

Northwest University

Integrative Project

Integrated Early Childhood Care and Education for Children in Rural Poor Communities

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## Introduction

On August 6 and 7, 2020, I did qualitative research visits to the homes of Hakizimana Marcel and Ingabire Roseline to access and validate the impact of church-centered savings groups (SGs) on these individuals and families. The pastors who shepherd each of these families offered to come with me for pastoral care. Both correspondents shared with me that many good things had happened to them through savings groups. Some positive outcomes included new and improved houses, increased food security, improved group-member relationships, participation in church and community events, respect and dignity in the community, spiritual growth, and education for children.

As I observed, I noticed many good things including livestock, improved houses, gardens and barns of harvests, and the meals that we enjoyed together in their homes. On both visits, however, what stunned me most was the condition of the children, both at home and in the community.



Karegyesa, Emmanuel. *Ingabire's family. Picture taken during Fieldwork. Aug 07, 2020*

Under further observation, I noticed a serious sanitation and hygiene problem. It was evident that the children have not had a decent bath for days. Their clothes were stained, devoid of water and soap for a while, as was the untrimmed hair on their heads. Lack of hygiene puts

children at a high risk of contracting diseases that lead to poor development and, at worst, death. Robert Black, et al., writes in their article, “Where and Why are 10 Million Children Dying Every Year”, that “unhygienic and unsafe environments place children at risk of death. Ingestion of unsafe water, inadequate availability of water for hygiene, and lack of access to sanitation contribute to about 1.5 million child deaths and around 88% of deaths from diarrhea” (Ibid 2227). These children in Ingabire’s home were at risk of contracting diseases due to unhygienic conditions. As I looked at the condition of the children, and them being at home in the early hours of the day, I wondered if they have a chance to go to school to unleash their future development potential.

I asked, “Do you have preschool education opportunities in this community?”

“We do not have preschool services in this community. Preschool-age children stay at home playing or helping their parents or caregivers with household chores and farm activities” she answered.

Her response reminded me of a similar parental attitude toward preschool-age children that I experienced in a different community during ethnography, a class in my master’s program. In a later conversation, Jean Damascene Sendugu told me that, “they (*children*) will learn how to till the land, how to herd cows, and they will learn how to take care of their siblings. They are too young to learn anything.” During a community walk on that day, I saw young children accompanying their parents with farm tools in their hands. I also observed a child taking care of another child.



Karegyesa, Emmanuel. Preschool Age-children Helping at Home. 01 Feb. 2020.

We live in a society characterized by social and economic inequalities that determine one's ability to achieve success in life. In her research about poverty and mobility in the United States, Mary Corcoran writes that “children raised in persistently poor homes are likely to cycle in and out of poverty as adults because parental poverty (perhaps because of increased stress or inability to provide enriched environments, access to good schools, or adequate nutrition) lowers children's cognitive skills, and these lower adult earnings for children” (247, 251). The child's environment plays a key role in shaping their ability to achieve success in school and to become responsible and self-reliant adults.

This thesis will explore how establishing replicable, low-cost, and integrated early childhood care and education centers will reverse adverse childhood conditions and offer life-changing experiences for children, families, and communities which leads to productive citizens and sustainable communities in Rwanda. Quality early childhood care and education services can help transform lives and build communities of shalom. This thesis concludes with an early childhood care and education proposal to build strong foundations for Rwandan children. The centers will work with the parents as primary stakeholders, the government, and other social service providers in the community to deliver appropriate interventions necessary for holistic development and transformation.

## **Research Methodology**

This paper is a result of a five-month long study starting from April – August 2020. The research utilized qualitative research technique – a form of inquiry whose overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences in their natural setting (Merriam and Tisdell 24). To collect data, the researcher employed qualitative research techniques such as ethnographic research, in-depth interviews (individual and focused group interviews), observation, and participation in individual or group activities.

## **Context**

The research was conducted in ten randomly selected church-centered savings and credit associations in the ten parishes of Kigali Anglican Diocese. Merriam and Tisdell write that any researcher who wants to discover, to understand, and to gain insight about a phenomenon must select a sample from which the most can be learned (96). For this research, I purposely sample seventy-three respondents who included fifty-six individual savings group members, eight savings group ministry leaders, five parish priests, and four focused-savings groups. Savings group ministry leaders and parish pastors were interviewed because of their in-depth understanding of the savings group ministry, community setting, and needs.



Figure 1: Map of Rwanda showing the location of Kigali Anglican Diocese

District	Parish	District	Parish
Bugesera	Kidama	Gasabo	Ruhanga
	Kamweru		Gikomero
	Mwogo	Rwamagana	Runyinya
	Mbyo		Jajagiro
	Nyabagendwa	Rulindo	Murambi

Table 1: Selected Fieldwork Sites

Data was collected from research respondents using the following open-ended questions:

1. Why did you join a savings group?
2. Please describe for me what life was like for you and your household before you joined the savings group?
3. What areas of your life (personal and household) do you consider to have significantly changed as a result of joining a savings group?
4. Describe how you have seen savings groups transform lives of other members in your group?
5. How have savings groups contributed to change in the life of your church and community?

These questions used guided the entire research process. However, I was flexible to change questions so as to go deeper in drawing data on the subject. Initially, the focus of my research as to establish how savings groups are helping to build communities of shalom by restoring broken relationships. Bryant Myers in his book *Walking with the Poor*, defines "poverty as a result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable. Poverty is the absence of shalom in all its meanings" (143). Through reading, observing, and listening to respondents, I established that poverty that is a result of broken relationships begins from childhood and is sustained through one's adulthood if the child's immediate environment – the family, community, and nation do not change for better.

### **The Condition of Children Globally**

While all children have the right to grow up healthy, protected from harm, with access to quality education and other services that enable them to reach their full potential (Article 2-6 of UNCRC 1989), many children like Ingabire's children find themselves unable to access these rights. According to UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), more than 175 million children of pre-school age are not enrolled globally, especially in low-income countries, where only 1 in 5 children are in pre-school education. Based on current trajectories, by 2030, there will be 305 million African children (two in every five) living in extreme poverty. Additionally, 7.4 million children will not complete primary education and 14.3 million will not complete secondary school education by 2030 (Watkins and Quattri 16-17). These conditions have been and will continue to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 consequences. According to UNICEF, the number of children living in multidimensional poverty – without access to education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation, or water – is likely to rise to approximately 1.2 billion, while 142 million children will fall into monetary poverty in the year 2020 alone.



## **The Plight of Children in Rwanda**

According to UNICEF, a child is considered multidimensional poor if he or she is deprived of any of the following dimensions of wellbeing: health, nutrition, sanitation, water, housing, protection, and education (9). Rwanda's multidimensional child poverty report indicates that despite the country's remarkable progress in reducing poverty, thirty nine percent of the children aged 0-17 years are multidimensionally poor. Nearly all children (more than ninety five percent) aged 0-23 months (about 2 years) are deprived in at least one dimension of wellbeing. Fifty seven percent of the children in this age bracket suffer deprivation in at least three dimensions. Nearly ninety four percent of all children aged 24-59 months (about 5 years) suffer at least one dimension while over twenty seven percent of them are deprived of at least three out of the six dimensions. More than twenty nine percent the children aged 5-14 years are multidimensionally poor, being deprived of at least three out of five dimensions. According to UNICEF's multidimensional deprivation (MOD) report for Rwanda, more than eighty seven percent of the children aged 36-59 months (about 5 years) are not attending any early childhood education or early learning activities (20-39). According to the nation's ECD Policy 2011, only six percent of 1.1 million children (3-6 years) are associated with preschool services (23). These multiple deprivations delay the child's growth and development, preventing them from reaching their full potential in cognitive, motor, language, and socio-emotional skills.

UNICEF Rwanda writes that over half of all girls and 6 out of 10 boys experience violence, neglect, exploitation, and abuse at home, at school, and in their community where children should feel safe. These multiple deprivations are higher for children in rural areas where more than fifty seven percent are deprived compared to about thirty seven percent in urban areas (UNICEF 30-31). This means that more than half of the Rwanda's children are multidimensionally deprived since more than eighty three percent of the nation's population lives

in rural areas (NISR 9). If the trend of child abuse is unreversed, it will continue to have a negative impact on the nation's future development efforts.

