

Report on the Proceedings at the 2025 Hilton Foundation ESA ECD Partners Convening



Compiled by Spark Health Africa

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Executive Summary

The 2025 Hilton Foundation East and Southern Africa (ESA) ECD Partners' Convening, held from October 8-10, marked a decisive moment in which to reflect on and re-energise the movement to ensure that every child can thrive. Bringing together government leaders from Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania with global partners and practitioners, the convening moved beyond celebrating isolated successes to forge a unified, systemic and actionable agenda for the next five years. It was preceded by pre-convening workshops (6–7 October) on **Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW), Childcare Systems Strengthening, Nurturing Care in Primary Health Care (PHC), and Rethinking Parenting Programs**—sessions that ensured focused attention on often-overlooked but critical dimensions of ECD, laying a strong foundation for the main event.

For presentations from pre-convening workshops and main event, as well as participant information, please access the [event website](#).

A Shifting Landscape and a Call to Action

The convening unfolded against a backdrop of profound global change. As Professor Amina Abubakar emphasized in her keynote address, Africa's demographic boom, constrained financing, technological disruption, and rising geopolitical instability demand a reimagined ECD agenda. Her challenge, which focused on **who owns, sets, and drives the agenda**, framed the entire gathering. Professor Amina Abubakar's call was clear: ***countries must commit to long-term investments, evidence-based interventions, and collaborations that prioritize collective impact.***

National Progress and Persistent Challenges: A Regional Snapshot

Country reflections painted a picture of important gains constrained by systemic bottlenecks, as exemplified by the following:

- **Kenya** has established strong policy frameworks at the national level, a newly constituted State Department for Children Services and at a subnational level, innovative county-led models driven by devolution. Yet **fragmented implementation, chronic underfunding, and data silos** continue to prevent policies from becoming reality for all children.
- **Tanzania** demonstrated exceptional **high-level government ownership**, with ECD integrated into Vision 2050 and national systems. However, it faces an **overwhelmed community workforce, weak data systems for tracking the ECD Multisectoral Program implementation, financing, and the exclusion of vulnerable groups**.
- In **Zanzibar**, where **ECD is a presidential priority**, the government has rapidly advanced coordination and resource mobilization. Within months, it completed a national baseline, established coordination structures with a dedicated secretariat, and secured a budget code for ECD. Community Health Workers are now on the government payroll and trained

on Nurturing Care, while partnerships with the private sector have led to the creation of ECD centres in marketplaces.

- **Mozambique** benefits from effective grassroots coordination and robust civil society advocacy. Still, **weak high-level coordination, duplication of partner efforts, and limited government leadership and ownership in planning, coordination, and monitoring** remain major obstacles.

Five Cross-Cutting Priorities

From these candid dialogues, emerged five priorities critical to for accelerating progress:

1. **Institutionalize Coordination:** Move from ad-hoc project-based collaboration to **permanent, funded multisectoral coordination structures** at national and sub-national levels.
2. **Anchor on Government Leadership:** Ensure that all partner support **strengthens and works through government-led systems and leadership** to ensure sustainability and scale.
3. **Bridge the Data-Policy Gap:** Transition from generating data to **building integrated national knowledge management systems** that directly inform government planning and budgeting cycles. This is backed by a clear consensus amongst stakeholders on the indicators that should be prioritized within the data management systems.
4. **Secure Domestic Financing:** Develop compelling national ECD investment cases and costing frameworks, while positioning the **private sector as a strategic partner** to support implementation.
5. **Empower Local Implementation:** **Decentralize funding and decision-making** to the lowest level possible and invest in the capacity of local authorities and communities to lead.

Country Commitments and a New Investment Narrative

The convening catalyzed concrete, forward-looking commitments. Each country developed and presented a "pitch" reframing ECD as a cornerstone of national development, and linking it directly to economic growth, human capital, and poverty reduction:

- **Kenya** committed to **operationalizing its Integrated ECD Policy by 2030**, strengthening coordination by 2026, tracking financing, building a centralized child data system, and training its frontline ECD workforce.

- **Mozambique** pledged to **leverage its strong policy foundation** within its National Development Strategy, decentralize implementation, strengthen service delivery via health units, and build a national ECD dashboard.
- **Tanzania** committed to **systematizing its approach** by reinforcing coordination, expanding community daycare centers, analyzing cross-sectoral financing, and re-establishing population-level ECD data.

The Way Forward: A Spirit of Deepened Partnership

The Hilton Foundation concluded the convening by reaffirming its commitment to children as it undergoes a period of strategic reflection. It celebrated the collective progress made over the last five years but recognized the scale of remaining challenges. The Foundation committed to remaining as a reliable grant-maker and to using other vehicles "**beyond grant-making**," like its voice, to support its partners in delivering change for young children and families. Its next five-year strategy will prioritize targeted technical assistance, capacity building, advocacy, research and alignment with country-led action plans, that entail community-led engagement, ensuring that commitments translate into measurable outcomes for young children, families and communities. The path forward is clear: the region must shift from **collective ambition to coordinated, accountable action**. With sharpened priorities, concrete commitments, and stronger partnerships, the convening has set a bold course. The ultimate measure of success of coordinated and accountable action will be in the delivery of **a thriving future for every child in East and Southern Africa**.

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.

Convening Day 1- 8 October 2025

Overview of Day 1

The first day of the convening was dedicated to establishing a shared understanding of the global context, regional realities, and strategic direction for Early Childhood Development (ECD).

