Exploring the potential for a scalable "ECD Change Lab" to invigorate inclusive innovation within the ECD NGO sector and so advance service delivery in under-served communities

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by

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Igniting Knowledge and Opportunity

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ABSTRACT

The gaps in the provision of early childhood care and education in South Africa are persistent. Too many young children are still outside learning programmes, and many women struggle to find ways of ensuring that their young children are cared for while they are at work. In 2015, universal access to ECD services was prioritised at policy level, yet
1.1 million children between three and five years old still do not benefit from early learning programmes. Essentially, this is a failure of our public policy to protect our youngest children, women and the interests of the whole of society.

While government has been vocal about its commitments to leading the ECD sector, which has until recently been dominated by non-profit organisations, it has shown itself to be ineffective in bringing about much needed changes in provision. It is well recognised that partnerships between government and civil society organisations can help widen service delivery to reach children and increase the quality of provision they experience. But South Africa's civil society sector has struggled to fill these gaps. In some respects, the sector seems stuck in a quagmire, mirroring government struggles. Given the high level of interest in ECD in South Africa at the moment, there is a window of opportunity for action.

This study brings to the fore critical voices to shed light on these challenges through a series of dialogue interviews with thirty key informants from the ECD civil society sector. What emerges is a picture of committed but struggling organisations that have yet to find their way in a changing sector. Donors and investors have altered their way of working as government is now the leader of the sector, and opportunities for engagement are funneled through state-managed forums.

With an eye on sustainability, organisations are doing their best to keep going, while struggling to answer the question "what's next?". Even though the Integrated ECD Policy (2015) defines a role for civil society organisations, there is still uncertainty and a failure to realise the potential of this group of expert and experienced stakeholders. Actions towards change are fragmented while tensions run high – there seems to be no real plan for what comes next for civil society organisations that is driven by this 'body'.

This study puts forward that an ECD Change Lab process offers a potential route to explore these challenging dynamics and to find new solutions. Change Labs are living laboratories that draw life from processes of collective enquiry, problem framing and solution seeking. The ability of Change Labs to unfreeze and open new channels for innovation and problem- solving are well documented. In this context, it is argued that such a Lab could bring stakeholders together to build trust, plan and create prototypes that can be tested in the field with a view to increased sector resilience and sustainability.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DGMT	Douglas Murray Trust
ECD	Early childhood development
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
NDP	National Development Plan
NECDA	National Early Childhood Development Alliance
NIECD	National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
SONA	State of the Nation Address
WBG	World Bank Group
WHO	World Health Organisation
ELOM	Early Learning Outcomes Measure
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results

Chapter One
Learning gaps begin in early childhood

"If we are to break the cycle of poverty, we need to educate the children of the poor." President Cyril Ramaphosa, State of the Nation Address 2018

1.1 Introduction

In my research, I set out to better understand the role of civil society, as partner to the state, in enabling progress in the early childhood development (ECD) sector in South Africa. Of particular interest was an observation that despite the growing political attention, policy revisions, financial investment and implementation expertise in the country, the reach and quality of service delivery is still, in 2020, a challenge for a weak, under-resourced and fragmented sector (Van Der Berg, S. and Hofmeyr, H., 2018).

The impact and cost of inaction and poor provision is felt most significantly by poverty affected communities, families and children living in informal settlements and communities in rural areas. A poor start in life can have lifelong consequences for health, education and socio-economic wellbeing (Richer, L. et al., 2017). Finding ways to stimulate and accelerate action to strengthen the ECD sector, and so its capacity to deliver early years services, is a core focus of this research study.

In this chapter, I sketch the current commitment of the South African government both to delivering early childhood services for all by 2030, and to an enabling partnership with civil society to make this happen. In outlining the current failure of the system on multiple levels to provide for the most vulnerable children, I note the knock-on effect of this to general education outcomes.

Furthermore, I contend that in order to optimise our achievements as a nation at every level, we need to pay greater attention to our youngest children, ensuring their access to the early childhood services that they need to survive and thrive. To do this, we need to fix the system, and public private partnerships could be instrumental to this end.

1.2 Early childhood development is a complex field

Early childhood development is a dynamic and interconnected process of development. It spans the period of human growth and development from conception until young children begin their primary schooling at around age six. During this time of rapid growth, children

have multiple needs that, if optimally satisfied, can ensure that they survive and thrive. This encompasses universal, equitable access to an interrelated set of conditions, which include a safe environment, healthcare, water and sanitation, good nutrition, as well as emotionally responsive caregiving and developmentally appropriate stimulation (Woodhead, M., 2014; Black, M., et al., 2017; Britto, P.R., et al., 2017).

The convergence of these mutually reinforcing domains is foundational to early brain development and so to lifelong learning. There is strong scientific evidence showing that good investments in early childhood development set the stage for health, wellbeing, socio-economic advancement and good citizenship. These multiple benefits accrue over a lifetime, making this the most critical and cost-effective investment any nation can make (Shonkoff, J.P., Phillips., D. and National Research Council, 2000; Heckman, J.J., 2011).

Although in many countries, including South Africa, there has been a growing commitment at policy level to support and bring about coherent, integrated early years services – often referred to as a comprehensive or an essential package (Berry, L., et al, 2013) – the struggle against the pushback of politics, siloed approaches and a deeply fragmented system still hinders this commitment.

In my attempt to answer the key questions in my research, and gain insight into the early childhood development sector in South Africa, , I will use the early childhood care and education (ECCE) sub-sector as an access point through which to examine bigger challenges facing the field (Neuman, M.J. and Devercelli, A.E., 2012).

1.3 Background

There is compelling evidence linking what happens in the early years of a child's life, from conception to the beginning of formal education, to later school success, adult health and socio-economic development (Grantham-McGregor, S., 2008; Walker, S.P., et al., 2011; Daelmans, B., et al., 2017).

Arguments based on a growing science of early development have, in the past fifty years, amplified advocacy voices and added momentum to international and national agendas for early investment in the lives of young children, beginning at conception. This ever evolving

body of knowledge about the early years of life illuminates how infants and small children learn, grow and thrive. It also tells us that inequalities can be established as early as conception with consequences for socio-economic wellbeing that last a lifetime (Black, M.M., et al., 2017; Irwin, L. G., et al., 2007).

Heckman (2011), Nobel Laureate for economics, asserts that the most important investment that can be made in the life of a human being begins from the time of conception until around five years of age, with the highest return in the first 1000 days (Heckman, J.J., 2011). Heckman's argument of the earlier the investment the higher the return is based on calculations that illustrate how inputs like good healthcare and nutrition, that begin during pregnancy, can reduce later social spending drags on the fiscus.

A bad start to life can impact across the life course, placing the developing child on a "lower lifetime trajectory with negative implications for adult cognitive and psychological functioning, educational attainment, and subsequent income, thus contributing to continued inequalities in the next generation" (Walker, S. P., et al., 2017).

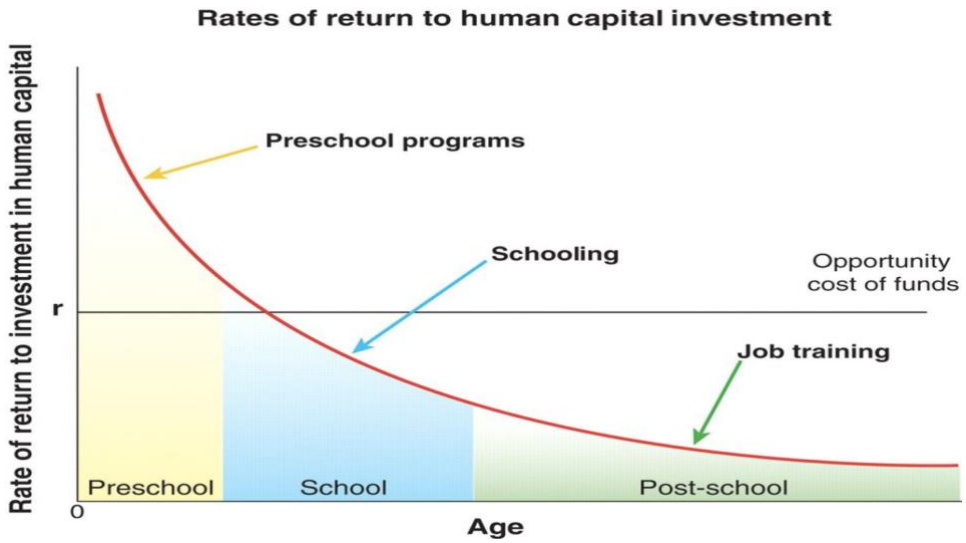

Figure 1.1: Heckman's model showing the earlier the investment the higher the return (Source: www.heckmanequation.org)

Supporting the healthy development of young children sets them on a path to good health, success at school, socio-economic wellbeing, and good citizenship, all in all lowering the "inter-generational transition of poverty and inequality". By intervening from the start of human life with sufficient care and support, even children who are born into adverse

circumstances have a fair chance to realise their full development potential provided early investments are sustained also beyond that period (Heckman, J.J., 2011; Barnett, W.S. and Nores, M., 2012).

Specific gains associated with early interventions include increased levels of verbal, mathematical and cognitive achievement; high$_3$er levels of success at school, including fewer and improved retention; better employment and earnings; improved health outcomes; reduced dependence on welfare; and decreases in crime rates. The net effect is improved government revenues and less social spend (Lynch, R.G., 2014).

This realisation offers hope and opportunity for transformative action for the whole of society. It provides a strong argument to engage government on their investments in human capital formation, asserting the importance of a start from the very beginning of life. It follows that ECD is promoted as a definite strategy to poverty alleviation and the long-term development of nations. Not making this investment, or beginning too late, has potentially disastrous consequences for young children and so for the country as a whole (Denboba, A., et al., 2014; Doyle, O., et al., 2009; Heckman, J.J., 2013).

1.4 Early childhood development is a government priority

Government support and investment to ensure access to early learning and development, especially for the most disadvantaged children, is critical. Even with a fully engaged civil society sector, the state remains the ultimate guarantor for ensuring the fulfilment of early childhood development goals. The potential for scaling up early years services essentially sits with the systemic capacity of government to implement services and, where needed, to guide civil society partnerships toward filling the gaps (Britto, P., et al., 2014; LaRocque, N. and Lee, S., 2011; Unies, N., 2006).

In recent years, we have witnessed a growing expression of commitment to early years investments at a political level across the world. The South African government has joined these global political voices in prioritising early childhood development, acknowledging it as fundamental to the growth of our nation. Government has committed to the realisation of services for every child by 2030 in the National Development Plan (NDP) noting specifically that early childhood development is "a leading measure to improve the quality of education and long-term prospects of future generations" (NDP, 2013). Gaps and challenges toward this

level of provision are acknowledged in the National Integrated Early Childhood Development (NIECD) Policy of 2015 which commits government to a programme of intervention from conception.

More recently, at his State of the Nation Address (SONA), the President confirmed these commitments, reiterating that government wants "young ones from the ages of two to three years to enter into early childhood development because the learning of a child starts while they are still young" (Ramaphosa. C., 2019). Both the ECD Policy and the NDP note the role for civil society as a partner to the state in rolling out these plans. The NDP emphasises that these intended outcomes for children cannot be achieved without robust partnerships between the state and civil society.

1.5 Our youngest children cannot thrive without the necessary care and support

Unfortunately, we are a long way from realising these ambitions of ensuring that no young child born in our country is left without the care they need to thrive. Figures released in 2018 by Statistics South Africa reveal that, of the 8.2 million young children in South Africa between 0–6 years old, almost half (46%) are deeply affected by poverty, living in quintile 1 or 2 households. As many as 49% of three-year-olds and 29% of four-year-old children, who should be getting ready for primary schooling, still do not participate in any early learning programme.

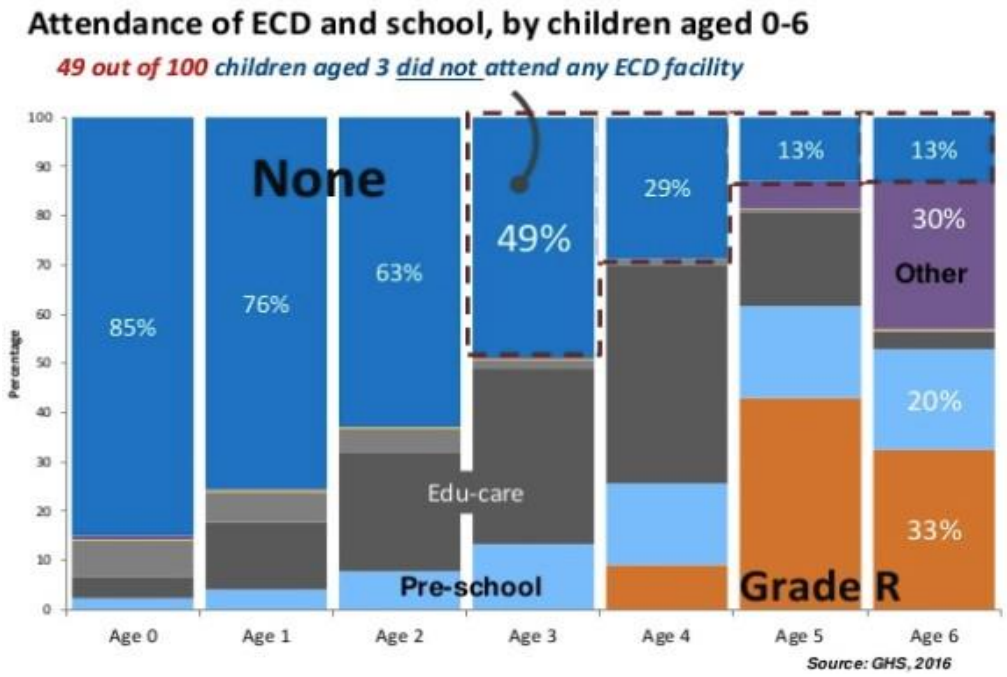

Figure 1.2: 49% of South African children 0 - 6 do not participate in early learning programmes (source: GHS, 2016)

In addition, they show (self-reported) learning and stimulation is not supported in the home environment for many young children. Evidence is that, across quintiles, less than a quarter of 0–6 years olds are read to or told stories every day.

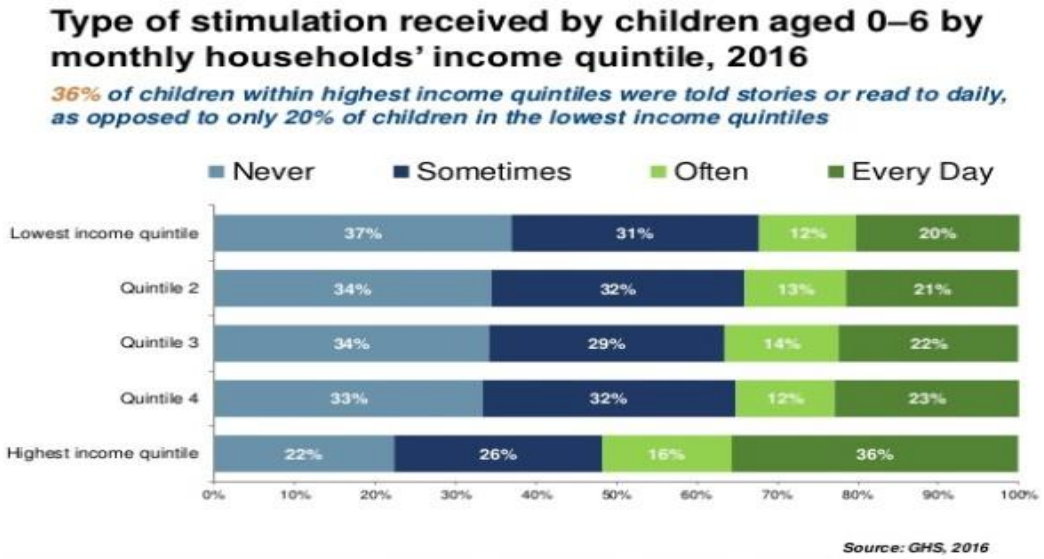

Figure 1.3: Type and frequency of stimulation received by children 0 – 6 are by household income quintile (Source: GHS 2016)

Despite the heady commitments to early childhood development in South Africa, without sufficient, well-allocated resources progress will not be effective. Domestic funding is critical to universalising and sustaining ECD services. The Education Commission recommends that for national governments to achieve two years of free pre-primary education, they should allocate at least 10% of their education budget to this sector. Currently in South Africa, only 1–2% of the total education budget is spent on early learning programmes – 5% of national expenditure (1.5% of GDP).

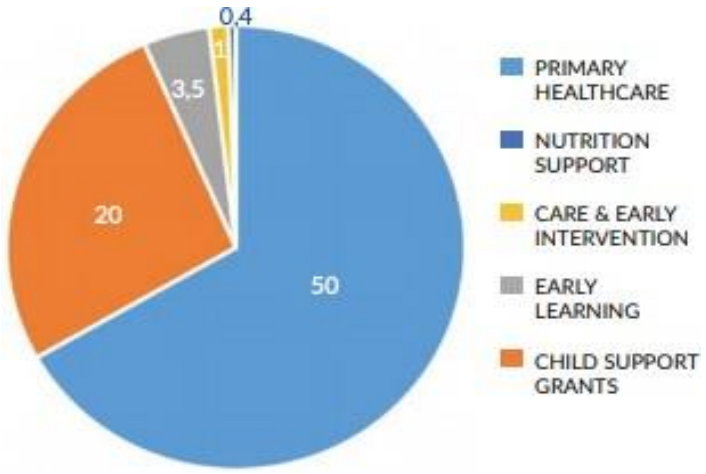

Figure 1.4: Public spending on early childhood development services in South Africa Rand billions, 2018 (Source: dgmt.co.za)

By far the largest investments are in primary healthcare and child support grants, while early learning, nutrition support and parenting programmes remain seriously underpowered (Figure 1.4). Government subsidies for ECD programmes are insufficient to universalise access for the 65% of South Africa's under six-year-olds living in poverty-affected households (National Treasury, Republic of South Africa. Estimates of National Expenditure 2018, Richter. L., et al., 2012; Zubairi, A. and Rose, P., 2017).

Access to early childhood development programmes across the country is uneven across income groups (see Figure 1.5). Cost is a significant factor in who attends an ECD programme and who is left out. Poor children are less likely to be enrolled in preschool than their wealthier peers. Approximately 70% of young children in South Africa do not have access to any kind of early learning programme.

The 30% who do have access to some sort of early learning programme comprise 1,843, 960 of this number. Of these, 72% are five and six-year-olds enrolled in Grade R programmes and the remaining 1,3 million are catered for by ECD centres (registered and unregistered) (Hall, K., et al., 2017).

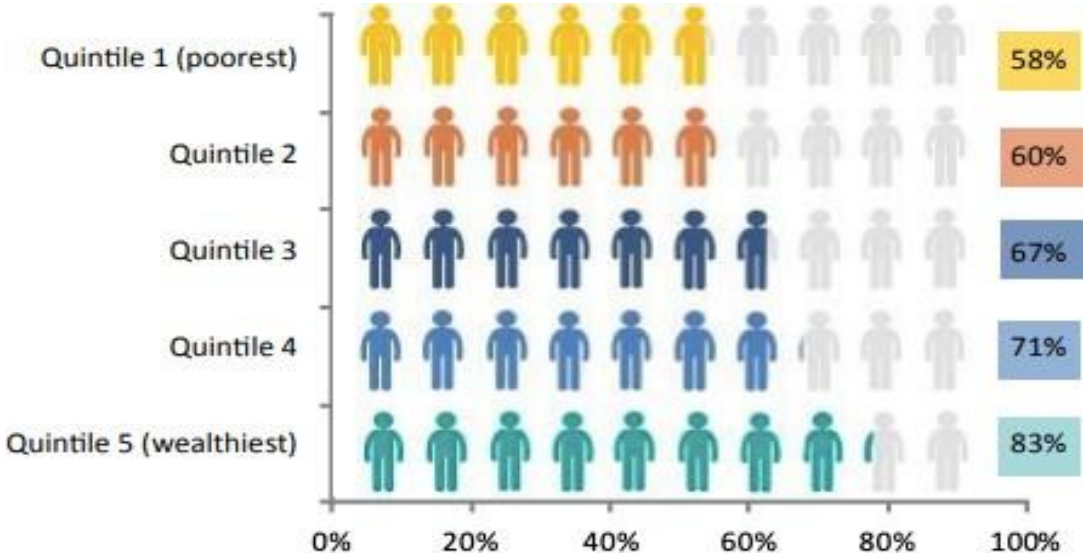

Figure 1.5: Early learning enrolment for 3 – 5-year-old by wealth quintiles illustrates significant income disparities (Source: Centre for Early Childhood Development)

A UNICEF (2020) report highlights insufficient access to primary health care (despite it receiving the largest budgetary share), WASH [1]and child development opportunities, are major contributors to poverty factors impacting on 0- and 4-year-olds. Without enough sustained investment in the social services sector, specifically to support households affected by poverty,

these worrying trends will persist, compromising children's development (Maluleke, R., 2020; Morgan, B., 2013; Hall, K., et al., 2019; Richter, L.M., et al., 2017).

1.6 Learning gaps begin early and persist across the life course

Poverty impacts directly on children's access to the multiple services and supports associated with healthy human development education (of parents and children), nutrition and healthcare. Collectively, these deficits in care gang up on children who experience multiple deprivations. Data linking poverty to poor child outcomes shows that children who grow up poor or in adverse circumstances often start school (or even Grade R) with gaps in their development (Jensen, 2009; Stephens, N.M., et al., 2014; Woodhead, M., 2014).

Studies highlight that the brain is most malleable and develops faster from birth to around five years old than at any other time in life. During this time of exponential growth, the foundations for later learning and wellbeing are laid. Early brain architecture is shaped by genetic make-up and the environment which 'encircle' the developing child (Shonkoff, J., et al., 2012). Together, good nutrition, health care and stimulating, warm, responsive caregiving ensure that children can thrive (WHO, 2018).

Research shows that children who do not receive this nurturing care are at risk developmentally and will in all probability struggle to fully realise their potential. The "accumulation of adversities, beginning before conception and continuing throughout prenatal and early life, can disrupt brain development, attachment, and early learning" (Daelmans, B., et al., 2017).

Young children who face multiple deprivations, and begin school unprepared, are not able to enjoy the full benefits of primary schooling. They may struggle to learn and often fall behind their peers who are ready to learn at school (Barnes, H. and Wight, G., 2012; Britto, P., 2012). These learning gaps are hard to overcome and frequently manifest as large school readiness differences between children from different socio-economic groups (Black et. al, 2017; Britto et al, 2017; Grantham-McGregor et al, 2007; Neuman, M., 2006; Richter et al, 2017).

Studies from the USA indicate that learning gaps can emerge as early as nine months old (Figure 1.6), with three-year-old children from low-income families having only 50% of the vocabulary of their peers from middle/high income communities. For young children about to

start primary school these learning lags can lead to underachievement in their primary schooling.

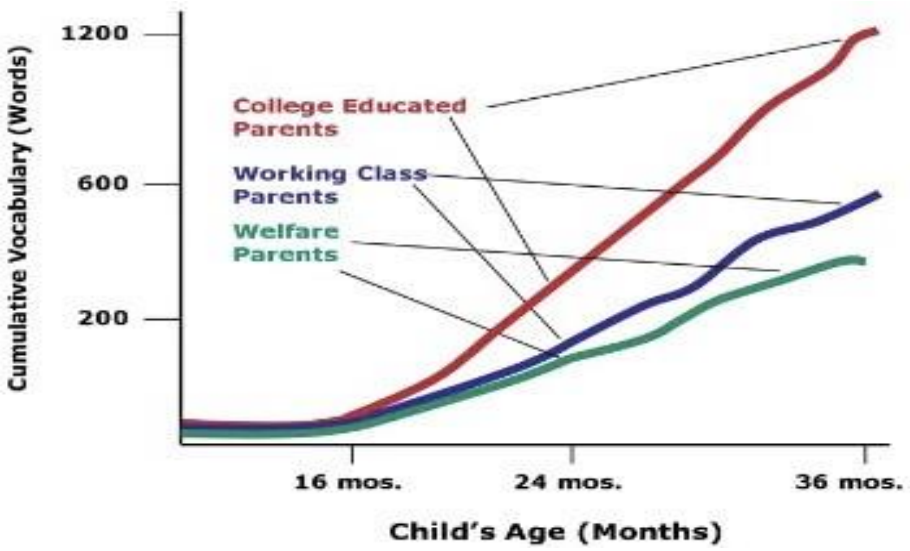

Figure 1.6: How early experiences shape cognitive development (Hart, B. and Risley, T.R., 1996)

An OECD review in 2019 of the Programme for International Student Assessments (PISA) cited amongst the 100 things learnt through eight years of assessments is that "fifteen-year-old students who attended pre-primary education perform better on PISA than those who did not, even after accounting for their socio-economic backgrounds" (Peña- López, I., 2016; Schleicher, A., 2019). Without effective intervention, these achievement gaps do not disappear– children who start behind many never catch up sufficiently to realise their full potential (García, E. and Weiss, E., 2017; Shonkoff, J., et al., 2012).

1.7 The learning crisis: A consequence of our failure to nurture our youngest children

While there has been undeniable progress in advancing access to early years services in South Africa over the past three decades, progress has been slow, fragmented, of questionable quality and insufficiently impactful. As set out thus far in this thesis, over 60% of South Africa's youngest children, especially those living in poverty, do not receive the nurturing care and stimulation they need to thrive.

Without equal access to holistic support services young children born into poverty are likely to remain captive to a cycle of inter- generational deprivation and hardship that can be impossible to escape. (Zubairi, A. and Rose, P., 2017; Van Der Berg, S. and Hofmeyr, H., 2018).

Consistent with the global assertions about the links between preschool outcomes and poverty, data collected in South Africa through the Early Learning Outcomes Measure (ELOM), designed to monitor early learning outcomes (Dawes, A., et al., 2016), confirms a relationship between wealth quintiles and children's early learning (Figure 1.7). It suggests that the lower the wealth quintile the higher the probability that the child will have learning gaps to overcome and be at risk of not developing the foundational skills that are predictors of readiness for school (Hall, K., et al., 2017).

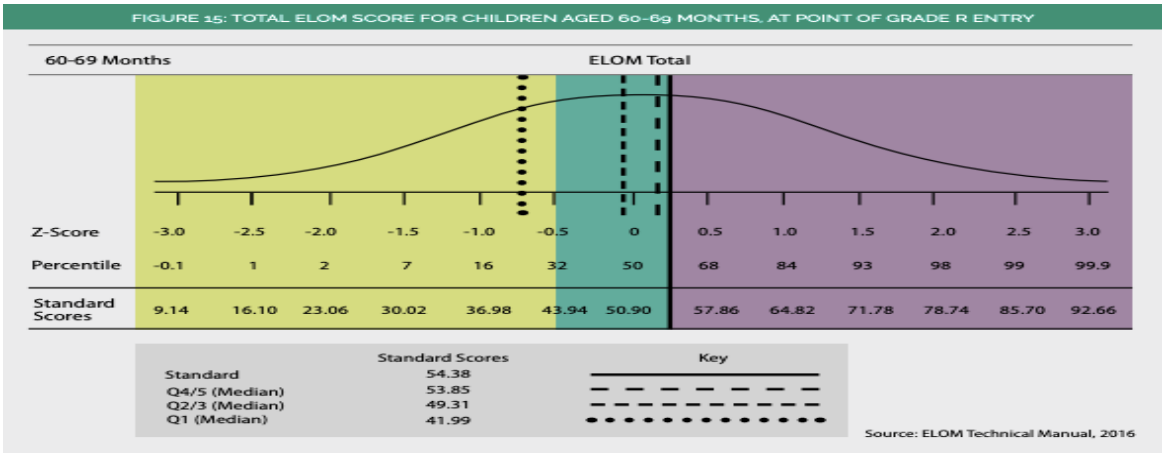

Figure 1.7: ELOM Score for children aged 60 - 69 month at the point of entry into Grade R - quintile 1, 2&3 combined, 4&5 combined (Key for reading the graph: yellow – children at risk, purple – well below performance standard and green – below standard but with support should achieve.) (Source: www.**elom**.org.za.)

A Centre for Development report in 2013 noted major gaps in achievement amongst Grade 3 learners in South Africa, linking the impact of these gaps up the ladder in Grade 6 and again in Grade 9. The study estimates that "50% of learners in schools would make it to Grade 12 and only 12% of this cohort would later qualify for university entrance" (McCarthy, J. and Oliphant, R., 2013).

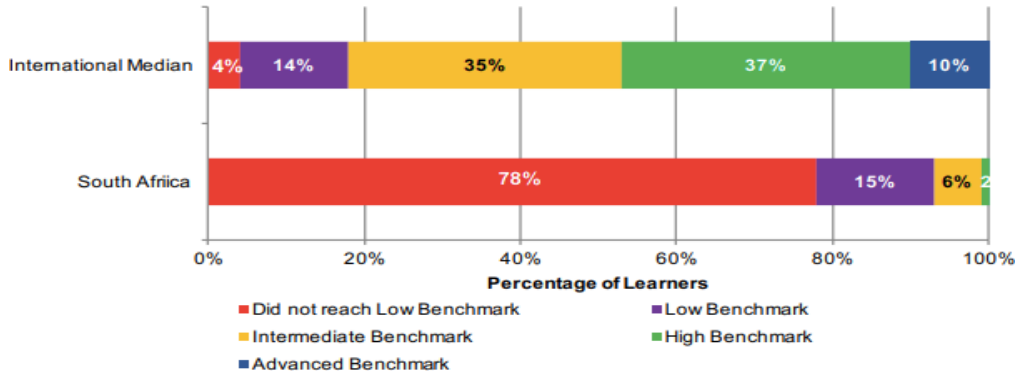

Figure 1.8: South African and International Learners not reaching the Low International Benchmark (Source: PIRLS Literacy 2016)

The 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which provides

internationally comparable data on education achievements, systems and learners, indicated that 78% of South Africa's Grade 4 learners were unable to read for meaning, failing to reach even the lowest PIRLS benchmark (Figure 1.8). It is unlikely that children with these significant skills deficits will, without massive intervention, succeed as lifelong learners (Spaull, N. and Pretorius, E., 2019).

Reading and storytelling are well connected across the literature with early cognitive development. Research shows that early childhood is the best time to lay the foundation for reading fluency stressing that "the degree to which children acquire language skills and become motivated, habitual readers, is a strong predictor of future academic success, educational attainment, employment and income."

Earlier in this study, the gap in reading and storytelling in the home environment across wealth quintiles was highlighted (Figure 1.3). The 2016 PIRLS study shines a light on this deficit and asserts that in the assessment "children of parents who liked reading achieved on average higher scores than those whose parents did not like reading" (Howie. S., et al., 2017).

A further challenge for South Africa's children is that the language of instruction is frequently not the same as the language/s children speak at home. Evidence from Benin, Cameroon, Guatemala, Iran and Turkey reveal that children who speak a language at home that is different from the main language of teaching and learning are prone to learn less than their peers (Rose, P. and Alcott, B., 2015; Zell, H., 2017).

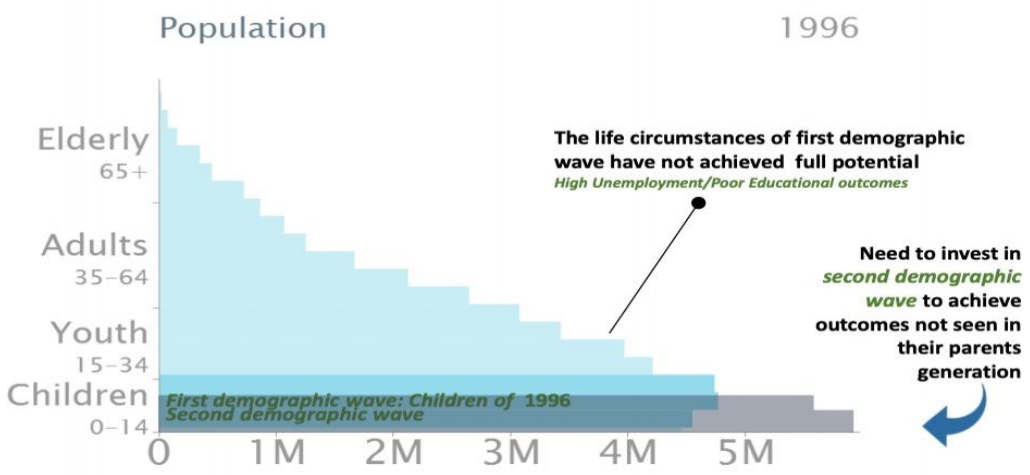

Figure 1.9: Advances made in South African society since 1996 (Source: Stats SA, Community Survey, 2016)

It is unsurprising, given this data and these insights, that even with reforms in primary and higher education, moves to increase access to early childhood development services and

achievements in Grade R access, the first wave of 'born frees' have not realised their potential (Figure 1.9 below) (Motsepe, T., 2016).

Coming back to the science of early development, where this conversation started, the development of brain architecture and so the formation of skills begins at the start of life. This development is sequential with early capabilities laying the foundation for new learning that follows or, in the words of Heckman, "skills beget skills" ((Babcock, E.D., 2014; Heckman, J.J., 2006).

If the foundations for health, lifelong learning and wellbeing are not well laid in the early years some children may never catch up when they get to primary school. Starting from the beginning of a child's life, offering the right kind of support at the right time in their development offers an opportunity to not repeat this dismal performance for another generation; we owe this to our children.

1.8 The leading role of the civil sector

> "Real change only comes about when the current status quo is disrupted, and a 'new course' is set." (Brooks, 2013)

Across the world, it is evident that messages about the importance of early childhood care and education have landed. In 2015, 193 countries signed on to 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which include a promise to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so they are ready for primary school (SDG 4.2).

With this has come an expansion and a growing role for the non-state sector, including civil society organisations (Gustafsson-Wright. E., et al., 2016). This is especially true in developing economies, as is evident in Figure 1.10 below (Roser, M. and Ortiz-Ospina, E., 2016).

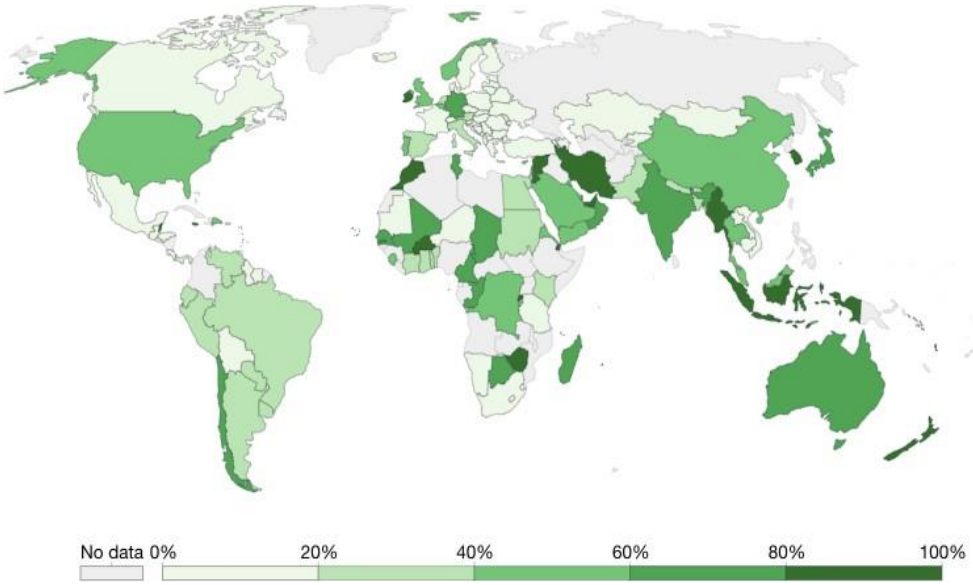

Figure 1.10: Share enrolled in private institutions at the pre-primary education level 2015 (Source:www.outworldindata.org)

In South Africa, before 1994, early learning and care for young children from birth to five was regarded as the private responsibility of the family. This meant that government did not provide ECD services. Programmes that were available were largely only accessible to those who could afford to pay a fee, although there were some NGOs that catered for poverty affected children, mainly through funding provided by charitable donors. These services tended to be scattered, uncoordinated and in short supply (Hwenha, S. and Investments, T.S., 2014; Rudolph, N., 2006).