According to the basic educational analysis report 2012 by Japan's International Cooperation Agency, there were only 1,471 pre-schools in the entire nation of Rwanda: only 2 of them being public schools. The same report reveals that the private sector entities and civil society organizations remain the primary service providers for early childhood development (ECD) in Rwanda (JICA 11). According to Rwanda's 2009 national skills audit report, quoted in the ECD national strategic plan, the pre-school education sector lacks managers, trained teachers, and administrators (26). Based on the above facts, it is noticeably clear that the Rwandan education system has been putting less emphasis on the need to make pre-school education accessible.

Failure to provide for the needs of children perpetuates through their adulthood and it is passed on to their children and their children's children. According to Wagner and Adelman, "studies focusing on the intergenerational transmission of poverty find that while individuals can break out of intergenerational cycle poverty, they are less likely to do so than is commonly thought" (2). Corcoran writes that "children who grow up in poverty are likely to remain poor as adults because poor parents invest less in their children's schooling" (250). Countries like Rwanda with limited natural resources, pushing to break away from the cycle of poverty by developing a knowledge-based economy, will need to invest significantly in early childhood care and education. Families and communities lagging economically must be supported to provide the right care and access to quality education for their children to grow holistically and to consequently achieve sustainable development in the long run.

## **Defining Early Childhood Care and Education**

According to UNICEF's article *a World Ready to Learn*, the term early childhood care and education refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain, support, and aid the holistic development of children during the early years of life from birth to eight years. It includes education, physical, social, and emotional care, intellectual stimulation, healthcare, and nutrition. An integrated early childhood development approach is child-centered, family-focused, community-based, and society-supported and globally advocated (8). According to UNESCO, early childhood is a time of remarkable growth when the child's brain development is at its peak and highly influenced by the environment and the people that surround them. Early childhood care and education therefore aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. According to Bokova, Irina, former director of UNESCO, early childhood care and education (ECCE) is the most basic insurance against poverty (UNESCO, vi). Giving all of Rwanda's children a good start in life, we not only help them to be successful in their later years of education but will also give them, their families, and communities an advantage to escape poverty.

### *The Importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)*

Early childhood experiences, positive or negative set a foundation throughout the child life course. According to UNICEF's Global report *A World Ready to Learn*, positive childhood experiences guarantee that a child's physical and mental health needs are met while children who experience stressful and poor-quality childhoods are more likely to adopt health-harming behaviors later in life, perform poorly both in school, are more likely to become unproductive in society (14). Through ECCE quality provision of a child's needs optimizes the opportunity for

their holistic development. Early childhood interventions have contributed to breaking the cycle of poverty and offer an entry point and platform for improving social equity and inclusion" (Ibid). Therefore, investing and strengthening early childhood care and education is key to achieving sustainable development goals. Supporting families and communities is essential to the child's holistic development, inclusive development, and local ownership of change processes for all children worldwide.

### **ECD and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

In September 2015, after three years of consultation, 193 UN member countries agreed and signed the 2030 global agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. Early childhood education is included in Goal: 4 Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all. The SDG 4 target 4.2, aims to ensure that by 2030, all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and preschool education so that they are ready for primary education. Since there is increasing evidence that the quality of the first eight years of a child's life is crucial in laying a solid foundation, not only for the child's educational achievement and life-long learning, but also their future health, socio-emotional development, and financial success, what then is the multiplier effect of quality ECD on many of the Global Goals? Investing in quality early childhood development, supporting families and communities will have a multiplier effect on achieving SDGs in the following ways:

- Goal 1: Eradicating poverty – According to the Heckman Equation research, children who received quality early childhood care had significantly better life outcomes than those who did not receive center-based care or those who received lower quality care. ECD care improved the economic prospects of children, by

giving them foundational skills that allowed them to be more productive and enabled them to enter the workforce and increased their earnings (2). Therefore, quality ECD contributes to poverty eradication through the development of human capital and skills that will allow children to flourish in the 21<sup>st</sup> century job creation and employment marketplace.

- Goal 2: End hunger and improve nutrition – According to the World Health Organization, over 200 million children under 5 years of age in the developing world have significantly impaired growth (1). Integrating health, nutrition, and stimulation at an early age will prevent children from wasting away as well as ensure good child growth and development.
- Goal 3: Good health and well-being at all ages – Early childhood experiences and health research by Braveman, et al., has shown that “brain, cognitive, and behavioral development early in life are strongly linked to an array of important health outcomes later in life, including cardiovascular disease and stroke, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, smoking, drug use and depression – conditions that account for a major portion of preventable morbidity and premature mortality” (4). Therefore, children who participate in high quality ECD services will experience an array of immediate and long-term health benefits including reduced incidence of non-communicable diseases and lower health costs overtime.
- Goal 4: Ensuring Life-long Learning – According to UNESCO, quality early childhood care and education is more than preparing children for primary education. It aims at the holistic development of a child’s social, emotional,

cognitive, and physical needs to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. Therefore, early learning opportunities for children pave the way for optimal learning and productivity later in life.

- Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. According to the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007, participation in ECCE programs can help reduce gender inequalities. The report reveals that “in ECCE programs, the impact of participation on health has been found to be higher for girls than for boys. Early childhood programs can compensate for the priority that is given to boys than girls in accessing basic needs in some societies. Girls who participate in early childhood programs are much more likely to begin school at the appropriate age and complete primary school than girls who do not. Access to early childhood programs is relatively gender-equal in a majority of countries” (UNESCO 113). According to Plan International, there are deep gender inequalities in many societies around the world. Cultural norms and attitudes in Rwanda and parts of Africa, often define child-rearing and housekeeping as a woman’s responsibility. The gender division of labor affects women more than men because the time women spend on unpaid domestic work is three times higher than that of men. Therefore, access to quality early childhood care and family friendly interventions can help to reduce these gender imbalances and promote opportunities for girls to access and complete their education, setting them up for better future opportunities.
- Goal 6: Ensure Access to Clean Water and Sanitation for all – A clean and safe environment is fundamental to a child’s health. ECD services have the potential to

ensure that children and their families have access to clean water and adequate sanitation facilities. Integrating water and sanitation in ECD services will not only ensure that children are healthy but will also help them to develop life-long hygiene habits.

- Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all. Keith Hansen, the World Bank’s senior advisor, in his blog *Early Childhood Development: A Smart Investment for Life*, explains that “ECD is one of the smartest investments a country can make in its future. Evidence shows a potential return rate of seven to sixteen percent annually from high-quality preschool programs that target vulnerable groups. Children who escape stunting stay in school longer, have between five to fifty percent higher incomes as adults and thirty three percent more likely to escape poverty.” Quality, early childhood care and education has the potential to ensure a child’s holistic development which in turn ushers them into adult productivity.
- Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries – Disparities that begin at childhood have a long-lasting impact on a child’s social, cognitive, emotional, and physical health. Quality early childhood care and education services have a great potential to be a great equalizer. According to the World Bank Report “children in poor families can differ dramatically from children in richer families in their cognitive and noncognitive abilities, resulting in enormous loss of human potential for themselves and society. Different mental models and parenting beliefs can also contribute to substantial gaps in language and cognitive development” (98-99). Philip Johnson-Laird writes that mental models are how

human beings perceive and make meaning of the world around them based on their knowledge and experiences (2-3). Therefore, the quality of one's thinking is proportional to the models in their head and the perceived usefulness in any given situation. Since the child's early environment plays an important role in shaping their brain, families and societies that make equitable invest in quality childhood experiences are likely to have higher returns over the child long life experiences.

- Goal 12: Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns - According to Clawson, "acting justly every day means developing awareness about the problems in the world. It means changing how we shop, how we dress, and how we drive; it means starting to see how our every action as an ethical choice" (Loc 83). Our everyday consumption choices have an impact on the world around us. To effect change, we must start tweaking the way we live (Clawson Loc 98). Jenny Ritchie writes that "ethics of care requires fostering empathy for ourselves, other humans and for the more-than-human-others with whom our lives are entangled" (47). Early childhood care and education has the potential to teach children different habits of the mind that will last for a lifetime including caring for the environment.
- Goal 16: Promote Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies - Michael Haslip and Dominic Gullo write that "early childhood education and care systems are the first educators of children outside the home and the first social system experience that children are interacting with individuals from different cultures, religions, languages, and family backgrounds" (261). Therefore, quality early childhood



care and education has the potential to instill values and behaviors that promote diversity, peace, nonviolence, social cohesion, and justice in society.

