

It is essential that NPOs sustain themselves in the long term in order to be able to provide the much needed programmes that they provide. If NPOs are not sustainable then they close, and vulnerable communities lose out on much needed social development services. Over the years many, many thousands of NPOs have closed in South Africa. In fact, probably more than half of the over 120,000 NPOs registered on the national department of Social Development database are dormant or closed.

One way of sustaining an NPO is to collaborate with other NPOs in forming an income generating company. About 12 years ago, Ditikeni Investments was set up by 23 NPOs across South Africa. The intention was to build and grow an investment company so that the shareholders would benefit in the long-term from the profits of the investment company. Today, Ditikeni is thriving with 18 NPOs involved, with others having cashed in their shareholding. The Centre for Early Childhood Development is one of the 18 shareholders in Ditikeni.

Ditikeni started with share capital of R 2 million and has grown assets to just over R 190 million. In addition to this, each of the shareholders has had their original investment paid back through dividends, to date, to the value of R 13.8 million. Essentially the 18 shareholders have a R 190 million shareholding in Ditikeni at no cost to them at all. Investments held include MTN Zakhele, Chevron, Brimstone, African Pioneer Limited, Vodacom YeboYethu and others. Net Asset value has increased this year by 27% to R 48.22 per share.



If you would like a copy of the 2017 Ditikeni annual report please email me on cecd@iafrica.com.

This is just one innovative way of building NPO sustainability. There is place for such an initiative in the ECD sector – it just needs ECD NPOs to realise this and to act on it.

We hope you enjoy this edition of EARLY YEARS.

ERIC ATMORE
Director

FIVE THINGS THAT MATTER, NO MATTER WHAT

~ Elizabeth DiLauro & Lauren Hogan

A growing body of science and research continues to demonstrate the need to begin supports for children as early as possible to promote their healthy growth and development. Based on this knowledge, and our shared commitment to turning the tide for kids, we're bringing it back to the five "things that matter" in yielding important impacts on the child, and significant, lasting returns for their families, the communities in which they live and work, and the economic and social strength of society as a whole.



1. Relationships Matter

Science shows that a baby's brain makes more than 1 million new neural connections per second in the first few years of life. During this time, babies discover the world through experiences with parents and other caregivers, shaping how they learn and view the world. These experiences - both positive and negative - influence the connections being made in their brains, shaping how they will manage situations as a toddler, pre-schooler, and beyond.

The relationships babies have with trusted adults are critical because they affect the actual wiring taking place in their brains. Parents, as the saying goes, are their children's first and most important teachers. Yet with more than 60 percent of mothers of young children in the workforce, a diverse range of early childhood educators and child care providers also play a critical role in ensuring that children, supported by their families, have the early experiences they need for strong cognitive, physical, social and emotional, and language and literacy development. When babies receive consistent, nurturing, and quality care, they build the necessary foundation to boost their chances to live up to their potential and their promise.

2. Early Childhood Educators Matter

The role of early childhood educators in delivering on this promise is undeniable. Early childhood educators perform complex, demanding, and valuable work. Supported, skilled, knowledgeable, and diverse early childhood educators are the

linchpin in high-quality early learning and it is why 'Power to the Profession', a USA collaboration, seeks to establish a shared framework of career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards and compensation that reflects the critical role early childhood educators play in delivering on the promise of high-quality early childhood education.

3. Quality Matters

Making sure babies and young toddlers - whose brains are growing more rapidly than at any other later time in their lives - receive the quality care necessary to put them on a path toward future success should be one of a country's top economic priorities. We must act under a shared understanding, based on research, science, and evidence, that investing in equitable access to high-quality early care and learning will make a country brighter, stronger, and more competitive. After all, today's diverse group of young children are a nation's future generation of workers, leaders, and innovators. In fact, a recent report by the 'Council for a Strong America' finds that 92 percent of business decision-makers agree that early life experiences directly influence the social and emotional skills needed for the 21st century economy. As one leader put it: "Character is built in the first years of life and it is absolutely necessary for life success."

4. The Impacts of Poverty Matter

Keeping children out of poverty is also key to an economy's long-term health and wellness. As Janet Yellen, Chair of the U.S. Federal Reserve System, noted during a recent conference, adults who grew up worrying about food, an unstable family, or safety are less likely to be employed, have a stable income, or an ability to pay monthly bills compared to adults who had fewer stressors growing up. We know that the effects these types of environmental stresses - hunger, fear, and harm - are toxic to growing brains. When stress is the "input," the outcomes are likely to be less than optimal. Poverty can literally get under the skin, undermining development in key regions of the brain including self-regulation and learning, memory and language, and emotional control.

