



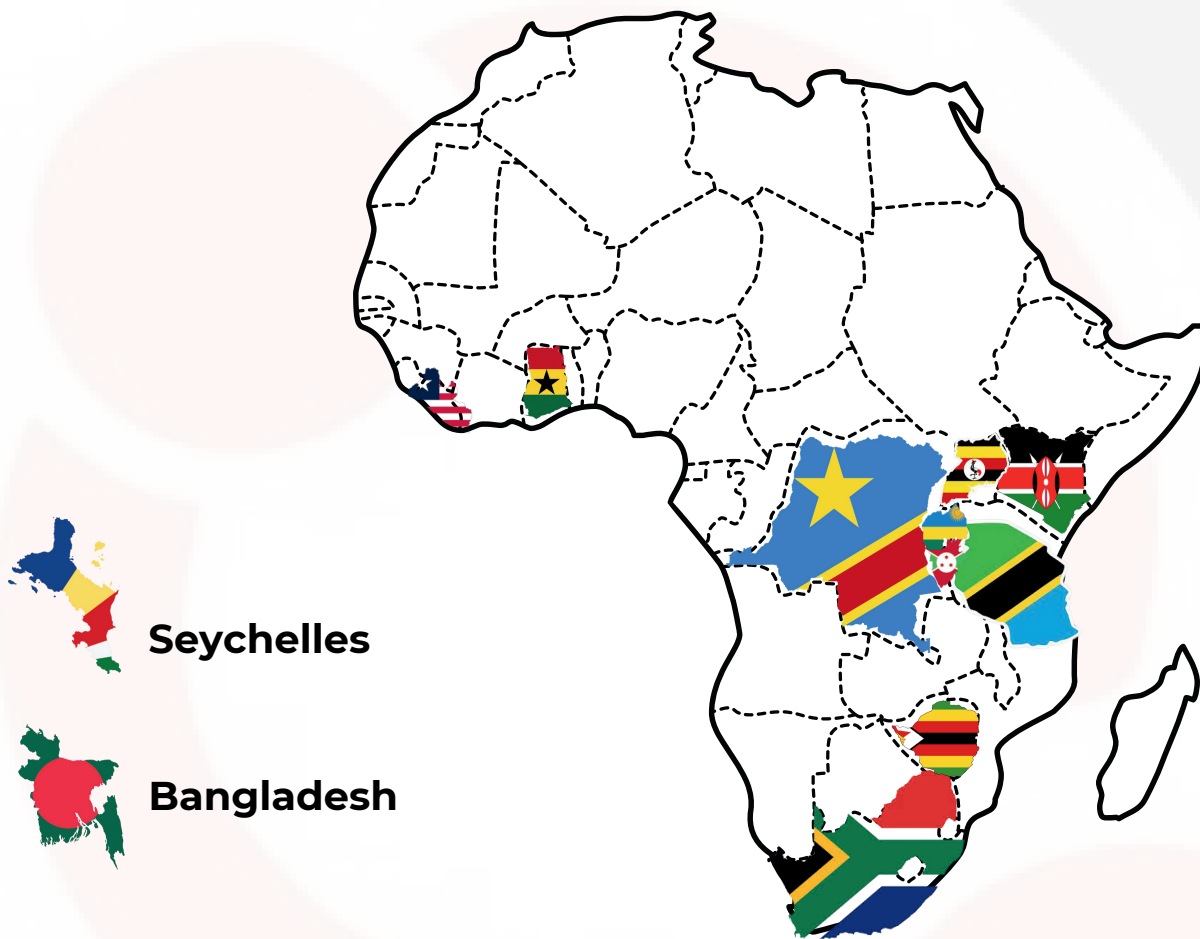
The Kigali Commitments on Early Childhood Care and Development.

**Adopted at the Africa Childcare
Forum (ACFKigali2025),
6-9 May 2025**

*Theme: Strengthening Evidence,
Accelerating Action.*

Preamble

We, the participants of the Africa Childcare Forum (ACFKigali2025), representing governments, civil society organizations, grassroots caregivers, development partners, the private sector, academia, and regional institutions from across Africa and beyond, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, South Africa, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, Ghana and Bangladesh, have gathered in Kigali with unwavering conviction: that the transformation of childcare systems in Africa and globally is not optional: it is urgent, just, and foundational to Africa's future.



