MAY 6–8, 2026

INVESTING IN THE EARLY YEARS

A Global Technical Financing Forum

KIGALI, RWANDA

In support of Act For Early Years

Forum Report

August 2026

ECDAN
Early Childhood Development Action Network

Acknowledgements

Investing in the Early Years: A Global Technical Financing Forum was organized by the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN), together with the Government of Rwanda, the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN), UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Forum's agenda was guided by ECDAN's Early Years Financing Technical Working Group, which brings together leaders and experts across the field. The Forum was designed as a milestone within a broader global roadmap that includes efforts by UNICEF, UNESCO, OECD, the World Bank, Grand Challenges Canada, Theirworld, and others to unlock financing for ECD. These efforts include the Act for Early Years campaign, the G20 agenda, and the UNESCO/UNICEF/OECD Global Report on Financing for Equitable and Inclusive Access to Early Childhood Care and Education, and will culminate in the first-ever International Finance Summit for Early Childhood, planned for 2027.

Co-hosts organizing committee: Gilbert Munyemana, John Paul Nyandwi, Monique Mukamana (Rwanda's National Child Development Agency); Andrew Kardan, Dominic Muntanga, Pierre Nzeyimana, Samson Desie (UNICEF Rwanda); Boniface Kakhobwe, Chemba Raghavan, Michael Banda (UNICEF Global); Lara Daher, Rokhaya Diawara, Sebla Ayse Kazanci (UNESCO); Janet Kayita, Nuhu Yaqub, Sheila Manji (WHO); Brett Weisel, Caroline Mochoge, Elizabeth Lule, Emily Gilkinson, Harper Lagares, Sarah Marjane, Shekufeh Zonji (ECDAN)

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Special thanks are extended to the government delegations from the 17 countries that participated: Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Germany, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, United Arab Emirates, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Their contributions ensured the Forum was grounded in real examples and practical recommendations. The organizers appreciate the donors and UN agencies that mobilized and facilitated government participation.

The Forum was highly participatory, and the contributions of all 238 attendees enriched the experience. 81 individuals (34%) spoke on the main stage or in a breakout session. The Forum would not have succeeded without the expertise, experience, passion, and preparation of each one of these speakers. The organizers express sincere gratitude for the demanding work of all the presenters, as well as Lisa Stern of AIM Group who coordinated the logistics, and Eugene Anangwe (East Africa Media Group) who smoothly led the event as emcee.

Deep appreciation is extended to the Forum sponsors who made the Forum a success.

Forum co-host organizations and sponsors.

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Acronyms

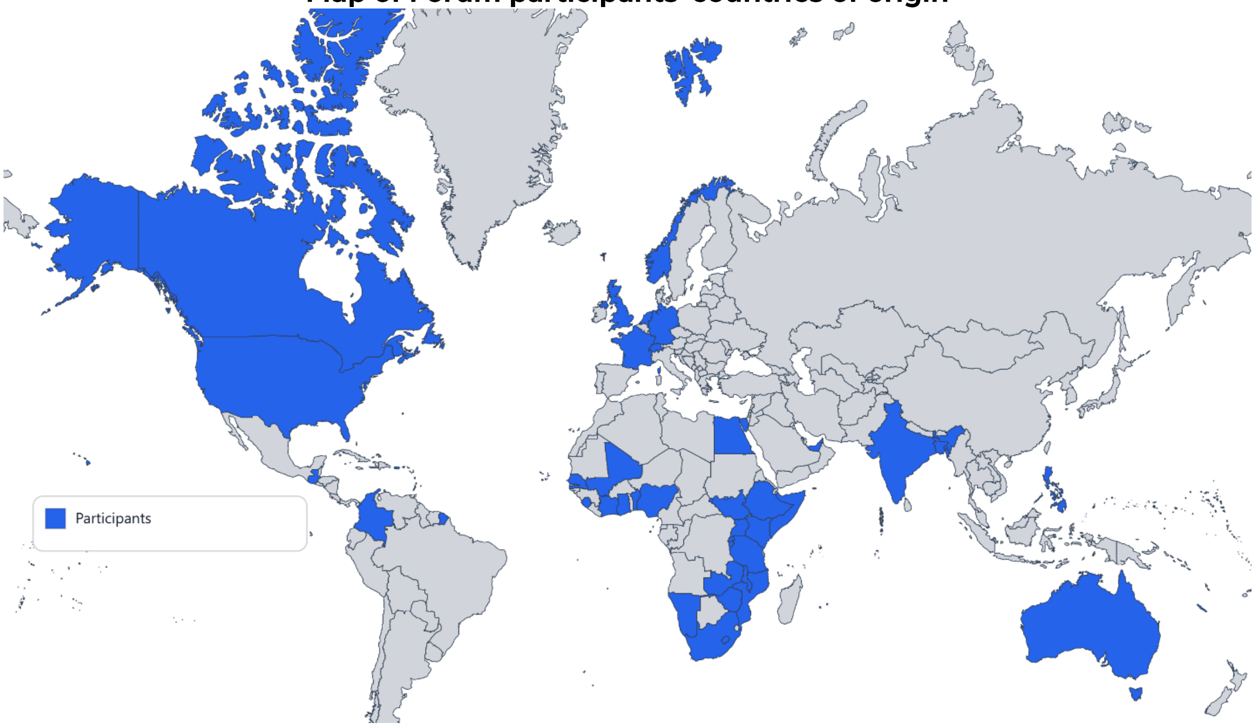
AfECN	Africa Early Childhood Network
AI	Artificial intelligence
ECD	Early childhood development
ECDAN	Early Childhood Development Action Network
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICBF	Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (Colombian Institute of Family Welfare)
NCCM	National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (Egypt)
NCDA	National Child Development Agency (Rwanda)
NCF	Nurturing Care Framework
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OBF	Outcome-based financing
ODA	Official development assistance
OMEP	World Organization for Early Childhood Education
PFM	Public financial management
PPP	Public-private partnerships
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

Government representatives from sectoral ministries and ministries of finance joined philanthropists, program implementers, finance experts, and advocates from countries across five continents in Kigali for Investing in the Early Years: A Global Technical Financing Forum. The Forum took place over three days, May 6-8, and included presentations and workshop sessions led by global leaders and experts committed to advancing sustainable financing for early childhood development (ECD).

Globally, governments are seeking practical, country-owned solutions to ensure young children and their families can access quality services they need to survive and thrive. The Forum came at a time when the case for early investment is clear, but financing remains fragmented and insufficient. The Forum involved **238 participants** from **39 countries** across six continents, and **17 governments** were represented from Africa and Asia.

Map of Forum participants' countries of origin



Evidence shows that early investments can deliver up to US$13 in returns per $1 spent, yet many countries continue to face barriers that limit financing for the full range of ECD services. These include gaps in public financial management (PFM), weak coordination across sectors, and limited fiscal space for services that support children's development from the start.

Failing to invest appropriately carries substantial economic costs. Every dollar not invested in early childhood represents an estimated loss of $8–$19 in future returns. In a world where human capital drives economic competitiveness, investing in the early years is one of the smartest and most urgent choices governments can make.

The Forum provided a platform for joint strategy development and generated practical recommendations for how public financial management systems and financing instruments can support comprehensive, whole-child services.

Over three days, the Forum achieved several expected outcomes:

- **Influence global processes:** Inputs provided to UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report and the Act for Early Years campaign.
- **Document and learn about innovative financing models and solutions:** Country case studies and research shared innovative financing strategies and mechanisms.
- **Launch a Financing Toolbox for the Early Years:** Toolbox introduced, interest built, and feedback received to clarify its scope, contents, and use cases.
- **Set a post-Forum action agenda:** Priorities and actions agreed upon to take forward at the national, regional, and global levels to advance coordinated equitable financing for the early years and contribute to the Act for Early Years campaign.

The presentations are available on ECDAN's website as a resource for not only Forum participants but also for other stakeholders who will join the movement to unlock financing for the early years.

The Forum ended with a commitment to follow-up actions to take the momentum generated forward. ECDAN and the co-hosts stated their intention to complete the following steps:

- Publish outputs from the Forum including presentations, videos, pictures, and a Forum report.
- Finalize the Financing Toolbox for the Early Years, customize it for country contexts, and make it open access.
- Mobilize countries, implementers, and donors to use the Toolbox.
- Include key Forum outcomes in the upcoming UNESCO/OECD/UNICEF Global Monitoring Report.
- Build momentum from the Forum to the International Finance Summit for Early Childhood in 2027.
- Prepare for the post-2030 agenda.

Participants were also asked to bring key learnings, advocacy messages, and tools back to government, philanthropic, and civil society stakeholders in their countries. ECDAN called on each stakeholder group to support the Financing Toolbox for the Early Years in its next phase: moving from a robust technical framework into structured country applications that strengthen real financing decisions at different levels.

- **Countries:** Use the Toolbox to advance your ECD financing priorities by applying it to selected services, testing financing options, and building a clearer pathway for budget and partner dialogue.
- **Civil society:** Support country-led application and finalization by backing facilitated use of the Toolbox, practical templates, case studies, and the conversion of emerging lessons into a field-ready global resource.

- **Donors:** Support digitization and ready-to-use enhancements—including a practical, user-friendly interface, guided workflows, and digital templates—to make the Toolbox easier for countries to use efficiently.
- **UN agencies:** Actively engage with governments on financing for ECD, ensure child rights are upheld, and promote equity and inclusion in policy dialogues as well as financing mechanisms.

This report highlights the key issues that emerged from the Forum dialogues, summarizes actionable takeaways, and presents recommendations for the field. It is organized around the five dialogues that structured the agenda and responds to the guiding questions that framed each discussion. The annex includes the full agenda, participant list, and speaker list by session.

Forum Framing

Question: How do we establish sustainable financing ecosystems for young children at scale?

The Forum was opened by the Honorable Consolée Uwimana, the Minister of Gender and Family Promotion in Rwanda. She welcomed participants to Kigali on behalf of the Government of Rwanda and underscored Rwanda's commitment to advancing ECD.

The Minister highlighted the challenging global financing landscape, noting that governments are facing constrained national budgets, declining external financing, and competing priorities. In this context, she emphasized that the focus must extend beyond the volume of investments to the efficiency and effectiveness of resource allocation to achieve sustainable, high-impact outcomes.

The Minister stressed that the early years are foundational to lifelong health, learning, and productivity. Investments in young children not only benefit individual life outcomes but also strengthen societies and contribute to long-term economic and social development. Despite this strong rationale, she acknowledged that financing for ECD remains insufficient and not yet at the scale required to meet national and global ambitions.

"Financing for ECD services is not yet at the scale we aspire to. This Forum is an opportunity to explore innovative solutions and ensure that available resources are allocated where they matter most. Together, we can build integrated, equitable, and sustainable systems that ensure every child has access to quality ECD services."

- Honorable Consolée Uwimana, Minister of Gender and Family Promotion, Rwanda

Drawing on Rwanda's experience, the Minister presented the country as an example of strong political commitment and integrated service delivery. Guided by its Vision 2050, Rwanda has prioritized ECD through investments in health, nutrition, education, protection, and family support. She noted significant progress in expanding access to services, with ECD programs growing from reaching approximately 297,000 children in 2020–2022 to over 1.8 million children today through more than 32,000 centers nationwide. This expansion reflects coordinated efforts across sectors and sustained government leadership.

Looking ahead, the Minister called on participants to translate dialogue into action over the course of the Forum. She stressed the importance of strengthening partnerships, including deeper engagement with the private sector, to mobilize additional resources and ensure that investments reach the most vulnerable children and families.

A panel discussion with the co-hosting organizations framed the Forum in the context of their individual organizations' strategic priorities and ongoing work. ECDAN stressed that the window for action is narrowing, creating a need for practical solutions and stronger political commitment now. Rwanda's National Child Development Agency (NCDA) noted that while the country has made ECD a national priority through policy, budgeting, and service delivery, the Forum creates opportunities for synergy and peer learning, allowing countries to build on each other's successes instead of reinventing solutions. UNICEF emphasized its goal of expanding access to nurturing care services for hundreds of millions of children and the need to rebalance public spending toward the early years. UNESCO highlighted its role in strengthening the evidence base, supporting policy dialogue, and contributing to a forthcoming global report on early childhood financing. WHO underscored the importance of integrating ECD within health systems and primary health care, while AfECN stressed the urgency of translating growing political commitment into practical implementation across African countries.

The co-hosts emphasized that the Forum took place at a pivotal moment, with fewer than four years remaining to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and growing recognition that current financing levels for early childhood are inadequate. A central message was that the global ECD financing gap is not due to lack of evidence, but to gaps in political prioritization, resource allocation, and coordination. They framed this as a "choices challenge," underscoring the need for governments and partners to make deliberate decisions to prioritize young children.

KEY MESSAGE

Lack of evidence is not a challenge, but rather the challenge is related to the choices governments make about how they invest public funds.

The Shifting Financing Landscape

A keynote address by Biniam Bedasso from the Center for Global Development highlighted three major structural shifts affecting development financing. First, official development assistance (ODA) is declining, with preliminary estimates showing a 23 percent real-term drop in 2025—the largest contraction on record. Second, debt burdens in low-income countries have intensified, with countries paying significantly more in debt service than they receive in new financing, resulting in the largest net financial outflow in decades. Third, rising borrowing costs are placing additional pressure on public budgets, diverting resources away from social investments, including ECD.

The SDG era began in a more forgiving financing environment. That world is gone.

–23.1%

ODA, 2025 (real terms)

Largest annual drop on record. Bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa fell 26.3%.

OECD · preliminary 2025 data

$741bn

Net debt outflow, 2022–24

Developing countries paid out more in debt service than they received in new external financing: the largest gap in 50+ years.

World Bank · IDR 2025

$415bn

Interest paid in 2024 alone

A record sum for developing countries — resources that could have gone to schooling, primary healthcare, and essential infrastructure.

World Bank · IDR 2025

Together, these trends are tightening fiscal space across many low- and middle-income countries, forcing governments to make difficult trade-offs. Bedasso emphasized that in periods of fiscal stress, governments tend to prioritize immediate and visible needs, often at the expense of longer-term, cross-sectoral investments such as early childhood development. As a result, ECD is particularly vulnerable, as it sits at the intersection of sectors such as health, education, and social protection, and often lacks a clear institutional champion within public budgets.

"When governments face harder trade-offs, they tend to protect what's urgent and what's visible. And so that means longer horizons and cross-sectoral areas tend to be pushed aside … ECD, which usually sits at the intersection of these sectors, risks falling out of the conversation entirely when fiscal stresses intensify."

- Biniam Bedasso, Research Fellow, Education Team – Europe, Center for Global Development

He also explored the evolving financing architecture, noting that while traditional aid is declining, new financing instruments are emerging. These include results-based financing, debt swaps for development, and blended finance approaches. While private finance does not replace government spending and may not be a natural fit for all ECD interventions, there are opportunities to adapt financing mechanisms to support system-level investments.

Bedasso outlined four strategic priorities for strengthening ECD financing:

1) Protecting ECD within core fiscal frameworks.
2) Integrating fragmented funding streams across sectors.
3) Leveraging concessional and innovative financing instruments to strengthen systems.
4) Connecting ECD to emerging global financing agendas such as human capital development and the care economy.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

ECD needs clear institutional champions within public budgets across multiple ministries and programs. Governments can take steps to protect and prioritize ECD by making it more visible within budget frameworks and establishing dedicated or protected funding mechanisms.

The Financing Gap

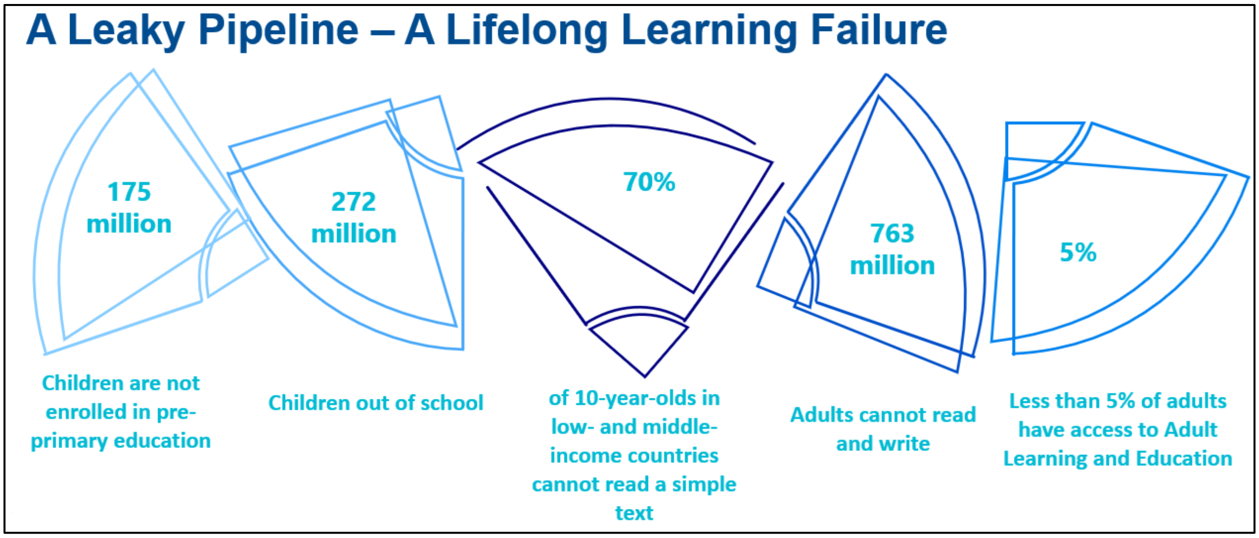
Borhene Chakroun of UNESCO also made a keynote address that stressed the need for stronger political commitment and more effective multilateral cooperation. Chakroun called for renewed global solidarity, noting that partnerships across governments, UN agencies, international organizations, development partners, and civil society are essential to mobilize resources and drive systemic change.

He emphasized that it is important to think about early childhood investment from a lifelong learning perspective, so that policymakers realize that issues like school drop-out, illiteracy, and low earnings, which show up later in the life course, have their roots in early childhood. Making the connection between ECD and sustainable development is critical to widening the circle of people who champion the early years.

"If we make the narrative not only about investing now in early learning but show that the impact can be much greater in a lifelong learning perspective, the stakeholders that we can bring around the table will be many more than what we have in this room."

- Borhene Chakroun, Director for Policy and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO

He reinforced that too much investment comes too late and focuses on fixing problems of joblessness in adolescence and early adulthood, for example. Lower-income countries spend on average 6.7% of their cumulative public spending per child on children under age five. The gap compounds, with poorer countries spending less per child and less early.



Despite the Tashkent Declaration demonstrating a commitment for countries to spend 10% of their education budgets on pre-primary, currently countries spend 0.4% on average. A 2024 report estimated the cost to the global economy of children lacking basic skills to be US$10 trillion a year by 2030.

