



The 7th National ECD Stakeholders Conference, 2027

Concept Note

Theme: *Investing in ECD Ecosystems for Better Child Outcomes.*

1. Introduction

Globally, growing recognition has been given to the importance of nurturing care and integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) systems. Investing in Early Childhood Development (ECD) ecosystems is fundamental to achieving better child outcomes and sustainable national development. An effective ECD ecosystem brings together families, communities, governments, the private sector, and development partners to provide nurturing care through quality health services, nutrition, early learning opportunities, child protection, and responsive caregiving. The first 1,000 days of a child's life are particularly critical, as they represent the period of most rapid brain development and establish the foundation for lifelong health, learning, and productivity (WHO, UNICEF & World Bank, 2018). Strengthening ECD ecosystems ensures that children receive comprehensive and coordinated support that enhances school readiness, cognitive development, and overall well-being (UNICEF, 2024). Furthermore, investments in quality ECD interventions generate substantial social and economic returns, with evidence suggesting that every dollar invested in early childhood can yield up to US\$13 in long-term benefits through improved education, health, and economic productivity (Heckman, 2006). By investing in strong ECD ecosystems, countries can reduce inequalities, break intergenerational cycles of poverty, and create the conditions for every child to survive, thrive, and reach their full potential (WHO, UNICEF & World Bank, 2018).

In Kenya, significant progress has been made in advancing Early Childhood Development (ECD) through constitutional provisions, National policies, County Government investments, and multi-sectoral partnerships aimed at improving the wellbeing of young children. The devolution of Key ECD related functions or services supporting early childhood development has enabled counties to develop context-specific solutions and strengthen service delivery in response to local needs. Despite these gains, persistent challenges in equitable access, service quality, financing, workforce capacity, coordination, data use, and caregiver support continue to limit the effectiveness of ECD interventions. Increasingly, evidence shows that addressing these challenges requires moving beyond sector-specific approaches to strengthening ECD ecosystems.

Kenya has made some strides on its commitments under the Constitution of Kenya 2010, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Agenda 2063, the National ECD Policy Framework, and the Nurturing Care Framework. Such investments must be informed by evidence, supported by strong County systems, responsive to the realities of caregiving and the care economy, and inclusive of emerging priorities affecting young children. There is an urgent need to accelerate investments that

strengthen ECD ecosystems and deliver measurable outcomes for children, families, and communities.

1.1. The Early Childhood Development Network for Kenya

The Early Childhood Development Network for Kenya (ECDNeK) is a national membership organization established in 2015 to bridge the gap in coordination of ECD initiatives in Kenya. The Network's mission is to promote and support an enabling environment for the implementation of Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development through research, advocacy, and stakeholder coordination. To achieve this, the Network generates evidence on Early Childhood Development (ECD), undertakes advocacy at national and sub-national levels, and strengthens stakeholder coordination through knowledge-sharing platforms, including national conferences, policy dialogues, and webinars. ECDNeK operates in close partnership with the National and County Governments, particularly collaborating with key ministries such as Education, Health, and Gender, Culture & Children services (*The State Department for Gender and Affirmative Action (SDGAA) and the State Department for children services*) and the Council of Governors (COG) across various Counties.

By fostering collaboration between state and non-state actors engaged in early childhood programs, ECDNeK plays a pivotal role in enhancing multi sectoral partnerships. The network's involvement in National Technical Working Groups focused on ECD enables it to contribute significantly to policy development and implementation. ECDNeK advocates for the integration of nurturing care principles and holistic approaches in ECD programming to ensure comprehensive child development.

At its core, ECDNeK aims to cultivate a dynamic network committed to continuous learning, policy influence, and effective advocacy in ECD. <https://ecdnetworkforkenya.org/>

2. The 7th National ECD Stakeholders Conference, 2027

Through its biennial National ECD Stakeholder's Conferences, the Network provides a national platform for Early Childhood Development (ECD) stakeholders to showcase best practices, share knowledge and experiences, and foster learning and collaboration across the sector.