5. Equitable Access Matters

Quality, affordable child care for young children can change the trajectory for many children and their families living in or near poverty. It enables their parents to work, relieving the economic instability that contributes to a stressful family environment. At the same time, it provides a responsive, enriching environment that meshes with the strengths of the family to support early development.



EARLY YEARS

When very young children are nurtured and cared for by loving adults, who honour and respect the language and culture of the child's home, the negative effects of poverty are mitigated. These relationships serve as a buffer to the harm caused by environmental and physical stress and supports healthy brain development - which is the key to all future learning.



Finally, and perhaps most importantly, resources matter. Child care assistance for low-income families still reaches less than 1 out of every 6 eligible children and is continuing to decline. And despite research that shows that the strongest effects of quality child care are found with children from families with few resources and who are under great stress, lower quality care is often the only care available in low-income communities. We must act with urgency to ensure that our nation's youngest, and most vulnerable, learners receive equitable opportunities and reach their full potential.

We must commit to making the public investments needed to create a child care system that ensures it is economically feasible to provide high-quality services for young children and families, regardless of income or zip code, state or setting. Not only will babies and toddlers benefit from close relationships with well-qualified and well-compensated child care providers who are culturally and linguistically responsive, but, we all stand to benefit when our diverse future workforce—today's babies and toddlers—arrive at school as eager, confident learners, prepared for future success.

Article available at

<https://medium.com/@zerotothree/five-things-that-matter-no-matter-what-5e2355bb1be3>

ENGAGING FATHERS IN PARENTING INTERVENTIONS IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

~ Joshua Jeong

A strong body of research has highlighted parenting interventions as a key strategy for improving early childhood development outcomes in low- and middle-income countries

(LMICs). Particularly over the past decade, parenting intervention studies have expanded across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, and growing investments have been made by national governments to integrate and scale up early parenting programmes across various sectors.

Despite this encouraging prioritisation and emphasis on the importance of parenting, programmes in LMICs have largely remained focused on mothers exclusively. And perhaps unintended, the terms “parents” and “caregivers” in the early childhood literature, especially in LMICs, have become used interchangeably to just reflect “mothers”.

However, it is well-documented that fathers positively influence children's early development, above and beyond maternal contributions. For example, many studies from the U.S., U.K., and other high-income countries using large longitudinal datasets have consistently underscored the unique importance of paternal stimulation and paternal warmth and responsiveness for children's early cognitive, language, and socioemotional development. A small but growing body of evidence from LMICs has similarly shown positive effects of fathers on ECD outcomes. So in light of this global evidence, why are fathers still side-lined and overlooked in parenting research?



While this is certainly not exhaustive or mutually exclusive, three factors might contribute to the imbalanced focus (more on mothers than fathers) in parenting research and programming in LMICs.

Availability and accessibility of mothers – Mothers in many of these contexts (from the Caribbean to sub-Saharan Africa to South Asia) are the primary caregivers of the child. They objectively spend more time together with the child (whereas fathers are more likely out of the home longer, even residing away for work for multiple days at a time) and undertake the majority of the caregiving roles and responsibilities that it “makes sense” to target mothers for their accessibility and direct involvement with the child.

Social and cultural norms – In many LMICs, particularly in

contexts where gender inequalities are quite stark and persistent, the portrayal of men as nurturing caretakers who engage in play and stimulation may be less common and not even something that is expected or encouraged by family members and society. Perhaps unintentionally but typically not based on formative research or data collected, it has become assumed that fathers are not interested or additionally impactful for promoting child development.

Operational and resource limitations – The primary cadre of personnel who have delivered early childhood intervention programmes in LMICs has been local women volunteers or female health professionals/paraprofessionals. This raises challenges in contexts where it is less common and acceptable for men and women to engage one-on-one or in group settings with each other (in the way that female health workers have traditionally coached and engaged with mothers in home visits or community group meetings). Additionally, a major component to the success of ECD programs has been well-established curricula – which have allowed for easy adaptation across contexts. However, the overwhelming majority of these curricula and manuals have been designed exclusively for mother-child dyads. Currently we don't yet know which content "ingredients" are necessary and effective for mother and father, holistic family focused programmes.

Despite such barriers that may marginalise fathers from parenting programmes, there are two notable exceptions of innovative programmes in LMICs that have focused on engaging fathers and supporting co-parenting to improve ECD. In Turkey, the Mother-Child Education Foundation (ACEV) established the Father Support Programme, or a 15-week course to encourage fathers to take a more positive and active role in their children's early development. In this programme, fathers meet in male groups to build parenting skills and freely discuss the challenges of fatherhood. The programme is currently being implemented across Turkey and is expected to reach almost 4,000 fathers by 2018.



