EXPLORING THE RIPPLE EFFECTS OF THE ECDVU

From the outset, the ECDVU's purpose has been to promote capacity at the individual, community, and country levels. The question of how to define and promote capacity is central to this volume. In this chapter, we carry forward key elements of that discussion, drawing on the findings of three evaluations of the ECDVU's effectiveness in promoting capacity in sub-Saharan Africa. These evaluations include internal and external evaluations of SSA-1, the three-year graduate program (Schafer, with Pence & colleagues, 2005, and Vargas-Barón, 2005, respectively) and an external evaluation that included SSA-1 participants and graduates from the one-year SSA-2 and SSA-3 programs (Vargas-Barón with Joseph, 2011). Most of the evaluation data discussed here is based on participant surveys from these evaluations, all of which had very high response rates—ranging from 85% and 90% for the 2005 and 2011 external evaluations, respectively, to 100% for the 2005 internal evaluation. The focus for much of this chapter is on the 'ripple effects' or 'multiplier' impacts achieved by ECDVU graduates. We start, though, with a portrait of the participants themselves, based on their own self-reports and comments from colleagues in their home organizations.

Impact on ECDVU Graduates' Work and Lives

Increased Confidence

Whether educational programs empower or disempower participants hinges largely on the relevance of the topics and activities to learners' contexts. When education provides people with the knowledge and skills to become leaders within their own organizations and countries, it empowers. When learning is

disconnected from context, it can undermine learners' effectiveness and others' perception of them as knowledgeable and suitable leaders.

A danger with much post-secondary education, both in First Nations communities and in Africa, is the very common 'pull-out' model, where students pursue higher education far removed from their home contexts, with the ensuing issues of relevance of education and 'brain drain.' As highlighted in chapter 5, the structure and learning activities of the ECDVU were designed to take place in and be relevant to the local context of the learners and to value their knowledge of their communities and countries. Many ECDVU participants reported that the program increased their confidence, allowing them to participate actively in decision-making and policy development at higher levels than before the program. These benefits are reflected in the quotes below from SSA-1 participants:

> I can now discuss ECD issues with much more self-confidence whenever and wherever I happen to deal with them—at organizations, UN agencies and associations, media (both TV and radio), including at the line ministries level. (Student, SSA-1, Eritrea)

> [The ECDVU program] has built my confidence in presentation skills, IT abilities and finally, there is an in-depth knowledge on the concept of ECD. (Student, SSA-1, Ghana)

> The program has raised my level of confidence and not surprisingly I am now considered as an 'authority' in ECD by my colleagues and supervisors in my place of work.
> (SSA-1, Tanzania)

During the internal evaluation (Schafer, with Pence & colleagues, 2005), researchers followed up with the supervisors and co-workers of the ECDVU graduates, to gain their perspectives on the program's impact. Many respondents commented on the increased confidence of ECDVU participants, echoing the comments of the learners themselves:

> He is able to communicate with various groups of people so effectively and confidently and because of that he is usually asked to lead in various activities/programs. (Colleague, SSA-1, Malawi)

> The course has given her a lot of confidence to speak in public about early childhood issues and even to help other organizations develop programs on [these] topics … in an integrated manner. (Colleague, SSA-1, Malawi)

Increased Skills to Enhance Capacity Promotion

ECDVU graduates gained many key capacity-promoting skills through the program, including leadership, management, research, policy analysis, networking, and computer skills. When asked to assess how much ECDVU had contributed to their development of such skills, the majority of respondents reported a great improvement (see Figure 6.1). Leadership skills were cited as showing great improvement by the highest proportion of graduates—over 85%—a clear success given the program's emphasis on leadership development. Following close behind, with over 80% of participants reporting great improvement, was the use of integrated approaches to ECD, a skill that is considered critical to advancing the health and well-being of children and families in sub-Saharan Africa and one promoted throughout ECDVU learning activities and assignments.

