

## Inauguration of the Institute of Early Childhood Development as UNESCO Category 2 Centre, 27 October 2023

### 10 to 15 minutes keynote speech

His Excellency, Mr. Wavel Ramkalawan, President of Seychelles,  
Honorable ministers,  
Esteemed guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to represent Madame Stefania Giannini, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Education, on this monumental occasion. As we gather to commemorate the inauguration of the Institute of Early Childhood Development in Seychelles, it's clear that the recognition of Seychelles' IECD is not merely by chance. Instead, it results from years of tireless work in Early Childhood Care and Education, ECCE. Your tenacity, expertise, and passion have been the driving force behind this significant achievement, highlighting the true spirit of collaboration, innovation, and dedication.

By joining the esteemed network of UNESCO Category 2 centres, Seychelles is well-positioned to further bolster its early childhood education endeavours by sharing its expertise and drawing from global best practices.

Some of you may wonder what being a UNESCO Category 2 centre truly means.

Allow me to explain that It's more than just a prestigious title; it carries responsibility and honour with it.

- Category 2 institutes and centres are critical in UNESCO's global agenda, becoming bastions of knowledge, research, and policy development.
  - Category 2 institutes and centres operate under the auspices of UNESCO. Member States propose these institutions. Their primary purpose is to contribute to realizing UNESCO's Strategy and Approved Programme. This contribution aligns with global agreements, action plans, sector-specific programs, and priorities. The means of their contribution encompass five areas:
    - **International and regional cooperation:** Through fostering ties and building bridges between countries and regions, these institutes and centres play a crucial role in promoting mutual understanding, sharing best practices, and facilitating collaborative projects that address global challenges and promote sustainable development.
    - **Research:** By delving deep into scientific, cultural, and educational studies, these institutes and centres generate insights, data, and methodologies. Their research initiatives contribute to the global knowledge pool and inform policymaking and program development in alignment with UNESCO's objectives.
    - **Knowledge production:** Beyond mere research, these centres are hubs of innovation, producing new knowledge, tools, and resources. By synthesizing existing information and exploring uncharted territories, they help advance the frontiers of knowledge and introduce novel perspectives and solutions to contemporary issues.
    - **Policy advice:** Leveraging their expertise and research outcomes, these institutes and centres offer strategic guidance to governments, educational institutions, and other stakeholders. Their policy recommendations are instrumental in shaping effective strategies, ensuring that actions taken at the ground level resonate with global goals and standards set by UNESCO.

- **Capacity enhancement:** Recognizing the importance of skill development and institutional strengthening, these institutes and centres conduct training programs, workshops, and seminars. Through these initiatives, they uplift professionals, educators, and policymakers, ensuring they are well-equipped to drive positive change in their respective fields and communities.

**Mr. President, with your permission,**

I would like to open a short page of the IECD journey to category 2 centre. Madame Choppy, the journey you and your dedicated team have undertaken with the support of the entire nation is just amazing. The voyage from a simple conceptual idea to its endorsement by the General Conference is an indication to the perseverance, dedication, and unwavering commitment of everyone involved. It's not just about reaching a destination, but about remembering and appreciating the challenges, learnings, and milestones encountered along the way.

Since the beginning of 2023, Seychelles has not only added its name to a list, but has taken a monumental step forward in the global landscape. By joining the esteemed international community of UNESCO Category 2 Centres and Institutes, Seychelles has firmly positioned itself on the global stage, signaling a profound commitment to nurturing the future of our children around the world. Allow me ladies and gentlemen, to repeat what I just said and ensure that it sinks in.

By joining the esteemed international community of UNESCO Category 2 Centres and Institutes, Seychelles has firmly positioned itself on the global stage, signaling a profound commitment to nurturing the future of our children around the world.

This dedication to fostering excellence in early childhood care and education is not just a statement but a reflection of the nation's values and aspirations. Such a remarkable achievement, born from hard work, collaboration, and vision, truly merits a hearty round of applause and deep appreciation from all of us.

**Your Excellency Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen,**

It fills me with immense pride to highlight Seychelles' remarkable early childhood care and education achievements.

When we discuss excellence in Early Childhood Care and Education on the African continent or in the SIDS countries, Seychelles stands out as a shining example. This remarkable archipelago has showcased an exemplary commitment to its youngest citizens. Seychelles' investment in ECCE, marked by an impressive infrastructure of early learning centres and a curriculum rooted in holistic child development, is a testament to what is possible with dedication and vision. With well-trained educators and state-of-the-art facilities, Seychelles ensures that every child embarks on an educational journey that's second to none. The achievements here underscore the profound impact of prioritizing the early years, and we hope to see this model replicated across the continent and beyond.

