

MAY 6–8, 2026

INVESTING IN THE EARLY YEARS

A Global Technical Financing Forum

KIGALI, RWANDA

TRACK 1: READINESS & COUNTRY CRITERIA
May 7, 2026



In support of **actFOR**
Early Years





Dialogue 3: How can we strengthen the financing architecture for young children?

Moving from funding to financing.



Dialogue 3 Track 1: Readiness and Country Criteria (Simba ballroom)

- **Focus:** What are the enabling conditions for investments?
 - How are the incentives and investment strategies of DFIs, philanthropy, and private actors changing relative to financing for young children?
 - What can these different actors realistically contribute, and what are the limits of their capital?
 - What are the optimal partnership models and conditions needed for these relationships to support public priorities, systems building, and long-term sustainability?
- **Chair:** Priyanka Upreti, Evidence Hub Manager, Global Schools Forum
- **Framing:** Katie Brauer, Senior Project Leader, Open Capital
- **Discussants:**
 - Eunice Fedha, Director Resource Mobilization and Partnerships, Council of Governors, Kenya
 - Dr Kwabena Bempah Tandoh, Thrive Country Manager – Ghana, Co-Principal Investigator – Ghana, Oxford Policy Management
 - Jessica Harrison Fullerton, Managing Director of the Strategy and Build team, Global Development Incubator
 - Jessica Brown, Co-Founder, Early Years Impact Center
- **Rapporteur:** Elaine Wacuka Hurt, Director Policy & Partnerships, Kidogo Early Years

Agenda

Strategic context *(10 mins)*

Panel discussion *(30 mins)*

Breakout group discussions *(35 mins)*

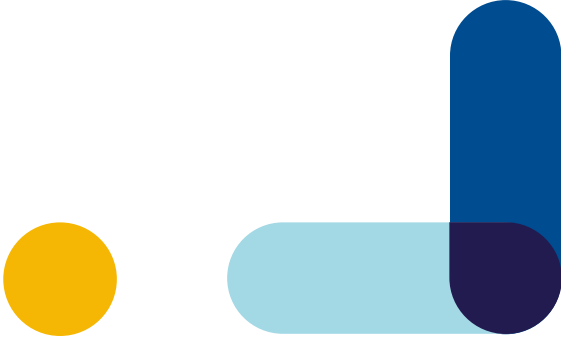
Synthesis & close *(15 mins)*





Katie Brauer

Senior Project Leader,
Open Capital



Open Capital is a consulting firm & implementation partner strongly committed to Africa's growth

Introducing Open Capital

- Global-quality, pan-African advisory & implementation firm; founded in 2010 in Nairobi
- Full-time team of 100+ based across the continent with experience across 30+ SSA countries

