



MINISTRY OF WOMEN, COMMUNITY  
AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN SAMOA 2024-2034

*'Change the beginning of the story to change the whole story'*



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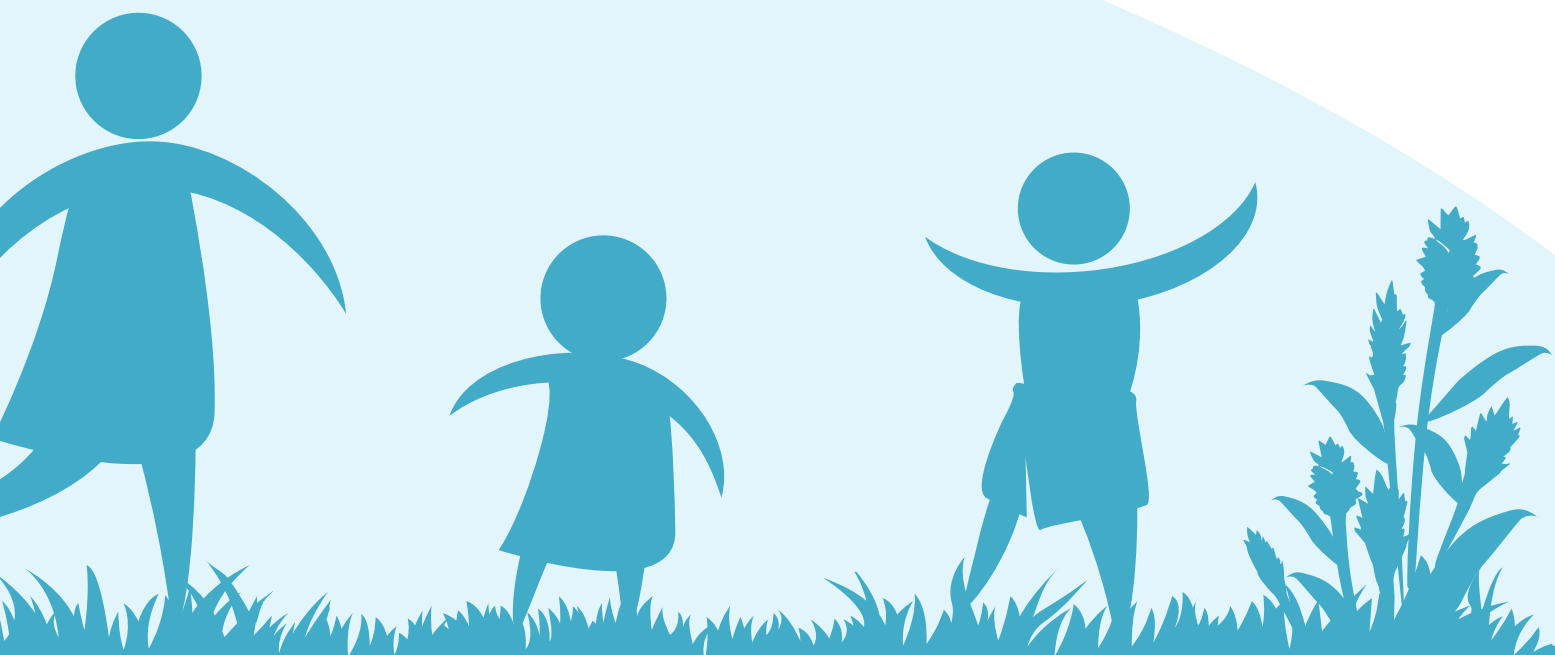


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EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT  
IN SAMOA 2024-2034**



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## ACRONYMS

<b>CRC</b>	-	Convention of the Rights of the Child
<b>CRPD</b>	-	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>CSO</b>	-	Civil Society Organisations
<b>DP</b>	-	Donor Partners
<b>ECCE</b>	-	Early Childhood Care and Education
<b>ECD</b>	-	Early Childhood Development (0-6 for Samoa)
<b>ECE</b>	-	Early Childhood Education
<b>EPI</b>	-	Expanded Program of Immunization
<b>ESP</b>	-	Education Sector Plan
<b>FBO</b>	-	Faith Based Organisations
<b>GDP</b>	-	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GoS</b>	-	Government of Samoa
<b>M.E.A.L</b>	-	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
<b>MSS</b>	-	Minimum Service Standards
<b>NCD</b>	-	Non-Communicable Diseases
<b>NCECES</b>	-	National Council of Early Childhood Education Samoa
<b>NCF</b>	-	Nurturing Care Framework
<b>NGO</b>	-	Non-Government Organisation
<b>PDS</b>	-	Pathway for the Development of Samoa 2021/22-2025/26
<b>PTA</b>	-	Parent Teacher Association
<b>SAT</b>	-	Samoan Tala
<b>SDGs</b>	-	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>TOR</b>	-	Terms of Reference
<b>UDHR</b>	-	Universal Declaration of Human Rights



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The future of a nation is shaped by the quality of its children's early years. As we unveil the National Framework for Early Childhood Development in Samoa, I extend my deepest gratitude to all those who have contributed to this transformative process. This framework is not just a document, but the collective vision of countless individuals and organizations committed to the betterment of our children and communities.*

We express our sincere appreciation to the policymakers, early childhood educators, community leaders, and parents whose insights and experiences have been integral in the development of this framework. Your unwavering support and contributions have played a pivotal role in shaping this critical document.

A heartfelt thank you to the community members across Samoa, whose dedication and active participation form the very foundation of this framework. Your voices are central to this initiative, and your collective wisdom will guide us as we work towards a brighter future for our children.

We also acknowledge the vital role of the ministries, civil society organisations, and both government and non-government stakeholders. Your collaboration, expertise, and commitment have enriched this process, ensuring that the framework is not only comprehensive, but relevant and impactful for every child in Samoa.

A very special thanks to UNICEF Pacific, whose financial, technical, and strategic support has been instrumental in the development of this framework. Your dedication to advance early childhood development in the Pacific region has been a cornerstone in the success of this endeavor.

As we look ahead, the National Framework for Early Childhood Development will serve as a guiding tool for shaping the future of our children. It is our shared responsibility to implement and uphold its principles to ensure that every child in Samoa receives the best possible start in life.

Thank you for your unwavering dedication to this critical cause.

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**Afioga Hon. Laga'aia Ti'aituau Tufuga**

Minister for the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development





## FOREWORD

Care is at the centre of the human condition. To reflect this reality, we need to put it at the heart of political thinking and national development initiatives. If we adopt a care-centric perspective, a more prosperous, enriching, healthy and learning environment is enabled for all. Availability of a positive environment in early childhood development ages enhances children's health, future education, employment opportunities, and productivity. Ensuring children's right to live, right to protection, right to development, and right to participation contributes to their life cycle development.

A strong start in life is vital, as it lays the foundation for well-being and resilience for the years ahead. Supporting children to thrive and develop to meet their learning potential in the first five years of life will set children up for success in education, employment, long-term health, connection to family, culture, language, and communities.

Important conversations have informed the development of this Framework to ensure Early Childhood Development becomes central to Samoa's national development plan which sets out a medium-term plan to position Samoa on a higher growth path. This will ensure a roadmap that meets the needs of present and future generations.

This is a national strategy that aims to align and coordinate cross sectoral efforts that apply a whole-of-government

and whole of society lens that recognizes early childhood development as critical to Samoa's prosperity.

The Government of Samoa is committed to the advancement of human development. Therefore, its policies, resources and actions are focused on people: on ensuring that those living in Samoa have a long, healthy, and fulfilling life.

The foundation of the advancement of our human development relies on the full appreciation and understanding that a child in his or her first 1000 days has equitable access to quality services in health and nutrition, opportunities for learning, responsive caregiving, security and safety.

Nurturing care is about children, their families, primary caregivers, and the environments where they interact. We need to recognise the enabling environment of policies, programs, services, human and financial resources required to provide that nurturing care platform.

Samoa's commitment to the advancement of human development captures all the conditions and elements of the Nurturing Care Framework when it comes to our youngest citizens. It is our responsibility to cultivate a culture that places/prioritises children, parenting, and raising future generations front and centre. It is simply the right thing to do, and the cost of inaction is far reaching with profound detrimental effects on an individual's life course.



# 01. INTRODUCTION

The main objective of Early Childhood Development (ECD) is to provide opportunities for health, nutrition, safety, protection, and early learning for development. According to the abundance of research, early childhood is an extremely important phase for children's growth and development, as the human brain develops at its fastest pace during these formative years of life.

According to UNICEF (2016), a three-year-old child's brain is twice as active as that of an adult. According to Heckman (2000), nutritious food, physical health and exercise are essential for the development of the human brain during the ECD ages. A positive environment during these ages provides them with the opportunities necessary for their holistic development, which accelerates children's health, future learning achievement, employment prospects, and productivity in the future.

The integrity of a culture's social fabric is dependent upon the stability of the family and raising healthy children who become healthy adults. Our children are our future: not just for our families but also for our society. Raising emotionally secure, resilient, nurturing, and responsible children is a puzzle with many pieces.