The birth of democracy brought commitments to basic human rights. What followed was a period of significant reform which included a focus on young children and families and so, the ECD sector. The policy environment was strengthened, systems revisions started, and new funding mechanisms activated, all with a pro-poor intention. Civil society organisations, who were seen to have the ECD knowledge and experience on the ground, offered important expertise to the state. In 2001, 17% of available provision was provided by government and 83% by NGOs (Williams, T., et al, 2001). Donor partners have continued to invest in the sector in partnership, sometimes with NGOs and at times with the state (Mseme, L., 2013).

This form of 'collaboration' between government and NGOs is still, to this day, a striking feature of the ECD landscape. Unfortunately, despite being well regarded for its experience and expertise, the ECD sector was small and diverse, and it lacked the complement of human and financial resources needed to take early learning programmes to scale.

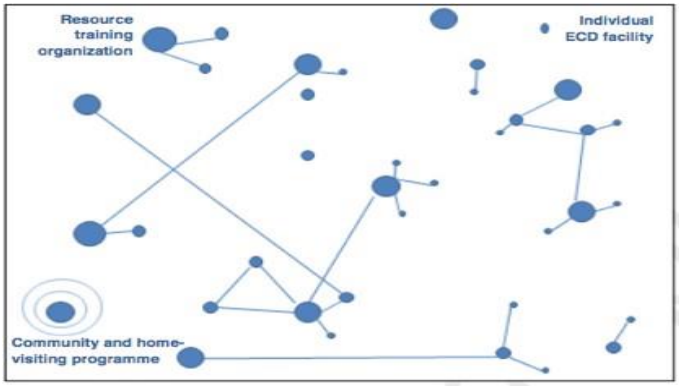

Figure 1.11: Organisations tend to cluster instead of providing full coverage (Source: Harrison, D., 2012)

The ECD sector's scattershot efforts (Figure 1.11) had, over the years, achieved few connections across the landscape of providers (Harrison, D., 2012). In addition, as government became more engaged in the landscape, efforts were unsystematic and further entrenched the unequal patterns of provision that had inadvertently been created over time by these well-intentioned but scattered investments (Biersteker, L. and Picken, P., 2013).

The sector in this formation is clearly not geared for change and definitely not for scale. In the words of the CEO of the DG Murray Trust, without addressing this, "we will continue to grumble along with limited coverage – and access skewed towards those who actually need ECD services least, because they come from better-resourced homes" (Harrison, D., 2012). The National Integrated Policy on ECD (2015) rightly noted in its preamble that because of this configuration, civil society, despite its noble intentions, in fact contributes to the perpetuation of inequality for children (Le Mottee, S., 2016)

1.9 Research question

These insights informed a question that I began asking myself as the former leader of an innovative ECD donor-led platform, Ilifa Labantwana, where we worked with, and depended on, the skills of ECD organisations to achieve outcomes. Despite numerous forums, meetings and investments to support expansion, change was slow and seemingly disorganized. The leadership, though well experienced in programme implementation and training, seemed unable to move beyond the dysfunctional architecture of this system. They seemed to be stuck.

Curiosity about this conundrum, led to the formation of my dissertation question:

Why, despite the growing political interest in ECD and the expanding commitments at policy and programme level to advance services for children, was the civil society sector not able to harness their wealth of knowledge and experience to leverage these opportunities and rapidly expand the number and quality of services for children across the country?

Underpinning the study is the idea that a shared vision for what is possible together as an ECD sector could increase collaborative effort and momentum for innovation, change and successful impact. An ECD Change Lab could successfully contribute toward this momentum by unblocking thinking in the sector through collective problem solving and planning, thereby deepening relationships and commitment to teamwork and partnership. Through this type of engagement, the opportunity for expanded action geographically and strategically could potentially be realised.

The opportunity:

- there is this massive need for children to get the early childhood care and support they require, and extraordinary political interest in ECD in South Africa is backed by some (although not sufficiently so) increases in budget allocation.
- the South African government is the duty bearer for ECD service provision but does not have sufficient financial resources, capacity, or expertise to expand services of quality at the pace needed without support.
- there is a body of civil society organisations and networks with knowledge and expertise who could take up the opportunity of partnership with the state and each other to build viable programmes and contribute to a pipeline of services, enabling universal access to ECD with particular emphasis on under-served communities?

The challenge:

The civil society sector is fragmented, and leadership is often uncoordinated, without a shared vision or plan for how they can respond to the multiple opportunities and challenges that need

My intention in this research is to gain insight into the way in which members of the NGO sector in ECD describe and analyse its current formation, challenges, opportunities, and successes, as well as how they explain their own role in this landscape. The intention through this process is to illuminate and diagnose the blockages (real and imagined) that prevent the sector from taking up the many opportunities that current reforms present for innovation,

partnership, and accelerated change.

Through the study key civil society stakeholders (academics, CSI actors, donors and NGO leaders) in the ECD ecosystem, who are in a position to shed light from their own professional viewpoint, will be interviewed. The outcome of this data collection and analysis will be the framing of what from the outside appears to be a ‘complex problem’. Understanding and articulating this perceived ‘stuckness’ will be the first step in identifying potential pathways to solution-seeking dialogues through the Change Lab process.

Chapter Two Literature review

"Conversation is thus the essence of society." (Huff, A.S.,1999).

2.1 Introduction

As elaborated on in Chapter One, there are serious gaps in the provision of early years services in South Africa. While this is a matter of grave concern for child development, it also presents a massive opportunity for civil society organisations to build on their existing expertise and partner with each other and the state. In this moment, there is potential to create a thriving early learning service-sector – one which, while being pro-poor, still creates employment, contributes to the development of young children equally and furthers the country's socio-economic development agenda.

Yet, despite the policy platform, numerous government and donor-led initiatives to engage and even support organisations in the field, civil society organisations appear to be in a holding pattern. Given the multiple issues that need to be explored to better understand the dynamics at play and to seek ways that could unlock the real potential they hold, I have attempted to bring multiple relevant literatures into dialogue with each other in my literature review. The intention is to weave an integrated theoretical framework that illuminates the complex dynamics impacting on civil society organisations and use this analysis as a lens through which to examine the dynamics at play in the ECCE sector in our country.

In this review, I emphasise the science of early childhood development while recognising a robust field of research which has attracted the attention of many well-practiced academics, and which is demonstrated by an ever-expanding body of literature. This collection of work has an intense focused interest in the practices and impact of ECD programmes, often with a view to replication and scale. However, little attention focuses on the means to replicate and scale. Given the shortage of early learning programmes of quality around the world, it seems logical to focus on stimulating an approach that will broaden access and promote universal access, while deepening quality to achieve good child outcomes.

What seems to be overlooked is how, in a global financial environment (where traditional donors have begun to shift their focus away from traditional grant-making to investments and results-based financing), organisations with the right impetus could revise their services and way of working to increase population impact while simultaneously being robust partners to the state. Even where it is not overlooked, the NGO sector seems to struggle to achieve a coherent and well organised role that leverages off its existing ECD expertise and footprint.

If the non-state ECD providers, for-profit and non-profit, are to develop and fulfil a role in the sector that is financially viable while promoting equity, a shift in thinking and approach is crucial. In low- and middle-income countries, finances are short and capacity low. Civil society organisations can play a significant role, alongside the state, in filling these gaps, enable the achievement of important child development goals, equalise societies and build nations from the bottom up (Noble, K.G., et al., 2015; Shonkoff, J.P., et al., 2012; Weaver, I.C., 2014).

Key considerations for the review include an exploration of literatures to elucidate:

- the role of the state in achieving equal access quality to early childhood care and education.
- non-state actors, including donors (investors) and civil society organisations; and
- the interface of ECD with inclusive innovation.

2.2 Investing in early childhood care and education is smart

Early childhood development has exploded as a field of study with numerous well-researched national and international reviews easily available, including those by government departments pursuing early childhood programmes as a national priority (Baxter, J., 2015; Bertram, T. and Pascal, C., 2014; Evangelou, M., 2009; Mbarathi, N., 2016; Neuman, M.J. and Hatipoglu, K., 2015; Rao, N., et al., 2014).

Since building on the development opportunities for the individual child and society is core to my study on the role of civil society organisations, I touch on this body of literature largely as motivation for the intervention and for making the fundamental links between ECD and socio-economic growth. Noted throughout the literature as a path to a better, more equal future for everybody, early childhood development, it is argued, is a critical determinant of school success, long-term health and wellbeing and good citizenship (Shonkoff, J.P., et al., 2016; Zafeirakou, A., 2015).

Early childhood development is a time of hope and opportunity. It is a process that begins at conception. A significant number of studies show that what happens during the early years can last a lifetime. When children are given the care and support that they need, they are able to realise their potential and thrive.

Vital development in all domains takes place during these early years at an exponential, never to be repeated pace. It is a critical period for ensuring that young children have all they need to secure their healthy growth, learning and development. This includes inputs across the early ages and stages of child development (Figure 2.1), such as good nutrition, primary healthcare, social security, parenting support and opportunities to learn and play (Profeta, M., 2012; Walker, S.P., et al., 2011).

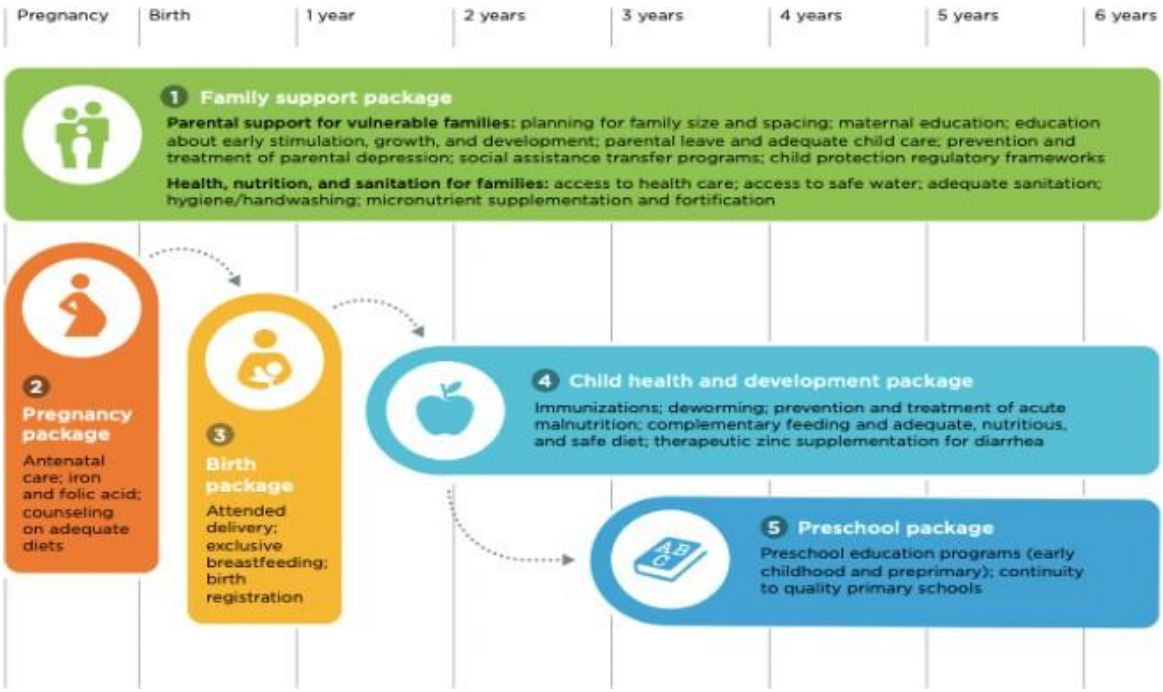

Figure 2.1: Early childhood requires multi-sectoral support for child development beginning during pregnancy and continuing until children enter primary schooling (Source: Denboba and others, 2014)

Negative life experience including poverty, a lack of stimulation, or exposure to toxic stressors such as violence and substance abuse, can impact negatively on the developing brain of a young child and seriously threaten their healthy development and long-term wellbeing (Shonkoff, J.P., et al., 2012; Walker, S.P., et al., 2007). Especially worrisome and negatively disruptive is when children face multiple deprivations resulting in 'cumulative disadvantage' (Kurukulasuriya, S. and Engilbertsdóttir, S., 2012; Zubairi, A. and Rose, P., 2017). These insights constitute a warning and explanation for the learning gaps evident in the statistics cited in Chapter One.

Within this context, Heckman's (2011) first 1000-day equation, as already referenced, offers hope and opportunity for transformative action, making a strong case for deepening and broadening our investment in our younger children in order to take the leap toward "equitable and sustainable human development" (Heckman, J., 2011; Bassok, D., et al., 2016; Walker. S.P., et al., 2011). "Science...shows that providing stable, responsive, nurturing relationships in the earliest years of life can prevent or even reverse the damaging effects of early life stress, with lifelong benefits for learning, behaviour, and health" (Perry, C., 2016).

The literature elaborates on the returns on investment put forward in the introductory section of this study. Investments in early learning are bi-directional. By building the ECD ecosystem one creates an environment in which young children thrive, and society reaps multiple socio-economic benefits that accrue overtime (Morrissey, T.W. and Warner, M.E., 2007).

Figure 2.2 Early childhood development programmes outcomes are bi-directional (2020)

In summary, the key arguments for investment are:

- promoting human development by ensuring that every child from conception has access to a high-quality set of services that includes health, social protection, good

nutrition, stimulation, and support for the critical role of mothers/primary caregivers can improve lifelong learning, reduce crime, promote good citizenship, and increase health and wellbeing (Britto, P., et al, 2016; Deming, D., 2009).

- investments in ECD services can reduce the demand for remedial intervention resulting in returns on investments of as much as $17 for every $1 (Bartik, T., 2013, Barnett, W.S. and Nores, M., 2012; Kilburn, M.R. and Karoly, L.A., 2008. Pereonite, P., et al., 2011; Zubairi, A. and Rose, P., 2017).
- giving early childhood care and education services an equitable share of education and social sector budgets contribute positively to the economy and reduces the burden on taxpayer money (Heckman, J.J., 2011; Temple, J.A. and Reynolds, A.J., 2015; van der Gaag, J. and Putcha, V., 2015).
- early childhood development programmes can decrease inequality, especially because they benefit socio-economically disadvantaged children and families and help build stronger economies, political stability and increase social cohesion (Barnett, W.S. and Nores, M., 2012; Burger, K. 2010. Camilli, G., et al., 2011; Campbell, F.A., et al., 2012; Rose, P. and Alcott, B., 2011).
- early childhood care and education can be an economically important industry, driving and being driven by socio-entrepreneurs. Accordingly, it deserves the attention of government (and other) investments (Gustafsson-Wright, E., et al., 2015; Gertler, P., et al., 2014).
- Affordable, accessible early childhood care and education services enable mothers and fathers to be economically active and to support their families, contributing to increased gender equality and socio-economic wellbeing for families (Berlinski, S. and Galiani, S., 2007; Clavet, N. J. and Duclos, J. Y. 201; Lokshin, M., Harris, K.M. and Popkin, B.M., 2000; Nollenberger, N. and Rodríguez-Planas, N., 2015; Save the Children. 2017).

2.3 The role of the state

There has been a proliferation of documentation on systems and the governance of ECD, mostly providing good lessons, but few ready to be transferred directly into a South African context (Aidoo, A.A., 2005.; Britto, P.R., et al., 2013; Martin, P., et al., 2010; UNICEF, 2017). To better inform this research, I have sourced and accessed easily available

materials, using what is appropriate to frame the thinking of this study and to draw a line when the same ideas began to occur consistently.

2.3.1 Government is the guarantor

A growing body of literature propounds that investing in ECD yields greater returns in human capital than any other social investment across the life-course (as already demonstrated in this paper). It follows that, as this message has taken hold at geo-political level, governments have stepped up, recognising their responsibility to ensure the development of children as foundational and necessary to their national development agendas (Richter, L., et al., 2012; Urban, M., Cardini, A. and Romero, R.F., 2018).

Currently, there are 193 countries across the world committed to the Sustainable Development Goals, agreeing that access to early childhood development (SDG 4.2) is their responsibility (Tarrant, D. and Walker, N., 2018). How this is expressed at policy level differs across regions and countries. For example, in New Zealand early childhood education is not compulsory though the state does work to make it accessible to all by funding, guiding, and regulating the sector (Kaye, H.N., Minister of Education). Kenya, on the other hand, has instituted one year of free pre-primary access to boost enrolment and realise the associated benefits (Their World's #5for5 Campaign, 2018).

A closer look at accelerators across countries where significant progress has been made in realising access to early learning, despite the odds, shows governments taking a strong lead through policy reform, sub-sector planning, budgeting, and sector coordination, including public and private sector partnerships (Malkin, J., 2011.; Britta. P., et al, 2014.; Neuman, M.J. and Hatipoglu, K., 2015; UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2018).

Implementing child rights as set out in global treaties like the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights of the African Child and South Africa's Bill of Rights, recognises that the state is the guarantor of the rights of the child and so should systemically develop national policies and strategies that go beyond electoral cycles to ensure committed, systemic government leadership and support for every child (Britto, P.R. and Yoshikawa, H., 2013; Goldstone, R.J., 1997; UNICEF, 2009; Unies, N., 2006).

What is clear is that ECD outcomes will not be achieved without attention to the system. This includes planning, coordination and making necessary resources for implementation available (Britto, P., et al, 2013; Urban, M., Cardini, A. and Romero, R.F., 2018).

Numerous global and regional reports provide statistics on the large number of young children who are still outside of early childhood development services and urge investments from governments and donors alike to facilitate access for the 175 million children globally (50% of the pre-primary population) who remain unenrolled in preschool programmes (UNICEF (2019) *World Ready to Learn)*. Responsibility for this is levelled largely at the state where governance systems are seen as insufficiently robust and ready to facilitate and finance universal services for early learning and development (Britto, P., et al., 2014; Richter, L., et al., 2012).

While policy reform is recognised as a necessary and good starting point for addressing shortfalls in ECD provision, it cannot be used to facilitate change when resources and action do not follow. Multiple advocates and academics recognise that higher levels of coordination and systematisation of early childhood development services are fundamental to achieving improvements in the quality and availability of services (Azzi-Lessing, L., 2009; Berry, L., et al., 2013; Kagan, L. and Kauerz, K., 2015; Lagomarsino., G., 2017; Melnick, H., et al., 2018).

2.3.2 Government is the duty bearer and the leader

ECD developments in Africa were clearly spurred on by the Education for All agenda. Prior to that, most countries mirrored the scattered, unequal geography of unregulated services evident in South Africa. A 2005 UNICEF report indicated that more than 95% of children on the continent did not have access to early stimulation programmes, care facilities or non-fee-paying preschools (Aidoo, A.A., 2005; Kamerman, S., 2007; UNESCO, 2015).

In many ways, we are witnessing the growth of a sector, fed exponentially by the global politicisation of early childhood. Unfortunately, systems are slow to change and many countries across the region have only begun to put policies in place to promote access to comprehensive, integrated early childhood services in the past two decades (Kamerman, S., 2007; Pence, A.R., et al., 2009; Torkington, K., 2002).

As early as 2000, Jordan prioritised integrated ECD at policy level followed by a

comprehensive strategy and then plan of action for 2003–2007, linked to their National Plan of Action for Children for 2004–2013 (El-Kogali, S. and Krafft, C., 2015). Following close behind in 2003, Jamaica established a single agency to coordinate the implementation of early childhood programmes from birth to entry into primary schooling. This agency set the agenda by focusing on two things: data for decision-making and a single cross-sectoral plan for everyone, including ministries, private sector and even advocacy groups. Two lessons learned 15 years later are that:

- change does not come easily, particularly for organisations that have been in existence for some years; and
- expecting multi-sector reporting to a single ministry against one action plans is complex and challenging to the agencies involved (Lagomarsino, G., 2017).

Another country to join the move toward higher levels of integration has been Scotland. Here, reform processes have been carefully 'curated' right down to the use of terminology, well-defined standards, as well as roles and responsibilities to achieve these, and implementation is supported by a single coordinating structure (Scottish Government, 2014).

California is another example of this move toward increased sector coordination where early childhood units were deliberately extracted from the Departments of Public Health, Education, Developmental Services, Social Services and Board of Regents to form a single high-powered, well-funded initiative with the intention of streamlining, coordination and planning of state-supported early learning to address Grade 4 achievement gaps (Kovner, J., 2015; Melnick, H., et al., 2017). "The idea that we need to think more systematically at the state level is a key factor to improving early childhood education that I think few people would debate" (Melnick. H., et al., 2018). Recommendations for sector reform that will be enabling of higher levels of success include:

- building a single system for administration.
- fully funding a plan of action and making services highly accessible to parents and other role-players (Melnick. H., et al., 2018).

Also in the United States, to move rapidly from policy concepts to implementation, particularly for children from situations of poverty, thirty-five States, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, developed a strategy called Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (ELC). The funders of this initiative recognised that, without accompanying systems reform that

embedded the initiative at government level, children and their families would continue to be left behind. Amongst the lessons learned, expanding stakeholder involvement and integrated governance were cited. This included establishing a single consolidated office, organisational structure and staff designated to integrate the work across the system and on the ground (Mathias, D., 2015; Perry, G., 2012).

Rwanda has followed a similar path to reduce ECD service fragmentation, revising its policy to include all duty bearing sectors and moving responsibility for implementation from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (Binagwaho, A., et al., 2016). South Africa has been through several early childhood policy revisions since 1994, finally settling on a more holistic agenda set out in the Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy that was ratified in 2015.

The policy establishes a dual-rights and developmental imperative that acknowledges government as the guarantor of universal, equitable access to a package of early childhood services by 2030.Services for children span a number of sectors and government departments and are provided by numerous public and private actors, each with their own administrative structures, planning, programming and budgeting systems (Martin. P., 2015).

A key proposal in the drafting process that was rejected was the establishment of a lead agency that would have held responsibility for the multi-sectoral functions, including planning and implementation. This was revised with a complex multi-sectoral, multiple stakeholder governance structure that will manage and coordinate the implementation of the multi-sectoral policy agenda (Harrison, D., 2017; Neuman, M.J. and Devercelli, A.E., 2012).

A further policy revision announced in 2017 by the Minister of Basic Education was a function shift for early learning from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education. The National Education Collaborative Trust (NECT) has been tasked to facilitate this move in consultation with ECD stakeholders, including government, service providers, NGOs, funders, and practitioners (NECT ECD Dialogue Group, 2018).

2.3.3 Government must have a plan with a budget

Investments in early childhood care and education are an important component of a larger

socio-economic strategy to facilitate balanced and sustainable growth across societies (Barnett and Nores, 2012). Government's commitment to realising early childhood development outcomes can, to a large extent, be measured through its willingness to put public money on the table. Global calls are for at least 10% of education budgets to be spent on early learning and that this should include a minimum of two years of free pre-schooling, particularly for poverty affected families (Zubairi, A. and Rose, P., 2017).

The literature is clear; it is at this point that the system is most likely to come apart, even when optimally designed. Without sufficient resourcing, policy realisation is impossible (Harrison, D., 2012; Neuman, M.J. and Hatipoglu, K., 2015; Pereznieto, P., et al., 2011). The literature points to early childhood the world over as over-promised and underfunded. For example, in Brazil, about 1.2% of GDP is spent on social pensions while transfers for the Bolsa Familla, a programme focused on poor children, receives 0.4% of GDP (Levy, S. and Schady, N., 2013). Back home, "South Africa spends only 1-2% of its total education budget on early learning programmes – not enough to power better educational outcomes" (Harrison, D., 2012).

Estimates indicate that, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, per student costs for pre-primary in lower-income countries should be $232 and for lower-middle income Countries, $571. The 2015 combined spend of donors and governments for lower-income countries reached 11% and 27% for lower-middle countries – way off target for what needs to be achieved (Zubairi, A. and Rose, P., 2017).

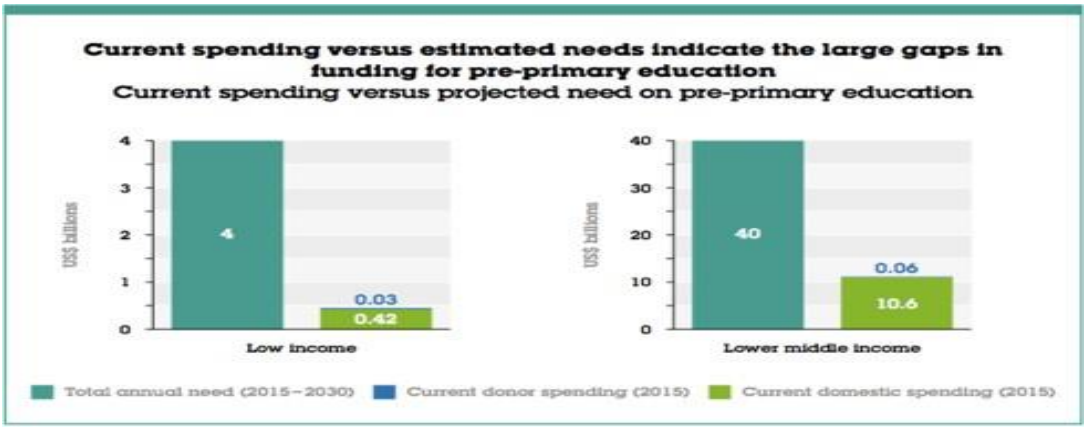

Figure 2.3: Current spending versus projected need on pre-primary education 2015 (Source: theirworld.org)

Given the fiscal constraints faced by many countries, it is unlikely that domestic budgets alone, especially in lower-middle income countries, will enable the achievement of universal fee-free early learning by 2030. Therefore, the International Commission for Global

Education Opportunity has called for countries to be guided by the principle of 'progressive universalism', prioritising the poor and early years with a focus on minimising pressure on poor households (van der Gaag, J. and Putcha, V., 2015; Zubairi, A. and Rose, P., 2017).

It is also why finding alternative ways of boosting investment in ECD should be part of government strategies, which is where public private partnerships often come into the mix. A closer look at levers that have accelerated access to preschool enrolment in lower-middle income countries, where significant progress has been made despite the odds, show government taking a strong lead through policy reform, sub-sector planning, budgeting and sector coordination, which frequently includes partnerships between the public and private sectors (Kilburn, M.R. and Karoly, L.A., 2008; Languille, S., 2017; Malkin, J., 2011; Mseme, L., 2013; UNESCO, 2015; van der Gaag, J. and Putcha, V., 2015).

2.4 Public private partnerships

While non-governmental organisations are not responsible for universal equitable access to early childhood services (nor can they achieve the scale that is needed), partnership with the non-state sector is often regarded as one part of the solution to service delivery and funding gaps.

Public private mechanisms can, at best, serve to accelerate targeted programme expansion and leverage for increased resource flows through donor investments, innovative finance mechanisms, means-based household contributions and so on (Sayre, R.K., et al., 2015; Sardjunani, N., et al. 2007; Gustafsson-Wright, E., et al., 2016; Verger, A. and Moschetti, M., 2017; Patrinos, H., et al., 2009). This is with the proviso that it is always understood that the potential for scaling up early years services is a government obligation, even when involving public private partnerships (Britta. P., et al, 2014).

Despite the many non-state actors providing ECD services and the relatively long history of public private partnerships in the education sector generally, this is largely an unexplored issue. It is also sometimes a hotly contested space largely because:

- early years childhood services are a public good and a right; it is therefore the duty of the state to ensure universal access;

- fee-paying private provision can create barriers to access for poverty affected and resource-constrained families; and
- in the early childhood development sector private services are associated with unequal distribution, insufficient regulation, often sub-standard quality and largely provided to the poor.

When these factors converge, whether through government or private provision, they expand socio-economic disparities and further entrench inequity (Benavot, A., 2015; Verger, A. and Moschetti, M., 2017).

These concerns are critical since they determine long term impacts across the life course. However, they must be examined alongside the realities that most low-middle income country governments cannot afford to rapidly deliver early childhood programmes of quality immediately. Partnerships with civil society organisations (for-profit and non-profit) present an important way to reach children and parents. Public private partnerships can present a viable proposition with benefits to multiple stakeholders especially when managed by the state as it systemises and grows its own capacity (Gustafsson-Wright, E., et al., 2016; Lagomarsino. G., 2017).

This potentially opens the door for civil society organisations – who, in the absence of public provision, have played a primary role in service delivery for many years – to continue their support for the development of young children, while keeping their expertise and connection to communities in place. Within this arrangement, the task of government policymakers must be to achieve the best balance of roles for their country context in an inclusive, coherent, and resourceful manner, regardless of whether actual provision is mostly delivered by the state or not (Gustafsson-Wright, E., et al., 2016).

As already noted, the way in which public private partnerships are configured can perpetuate inequitable access and unequal quality (García, E. and Weiss, E., 2017). This was a concern raised in South Africa's 2015 INECD policy. Some countries have overcome this challenge by subsidising services through approaches like conditional cash transfers, fee payment on a sliding scale or per child per day subsidies for those who are most in need.
In Uzbekistan a government-run half-day model, costing families the equivalent of $2 a day, was implemented to boost enrolment rates (Ibragimov, 2018). Funded through the World

Bank Group, a requirement is that all private, fee-charging providers allocate a set percentage (based on the percentage of children who are in need but cannot afford access in a set region) of spaces for non-fee paying (means tested) children (World Bank, 2018).

Low-cost private provision has also been tested in several developing countries. Although seen as a way of offering 'choice' to the poor, evidence shows that even these supposedly inexpensive options can be out of reach for the poorest and most marginalised children (Gustafsson-Wright, E., et al. 2016). The following figure (Figure 2.4) illustrates this point, highlighting the extent to which preschool related costs impact on household expenditure in four countries in sub-Saharan Africa including South Africa (Bidwell, K. and Watine, L., 2014.).

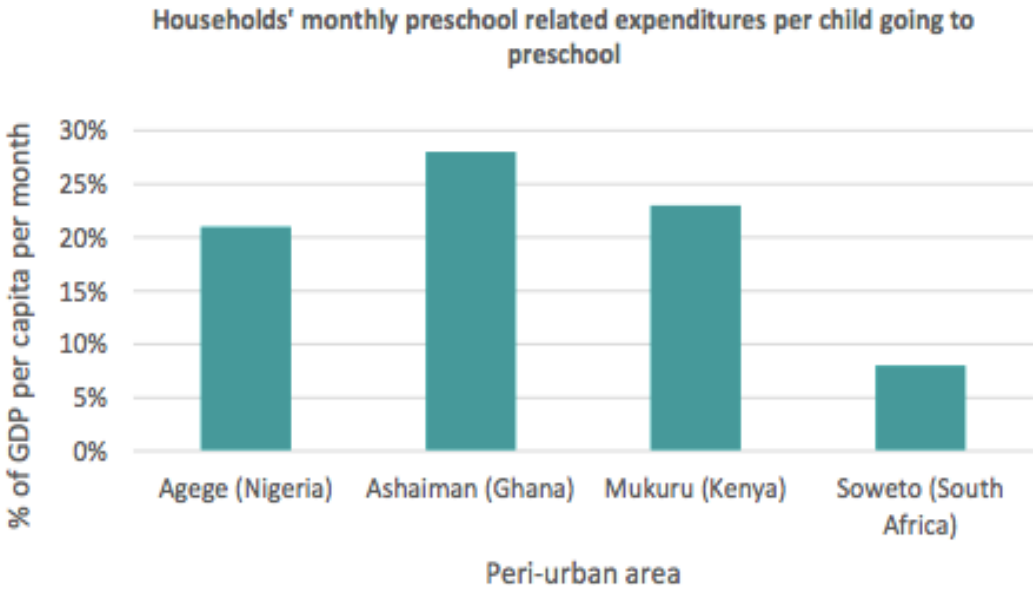

Figure 2.4: Households preschool related expenditure (Source: UBS Optimus Foundation)

Given that the focus in South Africa will be on universalising access and ensuring quality services for children who currently do not have access to services to strengthen equality and build human capital, these considerations should influence thinking and planning to address current challenges in the ECD sector.

2.5 The civil society sector

Defining the civil society sector in development studies is critical to fully understanding and analysing its role. Viterna et al (2015) argue it is a widely used and frequently maligned term which warrants definition as a 'third sector'. This allows for discourse that brings more

coherence to analysis and thinking on its role and how its actions either advance or create bottlenecks in socio-economic advancement. Within this study, the term civil society refers to all stakeholders and actors that are not the state i.e., NGOs, donors, and investors, it does not cover private for-profit organisations (Viterna, J., Clough, E. and Clarke, K., 2015).

Even with a fully engaged non-state sector, the state remains the ultimate guarantor for ensuring the fulfilment of pre-primary education goals as set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4.2 agenda. Where alternative private providers are engaged in education services, it is the state's responsibility to regulate and monitor these services to ensure appropriate standards and equality of opportunities. Across the world, the non-profit sector has established itself as a 'viable' sector (often in Lower-Middle Income Countries) as partners to the state and philanthropic organisations (Mseme, L., 2013).

In a Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-Profit Sector study undertaken over a ten-year period in 26 countries, Werker and Ahmed (2008) highlighted that 31 million people were employed by the NGO sector, accounting for as many as 1 out of every 8 service sector workers. In their analysis, three contributing factors to this proliferation were "a trend to outsource government services, new ventures by would-be not-for-profit 'entrepreneurs', and the increasing professionalisaton of existing NGOs" (Werker, E. and Ahmed, F.Z., 2008).

The literature does not offer an exclusively glowing picture of NGOs. Some suggest that many are serial underperformers because they do not have the resources and capacity to keep abreast of a fast-changing socio-economic landscape (Banks, N., Hulme, D. and Edwards, M., 2015). In South Africa, end of apartheid brought significant change to a vibrant civil society sector. Key leaders were drawn into leadership roles in government, leaving organisations depleted and in an identity crisis as they grappled with the paradox of service- provider and partner to the state versus the familiar critic and watchdog role. Some claim that the ongoing manifestation within organisations of a lack of resources or funding is in fact rooted in this induced crisis of leadership (Boulding, C.E., 2010; Julie, F., 2009; Habib, A., and Rupert T., 1999).

