



REPORT OF THE WEST AFRICA ALTERNATIVE CARE SUMMIT (WAACS) 2025

THEME:
**Homegrown Solutions from Africa
Moving Beyond Orphanages**

Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria | July 15–17, 2025

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Executive Summary

The 2025 West Africa Alternative Care Summit (WAACS), held in Jos, Nigeria, from July 15–17, convened over 400 policymakers, practitioners, care leavers, and experts from across West Africa and beyond to advance reforms in child protection and alternative care. Co-convened by Mrs. Sandra Dirmwa Chikan (ASOHON) and Mr. Ade Olowo (African CAFO), the summit championed a bold shift toward family-based care systems, de-emphasizing institutional care in favor of indigenous, community-centred solutions.

Child Care Reform:

David Adoke emphasized that Africa’s greatest asset, its children, must be nurtured through sustainable, family-based models.

Mentorship:

Dr. Ken Merrifield and Donovan Karber underscored mentorship as a vital bridge for youth transitioning from care to independence.

Trauma-Informed Practice:

Julie Cooper highlighted the deep impact of trauma and the urgent need for healing-centered, compassionate caregiving.

Family Strengthening:

Sarah Ellis emphasized the four pillars of nurturing families: connection, structure, nurture, and provision.

Technology & Data:

Kenneth Ayebazibwe introduced Children First Software as a tool to track child transitions and promote informed, evidence-based care.

Legal & Policy Reform:

Plateau State’s Attorney General, Philemon Dafi Esq, called for systemic, rights-based change guided by national and global frameworks.

Key Engagements

01. Breakout Sessions:

Covered mentoring, trauma management, legal reform, and digital systems providing practical, contextual solutions to regional care challenges.

02. Panel Discussions:

Explored sustainability, systemic reform, collaboration, and care for children with disabilities. Panelists advocated for cross-sector alliances, disability-inclusive care, and capacity-building for caregivers.

Innovations and Strategic Directions



Regional leaders emphasized the need for national multi-stakeholder platforms, community sensitization, and integration of legal and cultural systems to scale family-based care.



Care leavers' stories grounded the summit in lived realities, prompting urgent calls for investment in mentorship, family reunification, mental health, and disability rights.



The summit also highlighted the commercialization of child care, pushing for transparent policies and stronger regulatory oversight.

Conclusion and Next Steps

WAACS 2025 concluded with a strong commitment to build resilient, inclusive systems that uphold every child's right to a loving family. The summit laid the groundwork for a regional movement, with Sierra Leone elected to host the 2026 WAACS Summit. Participants left empowered to collaborate, innovate, and reform care systems across West Africa ensuring that no child grows up alone.



Introduction



In response to the growing need for a coordinated regional approach to transform child protection and establish sustainable, evidence-based care reform, the Association of Orphanages and Homes Operators in Nigeria (ASOHON), in collaboration with key partners, convened the first-ever West Africa Summit on Alternative Care (WAACS).

Held from July 15th to 17th, 2025, in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, the summit served as a dynamic platform for reimagining alternative care systems across West Africa through collaborative dialogue, knowledge exchange, and the development of actionable strategies. The gathering brought together high-level policymakers, government leaders, orphanage operators, researchers, social workers, legal experts, security agencies, community and religious leaders, as well as young adults who had aged out of care. Over the three days, participants explored best practices, legal pathways, and strategic frameworks for transitioning children from institutional care into stable, loving families. The discussions emphasized the need for West African countries to prioritize family-based care over institutionalization, with a focus on homegrown solutions tailored to the region's unique challenges.

Convened by the Vice President of ASOHON (Northern Region) and Global Coordinator of Kingdom Kids Klub, Sandra Chikan alongside the African CAFO Coach, Ade Olowo, the event set a bold tone for innovation in the alternative care sector. ASOHON, a vibrant network of over 500 organizations across Nigeria, is dedicated to serving orphaned and vulnerable children, particularly those in institutional care. The network is also a member of the Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO) internationally and actively engages in the national Child Protection Network.

The summit pursued four core objectives:

- 01 Promote Family Strengthening**
Address the root causes of child–family separation and identify interventions that empower families to care for their children.
- 02 Advocate for Legal Pathways to Permanency**
Promote adoption and foster care as sustainable legal options for child placement.
- 03 Develop Actionable Frameworks**
Facilitate discussions that produce regional policies and best practices for transitioning from institutional to family-based care.
- 03 Mobilize a Movement for Care Reform**
Establish a long-term, multi-stakeholder collaboration for sustainable child protection and welfare reform in West Africa.

The 2025 WAACS marked a significant step toward reshaping the narrative of child care in the region laying the foundation for a future where every child grows up in a safe, nurturing, and permanent family environment.

Cultural Night and Pre-Summit Reception

The summit officially began on the evening of July 15 with a vibrant cultural dinner, welcoming delegates from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the United States, and other regions. This immersive experience exposed guests to the diverse cultural heritage of West Africa through traditional music, dance, attire, and cuisine. It created a warm and inclusive environment that set the stage for deeper collaboration throughout the week.





