



Story and Photos; Anthony Nyandiek, CRS Kenya

SCORE ECD enhancing the potential of sisters' congregations in Kenya

SCORE ECD KENYA

The project funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (CNHF), builds the capacity of Catholic sisters in Kenya, Malawi, Ghana and Zambia to expand the provision of quality ECD services for the most vulnerable children in their communities. SCORE ECD project in its third phase (2021-2024) engages a total of 29 sisters' congregations through the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA) and Catholic sisters' national associations in Kenya, Malawi, Ghana and Zambia in activities aimed at increasing their technical capacity in ECD, organizational sustainability, networking, and learning around ECD.

Most Kenyan communities are currently facing unprecedented levels of hunger, due to extremely high and rising food prices, with millions of lives and livelihoods at stake. Predictions indicate that the drought's negative impact will worsen, resulting in a protracted drought-recovery period. Meru County, where SCORE ECD III is being implemented, has had a string of six failed agricultural seasons due to insufficient rainfall. This has been difficult for farmers who make their living solely from agriculture.

I greet the warm and always smiling Sr. Mary Agnes Nkatha, a member of the Little Sisters of St. Theresa's Child Jesus congregation and the CEO of St. Theresa Mission Hospital. She inquires about my health and adeptly guides us to one of the *shambas* Catholic Relief Services has been supporting. It's an easy morning; we receive a big farm tour, one example of the activities Sr. Pauline Acayo has been coordinating in the county. Despite the drought, I am blown away by the lush green farm that was once an arid wasteland and has now been transformed into a breathtaking sight that you must see to believe.

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SCORE ECD PRIORITY AREAS

- *The project is building the technical capacity of sisters' congregations to deliver high-quality, equitable iMBC/ECD care and family strengthening services to caregivers of children under three.*
- *SCORE ECD project is working towards improving knowledge and skills among pregnant and lactating women and fathers of children under 3 years, to enable them to provide their children nurturing care.*
- *Support the National Associations and Congregations of Catholic Sisters (NACCS) to strengthen their organizational capacity to ensure a sustainable institution and continue positioning the NACCS as influential leaders in early childhood at the national level.*

Journey to sustainability through resource mobilization

While on tour of the big orchard, each of us has a fill of delicious mangoes, pumpkins, ripe oranges, bananas, and tomatoes. This has given a huge financial boost to the congregation which the now owns cattle for milk and meat, as well as chickens, pigs, rabbits, goats, and other animals.

"We have this parcel of land that is currently generating revenue for our organization projects. Catholic Relief Services through the SCORE project continues to train, mentor, and accompany our sisters, that led to increased skills and knowledge in resource mobilization through horticulture, beef farming, goat rearing, poultry, and fruit farming. For example, we harvest 20 bananas per week at a cost of approximately \$ 5 to 7 (KES 600-700) per banana. This is already a good income, our cows produce 230 liters of milk each day and we use milk in our hospital and at the children's home, and we sell the extra to the community." Sr. Mary Agnes also asserted.



Sr. Mary Agnes during an interview with Sr. Pauline Acayo, SCORE ECD Coordinator, Sisters' farm in Meru County, Kenya

"The journey towards resource mobilization and enhancing sustainability started with institutional capacity assessment. We did a holistic assessment using the Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument (HOCAl) tool developed by CRS. After the assessment, several gaps were identified, and we immediately embarked on addressing those gaps with support from CRS and AOSK, to position the organization for self-sustainability. For an institution like this, we saw the need to strengthen the systems and set up an internal audit department to ensure that we do not have loopholes that would lead to unnecessary losses..." explained Sr. Mary Agnes.

PROJECT GOAL

The overarching project goal is that children 0-3 years in target areas live in a nurturing environment by 2024. It has the following objectives:

1. *Sisters deliver nurturing care and family strengthening services to caregivers of children 0-3 years.*
2. *Caregivers of children 0-3 years provide their children nurturing care by 2024.*
3. *National Associations and communities of sisters' congregations have strengthened organizational capacity by 2024.*

After identifying our potential weaknesses, we set out to strengthen our sisters' capacity in human resources, finance management, networking, and resource mobilization. This was significant because, during the assessment, we discovered that over 60% of our resources came from a single donor, and we wondered what would happen if the donor ran out of money... Our projects would come to a halt," Sr. Mary Agnes emphasized.