KEY MESSAGE

The question is no longer whether to invest, but how fast and how equitably it can be done.

Chakroun clarified that the complete funding gap cannot be calculated because the $21 billion financing gap only covers *one year of pre-primary education*—not the full Nurturing Care Framework (NCF). No common framework exists to track domestic financing across the five NCF domains, and multisectoral data fragmentation makes cross-sector financing analysis structurally impossible. To combat this, he called upon stakeholders to be a voice of reason in finance discussions by holding governments to account, recommending realistic solutions, and keeping the big domestic financing picture in focus.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Contribute to producing good quality data on budgeting and spending.
- Support countries to spend more equitably and more efficiently.
- Be at the table during sectoral finance discussions.

Georgina Bonet Arroyo from WHO examined the role of health financing in advancing ECD, with a particular focus on the African context. A central message of her keynote was that the health sector is uniquely positioned to contribute to ECD outcomes, as it delivers critical services such as reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health and nutrition. However, in many low- and lower-middle-income countries, health systems remain significantly underfunded and are unable to provide these essential services at sufficient scale or quality. Current levels of per capita health spending in most African countries fall well below the estimated thresholds required to deliver basic and comprehensive health services, limiting the effectiveness of ECD-related interventions.

Arroyo underscored the broader financing constraints affecting the health sector. A high reliance on out-of-pocket spending—accounting for a substantial share of total health expenditure—continues to place a heavy financial burden on households, particularly the poorest. This not only limits access to essential services but also contributes to increased poverty and inequity.

She emphasized the importance of strengthening domestic resource mobilization as a foundation for sustainable health and ECD financing. Governments are increasingly exploring strategies such as tax reforms, earmarked "health taxes" (e.g., on tobacco, alcohol, and sugary drinks), and broader efforts to increase the tax-to-GDP ratio. These measures can help expand fiscal space for health and social services, though their success depends on strong political will and effective coordination with ministries of finance and other sectors.

KEY MESSAGE

Persistent reliance on out-of-pocket spending, instead of prepaid public financing, increases inequities and contributes to poverty.

A stark statistic presented by Arroyo was that a 2% annual increase above current reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health spending could prevent the needless deaths of 147 million children and 5 million women, as well as 32 million stillbirths, globally by 2035. This shows how integrating ECD interventions into essential health service packages is a critical strategy to increase ECD's visibility and prioritization within national budgets and achieve significant results.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Promising practices that countries can apply include:

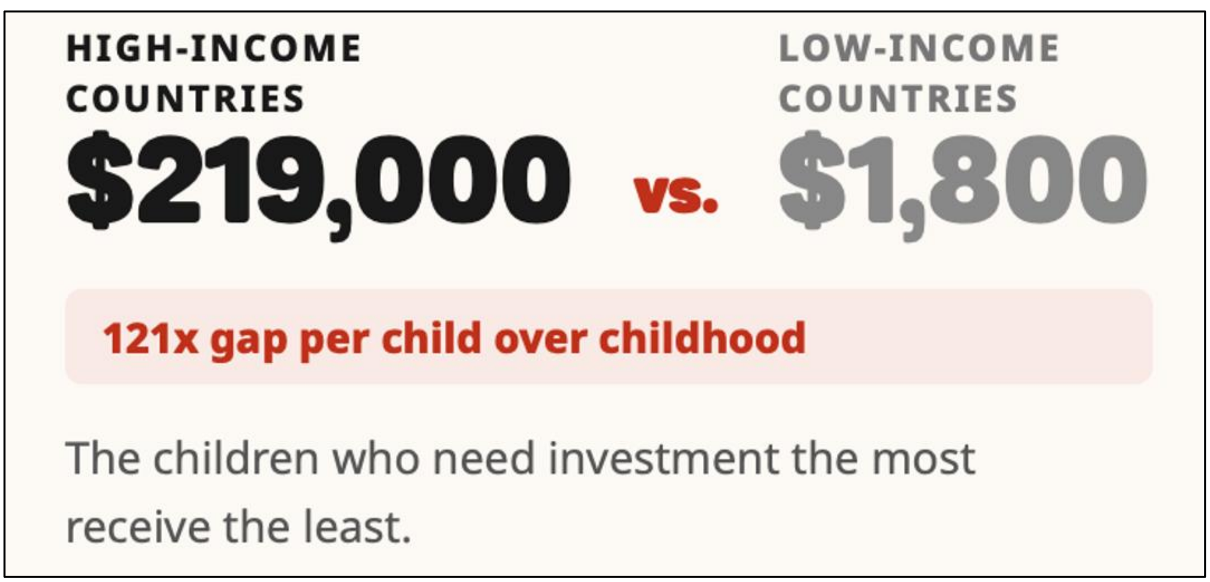
- Expanding pooling mechanisms such as social health insurance to better protect vulnerable populations.
- Improving public financial management systems to increase efficiency and accountability.
- Implementing revenue raising reforms including tax policy, debt conversions, and support from multilateral development banks.

Core Systems and Reform Priorities

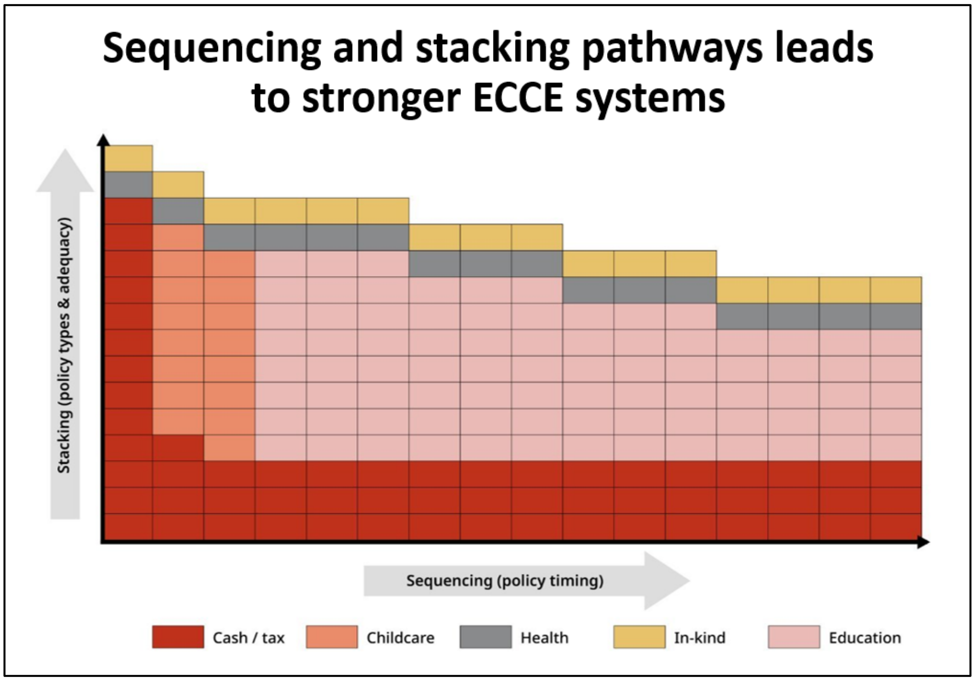
Dominic Richardson from the Learning for Well-being Institute presented key insights from the "First Things First" study, developed in collaboration with UNESCO, which explores how governments can prioritize ECD investments under constrained fiscal and governance conditions. He highlighted the scale and urgency of the challenge, noting that approximately 290 million children are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential due to inadequate policies. Preventable child mortality and poor developmental outcomes remain closely tied to poverty and insufficient support systems.

> *"Inequality is the source of everything bad, whether it be financial or categorical, and it results in huge social and private costs ... In the seven minutes that I've got, the most distressing figure is about 65 children will die because of causes related to poverty and a lack of good supports. And 600 African children will be born."*
>
> - Dominic Richardson, Managing Director, Learning for Well-being Institute

Richardson emphasized that children who are safe, healthy, and supported are better able to learn, and improved learning contributes to long-term well-being—creating a reinforcing cycle of positive outcomes. Inequality was identified as a central issue. Current policy and financing systems often exacerbate disparities, both within and between countries, leading to significant social and economic costs.



Richardson stressed the need for balanced, cross-sector investment. He cautioned that prioritizing education alone—without sufficient investment in health, nutrition, and social protection—can worsen outcomes such as mortality, poverty, and stunting. Base stacking is about making sure that the right policies are in the right place at the right time and that multiple interventions happen at the same time.



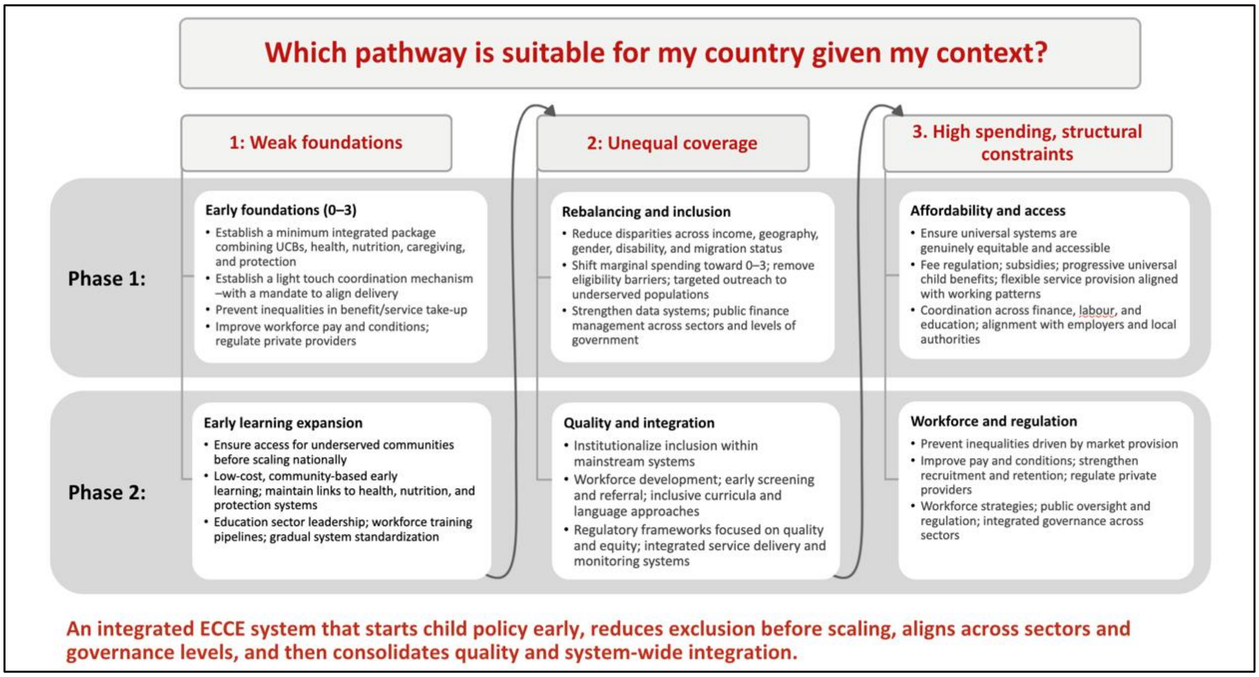
KEY MESSAGE

Sequencing policy adoption and implementation as well as *stacking* different types of policies is necessary to build stronger systems for ECD.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Work towards a balanced portfolio with policies and investments across sectors (i.e., social protection, health, education) that are implemented at the same time for sustainable outcomes that reach all children.

Richardson ended by outlining a pathway for governments to follow that begins with establishing a minimum package of services for children ages 0-3 that covers all NCF components, builds by addressing inequalities and service disparities, and then consolidates quality and expands access through universal systems with a reliable and regulated workforce.



Ivelina Borisova from UNICEF went further to describe the underlying "architecture" that financing must support. Her central message was that the effectiveness of investments depends not only on how much funding is mobilized, but on how well financing is aligned with the systems, services, and results that children and families actually need. Comprehensive nurturing care services that promote health, nutrition, early learning, responsive caregiving, and child safety are delivered through three key sectors—health, education, and social protection—with parental support acting as a critical cross-sectoral accelerator.

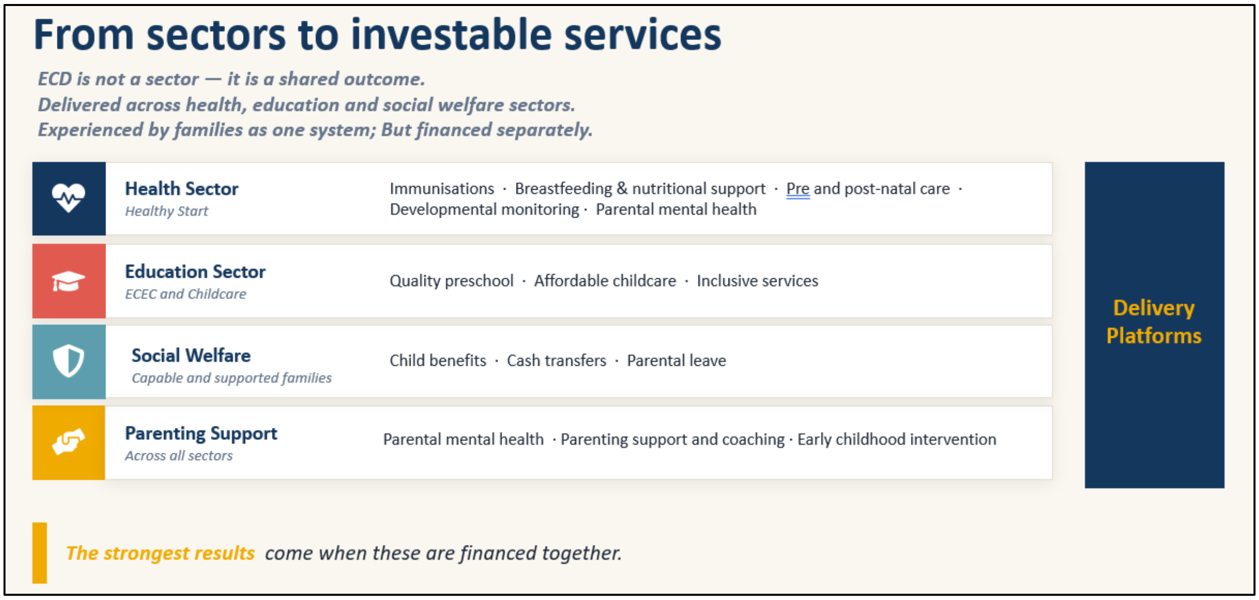
RECOMMENDED ACTION

Every sector needs to integrate parenting support, and it needs to be costed and incorporated into policies and services across health, education, and social protection sectors.

Borisova highlighted that effective financing must extend beyond service delivery to include delivery platforms and system capacities. These include workforce development, data systems, quality standards, and governance structures, all of which are often underfunded.

"A child doesn't experience the health sector and the education sector and the social welfare sector, they experience continuity of care and services."

- Ivelina Borisova, Senior Early Childhood Expert, UNICEF



She outlined three major gaps that must be solved together: a service gap (insufficient investment in key interventions), a systems gap (missing investment in delivery capacity), and a cross-sectoral gap (lack of coordinated funding for shared priorities such as parenting support).

KEY MESSAGE

Solving only one gap will not deliver results at scale. Financing must cover services, systems, AND cross-sectoral accelerators. Currently all three are underfunded, but cross-sectoral coordination is the weakest.

Borisova also emphasized that challenges are not just related to inadequate investment; limited visibility of ECD spending, imbalances across sectors, misalignment with actual costs, and weak budget execution are critical concerns. In some cases, funds are allocated but not effectively spent. She went on to explain that different actors can finance layers, but they should all contribute to a cohesive investment plan that is built upon domestic financing. Government must remain the core funder, while philanthropic organizations, development banks, the private sector, and other donors can support and expand the pool of funds.

KEY MESSAGE

Alignment matters as much as volume—the wrong money in the wrong place can keep systems fragmented.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Use catalytic finance to build systems that domestic budgets can sustain. If a pilot has no fiscal transition path, it is not catalytic—it is temporary.

Borisova ended by outlining five questions to carry into the remaining sessions of the Forum:

1. Are core services within each sector adequately financed?
2. Are delivery systems funded—workforce, quality, data, referral, and local capacity?
3. Are cross-sector accelerators financed explicitly, or left as unfunded coordination ambitions?
4. How will catalytic and innovative finance unlock public funds without creating unsustainable project islands, and how will those investments transition into recurrent domestic financing?
5. What budget markers, execution data, and outcome indicators will tell us whether money is reaching children?

She reiterated that the aim is not to finance more activities—it is to finance a system capable of delivering quality and results at scale.

Dialogue 1

Question: Why are young children not prioritized in public expenditure? Moving from political commitment to sustainable public financing.

The first dialogue opened with a panel discussion involving representatives from Tanzania, Bangladesh, Malawi, Egypt, and Nigeria. Drawing from real country experiences, the session provided a candid and practical discussion about the political, institutional, and financial barriers that limit investment in young children, as well as emerging strategies to address them.

Across countries, panelists emphasized that commitment to ECD is not the primary constraint. Governments have adopted national policies, strategies, and long-term development plans that recognize the importance of investing in the early years. However, the transition from policy commitment to budget allocation and effective spending remains uneven. A central challenge is limited fiscal space, with governments facing competing priorities and constrained national budgets. ECD investments often struggle to compete with sectors that yield more immediate and visible political returns, such as infrastructure, despite the evidence of ECD's long-term economic benefits.

Political economy factors were identified as a major driver of underinvestment. Short political cycles tend to favor investments that generate quick results, while ECD outcomes materialize over longer timeframes. In some contexts, weak public demand and limited advocacy for early childhood further reduce pressure on decision-makers to prioritize these investments. Panelists also noted that early childhood is often framed as a social sector expenditure rather than a foundational economic investment, which can influence budget decisions at the highest levels.

Institutional and systems challenges also play a critical role. The multisectoral nature of ECD—spanning health, education, and social protection—creates fragmentation in planning, budgeting, and service delivery. Funding is dispersed across multiple ministries, making it difficult to track total investment and assess impact. Weak coordination mechanisms, both across ministries and between national and subnational levels, further complicate implementation. In several cases, panelists highlighted that even when funds are allocated, they are not fully executed due to capacity constraints, weak public financial management systems, or lack of clear budget structures.

Another recurring issue is the limited visibility of ECD within public budgets. Without clear budget lines or coding, early childhood investments are often 'invisible' within broader sectoral expenditures, making it difficult for policymakers and advocates to monitor spending or make the case for increased investment. Panelists stressed that strengthening budget classification systems and linking resources to outputs and outcomes are essential steps toward improving accountability and effectiveness.

"NCCM (a parastatal) now reports directly to the president ... this gives a very important way to [take action on] early childhood development in Egypt."

- Hana Ismail, Girl's Health Program Manager, National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, Egypt

"ECD is seen as a social sector cost ... [yet] it's not a social sector spend. It's an economic intervention."