Day 1 Proceedings

Alternative Care Conference in W/Africa

The formal opening of the summit took place on July 16, beginning with registration, housekeeping, and conference protocols. The Summit was well hosted by the amazing Yonpan Yonnie Dariem and Olamilekan Dudubo. They both coordinated each session ensuring they aligned with the Summit objectives. Opening remarks were delivered by the host team, followed by goodwill messages from government representatives, donors, and development partners. A powerful session led by care leavers under ACNA (Alternative Care Network Africa) gave voice to their lived experiences, grounding the summit in real-world perspectives.

Mrs. Sandra Chikan and Mr. Ade Olowo formally launched the summit, urging participants to rethink systems, redefine care, and recommit to centering children and families. Their message challenged stakeholders to move beyond rhetoric and embrace meaningful reforms that prioritize the well-being of vulnerable children.



Mrs. Sandra Chikan and Mr. Ade Olowo

Key Presentations

Talk 1: Reimagining Child Care in West Africa



David Adoke, Country Director for Uganda at Child's i Foundation, emphasized the urgent need for care reform. With Uganda's youth comprising over half the population, Adoke stressed that children are a continent's greatest asset. He outlined the harmful impact of institutional care, highlighting the ongoing transition toward family-based models in Uganda. Drawing from African traditions, he advocated for indigenous, sustainable solutions and called for a unified regional policy supporting family-based care systems. "Our greatest assets are our children," Adoke remarked, underscoring the summit's core message.

Talk 2: Preparing for Independence: The Role of Mentors



Dr. Ken Merrifield and Donovan Karber explored how mentorship plays a critical role in preparing youth, especially those in care for independence. Merrifield emphasized mentorship as a stabilizing force for children who have faced broken homes, abuse, and trauma. He highlighted how informal support systems, such as relationships with caregivers and trusted adults, can significantly influence a child's development and resilience. Karber expanded on this by identifying trust as the cornerstone of mentorship. He discussed mentoring's role in fostering social capital, resiliency, and positive identity formation, noting that

Karber expanded on this by identifying trust as the cornerstone of mentorship. He discussed mentoring's role in fostering social capital, resiliency, and positive identity formation, noting that the benefits extend beyond individuals to entire communities. "Mentoring does not change one life," he declared. "It changes an entire generation, community, culture, and nation."

"Mentoring does not change one life. It changes an entire generation, community, culture, and nation." - **Donovan Karber**

Key Presentations

Talk 3: Trauma-Informed Practices



Julie Cooper, President of Trauma-Free World, delivered a deeply moving session on trauma-informed care. Drawing from her personal experience as a caregiver and foster parent, Cooper illustrated the lifelong impact of trauma on a child’s development. She argued that healing emotional wounds is essential, noting that what is not repaired in children often gets repeated. Her testimony served as both an educational and emotional appeal for systemic compassion and responsive caregiving: "Survival is not enough for children. Trauma has become a way of life, and we must do better."

Talk 4: Strengthening Families



Sarah Ellis presented on the four pillars of family strengthening connection, nurture, structure, and provision arguing that children thrive best within their own families. Her message was grounded in the belief that the family is the foundational environment for growth and development. She emphasized the importance of creating robust support systems around vulnerable families to prevent separation and institutionalization. "Children belong in families," she affirmed. "God’s design is to grow in families."

"Children belong in families. God’s design is to grow in families."
- Sarah Ellis

Key Presentations

Talk 5: Leveraging Technology and Data



Kenneth Ayebazibwe presented a session on data-driven solutions and introduced Children First Software, a free platform designed by Both Ends Believing (BEB) to track children's transitions in and out of care. The goal of the tool is not merely data collection, but to support family reunification and reintegration. The emphasis was on transparency, evidence-based decisions, and informed service delivery for better child outcomes.

Talk 6: Legal and Policy Levers for Better Transitions and Reintegration



Philemon Dafi Esq, the Honorable Commissioner of Justice and Attorney General of Plateau State, addressed the commercialization of child care in Nigeria. He criticized societal tendencies to outsource parenting responsibilities and urged systemic change guided by national and international legal frameworks. Referencing Article 20 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, he called for stronger protections and reintegration strategies for children without parental care.

DAY 1 BREAKOUT SESSIONS

The afternoon breakout sessions allowed participants to dive deeper into critical areas:



Room 1: Designing Mentoring and Aftercare Programs for Care Leavers

Facilitated by Donovan Karber and Dr. Merrifield, this session explored the design of mentorship models that ensure continuous support for care leavers transitioning into adulthood.

Room 2: Trauma-Informed Care in Practice: Tools for Caregivers and Institutions

Led by Erick Mowrey and Lily Lar, this session addressed trauma's impact on children's development especially in West African contexts plagued by conflict, poverty, and instability. Participants explored practical caregiver tools to manage trauma-related behaviors and promote healing.





Room 3: Legal and Policy Levers for Better Transitions and Family Reintegration

Moderated by Barr. Nenrat Agada, this room examined child welfare laws and policy frameworks for reunification, youth transition services, and mental health. Participants discussed how legal provisions in Plateau State align with international best practices in child protection.

