



SCORE-ECD NEWSLETTER

Edition 2

CONRAD N.



FOUNDATION



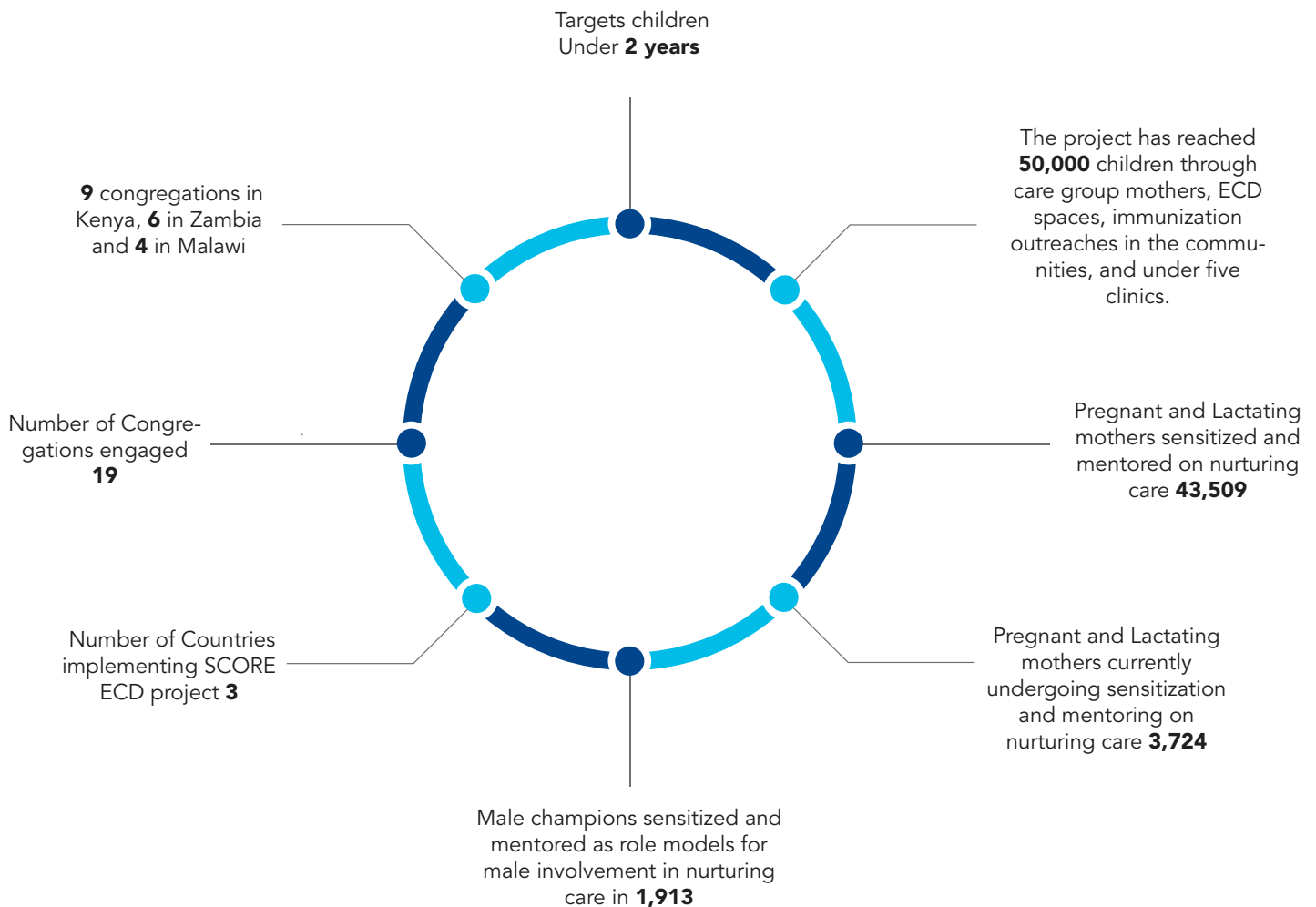
About SCORE ECD II

Strengthening the Capacity of Religious Women in Early Childhood Development (SCORE ECD II) is funded by Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (CNHF). The project builds the capacity of Catholic sisters in Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia to expand provision of quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) services. Now in its second phase (2017-2021), SCORE ECD II engages 19 congregations through the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA), the National Associations in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia with activities designed to increase their technical capacity in ECD, organizational sustainability, networking and learning around ECD.