Another explanation for the ongoing difficulties faced by non-profit organisations is the complexity of the relationships between the state and these organisations, who are both influenced by and influencers of government actions (Kim, Y., 2011). Game-theory concepts

could provide a window into this complexity. The nature of relationships between the public and private sectors is fluid and can be generated in ways that are and that could be "partly harmonious and partly in conflict" (Brass, J.N., 2012; Bratton, M., 1989; Bräutigam, D.A. and Segarra, M., 2007; Walker, S., et al., 2007).

On the other hand, some of the literature also suggests that the unequal distribution and poor quality of services offered by non-profits is not entirely their doing. The state must step up and recognise its contribution given that, fundamentally, the potential for scaling up service sits with their capacity to lead the sector toward universal access through effective collaboration and partnerships (Britto, P., et al., 2014). A broad array of governmental and non-governmental actors could be a route to gaining adequate 'policy purchase' for these organisations (Ortiz, I., et al., 2012).

The role of the philanthropists and donors, now moving rapidly toward defining themselves as investors or partners, should not be forgotten in this landscape. NGOs are often subject to the aftershock of donor changes in strategy or interest. A good example of this is from the United States, where a $1.25 million grant to support ten Marie Stopes Clinics in Burkina Faso was cancelled because these clinics refused to comply with a requirement that they not carry out or offer any advice on abortions or distribute contraceptives. Given that organisations like Marie Stopes are totally dependent on grant money, it is of little wonder that they have a preoccupation with sustainability (Cocks, T., 2018).

While some non-profits have moved toward hybrid-income generating models, most have been established to serve the poor and do not have their own income generating strategies. This can leave them vulnerable to "following or at least accommodating the agendas and fashion set by their investors" (Pearce, J., 2010), and so to being strategically unsettled, often with long-term consequences for their sustainability. Suggestions are that non-governmental organisations can become more robust by increasing their own resilience, thereby making themselves more desirable as partners to public agencies and seeking ways of generating their own income to achieve more sustainable futures (Islam, M.R., 2016).

2.6 Moving toward innovation

Across the literature, numerous calls for NGOs to rethink their strategies and identify new ways of working together to achieve innovative new solutions to social problems have

become apparent (Gold, L., 2004; Nelson, J., 2007; Westley, F., et al 2017). The World Economic Forum advocates that civil society be the glue that binds public-private activity and strengthens common intentions to do good without compromising core missions, integrity, purposefulness, and trust (Schwab, K. and Sala-i-Martín, X., 2016).

Kania and Kramer (2013) note that it is time to come together because the 'Lone Ranger' approach keeps NGOs isolated and unable to offer the reach needed to address complex social challenges, claiming that "finding and funding a solution embodied within a single organisation, combined with the hope…(to) grow or replicate...their impact more widely" often leads to disappointing results (Kania, J. and Kramer, M., 2013).

Goldsmith (2010) calls for "new methods", noting that "simply adding new innovations on a stable base of mediocrity cannot produce social transformation" (Goldsmith, S., 2010). Acknowledging the flexibility of the sector to innovate and experiment, he claims this is the moment for "creative civil engagement" (Goldsmith, S., 2010). He uses the term "civic entrepreneurship" to argue for an approach to social change that includes the conventions associated with social entrepreneurship, claiming that civic entrepreneurship represents "both the spirit of change and the spirit of community" (Goldsmith, S., 2010).

Interestingly, the United Nations Sustainable Development Programme (UNEP), in a published series on civic entrepreneurship notes the issue of will, or entrepreneurial spirit, as motivation for those who champion sustainable development in practice (Mugione, F. and Farinelli, F., 2017). This sense of social value and change, Phillis et al (2008) contend, can emerge from people outside of the social entrepreneurship space. They redefine social innovation to mean: "a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions," claiming it "transcends sectors, levels of analysis, and methods to discover the processes – the strategies, tactics, and theories of change – that produce lasting impact" (Phillis, J.A., Deiglmeier, K. and Miller, D.T., 2008).

The idea that there is a window for change in the early childhood development sector is recognised by Shonkoff (2016) who calls this an "unprecedented...opportunity to catalyse a new era in early childhood policy and practice guided by science...driven by leadership that combines a strong sense of civic responsibility, an informed understanding of the positive

returns that can be generated by wise investment, and a willingness to explore new ideas" (Shonkoff, J.P., et al. 2016).

Into the mix has come a new kind of philanthropy, which also potentially creates diverse opportunities for the civil society sector. The idea of 'venture philanthropy' emerged strongly in the late seventies when the point was made in a Harvard Review those foundations should learn from the venture capital companies focusing their giving on impact rather than programmatic intentions (Letts, C.W., Ryan, W. and Grossman, A., 1997). This kind of thinking has brought new philanthropies into the charitable landscape (Keohane, G.L., 2013).

In South Africa, a *Mail & Guardian* (2013) article notes the rise of this kind of giving in the country. It cites pledges from businesspersons Cyril Ramaphosa and Patrice Motsepe who gave of their wealth to enable human development. OECD (2014) notes these moves are not without critics but goes on to recognise their potential "revolutionary power" (OECD., 2014).

2.7 Change Labs

> "A network provides a natural environment for experimentation and learning." (Bradach, J.L., 2003).

Westley et al. (2011) identify an explosion of interest in Change Labs as a means of finding solutions to complex or wicked problems, recognising they provide a space for "creative, cross sector and cross-disciplinary decision-making and innovation" (Westley, F., et al., 2011). By way of example, the Sustainable Food Lab "was launched with the purpose of making mainstream food systems more sustainable." Drawn into the lab were "leaders from more than sixty businesses, governments, farm groups and NGOs with this explicit focus" (Westley, F., et al., 2015, 2017).

In South Africa, a similar process was followed to initiate the Southern Africa Food Lab (SAFL) which sought to bring together diverse and ideologically opposed people from within the food system so that they could dialogue and act collectively (McLachlan, M. and Thorne, J., 2009; McLachlan, M., et al., 2015). The thinking, according to Freeth and Drimmie (2016), was for this group of influencers to "cast their eye toward the horizon of future possibilities…open their perspectives beyond often narrowly held views of current realities". The product of this process would be a "pot" of knowledge, insight and wisdom that could be harnessed for new solution making (Freeth, R. and Drimmie, S., 2016).

The process followed by in the Change Lab model is based on Adam Kahane of REOS Partners' model of complexity (Kahane, A., 2004), which calls for three layers of entanglement to be addressed in any solution-seeking endeavour: dynamic complexity, social complexity, and generative complexity. The argument is that problems manifest in these multiple layers, requiring an equally multi-layered problem-solving approach which is "systemic, participative and emergent" (Kolko, J., 2012).

Dynamic complexity (systemic)	Social complexity (participative)	Generative complexity (emergent)
Cause and effect are distant in time and space requiring a systemic approach and solution.	Many different and usually conflicting points of view and assumptions - the problem is not owned by a single entity demanding a participatory approach.	Old solutions don't work - the problem constantly changes and so is unpredictable requiring a creative approach.

Figure 2.5: Three types of complexity (Source: www.reospartners.org)

This approach to analysis is congruent with what is described in the literature as a wicked problem "that is difficult or impossible to solve; these "are problems that can be mitigated through the process of design, which is an intellectual approach that emphasises empathy, abductive reasoning and rapid prototyping" (Kolko, J., 2012). Multi-stakeholder partnerships have the potential, through these processes, to develop robust responses to these complexities. The Change Lab process, which has been tried successfully in several milieus has demonstrated its appropriateness for this kind of solution seeking (McLachlan, M., et al., 2015).

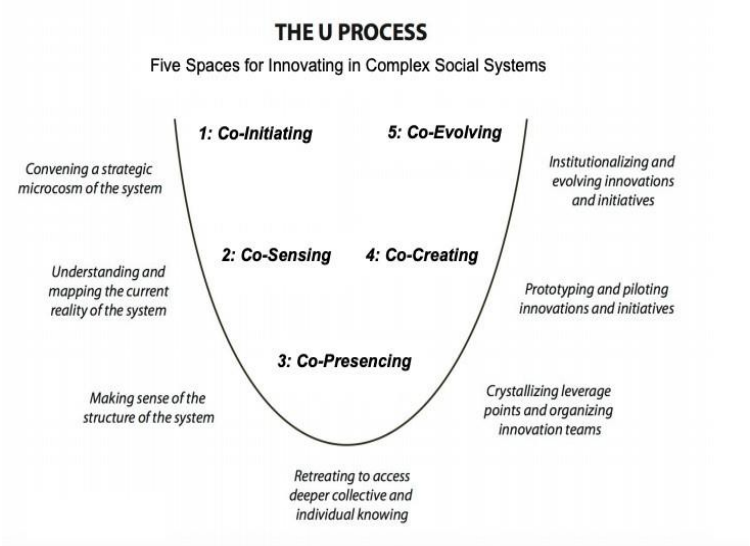

Figure 2.6: The U process model (Source: www.presencing.org/aboutus/theory-u)

Drawing on human-centred design and the thinking of Scharmer's Theory U model of "slowing down to understand" (Scharmer, C.O. and Kaufer, K., 2013), the Food Lab model (Fig 2.6) followed a step-by-step process that included framing the problem, designing prototype innovations and seeking solutions to be institutionalised (McLachlan, M., et al., 2015). The Reos Change Lab (2013) make the point that in the context of the Change Lab process, "these movements are both a way of mapping the Lab's activities while they also represent the capacities that participants develop and utilise during each phase of the Lab itself" (The Reos Change Lab., 2013).

The ECD landscape currently manifests multiple layers of complexity. The sector seems stuck in a quagmire, reprocessing the same challenges and not moving forward. Given the high level of interest in ECD in South Africa at the moment, there seems to be a window of opportunity for action. A Change Lab process offers a potential route to explore the current challenges and dynamics in the sector, harness potential for change, develop opportunities to collaborate, identify viable forward-looking solutions and innovative ways to strengthen sector offerings and scale up services for children. Perhaps the last word should be with Banks (2016) who claims that "innovation and entrepreneurship start with passion, so we need to focus more on that" (Drayton, B. and Gabriel, P., 2016).

2.8 Inclusive innovation

Foster and Heeks (2013) elaborate on an emergent idea going by a variety of names, each of which reflects a "different emphasis; inclusive innovation, pro-poor innovation, below-the-radar-innovation, bottom-of-the-pyramid innovation" noting that in common is a central concern with the development and provision of "goods and services for poor consumers" (Foster, C. and Heeks, R., 2013).

The vision for collaboration and so increased cohesion is well set out in the "old paradigm-new paradigm" diagram sourced from the World Economic Forum and shown in Figure 2.7, which recognises the reframing of relationships as key to the achievement of greater social impact and change, driven to some extent by the evolution to hybrid models of endeavour (Schwab, K. and Sala-i-Martín, X., 2016). Mashelkar (2012) uses the phrase "doing well by

doing good", expanding the concept to integrate the "creation of livelihood opportunities for excluded populations." He also makes the point "that together, research institutions, government, the private sector, NGOs and foundations can create an eco-system for inclusive innovation" (Mashelkar, R.A., 2012).

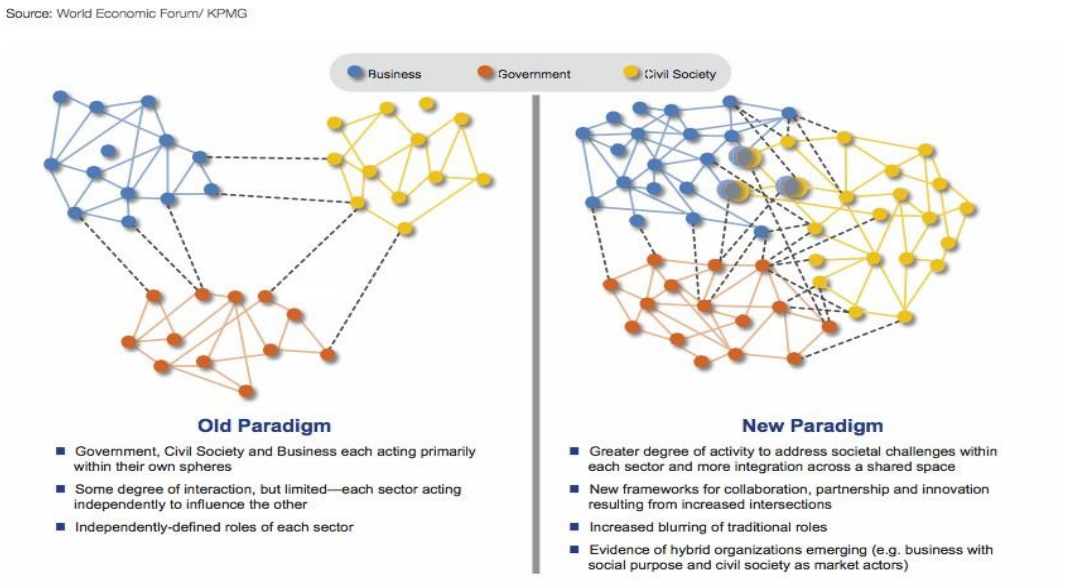

Figure 2.7: Old Paradigm - New Paradigm for Collaboration (Source: World Economic Forum KPMG)

The idea of pushing the boundaries to lead development changes such as these emerge as a strong theme in the literature on inclusive innovation, well summed up by Gupta who argues that we must "go beyond the boundaries of the conventional organisations, disciplines, sectors and pedagogies…to look for platforms that link creative but economically disadvantaged people to learn from sustainable solutions developed at grassroots globally" (Gupta, A.K., 2012).

Chapter Three
Research methodology

"Scholarship is a collective endeavour and writing a central ground for conversation within that collective." (Huff, A.S., 1999).

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter One, an overview of the current realities for young children in South Africa has been sketched, together with key insights into the geography of an inadequate and inequitable level of provision. This explanation was followed in Chapter Two by key observations guiding this research which emerged during my own professional experiences with a cross-section of early years stakeholders over a five-year period (Jamshed, 2014)

Despite growing opportunities to engage with a changing early-years landscape, the sector, and civil society organisations, have not made the necessary strides toward creating viable, robust providers of early-years services that successfully fill the many gaps in provision. In order to explore and better understand this perception, this has been problematised and set up as the research focus. A qualitative research methodology, focused on dialogue, will be set out in this chapter.

Huff (1999) notes that all of academic writing in scholarship is fundamentally an endeavour in conversation. Conversation or dialogue is pivotal to this piece of work. It underpins its conceptualisation, is integral to the methodology and it will be the tool used to shape the outcome (Huff, A.S., 1999).

3.2 Locating the self as a research instrument

Underpinning my approach to this study is a level of professional curiosity. The dilemma facing the early childhood sector is something that I have experienced in my work in the ECD sector in South Africa. This curiosity (sometimes confusion), my relationship with the ECD sector and specifically the key informants for this study, has had an important bearing on how I have accessed, collected, and interpreted the research data. In this chapter, I work with the idea of self and my own voice within the landscape I am exploring – recognising that my role as researcher is not neutral (Goldstein, A., 2003; Walshaw, M., 2010).

By being alive to my own voice and thoughtful about how this might play itself out in the data collection and analysis processes, I own my subjectivity, recognising that I am the central research instrument (Pezalla, A.E., et al., 2012). This is an awareness that enables me to bring a level of mindfulness to how I engage through the process, and so manage it more effectively (Ford, D.Y., et al., 2008). Rather than detract from the integrity of this study, this acknowledgement creates a conceptual lens for data gathering, providing context to the analysis and has the potential of ultimately strengthening its outcome (Kuzmanić, M., 2009; Mosselson, J., 2010).

It can be argued that adding my own 'reflexive' voice in this way to knowledge production increases the validity of the data (Goldstein, A., 2010) and makes me a better social scientist (Kusenbach, M., 2002), thereby rendering my work more 'truthful' (Gilbert, K., 2000). A further part of addressing validity and reliability is the design of the research approach (Hofisi, 2014), which in this case is a set of key informant interviews using an unstructured 'dialogue' type construct. Bringing thoughtfulness to a design process is part of ensuring its quality. As Kline (1999) argues, "the quality of everything we do desponds on the quality of the thinking we do first" (Kline, N., 1999).

The chosen methodology for this study is carefully outlined in this chapter, recognising that validity and rigor start here.

3.3 The dialogue interviews

> "A central purpose of an intensive interview is conceptual mapping"
> (Hochschild, J.L., 2009).

Qualitative research provides a platform for social inquiry. As a methodological approach, it embraces a number of methods which are mostly ways of gaining insight into the social realities of people and the groups to which they belong. These approaches provide tools that enable the exploration and interpretation of "the behaviour, perspectives, feelings and experiences of people and what lies at the core…It is also useful in the exploration of change or conflict" (Ford, D.Y., et al., 2008). Data gathered through qualitative means can be structured into an evidence base that goes beyond the confines of a set study to provide generalised insights, usable across "time and space" (Skovdal, M. and Cornish, F., 2015).

Interviews are a well-accepted tool for the collection of qualitative data. Also accepted is that interview styles and approaches need to be fit for purpose (Hofisi, C., et al., 2014). How they are designed, structured and implemented is the first step in ensuring research rigor. Different types of interview processes produce different kinds of data.

Unstructured or 'discovery' interviews can be a useful tool for generating qualitative data of depth (McLeod, S. A. 2014). When perceived as open-ended, a 'joint venture' between an interviewer and the interviewee, the 'dialogue or discourse', can be illuminative of a situation or circumstance, create meaning (Mishler, E.G., 1986) and allow for the construction of knowledge (Kuzmanić, M., 2009).

This kind of intensive interview process is consistent with a method used by REOS Partners (Lindop, H., 2015; McLachlan, M., 2013; Zubizarreta, R., 2013) referred to as dialogue interviews and defined as "in-depth conversations with concerned people throughout a complex system" (Kahane, A., 2008). Diverse 'stories' collected through dialogue interviews enable the construction of possibly unknown knowledge from diverse voices in the field, creating a platform for further exploration (Gustavsson, B. ed., 2007).

The validity of this style of interview is increased by the opportunities they create for the interviewer to probe for meaning and clarification, even allowing the interviewee to direct the interaction (McLeod, S. A. 2014). At the same time, as the interviewer asks these probing questions as part the dialogue interview, interviewees can be drawn into a thoughtful process about their own work and the political dynamics that impact its existence (Råheim, M., et al., 2016).

In this study, this method brought researcher and 'subject' together in meaningful dialogue. It was not just the researcher who had an interest in the outcome of the process or the power to direct the dialogue process – both saw this engagement as potentially beneficial. In a sense, the research method mirrored Kline's (1999) thinking on the work of leaders, to take time to think, listen with palpable respect and without interruption, ask incisive questions and allow thoughts and feelings to flow.

In this process, the interviewer was not just documenting people's ideas; the dialogue itself allowed for each interviewee to be thoughtful, to step away for a moment from their business

and to engage with something that was of fundamental concern to all of civil society working in ECD (Kline, N., 1999). In other words, the research method employed for this study was fit for its purpose. The method did not just harvest data to inform the Change Lab, but also gave stakeholders participating in the process an opportunity to reflect on their own work and role in the sector and begin thinking about what could change. The dialogue interview processes could thus be seen as instrumental in beginning the change management process.

A set of six cue cards were designed. Each card (Figure 3.1) outlined a key area of focus, probing the current dynamic in the sector and the idea that perhaps new thinking needed to be brought from within. The cards were used to facilitate this open dialogue. They offered context to the issues under exploration, touching on policy landscape, collaboration, the role of the state and the role of non-state actors. They were open-ended so that they could be used generatively to stimulate conversation and deeper thinking on the challenges described in Chapter One of this study (Whiting, L.S., 2008).

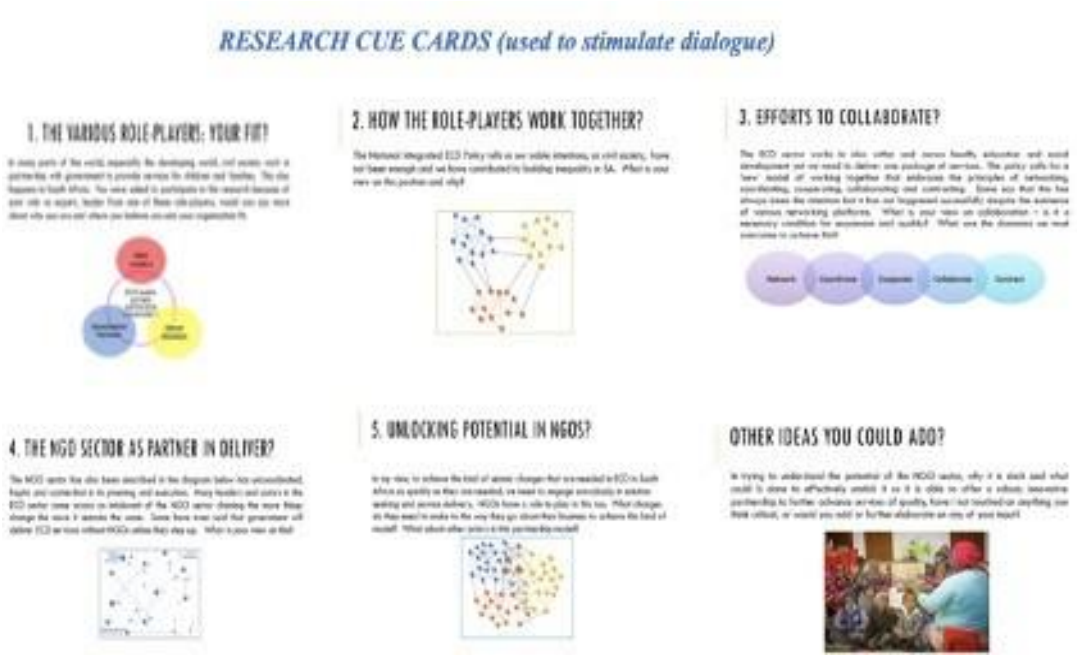

Figure 3.1: The set of 6 cue cards used to stimulate dialogue in the interview process (available in Appendix.)

While some interviews were conducted in person, to accommodate the participation of interviewees across the country and with busy schedules, just under half were facilitated online (over Skype). Interviews took between 45 and 60 minutes. Each was documented during the process and finalised immediately post-interview with additional reflections recorded in a

journal. Given the number of interviews and their length, none were fully transcribed.

3.4 How many research participants?

Debate rages across the literature about how many participants to interview in a qualitative research undertaking. It is commonly held that qualitative researchers engage fewer people but delve with more depth into their 'worlds' in the hope that this will generate a significant depth of understanding of a particular issue or set of issues. Sampling in qualitative research is largely purposive (Baker, S.E., et al., 2012; Curry, L.A., et al., 2009).

There is no set calculation like those used in statistically valid quantitative research initiatives. There are even studies that have had as few as one subject (Black, L., 2012). To shed light on the 'how many is enough' question, Thompson (2010) analysed one hundred studies that used grounded theory as a methodological framework. The outcome pointed to twenty-five as a good number, but to thirty as even better for the formulation of concepts, categories, and properties of the phenomena under scrutiny (Mason, M., 2010; Thomson, S.B., 2010).

Aspects to be considered alongside this question of number, with direct bearing toward the achievement of saturation and so to a study's validity, are the scope of the question, the experience of the interviewer (Becker, 2012) and the expertise/knowledge of the interviewees (Baker, S., et al, 2012; Thomson, S., 2010). The more homogenous and expert a target audience, the sooner data saturation is achieved, as participants are more likely to share a discourse and common knowledge that is likely to overlap in significant ways (Adler, P. & Adler, P., 2012; Bryman, A.,2012; Newman, J., 1957).

This study drew together experts engaged in networks of ECD practitioners in South Africa, individuals who each would be considered a leader in the field. As the researcher conducting the interviews, I possess years of experience working in the field, nationally and internationally, and so could manage the issues under discussion with competence. These two factors allowed for a quick entry into meaningful discourse with strong connections to the issues under consideration. In the end, thirty key informants were interviewed, all with expertise in ECD, meeting both the requirement for number and for depth of knowledge.

3.5 Who were the research participants?

Across the country there are those who know and understand the issues facing the non-state sector in early childhood development. These are people who, on a daily basis, work within early childhood organisations, academic institutions and networks. They are "knowledgeable about the topic…able to reflect and provide detailed experience and are willing to talk" (Whiting, L.S., 2008.).

A cluster of this cohort of stakeholders, involved in leadership roles from across civil society (who would therefore be in touch with a broader grouping of the ECD sector), were invited to participate in this study as key informants. The intention here was to bring into the research dialogue 'knowledgeable agents', as Gioia (2013) refers to them, who are able to clarify their thinking, articulate their perceptions and tell the stories of their strategic engagement in ECD in South Africa in a way that warranted inclusion in a study such as this (Gioia, D., et al., 2013).

The ECD civil society sector in South Africa is relatively small (Biersteker, L. and Picken P., 2013). While there is a common focus on early years and a shared knowledge about the issues, in many respects the sector is not homogenous. There are multiple ways of identifying or configu ring groups within and across it depending on geography, focus and position (power). For the purposes of this research, participants were drawn from four 'clusters' within this ecosystem. Each cluster played a slightly different role (Table 3.2 below).

1	leaders of early childhood civil society networks	4 women		4
2	leaders from the donor investor sector	4 women	3 men	7
3	leading academics and thought leaders	5 women	2 men	7
4	leaders of early childhood civil society organisations	8 women	4 men	12

Table 3.2 Key research participants

While largely similar in their broader experience of the sector and focus, the group offered some diversity important to this study. Their start-point for engaging in ECD was different, either as implementer, researcher and thinker or investor and strategic partner. Drawing representation from across these groups within the same sector allowed for important differences in perspective on the same issues to emerge (Baker, S., et al, 2012).

The number of participants in each cluster was roughly consistent with the size of their 'constituency' (admittedly also with some cross-over between groups; for example, a donor/philanthropic investor could also be a thought leader and a network leader might also be a director of an organisation). Within the clusters, individuals were selected on the basis of position, knowledge, experience and connection to the wider ECD sector. All had at some point interacted with the interviewer professionally. Requests for the interview were well received. Participants were interested in the topic and some shared similar concerns about the perceived failure of the sector to make rapid progress despite the apparent opportunities.

Most asked what would come after the research and were interested in having a follow-up discussion on the findings. This is consistent with the ideas expressed by Heiko and Marianne (2008), that people have an inherent interest in finding answers to the challenges they face but that they want to solve these things themselves: "where formulaic responses are imported or imposed from the outside, they meet resistance and often fail". This level of interest was important to the level of engagement in the interview process and also to the momentum necessary for establishing a Change Lab based on the research outcomes (Heiko, R. and Marianne, K., 2008).

The decision to focus on the non-state sector was important to the overall purpose of this study and the potential for the ECD change lab. Based on years of working in the sector I was aware of a level of mistrust between state and non-state actors as well as a frequently touted criticism of ECD leaders and NGOs for their seeming inability to bring greater coherence to a fragmented and struggling sector. It seemed that what the non-state sector would benefit from was; the opportunity and space to strengthen relationships with each other, to think about what they could offer collectively and collaboratively, spend time organising themselves and then to engage the state with increased coherence and strength. A second step would be to bring government actors to the table.

3.6 Data analysis

> "...qualitative data analysis tends to be an ongoing and iterative process, implying that data collection, processing, analysis and reporting are intertwined, and not necessarily a successive process" (Nieuwenhuis, J., 2007).

Qualitative data analysis involves a range of processes, that take us from what we have collected and into some form of explanation or understanding of the issue we have been investigating. It can be described as the process of systematising and bringing shape as well as meaning to a body of collected research information. Often messy and time consuming, it is not linear in nature and involves the search for meaning in what has been gathered. For many researchers, a stark division between the collection of data and its analysis in qualitative studies is somewhat superficial (Schurink, E., 2009).

The collection and analysis of narratives through a series of interview processes ebb and flow into each other (Atkins, L. and Wallace, S., 2012; Tuckman, B.W. and Harper, B.E., 2012), with the researcher already beginning to build a sense of connections and themes as they "get in there and get (their)...hands dirty" (Gioia, D., et al, 2013).

While the analysis for this study is largely rooted in a grounded theory methodology, which is congruent with the data collection method used and also appropriate to a qualitative study, some of the collected data was further analysed using quantitative methods. The process and rationale for the qualitative approach and the combining of quantitative analysis are outlined below.

Also important to the overall analysis was the time in which the interviews and analysis was conducted in 2018/2019. The study took place while the sector was still struggling to figure out how to implement the Integrated ECD Policy (2015). Political interest in ECD was expanding both within the country and internationally. Finding mechanisms for scale to deliver effective integrated services was high on the agenda for government and civil society alike.

3.6.1 Using a grounded theory method

Dialogue interviews do not set out to capture a single truth that exists out there. Rather, they allow the researcher to listen carefully for voices and ideas, ensuring they are 'translated' with as much accuracy and depth as possible. This makes the interpretation and analysis of interview transcripts probably the most complex and crucial part of the dialogue interview process, as a number of peoples' voices are brought into connection with each other to reveal patterns, synchronicity, discords and even surprises (Starks, H. and Brown Trinidad, S., 2007).

The concept of the researcher as the 'reliable reporter' (Gioia, D. A. 2004) in this instance was

tricky since the researcher is also part of the sector, and so not neutral in the dialogue that unfolded. Being transparent about this, applying extra rigour to the recording of interviews and making sure that the process of analysis was especially rigorous was critical to ensuring that any preconceived ideas on my part were quietened as much as possible in the process (Seale, C., 1999).

Bringing meticulousness to the analysis process was central to making the study 'believable', for myself and for others. The literature provides pointers as to what it takes to imbue this kind of thoroughness and consistency into a study without dumbing down the openness and creative endeavour that underpins a generative open-ended data gathering process such as was undertaken for this research. Gioia (2013) suggests a holistic approach to inductive concept development in which the researcher systematically organises data into clusters in a 1st and then a 2nd order of categories to facilitate the assembly of information into a structured form for further analysis.

The first layer is relatively 'unfiltered', allowing for an almost organic flow where ideas and meanings are recorded as lists, categories, or key ideas (Gioia, D., et al., 2013). What emerges can be an "explosion...a myriad of informant terms, codes, and categories...easily...50 to 100", potentially leaving the researcher with a sense of being lost, which, according to Gioia, is an important part of the process, claiming "you gotta get lost before you can get found" (Gioia, D., et al., 2004). The 2nd ordering of this emerging data involves reducing the groupings to a more convenient 25 to 30 ideas, categories, or labels.

Throughout this process, the researcher, as the "knowledgeable agent" should be asking themselves, "What's going on here?" (Gioia, D., et al., 2013). This cluster of 2nd order ideas are then further classified into aggregate clusters allowing for the emergence of a "data structure" that will inform the narrative telling of the research outcomes using the literature and the authentic voices of those who participated in the creation of this chronicle.

The use of a grounded theory methodology is not fixed or rigid. At its core is a level of flexibility that allows for its use in innovative design and thinking. Primarily, it offers a compelling level of rigour associated with scientific research, allowing for ideas to be crystallised and explained as part of the dynamic interrelationship between emergent themes, ideas and concepts that are gathered through a data- or evidence- led process of analysis (Gioia

et al, 2013), the core elements of which were applied to my research and are summarised in the table that follows.

Process	Key features
1. Research Design	• Qualitative design • Deep dialogue interviews • Recognise and use personal reflection
2. Data Collection	• Mapping to identify key informants • Deep listening with emphasis on emergent to frame, connect and understand; seeking evidence to illuminate • Detailed recording of key informant interviews supported by notes and post interview journal
3. Data Analysis and Structuring	• Using axial coding break down core themes in a 2nd order data reduction process, using excel workbook • Data reduction to 1st order – capture it all, an explosion of thinking • Data reduction to 2nd order – distil categories, seek similarities and differences to reduce categories • Ask myself "what's going on here?" • Do the themes suggest concepts that will help to describe what is happening in theoretical terms? • Build a data structure using the literature. • Combine quantitative analysis using the following core questions asked in the dialogue interviews: ❖ Is the sector stuck? ❖ Is collaboration necessary to expansion? ❖ How many think governments can deliver ECD without civil society? ❖ Do NGOs have a role to play in advancing service? (dominant ideas on this)
4. Grounded Theory Articulation	• Demonstrate dynamic relationship between data sets – the author refers to this as 'Shazzam'. • Arrive at a core statement about the early childhood sector which provides an analytical understanding of where the sector is and how/why it is stuck • This thinking is 'fed' back into the sector, firstly via research participants with a view to generating a second, wider sector conversation

Table 3.1: Outline of the research approach using core features of Goia's Grounded Theory

3.6.2 Quantitising the data

Some researchers argue that qualitative data cannot be quantified. However, there are a growing number who argue that this is not just doable, it is also desirable, potentially adding a richness of insights to analysis (Lilford, R. and Braunholtz, D., 2003; Mertens, D., 2005; Srnka, K. and Koeszegi, S., 2007). A basis for this argument is put forward by Sandelowski et al. (2009), that data is the product of a researcher, "an abstracted version of a phenomena...qualitative and quantitative data are not so much different kinds of data as these data are experiences formed into, for example, words or numbers, respectively" (Sandelowski, M., et al., 2009).

As such, data is something that is constructed rather than given; decisions can thus be made about how best to represent it. Interpreting qualitative data with a quantitative lens or combining the approaches gives additional nuance to the data analysis process, moving the researcher closer to being able to create a general overall statement about the challenges facing the ECD sector. By summarising these two approaches in the table below, the crossovers, or ways in which the one can strengthen the other, become more accessible.

	Qualitative	Quantitative
Purpose	To describe a situation	Describes magnitude
Format	No predetermined response categories	Predetermined response categories
Data	In-depth explanatory data from a small sample	Wide breadth of data from a large statistically representative sample
Analysis	Draws out patterns from concepts and insights	Tests hypothesis, uses data to support conclusions
Result	Illustrative, explanatory and individual that gives meaning to experience and views	Numerical aggregation in summaries, allow for comparison and generalisation
Sampling	Theoretical	Statistical

Table 3.2: Basic differences between qualitative and quantitative research (Sunday, 2015)

'Quantitising' is the term that has been coined to describe the process of translating qualitative data into quantifiable terms (Driscoll, D., et al, 2007). By way of example, amongst a number of described approaches to achieve this quantification of data gathered by open-ended interview-type processes is by enumerating the frequency of themes within a sample, the percentage of themes associated with a given category of respondent, or the percentage of people selecting specific themes. In all these cases, the quantitised data can be statistically presented and used to strengthen analysis by combining it with the qualitative insights (Onwuegbuzie, A., and Teddlie, T., 2003).

Interviewees for this research study were homogenous in that they all came from the non- state grouping of the early childhood development sector in South Africa. They were diverse in that they did not all come from the same 'part' of this sector. Some were donors, some academics, others were NGO network leaders, and a significant portion were NGO leaders.
Each group could conceivably have had differences in perception on some of the key questions being raised. Understanding the nuance of these positions by quantifying specific responses within the whole group and across the group could provide important clues to describing the landscape and some of the challenges currently being experienced.

While the cue cards were designed to be open-ended, embedded within the questions were some that could be answered with a simple 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe'. In addition, there were some that involved listing key ideas on how issues could be responded to. Replies to both these questions can be quantified to deepen understanding elaborated on through the qualitative analysis process (Driscoll, D., et al., 2007; Sandelowski, M., et al., 2009).

This data was coded, classified, and categorised using either EXCEL to establish a numerical value to the responses to these specific questions. This data was then combined with that of the qualitative analysis, adding more depth to the overall problem analysis and enriching the statement that emerges.

