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CONCEPT NOTE

Regional Meeting on Measurement of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Eastern and Southern Africa

24–27 October 2023
KIGALI, RWANDA

Co-organized by the United Nations Children’s Fund Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (UNICEF ESARO), the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa (WHO AFRO), the World Bank, the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN), and the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN), in collaboration with the Government of Rwanda.



Background

Early childhood development (ECD) is the foundation of an individual's health, learning, productivity, and well-being for life. Referring typically to the period between birth and 8 years of age, ECD constitutes an essential building block in the formation of human capital.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) highlights the fundamental role of all aspects of a child's development under Article 27, where *States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development*. CRC General Comment No. 7 (2005) on Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood recognizes that "early childhood is a critical period for realizing children's rights" as "young children experience the most rapid period of growth and change during the human lifespan, in terms of their maturing bodies and nervous systems, increasing mobility, communication skills and intellectual capacities, and rapid shifts in their interests and abilities".

The Comment states: "Young children should be recognized as active members of families, communities and societies, with their own concerns, interests and points of view. For the exercise of their rights, young children have particular requirements for physical nurturance, emotional care and sensitive guidance, as well as for time and space for social play, exploration and learning. These requirements can best be planned for within a framework of laws, policies and programmes for early childhood, including a plan for implementation and independent monitoring (...) and through assessments of the impact of laws and policies on children."

The importance of ECD is also recognized in Target 4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, *By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education*.

In sub-Saharan Africa, 66 per cent of children under the age of 5 are at risk of poor developmental outcomes; many children cannot reach their potential due to factors such as poor health, inadequate nutrition, exposure to stress, and limited opportunities for early learning.

We know what children need to develop to their full potential. Young children need nurturing care, i.e., conditions that provide responsive caregiving; promote health; support adequate nutrition; bring a sense of security and safety; and include opportunities for early learning.

We know what strengthens the capacity of families and caregivers to support young children's development. An enabling environment of appropriate policies, programmes, and services is needed to support families, parents, and caregivers to provide quality nurturing care for young children. In addition to relevant knowledge and resources, community participation and respect for the diverse and specific needs of children and families are key aspects of this enabling environment.



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In sub-Saharan Africa, **66 per cent** of children under the age of 5 are at risk of poor developmental outcomes

Figure 1. Frameworks guiding early childhood education policies and programmatic actions



Source: *The Nurturing Care Framework, developed by WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank Group (2018).*

Gains in reducing child mortality provide a vivid example of what can be achieved when government commitment and collective action are driven by clearly defined objectives and effective implementation at scale.

To bring about a similarly successful shift in early childhood development and help more young children make the shift from surviving to thriving, an unwavering commitment and clear process, supported by strong scientific research, sound implementation, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation, are needed.

Monitoring children’s early development is critical for effective programme implementation, and needs to be complemented by tracking of the availability, access, quality, and coverage of evidence-based interventions. Collection of data relevant to early childhood development is essential for continuous programme improvement; accountabilities; attracting buy-in and commitment from government entities, development partners and donors; and, most importantly, for spurring and sustaining country-level action.

Accurate and reliable measurement of indicators relevant to early childhood development can provide

the evidence base to help inform sound policy formulation; pinpoint areas for additional investment; and, perhaps most critically, identify those children who are least supported on their path to optimal development, either on an individual or population level.

Across Eastern and Southern Africa, efforts are underway to collect and use data that are relevant to ECD to inform decision-making at national and subnational levels. New measures have become available to strengthen this process. These include the UNICEF Early Childhood Development Index 2030, the WHO Global Scales for Early Development (GSED), and the World Bank Anchor Items for the Measurement of Early Childhood Development (AIM-ECD). These measures were developed to facilitate a better understanding of children’s development at the population level. *The Countdown to 2030 – Country Profiles for Early Childhood Development* are aligned with the *Nurturing Care Framework* and several countries have introduced country dashboards. Finally, work is underway to fill data gaps and develop new indicators, such as for assessing responsive caregiving. Links to more information on these initiatives can be found at the end of the document.

Regional Meeting on Measurement of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Eastern and Southern Africa

The Regional Meeting on Measurement of Early Childhood Development in Eastern and Southern Africa will provide an opportunity to take stock of the available measurement tools and indicators that are important for ECD; to exchange experiences and streamline efforts; and to agree on how to ensure relevant data is captured and utilized to strengthen policies and services.



The four-day regional meeting due to take place in Kigali, Rwanda on 24–27 October 2023 is co-organized by the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO); the WHO Regional Office for Africa (AFRO); the World Bank Group, the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN); and the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN).

The event will be held as an in-person meeting. The methodology will include presentations, plenary sessions, working groups, a marketplace, poster sessions and videos.

Meeting Objectives

The primary aim of the Regional Meeting is to support governments to develop robust measurement systems for early childhood development (ECD).

More specifically, the objectives of the meeting are to:

- Discuss population-level outcome and impact measures of ECD and how to interpret and use the data.
- Review national monitoring and evaluation frameworks for ECD to facilitate peer learning and identify any areas for improvement.
- Discuss availability and integration of data at national and subnational levels, and how available information is being used to strengthen programme implementation.
- Agree on priority actions to advance the measurement of data relevant to ECD at the country level, as well as the supportive role of regional and global entities.