### **Rwanda’s Development Vision in the Lens of ECD**

Similar to UN’s sustainable development goals, Rwanda’s national development agenda expressed in Vision 2050 aims to transform the country into an upper middle-income economy by 2035 and a high income by 2050, based on sound economic reforms and human capital development so that the country has a healthy, well educated, and highly skilled labor force that is gainfully employed (12). The Vision recognizes that access to quality early childhood care and education is essential to achieving national development goals in the long run (14). This vision will be realized through five pillars and the key considerations areas as illustrated below.

<b>Rwanda’s Vision 2050</b>	
<b>Pillars of Vision 2050</b>	<b>Key Considerations for Success</b>
1. Human development	1. Strong and sustainable macroeconomic fundamentals  2. Positive values supporting social transformation  3. Rigorous and effective monitoring and implementation framework
2. Competitiveness and integration	
3. Agriculture for wealth creation	
4. Urbanization and agglomeration	
5. Accountable and capable state institutions	

Table 2: Summary of Rwanda’s Vision 2050 Pillars and Key Considerations areas.

#### *Rwanda’s ECD Policy*

Rwanda’s current ECD policy recognizes that “all Rwandan children will achieve their full potential, ensuring that they are healthy, well-nourished and safe, and that their mothers, fathers, and communities become nurturing caregivers through receiving integrated early childhood development services” (MINEDUC 18). As stipulated in the ECD policy, the

government of Rwanda seeks to increase access to and use of quality ECD services for families and their children, including integration of health, nutrition, and protection.

The policy recommends and defines an integrated ECD approach as “the process that seeks to address children’s multiple needs and rights taking into consideration the rights of the child across their life cycle, helping to map out the issues, their vulnerabilities while identifying critical transitions from one stage to the next, each of which poses risks and opportunities for development” (11). An integrated early childhood development approach will greatly contribute to building Rwanda’s desired human resource for sustainable development. Quality ECCE leads to improved child-health, nutrition, educational efficiency through timely enrollment and school readiness at primary and secondary level. It also leads to improved school attendance, school continuity and academic achievement. School completion will lead to expanded adult literacy and skills necessary for the labor market. Widespread employment and entrepreneurial development stemming from quality ECCE will lead to reduced poverty. Therefore, expanding investment in early childhood care and education will provide a stable environment for Rwanda to achieve its Vision 2050 as illustrated below.

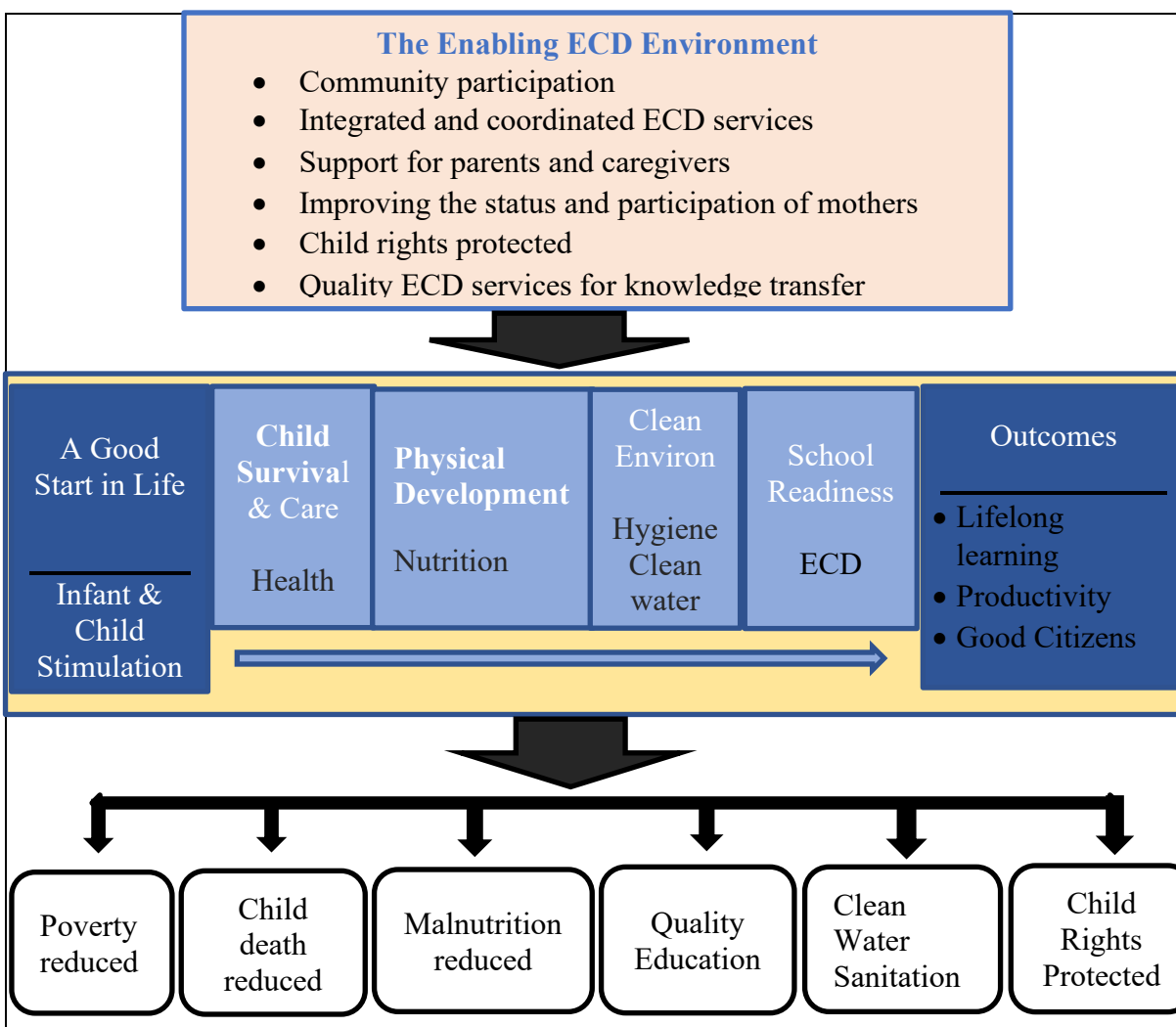


Chart 1: Rwanda Ministry of Education: ECD Polciy. 2011. pp.15

### ECD Principles

Rwanda recognizes early childhood development as one of the pillars to developing human capital for national development. Scaling up ECD centers is a part of the country's national development plans well laid out in its Vision 2050 (14) as well as its ECD policy framework 2011. The following ECD principles have been identified to guide the implementation process for equality ECD services.

1. ECD is holistic and requires a multi-sector approach.

A child's development does not happen in isolation. According to World Vision, "a child's well-being in all aspects of his or her life, reflects the overall health and development of the family, community, and society in which they live" (1). According to Tomkins "a child may grow in a wealthy environment receiving all they need to grow healthy, physically, and academically but will be stunted, if they lack emotional social and/or family support. Another child may do well at school, at work, and function well socially but many be spiritually stunted, hence lack spiritual values and experiences. Another child may be severely malnourished to the point of death but may do well, socially and spiritually than the other two children" (301). Understanding the culture and the social environment in which children grow, as well as listening to the children's voices; what they think and wish as active contributors to their development will help design appropriate interventions that promote children's holistic development.

Child development is determined by the quality of assets available to support and nurture a child within the family and community. If the family and community sustainably invest in health and nutrition of both the mother and the child, providing safe housing, health, hygiene, nutrition, quality early education, a safe space to play and socialize, caring adults that provide physical, emotional, and spiritual support, it will have long term impact on the life of the child.

2. ECD is the result of the child's biological factors and the environment in which the child is embedded.

Human beings are creatures of relationships. God designed humans to relate with him, others, individuals, and other creation (*New International Version*, Gen. 1:26-28, 2:18). Tomkins

writes that “programs that focus on the whole community, recognizing that children are a key part of society, and seeks their participation by voicing issues that affect their lives and community are more likely to be successful, in their children’s development efforts” (305). It is important, therefore, to understand and to consider the various aspects like the spiritual, cultural, socio-economic, political, and environmental issues within the child’s immediate environment, that may hinder his or her development to full potential.

Care International a leading child development organization, identifies five intervention areas that ECD programs should address to help children survive and thrive (5). These areas include health, food and nutrition, economic strengthening, child rights and protection.