Room 4: Tech-Driven Care: Using Digital Tools for Case Management and Child Protection

This session led by Kenneth Ayebazibwe and Silas Gyang explored how robust data infrastructures and digital platforms can be leveraged to support coordination, improve outcomes, and ensure accountability in child welfare systems. Emphasis was placed on harmonizing efforts through a national referral pathway. The session opened with reflections on the impact of technological advancement, using the evolution of mobile phones as an illustration of how innovation has transformed various sectors, including child care management. This example underscored the importance of adopting and adapting technology to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of child protection systems.





Room 5: Cultural and Faith-Based Perspectives on Healing and Reintegration

Moderated by Bobby Joachim and Rev. Gabriel Oyediji.

Challenges in the Nigerian Context

It was noted that one of the persistent challenges in child care management in Nigeria is the incomplete or missing data on children, particularly in residential care facilities. Many children lack essential legal documents, such as birth certificates or formal identification. This often results in lengthy processes when retrieving or verifying information, requiring multiple rounds of questioning to establish a child's history and status.

Solutions and Approaches

In certain regions, facilities and orphanages have been integrated into broader child protection systems as operational hubs for case management. Alternative care options were highlighted as a critical tool for transitioning children into environments where they can receive improved care and protection. Collaboration with border agencies was emphasized as an essential measure in combating child trafficking and ensuring safe transitions.

A key principle shared was the importance of individualized care, recognizing that every child's personality, history, and behavioral patterns are unique. Collecting accurate and comprehensive data allows caregivers to tailor interventions to meet each child's needs effectively.

Strengthening Regional Partnerships

Discussions touched on cross-border collaborations, where agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) have laid the foundation for joint initiatives in child protection. Such agreements have led to the establishment of councils, integration of software systems, engagement with relevant ministries, and the rollout of pilot projects aimed at reclaiming and supporting multiple care homes. These measures have contributed to stronger institutional partnerships and expanded operational capacity.

Case Study: Tracing and Reuniting a Child with Family

A real-life case was shared in which a boy, separated from his family for over three years, was successfully reunited with his mother. The tracing process utilized structured models within the Child Tracing System (CTS) and involved verifying the child's origin and meeting legal requirements. In this instance, documentation such as a death certificate was required before the child could be formally registered within the national database and cleared for reunification.

Technical Considerations for Child Care Software

Questions arose regarding the technical requirements for operating the child care management software. It was explained that when entering a new country through partnership with a government, arrangements could be made to set up a dedicated “Computer Hub” equipped with printers, laptops, and other necessary infrastructure.

In response to inquiries about device compatibility, it was confirmed that the software could operate on digital devices and that a web-based version was available. This flexibility enables access in various institutional settings, including during times when internet connectivity is critical. The process as a whole is heavily dependent on digital tools, ensuring data accuracy, accessibility, and secure record-keeping.

The discussions underscored the interconnectedness of technology, legal documentation, individualized care, and institutional collaboration in advancing child protection. While challenges remain, particularly around documentation and data completeness, the integration of digital solutions, strengthened partnerships, and targeted interventions are helping to create more responsive and sustainable systems for child welfare.

Participant Contributions and Engagement

The summit was marked by dynamic participant engagement. David Adoke emphasized the need for children’s basic needs including education, mental health care, and skills training to be met. Folasade of SOS Children’s Villages shared insights on child adoption, while Eunice Ogbaji spoke on the erosion of parental responsibility in today’s society. The Q&A sessions addressed practical concerns, including the legal process for fostering and the limitations of state-provided care.





Day 2 Proceedings

Focusing on Solutions and Building Capacity

The second day commenced with a recap of Day 1, moderated by Azubike Kalu and Elizabeth Mark

Key Presentations

Talk 7: Aging Out and the Journey to Adulthood

The session focused on how to prepare children in care for a successful transition to independent life. It emphasized setting realistic expectations, building resilience, and equipping children with practical life skills to navigate adulthood confidently.

- **Realistic Expectations:** Children must be guided to set achievable goals for their future, avoiding unrealistic dreams that may lead to disappointment.
- **Resilience Through Failure:** Allowing children to make mistakes is critical for growth. Many children from difficult backgrounds fear failure due to past trauma. Supporting them to see mistakes as learning opportunities builds resilience and self-regulation.
- **Knowledge of Systems:** Young people leaving care must be taught how to navigate real-world systems—housing, utilities, banking, and applications for aid or employment.



Speaker:
David Nowell

- **Asking for Help:** Preparing children to seek guidance and connect with trusted mentors is vital to avoid isolation after leaving care.
- **Critical Needs for Transition:** At minimum, young adults require (1) safe and affordable housing, (2) financial security through marketable skills or employment, and (3) community connections for support and belonging.

Recommendations

- Integrate vocational and skills training alongside formal education.
- Foster connections between children and local businesses, civic groups, and mentors.
- Ensure programs prioritize resilience building, financial literacy, and housing readiness as part of care.

Conclusion

A successful transition to family and community life depends not only on academic preparation but also on resilience, practical life skills, and strong community networks. Empowering children in these areas allows them to thrive beyond institutional care and build stable, fulfilling lives.