"The training not only included the leadership of our congregation, but also all our sisters. For each training, our congregation sent seven sisters, who then served as peer educators to the sisters including those not from our congregation. We were able to scale up similar resource mobilization skills to our sisters in Tanzania and Italy as well as four other non-SCORE ECD congregations. In all our sisters' communities, we have income generating projects. This is because the sisters realized that for any sustainability to be effective, we needed to empower the sisters who will scale up our ECD work while maintaining quality services," Sr. Mary Agnes explained.



Sisters of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus preparing silage for dairy cattle feeding - Kenya

"The team went through several trainings on resource mobilization, Human Resource Management, Networking and Partnerships. They were also trained on various components of Early Childhood Development to enable them to implement the SCORE ECD project in their community," Sr. Mary Agnes

The congregation now has a herd of cattle for milk and meat, as well as chickens, pigs, rabbits, goats, and other animals.



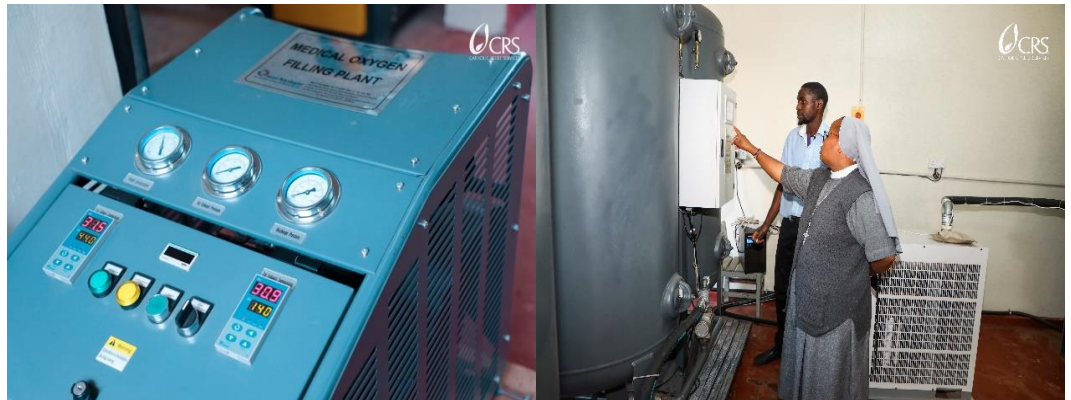
Production of Oxygen for sustainability



Sr. Mary Agnes conducting daily routine monitoring of the production of the Oxygen plant at St. Theresa Hospital, Meru County, Kenya

Oxygen is an extremely scarce commodity; for example, 6.8 cubic meters of oxygen – enough to sustain one adult for 24 hours – costs over \$100. Many Kenyan hospitals use oxygen concentrators, which remove nitrogen from the air instead of drawing from an oxygen cylinder. However, unlike gas cylinders, which can serve an entire ward of patients, an oxygen concentrator can only serve a single patient and is prone to malfunction. One of the cost-cutting initiatives undertaken by the hospital for sustainability is the production of their own oxygen. This was important during the COVID-19 pandemic, when patients required 10 to 15 liters of oxygen per minute. The hospital uses 885 liters of oxygen per minute on average.

"We recently set up a plant that produces more than 100 liters per minute to reduce the costs of buying oxygen, and St. Theresa hospital now saves over \$15,975 approx. (KES 2 million) per month. We have come to understand that building the oxygen plant is one step toward sustainability and self-reliance," echoed Sr. Mary Agnes.



"We did a calculation and realized that when we go for retreats, workshops or even conferences, we spend up to \$24,194 approx. (KES 3 million) annually. So, we decided to construct a facility for other sister congregations at a subsidized rate while offering other clients standard rates. The facility accommodates around 40-45 guests and hosts workshops. They attest that the facility is an excellent source of income following bookings from other organizations, and savings for their meetings," added Sr. Mary Agnes.

Sustainable income generation through conference and lodging facility

"The Sisters also assessed their available resources and realized that besides all they are already doing for fund mobilization and sustainability, they could set up a conference and accommodation facility on one of their parcels of land in Karen, Nairobi. The plot of land is in a peaceful and serene setting. We used the skills gained in proposal writing and developed good proposals that made us get funding for putting up the building. We are very proud, because we are now getting much from this income generating project. Thanks to CRS and AOSK for the capacity building in proposal writing, mentorship and accompaniment that made us fulfill our dreams." Sr. Mary Agnes explained.

The increased financial sustainability of sisters' congregations added in building the skills of sisters to deliver nurturing care to caregivers of children aged 0-3 years.