Figure 6.1 Participants' rating of their skills improvement due to the ECDVU Program
(excerpted from Vargas-Barón with Joseph, 2011, p. 50).
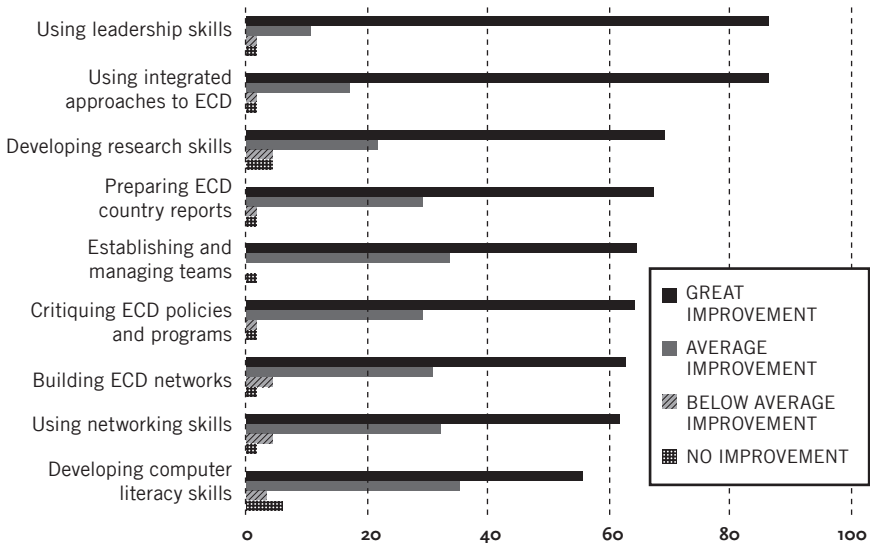
Not surprisingly, SSA-1 graduates, who received two more years of training than SSA-2 and SSA-3 graduates, and who had worked longer since graduation at the time of the evaluation, were more likely to report additional skills, such as helping plan ECD policies, plans, regulations or standards; improving ECD coordination in their program or countries; and providing ECD training workshops. All these skills were essential to creating the 'multiplier effects' of the ECDVU program in the participants' home countries.

Enhanced Professional Experiences in ECD

While ECDVU graduates' increased self-confidence and skills are significant, the program's impact goes far beyond the individuals involved. Each ECDVU graduate leaves the program with extensive experience as an advocate for culturally relevant, respectful, and integrated ECD, because this skill and perspective is an integral part of the program. In course work and major projects, ECDVU learners are required to disseminate information and resources and to apply their learning to their everyday ECD activities at work. This approach allows learners to be active in the ECD field within their countries during the program, with wide-ranging local, regional, and international impacts. Table 6.1 shows professional activities in which participants have engaged since graduation and Figure 6.2 shows ECDVU's impact on such activities. In the rest of this chapter, we discuss the broader 'ripple effects' that ECDVU graduates' professional activities have created.

Table 6.1 Professional activities since graduation
(excerpted from Vargas-Barón with Joseph, 2011, p. 58).

Professional Activities	%
Helped plan ECD policies, plans, regulations or standards	85.3
Improved ECD coordination in your program or nation	76.5
Implemented ongoing ECD services and/or programs	76.5
Provided ECD training workshops in your country	75.0
Planned or designed new ECD services and/or programs	72.1
Helped integrate ECD services across sectors	63.2
Gave talks at local, national, or regional meetings	63.2
Engaged in networking among programs	61.8
Prepared or adapted ECD curricula, materials, or methods	57.4
Developed inter-institutional partnerships	52.9

Conducted program monitoring activities	50.0
Conducted research or evaluation projects	47.1
Assessed children's development	45.6
Prepared publications on ECD	32.4
Taught university or training college courses on ECD	30.9
Conducted Early Childhood Intervention programs for children with developmental delays or disabilities	22.1

