

Terms of Reference for a Kenyan-based Qualitative Researcher

Consultancy to conduct a scoping exercise: A community childcare model for children 0-3 years.

Introduction

Zizi Afrique Foundation is a nonprofit organization working on improving foundational learning in Kenya and the region. Zizi Afrique Foundation works in the intersection between evidence, policy, and practice, and uses research as a pathway toward improving public education systems. Zizi Afrique Foundation envisions a world where all children and youth have the foundations to learn and thrive. Zizi Afrique Foundation underscores the importance of early years of development as a pipeline to foundational learning for all children and hopes to achieve this through system strengthening – working for and from government - and ecosystem building – locating and involving others - for collective impact. Following this, Zizi Afrique Foundation is partnering with strategic government agencies with the responsibility of child development to learn together and elevate innovations that work in supporting holistic child development.

About the ECD Mapema Initiative

Childcare provision is currently a priority global agenda and is widely recognized for its multi generational benefits. Increasing evidence connects the benefits of investing in early childhood development to the parallel triple outcomes of improved early childhood development and learning outcomes for children, increased women's economic empowerment, and job creation.

In this context, the ECD Mapema impact is an initiative designed to support nurturing care for children aged 0–3, with a particular emphasis on marginalized communities such as the pastoralists. It aims to address the systemic gap of limited structured childcare provisions and support systems targeting children under three years. This initiative is informed by lessons from a political economy analysis of ECD in Kenya, that highlighted to limited access to childcare services and legislation in the majority of Counties in Kenya as well as lack of focus on the 0-3 by most of the grassroots organizations, highlighting nudging constraints in the ECD ecosystem.

While caregiving has been highlighted as a major barrier to school re-entry for girls, children are often affected upon re-entry, calling for holistic approaches that address the needs of the child and the adolescent or teenage mothers. This initiative therefore strives to provide evidence on scalable community-rooted childcare models that would promote the holistic development of children and also promote school re-entry among adolescent mothers. The scoping exercise will leverage the existing care communities and networks to identify models that could be contextualized and adapted to the arid county contexts. This will help to amplify the voices of frontline caregivers, supporting adolescent mothers, designing scalable community-rooted childcare models, and fostering a robust ecosystem of support through strategic partnerships and evidence-led advocacy.

The scope of the study

The consultancy is expected to conduct a scoping study to identify promising, scalable, community rooted caregiving models and interventions suitable for adaptation and piloting in arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASALs)/marginalized county contexts (with priority in Samburu County). The work should center on adolescent mothers and their children 0-3, pay particular attention to gender issues around the community, leverage existing care networks, and how they work and available community resources that anchor the models. Further, it should provide practical recommendations and framework for county-level contextualization, for adaptation through pilot partnership with Samburu and similar counties and the community.

Objectives

The objectives for this exercise are to:

- a. Assess how Childcare issues among adolescents' shape gender equality in Samburu County
- b. Provide a detailed assessment of the existing gaps in childcare models for adolescent mothers
- c. Map and synthesize caregiving models and interventions that support nurturing care for children 0–3, with explicit emphasis on models that engage and benefit adolescent mothers.
- d. Assess evidence of scalability, contextual fit for local arid settings, feasibility for county-level adoption, and potential to promote holistic development and school re-entry of adolescent mothers.
- e. Provide strategic recommendations for policymakers and other key stakeholders in the ECD 0-3 space to promote access to quality and affordable childcare and wellbeing among adolescent mothers.
- f. Facilitate the co-creation of contextualized childcare models for the marginalized communities.

Key responsibilities and outputs

- a. Inception report detailing approach for the study, plan of action with detailed framework of activities, methodology to be applied, proposed content outline for the report, schedule and any logistical propositions
- b. Undertake a comprehensive desk review to explore - the working childcare models and policy environment, existing gaps and issues around accessing childcare generally and particularly in accessing childcare by adolescent mothers of differently abled children, childcare providers, issues affecting early childcare and the connection between childcare and Gender equality outcomes in ASAL communities, in sub-Saharan Africa
- c. Develop tools and gather data on existing caregiving and responsive caregiving modes, community childcare models, and adolescent-mother-centered interventions by leveraging on community learnings from Samburu.
- d. Extract the evidence on the model outcomes or impact, scalability and transferability, costs, and implementation requirements.
- e. Facilitate a stakeholder validation workshop to review findings and co-design contextualization steps with Samburu County Government, community representatives, and partner institutions
- f. Design the model pilot by producing a contextualization and a pilot plan.
- g. Draft and submit full report, executive summary, short policy brief, and practical implementation plan.

Qualifications and desirable skills

It is expected that the consultant(s) will have the following qualifications and experience:

- a. Demonstrated experience in designing, facilitating and coordinating scoping assessments in nurturing care in Early childhood development and Gender.
- b. Holds an MSc or MA (preferably PhD) in relevant disciplines such as Gender, Education, ECD, Development Studies, or Sociology.
- c. Demonstrated ability to lead and coordinate a multi-disciplinary team.
- d. Strong mixed methods research skills, with a leaning towards quantitative skills
- e. Experience conducting mixed-methods scoping or feasibility studies and producing policy- and practice-oriented deliverables.

Duration

The Consultant will be engaged for about five months, starting mid-February 2026 to July 2025.

How to apply

- a. Interested and qualified candidates should submit:
- b. A cover letter expressing interest
- c. A detailed resume, highlighting fit to the consultancy expectations
- d. An inception design, which includes a brief background, methodology, study participants,
- e. tools, data collection, work plan, and budget.
- f. Sample reports of similar work undertaken
- g. Three referees work with contact information.

Applications should be received by email to jobs@ziziafrique.org by **February 15th, 2026**.