We gathered with the shared belief that quality, affordable, and inclusive childcare is a fundamental right, a catalyst for gender equality, and a cornerstone of Africa's socio-economic transformation. Yet across the continent, millions of children, especially those from low-income and rural communities, lack access to safe and nurturing early childhood care. Women, particularly those in informal employment, continue to shoulder the burden of unpaid care work, often without recognition, protection, or institutional support. Those in paid care continue to work in unsafe environments where policies and regulations are unsupportive. The childcare workforce remains largely invisible, underpaid and excluded from labour protections. Meanwhile, childcare systems are fragmented, policies remain underdeveloped or poorly implemented, financing is inconsistent and coordination across sectors is weak.

In response to these challenges, the Forum convened over 25 presentations and high-level policy dialogues—including plenary sessions, spotlight innovations, and partner-led discussions—showcasing transformative models, bold lessons, and urgent calls to action from across Africa and Asia.

We therefore issue this communiqué as a united commitment to reimagine and rebuild childcare and early learning systems that are resilient, equitable, and sustainable anchored in African realities, powered by community leadership, and aligned with continental development aspirations.

Forum Objectives

The Africa Childcare Forum was organized to:

1. Catalyze a continental conversation on the urgent need to reform childcare systems in Africa.
2. Showcase innovations and evidence-based practices in Early Childhood Care, Education and Development (ECCED).
3. Build momentum for national, regional and continental policy and financing reforms.
4. Foster partnerships, collaboration and coalitions across sectors and countries to sustain collective action for childcare.
5. Lay the groundwork for a Continental Childcare Compact and Africa-wide accountability framework.

What Is Working: Innovations, Best Practices and Learnings for Scale

We acknowledge and commend the following promising practices and learnings:

- **Community-led and Home-Based Childcare (HBCC)** models in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Liberia, which are building trust, creating jobs and anchoring care in local culture and social networks.
- **Public-private partnerships** in South Africa and Ghana that have unlocked co-financing for workplace childcare, improved standards, and catalyzed innovation through corporate social responsibility.
- **National policy reforms** in countries such as Seychelles, South Africa and Zimbabwe, where care work is being progressively integrated into national development strategies and gender budgeting frameworks.
- **Childcare entrepreneurship hubs** and incubators especially those led by women which are transforming informal caregivers into recognized service providers through access to training, capital and markets.
- **Male engagement programs** and fatherhood campaigns from Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi that challenge regressive gender norms and promote shared caregiving.



- **Digital solutions** for caregiver training, data collection, and parental engagement being piloted in Bangladesh, Malawi, and Kenya, offering cost-effective and scalable tools to strengthen ECCED systems.
- **Integrated service delivery models** linking childcare with nutrition, social protection, and early learning in Sierra Leone and the DRC, which have improved developmental outcomes for children in vulnerable settings.
- **Local government leadership** in counties and municipalities that have prioritized childcare through localized policy frameworks and direct budget allocations.

These innovations demonstrate that when childcare is understood as an investment in human capital, gender equality and inclusive development, not merely a social service, transformative change is both achievable and scalable.

As such, the Forum reaffirms the need to invest in and scale these evidence-based solutions across the continent through political leadership, regional cooperation and catalytic financing.

What Is Working: Innovations, Best Practices and Learnings for Scale

Through high-level policy exchanges, technical sessions, and multi-country reflections, the Forum surfaced the following urgent and interconnected challenges that continue to undermine the realization of quality, inclusive, and equitable Early Childhood Care, Education and Development (ECCED) in Africa:

1. Persistent Informality and Fragmentation of Childcare Provision

- Childcare services across much of the continent remain unregulated, informal and inconsistent in quality. This fragmentation limits oversight, hinders standardization and perpetuates inequality in access and outcomes.

2. Chronic Underinvestment and Budgetary Neglect

- Most governments have yet to allocate consistent, adequate funding for ECCED, leaving community and family-based systems overstretched and donor-dependent. Childcare is largely absent from national development budgets and plans.

3. Invisibility and Exploitation of Care Workers

- Care providers predominantly women—operate in informal or unpaid roles without legal protections, fair remuneration, or access to training. Their essential contributions to early childhood development and national productivity remain unrecognized and undervalued.

4. Entrenched Gender Norms and Unpaid Care Inequities

- Deep-rooted cultural and societal norms continue to assign caregiving to women and girls, limiting their access to education, formal employment and leadership opportunities. This care penalty reinforces cycles of gendered poverty and inequality.

