



Executive Summary

OUTCOME EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT “MAKING THE FIRST 1000 DAYS COUNT IN ETHIOPIA – SCALING UP PHASE”

Acknowledgements

This Executive Summary was developed by International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI) in the Netherlands. We thank Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Wabe Children's Aid and Training (WCAT) staff for the fundamental support in the design and execution of the evaluation and for their eagerness to exchange their experiences, learn new approaches, and improve their practice. The practitioners and parents who participated in the evaluation deserve our deepest gratitude.

Suggested citation: ICDI (2024). Executive Summary of Outcome Evaluation. *Project 'Making the First 1000 Days Count in Ethiopia- Scaling Up Phase'*. Leiden: ICDI

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THE FIRST 1000 DAYS OF A CHILD'S LIFE ARE A CRITICAL PERIOD FOR BRAIN DEVELOPMENT AND OVERALL WELL-BEING. DURING THIS TIME, THE FOUNDATIONS FOR COGNITIVE, EMOTIONAL, AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT ARE LAID. ECD INTERVENTIONS PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN SHAPING THESE EARLY EXPERIENCES, PROVIDING THE NECESSARY SUPPORT AND STIMULATION FOR OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT. HIGH-QUALITY ECD INTERVENTIONS, SUCH AS RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING, EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS, AND ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE, SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT A CHILD'S COGNITIVE ABILITIES, SOCIAL SKILLS, AND LONG-TERM EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES.

World Health Organisation, 2020

Background and introduction

This executive summary covers the findings of the outcome evaluation for the project 'Making the first 1000 days count in Ethiopia! Scaling up phase', coordinated by ICDI and implemented by Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Wabe Children's Aid and Training (WCAT). In 2018, ICDI, together with Ethiopian partner organisation ESD, piloted an approach that supports playful learning and responsive parenting activities for children under 4 and their caregivers in 7 communities in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. The project was called 'Making the first 1000 days count in Ethiopia'¹ and it combined home visiting and centre-based programmes. The focus on the pilot phase was on the usability and outcomes of the Home Visiting Programme. The successful [outcomes observed](https://icdi.nl/projects/making-the-first-1000-days-count/), such as the effective provision of parenting support, establishment of positive relationships with families, and dissemination of essential knowledge, clearly justified conducting a scaling phase of the project in 2021² by expanding the approach to new communities. Additionally, during the scaling phase, partners actively engaged in lobbying and advocating for change in local and national policies, aiming to promote broader systemic improvements in early childhood support. In this second phase, the project reached 8 new communities in the Amhara region. Overall, the project reached a total of 15 communities over 4 years.

¹ <https://icdi.nl/projects/making-the-first-1000-days-count/>

² <https://icdi.nl/projects/making-the-first-1000-days-count-in-ethiopia-scaling-up-phase/>

The outcome evaluation for the project sought to answer the overall question: “*Has the 1000 days approach been effectively implemented in the new communities?*”. Data was collected during mid to late 2022.

The full Outcome Evaluation report is available upon request. Please contact the team at ICDI.

Key findings

1. Community sense of ownership for young children

- A **sense of ownership regarding the health and psychosocial well-being of children** and their families within the communities was supported by the **establishment and operation of ECD Committees**. ECD Committees worked as a team through a mutually respectful working relationship that cultivated trust and esteem between the members. Each ECD Committee **developed community plans** for children 0-4 and organised several community learning events. ECD Committees were able to identify unmet needs within communities and implement solutions.
- Achievements in terms of **lobbying and advocacy** were reflected in **two advocacy sessions** held among representatives of beneficiaries, local and national governments, and national and international Civil Society Organisations, **13 lobby and advocacy activities**, including 5 workshops and 8 round tables, and **9 monitoring sessions held with government signatories**. As a result of these efforts, **7 new villages or communities showed concrete interest in the 1000 days approach**.