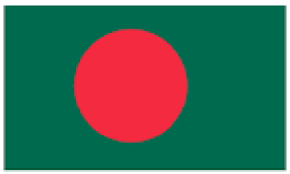
- Juma Mfaume Salum, Principal Finance Management Officer, Ministry of Finance, Tanzania

Some countries are embedding ECD more clearly within national development frameworks, ensuring it is reflected in long-term plans and medium-term expenditure frameworks. Others are strengthening coordination mechanisms, including establishing dedicated national bodies or multi-sectoral platforms to align policies, financing, and implementation. Additional examples included expanding social protection programs, increasing decentralization of funding, and using evidence on economic returns to advocate for greater prioritization of early childhood investments.

The session highlighted several promising approaches.

Tanzania demonstrates how **strategic framing (ECD as economic investment)** and **long-term planning** can shift budget priorities.

- Tanzania corrected a major gap by embedding ECD in its long-term national development plan.
- The Ministry of Finance is using return-on-investment data to justify ECD spending.



Bangladesh demonstrates how **political will + direct benefits** can rapidly expand ECD coverage, especially for vulnerable children.

- They are shifting toward *direct resource delivery to children*, including educational kits, school uniforms, and meals.
- The Mother and Child Benefit Program is being extended from 36 months to 48 months to fully cover the first 1,000 days.
- The Prime Minister publicly declared financing ECD a priority.

Malawi shows how **decentralization + civil society pressure** can unlock new financing streams and elevate ECD politically.

- The Community Development Fund increased from 200 million to 5 billion MWK, enabling districts to allocate more to ECD.
- Civil society and religious institutions directly engage the Ministry of Finance to demand increased allocations.
- Malawi is increasingly integrating ECD into long-term planning (Agenda 2060).

Egypt offers a model of **institutional reform, digital visibility, and integrated service delivery** at scale.

- The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) has been strengthened by law and reports directly to the president which elevates ECD politically and improves cross-ministry coordination.
- 27 regional NCCM branches provide local-level coordination and equitable financing.
- A partnership with the Information Decision Support Center integrates ECD strategy into a national digital platform for tracking key performance indicators and spending.
- Decent Life Initiative is a presidential initiative delivering health, education, and infrastructure services in underserved villages.

Nigeria shows how **health system integration and high-level coordination** can institutionalize ECD sustainably.

- ECD is embedded in the national health strategy, treating it as part of a continuum of care, not a standalone project.
- A national coordination structure across health, nutrition, and social protection has been set up under the Vice President.
- Support is given to states to integrate ECD into annual plans.

KEY MESSAGE

Commitment to ECD is not the primary constraint. Having a strong political champion helps to move political commitments into action so that ECD can become embedded into national development frameworks and annual implementation plans.

Panelists emphasized the importance of stronger advocacy and communication strategies. Effectively engaging ministries of finance requires presenting ECD as an urgent and evidence-based investment, demonstrating both its immediate relevance and long-term economic returns. Clear data, credible cost-benefit analysis, and alignment with national development priorities were identified as critical tools for influencing resource allocation decisions.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Deploy promising practices used in other countries, including:

- Engage civil society in advocacy efforts.
- Present ECD as an urgent and evidence-based investment with both immediate and long-term economic returns.
- Institutionalize multisectoral coordination.
- Embed ECD within sectoral strategies.
- Support decentralized funding mechanisms to operationalize action plans for ECD services.

Country Dialogues

Question: How have certain countries made notable increases in ECD investments? What conditions contributed to their success? What barriers do they still face?

Rwanda's Experience

Bringing together representatives from government, development partners, academia, and the private sector, a dialogue between Rwanda stakeholders offered practical insights into how sustained political commitment and coordinated action can translate into tangible results for young children. This discussion showcased Rwanda's experience in building a comprehensive, multisectoral ECD system and explored how the country has expanded resources, improved efficiency, and advanced equitable access to services.

The discussion highlighted Rwanda's deliberate and phased approach to ECD system development. Beginning with the adoption of a national ECD policy in 2011 and its expansion in 2016, the country progressively diversified service delivery models beyond school-based provision to include community-based, home-based, workplace, and model ECD centers. This expansion was designed to increase access while reducing costs by using existing infrastructure such as community spaces and places of worship. As a result, access to ECD services increased dramatically, rising from 17% in 2016 to over 80% today, reaching more than 1.2 million children across more than 32,000 service points.

A central theme of the session was the importance of experimentation and scaling. Early investments by organizations such as Imbuto Foundation demonstrated integrated service delivery models combining education, health, nutrition, and parenting support. These pilot initiatives provided proof of concept and were gradually institutionalized and scaled by government systems, illustrating the value of partnerships between government and non-state actors in driving innovation.

KEY MESSAGE

Non-state actors can play a key role in piloting innovations to demonstrate proof of concept. However, these pilots should always be designed in partnership with the government and consider a pathway to scale from the outset by building upon existing services.

Strong governance and coordination mechanisms emerged as key enablers of progress. The establishment of the National Child Development Agency (NCDA) consolidated responsibilities across sectors and strengthened alignment among ministries responsible for education, health, nutrition, and social protection. Panelists also emphasized the importance of harmonized standards across different ECD delivery platforms and improved data systems, which now allow Rwanda to track participation across multiple service modalities and inform evidence-based decision-making.

Investments in human resources were identified as another critical milestone. Rwanda has significantly expanded its ECD workforce, increasing the number of qualified teachers from around 2,000 in 2020 to over 10,000, supported by dedicated teacher training programs under the Rwanda Education Board. This focus on workforce development has been essential for improving the quality and sustainability of services.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Build a pipeline for a trained ECD workforce as part of the national education system.

The session also highlighted the role of community engagement and homegrown solutions in addressing resource constraints. Community members contribute land, labor, and in-kind resources. Parents also play an active role in service delivery, particularly in home-based models. These approaches have helped reduce costs and increase local ownership, reinforcing the principle that ECD is a shared societal responsibility.

Private-sector engagement was presented as a powerful complement to public financing. Rwanda Mountain Tea provided a compelling example of how workplace-based ECD services can deliver mutual benefits—improving employee productivity and well-being while ensuring children receive safe, nurturing care. The company reported productivity gains of up to 20% among workers when childcare services were provided, illustrating a strong business case for investment in the early years.

"Financing ECD is not all about mobilizing more resources. It's all about ensuring the mobilized resources are embedded in resilient systems."

- Samson Desie, Chief of Health and Nutrition, UNICEF Rwanda

"We should not forget that parents are key partners in supporting the implementation of ECD services."

- Ildephonse Hitimana, Programs Specialist, Imbuto Foundation

From a financing perspective, the panel underscored that sustainable ECD systems require a blended approach. While the government remains the primary funder, additional resources can be mobilized through partnerships with development partners, the private sector, and communities. The Ministry of Finance emphasized the need for clear prioritization, targeting, and demonstrated returns on investment to justify resource allocation within constrained national budgets. Evidence showing strong social and economic returns on ECD investments was identified as critical for sustaining political and financial commitment.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

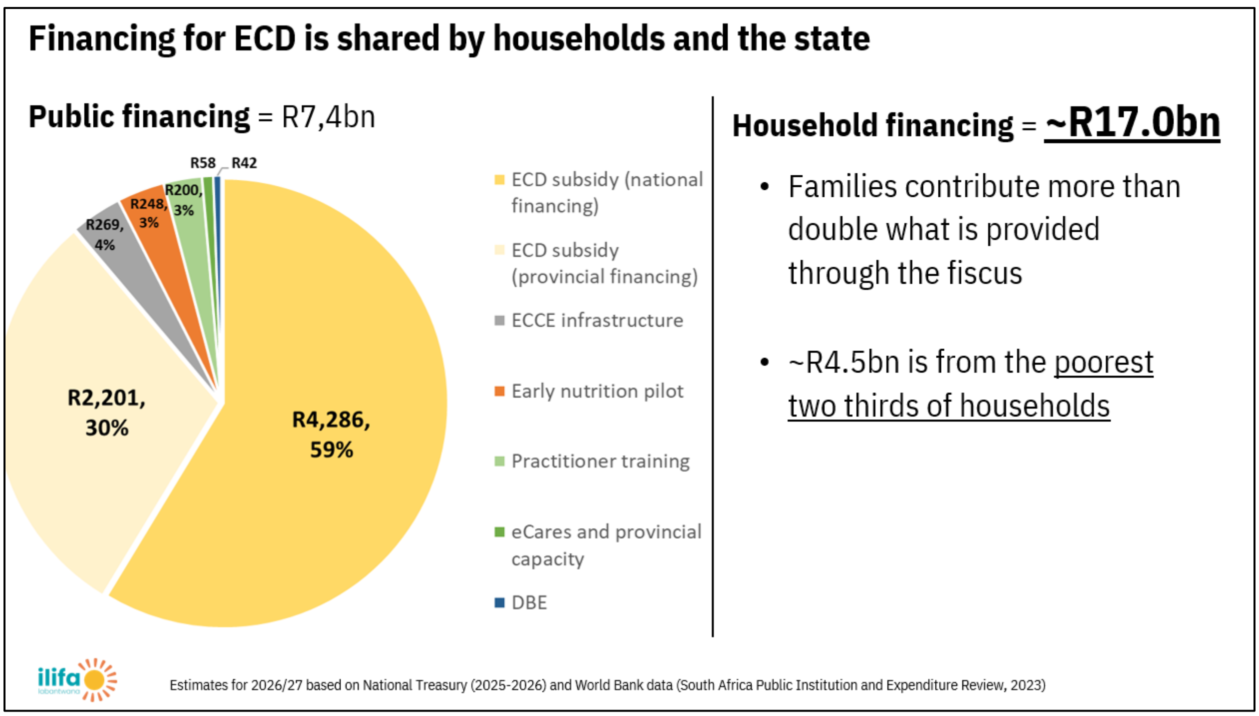
Encourage private-sector businesses to offer workplace-based ECD services. Make the case by citing the mutual benefits for children, workers, and the company.

Finally, the session highlighted key priorities for the next phase of Rwanda's ECD journey. These include further strengthening domestic financing, improving efficiency and accountability in resource use, expanding innovative financing mechanisms, and professionalizing the care workforce. Ensuring that expansion is accompanied by quality and equity—particularly for the most vulnerable populations—remains central to future efforts.

South Africa's Experience

Bringing together government, civil society, philanthropy, and technical partners, a panel discussion examined South Africa's experience in financing and scaling ECD, with a focus on early learning. South Africa is a middle-income but highly unequal country, where ECD is increasingly recognized as a critical lever to address entrenched inequality, support human capital development, and enable women's economic participation. Despite a well-established, largely community-driven ECD sector serving millions of children, access and quality remain deeply unequal. Children from low-income households have significantly lower access to services, and only a minority of children in programs are developmentally on track. At the same time, practitioners—predominantly women—remain underpaid and under-supported.

A defining feature of the South African model is that ECD services are largely delivered by private and community providers, while financing is shared between households and the state. Households—often the poorest—have historically borne the majority of costs, while public spending has remained limited. This has constrained both access and quality, reinforcing inequality.



The panelists underscored that South Africa is now at an important turning point. A combination of sustained advocacy, improved data and evidence, and stronger coordination across government, civil society, and philanthropy has led to a major increase in political attention and public investment. The 2025 national budget included a landmark allocation of 10 billion rand to ECD over three years—marking a permanent step change in public financing and signaling strong government commitment.

The speakers emphasized that this breakthrough was the result of long-term ecosystem efforts. Civil society coalitions mobilized public support and practitioner voices, while philanthropy played a catalytic role over more than a decade, investing in service delivery, data systems, and advocacy. Improved evidence—such as national ECD census data and child development assessments—strengthened the investment case and influenced decision-making at the highest levels of government.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Form coalitions of civil society organizations and coordinate joint advocacy efforts to mobilize public support and build political will.
- Leverage philanthropic investments to strengthen the evidence base and data systems.
- Engage directly with practitioners to understand their needs and uplift their voices as part of advocacy efforts.

At the same time, the session highlighted that increasing funding is only the first step. A central challenge remains ensuring that resources reach children and providers effectively. Structural bottlenecks—including high levels of unregistered programs, administrative complexity, and delays in subsidy payments—limit the reach and impact of public financing. Many providers, particularly in low-income and rural areas, are unable to access subsidies due to registration barriers, even when they serve the most vulnerable children.

To address these challenges, several reforms and innovations are underway. These include a large-scale registration drive to bring informal providers into the system; the introduction of compliance support grants to help programs meet regulatory standards; and the development of a new management information system to improve tracking, accountability, and payment efficiency.

KEY MESSAGE

Digital systems and better data are critical to improving transparency, reducing delays, and enabling scale.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of delivery systems and partnerships. Public systems alone are insufficient to reach all children, particularly in underserved communities. Models such as social franchises and community-based programs provide essential support to practitioners, helping them move from startup to sustainability through training, mentorship, and financial support. Coordinated action across government, delivery partners, and funders is therefore essential.

"Allocation is a crucial step ... but also equally as important is how that money gets to children and practitioners and to programs."

- Hopolang Selebalo, Head of Policy and Advocacy, SmartStart Early Learning

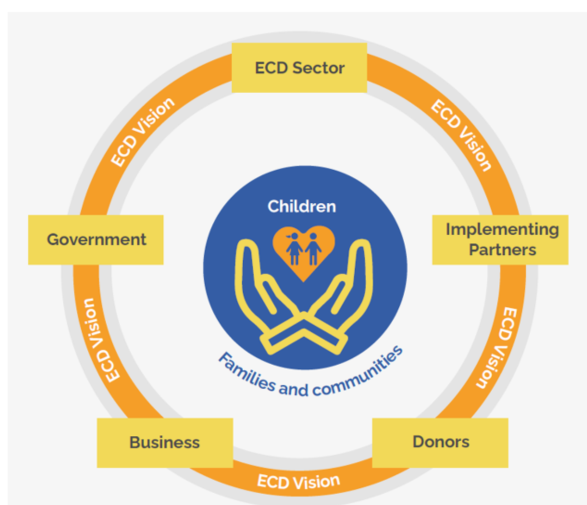
"The challenge really for us now is to transform that political and economic backing into tangible, scalable changes in the system."

- Daniel McLaren, Public Finance Economist, Ilifa Labantwana

Finally, the panelists emphasized that sustaining momentum would require continued collaboration, investment, and focus on implementation. While recent progress represents a major achievement, significant work remains to achieve universal access to quality ECD services. The ability to translate increased funding into reliable, equitable services will be the key determinant of long-term success.

The momentum shift – <u>transition to DBE</u>

- In 2022, responsibility for ECD shifted from social development to the **Department of Basic Education (DBE)**
- Prior to this, Constitutional rights and good policies were not translating into meaningful changes in the ECD ecosystem
- As a major **delivery institution**, the transition to DBE created new conditions for progress ...



"A new social compact for ECD" in South Africa's 2030 Strategy for Early Childhood Development Programmes, Department of Basic Education, 2024

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Build strong partnerships across government, civil society partners, social enterprises, and funders in order to reach all children, including those in marginalized communities. Training, mentorship, and start-up capital from partners can complement government investment.

Colombia's Experience

Colombia's ECD journey began over 50 years ago with the establishment of a national family welfare institution (ICBF), followed by the expansion of services through community-based models. Over time, early childhood became a constitutional priority, culminating in comprehensive legislation in 2006 and a major policy turning point in 2011. This shift introduced an integrated national strategy focused not only on expanding coverage, but also on improving quality, strengthening monitoring systems, and reducing disparities between urban and rural populations.

A major achievement has been the significant expansion of service coverage, reaching millions of children through a mix of institutional, community-based, and family-based modalities. Colombia has also made substantial progress in building a national ECD architecture, including quality standards across multiple dimensions, an intersectoral governance structure led at the presidential level, and coordinated financing across health, education, and social protection sectors.

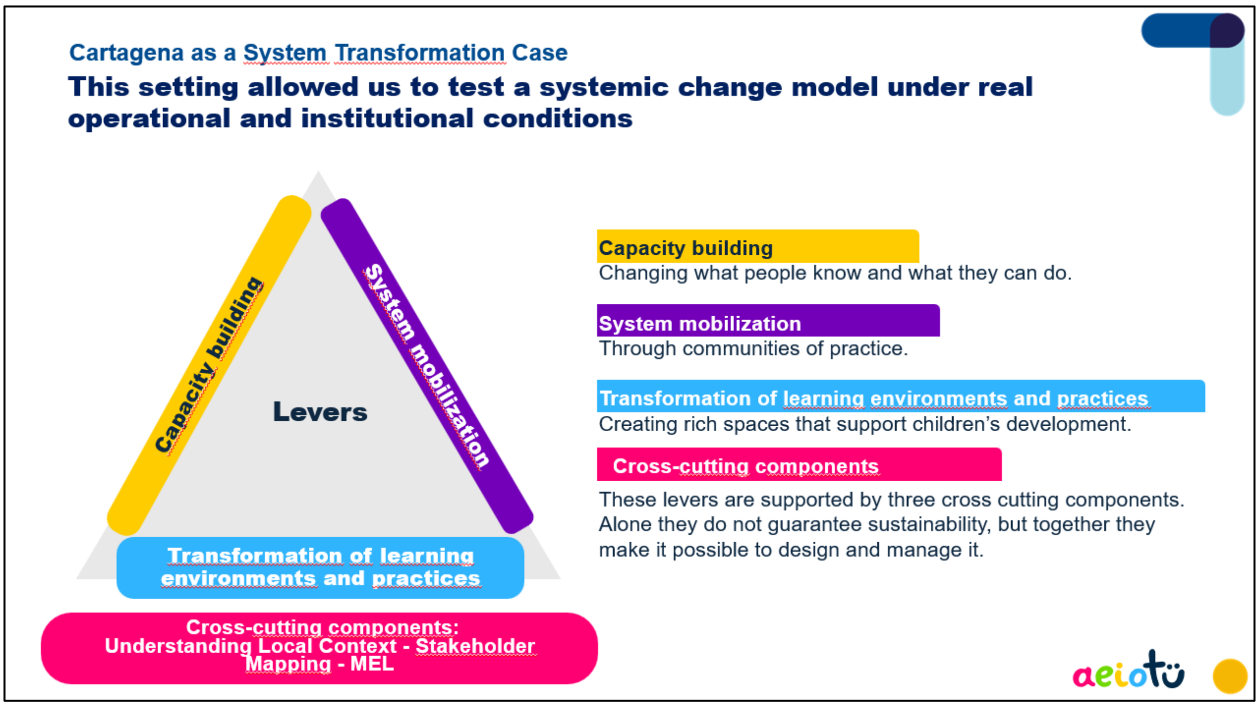
Despite these advances, the session emphasized a critical gap between national policy design and local implementation. While the national government has established strong frameworks and financing flows—primarily channeled through ICBF and partnerships with NGO providers—service delivery is decentralized. Local governments are responsible for infrastructure and co-financing, resulting in variations in capacity, coordination, and access. This has contributed to uneven quality and persistent inequities, particularly between urban and rural areas.