The day was framed by two powerful keynotes. **Professor Amina Abubakar**, in her address "Reimagining ECD in a Shifting Landscape," detailed the rapid changes—from demographic shifts to funding constraints—demanding a critical re-evaluation of the ECD agenda. She challenged leaders to ask, "Who owns, sets, and drives it?" and called for evidence-based interventions, long-term investments, and strong collaborations. This was complemented by an **inspirational address from Mama Graça Machel**, who framed ECD as a non-negotiable, time-sensitive imperative for social justice and breaking the cycle of poverty, urging the generation of "unquestionable commitments."

The session on **National Level Priorities** provided a snapshot of country-specific contexts. Representatives from Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania, including Zanzibar, highlighted progress in coordination and system integration but shared common challenges, including service quality, coverage, and the need for sustained capacity building at the community level.

A panel on **Regional & Global Trends** featuring UNESCO, WHO, the World Bank, and UNICEF underscored the need to reposition ECD within broader development goals. Key messages included the necessity of rethinking advocacy, demonstrating concrete impact in a tight funding environment, and ensuring ECD is "everyone's business."

The **Hilton Foundation** reiterated its established approach of combining grant-making with strategic, non-financial support to achieve measurable and systemic impact across ECD systems.

The day culminated in the **Country Roundtable Conversations**, where teams from Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania conducted a candid reflection on the last five years. These

dialogues crystallized the core challenges of **fragmented coordination, chronic underfunding, and data-policy gaps**, leading to a **Synthesis of Cross-Cutting Learnings** that would inform the subsequent days' work.

Keynote Address

The core message from Professor Amina Abubakar's keynote address, "Reimagining ECD in a Shifting Landscape," for the Hilton Foundation East and Southern Africa ECD Partners Convening was that the landscape of Early Childhood Development is undergoing rapid and unpredictable changes, requiring a critical re-evaluation of the ECD agenda to lead with purpose and impact.

She described key shifts in the Landscape, namely:

- **Global Changes:** The influence of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Technology:** The digital and technological revolution, including AI, is shaping the future of early education.
- **Geopolitical & Social Factors:** Increasing conflicts, population displacements, and rapid urbanization.
- **Demographics:** A significant demographic shift, with 40% of the world's children projected to be born in Africa by 2050, many in urban informal settlements.
- **Funding:** A changing and challenging funding environment.

Professor Abubakar made a Call to Action for ECD Leaders, urging partners to critically examine the ECD agenda by asking:

- Who owns it?
- Who sets it?
- Who drives it?

She highlighted the importance of Political Determinants of Health in shaping outcomes.

As a Way Forward, Professor Abubakar encouraged participants:

- To navigate this shifting landscape.
- To craft evidence-based interventions.
- To commit to long-term investments.
- To form strong collaborations, focusing on collective contributions rather than individual attributions.
- To foster continuous skill development (upscaling) for professionals.
- To maintain a sharp focus on quality even as programs scale up to meet growing needs.

Summary of the Inspirational Address by Mama Graça Machel

Mama Graça Machel's core message is that **investing in early childhood is a non-negotiable, time-sensitive imperative for Africa's future.**

She argued that the period from gestation through the first years is a scientifically proven, critical window for developing human potential. Failing to invest during this period has severe consequences, as it **"plants the seeds of underdevelopment," perpetuates social injustice, and condemns generations to poverty.**

Conversely, she framed this investment not just as a moral duty but as **the most effective strategy to break the cycle of poverty, drive inclusive social transformation, and build sustainable development.** She made this personal by challenging every adult to offer all African children the same "best" care they would demand for their own children.

Finally, she issued a clear call to action for the convening: to generate **"unquestionable commitments"** that will move governments and partners from policies to tangible results, ensuring this vital agenda remains a central priority.

National Level Priorities

The discussion on National Level Priorities brought together government representatives from Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zanzibar to reflect on the progress, coordination, and challenges in advancing ECD across their contexts.

Across all four countries, participants emphasized **the growing recognition of ECD as a national development priority. In Kenya, coordination across ministries and counties is strengthening,** with mechanisms in place to track outcomes from the community level through to national policy. Data tools, including those focused on the first 1,000 days of life, are being used to inform planning and resource allocation.

In Mozambique, ECD has been integrated into multiple sectors, particularly within health and social action. Maternal and child health platforms were highlighted as strong entry points for integrated service delivery, supported by trained community health workers who provide counselling and caregiver support. However, challenges remain around quality and coverage—particularly in ensuring that service providers and caregivers have the necessary knowledge and awareness to deliver nurturing care effectively. Coordination mechanisms under the National Council for Social Action and a multisectoral technical working group are supporting joint planning and oversight, though sustaining engagement and validation processes were noted as ongoing areas for improvement.

In Tanzania, ECD is positioned within the national Vision 2050 framework as part of the human capital development agenda. Integration of ECD into health systems continues to be strengthened through workforce capacity development and national training programs. Efforts to embed ECD within local government structures are also taking shape, with social workers leading service integration in community spaces such as marketplaces.

Zanzibar has made notable progress in institutionalizing ECD as a presidential priority. Within months, the government completed a national baseline assessment, established coordination structures with a dedicated secretariat, and introduced a budget code that allows ECD allocations to be tracked across ministries. Community Health Workers are now on the payroll and trained on Nurturing Care, while partnerships with the private sector have expanded access through the establishment of ECD centres in marketplaces.