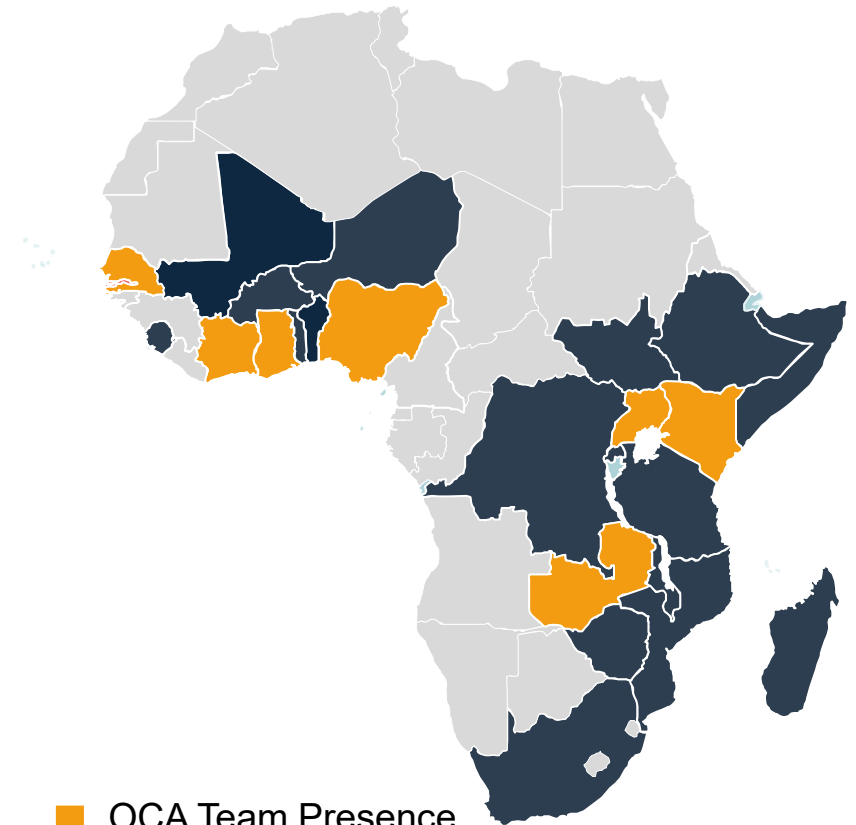
Experience

- Completed 1,600+ client projects
- Specific expertise designing and implementing outcome-focused market systems projects & new innovative finance solutions

Impact

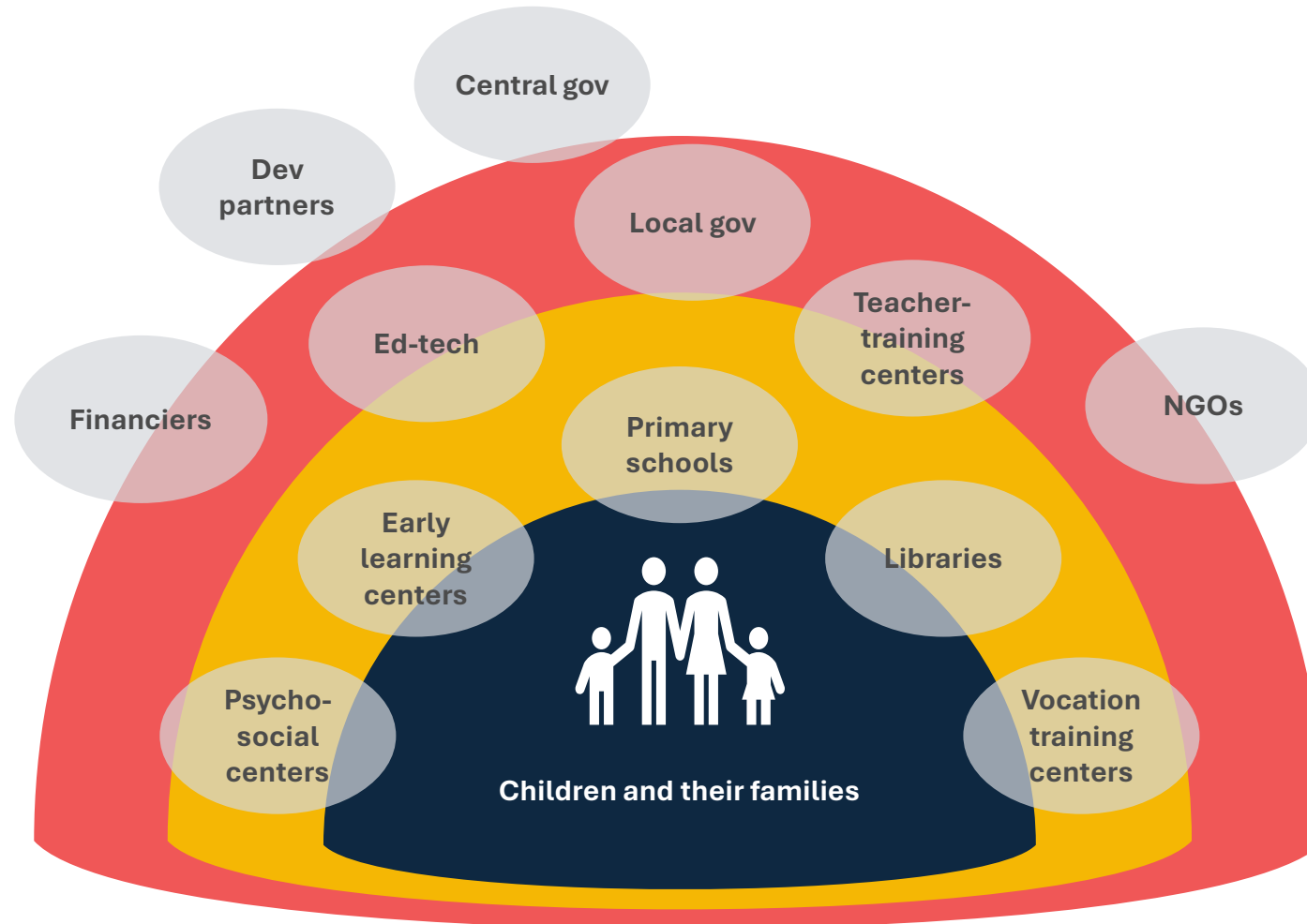
- Reached 30k+ children and caregivers through early learning ecosystem sustainability initiatives
- In total, helped raise >US \$1.5 billion for clients, bringing fresh market-oriented perspectives & leveraging extensive sector experience

