngwaru, Mweru, & Oluga, 2013; Ngwaru & Njoroge, 2011). In this chapter, I reflect on those studies to highlight the significant value of early childhood education and the crucial role that parents can play at home and school, especially if they have been empowered to embrace the pedagogies of cooperation. I argue that a new kind of relationship is required between teachers and parents to transform the traditional negative dominant relations of power to relations of collaboration in the schools.

Background to the Reflections

Three studies informed the reflections in this chapter: a study exploring *the home and school literacy practices interface in rural Zimbabwe* (Ngwaru, 2010), a study evaluating the *East Africa Quality in Early Learning* (EAQEL) project in Kenya and Uganda (Ngwaru & Njoroge, 2011), and a study examining *early literacy development for sustainable schooling in Southern Tanzania* (Ngwaru et al., 2013).

Home and School Literacy Practices Interface in Rural Zimbabwe Study. This study used a qualitative research design involving home and school observations, interviews, focus group discussions with parents and teachers, and analysis of professional documents in the school, such as teacher scheme and plan books, pupil exercise books, class story and text books, and any other relevant records. For this study, interviews and focus group discussions created unique opportunities to listen to teachers and parents voicing their own interpretations and thoughts as well as their frustrations with regard to children's education rather than relying solely on "outsider" interpretations. In other words, participants were encouraged to tell, and did tell, their side of the story in their own words. The study looked at literacy practices at home and school in a more homogeneous rural setting with a particular focus on ten parents from six families and their combined total of 25 primary school–going children. From the school, seven teachers, including student teachers, participated. Slightly more than halfway into the project, sensitization sessions were held with parents and teachers around effective parenting, including increasing dialogue and appreciation between parents and children, constructivist pedagogies, and recognition of children's sociocultural funds of knowledge, respectively. At a joint teacher, parent, and children meeting, both teachers and parents realized how much they needed to work together and pledged the same.

Among the findings, as discussed in some detail later in this chapter, were the following: parents were not aware of the roles they could play in the literacy development of their children; teachers were under the mistaken perception that parents did not know anything about children's literacy development and therefore could not participate in their development either at home or at school; and both parents and teachers perceived literacy development from the Western schooling perspective of reading books and

writing for school purposes. Furthermore, teachers' pedagogies completely excluded children's sociocultural funds of knowledge (Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

East Africa Quality in Early Learning (EAQEL) Study. The EAQEL study was an evaluation of a pedagogical intervention based on Rose and Acevedo's (2006) instructional approach to scaffolding literacy instruction—"*Reading to Learn*" (RtL)—a systematic approach to the teaching of reading and math developed and first used in Australia but adapted to different educational contexts around the world to recognize local pedagogical rhythms. RtL provides a systematic and explicit approach to the teaching of reading and math to enable all children to succeed by breaking complex tasks down to manageable components. In Kenya and Uganda, the intervention was introduced in 115 schools—64 and 51 in Kenya and Uganda, respectively. It involved three strands: (a) training and supporting 115 head teachers (and their deputies) and 345 lower primary teachers (Standard One to Three), 60% of whom were female, to teach literacy and numeracy using the RtL approach; (b) introducing classroom libraries in each of the intervention schools; and (c) introducing, in half of the intervention schools, the Reading for Children (RfC) component where village libraries were initiated to encourage parental involvement in support of their children's education. The evaluation focused on assessing the effectiveness of each of the strands, with specific emphasis on factors that seemed to influence children's reading abilities and acquisition of reading skills. The study equally focused on the learning environment, including availability and utilization of teaching and learning materials and parental involvement at home and in the school. Classroom observations were employed to obtain data on the use of the RtL and the classroom libraries, while interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of teachers' professional records were important sources of additional information.

