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OPINION PIECE

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# The Bana Pele 2030 Roadmap ECD Leadership Summit

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# BANA PELE LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

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**BETTER LATE THAN NEVER**

President Cyril Ramaphosa with the 2030 ECD Roadmap Activity Book

On March 17, 2025, President Cyril Ramaphosa addressed delegates at the Bana Pele Leadership Summit in Johannesburg.

- The President set a clear goal for all our children: access to quality learning opportunities for an additional 1.3 million children by 2030 in South Africa.
- The President acknowledged that early childhood development (ECD) should have been a priority 30 years ago and that ECD will be a priority going forward. The goal is to have a more inclusive, efficient and sustainable ECD system that nurtures the future of South Africa's children.
- The Minister of Basic Education, Ms Siviwe Gwarube, made a strong call to action to leaders in the ECD sector when she opened the Bana Pele Leadership Summit.

*We want every child in South Africa to have access to quality early learning. But let me be very clear: this goal is not about doing more of the same. It's not about simply throwing more money or resources into a system that's already under strain. No, this is about doing something impactful! Meaningful! Transformative!*

- To achieve this milestone, the President announced a significant R10 billion investment in ECD over the next three years, aiming to expand access to quality early childhood education (ECE).



## Draft Resolution and 2030 Roadmap Commitments

Putting the children of South Africa first by 2030.

Significant commitments to ECD were made at the summit, including but not limited to:

- Increasing long-term investment in ECD programmes;
- Improving access by removing barriers and promoting evidence-based decision-making;
- Maintaining child-centred approaches;
- Professionalising the workforce and ensuring fair compensation;
- Enhancing the quality of ECD services and raising public awareness to increase demand and affordability, with the ultimate goal of supporting sustainable, long-term developmental outcomes for children.

### A response: Towards the Realisation of ECD in South Africa

South Africa's ECD sector faces several significant challenges despite ongoing investments such as the [DBE 2030 Strategy for ECD programmes](#) and the [Bana Pele ECD Registration Drive](#).

Despite these efforts, high levels of child poverty are a pressing issue: As stated in the [South African Early Childhood Review 2024](#), there are nearly 7 million children under the age of 6 years in South Africa, 70% of whom live below the poverty line, emphasising the need for affordable and accessible ECD services to support children's development.

The stagnant ECD subsidy rate, which has been fixed at R17 per child per day since 2019, has made it difficult for ECD centres to provide quality programmes. While the recent increase to [R24 per child per day](#) and the expansion of subsidies to 1.5 million children by 2027/28 is a positive step forward, R24 is currently insufficient to fully cover the costs of a basic quality ECD programme. It has been estimated that the subsidy should be at least [R45 per child per day](#) to meet the financial requirements for a quality programme. This increase would allow ECD centre managers to provide better services, including adequate salaries to the workforce, facilities and learning-through-play toys, to ensure that children receive the necessary care and education. However, only a fraction of vulnerable children currently benefit from the ECD subsidy.

Another example of South Africa's poverty alleviation programmes is the Child Support Grant (CSG), legislated and managed under the South African Social Security Agency Act (SASSA) 9 of 2004. Although the [increase in the CSG by R30 to R560](#) is a reasonable effort, it may still not be enough to adequately cover the needs of young children, especially in the poorest communities. Moreover, the limited reach of the CGS further highlights the significant gap in the provision of financial support to vulnerable communities.

Another issue for ECD is the underqualification of ECD practitioners. According to the [2021 ECD Census report](#), 22% lack relevant qualifications, which raises concerns about the quality of ECD in South Africa.

Infrastructure remains a major hurdle for ECD registration. The ECD 2021 Census report indicated that 22% of ECD centres in South Africa were fully registered with the Department of Social Development, while 50% remained unregistered, operating outside of formal regulatory frameworks. To address the barriers associated with ECD registration, South Africa is rolling out the Bana Pele Mass Registration Drive, which aims to facilitate the formal registration of more ECD programmes and close the gap in access to the infrastructure grant. The allocation of [R210 million in new funding for ECD infrastructure](#) is a step in the right direction, but it is still insufficient to address the scale of the issue.



The [South African Early Childhood Review 2024](#) highlights that nutrition is another key concern, with over 1.5 million children under the age of 5 years suffering from stunting, a form of malnutrition. The increase in funding for early nutrition programmes by 70% from R197 million in 2024/25 to R336 million in 2025/26 is a positive development. This development aligns with the [World Health Assembly of 2012](#), which set a goal to reduce stunting in children under five by 40% by 2025. More recently, [UNICEF](#) has updated this target, aiming to reduce the rate of stunting in children under five by half by 2030, highlighting the ongoing global effort to tackle malnutrition and support healthy child development.

**The way forward for the ECD sector in South Africa includes several key steps:**

- 1. Increase Funding for ECD Services:** Expand subsidies and financial support to ensure long-term sustainability and greater access, particularly for low-income communities, while adjusting for inflation.
- 2. Expand the reach of the CSG:** Broaden the distribution of grants to more vulnerable children, ensuring they have access to essential early learning and care.
- 3. Professionalise the ECD workforce through collaboration:** Invest in qualification and training programmes for ECD practitioners, partnering with organisations such as the South African Council for Educators and the Department of Higher Education and Training to enhance the quality of care and education provided to young children.
- 4. Strengthen ECD nutrition programmes:** Increase funding for nutrition initiatives to combat malnutrition, ensuring children receive the support they need for healthy development.
- 5. Promote inclusivity in ECD Services:** Ensure that all children, including those with disabilities or from marginalised communities, have access to ECD services that meet their needs.



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