Voices from the Field

Speaker: *Representative from SOS Children's Villages Nigeria (CVN)*

The representative from SOS Children's Villages Nigeria (CVN) emphasized that every child belongs in a family. Alternative care and family strengthening initiatives are essential for successful family reintegration. Key points in her presentation include:

- Identification of vulnerable children in collaboration with local government.
- Social workers conducting investigations.
- Developing individualized care plans.
- Creating and updating a family database.
- Matching the services a child receives with their needs.
- Investing in post-reunification assessments.

Folashade shared multiple success stories, stressing that family strengthening is crucial to reintegration. She noted that integration must be handled case by case—some succeed quickly, some fail, and some take time.

Panel Discussions

Panel Discussion 1: Sustainable Family-Based Alternatives

Moderator: Matt Copper

Panelists: David Adoke, Miracle Damanka, Alex Destiny Newon, Frederick Boadu Asare

- Emphasis on community as the foundation for sustainability.
- David highlighted the role of peer support groups among caregivers and practitioners, sharing experiences and emotional support.
- "We grow stronger when we support each other."



Panel Discussion 2: Building Systems for Long-Term Impact

Moderator: Sandra Chikan

Panelists: Rev. Gabriel Oyediji, Grace Solomon, Azubuiké Kalu, Donoovar Kabar

The discussion focused on long-term, multi-stakeholder collaboration for sustainable child protection and welfare reform in West Africa.

- Grace Solomon suggested 15 approaches to mobilize a care reform movement.
- Justina Isimishere of Second Voice Foundation emphasized dependable partnerships with law enforcement and care homes.

Stakeholder Engagement:

During the stakeholder engagement session, participants discussed ways to establish a platform for understanding stakeholder roles. It was highlighted that in some contexts, social welfare agencies connect registered stakeholders through digital platforms to address poverty by linking resources and facilitating program implementation, such as health insurance and other support services. The platform was confirmed to be digital, enabling efficient coordination and service delivery. Participants also emphasized that strong stakeholder engagement is critical for effective implementation, noting that in certain settings, laws exist but often fail to achieve their intended impact due to structural and systemic challenges.



Panel Discussion 3: Innovations and Partnerships in Care Reform

Moderator: Ade Olowo

Panelists: Erick Mowerey, Kenneth Ayebazibwe, Abraham Davis

Focus: Driving change through partnerships with governments and other organizations

The panel discussion focused on fostering collaboration with governments and other organizations to drive impactful care reform. Panelists emphasized the importance of building effective referral pathways, citing the example of the NSCDC's partnership with Kingdom Kids Klub to support rescued children. Kenneth, one of the panelists, shared that his organization has achieved significantly more through collaboration than during the years it operated independently. The discussion highlighted the need for organizations to intentionally invest in building alliances, identify groups with shared interests, and collaborate especially with local actors to ensure sustainable impact.

Q&A Session:

- What does collaboration mean to you?
- How do you coordinate all alliances in the social work sector?
- What do we do about those who come in the name of collaboration, take pictures with children, and never return? (Evang. Dr. Mrs. Victoria Oloche – Audience)
- Can the government build shelters for displaced or adopted children? (Don Savage via Facebook)

This panel explored how strategic collaborations are essential to achieving sustainable care reform. Panelists emphasized that no single organization can meet all the needs of vulnerable children and families; thus, partnerships with government bodies, civil society, and faith-based organizations are critical. Erick Mowerey underscored the importance of aligning efforts with government policies to ensure systemic and long-term reform. Kenneth Ayebazibwe shared that his organization's impact significantly increased through partnerships, especially when compared to its earlier, more isolated efforts.

A key example discussed was the partnership between the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) and Kingdom Kids Klub (K3). This collaboration demonstrated a practical model: NSCDC supports investigations and rescue missions, while K3 provides shelter, food, and clothing for rescued children—showing the power of complementary roles in multi-sector collaboration.

Panelists and audience members also raised critical issues such as:

- The misuse of partnerships by individuals who exploit children for photo opportunities without follow-up.
- The challenge of trust and accountability in alliances.
- The need for the government to invest in infrastructure like shelters for displaced or adopted children.

Recommendations from the discussion included:

- Establishing **referral networks** and **resource-pooling** among organizations.
- Investing in **trust-building activities, joint advocacy, and shared data systems**.
- Encouraging **faith-based** and **public-private partnerships** to expand services and ensure long-term support for children transitioning out of care.

Overall, the panel called for intentional, transparent, and well-structured alliances to drive meaningful, child-centered care reform.



Panel Discussion 4: Addressing Needs of Children with Disabilities in Alternative Care

Moderator: Pastor Elisha Akwai

Panelists: Isaac Yeboah Agyei, Dr. Samuel Epifa, Rev. Polycarp Degri, Tobi Salawu

The panel emphasized the need to develop specific capacities to equip caregivers and care homes to adequately support children with special needs. This includes strengthening homes with the necessary resources and skills to provide appropriate care. Panelists stressed the importance of educating caregivers on the true meaning of disability and promoting a culture of acceptance and inclusion within orphanages. Orphanages were encouraged to support the adoption and integration of children with disabilities.

The discussion also addressed the barriers caregivers face in caring for these children and underscored the importance of enforcing disability rights laws to protect Children Living With Disabilities (CLWD). As Yeboah Agyei aptly stated, “Children with special needs require special care.”