Overall, the discussion underscored the importance of multisectoral coordination, clear governance structures, and sustainable financing mechanisms to translate policy commitments into tangible outcomes for young children and families.

Regional & Global Trends

The session brought together representatives from key international agencies (UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank) to share perspectives on the evolving ECD landscape and the implications for countries in East and Southern Africa. The discussion highlighted a shared recognition that while ECD is increasingly acknowledged as a driver of human capital and inclusive growth, the global context is shifting rapidly—financially, politically, and institutionally—requiring renewed approaches to advocacy, coordination, and investment.

Participants underscored the persistence of critical challenges in education and early learning, including the global learning crisis, limited financing, and the need to build resilient and transformative education systems. At the national level, attention must focus on improving access, inclusion, quality, and governance—supported by stronger data, policy alignment, and sustainable funding mechanisms.

From the health perspective, partners emphasized that nurturing care in the first 1,000 days remains central to human development, noting that children cannot learn or thrive without good health and nutrition. Achieving this requires investment in health facility readiness, workforce capacity, and integrated models of care adapted to country contexts. The discussion also called for greater digital innovation, stronger monitoring systems, and enhanced collaboration among UN agencies to ensure a coherent and multisectoral response.

The conversation reflected a shifting global funding landscape in which traditional development assistance is declining, bilateral funds are constrained, and private philanthropy is increasingly filling the gap. This has placed greater pressure on governments and partners to demonstrate measurable results and link ECD investment to job creation, productivity, and national priorities. Participants agreed that public sector leadership and sustainable domestic financing will be key to long-term success.

Finally, the session emphasized the need to reframe the ECD narrative—from a donor-driven agenda to a collective societal priority. Partners called for renewed advocacy that positions ECD as integral to health, education, and economic outcomes, urging stronger local ownership and coordination. The discussion closed with a shared commitment to scale what works, support parents and caregivers across systems, and bring new energy and evidence into the next phase of the ECD movement.

Hilton Foundation Presentation

The Foundation reaffirmed its core values and ECD priorities while refining its focus and approach for greater impact. It acknowledges the collective progress made and emphasizes its commitment to playing a more supportive role beyond just grant making.

The Foundation shared Key Updates and Refinements as described below.

- **Rooted in Legacy, Refined in Approach:** The Foundation's work remains guided by Conrad N. Hilton's will, with a specific focus on sheltering children. While core values are unchanged, they are using this moment to refine their portfolio and refocus their definition of impact.
- **A Clearer Definition of Impact:** Grants and partnerships are now expected to demonstrate:
- **Direct Impact:** A measurable, positive difference in people's lives today.
- **Lasting Change:** Enduring alterations to policies, practices, and institutions to scale impact and reach more people.
- **Global ECD Strategy:** The initiative works in the US and East & Southern Africa, sharing lessons across regions. The strategy focuses on three critical pathways:
 - Supporting Parents
 - Integrating ECD into Healthcare Services
 - Expanding Access to High-Quality Childcare

These pathways lead to intermediate outcomes (e.g., improved parenting, trained workforce) and longer-term goals (e.g., improved health and learning for children).

The Foundation celebrates "great progress" made with partners, including Collective Progress & Learnings in East & Southern Africa, namely:

- Improved well-being for children and caregivers.
- Better national ECD policy frameworks and data.
- Improved coordination and positioning of ECD as a priority.

The Foundation shared key learnings from the collective work that include:

- The need for parental support (more than just education).
- The challenge of addressing families' complex needs.
- The difficulty in unlocking funding.
- The need for more targeted technical assistance.

The Foundation's Commitment & Supportive Role signalled a clear intention to be more supportive, explicitly stating:

"The Foundation has an important role to play beyond grant making."

This commitment is underpinned by the acknowledgment of the challenges grantees face. It suggests a move towards providing more strategic, non-financial support to build on the "great foundation" already established. This likely includes addressing the learned needs for targeted technical assistance and helping partners navigate complex challenges to unlock lasting change.

In conclusion, the presentation outlined how the Foundation is sharpening its strategic focus on measurable, systemic impact while simultaneously pledging to be engaged and supportive partner to its grantees.

The presentation sparked questions around the Foundation's approach towards direct funding to the government, the rationale behind investing in only three countries in Africa and its plans on investing more towards the youth.

Country Roundtable Conversations

These reflective roundtable dialogues, led by country teams from Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, aimed to use evidence, knowledge and experience to think about the last five years (2020-2025) and reflect on:

- What has worked across the three countries—and why?
- What has not worked—and why?
- What key learnings we should collectively take forward over the next 5 years to build a better future for young children.

The table below summarises country-specific discussions on the three areas, with the more detailed narratives summarised in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Table 1 Outputs from Country Roundtable Conversations

Country	What Has Worked	What Has Not Worked
Kenya	<p>Multisectoral Coordination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> County-led blocs (e.g., Lake Regional Economic Bloc) & national networks enabled collaboration. <p>Policy & Legal Frameworks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong laws (e.g., Children Act 2022) provided a solid foundation. <p>Devolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counties drove localized programs and data systems. <p>Data Generation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECD indicators were integrated into national surveys. 	<p>Fragmented Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Siloed ministries caused duplication and inefficiency. <p>Policy Bottlenecks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slow, donor-dependent processes left policies unimplemented. <p>Underfunding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unclear costing and delayed budgets made "free" pre-primary unaffordable. <p>Data Silos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No central repository; data was not used for decision-making.
Mozambique	<p>Grassroots Coordination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective local-level collaboration between government sectors & NGOs. <p>Community Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious & community leaders secured local buy-in. <p>Civil Society Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong advocacy pushed the ECD agenda forward. <p>Integrated Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investments built a shared understanding of ECD. 	<p>Weak National Coordination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor communication and unclear roles hampered strategy development. <p>Partner Duplication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NGOs worked in isolation, repeating efforts in the same areas. <p>Limited Government Ownership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government was not adequately involved in planning or monitoring.
Tanzania	<p>Government Ownership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong national structures & a parliamentary group to champion the ECD agenda. 	<p>Overwhelmed Workforce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Health Workers were under-resourced and stretched thin.

