

A Journey Home: Reuniting Children with Families through Collaborative Efforts



Figure 1Sr .Delvin Mukhwana –AOSK-CCCK right, followed by Secretary general of Malawi Association of Women Religious in Malawi, and lastly the government official from the ministry of social and Labor during the brief meeting between AOSK/AMECEA/GOVERNMENT/AWRIM and EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF MALAWI before visiting the parish and the family for reintegration.

In the heart of Eastern Africa, a transformative collaboration emerged between the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya – Catholic Care for Children in Kenya (AOSK-CCCK) and the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) Social Communication Department. Their joint mission was to advocate for and implement the Comprehensive Catholic Care for children (CCC) movement across the region, focusing on family and community-based care for

children.

The collaboration chose Kenya (AOSK-CCCK), Uganda (ARU-CCCU), Zambia (ZAS-CCCZ), and Malawi (AWRIM-CCCM) as pilot countries. This narrative unfolds in Malawi, where the AOSK and AMECEA embarked on a groundbreaking reintegration pilot to support AWRIM-CCCM, in reintegration of children from their allied Charitable Children Institutions (CCIs) back to their families or family-like environments.

On the pivotal date of February 26, 2024, representatives from AOSK-CCCK and AMECEA convened with key stakeholders in Malawi. The Episcopal Conference of Malawi's Secretary General, commissioners from the ECM of Family Apostolate and Safeguarding, Catholic Care for Children in Malawi (CCCM) and a government representative from the Social Welfare of Children gathered to strategize ways on how the church and government could collaborate to achieve CCCM's objectives.



Figure 2 Team from Diocese of Mangochi:3 priests uncharge of PMS/SAFEGUARDING AND PASTORAL DEPARTMENTS OF MANGOCHI DIOCES DURING FAMILY VISIT

Their collective vision was clear: prevent children from being separated from their families and facilitate the return of those already in CCIs to family like environments (alternative families). This collaboration was not just a partnership; it was a commitment to strengthen families and communities.

Our journey continued as the team, accompanied by AWRIM-CCCM, traveled to Kankao Parish in the Catholic Diocese of Mangochi. Here, we engaged with various stakeholders, including the Bishop of Mangochi Diocese, Rt. Rev. Bishop Montfort Stima, Diocesan commissioners from family apostolate, safeguarding, and Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), the parish priest, the Traditional Authority (TA), the police, the parish council, and the Poverelle sisters who manage the CCIs. During the reflection meeting, the various stakeholders were sensitized on the importance of children growing up in their families, preventing separations, and garnering support for the reintegration process. The team's focus was on a Baby Home named Nyumba ya Chimwemwe (*House of Joy*), serving as a pilot CCI. One baby was identified for reintegration, marking the beginning of a transformative journey.

Visiting the child's prospective family, the team encountered a family eager to welcome back their niece. However, challenges loomed large including inadequate housing, lack of clean water, sanitation facilities, and an inability to afford basic needs. The family, with fertile land but lacking farm inputs. Undeterred, the collaborative effort demonstrated its strength as they recognized the potential of connecting the family to various stakeholders for support.



Figure 3 Rt.Rev. Montfort Stima, family where the child will be reintegrated, CCI team, CCCM together with AOSK-CCK & AMECEA team who had paid a visit to the family for assessment before placement.

In a profound moment, the team witnessed the stakeholders' commitment to planning and supporting the family. This became a testament to the belief that, when communities and stakeholders unite, solutions to challenges emerge effortlessly. The story of this collaborative journey is ongoing, with the commitment to follow up, stabilize the family, and ensure the child seamlessly transitions to their home. The narrative underscores the power of collective action, emphasizing that uniting heads and hearts can indeed pave the way for community development, creating a safe net for vulnerable children