3.7 Generating the evidence for the start-up of a Change Lab through the research

Change Labs, just like scientific labs, focus on solving pressing or 'wicked' problems. They are social because they bring people together, ideally from diverse backgrounds, to think, problem-solve and act together. They are experimental because they create the space and opportunity for the testing and prototyping of ideas to tackle these social challenges. They are systemic because they focus on addressing the root causes of the problem rather than just tackling symptoms or surface issues (Hassan, Z., 2014).

For this research the interview process was conceptualised as part of the formation of the Change Lab. Through this dialogue processes, participants explored with the researcher what they thought the key issues were confronting the sector and how they could potentially address these. The data gathered and analysed through this process will enable the framing of the 'complex problem' facing the ECD sector in South Africa in such a way that it can be used to ignite a larger conversation in the non-state sector through a Change Lab process. The research reported here will provide the evidence on which the start-up can be based.

It is suggested that this start-up phase is facilitated through a two staged process:

- firstly, by providing feedback to the interview participants through a webinar (as requested by many during the interview stage). This will allow for further triangulation of the findings.
- based on the outcome of the first step, the second step toward the activation of the Change Lab can be taken. A statement drawn from the research findings will be drafted to inform the move toward a bigger dialogue through the Change Lab process.

This is similar to the processes used by organisations like REOS partners. For example, the South African Food Lab process included an emphasis on "emergence rather than predetermined outcomes, creating spaces for personal reflection" (Freeth, R. and Drimie, S., 2016).

A Change Lab is a living laboratory drawing its life from processes of collective enquiry, problem framing and solution seeking. It creates a platform for questioning, dialogue, and storytelling to deepen insight, understanding and empathy. REOS Partners explain that Labs begin with the recognition that problems are symptoms; "they bring together people from across the system to seek root causes and then collaborate on devising and testing initiatives aimed at addressing those causes. The real work happens out in the "lab" of the real world, over time", they claim (Kahane, A., 2013).

The nature of the Change Lab process paves the way for the use of a qualitative framework, given that these are, at heart, about dialogue and story over a period of time. This is especially true at start-up as the nature of the problem at hand is unpacked and explored with a diverse coalition of leaders and thinkers. The process is not 'rigid', and it does not begin with the specific outcomes; it is by definition emergent, "creating spaces for personal refection and authentic communication, and shared experiences of the system 'on the ground'" (Freeth, R. and Drimie, S., 2016).

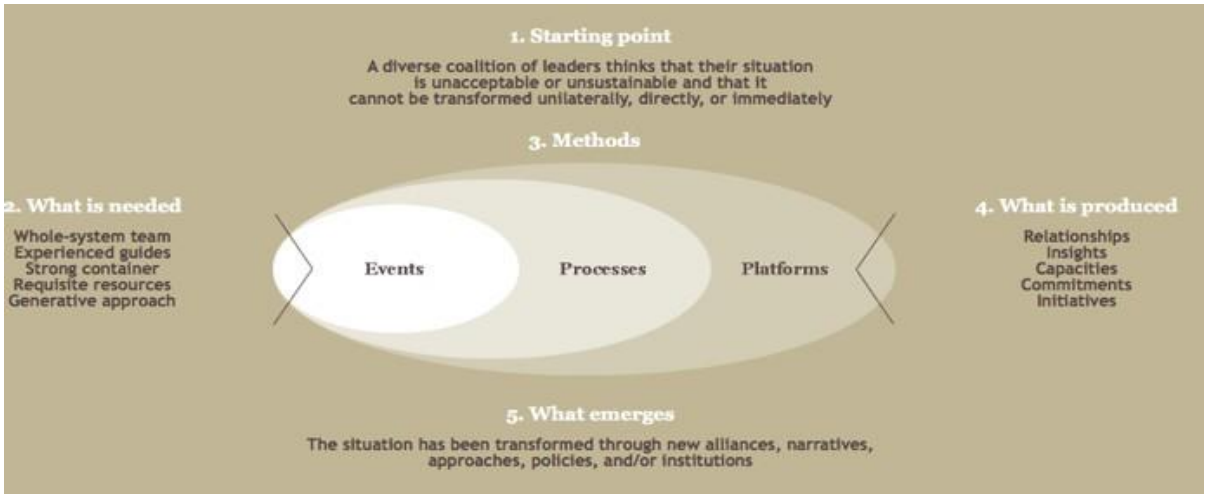

Figure 3.2: A model of the Change Lab process outlining the 5 key steps (Source: Freeth and Drimie, 2016)

This is an emergent model that allows for creativity, rich critique, dialogue and problem-solving. The research method employed in the data collection to frame this problem is congruent with the Change Lab process and will add legitimacy to its start-up.

3.8 Conclusion

Civil society organisations are key partners to the provision of services for young children in South Africa. Given their current form, they are unable to offer a robust solution to satisfy the need, and indeed show little movement in this direction. Change Labs are a long-term process that offer an opportunity to ignite a stuck sector and begin a process of deliberate action towards greater collaboration. Change Labs also offer an opportunity for the design of more sustainable models of intervention that are not donor-dependent but explore innovative practices and enterprise development.

This research process will form an integral part of the lab process. It will open dialogue and define the problem in a new way for the NGO sector, that currently plays an almost observer-like status in its own 'demise'. Through the deep dialogue process, I have been able to amplify and connect voices from within the ECD sector to each other in a new way, to forge pathways to new thinking and provide an opportunity for re-clarifying strategic purpose.

Bearing in mind Change Labs are not short-term innovations, the intention is to contribute to the start of the process with the particular intention of seeking sustainable ways of working with the NGO sector within the ECD context to strengthen and develop the capabilities that allow momentum for longer-term impact.

Defining the problem and opening its possibilities can be a first step toward igniting an ECD Change Lab and drawing support and interest for the steps that will follow. The ability of Change Labs to unfreeze and open new channels for innovation and problem-solving are well documented and referred to in my literature review. It is not envisaged that such a lab be a solution; rather that it will be a platform and impetus to "harness human creativity and innovation potential in order to tip interlinked social and ecological systems in the direction of greater resilience and sustainability" (Westley, F., et al., 2017).

Chapter Four
Organising and Coding the Data

> "We have scientific and technical labs for solving our most difficult scientific and technical challenges. We need social labs to solve our most pressing social challenges." (Hassan, Z., 2014).

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four, the grounded theory (GT) method is applied to the analysis of the data captured through the dialogue interviews with the thirty ECD non-state stakeholders. The 5-step analysis process elaborated in the flow diagram below (Figure 4.1), as previously outlined in Chapter Three, allowed the researcher to gather insight into their current experiences, perspectives, dynamics, challenges, and solutions. It is in this way that one begins to develop a grounded theory on why the non-state ECD sector seems to be on a hamster wheel, from which the potential for unlocking its capacity and capabilities can be explored.

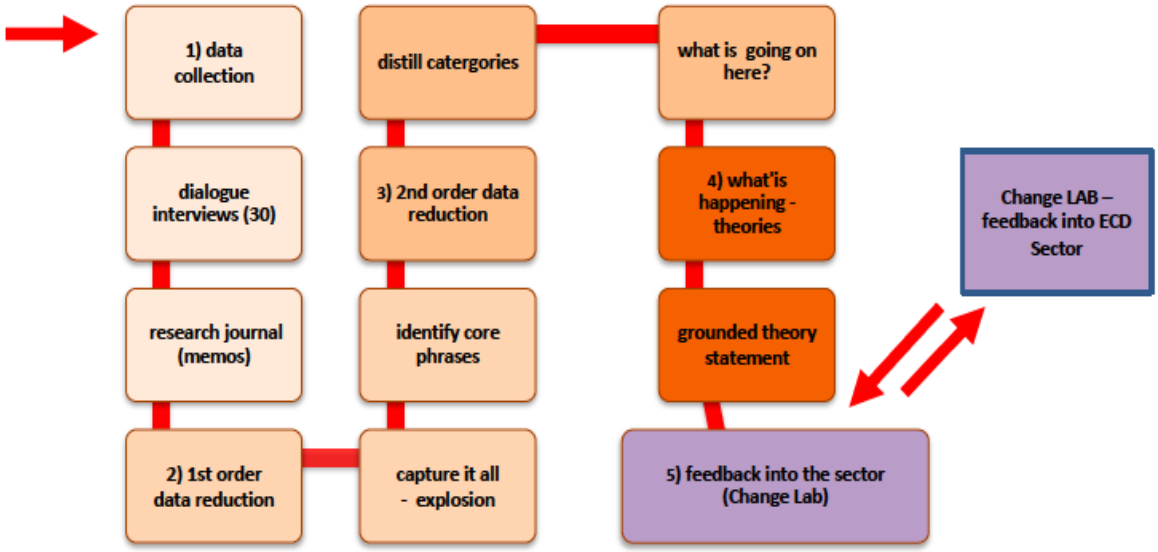

Figure 4.1: Flow chart elaborating each step in the data analysis for this study

As a method, grounded theory (GT) enables research rigour in both the collection and the analysis of data. As a scheme for organising and understanding data, it is not a linear practice, nor should its use be overly rigid. Its creators argue for its application to be 'rule of thumb' rather than unbending adherence (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Its strength, proponents of the

theory claim, lies in the focus on the data collected from the subjects of the study, the assumption being that they, better than any framework imposed from outside, can impact their experiences, definitions and interpretations with most meaning and accuracy (Glaser, B., 2004; Strauss, A.L. and Corbin, J. 1998).

The researcher in this data collection and analysis process embodies certain qualities that are seen to be enabling of the data-collection process including receptiveness, reciprocity, authenticity, and credibility (Cuban, S. and Spiliopoulos, G., 2010). Inflexibility in approach could, it is argued, constitute a threat to this analytic progression, stifling the emergent, creative processes associated with grounded theory, and so impact negatively on the research outcome.

As such, the grounded theory model is a good approach to exploratory studies, as in the case of this research study which focusses on illuminating and unravelling the complex challenges facing the civil society early childhood development sector in South Africa (De Búrca, S. and McLoughlin, D., 1996; Cuban, S. and Spiliopoulos, G., 2010; Dey, I., 1999; Dey, I., et al, 2004; Charmaz, C., 2006, 2008, 2009; Henwood, K.L. and Pidgeon, N.F., 2006; Martin, P.Y. and Turner, B.A., 1986; Turner, B.A., 1983).

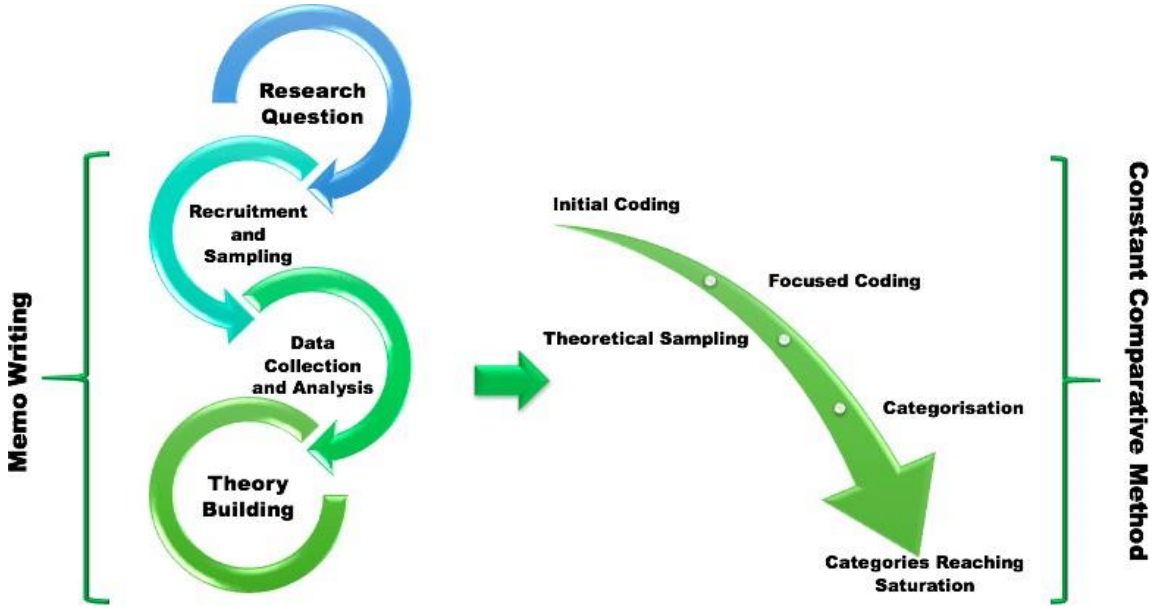

Figure 4.2: Detailed outline of the grounded theory process (Source: Uibariu A, 2018)

Outlined in the diagram above (Figure 4.2) are the core stages of the process explored in this chapter. These stages include the framing of the research question, the recruitment of key informants data collection and analysis and theory building. Memo-writing constitutes a parallel accompanying activity to allow reflection on each of these steps and integrate learnings

into the process. The coding and constant comparative steps are further elaborated in the following sections. .

4.2 Identifying research participants

The South African National Integrated ECD Policy (2015) frames ECD as holistic and sets out parameters for collaboration across duty-bearing departments and agencies, including partnership with the non-state sector. It brings the promise of reduced fragmentation for the ECD sector and robust partnerships to support implementation. Early childhood development spans the period from conception until children begin primary schooling. For young children to survive and thrive during this period of life, they need to receive the benefit of a compressive package of services that include health and nutrition, social protection, stimulation and learning, water and sanitation.

In most countries, the leading government departments responsible for ECD service- provision include Departments of Health, Departments of Education and Departments of Social Development. Traditionally these departments do not work together; their services are siloed and delivered within their discreet systems, usually disconnected from each other (e.g., clinics provide basic healthcare while social development provides for protection, nutrition and parenting). Without effective coordination across sectors to manage the complexities of the multi-sectoral nature of ECD, the sector and services it offers are often fragmented, inefficient and ineffective. To facilitate the convergence of services, sectors, agencies, and stakeholders should ideally find ways of working together to ensure the seamless provision of ECD services to children.

There is, however, no centralised department for ECD in South Africa, nor is there a distinct, single sector. What the policy offers is a mechanism through which to achieve cross-sector collaboration to achieve the implementation of a comprehensive package of early childhood services (nutrition, health, social protection, and early learning). This includes setting up a multi-sectoral, whole-of-government structure at national, provincial and district levels, to govern the sector and roll out implementation.

The policy envisages that through this structure, over thirty departments will work together in various ways to ensure universal access for all of South Africa’s children, ensuring that they survive and thrive. The Department of Social Development has been the primary duty-bearer for services for children between 0 and 4 years old, before moving over to the Department of Basic Education for Grade R.

A more recent development is the mandating of the Department of Basic Education, traditionally responsible for teacher development and Grade R provision for children from 5, to take the lead role for preschool education generally, and to introduce two years of mandatory pre-schooling, (Harrison, D., 2019). The politics of this function change are not straightforward and will have to be resolved carefully between the two agencies.

To complicate matters further, South Africa's ECD system is emergent. The means of provision across the sector is not well-defined. Some systems are stronger or more efficient than others and funding issues are not fully resolved, with weak cross-sector collaboration. In addition, there are gaps in the technical and human resource capacity needed to build the system and deliver ECD services.

While the civil society sector for ECD is small (as noted earlier in this study) a large portion of the necessary ECD skill and expertise is located here. Government agencies responsible for these services have for many years contracted NGOs to implement programmes for children in an attempt to fill gaps. This, however, has not been sufficiently systematic, and has not yet led to the establishment of a pipeline of services to achieve geographic coverage and reach every child (Le Mottee, S., 2016).

These civil society partners (organisations and individuals) have set up and run programmes within their areas of function. Mostly, what has been seen as ECD in South Africa relates to the services offered to support early learning, parenting and nutrition. In recent years as commitments have grown to embrace a more holistic and science-based agenda for children, traditional boundaries, and understandings of the agencies responsible for early childhood services have begun to shift. This has included an acknowledgement that health services such as maternal health and wellbeing are essential to children's early development and so are part of a basket of services that fall under the ECD umbrella (Biersteker, L. and Picken, P., 2014; Rudolph, N., 1996).

The following diagram (Figure 4.3) highlights the key components of an ECD package. In South Africa, ECD has been split along these traditional lines; the policy advocates a more integrated approach, but the sector is still strongly siloed, with little cross sector engagement, particularly at ground level. Given these divisions across sectors, it made sense to zoom in on stakeholders involved in one 'segment' of the early childhood landscape as a way of ensuring strong data comparability and articulation across and between the research participants.

These participants would also provide insights into cross sector collaboration and the challenges with achieving a greater level of cooperation at implementation level. To achieve this, participants were drawn from one segment of the ECD sector, those engaged mostly in early learning and stimulation (ECCE), many of whom also provided some services related to nutrition.

Figure 4.3: For this research study, the focus was on early learning (ECCE) (Source: UNICEF, 2016)

Mapping to select participants for the study included the four clusters outlined in Chapter Three (donors, NGOs, ECD networks and academics/thought leaders). Leaders from each of these groups were identified and invited to participate in the study. The request to participants made clear that the intention was to explore, with the researcher, factors that in their experience presented barriers to growth, expansion, and collaboration, with a view to identifying the potential to shift thinking and action through a down-the-line dialogue process in the form of an ECD Change Lab. The grounded theory emerging from the data-collection interviews was to be used to frame the start-up of this Change Lab.

Of the thirty people approached to participate in the study, all were interested and responded positively to the idea. All participants requested follow-up in the form of feedback, possibly through a webinar, once the study was completed. As a first step in the research process, this level of interest was important. It signaled engagement in the dialogue interviews and commitment to the content of the conversations. The selection of interviewees and their interest in the study was in itself the first step toward the outcome of activating the Change

Lab (Cuban, S. and Spiliopoulos, G., 2010).

4.3 Conducting and Recording the Interviews

> "The research process is an interactive one between interviewers and interviewees as dyadic relationships through discourse are developed" (Qu, S.Q. and Dumay, J., 2011).

Outlined in Chapter Three on method were the set of 'cue cards' which were used to stimulate discussion and lead into more open-ended dialogue. Encouraging a bit of 'rambling' was important to gaining insight into what individual key informants might regard as important or relevant (Bryman and Bell 2015). As a researcher who had played a role in the ECD sector for some years, I knew all key informants, which made it easy to begin the interviews with a minute or two of general conversation on the subject as a way of settling into the process (Kumar, K., 1989, Kusenbach, M., 2002).

Given that dialogue interviews with key informants are designed to be generative, effectively a two-way engagement (more of a conversation), this rapport was important to the data collection processes. It was clear to me that both interviewee and the interviewer, by engaging in the 'dialogue' process, had entered a shared 'meaning-making' conversation, where some ideas stimulated deeper thinking and engagement.

When using dialogue or key informant conversations to find or elaborate answers to challenges, this is an important feature of the interview dynamic. This thinking is consistent with grounded theory and Thornberg's (2012) reference to 'theoretical playfulness' whereby the qualitative researcher must, in their work, bring together both the critical reasoning and the creative thinking mind in order to move beyond "descriptive cataloguing" to "theorizing imaginatively" (Gioia, D.A., Corley, K.G. and Hamilton, A.L., 2013; Thornberg, R., 2012).

During the interviews it was not uncommon for the remarks made by a respondent to generate new ideas and insight in the middle of the interview and for this to lead to a change in direction or pace. The skill and agility of the researcher in a context such as this, together with a knowledge of the field, can be critical to maintaining the flow of the dialogue and, simultaneously, data quality and reliability. As noted by Qu and Dumay (2011), good key informant interviews rely on the researcher being able to maintain the flow of the interviewee's narrative, keeping the engagement positive and avoiding bias (Qu, S.Q. and Dumay, J., 2011).

The cue cards were shared with interviewees in advance, so they were able to give some thought to the interview beforehand and also as a courtesy to busy professionals who were generously giving of their time to share their knowledge and insights. The added advantage was that it allowed for an easy lead into the conversations on the interview day. Many of the key informants, being experts in some or other way in the field of ECD where they were actively engaged, held well-formed ideas about the issues under the spotlight which made the dialogues flow easily and increased their richness.

Documenting the flow of conversation can be tricky and needs to be managed from the outset, particularly as a step to keep any researcher bias in check. Everything said by the key informant was recorded during the interviews. This allowed for not just big ideas to be captured, but also those seemingly unimportant ideas or throw-away thoughts that had the potential to be a 'brainwave' during the analysis phase (Gustavsson, B. ed., 2007; Jamshed, S., 2014).

For these interviews, the dialogues were recorded and transcribed immediately after each interview. Consistent with good practices in this research approach, extensive notes were taken during the interviews to document ideas in the moment, to highlight new thinking and also capture observed details such as non-verbal responses, context and so on. Without detailed notes, comments are unduly summarised, details are forgotten, and important subtleties can be lost.

Again, top of mind during this kind of documenting must be the interviewer's bias or misinterpretation. Addressing this through data triangulation is covered later in this chapter. Data transcription was not verbatim, but rather took the form of detailed notetaking and quotation nuggets from the key informants. Given the nature of this study, the interview process and the number of key informants, 'chit-chat' was not recorded (Bailey, J., 2008; Halcomb, E.J. and Davidson, P.M., 2006; Oliver, D. G., et al., 2005).

All of the interview data, including transcriptions, were captured in Word documents. Folders were created for subcategories of key informants, i.e. donors and investors (D), network leaders (N), academics and experts or thought leaders (A/E), as well as NGO (NGO) leadership.

4.4 Capturing Insights in a Research Journal

As has been clarified thus far, the goal of grounded theory is to uncover a theory from within the gathered evidence. The theory offers a number of guidelines and procedures (as set out in Chapter Three) which allow for the generation of categories from the data itself (Hutchinson, S. et al., 1994; Wainwright, S.P., 1994). It is noted that this process of data generation actually begins during the data collection process (Strauss, A. and Corbin, J., 1998).

After each interview, any striking ideas, thoughts, and reflections on the process were recorded in a research journal. This included going back and making connections to ideas already recorded in previous interviews in an attempt to trace connections. Recording and keeping such a research journal provides an important first step in the process of data collection and analysis. It can be argued that it underpins the successful generation of grounded theory (Cuban, S. and Spiliopoulos, G., 2010).

Documenting not just the interviews themselves but ideas, context and refining thinking through the process in this way can shape the researcher's questions, emerging understanding and next steps. What emerges through this documenting process from each interview can be taken into subsequent interview rounds to be tested, interrogated and so can impact further on what the process is able to reveal (Hutchinson, S., et al., 1984; Wainwright, S., 1994).

Pidgeon and Henwood (1997) argue that these processes of documenting and reflecting are "deeply influenced by the researcher's assumptions, values, sampling decisions, analytic technique, interpretation of context..." As a researcher, engaged in this sector, looking for answers to critical questions, something acknowledged throughout this dissertation, I found the assumptions that I had begun with were challenged. I heard things I had not anticipated and began to form a more nuanced, holistic picture of the early childhood sector in South Africa and the views of its leading thinkers (Pidgeon, N. and Henwood, K., 1997). For example, a key shift was from seeing civil society organisations (NGOs) as the source of the difficulties in expanding services and the role of the state in the big picture of provision.

Also interesting was an emerging perspective on the role of the 'donor' community in the changing ECD landscape. The stuckness, that I had associated with the non-response of the NGO sector to perceived opportunities, changed. Ideas about the multiple players, a complexity of dynamics, leadership concerns and 'multiple dysfunctions' across the sector began to materialize.

These converging ideas were documented in a research journal. Documenting in this way allowed for new threads or ideas to be explored as they surfaced, going back to the idea of the merging of the creative and the critical. This approach is consistent with grounded theory and the work of Thornberg (2012), who explains his own process of switching between unfolding data and prior knowledge as an interplay between multiple factors including comparison, many points of view and questions like "what is going on here, and "does what I think/see fit the reality of the data?" (Charmaz, K., 2006, 2008, 2009; Gioia, D., et al., 2013; Thornberg, R., 2012).

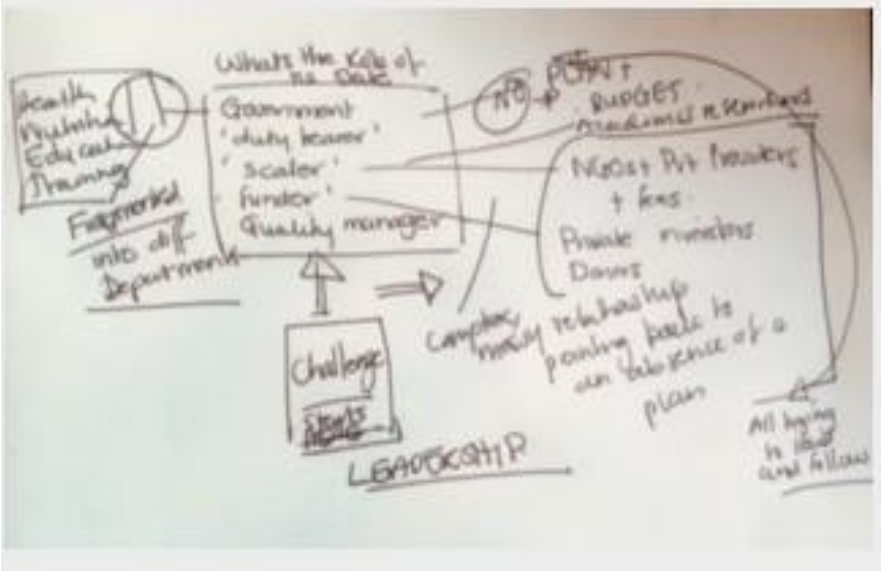

Figure 4.4: 'Memo' or note in research journal as ideas gained from interviews began to shift perspective on the challenges faced in the sector

Gradually, through this back-and-forth action, interview after interview, common strands in thinking and cross articulation between voices revealed themselves. Some of this led to new exploration in the literature and new areas of interest in the data-collection process. As the researcher I was also, through this engagement in interpreting data, a co-constructor of potential solutions (Glaser, B., 2004; Thornberg, R., 2012).

As emphasised already in this chapter, this approach is consistent with grounded theory which takes a position that theory emerges not just at the end with analysis, but throughout the collection exercise, placing the researcher consistently in conversation with the research participants and the collected data. The cycle is one in which the researcher collects data on

the topic from knowledgeable agents in the field and then in the process of analysis, fills in gaps based on their own insights, position, interaction, and knowledge, continually looping back in the interview processes to bring these multiple voices into conversation with each other to further explore and verify thinking and analysis.

Given the amount of data generated through thirty interviews, this reflective writing process was important. It allowed for both an immersion in the data and for meaning making to begin from the outset, as it should in grounded theory. This process of illumination led smoothly into the next step - the 1st order classification (Charmaz, K., 2006, 2008, 2009; Mills, J., et al, 2006; Orlikowski, W.J., 1993. Ravenswood, K., 2011; Thornberg, R., 2012).

4.5 Using Excel and Word to structure data

> "No software can actually analyse qualitative data; only the human mind can do that," (Faherty, V., 2009).

For the analysis phase, different data packages for the analysis of qualitative data and the quantisising thereof were looked at. Given the size of the study (thirty informants), the quantity of data, and that all that was needed was for this data to be sorted and structured, it was decided that computer-assisted software offered a level of sophistication that was unnecessary (Blair, E., 2015; Faherty, V.E., 2009; Ose, S.O., 2016).

Instead, what was opted for was the use of the standard, easily available tools, Microsoft Word and Excel. This is a choice that is well supported by numerous researchers who have demonstrated the feasibility of using these general-purpose options as robust instruments for data coding and analysis (Amozurrutia, J. and Servós, C., 2011; La Pelle, N., 2004; Ryan, G.W., 2004). How this process unfolded is outlined in the following two sections on 1st and 2nd order inquiry, coding, and analysis. These tools were also used for quantisising of the data, a feature explained and explored later in this chapter.

4.6 1st Order data analysis – taking a view across the data

Bree and Gallagher (2016) remind us that keeping an open mind during the data analysis process, in order to "welcome and accept alternative views", must persist throughout the

analysis process, even as ideas are coded into themes and synthesised (Bree, R.T. and Gallagher, G., 2016). Tabulating the data in Word documents was the first step in connecting with the full body of voices collated through the interviews. Setting it out this way was the first step in coding.

This 1st order analysis was a relatively 'unfiltered' process which allowed for an almost organic flow of ideas and meanings, recorded as lists, categories, or key insights. This step, in grounded theory, is noted as potentially the most complex, with the researcher often experiencing a sort of cognitive dissonance or 'sense of being lost', which is not difficult with thirty interview transcripts (Gioia, D., 2004).

Finding one's way through the interview transcripts and emerging ideas is probably the most time-consuming, complex – but crucial – part of the analysis, as a number of voices are compared and brought into synch to reveal patterns, discords and even surprises. At this point, the analysis is both hierarchical and recursive as the researcher categorises data, keeping the theorising at bay until relationships between the data begin to show themselves (Morse, J. Morse and Field, P., 1995; Starks, H. and Brown Trinidad, S., 2007).

During this first stage of coding, four Excel spreadsheets were opened; NGO leaders (NGO), network leaders (N), donor/investors (D) and academicals/experts (A/E). These separations of the data were firstly to make the amount of data manageable, and also to begin to identify patterns within and across these groups. All the text from each interview, captured in Word, was first pasted into the top-left cell of a sheet in an Excel workbook. This was repeated for each interview across the four groupings and labelled accordingly. In this way, the text from the interviews was transformed into a suitable format for coding and sorting (Ose, S.O., 2016).

Patterns eventually began to emerge across the data allowing for it to be clustered (coded) into conceptual or thematically similar areas. To a large extent, and maybe understandably given the flow of the dialogue interviews, much of what emerged in the classification or ordering process followed the logic of the dialogue interview tool. The anticipated data explosion came, but not in the naming of categories as suggested in the literature (Figure 4.5). Rather, in the number and range of ideas expressed by key informants about this easily elaborated cluster of categories (Gioia, D., 2004; Strauss, A. and Corbin, J., 1998).

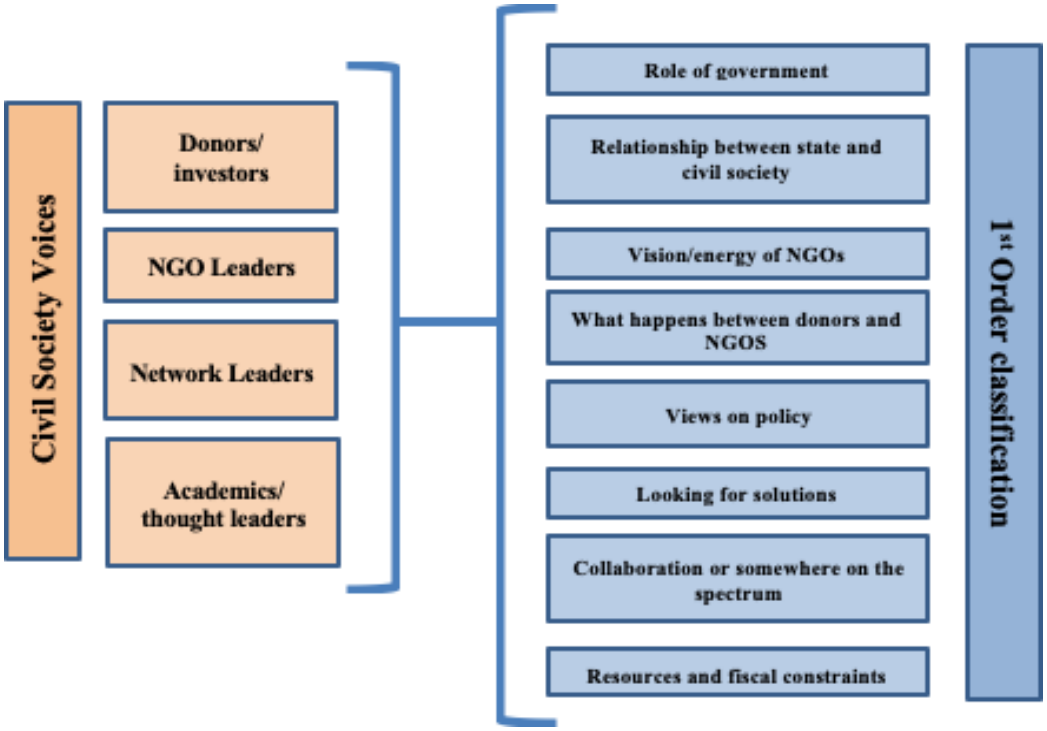

Figure 4.5: Eight thematic areas that emerged consistently across the cluster of civil society stakeholders interviewed

These insights and views on the ECD sector were captured in the pages of Excel spreadsheets. What the data showed was an underlying coherence to the ECD narrative amongst key informants, and that from the outset participants and researcher were working from a similar, if not common, foundation. These 'informant- centric' themes or codes provided the logical transition to the 2nd order break down and clustering (Gioia, D., et al., 2012).

4.7 2nd Order data analysis – diving into the data

The 2nd order analysis involves a deep dive into the 'exploded data', looking for common words, themes or ideas – ultimately, seeking the 'shazaam' or 'aha' moment talked about in the literature. Through this iterative process, the researcher moves between the data and analysis. Here I looked not just to the data itself but also to my own understanding and experience in the field of ECD, constantly curious, asking, as "knowledgeable agent", "what's going on here?" (Charmaz, K., 2006, 2008, 2009; Gioia, D., et al., 2013).

This practice is consistent with the grounded theory approach described by Charmaz (Charmaz, K., 2006, 2008, 2009), resonating most consistently with the practice of Thornberg (2010) who adds the idea of constructivism to the methodology. In this evolution of the grounded theory method the researcher, who is familiar with the field and its stakeholders, is concerned mostly

with the construction of the interpretation rather than being wholly focused on the discovery process (Dey, I., 2007; Dunne, C., 2011).

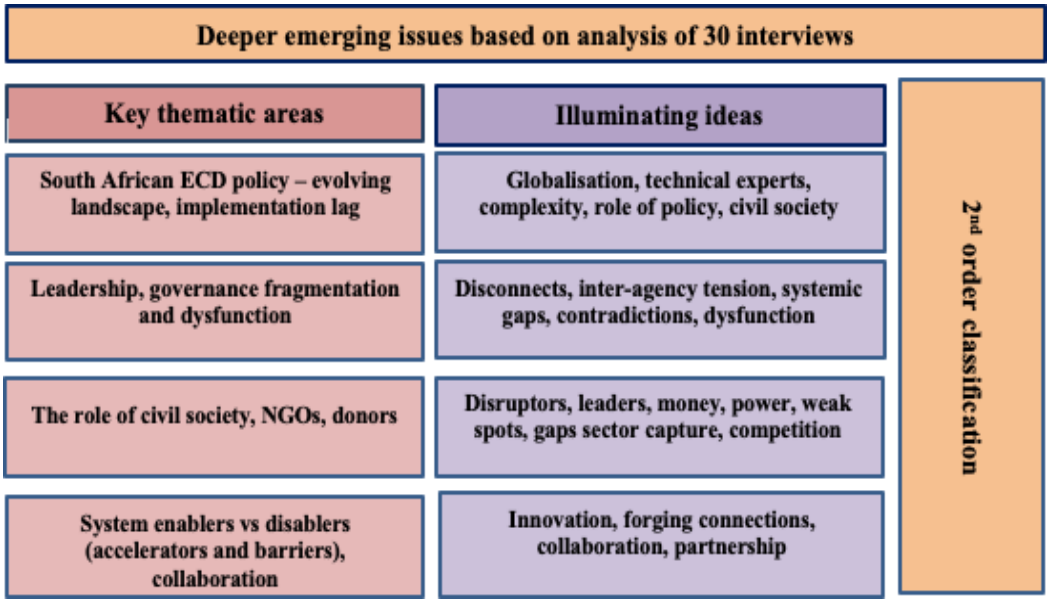

Figure 4.6: Emerging thematic and illuminating ideas based on the data analysi

During the 2nd order clustering, the 1st order cluster of ideas was aggregated into constellations. This was done by the re-evaluation concepts, categories, and themes (Strauss, A. and Corbin, J., 1998). A 'data structure' began to reveal itself, drawing ideas from the body of literature and the authentic voices of those who participated in the study. This shape that revealed itself provided the pathway for the research narrative.