The fact that investment in children's holistic development in their early ages yields dividends many more times the investment, has been proven by various studies and research. It is now time for Samoa to map out its own Strategic Framework for Early Childhood Development in Samoa. As early as signing; and subsequently ratifying the Convention of the Rights of Children, Early Childhood

Development was flagged as a most critical development area for our nation's prosperity. Fast forward to 2023 and the evidence base just gets increasingly confirmed; and the costs of inaction escalate and become more of a threat to our human capital.

Samoa must be the architect of its own commitment to ECD as we know well our own national, spiritual, cultural, political and institutional values, and socio-economic conditions. The adversity that disadvantaged children face is complex. Single sector solutions are insufficient. Coordinating across sectors has synergistic effects that result in improved development outcomes for young children and their families. It is recognising that an ECD Framework for Samoa is framing a national understanding and outcome about what is needed for all the youngest members of our society to survive, thrive and reach their potential.

Samoa in embarking on this framework is a sign of recognition and commitment to investing in this period under the age of 6. It identifies ECD as one of the most efficient and effective ways to help eliminate poverty, inequality, boost shared prosperity, and create the human capital needed for our economy to diversify and grow.

The world is increasingly digital, which means there is more information and a greater need for the abilities to reason, continually learn, effectively communicate, and collaborate with others – all of which originate in early childhood. The real commitment of any Government to developing human capital is measured by the size of its investments in ECD.



## 1.1 CONTEXT

The SDGs implementation review has highlighted some of the positive results in addressing the needs of the children of Samoa. Children's access to basic services such as education, health care, water and sanitation are high with results showing low prevalence of undernourishment, malnutrition including stunting and wasting compared to other Pacific Island nations. Overall, children in Samoa appear to be developing well in terms of their physical development, verbal communication, and approaches to learning. There are also positive trends in terms of the increase in the number of children with disabilities enrolling in schools. Food security is not an issue, but the prevalence of overweight is a serious challenge for Samoan children.<sup>1</sup>

Pathway for the Development of Samoa FY2021/22-FY2025/26 - The Pathway has been developed from the people's vision of "Fostering social harmony, safety, and freedom for all" Our aspiration is to nurture growth that benefits all our people. The PDS aims to widen community participation so that we can build community prosperity, enhance security, and protect our people and the environment. Human development is at the forefront – an ambition that crosscuts the five Key Strategic Outcomes of improved social development; diversified and sustainable economy; security and trusted governance; secured environment and climate change; and structured public works and infrastructure – to help overcome hardship for the poor and vulnerable people; and to enable them to access opportunities so that they will reach their full potential and enjoy a better quality of life.

While the Government of Samoa has several programmes and services for young children, these are not coordinated well across ministries to ensure children are able to access a comprehensive package of services and a seamless continuum of care to achieve their full potential. The cost of inaction needs to be well understood also by key decision makers. The costs of inaction on ECD are too high to bear for Samoa. Governments are likely to spend approximately 2-3 times the cost of an ECD program in responding to the health, security, and productivity deficits that early childhood needs.

The Samoa Early Human Capability Index report identifies, low prioritisation, limited access, and costs as key factors for low ECE attendance. The same report also notes significantly better literacy and numeracy results for children that attended ECE compared to children that did not attend (0.61 versus 0.21). Based on the 8 dimensions of child development (phys-

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<sup>1</sup> Samoa's 2nd voluntary national review report for Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal / SDG Taskforce. —Apia, Samoa: Government of Samoa, 2020: 24



ical, verbal, cultural/spiritual, social/emotional, perseverance, approaches to learning, numeracy/concepts, and literacy) an overall SEHCI development score for 2-5 years old in Samoa was 0.51 on a score of 0 to 1 with 1 being the highest.

The National Council of Early Childhood Education, being an approved organization appointed by the Minister of Education and Culture under the Education Act 2009, shall monitor all ECE for Samoa. The One Government Grant (OGG) through the MEC assists all ECE Centres with infrastructure, operations, required resources and teaching materials they require. The grant allocation is based on numbers attending. It is a support by the government through the Ministry for all ECE centers to improve environments and learning abilities of children so that they are well prepared to enter primary level education.

Currently there is an annual allocation of \$400 per enrolled child, up from \$200 in previous allocations. ECE centres are mostly managed by church ministers' wives or village women's committees. Facilitation of children's learning through play is either held in the church halls or fale komiti. These places are mostly used by villagers daily and therefore impact on the centres' organisation and planning.

The Community Sector Plan 2024/25 to 2027/28 envisions a peaceful, resilient, and thriving community for all Samoans. The plan emphasizes inclusive governance, economic empowerment, and sustainable social outcomes, applying a lifecycle approach to community development with outcomes aimed at creating an enabling environment for all community members to thrive. Under Outcome 3, which focuses on improving social outcomes for vulnerable groups—including women, children, and persons with disabilities— a key objective (3.2) is to enhance childcare and protection services. A critical action under this objective is the implementation of the Early Childhood Development Framework. Integration supports the broader goals of the Community Sector Plan by laying the foundation for resilient, inclusive communities that safeguard future generations. Additionally, it promotes a sector-wide approach to the implementation of the ECD Framework, ensuring alignment with activities at the local level.

The Health Sector Plan 2019/20 – 2029/30 has been developed to assist the government of Samoa and most importantly the health sector in delivering people-centered health services (healthcare, health promotion & health prevention services) that promote health and well-being of its people. – Outcome 5 - “Improved Maternal and Child Health” – has



an indicative budget of SAT19,888,000. This Key Outcome has the strategic goal “to reduce maternal and perinatal mortality, and to reduce child morbidity and mortality.

Key Outcomes includes a very wide range of programs including reducing maternal, under-five, and neonatal mortality rates; expanding immunization coverage for DTP3, measles and Hep B; updating the Expanded Program of Immunization (EPI) program; expanding antenatal care coverage; training of midwives and traditional birth attendants; and reducing low birth weight and stunting. Unfortunately, there has been no annual progress reporting against this HSP since its inception.

National Non communicable Disease Control Policy 2018-2023 – represents the need to accelerate our collaborative effort by the health sector, our communities, and partners to develop a comprehensive national NCD Control Program that aims to tackle the NCD challenge in a more systematic approach. Health Promotion, Advocacy and Risk Reduction is a key strategic area with linkages to ECD through targeted areas around the development and implementation of the school health program: including health promotion, nutrition, oral health education, rheumatic heart disease, immunization; and strengthening breastfeeding counseling and education to community nurses to convey the benefits of breast milk to women in the village.

In terms of access to safely managed drinking water, Samoa has a rate of 47% of the population. In terms of sanitation, Samoa is close to 95% of access to basic sanitation services and the data in terms of WASH indicators is incomplete and this applies to schools also.<sup>2</sup>

The draft Childcare and Protection Bill is in progress and will be revisited in line with this framework and an updated Child Protection and Childcare Policy. The draft Bill is expected to provide for the well-being and protection of children and to make provision for assistance to children in need of care and protection in a manner consistent with international conventions and standards, Christian principles, and cultural values. The key objective of the draft Bill is to promote the well-being of children and protect them from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. In addition, a range of legislative provisions establish crimes, penalties and protection mechanisms relating to family violence such as the Family Safety Act 2013, Crimes Act 2013, Infants Ordinance 1961, Young Offenders Act 2007, and Education Act 2009. The Family Safety Act 2013 is the key piece of legislation and provides for the “greater protection of families and the handling of domestic violence and related matters”

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<sup>2</sup> Defined as ‘Drinking water from an improved source that is accessible on premises, available when needed and free from fecal and priority chemical contamination’ SITAN of Children in the Pacific Island Countries: UNICEF2021:60



## CURRENT NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

- ✧ Demographics – In 2021 there were a total of 27,104 children under five, representing 14% of Samoa’s population of 205,557. Under five mortality 15/1000 and infant mortality 9/1000. Samoa is on track for global SDGs maternal mortality (SDG 3.1.1) and child health (SDG 3.2.1, 3.2.2) targets and indicators.
- ✧ Early Childhood Development Samoa ECD Index – 73% of children aged 36-59 months who are on track in at least three of the four domains (literacy numeracy, physical, social-emotional and learning). Parental engagement – 58% of children aged between 2-4 engage in school readiness and learning activities (which involve reading and playing) with their mothers compared to 23% with their father in these learning activities. 16% of children under 5 are left in inadequate supervision-alone or supervised by another child below 10 years old for more than an hour at a time, Children’s books in the home -9%. Adolescent birthrate 39/1000, Preterm births – 6%, Under 5 stunting – 7%. This invites us in developing our Samoa Model to explore how we can get parents and caregivers more involved early stimulation in the home to help facilitate that early learning and responsive caregiving.<sup>3</sup>
- ✧ We know apart from ECE targets there are very few explicit national ECD targets across high quality early education, adequate health care, nutrition, responsive caregiving and safe and secure environment for the 0-6 age group. The majority of the national landscape has outcomes that include these components, but they are not defined in a way that makes ECD a national priority.
- ✧ We know that the law requires children aged four to be enrolled in an ECE centre. We know that only 1 in 4 children are attending, uptake is exceptionally low. This also differs between urban and rural areas. This equates to approximately 5291 enrolments.
- ✧ We know only 3/126 ECE have met full compliance of MSS. Private providers of day care are growing and there are significant costs here.
- ✧ We know early childhood is an extremely important phase for children’s growth and development, as the human brain develops at its fastest pace during these formative years. Yet if we take ECE participation as one indicator of ECD we have an extremely poor score card indeed. If we look then at current MEC budget estimates of -

