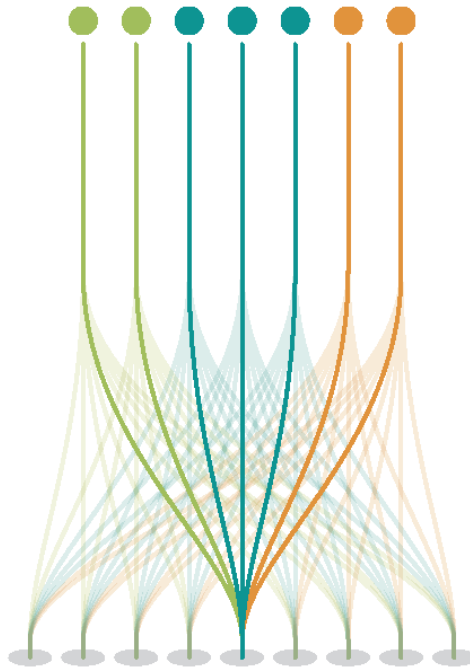


The Governance of ECD

Lighting the LAMP of Locally Adaptable Mono-sectoral Policies

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Abbreviations

ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECDAN	Early Childhood Development Action Network
FN&E	Failed Nations and Emergencies
IECD	Integrated Early Childhood Development
IKC	Integrated Child Center
LAMP	Locally Adaptable Mono-sectoral Policies
LSG	Local Self-Government
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trial
U5M	Under-5-Mortality

Introduction

Trend Analysis¹ suggests that the expansion of some essential Early Childhood Development (ECD) services decelerated between the turn of the century and the outbreak of Covid-19, despite favorable circumstances. The reduction of Under-5-Mortality (U5M) slowed down around 2005, resulting in a significant surplus² of avoidable child deaths annually. The expansion of preschool education began to decelerate in 2015 and came to a global standstill in 2020. The Trend Analysis excluded that these two setbacks were caused by HIV/AIDS, the Great Recession of 2008, the refugee crisis, climate change, or another trend or event.

In search of an alternative explanation for these setbacks, the Trend Analysis revealed that the slowdown in the reduction of U5M coincides, by and large, with the spread of a governance concept called Integrated ECD (IECD), especially in aid-dependent countries in Africa and Asia where U5M is high. Is there perhaps causality between these two developments? Without providing hard evidence – policy analysis is not among the exact sciences - this paper about the governance of ECD suggests that IECD did indeed play a role. But more than a critique of IECD, the paper is a plea for its alternative: Locally Adaptable Mono-sectoral Policies (LAMP).

LAMP is an occasional name for a widely applied governance concept that emerged in recent decades in response to multi-sectorality and decentralization. LAMP entails policies that are on the one hand provisioned at the national level³ by individual ministries based on a shared vision, and are on the other hand formulated with such a large degree of flexibility that Local Self-Governments⁴ (LSGs) have the scope to build the service configurations that best fit their unique local contexts and local preferences. This may or may not lead to integration of services - this is a local choice. It is the task of the national level to ensure that services are adaptable and that they *converge* at the local level. The table on the next page juxtaposes LAMP and IECD, showing where the two governance concepts are in agreement and where they diverge.

A key point in this paper is the fact that ECD is not unique in its multi-sectorality. Nearly all fields of policy span multiple sectors and they respond to that multi-sectorality in ways that ECD can emulate. This is the theme of the first two sections of this paper. Section 3 introduces decentralization, asserting that it can only be beneficial to ECD if there is a carefully crafted relationship between the national and the local. That relationship is the essence of LAMP, presented in Section 4. This is followed by a problem analysis of IECD in sections 5, 6, 7 and 8. Section 9 brings the focus back to LAMP, elaborating the way in which it works at local level. Section 10 emphasizes the contextual differences between emergencies and failed nations on the one hand, and parliamentary democracies on the other hand. This leads to the conclusion,

¹ Van Ravens, J. and Yarosz, D. (forthcoming) Trend Analysis of ECD (working title). This manuscript was submitted for publication in November 2022 and will henceforth be referred as “the Trend Analysis”.

² The total number of children who die before the age of 5 stood at about 5 million globally in 2020. The Trend Analysis suggests that up to a maximum of 40% of these children might have survived without the slowdown in the reduction of U5M. This is a rough estimation. A precise estimation would require more in-depth analysis.

³In most countries it is the national government that has legislative power for ECD services. But in larger countries, ECD policy can (partly) be the purview of sub-national levels such as Cantons, Prefectures, States, Länder, Provinces, et cetera. For brevity, however, this paper assumes that the national level has legislative power.

⁴ In the literature on decentralization, the term “Local Self-Government” (LSG) is often used to refer to the (local) level to which functions have been decentralized, deconcentrated and/or devolved. Depending on how the decentralization process has been shaped, and depending on countries’ governance architecture, these LSGs can be a municipality, a county or a district, to restrict it to the English language. Globally, there is an even richer nomenclature. This explains the use of an abstraction like LSG.

in Section 11, that ECD must emancipate from philanthropy and that policy makers in the Global South must be treated with the same respect as their colleagues in high income countries.

The LAMP governance concept has been applied to preschool education in a publication titled The Preschool Entitlement⁵.

Summary Table. Agreements and Differences Between IECD and LAMP

	IECD	LAMP
Child	Children must develop holistically. Not only must they grow up healthy, they also need to develop cognitively and emotionally, while being protected from poverty, abuse, exploitation and trafficking.	True.
Program	Because children must develop holistically, they must benefit from interventions that span multiple sectors, including at least health, learning, and social protection. ECD is a multi-sectoral field.	True, although ECD is by no means exceptional in its multi-sectorality.
	Because ECD is multi-sectoral, ECD programs must be integrated across multiple sectors. RCTs prove that integration creates synergy between the interventions.	Synergy also occurs in converging programs. What matters is that programs come together in the child. Therefore, programs must <i>converge</i> at the local level, where LSGs decide how to shape and combine programs. For LSGs, integration is an option - not an imperative - and it can have serious consequences when it is applied where programs are not yet universal.
Policy	Because programs must be integrated, policies, too, must be integrated.	Section 9 of this paper proves the very opposite. If an LSG chooses to integrate programs at local level, it can only do this if policies are <i>not</i> pre-integrated at national level.

⁵ Van Ravens et al (2023). The Preschool Entitlement. A Locally Adaptable Policy Instrument to Expand and Improve Preschool Education. RTI Press

1. Multi-sectorality is not exceptional

Nearly all fields of policy are multi-sectoral. ECD is by no means an exception. Therefore, ECD has the opportunity to benefit from what has been learnt about governance in other policy fields.