The main finding from the study was that although pedagogical interventions were introduced to improve the teaching and learning of literacy and math, there were significant barriers to the attainment of intervention goals. Most significant among the challenges were teachers' inability to use constructivist pedagogies or to develop and use effective teaching learning materials, even when these were available, and the dearth of reading materials. Teachers were inevitably left as the only source of knowledge in the classroom as parents did not participate or engage and were not expected to do so. However, these communities still were endowed with resilience, skills, and knowledge based on their cultural ways of knowing that enabled them to make the best of their situations, as further illustrated below when the RtL intervention project in Kenya successfully trained some parents to run community libraries and RfC programs. These programs made parents so much more aware of the importance of early literacy development that they asked their older, secondary school children to teach them to read so they, in turn, could teach children in preschool and the early

grades to read. This demonstrates that with systematic empowerment, these families were ready and capable to embrace effective school-type literacy practices.

Parent–Teacher Empowerment and Early Literacy Development Study. This was a baseline study of literacy development indices in Lindi Rural District of Southern Tanzania based on a sequential mixed method research design to harness the generalizability of surveys and the detailed nature of interpretive data from qualitative methodology. It used a questionnaire survey accompanied by rapid ethnographic observations and interviews, followed by detailed case studies of schools and communities. It was carried out in 86 of 113 primary schools in one rural district representing all schools with preschool sections and involving 276 preschool and lower primary school teachers and 288 parents of children from the same level. The study focused on understanding factors that determine literacy development in low-resourced communities in order to empower parents and teachers for children's sustainable schooling and learning outcomes in Southern Tanzania.

The study was informed primarily by the need to document, through survey and ethnographic procedures, the factors that influenced early literacy development among the 3- to 8-year-olds in rural low-resourced communities in Lindi Rural District of Southern Tanzania. The literacy development perspectives that informed the study blended Africentric perspectives (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011; Pence & Nsamenang, 2008) and Eurocentric sociocultural theories such as Vygotsky (1978). This study aimed to contribute knowledge about the influence of participants' socioeconomic and cultural well-being on their children's literacy development in general and school literacy in particular. The goal was to determine possible pedagogical approaches and practices that would speak adequately to the experiences of rural parents and their young children to repudiate marginalization (Ada, 1988; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2005). It was also informed as much by the need to target parents unable to support their children and unaware of the potency of their involvement in children's literacy development (Ngwaru, 2010; Ngwaru & Njoroge, 2011) as it was by the need to sensitize preschool and early grade teachers who required support in constructive developmental pedagogy (Magolda, 1999).

The study recognized the fact that knowledge is coconstructed by the child and others within the family and the school (McNaughton, 2001). Because much literacy learning takes place in families, homes, and neighborhoods, it is imperative for schools to harness the power of out-of-school learning, especially for children who are at risk (Nickse & Speicher, 1988). The overarching goals were to bridge the gaps between pedagogies influenced by dominant relations of power and those emanating from sociocultural and critical constructivist perspectives.

The questionnaire survey indicated that socioeconomic well-being, in particular the level of their parents' education and income, were major

factors influencing the lack of literacy development of children. The parent profiles data clarified this factor further by indicating that the majority (81%) reported their highest level of education as primary school and primary source of income as farming (88%), with the vast majority living on about a dollar a day. It was still the case, however, that their homes were endowed with sociocultural funds of knowledge that would enable them promote their children's learning if they were empowered. The homes were furnished with basic but appropriate items including locally made furniture—beds, chairs, tables, and stools, as well as other paraphernalia for household uses. Some of the furniture gadgetry included coconut flesh extracting devices (mbuzi), spice miniature mortars and pestles, mixers, and special charcoal stoves, as well as decorations and cultural and religious artifacts significant in the lives of the villagers.