Figure 6.2 Impact of ECDVU on Participants' Future Activities (excerpted from Vargas-Barón with Joseph, 2011, p. 62).
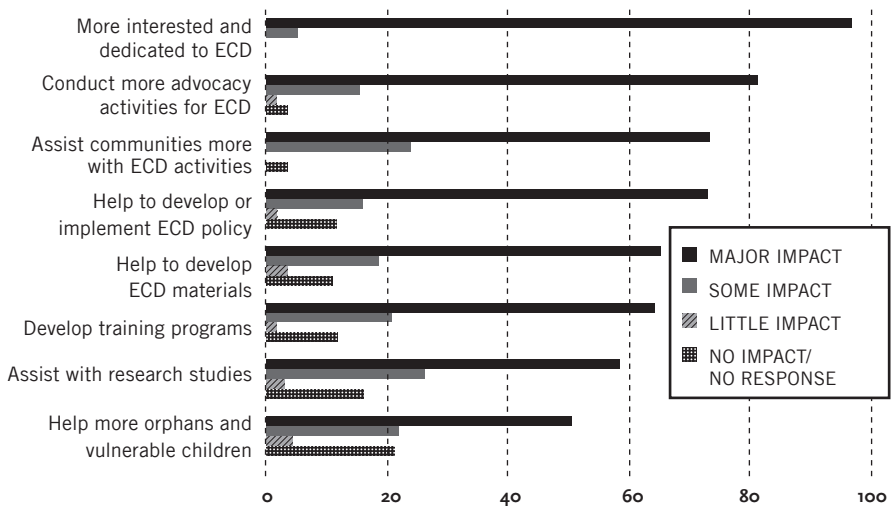
ECD Policy

ECD policy is critical to advancing the ECD agenda in sub-Saharan Africa. Nearly all SSA-1, SSA-2, and SSA-3 graduates reported helping to plan ECD policies, regulations, or standards—indeed, many ECDVU graduates work as policy developers. Whether through their jobs or other commitments, ECDVU learners took on new, more influential roles in advancing ECD policy in their countries by participating in policy forums, lobbying, and advocacy.

Many ECD advocates across sub-Saharan Africa have cited the need for discrete and holistic national ECD policy frameworks to develop effective programs. Around the time that ECDVU proposed its capacity-promoting program, only a few African countries had national ECD policies or policy frameworks, with significant negative consequences for the health and well-being of children and families (Colletta & Reinhold, 1997, p. 73; Torkington, 2001). As noted by Colletta and Reinhold, "with few exceptions, the needs of children in SSA are not being met through integrated inputs of health, nutrition and early education and wider family and community support services" (1997, p. 73). The *Asmara Declaration* (2002), released following the 2nd International African ECD conference, emphasized the importance of macro-level policy frameworks and integrated and coordinated planning, a theme taken up at the Accra Conference in 2005 and at Dakar in 2009. By 2008, the year before the Dakar Conference, 19 countries had tabled ECD policies, and another 20 were preparing them (UNESCO-BREDA, 2012).

ECDVU has supported learners to play an active role in advancing the policy agenda in their countries. During the ECDVU deliveries, nations represented at ECDVU programs were at different stages in developing comprehensive, holistic ECD policies. For example, during SSA-1 (2001-2004), Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia were in the early stages of gathering support and momentum for an ECD policy. Remarkably, during the three-year delivery of SSA-1, Malawi went from having no policy at all to having an approved policy in place, largely due to the work of key ECDVU participants (see chapter 8). Tanzania developed a very effective, nation-wide network (TECDEN), which provided the foundation for significant governmental and NGO interaction, ministerial coordination, and policy framework development work (see chapter 7).

