



Conference Report on KU-WEE Hub Participation in the Eastern Africa Regional Early Childhood Conference

11th March 2024 – 14th March 2024

Mwalimu Julius Nyerere International Conference Centre, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania

By

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Introduction

EARC conference was held in Dar Es Salaam on 11th to 14th March, 2024. The conference theme was, “Investing in Early Childhood: Building Human Capital along the Life Course”. The purpose of the conference was to provide a platform for taking stock of the status of early childhood in the East African region and sharing knowledge and learning on how to take innovative models of quality early childhood interventions to scale. The conference brought together a diverse group of early childhood actors from across the globe, including policy makers, researchers, CSOs, academia, funders, early childhood practitioners, and government ministries, departments, agencies to discuss and make concrete deliberations on early childhood investment trajectory in Eastern Africa.

Conference Sub Themes:

The conference sub-themes included: Empowering parents, caregivers, and communities; Systems strengthening with a spotlight on workforce development; Monitoring progress focusing on data/evidence generation, dissemination and utilization; Financing at both micro and macro-levels; Leadership and Governance; and Scaling up and Innovating.

Opening of the Conference and Guest Speakers

The meeting was graced by the Minister of Community Development, Gender, Women, and Special Groups, Dr. Dorothy Gwajima who was representing Her Excellency Samia Suluhu Hassan President of the Republic of Tanzania. The Conference was organized by the African Early Childhood Network (AfECN) in partnership with the African Union Continental Education Strategy for Africa Early Childhood Education and Development (AU CESA ECED) Cluster and

the Tanzania Early Childhood Development Network. CESA aim to “Delivering Quality Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Development (IECD) Services in Africa and Asia Pacific Regions”. The strategy is driven by the desire to set up a “qualitative system of education and training to provide the African continent with efficient human resources adapted to African core values and therefore capable of achieving the vision and ambitions of the African Union.

Dr Gwajima in the President’s speech indicated that the work on generating evidence is important for policy reform in East Africa Community (EAC). She said that the Tanzania government was interested on partnership to advance the agenda of the preschool education for all children including children with disability.



Prof. Simon Onywere having a chat with Prof. Mary Getui, Boad Chairperson of AFECN. Mr. David Aduda, Media Specialist in Kenya and Dr. Sara Ruto, Former CAS, Ministry of Education. Kenya

Among the guest speakers in the opening ceremony included Prof Mary Getui, Board Chair African Early Childhood Network and a former Dean at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kenyatta University; Mr. Mohammed Nkinde, Board Chair of the Tanzania Early Childhood Development Network (TECDEN); Mr. Peter Laugharn President and CEO of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and Ms. Etleva Kadilli, UNICEF Regional Director. The full agenda of the conference is appended to this report.

KU-WEE Hub Participation at the AFECN Conference 2024

Kenyatta University Women’s Economic Empowerment Hub (KU-WEE Hub) was represented at the conference by Prof Simon Onywere, the PI of The Tharaka Nithi RCT Childcare Intervention Project and Ms. Dorothy Naivasha, Co-PI and CECM Tharaka Nithi County, Education and Vocational Training Department. The Hub had an exhibition boot where they showcased two posters on the RCT Intervention project and some publication products from the Hub. Prof Onywere was part of the Panel Discussant in a panel moderated by Dr. Sara Ruto - Programme Officer, ECHIDNA GIVING and the immediate former Chief Administrative Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Kenya, during Plenary Session 3 on Children and Families.