2. Improving health, early learning opportunities, and social integration of children

- Increased **availability of non-formal education services**, connected to the establishment of **Play Hubs**, non-formal education services created within the communities that provided children with opportunities for early learning. A total of **8 new Play Hubs were successfully established** during the Scaling up phase of this project in the Amhara region. Furthermore, **11 satellite Play Hubs were established**. A total of 2772 children visited these Play Hubs. Additionally, 866 children from harder to reach locations benefited from the **Home Visiting Programme, that also provided children with early learning opportunities**. A mapping of services identified **requests for Play Hubs to be open more than twice per week**. Another significant effect of the Play Hubs was how they supported families and children to build social networks.

- There was an **improvement in quality of health services** and **increased staff skilfulness** both during pre- and post-natal period, with the staff being considered professional and reliable. A **referral system** amongst services was a key factor contributing to **enhanced accessibility of services**; the programme actively build collaborative links with other services, including hospitals, health posts, vaccination clinics, midwives, childcare centres, and preschools.
- A group of **selected mothers engaged in income-generating activities** involving: basic business skills and entrepreneurship; vocational skills training and income-generating activities; Child development, responsive parenting, nutrition and sexual and reproductive health rights. These mothers considered their quality of life had somehow improved following these activities. They were able to avoid high debts and generate additional income and therefore improve the overall nutrition in their household.

3. Fostering the parent-child relationship

- The **parent-child relationship was fostered through building parents' skills and confidence in creating a safe and supportive environment for their young children**. It was found that parental skills and confidence were increased, with 1603 nursing mothers, pregnant women, and their husbands attending workshops at the Play Hubs. Families unable to attend workshops could foster these skills through the Home Visiting Programme. During these visits, staff modelled **favourable behaviours to parents, helped parents promote the social and emotional competence of their children**, and activities to **strengthen the parent-child relationship**. Parents frequenting the Play Hubs with their children demonstrated **appropriate social and emotional competencies** regarding interactions with their children.

Recommendations

- Ensure the continuity of the **ECD Committees**, considering the additional benefits they bring to the communities where they operate.
- Prioritize the **sustainability and maintenance of existing Play Hubs** as a key focus in ongoing lobby and advocacy initiatives to guarantee their continuation beyond the project's conclusion. Increase the frequency of Play Hub operations. Recognizing the significant role of Play Hubs in the community, expanding their availability throughout the week can provide children with more opportunities for learning and interaction.
- Expand the Home Visiting Programme**, acknowledging the positive impact of combining it with Play Hubs. The joint delivery of services has proven effective in ensuring

children's social inclusion and access to support. Consider extending home visits to reach a wider range of families.

- iv. **Extend the project to adjacent communities** by adopting successful practices observed in current project communities, i.e. the establishment of ECD Committees, fostering a sense of ownership, ensuring Play Hubs' suitable location and accessibility, implementing satellite options (mobile play hubs), and conducting home visits for families facing accessibility challenges.
- v. Continue providing **activities and workshops for parents in the community** to increase their knowledge and confidence about child development and parenting. Expand the scope of activities and workshops for parents. The evaluation has shown progress in equipping parents, but there is still room for improvement. New topics can be discussed and proposed by caregivers themselves, in order to meet their learning needs.

Concluding Note

This executive summary covers the projects efforts and achievements toward enhancing the early learning experiences of children within local communities, as well as fostering significant improvements in their social integration and health. The Play Hubs and the Home Visiting Programme have played pivotal roles in offering accessible non-formal education services for children and their families. The 1000 days approach not only enriched the children's learning environment but also extended support to parents, empowering them through workshops focused on nutrition, child development, and responsive parenting (between others). These efforts collectively contributed to a nurturing environment conducive to the holistic development of children. The findings also highlight the development of a strong sense of ownership and collaboration within the communities, as evidenced by the actions and efforts of the ECD Committees.

The overarching success of this project lies in its ability to empower communities, to improve access to education and healthcare, and to enrich the parent-child relationship, thereby laying a solid foundation for the future of these young learners and their families. Moving forward, the recommendations emphasise the need for sustained support and expansion of these initiatives, highlighting the potential for these efforts to serve as a blueprint for similar projects globally.



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