Project Goal and Objectives

The overarching project's goal is that children under 2 years (CU2) in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia thrive in a sustainable culture of care and support. To that end the project is pursuing three strategic objectives:

- (i). Children under 2 years attain age-appropriate developmental milestones.
- (ii). Sister organizations sustain ECD at national and sub national levels. Crosscutting.
- (iii). Stronger sister organizations assume greater ownership of ECD services.



Strategic Partnerships to Enhance ECD in Kenya – Siaya County

The SCORE ECD project works through a network of stakeholders to enhance early childhood development in Kenya. One of the strategic partnerships that the project has cultivated over the years is working closely with the county government.

SMART Start Siaya is one of the initiatives under the County Government of Siaya that SCORE ECD collaborates. Founded in April 2018, SMART Start Siaya focuses on scaling up Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Siaya County.

Dr Elizabeth says that their goal is to support all the children in Siaya to reach their full potential. "We want our children to not only survive but thrive, meaning no child should be left behind.



In collaboration with SCORE ECD Project and other partners, SMART Start Siaya is targeting children below the age of 5 years to ensure they receive nurturing care. This is achieved by sensitizing caregivers and communities to adopt nurturing care practices that respond to the child's needs, including health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, early learning, security and safety and child protection.

Dr Elizabeth Omondi serves as the technical advisor for SMART Start Siaya. "This initiative supports the County Government of Siaya to scale up nurturing care for early childhood development. Siaya county was recording poor health indicators, especially child health indicators.

The county was already investing in child health interventions, but the gains were limited despite the heavy investment," said Dr Elizabeth.

Elizabeth says that on realizing little gains, the county government decided to map out stakeholders supporting child health and brought them together to try and establish why they were the poor indicators and come up with effective strategies to address them.



The county government leadership then established a team comprising representatives from various organizations working in child health, including CRS, UNICEF, Path, among other organizations.

"We realized that organizations were working in silos, and there was the need for better and effective coordination to maximize gains. We also realized that we needed to have a common goal," Dr Elizabeth said. "The organizations came together under the leadership of the county government and developed a strategy to work as a team. This is what brought forth Smart Start Siaya," she added.

Dr Elizabeth says that they looked at each organization's strength and area of influence as an entry point to enhance children's wellbeing with the strategy in place. For instance, SCORE ECD is working through the catholic sisters, who work with communities and so for us to reach a wider congregations, SCORE ECD came in handy," Dr Elizabeth said.

"We did not stop at that; we also brought other faith-based institutions like the Anglican Diocese Services to reach the Anglican congregation and the Seventh Day Adventist Church," she added.

The initiative also works with the private sector. Dr Elizabeth says that their goal is to support all the children in Siaya to reach their full potential. "We want our children to not only survive but thrive, meaning no child should be left behind.

Working with CRS through the SCORE ECD project, SMART Start Siaya conducted a baseline survey to identify gaps in nurturing care. Dr Elizabeth says that one of the issues identified is maternal Mental Health which is crucial in ensuring that mothers take care of themselves and their children wellbeing, "We realized that caregivers might not be nurturing their children well because of psychological issues. For a mother to breastfeed her baby well, she needs to be psychologically stable.

Through SCORE ECD project, we are sensitizing and mentoring teenage mothers on nurturing care. We also engage them to process their new role and guide them through parenthood.

Working with CRS and her partners through the SCORE ECD Project through, Siaya County Government is bringing men on board to take full role in childcare.



"For a long-time, men were not actively engaged in childcare. Not because they don't want to, but they lacked clear guidance on their role on responsive caregiving right from conception of a child. Through the SCORE ECD project, we now have ECD male champions who are helping in sensitizing the other males on their roles in child rearing, for instance from the in the records we get at the hospitals, more males are now accompanying their wives for antenatal care and post-natal care. she added.