Expected Outcomes and Key Deliverables

The key expected results of the meeting are that participating countries are better positioned to understand and use relevant ECD measurement and monitoring tools; that existing measurement and monitoring processes are harmonized at population and implementation levels; and that data is more effectively used to inform decision-making.

Specifically, the expected outcomes and key deliverables are:

- Countries are oriented and equipped to use data from available and forthcoming measurement and monitoring tools to track progress in ECD.
- National and subnational mappings of data are used to influence policy, budgeting, and programming for ECD.
- Consensus is reached on the regional roadmap to guide countries on how they can mainstream/integrate monitoring of ECD into their national statistical systems.
- Country-specific action plans to strengthen monitoring and evaluation of ECD policies and programmes are developed.

Target Audience



The Regional Meeting will bring together up to 200 representatives of national governments, development partners, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders involved in using data to monitor and strengthen policies and programmes supporting early childhood development. Participants will represent the following 23 countries of Eastern and Southern Africa: Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Comoros, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Specifically, participants will represent:

- **Governments** – up to 3 officials per country, responsible for planning, monitoring, and reporting on ECD-relevant programming, representing the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and/or any other relevant government entity.
- **Development partners** – UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank, bilateral agencies.
- **ECD networks** – the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN) and the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN).
- **Implementation partners** – national and international non-governmental organizations engaged in planning, implementation, and monitoring of ECD initiatives in the region.
- **Civil society organizations** engaged in planning, implementation, and monitoring of ECD initiatives in the region.
- **Private foundations and funders** supporting the ECD agenda.
- **Experts and academic institutions** involved in strengthening the ECD regional landscape and measurement agenda.

Administrative and Logistical Information

The Regional Meeting will take place on 24–27 October 2023 in Kigali, Rwanda.

Participants should plan their travel to be able to attend the full four days of the meeting, e.g., by arriving on Monday, 23 October and leaving Friday evening, 27 October or on Saturday, 28 October 2023.

The meeting will be held at the **Ubumwe Grande Hotel** in Kigali city centre. The hotel features amenities for both business and leisure.

A Rwandan entry visa is provided at Kigali International airport and all land borders to nationals of all countries; no prior visa application is required. The applicant's passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months from the date of entry. Visa fees are waived for United Nations staff members and nationals of select countries.

For more information, please see <<https://www.migration.gov.rw/our-services/visa-issued-under-special-arrangement>>.

A provisional agenda and administrative and logistics note will be made available closer to the meeting dates.

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Measuring Early Childhood Development – Essential Reference Materials

Global measures of early childhood development

Global Scales for Early Development (GSED)

The WHO Global Scales for Early Development (GSED) package assesses the development status of children 0–36 months of age. They are a population-based measure that can complement the ECDI2030. Research relevant to GSED is in progress at multiple sites. Governments and partners are invited to join the GSED initiative and collect data while further global validation and expansion of the toolset is underway. www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-MSD-GSED-package-v1.0-2023.1

Early Childhood Development Index 2030 (ECDI2030)

The UNICEF Early Childhood Development Index 2030 assesses the development status of children aged 24–59 months. It is the measure used for official global monitoring and reporting of SDG indicator 4.2.1. The ECDI2030 can be assessed through Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multi-Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) – the two largest global household surveys relevant to health and well-being. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/early-childhood-development-index-2030-ecdi2030/>

Anchor Items for the Measurement of Early Childhood Development (AIM-ECD)

The World Bank Anchor Items for the Measurement of Early Childhood Development (AIM-ECD) have been developed to help countries monitor early childhood development for children aged 4–6 years. The AIM-ECD caregiver report questionnaire and additional resources are publicly available in multiple languages and can be embedded in household surveys to complement existing efforts to measure child development. www.worldbank.org/en/topic/earlychildhooddevelopment/brief/a-set-of-resources-to-help-countries-measure-and-improve-early-childhood-development

Country snapshots

Countdown to 2030 – Country Profiles for Early Childhood Development

The ECD country profiles are aligned with the *Nurturing Care Framework* and bring together data on over 40 indicators covering different dimensions of the framework. Developed by UNICEF in collaboration with the ECD Countdown to 2030 Working Group, the profiles are available for 197 countries. They are updated regularly, enabling comparisons over time, and supporting advocacy and accountability. <https://nurturing-care.org/resources/country-profiles/>

Filling indicator gaps

The Nurturing Care Framework: Indicators for Measuring Responsive Care and Early Learning Activities

This paper outlines the methodology developed to assess responsive caregiving and early learning activities, and track caregiver practices in these two domains of nurturing care. The methodology is available upon request from WHO or the originators. <https://nurturing-care.org/assessing-responsive-caregiving-and-early-learning-activities/>

‘Measurement tools and indicators for assessing nurturing care for early childhood development: A scoping review’

This scoping review commissioned by WHO provides a comprehensive review of the current state of measurement of nurturing care in relation to early learning; responsive caregiving; and safety and security outcomes for children under 5 years of age in low- and middle-income countries. <https://nurturing-care.org/measurement-tools-for-nurturing-care/>



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