

This research project explored ways of promoting innovations that could support quality service delivery to children 0-4 years. This includes integrating food security and child wellbeing, designing interventions to strengthen support to non-profit early childhood development (ECD) stakeholders delivering services through the CWP programme, expanding access of vulnerable children to quality home- and community-based ECD programmes through placement of CWP participants in these kinds of programmes, and promoting integration between CWP interventions and other service providers to enhance delivery of services.

Implementing organisation: Human Science Research Council

EMPLOYMENT CREATION FUND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT — GIVING CHILDREN A HEAD START IN LIFE

Looking at how to make the Community Work Programme work for young children by identifying innovations that will enhance early childhood development.

If children receive proper nourishment and attention when they are young, the chances are good that the path they are on will take them to success in adulthood. While parents play an important role in early childhood development, home life in South Africa is often far from ideal, with many parents working long hours and not being able to spend quality time with their children.

For this reason, ECD centres are of utmost importance in our society, and they should have enough space for all registered children to develop well. There should also be an adequate number of educators, and they should be well-trained to detect any learning disabilities that any of the learners might have. Equipment is vital too, and if any specialised equipment is used, then proper training should be given so that the equipment is used properly.

The CWP is actively involved in ECD around the country, both through assisting with crèches and also with planting food gardens and feeding young children. ECD is, however, a specialised field, and participants are not always adequately trained. Finding out how effective this aspect of the CWP work is, and what could be done to improve it, motivated this research project.

Research included fieldwork at a site level and telephone interviews.

Interviews were completed at 13 sites with the following stakeholders: CWP site manager, CWP food gardens co-ordinator, CWP ECD or social co-ordinator, CWP Reference Committee members, ECD organisations working with CWP, ECD organisations at the CWP site not working with CWP, where relevant, the local councillor and government officials working with CWP site.

In addition, interviews were conducted with Provincial government in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape with the following departments: Western Cape Departments of Social Development, Local Government, Transport and Public Works, and KwaZulu-Natal Departments of Social Development, Education, Local Government and Traditional Affairs and Health.

The findings were presented at a stakeholder workshop in June around three theme areas: food security interventions, early childhood development interventions, and CWP operations.

An innovation facilitation tool has also been developed. This will provide information and resources to guide implementation of programmes if a site wishes to pursue an innovation. The tool is not intended as a “one size fits all”, and has been designed to allow sites to determine how to implement an innovation taking into account local conditions.



The research findings indicate that there are a number of CWP interventions which support the ECD policy goals for young children. Although the scale of implementation is fairly small compared to other CWP interventions, and to the need, this is fulfilling an important need for young children.

Child poverty is deeper and more severe in rural areas of South Africa, which are also the target areas for CWP. Interventions such as the food security and ECD interventions being implemented by CWP coupled with providing vulnerable households and caregivers with a regular source of income (particularly to female breadwinners) can contribute significantly towards improving children's wellbeing outcomes. In the context of widespread poverty and high levels of unemployment such safety nets are important and would appear to be well targeted.

CWP food security interventions are reaching vulnerable children and households in meaningful ways, at least in reducing hunger, a key millennium development goal. However, much more could be done to address nutrition security, that is the kind of food children are eating so that they get this nutrients they need to grow both physically and mentally.

CWP social and community interventions targeted to young children are making equally important contributions in the protection and development of young children. However unless the quality of interventions is managed and supported some interventions may cause harm and maybe wasteful expenditure of scarce resources.

Below are some examples of what the CWP doing at different sites around the country:

To see to the nourishment needs of children, CWP workers are establishing food gardens around the country. In Keiskammahoek alone, gardens have been started at 30 crèches. In Welkom, 400 gardens have been started, and in Sterkspruit, an amazing 5000 gardens have been planted. Bohlabela has taken the initiative of using 'master farmers' as part of their CWP drive. These workers have shown ECD centres how to start and run their very own food gardens.

The CWP has helped erect jungle gyms in Dukuduku, Dlangubo and Mbazwane schools and crèches. These are known to improve children's motor skills, balance and eye/hand co-ordination.

Gavin Eichler of the Zululand Centre for Sustainable Development, the local implementing agent for a number of CWP sites in KwaZulu-Natal, has experience in building jungle gyms.



"A lot of thought goes into making a good jungle gym," Gavin explains. "Our jungle gyms are constructed in such a way that each part helps the child to develop a certain aspect of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, for example 'balancing on the bridge', 'climbing the net', 'hand-over-hand swinging' and so on."

Children's blocks are created from wooden off-cuts in Dlangubo. Different shapes are created and then coloured using natural, non-toxic dyes. Disabled CWP workers take great pleasure in being trained to produce these blocks, and the children love the end products.

Another aspect of CWP work at ECD centres is help with maintenance. CWP workers are experts at helping to install toilets and water tanks and erect fences.

In Gawula, CWP participants assist with cooking, cleaning and other chores, and in so doing, help to care effectively for 135 little learners at the local ECD centre.

In Mthwalume, the CWP workers offer their services as teachers' assistants and substitute teachers if any educators are absent.

Meriting CWP workers thoroughly enjoy interacting with the children at the ECD, teaching them songs and nursery rhymes much to the delight of the kids. The children at this centre were overjoyed when they received 95 plastic mats donated by the CWP. The children used to sleep and play on a bare floor ... now they have the mats. Rustenburg Cash 'n Carry was moved by a letter by CWP participants requesting donations for the local centre. As a result they donated balls, tables, chairs, pots, food, paint and even vuvuzelas to brighten the children's days. They have also pledged a donation of R1 500's worth of groceries to the crèche, every month until June 2012.

This profile is part of a series that looks at local innovation in the South African government's Community Work Programme (CWP). It was produced by Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) for the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG). For more information about the CWP go to www.cogta.gov.za/cwp.