Country	What Has Worked	What Has Not Worked
	<p>Community Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs were personalized at the local level for strong buy-in. <p>System Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECD was embedded into government policies, guidelines, training packages, and digital systems across different sectors, including health , education and social welfare. <p>Media Campaigns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion journalists raised public awareness nationwide. 	<p>Weak Data Systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could not track financing or progress due to poor MEL systems. <p>Exclusion of Vulnerable Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues of Children with disabilities and mental health needs were not well captured in different government packages including the multisectoral program resulting to poor services provision.

Synthesis of Cross-Cutting Learnings for ECD Advancement Arising from the Country Roundtable Conversations

The roundtable dialogues from Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania reveal several critical, universal themes that must be addressed to accelerate progress in Early Childhood Development. A consistent finding is that **functional, multi-stakeholder coordination acts as the single greatest accelerator for ECD**. However, **establishing this coordination** beyond isolated projects or local levels **remains a pervasive challenge, hampered by institutional silos** and a lack of overarching frameworks. To overcome this, it is imperative to **invest in building permanent, funded coordination structures** at both national and sub-national levels, moving beyond short-term project-based models.

Underpinning all efforts, **government ownership emerges as the non-negotiable cornerstone for sustainable impact**. The successes in Tanzania, where ECD is integrated into national systems, and in Kenya, driven by county-level leadership, stand in stark contrast to the limitations faced in Mozambique where government engagement was weaker. This underscores that **all partner support must be deliberately designed to strengthen and work through government systems and leadership**, rather than bypassing them.

Furthermore, **a significant gap persists between data collection and its practical application**. While all three countries generate evidence, this information rarely informs policy and planning in a systematic way due to fragmented data systems and a lack of centralised repositories. A

strategic shift in focus is required—from merely generating data to building robust national knowledge management systems that are directly integrated into government planning cycles.

Domestic Financing remains the most unresolved challenge. Chronic underfunding, an absence of clear costing guidelines, and the underutilization of innovative financing mechanisms like public-private partnerships universally constrain ECD initiatives. **A concerted effort is needed to develop compelling national ECD investment cases** and costing frameworks, **while actively engaging the private sector as a strategic partner** in implementation, not merely as a donor.

Finally, **the power of localization is a clear driver of success.** The most effective interventions across all contexts were those tailored to local realities and led by county or district governments, community leaders, and religious institutions. This points to the **critical need to decentralize funding and decision-making to the lowest feasible level** and to concurrently **invest in capacity building for these local authorities and community structures.** By acting on these five cross-cutting insights, stakeholders can collectively build a more effective, sustainable, and equitable future for young children.

Convening Day 2- 9 October 2025

Overview of Day 2

Day two of the convening marked a strategic pivot from analysis to action, focusing on repositioning Early Childhood Development (ECD) as an indispensable driver of national progress and detailing the components of a compelling investment case.

The day opened with country teams presenting powerful **elevator pitches** that deliberately reframed ECD beyond a social sector issue, aligning it directly with core national economic and human capital goals.

- **Kenya** positioned ECD as the foundation of its *Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda*, highlighting its role in both immediate job creation and long-term workforce productivity, and calling for doubled investment and integration across all economic pillars.
- **Mozambique** presented ECD as the cornerstone of its human capital strategy, essential for reversing the trend of multidimensional poverty and building a skilled citizenry, and called for high-level coordination and a unified national ECD policy.
- **Tanzania** leveraged its robust Investment Case, demonstrating a 1:57 return on investment, to argue that ECD is the most effective strategy to achieve the goals of *Tanzania Development Vision 2050*, urging cross-sectoral early investment.

The subsequent session on **Localising the Investment Case** deconstructed the essential elements required to turn these powerful narratives into fundable, actionable strategies. A high-level panel underscored that a compelling case is built on five interdependent pillars:

1. **Government Leadership:** Emphasizing the need to "domesticate" global commitments and provide local governments with practical guidance for implementation.
2. **Domestic Financing:** Advocating for a shift from narrow "ECD-specific" budgeting to also leveraging "ECD-sensitive" sectoral funds and engaging economists in financing dialogues.
3. **Community Leadership:** Highlighting that deep community ownership, where "a child belongs to the community," leads to tangible local investments and sustains interventions.
4. **Measurement:** Stressing that data must be transformed into actionable evidence for decision-making and accountability, requiring specific metrics to track embedded government ECD spending.
5. **Private Sector Partnership:** Showcasing how corporate initiatives, like extended parental leave and workplace childcare, are integral to the ECD ecosystem.

Collectively, Day 2 provided the conceptual and practical toolkit for transforming ECD into a prioritized, investable national agenda, setting the stage for the concrete commitments to be unveiled on the final day.

