

## **The evidence base for supporting SHAMBA**

SHAMBA's programme to support communities in Eswatini to provide early childhood development (ECD) services for their most needy children is strongly evidence based. Not only is there strong evidence to support what we are doing, there is also strong evidence to support the way in which we are doing it.

### ***The global need for early childhood development***

A recent Lancet comment on a series of commissioned papers is entitled: "Early childhood development – global action is overdue". And early child development is featured in the most recent World Development Report from the World Bank.<sup>1</sup> All over the world, evidence is mounting that children who experience quality early childhood development, including early stimulation, early education and proper nutrition have an exponentially higher chance of socio-economic success as adults.<sup>2,3</sup> Children in the most disadvantaged quintiles of their societies are at the greatest risk of being deprived during this critical early period.<sup>4</sup> Interventions directed at the poorest children have been shown to provide enormous returns on investment.<sup>5,6</sup> There is now widespread consensus that investing in early childhood development services has a far higher return on investment than attempts to address poverty and inequality later in life.<sup>7</sup>

### ***The crucial need in Eswatini***

Eswatini has the world's highest rates of HIV and TB. The impact of the dual epidemic has been severe, especially on families and children. One third of the population aged 15-49 is living with HIV, while 80% of TB patients are co-infected with HIV. UNICEF estimates that there are 130,000 orphans and 15,000 child-headed households. This represents only part of the problem. 43% of pregnant mothers are HIV positive and the children of HIV positive parents experience need long before they become orphans.

Sister Diane from the Cabrini Ministries points to a hidden crisis of families resulting from the AIDS epidemic in Eswatini. She says, "After 20 years of sickness and dying and then 10 years of recovery with ARVs, many, many families have been left disintegrated." The result is that many children are being brought up in impoverished households by a grandparent, single parent or other relative. These carers, who are focused on day to day survival, are in no position to provide early learning opportunities through books, toys or learning experiences. Children from these households, who are often malnourished and stunted,<sup>8</sup> are poorly prepared for primary school. They seldom perform well, often repeat years and few graduate to secondary school. As a result, they are unable to break out of the poverty cycle.

The lack of publically funded preschool education in Eswatini means that only children from better off families attend preschool and this exacerbates the high social costs of early childhood development inequalities highlighted by Heckman.<sup>7</sup>

### ***How to address the need and get the biggest bang for your buck***

As part of Lancet's series of papers on early childhood development, a review of the impacts of different strategies to promote early child development was undertaken. The authors conclude that, "The most effective early child development programmes provide direct learning experiences to children and their families, are targeted towards younger and disadvantaged children, are of longer duration, high quality and high intensity and are integrated with family support, health, nutrition or educational systems and services."<sup>6</sup>

In the table below, the characteristics of successful early child development interventions are taken from the Lancet review and set against SHAMBA's current support activities with neighbourhood (NCP) communities.

**Table 1: Successful ECD interventions and the SHAMBA model**

<b>Characteristics of successful early-child development interventions</b> (taken from Engle et al. <sup>6</sup> )	<b>SHAMBA supported ECD at community Neighbourhood Care Points</b>
Provision of services direct to children is more effective than only providing information to parents	Direct children's services include preschool, after-school clubs, kids' clubs.
A focus on disadvantaged children	Preschool applications assessed by home visits to ensure the neediest children are accepted
Provide ECD staff with in service training, continuous support and learning material support	Daily support provided to preschool teachers, on the job training by an early years' education expert consultant, extensive library, and access to computer teaching materials.
Small group activities and high staff to children ratio	Preschool classes of 20 with teacher and assistant teacher
Variety of age appropriate activities	Full range of learning activities and experiences including pre-maths, pre-reading, fine motor and gross motor skills, exploration of own environments, health and nutrition.
Younger children with longer exposures benefit most	Preschool enrolment 3-6 years. We try to take the children from age 3 or 4 years.
Organised community-based early learning centres have the best impact and they yield even greater dividends when coupled with community-based nutrition and parenting programmes, including health and child protection interventions.	Preschools established at community-based NCPs with kitchens for daily feeding. Parents contribute by cooking, providing fuel and volunteering for children's learning activities. Frequent parents' meetings are held. Community NCP committee oversees the feeding programme and preschool. SHAMBA staff identify and follow up where there are child protection and safeguarding concerns.
Integration of health, nutrition, education, social and economic development and collaboration between government agencies and civil society	SHAMBA staff work with government social welfare, health and education services and with organisations providing adult education and skills development opportunities.

We believe the SHAMBA model of supporting ECD through community NCPs and the development at NCPs of high quality preschool education for the most vulnerable children ensures that investments through SHAMBA pay very high dividends and make a real difference to the children and families directly supported, as well as to the communities with whom we work.

From the literature on the experience of ECD programmes in developing countries, we realise there is more we can and should be doing. For example we need to do more to ensure that all members of the community understand the importance of ECD. We should be doing more to promote good parenting at the community level. And we should do more to ensure home-based carers have the knowledge, skills and support they need to provide safe, healthy and stimulating environments for the children in their care.

Our model of providing quality preschool learning for the most disadvantaged children at community NCPs can be a springboard from which wider community ECD can be built.

<sup>1</sup> World Bank. World Development Report 2015

<http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/Publications/WDR/WDR%202015/Chapter-5.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> ELMA Featured Blog, 2014. [www.elmaphilanthropies.org/blog/why-does-elma-invest-in-early-childhood-development-in-africa/#.VPfuvfmUcSI](http://www.elmaphilanthropies.org/blog/why-does-elma-invest-in-early-childhood-development-in-africa/#.VPfuvfmUcSI)

<sup>3</sup> OECD, 2014. [www.oecd.org/edu/school/48980282.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/48980282.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Lancet editorial comment. 2011. <http://www.thelancet.com/series/child-development-in-developing-countries-2>

<sup>5</sup> Walker et al. 2011. <http://www.thelancet.com/series/child-development-in-developing-countries-2>

<sup>6</sup> Engle et al. 2007. <http://www.thelancet.com/series/child-development-in-developing-countries>

<sup>7</sup> Heckman J.J, 2014. <http://www.heckmanequation.org/content/resource/case-investing-disadvantaged-young-children>

<sup>8</sup> The Cost of Hunger in Africa study 2013. [www.wfp.org/content/cost-hunger-africa-Eswatini](http://www.wfp.org/content/cost-hunger-africa-Eswatini)