Looking for clues across the spreadsheets did not reduce categories so much as show deeper connections between ideas, and so new sets of labels or hypotheses about the experiences of these sector stakeholders became apparent. Words, phrases or recurring issues in the transcripts were identified and clustered around themes that seemed to sum up the text. These were further tabulated into a Word document within each category. Brief sentences and quotations were clustered under these concepts, largely focused on trying to better understand how participants related to the context in which they were currently working (Cuban, S. and Spiliopoulos, G., 2010).

This clustering process drew on my existing knowledge as an ECD expert and researcher. I recognised that my voice with its assumptions and perspectives would (unavoidably) contribute to shaping the theory that emerged from this piece of work. Again, this approach is consistent with the social constructionist version of grounded theory that argues that theories do not emerge, but that the researcher constructs or builds them (Charmaz, K., 1990).

The approach to the data collection, the questions asked, and even how they are phrased can influence and shape the findings (Pidgeon, N. and Henwood, K., 1997). My own professional experience and voice from the ECD field undoubtedly influenced how data was sorted, ordered, and eventually the shape it took. Acknowledging this from the outset, and working with the data reflexively, addresses some of the criticisms of the grounded theory method which argue that its concern with uncovering social processes limits its relevance to more phenomenological research such as this (Charmaz, K., 2008, 2009).

4.8 Quantitising the data

Finally, some of the data that lent itself to this kind of treatment was quantitised (Driscoll, D.L., et al., 2007). Given the responsibility of the researcher to not go beyond the data, but rather to act as witness (Charmaz, K., 1990) and to present a slice of the experience and dynamics under study, looking at research findings in multiple ways to ensure its validity seemed prudent.

The research participants, as already noted in Chapter Three, could be seen as largely homogenous in that they all work in ECD as part of the non-state sector, yet diverse in that they come from different groupings within this part of the sector, donors, academics, network leaders and NGOs. These participants also hold different views on the dynamics in the field. To triangulate data and better understand the intersection of ideas between these groups within the different themes, data that could be was quantitised and integrated as a feature of the analysis process (Bazeley, P., 2009.; Fetters, M.D., et al., 2013).

Four statements, which would enable the researcher to "count" responses relating to the themes in the 2nd order analysis were developed:

- the policy environment has enabled the ECD sector to realise its objectives;
- the government is the leader of the ECD sector;

- NGOs have a contribution to make in the ECD sector
- collaboration across the sector is feasible and desirable.

Counting how many shared a particular view or understanding within each group and how many across each question provided an extra layer of understanding to the study, enriching the analysis. This process involved working through the data clusters in the spreadsheets and capturing the responses ‘yes’ or ‘no’, with qualitative insights captured alongside, into an Excel workbook. Using Excel, the data could then be visualised into pie charts and percentages.

4.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the processes used to capture, explore, and code the data have been described. Of particular interest was the use of a mixed approach which included the translation of qualitative data into quantifiable material. This included a number of steps which allowed for the clustering of data into key thematic areas, as well as the triangulation of data findings. This has been in preparation for further analysis in the chapters that follow in which the key themes that emerged will be picked up and explored in more depth.

Chapter Five
Does policy create a sufficiently enabling environment for civil society action in the ECD sector?

"Policy for young children in South Africa provides much to celebrate...Early Childhood Development (ECD) has slowly gained legitimacy during the 20 years of democratic rule (Rudolph, N., 2017).

5.1 Introduction

A robust policy environment to support the implementation of a multisectoral approach to ECD is recognised globally as a necessary enabler of universalising access. More and more countries have been persuaded to this way of thinking, seeking ways to strengthen their policy environments as a necessary step to expanding their ECD services and improving child development outcomes. The international literature on ECD systems acknowledges the complexity of policymaking in this field. Given that young children's growth and development is a continuum, during this time of immense sensitivity and potential they need access to multiple services, provided by different agencies simultaneously (National Research Council, 2012).

Figure 5.1: Summary of the SABER Policy Goals and Policy Levers which outline key areas of action to be taken to successfully transform ECD systems (Source: www.saber.worldbank.org)

To better assess and enable policy development in this challenging landscape, the World Bank Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) (Figure 5.1) motivates for policymakers to set three important goals towards successful policy realisation:

- establishing an enabling environment;
- implementing widely; and

- monitoring and quality assurance.

Neuman and Devercelli (2013) argue that "together, these goals form a coherent system that address the constraints to achieving effective ECD progress at national level" (Neuman, M. and Devercelli, A., 2013). Well-shaped policies are evidence-based, providing a roadmap for implementation which recognises and defines the role of key stakeholders. Achieving policy goals is often tough; there is a real difference between creating a policy and its implementation (Attanasio, O., et al., 2016).

SABER provides a useful framework within which to analyse the discussions with key informants on the National Integrated ECD Policy (2015) and the extent to which it has been enabling of the sector. Key considerations here are how participants believe the newly developed policy is, or could be, an accelerator of access to universal services of quality and their justification for their position.

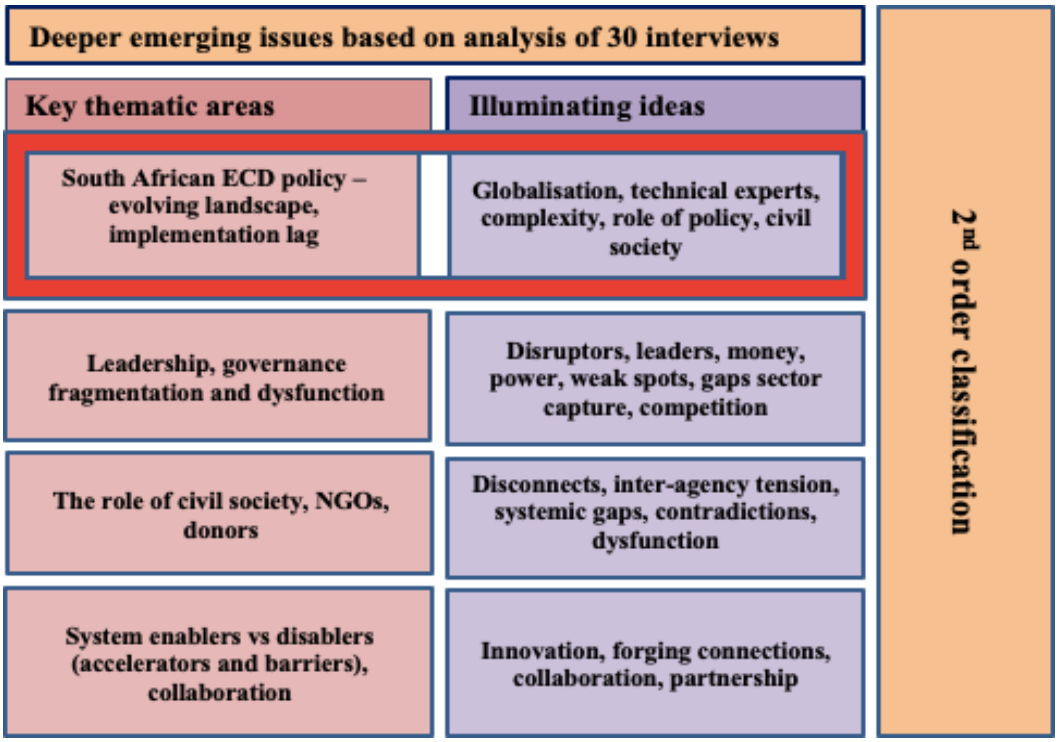

Figure 5.2: Key thematic areas and illuminating ideas that emerged from the data to be explored in the chapters that follow in this study

As set out above (Figure 5.2), important insights on the drafting of this policy and its impact on the sector and complexity were raised from the analysis of the interviews with key non-state experts and practitioners. In this chapter, these ideas, together with the extent to which the

policy is widely implemented as an enabler of expansion, are further explored.

5.2 The fast-changing policy landscape for ECD in South Africa

South Africa's National Development Plan Vision 2030 (2012) acknowledges the role that ECD can play in achieving the country's shared goals for socio-economic advancement, with a particular emphasis on improved health and education. This commitment to the development and wellbeing of young children has been carried through various policies and commitments since 1994. Emphasis has been placed on overcoming the inequality and poverty legacies of apartheid. A central premise of the policy landscape has been (and still is) that the care and upbringing of young children is the primary responsibility of parents and caregivers, while the state is pivotal to ensuring the universalisation of access to quality ECD, as a public good (Mbarathi, N., Et al. 2016).

As understanding of the science of early ECD expanded, political will expanded. By 2001, the collection of policies, laws and programmes relevant to ECD had expanded to over thirty (Richter, L.M., et al, 2019). In 2004, the social cluster was mandated by the state to design an integrated plan for ECD. The budget for the sector was increased and a specific focus on ECD included in the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). In addition to this was the naming of ECD as an Apex priority by the president in 2008 and again in 2009. These advances were strong indications of a level of political prioritisation of the development needs of young children (Davids, M., et al. 2015). The National Development Plan Vision 2030 (2012) takes this further, acknowledging ECD as central to the achievement of the country's shared goals for socioeconomic advancement (Richter, L., et al. 2012).

5.3 Global frameworks and the national policy discourse

South Africa is signatory to a number of regional and international treaties which carry ECD obligations, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Education for All, as well as the Millennium Development Goals. While these legislative and programme advances were happening at national level, there were numerous global developments unfolding simultaneously, including a significant push for ECD by influential institutions like UNICEF, the WHO and the World Bank (which took a strong position on the human capital benefits of investing early) (Clark, H., et al. 2020, Gomez, J.C., 2009).

The synchronicity between the global discourse and the early years narrative in South Africa is clear. Ideas pushed by the growing science of early development echo across our national instruments. These include the economic argument of return on investment, the human capital start-point, the rights of the child to development and ECD as a means to increased equality by levelling the playing field (Heckman, J., et al., 2006; Shonkoff, J., et al. 2000).

Indeed, many South African experts, academics, bureaucrats, and political actors participated in, and led, events where these messages were explored and promoted. We can assert that the political commitments from the South African government to strengthening ECD were reinforced by this growing global consensus that early childhood constituted the best social investment by any country and provided a route to improved child outcomes and greater education efficiencies (Biersteker, L., et al. 2016, Davids, M., et al. 2015).

5.4 South African ECD policy processes outsourced to technical experts

In 2012, a Diagnostic Review of the ECD sector in South Africa was commissioned by the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation in the Presidency and the Inter-Departmental Steering Committee for ECD (Richter, L., et al. 2012). The review assessed the status of ECD in the country, including the role of the state, elaborating on the contextual issues impacting children's early development. The review also drew attention to the availability of services, challenges, gaps and opportunities to ensure South Africa's youngest children have the best start in life. It covered topics such as human resource development, intersectoral collaborating, funding and cost-effectiveness. The purpose of the study was to steer an evidence-based policy process for ECD in South Africa (Davids, M., Et al. 2015).

By 2013, the drafting of the South African National Integrated ECD Policy (NIECDP) had been commissioned. The drafting process was led by the same group of civil society technical experts brought together under the leadership of the HSRC, who undertook the diagnostic review. While the team worked with the responsible state departments, it is interesting to note that no government representative was actually part of the technical drafting team.

Atmore (2018) makes an important observation in this regard:

> "Stakeholders provided intellectual and technical input and the ECD policy thinking

did not come from government as the policy-making expertise lay outside of government. When an ECD policy team was set up, it was invariably civil society, through the non-profits, that took the lead since individuals in the ECD NPO sector had the expertise and competence to be part of policy teams, and not government officials".

The policy drafting process included written input as well as nine consultations in each province, culminating in a national consultation process. The policy was approved by cabinet in 2015 (Atmore, E. 2018; Davids, M., Et al. 2015).

Key informants interviewed for this study had mixed ideas about the usefulness of the policy and how successful it was as a tool to accelerate advances in the ECD sector.

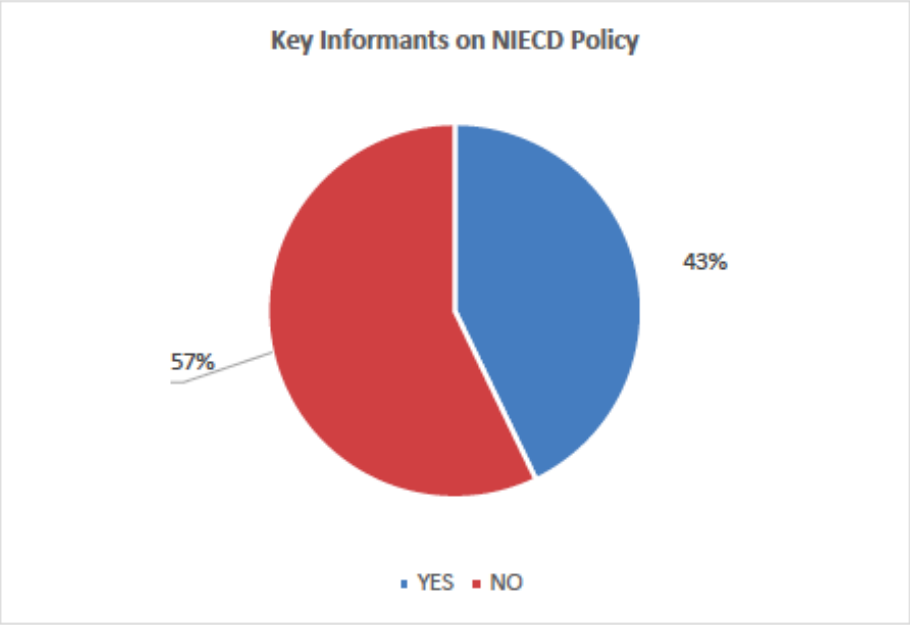

Table 5.1: Key Informant Views on the Integrated ECD Policy

Only 43% of key informants for this study held the view that the policy provided a clear turning point for ECD in South Africa, while 57% had reservations. Most were of the view that it had definitely been an important marker but, going back to the World Bank SABER framework, it had yet to be implemented widely and the policy levers to make this happen – such as strong intersectoral coordination and sufficient finances to unlock programmes and realise equity – remained a challenge. The reservations and concerns raised were critiques of the policy itself, some noting that the drafting process had been a problem that may have contributed to problems in the take-up of the policy and so to its implementation. These ideas are further

explored in what follows.

5.5 Adopting an integrated approach adds complexity to policy realisation

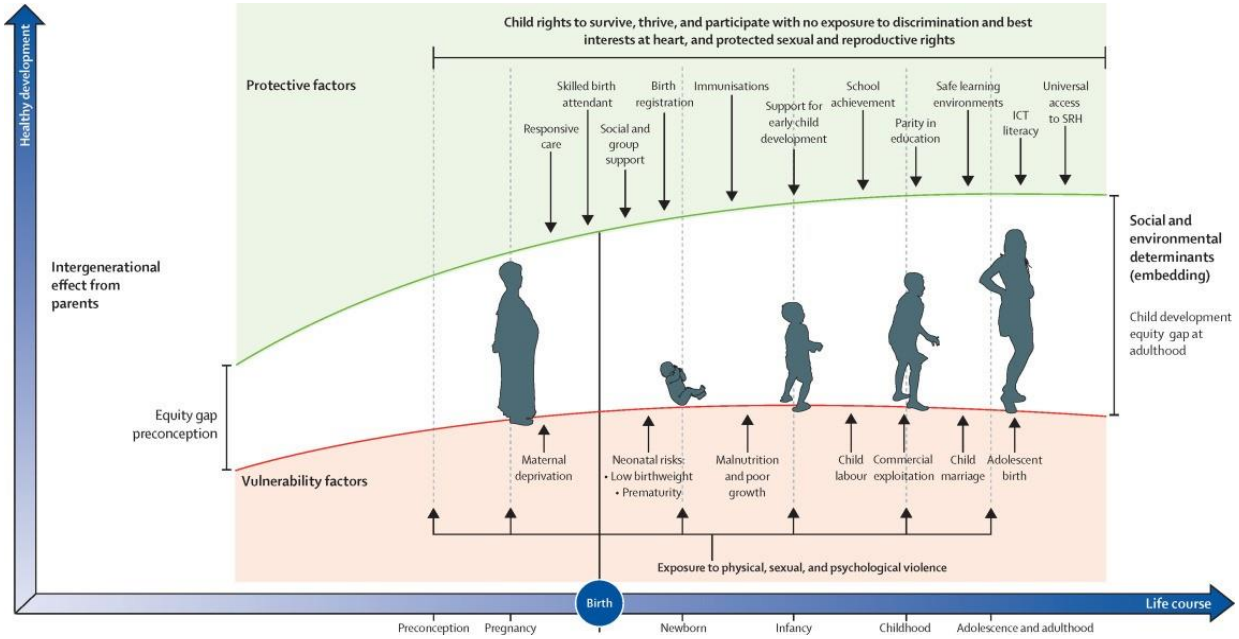

Figure 5.4: Early childhood development is optimized through a continuum of care and support across the ages and stages the early years (Source: WHO)

ECD is a dynamic process of development, requiring a multi-sectoral response that provides for the multiple needs of young children as they develop from foetus to infant, and to young child during the early years (Woodhead, M., 2014). This diagram (Figure 5.4) highlights the ages and stages of early childhood development, emphasising the key points of intervention along that continuum to ensure optimal development (Lancet, 2020).

As noted already in this thesis, the implementation of this full package of provisions calls for high levels of coordination across government agencies. This 'whole-of-government' response includes activating multiple public agencies to move away from traditional siloed ways of working based on a shared vision and commitment to early childhood development (Gasper, M., 2010; Worzala, M., et al., 2012). For the ECD sector, implementation relies on a "coherent national vision of child wellbeing...to ensure aligned institutional frameworks and coordination mechanisms across ministries and sectors," reinforced by meaningful political support and strong leadership (Clark, H., Et al. 2020).

South Africa's National Integrated ECD Policy aims for service integration by ensuring "the

provision of comprehensive, universally available and equitable ECD services" (RSA, 2015) across these stages of development. It outlines a comprehensive package of services including: "Health care and nutrition; Social protection; Parental support; Opportunities for learning and stimulation; National public early childhood development communications; Water, sanitation, refuse removal and energy sources; Food security; and Play facilities, sport and culture" (RSA, 2015). This vision for ECD is consistent with the model put forward already; an approach which enjoys endorsements of significant actors on the global stage, including the World Bank Group, the World Health Organisation, UNICEF, and UNESCO.

The National Integrated ECD policy sets out clear goals and clarifies roles and responsibilities to some extent, but it is a long and complicated document which does not give explicit guidance on key enablers like human resourcing, financing, and cross sector implementation. Key informants in this study expressed concern, especially about the complexity of the policy, recognising it could constitute a barrier to implementation.

Academic 1 "…the policy is too long – it's hard to navigate and a hindrance to success."

Evidence from various international studies point to the role of a central coordinating structure as a way of addressing this complexity. Those responsible for drafting the policy noted that without such a dedicated body of some sort, policy implementation would be challenging. They put forward a strong argument for the establishment of a governance structure tasked with oversight of the policy coordination and implementation across sectors and agencies (Richter, L., 2013).

It is striking that the policy aims for 'integration' as implied in its title, yet there is reportedly an extraordinary level of resistance from within government departments to putting in place a strong administrative platform dedicated to this role. Various actors in the ECD sector still argue for such a body, claiming that its absence has contributed to poor implementation of the NIECD and so to slow progress toward the attainment of ECD priorities.

Key informants in the interview process, two of whom were part of the policy drafting team, felt the absence of this ECD agency constituted a serious barrier to policy realisation, with one arguing that it would perpetuate inequality.

> **Donor 4** "No coordinating body to bridge the gap...that there were different providers offering different services of different quality inevitably led to inequity for sure...can see how this had a negative effect...but not intentionally."

What the policy offers is a detailed and complex proposal for a government led mechanism to support a coordinated whole-of-government approach elaborated on below (Figure 5.5).
This body, comprising ministers at the National level, is tasked with the management, coordination and monitoring of ECD vertically across sectors, and horizontally, linking the spheres of government and civil society.

Mechanisms for the coordination, monitoring and oversight of policy delivery to ensure seamless planning and implementation at national, provincial and local government level including the involvement of the non-governmental sector.
Government establishes a National Inter-Ministerial Committee on Early Childhood Development.
A National Inter-Departmental Committee for Early Childhood Development with members and coopted members from across government departments to support the inter-ministerial committee is established.
The necessary leadership, management and implementation capacity and structures across primary duty bearing departments and agencies across the three spheres of government will be appropriately constructed within each duty bearing department. The purpose is to strengthen capacities and to enable effective coordination where necessary to ensure effective delivery across the ages and stages.

DOH to enable delivery of health and nutrition and early learning and parenting support for the first 1000 days through the integration of the relevant services into facility based and outreach (home based) programmes	**DSD to enable fulfilment, accountability and responsibility of centre and non-centre based services covering parenting support, nutrition and early learning from birth until the year before schooling**	**DBE enable fulfilment of and accountability and responsibility for the management and implementation of an early learning and development curriculum as well as training of practitioners**	**Municipalities responsible for the provision of infrastructure for registration, support, resourcing, monitoring of ECD services and where capacity exists, provision of direct or contracted services**

The Minister of Social Development will, through the National Inter-Departmental Committee for Early Childhood Development, establish the South African Inter-Sectoral Forum for ECD. This body will serve as a national platform for engagement between the Government and the non-governmental sector involved in ECD service delivery in SA. The forum will meet at least twice a year and is established via a mutually accepted TOR.

Figure 5.5: Inter-sectoral structure set up to coordinate and implement ECD by the 2015 policy (Source: Le Motte, S, 2016)

Downstream, the structure is replicated across departments as the Inter-Departmental Committee focused primarily on coordinating action across the Department of Basic Education, The Department of Health, and the Department of Social Development. The Department of Social Development is tasked with the establishment of a National ECD Forum to provide a platform for collaboration between the state and civil society (Atmore., E, 2018; Le Mottee., S. 2015, Woodhead., M. 2014).

By 2019, in the State of the Nation address, the President announced a significant change to this structure, indicating that Government would migrate the responsibility for early learning (therefore for early childhood development (ECD) centres) from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the Department of Basic Education (DBE). For some this was interpreted as a strong indication that the DSD as the lead agency had not fulfilled its mandate (Tshikululu Trust, 2019).

Having worked in the ECD sector for many years at systems level, I am mindful that some of what gets in the way of progress in ECD is not only the complex nature of what needs to be done and the need for work across sectors, but the politics within the system itself. Internal issues within ministries, from national down to municipal level, often present barriers to those who work to drive this agenda. Issues of 'malicious' compliance can be used to stymie any progress and when the system requires high levels of cross-sectoral engagement, vertically and horizontally, the potential for this increase (Mautjana, M.H. and Makombe, G., 2014).

To achieve meaningful policy implementation, navigation of the multifaceted nature of ECD and the complexity of an often-fragmented implementation landscape with various political challenges playing out across sectors, would have to be piloted. Moving a system beyond articulation on paper as a policy framework is tricky in itself; when the policy leaves gaps that need to be covered by collaborative endeavour within an already struggling sector it can be a serious hinderance. Although there is currently not much global evidence of successful ECD policy implementation around the world, some of what is known does point to reducing complexity, putting in place a central implementation structure and facilitating robust communication across and within the system (Britto, P.R., et Al. 2014; Neuman, M. and Devercelli, A., 2013).

5.6 Government establishes terms for collaboration with civil society

The civil society sector has long been a significant contributor to ECD in South Africa. As one key informant noted, this role is long standing. The civil society sector had:

> **A/E2** "played the critical role of putting ECD on the map in the early days of democracy".

As government has taken on more responsibility for ECD in the country, the role of civil society actors has been unsettled with some experiencing this as alienation. Atmore (2018) supports this view, asserting that civil society organisations have been 'side-lined' from policy processes and substantially weakened by government's growing role. One key informant noted that these changes already started post-1994 with NGO sector leaders taking up government posts, leaving a fragile civil society sector that has yet to fully recover:

> **Academic 1** "stripped of many of its people who went off to government and was stripped of its knowledge and experience...the NGO sector did not jump to life...(instead) it was immediately weakened."

A role for civil society organisations is defined in the National Integrated ECD policy, which acknowledges their contribution over the years and recognises the potential for collaboration and partnership. The policy clarifies that the relationship should be based on a "balanced approach, which ensures that the role of non-government service providers (for-profit and non-profit) is recognised and utilised to complement the fulfilment of its early childhood development commitments" (RSA, 2015).

It makes clear that Government will oversee all services and actions taken by the non-state sector, which will be expected to comply with the limits, obligations and responsibilities prescribed by law. The policy also takes note of the fragmented nature of the civil society sector and recognises its contribution to the inequitable provision of services and so to the perpetuation of inequality in South Africa.
What it does not do is provide a roadmap for a way out of these challenges (RSA, 2015).

A number of key informants expressed some reservation about the intention or use of the policy, highlighting a level that could best be described as 'mistrust 'or 'uncertainty'. For

example, one said:

> **NGO 8** "I have noticed over time that government has attempted to reduce civil society into more of a rubber stamp that they can use to promote something and then they say we have consulted..."

The Inter-Sectoral Forum for Early Childhood Development (as described earlier) was established as the body through which the state and civil society could communicate, coordinate efforts, collaborate across programmes and partner where appropriate (RSA, 2015). Some key informants argued that it could be construed as a measure to control access and communication between government departments and civil society organisations working in ECD. Rather than build trust in these relationships, it seemed to also have the potential to undermine relationships and even deepen mistrust. One informant asserted that:

> **Network2** "Government is not accustomed to working collaboratively so there is nothing at the moment that forces them to change the way they operate. As the civil society committee, we have engaged with them, they have been open to our influence, but government still operates on the basis that we have not set the meeting dates so we will just decide 10 days before a meeting. They send a meeting note without even asking civil society partners – there is no sense it's collaborative"

Yet another comment that corroborated this position was:

> **Network4** "We are ticking a box and can give input into the agenda; we are called a co-chair but what that means is that we are never engaged with. They operate in a government kind of authoritarian way so it's all very well for us to want to participate and do things differently, but there is no space to engage with how we do it. Civil society also does not sit back and say how can we participate most productively?"

5.7 Can policy lead transformation?

> "Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it… We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and

> produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart" (Foucault, M., 1998).

Reform is often spearheaded by policy processes and revision. In this way, policies can be seen as imbued with transformational energy to solve social problems. Those who hold this view would argue that policy change can be catalytic and necessary to wider social reform (Bacchi, C., 2000; Clark, H., Et al., 2020; Hudson, B., Et al. 2019). In the ECD policy context, a great deal of hope was pinned on the NIECD policy during its drafting phase, seeing it as the culmination of years of advocacy work and a pathway to increased ECD service delivery. Atmore (2019), in his chronology of policymaking in South Africa, refers to this policy design period between 2012 and 2015 "as a new direction: towards a comprehensive and integrated ECD" (Atmore, E., 2019).

The National Integrated ECD Policy provided a pathway to:

- address the immediate needs of vulnerable young children; while simultaneously
- enhancing socio-economic wellbeing for the country.

The policy drafters were technical experts drawn from a range of civil society organisations, appointed by the Presidency. In fairness, they did undertake a process of consultation across provinces designed to hear multiple voices from within and outside of the ECD sector and through this process of inclusion to manage the 'politics' of the sector. A government appointed committee had the final say in the policy decisions that were eventually gazetted by the Department of Social Development (Atmore, E., 2019).

Policy interactions and the discourse set by policy actors is not neutral, nor is the process linear. Appointing a team of experts, "intellectually and professionally trained, whether in state employment or in civil society" with the power to influence is not neutral. The web of actors, dialogue, expertise, and political positions is amongst the key attributes that can have a significant influence on the process and its outcome. Power dynamics can easily result in silencing some voices, giving space to others and can perhaps even amplify certain positions (more on this in the next chapter). The result can be alienation, anger, disappointment, or a sense of empowerment, depending on the role played by individuals or organisations. It follows that the policy design process itself can impact on policy take-up and implementation

(Almaguer-Kalixto, P., 2014; Bacchi. C, 2000).

Most key informants in this study felt that the policy did not provide sufficient direction and would benefit from better planning and enhanced accountability, with an emphasis on 'let's get practical'. They seemed to understand and accept policy as fixed rather than as a process; while they critiqued the policy, there was no talk about re-engaging on key elements of the policy, evaluation of the relationship between the policy and implementation or reform based on experiences from the field. Two key informant-inputs add perspective to this thinking:

> **N5** "Until we concretise this...what is it we want to achieve and then work backwards from there? This must be a consultative process and civil society must be part of this because they have the knowledge – NGOs have pioneered this. This is critical if we want to see the policy move to implementation."

> **Donor3** "The new policy tells us about our intentions, (which) are still not clear enough on accountability. There has been a huge confusion about what is best so that's why I wonder if a lot of things that can be done on a policy level can be reimagined to a practical level."

Top-down or linear policy making is probably the most common policy making strategy. Considered a rational approach, it follows a sequential order beginning with the defining of a problem and culminating in a plan or set of actions that need to be taken to resolve the issue or issues it sets out to address. It follows that this thinking then leads to a linear policy-implementation relationship, "a chronological order in which expressed intentions precede action; a linear causal logic whereby goals determine instruments and instruments determine results; and a hierarchy within which policy formation is more important than policy implementation" (Hill and Hupe, 2015).

Such technocratic approaches to policy design make a strong distinction between policy development and policy implementation, potentially negating essential connections between the policy, its developers, implementers and most importantly, the beneficiaries who also impact on the take-up and success of policy realisation. Often, when the implementation of policies shaped in this way is unsuccessful, blame is placed on a lack of political will, insufficient resources and poor implementation capacity rather than on the policy itself. Of

course, all these factors may play a role in poor implementation but not examining policy design as an element of its rollout can leave an important aspect out of a review or evaluation process (Sutton, R., 1999; Emad, G., and Roth, W.M., 2009).

As thinking has shifted toward the inter-connectedness of global, regional, and national challenges, thinking on inter-departmental and whole-of-government actions has increased, bringing with it more complex governance systems. Accordingly, policy design has shifted to reflect and act on more complex systems thinking which includes "notions of unpredictability, nonlinearity, and adaptability" (Braithwaite et al. 2018). Here, policies are regarded as multi-layered, multivariable processes invariably "resembling 'wicked problems' that are resistant to change, have multiple possible causes, and with potential solutions that vary in place and time according to local context" (Bach, T., and Painter, M., 2012; Lindquist, E., 2006).

Another way of framing this is that polices are dynamic, interactive tools requiring feedback loops and interaction from those who are to be its implementers. Policy should therefore change over time to fit new contexts and needs. In a complex, adaptive system, policy- making and keeping is a dynamic process, the policy-actors (developers and implementers) learn and adjust (even course-correct) through on-going interactions with other policy-actors, the outcomes of which culminate in an adaptable system, or in other words a system that learns (Bacchi, C., 2009).

Working on the premise of policy as dialogue can be important to furthering implementation on the ground where it is most needed. The technocratic approach to policymaking is frequently difficult to realise at community level because the voices of those who know what is needed (implementing agents and beneficiaries) do not filter through sufficiently. South Africa's ECD policy-making approach is far from being shaped by implementing agents on the ground, in collaboration with government. While issues in the implementation eco-system no doubt play a role in its realisation, the design of the ECD policy, by a select group of ECD 'elites' from civil society, may have been alienating for a sector that is deeply mistrustful and fragmented, contributing to implementation challenges.

5.8 Conclusion

As the literature reveals, policy can be a catalyst for change, particularly when recognised as dynamic, accompanied by a realisable action plan and by the necessary implementation resources. Policy can also act as a barrier to progress when it is overly complex and poorly aligned with systems capabilities. Through the South African National Integrated ECD policy, government has demonstrated a commitment to a holistic agenda for early childhood development. Government has also made clear its role as leader of the ECD sector. In 'stepping up' to lead, the state has made it clear to the civil society sector, which had effectively carried ECD in South Africa prior to 1994, that their role has changed. Through its policy making processes, government has claimed its ECD space and responsibility.

Opportunities for civil society to participate and partner with the state are also outlined in the policy, setting clear parameters and terms for this engagement. Key informants interviewed for this research had some misgivings about the policy landscape, particularly with regard to the realisation of policy goals. They lacked confidence in government's ability to deliver on the policy goals and some expressed unhappiness about the relationship of the civil society sector with government. There was little by way of deep reflection on their own role in policy design or realisation, sticking largely to the idea that the natural progression of things is from design to implementation.

> "Policy-making must be understood as a political process as much as an analytical or problem solving one. 'The policy-making process is by no means the rational activity that it is often held up to be in much of the standard literature. Indeed, the metaphors that have guided policy research over recent years suggest that it is actually rather messy, with outcomes occurring as a result of complicated political, social and institutional processes which are best described as 'evolutionary'' (Juma and Clarke 1995).

Lipsky, who in 1980 coined the phrase "street level" bureaucrat to refer to those on the ground who are responsible for the real delivery of policy intention, argues that the implementers of policies are "more than cogs in an automatic transfer of policy-making to outcome in practice" with their agency, they can engage with policy in multiple ways (Atieno, O.P., 2009; Sutton, R., 1999).

Chapter Six
Bridging the Leadership Divide

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I considered how key informants related to South Africa's National Integrated ECD policy that was ratified in 2015, and the extent to which they were of the view that it enabled implementation. What was evident is that the process of policy design plays an important role in shaping the ECD landscape, who does the policy development work, how this determines what is included and what is left out, as well as what sector-wide power dynamics it reflects or unlocks.

Civil society's role as the leader of ECD thinking and action had begun to shift steadily since the start of democracy. The pace of change seems to have sped up as government took over defining policy in a much more robust way. While some of this was done through dialogue or 'consultation' with the sector, it seems that the most influential players were a group of 'ECD elites' on whom government depended for critical knowledge about early childhood development. The process of policy design, not just the policy itself, had a disruptive effect on 'business as usual'. It may even have contributed to a sense of who is 'in', who is on the 'fringe' and even to who is 'out'.

At the start of this chapter, I revisit assertions made in Chapter Five about the government in ECD. This is because, in my view, the position of the state as the duty bearer for ECD and how those responsible for implementing this commitment fulfil their roles is critical to understanding how key informants described and related to changes in the sector during the dialogue interviews.