Q&A Session:

- What do you think is the gap in alternative care for children with disabilities?
- What are the misconceptions about children living with disabilities in homes?
- What barriers do caregivers face in service provision?
- What policy changes are urgently needed to protect children with disabilities in homes?
- How can a caregiver with mental disability care for a child with disability? (Pst. Safe – Audience)
- What if the parents permanently reject their child with disability, even unto death? (Ogbaji Eunice – Audience)
- What happens when children with disabilities are aging out into independence? (Adiquene – Audience)

Key Themes:

- **Resource Strengthening:** Many care facilities lack the tools, equipment, and skilled personnel needed to support children with diverse and complex needs.
- **Caregiver Education:** There is a need to shift mindsets by debunking cultural myths and promoting dignity, empathy, and inclusion in caregiving.
- **Inclusive Care Models:** Children with disabilities should be supported in community or family-based settings rather than long-term institutional care.

Key Issues Addressed:

- **Changing Perceptions:** Disability is still seen by some communities as a curse or punishment. Caregivers must lead cultural change by modeling respect and acceptance.
- **Service Provision Barriers:**
 - Lack of adaptive infrastructure (e.g., ramps, accessible toilets).
 - Insufficient training for complex disabilities.
 - Caregiver burnout due to lack of support.
- **Policy Gaps:**
 - Existing disability laws are poorly enforced.
 - Government must allocate more resources and implement inclusive child protection policies.

- **Community & Family Integration:**

- Foster care and adoption must be made more accessible for CLWD.
- Community education campaigns are needed to reduce stigma.

Recommended Actions:

1. **Specialized Training** for caregivers on medical and emotional care of CLWD.
2. **Infrastructure Investment** to ensure facilities are accessible and equipped.
3. **Public Awareness Campaigns** to combat stigma and misinformation.
4. **Legislative Enforcement** with accountability for neglect or rights violations.
5. **Transition Programs** to prepare CLWD for independent adult life.
6. **Family Support Programs** to prevent abandonment and promote kinship care.





Day 2 Breakout Sessions:

Sustainable Care Reform in West Africa

1. Promoting Family Strengthening

Facilitators: Sandra Chikan & Gladys Mattew

Question: Highlight 5 major root causes of child-family separation and identify interventions that empower families to care for their children.

Answer: During this session it was discussed that Child-family separation remains a critical issue affecting children's well-being, development, and future stability. Understanding the root causes and identifying interventions that strengthen families is essential in ensuring that children grow up in safe, nurturing environments.

Five Major Root Causes of Child-Family Separation

1. Poverty and Economic Hardship

- Families struggling with unemployment, low income, or lack of basic resources may feel unable to provide for their children. This often leads to children being placed in alternative care or sent to institutions.

2. Armed Conflict, Insecurity, and Displacement

- Violence, insurgency, and displacement due to conflict or natural disasters separate children from their families and expose them to unsafe environments.

3. Breakdown of Family Structures

- Divorce, domestic violence, death of a parent, or family disintegration can weaken protective structures, resulting in children being abandoned, neglected, or placed in care institutions.

4. Lack of Access to Basic Services

- Limited access to education, healthcare, psychosocial support, and social protection contributes to child neglect and increases the risk of separation.

5. Harmful Social and Cultural Practices

- Practices such as child labor, early marriage, stigma against children with disabilities, or gender-based discrimination often push children out of their families.

Key Interventions to Empower Families

1. Economic Strengthening Programs

Livelihood support, skills training, access to microfinance, and conditional cash transfers help families meet children's basic needs and reduce reliance on institutional care.

2. Psychosocial and Parenting Support

Community-based counseling, positive parenting programs, and trauma healing help parents improve caregiving skills, manage stress, and provide nurturing care.

3. Strengthening Social Protection Systems

Expanding child-sensitive social safety nets, health insurance, and education subsidies to reduce financial burdens and increase resilience.

4. Access to Quality Basic Services

Ensuring inclusive education, healthcare, and disability support programs prevent separation and promote the child's right to grow in a family environment.

5. Community Engagement and Advocacy

Raising awareness against harmful practices, promoting child rights, and building strong community networks that serve as a protective circle for families and children.

Promoting family strengthening requires a holistic approach that addresses both the economic and psychosocial needs of families. By tackling poverty, improving access to services, and providing strong community-based support systems, families can be empowered to provide safe, stable, and nurturing environments where children thrive.

2. Advocate for Legal Pathways to Permanency

Facilitators: Barrister Nanret Agba & Kyenpia Mafuyai

Question: Give 5 major ways to promote kinship, adoption, and foster care as sustainable legal options for child placement.

Answers: It was agreed in the group that Ensuring that children grow up in safe, loving, and permanent family environments is central to child protection. Kinship care, adoption, and foster care provide sustainable alternatives to institutional care, but their effectiveness depends on strong legal frameworks, awareness, and support systems.

Five Major Ways to Promote Kinship, Adoption, and Foster Care

1. Community Sensitization on Legal Processes

- Raising awareness in communities about the legal pathways for kinship care, adoption, and foster care.
- Educating families and community leaders to dispel myths, reduce stigma, and promote acceptance of these family-based care options.