Dr Elizabeth said. "In Siaya County, we have most of the mothers as teenagers. This is a group that undergoes a lot of trauma because they are children who have become parents at an early age," she added.

Dr Elizabeth says that for long we have concentrated on the children other than both the mothers and their children, SCORFE ECD project showed us that to help the children grow and thrive, there is need to target both the mothers and their children, and this was an eye opener for us.

The key challenge that Smart Start Siaya has encountered is the change in the political wing at the county level. "When the role of a leader at the county government ends, they assume that their role in the initiative has ended too. This hinders continuity, and so we have resorted to grouping them as champions so they can continue enhancing ECD in the community," she said.

"The other challenge is the pandemic that has slowed down activities, especially the ones that require bringing people together," she concluded.

"At the onset of the pandemic, caregivers withdrew from taking children to the health facilities for fear of contracting COVID-19 at the health facilities. This meant that many children were missing out on immunization and growth monitoring," she added. Dr Elizabeth says that they resorted to sending SMS messages to caregivers to remind them of the importance of taking their children to health facilities and other age-appropriate services.

Together with the partners in Siaya, Smart Start Siaya has launched several campaigns with the recent one referred to as "Nyathi en Mwandu" [a child is wealth]. The campaign advocates for caregivers to give their children good health, adequate nutrition, and safety.

Role of Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) in Enhancing ECD

Christine Akinyi Oyuga is a Community Health Volunteer (CHV) in Lawak, LWAK Siaya County. Christine supports the implementations of the SCORE ECD project by sensitizing caregivers on nurturing care practices.

"As a CHV, I conduct ECD sensitization through caregiver groups. We meet weekly and discuss various issues that contribute to the wellbeing of children between the age of zero to two years," Christine said. "Some of these issues include nutrition, responsive caregiving, children's health, safety and security hygiene promotion that contribute to children's development and encouraging pregnant and lactating mothers to attend pre-and post-natal care as required," she added.

Christine says that her role does not end at the group sensitization forums. She also conducts home visits to monitor the uptake of the information shared at the forums.

"I visit caregivers at the household level to see if the sensitization messages are put into practice," Christine said. "I also follow up with caregivers who miss the group sessions to provide one-on-one sessions for them.

Community Health Volunteers play a crucial role in supporting the implementation of the SCORE ECD project. These are individuals that live within the targeted community, thus known by the community members. They are also individuals who have gone through several training sessions provided by CRS, her partners and in collaboration with the County Government of Siaya to enable them execute their work effectively.



In Kisumu County, Teresa Anyango also serves as a CHV with the project. She has formed a group known as "achievers" and meet every week.

Like Christine, Teresa also looks out for caregivers in the group who are unwilling to talk or participate in discussions. "As a facilitator, you have to be attentive and observant. Some caregivers are not willing to speak because they could be going through stressful situations back at home," she said. "In such cases, I conduct home visits to find out what the issues are. If I can't handle them, I refer them to places where they can get the help they need," she added.

Teresa says that caregivers were hesitant to join the groups at the beginning of the project, but now the demand has grown. "When we started, few caregivers would attend the sessions. She said that most saw it as a time-wasting activity because they wanted to attend to their income-generating activities.

“Now I receive requests from several caregivers who want to join the sessions because they have seen the results in their friends or neighbours,” she added.

Teressa says that initially, men were not targeted, but with time the project realized that men needed to get involved.

“A child develops well in a peaceful and safe environment. When there is peace in a household, and both parents feel responsible for the child, the child’s wellbeing is guaranteed,” she said. “That is why we encourage men to get involved and learn what roles they can play,” she added.

Christine and Teressa work with ECD male champions to encourage men to play active roles in nurturing care. This involves accompanying their wives to the health facilities for prenatal care.

Teressa says that aside from the ECD component, she teaches women to make liquid soap as an income-generating activity. “In my group, I have taught members to make liquid soap to earn some little money. I venture into IGAs to improve their household income,” she said. When one needs to buy clothes for the baby or milk, you don’t have to wait for your husband always to provide. Teaming up contributes to joy and peace in the family,” she added.

