

Rwanda on Thursday opened a two-day national conference on early childhood development, bringing together more than 300 stakeholders to assess progress, address persistent challenges and explore innovative approaches to strengthening services for children from conception to age six.

The conference, organized by the National Child Development Agency (NCDA) and its partners, is being held Jan. 15–16 at the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda meeting hall under the theme “Promoting a Transformative and Innovative Early Childhood Development Ecosystem in Rwanda.” Participants include government officials, civil society organizations, private sector representatives, academics, early childhood practitioners, parents and members of the media.

The opening ceremony featured performances by children from Silver Bells and Musave Model ECD centers, who presented songs, dances and creative displays illustrating their hopes for the future, highlighting the role of children as active participants in their own development rather than passive beneficiaries of policy.



*Minister of Gender and Family Promotion Consolée Uwimana*

In her opening remarks, Minister of Gender and Family Promotion Consolée Uwimana said the government views early childhood development as a cornerstone of national development, noting that the earliest years shape brain development, learning capacity, behavior and social skills. She said experiences during this period, whether positive or negative, have lifelong consequences for individuals and society.

Uwimana said Rwanda’s early childhood development policy aligns with national and global frameworks, including the National Strategy for Transformation (NST-2), Vision 2050, the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa’s Agenda 2063, all of which emphasize investment in human capital, innovation and skills development from an early age.

Since the adoption of the national ECD policy in 2016, Rwanda has expanded ECD facilities, strengthened the capacity of parents, caregivers and educators, developed and distributed learning materials, and improved coordination among development partners. However, she acknowledged that challenges remain, particularly in improving service quality, closing infrastructure gaps and ensuring

adequate resources.

NCDA Director General Assumpta Ingabire said the early years form the foundation for children's overall growth and the country's future development. She said integrated early childhood services support children's physical, emotional and cognitive development while also benefiting families and communities.



According to NCDA data, Rwanda currently has 32,205 early childhood development facilities nationwide supported by 101,809 caregivers, with enrollment of children under six standing at 80.7%. NCDA Deputy Director General Gilbert Munyemana said that while access to services has expanded significantly, disparities in quality and availability persist depending on location and type of facility.

Conference discussions will focus on digital innovations in service delivery, school readiness particularly in rural areas training and professionalization of early childhood practitioners, integration of maternal mental health services, and inclusion of children with disabilities.

The second day will be dedicated to identifying high-impact practices and innovations that can be scaled up nationally, with particular attention to the districts of Rusizi, Ruhango, Kirehe, Burera and Nyarugenge.