"We need to continue to build the case because even though we have a public policy framework, the questions are changing so quickly. The challenges are becoming so strong that the main question is, how are we going to sustain quality over time?"

- Victoria Arciniegas, Executive Director, aeioTU

Efforts to strengthen quality—through standards, training, and monitoring—have revealed underlying system constraints, including limited resources, fragmented delivery systems, and insufficient incentives for frontline workers. For example, early childhood educators, many of whom are women, often face low pay, heavy workloads, and limited motivation to participate in professional development, leading to low completion rates of training programs.

The city of Cartagena in Colombia offers a unique case study. Through long-term collaboration with local authorities, stakeholders have invested in capacity building, improvements to learning environments, and system mobilization through communities of practice. These efforts have generated early gains in shifting knowledge, beliefs, and stakeholder alignment. However, evaluation findings highlight that translating these changes into sustained improvements in classroom practice is a long-term process requiring continuous investment and stronger incentives.



The Colombian experience underscores the importance of shifting from fragmented service delivery models to integrated system approaches. Sustaining quality will require aligning financing with long-term system goals, investing in workforce development, strengthening local implementation capacity, and ensuring that national policies translate effectively into practice. As Colombia faces demographic changes and increasing fiscal pressures, maintaining political commitment and adapting financing strategies will be essential to safeguarding ECD as a cornerstone of human capital development.

KEY MESSAGES

- Existing budget allocations often cover only minimum operational costs, leaving insufficient resources for quality-enhancing investments such as professional development.
- Effective coordination across sectors and levels of government requires sustained ownership, time, and resources, which are not always fully secured.
- Maintaining quality requires long-term financing and a systemic approach that goes beyond infrastructure to address processes, workforce conditions, and interactions between children, families, and providers.

Dialogue 2

Question: How can we expand resources, improve efficiency, and ensure equity and quality services? Securing sustainable public finance for young children.

Participants were given an opportunity to select the track that most interested them between **expansion**, **efficiency**, and **equity**. During the breakout discussion, participants heard from presenters as well as had time to ask questions and offer commentary.

Track 2.1 – Expansion

Question: How can we responsibly diversify public financing sources? Expanding the financing envelope to support key early years policy priorities.

Bringing together perspectives from governments, multilateral organizations, and practitioners, this breakout discussion highlighted both structural constraints and actionable opportunities to increase investment in young children. A central message was that while financing gaps for ECD are widely acknowledged, substantial resources already exist within current systems but are often underutilized or misallocated. Speakers emphasized that expanding financing is not only about mobilizing new funds, but also about improving efficiency, reallocating resources, and ensuring that existing budgets reach frontline services. Examples included shifting spending from higher education to early childhood, improving budget execution to reduce delays in service delivery, and ensuring that funds flow directly to local facilities where they can have immediate impact.

Decentralization and local governance were identified as critical levers for expanding financing. In many contexts, significant resources are available at subnational levels but are not directed toward ECD. Evidence from Kenya showed that while substantial county-level funds exist for childcare, actual spending remains low unless ECD is prioritized politically. This underscores the importance of aligning financing strategies with local mandates, strengthening planning and budgeting capacity at decentralized levels, and creating incentives—such as conditional or performance-based grants—to encourage subnational investment.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Increase the skills and incentives of planners at local levels to budget and execute resources directed to ECD.

The session also highlighted the importance of addressing political economy constraints. ECD financing decisions are often shaped less by evidence and more by political incentives. Panelists emphasized the need to position ECD as a visible and vote-winning investment, including through dedicated budget lines that allow politicians to demonstrate tangible achievements. Strengthening advocacy—both at technical and political levels—and aligning messaging across stakeholders were identified as essential for building sustained political support.

A wide range of innovative and complementary financing mechanisms were discussed. These included:

- Leveraging domestic revenues from natural resources, tourism, and emerging sectors, such as technology.
- Introducing fiscal incentives to encourage private-sector investment in childcare and utilizing instruments such as debt swaps, climate finance, and blended finance.
- Leveraging corporate social responsibility and public–private partnerships to expand financing in a sustainable manner.

Examples from Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal illustrated how catalytic grants and matching mechanisms can mobilize additional public resources and scale integrated ECD programs.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Position ECD as an outcome that is budgeted and funded through all key public sectors.

The discussion reinforced the value of multisectoral approaches to financing. ECD investments are often embedded within health, education, nutrition, and social protection systems, and should be recognized as both ECD-specific and ECD-sensitive. Coordinating financing across sectors not only broadens the resource base but also improves efficiency and outcomes. However, fragmentation remains a major challenge, pointing to the need for stronger coordination mechanisms and integrated planning and budgeting processes.

Capacity constraints were also identified as a significant barrier. Many countries lack the technical expertise within ministries to effectively plan, cost, and advocate for ECD investments. Strengthening capacity across sectors—including engaging finance ministries and building a cadre of professionals who can make the economic case for ECD—was highlighted as essential. Improved data systems, monitoring tools, and timely feedback mechanisms are also needed to track spending and ensure accountability.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Expanding financing requires increased efficiency through actions such as the following:

- Improve data systems.
- Develop and use monitoring tools.
- Build mechanisms to track spending and ensure accountability.
- Invest in enhancing the skills of ministry staff to plan, cost, and advocate for ECD services.

Finally, participants stressed the importance of pragmatism and context-specific solutions. Rather than relying solely on large-scale reforms, countries can achieve meaningful progress through incremental steps, such as tapping into existing fiscal space, removing administrative barriers, supporting informal childcare providers, and leveraging community and household contributions. At the same time, building public demand for ECD and raising awareness among communities and policymakers were seen as critical for sustaining long-term investment.

KEY MESSAGE

Progress can come from incremental, practical steps, not only large-scale reforms. However, building public demand for ECD is essential to sustaining investments long-term.

Track 2.2 – Efficiency

Question: How do we improve value for money within sectors and across sectors? Strengthening domestic finance to support early years policy priorities.

This breakout session emphasized the urgent need to ensure that existing funds are used more effectively to generate measurable improvements in outcomes for young children. A central message was that efficiency is a universal challenge affecting all countries, regardless of income level. While political commitment to ECD is often strong, it does not automatically translate into effective spending. Instead, value for money depends on how well resources are allocated, delivered, and linked to results. Participants stressed that success should not be defined by increased spending alone, but by the extent to which investments reliably improve child outcomes, especially for the most vulnerable children.

The session highlighted a range of systemic inefficiencies across public financial management processes. These include fragmented financing across sectors, weak coordination between national and subnational levels, delayed or incomplete fund releases, duplication of efforts among government and external partners, and limited visibility of ECD spending in public budgets. In many contexts, these challenges are compounded by insufficient data systems, making it difficult to track expenditures, assess service delivery, or demonstrate impact and quality.

A recurring theme was that efficiency must be understood as a multi-dimensional concept. While budget execution is important, it is only one element of value for money. Participants emphasized the need to consider cost-effectiveness, equity, service quality, and sustainability. This requires moving beyond simple metrics to a more nuanced understanding of how resources translate into services and outcomes.

KEY MESSAGE

Efficiency must consider different types of data, not only on spending, but also on quality, inclusion, and outcomes. Value cannot be measured if it is not seen.

The discussion also underscored the importance of cross-sectoral complementarity. Investments in health, nutrition, education, and social protection must work together to achieve optimal results. Underinvestment in any one area can undermine the effectiveness of spending in other areas, reducing overall efficiency. As such, integrated planning and coordinated financing across sectors are essential.

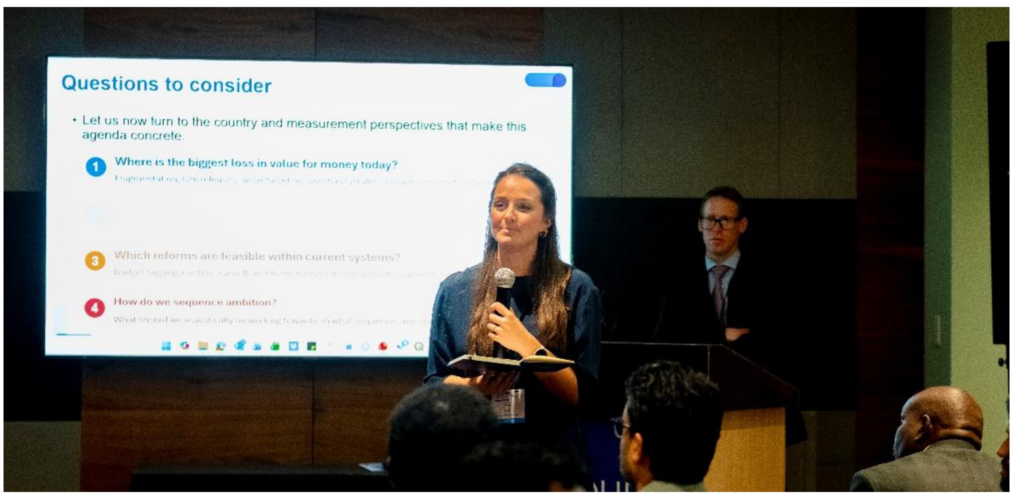
Country experiences illustrated both challenges and promising practices. Examples included:

- **Tanzania:** fragmentation exists within and across sectors; focus is often on treating health issues instead of preventative measures; new opportunity emerging with the Universal Insurance Act and health equity funds.

- **Kenya:** decentralized structure with county governments managing ECD; data gaps exist; no harmonized fee structure; many ECD centers attached to primary schools and benefit from a subsidy program.
- **Ghana:** formal multisectoral framework for ECD yet fragmentation persists; national coordination platform to coordinate actors; NGOs can duplicate efforts and waste government's time.
- **Rwanda:** model ECD centers serve as multi-functional community hubs for services; budget tracking done for nutrition and climate; scope overlap across sectors.
- **Bangladesh:** budget increases annually without demand analysis; local-level capacity is weak.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Invest in health, nutrition, education, and social protection services in a balanced and coordinated way. Financing should be coordinated across sectors and monitored jointly.



Participants identified several priority reform areas. First, strengthening data systems is essential, including cost accounting, budget tagging, and routine tracking of expenditures, outputs, and outcomes. These are not administrative add-ons but foundational components of effective financing. Second, improving allocative efficiency by prioritizing high-impact services and reducing duplication can significantly enhance results. Third, better alignment of intergovernmental transfers can ensure that national priorities are reflected in local-level service delivery.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Commit financing to hiring a qualified workforce, improving data collection and literacy, and ensuring systems remain functional and sustainable without external support.

Equity considerations were highlighted throughout the discussion. Participants noted that a narrow focus on cost efficiency can risk excluding the most vulnerable children, including those with disabilities, who often require more resource-intensive services. Integrating equity into financing approaches—through targeted incentives, budget tracking, and inclusive system design—is therefore essential to achieving both efficiency and equity.

KEY MESSAGE

Too much focus on cost efficiency can cause children with special needs to be neglected, since they may have more complex needs that require additional services at a higher cost.

Track 2.3 – Equity

Question: How do we ensure financing expands high-quality access to early years services equitably? Improving equity and quality.

This breakout session explored how financing for ECD can more effectively drive equitable access to high-quality services, particularly for marginalized and underserved populations. A central message was that equity should not be treated as an afterthought or a secondary outcome, but as a core principle guiding how financing systems are designed, prioritized, and implemented.

Speakers highlighted a persistent gap between strong policy commitments to ECD and actual financial investment. Despite representing a large share of the population, young children—particularly those in low-income, crisis-affected, and marginalized communities—receive a disproportionately small share of public spending. This imbalance contributes to ongoing inequities in access to essential services.

Participants emphasized the importance of a systems-based approach to equitable ECD financing. Rather than focusing on isolated interventions, governments should build integrated portfolios of policies spanning health, education, nutrition, and social protection. Early investments that support families—such as social protection and income support—were identified as critical for reducing intergenerational inequality and enabling children to benefit from later-stage services.

The session also underscored the risks of poorly sequenced reforms. Efforts that improve quality within existing services can inadvertently increase inequality if large numbers of children remain excluded from access. Participants stressed the need to ensure that expansion, inclusion, and quality improvements are pursued in tandem.

KEY MESSAGE

If safeguards are not in place to ensure that access reaches all children, there is a risk that inequality grows as quality improves for only a select few.

Country experiences illustrated both challenges and promising solutions. In Kenya, integrated policies and programs such as school feeding and provision of teaching materials help reduce financial burdens on families. In South Africa, reforms to subsidy systems, improved targeting based on poverty data, and more flexible quality standards have expanded access to underserved populations.

Reaching the most marginalized children, particularly children with developmental delays and disabilities and children in conflict-affected regions, requires targeted and context-specific approaches. Presentations highlighted the importance of community-based systems, including community health workers for early identification of children with disabilities and caregiver support programs that strengthen inclusive care environments. In crisis settings, participants noted that ECD remains severely underfunded, with minimal allocation within humanitarian financing.

Participants also emphasized the importance of redefining quality to support inclusion. Rigid regulatory frameworks often exclude informal and community-based providers, which serve a large share of children in many contexts. More flexible approaches to quality assurance can enable inclusion while supporting gradual improvements.

Key priorities for reform include increasing the visibility of ECD within public budgets, strengthening data systems to track equity outcomes, targeting resources toward the most vulnerable populations, and reducing the financial burden on families.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Design financing with equity as an underlying principle.
- Allocate more resources to the most vulnerable populations, such as children with disabilities and children in conflict-affected contexts.
- Recognize and subsidize informal service options that reach large numbers of children.
- Reduce the burden on caregivers and families by shifting the responsibility of financing from households to the government.

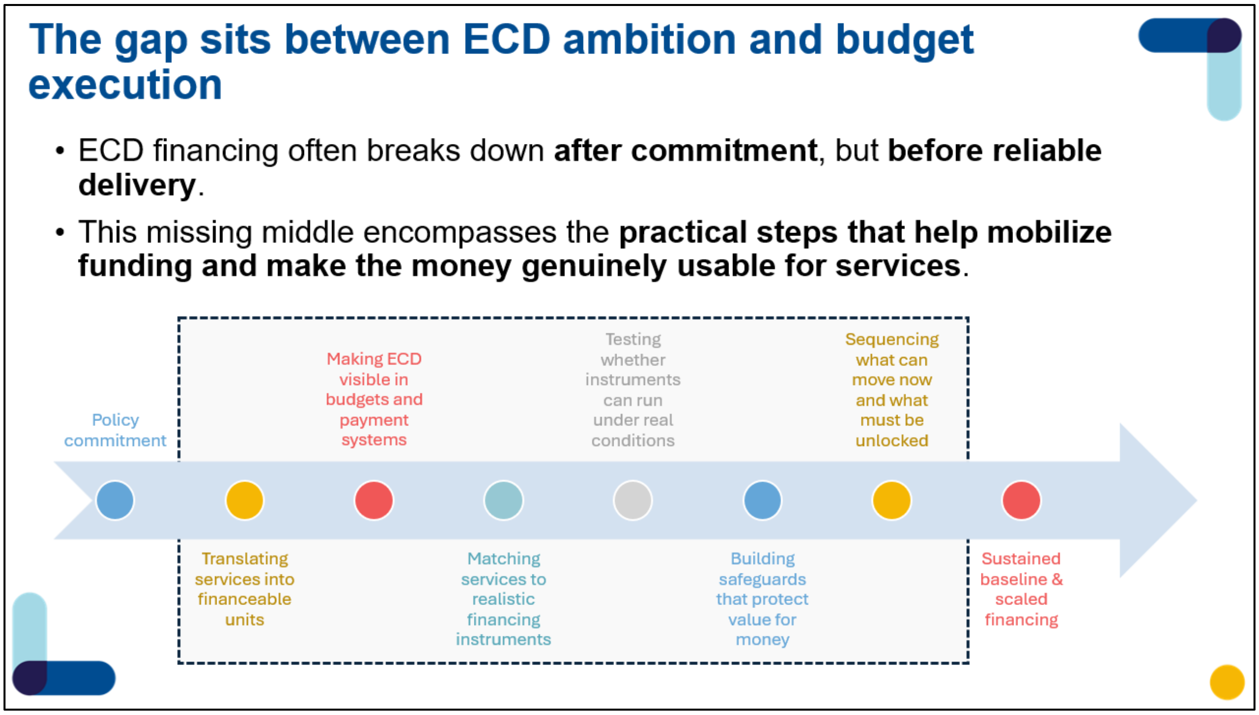
Financing Toolbox for the Early Years

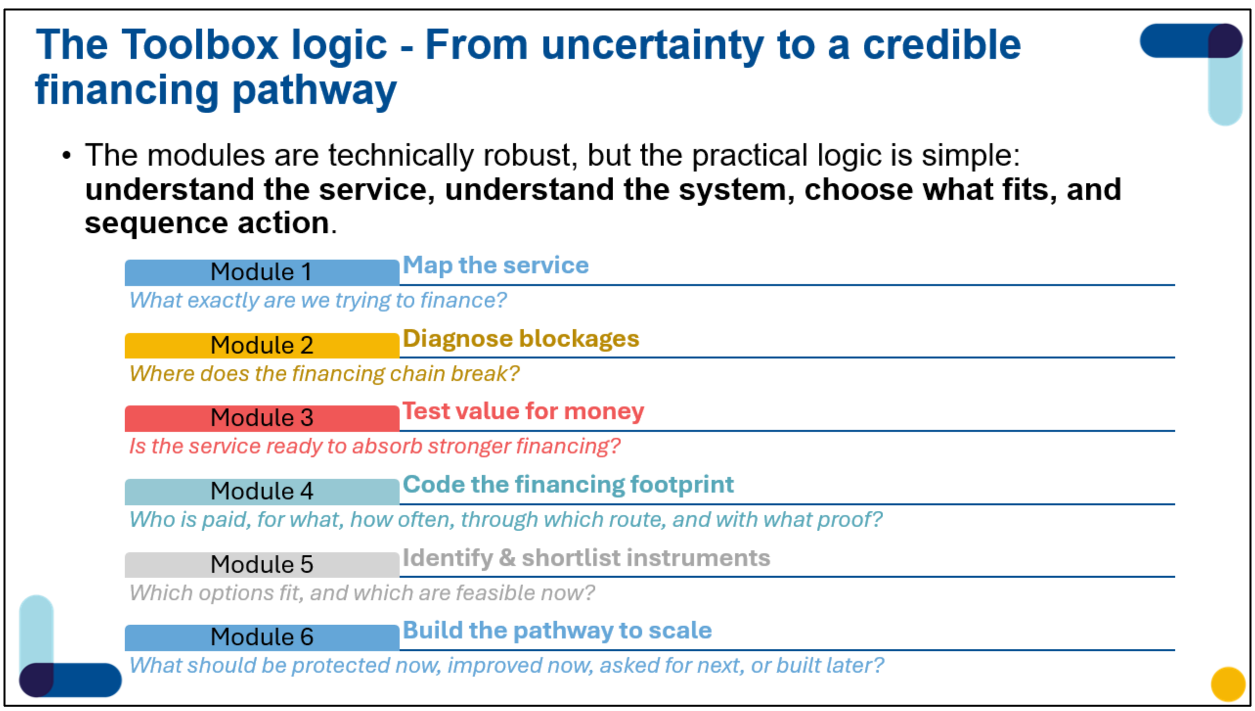
In response to the challenges surfaced, ECDAN's Early Years Financing Technical Working Group has developed a Financing Toolbox for the Early Years. The Toolbox is designed to be a practical decision-support framework that assists governments and partners in identifying, assessing, and prioritizing financing options for scaling sustainable ECD services.

