

ECD MEASUREMENT CONFERENCE

Venue: Ubumwe Grande Hotel

Date: 24th October 2023

OPENING REMARKS

Greetings:

- Resident Coordinator Rwanda
 - Government officials from Eastern and Southern Africa
 - Representatives of UNICEF
 - Representatives of the WHO
 - Representatives of the World Bank Group
 - Representatives of the Africa Early Childhood Network
 - Representatives of the Early Childhood Development Action Network
 - Representatives of developmental partners, civil society, funders, academia
 - All protocols observed
1. Warm Welcome to Kigali Rwanda. On behalf of the Government of Rwanda, I am honored to welcome all of you. I hope you are enjoying your stay so far.
 2. We are all here because we believe that every child has the right to the best start in life. Including the right to good nutrition and stimulation, responsive care and early learning, health, and a safe environment. These rights provide children with the opportunity to grow and develop to their full potential. As children thrive, families are happier, communities are stronger, and a more sustainable and peaceful future is possible.
 3. Unfortunately, according to *The Global Health Journal (2020)*, in Sub-Saharan Africa, 66% of under-5 children are at risk of poor developmental outcomes- far too few children are thriving because of poor health, inadequate nutrition, exposure to stress, a lack of love and early stimulation, and limited opportunities for early learning. They are not

thriving in the crucial first 1,000 days when the foundations for healthy, lifelong physical growth and mental development are laid.

4. It is therefore interesting to note that The Regional Meeting on Measurement of Early Childhood Development in Eastern and Southern Africa brought together an impressive number of national governments, development partners, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders involved in supporting early childhood development policies and programs. This gathering will share knowledge and experiences that will help us, especially the Saharan Region to get solutions for improved ECD services delivery.
5. In Rwanda, we are committed to shifting from an agrarian to a knowledge-based economy by 2050. This goal can hardly be achieved without a well-developed human capital. It is within this background that the government has put a strong emphasis on investing in Early Childhood Development to build a firm foundation for the powerful, able, and healthy population which will push the country towards achieving the goal.
6. Generally, ECD is part of the transformative agenda for 2030, making it an international priority for the 21st century. Global targets in education (SDG 4.2); health (SDG 3.2); nutrition (SDG 2.2); and protection (SDG 16.2) address key outcomes to realize young children's developmental potential
7. We are therefore working hard to ensure that quality ECD service delivery leaves no child behind, Nonetheless, we acknowledge that we still face challenges which is why we feel privileged to be with you today to learn, unlearn, and agree on what works to improve our children's lives.
8. Investment in early childhood pays off through better health, enhanced learning capacity, increased adult earnings, poverty reduction, fewer inequalities, and a more peaceful society.
9. Investing in quality early childhood is socially fair and economically efficient. According to *Professor James Heckman's recent (2012) research findings*, benefits derived from ECD investments far outweigh costs, with ECD investments giving back almost 13 percent annually. The returns are

actualized in reduced poverty and income gaps, as well as increased prosperity and competitiveness of economies.

10. I have strong expectations that 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; exchange experiences streamline efforts, and agree on how to ensure relevant data is captured and utilized to strengthen policies and services.
11. I hope that the discussion on population-level measures of ECD, and revision of national monitoring and evaluation frameworks, will facilitate learning across countries and result in more effective use of data and in clear priority actions to advance ECD in Eastern and Southern Africa.
12. I would like, once again, to thank partners, the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office; the WHO Regional Office for Africa; the World Bank Group, the Africa Early Childhood Network; and the Early Childhood Development Action Network for organizing the meetings and bringing this group together in Kigali.
13. I therefore declare this meeting officially opened, and I wish you a fruitful meeting.