



FIFTH BLENDED NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) STAKEHOLDERS' CONFERENCE (2023)

Theme: From Policy & Evidence to Action

Held at Stegra Hotel, Turkana County from 17th - 19th July, 2023

CONFERENCE COMMUNIQUE AND CALL TO ACTION

#5thECDConf; #5thECD; #5thConference

Preamble

We the 1,193 conference participants from **31 counties in Kenya, 11 countries** and over **80 organizations** comprising Government Officials, United Nations Agencies, Civil Society Organizations, Faith Based Organizations, Philanthropists, Donors, ECD professionals, practitioners and academia convened for the Fifth Blended National Early Childhood Development (ECD) Stakeholders' Conference themed "from Policy and Evidence to Action" from 17th - 19th July, 2023 at Stegra Hotel, Turkana County, Kenya.

The conference takes cognisance of the new governments in place at the National and County level as we mark 10 years of Devolution. As delegates and ECD champions, we have interrogated systems supporting nurturing care for all children. Kenya has a population of 12.2 million children aged 0-9 years comprising 72 % rural and 28% urban dwellers. The Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS, 2022) notes a reduction of stunting from 26% in 2014 to 18% in 2022; however, these data are in need of being updated as the COVID-19 pandemic led to significant reversals in health, education and livelihoods affecting women and children most. Therefore, ECD Stakeholders need to do more to ensure that no child is left behind.

The Nurturing Care Framework has been adopted by the regulatory frameworks in Kenya through various legal¹ and legislative instruments to support children's rights to survive and develop to their full potential with an aim to thrive and transform society.

The 2010 Constitution of Kenya (Article 53) recognizes the right of all children to be protected from abuse, neglect, harmful cultural practices, all forms of violence, inhumane treatment and punishment, and hazardous or exploitative labor. Further it stipulates that the best interest of the child is a central tenet for

¹ Legal and legislative instruments supporting children's rights include: Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, 1990) and Constitution of Kenya, 2010.

the development of the entire country with responsibility shared by the National and County Governments and civil society.

Through initiating integrated ECD services, County Governments across Kenya are striving towards improved investments in the early years. To this regard, though Kenya's investment in Early Childhood Development (ECD) has grown to an estimated USD 81 per child, this is still well below regional counterparts in Eastern and Southern Africa. Regional disparities and inequalities persist, particularly in hard-to-reach areas.

The timely finalization of the Integrated Early Childhood Development policy and its implementation is now urgent. We call upon all stakeholders to create coordinated support structures and processes to meet the needs of all children. The National Council for Children Services (NCCS), mandated under the Children's Act (2022), warrants engagement of all stakeholders to support effective monitoring and advocacy. **Therefore, building on this conference and the proceedings of previous national conference communiques ECDNeK has issued [at KICD (2016), Kenyatta University (in Nairobi of 2018), Mombasa (2019) Siaya (2021) and now Turkana (2023)], we make the following call to action:**

The Turkana Call to Action

This Communique calls on all Early Childhood Development (ECD) State and non-state actors to embrace multisectoral collaboration and implement the Roadmap of Action on ECD. This entails collectively moving from the available knowledge and evidence-base to action. We urge all ECD stakeholders to engage in coordinated efforts and interventions to overcome fragmentation of services and unleash synergies. The Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy must be the reference point informing activities, services, and provision at all levels of Government with governmental oversight. We therefore call for the mainstreaming of ECD and early learning in the existing education system.

The following are the substantive policy and action-oriented recommendations made at this conference:

- 1. Systems thinking and the Nurturing Care Framework: Strengthening community systems - Leveraging the community health strategy to ward level**
 - Emphasize prevention and control of poor health with a focus on wellbeing, address the burden of **malnutrition** through education for parents and caregivers, optimal preconception care, access to prenatal services, safe delivery and Maternal Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) to ensure pregnant mothers and children have a good start in life;
 - Utilize existing government systems and political leadership and the First Spouses as **ECD Champions**;
- 2. Leveraging intersectionalities: Coordination, Technical Working Groups, and implementation blocks**
 - Prioritise **multi-sectoral coordination** on the early years focused on age and stage-related child development; building on the Science of ECD which tells us that the first 1,000 days (ages zero to three) and the subsequent 3,000 days (ages) 4-8, are the most rapid for brain development and the foundation of an individual's skills and capabilities;

- Development of a **costed ECD Implementation Plan** that aligns to sectoral mandates with intra-Ministry coordination;
 - Coordinate Government **monitoring and reporting** on the Situation of ECD in Kenya and the level of implementation of the Integrated ECD Policy;
 - Actively support ECD advocacy with a **communication strategy** at County and National Government levels, for state and non-state actors to collaborate in supporting parents, caregivers and service providers with information, technical competencies and evidence for investing time, energy and resources in the early years;
 - Prioritise ECD and ring-fence **resourcing** on programmes for young children to ensure higher economic and social returns in the County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) and annual budgeting rounds;
 - Leverage **technology and data analysis** capabilities to inform planning, budgeting and early warning interventions in crisis areas;
 - Support, under the leadership and direction of the County, a **comprehensive mapping and up-to-date database** to support partnerships, collaboration, and programme synergies to reach unreached areas;
2. **Aligning knowledge: Indigenous and traditional child-rearing practices and cultures that promote nurturing care**
 - Enhance uptake of **positive indigenous knowledge** on the care and needs of all children aged 0-8 years including in the workplace and social support serves to diversify and strengthen quality childcare options;
 3. **Reframing inclusivity: A good start for all children**
 - Empower, through **capacity building and training**, the ECD workforce, including parents and caregivers, to address the need for early detection, screening and support differently abled children including children with extraordinary talent;
 4. **Early Childhood Education: building programs on best practices**
 - Articulate early years' workforce training with the Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) to professionalize the ECD workforce with recognized qualifications, training, and schemes of service and Remunerate them well;
 5. **Sixth biennial National ECD Stakeholders' Conference will be held in Garrisa County in 2025.**

Endorsed on 19th July, 2023 at the Fifth National ECD Stakeholders' Conference, held at Stegra Hotel, Turkana County, Kenya