The Toolbox was developed through an extensive review of international evidence and existing financing approaches and has been structured to guide users through a systematic decision-making process rather than simply presenting a catalogue of financing instruments.

At its core, the Toolbox helps answer a critical question: *how can specific ECD services be financed in ways that are feasible, value-for-money conscious, and scalable*? It does so through modules that guide users through mapping services, diagnosing financing gaps, identifying suitable financing instruments, and sequencing reforms.

A key feature of the Toolbox is its collaborative approach. Application of the tools requires engagement from ministries of finance, line ministries, practitioners, and partners to ensure alignment with policy priorities and real-world systems. The Toolbox strengthens coordination, reduces fragmentation, and enhances government ownership of financing pathways.





ECDAN emphasized that the Toolbox is a co-created public good, developed with partners, and that it will require further engagement with partners to refine. The government of Rwanda convened local stakeholders for a two-day workshop hosted by NCDA the week prior to the Forum. ECDAN facilitated an introduction to the Toolbox and application in the Rwandan context. Forum participants were invited to engage in testing, refinement, and scaling of the tool, including future digitization and usability enhancements.

Pre-Forum workshop at NCDA with local governmental, civil society, and development partners.

Help shape the next phase of the Toolbox - From financing ambition to services that reach children

- The Financing Toolbox for the Early Years is entering its next phase: moving from a robust technical framework into structured country applications that strengthen real financing decisions at different levels.

Uptake by countries:

Use the Toolbox to advance your ECD financing priorities by applying it to selected services, testing financing options, and building a clearer pathway for budget and partner dialogue.

Partner support for uptake:

Support country-led application and finalisation by backing facilitated use of the Toolbox, practical templates, case studies, and the conversion of emerging lessons into a field-ready global resource.

Donor support for digitisation and usability:

Support digitisation and ready-to-use enhancements - including a practical, user-friendly interface, guided workflows, and digital templates - to make the Toolbox easier for countries to use efficiently.

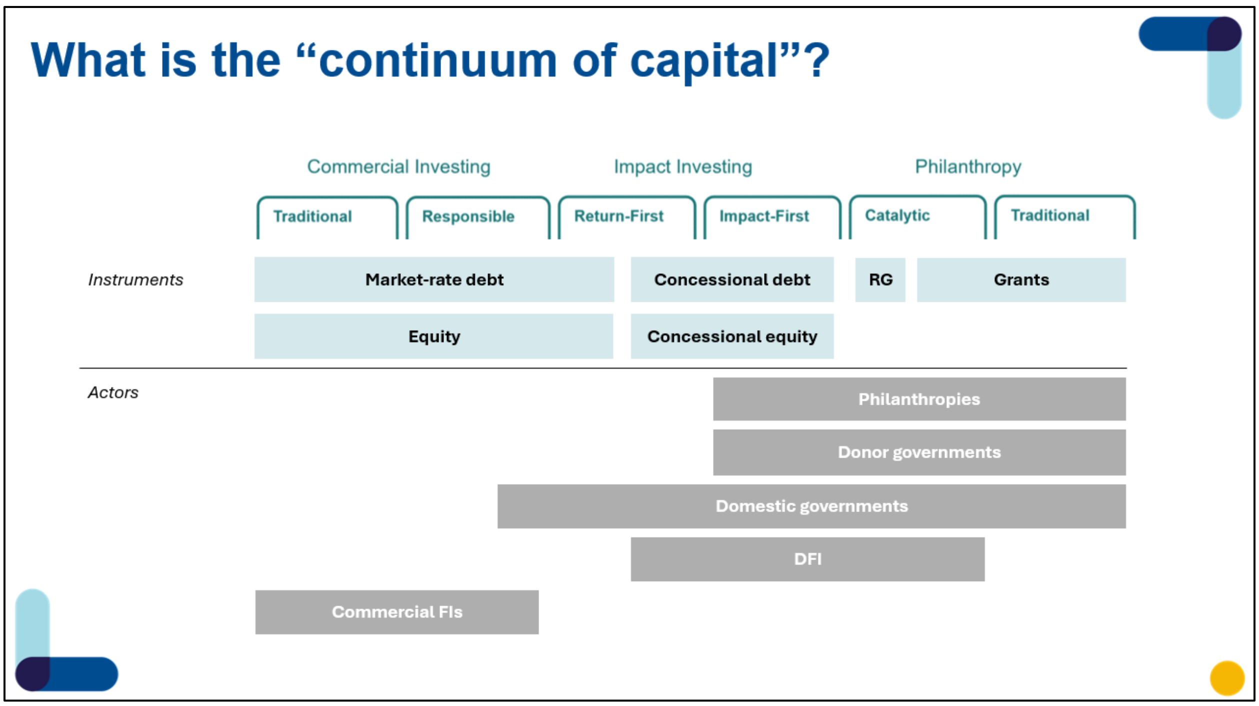
KEY MESSAGE

The Toolbox reduces financing instrument misfit and risk, strengthens government ownership, and builds more opportunities to scale financing for ECD services.

Dialogue 3

Question: How can we strengthen the financing architecture for young children? Moving from funding to financing.

A panel discussion with the Dalberg Advisors, the World Bank, ELMA Philanthropies, and the Development Bank of Rwanda explored how evolving financing models and cross-sector partnerships are reshaping investments in ECD. Speakers highlighted the importance of leveraging the “continuum of capital”—ranging from grants to commercial financing—to mobilize greater and more effective resources for ECD.

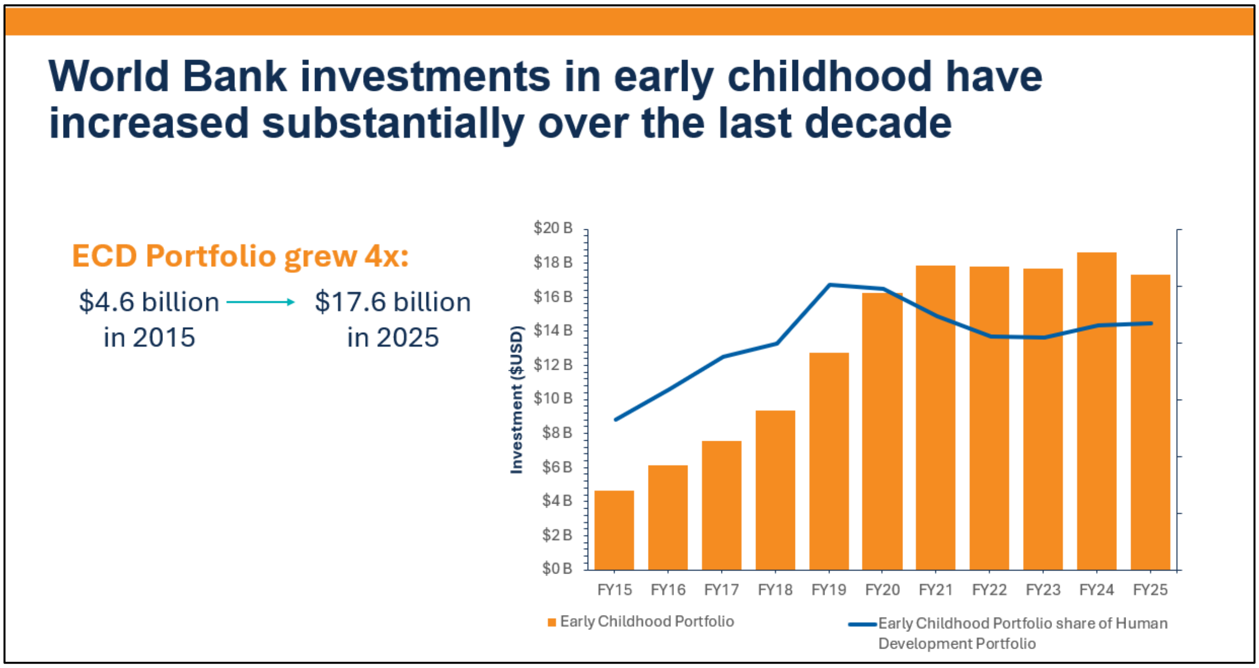


The discussion opened with an overview of how different forms of capital operate with varying expectations around financial return, risk tolerance, and time horizons. Participants emphasized the importance of blending and sequencing financing instruments—such as grants, concessional debt, and private investment—to support initiatives from pilot stages through scale. A persistent challenge identified was the “missing middle”: while funding is often available for early-stage innovation and fully scalable models, fewer mechanisms exist to support the transition between these stages.

KEY MESSAGE

It is important to consider and plan for how pilot innovations can transition to fully scalable models. This requires systems investments and planning with the end in mind from the beginning.

Evidence from the World Bank demonstrated significant growth in ECD financing over the past decade, with investments increasing from $4.6 billion in 2015 to $17.6 billion in 2025 across the World Bank departments and regions. ECD is increasingly recognized as a mainstream, multisectoral investment area, integrated across health, nutrition, education, and social protection systems. A key driver of this growth has been catalytic partnerships, such as the Early Learning Partnership, which used relatively small, flexible grants to unlock much larger public financing and policy commitments.



"Relatively small, targeted investments and support for knowledge, policy dialogue, and capacity building can help countries unlock large-scale financing for early childhood. We can do more, even if we have less."

- Amanda Devercelli, Global Co-Lead for ECD, World Bank Group

Panelists underscored the critical role of partnerships in overcoming systemic constraints. For example, national development banks need to collaborate with local financial institutions to extend reach and address last-mile financing challenges. Concessional capital, risk-sharing mechanisms, and advisory support are also critical to enabling investments in high-impact, but lower-return sectors such as ECD.

Philanthropic actors were identified as uniquely positioned to provide patient, flexible capital that enables innovation, experimentation, and cross-country learning. Beyond financing, philanthropy plays a key role in convening partners, facilitating knowledge exchange, and influencing policy. A case study from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, illustrated how targeted philanthropic support, combined with political commitment, led to regulatory reforms and rapid expansion of childcare services through both public provision and community-based models.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

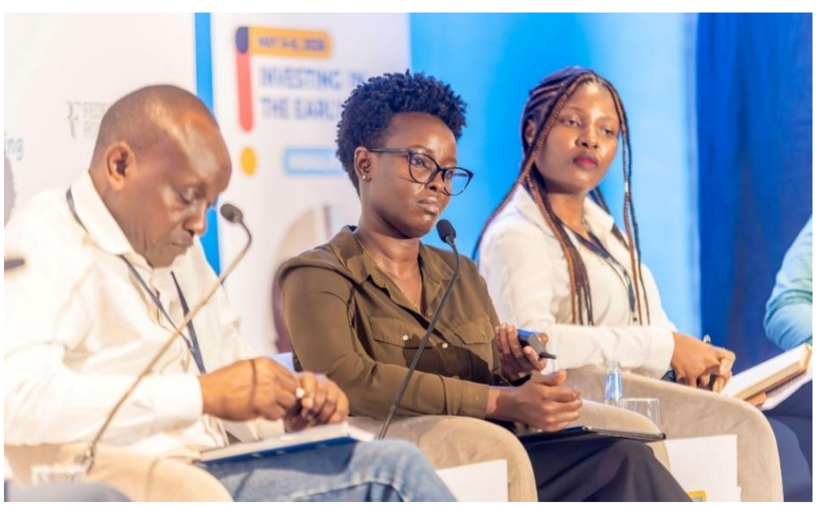
Leverage philanthropic investment to innovate, experiment, facilitate peer learning between countries, document lessons learned, and support advocacy efforts.

Across the discussion, data emerged as a critical enabler of change—both for demonstrating need and for influencing policy decisions. At the same time, participants noted the importance of simple, actionable evidence rather than overly complex systems. Data should be used to help build a common sense of responsibility among stakeholders across sectors, so that ECD is not seen as niche or fragmented.

KEY MESSAGE

Shifting the framing of ECD from a niche issue to shared responsibility across all sectors will unlock diverse pathways to delivery impact at scale.

Another panel highlighted real-world examples of innovative financing by governments, international organizations, and private-sector actors. The discussion focused on what is working, what challenges remain, and how diverse financing instruments can be adapted to country contexts to scale impact. A central theme was that the primary constraint in ECD financing is not the availability of capital, but the absence of well-structured, investable opportunities. While global blended finance volumes remain significant, only a small share are directed to ECD.



The session showcased several financing models and introduced an innovative mechanism being tested with support from UNICEF in the Europe and Central Asia region, titled "Childcare and Early Learning Financing Facility," that provides countries with technical support in their financing journeys. In addition to the Toolbox and technical resources discussed, participants also expressed interest in learning more about the current regional financing facility.

Outcome-based financing (OBF) was highlighted as a powerful tool to shift the focus from inputs to results. OBF can function not only as a financing mechanism, but also as a diagnostic and system-strengthening tool. The approaches highlighted the importance of linking finance with quality improvements and capacity building.

In Rwanda:

- **OBF** is being co-designed with government leadership to align with national priorities, emphasizing **clear outcome metrics, co-financing, and strong data systems**. They are using co-financing, equity premiums, and results payments to improve ECD outcomes and strengthen systems.
- Kumwe Hub **supports low-cost ECD providers** through technical assistance, catalytic grants, recoverable grants, and concessional loans.
- A **refugee-led daycare model** began at Mahama Camp. Parents pay small fees that are able to sustain services. This model led to increased household income and is being scaled to other camps.

In Kenya, **social health insurance reforms** demonstrated how domestic resource mobilization can expand equitable access to services for young children by **reducing out-of-pocket costs and improving service quality**. Health facilities retain 75% of the revenue collected to improve infrastructure, staffing, and supplies. Their focus is on maternal, newborn, and child health.

In Colombia, performance-based contracts with childcare providers increased attendance and improved quality while simultaneously revealing gaps in data systems and provider capacity. Attendance rose to about 80%, and new quality measurement systems were established. OBF has been used not only to finance services but also as a diagnostic tool to **improve data systems, provider oversight, and accountability**.

Serbia is one of seven pilot countries where UNICEF's Childcare and Early Learning Financing Facility is supporting the government to identify context-appropriate financing pathways, combining instruments such as OBF, social enterprise financing, and credit enhancements. UNICEF is **building upon Serbia's National Development Fund as the foundation** for innovative childcare financing rather than creating a new mechanism.

In **Peru, results-based financing** reportedly helped reduce stunting by half in less than a decade. A **dedicated nutrition/ECD unit inside the Ministry of Finance** was a key success factor.

Across all examples, several key lessons emerged:

- Successful models start with the problem—not the financial instrument—and are tailored to local system readiness.
- Measurement and verification systems are essential but must remain practical; overly complex models can hinder implementation.
- Equity must remain central, as innovative financing risks excluding the most vulnerable children, particularly those in informal or unregistered settings.
- Government leadership and ownership are critical to ensure alignment with national systems and long-term sustainability.

"The Sustainable Development Goals will not be achieved by international development and governments alone. There is a role and a contribution for the private sector to play."

- Pacifique Kwizera Irumva, Director, Kumwe Hub, Save the Children

Participants also identified persistent challenges, including weak data systems, limited provider capacity, and unclear pathways from pilot projects to sustained public financing. Suggestions were made to consider direct support to households to ensure children aged 0-3 years are reached as well as the most vulnerable. Addressing these gaps requires investment in foundational systems such as costed service packages, provider registries, and payment mechanisms.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Keep government in the driver's seat and focus first on the problem before selecting the most appropriate financing instrument. Create investable child-focused pipelines.

Three-Track Approach to Innovative Finance for ECD

01
Build the Architecture

Designing instruments that connect policy reform with capital ,where relevant

- Outcome-based financing linked to verified ECD results
- MSME financing to de-risk expansion of quality non-state providers
- Municipal credit enhancers for childcare infrastructure investment

02
Strengthen National Systems

Building the readiness conditions that make financing possible

- Policy and costing diagnostics: what is financeable vs. what must stay public
- Trust infrastructure: provider registries, data systems, payment rails
- Assessment-to-action journeys with 7+ countries in CELFF first-mover cohort
- Building government contracting and monitoring capacity

03
Broker & Convene

Connecting actors who would not otherwise find each other

- Convening governments, development banks, private investors, and technical partners
- Designing equity safeguards and quality guardrails into every instrument
- Learning across country cohorts and sharing evidence globally

Five Lessons from the Field

01 Capital is not the constraint — pipeline is
Investors are ready. What's missing is a credible, verified pipeline of investable ECD opportunities with defined outcome metrics and government backing..

02 Equity must be designed in, not added on
IF instruments default toward the 'bankable' — typically less marginalised populations. Deliberate design choices (equity screens, targeted allocation, geographic targeting) are essential from the outset.

03 Instrument-context mismatch is the biggest risk
We've seen instrument-driven design crowd out needs-driven analysis. The question is never 'can we use an impact bond?' but 'is this the right tool, for this service, in this context?'

04 Policy reform and financing must move together
Financing without policy reform creates parallel systems. Policy reform without financing creates unfunded mandates. CELFF's architecture deliberately links both — this is the innovation.

05 Absorption timelines must be built in from Year 1
Every pilot needs a defined trigger for national budget absorption — what outcome, what vehicle, whose ministry. Partners must commit to progressive handover, not open-ended co-financing.

Participants were given an opportunity to select the track that most interested them to further explore innovative finance between **readiness and country criteria**; **measurement, results, and verification**; and **system integration**. During the breakout discussion, participants heard from presenters as well as had time to ask questions and offer commentary.

Track 3.1 – Readiness and Country Criteria

Question: What are the enabling conditions for investments?

This breakout session explored the enabling conditions required for effective investment in ECD. Presenters emphasized that while financing is essential, the success of ECD investments depends primarily on system readiness, alignment with country context, and strong public leadership. A central message was that ECD is fundamentally a public responsibility, forming the foundation of human capital development. Therefore, governments play a critical role in financing core services, regulated services by setting standards, and ensuring equitable access to quality services.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Frame early childhood development as essential to human capital development.