The day started with country teams meeting to Reframe ECD as a National Development Priority. The objective of this session was to shift the narrative beyond sectoral boundaries and align it with broader goals such as economic growth, human capital, and social equity.

As output of these discussions, government and partner representatives from Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique developed and delivered concise country “elevator pitches” articulating why Early Childhood Development (ECD) should be positioned as a core national development priority. Each country’s pitch linked ECD to its overarching national agenda—such as human capital development, poverty reduction, and economic transformation—demonstrating how early investments contribute to productivity, social equity, and long-term growth.

Across the three countries, common themes emerged: the recognition that ECD is foundational to achieving national visions and sectoral targets; the importance of integrated service delivery through health, education, and social protection systems; and the need for coordinated leadership, domestic financing, and community engagement. Collectively, the pitches reflected growing political will to move ECD from a sectoral issue to a central pillar of sustainable national development. *(Full country pitches are available in Appendix 3)*

Localising the Investment Case

The session explored how leadership, financing, community engagement, measurement, and private sector collaboration collectively form the foundation of a sustainable, locally driven ECD agenda. The discussion emphasized that building a compelling national and sub-national

investment case requires integrating these five dimensions to ensure that ECD is both contextually relevant and financially viable.

Participants highlighted that **government leadership** is critical for translating global and national commitments into local action. Experience from devolved systems demonstrated that meaningful progress often originates at sub-national levels, where counties and districts have taken the initiative to craft ECD policies and programs aligned with local priorities. However, this has also surfaced challenges of coherence and coordination, underscoring the need for a unified framework to guide implementation and ensure consistency in standards, financing, and service delivery.

On **domestic financing**, it was agreed that progress depends on moving beyond narrow definitions of ECD expenditure. While direct funding for ECD-specific programs remains limited, substantial opportunities lie in ECD-sensitive sectors—such as health, nutrition, and social protection—where existing budgets can be leveraged. The discussion pointed to the importance of recognizing ECD within government budgeting frameworks, engaging economists and planners in financing dialogues, and developing country-led evidence to demonstrate the economic returns of investing in young children.

The session also underscored the vital role of **community leadership** in sustaining ECD investments. When communities are engaged as co-owners of interventions rather than passive beneficiaries, they contribute resources, labor, and local solutions that ensure longevity and relevance. Examples shared included communities donating land for childcare centers and participating directly in management and oversight, reinforcing the principle that “a child belongs to the community.”

Measurement and evidence generation were identified as essential tools for accountability and adaptive management. Participants noted that while large amounts of ECD data are collected, their potential is often underutilized. Transforming data into actionable insights requires analytical capacity, contextual understanding, and systems for tracking government funding—often buried within sectoral budgets. Effective measurement frameworks can both inform decision-making and strengthen advocacy for sustained financing.

The **private sector** was recognized as an underutilized but powerful ally in advancing ECD. Companies are increasingly aligning their internal policies with family-friendly standards—such as extending parental leave and establishing workplace childcare facilities—and investing externally in programs that strengthen the care economy. Such initiatives demonstrate that business engagement in ECD can yield shared social and economic value.

Overall, the session concluded that localizing the ECD investment case demands a holistic, multi-sectoral approach—anchored in government leadership, sustained domestic financing,

empowered communities, robust measurement systems, and active private sector participation. Together, these elements create the enabling environment needed to transform early childhood investments into national development outcomes.

Convening Day 3- 10 October 2025

Overview of Day 3

The final day of the convening was dedicated to translating the week's reflections, narratives, and strategies into concrete, actionable national commitments. Each country presented a clear and time-bound action plan, demonstrating a decisive shift from dialogue to accountable implementation.

Country Commitments: A Tripartite Action Agenda

The three focus countries outlined distinct yet complementary pathways, each addressing their unique challenges while aligning with the cross-cutting priorities identified earlier in the convening.

- **Kenya** committed to **systematizing implementation at the county level**. Its action plan is focused on operationalizing its robust policy framework by 2030, strengthening functional coordination by 2026, securing and tracking domestic financing, building a centralized child data system, and investing in a large-scale capacity-building program for its frontline ECD workforce.
- **Mozambique** pledged to **institutionalize ECD within its core governance structures**. The government's commitments center on leveraging its integration into national development plans (ENDE and PQG) to drive a decentralized, service-delivery-focused agenda. This includes strengthening health systems as the primary ECD delivery point, scaling up social protection programs for young children, and building a national data dashboard to track progress.
- **Tanzania** focused on **scaling its efforts through stronger governance and strategic financing**. The commitments signal a move to solidify its high-level government ownership by reinforcing coordination structures, expanding community-based infrastructure, formally engaging the private sector, conducting a seminal analysis of ECD financing, and building a culture of data-driven decision-making.

A Collective Journey Ahead

The national commitments revealed a unified understanding of the path forward: success hinges on **functional coordination, targeted domestic financing, and robust data systems**. While the country-specific approaches differ—from Kenya's county-level empowerment to Mozambique's system-wide institutionalization and Tanzania's strategic scaling—they collectively represent a mature, next-phase agenda for ECD in the region.

Day 3 concluded the convening by solidifying a clear and collaboratively owned roadmap. The challenge now is to translate these commitments into uniformly financed and executed

actions. The stage is set for a period of intensified, accountable implementation, with each country charting a detailed course toward a future where every child can thrive.