2. Training and Education of Prospective Parents and Children

- Providing pre- and post-placement training for adoptive, foster, and kinship caregivers.
- Preparing children through age-appropriate counseling and education to ensure smooth integration into new family settings.

3. Legislation and Regulation of Kinship Care

- Strengthening laws and policies to formally recognize and regulate kinship care arrangements.
- Ensuring children placed with relatives are adequately monitored and protected under the law.

4. Capacity Building and Synergy Among Judiciary, Social Workers, and Stakeholders

- Training judges, lawyers, social workers, and child protection officers to streamline legal processes and improve case management.
- Enhancing collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and community-based organizations to ensure effective oversight and coordination.

5. Government Establishment of Social Funds to Support Foster Care

- Creating dedicated social welfare funds to provide financial assistance to foster families.
- Ensuring sustainability by integrating such funds into broader child welfare and social protection schemes.

Promoting kinship, adoption, and foster care as sustainable legal options requires a balance of legal reform, community engagement, and institutional capacity. With strengthened laws, community awareness, trained caregivers, and government support systems, children can be assured of safe, permanent, and nurturing family-based care.

3. Developing Actionable Frameworks

Facilitators: Yonpan Dariem & Bobby Joachim

Question: Identify 5 ways to facilitate discussions that result in regional policies and best practices guiding the transition from institutional to family-based care.

Answers: The session focuses on the fact that transition from institutional care to family-based care requires deliberate dialogue, advocacy, and structured frameworks that address the realities of children, families, and communities. Regional discussions provide an opportunity to harmonize approaches, share best practices, and ensure that policies are culturally relevant and sustainable.

Five Ways to Facilitate Discussions Leading to Regional Policies and Best Practices

1. Sensitization and Awareness Campaigns

- Targeting key influencers and community structures such as:
 - Traditional rulers
 - Religious leaders
 - Community groups & associations
 - Schools and markets
- Building widespread understanding of the benefits of family-based care and reducing reliance on institutionalization.

2. Advocacy Across All Levels of Governance and Leadership

- Engaging government institutions, policymakers, and traditional leaders with evidence-based arguments.
- Ensuring that family-based care is prioritized in national and regional child protection agendas.

3. Multi-Sectoral Assessment of Existing Laws and Policies

- Reviewing current legal frameworks to identify gaps, overlaps, and inconsistencies.
- Using research and case studies to recommend reforms that strengthen family-based alternatives.

4. Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

- Fostering partnerships between government ministries, civil society, NGOs, faith-based organizations, and the private sector.
- Encouraging joint planning, resource-sharing, and coordinated implementation of child protection strategies.

5. Empowerment of Families

- Supporting families through livelihood opportunities, psychosocial support, parenting programs, and social safety nets.
- Positioning families as central actors in the care and protection of children, thereby reducing the demand for institutional placements.

Effective facilitation of discussions on child care reform requires a combination of grassroots mobilization, high-level advocacy, evidence-based policy assessment, cross-sectoral collaboration, and direct family empowerment. By aligning efforts at community, state, and regional levels, sustainable policies and best practices can be developed to guide the transition toward family-based care across the region.

4. Mobilizing a Movement for Care Reform

Facilitators: Grace Iye & Tobi Salawu

Question: Identify 5 ways to facilitate discussions that result in regional policies and best practices guiding the transition from institutional to family-based care.

Answers:

- Creation of national/regional multi-stakeholder platforms.
- Investment in capacity building and joint training.
- Leverage technology and data systems for collaboration.

The session focused on “Mobilizing a Movement for Care Reform”, emphasizing the creation of long-term, multi-stakeholder collaborations for sustainable child protection and welfare reform in West Africa. Participants explored strategies for establishing such partnerships, with particular emphasis on dependable cooperation between law enforcement agencies and care institutions. A case study from Benue State illustrated the complex vulnerabilities children face: a sixteen-year-old girl, orphaned and sent away by a relative, faced serious health issues, early motherhood, depression, and financial neglect despite external support being provided. This example underscored the urgent need for coordinated systems that protect children, ensure accountability, and close gaps in care delivery.

The session also explored the establishment of national and regional multi-stakeholder platforms, investment in capacity building, and the use of technology and robust data systems to strengthen collaboration. Key recommendations included implementing existing policies more effectively, integrating national referral pathways for case management, and developing a unified sub-regional policy to address differences across countries. Participants stressed the importance of a clear strategic plan with defined roles, joint training initiatives, and the use of digital platforms to connect resources and streamline referrals, particularly in cases of abuse. The discussions highlighted that sustainable reform in West Africa depends on strong, well-resourced networks that bridge policy and practice, supported by consistent stakeholder engagement and technological innovation.

5. Fundraising and Resource Mobilization

Facilitators: Ade Olowo & Azubuike Kalu

Question: How do we raise funds and mobilize resources to improve family-based care?

Answer: It was concluded that Improving family-based care requires sustainable funding and resource mobilization that go beyond short-term interventions. By engaging diverse stakeholders, leveraging existing networks, and creating innovative funding mechanisms, resources can be directed toward strengthening families and reducing reliance on institutional care.

1. Government Budgetary Allocation and Policy Commitment

- Advocate for increased government investment in child protection and social welfare budgets.
- Push for dedicated budget lines for family strengthening, foster care, and adoption programs.

