

The First International Conference on Early Childhood Development

**Held on 16th -19th October, 2018 at Safari Park Hotel
NAIROBI KENYA**

FINAL CONFERENCE COMMUNIQUE

Preamble

We, the 800 delegates from 48 Countries in Africa with representation from other continents and over 100 organizations including Government representatives from Ministries of Education, Health, and Social Protection from across the continent; UN agencies, private sector, philanthropists, donor communities and academia, congregated at Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi-Kenya on 16th - 19th October, 2018; for **The First International Conference on Early Childhood Development (ECD)**.

The theme of this conference was 'The Africa We Want: A Better Future Now'. This was an important three-day platform for stakeholders in ECD to deliberate on how to make concrete progress in line with the vision and aspirations of the AU Agenda 2063 and global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Delegates discussed one of the greatest challenges facing the continent: how to support the proper nurturing of children during the most pivotal days of their lives.

We express appreciation to the Government of Kenya for hosting this important conference and the Africa Early Childhood Network for bringing national, regional and international communities together in Nairobi.

In 2015, the global community agreed on the SDGs, several of which address issues related to the development of young children. In May 2018, global institutions launched the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) at the World Health Assembly. Components of the Nurturing Care Framework include: *Good health, adequate nutrition, opportunities for early learning, security and safety and responsive caregiving*. The Framework seeks to ensure that children **not only** survive but also thrive and live to transform their communities. Further, the Nurturing Care Framework is especially important for supporting initiatives targeted at children living with developmental difficulties.

Building upon the commitments made by Member States in the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of young Children (ACRWC), in Agenda 2063, the African Union places at the forefront, the transformative role of investing in building human capacity.

The Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016 - 2025 (CESA16-25) identifies preprimary education as the pillar for future learning and the next frontier if Africa is to realize sustained quality education and training. In recognition of this, the AUC launched the Early Childhood Education and Development Cluster (ECED) to support achievement of CESA 16-25 objectives.

We **AFFIRM** that early years present a time of great opportunity and are decisive for human development. Demographically, the African continent is the youngest in the world and as such, holds tremendous promise. Realizing Africa's potential and aspirations depends on the investments that are made today towards the development of Africa's children and young people.

We **RECOGNIZE** the importance of global and regional deliberations on the Sustainable Development Goals and African Union Agenda 2063;

We are **CONCERNED** that, while much is expected of Governments, public investment in the holistic development of young children is persistently low;

CONSIDERING that the ILO–UNESCO recommendation on the Status of Teachers (1966); Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4.2 on access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education; and the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health – remain relevant in guiding policies aimed at improving the status of young children;

WE CALL UPON African Member-States, ECD stakeholders and the world at large to:

1. **NOTE** that the first 1000 days of a child's life provide a critical window of opportunity for ensuring optimal brain development and strong foundations for success in later years.
2. **RECOGNIZE** that implementation of the Nurturing Care Framework plays a critical role in advancing achievement of the SDGs 2030 and African Union Agenda 2063.
3. **ACKNOWLEDGE** the role of the AU ECED Cluster in advancing progress towards achieving better learning outcomes for young children in Africa.
4. **PRIORITISE** Early Childhood expenditure in national budgetary allocations at National and Sub-national levels.
5. **INVEST** in ensuring equitable access to high quality programmes and services aimed at improving the health, nutrition, early learning and care of young children and their families.
6. **DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT** policies that will safeguard children's access to high quality nurturing environments in their early years.
7. **ADOPT** multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary approaches to the implementation of national policies and strategies that promote national coordination mechanisms to address child development in a holistic way.
8. **PRIORITISE** young children and families in deprived, emergency and marginalized contexts.
9. **PROMOTE** working through community system 'change agents', in order to reach all children, particularly the hardest to reach.

10. **INVEST** in empowering the early childhood care and development workforce, and devise strategies for the provision of appropriate incentives, including competitive remuneration, clear career pathways and continuous professional development opportunities, in order to attract and retain a competent workforce across the sectors.
11. **COMMIT** to build an evidence-base at the national, regional and continental levels to guide development and implementation of policies, systems and programmes.

Endorsed on 19th October, 2018, at the The First AfECN International Conference on Early Childhood Development (ECD) held at Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi-Kenya.

A Call to action – National

***Janet Ouko, Member, County Executive Committee – Education, Culture and Sports,
Nairobi County, Kenya***

1. Prioritisation of ECD expenditure in national budgets is critical;
2. Need to develop policies to drive the ECD Agenda;
3. We must empower the workforce to accelerate the ECD efforts.
4. Must commit to work together and promote national coordination mechanisms;
5. Need to continue to participate in regional conversations and review developments made.

Endorsed on 19th October, 2018, at the The First AfECN International Conference on Early Childhood Development (ECD) held at Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi-Kenya.