Case study data indicated that the target institutions—the schools and communities—had historical, economic, and sociocultural conditions that did not reinforce the link between activities of reading and writing and social structures. The communities were preoccupied with different levels of livelihood challenges, including lack of development, intergenerational poverty, and lack of gainful employment opportunities for their women and youths, all of which could not be solved by the education offered in the schools. They perceived their sociocultural economies as more reliable for their livelihoods than school education because at least they had relied on these economies for generations. This left parents less motivated to encourage their children to pursue school educational goals. Parents openly disparaged school education in its current form as having failed to change their fortunes since even the few whose children had completed "O" Level had nothing to show for it, they said. It was no surprise that they had become cynical about school education because it did not appear to have delivered anybody they knew from the cycle of poverty. This made them further lose trust in civic institutions again because they had proved over the years to be partisan and partial. At one of the case schools, teachers reported and the education officers confirmed that parents were known to be openly hostile to the school agenda because it burdened them to look for secondary school fees and other requirements. These parents echoed Nsamenang and Tchombe's (2011) critique that school education was not automatically bringing economic growth and societal development in Africa, contrary to what was predicted by human capital theory (Dasen & Akkari, 2008). If anything, it was just an inconvenience—taking away children from home and depriving them of meaningful economic activities such as farming and fishing (these were coastal communities). On the other hand, schools were perennially grappling with a range of systemic challenges such as the lack of resources, including inadequate number of teachers, lack of timely responses to their needs by responsible authorities, lack of support from parents and communities, and lack of motivation among children.

The study underscored the need for genuine efforts to uplift communities from their current political economies. The appropriate starting point for the government and development partners was to make an effort to understand the deep-rooted factors that made these communities culturally vibrant and cohesive. This is where development advocates had to begin if they were to endear themselves to the target populations. Initiatives such as schooling had to be seen to be part of the cultural improvement trajectories of local communities. The local population perceived that schooling had transformed other communities in different contexts but would not necessarily transform their own. Many indications pointed to the lack of cohesion between factors that could positively promote literacy development and local political economies. Communities appeared to miss genuine agency in current socioeconomic structures, including school education and modern political governance.

For immediate and medium-term turnaround, community development projects needed to align themselves with local social-cultural ways of knowing. Curran (1984) asserts that Africa "provides opportunities for learning and development which simply do not exist in the West and therefore are not considered by the predominant theories" (p. 4). Literacy learning at home, as abundantly recorded in African literature (e.g., Achebe, 1958; Kenyatta, 1939) to be socioculturally based, should become part of the school curriculum. Literacy development as currently conceived to constitute only school education should be reconsidered. The curriculum, teachers, and schools need to be primed to adopt the sociocultural view of literacy that would smoothly merge home and family experiences into the school curriculum. This would go a long way to make schooling an institution that can transform communities.

The Need to Invest in Parents' Empowerment

In most African countries, children from low-income families grow up in environments where parental involvement in their education is either minimal or absent. Low-income parents often do not see beyond their economic circumstances. The three studies informing the reflections in this chapter highlighted some of the contextual reasons why parents cannot participate in the literacy development of their children and why their homes can be described as lacking in intellectual motivation and reading opportunities (Ngwaru, 2010).

It must be noted that intellectual motivation and even reading opportunities are not necessarily viewed from a Western perspective. In Zimbabwe, parents were more often than not preoccupied with poverty, socioeconomic insecurity, morbidity (usually arising from the scourge of HIV/AIDS), and a lack of understanding of the potency of their involvement. In Kenya, it was the same preoccupation with poverty and lack of education that left some parents thinking that since they could not read themselves, they could not

help their children. These were parents' ruling passions (Barton & Hamilton, 1998)—that is, their immediate priorities—that made them appear not to place a high value on the educational and intellectual achievements of their children, as if they believed that school education was not for them. It was always the case however that parents in all the countries expressed satisfaction at the roles they played at home—looking after younger siblings, taking charge of cattle and chickens, as well as domestic chores. At a practical level, parents were doing everything in their power to help their children acquire a well-rounded education from home to school. Parents reported, in a manner seemingly evoking Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, that direct participation or involvement in school activities was likely to occur only after their families' physiological needs of hunger, thirst, and bodily discomfort had been satisfied.