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<sup>3</sup> Factsheet Samoa Demographic and Health – MICS 2019-2020



- ✘ \$139,162,748 and look at estimated priority cost of ECE 2023/24 of \$4,528,279, it appears based on this assessment, .032% allocated to ECE.
- ✘ On analysis on Health outputs budgeted from an ECD lens where clear ECD targets exist, there is a less than .05% health budget spend on ECD interventions.
- ✘ Maternal mortality - 43/100,000. Currently no data on low birth-weights
- ✘ Support and Services for ECD – Nurturing care -Antenatal care (4 or more visits) -70%, Postnatal visits – 83%, care seeking for child pneumonia – 72%, Early initiation of breastfeeding – 81%, exclusive breastfeeding – 70%, minimum acceptable diet – no data, Birth registration – 67%, Basic drinking water -92%, Basic sanitation – 97%.
- ✘ Urgent comparative country data urgently needed around public information on ECD, Parental mental health, parent support (groups and home visits), quality child day care.
- ✘ Prevalence of undernourishment (<2.5%\*) and malnutrition including stunting (5%) and wasting (4%) are also low compared to other Pacific Island nations although prevalence of obesity is a challenge for Samoan children.

## 1.2 EMERGING THEMES

### I. ACCESS AND QUALITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECCE)

Quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) plays a crucial role in preparing children for primary education and beyond. Children who have access to high-quality ECCE tend to show improved cognitive abilities, as well as enhanced social and emotional skills. These early experiences significantly influence a child's educational trajectory, making access to quality ECCE a key predictor of school readiness and long-term educational success.

The evidence supporting early interventions is robust, showing that targeting children's health, well-being, social-emotional or cognitive development are smart policy investments. Increasing access to and quality of ECCE programmes has far-reaching benefits, as it yields significant returns by reducing dropout rates, preventing grade repetition, and increasing the overall efficiency of an education system (UNICEF, 2019a). The first five years of a child's life are crucial for their development, and





this period lays the foundation for their future learning and success. More than 90% of brain development takes place during this time and children learn how to think, communicate, and engage with others at a rapid rate, building new neurons from between 1,000 to 1 million per second (Center on the Developing Child, 2010).

## II. COMMUNITY LED

This approach is not new to Samoa; the District Development model reinforces the focus on the strengths and assets of our communities, as well as the importance of their knowledge base. Community-led mobilization is built on a strengths-based approach, grounded in the belief that the well-being and development of our children are shared aspirations for all. At the heart of this is the recognition that the core aspects of our fa'a Samoa, faith, and culture play a pivotal role in nurturing and maintaining well-being.

Our interconnectedness and the relationships fostered through values such as respect, dignity, love, protection and service guide our daily interactions and responsibilities. It is through these principles that we bring critical Early Childhood Development (ECD) messages to life, strengthening our community's resolve to prioritise ECD. A 'community led' approach invites advocacy for a whole-of-nation commitment to inclusive ECD to ensure all children benefit from enabling conditions in their earliest years, without exception.

## III. ENGAGING PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

It is about using ECD as an opportunity to engage parents and caregivers across the sectoral platforms to promote positive responsive caregiving messages; and the continuous advocacy of the importance of the early years for healthy brains and body development. It includes the promotion of positive parenting messages through relevant localised social and behavioral change strategies.

## IV. ECD AWARENESS

Reaching all our districts enables comprehensive awareness and education, improving ECD programs and services across the nation.. Reinforcement of a national approach to ECD would also ensure the consistency of messaging; and infiltrate key messages into our communities to enable that much needed consensus building. It is about promoting champions at national, district and village levels and strengthening the knowledge and capacity of sector leaders to enable any developed ECD roadmap to be aligned and integrated into existing or new sector plans.



## V. PASIFIKA CALL TO ACTION ON ECD

The Pasifika Call to Action on Early Childhood Development that comprises a nine-point action plan outlines the key actions to guide national multi-sectoral efforts for the optimal development of young children and provides a means to track progress of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda target on ECD, and contribution to other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The commitment to ECD was further strengthened by the Pacific Island Forum Leaders call for a “whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach” to address non-communicable diseases, childhood obesity and early childhood development.

A tenth action point was endorsed in February 2023 focusing on the adaptive capacity of communities to the effects of climate change, promoting close collaboration between the areas of ECD and natural resources, environment, and sustainable development; and committing to heightened advocacy for ECD in the global climate discourse and to call for global green financing mechanisms that allow for financing of ECD programmes and services.

The Pasifika Call to Action recognises that ECD is the responsibility of everyone, and that collective efforts are essential to advancing ECD. Based on various regional and international evidence and findings, we understand the significant returns from investing in children at the earliest stages of their lives, as well as the irreversible consequences of failing to make these investments.

## VI. ECD BUDGETING AND FINANCING

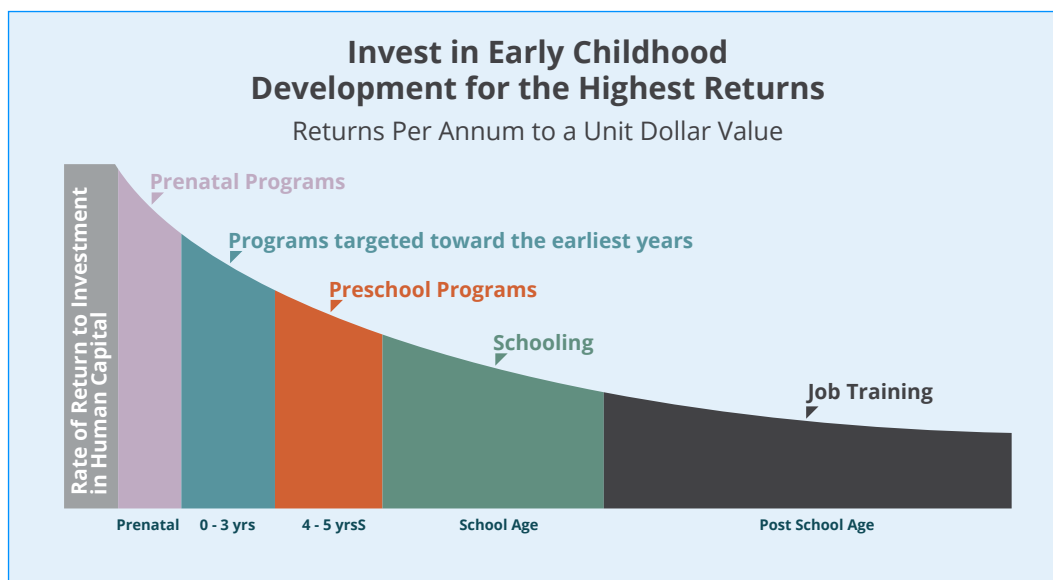
It is about strengthening the capacity of government to understand the importance of the evidence of ECD budgeting and financing; and to assist in the design and development of advocacy strategies to make the case for investment; while at the same time leveraging resources from development partners and other financing opportunities.

It is also about understanding the impacts of climate change and emergencies in terms of risks and the associated increased vulnerabilities to services and the essential components for our children’s health, nutrition, education, protection, and well-being and to engage green global and climate change financing facilities. It is also about understanding the different financial instruments of climate finance which refers to: “finance flowing to developing countries, including support for mitigation, adaptation, ‘climate’ policy and capacity building.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Accessing climate finance: © International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, 2013 Working definition of UNEP Bilateral Finance Institutions Climate Change Working Group (UNEP BFI C CWG).

### 1.3 FOUNDATION AND RATIONALE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTI-SECTORAL STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR ECD IN SAMOA



**Figure 1:** The Heckman Curve; Return on investment: economic impact of investing in early childhood learning

#### I. ECD AS A DEVELOPMENTAL IMPERATIVE

The centrality of ECD to the human developmental initiatives is founded on an ever-growing body of evidence which confirms that a nation's development depends on the extent to which it can unlock the potential human capital inherent within its very youngest population. This in turn depends on the extent to which Government secures or provides the conditions necessary for the realisation of the right of every infant and child to develop "his or her potential to the maximum extent possible, to become physically healthy, mentally alert, socially competent, emotionally sound and ready to learn – cognitively, socially, emotionally, physically and psychosocially – to their full potential."