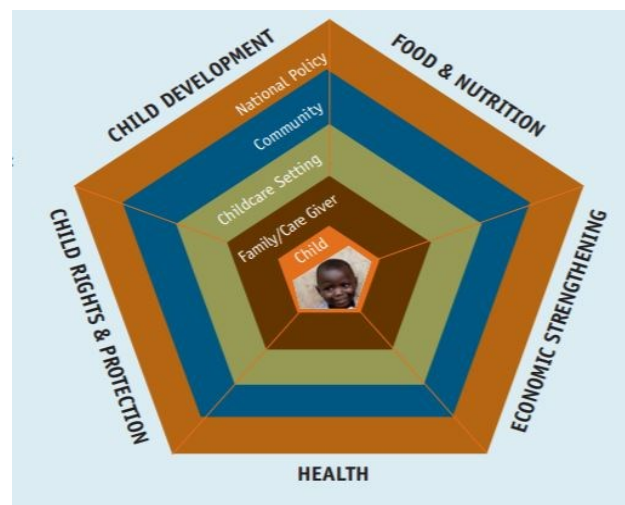


Chart 2: Care’s Integrated ECD Model. 2010. Pp.5

### 3. ECD is influenced by interacting and interdependent spheres of influence.

While focusing on the child and putting the child at the center development is important, emphasizing the child alone will not give appropriate outcomes. Miles et al., write that “a child does not exist in isolation. A child exists in a context. To understand a child, we must also understand his or her context. A child is born of a mother in the form of a family, which is part of a neighborhood, part of a community, part of a village, town, city, country, and so on. A child

is affected by these systems as she or he grows up” (3). According to Forbes et al., a systems approach to child development is critical to achieving sustained wellbeing of children within families and communities (2). Bronfenbrenner also writes that “human development occurs in an ecological system composed of five socially organized subsystems that help support and guide human growth and development” (37). Children grow up in a complex system of relationships that reinforce each other. The quality and context of the child’s environment, therefore, provides opportunities for young children to thrive and vis-versa.

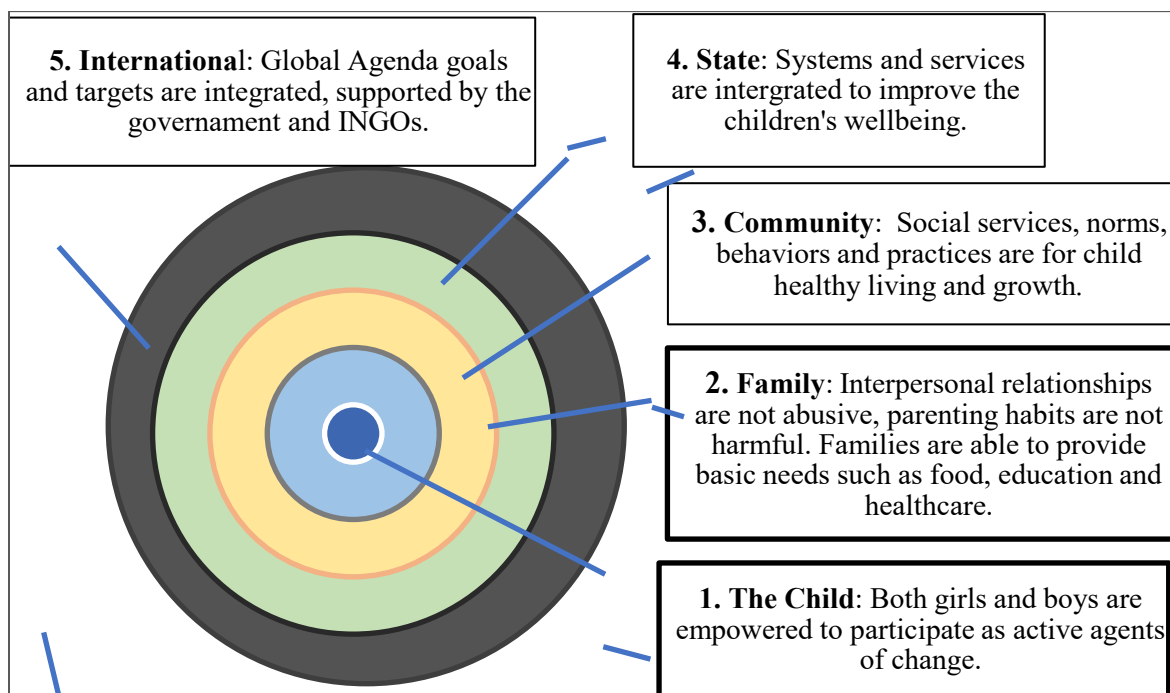


Chart 3: Bronfenbrenner’s Ecology of Human Development. 1977. pp. 514-515

Each of these five levels of the ecology of human development have a significant influence on the wellbeing of the child. However, individual characteristics of the child such as physical, psychological, mental capacities and stability result from good nutrition, healthcare, education, as well as positive relationships within the child’s immediate environment that includes the parents, peers, and other caretakers. According to Peter Benson, child development

approaches need to pay particular attention to interconnectedness of development assets within the family and community that the child will need to development fully (59). Children with access to these assets will grow to their full potential than those living in families and communities whose assets ate depleted.

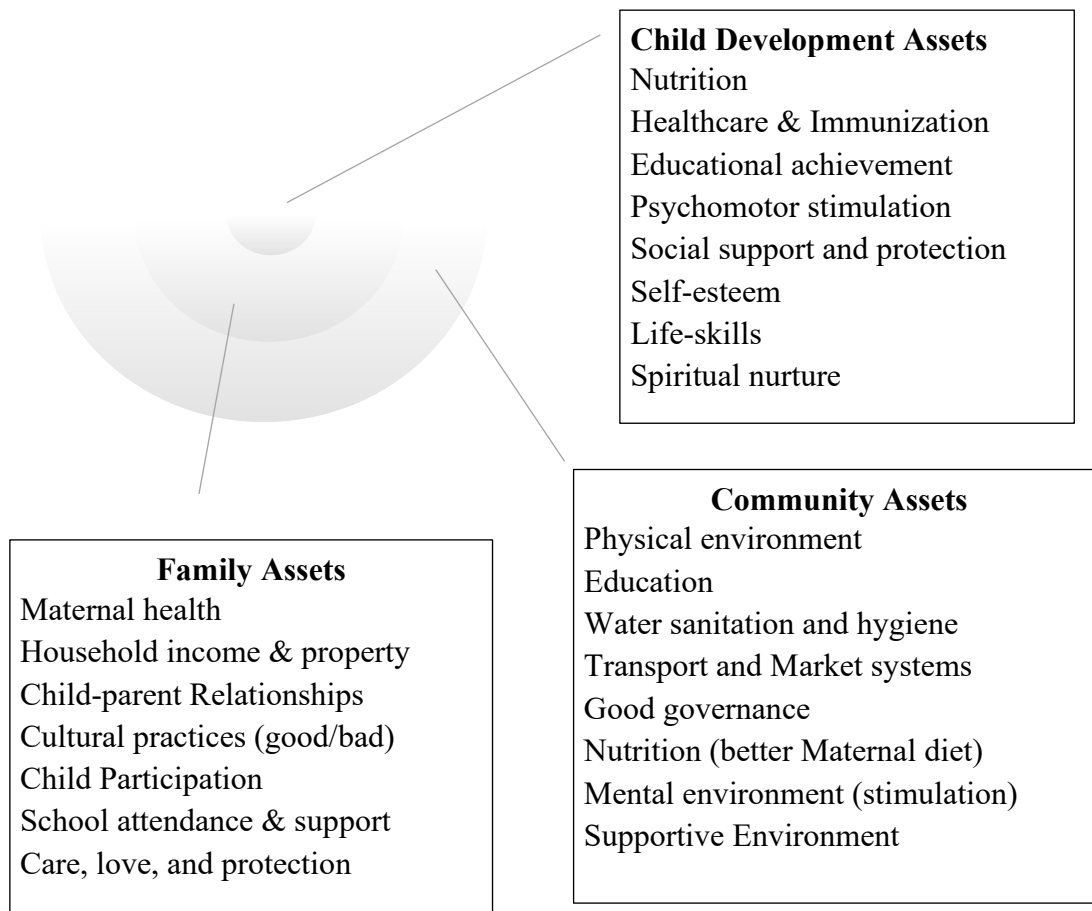


Chart 4: Adopted from Peter Benson: All Kids Are Our Kids. 2006. Pp. 69-75

#### 4. Children are Rights Holders.

According to Save the Children's website, realizing that there were no standards for the protection of children, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, a general assembly resolution 44/25 of November 1989, was adopted by member countries, including Rwanda, to guide national and international planning, designing, and implementation of rights

relevant to children. It has 54 articles based on four major principles: non-discrimination; best interests of the child; the right to life, survival, and development; and respect for the views of children.