In a focus group discussion, one parent in the Zimbabwe study, Mr. Mhosva (all names used are pseudonyms), said: "I know you want us to talk about the education of our children, but you will appreciate why we want to tell you about our problems so that at least you know the challenges we face every day" (Ngwaru, 2010, p. 85). He continued:

> I live with my wife and children and I am not in good health at all; my wife has lots of problems coping with domestic and household chores and work in the fields without as much support from me as used to be the case when we were both fit and healthy. Perhaps I am HIV positive—I don't know—but I suffer pains in the chest and have frequent severe heartburn. This is part of the reason we leave the education of the children to teachers. (p. 90)

In this Zimbabwean community, as in others throughout Africa, disease, poverty, and the resultant mortality are everyday realities and it is an illusion to believe that, left on their own, parents in these circumstances can prioritize their children's literacy development. What makes the need for advocacy and empowerment particularly poignant is that families often do not have the means to make their way out of their difficult situations. For instance, Mr. Mhosva, focusing on the stewardship of the land, underlined the causes of food insecurity:

> Our fields are now sandy and require fertilizers or organic manure but we have none because our government cannot give us agricultural inputs and our cattle are depleted. There does not seem to be an easy way out of this quandary because we have no means to pull ourselves out of this on our own … (quoted in Ngwaru, 2010, p. 88)

About the way they perceived their role in the education of their children, another participant, Mr. Madzibaba, highlighted how they nevertheless still contributed to their children's education. They ensured, as far as possible, that children's everyday needs were satisfied as a way of helping them to remain in school. They provided adequate food and appropriate

clothing, and struggled to pay school fees. In Zimbabwe, school fees entitle children to school books and stationery and those with arrears do not receive any learning materials but instead are periodically sent home to force their parents to pay. Not only does this practice make children disaffected, it also encourages them to drop out and leave parents frustrated.

A third participant, Mrs. Gato, was a widow living with four dependants—her 15-year-old daughter (a secondary school pupil at the time) as well as two sons and a nephew, all attending primary school. Like many other homes in the Zimbabwe community study, Mrs. Gato's home comprised two simple and basic round huts under thatch without any other buildings. Despite the obvious poverty, and despite the absence of most Western-type intellectual stimulation or books, Mrs. Gato's home still had an abundance of wealth, the efficacy of which she was unaware of. This wealth took the form of oral histories, family stories, and real-life experiences that could have been used to help children better understand the context of their lives and situations. For example, enduring extended family ties existed between her family and that of her father-in-law who had lent them a small herd of cattle for domestic purposes, including their milk needs. These were resources equivalent in complexity to any other in other cultures that could be used as part of the social-cultural resources for literacy development. Generally, the homes did not have the culture of reading or resources in the mold of books, paper, or pencils; they had practical implements for everyday livelihoods in rural contexts. Unfortunately, these were not used to enhance literacy development because the parents were not aware. After sensitization and empowerment meetings about the need to ensure that parenting brought about children's social-emotional development, family harmony, and literacy development, Mrs. Gato said:

> From this study ..., I learnt quite a lot about all that. I did not know how to handle my children; we could not go on well together. I didn't know (1) when to assign them on the different home errands needing attention, (2) when to get them doing household chores and (3) when to get them to do their homework or something related to their school work. I didn't realize at all that I could actually help my children with their homework after school. I always thought it was the responsibility of the school teachers. I now realize that with this kind of knowledge I can bring up my children in a much better way than those families with both parents. (Ngwaru, 2010, p. 93)

In Southern Tanzania, in Lindi Rural District, cultural resources were even more abundant. The region was a rich coastal area with tropical crops and food resources. Cassava, yams, and coconuts formed an important part of the people's diet. As depicted in Figure 4.1, young girls led by the elder ones prepare the staple food as part of everyday home chores done collaboratively in play mood.

In Figure 4.1, seven girls and two boys are supporting the elder girl as she pounds the staple cassava (*mihogo*) using mortar, pestle, and a reed

Figure 4.1. Traditional Food Processing in a Village of Southern Tanzania

tray (*wanatumia kinu namuti wake wakiweka kwenye ungo*). Each one of the girls learns in that natural context while the boys are looking after the goats (only one in the figure) but obviously supporting the processing. These examples of growing up together, learning cooperatively, and supporting each other form the basis of child development dovetailed to cultural, social, and economic production. These are abundant funds of knowledge that can be utilized even in the development of school literacy.