Labor market policy is one of many fields that can serve as an example⁶. Its central activity is to match the supply of and the demand for labor. This is a task for specialized agencies and professionals who mediate between job-seekers and employers with vacancies. These mediation processes can be governed by a single ministry, but to do this successfully, employment policies are needed to create and maintain jobs. This requires, on its turn, innovation and expansion in every potentially viable sector of the economy, bringing a whole range of ministries into the picture. In fact, in periods of high demand for labor, mediation activities (the core activity in labor market policy) may become close to irrelevant as job-seekers become scarce and find their way on their own. On the supply side of the labor market, education and training are critical to ensure the required competency of workers, while public transport and housing policies are needed to enable workers to reach their jobs on a daily basis. Accessible healthcare can enhance productivity and reduce job-absenteeism. There are not many ministries that are not involved in labor market policy. Very similar stories can be told for youth policy, regional development, infrastructure, and practically every other policy field.

Indeed, two of the biggest challenges of our time require multisectoral action. Inequality does not only have economic dimensions but also social, psychological and political dimensions, addressing practically all spheres of public life⁷. Climate change can only be confronted by efforts that encompass all sectors that emit carbon dioxide⁸. And even if all school buildings are made climate-neutral, the education sector's involvement is still needed to enhance the population's awareness of the need for behavioral change and to create the human resources necessary to confront the crisis.

We might as well reverse the question: is there any field of public activity that is *not* multisectoral? One could argue that the military is fairly self-contained, with its internal education and training system, its own medical infrastructure, its exclusive vehicle maintenance facilities, et cetera. But this has causes that are unique to the military: the need for secrecy and the need for self-reliance in times of conflict. Apart from the military, all fields of policy are multi-sectoral. ECD can and should learn from others.

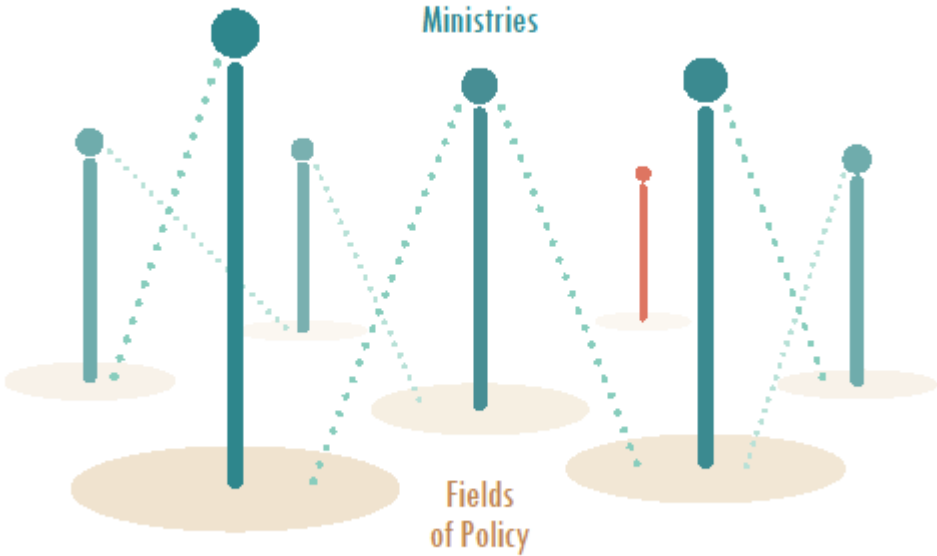
Figure 1 visualizes how most fields of policy are governed by multiple ministries, and, conversely, how most ministries are addressing more than one policy field, with the military (red) as the one exception. The continuous lines represent the relations between ministries and their "own" fields of policy, whereas the dotted lines represent "flanking policies", a term to be clarified in the following section.

⁶ file:///C:/Users/Gebruiker/Downloads/Multi-dimensional_preferences_for_labour_market_re.pdf

⁷ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jiec.13222>

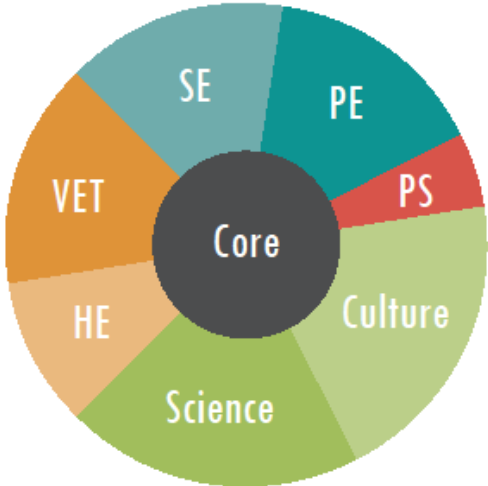
⁸ <https://www.rti.org/announcements/rti-building-experience-providing-multisectoral-solutions-climate-change-resilience>

Figure 1. Ministries and Fields of Policy



Clearly, figure 1 is a simplification of reality. In practice, most governments have between 10 and 20 ministries, with linkages to a multitude of fields of policy. Figure 2 zooms in on the level of the ministries. Using a Ministry of Education, Culture and Science as an example, it illustrates how the ministerial core (consisting of units of finance, legislation, HRM, public relations, and the minister’s personal staff) is surrounded by a number of field directorates such as Preschool Education (PS), Primary Education (PE), Secondary Education (SE), Vocational Education and Training (VET), Higher Education (HE), Science and Culture. Each of these directorates has its own links to external fields of policy; these are not shown in the figure.

Figure 2. Structure of a Ministry of Education, Culture and Science



In figure 2, the preschool directorate (PS) is linked to the policy field of ECD, with further links to health and social protection. The directorate of vocational education and training (VET) has strong links with any sector of the economy that is in need of qualified workers. Via these sectors, the ministry has links with ministries of economic affairs, agriculture, infrastructure, healthcare, et cetera. The department of higher education (HE) has similar connections with the world of work, but is also maintaining relations with a range of research institutes, covering all disciplines of science. The departments of primary education (PE) and (non-vocational) secondary education (SE) seem relatively self-contained, but even here we see increasing links with the outer world. Community schools, for instance, are rooted in local communities, which connects them with local service providers from sectors such as healthcare, social affairs, cultural affairs, sports, police, et cetera. Secondary education can also be a communication channel for other sectors: ministries of health and justice, for example, may request prime-time in the curricula of schools in order to convey messages about healthy behavior and crime prevention. In section 6 – about the implications of IECD – we will return to figure 2.

1. Some responses to multi-sectorality

One of the standard responses to inter-ministerial entanglement is the appointment of one or more *contact-persons or gatekeepers*. For every external organization – whether it concerns a ministry or other - with which a ministry needs to connect, it can appoint a designated official who will keep track of all ongoing interaction and who will inform and guide colleagues who embark on new joint activities. This is standard practice and unproblematic.