However, participants stressed that government resources alone are insufficient. Effective ECD systems require complementary contributions from philanthropy, private-sector actors, and communities, with each playing distinct but interconnected roles. Examples from Kenya illustrated how subnational governments can lead service provision while leveraging partners for nutrition, service delivery, and innovation at the community level.

The discussion highlighted that financing challenges are often less about capital availability and more about readiness and alignment. Key readiness conditions include:

- Clear government vision and policy ownership.
- Evidence that interventions are effective at pilot stage.
- Availability of champions within government to drive reform.
- Functional data systems to inform decision-making and track outcomes.

Without these elements, even well-designed financing models struggle to achieve impact or scale.

Several system gaps were identified. Misalignment between public- and private-sector approaches can create barriers, including differences in incentives, timelines, and operational models. Data fragmentation remains a persistent issue, limiting the ability to make informed investment decisions. Participants also noted that ECD investments often occur in high-risk environments, requiring funders to adopt greater flexibility and risk tolerance. In addition, weak alignment between donor financing and government systems can undermine sustainability when external funding ends.

Speakers underscored the importance of tailoring financing approaches to local context. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' model; solutions must reflect political realities, institutional capacity, and service delivery conditions in each country. Experiences from Ghana demonstrated how failing to consider political economy factors—such as stakeholder resistance or electoral cycles—can derail otherwise promising financing models. Similarly, short-term project-based funding was seen as ill-suited to ECD, which requires long-term investment horizons of 10–15 years.

KEY MESSAGE

External financing can increase fragmentation and undermine existing systems when not planned properly and not aligned to government priorities.

Innovative and blended finance models were discussed as important tools, but only when applied appropriately with stakeholder buy-in. Participants emphasized a 'graduation' approach to financing, in which providers and systems move incrementally from grant funding to more sustainable and potentially commercial forms of capital. Childcare models from multiple regions illustrate how a mix of philanthropic funding, public subsidies, and impact investment can support service delivery, particularly when designed to reach low-income populations.

Government action was identified as a critical enabler of investment. Priority actions for governments include the following:

- Simplifying regulatory frameworks.
- Improving accessibility of systems such as registration and licensing.
- Strengthening quality assurance.
- Ensuring that public funding signals clear commitment to ECD.
- Aligning external financing with national priorities and budgeting systems.

Philanthropic funding can be catalytic. Additionally, the private sector—including employers—can play a key role in expanding access to childcare services with governments regulating the quality of services. Apart from service delivery, the private sector can support manufacturing and supply chains, insurance, research, and innovation through public and private partnerships.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Set up and institutionalize coordination mechanisms for funders to avoid duplication and fragmentation and align with government financing systems and priorities.

Track 3.2 – Measurements, Results, and Verification

Question: How do we ensure transparency, accountability, and trust in service delivery?

This breakout session examined how robust measurement and data systems—referred to as the 'trust infrastructure'—are essential to ensuring transparency, accountability, and effective use of financing for ECD. Speakers emphasized that as innovative financing mechanisms expand, including OBF, strong data systems are no longer optional but foundational to achieving results and building trust among governments, funders, and communities.

Participants highlighted four critical types of data for ECD financing:

1. Cost data
2. Real-time monitoring data
3. Outcomes data
4. "Cost of inaction" data

KEY MESSAGE

Strong data systems enable stakeholders to understand what works, track progress, determine value for money, and make the economic case for investment in ECD.

The session showcased how OBF is reshaping the role of measurement. In Rwanda's Education Outcomes Fund program, payments are tied to verified results across structural quality, process quality, and child development outcomes. The program combines international rigor with local adaptation, using tools tailored to country context while maintaining credibility. Importantly, independent verification systems and partnerships with impact investors help ensure objectivity and strengthen provider capacity.

Across examples, speakers stressed that measurement must be user-centered, culturally relevant, and practical. Tools such as South Africa's Early Learning Outcomes Measure demonstrate how locally adapted instruments can transform both service delivery and policy dialogue. At the same time, participants warned against overly complex or externally imposed measurement systems that risk misalignment with community needs or incentivizing "teaching to the test." Measurement should ultimately serve children, families, and communities—not just donors or governments.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Design measurement tools and systems that are user-friendly, culturally relevant, and practical. They must serve children, families, and communities and be locally owned, used for decision-making, and not externally imposed.

Technology is playing an increasingly important role in improving data quality and reducing costs. Digital platforms, mobile tools, and emerging artificial intelligence (AI) applications are enabling real-time data collection, streamlining reporting, and supporting scaling efforts. Examples included digital self-assessment tools for school leaders, AI-assisted teacher planning in Ghana, and efforts to integrate ECD data systems with existing national education platforms. However, participants cautioned that technology solutions must be ethical, account for digital access inequalities, and include offline functionality to ensure inclusivity.

Despite these advances, measurement remains resource intensive. Data collection, fieldwork, and evaluations can be costly, particularly in low-resource settings. Strategies to mitigate these costs include leveraging existing administrative systems, clustering ECD services with schools to share infrastructure, and developing stable, trained workforces for data collection. There is also growing interest in using AI to streamline program design and cost modeling.

A recurring theme was the importance of using data to drive system-level change. National benchmarking efforts, such as South Africa's Thrive by Five Index, demonstrate how evidence can reveal service gaps, promote accountability, and catalyze policy reform. Participants emphasized that data should be framed as a tool for learning and improvement—not punishment—in order to build trust and encourage uptake among government actors.

Equity and inclusion were central to the discussion. Innovative financing and measurement approaches must prioritize the most excluded children, including those in informal settings and children with disabilities. In Rwanda, incentives are being used to encourage ECD service providers to surface barriers to inclusion, while community-based and home-based delivery models are expanding access in underserved areas. Evidence from South Africa shows that such models can deliver strong child outcomes even in low-income contexts.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Embed ECD measurement into national information and monitoring systems.
- Align financial and non-financial performance metrics.
- Invest in digital infrastructure for data collection and analysis.
- Shift mindsets around data from viewing measurement as compliance-driven to a tool for decision-making, learning, and outcome improvement.

Overall, the session reinforced that effective measurement is not only a technical requirement but a strategic lever for advancing and improving ECD financing, improving service delivery, and ensuring that investments reach the children who need them most.

Track 3.3 – System Integration

Question: How can public-private partnerships be leveraged for long-term sustainability?

This breakout session explored how public-private partnerships (PPPs) and innovative financing can be effectively leveraged to ensure long-term sustainability of ECD services through integration into public systems. Discussions highlighted both the opportunities and risks of innovative financing approaches, particularly when pilots operate outside government systems.

A key theme was the need for innovative and catalytic finance to complement—not replace—public financing. Speakers proposed a clear framework for effective system integration including:

- Designing initiatives with integration in mind from the beginning.
- Defining government roles and responsibilities.
- Establishing guardrails for equity and quality.
- Identifying clear pathways for eventual absorption into public budgets.

Importantly, these elements are sequential: financing must first complement public systems, then ensure accountability and equity safeguards, and ultimately support transition into sustainable public financing.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Set up innovative financing to complement public systems. This cannot be an afterthought or step later in the process.
- Address accountability and equity concerns before fully scaling and transitioning to fully sustainable public financing.

Practical experiences illustrated these principles. The Federer Foundation's School Readiness Initiative demonstrated how catalytic funding can support large-scale innovation while remaining aligned with government systems. Operating across multiple countries in southern Africa, the initiative combines offline digital tools, curriculum-aligned child tracking, and stakeholder mobilization. A major lesson was that governments are highly receptive to tools that strengthen their own systems—particularly real-time data dashboards—while some components, such as community engagement, may not be easily absorbed into formal structures.

Government perspectives reinforced the importance of alignment and ownership. Representatives highlighted key criteria for adopting external interventions, including alignment with national priorities, government co-design, sustainability and affordability, system strengthening, and proven scalability. Experiences from Zimbabwe and Kenya underscored challenges of fragmented financing, duplication of efforts, and insufficient coordination among partners, often leading to inefficient use of resources and uneven geographic coverage.

Private-sector and civil society actors emphasized their roles in supporting system strengthening rather than creating parallel structures. Participants stressed the need for integrated data systems that link public and private interventions, ensuring transparency and enabling evidence-based decision-making. Government stewardship of data was seen as essential, alongside clearer accountability mechanisms to ensure that all actors are held responsible for results.

KEY MESSAGE

Not all models or financing instruments are suitable for all countries or services. In some cases, absorption into government systems may not be the only pathway to sustainability.

Sustainable ECD financing requires a shift from isolated pilots to integrated system approaches. By designing financing solutions that strengthen public systems, establish clear accountability, and build pathways to scale, stakeholders can ensure that investments deliver lasting impact for young children.

Dialogue 4

Question: What is the roadmap to increasing sustainable financing for young children? Moving from dialogue to action.

Increased investment in the early years depends not only on evidence, but also on strategic, sustained engagement with policymakers, donors, and cross-sectoral actors. The Federer Foundation shared their experiences of how advocacy can translate strong evidence into political prioritization and concrete financing commitments for ECD.

Advocacy is essential to ensure that evidence is communicated effectively, aligned with national priorities, and embedded within budget and policy processes. Programs alone are not sufficient to drive lasting change. Sustainable progress requires a combination of high-quality service delivery, strong systems, effective partnerships, and deliberate advocacy efforts. Over the past several years, practitioners have learned that advocacy itself requires investment—including building the capacity of national actors to engage in financing discussions and equipping stakeholders to "speak the language" of budgets and economic planning.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Invest in advocacy by strengthening the capacity of national civil society coalitions to engage directly with sectoral and national budget specialists and engage in economic planning processes.

The Role of Advocacy in Financing

Advocacy is necessary at all levels. At the **community level**, parents, caregivers, educators, and local leaders play a key role in demonstrating the value of early childhood services and building demand. At the **national level**, governments and partners must align ECD investments with national development plans and broader policy frameworks, so that they strengthen delivery systems. At the **global level**, coordinated advocacy efforts can elevate

ECD within international agendas, influence major financing platforms, and generate political momentum.

A practical example of this approach was a joint advocacy initiative linked to the G20 process. The Federer Foundation, ECDAN, Theirworld, and other stakeholders developed a clear message positioning ECD not only as an education priority, but as a cross-sectoral investment contributing to health, employment, gender equality, food security, and economic resilience outcomes. This approach demonstrates how investment in ECD can be framed in terms that resonate with decision-makers across sectors, particularly finance ministries.

Philanthropy can catalyze progress by supporting advocacy efforts. Strategic philanthropic investments can help unlock larger, more sustainable financing flows from governments and other sources. This can include supporting governments to prepare commitments, strengthening national investment cases, and aligning stakeholders around actionable financing plans.

KEY MESSAGE

Advocacy is not a peripheral activity, but a core component of ECD financing strategies. By connecting evidence to policy, aligning stakeholders across levels, and positioning early childhood as a driver of broader development outcomes, advocacy can help close the financing gap.

"Advocacy is not only about speaking louder. It is also really about speaking in a connected way and connecting different arguments to different priorities of other sectors."

- Ramona Luminati, Manager Global Partnerships, Advocacy and Switzerland, Federer Foundation

Preparing for the 2027 Summit

The Act for Early Years campaign is a global advocacy platform aimed at securing ambitious commitments from governments at the first-ever International Finance Summit for Early Childhood planned for 2027. The Summit is envisioned as a catalytic moment to mobilize domestic leadership, with heads of state, finance ministers, and other senior decision-makers making time-bound commitments to expand and strengthen ECD systems. Preparatory efforts over the next year will focus on building coalitions, generating political momentum, and supporting countries to develop credible, actionable financing commitments.

The Summit process is designed not only as a single event, but as a broader movement, with a series of milestones, convenings, and technical dialogues—including this Financing Forum—helping to define priorities, share evidence, and strengthen capacity. Commitments brought to the Summit should reflect concrete financing decisions already embedded in national systems, ensuring that announcements translate into real-world impact.

Journey to the Summit (2026–2027)

Now: Sensitisation and Mobilisation

April: World Bank Spring Meetings (Big Wins)

May: Global Technical Financing Forum & Toolkit (ECDAN)

September: UNGA -> Summit Launch

October: Regional Convenings in Portugal (ISSA), Indonesia (ARNEC) and Mexico (Somos Crianza)

November 20 → UNESCO Global ECCE Report Launch

Mid 2027: **First-ever Global Early Years Summit**

ECD is both a social and economic priority with significant returns. Conversely, the cost of inaction is substantial, with long-term consequences for human capital development and national growth. Communicating these economic returns is essential for engaging finance ministries and senior political leaders.

Many countries have already developed ECD policies and frameworks, but these are often underfunded or unevenly implemented. The Summit presents an opportunity to activate these commitments, align financing with policy goals, and scale effective models. Examples from countries such as South Africa, Rwanda, and Colombia as highlighted in this Forum are evidence of growing political commitment, which can inspire broader action.

The Summit will include high-level government announcements, a platform for sharing evidence and innovation, and opportunities to build partnerships that can support long-term system strengthening. Inclusive participation is a priority. Voices from communities—particularly youth and marginalized populations—must inform global advocacy and financing priorities.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Use insights and tools from the Global Technical Financing Forum to engage leaders, shape national strategies, and contribute to the preparation of tangible commitments prior to the 2027 Summit.

"If we truly believe that every single child deserves the best possible start in life, then that belief must stop living only in speeches. It must show up in the budgets, the policies, and the national priorities we make every day."

- Claude Niyibizi, Youth Ambasador, Theirworld

"The actual cost of inaction not only affects children and families, but also affects countries, societies, and economies."

- Michael Simpson, Senior Research and Project Manager, Early Childhood Development, Theirworld

The Role of Civil Society

Civil society plays a central role in mobilizing public demand and holding governments accountable for ECD commitments. Panelists from ECD national networks and the Africa Early Childhood Network highlighted experiences from various African countries. They demonstrated how NGOs act as bridges between communities and policymakers, ensuring that commitments translate into meaningful action, equitable financing, and improved services for young children.

A central theme was the shift from adversarial advocacy toward constructive engagement with government. Across countries, national ECD networks emphasized collaboration as a core strategy, working alongside ministries through formal platforms such as technical working groups, joint reviews, and coordination mechanisms. These partnerships enable civil society to track implementation, identify gaps, and contribute to policy development while maintaining a critical accountability role.

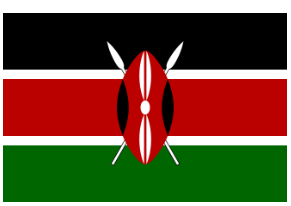
The discussion surfaced specific examples of successful initiatives undertaken by national ECD networks and civil society organizations.

Tanzania

- The ECD network worked with the government to develop and implement a **National Multisectoral ECD Program** aligned with the Nurturing Care Framework and is now helping oversee the transition to the next phase.
- Civil society successfully advocated for the creation and use of an **ECD dashboard and scorecard**, and recently secured government-appointed focal persons to improve monitoring and use of ECD data across sectors.
- Civil society influenced Tanzania's **Vision 2050**, ensuring ECD is reflected in national development priorities, including a goal that 90% of Tanzanian children reach their developmental potential by 2050.

Mozambique

- The ECD network developed a **10-year advocacy strategy** that guides engagement with government, civil society, and other stakeholders around ECD priorities.
- The network partnered with the government, which convened officials from the ministries of finance, gender, education, and others for a **joint capacity-building workshop on ECD**. This helped build ownership across government.
- A **national ECD mapping exercise** is planned with government leadership to establish an evidence base on the status of ECD services across the country.
- The network is helping shape a new National Multisectoral Coordination Group for ECD led by the government.



Kenya

- The ECD network participates in multiple **government-led technical working groups.**
- Kenya is developing **national childcare standards and regulations** for younger children, addressing a sector that was previously unregulated.
- The network conducted an **ECD systems assessment** that identified strengths and gaps, then advocated for policy improvements and resource allocation.

Malawi

- NGOs and government **jointly trained regional ECD master trainers**, creating a cascading model to reach community health workers, caregivers, and ECD partners and improve sustainability.
- Government officials now conduct **field monitoring of ECD quality at household, community, and district levels**, sometimes jointly with NGOs and sometimes independently.

Rwanda

- **Strong political will and stakeholder collaboration** have contributed significantly to advancement of ECD as a national priority.

Overall, the examples revealed that effective accountability in ECD requires strong partnerships, robust data, and sustained advocacy across levels and sectors. Civil society is uniquely positioned to connect evidence, community demand, and political processes, ensuring that investments in the early years are not only increased but translated into real improvements in children's lives.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Embed civil society in government coordination structures.
- Build government ownership rather than parallel systems.
- Use evidence, mapping, scorecards, and data dashboards to drive accountability.
- Engage ministries beyond education, especially finance and social protection.
- Translate advocacy into concrete financing and policy reforms.
- Leverage subnational structures for implementation and accountability.

"Investing in our young children is the most powerful foundation we can lay for a prosperous, equitable, and resilient future."

- Gilbert Munyemana, Deputy Director General, NCDA Rwanda

"We need to reframe ECD as part of the broader agenda—human capital development, care economy, humanitarian response—but most importantly, it's part of economic development and poverty reduction efforts, so that young children are everyone's concern."

-Elizabeth Lule, Executive Director, ECDAN

Conclusion

The conclusion of the Forum marked a critical milestone—not an endpoint—in a longer journey toward sustained investment and action. Participants were encouraged to work collaboratively and urgently to translate the knowledge shared during the Forum into meaningful action. Returning to their countries and organizations with clear commitments, practical tools, new partnerships, and inspiring examples, participants can help move the field from dialogue to action. By maintaining momentum together, the global community can ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive from the earliest years of life.

Key Takeaways

- The question is not only how much we invest, but how **effectively**, **efficiently**, and **equitably** we use our resources to achieve maximum impact.
- **Equity cannot be an afterthought**; scaling without consideration of all children will increase inequalities.
- Despite the shifting financing landscape, **governments have many opportunities** to still expand their fiscal space.
- We need to reframe ECD as part of **broader agendas** (e.g., human capital development, care economy, humanitarian response, economic development, poverty reduction) so that young children are everyone's concern.
- **Domestic financing is the backbone** to scale up sustainable services, while philanthropy and private capital are catalytic and fund innovation.
- **Investment in caregiver support** is very low yet is highly effective and brings benefits across sectors and domains.
- We need to address political economy challenges and continue to **increase public demand**.
- As long as governments underinvest in ECD, the **burden of the cost remains on the household**.
- We need to invest in a financing architecture built around the **services** that families actually use, the **systems and delivery platforms** that reach them, and the **cross-sectoral collaboration** that makes holistic services possible.
- **Improved public finance management** is the backbone of efficiency.
- The **Financing Toolbox for the Early Years is the bridge** between diagnosis and action.
- It takes **strong leadership**, **partnerships**, and **cross-sectoral collaboration** that is institutionalized to make financing effective.

"The happiest person is the person who makes others happy. So, let's make every child happy on earth. That's our vision. That is our moonshot."