Our geographical footprint



- OCA Team Presence
- Completed engagements

Early learning is essential & complex with many different actors and needs



Early learning is often seen as a “public good” especially in rural contexts.

However, public funding is stretched. Donor funding is limited. Providers can’t scale.

We need to move to more sustainable, quality, early learning services.

A higher resilience model for early learning services integrates market driven approaches to ensure continuity

Public definition:

Government or donor funded

At most, cover costs

Equal, constant access

Sustainability 'spectrum'

Private definition:

Commercial viability

Profit goals

Continued cashflows to scale

What does a 'higher resilience' model look like?

Some reliance on govt or donor funding for growth & improvement

Early learning centers able to sustain a basic level of income to cover costs and weather funding shortages

Multiple streams of income for early learning centers to ensure some form of sustainability

Financial inclusion for early learning centers, caregivers and parents

Scaling access for all children to higher quality early learning

A higher resilience model for early learning services integrates market driven approaches to ensure continuity

Public definition:

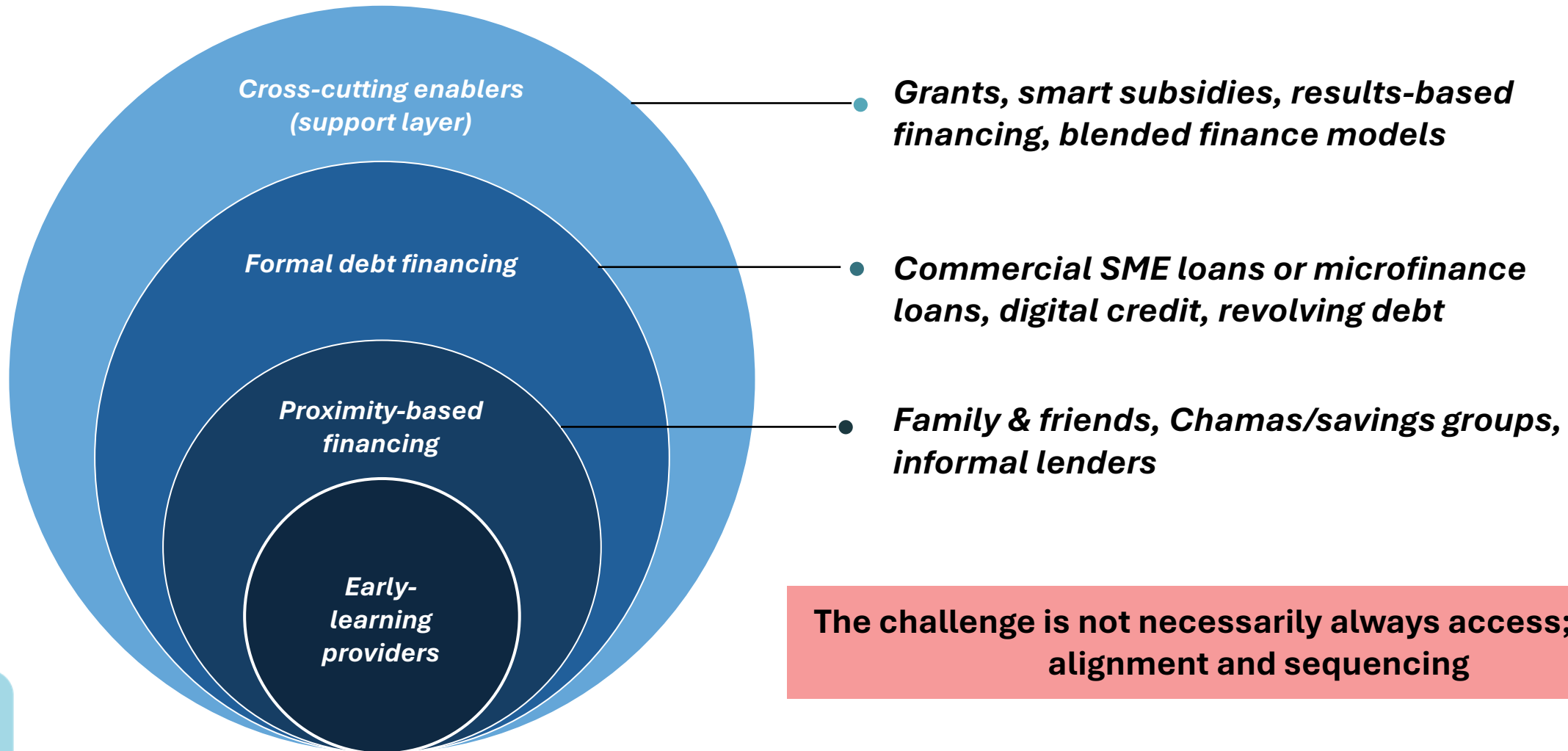
Sustainability 'spectrum'

Private definition:



Essentially, the goal is to shift the sector from status quo towards a more robust and sustainable 'high resilience' model

A diverse range of financing instruments can be used to support the early learning sector



The challenge is not necessarily always access; it's also alignment and sequencing

Early learning is constrained by a persistent ‘quality–affordability’ trade-off with a financing mismatch



Families