8:45 - 10:15 PLENARY SESSION SELOUS HALL	SESSION 3: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Session Chair: Lucy Minayo - Executive Director, NURTUREFIRST Keynote Speakers 1. Investing in Childcare to Build Human Capital, Ms. Amanda Devercelli - Global Lead for Early Childhood Development, WORLD BANK 2. Family Friendly Policies: Good for Children, Women and Economies, Dr. Oliver Petrovic - Regional Adviser, Early Childhood Development, UNICEF ESARO 3. My Story: Ms. Wangeci Kihara – Founder, THE MOTHERSHIP VILLAGE Panellists • Ms. Elizabeth Gitonga – Programme Manager, THE AFRICAN NETWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (AfECN) • Tulio S. Masanja- Assistant Commissioner for Social Welfare, Ministry of Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups, TANZANIA • Prof. Simon Onywere - Research Associate, KENYATTA UNIVERSITY WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT HUB (KU-WEE)
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Prof. Onywere and Ms. Naivasha with one of the participants at the KU-WEE Hub Stand at the AfECN Conference

The poster presentations were on:

- Randomized Control Trial Childcare Intervention Programme: Non-random Mapping of Status of Pre-primary Schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya.
- A Randomized Control Trial of the Effects of a Preschool Intervention on Child Learning and Women’s Economic Empowerment in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya.

The KU-WEE Hub was among the national advocacy partners that had an exhibition space to showcase its work and the progress since inception of the RCT Childcare Intervention Project. The booth gave opportunity to showcase intervention the stakeholders interested in learning more about the work and to network and engage in discussions regarding potential areas for collaboration.



Panel discussion on Children and Families

Two Other Hub Researchers were in the conference in different capacities:

1. Dr Teresa Mwoma, from Early Childhood Development Network for Kenya (ECDNeK), who made a presentation under the Sub-theme on Strengthening Systems - Ensuring nurturing care for all: How collecting systems-level indicators contributes to change in East Africa and made a case for *Strengthening ECD Systems in Kenya: A Collaborative Research Approach*. She also had a Roundtable discussion on: *Empowering parents, caregivers, and communities*.
2. Prof. Orazio Antonasio of Yale University: In a breakaway forum organized by the Oxford Policy Management



Dr Mwoma in a Roundtable discussion on: Empowering parents, caregivers, & communities



Prof. Orazio Antonasio of Yale University seated second left keenly follows the comments by Hon. Dr Pius Chaya MP for Manyoni East, Singinda region of Tanzania



From Left, Dorothy Naivasha of Tharaka Nithi County and Co-PI in the RCT curriculum Childcare Intervention project pose for a photo at the KU-WEE Stand with Prof. Orazio Antonasio of Yale University and PI in the project and Elaine Wacuka, Director Policy & Partnerships at Kidogo.

COMMENTS FROM THOSE WHO SIGNED THE KU-WEE VISITORS

Excellent and looking forward to the findings – Care International

Great to See my Alma Mater doing groundbreaking research – Keep going – Dr Sara Ruto former Chief Administrative Secretary (CAS) Ministry of Education Kenya.

What an honour to listen to your work and observe the changes you are making, contributing to WEE Upwards and Onwards – Dr. Jacklyn Makaanu Arinaitwe, member, Uganda Education Policy Review Commission and a Director of Ace Policy Research Institute – a research, advisory, and consultancy firm.

I like the idea/concept of the project

Keep the good work to empower women economically

Excellent work let us collaborate – D-Tree

Interested in Partnerships to enhance issues of children with disabilities – Action for Children with Disabilities