Country Commitments

Kenya

The Government of Kenya's action commitments for Early Childhood Development (ECD) are focused on **translating a robust policy foundation into a coordinated, well-financed, and data-driven implementation reality at the county level**. The plan prioritizes systemic strengthening and accountability.

The principal action commitments include:

- **Finalizing and Operationalizing the Policy Framework:** A primary commitment is to **finalize, disseminate, and implement key policies like the Integrated ECD (IECD) Policy and childcare standards by 2030**. This involves standardizing national initiatives across all 47 counties and clarifying the roles and mandates of different actors to ensure coherent action.
- **Strengthening Multi-Level Coordination Structures:** The government is committed to **making coordination functional at both national and county levels by 2026**. A key measure of success will be the regular convening of Technical Working Groups (TWGs), leveraging public-private partnerships (PPPs) to optimize ECD activities.
- **Securing and Tracking Domestic ECD Financing:** There is a strong commitment to **increase budgetary allocation, absorption, and accountability for ECD**. Key actions include developing an investment case, advocating for ring-fenced ECD funds, and tracking funding through the Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) to ensure transparency and sustainability.
- **Building a Centralized Child Data System:** A significant technological commitment is to **develop and operationalize an integrated children's database system by 2030**. This involves investing in digital infrastructure, ensuring interoperability between systems, and creating a unique identifier for every child to improve the efficiency and equity of ECD service delivery.
- **Investing in the ECD Workforce:** The government is committed to a **large-scale capacity-building program for all ECD frontline workers**, including Community Health Promoters (CHPs), Children's Officers, and social workers, to be completed by 2030. The number of trained workers is a key success measure for this commitment.

In essence, Kenya's action plan charts a course toward a more unified, accountable, and data-informed ECD ecosystem, with a clear focus on empowering county-level implementation through standardized policies, dedicated funding, and a skilled workforce.

Mozambique

The Government of Mozambique has made several key institutional and policy commitments to Early Childhood Development (ECD), demonstrating high-level political will. These commitments are primarily articulated through national strategic documents and structural initiatives.

The principal commitments include:

- **Mainstreaming ECD into National Development Agendas:** The government has formally recognized ECD as a fundamental pillar of national development by **integrating it into the National Development Strategy (ENDE) 2025-2044 and the Five-Year Government Plan (PQG) 2025-2029**. This elevates ECD from a sectoral issue to a national priority.
- **Establishing a Common National Framework:** The government has adopted the **National Plan for Child Action (PNAC)** as the common structure for coordinating action and mobilizing resources for ECD. This provides a unified framework for all stakeholders.
- **Prioritizing ECD in Fiscal Policy:** The government has committed to **maintaining social sectors that contribute to ECD as priorities in its financial allocations**, even within a constrained fiscal environment.
- **Decentralizing Implementation:** There is a clear commitment to **decentralized leadership**, empowering provincial and district levels in the planning, coordination, and implementation of ECD actions in collaboration with civil society.
- **Strengthening Service Delivery Systems:** The government is committed to using and strengthening public systems for ECD, notably by:
 - Making **health units the primary delivery point** for ECD services.
 - **Integrating ECD components (like early stimulation)** into primary health care.
 - **Introducing and scaling up social protection programs**, including cash transfers, specifically for children aged 0-2 years.
 - **Integrating birth registration into health units** to improve vital statistics.
- **Building a Robust Measurement System:** The government is committed to evidence-based planning through:
 - The **inclusion of ECD indicators in national surveys** like the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS).
 - The development of a **national ECD indicator system and a dashboard** to track progress.

In summary, the Government of Mozambique's key commitments revolve around institutionalizing ECD within its core development plans, leveraging and strengthening its public service delivery infrastructure (especially health and social protection), and building a decentralized, data-driven system for implementation and accountability. The current challenge, as noted, lies in translating these strong policy commitments into coordinated, adequately financed, and effectively implemented action across all levels.

Tanzania

The Government of Tanzania's key commitments revolve around **systematizing and scaling** its Early Childhood Development (ECD) efforts through stronger governance, strategic financing, and enhanced data-driven accountability. The commitments signal a move from foundational policy work towards more integrated and actionable implementation.

The principal commitments include:

- **Strengthening the Architecture of Leadership and Coordination:** The government is committed to **reinforcing the central coordinating role of the PO-RALG and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO)**, reviewing the national ECD program, and ensuring new political leaders are engaged to maintain consistent high-level support for ECD.
- **Deepening Community-Based Service Delivery:** There is a clear commitment to **expanding the physical infrastructure of ECD** by establishing more community day care centres and to **strengthening the community workforce** by revising the training and tools for Community Health Workers (CHWs) to cover all nurturing care components.
- **Formally Integrating the Private Sector:** The government has committed to **actively convening the private sector** to develop a concrete plan for their contribution to ECD outcomes, moving beyond ad-hoc engagement to a structured partnership.
- **Advocating for Strategic and Trackable Domestic Financing:** A major commitment is to **conduct a seminal analysis of cross-sectoral ECD financing** and use the findings, along with the ECD Investment Case, to advocate for and track explicit ECD budget lines within ministry and local council plans.
- **Building a Robust Data for Decision-Making Culture:** The government is committed to **re-establishing population-level ECD data** through new surveys, **improving routine data quality**, and, critically, **building the capacity of officials to use data** from dashboards and scorecards for planning and accountability.