The idea of government as the lead role-player, and the impact of this on the changing environment for civil society actors in ECD, is further explored in this chapter (Figure 6.1). This is done through the voices of the key civil society informants who are mostly connected to networks and organisations. What was an ever-present theme in the dialogues with interviewees was the extent to which their ECD work, or their related roles, are personal? Interviewees expressed strong views generally locating the 'I' in these conversations. The generalisations that are being drawn in this analysis seem to relate very much to the identity

and ‘ego’ of the interviewee and how they, as professionals in the sector, understand the terrain, form opinions, and navigate in an ever-unfolding landscape.

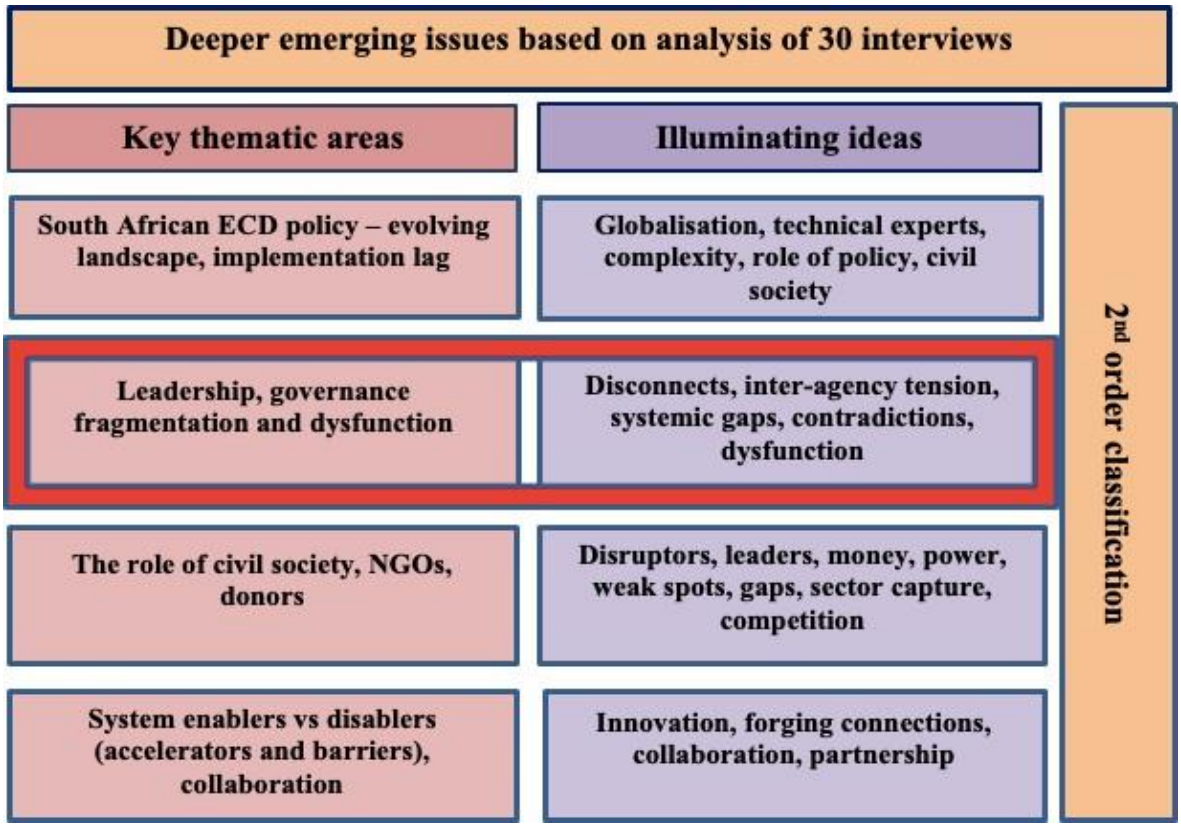

Figure 6.1: The key thematic areas and illuminating ideas considered in this chapter are highlighted in the red box

6.2 Governments are the duty bearers for ECD provision

> “States have a clear role in '...rendering appropriate assistance to parents, legal guardians and extended families in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities...' (arts. 18.2 and 18.3); '...including assisting parents in providing living conditions necessary for the child's development...' (art. 27.2); and '...ensuring that children receive necessary protection and care...' (art. 3.2)” (Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Early childhood development in lower-middle income countries (LMICs) is an emerging focus for governments. Up until about twenty-five years ago, across the world, the care of young children was regarded as the responsibility of parents (mostly mothers). As women have joined the workforce, demand for services has grown, as has global pressure based on a growing body of research about the multiple socio-economic benefits of early investment in human life. This

has added impetus to governments stepping up to take responsibility for young children's development.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2007, "Strong Foundations", urged countries to develop a national early childhood policy to promote the holistic development of young children. By 2015, 193 countries had pledged their support for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, recognising the importance of ECD as part of a strategy to eradicate poverty and hunger and to promote good health, education, and peace. Later, in 2018, the World Health Organisation (WHO), UNICEF and the World Bank released the Nurturing Care Framework, calling governments to invest in early childhood development (Neuman, M.J., 2007; Neuman, M.J. and Okeng'o, L., 2019).

Closer to home, as already explored in the previous chapter, South African politics and the National Development Plan (NDP) affirm the state as responsible for children's early development. To achieve this, the development of an integrated system to support the delivery of essential ECD services for every child, particularly those who are vulnerable, is emphasised. Furthermore, the role of the state to develop a "properly resourced, coordinated and managed early childhood development system" is articulated in the Children's Act (Gauge, S.A.C., 2013).

As described in the previous chapter, the NIECD policy sets out a plan to provide solutions to the challenges facing the ECD sector in South Africa. Policies are recognised as necessary for transformation and as potentially catalytic of change. However, without a set of actions, systems and resources, the full potential of policy reform cannot be realised (Hudson, B., et al., 2019; Richter, L.M., Et al, 2017).

In exploring common factors between the implementation systems of ten high-achieving countries globally, Mehrotra (2000) claims that the first characteristic was "the pre-eminent role of the state in ensuring that the vast majority of the population had access to basic social services". The second characteristic was that this translated into financial and human resources (Mehrotra, S., 2000). This is consistent with the policy levers in the SABER framework, referenced in the previous chapter, which include the legal framework, intersectoral coordination and financing (Neuman, M. and Devercelli, A., 2013).

Politics and policy cannot be separated. As much as implementation capacity is critical, political will and government leadership are necessary drivers of policy realisation. Policy in South Africa frames early childhood development as a key development priority. Over the past two years, the President has shone a light on ECD at the State of the Nation Addresses (SONA), affirming government's obligation to deliver services for young children. While these expressions of commitment to ECD are important and encouraging, too many children and families are still outside of support programmes.

Vargas-Barón (2015) argues that "a lack of political will is not always clearly evidenced...a minister or deputy minister may mouth words of support; however, behind the scenes s/he may quietly torpedo participation in the ECCE policy planning process" (Vargas-Barón, E., 2015). While this may not be specifically true for ECD in South Africa, what is real is the lack of reach and quality, which begs the question, how real is the commitment? Atmore (2019) is of the view that the weak implementation evidence at community level shows that government is actually not serious at all (Atmore, E., 2019).

6.3 Government in South Africa has failed to lead ECD

For ECD to move forward at the required pace, the state needs to lead. Its role is unequivocally to guide and shape the policy development and law-making procedures and to ensure the sector is adequately funded, standards maintained and the implementation and quality of services well-managed. This includes building the pipeline of provision to ensure universal robust implementation and the keeping of promises made to young children and their families. Sector governance and leadership is the oil that keeps the system's wheels turning effectively and efficiently.

As set out in the table on the following page (Table 6.2), the role of the state as leader of the ECD sector was largely endorsed by the cohort of thirty key informants interviewed for this study (86,7%). Donors (D) and Network (N) leaders were adamant that this was the state's role, while academics/experts (A) expressed a level of hesitation. Interesting is that of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) informants, 25% were of the view that the state is not fit for this role, citing it as unreliable and ill-equipped.

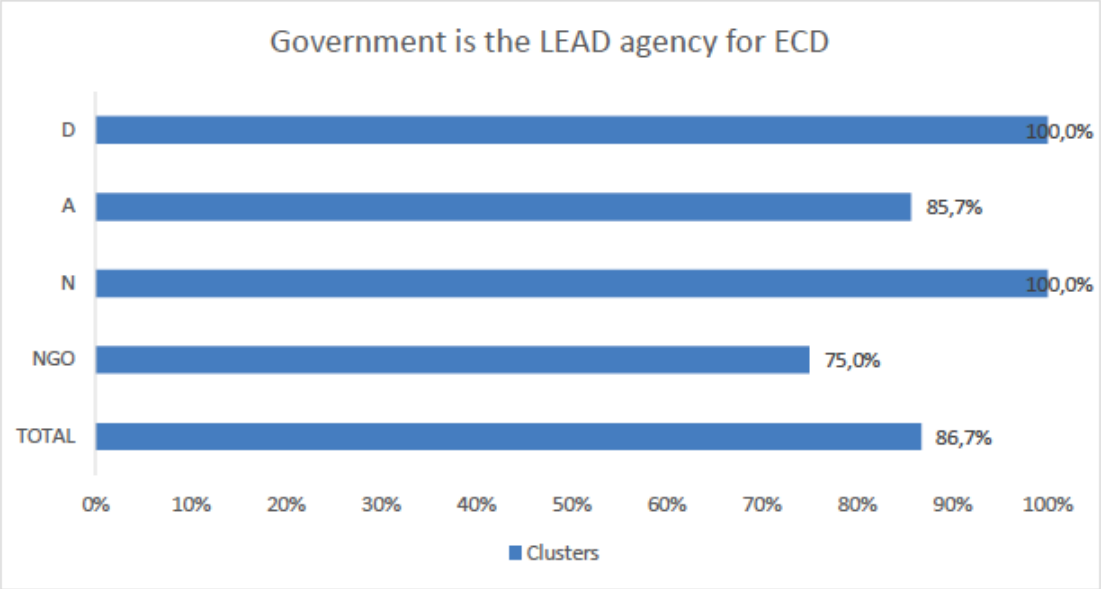

Figure 6.2: A summary of the views of key informants from the four interview clusters on the responsibly of the state to lead ECD

Furthermore, key informants held the view that one of the challenges facing the ECD sector is a lack of leadership capacity. Some felt that only government could take on the role and needed to step up, even if this meant their organisation would eventually go out of business.

> **NGO3** "I do understand and support government being in the driving seat even though that might make us redundant."

> **Academic1** "If the state played its role, the NGOs would adjust and do what they needed to – as long as it still was in a weak DSD; then NGOs will not do anything."

Amongst the cohort who did not fully endorse the state as leader of the sector, comments were largely focused on the capacity and capabilities of government departments to provide the necessary skill and ability to guide ECD sector implementation. On the whole, their insights show a level of tension, mistrust and uncertainty (possibly even conflict) about government actors and the future of NGOs in the ECD sector:

> **NGO1** "The tension between government and NGOs is very strong..."

> **Network1** "Government needs to step out of their office to get involved in what works ...must be a more deliberate discussion."

NGO2 "If government is leading, they must set the strategic objectives, there is no strong and clear lead from the state."

Academic2 "Government is rigid, trapped in silos..."

Network2 "Can't have collaboration and cooperation unless you have clarity of purpose and leadership to support action – we don't have a vision for the country yet about what we want to shift...undermined by deep seated issues."

In the view of some interviewees, gaps in leadership created a void that needed to be filled. Many claimed that donors have taken on this responsibility using their resource base as leverage to influence strategic thinking as well as government and civil society action:

NGO3 "Government doesn't step in so it's a free for all. Government doesn't provide strategic leadership; there is a vacuum so people just all do different things."

NGO5 "Because government does not coordinate the sector, donors have stepped into the void and some of it has left NGOs out."

Donor3 "NGOs need direction and that's our role as a funder, to provide that strategic direction."

NGO4 "The ECD sector is no longer being driven by the civil society sector..... it is now largely in the hands of donors, funders and government*."*

As ECD policies have proliferated around the world in recent years, much has been written about the complexity of their implementation, especially where the system itself is not fit for the purpose. Realising the intention of the IECD Policy requires a system that can implement a multi-sectoral package through whole-of-government[2], whole-of-society[3] collaboration.

[2] "The **whole of government approach** is one in which public service agencies work across portfolio boundaries, formally and informally, to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response to particular issues. It aims to achieve policy coherence in order to improve effectiveness and efficiency. This approach is a response to departmentalism that focuses not only on policies but also on programme and project management." (Source: WHA A68/17, footnote 2)

[3] "The **whole of society approach** acknowledges the contribution of and important role played by all relevant stakeholders, including individuals, families and communities, intergovernmental organizations and religious

Building the capacity to implement policy begins with its design. Neuman and Devercelli (2012), note the important role that participatory policy development can play in shaping and preparing the system for delivery. It sets the agenda and vision, providing an "an opportunity to define the respective roles of the public and private sectors in important areas including funding and service provision". Ideally, it should also provide opportunity for feedback loops and ongoing improvement based on implementation evidence (Atchison, B. and Diffey, L., 2018; Daugbjerg, C. and Kay, A., 2019; Neuman, M. and Devercelli, A., 2012)

In the previous chapter, it was noted that policy has been shaped by a team of technical experts, drawn from the ECD sector. While the process did include consultations across the country in almost every province, these were one-off events (box-ticking) which did not afford the sector opportunity to participate in 'shaping' policy in a significant way, nor did they include feedback loops or implementation consultations. It is also true that the policy drafters themselves did not have the final say in the design, or space to reinforce certain key features they felt were essential to the policy framework, such as a central agency to manage implementation.

6.4 Recalibrate the system

> "To get major change programs right...governments need to focus relentlessly on the three Ps: people, people, and people" (Checinski, R., et al 2019).

What does it mean for government to step up and lead? Arguments for whole-of-government or cross-sectoral policy action are no longer new; most people agree they are necessary features of ECD policy development and implementation architecture. Achieving this level of multi-sector engagement depends on the will and capacity to facilitate levels of cooperation and collaboration across multiple stakeholder groups.

Some important perspectives emerged from the dialogue interviews that drew attention to the human resourcing and the weakness of the government agencies, and the Department of Social Development in particular. Two responses were especially illuminative on this point:

institutions, civil society, academia, the media, voluntary associations and, where and as appropriate, the private sector and industry, in support of national efforts for noncommunicable disease prevention and control, and recognize the need to further support the strengthening of coordination among these stakeholders in order to improve the effectiveness of these efforts;" (Source: 2011 Political Declaration, (37))

> **Donor2** "What we have failed to do as a country is to get the right people to implement what is right with the spirit of what is in there (the policy)."

> **NGO7** "I believe it has been government to a large extent that has led to so much dysfunction in the sector, bearing in mind that I work predominantly in the Eastern Cape that has a great reputation for incompetence and the inability to spend resources allocated, and I am not talking about corruption. So, the dysfunction is perpetuated by a lack of communication from provincial down to local levels."

The decisive factor making the difference between policy success and failure is the human element. People are arguably the most critical drivers of change. They are also potentially the least predictable change makers. Inter-departmental and cross sectoral tension and even conflict may be common, especially where multiple government departments and stakeholders from outside need to work together.

Checinski et al (2019) assert that the failure rate of public sector transformation initiatives to deliver on their mandate points directly to human resources as a weak link. They argue that the health of public-sector organisations is often below-average with especially complex people-related challenges and gaps in their organisational culture, coordination, and capabilities. It is not unusual for conflict, territorialism, and gatekeeping behaviours to impact on progress in the public service.

Successful endeavours are steered by individuals who show a commitment to leadership, possess compelling communication skills, have a clear sense of direction and purpose together with a deep capacity for change and essential capabilities to coordinate delivery (Figure 6.3) (Checinski, M., et al., 2019; Neuman, M.J., 2007).

Figure 6.3: Qualities demonstrated by leaders able to steer organisational change (Source: McKinsey Analysis)

Shonkoff (2012) makes an important point in this regard, claiming that "a logic model for the development of effective policy should emphasize both people and programs" (National Research Council, 2012). The NIECD policy pays attention to programmes, the mechanisms that will be created to facilitate their implementation and to management. On the whole though, this policy is technocratic and does not factor in the politics (small 'p') or provide sufficient guidance on the realisation of the policy, which should include a more specific focus on the necessary human resources and management in particular.

The ECD system in South Africa is young. While policy has created the framework for systems-building, the system itself is still under construction. The design and implementation of a programme able to meet the needs of young children via multi-sector collaboration, or at least coordination, is new for government in South Africa. It is also new for civil society organisations. Vargas-Baron (2013) notes how the need to systematise early childhood services may overwhelm those who work in the sector, "with good reason". Barriers to success in this regard are elaborated to include observations that:

- "Institutional cultures tend to be highly sectoral and do not reward personnel for engaging in multisectoral coordination or service integration,

- Ministerial leaders and personnel are rarely trained in ECD policy planning, participatory processes, negotiation and consensus building skills,
- Coordination and joint communication strategies are needed to link ECD services of the public and non-public sectors, and
- Sectoral competition for ministerial budgets is a barrier to multisectoral cooperation" (Vargas-Barón, E., 2013).

Made up of "interacting, interrelated and interdependent components that make up a complex and unified whole" (Ruderman, M. and Grason, H., 2004), a system is the sum of its parts. To achieve the full benefits of these multiple investments in ECD, children should experience services seamlessly and at the moments in their lives that are most critical. Often, because the systems and services of multiple agencies involved in ECD do not converge, the system is fragmented across government.

This fragmentation is mirrored in the civil society sector, which plays a role in supporting the implementation of government policy initiatives (donors, academics, NGOs, religious organisations, and so on). Efficiencies and effect could be improved through real efforts to work together, guided by shared commitments. By working together, government agencies can increase administrative and economic efficiencies while improving child outcomes (Sarakatsannis, J. and Winn, B., 2018).

A multi-sectoral approach calls for innovative civil servants who are able to break out of their siloes to work across government and civil society agencies (Vargas-Baron, 2013).
Successful policy implementation calls for change agents who have the skills to collaborate and convene across departments and agencies, gaining the trust and support of people over whom they have no direct influence. Finding "new-generation solutions" calls for new ways of working and leading (Chechinski, M., et al., 2019).

The literature refers to these drivers of collaborative endeavour as 'boundary spanners', able to play an internal and external role simultaneously by sharing knowledge, facilitating collaboration, managing the politics and conflicts of change, and brokering new partnerships or access to resources (Mäkelä, K., Et al., 2019; Barner-Rasmussen Prysor, D. and Henley, A., 2018; Williams, P., 2002).

How ECD actors understand their role, both within government and civil society, is a key contributing factor in system's dysfunction. Key informants for this study noted that there were not enough supportive and engaged people in the system to fulfil the role of 'boundary spanners'.

> **Academic7** "Government needs to activate the plan and decide what their role will be...I am not sure why they have not been keen to take the lead."

> **Academic4** The Cabinet Committee for ECD has only met once in the last two years. Government have not put staff into this even in the Western Cape the Director of
> ECD is also expected to be the Director of Monitoring and Evaluation. There are not enough people and not enough resources."

> **Network2 "**The Community of Practice (COP) has been trying to get the Department of Basic Education and Social Development to talk to us about the implementation of the new policy – we have asked leaders who are either non-responsive or too busy or cannot make the date. It is really frustrating."

Tensions between the Department of Social Development and the Department of Basic Education, as well as with the Department of Health, were noted by key informants during the interviews. Most common inputs here were that representatives of these departments do not always attend the same meetings or attach the same importance to multi-sector collaboration.

> **Network2** "The space is up for sale civil society is not recognised as a key player – even by the Department of Social Development which is a toxic space -
> the system is broken, and NGOs cannot fix it, government must rejig its sector."

> **NGO8** "Government still operates in silos and compete when there is no need – the National Integrated ECD policy says they must roll out access in a universal integrated manner that makes it a force for us to come together."

NGO1 "I think government should take responsibility for the artificial divisions within the landscape and for perpetuating these."

Donor2 "For government, in my limited understanding, the obstacles seem to be politics, which department has more clout and who has the decision-making power."

Choosing one agency to serve as the anchor can be politically sensitive. These political tensions can impact directly on the effectiveness of service delivery. Navigating the political landscape and power dynamics is an important element of ensuring an enabling environment for policy implementation and systems change (Neuman, M.J. and Devercelli, A.E., 2012). A number of key informants pushed the need for greater collaboration, possibly through a coordinating agency that could act as the boundary spanner.

Netwrok2: "Government is not accustomed to working collaboratively so there is nothing at the moment that forces them to change the way they work."

Academic4 "There is need for an agency because of that nature of ECD unified approach with a clear funding pathway."

Some countries have had great success in this regard. Examples are the Educate Your Child intervention in Cuba, where vertical and horizontal collaboration was a key feature of the implementation system. Also in Chile, where rather than focusing on a government department, a programme has been designed that coordinates all responsible agencies, across sectors, to ensure coherent implementation (Table 6.4). There are clear implications for South Africa; "designating a lead agency makes it easier to develop and implement policies and reduces some inefficiency. We urgently need a national child rights co-ordination, planning and accountability mechanism in the Office of the Presidency to lead and drive government-wide planning and accountability for child-centred planning, monitoring, and reporting" (Martin-Wieser, P., 2018).

Case studies: International evidence on cross-sector collaboration

Cuba, Educate Your Child, Círculos Infantiles, and Salones de Preescolar

Achieved reached 99.8 percent of the child population in 2000 and has remained steady. Drivers of successes were:

- A high-level political support and involvement.
- Vertical collaboration through the set-up of programme management groups at national,

provincial, and municipal assemblies of people's power and local councils. • Strong cross-sector collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Ministry ofEducation (signed an agreement in 1997). • The Ministry of Education was strengthened by the formation of multi-sectoral groups rather than its internal structure being reshaped.
The Cuba programme was successfully contextualised and implemented in both Brazil and Ecuador. Attempts have also been made in Jamaica and Chile.
• Ecuador used local participation and the formation of management committees to great effect (Tinajero, A.R., 2010). • Brazil's plan was developed collaboratively over a period of time. The Rio Grande do Sul Progam Primeira Infancia Melhor is housed in the State Health department, but the secretariat is managed by the State Technical Group which includes technical staff from the Secretariats of health, Education, Culture, Justice and Social Development tighter with regional coordinators and others. This structure is mirrored at municipal level. • Jamaica has been less successful. Buy-in to a national plan was limited because of the lack of involvement from service providers in the design process. In addition, inter-personal conflicts delayed implementation highlighting the importance of skilled champions, able to work across sectors. • Chile created one program implemented by an inter-sectoral ministerial working group; the group is coordinated by the Ministry of Planning, a non-sectoral ministry, aimed at reducing the potential for tension between key duty bearing agencies (Evans, D. and Kosec, K., 2012).

Table 6.4: Key actions taken by governments around the world to facilitate policy implementation

6.5 The relationship between NGOs and Government

> "The literature points to 'multi-actor collaboration as a superior driver of innovation." (Torfing, J., 2019).

Torfing (2019) argues that collaborative innovation offers a pathway for the realisation of innovative ways of bringing new and bold ideas to life within the public sector. Complex problems can be solved through a process of collaborative governance (Mosley, J.E. and Jarpe, M., 2019) which bring public and private stakeholders together to engage in collective consensus-building and decision-making (Nores, M. and Fernandez, C., 2018).

South Africa has gone through a turbulent time politically and economically during the past few years under what is now referred to as a period of 'state capture'. All of society was impacted upon, including social services, exacerbating poverty and inequality (Martin, M.E. and Solomon, H., 2016). Acknowledging the realities faced by the nation and the challenges that lay ahead at the 2018 State of the Nation Address, the newly elected President quoted

Hugh Masekela's Thuma Mina, calling for all citizens to take practical action to achieve common goals.

For many years (before the Thuma Mina rally call during SONA 2018), civil society organisations in South Africa had played a key advocacy and service delivery role, focused on advancing early childhood support and services to disadvantaged young children. As one interviewee put it:

> **Donor1** "For a long, long time ECD service delivery (particularly in relation to early learning) has been driven almost exclusively by the private sector and civil society. If it weren't for these efforts, we would be even further "behind the ECD curve" than we are now."

And still today, there is a willingness expressed by civil society organisations to continue to work alongside government by sharing skills, resources, and knowledge:

> **NGO3** "We would welcome government to say we are going to make this a public thing and we are going to wean ourselves off NGOs...fantastic...if they can put the money behind it, but I don't see how they can carry out a plan...I don't think the NGOS alone are responsible, we fund haphazardly- we don't fund strategically, there is no ten-year plan, its competitive, they make us compete."

> **Donor2** "The skills we need are all in civil society, particularly for 3 – 6 so you need collaboration between civil society and government."

> **NGO6** "The people in the NGOs are fundamental to the solution, they have the knowledge and expertise. In the next 15 – 20 years, I don't see the state being able to do it without them."

The complex nature of the challenges we face call for us as a country and an ECD sector, to explore "entirely new forms of solutions" that include learning to "think differently about our complex world and to work together in unusual and very strategic new ways (Westley, F., et al., 2015). By understanding more fully the systems within which we all exist and work, we will be better able to identify and create conditions that are conducive to social problem solving (Rose, C., McGowan).

There is solid evidence from many countries in the world that partnerships between government and civil society can be pivotal in coordinating, consolidating or even strengthening governance structures to advance ECD. UNDP (2001) noted that where governments are unable to fulfil the task required for sustainable human development, civil society organisations can play various roles, including those as "participants, legitimizers and endorsers of government policy and action, as watchdogs of the behaviour of regimes and public agencies, and as collaborators in the national development effort" (Chitiga-Mabugu, M., 2015).

As two key informants noted:

> **Network2** "We are talking about scaling up services within a public framework set by the ECD policy – without the state this simply cannot happen, the system is broken - NGOs cannot fix it. They can only bring their knowledge, and development partners can bring money; government must restructure and regulate the sector."

> **Academic2** "The little bit that I work at government level, I see an increasing recognition that we need to work together and collaborate. I think at working level or ops level, people see the necessity of it."

These sentiments resonate with the idea that civil society should be the glue that binds public and private activity in such a way that the common good intentions are strengthened. This should be done without compromising core missions, integrity, purposefulness, and high levels of trust (World Economic Forum, 2013).

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, a little more light was cast on the role of the state as primary duty bearer, which includes being the enabler of the system of care and support needed to secure the development and wellbeing of young children in our country. The insights offered by key informants shaped the discussion on the challenges of implementing a whole-of-government programme for young children in the South African context. The emergent ideas expose a difficult and fractured relationship between the ECD civil society sector and government. In many respects, civil society organisations find themselves on the back foot having to rethink their role in the

sector.

Amongst government's commitments to ECD is the undertaking to lead and coordinate action toward the realisation of a comprehensive multi-sectoral system. As consistently acknowledged through this study, progress has been made in this regard, but there are systemic dysfunctions and gaps which prevent services from reaching certain communities and children, especially the poor. Leadership gaps create spaces that can leave a void in the system and can create fertile ground for brinkmanship, conflict and toxicity as people jostle for power, space, and opportunities (Asuelime, L.E., 2017; Chichevaliev, S., 2017; Cooper, R., 2018; Kolzow, D.R., 2014).

Senge (1996) makes the point that the hierarchical authority of traditional management approaches unlock compliance rather than engendering new forms of commitment and change. He goes to say that "the more strongly hierarchical power is wielded the more compliance results" (Senge, P. 2006). If government is serious about unlocking the blockages to reach every child, hierarchies will not achieve the desired results. Government action must be embracing of civil society organisations as real partners, not just on paper.

Chapter Seven
Minding the Gap

7.1 Introduction

The story of the South African ECD sector is complicated and fragmented. It includes a web of inter-related organisations, relationships, and actions. In the previous two chapters, I outlined the critical role that government, together with civil society members, has played in advancing an enabling policy environment for ECD in South Africa. It was recognised that it is the state that is the duty-bearer for children's early development rights, a commitment that is embedded in the South African Constitution, the National Development Plan, as well as other more specific ECD related policies and frameworks such as the National Integrated ECD Policy. I further argued that the failure of the state to build a fully functional system, able to deliver on these commitments, is in part due to gaps in political will, leadership and governance.

The main premise here is that failures to lead an inclusive whole-of-government, whole-of-society ECD response contribute to, or exacerbate, systems dysfunction, which has a serious knock-on effect to the sector as a whole. This journey - the dynamics, complexities, and the current shape of the ECD civil society sector as brought to the fore through the dialogue interviews - are further explored in this chapter (Figure 7.1).

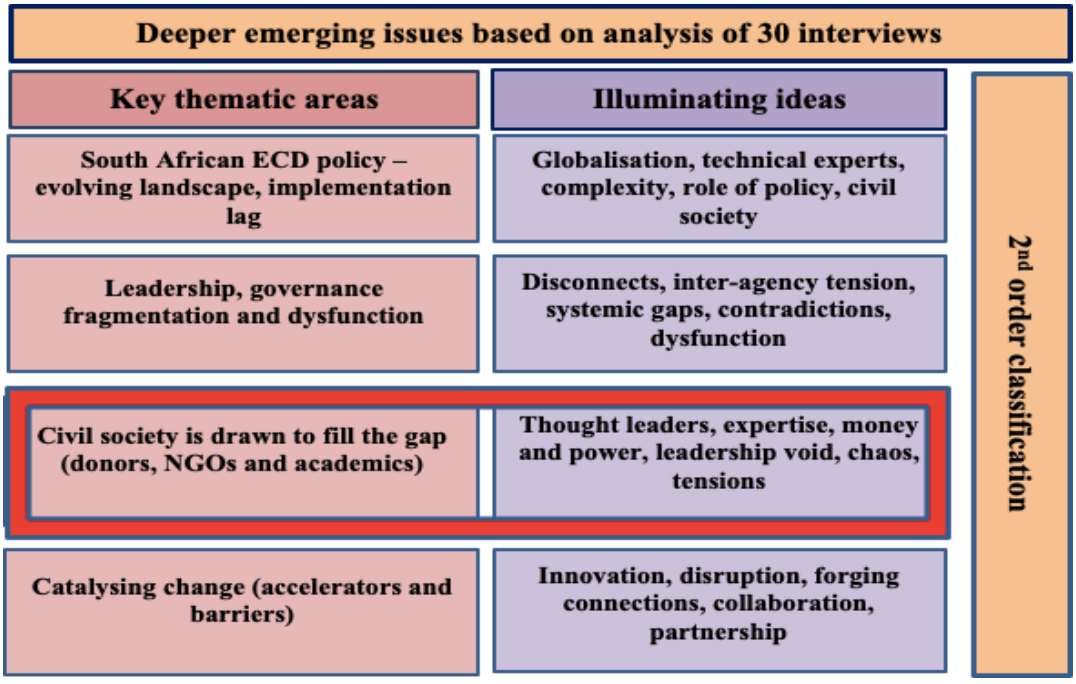

Figure 7.1: Highlighting the key thematic areas and illuminating ideas explored in this chapter

7.2 Who is civil society?

> "Civil society is the conscience of our countries. It's the catalyst of change. Its why strong nations don't fear citizens. Strong nations embrace and support and empower active citizens" (Barak Obama, 2015).

As referenced earlier in this study, some clarification on what is meant by civil society in this study is prudent. The literature makes clear the fluidity of the concept and the various understandings associated with the term globally. In the ECD sector in South Africa it seems to be used synonymously with non- governmental organisations and not-for-profits, and at times includes academics. Donors appear to be awarded a rarefied category of their own. To be clear, for the purposes of this study I have adopted the generic and inclusive definition offered by the World Bank, in which civil society is made up of a "wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations that have a presence in public life", and as such, comprises "community groups, NGOs, labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and foundations" (Cooper, R., 2018).

Civil society organisations ebb and flow as they learn, evolve, and respond to a wide range of political, economic, human and environmental realities. Accordingly, they redefine their roles, relationships, and the boundaries within which they operate (Davis. N., et al., 2013). In the South African context, the ECD civil society sector emerged in the 1960s. Since then, it has gone through radical changes in its identity and role in society. Shapeshifting has been its super-power as it has fulfilled numerous roles as activist, advocate, partner, service- provider, facilitator and thought leader. Its history is instructive, providing insight on how and why these changes occurred and how they can explain some of the dynamics and challenges the civil society sector is grappling with today.

7.3 The historical background – the changing role of ECD civil society organisations

A lot has changed in South Africa since 1994 and with it, the civil society sector. Its early beginnings map a world-wide, growing recognition of the importance of early childhood care and education that took hold, starting in Europe in the early 1960s (Kamerman, S.B., 2007). By 1970, programmes began expanding and the development of the sector accelerated during the '80s and '90s. This occurred "mostly in response to a demand for training, from women

who had started or wanted to start crèches or pre-schools in disadvantaged communities, either as private businesses or community organisations" (Biersteker, L., and Picken, P., 2013)?

The services they offered were ad hoc, largely donor-funded, uncoordinated, and scarce (Berry, L. and Rudolph, N., 2006; Hwenha, S. 2014; Rudolph, N., 1996). While civil society organisations in South Africa focused primarily on poverty-affected young children who were significantly compromised because of the policies of the racist regime, government played an insubstantial role with little or no interest in serving poor, black South African young children (Atmore. E., 2019).

Influenced by the changing social sector globally and a growing body of knowledge on why early childhood development was important, the post-1994 ECD sector was dominated by civil society organisations advocating for young children and offering services to support their development. Their expert knowledge and experience in programme implementation played a significant role in political and policy processes. A key informant who had been in the sector for many years noted that:

> **Donor1** "For a long, long time ECD service delivery (particularly in relation to early learning) has been driven almost exclusively by the private sector and civil society. If it weren't for these efforts, we would be even further "behind the ECD curve" than we are now."

As advocates for young children, they successfully helped advance an agenda for the early years, contributing to the development of government policies, agencies and programmes. As government gradually grew into this role, so the 'movement' for ECD changed as did their relationship with the state. Most of the organisations that had been activists for the development rights of the child and critics of state-inaction, morphed into service-providers and partners to government, with some still trying to traverse the complex terrain of advocate-partner.

Of this group, a handful of politically well-connected individuals rose through the ranks to take on positions within government, which then left gaps within the already underpowered civil sector (Case, 2008; Biersteker., L. 2010; Boudling 2010; Frank, 2009; Seleti. J.,2007). Support for government and civil society collaboration was included in various policy documents,

including White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education (2001), the National Integrated Plan for ECD (NIP) (2005) and in the more recent NIECD Policy (2015). The NDP specifically called for a systemic approach to collaboration that enables alignment with the overarching education ambitions of the country (Volmink, J. and van der Elst, L., 2017). To facilitate this engagement, an Inter-sectoral Committee inclusive of government and civil society members was formed allowing for a level of dialogue between role-players, but this mechanism did not effectively create momentum for partnership (Richter., et al. 2012). This structure was recreated under the banner of the National Integrated ECD Policy but judging from inputs from key informants, the success of this body has also so far been limited.

Some key informants were skeptical about why government created the forums in the first place, with one making it clear that they felt it was at best manipulative.

> **NGO8** "I have noticed over time that government has attempted to reduce civil society into more of a rubber stamp that they can use to promote something and then they say we have consulted ..."

Another noted a lack of interest on the part of government to engage with their national community of practice, calling into question their real commitment to engaging with the civil society sector.