ECDVU supported participants to advocate for ECD policy development and to carry out sensitization campaigns in policy circles and with the general public. Through their ECDVU course work, many participants gathered information and conducted research to help advance an ECD policy or policy framework in their countries. The Gambia, Eritrea, and Lesotho were at the preliminary policy design stage at the outset of SSA-1, and each moved forward in developing multi-sectoral ECD policies. Nigeria has a federal system, so policies are developed at both the state and federal levels. Nigerian participants in ECDVU were mainly active at the state level, but some successfully reached the national level as well. Throughout SSA-1, they strove to ensure the inclusion of ECD in important plans, such as the Education for All plan of action and HIV/AIDS strategies. In 2007 the Nigerian federal government established a policy that called for the establishment of a pre-primary program in every primary program in the country (Oluwafemi, Nma, Osita, & Olugbenga, 2014). In Ghana, Jophus Anamuah-

Mensah, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Education-Winneba and the instructor of the ECDVU leadership course in SSA-3 and SSA-4, authored the White Paper on Education (2004), which called for pre-primary programs throughout the country.

ECD Curriculum and Training

Curriculum

In 2001, when the ECDVU program was launched, many participating countries had identified ECD curriculum development as a key objective. The need for ECD curriculum, materials, and methods that fit the multilingual, multicultural nature of sub-Saharan Africa remains pressing—typically, overly simplified Western-based ECD curricula and materials are used. African universities, institutes, and large-scale programs require new curricula, educational materials, methods, and training manuals to enhance pre- and in-service training.

ECDVU graduates have made substantial contributions to the development of culturally relevant ECD curriculum in sub-Saharan Africa. Chapter 8 provides an extensive case study of ECDVU participants' achievements in curriculum and training in Malawi, but here we highlight some other notable achievements. The 2011 evaluation indicated that nearly 60% of participants in SSA-1, SSA-2, and SSA-3 have prepared or adapted ECD curricula, materials or methods since graduation. These initiatives have reached hundreds of individuals in some countries and thousands in others. In Nigeria, one ECDVU participant alone reached 420 people through training on important topics such as the use of an Indigenous communicative teaching approach and the management of child-friendly schools. Another prominent achievement was the work by ECDVU participants in Ghana and Eritrea to create curricula for non-formal caregivers, a key but often neglected sector in ECD. One SSA-1 graduate's innovative, generatively focused work with parents in Eritrea was cited as exemplary in an international evaluation.

In Lesotho and Uganda, ECD-specific coursework has been added to existing undergraduate programs, creating new specializations. In Ghana, one ECDVU graduate revised the country's ECD curriculum for caregiver institutions and developed a training manual that reached caregivers nationwide. Working at the national level, he organized workshops for ECD experts to critically examine documents used by ECD centres and training institutions. These workshops ultimately led to development and implementation of a national ECD preschool curriculum—an excellent example of the ripple effects made possible through ECDVU.

Training

Across sub-Saharan Africa, there is tremendous demand for 'training of trainers' in holistic, integrated ECD principles and practice. ECDVU participants have significantly impacted this area of the ECD field: 75% of graduates from SSA-1, SSA-2, and SSA-3 became workshop trainers, taught ECD classes, or spoke at related events after graduation. Below are some examples of innovative training endeavours that ECDVU graduates have led (Vargas-Barón, 2005):

- **Eritrea:** One graduate introduced the Training of Trainers Strategy, which reached approximately 200 community caregivers across the country, enabling them to provide service to parents and children in villages in the most remote parts of the country. A second graduate organized training in administration, financial accounting, procurement, communication, and using technology for ECD leaders, who could then train other ECD stakeholders at the regional and sub-regional levels.

- **Ghana:** One ECDVU graduate organized three-day ECD workshops for informal child minders of street children, their parents, and community leaders. Topics included birth registration, health and nutritional needs, immunization, growth monitoring, and early childhood stimulation. Another graduate trained 68 members of the Ga District Assembly, the district planning authority, on legal provisions to protect and promote children's rights. Preschool teachers and attendants received further training on child rights.

- **Nigeria:** A graduate facilitated community-based training of trainers on integrated ECD. As a result, health, nutrition, education, and water and sanitation officers from the 10 participating states integrated ECD issues into program planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation at the state and national levels, with very strong community participation.