Samoa must recognise as a nation that the earlier the investment in ECD, the higher the returns. The Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development Framework strongly emphasizes that, without intervention, adults who experience adversity in early childhood are estimated to earn nearly a third less than their peers' average annual income. These individual costs accumulate, limiting wealth creation and national earnings. Estimates show that countries that invest less in health now will face greater costs in the future due to the consequences of poor growth and development in early childhood.



## II. EVIDENCE BASED FRAMEWORKS

The Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) for ECD emphasizes the importance of the early years and the universal conditions that must be in place for every child to develop to his or her full potential. Under the globally accepted NCF, the optimal environment is the one that provides nurturing care for the child in conditions that promote good health, adequate nutrition, opportunities for early learning, responsive caregiving, and security and safety. Samoa's commitment to the advancement of human development captures all the conditions and elements of the NCF when it comes to our youngest citizens.

Over the last three decades, scientific findings from a range of disciplines have converged. They prove that, during pregnancy and the first three years after birth, we lay down critical elements of our health, well-being, and productivity, which will last throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. A new-born baby's brain contains almost all the neurons it will ever have. By age 2, massive numbers of neuronal connections have been made in response to interactions with the environment, and especially interactions with caregivers.

This type of adaptive learning is what makes it critical to focus on pregnancy to age 3 in the first instance. Because of these early developmental and adaptive processes, experiences in pregnancy through to age 3 significantly affect health, learning and productivity, as well as social and emotional well-being. This recognizes that abilities created in early childhood not only last an individual's life, but they also influence the next generation's human development.





### III. LEGAL AND RIGHTS BASED FOUNDATIONS

**The Samoan Constitution guarantees certain fundamental human rights to all people** such as the right to life (Article 5), to personal liberty (Article 6), freedom from inhumane treatment (Article 7), from forced labour (Article 8), the right to a fair trial (Article 9), freedom of religion (Articles 11, 12), rights regarding freedom of speech, assembly, association, movement and residence (Article 13), and freedom from discriminatory legislation (Article 15). These fundamental rights also correspond directly with the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

**Freedom of religion is enshrined in Samoa's Constitution.** Furthermore, the Constitution declares Samoa to be a Christian nation, meaning Christian faith and values play a fundamental role in everyday life. Christian values are founded on unconditional love, kindness, respect, integrity, peace, and forgiveness, which are invariably inter-linked with the fa'aSamoa in the same mutually reinforcing manner as described between the fa'aSamoa and human.

**Fa'aSamoa and Human Rights.** The fa'aSamoa is the invisible resin that keeps Samoan society intact and its governing systems functional, a fact that has also set it apart from our contemporary Pacific Island neighbors. The strength of the fa'aSamoa is the extended family. The extended family is headed by a Matai or chief who is appointed by family consensus. The matai plays a vital role in providing leadership and protection for the family, is responsible for maintaining family unity and prestige, the caretaker of family customary land for current and future generations, the mediator in settling disputes and represents the family in the meetings and gatherings of the village council. The fa'aSamoa also provides for the distinct and different roles of men, women and children in society which inherently promote and protect the rights of all Samoans. Human rights are underpinned by core values of respect, dignity, equality, and security for everyone. Similarly, fa'aSamoa holds core values that guide social interaction such as respect, dignity, love, protection, and service, which mutually reinforce human rights.

**This framework is founded on a human rights-based approach to ECD.** It is grounded in, and seeks to give effect to, the Government of Samoa's international, regional, and national legal commitments to recognise, respect, protect and promote the universal rights of all children and their caregivers. Samoa adheres to the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and is party to six of the nine core human rights conventions. Samoa has also ratified all three CRC optional protocols.



## 02. REALITIES AND CHALLENGES


The Desktop Review Report highlighted the ongoing development of a very sound national policy, planning, legislative landscape; and how Samoa has rightly aligned us to the relevant regional and international landscape to help inform how best to advance the right ECD platform for Samoa. This commitment has been reiterated in various national and regional forums; and in our country reporting against SDG's and our international conventions.

The overarching challenge is about affirming these commitments through tangible interventions and actions. This has been supported by consultations to date. The reality is that we have been too slow to implement ECD as central to Samoa's national development and now the challenges have become increasingly complex. This Strategic Framework gives us the real opportunity to mobilise options to address the suite of challenges documented below.

### 2.1 EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Parents, caregivers, and children have a right to information, yet very little is currently available in terms of national communications campaigns relaying pertinent early childhood development messages. Communication aimed at parents should enable them to understand what they can do to improve their children's nutrition, health and early learning; protect their children, and engage in positive discipline and family relationships; understand and demand quality early learning and development; understand the importance of play in the early learning and development of their children; understand the appropriate use of ICT with young children foster positive parent-child interaction; access support and early intervention services for children with disabilities; and build understanding of the roles of mothers and fathers in early childhood development. Humans are born neurologically, physically, and emotionally more fragile than any other mammal on earth.

***“Children are not born resilient, emotionally secure, or capable of regulating their emotions. They require our physical and emotional presence from birth until after adolescence to reach the pinnacle of emotional stability, security, and health. Age 0-3 is a critical period of brain development where children need attachment security as a foundation for future mental health. Mothers serve a unique biological function in this period. Through their physical and emotional presence, they regulate children's emotions***



*from moment to moment by soothing them when they are in distress, buffering them from stress that is toxic to a young child's brain, and providing them with a sense of safety and security in the world. Only after three years of age can a child internalize a feeling of security that helps them cope with stress in the future.”<sup>5</sup>*

There is a need to strengthen public knowledge and perception of ECD and the importance of holistic ECD and nurturing care in the early years of a child's life, particularly its impact on brain development. Messaging in all these areas of communication must be based on evidence and, most importantly, must be consistent across all communication mediums and informed by our Samoan context.

## **2.2 ACCESS TO EQUITABLE AND QUALITY REPRODUCTIVE, MATERNAL, NEWBORN, CHILD HEALTH AND NURTURING CARE WITH A FOCUS ON THE FIRST 1000 DAYS**

This is done to some degree through high level health sector outcomes and Samoa's national development agenda, but it currently lacks a holistic child development approach with targeted ECD specific interventions. The absence of any annual progress reporting against the current Health Sector Plan means our progress indicators remain that in the Annual reporting of the Ministry of Health. We are not getting a whole of sector reporting lens against the seven critical outcome areas to help us to keep pace of current and future needs of the country and on track with our mission of; “Enhancing Public Health to provide people-centered health services”.

All sectors such as the Community Sector, Education Sector, Law and Justice Sector, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector, Environment Sector and Finance Sector have significant responsibilities for the development of a coordinated ECD strategic framework to meet the holistic needs of our youngest in the first 1000 days. However, the health sector remains the critical starting point for scaling up ECD efforts in the first 1000 days, given its reach to pregnant women, families, and young children.

## **2.3 PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT**

The most important kind of stability is family stability, and family/extended family support. Embrace the responsibility and meaning of starting and raising a family and committing to it. Service providers and Consultations told us this can work at the home and community level, but it needs to be taken from an appreciation of the current practices and behaviors; and what tools and components of ECD are being introduced and why.

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<sup>5</sup> Erica Komisar: Being There: Raising Resilient Children; November 2023;4 (Erica Komisar LCSW is a clinical social worker, author, psychoanalyst, psychological consultant, and parent guidance expert who has been in private practice in New York City for over 30 years)



The challenge is introducing an ECD theory of change informed by the Nurturing Care framework that builds on existing local practices of raising children which supports nurturing, learning, safety, health, and nutrition and build on positive parenting support mechanisms. The challenge also is to be able to recognise mental health support mechanisms that may also need to be integrated into any positive parenting resources or programs.

Many parents are misinformed about the ability of their children under the age of three to be independent. A broad campaign of parent education classes— folded into prenatal care and through the health workforce, faith-based communities and the education sector—as well as educational campaigns through public service announcements on television and all forms of social media, to prioritise the care of children in the home, and highlight emerging issues such as the negative effects of electronic devices and ICT on young children, could go a long way towards parents and families awareness that nurturing in these crucial years means we are developing valuable human assets of our society.

## **2.4 QUALITY STANDARDS FOR THE PROVISION OF ECD SERVICES**

Apart from ECE Minimum service standards, which we know are not well met by ECE registered centres, there is a real gap on minimum standards for ECD services that can be; or presently are delivered across a different range of platforms, as supported by the Nurturing Care approach. Given the different types of ECD services which cross different sectors, quality is essential for our young children to reach their maximum developmental potential.

The challenge is to make sure the different variables such as workforce, curriculum, infrastructure, families, health and safety policies, communities are all integrated and regulated areas when looking at quality assurance. Different service modalities of ECD cannot always be measured in the same way. For example, an urban private day care facility set of variables would be different to a rural ECE centre operating from a community hall; but still there will need to be key minimum requirements for example around safe and secure spaces, clean water, sanitation, age-appropriate curricula and so forth.