Equally common is the practice of *inter-ministerial working groups*. Whenever inter-ministerial cooperation around a certain subject or policy area is substantial and/or structural, ministers will consider the creation of an inter-ministerial committee or working group, either ad hoc or on a permanent basis. In some cases, such a working group can benefit from a common vision statement from the Cabinet, or advocate for such a statement if it is lacking.

A concrete outcome of inter-ministerial interaction can be a *flanking policy*. A ministry of health, for example, may be concerned about the local availability of healthy food and urge the ministry of agriculture to stimulate production for local consumption rather than for export. The treasury and the ministry of social affairs might be involved to mitigate the loss of income for the farmers. From the perspective of the ministry of health, this agricultural production shift is a flanking policy, while it is a core policy for the ministry of agriculture.

In today's complex modern world, arrangements such as the ones described above have become business as usual throughout the government apparatus. Generations of policy makers have grown up with these practices. Inter-ministerial entanglement requires absolutely no integration of policies. In fact, policy integration (at national level) may take out the flexibility that is needed so urgently in multi-sectoral policy development, as this paper will demonstrate.

2. Decentralization

Whereas multi-sectorality is as old as mankind's first structured attempts to exercise control over societal development, it is easier to put a date on the genesis of "decentralization". When the French Revolution of 1789 dismissed monarchy quite abruptly as an unacceptable governance concept, the French were urgently in need of something new to replace it. But soon it appeared that La Republique was as centralized as the old monarchy⁹, and this is when decentralization became a theme in the ongoing debate on how best to govern a country, first in France and then beyond.

Various thinkers and leaders kept decentralization on the agenda until it became the most prominent governance theme in the second half of the 20th century. This had two main dimensions: ideological and pragmatic. The ideology of decentralization rests on the fundamental human desire for self-determination: a value in its own right. But in addition, decentralization brings decision making closer to the citizen, and there is the basic belief that people at local level know better than those in the capital which policies – or policy adaptations – work best for their community. The same two dimensions were prominent in developments in industrial democracy and in the governance of higher education in the 1960: workers and students alike began to claim the opportunity to co-govern their company or university, arguing that this was their right *and* that it leads to better outcomes for all. Earlier, in 1954, Peter Drucker¹⁰ reconciled the two dimensions in his holistic theory of management in which the empowerment of employees is central, both in their own interest and in that of the organization.

"Participation" and "community-driven development"¹¹ are the banners under which ideas about self-determination and self-reliance entered the realm of development assistance. In recent decades, aid agencies became self-critical about their own western bias and banned prescriptive approaches to development assistance, in favor of localized models with communities in a central role. It is the personal opinion of this paper's author that this represents a strange twist of history. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, local communities have played a central role for ages, and it wasn't until the classical western governance model – the centralized nation state – was imposed on this continent, that distances and tensions were created between the national and the local. That said, allowing communities to take back control does yield results, with community-based healthcare practices in Ethiopia¹² as an excellent example.

Decentralization begot a bad name when the recession of 1982-1983 inspired governments to decentralize functions to LSGs without disbursing sufficient funds to fulfil those functions properly. Casey (2018)¹³ confirms that swinging the pendulum radically from centralized to decentralized governance is not an option because communities cannot operate public service systems without adequate financial assistance and regulatory guidance from the national level. Ponguta et al (2019)¹⁴ investigated the impact of decentralization in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan,

⁹ https://www.jstor.org/stable/1009475#metadata_info_tab_contents

¹⁰ Drucker, P.F. (1954) *The Practice of Management*. New York, Harper and Row

¹¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/communitydrivendevelopment>

¹² <https://cdn2.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2014/09/HSPH-Ethiopia4.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/publications/radical-decentralization-does-community-driven-development-work>

¹⁴ <https://ecdpeace.org/exploratory-analysis-decentralized-governance-and-its-implications-equity-early-childhood-0>

Moldova and Serbia, finding that preschool education is often “orphaned” at the local level, being one of the few local functions in the sphere of human development, with other education levels as well as healthcare remaining national functions. A result is a local culture that prioritizes physical infrastructure and leaves limited capacity, funding and political support for ECD. Devercelli et al (2016)¹⁵ confirm this for Kenya, where the decentralization of preschool education to the county level was not backed up by funding. The quest is for a governance concept that cautiously balances local autonomy and national responsibility.

3. Multi-sectorality and decentralization in LAMP

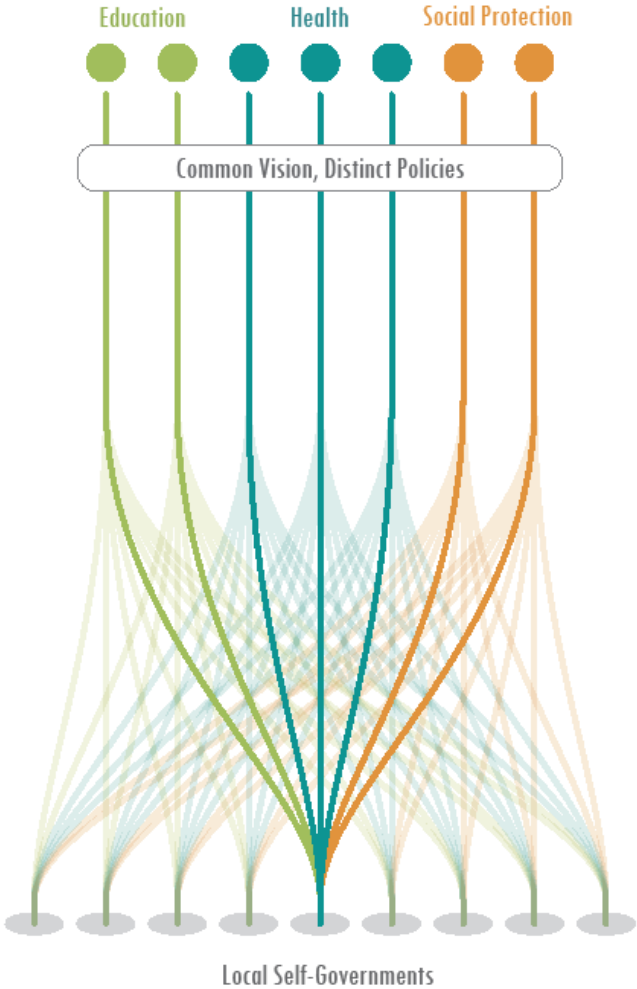
Figure 3 indicates how the LAMP governance concept makes multi-sectorality and decentralization work together to optimize ECD. Based on a common vision on child development, arising from horizontal and vertical consultation, the ministries of education, health and social protection issue distinct mono-sectoral policies. Even within sectors, programs remain separate. In the health sector, for example, growth monitoring is a very different kind of service than immunization in terms of timing, logistics and human resource requirements. The two are best kept separate until they “land” and converge at the level of the LSGs, where local actors are in the best position to decide how, if at all, they should be combined or integrated. LSGs where preschool is universal may want the provision of nutrition and the testing for intestinal worms to take place in the preschool, whereas that same measure would be disastrous in LSGs where only a minority of the children is attending preschool.