- **Uganda:** One ECDVU graduate used her ECDVU learning to train others in the use of computers and the internet in ECD research. A second graduate provided training to facilitators, local and zone leaders, grandparents, and guardians in ECD and HIV/AIDS.

Innovative Program Development

Following graduation, many ECDVU learners piloted new programs or brought innovative approaches to existing programs—many became models that were replicated throughout the country. The 2011 evaluation (Vargas-Barón with Joseph) found that 76.5% of graduates had improved ECD coordination in their programs and had implemented ongoing ECD services and/or programs in

their communities and countries. Further, 72.1% of participants said they had planned or designed new ECD services and/or programs. Indeed, a colleague from an internationally respected university in the United States contacted the ECDVU Director to say that as she went from country to country across SSA, the ECDVU graduates were invariably the most knowledgeable and capable in helping her to move forward with her own ECD project.

One unusual and valuable project developed by a graduate from Malawi was the creation of an ECD centre at Zomba prison. This graduate also assisted single mothers in rural Malawi communities to improve their standard of living and their capacity to care for their children. The internal evaluation of SSA-1 (Schafer, with Pence & colleagues, 2005) highlighted the importance of this learner's creative approach in working with hard-to-reach populations using a community development approach:

> She is piloting new approaches in working with single women and teenage mothers. … She has already expanded the program … to 15 new areas where participation by all community members is key for sustainable ECD programs. Communities are opening communal gardens to feed the children and sell surplus for buying other necessities. (Colleague, SSA-1 graduate, Malawi)

> Another sign of the wider impacts of the innovative work … is that one of the communities they have been working with has been voted a model village in terms of child care and an integrated approach to child development. The UNICEF country representative and the Regional Representative for the Eastern and Southern regions of Africa visited the project village with a big convoy … (Email from UNICEF colleague, SSA-1, Malawi)

While enrolled in ECDVU, one SSA-1 student worked on a highly innovative program with grandmothers who care for AIDS orphans in Uganda. The quality of her work was recognized by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, whose representatives came to Uganda in September 2003 to visit her project and asked her to write a three-year funding proposal, which was approved. As part of this initiative, a group of grandparents was taken for study tours of similar projects in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

Several ECDVU graduates piloted new approaches to the use of Indigenous knowledge. In addition, an ECDVU graduate from Uganda introduced children's participation into the review of government policy. Policy-makers have not traditionally sought children's input into policies relating to their lives, but this

practice is now considered an integral aspect of the new rights-based approach to children's development and was adopted into the UN Charter of Children's Rights, which was discussed extensively in the ECDVU program.

Community-Level Work

In many African countries, ECD has typically been delivered in formal centres and based around an academic curriculum. ECDVU emphasized the importance of working at the community level and empowering communities to respond to the challenges of providing integrated ECD services, which reach far beyond purely academic goals. Over 73% of SSA-1, SSA-2, and SSA-3 graduates said they had helped to integrate ECD services and/or programs at the community level since graduation.

Participants in all ECDVU deliveries said they learned new techniques for working with communities that enhanced grassroots participation and community leadership skills. Graduates and colleagues alike noted the usefulness of the 'community dialogue' strategy in working effectively with communities and empowering people at the grassroots. For example:

> Our exposure to ECD information that recognizes community members as vital in implementing the community-based programs—well summarized in the saying 'It takes a village to raise a child'—has also helped us to network with community members in order to reach the child. We have so far worked with community members to establish community-based programs like preschools, and have conducted training in villages to empower the community members. The results of these endeavours were very encouraging. (Student, SSA-1)

Several people noted that ECDVU had helped graduates to value and use Indigenous knowledge in community-based ECD initiatives:

> She has carried out research on key household practices, working with parents and caregivers at the community level, respecting their cultural beliefs and practices (Colleague, SSA-1, Nigeria)

> During a team visit, I found her singing the tune of local people in each particular community (Colleague, SSA-1, Zanzibar)