5. Weak Policy Implementation and Enforcement Gaps

- Even where childcare-related policies exist, they suffer from poor operationalization, lack of accountability and insufficient inter-ministerial coordination. Institutional fragmentation undermines effective delivery and oversight.



6. Lack of Robust, Disaggregated Data and Research

- National data systems fail to collect and use gender-disaggregated and age-specific information on ECCED. This data gap impairs planning, monitoring and evidence-informed policymaking.

7. Systemic Exclusion of Adolescent Mothers and Children with Disabilities

- Current childcare systems often exclude vulnerable populations especially adolescent mothers, children with disabilities and those in humanitarian or fragile settings further entrenching social and economic marginalization.

8. Disconnect Between Early Childhood and Broader Development Planning

- Childcare is not sufficiently integrated into macroeconomic, health, education, labour and social protection policies. This siloed approach misses the multiplier impact of childcare on long-term development outcomes.

9. Limited Private Sector and Employer Engagement

- Despite growing recognition of the productivity gains from supporting childcare, most employers have not invested in family-friendly policies or workplace childcare models, missing a key opportunity for shared responsibility.

10. Inadequate Community and Local Government Empowerment

- Local governments and grassroots organizations are under-resourced and underutilized despite being closest to families and well-positioned to design contextually relevant childcare solutions.

11. Digital Divide and Limited Technological Innovation in Childcare

- While digital platforms offer promising tools for training, service coordination, and parental engagement, the lack of connectivity and digital literacy in rural and underserved areas limits scale and inclusion.

12. Limited Regional Coordination and Absence of Binding Continental Commitments

- The African Union and Regional Economic Communities have yet to fully prioritize childcare as core to continental development. This limits political momentum, shared accountability and cross-border learning.

13. Unaddressed Mental Health Needs of Care Providers and Recipients

- The psychological toll on caregivers, many of whom work in precarious, unsupported conditions, is often overlooked, as are the emotional and developmental consequences on children in unstable or overstressed environments. Prolonged stress, trauma and burnout among caregivers directly affect the quality of care and early childhood outcomes. Yet mental health remains underfunded, stigmatized, and disconnected from ECCED interventions.



Forum Commitments and Collective Actions

In light of the urgent challenges and inspired by emerging innovations and evidence, we commit to catalyzing action across the following eight priority areas. These commitments will be advanced through advocacy, partnerships, and collective leadership by governments, civil society, private sector actors, caregivers and development partners.

1. Policy and Legal Reform

- Call on governments to adopt, fully fund and implement comprehensive national care and ECCED policies that are rights-based, gender-responsive and inclusive.
- Urge alignment of childcare policies with national development strategies, Agenda 2063, the SDGs and AU frameworks on child and women's rights.
- Promote the establishment of inter-ministerial and multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms to drive policy coherence and accountability.
- Advocate for the harmonization of fragmented regulations and the integration of ECCED in education, labour, health, gender and social protection frameworks.



Dr. Javier Rose, Chair of the Seychelles Institute of Early Childhood Development, presented the Seychelles Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education to Asayya Imaya. Looking on were IECD CEO Shirley Choppy and Chryspin Afifu, Gender and WEE Specialist at ICRW.

2. Sustainable Financing for Childcare Systems

- Urge governments to create dedicated ECCED budget lines targeting 1.5%–2.5% of national budgets and prioritize childcare in public expenditure tracking systems.
- Support the development of financing guidelines and monitoring frameworks to track investments and social returns in childcare.
- Promote fiscal decentralization and resource allocation to sub-national entities to enable local planning and delivery of childcare services.
- Leverage innovative financing models including employer contributions, social impact bonds, diaspora remittances, and blended finance instruments.
- Institutionalize financing guidelines and M&E frameworks that track care investments, expenditures and social returns at national and sub-national levels.

3. Workforce Development, Protection, and Dignity

- Advocate for the formalization and professional recognition of childcare workers, supported through structured training, certification and decent remuneration.
- Call on governments and TVET institutions to institutionalize caregiver training curricula and career pathways for ECCED workers.
- Promote the extension of social protection schemes, including health coverage, maternity leave, and pension contributions to formal and informal childcare providers.
- Challenge harmful stereotypes through public campaigns that elevate care work as skilled, dignified and essential to national development.