2. Partnerships with Donors and International Organizations

- Engage bilateral and multilateral agencies, foundations, and INGOs to support family-based care initiatives.
- Position family-based care as aligned with global child protection standards and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3. Private Sector Engagement and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

- Mobilize resources from businesses and corporate foundations to support family-based care through CSR initiatives.
- Build partnerships where companies provide financial contributions, services, or in-kind support (e.g., scholarships, healthcare packages).

4. Community-Based Fundraising and Philanthropy

- Encourage local giving through community associations, religious organizations, and individual philanthropists.
- Organize fundraising events, campaigns, and platforms where communities take ownership of supporting vulnerable children and families.

5. Innovative Financing Mechanisms

- Explore social impact bonds, microfinance programs for caregivers, and crowdfunding platforms.
- Promote income-generating activities and cooperative models that directly benefit families caring for children.

6. Capacity Strengthening for Resource Mobilization

- Train child protection organizations in grant writing, donor engagement, and financial management.
- Build coalitions to jointly apply for funding and advocate for systemic change.

Raising funds and mobilizing resources for family-based care requires a mix of government commitment, donor and private sector partnerships, community engagement, and innovative financing mechanisms. Sustainable investment will ensure that families are empowered to care for their children, thereby reducing reliance on institutional care and promoting every child's right to grow up in a loving family.

Conclusion

The 2025 West Africa Alternative Care Summit concluded with a renewed sense of purpose and a collective commitment to action among participants. Over the course of three days, impactful keynotes, collaborative discussions, and culturally grounded exchanges laid a strong foundation for sustained regional cooperation on child protection and alternative care. The voices of care leavers, woven throughout the sessions, brought urgency to the call for reform, while the expert insights provided clear direction on practical steps forward.

Building on the momentum generated in the Summit, participants agreed on a shared agenda that includes strengthening family-based care systems, closing gaps in policy implementation, investing in capacity building, and leveraging technology for case management and cross-border collaboration. Concrete commitments were made to develop a sub-regional strategic framework, track progress through annual reviews, and establish an online knowledge hub for sharing best practices and resources. The summit also resolved to foster stronger partnerships between governments, civil society, faith-based organizations, and community leaders to ensure that reforms are both contextually relevant and sustainable.

In a symbolic and strategic gesture, a ballot process determined that the 2026 West Africa Alternative Care Summit will be hosted in Sierra Leone. This decision reflects the vision of making WAACS a regional and rotating platform for learning, accountability, and innovation. As delegates departed, they carried with them not just the inspiration of shared ideals but a tangible roadmap for advancing family, resilience, and dignity for every child in West Africa, transforming dialogue into measurable change.

WAACS 2025 PHOTO WALL

Appendices

1. WAACS 2025 Photo Wall



Appendices

2. Summit Agenda



DAY 1

ALTERNATE CARE CONFERENCE IN WEST AFRICA

Theme: Homegrown Solutions from Africa Moving Beyond Orphanages

Time	Session	Lead
08:00 – 09:00	Arrival, Registration & Welcome Coffee	WAACS Team
09:00 – 09:15	Housekeeping & Conference Protocols	Host
09:15 – 09:30	Opening Remarks	Rev. Gabriel Oyediji
09:30 – 10:00	Goodwill Messages (Government, Donors, Partners)	Various
10:05 – 10:20	Voices of Care Leavers	ACNA
10:20 – 10:50	Set The Tone- WHY WAACS?	Sandra Chikan & Ade Olowo
10:50 – 11:05	Talk 1: Reimagining Child Care in West Africa/Care Reform in Africa	David Adoke
11:10– 11:35	Talk 2: Preparing for Independence: The role of mentors	Dr. Ken Merrifield
11:40 – 12:05	Talk 3: Trauma-Informed Practices	Julie Cooper
12:10 – 12:35	Talk 4: Strengthening Families	Sarah Ellis
12:35 – 01:30	LUNCH	All Participants
01:35 – 01:55	Talk 5: Leveraging Technology and Data in alternative care	Kenneth Ayebazibwe
02:00-02:25	Talk 6: Legal and Policy Levers for Better Transitions and Family Reintegration	Philemon Dafi ESQ
02:30– 03:00	Tea Break	All Participants

03:05 – 04:05	<p>Breakout (5 rooms)</p> <p>Room 1: Designing Mentoring & Aftercare Programs for Care Leavers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Room 2: Trauma-Informed Care in Practice: Tools for Caregivers and Institutions ● Room 3: Legal and Policy Levers for Better Transitions and Family Reintegration ● Room 4: Tech-Driven Care: Using Digital Tools for Case Management and Child Protection ● Room 5: Cultural and Faith-Based Perspectives on Healing and Reintegration 	<p>Room Facilitators</p> <p>Room 1: Donovan Karbar/Dr Ken Merrifield</p> <p>Room 2: Erick Mowrey/Ene Oklo</p> <p>Room 3: Kyenpia Mafuyai/Nanret Agaba</p> <p>Room 4: Kenneth Ayebazibwe/ Silas Gyang</p> <p>Room 5: Bobby Joachim/Rev Gabriel Oyediji</p>
04:10 – 05:10	Plenary Reflections from Breakout Rooms	Host / Rapporteurs
05:15 – 05:30	Closing Remarks & Day Two Preview	ASOHON
05:30 – 06:00	Connect with one another	ALL PARTICIPANTS