Based on the available data about the situation of children in Rwanda, there is a need to engage families and communities to own the transformation process for their children.

According to UNICEF's website "situation of children in Rwanda's, thirty nine percent of the population lives below the poverty line, with sixteen percent living in extreme poverty. Children and their families in Rwanda face significant challenges including:

1. Out of 1000 mothers giving birth, 210 do not survive. Death is prevalent in poor rural communities.
2. Out of 1000 births, 50 of the children do not survive to see their fifth birthday.
3. Over seventy five percent of child deaths under the age of five are due to neonatal complications.
4. Even though Rwanda's children are immunized and vaccinated regularly, parents and caregivers do not take them for the appropriate care and prompt treatment they need when they get sick.
5. Thirty eight percent of Rwanda's children are stunted, which means that children do not receive adequate foods and nutrition they need to grow healthy.
6. Only sixty four percent of the population has their own latrines. Access to clean water is still a big concern. Only forty seven percent have access to clean water sources within 500 meters. Only five percent of the households have hand-washing facilities with soap and water.



7. About twenty percent of young children attend early childhood education (preschool) with gaps between rural and urban children. A few parents and caregivers encourage learning activities at home.
8. Educators struggle with the language of student instruction and demonstrate ineffective teaching methodologies in the classroom to meet the various needs of children.
9. While there are equal numbers of boys and girls in school (preschool to secondary school), boys outperform girls at national exams. Girls are more likely to drop out of school than boys.
10. Many children live in poor and vulnerable families with harsh child disciplining practices and domestic violence experiences. Over half of Rwanda's children and youth report to have experienced physical, sexual, and emotional violence before the age of 18.
11. About only eighty percent of HIV positive Rwandans receive antiretroviral treatment (ART) but only fifty five percent of children aged 14 and under receive ART. Adolescents often do not go for HIV testing and are less likely to use preventive means resulting in more HIV incidences.
12. According to UN Rwanda, the rate of teenagers getting pregnant in Rwanda has increased from six percent in 2010 to over seven percent in 2015. About fifty percent of teen mothers reported having had their first pregnancy from the age of 12 to 17. According to Channels of Hope (CoH), children born out of wedlock are less likely to be accepted (6). This is true of Rwanda's culture where the mother and the child out

of wedlock are often shamed, isolated, stigmatized, discriminated against, and bullied with names that have negative connotations.

13. Rwanda's children are likely to be affected by natural disasters since the country is also prone to heavy rains, landslides, droughts, floods, and earthquakes. According to the Red Cross Society of Rwanda, in 2020 over 2,200 households, about 11,000 families were affected by floods in 2021, more 5,850 were affected in 2018. This means the destruction of houses, food insecurity, water contamination and disease. Children as dependents are the most affected.

According to UNICEF's situation analysis of children in Rwanda, and evidence from my fieldwork research, 7 key issues that limit child growth and development have been identified and intervention areas to offset the issue will have been called out in the project to implement to offset the existing condition process.

- a. Good maternal health is critical to child development during infancy and throughout a child's growth. Key interventions for children include child immunization, disease prevention, and timely treatment for child sicknesses (8). The early childhood care and education center will work with the community health center to promote healthcare for mothers, child immunization and deworming.
- b. Healthcare seeking behavior is low, especially among poor families (10). There is a need to champion behavioral change through basic health education in rural communities.
- c. Adequate nutrition is critical for child growth and cognitive development. Stunting remains at 41 percent in rural areas and 24 percent in urban areas (13). It is, therefore, important to promote improved nutrition.

- d. Access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene is fundamental to the prevention of waterborne diseases including diarrhea, which weakens the children's immune system, leaving them vulnerable to illnesses (15). The project will champion safe, and clean drinking water, handwashing, improved latrines for families and in the community.
- e. Lack of trained preschool teachers and facilitators. Many preschool teachers are either unqualified or underqualified. The pupil-to-teacher ratios remain high (32 to 1) in pre-primary school (20). The project will put focus on improving capacities for teachers and volunteers through specialized on-job training and holiday workshops.
- f. Child protection encompasses policies and programs that aim to prevent and respond to abandonment, neglect, violence, exploitation, and abuse against children. Child protection also means protecting children out from wedlock and those with disabilities who face stigma, social exclusion, abuse, and discrimination. It also means protecting mothers from abuse and violence (23). The project will put emphasis on positive parenting practices, campaigns against gender-based violence (GBV) and community sensitization to cause awareness of child rights.
- g. Income poverty, particularly extreme poverty remains the main driver for child deprivation (28). Early childhood care and education, savings groups, farmer learning schools, along with the above services aim to maximize impact and to create household resilience.

The underlying causes are poverty, parental attitudes, cultural norms, and practices that do not support child development to its full potential and need to be solved for people to live better, especially for children.

*Faith-based Communities and Children's Rights.*

The church as parents has a biblical mandate to nurture, care and speak for children as a gift from God (Matthew. 18:1–4, Prov. 22:6, Ps. 127:3). A research study conducted by Arigatou on international organizations and seven major faith-based communities shows that religious communities bring vital assets to eradicate poverty. They offer a moral impetus for action, access to large constituencies, and a wealth of practical experience in helping the poor (42). A study by Miles et al., on the rights of the child and Christian response indicates that “with a constructive interpretation of the rights of the child by faith-based leaders, enables them to have a good standing in their communities while advocating for the rights of children and monitoring their communities, to ensure that children’s rights are respected, hence creating a conducive environment for children to thrive and develop holistically” (55). According to an article by Christianity Today, about 95 percent of Rwanda’s population are considered Christians. This indeed is a large constituency and provides a unique opportunity for faith-based communities to champion the rights of children.

Though the church has a unique opportunity to champion the rights of the child and child protection, the question that comes to mind is whether church leaders clearly understand and desire to see the child rights implemented. Berry and Stephenson’s study affirms that a proper understanding of the CRC (Convention of the Rights of the Child) by faith-based leaders and communities has a unique strength of playing an advocacy role to advance the process of meeting the rights of the world’s poorest children (59). Given all this evidence, when faith-based leaders and communities clearly understand child rights and child issues, their role in advocating for child rights and voicing key issues facing children can have tremendous outcomes.

*Myths and Misconceptions about the Rights of the Child by the church*

Though the church has enormous strength and uniqueness to advance the rights of the child in their communities, there can be challenges working with and through the church. According to Paul Stephenson “anthropologists, social scientists and religious groups accuse the child-rights movement of insidious cultural imperialism and interference in the affairs of sovereign states and families” (Miles et al. 54). Fundamentalists see CRC implementation conflict in terms of religious laws and the values of the CRC because CRC sets itself over and above other institutions that other priorities like family values and religious settings such as sharia law that undermine practical entitlement of children. They thus see convention of the rights of the child as unnecessary but another step that gives the UN power to intervene in the sovereignty of other states (59). According to Arigatou, despite the potential position faith-based leaders and communities have in advancing best practices of children’s rights, evidence shows that faith leaders and communities have also played a big role in perpetuating abuse and violating the rights of children (49-50). They argue that the rights-based movement presents three major threats to the family:

- I. Article 3 aims to transfer God-given parental rights and responsibilities to the state.
- II. Articles 12, 13, and 14 aim to institutionalize rebellion by vesting children with various fundamental rights, which advance notions of the child’s autonomy and freedom from parental guidance.
- III. Articles 16 and 17 aim to establish bureaucracies and institutions of national and international nature designed to promote the ideas of the UN and to investigate and prosecute those who violate their children’s rights (58-59).

The church's misinterpretation of the Rights of the Child, and their questioning of the monitoring role by the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), gives less room for application, especially when parents, faith leaders, and state leaders feel that their rights over their children are undermined. According to Miles, the child rights-based approach brings conflicts within family and religious laws and values (57). In many societies and religious communities, there are gender sensitivities such as boy-preferences, limited or no female inheritance provisions, hidden female voices, forced female genital mutilation, and paternalism that undermine the child's right to participation and development to their full potential.