In-Country, Pan-African, and International Contacts, Partners, and Networks

The motivation to create the ECDVU program stemmed partly from African ECD leaders' expressed need for more networking between ECD partners

within countries, across Africa, and internationally. The ECDVU program explicitly recognizes the strength of network building as a tool for leadership capacity promotion in Africa. Networks support ECD professionals within each country, helping to link the work of different stakeholders and creating a strong force for ECD lobbying. Importantly, they also help to eliminate the 'silo' mentality that tends to predominate in sectoral ministries—ultimately supporting the creation of policies and programs that put the interests of children before the political fiefdoms of government. For all these reasons, ECDVU built requirements for in-country and Africa-wide networking directly into the course work. Reflecting on these experiences, participants wrote:

> We formed a "Country Team", which in itself is [an advance for
> ECD] as four very different personalities from different ethnic
> and socio-economic backgrounds became a group that would
> grow and work together for the next two and a half years.
> (Participant, Malawi, SSA-1)

> I have also learnt from colleagues across Africa, especially those
> from countries where ECD is much ahead … networking among
> ECDVU partners has also promoted dissemination of experiences
> among different countries. (Colleague, Tanzania, SSA-1)

Seventy-five percent of participants reported that prior to the ECDVU program, they engaged in very little ECD networking and felt considerable isolation. While we have no pre-program measures on the number of their previous contacts, partnerships, and network memberships, anecdotal evidence suggests that these were minimal. The 2011 ECDVU evaluation (Vargas-Barón, with Joseph) asked participants to estimate the number of contacts, partnerships, and networks they had developed or engaged with since graduation. Eight-seven percent of graduates developed new contacts in African countries through the ECDVU program. Most people said they had made up to 10 new contacts and many people (27.5%) had made more than 10. Similarly, 52.9% of graduates said they had established partnerships with groups in other African countries, and 60.3% said that they engage in one or more African networks. Finally, 35.3% have participated in non-African networks and 38.3% are members of networks with international agencies.

Work on Other Key ECD Themes

The ECDVU gave learners the chance to share their knowledge, research and experiences in addressing some of the more difficult ECD issues across sub-Saharan Africa. The ECDVU program was initiated during the second decade of the

Education for All (EFA) initiative, 2000 to 2010. The first goal in the EFA Framework for Action calls for "expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children." (UNESCO, 2000) This line became a rallying call for progress in ECD in sub-Saharan Africa and generated much discussion in the ECDVU program. The 2011 evaluation (Vargas-Barón, with Joseph) asked graduates about their involvement in EFA-related activities. Nearly 84% of graduates had participated in at least one EFA activity following graduation. Integration of ECD into EFA plans or education sector plans was the most commonly reported activity (61.8%), followed by participation in other national EFA activities (50%), assisting with EFA plan implementation (44.1%), participation in international EFA activities (33.8%), and evaluation of the implementation of an EFA plan (23.5%).

The Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) in each African country provide a major opportunity to promote ECD services—many PRS indicators include indicators often used in ECD policies and strategic plans. Most ECDVU graduates (77.9%) said they had participated in some PRS activity, the most common being the integration of ECD in to PRS activities, at 55.9%. Other PRS-related activities reported by ECDVU graduates were helping to include ECD in PRS planning efforts (47.1%), conducting advocacy to include ECD in PRS activities (47.1%), and participating in evaluations of PRS documents (29.4%).

The ECDVU is a compelling case story of how a relatively small-scale program can have large ripple effects on communities and countries when it is designed to respond to local needs and to respect and build on Indigenous knowledge and skill. The program participants were carefully selected by the countries themselves as individuals who were well placed to grow as ECD leaders, given support and the flexibility to keep working at the local level throughout the program. The model's success is clearly demonstrated across three separate evaluations. This chapter has reviewed only a small fraction of the many accomplishments that ECDVU graduates have made in their communities and countries. The next two chapters provide a more in-depth view of ECD related developments in two countries which have had multiple cohort involvement in ECDVU deliveries (SSA-1, 2, and 3): Tanzania and Malawi.

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