Quality care is economically out of reach due to low-income families



Providers

High overhead and low margins constrain long-term business sustainability



Financing approaches are often misaligned with the actual needs and realities of early learning services



Financing instruments are frequently introduced before the necessary conditions are in place for them to work effectively



Results: fragmentation, limited sustainability

We have three themes to dig into what is needed to unlock access, alignment and sequencing of financing

Public vs external financing boundaries

Who should be providing financing to fund early learning? Which services or components for young children are realistically commercially financeable, and which should remain fully financed by government or philanthropy?

Readiness conditions

What minimum conditions are required before introducing new financing? How does this differ between contexts? And who should be responsible for regulating and supporting these conditions?

Financing instrument approaches

What types of financing actually make sense for this sector? How can financing be designed to reflect the realities of providers and country contexts? Which financing models have proven most applicable, and what lessons emerge when financing approaches fail to align with system needs or provider realities?



Staying connected



Panel Discussion





Katie Brauer
Open Capital
(Moderator)



Ms Eunice Fedha
Council of Governors
(Kenya)
(Panelist)



Dr Kwabena Bempah Tandoh
Oxford Policy Management
(Panelist)



Elaine Wacuka
Kidogo
(Rapporteur)



Jessica Brown
Early Years Impact Center
(Panelist)



Jessica Fullerton
Global Development Incubator
(Panelist)

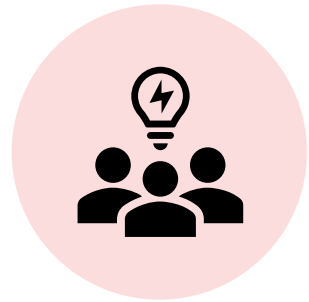




Breakout groups



Let's now move into our breakout group discussions...



