Community Perspectives on Early Childhood Development in Kenya: Preliminary Findings

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Introduction

- 43% (250 m) children under 5 in low & middle income countries at risk of sub-optimal devt – poverty and stunting

- Poor start in life – poor health, nutrition – inadequate learning – low adult earnings

- Young children need nurturing care from start

- Devt. – begin at conception

- Early intervention can reduce negative effects (Lancet, 2016)
Project Partners

CONRAD N. HILTON FOUNDATION

UNICEF

CENTER ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

AFRICA EARLY CHILDHOOD NETWORK
@AfricaECDnetwork

FRAMEWORKS INSTITUTE
Project Goals

- To translate the neuroscience of ECD in ways that improve people’s understandings of the science.
- To provide communications tools to ECD practitioners and decision-makers in Kenya to help them improve outcomes for children.
Experts
The science you want to be communicating and implementing.

Decision-makers
Practitioners, planners, and policymakers

Public
The people who raise and interact with children, as well as who vote, volunteer, work, and participate in the national discourse about
Research Base

“Cultural Models” interviews
- 2 hours
- one-on-one
- semi-structured
- recorded

Public (x24) and Decision-makers (x20) in six locations: Siaya, Isiolo, Machakos, Kisii, Nairobi, Eastleigh

“On-the-Street” interviews
- 10-12 minutes
- sidewalk recruitment
- open-ended questions

Public (x60) in 4 locations: Siaya, Machakos, Nairobi, Eastleigh
Cultural Models

- Shared, durable, and dominant understandings and assumptions that structure thinking around a topic.
- Many are widely shared across a population, and are reinforced in media, education, custom, and elsewhere.
- People rely on cultural models to make meaning out of experiences, feelings, thoughts... and your communications.
“Cultural models are presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it.”

— Naomi Quinn and Dorothy Holland, *Cultural Models in Language & Thought* (1987)
Public Models
What is early childhood about?

CHILDHOOD!
Public does not operate with a distinct category of “early childhood”
What is early childhood about?

Aging Up
What is early childhood about?

Dependency on Basic Inputs

- Food
- Water
- Shelter
- Clothing

BASIC NEEDS
What is early childhood about?

“ECD” = Institutions
How does early development happen?

The Basics
- Love
- Shelter
- Nutrition
- Safety

Automatic
(If Basics Are Met)

What Develops
- Physical
- Mental
- Social
- Linguistic
What shapes early development?

Multiple environments, especially home

Poverty undermines development
What shapes early development?

Access to Health Services
Who is responsible for early childhood development?

Mothers First
(but a shared responsibility with fathers, family, neighbors, community, and government)
Who is responsible for early childhood development?

Government, in Health Services
How and when do young children learn?

Two Models of Learning

INFORMAL

- Starts right away.
- Mimicry
- Socialization

FORMAL

When “real” learning starts... at 3+ years of age.
What should be done to improve early childhood development?

- Raise Awareness
- Improve Schools
- Improve Infrastructure
- Improve Health Services
- Economic Empowerment
Decision-maker Models
What is early childhood about?

Dependency on Basic Inputs

“First 1,000 Days”

Conception

OR

Birth
How does early development happen?

**Public**

- Physical
- Mental
- Social
- Linguistic

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**Decision-makers**

- Physical
- Mental
- Social
- Linguistic

- Emotional
- Brain
How does early development happen?

Brain = Container
To be filled and fed
What shapes early development?

Basics/Nutrition

Multiple Environments

Poverty undermines development

Access to Health Services
Who is responsible for early childhood development?

Shared Responsibility
Mothers, fathers, family, neighbors, community, and government (in health services)

Caregivers

Domestic Workers
What should be done to improve early childhood development?

- Raise Awareness
- Improve Health Services
- Expand & Improve ECD Infrastructure
- Leverage Health Services
Implications on Brain Development

• Peoples thinking & understanding of ECD will influence their action/inaction in meeting developmental needs of children – stimulation (sensory pathways, language, cognition, socio-emotional)

• Lack of “early” in the public’s definition of childhood – attention to early years may be minimal – nutrition, brain devt. - focus is in education

• Understanding brain architecture – connections of neurons – environmental influences – not as a container

• Serve and return – social relationships - communication

• Communication materials
Thank you.