



AU CESA
ECED FLN CLUSTER

African Union ECED & FLN Cluster

Report of Proceedings

Cluster Orientation Meeting

Date: 7 July 2026

Format: Webinar

Duration: 90 minutes

Official launch of the reconstituted Early Childhood Education
and Development & Foundational Learning Cluster

Lead: African Early Childhood Network (AfECN)

Co-lead: AUC-ESTI | UNICEF



Meeting at a Glance

77+

Participants from Across Africa

90 Min

Webinar Duration

CESA 26–35

Strategic mandate

Pan–African

Regional Representation

Meeting Overview

The ECED & FLN Cluster Orientation Meeting was held on 7 July 2026 via Zoom, bringing together over 77 participants from across the African continent. The meeting served as the official launch of the reconstituted Early Childhood Education and Development & Foundational Learning (ECED & FLN) Cluster under the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026–2035 (CESA 26–35). The cluster is the successor to the CESA 16–25 ECED Cluster (2018–2025) and is coordinated by the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN), with the African Union Commission (AUC) serving as Chair.

Meeting Objectives

The meeting was convened to achieve three core objectives:

- ◆ Officially welcome members and introduce the cluster leadership.
- ◆ Present and discuss the cluster's Terms of Reference (ToR), including governance structure, thematic focus areas, and expected outputs.
- ◆ Provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions, share perspectives, and offer initial inputs to shape the cluster's work.

Key Proceedings and Discussions

The meeting proceeded through three main segments: opening remarks from the cluster leadership, a detailed presentation on the cluster's Terms of Reference, and an interactive session where participants contributed questions, suggestions, and reflections from their national contexts.

Opening Remarks

Dr. Caseley Stephens *AUC Principal Officer*

Dr. Caseley Stephens (AUC Principal Officer, Basic and Secondary Education) welcomed participants and emphasised that Africa's youngest population is both a blessing and a responsibility. He stressed that investing in early childhood is the smartest investment the continent can make, and that CESA 26–35 places strong emphasis on ECED and foundational learning as foundations for stronger schools, communities, and economies. He described the cluster as a community of partners committed to learning from one another, sharing evidence, and supporting Member States.

Dr. Lynette Okengo *Executive Director, AfECN*

Dr. Lynette Okengo (Co-Founder and Executive Director, AfECN) highlighted achievements of the previous cluster (2018–2025), including the elevation of ECED within CESA with a dedicated pillar, stronger continental dialogue, and expanded collaboration across sectors and regional economic communities. She explained that adding “Foundational Learning” to the cluster title does not redefine ECED but strengthens continuity across the education continuum and aligns with continental and global priorities. She outlined six priorities for the year: finalising the ToR, developing a practical work plan, expanding member State and REC engagement, establishing communities of practice/ working groups, generating and disseminating evidence, and delivering tangible results.

Six immediate priorities

- Finalise the Terms of Reference
- Develop a practical work plan
- Expand Member State and REC engagement
- Establish communities of practice/ working groups
- Generate and disseminate evidence
- Deliver tangible results

Euphrates Efosi Wose *UNICEF Senior Advisor*

Euphrates Efosi Wose (UNICEF Senior Advisor, Education – Africa) reaffirmed UNICEF's commitment to stand alongside the AUC and Member States, describing the cluster as “Africa's platform for implementation.” She stressed the importance of the ECED-to-foundational-learning continuum, holistic child development, and the need to engage all relevant ministry directorates across the education–health–nutrition–protection spectrum.



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Presentation: Cluster Terms of Reference

Mich-Seth Owusu (AfECN AU Liaison) presented the draft ECED & FLN Cluster Terms of Reference 2026–2035. A live Mentimeter poll was conducted to identify participants' key implementation challenges. Of 16 respondents, the most pressing challenge was the lack of trained educators and workforce constraints, followed by low community and parental engagement, weak policy and institutional support, limited teaching and learning materials, and monitoring and evaluation difficulties. Additional themes raised in the chat included the need to address digital tools in ECED and the rollout of pre-primary education in state-run primary schools (notably flagged by Comoros).

Key elements of the Terms of Reference

Mandate

Derives from CESA 26-35, Agenda 2063, the AU Decade of Education, and SDG 4.

Objectives

- (i) Strengthen partnerships and coordination for ECED and foundational learning
- (ii) Facilitate knowledge sharing and dissemination of evidence-based practices
- (iii) Promote adaptation, replication, and scaling of effective programmes
- (iv) Strengthen Member States' leadership in continental policy dialogue and peer learning

Governance

Open to all stakeholders. A Technical Committee of member state representatives (chaired by AUC, convened by AfECN) provides strategic guidance and validates cluster outputs.

Scope

Addresses the continuum from ECED through early primary education (Grades 1-3), focusing on foundational literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional competencies. Cross-cutting priorities: gender equality, education in emergencies, and data/monitoring/evidence.

Participation

Member states, RECs, multilateral/bilateral agencies, civil society, academia, private sector, and donors.

Interactive Q&A Session

A robust Q&A session addressed participant questions on working group selection criteria, monitoring mechanisms, funding, resource-sharing platforms, and harmonisation across diverse national systems. Key responses from the panel were as follows:

- Working Groups** Dr. Okengo explained that the new cluster shifts from permanent standing working groups to flexible, purpose-driven task groups with voluntary membership, based on emergent priorities and member interest.
- Monitoring** Dr. Stephens outlined the AUC's results-based monitoring and accountability system being launched, with standardised indicators and templates to be shared with all cluster leads by the November STC meeting.
- Funding** Dr. Stephens noted the AUC supports cluster leads in mobilising funding and encouraged clusters to develop their own resource mobilisation strategies, with AUC facilitating partner connections.
- Digital Platform** An existing digital platform for sharing ECED initiatives will be shared with all participants post-meeting, with over 100 initiatives already catalogued across 30+ countries.
- New Proposal** Participants proposed the establishment of a dedicated working group on educational quality and ECED curricula to develop an African support package for Member States.

Key Outcomes

The orientation meeting achieved its intended outcomes and established a strong foundation for the cluster's work going forward:

- 01** The reconstituted ECED & FLN Cluster was officially launched with broad participation from government, UN agencies, academia, and civil society across the continent.
- 02** The Terms of Reference which were presented in detail, received constructive feedback that will be used to finalize the draft. The were generally accepted as a key guiding document for operationalising the cluster.
- 03** Member State and partner priorities were surfaced through the Mentimeter poll and interactive discussion which will guide the cluster's thematic priorities.
- 04** Commitments were secured from key partners and participants for continued engagement.

The orientation established a strong foundation for a collaborative, responsive, and results-focused Cluster under CESA 26–35.