



COMMUNIQUE

Southern Africa Regional Conference on Early Childhood Development and Education 5th – 7th November, 2024

Maseru – Lesotho

We, the delegates from 9 countries in the Southern African region, one country from East Africa, and the USA, including Government representatives from Ministries of Education, and Social Development, UNICEF, NECDOL, Roger Federer Foundation, WFP, CRS, academia, researchers, NGOs, ECD Networks, LCN, private sector representatives and the media, gathered in Maseru, Lesotho, for the Southern Africa Regional Conference on Early Childhood Development and Education on 5th – 7th of November, 2024.

Responding to the theme: "Beyond Bricks and Mortar: Investing in ECDE, our most valuable asset-building blocks for the future" at this august three-day platform, stakeholders in ECDE convened to take stock of the status of ECD in the region and to deliberate on how to make concrete progress in line with the vision and aspirations of the AU Agenda 2063 and the Global Sustainable Development goals-SDG4, especially SDG 4.2,

Expressing appreciation to the Government of Lesotho, Ministry of Education and Training for hosting this significant conference in partnership with the Network of Early Childhood Development of Lesotho (NECDOL) and UNICEF as co-hosts,

Inspired by the SDG 4.2, "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", and the goal of achieving an Africa fit for children by the year 2040, and motivated to contribute to the realization of the Agenda 2063 on the Africa We Want,

Recognizing the constitutional, legal and policy instruments formulated to create a framework for the realization of the rights of all African children including the UN





Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC),

Observing that the first 1000 days of a child's life are fundamental for rapid brain development and the basis for the person's future life,

Cognisant of decisions reached by nations at the Transforming Education Summit, 2022 and the Tashkent Declaration of 2022,

Recognising progress made by governments in developing policies, acts, guidelines and standards to regulate and the slow growth in budget allocation for the ECDE sector,

Painfully aware that children who do not receive nurturing care specifically; good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for learning, may not develop optimally and thereby achieve their full potential, putting many children in the region at risk and reducing the economic possibilities for our region,

Aware of the human rights argument for investing in Early Childhood Development and the growing need for quality and inclusive childcare services,

Leveraging the increasing recognition of Early Childhood Development as an important sector in human and social development,

Appreciating that quality Early Childhood Development services result from effective and efficient implementation of holistic Early Childhood Development programmes and policies built upon the foundation of an integrated, multi-sectoral approach backed by existing policy and legal frameworks, and informed by clear evaluation and monitoring systems,

Aware of gaps that continue to persist including inadequate financing, an insufficient Early Childhood Development workforce, the current low quality of Early Childhood Development services, low access and enrolment in Early Childhood Development programmes, and



Buoyed by the Governments of Southern African countries as enshrined in key constitutional, legal and policy instruments

Do hereby make the following resolutions and call on all stakeholders to take collective and complementary action on ten interlinked areas that are crucial to achieving transformational and cost-effective change for young children and nations through:

1. Governments and SADC **strengthen** and/or **establish** ECDE leadership at decision-making spaces that plan, allocate resources, monitor, evaluate, track and report progress against nationally and regionally agreed indicators at ECDE level such as on financing, nutrition, access to and quality inclusive lifelong education, etc.
2. **Advocate** for and go beyond the rhetoric of inclusive, free, state-funded, and compulsory ECDE for at least one year of pre-primary education, with at least 10% of education budgets allocated to pre-primary.
3. **Strengthen** transparency and social accountability mechanisms among parliamentarians, civil society, NGOs, researchers and governments intended for efficient and effective systems that increase access to quality inclusive lifelong learning.
4. Governments and SADC, in partnership with development partners, and with the participation of civil society, to **strengthen** and/or **establish** research and tracking mechanisms for ECDE to inform decision-making, planning, financing and resource allocation.
5. **Establish** more private sector, NGOs, donor partners, and government partnerships in southern Africa to explore diverse, alternative, and sustainable financing mechanisms to alleviate poverty, stunting, malnutrition, loss of learning, and the effects of climate change.
6. **Adopt** a local, community-driven homegrown school and community feeding practices for children, families, and communities based on locally available food star meals.



7. Governments to **establish** coordinated whole of government and multi-sectoral approaches for promoting holistic development of children within the context of the nurturing care framework and fulfilment of child rights in four phases of pregnancy, birth to three, pre-primary (4-5) and foundation/lower primary (6-8years)
8. Governments to **adopt** the draft Protocol on children at national levels and initiate its adoption at the SADC level for nation-states to derive direction, guidelines, and institutional linkages for promoting the interests of children.
9. Robustly **institute** ECDE teacher professional development programmes for teachers to adopt inclusive play-based learning methods routed in developmental domains using mother tongue languages.
10. **Advocate** for parental programmes and practices that enable children to meet their developmental milestones inclusive of foundational skills and competencies of literacy, numeracy, socio-emotional, digital and technological learning. These programmes should include psychosocial support programmes for both the children and the parents/caregivers.

Agreed/Drafted, Resolved in Maseru, Lesotho, 7th November, 2024