> **Network1** "Our ECD community of practice has been trying to get DBE and DSD to talk to us about the implementation of the new policy – we have asked leaders, they are either non-responsive, too busy or cannot make the date. It does become really frustrating, especially when I then hear that one of the departments, I have been trying to engage with will be hosting workshops to share what is happening with the policy at provincial and local levels."

The civil society sector had never been large enough or sufficiently robust to make the same impact at population level as it did on policy development, knowledge about the science of early childhood development and programme implementation. In many respects, the contribution of civil society organisations shaped South Africa's ECD agenda and the reforms that took place between 1970 and 2015. It could be said that for these years, to a large extent, the leaders of civil society organisations owned the ECD agenda, its key messages, and

practices.

As political interest in ECD increased and government's role expanded, the relationship between government agencies responsible for ECD and ECD civil society organisations began to change and fracture. Government took ownership of the agenda and filled vacant positions in government, with leaders from the sector unsettling the already small, struggling sector. Having started together during apartheid as allies, the shift in power dynamics and roles altered relationships. One key informant reflected on these changing dynamics and relationships:

> **Academic1** "I was not involved. I was in school at the time but watching the ECD sector through the 1994 period (my mum worked in the sector) ...the sector was stripped of many of its people who went off to government. The NGO sector did not jump back to life – it was immediately weakened."

Most key informants were of the view that the NIECD Policy was a landmark for the sector that provided clarity on how government planned to work with civil society organisations. It makes it clear that government will take the lead of ECD provision, allowing for non-government service-providers (for-profit and non-profit) to play a complementary role to their efforts, provided these are in compliance with their regulations stipulating that:

> "Government will retain overall responsibility for the provision of universally available, inclusive and equitably accessible early childhood development services. It may contract out delivery of a number of the relevant services and support roles to NGOs and other private entities; however, it will remain responsible for the funding, regulation, capacitation and oversight of contracted partners within the limits of this Policy. This relationship will be underpinned by explicit expectations, secure contracting and performance requirements, quality control, and bilateral accountability mechanisms" (Department of Social Development, 2015).

In my professional role in the sector, there were occasions where these matters were tabled by government in a non-friendly way, making clear to civil society that they were in charge and able to deliver services to children with or without them. Through the INECD, the point is made that the civil society sector contributed to the perpetuation of inequity in South Africa

through its inequitable provision of services for young children.

Of course, it is not surprising that civil society organisations could not achieve population coverage, the sector is small, fragmented across geographic locations and significantly under-funded. Civil society does not have, and nor arguably should it have, the same systemic capacity to scale services as that of a national government. On this, one key informant had this to say:

> **Academic1** "If the state played its role, the NGOs would adjust and do what they needed to, as long as it is still led by a weak DSD, then NGOs will not do anything."

7.4 What is the role of the ECD civil society sector?

> "The contribution of community-based organisations in South Africa ranges from skills, passion, experience to heart and energy - all of which make up the immune system of the society" (Inyathelo Annual Report, 2012).

That the civil society sector has played an important role in developing the ECD sector in South Africa is unquestionable. To a large extent, advances made in the sector have their roots in civil society advocacy and grassroots programme implementation. These efforts have informed and been amplified by government policy processes (still with the help of civil society) and contributed to increases in funding for ECD and efforts toward expanding services for families and children affected by poverty. The actions of civil society and government have been inter-linked, sometimes with benefit to both and at other times bringing them into conflict with each other (Hyden, G. and Court, J. 2003). One key informant noted that the relationship is

> **Donor2** "not just about the ECD sector, but also about the relationship between government and civil society".

Evident across the data collected from key informants are multiple pain-points, tensions, judgements, and concerns that were expressed about relations within the sector between agencies. Although analysed in terms of the context and needs of the sector, it was evident that some of the challenges and difficulties, although professional, also touched informants in a personal way. Insight on the nature of the relationship between state and civil society as

conflicted and fundamentally disrespectful to civil society organisations were shared by two informants:

> **Network2** "Civil society is treated with absolute disregard; government doesn't know who they are talking about when they talk about civil society. They see civil society as an unquantified cadre of community organisations lurking out there somewhere the field...who is civil society...nobody in government can answer that...if you are civil society and you come with 10 million rand then you are not civil society, then you are a technical partner."

> **Network5** "The space is up for sale at the moment so Ilifa can buy it...civil society is not recognised as a player...even within DSD which is a toxic space, who do they engage at civil society level...besides DGMT and Ilifa, everybody else has been side-lined...there is no ECD sector in SA."

However, they also recognised that civil society is not a victim of the state, as two key informants noted:

> **Donor1** "There is absolutely no doubt that civil society's efforts have not been enough and are fractured."

> **Donor2** "Government is talked about incredibly disparagingly, as if they are completely useless. ECD organisations need to change their outlook on government."

They were almost unanimous about the need for a continued and central role for civil society organisations in the ECD sector, even as government increased its roles and responsibilities (Table 7.1).

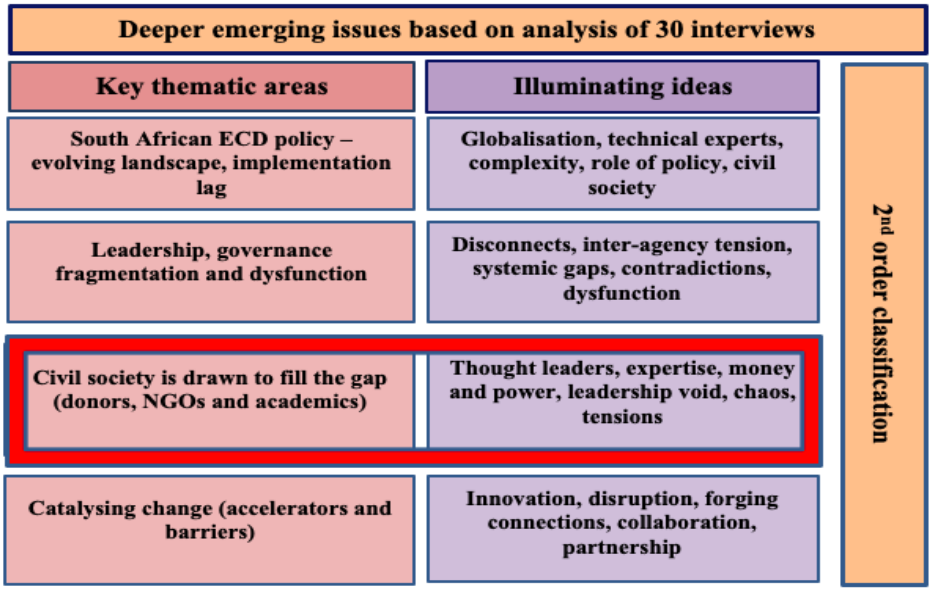

Table 7:.1 Tabulation of how the different clusters view the role of NGOs in the ECD sector in the future

Of the group of informants, the donor (D) group and network leaders (N) were unequivocally clear. NGOs (NGO) and Academics (A) showed a margin of uncertainty, largely related to concerns about the weak capacity of organisations and a lack of resources.

As one key informant from the donor (D) cluster said:

> **Donor3** "Even as a donor organisation...we could not work without there being NGOs who are connected on the ground to communities...they provide the access and mechanism for tackling challenges for children."

The deep worry expressed by some about change and survival potentially overrides the capacity to engage in the ever-changing landscape. Change in the social sector in terms of policy and programmes has been a global phenomenon, and with this has come the expansion, in the twentieth and twenty first centuries of social services (Aravacik, E.D. 2018; Piachaud, D. 2015).

With these changes, the role of civil society organisations working in the sector, has in many countries including South Africa, evolved from policy advocates to social service providers. The practice of civil society organisations as service providers is particularly dominant in countries where governments lack the capacity to scale services themselves (Okello, J.J. 2015). Ungsuchaval (2016) refers to this state-NGO collaboration, as a 'shadow government', a form of relationship that goes hand in hand with the depoliticisation and professionalisation

of NGOs (Ungsuchaval, T. 2016).

Paradoxically, while taking on these fee-earning roles, some civil society organisations continue to act as watchdogs, advocating for change and holding government to account for lack of service delivery. While this role was seen as necessary prior to democracy, government today may be defensive and unwelcoming of action by NGOs in this area (Asuelime, L.E. 2017).

Some organisations have well established networks creating platforms of support for implementation on the ground (e.g., Ntataise Network, South African Congress, the ECD Alliance and BRIDGE ECD Community of Practice). While there have been some moves toward collaboration, these bodies and their member organisations do not have a history of working together; in fact, they often compete for the same funding. Sustainability and therefore funding is, for most organisations, top of mind and from the interviewees seems to determine much of their strategic action:

> **Network3** "The biggest issue is the lack of resources...human, financial, knowledge resources...that seem to dominate the sector and one of the biggest is time ..... "

> **Academic5** "NGOs are desperate, they need the bucks."

> **Academic** "The whole idea that has driven the sector has not been to see how they can support government to deliver the policy as much as it has been to see how they can keep going and get resources."

Also illuminated was the tension emanating from these threats:

> **Network1** "NGOs are all dipping into the same small pool of funding for similar work and so I do understand why there might be competition and territorial issues donors encourage us to collaborate across different bodies, but this takes time and money ...they will tell us to do this, but they aren't willing to put the money toward that ...collaboration is a difficult thing to sell."

Donor5 "I think if ECD NGOs knew they could rely on government support and commensurate regular funding, we would see an entirely different body of organisations. Too much time and energy go to finding the financial resources to survive, when they should be focused on delivering services, proto-typing innovations (Where available) and working systemically at local and municipal level."

Donor7 "Its stuck because its fighting for survival and when you are fighting for survival you cannot focus on strategic thinking and big picture things...don't think there's a big answer but I think time must be spent on leadership and unlocking other organisations, how to use thinking time collectively to craft a way forward."

These difficulties add a level of urgency for civil society leaders who are under pressure to find solutions that will ensure the sustainability of their organisations. Some of the input from key informants made pertinent points in this regard, highlighting concerns about staffing, funding, capacity and geographic reach. While some argue these challenges could lead to creative and generative thinking, for organisations reliant on donor funding, informants seemed to find the idea untenable.

7.5 What about donors?

As referenced earlier in this study, much has been written about how donors can negatively or positively impact the sector and organisations they fund. A number of large donors like the DG Murray Trust, FNB Foundation and ELMA Philanthropies play a leading role in ECD in South Africa. It is apparent that in addition to the smaller foundations like Jim Joel who have long been supporters of ECD organisations, there has been an influx of new investors in ECD in recent years (for example, Hollard Foundation, the Standard Bank Tutuwa Community Foundation, Omidyar Network, Assupol Community Trust, the Allan Gray Orbis Foundation Endowment, and the Lego Foundation) however, there is no recently consolidated overview of private investment in the ECD sector (Appendix 1).

A 2013 study conducted by Ilifa Labantwana showed that investments in ECD followed a similar fragmented and geographically imbalanced route to that of civil society organisations, focusing more on support for ECD centres than wider needs like parenting and non-centre-

based programmes (Van Niekerk, L.J., 2013). It is evident that this pattern has shifted to some extent but clearly not sufficiently to reshape the sector toward a more equitable spread of sustainable services.

Donors wanting to better understand the impact of their investments have also opted to work differently; many see themselves as investor-actors, using their resources as leverage to gain access and influence thinking, policies, and programmes. While these changes have provided opportunity for some organisations, they have also created new challenges for many who for decades have enjoyed a traditional funding relationship whereby they received funds and report on progress.

These dynamics provided a talking point for many of the key informants for this study. While this includes providing resources for implementing agencies like NGOs, they have taken on a wider role than this at strategic level as they have set out to change the sector through their leadership and influence. Key leaders from South African donor organisations participated in the drafting of the National Integrated ECD Policy. They simultaneously supported organisations working in the field which included advocacy to take the policy forward:

> **NGO5** "Because government does not coordinate the sector, donors have stepped into the void and some of it has left NGOs out."

One might argue that there is nothing untoward about these strategic actions; they are consistent with international thinking on the role of donor partners in countries. For example, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2008) notes the following in country roles for international donors:

- identify the binding constraints to pro-poor growth;
- undertake broad-based dialogue;
- innovate to find context-specific solutions;
- make informed and evidence-based policy choices such as by carrying out ex ante poverty impact assessments; and
- manage for development results and ensure accountability (OECD, 2007).

However, this does not let the donor community – who because of their resources are often given added power and influence – off the hook for the unintended negative impact their actions may have on sector progress. The unintended consequences of these actions can be

negative for the sector as a whole. “NGOs are much less likely to act as carriers of alternative ideas and energies if they are captured by the donor sector and its priorities” (Edwards, M., 2011).

Here, some points made by key informants are insightful about the blockages and challenges they believe to have been created by the actions of donors:

> **Donor7** “The donor community is as fragmented as the NGO sector...they have their own agendas...there’s a lot of turnover of staff…they jump around and often drive their own agenda...”

> **Academic2** “Donors can be roadblocks to some of what could be happening...they have their own priorities and even if the local community or a big network of NGOs, if your needs don’t fit this then you won’t get their funding...”

> **Academic6** “Ilifa has made a colossal impression on the ECD sector, there have been a lot of positives...the investment has been amazing and I think the fruit is there but I also think...unintendedly, it has been divisive and I think mostly, the main role players feel that Ilifa is a bully and that they have usurped some of the funding that has been available and is no longer there for RTOs and centres...a huge consortium telling government what to do...”

Given their preoccupation with sustainability, NGOs are often vulnerable to “following or at least accommodating the agendas and trends set by investors,” (Oxfam GB., 2004) and so become strategically unsettled often with long-term consequences for their sustainability. In South Africa, donors have come and gone, strategies have changed, and money has dried up.

Organisations that may have hoped, through their active participation, to secure their roles were faced with serious challenges that potentially threatened their sustainability; reference has been made in the previous section to the concerns of NGOs in this regard. As one informant put it:

> **Academic6** “The whole idea that has driven the sector has not been to see how they can support government to deliver the policy as much as it has been to see how they can keep going and get resources – we are seeing more resources going to things like

> Ilifa who are rather driving an agenda than supporting NGOs and that does threaten the traditional NGO sector as well...it may or may not be a good thing...it's hard to see if this has been more effective than the scattershot."

While focused, alongside other civil society organisations and government, on achieving ECD services of quality at scale, investors do not have a joined-up strategy. Rather, they seem to follow similar patterns of engagement to the rest of their sector counterparts; sometimes ad hoc, spared by their specific interpretation of needs and priorities and their geographic interests.

There is an ECD Donor Forum which was established in 2013 in an attempt to strengthen collaboration within the donor community and with government. The forum comprises sixteen members, 8 – 10 of whom participate regularly. Members of the forum do not pool funding, nor do they work together. Government cites collaboration with this forum in various documents and presentations but again, engagement with this body seems to have had little impact on the sector as a whole (Zenex Foundation and BRIDGE, 2016).

Some key informants noted that some donors collaborate with each other forming funding 'coalitions' to support their own strategic agendas. One key informant explained why this was perceived by some NGO leaders as a capture of their funding:

> **NGO4** "We have a problem with our funding being captured...I would like to speak my mind, we need to have an open honest conversation about it, this is the development sector, we need to talk openly. I am not the only person thinking like this...the same 'stable' funds us through the network and as individual organisations...I need to think more strategically about how we take this forward...the sector is badly treated/bullied by the bigger organisations rather than being nurtured...or growing the sector...dominant forces and this is dictatorship not collaboration."

Other powerful insights on the idea that donors should be collaborating between themselves and that they could play a role in supporting sector wide cooperation included:

> **Network1** "There's an issue about donors themselves collaborating...they should also be more strategic about where and how they are using their money...BRIDGE tried to

set up a donor community of practice – it fizzled out, they don't want to share."

Network1 "NGOs must be more open and honest, more deliberate, donors must also give more money for collaboration and collaborate themselves and step out of our comfort zones and think about how to be more collaborative and innovate."

Network4 "Things that spring to mind, to be fair, DGMT did provide some money toward the Steering Committee meetings and attending forums, this did allow for participation but when that finished there was no more forthcoming, so we are back to where we were. I think there is that issue, donors could play a role in providing resources."

Noteworthy is that, even though the term civil society sector is inclusive of all non-state actors including donors, funders, investors and philanthropists, informants for this study drew a clear line between themselves and the donor community. One key informant reasoned that the leadership and funding gap left by government had created an opportunity for donors and investors to use their resources to influence the ECD agenda in powerful ways.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter highlights the complex and rapidly changing terrain in which ECD NGOs find themselves. As take up of responsibility for ECD services by the state has taken hold, NGOs have found themselves having to adjust their own roles. Evidence shows that levers that have significantly accelerated preschool enrolment in lower-middle income countries (LMIC) include government taking a strong lead, policy reform, sub-sector planning, budgeting, and strong coordination which includes partnerships between the public and private sectors (Britto et al, 2014; Neuman and Hatipoglu, 2015).

This role for civil society is well recognised in the policy landscape in South Africa. At the same time, civil society organisations show a strong commitment to the ECD sector. These factors bode well for a functioning ECD system. Yet the civil society sector is fragmented and conflicted within itself and to some extent with government. Vulnerabilities about funding, territorialism, and weak capacity impact negatively on the ability of NGOs to present to government a coherent plan. As one key informant noted if these organisations are to survive then they:

Network1 "need to overcome a sense of territorial behaviour especially within national ECD bodies – we are not having the difficult and honest conversations we need to; these are expressed in whispers, no one says anything directly. We need to step up and have difficult and honest conversations with each other."

It is clear that the dysfunction that hampers progress in the ECD sector is not just about weak government leadership and systems. Civil society organisations also play a part, albeit inadvertently, to system inefficiencies and fail to act in ways that build coherence, collaboration, and success. While government is the duty bearer for services, the civil society sector has agency to act and to realise the partnership intentions expressed in the NDP and in the NIECD policy.

It is time for an approach that is "driven by leadership that combines a strong sense of civic responsibility, an informed understanding of the positive returns that can be generated by wise investment, and a willingness to explore new ideas" (Shonkoff, J.P., et al., 2016). ECD organisations in South Africa have expertise. They also often have a footprint in the vulnerable and under-served areas that need to be reached most and can potentially provide a powerful partner to government to achieve ECD policy goals. What this may entail is setting aside individually driven agendas to identify points of commonality. In the absence of a government led plan, there is nothing that stops civil society from developing, offering its own solutions to the current situation, and taking the lead.

> "Leadership exists when people are no longer victims of circumstances but participate in creating new circumstances...Ultimately, leadership is about creating new realities" (Senge, P. 2006).

Can we get to collaboration?

"Democratic societies need democratic governance and just and accessible institutions, both public and private, that build a more equitable society" (Kuljian, C.L., 2005).

8.1 Introduction

Thus far in this study I have illuminated features of the current ECD sector in South Africa that present a challenge to the sector and impact on the opportunities for the NGO sector. These include:

- government is the guarantor of children's rights to ECD. The National Development Plan 2030 positions NGOs as social change partners rather than oppositional players. Alongside government, business and development partners, they have the collective responsibility of advancing South Africa's shared goals for development, to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality, in which the effective provision of ECD services has a significant role to play (Volmink, J. and van der Elst, L., 2017);
- civil society organisations have been the backbone of the ECD sector. They have knowledge and expertise, but the sector is small, and they have been weakened due to the changing landscape in South Africa (and globally). They are also spread out and have contributed to the inequitable model of service provision that characterises ECD across the country;
- while much progress has been made toward an improved ECD system in recent years, there are serious lags in policy implementation and cross-sector coordination, and government has not provided the robust leadership, or a viable plan needed to pull the sector together. Gaps have created opportunities for negative disruption rather than enabling cooperation and collaboration to drive the sector forward;
- relationships in the sector between various stakeholders are fractured and sometimes difficult, even though there are pockets of excellence. Organisations compete, feeling uncertain about the future and are worried about financial viability, and skeptical of finding a collective approach to addressing the gaps in provision and thus building their sustainability and securing their long-term role in ECD.

In this chapter, I pick up on the leading ideas from the key informants about this challenging space and explore the insights they shared on the potential for collaborative action. From government to donors to NGOs, it is evident that some of the dynamics that exist in the sector could prevent a joined-up, systemic approach to solving the ECD problem in South Africa.

The collective voice of the key informants for this study suggests that these underlying forces are fuelled by a failure to lead, an overly complex policy and system design, poorly conceived sector coordination, personal egos, conflicting agendas, a loss of faith in what is possible (experiences of marginalisation) and levels of fear and anxiety about the survival and the future of NGOs in particular.

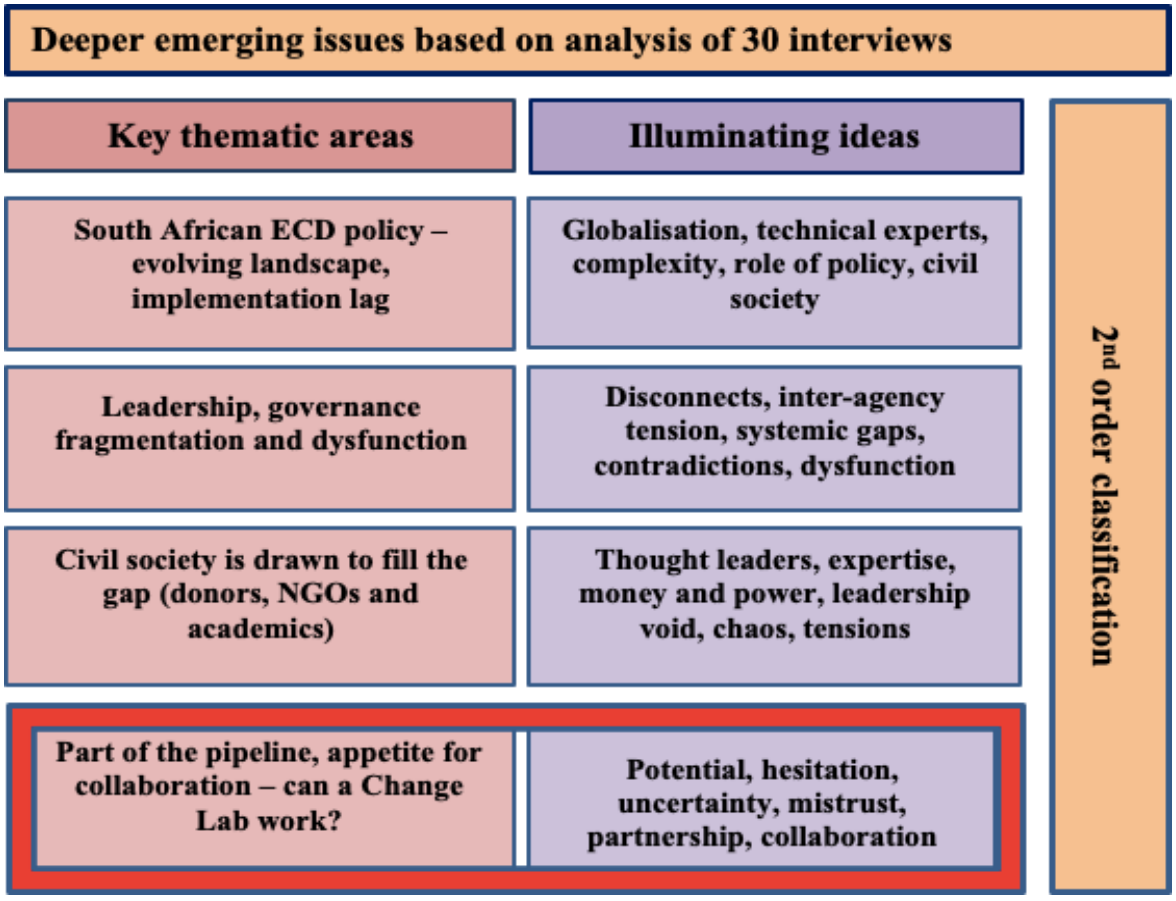

Figure 8.1: The focus moves to a deeper analysis of NGOs and their future role

The key informant data and analysis for this chapter will provide an idea of the extent to which ECD NGOs already work together and their appetite for deeper collaboration (Figure 8.1). This will provide essential evidence for the potential of shaping a viable Change Lab process for ECD NGOs in South Africa.

8.2 The role of NGOs in the ECD sector – a global perspective

As already expressed in this study, around the world interest in early childhood development has expanded significantly over the past twenty years. By 2018, at least seventy countries had ratified national ECD policies. Also, evident internationally is that the achievement of these policy goals presents significant challenges, especially lower-middle income countries (LMICs). In the literature this is attributed to similar issues raised so far in this study; the complexity of coordination across multiple agencies, a system that is not fit for purpose, inadequate human resources, political considerations (internal and external to the system) and insufficient financing (Clark, H., et al., 2020; Neuman, M.J. and Okeng'o, L., 2019; Richter, L.M., et al., 2018).

Ratified in 2015, the NIECD Policy was a significant moment for the ECD sector in South Africa. It brought together years of white papers, policymaking and activism for young children (Atmore, E., 2019; Rudolph, N. 2996). Using evidence generated by a national study on the status of young children in South Africa, the policy set clear evidence-based goals for the ECD sector and defined mechanisms (national, provincial, and local) for the coordination and implementation of early years programmes and services. \

What is not well-defined is the funding of the system and the human resources (training, employment, deployment etc.) needed to put services on the ground. Struggling against these challenges is not unique to South Africa. Current global evidence points to early years policymaking/policy- implementation cycles, as dynamic and emerging, largely unable to scale programmes and monitor quality (Yoshikawa, H., et al., 2018; Bertram, T. and Pascal, C., 2016).

In South Africa, by 2019 at least 1.1 million children between three and five years of age were not in an early learning programme, with at least 65% of this population living in households below the upper poverty line (Hall. K, et al., 2019). While the ECD sector is struggling to survive, these numbers point to gaps that civil society organisations could be filling in partnership with the state. They bring experience and expertise, often with a ready focus on serving families and children living in poverty affected areas where they contribute to "filling the gaps due to coordination failures triggered by inadequate institutional arrangements and the political economy". This expertise is critical to expanding services (Atinc, T.M. and Gustafsson-Wright, E., 2013; Richter, L.M., et al. 217).

Some would see public private partnerships as a critical feature of a diverse ECD sector – a means to promote innovation, increase provision, grow demand, and stimulate quality. Where the fiscus is under strain, government capacity low and the expertise of the civil society sector high, public private partnerships can be an important lever to accelerate policy realisation and strengthen the pipeline of provision (Gustafsson-Wright, E., Smith, K. and Gardiner, S., 2016).

This can be seen as a win-win-win for government, civil society organisations and for children and their families. While it holds that government is the duty bearer for ECD, it does not necessarily follow that they be the sole provider. It may even be that public private partnerships stimulate provision, increase demand and keep quality high (Patrinos, H., 2019). By governing the sector and facilitating the conditions for implementation (creating an enabling environment), government can play a powerful role in ensuring services reach where they are most needed (Hill, M. and Hupe, P., 2014).

There are also critics of the absorption of civil society organisations or NGOs as part of extended state machinery leading to a more 'professionalised' sector that may be less connected with the voices and needs of the communities they serve on the ground. This process of transition, and the conflicts it may produce for organisations that try to hold true to their roots while attempting to traverse terrain that is seen to influence their survival, can also be a contributing factor to the challenges faced by leaders of the NGO sector (who have traditionally been a voice of critique and accountability). It may also explain why government's approach to NGOs is guarded and sometimes conflicted (Clark, J., 1993; Ungsuchaval, T., 2016).

South Africa's evidence-based policy provided a critical starting point to motivate for science-based, programmatic action across the ages and stages of early development. However, the realisation of these goals depends on solid state leadership and a competent delivery system. The civil society sector has played a significant role in getting ECD on the road in South Africa.

The disruption to this role by government's actions (albeit inadvertently), has to some extent unsettled an under-funded and struggling sector that seems uncertain of how to plot a way forward that is sustainable. This study has pointed to the complexity of the situation that non-state actors find themselves in, as government – without a ready, detailed roadmap or system

for ECD – has stepped-up to take the reins for the sector.

Policy implementation is tricky. Pressman and Wildavsky (1994) argue that even under the best of circumstances it is a challenge. Evidence shows that "top-down approaches to policy implementation don't work and that the only way to steer (govern) a complex system is through influencing and shaping its context" (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Bekkers, V., Fenger, M. and Scholten, P., 2017). In his ground-breaking work "Street-level Bureaucracy – Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services'.

Lipsky (2010) emphasised that policy is not created only in "legislatures of top-floor suites'; its co-creators are the day-to-day actors who take it to the people, and they become the policy because their actions determine access to government intentions (Lipsky, M., 2010). When street level bureaucrats don't connect with policy intention it will never be fully realised.

8.3 Thoughts on NGO collaboration

The organisations of some key informants already have a working relationship with the government (mostly Department of Social Development or Department of Health and usually independently of each other). Many also work in some form of collaboration with each other through their networks. Juxtaposed to this are levels of dissonance and disconnection across the sector within and between all players in the field, government, donors, academics, and NGOs alike.

As explored in the previous chapter, NGO informants expressed a level of frustration, uncertainty and even anxiety about the future of their organisations because of these many challenges. When asked if they thought that collaboration between organisation could in part be a solution to the challenges organisations were facing, key informants shared strong views, with varying perspectives across clusters. Unsurprisingly, given their role already as leaders of existing ECD (N) networks, respondents in this cluster were all of the view that collaboration was essential (100%) if they were to achieve sustainability and to continue to support the ECD sector.

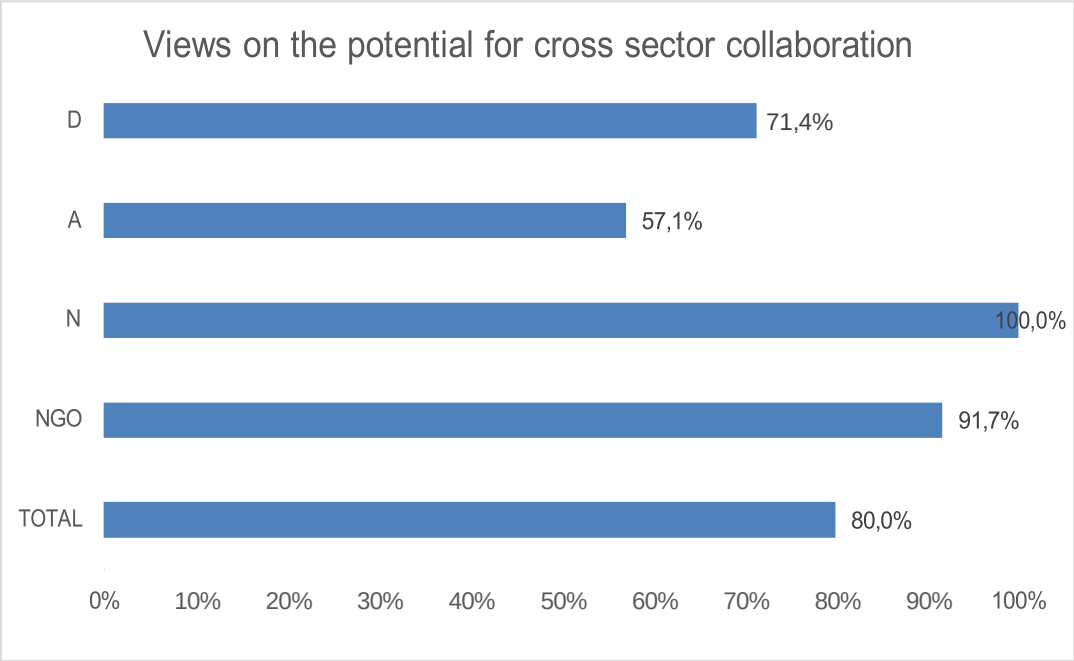

Table 8.1: Tabulations of key informant clusters on cross sector collaboration

Though some NGOs did raise concerns, 91,7% were primarily of the view that this would be an important contributor to their organisational wellbeing. The concerns raised are explored later in this chapter. Only 20% of the donor group (D) thought it would not be feasible. Academics and thought leaders (A) were less inclined to support collaboration (57,1%) as a means to achieve scale (Figure 8.2). This was largely due to the view that organisations and individuals were not primed for collaboration.

To elaborate and provide some insight on the thinking that informed these positions, some key informant points are shared:

> **NGO3** "If we collaborate, we can share information that can bring change, if we start having the conversation...I can't blame DGMT because they are doing it, we can also do it, okay they have a big cheque book behind them, it would be nice if they included us and took our ideas on things, we thought could also be valuable."

> **NGO8** "At the heart of peoples' inability to collaborate lies the issue of sustainability – instead of understanding there are millions of children needing access, we are competing for resources, so you try to set yourself apart from others...Everybody is fighting for survival – instead of being in a place of collaboration you are in a competitive and even combative space so that is not helping the situation."

NGO9 "Collaboration and working together is key – the need in our country is great – the private space can't do it alone, the public space can't do it alone...It is crucial that we have a network of bodies working for the good of our country, ensuring quality intervention, quality management, quality implementation & quality monitoring."

N4 "I think the only way is to find a balance through collaboration, we cannot afford to be in isolation anymore...Finding balance between a standard and allowing for innovation."

A/E5 "In my opinion I don't think there is a collaborative spirit – it is not a partnership; government does not see NGOs as partners...they are in charge and organisations must adhere to what they are saying."

Collaboration across the sector is not a new idea. ECD networks are already in existence and have provided a space for organisations to consider their various roles, in order to act and learn together. Some donors have provided support to these cooperative efforts while some NGOs have formed partnerships or even social franchises to enable more effective collaborative work. Yet, the sector remains fragmented and service-delivery patchy

8.4 Donors sometimes negatively disrupt the sector

Private philanthropy and investment have played an important role in establishing the ECD sector in South Africa. While new ECD organisations (investors and NGOs) focused on scaling services to poor families have sprung up recently, one could argue that it is a select group of NGOs, funded by a small cluster of donors, that played a role in shaping the ECD agenda we see today.

How NGOs talk to donors when they feel less than equal seems to be a concern. Some key informants noted that work they had shared had been colonised by donors and used as the basis for expanding their own endeavours. There is anger and frustration with the donor sector and a perception that some of their disruption has had negative consequences for individual organisations and even for the sector as a whole.

As one key informant put it:

A4: "There is something structural at play that allows donors to think they are gifting and doing good work and play as God, and not realising that what they are supporting on the ground are real human beings – they are not embodying collaboration and trying to build a unity between the different role-players – you have money you have power."

Key informants spoke extensively about their survival concerns. While they recognised the need to find new ways of sustaining their organisations, they seemed unclear about how to go about doing this. They also expressed a level of frustration with the ECD donor community. Data from the key informant interviews show many of the NGO informants felt strategically ambushed and at the same time stuck, because without donor funding, they cannot do their work.

NGO4 "Many NGOs hang on for dear life rather than reinvent themselves...offering the same old same old...If it were a marketplace, the system of capitalism would have killed them already...If we could find the same system in the NGO context – if you no longer offer a service for which there is a need you should die."

NGO5 "Organisations have a history...doing things their own way...they need to be open to something new coming in and they have to raise funds to deliver...this takes time to become part of their strategy and what they are willing to invest."

NGO6 "My thoughts are sitting down with donors and funders...having a credible champion…Being able to make the link could make the difference but I doubt at this stage that we have these kinds of champions who would win them over."