The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Gender, Culture, and Children Services, the Council of Governors, the County Government of Embu in collaboration with the Early Childhood Development Network for Kenya (ECDNeK) are pleased to announce the 7th National ECD Stakeholders Conference under the theme: ***"Investing in ECD Ecosystems for Better Child Outcomes."*** The conference will convene participants with diverse expertise and backgrounds from Government (National and County), Academia/Research, Donor agencies, Private sector, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), faith-based organizations, philanthropists, United Nations (UN) Agencies, parents and children. The conference format will include plenary presentations, breakaway sessions, group discussions, and interactive panel sessions. The conference will also offer an array of formal and informal networking opportunities, an exhibition of the ECD program innovations and ECD best practices. We look forward to welcoming

you to the Seventh ***National ECD Stakeholders' Conference, 2027*** scheduled for ***2nd - 4th March 2027 at Embu County***.

The conference updates, call for abstracts, program and proceedings will be available on the ECD Network for Kenya website

(<https://ecdnetworkforkenya.org/7th-national-eed-conference/>).

2.1. Objectives of the 7th conference

- ❖ To share evidence and innovations for strengthening ECD ecosystems.
- ❖ To promote investments in caregiving systems that improve child outcomes.
- ❖ To promote evidence-informed policy and practice in ECD.

2.2. Theme: Investing in ECD Ecosystems for Better Child Outcomes.

2.2.1. Sub-themes & Topics

Sub-theme	Topics
1. Research, Evidence and Innovation for Better Child Outcomes	● Translating ECD research into policy and practice ● Strengthening ECD data systems for decision-making and accountability ● Innovations in ECD service delivery and programme design ● Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital technologies in ECD (Ed-tech) ● Community-led and indigenous innovations in ECD ● Evidence-based approaches to nurturing care ● Monitoring, evaluation, learning, and adaptive management in ECD programmes
2. Strengthening National & County ECD Systems for Sustainable Impact	● Leadership and Governance for ECD ● Financing ECD: Budgeting, resource mobilization, and investment strategies ● Multi-sectoral coordination and integrated service delivery ● Workforce development and professionalization of ECD practitioners ● Public-private partnerships for ECD ● Accountability and performance measurement in ECD programmes ● Scaling innovations and best practices

	● Leveraging devolution to improve child outcomes
3. Investing in Caregiving Systems and the Care Economy	● Nurturing care ● Family-friendly policies and workplace support for caregivers ● Childcare systems and quality early learning environments ● The role of fathers and male caregivers in ECD ● Mental health and wellbeing of parents and caregivers ● Social protection and support for vulnerable families ● Recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work ● Advancing the recognition, professionalization and decent working conditions for paid care work
4. Building Resilient, Inclusive and Future-Ready ECD Ecosystems	● Climate-resilient approaches to ECD ● Inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs ● ECD in humanitarian, fragile, and conflict-affected settings ● Child protection, safeguarding, and violence prevention ● Urban ECD and supporting children in informal settlements ● Early childhood mental health and psychosocial wellbeing ● Nutrition, health, and early learning integration ● Future trends shaping ECD ecosystems and child outcomes ● Role of faith based organizations/actors in ECD / Faith-based interventions in ECD

2.3. Conference Outcome

The 7th National ECD Stakeholders Conference 2027 is expected to generate critical insights and practical recommendations on strengthening Early Childhood Development (ECD) ecosystems to achieve better outcomes for children. The conference will provide a platform for sharing evidence, innovations, and promising practices that contribute to improved child wellbeing and development.

Discussions will explore how investments in research, data systems, innovation, governance, financing, and workforce development can strengthen ECD systems and enhance the delivery of integrated services for young children and their families.

The conference will also highlight the importance of caregiving systems and the care economy in supporting children's holistic development, while showcasing approaches that strengthen responsive caregiving, family support systems, and inclusive service delivery. Participants will examine emerging priorities affecting young children, including climate resilience, child protection, mental health and wellbeing, disability inclusion, and the use of technology to improve ECD outcomes. Through dialogue and knowledge exchange, the conference will foster stronger multi-sectoral collaboration and partnerships among national and County Governments, academia, civil society, development partners, and the private sector.

The conference aims to advance evidence-informed policy and practice, promote strategic investments in ECD ecosystems, and strengthen collective action towards ensuring that every child survives, thrives, and reaches their full developmental potential.

Proceedings of the conference will be documented through a conference report, abstracts compendium, and a conference communiqué outlining key recommendations and priority actions for advancing ECD in Kenya and beyond.

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