Recognizing Family Funds of Knowledge

Any intervention to mitigate the literacy development challenges facing parents in low-resourced settings requires the acknowledgement and utilization of families' funds of knowledge—those historically developed and accumulated strategies, skills, abilities, ideas, practices, and bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household's functioning and well-being (Gonzalez et al., 1993). Most villagers in the Zimbabwe and Tanzania communities, for instance, had skills which allowed them to provide piecemeal labor and earn income locally. In Zimbabwe, the community as a whole drew on a wide variety of practical skills and relationships relevant to their context, such as crop and animal husbandry, treating cattle diseases with traditional herbs and methods, sinking deep wells, basketry, and reed mat-weaving, as well as carving tools and implements such as mortars and

pestles. In Tanzania, communities had similar skills as they depended on growing cashew and coconuts as well as fishing. The income from these activities, however, was always insufficient for their annual needs (see Chapter 3 by Ng'asike for another example of local funds of knowledge relevant to early educational curriculum for children of a rural African community).

Teachers in both countries seldom mentioned any of these examples in their classrooms because local teachers thought that this kind of knowledge was not part of the "correct" curriculum. Teachers did not realize that homes of the low-resourced still had abundant worthwhile knowledge that could become a rich source of curriculum material. Culturally appropriate literacy development materials for the home and school could be developed from such knowledge, skills, experiences, and relationships if teachers were empowered to embrace the concept. The view of this chapter is that stakeholders of literacy should hold this positive and realistic sociocultural view that low-income households contain ample cultural and cognitive resources with great potential for classroom instruction (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Moll et al., 1990). Unfortunately, this view contrasted sharply with the study families' prevailing perceptions (and those of working class and rural families in general) of local cultural resources as socially disorganized and intellectually deficient. Sadly, these perceptions, rather than being challenged, are reinforced by the dominant forces of power behind schooling and other social programs. This is the reason why parents think the way they do and need to be made aware of the efficacy of the abundant funds of knowledge in their local contexts. They need to embrace this to groom their children and develop them emotionally in preparation for lifelong literacy development.

It was not a coincidence that the clearest commonality across the three studies was parents' lack of awareness about how they could contribute toward their children's literacy development. This was most regrettable given that the contexts in which they were raising their children possessed local funds of knowledge that remained untapped in the absence of their empowerment. In Kenya, at the onset of a pedagogical intervention, parents refused to volunteer to take part in the running of village libraries, saying they had no skills to offer and in some cases could not read themselves (Ngwaru & Njoroge, 2011). After being empowered through project training, however, they were surprised by their effectiveness when many children became inspired as their parents took charge of their reading. The following testimony by one community librarian underscores this point:

> I discovered that learning to read was such an important skill [that] I could not trust anyone to do it for my children. I am satisfied with the progress my Standard Two and Four children are making in reading because when they come from school they come here to the community library and I continue with them. (Ngwaru & Njoroge, 2011, p. 45)

What was even more significant about this study was that reading with children supported children's social-emotional development, with children expressing feelings of satisfaction and encouragement after realizing that home and school were on the same continuum. Both parents and children said that their relationships had improved tremendously through the close cooperation arising from the RfC program. Similar findings emerged from the Zimbabwe study where:

> At the outset, parents perceived that they had no role to play in the formal schooling of their children, believing that this was the sole responsibility of the school. Similarly, the teachers saw parents as having no part to play. The only engagement with parents was through the PTC whose main purpose was purely administrative rather than academic. (Ngwaru, 2010, p. 218)

Parents Creating Literacy-Rich Environments

Parents as caring adults need empowerment to create literacy-rich environments, foster social-emotional stability and self-regulation, as well as promote other skills to prepare their children for sustainable access to schooling. Literacy development begins long before children are introduced to formal instruction in elementary school. Children acquire literacy skills in a variety of ways and at different ages. Early behaviors such as reading from pictures and writing scribbles are an important part of children's literacy development. Social interactions with caring adults, including shared storytelling with consistent exposure to literacy materials, where they are available, will nourish literacy development. Literacy-rich environments offer daily, extended conversations with adults about topics that are meaningful and of interest to children. However, even in the literate Western society, research with kindergarten teachers suggests that about 20% of children entering kindergarten do not yet have the necessary social and emotional skills to be "ready" for school. The U.S. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2005) estimates that as many as 30% of very low-income children may not have the necessary social and emotional skills. In Africa, these percentages are three- or four-fold. Yet, early social and emotional development is important both in its own right and because aspects of it facilitate cognitive development. Bloch (2002) highlights the fact that when children are young, the adults around them (parents, other adult caregivers, and preschool teachers) are the most important influences on their social and emotional development. For example, children will have lasting impressions about literacy when they see adults following instructions about how to operate a new cell phone or sharing a familiar story from a community newspaper than when they just see forms of print lying in their environment. As the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2005) points out, improved parenting methods that promote literacy development, coupled with high-quality preschool education, can support early