In the previous chapter, the failure of donors to collaborate with each other beyond a limited number of shared platforms was explored. Also noted was that they did not play a role in bringing coherence and collaboration to the sector as a whole. Some key informants noted that their actions had in some instances contributed to further fragmentation. Some had strong words on this:

NGO5 "Donors have taken it upon themselves to fix things that don't work...you can join in only if you are handpicked and if you get into the inner circle – where is the

transparency."

NGO3 "Donors have become competitors; they have all the resources...we have to fit in with their agenda or not participate...our funding and development agenda has been captured."

Academic: Often the donors contribute to this (fragmentation) by having targets and goals that they want to fund."

Academic "We are seeing more resources going to things like Ilifa who are rather driving an agenda than supporting NGOs and that does threaten the traditional NGO...it may or may not be a good thing...it's hard to see if this has been more effective than the scattershot."

8.5 Learning from collaboration near and far

As already referenced in this study, there are trends in the systemic challenges facing countries around the world. Especially comparable are the stresses on low and low-middle income countries where systems are essentially being established from scratch. It is in these contexts that a number of innovative initiatives in the ECD sector, involving civil society organisations working collaboratively with each other and the state, have emerged. To learn from current practices, some examples of these approaches from South Africa and a couple of international initiatives are further explored in what follows.

8.5.1 The Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Education (PIECCE)

The South African innovation Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (PIECCE) is funded by the European Union. It is a collaboration led by University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa Institute for Distance Education (Saide), the Centre for Social Development at Rhodes University and BRIDGE (a cross sectoral platform bringing education stakeholders together through communities of practice). Initiated in 2016, representatives from each organisation work with a group of longstanding ECD NGOs, the Department of Higher Education (DHET) and a consortium of Higher Education Institutions (Ebrahim, H.B., 2019).

Two key informants for this research study reflected positively on the initiative noting the

potential for similar processes to transform the ECD landscape and increase the potential not just for cross sectoral collaboration but also for a better functioning ECD ecosystem.

> **Network** "The PIECCE work is really interesting it will lead to the development of a model for collaboration...seeing people listening to each other in facilitated and productive ways. The quality tool is a good example of a cooperative project and organisations can work collaboratively from networking to a contractual stage."

> **Academic** "PIECCE is a good example of how partnerships can lead to change in the ECD landscape. Structures need to be deliberately set up so that integrated ECD is part of roles and responsibilities of institutions. If the system favours sectoral responses to ECD and fragmentation within a sector, then it is inevitable that people would be channelled to work in this way."

Key drivers of this intervention were strong leadership from within the ECD sector, positive and engaged government agencies and an agile donor investor who followed the lead of government and its partners rather than expecting to be followed.

8.5.2 The Collaboration of ECD Networks (CECDN)

The Collaboration of ECD Networks (CECDN) is a network of networks initiated between BRIDGE, the National ECD Alliance (NECDA) and South African Congress for ECD (SACECD is a national membership organisation of ECD practitioners) , that was started in response to the President's announcement that government would migrate the responsibility for ECD centres from the Department of Social Development and the Department of Basic Education. Together these ECD networks facilitated dialogues across nine provinces and one national dialogue to gather insights and feedback on this intended change to the ECD landscape.

The main output of these dialogues was a report outlining key considerations and concerns on the function shift, to be shared with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and other government agencies. The process was funded by the DGMT with the intention of feeding this outcome into a broader set of engagements being facilitated by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) on the ECD sector (BRIDGE, 2019). The report concludes that rather than be the end of a process, it be viewed as a step in a consultative journey between

CECDN partners and government.

Key informants did not comment specifically on this dialogue process (which took place after the data collection). However, comments that were made by academics/experts and network leaders do connect with the ideas that underpin this process. Collaboration was seen as important, but there was some skepticism on this and some hope that, if it happened, NGOs could develop their own implementation plans:

> **Academic6** "People get together and talk a lot there's no shortage of this...there is a CT network and province network...lots to networks where people talk about their programme or evaluation and even share their concerns with government, but I did not ever find a united petition to government between the top NGOs – so it works both ways – NGOs could have come with a ten-year plan!"

8.5.3 Doing the work for government can be a risky business

Ilifa Labantwana and Kago Ya Bana (an initiative of the Hollard Foundation Trust) collaborated to produce and publish a well-conceived plan that could lead the sector to achieve the National Integrated ECD policy objectives by 2030. The action plan includes costing, human resource projections and details of a coordinating mechanism. It is prefaced as a 'discussion' starter, stating up front that:

> "Because ECD has so many aspects to it, every sector of society needs to play its part. Many pieces are already in place, but there are still some big gaps that can be filled. Now is the time to put in place a powerful social compact for ECD." (Ilifa Labantwana and Kago Ya Bana, 2018).

This is a thorough and hopeful document illustrating all the benefits that would come from a compact such as this. It pushes the idea that public private partnerships with every sector playing its role are an integral part of a national social compact for ECD. Civil society organisations (NGOs) and faith-based organisations are on this social compact map with the statement "build new networks of support".

Doing the work first and hoping to market it to government afterwards is a risky strategy that

has not, in my experience, borne fruit. In fact, I have participated in meetings where irritated government leaders have accused donors of attempting to run a parallel government. This plan was not developed by or with government nor with other civil society stakeholders. The politics and power of the sector make take-up unlikely.

8.5.4 The case of Bangladesh GO-NGO

In 2005, the Bangladesh ECD Network (BEN) was able to broker a partnership between the state and the non-state ECD sector, which, until then had been tenuous. In 2008 the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MPME) initiated the Operational Framework for Universal Pre-Primary Education (PPE). Its development included liaison with BEN to ensure a mutual understanding of the implementation roles of government and the non-state sector.

By 2010, the BEN network included 240 members (this tapered off to 159 by 2015). The relationship between state and this network of civil society organisations was guided by the GO-NGO Guideline, which set out the terms of reference for partnerships, contracting and an application process. Under an MOU, a three-tiered coordination structure was activated, which included government and non-state representation (Zannatum, Z. and Khosneara, K. 2017; Ahmed, M., 2011).

This process was not perfect, but it does illustrate how a well organised ECD civil society sector can provide an important platform for engagement with the state, leading to favourable outcomes for both. Furthermore, it shows how a state led regulatory framework can be consultative and be part of an enabling ECD eco-system, creating conditions that are conducive to partnerships (Patrinos, H.A., et al., 2009).

While there are examples, as cited earlier in this chapter, of strong collaboration between civil society organisations and the state in South Africa. These have been in ‘pockets. Key informants spoke strongly of the need for government to lead and, a little more tenuously, about collaboration between civil society organisations.

> **Academic “**If you had some kind of coordination body that utilises the existing landscape to knit together a solution – over time this could emerge into something more state-led

– the expertise is there; the state needs to take leadership of the sector ...”

Academic “We know even intuitively we need to collaborate, and government needs to lead...why hasn’t government taken the lead?”

Network “No one organisation can hold the space this is why you need a broad base of support from the ECD sector...”

8.5.5 Learning from Strive

Strive is a non-profit initiative in Cincinnati that brought local leaders together to address a student underachievement crisis: a situation that other agencies and thought leaders had not managed to solve.

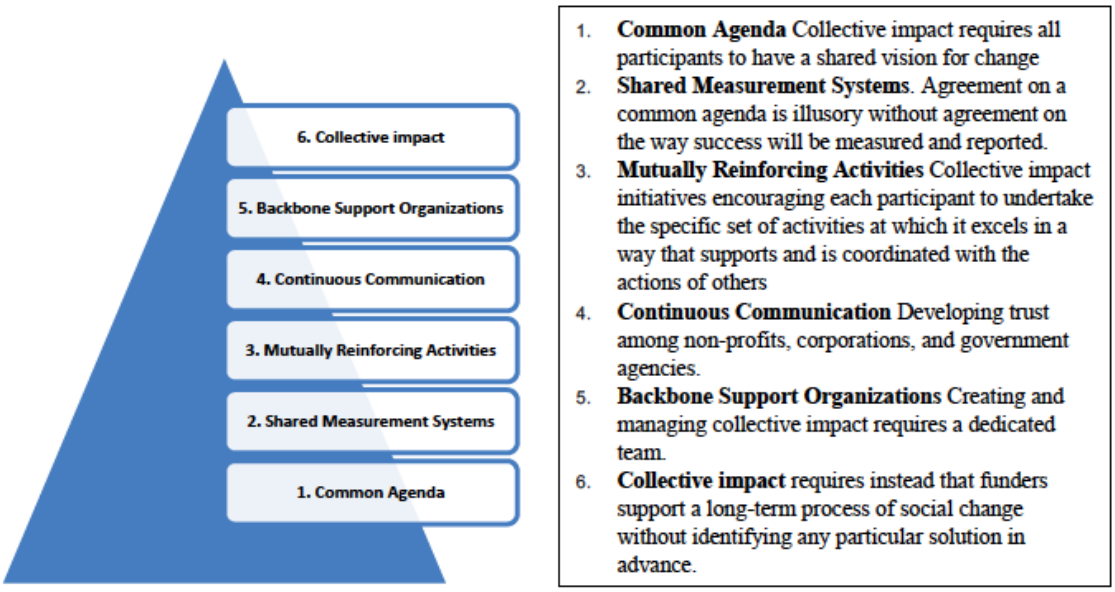

Figure 8.2: The six key features of the Strive model that enables its success

Despite numerous circumstantial challenges, the outcome was a great success. Programme developers claim the first pillar of this achievement was the commitment of the core group of leaders to “abandon their individual agendas in favour of a collective approach”. The programme-developers note six key features of their work (Figure 8.2) that changed the game (Kania, J. and Kramer, M., 2011).

8.6 In conclusion – NGOs can take the lead

Traditional problem-solving strategies no longer provide the much-needed answers to social

issues and policy-implementation-lags in many sectors just keep growing. New ways of solving problems and achieving systems outcomes are needed (OECE, 2017). In this chapter, various ways of solving problems through collaboration have been explored.

The Bangladesh story illustrates how political will translates into an environment that is enabling of deep collaboration between government and non-state organisations. Again, as was evident in Bangladesh as well as in the story of Strive, civil society organisations do not have to wait for government. They have the potential to lead, organise themselves and use this collective voice to engage government constructively. The work done by the PIECE project as well as the CECDN show that the potential exists for deeper collaboration between South African organisations. Stepping in this direction could be critical for their future survival as one key informant reflected:

> **Network3 "**Certainly over the past year, I have seen fundamental shifts in thinking about collaboration and contracting across all stakeholders... I think one of the biggest things around why the sector is stuck is that we are a bit scared to embrace change...we are a bit nervous to take the lead."

Shonkoff (2016) emphasises that at this moment in time we have an "unprecedented ... opportunity to catalyse a new era in early childhood policy and practice...to aim higher in order to achieve significant breakthroughs for children" (Shonkoff, J.P., Et al., 2016). Action requires the setting aside of egos, relationship building and a willingness to collaborate within the sector across and between organisations (even individuals), goals and ideas. The civil society sector would benefit from leaning into more innovative practices. Collective impact initiatives and problem-solving approaches are good tools for finding solutions to 'wicked' problems that have their origin in complexity and defy linear or technocratic solutions (Easterling, D., et al, 2013).

Chapter Nine
Initiating an ECD Change Lab

"Innovation and entrepreneurship start with passion, so we need to focus more on that" (Banks, K. 2016).

9.1 Introduction

This study has highlighted the many available opportunities to advance ECD in South Africa, as well as the numerous blockages and dysfunctions that reduce the potential of organisations to leverage off these possibilities. In this final chapter, the idea of a Change Lab as a tool to push through the blockages and challenges facing civil society and to achieve greater levels of coherence, cooperation and collaboration is deliberated. If civil society organisations that are important to the ECD ecosystem in South Africa identify solutions to the uncertainties they face, this bodes well for the sector and especially for young children.

Government is the critical actor in the ECD sector and it has taken important action to advance ECD in South Africa. As this study has stressed, changes led by government are significant but so are the gaps. By demonstrating political will, playing a strategic leadership role that activates collaboration and investing widely in the ECD sector, government can strengthen the actions already taken and increase the viability of the ECD eco-system in South Africa. This should include attention to how ECD is coordinated, perhaps through the function shift to ensure that, however the coordinating body is constituted, it has the resources (political, mandate, financial and human) to do its work. This should incorporate harnessing the expertise available in the civil society sector (Hall, K., et al., 2019; Neuman, M.J. and Devercelli, A.E., 2013).

Figure 9.1 PPPs can promote service delivery (Source: Minister P Gordon, Medium Term Budget Policy Speech)

Furthermore, civil society organisations have been shown to have interest and capacity to work together to advance ECD outcomes although the reach of their work remains limited. Civil society organisations can be responsive and agile, they have "a unique role in fostering innovations...the ability to experiment, move faster (than government) and act as an agent of change" (Nishtar, S., 2016). These capabilities add to civil society's value as a potential partner to the state. There are numerous obstacles to achieving this amongst them, the reservations of leaders about inter-sectoral relationships, trust, capacity and organisational sustainability.

Piecemeal collaboration when the resources are specifically available will not facilitate the radical innovations that are needed to build bridges and mastermind population coverage. While civil society organisations are worried about finances and their survival, rather than allowing this to suck them into inaction and uncertainty, it should add momentum to an agenda for transformation. Collaboration could be the springboard for deeper engagement and action. Problems that manifest with these multiple layers lend themselves to equally multi-layered problem-solving approaches which are "systemic, participative and emergent" (Freeth, R. and Drimmie, S., 2016). The knock-on of a more organised civil society sector would be enhanced systems and potentially more effective governance.

The conflicts and tensions raised by key informants during this study are troubling. However, Kahane (2017) argues that our misunderstanding of the term 'collaboration' stands in the way of progress. When working with uncertainty, he is emphatic that collaboration does not imply consensus. In fact, he argues that making progress often requires working with people we do not agree with or trust and so we need to move away from these visions of being on the same page and embrace a view of "collaboration that embraces discord, experimentation, and genuine co-creation" (Kahane, A., 2017).

9.2 What is a Change Lab?

Reos partners, who are experts in the use of innovative approaches to solving complex social problems, define the Change Lab as "systemic, participative, creative approach to making progress on complex social challenges that matter" (Kahane. A,. 2011). The Change Lab processes brings together leaders from across a social sector to talk, explore, learn and act to effect change in their eco-system. Key to this process is the focus on action. Participants do not just work with these ideas in facilitated sessions; they go away and try their change

strategies in the field.

A well-known example of a successful Change Lab process is the Sustainable Food Lab (SFL) which drew together more than sixty leaders from a cross-section of business, government, farmers and NGOs. This Change Lab provided a 'laboratory' where participants could work together to create a pathway for the institutionalisation of the conditions conducive to sustaining its work across organisations. This systems-building process included bringing government to the table as part of the solution seeking approach (Goldberg, K., 2014).

A Change Lab offers a compelling, inclusive methodology to tackle the seemingly impossible ECD landscape, providing the space needed for creative, cross-sector and cross-disciplinary decision-making and innovation. This potentially creates the space for trust and collective vision building, deeper empathy and ways of working together to achieve the overall goals that are common to everyone's agenda, a better world for our youngest children (Westley., F. et al. 2017). Change Labs are innovative design processes that are particularly effective for navigating through wicked problems. Wicked problems are regarded as so complex that actually identifying the specific cause of the issue is almost impossible, making the identification of a solution difficult (Termeer, C.J., et al., 2019). CoLab offers a tool that can be used to guide decision making about the usefulness of a Change Lab for ECD.

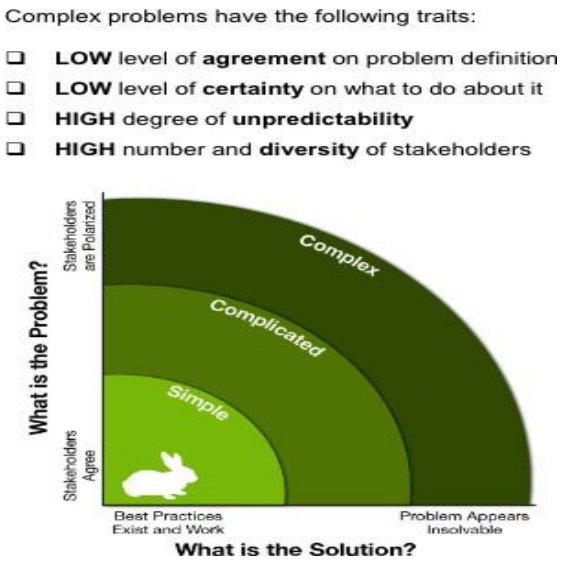

Figure 9.2: CoLab Tool for identifying wicked problems (Source: CoLab, 2016)

Four key features of the problem are identified using the tool (Figure 9.1):

- low agreement on the problem;
- low certainty on how to solve the problem;
- high degree of uncertainty; and
- a high number of diverse stakeholders (CoLab., 2016).

When each of these elements converge, CoLab argues it can be defined as a wicked problem.

Activating an ECD Change Lab

> "Disruption isn't about what happens to you, it's about how you respond to what happens to you" (Samit, J., 2015).

A Change Lab for ECD could provide an ideal space for the non-state sector to pause, explore and work out the next steps. It offers a route to explore dynamics and potential for collaboration, build trust and develop prototypes for future work that could bring much needed new energy to a divided sector.

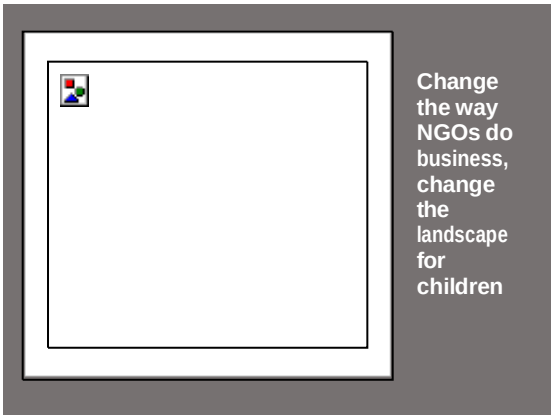

Figure 9.3 Civil society organisations can be the change-makers for ECD

The civil society sector has a history of change-making in South Africa. How it uses its agency can alter dynamics and stimulate lasting change. The next section of this chapter provides a brief overview of how this research process could be used as the basis for the establishment of a Change Lab for ECD and how the Lab would work.

I.Activate the Change Lab: this research study provides the "pot of collective

knowledge, insight and wisdom" (Freeth, R. and Drimmie, S., 2016) that could be used to harness energy and inform strategic conversations through a Change Lab for ECD (Change4Children Lab). The wisdom of the group of thirty key informants provides enough insight into the underlying structural issues and sector dynamics that impact on the current ECD situation to structure the start-up of a lab process. Narratives about the sector and its struggles can be crafted from this study to create a starting place for a Change Lab process.

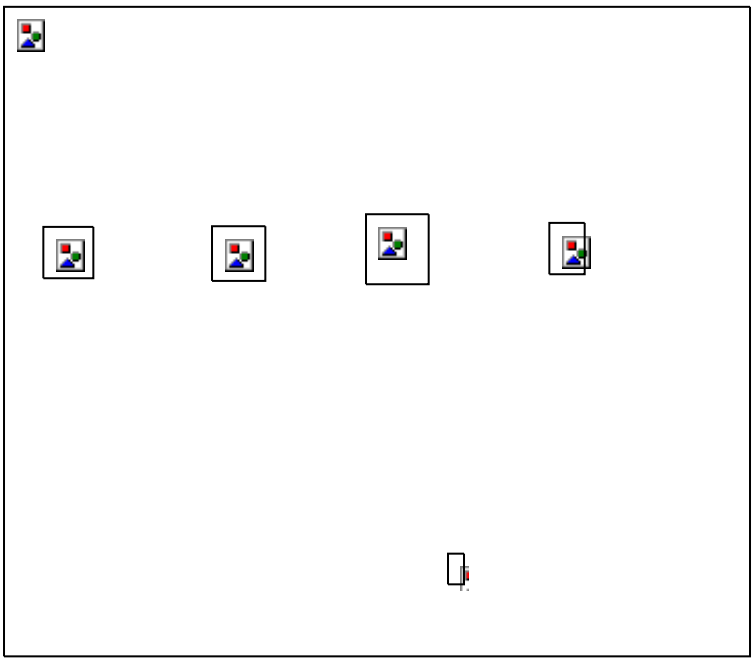

Figure 9.4 The Change Lab would involve 4 key steps Activate, Inspire, Collaborate and Innovate

II.Inspire change: participants in this study shared their frustrations and concerns about their work and the ECD sector as a whole, especially about the sustainability of their organisations. While they had misgivings about being able to work together, Change Labs provide open space to imagine a new future, figure things out, break out of old way of doing things and to experiment with new solutions.

III.Collaborate to solve challenges: a lab process provides participants with an opportunity to explore different types of collaboration and to identify possible, testable prototypes to shift the fragmentation, mistrust and financial challenges facing the ECD sector.

IV.Innovate for lasting change: Change Labs are not just talk shops; they focus

on implementing ideas in the field. It is imaginable that through this process, new ideas and partnerships can be tested in the field.

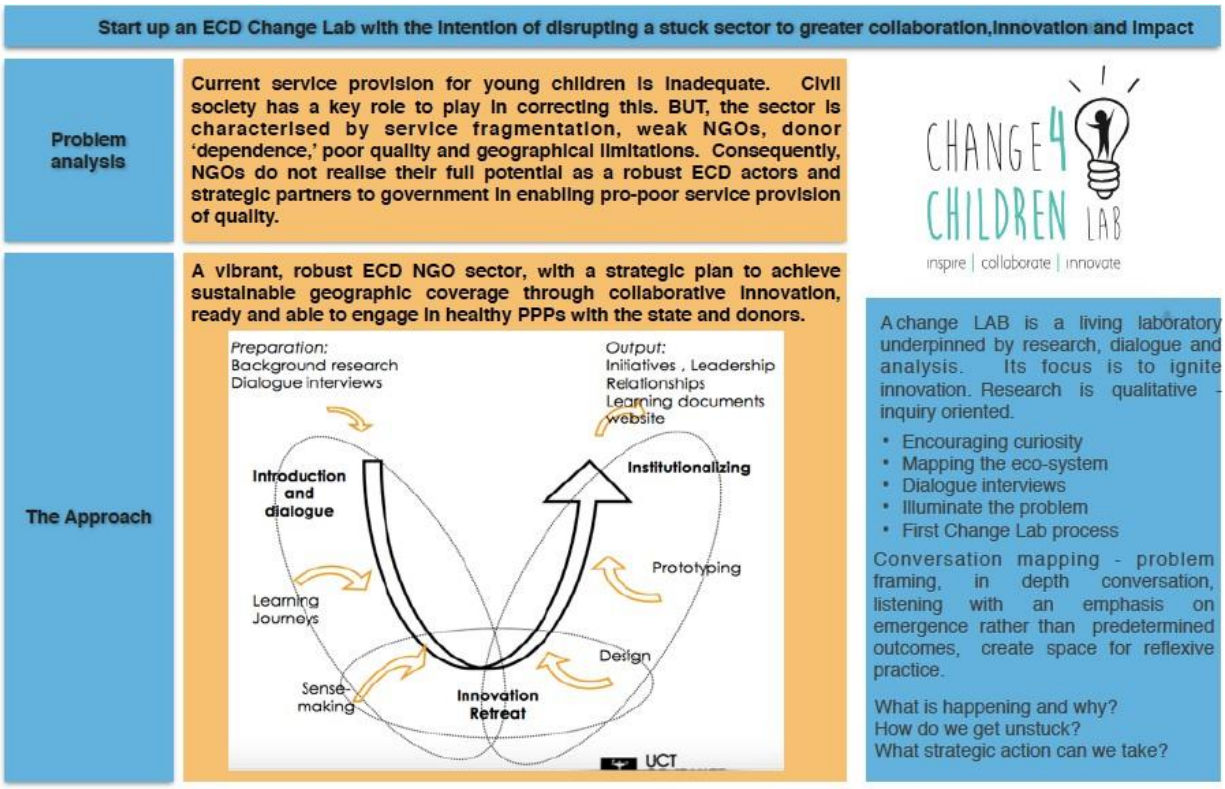

Figure 9.5: The idea of the Change Lab and its potential impact is summed up in the project one pager above

9.4 Conclusion

Through this study, I have highlighted the compelling argument for both government and civil society to prioritise the development and wellbeing of our youngest children as a way to change the future for them individually and for us as a nation. Attention has been drawn to the multiple failings on the part of all actors to respond to this unprecedented opportunity manifest in early life in a coherent and collaborative way. The failure to do to has disastrous consequences for thousands of children evident in the failure of a large percentage of young people in our country to thrive in school and beyond. Evidence through the study points to too many young children still outside learning programmes, while their mothers, 40% of whom are single, struggle to find ways of ensuring their youngsters are cared for and learning while they are at work (Van den Berg, W. and Makusha, T., 2018).

The Government of South Africa recognises ECD as an important development opportunity and has accordingly placed significant emphasis on the universal access noticeable in the

creation of an enabling policy environment to support service delivery since 1994. Perhaps the most significant acknowledgment of this in recent years is the National Development Plan and the advent of the integrated policy for ECD in 2015, addressing much of what civil society organisations had advocated for over many years.

Yet, even as government agencies responded to these reforms by becoming more vocal about their role and commitments to lead the ECD sector, their efforts have yet to successfully result in the closing of longstanding gaps. As is noted in the opening chapter, over a million disadvantaged children between 3 and 5 years old still do not benefit from organised early learning programmes. This is a massive public policy failure calling for urgent action; every day that passes is a day lost for young children.

Although government is the duty bearer and so responsible for this dismal performance, they are not alone on the field. Non-state actors who have historically been the leaders of ECD thinking and action in South Africa also play a central role offering the potential to play a role in filling these gaps.

This arrangement is not unusual; around the world, it is well noted that public private partnerships provide a means to increase the reach of programmes to children who are outside of the system. The potential of this kind of relationship between the state and civil society organisations in South Africa is on the road but it is fraught. As the state has clearly struggled to systematise its approach to ECD so the civil society sector has in many respects mirrored this state of affairs.

Through the voices of civil society actors interviewed for this study, light has been shed on a group of committed but struggling organisations and leaders who have yet to fully define their role in a changing landscape. Shifts in direction, programmes and expectations have not only come from the state; donors and investors have also altered their way of working in an attempt to match government action as well as to solve problems as they perceive them and to provide strategic leadership to sector.

The effect of these actions seems sometimes to lead to conflict, undermining the work and leadership of some while advantaging others. Conflict between agencies because of this milieu is evident and no doubt plays into a complex landscape limiting or inhibiting to some extent

the direction taken by key actors in the sector. With an eye on sustainability, organisations are concerned about the future.

Following the money, although recognised as not ideal, is a consistent concern while trying to stay their selected course, resolve critical questions about what lies ahead and how best to position themselves. Actions towards change across the sector are often fragmented sometimes with organisations collaborating with each other or with government but this is inconsistent. There is no strategic plan for how, together, the state and civil society can work across the spheres or government and the responsible agencies to drive on plan for change to ensure every child has the best start in life.

An ECD Change Lab process offers a potential route to respond to these challenging dynamics, to explore and to test new solutions. Change Labs are living laboratories drawing life from processes of collective enquiry, problem framing and solution seeking. Because Change Labs work best in the context of wicked problems, the potential to unfreeze entities, open new channels for innovation and solve problems in the ECD sector is strong.

Such a Lab could imaginably bring ECD civil society stakeholders together to build the trust that is lacking, develop a strategic plan and create prototypes that together they can test in the field. As Englund and Price (2018) found in their work in the Higher Education sector, Change Labs provide opportunities for participants to analyse, envision and reshape their practice, together.

An ECD Change Lab for the sector in South Africa could go a long way to transforming the status quo and strengthening the system, bottom up.

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Appendix 1: List of Donors Referenced in the Study

Name of donor	
DG Murray Trust	https://dgmt.co.za/
FNB Foundation	https://www.fnb.co.za/about-fnb/csi/fnb-fund.html
ELMA Philanthropies	https://www.elmaphilanthropies.org/
Jim Joel Fund	https://www.jimjoelfund.org/
Hollard Foundation	https://www.hollard.co.za/company-overview/corporate-social-investment
Standard Bank Tutuwa Community Foundation	https://tutuwafoundation.org/standimg/StandardBankGroup/tutuwa/
Omidyar Network	https://omidyar.com/
Assupol Community Trust	https://assupol.co.za/about-us/assupol-community-trust/
Allan Gray Orbis Foundation Endowment	https://www.allangrayorbis.org/about/
Lego Foundation	https://www.legofoundation.com/en/

Appendix 2: Ethics Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

FACULTY OF COMMERCE

Igniting Knowledge and Opportunity

Ethics Approval Request for the Study entitled:

Developing a scalable ECD Lab to invigorate inclusive innovation within the ECD NGO sector and so advance service delivery in under-served communities

Signed by:

	Full name and signature	Date
Principal Researcher/Student:		2/12/2017

This application is approved by:

Supervisor		2 Dec 2016
Co- Supervisor		

7.12.2016
Approved
Prof U Rivett
Chair
Ethics in Research Committee
Faculty of Commerce
University of Cape Town

The approval of this application is based on the researcher ensuring that all requirements regarding the permission to interview participants at the various organizations have been fulfilled prior to any surveys being conducted.

Com Ethics_V4

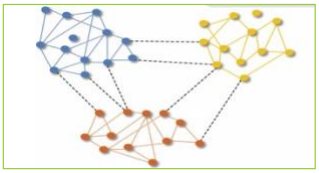
Appendix 3: Cue Cards used to facilitate dialogue interviews

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:CUE CARDS

1. THE VARIOUS ROLE-PLAYERS: YOUR FIT?

In many parts of the world, especially the developing world, civil society work in partnership with government to provide services for children and families. This also happens in South Africa. You were asked to participate in this research because of your role as expert, leader from one of these role-players, would you say more about who you are and where you believe you and your organisation fit.

2. HOW THE ROLE-PLAYERS WORK TOGETHER?



The National Integrated ECD Policy tells us our noble intentions, as civil society, have not been enough and we have inadvertently contributed to enabling systems dysfunction and perpetuated inequality in SA. What is your view on this position and why?

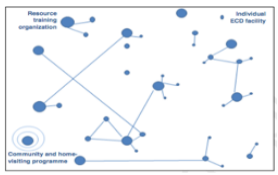
3. EFFORTS TO COLLABORATE?

The ECD sector works in silos within and across health, education, and social development yet we need to deliver one package of services. The policy calls for a 'new' model of working together that embraces the principles of networking, coordinating, cooperating, collaborating, and contracting. Some say that this has always been the intention, but it has not happened successfully despite the existence of various networking platforms.

What is your view on collaboration – is it a necessary condition for expansion and quality? What are the dynamics we must overcome to achieve this? Looking the layers of working together described below, where would you rate your current endeavour, what level would you be willing to work towards?

4. THE NGO SECTOR AS ROBUST PARTNER IN DELIVER?

The NGO sector has also been described in the diagram below has uncoordinated, haptic and scattershot in its planning and execution. Many leaders and actors in the ECD sector come across as intolerant of the NGO sector claiming the more things change the more it remains the same. Some have even said that government will deliver ECD services without NGOs unless they step up. What is your view on this? How strong do you think your organisation is? What challenges does it face? Do you have a business plan? How sustainable are you (who funds you and why)? What are your future funding plans?



5. UNLOCKING POTENTIAL IN NGOS?

In my view, to achieve the kind of seismic changes that are needed in ECD in South Africa as quickly as they are needed, we need to engage everybody in solution seeking and service delivery. NGOs have a role to play in this too. Do you agree? Why? What changes do you think organisations need to make to the way they go about their business to achieve greater levels of coherence, geographic coverage and sustainability? What about other actors in this partnership model?

OTHER IDEAS YOU COULD ADD?

In trying to understand the potential of the NGO sector, why do you think it appears to be stuck and what could be done to effectively unstick it? (so, it is able to offer a robust, innovative partnership to further advance services of quality?)

If you think I have I not touched on anything you think critical, to sector development, coherence, sustainability and quality service delivery, what would you add or further elaborate?

Appendix 4: Research Participant Information Statement

Research Participant Information Statement

Research Study Title	**Building a viable ECD NGO sector in South Africa able expand services of quality to underserved communities**
Ethics Approval Number	
Researcher's Name	Sherri Le Mottee
Researcher's Relationship to GSB	Master of Philosophy, Inclusive Innovation, Bertha Scholar

This research has been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

Dear

You are invited to participate in a study of exploring the current role of the ECD NGO sector in South Africa, and the opportunities for expanding their capacity for advancing scale of quality.

I Sherri Le Mottee hope to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing the sector in order to contribute to shifting dynamics that may current constitute barriers to growth and expansion. I have selected you as a possible participant in this study because of your expert role and leadership in the ECD sector.

What is the study about?

This research explores the challenges facing NGOs in the early childhood development sector as they seek to contribute to the scaling ECD services of quality. Its purpose is to obtain insight and analysis on the current 'stuckness' of the sector from three perspectives; civil society (donors, academics, NGOs), business (CSI) and government. The express intention is to analyse and describe the 'problem', which has hindered NGOs from significantly contributing to the scale of services of quality across the geography of need in South Africa. The problem statement will emerge from this interview dialogue process and the process itself will be the first step in establishing an ECD Change LAB. The change LAB would specifically focus on changing the dynamic in the sector to increase toward more sustainable innovative models of intervention with the NGO sector.

Who am I interviewing? Participants from civil society including thought leaders, NGO directors, academics and donors will be invited to participate in the study because all play a role in the delivery of ECD services in South Africa often in some form of partnership. Specific participants include those with expert knowledge and experience who are in leadership positions across these sectors.

Confidentiality Any information that is obtained in connection with this study able to be identified as in connection with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. If you consent to participating in this study, I plan to discuss the results with a view to publishing a short piece. In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

Expectations of participants? If you decide to participate, I will set up a time at your convenience for a short interview of 30 – 45 minutes in which I will ask some questions for reflection and discussion. Given your expertise and experience in the ECD sector, these questions are deliberately open ended to allow for you insights and thoughts to emerge. The interview with therefore be open ended and more focused on engaged dialogue. With your permission, the interview will be recorded.

The research outcomes? Outcomes of the study will add impetus to a think tank or ECD change LAB. Participants who contribute to the study will be invited to participate in a follow up dialogue where they will have further opportunity to contribute to the problem analysis. This is in effects step one of a change LAB process.

Participation in this study Participation in this study is voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent and - if you do consent - you can withdraw at any stage. You can withdraw your consent by advising the researcher either verbally, via email, or by completing and returning the 'Participant Withdrawal of Consent Form' that is supplied herein. Furthermore, you may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue. The audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

Yours sincerely

Sherri Le Mottee
0833336528
sherrilm1965@icloud.com

Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form

Research Participant Consent Form

Research Study Title	**Building a viable ECD NGO sector in South Africa able expand services of quality to underserved communities**
Researcher's Name	Sherri Le Mottee
Researcher's Relationship UCT GSB	Master of Philosophy, Inclusive Innovation, Bertha Scholar

Participant Consent

This research has been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

I _____, agree to participate in this research. I have read the Research Participant Information Statement and had any question I have about the research answered for me by the researcher and understand I can withdraw from this process at any time.

_____ _____
Research Participant Signature Date

_____
Name of Witness

_____ _____
Witness Signature Date

_____ _____
Researcher's Signature Date