Given the gaps in child rights and development, the project works toward harmoniously transforming attitudes and behaviors in the family, the church, and in the community where the project is located. The project will also engage in advocacy activities through religious leadership engagement at national and local level to create a conducive environment for child development. Emphasis will be placed on transforming child-family relationships and community structures as the child's immediate environment.

The core principle of early childhood development is that a child grows and flourishes in a nurturing and supportive environment (physical, social, spiritual, and economic), which is necessary to optimize holistic child development. To solve the child development gaps identified, the project proposes working with key stakeholders including the family, the community, faith-based institutions (church), the government and other social service providers to create a conducive environment for children to flourish.

### **The Quality of ECD programs.**

Increasingly children are growing up in families in urban and rural areas, where both parents and care givers are working to meet and maintain family financial needs. According to

Rwanda's ECD policy documents "Rwanda's demographic and household survey (DHS) in 2005, revealed that seventy percent of women with one or two children and seventy four percent women with three or more children worked outside of the home. During a government consultative workshop, mothers from parts of the country expressed a desire for more community based ECD centers" (23). Establishing ECD Centers that provide quality services to support the child, the families and the community are critical to Rwanda's rural poor communities and national development in the long run. During my fieldwork research it was clear that investment in education was among the important goals for savings group members. It was also one of the top services that savings groups provided to the members. More than eighty percent of the respondents however indicated that was lack quality early childhood care and education services, mostly in rural communities.

### **Establishing Intango Nziza Initiative**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2020 Rwanda's Heroes day, I decided to conduct qualitative research about how the villages of Rwanda were preparing for tomorrow's heroes – the preschoolers. I visited Gisenyi village in Kibirizi cell of Mayange sector in Bugesera district. On this day, people celebrated with local music, dances, and soft drinks. Government officials took turns (based on seniority) to give their speech about acts of bravery. After the gathering was dismissed, I approached the local leaders and requested an interview about preparing Rwanda's heroes for tomorrow.

In this interview, I learned through Celestin Minani the village chief, that the entire village of 6,600 residents had one poorly managed preschool with only 50 children in daily attendance. Despite extra costs for meals and transporting their children, concerned parents decided to send their children to better preschools in the far neighboring villages. Many of the

children in this village stayed home with their elder siblings or went to the farm with their parents. One elderly grandfather, Sendugu Jean Damascene, commented that “Umwana apfira mu ntango<sup>i</sup>” Meaning that a child is spoilt during the foundational years. It is through this honest conversation in the community about the need to give their children a good start in life that sparked the idea of establishing affordable early childhood care and education centers to give a good start to Rwanda’s disadvantaged children, primarily those living semi urban and rural poor communities, through quality early childhood care and education.

### *Early Childhood Care and Education Project*

Following my qualitative fieldwork experience and available literature that reveals Rwanda’s great need for preschool education, especially the disadvantaged children in rural poor communities, I am proposing to establish a low-cost integrated early childhood care and education (ECCE) model center in Kibirizi village, Mayange Sector of Bugesera district in the Eastern Rwanda. This project will be a pilot program with two core elements:

1. Preschool Center-based activities involving:
  - a) Indoor and outdoor learning and play activities to give children exciting learning experiences.
  - b) The center will have a simple model farm with fruits, vegetables, chicken, and local cows to offer nutritious meals to children.
  - c) Animal waste will give manure to the garden as well as biogas for cooking and lighting.
  - d) The center will provide space for teachers, parents, and volunteer training to build capacities and family resilience.



2. Home and community activities to improve a child's immediate environment. The activities will include:
  - a) Training in positive parenting.
  - b) Basic-healthcare services including immunization, deworming, water, sanitation, and hygiene in inter-agency collaboration with community healthcare service providers.
  - c) Economic empowerment for parents and members of the community through self-help savings groups and better farming practices.
  - d) Child protection and safe neighborhoods.

In collaboration with the cell and village members, a 2 hectare piece of land for the above proposed project has been purchased. The project will involve constructing 5 classrooms and 1 administration block, 5 sanitation facilities, 2 staff quarters, 1 drop-in-center to facilitate child stimulation, health checkup, as well as trainings for family and community co-powerment. The school and community open spaces will be fitted with outdoor play activities and games (see visual plan for the proposed project on page 81).

A part of the center's land will have gardens and domestic animals (chicken and cows) to produce nutritious food supplies needed for the children. The farm facility will also function as a demonstration farm for the community to help improve their livelihoods. Laura, Monsalvatge et al., in their article "Dimensions of Early Childhood: Turning Our World of Learning Inside Out" write that "gardens are an essential play-based natural learning environment that encourages preliteracy skills and a joy of learning" (24). While the gardens at the center will function as an Agri-learning school, they will also offer a place to grow vegetables and other food types needed for the children's nutrition. The center will also serve as a unique natural space for children to experience outdoor learning activities.

To ensure quality teacher-child interaction and responsiveness, the center will serve up to 150 children. Each class has a maximum ratio of 1 teacher to 30 children, with the support of an assistant. The project desires to develop meaningful relationships with each child's family and the larger community for continuous learning and development.

### Summary of the project interventions and Impacts

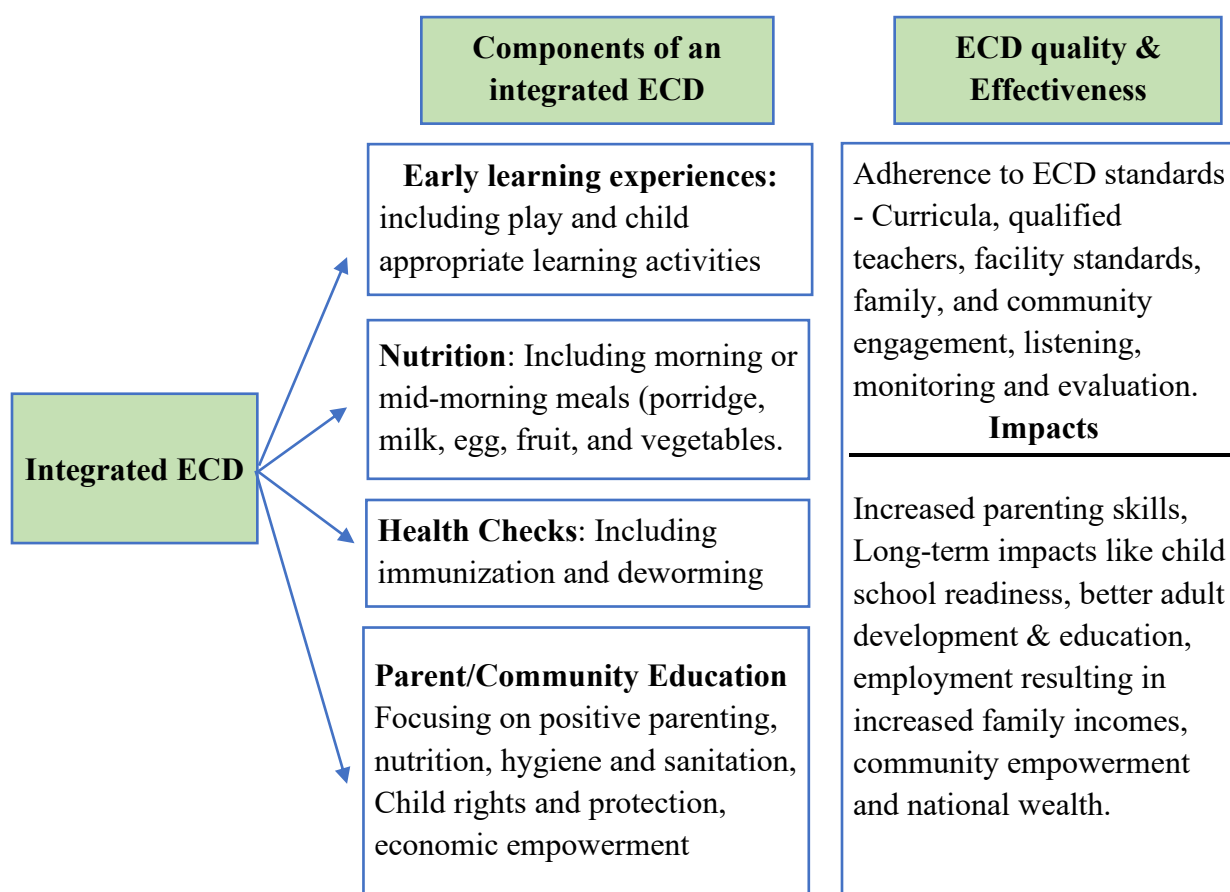


Chart 5: Integrated ECD Intervention Areas and Impacts

#### *Scaling-up ECD services to other districts*

The need for quality early childhood care and education in Rwanda is paramount. The government of Rwanda through its ECD policy document recognizes this need and calls for action through civil society organizations, communities, and private entrepreneurs to ECD services (ECD Policy 17). After 3-5 years of ECCE implementation, observing, measuring

impact, and evaluating the trends of the project, information will be drawn to scale up the project to more rural communities across the country. Regular assessment and evaluation (monthly, quarterly, and annually) involving children, teachers, parents, caretakers, and community members will be conducted for the purpose of informing management and all stakeholders progress and areas to improve.