4. Localization, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship

- Support efforts to scale up culturally appropriate and community-driven childcare models, including Home-Based Childcare (HBCC) and women-led initiatives.
- Promote investment in care entrepreneurship, especially for women and youth, through access to capital, incubation and market linkages.
- Urge for funding that is responsive to the needs of local organisations, particularly new innovations that are emerging, reducing the dominance of a few agencies in ecosystems.
- Advocate for the integration of digital tools for service delivery, parental engagement and remote caregiver training.
- Encourage governments and partners to document and adapt promising practices to local realities and institutionalize innovation labs and learning platforms.

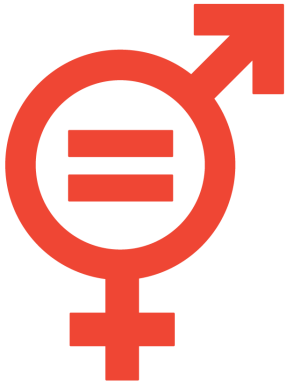
5. Data, Evidence, and Accountability Mechanisms

- Call for the establishment of national childcare data systems that are gender-disaggregated, harmonized and integrated with national statistics and planning frameworks.
- Urge the use of evidence and monitoring data in shaping policies, allocating budgets and improving service design.
- Promote open-access data sharing among governments, researchers and civil society to foster transparency, mutual accountability, and impact measurement.
- Advocate for the regular tracking of equity and inclusion indicators, particularly for adolescent mothers, children with disabilities and children in fragile settings.

6. Continental Leadership and Regional Integration

- Urge the African Union and RECs to prioritize care and ECCED as core pillars of socio-economic development and regional integration strategies.
- Urge African governments to establish centralized coordination mechanisms for childcare to enhance coherence, reduce duplication, and ensure effective oversight across relevant sectors and agencies.
- Co-develop the development of a Continental Childcare Compact and Action Plan 2030, endorsed by AU member states and development partners.
- Support the creation of an African Care Alliance to connect policymakers, feminist economists, employers and grassroots actors driving care economy reform.
- Promote the institutionalization of the Africa Childcare Forum as a recurring annual convening for evidence sharing, policy dialogue and continental accountability.





7. Gender Equality and Shared Responsibility

- Advocate for the adoption of gender-transformative care policies, including equitable parental leave, workplace flexibility and shared caregiving incentives.
- Promote community-level engagement with men, religious and traditional leaders to challenge regressive gender norms and encourage shared responsibility.
- Call for inclusive program design that addresses the needs of diverse caregiving contexts, adolescent mothers, single-parent households and children with disabilities.
- Align care interventions with women's economic empowerment strategies, recognizing unpaid care as a barrier to full participation in public and economic life.

8. Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing

- Promote the integration of mental health services into ECCED programming, including caregiver wellness, trauma-informed care and parental support.
- Advocate for investment in mental health infrastructure, especially in under-resourced, post-conflict or high-stress environments.
- Call on governments and health systems to destigmatize mental health and provide accessible community-based psychosocial services.
- Encourage caregiver training to include emotional development and stress mitigation for both children and providers.

Conclusion

These commitments represent a collective call to action. We urge African governments and their partners to translate these recommendations into national roadmaps, legislative reforms, institutional frameworks and budgetary commitments. The future of Africa's children and of inclusive, gender-just economies depends on the bold and sustained prioritization of care.

We, the undersigned, leave Kigali committed to action, partnership and transformation. We will carry this momentum into our parliaments, ministries, communities, boardrooms, media platforms and donor tables. Furthermore, we commit to reconvening at the ACFMombasa2026 to further affirm these commitments and continue together to accelerate quality, affordable childcare for all.

Let this communiqué serve as both a declaration of intent and a framework for accountability anchored in the unwavering belief that childcare is not a burden to be managed, but a right to be fulfilled and an investment to be prioritized.



Endorsed by participants from the following organisations:



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION



Ushirika wa Maendeleo ya Elimu Barani Afrika
 الرابطة لأجل تطوير التربية في إفريقيا
 Association for the Development of Education in Africa
 Association pour le développement de l'éducation en Afrique
 Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Educação em África



TECDEN
 TANZANIA EARLY CHILDHOOD
 DEVELOPMENT NETWORK



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Stellar Mengele Foundation





Signed in Kigali, Rwanda

On 9th Day of May, 2025

Asayya Imaya

Asayya Imaya
Convenor, Collaborative Action for Childcare
CEO & Founder, Uthabiti Africa