In essence, Tanzania's pathway forward focuses on creating a more cohesive, financially backed, and evidence-informed ECD ecosystem, with a strong emphasis on local government and community-level implementation. The overarching challenge will be to translate these

coordinated plans into uniformly financed and executed actions across all sectors and levels of government.

Conclusion

The 2025 Hilton Foundation ESA ECD Partners' Convening concluded not as an endpoint, but as a decisive launchpad for a more integrated and impactful phase of early childhood development work in the East and Southern Africa region. The dialogues over five days crystallized a powerful consensus: the foundational ECD policies and programs are largely in place. The critical task now is to translate this potential into tangible, scaled impact for every child. This requires a relentless focus on systems, financing, and accountability.

The path forward is clear. The key takeaways from country reflections and cross-cutting analysis demand a disciplined shift in mindset. Success will be measured by our collective ability to **operationalize policies, institutionalize coordination, secure and track domestic financing, build robust data ecosystems, and empower communities**. The national commitments articulated by Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania provide a concrete framework for this work, outlining specific, time-bound actions to address their most pressing challenges.

The spirit of the Convening was unequivocally forward-looking and collaborative. In this next critical phase, the Hilton Foundation reaffirms its role not merely as a funder, but as a steadfast partner in this journey. As the Foundation develops its strategy for the next five-year funding cycle, its approach will be guided by the insights and priorities that emerged from this gathering. This means aligning its support directly with the country-led action plans, providing targeted technical assistance and capacity building to address complex bottlenecks, and using its convening power to foster the cross-learning and advocacy necessary for systemic change.

The journey ahead is complex, but the collective resolve is stronger than ever. By walking together—governments, partners, and the Foundation—anchored in a shared commitment to systemic change and measurable outcomes, the vision of a future where every child in East and Southern Africa thrives is within reach. The work continues, now with a clearer map and a renewed sense of shared purpose.

Appendices

Appendix 1- Outputs from the Country Roundtable Conversations- what has worked

Kenya		
What has worked?	Description	Why it has worked
Strong Multisectoral Coordination Mechanisms	Platforms like the Lake Region Economic Bloc (LREB), the ECD Network (ECDNeK), and the Nurturing Care TWG have successfully facilitated knowledge exchange and collaboration between national and county governments.	Leadership from the Council of Governors and dedicated technical working groups has created structured spaces for dialogue.
Robust Policy Framework	Enactment of key laws (Children Act 2022, Persons with Disabilities Act 2025) and development of policies (National Care Policy, Integrated ECD Policy).	A deliberate focus on creating a comprehensive legal and policy environment for ECD.
Devolution as a Driver	County governments have been instrumental in developing localized ECD programs and child data systems.	Devolution has brought decision-making and resource allocation closer to the point of implementation.
Improved Data Generation	Adaptation of data packages (CCD) and inclusion of ECD indicators in national surveys (KDHS).	Conscious effort to make ECD visible within national statistical systems.
Mozambique		
What has worked?	Description	Why it has worked
Effective Grassroots Coordination	Successful coordination at the district and provincial level between key sectors (Health, Social Action) and NGOs.	Strong local government involvement and good knowledge of partner activities.
Community and Religious Leader Engagement	Coordination with these leaders has fostered community buy-in and support for programs.	
Strong Civil Society Advocacy	Vigorous advocacy efforts, including roundtables for accountability, have pushed the ECD agenda.	An active civil society and private sector coalition.
Integrated Vision of ECD	Investment in community-level coordination has helped strengthen a shared understanding of what integrated ECD entails.	
Tanzania		
Strong Government Ownership & Structures	Well-defined coordinating organs (National Committee, Secretariat, Regional Committees) and the ECD Parliamentary Group have institutionalized ECD.	High-level political will and commitment, evidenced by ECD's inclusion in National Vision 2050.

Successful Community Integration	Communities have personalized ECD interventions because of engagement with parents, community leadership, and government support.	Using the community as a deliberate entry point created buy-in.
Integration into Government Systems	Successfully integrated Nurturing Care components into health facility protocols, pre-service training, and digital community systems.	Strong government leadership in adopting and scaling partner-led pilots.
Strategic Use of Media	High use of media and a network of ECD champion journalists across all regions have significantly raised public awareness.	

Appendix 2- Outputs from the Country Roundtable Conversations- what has not worked

Kenya		
What has not worked?	Description	Why it has not worked
Fragmented Implementation	Duplication and inefficiency occur because ECD responsibilities are spread across multiple ministries without a single unifying coordination framework.	Persistent siloed operations among government and non-state actors.
Policy Implementation Bottlenecks	Policies often remain in draft form or face slow implementation due to lengthy processes, donor dependency, and lack of localized guidance.	Insufficient focus on dissemination and operationalization after policy development.
Chronic Underfunding	ECD faces insufficient and delayed budgets, with no clear costing guidelines. The policy of "free" pre-primary is undermined by unaffordable costs.	Lack of political and financial prioritization, and underutilization of private sector financing.
Data Silos and Underutilization	No central ECD data repository, and data systems across ministries are not interoperable.	Evidence generated is not systematically linked to planning and policy processes.
Mozambique		
What has not worked?	Description	Why it has not worked
Weak High-Level Coordination & Communication	The development of the national strategy suffered from poor communication and unclear responsibilities.	Organizations often work in isolation and fail to inform the government of their plans.
Inefficient Partner Collaboration	Criticism of NGOs working in the same locations on the same activities, leading to duplication.	Lack of a overarching coordination mechanism to map interventions and allocate zones/themes.
Limited Government Ownership	The government is often not involved in project conception and lacks information to monitor activities.	Advocacy has not effectively engaged the highest levels of government.
Tanzania		
What has not worked?	Description	Why it has not worked
Overwhelmed and Under-Resourced Community Workforce	Community Health Workers (CHWs) are overwhelmed and need more training.	Limited resources and multiple competing initiatives.
Weak Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)	Poor evidence generation and data systems, and an inability to track ECD financing.	Lack of clear indicators and objectives for government systems to track.
Exclusion of Vulnerable Groups	Services for children with disabilities and mental health are lagging, either due to gaps in guidelines or their implementation.	