-Borhene Chakroun, Director of Policy and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO

Annex A – Agenda

Forum Agenda

Last updated: 5/5/2026

Forum Objectives

1. **Raise awareness**: Highlight the economic and social returns of ECD and the critical financing gaps that hinder progress.
2. **Contribute to global processes**: Provide input into the UNESCO/UNICEF/OECD Global Monitoring Report on Early Childhood Care and Education and the Act for Early Years campaign.
3. **Facilitate policy dialogue**: Convene government, academic, civil society, private–sector, and development partners to discuss barriers to and opportunities in financing for ECD.
4. **Promote cross-country learning**: Share lessons on effective financing across the public-private spectrum.
5. **Catalyze action**: Develop practical tools and recommendations to increase and improve financing for ECD.

Day 1: Wednesday, May 6th

Time	Location	Agenda Item	Session Objectives	Key Guiding Questions
7:30-17:00	Ground floor	Registration		
8:00-9:00	Simba ballroom	**ARRIVAL**	• Network with fellow participants. • Find a seat and settle by 8:45.	
9:00-9:30	Simba ballroom	**PLENARY** Opening Ceremony	• Receive welcome from the Government of Rwanda. • Appreciate the importance of the work ahead.	

<table>
<tr><th>Time</th><th>Location</th><th>Agenda Item</th><th>Session Objectives</th><th>Key Guiding Questions</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Forum Framing Question: How do we establish sustainable financing ecosystems for young children at scale?</td></tr>
<tr><td>9:30-10:00</td><td>Simba ballroom</td><td>PLENARY
Setting the Scene: Forum Overview</td><td>• Understand the big picture vision for early years financing and the roadmap to the summit in 2027 from the forum’s co-hosts.
• Align on the expected outcomes of the Forum.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">10:00-11:00</td><td rowspan="3">Simba ballroom</td><td>KEYNOTE
The Global Financing Landscape Has Shifted: What Does It Mean for Young Children?</td><td>• Review the implications of how the financing context has shifted substantially.
• Outline the opportunity to move beyond fragmented funding toward financing approaches that are more strategic, durable, and systems based.</td><td>1. What has changed in the global financing landscape since the SDG era began, and how does it affect financing for young children?
2. How do we effectively respond to a volatile context in a tighter fiscal space and changing capital flows?
3. Why is the old model of fragmented funding no longer sufficient, and what does that imply for countries preparing for the 2027 International Finance Summit?</td></tr>
<tr><td>KEYNOTE
The Financing Gap and Opportunity: What Is the Scale of the Challenge?</td><td>• Understand the broad trends shaping current spending.
• Examine recent global evidence, including UNESCO’s work on ECCE financing, to form a shared picture of where things stand today.</td><td>1. What do we know globally about the returns of investing in young children and the costs of inaction?
2. What do current spending trends show about how much governments and partners are investing today?
3. How large is the remaining financing gap, and what does it tell us about the scale of action now required?</td></tr>
<tr><td>KEYNOTE
What Are We Financing? Core Systems and Reform Priorities for Young Children</td><td>• Understand the core systems and reform platforms that financing for young children must support.
• Examine the foundational public systems—across health and nutrition, childcare and early learning, and social protection and family support—that must be built, strengthened, and financed together.</td><td>1. Which core systems and reform platforms matter most for delivering results for young children and families?
2. Why is financing isolated services not enough without financing the wider systems that support delivery, quality, and continuity?</td></tr>
<tr><td>11:00-11:20</td><td>Ground</td><td>Tea break</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Time	Location	Agenda Item	Session Objectives	Key Guiding Questions
	floor			
Dialogue 1: Why are young children not prioritized in public expenditure? Moving from political commitment to sustainable public financing.				
11:20-12:35	Simba ballroom	**PANEL DISCUSSION** A Dialogue with Governments	• Hear real experiences that explain the blockages and barriers to acting on political commitments. • Compare models and practical fixes that have worked in different contexts to improve costing, budgeting, execution, coordination, and service delivery.	1. Where does the financing chain break most often in your context, and why do young children lose out in budget cycles? 2. What are the main political economy and institutional barriers—across ministries of finance, line ministries, and decentralized systems—that prevent financing from reaching services? 3. What reforms, strategies, or practical fixes have helped make financing for young children more visible, protected, and spendable?
12:35-13:50	Restaurant	*Lunch*		
Dialogue 2: How can we expand resources, improve efficiency, and ensure equity and quality services? Securing sustainable public finance for young children.				
14:00-14:45	Simba ballroom	**PANEL DISCUSSION** Country Dialogue: Rwanda	• Hear perspectives from actors within different parts of the ecosystem. • Learn what has worked well and not worked well in their country context.	
14:45-14:55	Simba ballroom	**PLENARY** Introduction to Dialogue 2 Tracks	• Understand the expectations for the second dialogue tracks. • Decide which track to join.	
		Transition		
15:00-16:30	Simba ballroom	**PARALLEL SESSIONS** ***Track 1. Expansion:*** *Expanding the financing envelope to support key early years policy priorities: How can we responsibly diversify public*	• Identify additional domestic public resource streams and fiscal policy levers beyond core budget lines. • Generate examples of how public financing can be broadened using financing tools that can increase investment in a realistic and sustainable way.	1. What additional public financing sources could governments draw on to increase investment in young children? 2. Which public financing options are most realistic, meaningful, and worth prioritizing in practice? 3. What policy or institutional changes are needed to unlock and use these public financing sources more effectively?

Time	Location	Agenda Item	Session Objectives	Key Guiding Questions
		financing sources?		
	Kinigi & Kivu rooms combined (first floor)	***Track 2. Efficiency:*** *Strengthening domestic finance to support early years policy priorities: How do we improve value for money within sectors and across sectors?*	• Examine how governments can improve value for money through effective and efficient execution and guard against leakage. • Generate examples of practical domestic reform levers such as expenditure efficiency, reprioritization, intergovernmental transfers, and costing frameworks that make financing more credible and resilient.	1. Where are the biggest losses in value for money in current spending for young children? 2. What reforms can help governments protect and strengthen fiscal space for young children despite tight budgets? 3. How can costing, budgeting, and transfer systems be improved so that financing is more credible, efficient, and sustainable?
	Muhabura & Gasabo rooms combined (first floor)	***Track 3. Equity:*** *Improving equity and quality: How do we ensure financing expands high-quality access to early years services equitably?*	• Examine how public resources can better reach underserved children and families. • Generate examples of strategies that reduce the burden on families and extend services to hard-to-reach and crisis settings.	1. How do we budget and plan for quality and equity? 2. How can public financing reduce out-of-pocket burdens and expand access more equitably? 3. What safeguards are needed to ensure that financing expansion improves inclusion, quality, and fairness at the same time?
16:30-17:00	Simba ballroom	**PLENARY** Reflections on Dialogue 2	• Report back on the top 3–5 key insights and any lessons learned from each track. • Ask questions and offer contributions.	
17:00-17:15	Simba ballroom	**PLENARY** Conclusion of Day 1	• Reflect on the key messages of the day. • Understand the direction the Forum will take on Day 2.	
17:15-19:00	Personal time			
19:00	Simba ballroom	*Networking dinner*		

Day 2: Thursday, May 7th

Time	Duration	Agenda Item	Session Objectives	Key Guiding Questions
8:00-9:00	Simba ballroom	**ARRIVAL**	• Network with fellow participants. • Find a seat and settle by 8:45.	
9:00-9:05	Simba ballroom	**PLENARY** Framing of Day 2	• Clarify the flow and expectations for the day. • Review the overall objectives of the Forum.	
9:05-9:30	Simba ballroom	**PLENARY** The Early Years Financing Toolbox: What is Included and How it Can Be Used	• Understand the vision for the Toolbox. • Gain clarity on how ECD services can be matched with financing instruments. • Learn about the input gathered to date in the development process. • Discuss next steps for piloting tools with country stakeholders.	
9:30-10:15	Simba ballroom	**PANEL DISCUSSION** Country Dialogue: South Africa	• Hear perspectives from actors within different parts of the ecosystem. • Learn what has worked well and not worked well in their country context.	
Dialogue 3: How can we strengthen the financing architecture for young children? Moving from funding to financing.				
10:15-11:00	Simba ballroom	**PANEL DISCUSSION** Shifts in the Financing Landscape: What New Partnerships Are Emerging?	• Hear perspectives of development banks, philanthropy, and private actors on the role they play alongside governments. • Understand the opportunities and limitations of each type of actor in practice. • Consider how stronger partnerships can be built to strengthen public systems.	1. How are the incentives and investment strategies of DFIs, philanthropy, and private actors changing relative to financing for young children? 2. What can these different actors realistically contribute, and what are the limits of their capital? 3. What are the optimal partnership models and conditions needed for these relationships to support public priorities, systems building, and long-term sustainability?
11:00-11:20	Ground floor	*Tea break*		
11:20-12:35	Simba ballroom	**PANEL DISCUSSION** Innovative	• Learn what types of innovative financing have been used successfully, including blended finance, outcomes-based	1. What do real examples of innovative financing for young children show about what is possible in practice?

Time	Duration	Agenda Item	Session Objectives	Key Guiding Questions
		Financing in Action: What Can We Learn from Real Examples?	models, bonds, and other approaches. • Understand what conditions have made these efforts possible. • Clarify how to determine which approach might be best in a specific context.	2. What conditions, partnerships, and design choices helped these models work—or caused them to struggle? 3. What lessons do these examples offer for matching financing approaches to the right services, contexts, and system needs?
12:35-12:45	Simba ballroom	**PLENARY** Introduction to Dialogue 3 Tracks	• Understand the expectations for the third dialogue tracks. • Decide which track to join.	
12:45-14:00	Restaurant	*Lunch*		
14:00-15:30	Simba ballroom	**PARALLEL SESSIONS** ***Track 1. Readiness and Country Criteria:*** *What are the enabling conditions for investments?*	• Explore the conditions that must exist before catalytic or private finance can responsibly enter. • Learn from countries' experiences distinguishing between services that require full public financing and those that may be suitable for blended or private-enabled models.	1. Which services or components for young children are realistically financeable with outside sources, and which should remain fully publicly financed? 2. What minimum readiness conditions need to be in place—such as defined service packages, costing, delivery roles, payment mechanisms, and accountability? 3. How do countries avoid instrument-driven solutions and ensure that financing choices follow service needs, rather than the reverse?
	Kinigi & Kivu rooms combined (first floor)	***Track 2. Measurements, Results, and Verification****: How do we ensure transparency, accountability, and trust in service delivery?*	• Examine the "trust infrastructure" of financing—data systems, verification anchors, results measurement, and accountability mechanisms. • Learn from countries' experiences ensuring that governments can pay, partners can verify, and communities are protected.	1. What is the minimum data and verification needed to support financing instruments such as contracts, subsidies, guarantees, or results-based payments? 2. How can accountability and verification systems be designed so they are credible and practical, without overwhelming governments or excluding smaller providers? 3. What underlying systems—such as provider registries, payment rails, quality assurance, and grievance mechanisms—need to be built to support transparency and trust?

Time	Duration	Agenda Item	Session Objectives	Key Guiding Questions
	Muhabura & Gasabo rooms combined (first floor)	***Track 3. System Integration:*** *How can public-private partnerships be leveraged for long-term sustainability?*	• Explore the risks inherent with innovative financing and pilots that are set up outside the public system. • Generate strategies for how catalytic and private finance can complement public responsibility, protect equity, and transition into durable public financing over time.	1. How do we ensure catalytic and private finance complement, rather than replace, public responsibility for services for young children? 2. What guardrails are needed to prevent exclusion, quality erosion, and unsustainable financing obligations? 3. How can financing pilots or blended models be absorbed into national budgets, transfer systems, or longer-term public financing pathways?
15:30-16:00	Simba ballroom	**PLENARY** Reflections on Dialogue 3	• Report back on the top 3–5 key insights and any lessons learned from each track. • Ask questions and offer contributions.	
16:00-16:30	Simba ballroom	**PANEL DISCUSSION** Country Dialogue: Colombia	• Hear perspectives from actors within different parts of the ecosystem. • Learn what has worked well and not worked well in their country context.	
Dialogue 4: What is the roadmap to increasing sustainable financing for young children? Moving from dialogue to action.				
16:30-16:50	Simba ballroom	**KEYNOTE** Global Advocacy for Early Years Financing	• Learn about the milestones from now until the Summit in 2027. • Understand how champion governments can prepare commitments.	
16:50-17:20	Simba ballroom	**PANEL DISCUSSION** Leveraging Civil Society to Mobilize Public Demand	• Hear from civil society actors about their experiences holding governments accountable for commitments. • Learn strategies that civil society can deploy to ensure equity and accountability for financing that delivers for young children.	
17:20-17:30	Simba ballroom	**PLENARY** Closing and Forum Wrap-Up	• Reflect on the achievements of the Forum. • Review the next steps for the Toolbox. • Commit to actions that take the work forward. • Appreciate the contributions of all Forum	

Time	Duration	Agenda Item	Session Objectives	Key Guiding Questions
			participants. • Review options for parallel sessions on day 3.	

Day 3: Friday, May 8th [Partner-led sessions]

Location/ Time	Simba ballroom (ground floor)	Muhabura & Gasabo rooms combined (first floor)	Kinigi & Kivu rooms combined (first floor)	Inyange boardroom (first floor)
8:30-10:30	Public Expenditure Review for Early Childhood Years made easy with AMPERA – OPM/Thrive	Launch of the Home-based Childcare Alliance – NurtureFirst, SmartStart, OneSky, aeioTU, BRAC IED, NAFCC, Tiney	From Commitments to Results: Capacity Building for Strengthened ECD Advocacy in East Africa – AfECN (invitation only)	Fourth Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on the 2026 Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education – UNESCO (invitation only - 9:00 start)
Tea break				
11:00-13:00	Big Wins to Bold Commitments – Theirworld and Genesis Analytics	Rwanda's Nkuza Neza Fund, Designing and Delivering Outcomes-Based Financing in Practice - Education Outcomes Fund	Continue	Continue
Lunch				
14:15-16:15*	The Critical Role of Cost Data in ECD for Advocacy, Budget Allocation, Priority Setting, and Scaling – Brooking Institution	Driving Systemic Change in Early Childhood: Aligning Government Capacity, Capital, and Service Transformation in Colombia – aeioTU	Continue	Continue
Tea break				

** The Thrive workshop will be in Inyambo boardroom (ground floor) at this time and is by invitation only.*

Day 3 Parallel Session Descriptions

Public Expenditure Review for Early Childhood Years made easy with AMPERA – OPM/Thrive

Public Expenditure Review (PER) is the most reliable way to analyze government budget allocations. But until recently, conducting a PER on a cross-sectoral issue like ECD remained out of reach of most governments. It was a highly resource-intensive one-time exercise that would take *large teams many months to complete, which few governments can afford. To make PER more accessible, Oxford Policy Management (OPM) has developed the AMPERA tool. This harnesses the power of new technologies like machine learning and artificial intelligence to deliver PERs more quickly, more accurately, and more affordably. AMPERA equips policymakers to understand what investments are being made in ECD, and to decide whether these are appropriate, at a fraction of the cost and in a fraction of the time of a traditional PER. Join us in this session to learn more about how OPM's AMPERA tool can equip you to find the answers you need.*

Launch of the Home-based Childcare Alliance – NurtureFirst, SmartStart, OneSky, aeioTU, BRAC IED, NAFCC, Tiney
This session marks the official public launch of the Global Home-Based Childcare Alliance, a new global coalition dedicated to elevating home-based childcare as a first-choice, high-quality early childhood care and education option to improve equitable access to high-quality childcare globally and support positive child development outcomes. The event will bring together the Alliance's founding members, ECD funders, and practitioners from across the globe to address a critical gap in the early years financing landscape: the persistent underinvestment in home-based childcare despite its prevalence, cost-effectiveness, and potential for scale. Join us to learn more about how the Alliance will mobilize finance and global policy to make home-based childcare a recognized, resourced, and high-quality option for families, supporting universal and equitable childcare coverage.

Big Wins to Bold Commitments – Theirworld and Genesis Analytics
The world's first International Financing Summit on Early Childhood takes place in 2027. It will only recognize funded, time-bound, and deliverable commitments from governments, mayors and local leaders, business leaders, and philanthropic actors. The work to secure those commitments starts now, at national and sub-national levels, with the coalitions and networks who understand both the evidence and the politics well enough to connect them. This session uses the Act for Early Years Big Wins for Early Childhood framework as a practical commitment-building tool. Working backwards from the Summit, participants will map what it takes to move a specific decision-maker toward a specific, credible pledge in their own context, whether that decision-maker sits in a national ministry, a city government, a development bank, or a business. Join us to begin to identify the political entry points, financing pathways, and coalition conditions that make a commitment achievable rather than aspirational.

Rwanda's Nkuza Neza Fund, Designing and Delivering Outcomes-Based Financing in Practice – Education Outcomes Fund
Nkuza Neza is a $13 million outcomes-based fund within Rwanda's early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector. This interactive session will help participants understand its distinctive features and its financing architecture. Attendees will analyze how outcomes funds can be structured in close partnership with government to align with national budget cycles and public financial management processes. Additionally, the session will clarify strategies for risk allocation and incentive alignment, providing participants with a framework for using outcomes-based models to strengthen domestic systems rather than creating parallel mechanisms. Participants will gain actionable insights from the program's transition from design to implementation, which illustrates how such models can be effectively embedded within a national education reform agenda. Join us for this deep dive into Nkuza Neza and explore how outcomes-based financing might work in your country context.

The Critical Role of Cost Data in ECD for Advocacy, Budget Allocation, Priority Setting, and Scaling – Brookings Institution

There has never been a more critical time for governments, funders, and implementing organizations to make sound decisions about financing early childhood interventions. But to make informed decisions, cost data are critical at local, national, and global levels to allow for accountability of spending, priority setting, budgeting and planning, managing program activities, and advocating for investment. This session aims to bring together a wide range of stakeholders to discuss the opportunities for increasing the amount of high-quality and consistent cost data in the sector. The Brookings Institution will be sharing its dual approach—partnering with local actors and governments through Costing Labs using the Childhood Cost Calculator (C3) while addressing longer-term institutional barriers through the Global Costing Taskforce for Education and ECCE. No costing expertise required, only a commitment and desire to work together to address this critical gap in the sector!

Driving Systemic Change in Early Childhood: Aligning Government Capacity, Capital, and Service Transformation in Colombia – aeioTU
Colombia offers an emerging example of how systemic change in early childhood can be pursued by aligning service transformation, government leadership, and financing architecture. While the country has made important progress in expanding access and building policy continuity, sustaining quality at scale remains a major challenge. This session will focus on the case of Cartagena, where local government, service providers, and philanthropic actors are working together to strengthen quality in early childhood services. Through this example, participants will explore the financial, operational, and institutional conditions required to sustain quality improvements at scale. The session will combine short framing presentations with an open discussion on how governments, funders, and implementation partners can move from fragmented initiatives toward more sustainable systems for young children.