In the LAMP governance concept there are multiple decision points: at the national level (ministerial policy decisions) as well as at local level, where the leadership of the LSGs adapts programs and makes decisions about the most appropriate service constellation. But LAMP also provides the opportunity to have multiple adjustment points in the downstream. If an early evaluation of a single program reveals flaws, it can be adjusted right away, precisely because it is a standalone program. It is much harder to correct a program if it is intertwined in one legally fixed “multi-sectoral intervention package”¹⁶ upon which a large number of ministries and stakeholders have reached hard-won agreement and which cannot be adjusted without renewed negotiation.

¹⁵ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/762961482316633811/pdf/111215-BRI-ELPPolicyBriefKenya-PUBLIC.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://ecdan.org/task-force/>

Figure 3. Policy development and implementation under LAMP



It should be emphasized that the empowerment of LSGs must go hand in hand with the strengthening of the oversight function¹⁷. Inspectorates and district education offices must monitor and ascertain that quality standards are being met as the national level eases its grip on public service provision. Concrete applications of LAMP are available for preschool education¹⁸ and for parenting programs¹⁹. To support the design and implementation of ECD arrangements at local level, there is an excellent toolkit called Primokiz which was developed in Switzerland and can be adapted to low- and middle-income countries²⁰. In Sri Lanka, the World Bank is supporting communities in building ECD arrangements by means of an approach in which the structured *brokering* between stakeholders is a crucial and innovative element²¹.

¹⁷ <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/decentralization/admin.htm>

¹⁸ See footnote 5.

¹⁹ van Ravens, J. (2021). Locally Adaptable Parenting Programs. Available at www.janvanravens.com

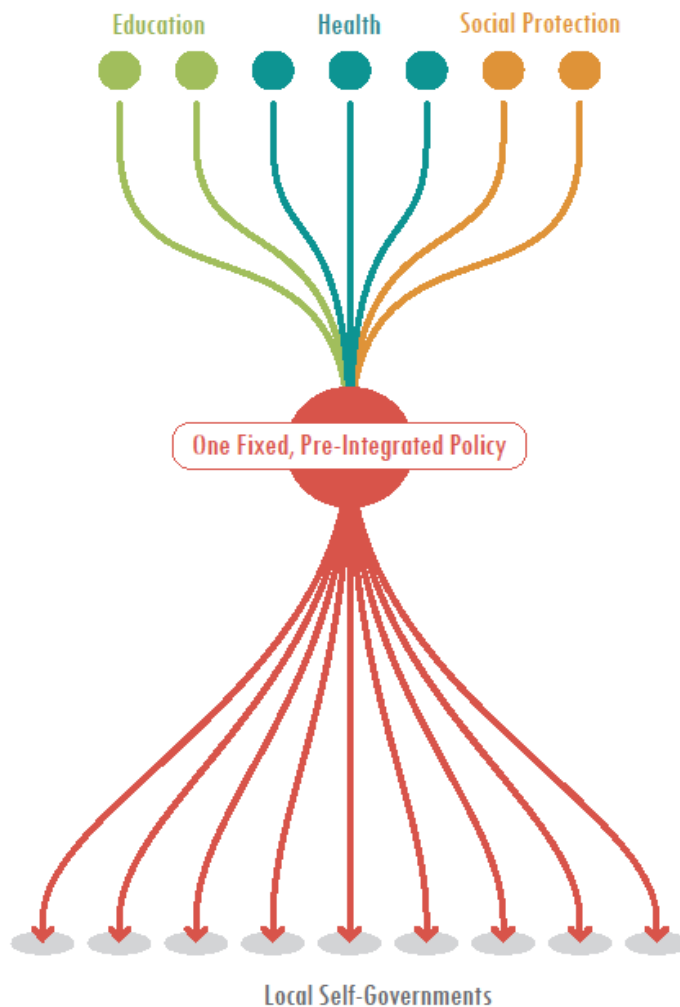
²⁰ <https://jacobsfoundation.org/activity/primokiz/>

²¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2020/10/05/enhancing-equitable-access-quality-early-childhood-development-sri-lanka>

4. Policy development and implementation in IECD

Figure 4 presents the process of policy development and implementation under the governance concept of IECD²². Typical is the single decision point (red circle): the single moment in time at which a very broad range of governmental and non-governmental entities must agree upon a very wide-ranging policy. The experience is that this can create years of delay even prior to adoption. But in addition, the single decision point allows limited space for policy adjustment during implementation. If flaws are observed in just one element of the policy necessitating changes in the planning and the funding arrangement, the full range of stakeholders must gather once again to adjust the policy.

Figure 4. Policy development and implementation under IECD



²² The figure is based on (i) the experience of the author with attempts to implement an IECD policy in Laos, Jordan, Tanzania and Indonesia, (ii) participation in multi-level governance analysis in Colombia., (iii) work experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and (iv) analysis of a range of documents on IECD.

There might be a degree of exaggeration in figure 4, in the sense that in practice IECD does provide some opportunity for adjustment and some space for local decision making. But the difference between figures 3 and 4 remains essential: the flexibility that LAMP offers by allowing ministries to develop and implement policies independently, in their own pace and in their own consensus building strategy, is absent in IECD's rigid structure where a large number of actors (ministries and their stakeholders in multiple programs) must reach agreement at one single point in time.

The fact that a variety of programs and policies must simultaneously pass through the single decision point creates a significant bottleneck. Not only does this arrangement slow down the process, it also brings a risk of tactical maneuvering. Teacher trade unions, for example, may resist budget increases in social protection to finance child benefits, fearing that these limit the fiscal space for increases in their own salaries. In recent decades, the practice of integrated policy development has shown in several countries that inviting everybody to talk about everything is not the quickest way to progress. Delays in decision making tend to be measured in years rather than in months²³.

Moreover, in the downstream there is limited scope for local autonomy because the multisectoral intervention packages are pre-designed at national level; LSGs receive these packages as they are. In short, there seems to be no clear place for decentralization in the IECD governance concept, which also tends to ignore some of the basic rules of policy development in parliamentary democracy, as the next section elaborates.