The project will continue to adjust and be flexible, taking the best practices and learnings to new contexts and experiences. Kelly and Kelly share that “building confidence through experience encourages more creative action in the future” (43). Bornstein and Davis recommend write that, “to scale an idea and to pilot the growth of that idea, it requires continuous learning and adjustment” (95). The project’s successes and failures will inform and present opportunities to scale in other poor rural communities. Expansion will put into consideration the unique contexts of each new community at every step and process to avoid blind spots that may lead to short comings.

While the need for quality ECD services is inevitable especially in the rural poor communities where more than 83 percent of the population (and therefore more children) live according to national statistics, it must also be noted that resources to implement quality ECD services on a large scale are scarce. To overcome this obstacle, the project management and staff team will need to adopt an empowered-fearless attitude and an active voice speaking (Kelly and Kelly 115-116). Bornstein and Davis recommend advocating and soliciting both expertise and financial support from individuals and organizations who share the same interest (19). Intango Nziza initiative will utilize these approaches to solicit support for children who deserve an equal opportunity to start well. According to Collective Impact Forum:

“When one individual person or organization attempts to solve problems alone, success stories are too rare. However, when organizations work together, under the right conditions: agree on a common goal, agree to track progress in the same way allowing continuous improvement, do what each one does best, while identifying new ways to work together, have consistent communication and have skilled and dedicated resources to support ongoing efforts; they can accomplish great things” (0.09 – 0:28, 1:11 – 1:32).

Therefore, the ECD centers will work hand in hand with families, communities, faith-based organizations, existing preschools, government, and nongovernment social service providers as well as attracting passionate and willing individuals to contribute toward early childhood care and development in Rwanda.

Many of the families I visited during my fieldwork research expressed that their savings, though helpful, were not enough to meet all their family needs. Those living in Kigali and other city suburbs complained of the inflated cost of living as well as high costs associated with private preschool education. According to UNICEF, many families and communities that are disadvantaged need extra support to promote their children’s healthy development. Bornstein and Davis also recognize that despite being uprooted due to forces beyond their control, poor people in rural areas and urban slums possess skills, resources, and have confidences to establish businesses and other organizations (11). Kelly and Kelly advise innovators to search for opportunities to design for the customers’ delight by serving them beyond expectations (176-177). Beyond early childhood care and education, the project will provide complimentary services to families and communities like workshops in parenting, nutrition, water, sanitation and

hygiene, resource mobilization, better agricultural practices through farmer schools, as well as economic empowerment through self-help savings groups.

During fieldwork research, it was revealed that most families, especially those living in rural areas and with low literacy levels, believe that children of preschool age (3-6 years) are too young to learn anything. They also have fears associated with high education costs at this age. Kelly and Kelly, recommend designing products and services with a human-centered and holistic thinking approach to give clients a pleasant experience” (15, 17). Intango projects will take this approach to creatively redesign the preschool environment and services in a way that attracts preschoolers, the family, and the community. The design will focus on more than just preschool education but taking into consideration child needs, family needs and community resources to improve community livelihoods. Dwight Conquergood while working with the Hmong who experienced a cultural shock when they moved to the United States, states that,

“instead of blaming the Hmong for the poor health conditions and issuing messages instructing them to change their behavior, we developed performances that would stimulate critical awareness about the camp environment, particularly how it differed from the Hmong mountain villages in Laos. Once their radically changed living conditions could be brought to consciousness through performance, the Hmong might understand the need for changing some of their habits to adapt to this altered situation” (226).

A part of the center will be designed to function as a demonstration farm (field-learning school) where the community members can learn about better farming practices and biogas generation. A drop-in hall will be constructed to offer several types of training like savings

groups, family planning, WASH, nutrition, child protection, parenting, and home-based child learning activities.

*Scaling up ECCE services through local churches.*

Intango Initiative desires to maximize impact by reaching and serving more disadvantaged children in rural poor communities. Appreciative inquiry expert Sue Annis Hammond writes that in the process of finding solutions for problems, practice looking for what works and find ways to do more of those things (7). To replicate and scale impact further, Intango Initiative will intentionally share with open hands its ECCE learning experiences with churches and other like-minded organizations desiring to build good foundations for Rwanda's children.

The Church and other Christian communities have a long history of championing social change through establishing initiatives like schools, health services, working with local communities to eradicate poverty and to improve the living conditions of the poor and marginalized. They are known for their wider geographical coverage. We will come alongside churches willing to open-up their church buildings to host preschool learning Monday to Friday when church services are not in session.

*ECD Center Operations*

Rwanda's ECD policy recommends having qualified project managers and teachers for the preschools, yet the country does not have enough qualified managers and teachers as recognized in the nations ECD policy document (26). This means that the project will have to compete, attract, and train available human resources. Lynch and Walls write that "social entrepreneurs will battle for smart-motivated people, who will do a good job running the enterprise" (83). To make the center and its services relevant and impactful to the children, their

families and the community, qualified and passionate staff including a project manager, a preschool administrator, teachers, and teaching assistants will be hired. All staff and volunteers will receive on-job and off training to build their capacities. The training and ECD services will boost the employment opportunities for the generation.

### *Market Analysis for ECD Centers*

The need for preschool education is inevitable, however, the willingness to invest in preschool education by government, private individuals, and organizations for the children remains low probably due to limited profitability. According to UNICEF's Child Situation Analysis in Rwanda, only 1 percent of Rwanda's children aged 3 to 6 (preschool age) can access ECD services. The government of Rwanda has underpinned in its national ECD policy, that all Rwandan children are to be given a fair chance to survive, to grow and to develop to their fullest potential. Lynch and Walls warn that "social entrepreneurs need to establish that people want what you have to offer and that they are willing and able to pay you what you need to be paid for it" (57). Leadership expert Simon Sinek advises that "people don't buy what you do; people buy why you do it" ("Great Leaders Inspire Action"). By clearly communicating why, rather than what and how of early childhood care and education, we hope to attract, engage, and inspire action from different stakeholders including parents, community leaders, the government as well as a pool of other supporters, and donors who believe in the promise of ECCE.

### *Stakeholder Engagement*

Effectively engaging stakeholders will be important and a priority for the success of Intango Nziza and its ECCE centers. Bornstein and Davis write that "every day, new social organizations open doors, but few close down or merge. Similarly, funders often change tacks for reasons concealed from their grantees, terminating relationships with explanations like, "we

have been working together for several years and we feel it's time to move on" (114). Lynch and Walls write that "You (enterprise owner), your team, your stakeholders, and any potential investor must gain the confidence that comes from transparency" (58). In the first years of the project's life, the stakeholders are the parents, the children, the community leaders, the community people, and the government. To deepen relationships and develop trust, the project will hold regular accountability, participation, consultations, and communication with all stakeholders to ensure clarity of the goals and objectives as well as ensuring that requirements and standards are observed. The management will ensure that agreed upon solutions are delivered regularly, consistently, and in a transparent fashion.

#### *Financial Projections and financial sustainability*

Significant amount of financial resources will be required for initial project start-up to put in place necessary infrastructure for the early childhood care and education center. In order to provide quality services, the project will incur ongoing costs reflected in each individual ECCE Project activities. Intango Nziza management will utilize funding mechanisms such as writing grant proposals, recruiting a network of supporters, financial contributions from the parents, seeking government subsidies toward staff salaries and property taxes, establishing center income generating activities like producing own food to feed the children, center will install a biogas facility to convert animal waste into syngas which can be used to generate electricity for lighting and cooking school meals. The center drop-in hall will be freed to host community functions like weddings and local meetings for a small fee to match preschool running costs.