DAY 1 BREAKOUT ROOMS

03:30 – 04:30

Room 1: Designing Mentoring & Aftercare Programs for Care Leavers

Room 2: Trauma-Informed Care in Practice: Tools for Caregivers and Institutions

Room 3: Legal and Policy Levers for Better Transitions and Family Reintegration

Room 4: Tech-Driven Care: Using Digital Tools for Case Management and Child Protection

Room 5: Cultural and Faith-Based Perspectives on Healing and Reintegration

DAY 2

FOCUSING ON SOLUTIONS AND BUILDING CAPACITY

Time	Session	Lead
07:00 – 09:00	Arrival, Registration, Tea & Coffee	WASC Team
09:00 – 09:05	Welcome & Recap of Day 1	Host
09:00-09:25	Talk 7: Aging Out and the Journey to Adulthood	David Nowell
09:30 - 09:40	Voices from the Field	SOS CVN
09:45 – 10:15	Panel Discussion 1: Sustainable Family-Based Alternatives PANELLISTS: 1. Prince Charles Dickson 2. Miracle Damanka 3. Alex Destiny Newon 4. Frederick Boadu Asare	Moderator: Matt Cooper
10:15 – 10:20	Q&A	
10:20 – 10:25	Children Presentation	TLCC Dance Group
10:30 – 11:00	Panel Discussion 2: Building Systems for Long-Term Impact	Moderator: Sandra Chikan
	Panelists <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rev Gabriel Oyediji • Grace Solomon • Azubike Kalu • Donovan Kabar 	

11:05 – 11:10	Q&A	
11:10 - 11:05	Stretch Break	MC Youngee
11:05 – 11:35	<p>Panel Discussion 3: Innovations and Partnerships in Care Reform</p> <p>PANELLISTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erick Mowrey • Kenneth Ayebazibwe • Regina Afiemo • Abraham Davis 	Moderator: Ade Olowo
11:40 – 11:45	Q&A	
11:50-12:20	<p>Panel Discussion 4: Understanding and Addressing the Unique Needs and Barriers Facing Children with Disabilities in Alternative Care</p> <p>PANELLISTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isaac Yeboah Agyei • Dr Samuel Epifa • Rev Polycarp Degri • Tobi Salawu 	Pst. Elisha Akwai
12:20-12:25	Q&A	Moderator
12:30– 01:30	Lunch Break	P/Team
01:35 – 2:35	Breakout Sessions (5 groups)	Facilitators
02:40 – 03:40	Group Presentations	Group Leads

Day 2: Breakout Session Questions: Sustainable Care Reform in West Africa

- **Promote Family Strengthening (Sandra Chikan and Gladys Matthew)**

Highlight 5 major root causes of child-family separation and identify interventions that empower families to care for their children.

- **Advocate for Legal Pathways to Permanency (Bar. Nanret Agaba & Kyenpia Mafuyai)**

Give 5 major ways to promote kinship, adoption and foster care as sustainable legal options for child placement.

- **Develop Actionable Frameworks (Yonpan Dariem/Bobby Joachim)**

Identify 5 ways to facilitate discussions that result in regional policies and best practices guiding the transition from institutional to family-based care

- **Mobilize a Movement for Care Reform (Grace Iye Solomon & Tobi Salawu)**

Suggest 5 ways we can establish a long-term, multi-stakeholder collaboration for sustainable child protection and welfare reform in West Africa.

- **Fundraising & Resource Mobilization (Ade Olowo/Azubike Kalu)**

How do we raise funds and mobilize resources to improve Family-Based Care?

SPEAKERS



Kenneth Ayebazibwe
African Regional Director (BEB)



Julie Cooper
President, Trauma Free World



Dr. Ken Merrifield
International Director CAYM



Philemon A. Daffi, ESQ.
Attorney-General, Plateau State



Sarah Ellis
Back2Back Haiti Stateside Manager



David Nowell
Executive Director at Hope Institute



David Adoke
Country Director (Uganda)
- Child's i Foundation

MEET THE TEAM



Sandra Chikan
Conference Convener & Chair



Ade Olowo
Co-Convener & Deputy Chair



Yonpan Dariem
Conference Coordinator



Moses Michael Ogbeche
Web Developer, ICT Manager



Yop Joy Nyam
Hospitality & Guest Relations
Manager



Victor Bello
Head of Logistics, Volunteer
Coordinator, Dep. Op. Manager



Tobi Salawu
Reports & Documentation
Manager



Azubike Kalu
Programs & Content Manager



Gladys Matthew
Registration Secretary &
Attendee Services



Grace Iye Solomon
Head of Logistics & Operations



Oiza Alonge
Communications Lead



Bobby Joachim
Mentoring & Professional
Development Coach



Olamilekan Dudubo
Assistant Conference
Coordinator



Ifeanyi Godwin
Conference Media Lead



Rev (Mrs.) Egun Oluwatoyin
Idowu Advisor

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