Yet, as we revel in our accomplishments, we must acknowledge that not all children globally are as fortunate as the young souls in Seychelles.

As we shine a light on the roadblocks inhibiting our global progress in ECCE, we must dissect each challenge, understanding its unique facets and nuances.

- **Infrastructure and Accessibility:** At ECCE's core is the nurturing environment where our children learn and grow. And while we've made strides, a vast number still need to be afforded even the basic

facilities. Quality, safety, and accessibility should be paramount. In places like developing countries and beyond, many educational infrastructures await enhancement. Even where these infrastructures exist, there needs to be more well-trained educators who can aptly guide our future generation. This is an avenue for the Category 2 centre and standards could be revamped and monitored.

- Moving on, we encounter a more intricate challenge, the **Polycrisis**. Our children's air quality, the stability of their surroundings, and their holistic health form the very bedrock of their early years. Environmental challenges, persistent conflicts, and health crises, notably COVID-19, threaten this foundation constantly.
- On another note, the **economic landscape** intertwines significantly with these early childhood development obstacles.

Let me recall that the prosperity of a nation or community heavily influences its children's educational path and, by extension, its broader development. Economic disparities, whether through the binds of poverty or limited resources, cast an elongated shadow on ECCE.

Further to the tangible infrastructural and economic challenges, there are some hurdles which can be found deep within societal structures.

- **Cultural and Social Barriers:** Prejudices, biases, and societal norms often dictate educational access. From gender biases, which we see manifesting even in early childhood, to the lack of inclusivity for diverse needs – these barriers might remain unseen, but their impact is felting.
- Lastly, a challenge often overlooked - **Parental Involvement**. Notably, the role of fathers. The family is a child's initial touchpoint to education. While mothers are traditionally involved, fathers' role is crucial and sometimes shadowed by societal norms or unawareness. Both parents must play pivotal roles in nurturing and educating young children. This importance should be mirrored in public policies, especially concerning parental leaves and benefits.

### Ladies and gentlemen,

The foundation of any thriving development, especially educational initiative, lies in the robust support of its governing bodies. Today, despite all the congratulations already addressed, UNESCO calls upon the government of Seychelles to recognize the immense potential and transformative power of the Category 2 Centre on ECCE. By bolstering the Centre's endeavours with policy, finance, and public awareness campaigns as stipulated in the ECD Act, we can ensure that these ripples extend far and wide, touching every child and every community in Seychelles, Africa, and worldwide.

UNESCO's commitment to advancing early childhood care and education remains unwavering globally. This commitment is reflected in the Tashkent Declaration.

The Tashkent Declaration provides a new impetus to mobilize countries and the international community towards raising adequate resources for ECCE. The Declaration was adopted by 155 UNESCO member States. These countries agreed to make every effort towards allocating at least 10 percent of education expenditures for pre-primary education. This goal requires bold public policy including increasing public investment in ECCE, prioritizing the poorest and most disadvantaged children and showcasing the social and economic benefits of such prioritization. The 216th Session of UNESCO Executive Board adopted by acclamation the draft resolution submitted by the Government of Uzbekistan on the Tashkent Declaration and its follow-up.

Yet, UNESCO commits to monitoring progress and identifying challenges in all member states, and the IECD and a Category 2 centre could be one key actor in that work.

The Regional Office for Eastern Africa and HQ stand ready to collaborate closely with you in nurturing the

young minds of today for a brighter, more prosperous tomorrow. By facilitating knowledge exchange, providing technical support, and building capacities, the Regional Office is committed to fortifying IECD in its mission. Whether within our regional borders or extending beyond them, the synergy between UNESCO and IECD promises a harmonized approach to delivering exceptional early childhood education. With you, UNESCO will organize joint missions and working sessions to maximize the support of the IECD Category Two Centre.

Before concluding, allow me to emphasize the importance of partnerships. The IECD needs a strong alliance between governments and international organizations to foster bilateral and multilateral partnerships for its mission. This will involve collaborating with stakeholders committed to ECCE goals and can offer financial support, technical expertise, and advocacy. In this context, let me mention the global partnership strategy known as GPS for ECCE, initiated by UNESCO during the COVID pandemic, which brought together more than 40 organizations to work and deliver together. How to move the ECCE agenda is well detailed in the five Strategies, which are also rewritten more clearly as the four pillars of the Tashkent declaration.

**Mon tiyava kontan remersie premiermant Presidan , zofisye Gouvernman , tout mam IECD et tout Dimoun quin bien recevoir nou dan sa zoli pays**