## **2.5 ECD WORKFORCE**

Samoa's efforts to date to boost an ECD workforce have fallen well short. We cannot even get enough qualified teachers involved in the ECE teaching profession. This suggests that potential teachers see ECE as an infor-





mal system, not sustainable, unsecured contracts, poor pay and status and perhaps inadequate training and ongoing professional development opportunities. At the same time, we are losing teachers to the various labour mobility schemes. Poor participation rates at ECE has been the trend for too long. Combine this with what appears to be low priority, informal nature and low status of the work, budget limitations, job insecurity, lack of investment in professional development and training at both teacher and community levels.

To change the story, Samoa needs to pursue tangible actions and interventions to boost the ECD workforce and strengthen the community platforms; and their capacities and understanding of the different roles as caregivers and as ECD service providers through flexible ECD platforms and what an enabling environment for caregivers, families and communities looks like to advance good quality ECD services.

## 2.6 SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING

ECD as a multi-domain process has not been addressed in an integrated manner by all relevant and responsible sectors. The silo approach has remained the main response through ministries. The desk top review report confirmed Ministry budget allocations, ministry outcomes and outputs responding to Ministry mandates and roles and responsibilities and lack of ECD specific outcomes and reporting was the current situation.

The current default towards project-based interventions rather than a much needed systems approach paired with current incentive structures that do not encourage vertical and horizontal coordination, tends to hamper absorption of integrated service delivery concepts, including nurturing care.

This strategic framework is Samoa's attempt at pursuing an integrated approach that provides for the mutual coordination, collaboration and support of all agencies and service providers concerned with ECD. It requires that any political and technical systemic challenges are resolved through consulting and adapting to Samoa's context and needs at both the national and local levels.

It is about addressing the apparent lack of awareness and understanding about ECD among leaders and promoting strength-based conversations and messages about the developmental benefits of ECD and the importance of a dedicated ECD Taskforce or Coordinating mechanism to lead ECD with clear participation by all relevant sectors and stakeholders.



## 2.7 LACK OF FINANCING FOR ECD

Apart from select health and nutrition programmes and ECE, most early childhood services are not easily identifiable in government budgets, making it difficult to regularly monitor and measure public investments in the early years of life. The Government of Samoa and its development partners are investing significantly fewer resources in the early years of life (0-6 years) compared to older children. Pre-primary education spending as a share of total education expenditure, averaged less than 0.04% as against the most recent annual progress report of the Education Sector Plan 2019-2024. The recommended UNICEF target is 10% of the total education sector budget. Health recorded a similar spend of less than .05%. Samoa would be challenged to prove an actual ECD spend of 1% of GDP. The Desktop Review suggests a .05% estimate of GDP.

The unavailability of up to date and comprehensive data and statistics has made planning and budget allocation decisions for ECD difficult. It is equally difficult to do any real analysis on actual public financing of ECD under the current silo agency approaches and budget reporting. Different sector priorities continue to remain the challenge because ECD has yet to elevate as a priority on a national scale; yet we know ECD is a cross sector, national development issue of great significance. The Government is called upon to review the budget classification system to enhance the identifiability of ECD in government budgets. Output-based budgeting is, therefore, an opportunity for the Government to improve the visibility of ECD in government budgets. If the Government of Samoa is to improve early childhood development outcomes, it should progressively increase the size of its investments in all elements of the nurturing care framework in line with cost estimates in sector plans.

If the current financing gap is to be closed, the government would have to at least double the current level of public resources committed to ECD. There may also be scope for redistributing current resources to prioritize investments in early childhood. The support of development partners will also be required considering current fiscal space constraints. The international financial institutions, especially the IMF and the World Bank, may have to be called upon to increase grants and concessional finance support to Samoa.



## 2.8 ECD IN EMERGENCIES, INCLUDING CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Children in the Pacific, given the relative isolation of many islands, are extremely vulnerable to many climate disasters, including tropical cyclones and typhoons, flooding, drought, and temperature extremes. Several Pacific Island countries and territories are low lying or have low-lying territories that are vulnerable to coastal erosion and rising sea levels, and all are affected by climate change and natural disasters that have considerable impacts across all outcome areas in relation to the realization of children’s and women’s rights (UNICEF Pacific, 2017)

In November 2019, Samoa declared its first ever public health State of Emergency (SOE) following a wide scale measles outbreak. The SOE lasted six weeks with a significant impact on the population and the healthcare system. There were 5,700 measles cases and 83 measles-related deaths, the majority of whom were children under the age of 5.

The pandemic also brought to light the need for adequate systems, tools, and capacities to be able to respond adequately and timely to the specific needs of our children and families in times of crisis. In the early years of life, when a child’s rapidly developing brain is exceptionally sensitive to environmental influences, the detrimental impacts of emergencies including threats to the nurturing care settings are especially felt by the youngest children and their caregivers.

Children who experience adversity and exposure to prolonged stress during infancy run a greater risk of developing cognitive, behavioral, and emotional difficulties, which can have multi-dimensional and long-term impacts into adulthood. Samoa has a dedicated Disaster management Office and emergency responses and planning in place. It is a matter of making sure ECD voices and lenses are heard and seen on current and future issues, such as climate change and natural disasters and to integrate ECD responses and interventions.

Employing climate change financing facilities, such as the Green Climate Fund, to resource ECD exemplifies the kind of implementation-ready investments that can achieve both mitigation and adaptation objectives, while multiplying the associated social and economic returns.



## 03. VISION & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*“O le tagata ma lona aiga, o le tagata ma lona fa’asinomaga”*

### 3.1 THE PRINCIPLES AND VALUES OF FA’ASAMOA

Alofa (love) | fa’aaloalo (respect and dignity) | tautua (service and responsibility) | usita’i (obedience) | va fealoa’i or va tapuia (sacred relationships between people) | fetausia’i (caring for each other) | puipuiga (protection) | malu i fale (if you are not safe at home, then you are safe in other places) | malu i fanua (being protected within your community or land) | tausi fanau (caring responsibility for children) | tausi aiga (caring responsibility for the family) | tausi matua (caring responsibility for parents) | tausi nuu (caring responsibility for the village community) | soalaupule (consensus requiring consultation and participation) | tofa fetala’i (wisdom is knowledge sharing and shared understanding) | amiotonu (honesty – doing the right thing) | fa’asinomaga (identity–where you belong).

### 3.2 THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN VALUES

Understanding that human beings are created in God’s image, helps shape the character of responsible citizenship that we desperately need as a nation. When life is created by a supremely good God, and our God values the lives he has created, or, to take the Christian view, he loves them, then they are valuable. Christian values establish a special blend of faith and learning. They act as a moral guide, shaping children’s actions and interactions, and cultivating a sense of responsibility and empathy towards others. Christian values highlight the significance of community and togetherness. These skills are vital for their social growth, aiding them in forming solid relationships and realizing the value of collective effort towards shared objectives. Faith-based communities are even more supportive and influential in terms of building resilience in children. When children are under stress and face adversity, they benefit from the belief in a protective higher power; it gives them hope that things will get better.

Integrity, honesty, and truthfulness form the heart of Christian values. When children learn these principles early on, it helps shape a strong moral character that influences their choices and actions as they mature. This sense of moral integrity becomes integral to their identity, steering their interactions with others and their responses to different life situations. Christian teachings emphasize compassion and empathy. In a developmental environment, these values encourage children to under-



stand and respect the feelings of others, fostering emotional intelligence. This understanding can help children navigate their relationships more effectively, promoting harmony and understanding in their interactions.

Christian values promote wisdom and knowledge. By fostering a love for learning, children are encouraged to be curious, ask questions, and seek answers, fueling their intellectual development. This love for learning can drive their academic success and inspire a lifelong passion for knowledge.

Christian values encourage service to others. This principle can inspire children to contribute positively to their community, fostering a sense of responsibility and empathy. By understanding the value of service, children can become more socially responsible and contribute positively to their communities.

Instilling Christian principles in early childhood sows seeds of purpose that can blossom into a life of meaning. Knowing they are crafted with intention fuels motivation to discover their special talents and gifts. Children who grasp their lives have God-given purpose are empowered to boldly pursue goals and dreams. They come to understand their lives are vessels for making the world brighter through service to others.

### **3.3 THE PRINCIPLES OF POSITIVE PARENTING AND FAMILY STRENGTHENING**

It is up to us as parents - despite our personal limitations - to give our children the right start in life: to help them become fulfilled, emotionally healthy adults capable of loving and trusting others.

The parent(s) and family have the primary responsibility for their child's care, upbringing, protection, and development. Concerns about the care and protection of children will be addressed by providing support to the child's parents /caregiver to address underlying problems and strengthen their ability to appropriately care for their child, and to minimise removal of children from their families and communities. The response to children in need of care and protection will seek to actively engage and mobilise the child's extended family, community, and church network in supporting the child and family. This support includes the support of the church, village council, village committees, village government representatives and other community-based institutions, groups, and individuals.