5. Integration of policies - disintegration of ministries

Figure 5 is an adaptation of figure 2, showing the same ministerial core and the same circle of field directorates within a ministry of education, culture and science. The difference is that in figure 5 it is assumed that the preschool department (PS) is no longer under full control of the ministerial core. As part of an integrated ECD strategy, the ministry has ceded some or all of its authority and power over the preschool department to an inter-ministerial body; a ministry to which a coordinating role in the field of ECD has been assigned; a First Lady's office; or any other legal or non-legal entity that acts as the "single administration" that is recommended by Vargas-Barón (2015)²⁴.

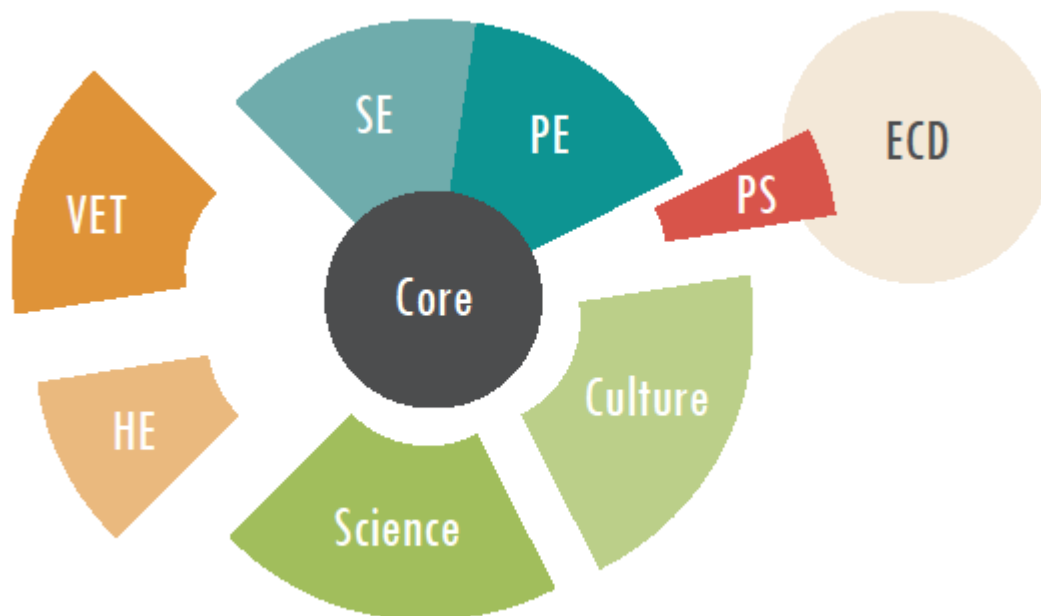
Moreover, if a country's ECD community begot the opportunity to gain control over the preschool directorate, this would be a precedent for various sectors of industry to claim the right to have more influence over courses in vocational education and higher education. Likewise, ministries involved in youth policy, as well as their circle of stakeholders, may claim influence over secondary education. The field of science may be claimed by the ministry of industry and by large corporations, whereas the field of culture may come under the influence of ministries

²³ Although IECD policies have been documented, there is to the best of the author's knowledge no systematically gathered information about the duration of the delays in the policy process caused by the integration of policies across sectors. Nevertheless, there is an overwhelming number of signals and indications of significant delays in policy development resulting from IECD. Yet, a recent overview of the state of IECD does not contain any critical analysis (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17450128.2022.2067382>). It seems that flaws are not documented and that there is cultivation of an image of IECD as a panacea, free of weaknesses.

²⁴ See Figure 2.1 in: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK327247/>

and stakeholders involved in strengthening national identity. In other words, the creation of a precedent in outsourcing can cause strong centrifugal forces as Figure 5 illustrates.

Figure 5. Centrifugal forces as a result of IECD



The situation depicted in figure 5 raises the question how the field directorates will perform the functions of the ministerial core from which they became detached. How can the preschool directorate be accountable to Parliament? How does it pass new legislation? How does its teacher policy relate to the Ministry’s overall teacher policy? Who watches over the transition from preschool to primary school? How does it obtain its budget? Via the Ministry? Directly from the Treasury? Not at all?

The risk of centrifugal forces is one of the reasons why ministries normally resist ceding authority, power and budget in one of their fields of policy. Many courses in vocational and higher education originated within sectors of the economy. Over time, and not rarely after years of political struggle, these courses were integrated in the formal education system on the grounds that the internal coherence of education systems – which allows learners to progress through the system and which enables ministers to ensure quality – is more important than tight connections between educational content and workplace demands. Few ministers would allow a reversal of this hard-won reform.

Ministries of education would disintegrate if they would cede authority and power to all multi-sectoral constituencies that knock on their doors for influence. It would no longer be possible for an education ministry to perform critical functions such as (i) managing the education budget; (ii) maintaining control over disbursements²⁵; (iii) exercising oversight and inspection

²⁵ IECD implies the creation of a “single administration” with “combined fiscal support” (see Figure 2.1 of: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK327247/>). An institute that functions as such a single administration

in the various sub-sectors of the education system; (iv) safeguarding the internal coherence of the education system; and (v) enabling learners to make smooth transitions between pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education. Similar things can be said about health ministries and their responsibility to ensure proper referral between primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary healthcare, and about ministries involved in social protection and their responsibility to prevent overlap and gaps in their palette of social interventions.

This multitude of objections against IECD may explain why the prevalence of IECD is by far the highest in parts of Africa and Asia²⁶. Here we find the world's most aid-dependent countries, experiencing the highest pressure from donors to integrate policies. These countries have no choice but to subject themselves to IECD. Unfortunately, these are also the countries with the highest levels of U5M, generally, which may explain the correspondence between the prevalence of IECD and the deceleration in the reduction of U5M since 2005 that the Trend Analysis revealed²⁷.

But the most important reason why ministries are adverse to ceding power to vaguely defined external constituencies, is that the minister would no longer be fully accountable to parliament. This is the key imperative for any minister: to have sufficient control over the ministry's operations to be able to show parliament that policy objectives are being met and that public resources are well spent. This is one of the foundations of parliamentary democracy. *A minister cannot be accountable for a policy over which he or she has lost control.*

6. Silos to dovecots

In the global ECD community it is common practice to refer to ministries as "silos". It has almost become a *rite de passage*: it seems difficult to become or remain a member of this community without regularly criticizing ministries for being organizations that operate in isolation, with a narrow focus on their own fields of policy²⁸. Yet, the existence of distinct ministries with clearly distinguishable responsibilities is at the heart of parliamentary democracy. This cannot be tampered with. Policy arrangements that are in conflict with the ministerial task division are bound to lead to stagnation, as the Trend Analysis has shown.