development in ways that yield long-term social and emotional benefits. In the African context, literacy-rich environments need not be created from Western conventional books and school-based activities but from the vast sociocultural resources embedded in daily activities in a variety of settings.

Promoting Literacy Practices in Local Environments

It has become clear that when planning interventions in low-resourced communities, such as in rural Zimbabwe and Tanzania, literacy-rich environments do not necessarily have to be based on Western examples of abundant books and parents reading to children. Instead, it has to recognize and utilize local knowledge and resources, and embrace features such as:

- Children surrounded by oral language emanating from family experiences and interactions around resources and artifacts in the home.
- Adults sharing their ideas and feelings and encouraging children to express themselves and ask questions about everyday experiences.
- Children seeing adults using a variety of materials for different purposes, such as purchasing mobile phone credit vouchers, merchandizing, or learning about the news.
- Where book and print materials are available, families should consider children's emergent reading and writing to be real, valuable experiences. They should accept children's efforts without correcting mistakes or providing direct instruction.
- Families talking with children about the print they see around them and explaining how it provides information (e.g., signs on buses, labels on food and commodity packaging, etc.).

Parents should not have any reason to fail to engage in literacy development except for lack of awareness. As has been noted, without appropriate awareness parents will often think they are unable to nurture their children's literacy and social-emotional development. Often they begin to think that it is the responsibility of school teachers or those parents in better financial circumstances. It was however illustrated that this could change if they were sensitized. Parents realized that they could still play a big role in their children's literacy development through activities such as finding time to sit with their children and talk about everyday experiences (including their school work), opening any print materials that might be available, telling stories around pictures, and encouraging children to read and feel relaxed with print materials.

Policy Recommendations

With the research-based knowledge we now possess as educationalists and ECCE activists, it is no longer defensible to leave children without carefully

planned literacy development programs connecting home and school. Governments in SSA should prioritize policy on ECCE going forward. Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong, and Gomby (2005) emphasize that policymakers must invest in programs that support development of the whole child, including academic, social, and emotional skills, because these skills reinforce each other. Emphasis should start at the school level, with teachers encouraging parental participation in the form of storytelling as well as interest in their children's play and reading at school and at home.

One of the most cost-effective measures will be school-based sensitization of parents and teachers about the importance of parental involvement and the utilization of children's sociocultural funds of knowledge for lifelong literacy development. It was clear that school curriculum experiences, pedagogy, and materials needed to be aligned to children's family and home cultural knowledge to ensure that parents and communities viewed them to be enhancing their livelihoods. While parents and teachers require empowerment, the school curriculum, especially content and methods of teaching, also urgently requires appropriate adjustment.

Conclusion

The EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2008) indicates that Sub-Saharan Africa has the most negative statistics on indicators of poverty, school dropout rates, gender inequalities in school, incidence of HIV and AIDS, and so on. All these are not likely to go away soon but working toward their reduction and complete reversal can begin now. One cost-effective place to start is ECCE. Children are not only the future of the world, but educated children are indeed the guarantors of a future that can ensure that the subregion will compare favorably to other regions of the world. Children's ability to learn and to function as contributing members of society rests heavily on their development of social competency and emotional health. Clearly, home and family early literacy development together with preschool programs with contextually relevant standards of quality will contribute substantially to this development. The research informing this chapter points to an urgent need to promote better home and family literacy development programs that will lead to equitable preschool access and a fair chance for sustained participation in schooling.

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JACOB MARRIOTE NGWARU is a lecturer at the Institute for Educational Development, Aga Khan University, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

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