***"While yielding to the loving leadership of their parents, children are also learning to yield to the benevolent leadership of God Himself."*** James Dobson (1978)



***"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn."*** - Benjamin Franklin

***"One generation of deeply loving parents would change the brain of the next generation, and with that, the world."***- Charles Raison, M.D.

***"Honor your father and mother, and you will live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you."*** - Exodus 20:12. God made each person special and unique. This verse reminds parents that it's their special job to take care of and love their children because they are amazing creations.

### **3.4 THE PRINCIPLES OF NURTURE**

Nurture refers to the care and attention that children are given while they are growing and developing. This helps to give them emotional resilience. Nurture highlights the importance of social environments because it focuses on the people around a child. Nurture is all about variables in our environments that have an impact on who we are, it includes our early childhood experiences, how we are raised, the relationships we have and the culture that surrounds us.

As well as that, nurture is also significant to our social-emotional skills, well-being, and behavior. This is important because it is shown that children and young people who have a good start in life have advantages over those who have missing or disturbed early attachments.

***"A brilliant idea is like a baby in a mother's womb. You need to bring it out into the world, nurture it, feed it, grow it, till it becomes big enough to take care of itself. If you leave it at the stage of an idea itself, it is as good as non-existent."*** - Manoj Arora

***"In caring for others, we are really caring for ourselves, for we all nurture one another in the garden of the heart."*** - Laurence Overmire

***"It is the relationships we build and nurture that is the foundation of accomplishment."*** - Jeffrey G. Duarte

***"Children nurtured in kindness learn the value of understanding. Children taught to be self-sufficient, to respect others, to value education and to build life up rather than to tear it down will become adults capable of leading us to a brighter future. For (as Karl Menninger noted) what's done to children, they will do to society."*** - Steve Goodier

***"Nearly all problems of human behavior stem from our failure to ensure that people live in environments that nurture their well-being."*** - Anthony Biglan, *The Nurture Effect: How the Science of Human Behavior Can Improve Our Lives and Our World*



### **3.5 THE PRINCIPLES OF COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES AND A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO CHILDCARE AND PROTECTION**

Community is important for raising resilient children on many levels. It provides comfort, safety, and a sense of belonging to a group of people who are like extended family. It is the collective responsibility of parents and adult members of extended families and communities (including church and village institutions) to nurture, educate and protect children as well as to ensure the health and well-being of children comply with national health and education standards set by the government. Any existing child protection system will build on the strengths, knowledge and opportunities that exist within the local community. Village councils, community leaders, churches, and other informal support networks (women's groups, youth groups, FBOs and NGOs) provide an important social safety net for children and families facing difficulties and have an essential role to play in the child protection system.

Samoa's child protection system is based on a community-caring approach, as this is the most beneficial and sustainable system for Samoa. The primary focus of the child and protection system is to prevent, and to intervene early with families at risk and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children with public policies, programs and services focusing on promoting and emphasising the roles and responsibilities of families and communities for childcare and protection.

The child and protection system will foster and support the community and family to prevent poor outcomes occurring in the first place and sharing amongst the community members relevant prevention and early intervention initiatives that are cost effective in improving children safety and well-being. Each community actor (individuals, groups, organisations, and networks) in the childcare and protection system has a fundamental role to play in ensuring the safety and well-being of children. Those roles should continue to be supported, promoted, and strengthened.

Early interventions must be undertaken in cases where the parents and families are struggling and where a child is assessed as at risk of harm. The extended family and close community are best placed to assist the parents if they are struggling to ensure their child's safety, care, protection, and well-being.

### **3.6 THE PRINCIPLES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION**

Early childhood inclusion is not just a beneficial practice; it is a fundamental right of every child. By embracing and facilitating inclusion, we create environments that celebrate diversity, promote empathy, and provide



optimal opportunities for all children's development. The benefits of early childhood inclusion are far-reaching, impacting children's psychological well-being, social skills, academic achievements, and long-term success. As educators, parents, and society, we are responsible for championing inclusive practices and creating a future where every child's potential can be unlocked.

Inclusion in early childhood settings requires teachers' and parents' collaboration and support. By working together, they can create a nurturing environment that embraces and facilitates the inclusion of all children. Teachers and parents are responsible for ensuring every child feels valued, respected, and included in the learning process. Understanding and implementing strategies promoting inclusion can create an enriching educational experience for all children.

Inclusion refers to incorporating children with diverse abilities into the same learning environment. This ensures that all children have equal access to education, resources, and opportunities for growth and development. Furthermore, early childhood inclusion extends beyond the classroom. It encompasses a holistic approach that involves families, educators, and community members working together to create an inclusive environment where each child can thrive.

Early childhood inclusion focuses on creating environments that accommodate, value, and celebrate each child's unique abilities and differences. Inclusion fosters empathy, understanding, and acceptance of individual differences for typically developing children. It provides them with invaluable lessons on diversity, adaptability, and the importance of inclusion in a larger society. When children grow up in inclusive environments, they are more likely to become tolerant, compassionate adults who advocate for inclusivity.

In inclusive classrooms, children learn to communicate and collaborate with individuals with different communication styles or abilities. They develop empathy and understanding as they navigate challenges together and find ways to support each other. These experiences lay the foundation for building strong and inclusive communities in the future. Furthermore, early childhood inclusion encourages a growth mindset, believing one's abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. This mindset fosters resilience, perseverance, and a desire to learn, setting the foundation for lifelong learning.

Early childhood inclusion is a concept that emphasizes the importance of providing children with disabilities access to inclusive learning environments from a young age. It recognizes the value of diversity and aims to create an inclusive society where every child can thrive and reach their full potential regardless of their abilities.





One of the key predictions for the future of early childhood inclusion is the advancement of assistive technology. As technology advances rapidly, we can expect to see even more innovative tools and devices that will further enhance the learning experiences of children with disabilities. These advancements will bridge the gap between children with disabilities and their typically developing peers, ensuring equal access to educational opportunities.

*"It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength."* – Maya Angelou

*"Inclusion is not a matter of political correctness. It is the key to growth."*  
- Jesse Jackson, Civil Rights Activist

### 3.7 THE PRINCIPLES RELATED TO A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

Protecting certain fundamental human rights is a key element of this effort, as guaranteed under our Constitution; as well as international human rights Conventions, inter alia the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Every child has the right to survival, growth, development, protection, and participation, and to achieve his or her full potential.

The Best Interests of the Child, all policies and programs for families and young children must aim to serve the child's best interests. The right of children to family life is a foundational right. International law gives a primary place to the rights of children by recognising that the family is "the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children,"<sup>6</sup> and that children require particular care and attention as they develop.

No child shall be left behind, discriminated against, or abused based on economic status, health status and/or disability. Children should be considered as active participants in their own development and capable of making valuable inputs. Specific attention should be given to the evolving capacities of the child, as a key component for identifying and designing opportunities for child participation. Programming and policy development for early childhood development should have child rights at the forefront, ensuring that all decisions and interventions prioritize the well-being, protection, and holistic development of every child, aligning with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including access to quality care, education, healthcare, nutrition, and a safe environment, considering the child's best interests in every aspect of policy implementation and program design.

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<sup>6</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Convention on the rights of the child. 1989. Treaty no. 27531. United Nations Treaty Series, 1577, Article <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>



## 04. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, RELATED OUTCOMES AND INTERVENTIONS

ENSURE OUR CHILDREN ARE BORN HEALTHY, REMAIN STRONG AND ARE SUPPORTED TO THRIVE IN THEIR EARLY YEARS

### KEY OUTCOME 4.1

Increased, equitable access to high impact, evidence-based health, nutrition, family planning and reproductive health services at primary and community level to children under 6 years, adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women with a focus on the first 1,000 days.

#### PRIORITY AREAS FOR INTERVENTION

- 4.1.1. Promote and maximise opportunities during antenatal and post-natal clinic visits and community-based support groups for well-baby care and immunisation and to counsel women regarding self-care and infant health, growth, and learning.
- 4.1.2. Support for early initiation and continued breastfeeding up to 24months.
- 4.1.3. Improve food security and access to nutritious foods in households with pregnant women, infants, and young children through promotion of and support for food gardens and early childhood development programmes with an emphasis on growing crops with high nutritional value and on local animal sourced foods for own consumption.
- 4.1.4. Increase districts capacities to have up-to-date nutrition and food security emergency preparedness and response plan.
- 4.1.5. Advocate for increased investment to scale up safe drinking water services.
- 4.1.6. Increase awareness, capacity building and support to families, with special attention to vulnerable households, to invest in and adopt appropriate/adequate sanitation and hygiene practices, including hand washing with soap.
- 4.1.7. Integrate “Baby WASH” messages into Nutrition and ECD trainings and materials.