The work on generating evidence is important for policy reform in EAC – OPML, UK

Excellent and looking forward to the findings – Care International

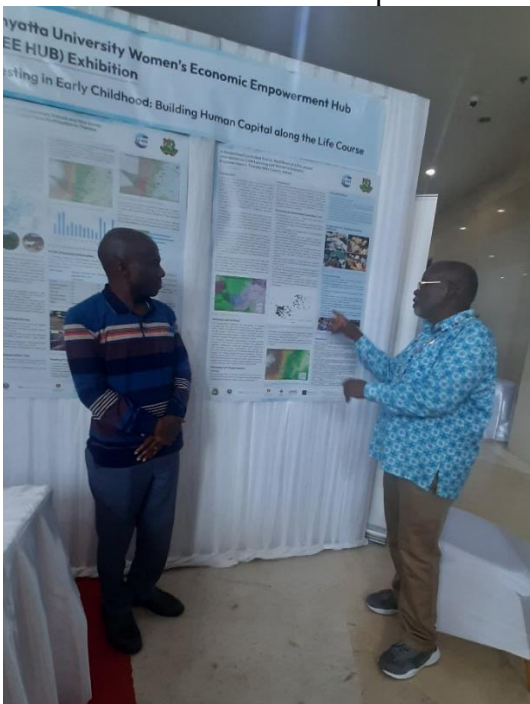


From right, Dr Sara Ruto former CAS Minsitry of Education Kenya and Dr Jacklyn Makaaru member of the Uganda Education Policy Review Commission catching up with Maureen Kapiyo of Care International while Dorothy Naivasha, ECEM Education and Vocational Training in Tharaka Nithi county (seated) and Co-PI in the project looks on



Dr Sara Ruto and David Aduda (Communication specialist (center) having a light moment with Lisa Bohiner of Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (Right) while Dr Dr Jacklyn Makaaru prepares to sign visitors book at the KU-WEE Hub Stand

We were also privileged to receive and explain to Hon. Dr Pius Chaya MP for Manyoni East, Singinda region of Tanzania about the RCT Curriculum Intervention project. Dr. Pius Chaya is an expert of Public Policy and Planning and served before in the Land, Natural Resource and Tourism Committee of the Parliament of Tanzania. He is now a member of Public Investment Committee (PIC) of the Parliament of Tanzania. He stated thus “investment in children is the key and fundamental to the development of Africa”



Hon. Dr Pius Chaya MP for Manyoni East, Singinda region of Tanzania, keenly follows prof Onywere explaining the RCT Design



Hon. Dr Pius Chaya signs the visitors book at the KU-WEE Hub Boot at the AFECN Conference

In his remarks during one of the breakaway session convened by Prof. Orazio Antonasio of Yale University, Dr Chaya commented that the evidence coming from the researches and intervention activities that were being presented in AFECN conference were for two audiences were to support:

- Programing – for programme implementers
- For changing systems, policies and regulations

Both are relevant, however there is lack of clear plans or systems on how to change policies and systems at the same time. This would require not only engagement with Government through cabinet and technical department but also involvement of the policy makers, at the level of members of Parliament. He asserted that to change policies on ECDE would require community engagement to support infrastructure development and use while also requiring members of parliament to influence government to put in place systems that support ECDE. This is done in budgeting by government departments and supported at Parliament. There is need to enhance to improve systems that supports development of ECDE. “How are you going to engage members of Parliament when you have developed your policies? So that they can push government to implement?” Dr Chaya asked?



Prof. Amina Abubakary, Director Institute of Human Development Aga Khan University Nairobi receives a walk through the Poster from Prof. Onywere



Labour and Social Protection CS Florence Bore addressing part of the Kenya delegation to the AFECN Conference. Among the delegates was Prof Mary Getui (in blue dress) Chairperson of AFECN Board and formerly Dean of School of Social sciences at KU, Oscar Kadenge (standing next to CS) Chairperson of ECDE Network, Kenya

Conclusion

The participation of the KU-WEE Researchers in the AFECN Platform increased the visibility of the Hub in the Global arena and provide a chance to the researchers to discuss and network with stakeholders in Children’s research and with Policy stakeholders. Many of the stakeholders were:

- Interested in the RCT Intervention design

- Were looking forward to the data from the RCT intervention
- Are interested in networking in various areas touching on child care and especially on children with disabilities.
- The approach to location-based decisions in the design as discussed in the panel discussion attracted interest
- Kenyan ECDE Stakeholders from the various counties present did express interest on the possibility of uptake of the intervention

Recommendations

- We recommend packaging the RCT Intervention process and to start early publishing of the intervention and its outcome especially as they will be informed by the baseline data.
- More engagement of the RCT Staff exhibition to give more room for the researchers to engage with the work of other researchers from across the globe
- Targeting conferences in other regions of the world with a similar interest