Each group has been assigned a theme

- Use the next 30 minutes to **discuss the two questions** within your theme
- Provide examples of what you have experienced, giving **context and any situational nuances**
- Focus on **solutions**, rather than only what is currently not working



Within your groups, please assign a scribe to capture notes from your group



Let's now move into our breakout group discussions...

Theme 1: Public vs external financing mechanisms

- Are there parts of the early learning ecosystem that are more “financeable” than others? What makes the difference?
- Which aspects of early learning do you believe must remain publicly financed, and why?

Theme 2: Readiness conditions

- What are the two biggest readiness gaps currently limiting financing in early learning systems?
- What does “good enough readiness” look like in practice?

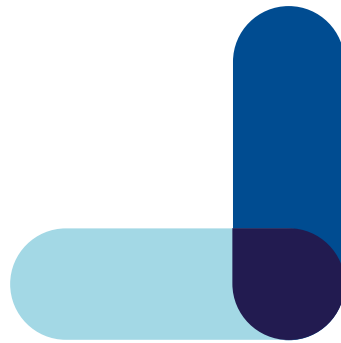
Theme 3: Financing instrument approaches

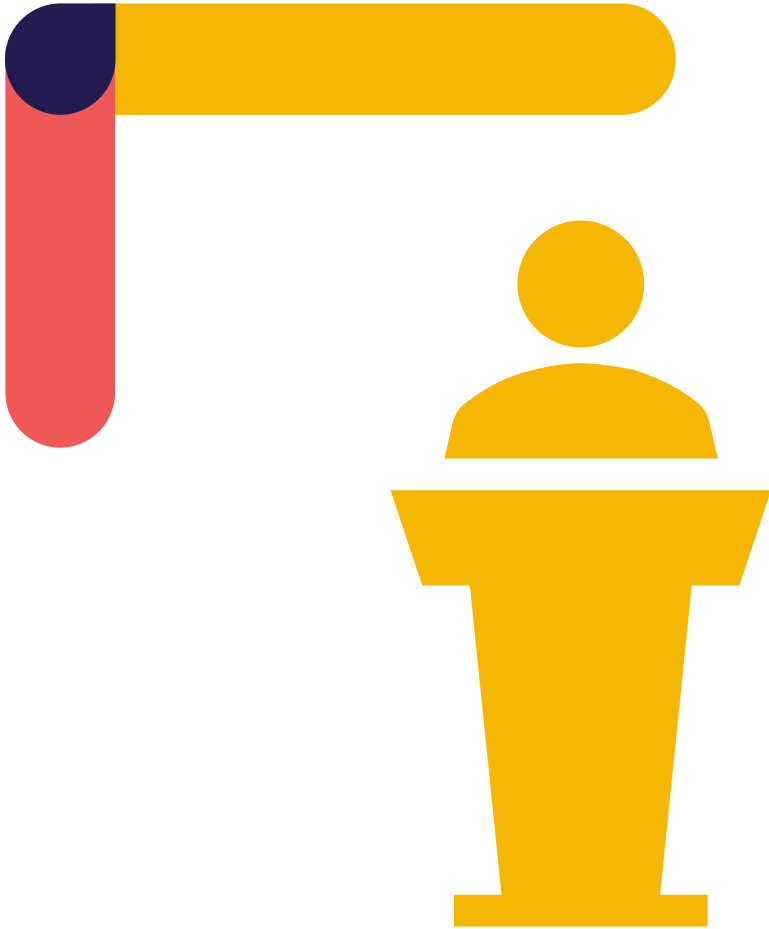
- Where have you seen financing approaches that didn't match system needs - and what were the consequences?
- Which financing approaches seem most appropriate for early learning in your context, and why?





Sharing Back





- Who would like to share **one interesting takeaway** that came out of the conversation?
- What was **the most surprising or challenging part** of your discussion?



Thank you

Together, we can unlock financing that will translate evidence into budgets and budgets into services for young children and their families!