Appendix 3- Country Elevator Pitches

Kenya Elevator Pitch

Context – National Priority

Kenya's top priority under the *Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA)* and *Vision 2030* is to raise living standards through job creation, food security, affordable housing, universal healthcare, and human capital development — lifting every family toward shared prosperity.

Connection – Why ECD Matters

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is the foundation of Kenya's transformation. With half of our population under 18 and 16% below age eight, investing in ECD means investing in our nation's future. ECD drives productivity — building the strong minds and healthy bodies that power agriculture, enterprise, and innovation.

In the short term, it creates jobs for teachers, caregivers, and health workers; in the long term, it delivers an educated, innovative, and resilient workforce.

Example / Evidence – What We Are Seeing

Counties such as those in the Lake Region Economic Bloc (LREB) show what's possible. By integrating health, nutrition, and social protection, they have improved child nutrition and reduced stunting.

Yet, 53.5% of children still live in poverty, and malnutrition costs us 6.5% of GDP. Evidence shows every dollar invested in ECD yields up to twenty-three dollars in long-term economic return.

Call to Action – The Vision

Making ECD central to Kenya's development agenda will secure healthier citizens, stronger families, and a more productive workforce.

We call on the government to:

- Double investment in ECD, with clear national and county budget lines.
- Integrate ECD outcomes across all BETA pillars.
- Strengthen coordination between sectors and counties for maximum impact.

Mozambique Elevator Pitch

Context – National Priority

Mozambique’s development agenda, outlined in the *Five-Year Government Program (PQG 2025–2029)* and the *Long-Term Vision 2025–2044*, prioritizes human capital development as the foundation for sustainable economic, social, technological, and environmental progress. Complementing this, the *National Action Plan for Children (PNAC III 2025–2034)* affirms that “Children Come First,” focusing on health, education, protection, and participation — ensuring that every child’s rights and voice are central to national development.

Connection – Why ECD Matters

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is the cornerstone of Mozambique’s human capital strategy. Currently, 61% of children are not developmentally on track, and 41% live in multidimensional poverty — a challenge that directly threatens national productivity and growth.

By investing in ECD, Mozambique can reverse this trend, building a generation of skilled, healthy, and capable citizens who will drive inclusive and resilient socioeconomic progress.

Example / Evidence – What We Are Seeing

Across provinces such as *Nampula*, *Gaza*, and *Cabo Delgado*, communities exposed to parenting education and preschool programs are already demonstrating impact: parents and caregivers show positive behavior change, and children are better prepared for school — evidence that early investments yield tangible results for families and systems alike.

Call to Action – The Vision

To realize the promise of human capital development, Mozambique must make ECD a national priority through stronger coordination, policy leadership, and financing. We therefore call on the government to:

- Operationalize the ECD Multisectoral Coordination Group under the National Council for Children’s Action to ensure accountability and coherence.
- Convene a National Council for Social Action meeting, led by the Prime Minister, to elevate ECD within the broader national agenda.
- Strengthen domestic and external resource mobilization and joint planning for ECD programs.
- Create the enabling conditions for a national ECD policy that unites all stakeholders behind a shared vision.

By making ECD central to Mozambique’s human capital development agenda, the nation can secure a future where every child thrives — building the foundation for a healthier, more skilled, and more prosperous Mozambique.

Tanzania Elevator Pitch

Context – National Priority

Tanzania's long-term development agenda, *Tanzania Development Vision 2050 (TDV2050)*, identifies nine national priorities. Among them, *poverty reduction* and *human capital development* are central — aiming for a future where 90% of children are developmentally on track and able to contribute fully to national growth.

Connection – Why ECD Matters

Early investment in children delivers the highest returns for society. Evidence shows that 90% of brain development occurs in the first five years of life — a critical window to build the foundation for learning, health, and productivity. Tanzania's Investment Case (2022–2050) demonstrates that every 1 Tanzanian Shilling invested in early childhood yields up to 37 Shillings in long-term economic return — a powerful case for prioritizing ECD within the national agenda.

Example / Evidence – What We Are Seeing

Regions that have made deliberate investments in parenting and early childhood programs are already seeing the benefits.

In *Arusha (73%)*, *Njombe (65%)*, and *Zanzibar (60%)*, the proportion of children developmentally on track exceeds the national average — demonstrating the transformative impact of early investment and coordinated service delivery.

Call to Action – The Vision

To realize TDV2050, Tanzania must invest early and strategically in its youngest citizens. We call on government to:

- Ensure early investment in children across all sectors.
- Deliver integrated services for children and parents and strengthen systems to track progress.

By prioritizing early childhood, Tanzania will nurture a generation of healthy, capable, and productive citizens — the human capital needed to drive sustained economic growth and achieve the aspirations of *Tanzania Development Vision 2050*.