However, if the word silo not only refers to the distinct nature of ministries but also to their closed nature, this must urgently be resolved. Section 2 presented a small selection of measures that can be taken to open up ministries to inter-ministerial coordination, such as contact persons or gatekeepers, inter-ministerial committees (ad hoc or standing), and flanking policies. Perhaps the most important measure is to build a *culture* of coordination: to strive for a situation in which civil servants consider it normal rather than exceptional to constantly move in and out of the four walls of the ministry, consulting and negotiating with external stakeholders.

was studied in a multi-level governance analysis. The degree of corruption in this institute was qualified by a high-level interviewee as "overflowing". This was confirmed by interviewees at local level.

²⁶ See column on the right-hand side of Table 2.2 in: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK327247/>

²⁷ This concerns the Trend Analysis referred to in the introduction. See footnote 1.

²⁸ An internet-search with keywords "silos" and "early childhood development" yields countless results. The second of these results refers to an article in a well-respected journal that speaks of "smashing silos": <https://academic.oup.com/jpepsy/article/41/10/1067/2951896>

If ever we think that civil servants of a certain ministry are insufficiently open to external interaction, we must help them to turn their silo into an open organization. This is perfectly feasible by means of training and on-job-coaching. Overburdening an already weak civil service with a problematic governance concept such as IECD will not resolve the problem.

7. Crickets on a turtle

In addition to delays in policy development, IECD also tends to create delays in the downstream. In most developing countries the coverage of ECD services is generally not universal. But services do expand, normally, and they do so at a different speeds. Preschool education typically expands at a low pace as it requires (i) the appointment of one qualified and sufficiently paid teacher for every 20 children of ages 3 to 6 in a country; (ii) significant upfront investments in classrooms, inventory, materials, and sometimes in kitchens and dormitories; and (iii) the continuous maintenance, cleaning, guarding, replacement and replenishment of all these inputs. Indeed, as the Trend Analysis has shown, the expansion of preschool education has generally been very slow and it came to a standstill after the adoption of SDG 4.2.

By contrast, a potentially lifesaving service like immunization can be rolled out much quicker, as many countries have recently demonstrated during the Covid pandemic. In each child's life there are but a few moments at which standard immunizations need to be provided. One well-prepared team can cover hundreds if not thousands of children during a campaign of a few days. Food fortification costs only \$0.05 to \$0.25 per child per year²⁹, making it one of the most cost-effective interventions to address malnutrition. In the same order of magnitude are the cost of curing a child from intestinal worms³⁰. The costs of equipment for growth monitoring are negligible, on a per child basis. Exclusive breastfeeding comes entirely for free; promoting it may incur some costs, but on a per child basis these are dwarfed by the costs of six months of baby-food. Parental education costs about ten times less than preschool education³¹.

If one or more of these low-cost, quickly expanding and lifesaving ECD services are integrated in one multisectoral intervention package together with a slowly expanding service like preschool, the pace of expansion of the entire package will slow down. It is like forcing crickets to travel on the back of a turtle.

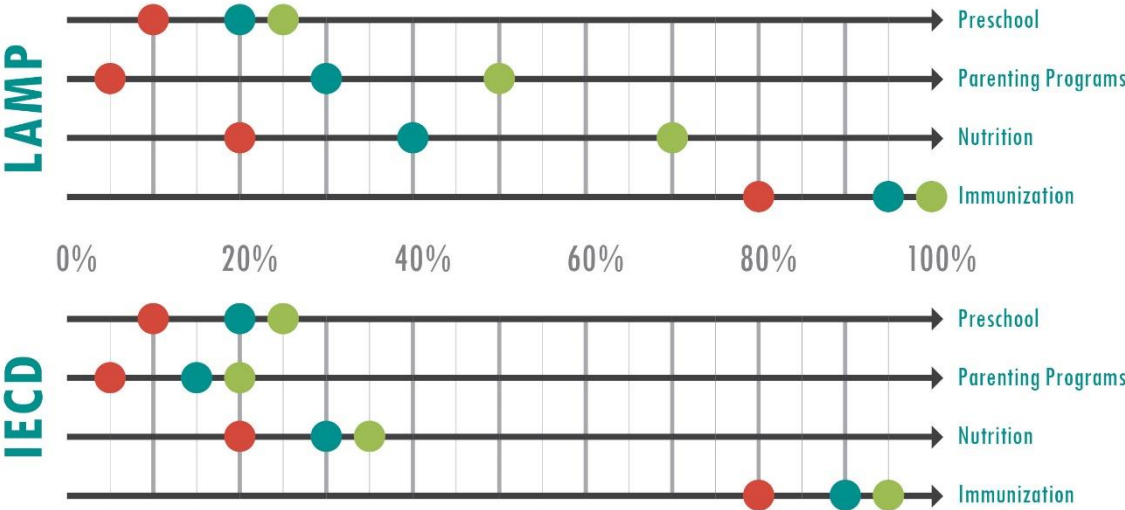
Figure 6 visualizes this for a fictive low-income-country. For both LAMP and IECD, the figure simulates the patterns of expansion of four ECD services: preschool, parental education, nutrition and immunization. The red circles indicate the coverage of these services in year X, the blue circles indicate the coverage in year X+10, and the green circles pertain to year X+20. The red circles are the starting points, so they are in the same position for LAMP and IECD. The expansion patterns for preschool are also the same for LAMP and IECD because preschool is the turtle; it determines the pace. But whereas the crickets expand freely under LAMP reaching relatively high coverage levels in year X+20, IECD slows down the crickets to the same pace as preschool education.

²⁹ <https://www.who.int/vietnam/news/feature-stories/detail/food-fortification-q-a>

³⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2657832/>

³¹ Van Ravens, J. (2021) Locally Adaptable Parenting Programs. Available at www.janvanravens.com

Figure 6. Expansion patterns under LAMP and IECD



It should be emphasized that Figure 6 is not here to suggest that each and every cricket will slow down to the exact pace of the turtle. Figure 6 merely intends to show the mechanism. And as in Figure 4, there may be a degree of exaggeration in Figure 6 in that multisectoral intervention packages, too, may have a certain degree of flexibility. Yet, the author of this working paper recalls a visit in 2012 to a nutrition distribution center in Iquitos, a Peruvian city on the banks of the Amazone river. Many families in the surrounding district live in hamlets and isolated homes near creeks and branches of the river. Nevertheless, the provision of nutrition was universal thanks to an impressive scheme by which narrow boats would reach every child in the district. Preschool enrolment, in contrast, stood at 70%, with most children outside the city being excluded. Given the challenging social geography, it would be very difficult to reach all children in a more or less regular form of preschool. Universal preschool would require a refined scheme with transportation, home-based provision, and travelling teachers; there was no sign of a beginning of such a diversification strategy in Iquitos. In that context, however, the government had ordered that nutrition become preschool-based. That would have meant that the coverage of the nutrition program would have decreased overnight from 100% to 70%. Hopefully the manager of the nutrition program succeeded in his attempts to change the government’s plan.