Teaming up with the ECD Network for Kenya

The beginning of National ECD Network and its contribution to the growth of ECD in Kenya

Under the Early Childhood Development Network, Dr “For children to grow to their full potential, they need nurturing care which includes security, safety, responsive care, nutrition among others. Strengthening the capacity of caregivers in nurturing care alone is not enough. We need to create an enabling environment by putting in place policies, programmes and services to enhance Early Childhood Development,” said Dr Teresa Muoma, Acting Executive Director, Early Childhood Development Network, Kenya.

Under the Early Childhood Development Network, Dr Teresa Muoma started as a national coordinator overseeing ECD initiatives in Kenya. In 2019 she became the chair of the ECD network board.

“In 2015, when I attended a strategic planning meeting for the African ECD network in South Africa, I realized that most African countries had ECD networks but Kenya. So, I thought, why not Kenya? When I returned, I started reaching out to partners in ECD in Kenya, starting with my university – Kenyatta University- where I discussed with the chairman in the department of ECD, Dr Muoma said.

Dr Muoma also contacted World Vision, who also loved the idea of having a network in place. The only challenge she faced was how to get other actors on board. “World Vision agreed to support the process of convening a meeting with ECD partners from the civil society. In 2016, the ECD Network in Kenya was officially launched,” she said.



Dr Muoma says that different actors working in the ECD area were implementing in silos before the network was in place. She noted that since these programmes were targeting the same ‘child’, there was the need for proper coordination to avoid double-dipping.

“We needed to have a multi-sectoral approach to maximize gains. When organizations work in isolation, it is difficult to tell where one can do referrals or who to partner with,” she said.

The network has a membership of over 15 organizations, including the Catholic Relief Services, through the SCORE ECD project.

“We organize events to bring policymakers and programme implementors through the national ECD stakeholders conference. In 2018, CRS supported in planning the conference by mobilizing entities implementing the SCORE ECD project at the grassroots level,” Dr Muoma said. “The caregivers who attended the event talked about the importance of empowering caregivers economically. They equally brought various hand-made items that sold at the conference,” she added.

SCORE ECD project was among the seven organizations in the network that supported the development of the nurturing care advocacy strategy funded by the Conrad Hilton Foundation through the Africa Early Childhood Network (AFCEN).

The network has been instrumental in influencing policies on Early Childhood Development. In 2018, the network was part of the drafting of the pre-primary Education policy. The network is also an active member of the National Early Childhood Education Committee, where they oversee the implementation of pre-primary education in the counties.

“We members of the technical working group on nurturing care hosted by the Ministry of Health. Apart from that, recently, we have had curriculum reforms where we were involved in curriculum design – we were asked to contribute to the national steering committee.

For the network to contribute to these documents or policies, Dr Muoma says that the documents are sent to the network secretariate, who then send them to the members. The member organizations review and send their feedback to the secretariate that consolidates and presents to the relevant authorities.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic -when schools reopened- Nairobi County reached out to the network to support them with personal protective equipment for the pre-primary schools.

Dr Muoma says she reached out to the partner organizations and supported the schools with masks, handwashing stations, and other items.

“When we get such requests from different entities, including the government, that’s a clear indication that the value of the network is widely understood. They see potential in us, and they know they can leverage the networking advantage we have to reach the community and influence early childhood development.



The biggest challenge the network has had is the pandemic that has slowed down certain activities. Dr Muoma also says they have a lean secretariate, yet the work at hand is a lot. They are looking at asking members to support with increasing the capacity of the secretariat.

The immediate plan for the network is to open county-level chapters to bring the grassroots organizations on board. “We want to have not just better coordination at the national level, but at the counties too. There is a need for the organizations at the counties to engage their counties governments to support ECD in areas like resource allocation, policy development, provision of good health care services, good nutrition in pre-schools and many more,” she said.

“Working together as a team amplifies our voices. When we push for policies together, we achieve a lot as compared to when we work in isolation,” she concluded.