## ENSURE OUR CHILDREN ARE SUPPORTED TO ESTABLISH STRONG CONNECTIONS WITH CULTURE, FAITH, AND LANGUAGE

**Our children develop strong, resilient, and proud cultural and faith identities in their early years; and are supported to maintain meaningful connections to their language, family, and communities.**

**KEY OUTCOME**

**4.2**

### PRIORITY AREAS FOR INTERVENTION

- 4.2.1. In partnership with families and communities support ECE and care services to build our children's sense of cultural identity and pride.
- 4.2.2. Strengthen cultural, faith and language connections with families, elders and FBO's and NGO's.
- 4.2.3. Increase cultural connection and language in all ECD programs and initiatives.
- 4.2.4. Support and prioritise the importance of strong and meaningful relationships with family, kin, faith, and culture.
- 4.2.5. Increase awareness that culture, faith, and language are recognized as supportive and protective factors for Children's safety, health, well-being, and development.
- 4.2.6. Increase awareness and capacity to recognise positive cultural identity and relationships in the early years set children up for success throughout life, and play a key preventative role in education, health, mental health, child protection, and youth and adult justice.

## ENSURE OUR CHILDREN GROW UP IN SAFE NURTURING HOMES, SUPPORTED BY STRONG PARENTS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

**Our children are cared for and supported by strong families and vibrant communities; are safe and protected and have access to support services when needed.**

**KEY OUTCOME**

**4.3**

### PRIORITY AREAS FOR INTERVENTION

- 4.3.1. Support community led prevention, early intervention and child and family support initiatives to provide long term social and economic benefits.
- 4.3.2. Enhance the participation, engagement and responsibilities of families and communities in ECD delivery.



- 4.3.3. Support and increase government, private sector and district initiatives that provide income generating opportunities and improvements in families' employment, education, and training outcomes which in turn enables families to afford the material basics, nutrition, safe homes, and overall improved sense of well-being.
- 4.3.4. Encourage and draw upon positive families' voices, beliefs and practices and incorporate into district planning.
- 4.3.5. Support communities in identifying local champions who can take on nurturing care and become the drivers of change in their communities.
- 4.3.6. Collaborate with mass media for ECD and plan and implement national communication strategies that inform and empower communities and families to provide nurturing care.
- 4.3.7. Consider the provision of incentives through district planning for the continuity of best local practices of child development and child raising across nurturing, learning, safety, health, and nutrition.
- 4.3.8. Strengthen and support community platforms for nurturing care. These include faith groups, Sui o le Nu'u, STN, Fono Faavae, community health workers, traditional healers, and birth attendants, women committees, youth committees, school committees and Parents organisations.
- 4.3.9. Involve Fono Faavae and Village leaders in planning, budgeting, implementing, and monitoring activities and create a climate of accountability for results in ECD.

## **ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SAFE, AFFORDABLE AND QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION; AND RELATED ECD MECHANISMS AND SERVICES FOR ALL CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 6**

### **KEY OUTCOME 4.4**

**Increase the number of our children that can access registered ECE Centres, which are compliant with safety, health requirements and meet the educational and care development needs of each child.**

**ECD is well structured, organized and coordinated with important roles and linkages that recognize the importance of a national management and oversight mechanism to drive and lead the elevation of the national ECD agenda at all levels of government and society.**



## PRIORITY AREAS FOR INTERVENTION

- 4.4.1. A comprehensive information system is designed to collect and store information on access, enrolment, and achievement across all ECE and Childcare services and involves an ongoing process of analysis, insight, new learning, and changes in practice that ensure better services and better learning for our children.
- 4.4.2. Scale up support in the ECE registration process through existing MSS standards and service model to address gaps and problems, deal with blockages and provide step-by-step registration process advice, as well as provide guidance to the unregistered ECE Centres.
- 4.4.3. Increase and strengthen ECE services to be informed by best practice, are culturally sensitive and effectively engage children, parents, families, and communities.
- 4.4.4. Focus on building and strengthening community partnerships and ECD outreach services which encourages parents and families to be actively supporting and advocating the ECE journey for their children.
- 4.4.5. Promote increased access and enrollment strategies, including Inclusive Education initiatives, that increase the proportion of our children starting primary school who have participated and engaged in ECE.
- 4.4.6. Promote the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy Framework.
- 4.4.7. Scale up the provision of under-provided early childhood development services to ensure nationwide availability and equitable access and enforce the legislation that mandates every child the age of 4 needs to attend a registered ECE Centre.
- 4.4.8. Involve the Fono Faavae and Village Councils to advocate and monitor ECE participation as per existing laws.
- 4.4.9. Support the scaling up at the local and community levels of parent support programmes and caregiver activities, including parent and caregiver education that helps prepare children to enter inclusive primary education.
- 4.4.10. Build an ECD mechanism with representation of all key stakeholders concerned with ECD at the national level. A national multi-sectoral ECD mechanism is a proven vehicle for reaching consensus and developing stronger integration of care, early learning, and development, while improving the quality of these, and, as a result, bringing about effective improvements in nutritional, social, educational, and cognitive outcomes.
- 4.4.11. Establish a National ECD Taskforce and ECD Core Technical Team.
- 4.4.12. Work with Sector Cabinet Ministers and parliamentarians to inform and guide their advocacy and championing of ECD in Samoa. This will help raise the political profile and public awareness of the legal and developmental importance of early childhood development.
- 4.4.13. Use existing Village Councils and District Development approach to conduct ECD planning, implementation and monitoring and reporting on ECD interventions and initiatives.



## ENSURE SKILLED HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR THE DELIVERY OF EFFECTIVE SERVICES FOR AN INTEGRATED MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH TO EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

### KEY OUTCOME 4.5

Government takes the lead and responsibility for the mobilisation and allocation of sufficient human, financial and other resources to enable the delivery of an integrated multi-sector nationwide approach to its ECD commitments so Samoa can realize the investment and development returns.

#### PRIORITY AREAS FOR INTERVENTION

- 4.5.1. Identify opportunities for strengthening and integrating the nurturing components of care into existing services and systems in the range of sectors such as health, education, community development, child and social protection, agriculture, and the environment.
- 4.4.2. Optimize opportunities for capacity building and to strengthen the current workforce; and the types of interventions to retain and grow the workforce.
- 4.5.3. Identify the categories of an ECD workforce including health promoters and community workers that provide a combination of home visiting and community and clinic-based support for pregnant women, and mothers of infants and young children up to the age of 2.
- 4.5.4. Articulation of ECD National Qualification system and entry levels and mobility choices across ECD sector jobs which includes recognition of core nurturing care competencies and childhood development skills and experience.
- 4.5.5. Develop a human resource plan that can help Samoa expand its ECD workforce through accredited specialized short-term courses including ECD and the nurturing care framework model so we can implement more programs at the community levels.
- 4.5.6. Involve CSO to contribute to the upskilling and support of the ECD workforce.
- 4.5.7. Government to act and recognise that increased public investment in national ECD systems will yield developmental returns exceeding the cost in terms of improvements in educational outcomes, increased labour productivity and improved child well-being, and ultimate reductions in inequality and poverty.
- 4.5.8. Development of a financing/funding framework.
- 4.5.9. Design and development of an ECD monitoring, evaluation and learning framework to assist in measuring progress towards achievement of the key objectives, outcomes, interventions, and outputs of the ECD Strategic Framework for Samoa.



## ECD AND CHILD PROTECTION INTEGRATED INTO DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT, EMERGENCY RESPONSES AND CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION EFFORTS ACROSS ALL SECTORS

ECD and Child protection is recognised as a priority issue and integrated into the Legal and policy framework including processes and structures for the Disaster preparedness planning and budgeting and climate change mitigation interventions across all key sectors.

KEY OUTCOME

4.6

### PRIORITY AREAS FOR INTERVENTION

- 4.6.1. Support the development of Disaster preparedness and procedures and planning resources for all appropriate stakeholders to be up skilled and increasing the capacity of all sectors involved to deliver on key ECD outcomes of integration of DRM and Climate change initiatives.
- 4.6.2. Promote access to appropriate child protection prevention, early intervention and response services in the Disaster risk reduction and preparedness plans at all levels of society.
- 4.6.3. Encourage District Plans to recognized ECD vulnerabilities in disaster situations and ensure young children and their parents are considered before, during and after emergencies.
- 4.6.4. Encourage and support young children and their families in all planning so that they will be disaster ready and resilient, including attention given to food security, health services, nutritional support, social protection, water, sanitation and hygiene and educational needs.
- 4.6.5. Promote the collection of ECD specific information during risk assessment and the inclusion of risk management in all ECD activities.
- 4.6.6. Use the multi sectoral approach to integrate ECD into emergency preparedness across all sectors as each sector offers different entry points to address health, nutrition, WASH, education, and protection of young children in times of emergencies.
- 4.6.7. Request UNICEF Technical Assistance in producing a cost-benefit analysis of investments in ECD in Samoa to inform funding models in the long term.
- 4.6.8. Promote and support local led and child sensitive action on climate change.
- 4.6.9. Encourage the increase of commitments to climate finance for both mitigation and adaptation in recognition that the climate crisis is a child rights issue that affects children first and women foremostly.
- 4.6.10. Mobilising Global Environmental Funds that finances both adaptation and mitigation efforts; and the Special Climate Change Fund to address the specific needs of developing countries.
- 4.6.11. Accessing the Pacific Resilience Fund. This is a fund of the Pacific by the Pacific for the Pacific, designed and suggested by Pacific leaders for Pacific circumstances. It has a goal of \$500 million.