But many more cases underscore the risk of integrating services before they are universal. Taman Posyandu is an Indonesian program for holistic child development in which a pre-existing health post (Posyandu) has been integrated with a (kinder) garden (Taman)³². Excellent in and of itself, the program includes growth monitoring and parental education which raises the question: who monitors the growth and educates the parents of the countless children who are not in that program? In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where only 10% of the children attended preschool, the existence of a six wonderful but unscalable multi-sectoral institutions in 2014

³² Observation from a mission to Indonesia in 2012

hindered the expansion of preschool education by making experts and policy makers adverse to the more austere and cost-effective preschool models that stood a chance to go to scale. And as in the case of Taman Posyandu it raised questions about health services: if a small minority of the children receive these within the six centers, then what about all the others³³. Box 1 elaborates this problem using an example from Lebanon.

Box 1. Deworming in Lebanon.

Testing children for intestinal worms and treating them for it is an essential health service. In some cases, it can be life-saving. In a note on Multiservice Community Centers in Lebanon, UNICEF promotes the integration of deworming in preschool. The note argues that deworming by going door-to-door is more challenging than doing it in the classroom, and it refers to a study from Kenya for scientific underpinning. Longer term gains in test-scores and cognitive functioning can be expected.

But how many children *are* in preschool? Lebanon has been heavily affected by conflict, disaster and the refugee crisis, and World Bank Data provides enrolment data only for 1980-1983, when gross enrolment decreased from 59 to 56. According to data from the UNICEF Country Office, enrolment stood at 21.3% in 2016-2017.

Time and again, household surveys show that exclusion from preschool is strongly associated with poverty and deprivation. And so is the risk of having intestinal worms. Therefore, the national burden of intestinal worms is unlikely to be concentrated in the 21.3% of the 3 to 6 year-olds who are in preschool. In fact, even if preschool enrolment increases to 80%, one may still miss most of the worms. Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, nomadic children in Niger, Roma children in Eastern Europe, children in peri-urban settlements in the Global South: they all run the highest risk of infection and are the last to be included in preschool. Confronted with such arguments, proponents of IECD usually say “Agreed: universal deworming requires universal preschool. And that is exactly what we are aiming for!” Or words to that effect. The Trend Analysis indicates how long it will probably take to universalize preschool throughout the Global South.

The study from Kenya, by the way, does not compare the effect of deworming door-to-door with the effect of deworming in the classroom. It just compares deworming with not deworming:

https://assets-global.website-files.com/61366d43ebd6df56d9b67a11/618560b1319ab15bd8f2e40f_School-Based_Health_Programs_RGB_10-30-21.pdf

The crickets-on-a-turtle problem is exacerbated by the changing balance between public, private and unregistered preschools. Integrating child health services in private preschools is often pointless since these institutions are generally attended by children from families with good access to healthcare. Integrating health services in the booming sub-sector of unregistered preschools³⁴ is impossible because one cannot integrate official government services in illegal

³³ Observation from missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2013 and 2014

³⁴ The Trend Analysis shows that about 20% of the children in the Global South attend unregistered preschools.

institutions. Therefore, the adage of IECD implies that the further expansion of essential child health services tends to become restricted to the group of children who attend public preschools. Globally, this is a relatively small group that stopped increasing in 2015 and has been decreasing since 2017, as the Trend Analysis shows. Therefore, the practice of integrating life-saving ECD services in a service that hardly expands may very well have contributed to the deceleration in the reduction of U5M since 2005 in parts of Africa and Asia.

8. Convergence and integration

The crickets-on-a-turtle problem does not occur when all ECD services are universal. But even then, the governance concept of LAMP is to be preferred above IECD. Figure 7 shows an Integrated Child Center (IKC) for ages 0-13 in The Netherlands³⁵. It is called De Samenstroom, which means confluence or convergence. The center is a Local Adaptation of seven Mono-sectoral Policies. Nationally, the number of IKCs is increasing, as LSGs all over the country are convening to discuss possibilities for integration. But it is the LSG that decides whether and how to start an IKC. There is no law on IKCs and there are no standard packages in this process. Few IKCs offer the exact same palette of child services.

Figure 7. Photograph of an IKC



Source. Picture taken by the author in April 2022

³⁵ <https://www.kindcentrumdesamenstroom.nl/>

IKCs are the living evidence that integration of programs is possible without integration of policies. In fact, most IKCs would not exist if programs were pre-integrated at national level, because it would only be by coincidence that a standard national package fits local needs and preferences.

But the IKCs as such are not universal. Many children in the country are still attended by universal but standalone ECD services. Are they at risk of not developing to their full potential?

The key argument in favor of the integration of programs – it can be referred to as the synergy argument – stems from an erroneous interpretation of Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT) that investigate the impact of integrating two interventions. We use preschool and nutrition as examples. The research design is such that the RCT monitors the development of four groups of children: those with just the preschool, those with just the nutrition, those who attend a preschool program in which the nutrition program is integrated, and a control group. Consistently the RCTs reveal synergy: children in the integrated program fare better than others.

But while this research design provides evidence of synergy, it does not provide an argument for integration. For that, there would need to be a fifth group: children who attend the exact same preschool program and benefit from the exact same nutrition program, but without the two being integrated. We might refer to this as converging programs: the nutrition is provided by a health dispensary or community center, while the preschool program is provided by the preschool. The two come together in the child. If it would appear, by RCT, that children in the integrated program would fare better than those in the converging programs, this would be an argument for integration.

To the best of this author's knowledge, there are no RCTs that offer a comparison between integrated and converging programs. And for a good reason: that comparison would be futile. Nutrition consists of matter, of molecules, that enter a child's body and have the effect of enhancing the child's receptiveness for the preschool program. This is independent of the building in which the nutrition is provided: school, community center, health post, town hall. We conclude that RCTs found synergy in integrated programs because that is where RCTs looked for it. The same synergy would have been found in converging programs.

Thus, we can safely keep preschool and nutrition programs separate until they converge at the local level, and leave it up to LSGs to decide whether or not to integrate them. And we can trust that LSGs will refrain from integration in places where the hungriest children are not enrolled.

9. Policy and philanthropy

In addition to countries with universal service provision, there is a second type of context where integration might be defensible: failed nations and emergencies (FN&E). In these contexts, there is often need for quick logistical operations in a vacuum of service provision, so there is no risk of interference with pre-existing provision and there is no policy process that can be disturbed. NGOs have free reign in FN&E. The cricket-on-a-turtle problem still exists³⁶ but

³⁶ If an NGO has a budget that is sufficient to reach an X-number of children in a refugee camp with a multisectoral intervention package that includes preschool, it could reach a multiple of that number of children on that same budget if it would delete preschool from the package. Depending on the scale of the intervention, the NGO will save dozens, hundreds or thousands of children's lives by choosing the second option.

seems to remain unnoticed. Indeed, philanthropic organizations have embraced IECD as the ideal strategy in FN&E³⁷.

