

## **Southern Africa Regional Conference on Early Childhood Development 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> Lusaka Zambia**

We, the delegates from 9 countries in Southern African region with representation from other parts of Africa, including Government representatives from Ministries of Education, Health, and Social Protection, from across the region; UN agencies, AUDA-NEPAD, academia, researchers, NGOs, and ECD Networks, gathered in Lusaka Zambia, for the Southern Africa Conference on Early Childhood Development from 28th - 30th March 2023.

**Responding to the theme: “Partnership for Better ECED Outcomes In Southern Africa”** at this very important three-day platform for stakeholders in ECD convened to take stock of the status of ECD in the region and to deliberate on how to make concrete progress in line with the vision and aspirations of the AU Agenda 2063 and the Global Sustainable Development goals (SDGs),

**Expressing** appreciation to the Government of Zambia, for hosting this important conference in partnership with the Southern African Network on Early Childhood Development, the Zambia National Education Coalition and the Africa Early Childhood Network,

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

**Recognizing** the constitutional, legal and policy instruments formulated to create a framework for the realization of the rights of all African children including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC),

**Noting the** importance of early childhood, especially the first 1000 days of a child’s life being a critical period for rapid brain development and foundational to a person’s later life,

**Acknowledging** the evidence-based arguments advanced in favour of investing in the early years, including returns on investment (ROI), the cost of inaction (COI), the significant contributions to productivity through promotion of enhanced labor force and participation by women,

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

**Aware** of the human rights argument for investing in Early Childhood Development and the growing need for quality and inclusive childcare services, and the imperative to empower women and ensure gender equity,

**Acknowledging** multiple efforts of taking best practices in Early Childhood Development to scale across multiple domains including implementation science, design, testing and implementation of promising practices,

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

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

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

**Buoyed by** the existence of multiple financing opportunities including the World Bank's Early Years Initiative, and commitments by key organizations including the Africa Union Development Agency-NEPAD, the Governments of Southern African countries as enshrined in key constitutional, legal and policy instruments,

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

1. **Advocate** for enhanced allocation of resources by governments committed to Early Childhood Development to a minimum of 10% of the education budget from the current average of less 2%,
2. **Deepen** the need to think of and see Early Childhood Development as system, with commitments by organizations such as the African Union Commission, the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD to breaking up of silos,
3. **Intensify** advocacy for the prioritization of the early years within sector plans. This includes the implementation of at least one year of quality pre-primary education within the education sector and embedding responsive caregiving within the health systems.
4. **Support** enhanced investment in community-level initiatives including parental support for beneficial childcare practices, food security, cash transfers, women empowerment programmes including village banking, development of

infrastructure for ECD hubs, and childcare centers, to enhance the capacity of parents, caregivers, communities and networks of ECD to work with the government to create a demand for ECD services thereby promoting uptake,

5. **Advocate** for enhanced quality of the Early Childhood Development workforce including making the sector attractive to potential Early Childhood Development workers, training, retention, professionalization and dignification of childcare work, and promotion of the welfare of childcare workers,
6. **Promote** broad partnerships and collaborations with multiple Early Childhood Development stakeholders including funders, governments, communities, NGOs, networks of ECD and other networks, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the Africa Union Commission and its Development Agency-NEPAD,
7. **Encourage** the design and implementation of inclusive Early Childhood Development programmes including children with special needs, children living in underserved and resource poor communities, children on the move, children affected by adverse climatic events, and children caught in the crosshairs of intercommunity, national and international conflicts,
8. **Deliberately** create coalitions with other stakeholders to expand the reach of Early Childhood Development services. These coalitions include with faith leaders and community groups including women's groups,
9. **Advocate** for the full implementation of international childcare instruments that have been ratified by governments in Southern Africa, and
10. **Promote** the availability of quality ECD Data and improve translation and utilization of existing research evidence to improve the quality of services. These include evidence on best practices and successful models of childcare interventions to promote ECD including learning through play models and contextually workable childcare options.

Agreed/Drafted, Resolved in Lusaka, Zambia 30<sup>th</sup>

March 2023