## 05. MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING

Proper and effective monitoring and evaluation systems and learning frameworks to track progress against objectives and goals, especially regarding improving levels of access to and the quality of early childhood development services for infants and young children, is an essential part of service delivery and the implementation of this ECD strategic framework for Samoa. The national early childhood development monitoring, evaluation and learning framework will be designed, developed, and implemented to collect and provide information for annual progress reporting on the realisation of the overarching vision and key strategic direction of Samoa's ECD framework.

Monitoring implementation is context specific. The choice of indicators will depend on the interventions and initiatives/activities that are being implemented. We will design our M.E.A.L to ensure prioritized interventions and programs fit the values, goals, experiences, and conceptual frameworks of diverse stakeholders, so that participating in the ECD strategic framework makes sense to us all. Through the ECD Strategic Framework for Samoa, efforts are aimed at improving nurturing care for early childhood development, so the M.E.A.L will look to the five components of the Nurturing care framework for applicable indicators.

Effective evaluation and learning processes help all stakeholders gain an understanding of the status of children's development at a point of time, to shine a light on the challenges, to act on evidence; and to help inform design of interventions to address critical issues. Effective monitoring and evaluation help to inform how services and support should be targeted so that positive influences are maximised across targeted populations. It assists in tracking changes over time and evaluating if policies and interventions are achieving the intended outcomes and objectives. Importantly it also informs financing and investment decisions.

## 06. FINANCING FRAMEWORK

The multisectoral dimension of Samoa's ECD Strategic Framework presents a vital opportunity to guarantee certain levels of domestic funding of a broad range of interventions. These will be reflected in an initial 2-year costed Action Plan where a whole of sector approach is taken to commit





budget allocations. Current ECD sector budget allocations do not reach .1% of the national budget.

One of the overarching goals is to strengthen coordination among GoS and all development actors working at the national and district planning levels to achieve shared development objectives and aligned development plans. This is pivotal for mutual accountability for resources and results. This will enable national and district levels to successfully coordinate ECD partners and stakeholders and strengthen their program and service delivery. Districts are now also budget agencies separate from sector-line ministries and must prepare annual district development plans in line with GoS planning and budgeting cycles.

There are several coordination and budget harmonization challenges, and these will need to be factored into the first 2 year costed action plan. These include but are not limited to:

- ✘ Unclear flows of ECD financing.
- ✘ Absence of ECD Action Plans and whole of country levels of Implementation.
- ✘ Fragmented accountability and reporting systems.
- ✘ Donor specific interests.
- ✘ Geographical and coverage inequities.
- ✘ Difficulties in ECD alignment of external funding to domestic resources.
- ✘ Fragmented planning and budgeting are a critical challenge to the responsive convergence of services to the targeted populations.

External Funding is vital to sustainable financing for our Integrated multi-sectoral ECD framework in the medium term and phased graduation in the long-term. Mechanisms of support include; Direct Budget Support, Sector Budget Support, Projects, and off budget support. In the immediate short term, external funding remains significant in ensuring adequate and effective delivery of ECD services. This ECD framework spells out the priorities and the initial first 2-year costed action plan will guide ECD specific interventions, improved coordination, and harmonization of development partners funding towards ECD in Samoa.

Efficiency, Equity and Accountability are cardinal ingredients of any financing regime. This will require a balanced combination of both technical efficiency and allocative efficiency. Technical efficiency will focus on which inputs in ECD care and service are optimized; and allocative efficiency will focus on how well the outcomes of services provided are distributed among the targeted population revolving around what might represent the optimum mix of services or interventions that maximizes the improvements and outcomes needed.



## 07. IMPLEMENTATION AND COORDINATION

Creating enabling environments for ECD and nurturing care requires a lot of different people and organizations to participate. All the stakeholders who are relevant need to join in the conversation. This includes organizations from many different parts of government, as well as civil society, professional associations, academia, implementation partners and funding partners. Stakeholders to consider involving are:

- ✘ Caregivers and their families.
- ✘ Policymakers and programme managers in health, nutrition, education, child protection, social protection, finance, and other sectors, at national and local level.
- ✘ Community Sector.
- ✘ Education Sector.
- ✘ Health Sector.
- ✘ Law and Justice Sector.
- ✘ Environment Sector and National Disaster Management.
- ✘ Trade, Commerce and Manufacturing Sector.
- ✘ Other Sectors/ Government Agencies.
- ✘ Sui o le Nuu and Sui Tamaitai o le Nuu and parliamentarians.
- ✘ Village Council and Community-based Organisations, Groups and Network.
- ✘ Church and church-based organisations, groups, and networks.
- ✘ Civil-society groups.
- ✘ Non-government organisations and private sector.
- ✘ Development partners.
- ✘ Professional associations.
- ✘ Academic institutions, such as training institutes, colleges, and universities.
- ✘ Funding initiatives, both global and national.
- ✘ Private-sector organisations including corporations and social enterprises.
- ✘ Local radio and newspaper journalists and other media.
- ✘ Local and national law enforcement.
- ✘ Representatives of marginalized groups.



The Cabinet approved Community Sector Advisory Committee (CSAC) will oversee the ECD Strategic Framework implementation, programme and budgetary planning and annual reporting. Technical support for the CSAC and for the implementation and reporting on the ECD Action Plans will be conducted by the ECD Working Group. The CSAC and all entities involved in implementing the ECD Strategic Framework and Action Plans will strengthen relationships for ECD with the Pacific Regional Forum and the Pacific Regional Council for ECD (PRC4ECD). Key ECD leaders will be selected to represent Samoa at PRC4ECD Regional Leadership Conferences, noting Samoa is hosting this forum in 2025.

The concept of an ECD Taskforce has already been explored and the GoS has endorsed this mechanism at regional forums as the preferred coordination and implementation arrangement to monitor the sequence of Action Plans for the ECD strategic Framework. The ECD taskforce will include representatives of all relevant ministries, sectors, networks, civil society organisations and international agencies dedicated to ECD.

The overall management of the ECD Strategic Framework will be led by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, the current central focus agency for the CRC and other childcare and protection mandates. The MWCS D has primary responsibility for leading, facilitating and coordinating services and programs for children, families, and the community, as well as facilitating and monitoring the development and implementation of the childcare and protection system.

MWCS D and Community Sector responsibilities primarily through the Community Sector Division and supported by the Social Development Division include but are not limited to the following:

- ✧ Design and implement appropriate strategies and programs, together with relevant partners, for early intervention with families and children who are vulnerable or at risk.
- ✧ Receive reports of children suspected of needing care or protection and lead case management process.
- ✧ Promote the safety, welfare health and well-being of children in collaboration with inter-agency partners and community support networks.
- ✧ Facilitate collaboration across services and with inter-agency partners to support and strengthen families and promote child safety, health, welfare, and well-being.
- ✧ Coordinate the drafting and provision of national multisectoral ECD reports and the preparation of any ECD surveys.
- ✧ Collaborate with the Regional Dashboard for ECD and directly with PRC4ECD.



An ECD Coordinator will be in place within the MWCSO whose primary role will be to coordinate the implementation of the ECD Strategic Framework and Action Plan, support the MWCSO as key focal point, work closely with the ECD Taskforce, and report to and respond to requests from the CSAC.

The MWCSO and ECD Coordinator will conduct bottom/up and top/down coordination activities. They will also help to ensure horizontal meetings and activities are held to enable the sharing of ECD programme innovations and experiences among our families and communities. They will work with District Councils (Fono Fa'avae), Village Councils (through Sui o Nuu and Sui Tamaitai) and Community Organisations to ensure they hold regular meetings each year and conduct ECD service coordination, training, monitoring and evaluation, and annual programme and budget planning for ECD.

The MWCSO and the ECD Coordinator will also need to ensure strong linkages are maintained and further strengthened with FAO, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNFPA, WHO, and World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asia Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), and the bilateral agencies of Australia, China, the Commonwealth, France, Great Britain, Japan, New Zealand, United States, and other countries. In addition, linkages with World Vision, Save the Children, Oxfam, and other international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) need to be constantly reinforced and more linkages pursued

Members of the CSAC, the ECD Taskforce, and the MWCSO will ensure that annual reports on progress achieved in ECD Action Plans implementation are prepared and provided to key stakeholders as well as our Members of Parliament. In addition, these entities will respond to requests for:

- ✘ Specific reports and information.
- ✘ Meetings with stakeholders.
- ✘ Help with information requests to inform any drafting of legislation.
- ✘ Provision of information and guidance to support ECD services in Samoa.

Upon the adoption of the ECD Strategic Framework and first Action Plan, the first act of the ECD Working Group will be to draft and endorse a TOR for the ECD Taskforce, and aligning the workplan of the ECD coordinator to support the respective TOR.