The role of philanthropy should not be underestimated. For ages, philanthropy has been providing relief to children in dire situations. We must be immensely grateful for these interventions and for the donations of generous citizens all over the world. Over time, philanthropy has expanded its work in ECD to the development of models of service provision, of which the community-based ECD center is a prominent example. Nurturing Care stands a good chance to become the next silver bullet of the global ECD community.

But philanthropy and policy have different paradigms. In some respects, they are one another's opposites: philanthropy provides instant relief on a charitable basis in FN&E, whereas policy is about providing services on a structural basis, by a national government - controlled by Parliament - that ensures access and quality using sustainable, domestic funding derived from domestic taxation. In FN&E, the philanthropic paradigm remains as relevant as it ever was. But high GDP growth and lower fertility rates are now enabling many countries in the Global South to emancipate from philanthropy, to end donor-dependency, and to become proud parliamentary democracies. This requires a different governance concept and a different approach to ECD networks.

Without being able to present hard evidence, the author of this paper became deeply convinced (i) that the global ECD community arose in times when most children in the Global South lived in FN&E type circumstances; (ii) that this FN&E orientation left a lasting mark on the global ECD community; (iii) and that this is the only plausible explanation why the community promotes an evidently incorrect governance concept like IECD in functioning parliamentary democracies, where it simply does not fit.

This lasting mark becomes evident when we compare, in Figure 8, the composition of the education networks of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and those of ECDAN. The Education Committee of the OECD consists entirely of policy makers who represent member states (green), whereas the Governing Board of the OECD's Center for Educational Research and Innovation consists for about 50% of policy makers and for the other 50% of country experts from academia (blue). There are no people in the two bodies who represent NGOs officially, but some are occasionally invited to meetings depending on subject (red). These people are welcomed to the meetings with utmost respect, but do not participate in decision making. In the OECD's Secretariat there are generally more scientists than policy makers, but again few if any people from the world of NGOs. A similar story can be told for the Education Committee of the European Union.

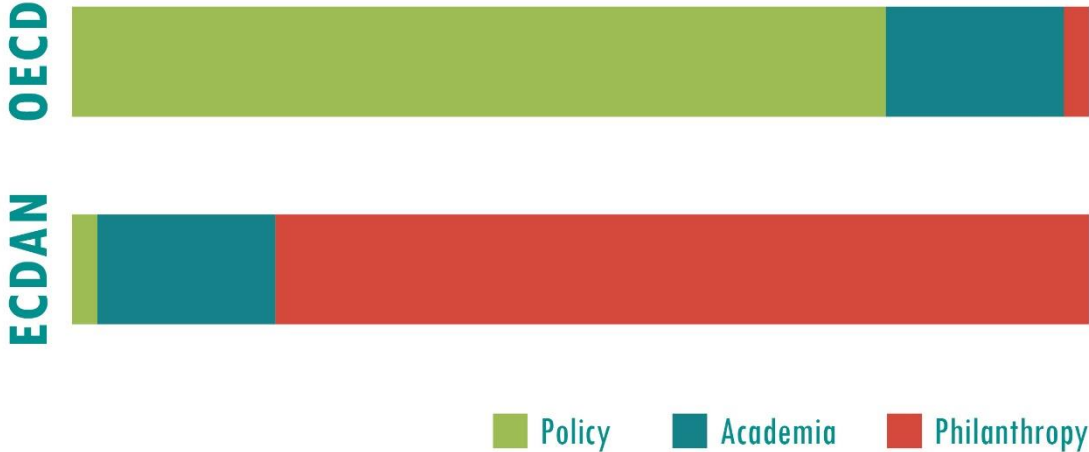
In the case of ECDAN, there is one person with an impressive policy background in the Executive Leadership Council, but there are no policy makers in the Secretariat, the Technical Advisory Group, the six Task Forces, or among the Knowledge Fellows³⁸. Across the various bodies of ECDAN there are nine experts from academia and some with an academic background. The vast majority of people involved in ECDAN is from (I)NGOs (including UN-

³⁷ https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/documents/publications/integrating-early-childhood-development-emergenciesacc2fb8-4ea0-4764-85bc-95e5a253f11f.pdf?sfvrsn=2aeeb478_1&download=true

³⁸ Website of ECDAN, visited on July 14th, 2022

organizations and development banks), regional ECD networks, foundations and other philanthropic organizations.

Figure 8. The composition of networks in OECD and ECDAN



Sources: Website of ECDAN accessed on July 14th, 2022, and author’s personal experience with OECD and European Union.

Please note that figure 8 is not based on exact measurement, but its message stands: whereas academia is more or less equally represented in OECD and ECDAN, policy makers are dominant in the OECD with philanthropy in a marginal role, while the very opposite is the case for ECDAN. The implications of this remarkable contrast are discussed in the concluding section of this paper.

10. Discussion

Suppose that we were to ask a group of laypeople of average intelligence whether it would be a good idea to integrate nutrition and preschool in a district where only 25% of the children are attending preschool. Undoubtedly, they would reject that idea, arguing that 75% of the children would be excluded from the nutrition. Then how can it be that a group of the most eminent of scholars embraces this idea?

The global ECD community has been meeting regularly for quite a number of years and consists primarily of philanthropists with vast experiential knowledge about program development and implementation in FN&E contexts, and secondarily of scholars with excellent knowledge of how children develop and how programs can support that development. From this frame of reference, it may seem an excellent idea *in the abstract* to integrate ECD services. But that same idea is highly problematic when it is applied *concretely* in emerging parliamentary democracies where service provision is not yet universal. However, signals about the negative impact of

IECD do not penetrate into the community since that would challenge the community's cohesion³⁹.

The expertise of the global ECD community is exceptionally strong when it comes to child development and program design, but the community seems somewhat less familiar with the idiosyncrasies of policy making. The counterproductive impact of SDG 4.2 – which brought preschool expansion to a complete global standstill - is another case in point⁴⁰. True, there is an *ambition* to reach out to policy makers. *But how can a network without policy makers teach policy makers how to make policy?*

Low- and middle-income countries should be treated with the same degree of respect as high-income countries, where policy makers are leading and agenda-setting in the networks of OECD and EU. And whereas IECD may work in some settings, LAMP should become the mainstream governance concept. These two steps – respecting policy makers and adopting LAMP – may cause the breakthrough in ECD that all of us have been working for.

³⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groupthink>

⁴⁰ van Ravens, J. (2015). Why SDG 4.2 is counterproductive. Available at www.janvanravens.com