

Introduction

The 2025 Hilton Foundation East and Southern Africa (ESA) ECD Partners' Convening was convened under a clear and urgent mandate: to collectively navigate a rapidly shifting global landscape and refocus efforts to ensure that every young child in Kenya, Mozambique and Tanzania not only survives but thrives. Against a backdrop of demographic booms, constrained funding, technological disruption, and persistent inequity, the convening brought together government leaders, practitioners, and global partners to move beyond business-as-usual and forge a more impactful, coordinated, and sustainable path for Early Childhood Development (ECD).

Ultimately, this convening was guided by the fundamental objective of transforming promise into practice. It sought to bridge the gap between high-level policy and tangible outcomes for children and the support their caregivers/parents need, setting a collaborative and actionable agenda for the next five years grounded in evidence, shared responsibility, and a renewed commitment to systemic change.

Key Takeaways from the Pre-Convening Meetings

In preparation for the Hilton Foundation ECD-ESA Convening, partners and government representatives from Kenya, Mozambique and Tanzania (with representation from Zanzibar) convened for a series of pre-meetings focused on deepening understanding and alignment around four critical Early Childhood Development (ECD) themes— Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) and Their Children, Childcare Systems Strengthening¹, Nurturing Care within Primary Health Care (PHC), and Rethinking Parenting Programs. These sessions surfaced key lessons and opportunities that will shape discussions during the convening.

6 October 2025- Supporting Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) and Their Children

- The AGYW convening emphasized the intergenerational link between adolescent mothers' wellbeing and child outcomes, underscoring the need for holistic, gender-transformative approaches.
- Partners highlighted the importance of safe spaces- at both the community and health service delivery levels, psychosocial support, and economic empowerment to help young mothers and the communities where they live overcome stigma, rebuild agency, and have

¹ The Childcare convening was co-hosted with the Hilton Foundation's Refugees' Initiatives and included representatives and grantees working across Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda

the voice dictate what they need and want for their own development and that of their child.

- Discussions called for greater integration of AGYW programs within existing ECD and health systems, with particular focus on mental health, adolescent friendly health facilities, stigma-free workforce, financial inclusion, and continued education.
- A key takeaway was the need to reframe adolescent mothers as active development actors, not just beneficiaries—empowering them through community-driven models and multi-sectoral collaboration that address the whole family ecosystem.

7 October 2025- Childcare Systems Strengthening

- Childcare must be viewed as a system critical to gender equity, workforce participation, and early childhood development.
- Priorities include strengthening data systems, policy frameworks, financing, and capacity-building for quality service delivery.
- Sustainable childcare systems require coordinated government leadership, public-private partnerships, and integration within broader social systems.

7 October 2025- Nurturing Care for ECD in Primary Health Care (PHC)

- Countries need a common understanding of *nurturing care* to avoid siloed implementation.
- Stronger data and evidence systems are essential to inform government priorities and track integration of nurturing care within PHC.
- Efforts should leverage existing PHC platforms and promote cross-sectoral linkages between health, nutrition, education, and social protection.

7 October 2025- Rethinking Parenting Programs in East and Southern Africa

- Participants reflected on the diverse interpretations of *responsive caregiving* and emphasized what responsive caregiving should look like in practice across partners, communities, and governments.
- Children with disabilities and their caregivers must be able to access parenting programs and services with a focus on family strengths through asset-mapping approaches.
- Parenting interventions should integrate evidence-based economic strengthening components, enabling families to act on what they learn and sustain positive caregiving practices.

Overall Reflection on the Pre-Convening Meetings

Across all sessions, participants emphasized the need to move from isolated, programmatic interventions toward integrated, system-level approaches that reflect family realities. Progress will depend on aligning around shared definitions, using data to drive decisions by uplifting the evidence that we have for what works and how that is built into and implemented within the various programmatic approaches, and ensuring community participation within government-led systems.