Thank you for joining us!

Together, we can unlock financing that will translate evidence into budgets and budgets into services for young children and their families!

Annex B – Participants List

Full Name	Organization	Position
AUSTRALIA		
Layusa Isa-Odidi	Dalberg Advisors	Partner
BANGLADESH		
Farasha Khan	BRAC Institute of Educational Development	Lecturer
Ferdousi Khanom	BRAC Institute of Educational Development	Senior Lecturer and ECD Academic Lead
Jessica Helen Corraya	BRAC Institute of Educational Development	Curriculum Specialist
Md Tarek Hossain	Oxford Policy Management	Thrive Country Manager - Bangladesh
Mohammad Iftekhar Hossain	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Bangladesh	Joint Secretary-Budget and Audit
Sajid Imtiaz Sharry	BRAC Institute of Educational Development	Sr. Manager, Grants Management and Finance & Accounts
Shaila Ahmed	BRAC University	Assistant Professor and Research Fellow
Shekufeh Zonji	ECDAN	Global Technical Lead
Wasima Nahrin	BRAC Institute of Educational Development	Lecturer
BENIN		
Jahdiel Kossou		Early Childhood Development Expert
BURUNDI		
Juvenal Batungwanayo	Burundi Early Childhood Development Platform	National Coordinator
COLOMBIA		
Victoria Arciniegas	aeioTU	CEO
EGYPT		
Ahmed Abdeldaim	UNICEF Egypt	ECD Manager
Ismail Hana	National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, Egypt	Consultant
Randa Fares	Ministry of Social Solidarity, Egypt	Advisor to the Minister for Family, Women and Children Health and Development Affairs
Sara Sabry	Egyption Ministry of Finance	Advisor to The Minister of Finance
Seif Aly	UNICEF Egypt	Social Policy Officer
ETHIOPIA		
Biniam Bedasso	Center for Global Development	Research Fellow
Birikit Terefe	Partnership For Change	ECCE Programme Manager
FRANCE		
Borhene Chakroun	UNESCO	Director for Policy and Lifelong Learning Systems

Full Name	Organization	Position
Cyrielle Auffray	Global Development Incubator	Senior Manager
Gilles Petreault	OMEP-France	OMEP Representative to UNESCO
Rokhaya Diawara	UNESCO	Education Programme Specialist and Global Early Childhood Care and Education Adviser
Zohreen Badruddin	Paris Peace Forum	Policy Manager
GERMANY		
Martin Wiese	European Union	Team Leader
GHANA		
Fayudatu Yakubu	Lively Minds	Ghana Country Director
Francis Dorkenoo	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Republic, Ghana	Senior Accountant
Godfred Irabayi Bayee	National Development Planning Commission, Ghana	Senior Budget Analyst
Kwabena Bempah Tandoh	Thrive / Oxford Policy Management	Thrive Country Manager - Ghana, Co-Principal Investigator - Ghana
Susan Place Everhart	Sabre Education	Senior ECE Technical Manager
Yaa Adoma Dwomo-Fokuo	Hopexchange Medical Centre	Doctor
GUATEMALA		
Rut Bran	School The World	Regional Manager of the Early Childhood Program
INDIA		
Priyanka Upreti	Global Schools Forum	Program Manager
Sumitra Mishra	Mobile Creches	CEO
CÔTE D'IVOIRE		
Francis John Biney	Ministry of Education, Cote d'Ivoire	Inspector General
KENYA		
Alex Mutua	Ministry of Health, Kenya	Program Manager
Anastacia Ngunjiri	iGravity	Associate
Caroline Bosire	AfECN	Technical Advisor
Caroline Mochoge	ECDAN	Communications Officer
Charles Habershon	Dalberg Consulting	Global Education Co-Lead
Dickens Omedo	PATH	Senior M&E Officer and ECD Project Lead
Elaine Hurt	Kidogo Early Years	Director Policy & Partnerships
Eunice Daritsu	Council of Governors, Kenya	Technical Lead
Ezinne Anyanwu	Instiglio	Head of Partnerships, Africa
Gacheri Njogu-Ndongwe	NurtureFirst	CEO
George Shimanyula	Cheshire Disability Services Kenya	
Jacqueline Chebi	Catholic Relief Services	Program Manager
Jacqueline Muthura	Local Public Sector Alliance	Coordinator, Africa Working Group
Joy Nafungo	IDRC	Senior Program Specialist

Full Name	Organization	Position
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Rahab Nderu	NurtureFirst	Kenya Delivery Lead
Robert Simiyu	UNICEF Kenya	Social Policy and Economics Specialist
Ruth Muendo	World University Service of Canada	Country Director
Susan Mtana	Kidogo Early Years	Associate Director Policy & Partnerships
Tracy Koske	WIEGO	Childcare Coordinator
LESOTHO		
Virginia Ntheketha	UNESCO	Education Programme Officer
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MALAWI		
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MALI		
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MAURITIUS		
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MOZAMBIQUE		
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NAMIBIA		
Jessica Brown	Early Years Impact Center	Co-Founder
NETHERLANDS		
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Roosje Sprangers	Liliane Fonds	Inclusive Education Adviser
NIGERIA		
Amina Mohammed	Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria	Director/Head Child Health Division
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Suleiman Oshioke Yakubu	The Power of Nutrition	Monitoring and Evaluation
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Full Name	Organization	Position
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SWITZERLAND		
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TANZANIA		
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Arcard Rutajwaha	AfECN	Regional Coordinator - East Africa
Astheria Lwena	Ministry of Education Science And Technology, Tanzania	Principal Education Officer
Craig Ferla	Children in Crossfire Tanzania	Country Director
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Farida Katunzi	Ifakara Health Institute	Research Scientist
Ibrahim Byatike Kabole	Presidential Delivery Bureau Zanzibar	Director PDB
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Mwajuma Davina Rwebangila	Tanzania ECD Network	Executive Director
Naike Chawachi	Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric Aids Foundation	Senior Manager Early Childhood Development
Regina Ndakidemi	WHO	Health Financing Specialist
Revocatus Sono	Amani Girls Organization	Director of Programs and Operations
Rosemary Mwaisaka	AfECN	Technical Advisor
Salome Nkwanga	Ministry of Community Development Gender, Women and Special Groups	Community Development Officer
Zena Amury	UNICEF Tanzania	Social Policy Specialist
Sadashiv Nayanpally	Oxford Policy Management	Thrive Senior ECD Finance Expert
UGANDA		
Helen Namulwana	Network of Early Childhood Actors - Uganda	Executive Director
Jacklyn Makaaru Arinaitwe	Ace Policy Research Institute	Director

Full Name	Organization	Position
Jane Aik	Opportunity International	Senior Director, Education Financial Products
Lydia Mubiru	Early Years Count	Executive Director
Melizsa Mugyenyi	Echidna Giving	Portfolio Lead, ECDE
Pauline Acayo	Catholic Relief Services	SCORE ECD Regional Project Coordinator
Stellah Tumwebaze Keihangwe	Literacy And Adult Basic Education	Executive Director
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES		
Bochra Kaddoura	Sharjah Private Education Authority, UAE	ECCE Strategic Advisor
UNITED KINGDOM		
Eleanor Sykes	Lively Minds	Advocacy Lead
Howard Taylor	Lumos	CEO
Katie Bullman	Genesis Analytics	Manager
Marlies Morsink	Oxford Policy Management	Thrive Deputy Programme Director
Michael Simpson	Theirworld	Head of Early Research and Policy
Renata Nowak-Garmer	WIEGO	Director, Social Protection Programme
Sarah Ul haq	Moving Minds Alliance	Knowledge, Evidence, and Learning Lead
Thato Letsomo	Street Child	Global Director of Advisory
Thomas Wagstaff	Oxford Policy Management	Data and Innovation Team
UNITED STATES		
Alix Cantave	W.K. Kellogg Foundation	Senior Program Officer
Amanda Devercelli	World Bank Group	Program Manager, Early Learning Partnership
Brett Weisel	ECDAN	Global Policy and Advocacy Lead
Chemba Raghavan	UNICEF Global Programme Division	Global Lead, ECD
Claudia Rokx	World Bank Group	Lead Health Consultant
David Harris	Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy	
Elizabeth Lule	ECDAN	Executive Director
Emily Gilkinson	ECDAN	Senior Program Officer
Emily Gustafsson-Wright	The Brookings Institution	Senior Fellow
Gabriela Phend	Research Program on Children and Adversity	Program Manager
Harper Lagares	ECDAN	Senior Program Assistant
Jamie Gow	Early Childhood Regional Networks Fund	Fund Director
Jessica Fullerton	Global Development Incubator	Managing Director
Lauren Pisani	Boston College	Associate Director, Research Program on Children and Adversity

Full Name	Organization	Position
Maniza Ntekim	Conrad N. Hilton Foundation	Senior Program Officer, Global Early Childhood Development East and Southern Africa
Michelle Neuman	Results For Development (R4D)	Senior Fellow
Nara Topp	W.K. Kellogg Foundation	Program Officer
Richard Paul King	Think Equal	Chief Impact & Sustainability Officer
Sara Dang	Save The Children	Lead Advisor, Early Childhood Care and Development
Sarah Marjane	ECDAN	Finance and Operations Director
Theresa Betancourt	Boston College	Director, Research Program on Children and Adversity
Tressa Johnson	ELMA	Director, Programs
ZAMBIA		
Edith Chisala Mwape Ngoma	ECD Action Network Zambia	National Coordinator
Katharina Wuppinger	UNICEF Zambia	Chief Education
Patrine Banda	Ministry of Education, Zambia	Assistant ECE Director
Zewelanji Serpell	UNICEF Zambia	ECD Specialist
ZIMBABWE		
Kahlari Marceline	Zimbabwe Network of Early Childhood Development Actors	Director
Sheunesu Mutsau	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Zambia	Chief Accountant

Annex C – List of Speakers by Session

NAME	ORGANIZATION	TITLE
DAY 1		
OPENING		
Borhene Chakroun	UNESCO	Director for Policy and Lifelong Learning Systems
Honourable Consolée Uwimana	Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, Rwanda	Honorable Minister
SETTING THE SCENE PANEL		
Elizabeth Lule	ECDAN	Executive Director
Chemba Raghavan	UNICEF Global Programme Division	Global Lead, Early Childhood Development
Rokhaya Diawara	UNESCO	Education Programme Specialist and Global Early Childhood Care and Education Adviser
Nuhu Yaqub Jr	WHO	Adviser Child Health Services
Rosemary Mwaisaka	AfECN	Technical Advisor
Gilbert Munyemana	National Child Development Agency, Rwanda	Deputy Director General
KEYNOTES		
Biniam Bedasso	Center for Global Development	Research Fellow, Education Team - Europe
Borhene Chakroun	UNESCO	Director for Policy and Lifelong Learning Systems
Georgina Bonet Arroyo	WHO	Technical Officer - Health Financing
Dominic Richardson	Learning For Well-being Institute	Managing Director
Ivelina Borisova	UNICEF Global Programme Division	Senior Early Childhood Expert
Manos Antoninis (VIDEO)	UNESCO	Director of the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report
DIALOGUE 1		
GOVERNMENT PANEL		
Maniza Ntekim	Conrad N. Hilton Foundation	Senior Program Officer, Global ECD, East and Southern Africa
Amina Mohammed	Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria	Director/Head of Child Health Division
Juma Mfaume Salum	Ministry of Finance, Tanzania	Principal Finance Management Officer
Oliver Kumbambe	Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, Malawi	Permanent Secretary
Mohammad Iftekhar Hossain	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Bangladesh	Joint Secretary-Budget and Audit
Hana Ismail	National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, Egypt	Girl's Health Program Manager
Sadashiv Nayanpally	Thrive OPM	Thrive Senior ECD Finance Expert

NAME	ORGANIZATION	TITLE
DIALOGUE 2		
RWANDA COUNTRY DIALOGUE		
Gilbert Munyemana	National Child Development Agency, Rwanda	Deputy Director General
Samson Desie	UNICEF Rwanda	Chief of Health and Nutrition
Jean Damascene Gasarabwe	Rwanda Mountain Tea	Monitoring and Evaluation Manager
Fred Mukombozi	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Rwanda	Director General of National Budget
Flora Mutezigaju	Rwanda Education Board	Deputy Director General
Theresa Betancourt	Boston College	Director, Research Program on Children and Adversity
Ildephonse Hitimana	Imbuto Foundation	Program Specialist, Education Division
TRACK 1: EXPANSION		
Boniface Kakhobwe	UNICEF Global Programme Division	Early Childhood Development Specialist
Robert Simiyu	UNICEF Kenya	Social Policy and Economic Specialist
Jean Claude Ndabananiye	UNESCO-IIEP	Senior Programme Specialist
Ibrahima Samba	World Bank Group	Education Specialist
Ibrahim Kabole	Presidential Delivery Bureau, Zanzibar	Director PDB
Jacqueline Muthura	Local Public Sector Alliance	Coordinator, Africa Working Group
Sara Dang	Save the Children	Lead Advisor, Early Childhood Care and Development
TRACK 2: EFFICIENCY		
Matthew Townshend	ECDAN	Consultant
Grace Leach	National Treasury, South Africa	Public Finance Technical Analyst: Early Childhood Development
Tom Wagstaff	Oxford Policy Management	Principal Consultant – Data Science, Data Innovation team
Regina Ndakidemi	WHO Tanzania	National Professional Health Financing
Kennedy Tegeret	Ministry of Education, Kenya	Director of Planning
Ezinne Anyanwu	Instiglio	Head of Partnerships, Africa
TRACK 3: EQUITY		
Michelle Neuman	Results For Development	Senior Fellow
Dominic Richardson	Learning For Well-being Institute	Managing Director
Daniel McLaren	Ilifa Labantwana	Public Finance Economist
Sarah ul Haq	Moving Minds Alliance	Knowledge, Evidence and Learning Lead
Martha Odundo	Ministry of Education, Kenya	Head of Directorate – ECDE
Nang'andu (Nana) Chizyuka	Clinton Health Access Initiative	Senior Program Manager
Sumitra Mishra	Mobile Creches	Executive Director

NAME	ORGANIZATION	TITLE
DAY 2		
TOOLBOX KEYNOTE		
Matthew Townshend	ECDAN	Consultant
Shekufeh Zonji	ECDAN	Global Technical Lead
SOUTH AFRICA PANEL		
Daniel McLaren	Ilifa Labantwana	Public Finance Economist
Tressa Johnson	ELMA Philanthropies	Director, Programs
Sam Varney	DataDrive2030	Director of Operations
Hopolang Selebalo	SmartStart	Head of Policy and Advocacy
Grace Leach	Treasury, South Africa	Technical Analyst for Public Finance in ECD
DIALOGUE 3		
PANEL 1: PARTNERSHIPS IN SHIFTING LANDSCAPE		
Layusa Isa-Odidi	Dalberg Advisors	Partner
Amanda Devercelli	World Bank Group	Global Co-Lead for Early Childhood Development
Tressa Johnson	ELMA Philanthropies	Director, Programs
Nelson Mandera	Development Bank of Rwanda (BRD)	Senior Manager, Housing and Infrastructure Portfolio
PANEL 2: INNOVATIVE FINANCE		
Shekufeh Zonji	ECDAN	Global Technical Lead
Pacifique Kwizera Irumva	Save the Children International	Director, Kumwe Hub
Chemba Raghavan	UNICEF Global Programme Division	Global Lead, Early Childhood Development
Ivelina Borisova	UNICEF Global Programme Division	Senior Early Childhood Expert
Ezinne Anyanwu	Instiglio	Head of Partnerships, Africa
Alex Mutua	Ministry of Health, Kenya	Program Manager, Newborn & Child Health Section
Angela Rugo	Education Outcomes Fund	Country Manager, Rwanda
TRACK 1: READINESS AND COUNTRY CRITERIA		
Priyanka Upreti	Global Schools Forum	Evidence Hub Manager
Katie Brauer	Open Capital	Global Lead, Early Childhood Development
Jessica Harrison Fullerton	Global Development Incubator	Managing Director of the Strategy and Build team
Jessica Brown	Early Years Impact Center	Co-Founder
Eunice Fedha	Council of Governors, Kenya	Director Resource Mobilization and Partnerships
Kwabena Bempah Tandoh	Oxford Policy Management	Thrive Country Manager - Ghana
Elaine Wacuka Hurt	Kidogo Early Years	Director Policy & Partnerships
TRACK 2: MEASUREMENT RESULTS AND VERIFICATION		
Emily Gustafsson-Wright	Brookings Institution	Senior Fellow
Simone Carter	DataDrive2030	Financial Director

NAME	ORGANIZATION	TITLE
Jane Aik	Opportunity International	Senior Director, Education Financial Products
Grace Malthape	SmartStart	Executive Director
Angela Rugo	Education Outcomes Fund	Country Lead Rwanda
Lauren Pisani	Boston College	Associate Director, Research Program on Children and Adversity
TRACK 3: SYSTEM INTEGRATION		
Anastacia Ngunjiri	iGravity	Associate
Ivelina Borisova	UNICEF Global Programme Division	Senior Early Childhood Expert
Carien Vorster	Federer Foundation	Director Global Partnerships and Advocacy
Shoeshoe Mofokeng	Network of Early Childhood Development of Lesotho (NECDOL)	Executive Director
Sheunesu Tawanda Mutsau	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe	Chief Accountant
Pacifique Kwizera Irumva	Save the Children International	Director, Kumwe Hub
Michael Kiema	iGravity	Senior Associate Consultant
COLOMBIA PANEL		
Victoria Arciniegas	aeioTU	Executive Director
DIALOGUE 4		
GLOBAL ADVOCACY KEYNOTES		
Ramona Luminati	Federer Foundation	Manager Partnerships, Advocacy and Switzerland
Michael Simpson	Theirworld	Senior Research and Project Manager, Early Childhood Development
Claude Niyibizi	Theirworld	Global Youth Ambassador
CIVIL SOCIETY PANEL		
Rosemary Mwaisaka	AfECN	Technical Advisor
Mwajuma Rwebangila	Tanzania ECD Network	Executive Director
Rachael Makena Kithinji	Kenya Early Childhood Development Network	Partnerships & Programmes Manager
Gertrudes Noronha	Rede para o Desenvolvimento da Primeira Infância, Mozambique	National Coordinator
Gilles Petreault	OMEP-France	Representative to UNESCO
Pauline Acayo	Catholic Relief Services	Project Coordinator – SCORE ECD Project
CLOSING		
Gilbert Munyemana	National Child Development Agency, Rwanda	Deputy Director General
Borhene Chakroun	UNESCO	Director for Policy and Lifelong Learning Systems
Elizabeth Lule	ECDAN	Executive Director