In Uganda, researchers at McGill University and Plan International designed and evaluated a parenting intervention that engaged both mothers and fathers to promote ECD. The programme consisted of 12 bi-weekly sessions (e.g.,

psychosocial stimulation; "love and respect" for yourself, your child, and your spouse; among other topics that were sensitive to both genders) and incorporated both fathers only group sessions as well as both mothers and fathers group sessions. This programme is continuing to be implemented by Plan International in Uganda as well as other countries across sub-Saharan Africa.



It is quite clear that fathers are influential caregivers for ECD across the world. Two programmes from Turkey and Uganda serve as great examples to learn from and build upon in the context of LMICs. However, many questions remain unknown regarding how to engage and integrate fathers in programmes with other caregivers; and considering some of these barriers regarding availability and accessibility of fathers, social and cultural norms, and operational and resource constraints in specifically LMICs. Qualitative studies, in particular, are a great next step in terms of research needed and can unpack some of these potential challenges and elucidate strategies for engaging fathers in ECD programs moving forward. Much remains untapped regarding the opportunities that can be achieved for young children, mothers, fathers, families, and their communities by adopting more family-integrated ECD programmes and services in LMICs.

Article available at

<https://novakdjokovicfoundation.org/engaging-fathers-parenting-interventions-low-middle-income-countries/>

FINDING WHAT'S RIGHT WITH CHILDREN WHO GROW UP IN HIGH-STRESS ENVIRONMENTS

~ Medical Xpress

A new research article proposes that more attention be given to what's right with children who grow up in high-stress environments so their unique strengths and abilities can be

used to more effectively tailor education, jobs and interventions to fit them.



Stress-adapted children and youth possess traits - such as heightened vigilance, attention shifting and empathic accuracy - that aren't tapped in traditional learning and testing situations. In addition, these skills may actually allow at-risk children to perform better than their peers from low-risk backgrounds when faced with uncertainty and stress.

Most research to date has focused on detrimental effects of growing up under stressful conditions and the deficits in cognitive development that can result, said Bruce J. Ellis, lead author.

"We're not arguing that's wrong, but that it is only part of the picture," said Ellis, a University of Utah psychology professor. "The other part is that children fine-tune their abilities to match the world that they grow up in, which can result in enhanced stress-adapted skills. We're trying to challenge a world view and give consideration to an alternative adaptation-based approach to resilience."

The study "Beyond Risk and Protective Factors: An Adaptation-based Approach to Resilience" is forthcoming in the July issue of *Perspectives on Psychological Science*.

Co-authors include JeanMarie Bianchi, University of Arizona; Vladas Griskevicius, University of Minnesota; and Willem E. Frankenhuis, Radboud University Nijmegen.

The prevailing view is that children who experience high-stress environments are at risk for impairments in learning and behaviour and that interventions are needed to prevent, reduce or repair the damage that has been done to them.

These high-stress environments include neighbourhood danger; exposure to environmental chemicals; bad housing conditions; neglectful and abusive parenting; low-quality childcare; and peer and school violence.

Research has shown that the more stressors children are exposed to, the more their performances in traditional learning

and testing situations is compromised.

Most interventions are aimed at countering these deficits and getting "children and youth from high-risk backgrounds to act, think, and feel more like children and youth from low-risk backgrounds," the authors say. In other words, the dominant approach assumes at-risk youth are somehow broken and need to be fixed.

Virtually no research attention has been paid to what strengths and abilities youth possess as a result of growing up in high-risk environments, Ellis said.

Although there is a rich body of literature examining adaptive responses in birds and rodents to stressful environments, the first theoretical work related to humans was published in 2013 by co-author Frankenhuis, followed by the first experiments in 2015 by co-author Griskevicius, Ellis said. That research showed repeated or chronic stress does not exclusively impair cognition and can improve forms of attention, perception, learning, memory and problem-solving.

"Our argument is that stress does not so much impair development as direct or regulate it toward these strategies that are adaptive under stressful conditions," Ellis said. "Stress-adapted children and youth may perform better on tasks that involve situations and relationships that are relevant to them, such as social dominance. They also may perform better in settings that do not attempt to minimize the reality of daily stressors and uncertainties."



These stress-adapted skills should be understood, appreciated and seen as building blocks for success, Ellis said. A first, essential step is that researchers catalog the strengths and abilities of people who grow up in high-stress environments and focus on how to leverage those abilities to enhance learning, intervention and developmental outcomes.

Article available at
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-07-children-high-stress-environments.html>