

**East Africa Early Childhood Development Network Conference
March 11-14 2024**

**NURTURING CARE FRAMEWORK: ADAPTING TO CONTEXTUAL
REALITIES & ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCERS**

SESSION HIGHLIGHT

The most effective strategies for early child development during the first 1000 days of a child's life involve enhancing nurturing relationships between caregivers and their children. In this interactive session, subject matter experts from Episcopal Relief & Development, Girl Effect/Tanzania, Anglican Development Services (ADS) Nyanza, Kenya, and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Tanzania discuss three "environmental influencers" that equally impact child caregiving and child development. You'll learn about the "relationship environment," the "natural and cultural environment" and the "systemic environment." Panelists will discuss risk factors that exist in each category, offering insights about how they differ depending on context and how they can be addressed by adapting the Nurturing Care Framework to fit local reality. Join us for engaging presentations, small group discussions, and shared learning!

Panelists:

Geraldine Sicola - Director Early Childhood Development, Episcopal Relief & Development
Rita Mbebe – Country Director, Girl Effect Tanzania
Gordon Onyango Abwajoh, Community Resilience & Household Economic Strengthening Coordinator – Anglican Development Services (ADS) Nyanza, Kenya
Charles Fungo - Program Manager (ECD), Catholic Relief Services Tanzania

NURTURING CARE FRAMEWORK: ADAPTING TO CONTEXTUAL REALITIES & ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCERS

PURPOSE: This learning session will demonstrate how the Nurturing Care Framework provides a roadmap for a holistic approach to nurturing relationships for children, **and** a strong platform for context-specific adaptations that are addressing other environmental risks to child development as they play out in E. Africa.



This learning session will:

1. Share how the Nurturing Care Framework is being used and adapted to address some contextual risk conditions for children in three environmental categories: “environmental relationships”, “built & natural environments” (including culture), “systemic environment”.
2. Highlight the importance and increasing practice of advocacy by influential faith leaders in promoting ECD in communities and with policy makers to advance systemic change.

3. Identify with participants other contextual realities that might be addressed with adaptations to the Nurturing Care Framework.

Background

We have long known that some of the most effective evidence-based strategies for child development during the critical stage of the first 1000 days of a child's life involve enhancing responsive relationships between caregivers and their children. In 2004, the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (Harvard University) made the scientific case that children develop and thrive in a healthy “environment of relationships”¹ that focus mainly on caregivers, their own well-being and relationship with their children.

Many early childhood development programs and interventions focus on children 0-3 and their caregivers to strengthen key protective factors, including access to health care and nutrition, social norms and behavior change related to feeding practices, responsive caregiving, protection & safety, and stimulation through early learning and play opportunities, all within the category of “environmental relationships”. Yet today, millions of young children are not reaching their full potential. An analysis of strategies aimed at improving child development shows that to achieve adequate development of children, multi-sectoral interventions are required.²

More recently, science is telling us that the **influencers of child development go beyond immediate nurturing relationships**. These are a necessary but not sufficient condition.³ According to recent evidence there are two other “environmental influencers” i.e., the “built and natural environment” (housing, infrastructure, access to water, climate change, culture), and “systemic environments” (policies and resources) which equally influence child caregiving relationships and child development.

While the context of these findings and recommendations are focused on the Global North, the categories of “environmental influencers” are relevant in the Global South though play out differently with specific risks shaped by the local experience. In Africa, for example, the most prevalent risk factors in those categories of “environmental influencers” include poverty & inequity, climate change, food insecurity, culture, and availability of services and resources.

¹ “Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships” (2004) National Scientific Council on the Developing Child

² Britto PR, Lye SJ, Proulx K, Yousafzai AK, Matthews SG, Vaivada T, et al. Nurturing care: Promoting early childhood development. *Lancet*. (2017) 389:91–102. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31390-3

³ “Place Matters: The Environment We Create Shapes the Foundation for Healthy Development”, (2023) National Council on the Developing Child

Format: 2 hours – Panel Presentations & Breakout Session Discussions.

Session I Presentations & Discussion (1hour 20 minutes)

**Moderated by: Geraldine Sicola, Director Early Childhood Development
Episcopal Relief & Development**

Welcome & Introduction

Presentations:

Girl Effect/Tanzania – Rita Mbeba, Country Director, will speak to the “relationship environment” in the Masai and Meru communities and the role of grandmothers as caregivers. In-depth formative research with young caregivers and other community members is informing the content creation for interventions that will influence child-rearing. Testimonies will be shared on how awareness creation sessions with young parents have elevated their responsive caregiving skills and how men, particularly, have become more involved in parenting. (15 minutes)

ADS/Nyanza – Gordon Onyango Abwajoh, Community Resilience & Household Economic Strengthening Coordinator, will focus on the integration of ECD and the conditions of the “natural and cultural environments” from the *Moments that Matter*® program, an integrated ECD program partnership with Episcopal Relief & Development: a.) the integration of climate resilience and Savings with Education⁴ to address food insecurity, nutrition & poverty; b.) faith leader engagement tackling the cultural environment especially related to gender; c.) multi-stakeholder community ownership that can contribute to a conducive “systemic environment”.
(15 minutes)

CRS/Tanzania – Charles Fungo Program Manager (ECD), will make the case for why faith systems and leaders are important actors in addressing the “systemic environment”. Faith leaders advocating for children’s well-being are well placed to be champions for ECD within their congregations/communities and in the wider policy arena in Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique. Nearly 85% of people worldwide are affiliated with a religious faith, including in sub-Saharan Africa⁵. As engaged community members faith leaders understand the culture, beliefs, and other factors that may influence child development outcomes. By profession, faith leaders are experienced public speakers with access to large numbers of people through their houses of worship and other community forums. Because they are trusted they play a powerful role in shaping attitudes, opinions, and behaviors, and are powerful advocates that can influence their governments for conducive policy and a responsive financing environment for ECD.
(15 minutes)

Participant Reflections

- A. Considering these presentations what is one thing that you heard that you are curious about? What is one thing that surprises you?
- B. Share in your table groups.
- C. Each table select 1 thing you are curious about and one that surprises you.

Participant Sharing/Panelists Response/Discussion

⁴ Savings with Education (SWE) is a highly replicable community-based and savings-led microfinance program where 15-25 individuals gather into weekly meetings, save a self-selected amount into a common fund, and lend the fund to one another.

⁵ Pew Research Center. The Future of World Religions. Accessed May 3, 2021.
<http://globalreligiousfutures.org/>

Session II – Participant Group Work (20 minutes)

We heard presents on contextual realities and environmental conditions that impact child development in the areas of culture, climate, and how they are being addressed.

- A. In your table groups, share your experience with environmental conditions that are impacting ECD. What other contextual realities are obstacles to ECD? How might they be addressed with adaptations to the NCF?
- B. Please select one or two that your group would like to share with the larger group.

Session III – Feedback/Discussion: (15 minutes)

Adding to the Nurturing Care Framework.
We will hear from each table group.

Closing