The Biogas project will also be used to train community people (including families of children who attend preschool), who spend a significant amount of time cooking using kerosene stoves, charcoal, wood, and other materials that emit harmful smoke. According to the World



Health Organization, household air pollution and health, close to four million people die prematurely from illness attributed to household air pollution from insufficient cooking practices. It is a single environmental health risk responsible for causing non-communicable diseases like strokes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, and heart disease (COPD).

The center farm will also function as farmer-school to help improving agricultural practices hence increased yields and food security. Children will have access to the farm and to learn that more about the importance of farming and environmental sustainability. According to Zavatta, more than sixty percent of the world population depends on agriculture for survival. Food insecurity will be rampant because of low agricultural production due to the uncertainty of rain caused by climate change. According to Beck, “modernity has presented new challenges that are health-impairing and ecologically harmful. Industrial and human practices intended for transformation have produced chemicals (toxins) that permeate every social institution, the human body, and the natural world. To be modern has become associated with manipulation, exploitation, subjugation, and control, putting nature and people at risk” (14, 18, 23). Environmental behavioral change needs to start with each child, each family, and each community.

### *Legal requirements*

Like any other enterprise establishment, preschool services and programs operate under state law. There are laws that the institution must adhere to while performing its activities like taxation, human resource requirements, child discipline, and training. The center will ensure that each activity happens within the boundaries of the law. All forms of violence, abuse, discrimination, neglect, or any activities that may jeopardize the health and general well-being of a child or a group of children and staff will be discouraged. Lynch and Walls encourage

entrepreneurs to do due diligence ensuring that all practices and behaviors of the company are consistent with acceptable values (101). Intango Nziza will ensure that the practices and behaviors of all its employees are consistent with the recommended ethics in early childhood education. We will develop a standards operation manual to guide all operations and staff behavior. All center staff will be trained and oriented on requirements and implications of malpractices.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, countries like Rwanda whose only major natural resource are its citizens, will need to invest heavily in early childhood care and education; a learning process and mechanism that sustains, supports, and aids a child's holistic development, right from birth to the age of eight years. This includes children being able to access good quality education, health care, nutrition, and emotional and cognitive development, which cannot be attained without the support of their families and community. The child's immediate environment will need to be transformed to support and facilitate the desired child holistic development, including the attitudes and behaviors in the child's family and community. The church is well positioned to influence behavioral change in the community because of the respect and history of championing social change. They also have a large constituency (coverage) in the hard-to-reach areas, which makes ECCE implementation, behavioral change, and resource mobilization effective and efficient. Creating preschool centers that focus on key child development areas will contribute significantly to the overall national development driven by its citizens long-term.

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## Appendix

INTANGO NZIZA  
Building Strong Foundations for Our Children

**Project Proposal**

Low-cost Integrated Early Childhood Care and Education

A Pilot Project in Bugesera District – Rwanda

**Duration:** 5 Years (2021 – 2026)

**Total Project Cost:**

**Target Population:** Children younger than 7 years of age, their families, communities, and preschool teachers.

**Partners:** Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, Church denominations, Local and International organizations.

**Project Manager (s):**

February 2021

## **Background of the Project**

Intango Nziza (Good Foundation) will be founded to offer early childhood care and education opportunities for children and families poor rural communities of Rwanda. The vision is to see every child thriving to their full potential and learning in quality early childhood settings. The goal is to start 15 low-cost integrated early childhood care and education (ECCE) centers to provide quality pre-school education to 2,250 children of 3 to 6 years old within poor rural communities. A pilot ECCE Center will be implemented in Bugesera district, Mayange sector, Kibirizi cell in Gisenyi village. Its success will inform expansion to other communities.

In the aftermath of the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, the loss of human capital has had a tremendous impact on the country. After the genocide, the country under its national development strategy Vision 2020 embarked on a series of recovery efforts to heal the population and revive the economy to survive and regain dignity. Rwanda faced and still faces a burden of rebuilding its human capital and institutional capacity since its infrastructure and the educated were targeted during the genocide (UNDP 23). As many other institutions, Rwanda's educational system was severely damaged as qualified teachers were targeted. Many of them fled the country while others were massacred. Schools, training centers and other education-related infrastructure were destroyed.

A research study on educational opportunities in Rwanda conducted by Japan's International Cooperation Agency (JICA) shows that private sector entities and civil society organizations remain the major service providers for early childhood development in Rwanda. In 2011, there were only 1,471 pre-schools in the entire country: only 2 of them being public schools (11). According to Rwanda's 2009 national skills audit report, quoted in the ECD national strategic plan, pre-school education lacks managers, trained teachers, and administrators



(26). Based on the above facts, it is noticeably clear that Rwanda is under pressure to rebuild the nation's human capital, a fact that makes early childhood care and education essential for providing a good base for lifelong human development and productivity.

According to UNICEF's multidimensional deprivation (MOD) report for Rwanda, 87.2 percent of the children aged 36-59 months (about 5 years) are not attending any early childhood education or early learning activities (20-39). According to the nation's ECD Policy 2011, only 6.1 percent of 1.1 million children (3-6 years) are associated with preschool services (23). These multiple deprivations delay the child's growth and development, preventing them from reaching their full potential in cognitive, motor, language, and socio-emotional skills.

Early childhood care and education offers a better chance of addressing gender inequality and discrimination in the foundational years for both children, families, and the community. In Rwanda according to UNICEF, over half of all girls and 6 out of 10 boys experience violence, neglect, exploitation, and abuse at home, at school, and in their community where children should feel safe. These multiple deprivations are higher for children in rural areas where 57.3 percent are deprived compared to 36.5 percent in urban areas (UNICEF 30-31). This means that more than half of the country's children are multidimensionally deprived since 83.5 percent of the nation's population lives in rural areas (NISR 9). If this multidimensional child poverty and abuse trend are not reversed, it will continue to have a negative impact on the nation's future development efforts, because failure to meet the children's needs will perpetuate through their adulthood, and it will be passed on to their children and their children's children.

Rwanda's current development framework (Vision 2050) recognizes that smart investment in human development beginning with access to enhanced quality early childhood and basic education (including basic skills for the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution) will play a central

role in creating and accumulating home-grown talent necessary for achieving national development goals in the decades to come (14). Early childhood care and education is the first and essential step toward achieving human capital and meeting sustainable development goals that aim to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

According to CDC, the early years of a child's life are very important for later health and development. The child's brain starts to grow before birth and continues to develop through adulthood. However, the first 8 years of a child's development can build a foundation for future learning, health, and life success. ECCE is designed to improve young children's capacity to develop and learn. A child who has gone through ECCE is equipped with characteristics like social and emotional health, she or he is friendly; and confident among his or her peers, develops good language and math skills, she or he is able to tackle complex challenges. This development trajectory continues as they enter primary school, advanced education and through their adult life.

Despite Rwanda's impressive economic progress since 2000, poverty remains pervasive and widespread. According to World Bank's Rwanda poverty assessment report of 2015, though 45 percent of the population were below the poverty line by national standards, 63 percent were below \$1.25 poverty line by international standards. The report further indicated that lack of education was one of the major salient characteristics of the poor. Only 20 percent of the poor households completed primary education, and less than 4 percent attained at least some secondary education. Agriculture, either subsistence farming or farm wage labor, remains the main occupation for about 80 percent of the nation's populations, mostly living in rural communities (12-14). These statistics show that a large percentage of poor households in Rwanda are unable to access quality preschool. Among the poor families, children begin school

at the age of 7, mostly in government schools. Not all children can adjust with the school curriculum and so they become less interested after a few months of admission, therefore increasing the risk of school dropout or poor performance. As the fieldwork findings revealed, most poor families in rural communities prefer to engage their children of preschool age in household chores or accompany their parents during farm activities rather than sending them to the preschool – understandably since preschool education and related activities are not accessible to all rural communities.

Our ECCE services will include providing center-based educational services to children (indoor and outdoor learning activities), trainings for parents and caregivers on several subjects like positive parenting, economic empowerment, nutrition, sanitation and hygiene, child protection as well as improving farming livelihoods. The project will intentionally develop capacities for teachers and caregiver assistants.

**Project Objectives:**

The overall objective is to make quality early childhood care and education opportunities accessible to 2,250 less privileged children. Fifteen (15) learning centers will be set up in the least economically advantaged communities across the country.

**Specific objectives include:**

The first 5 years will involve establishing a pilot low-cost integrated early childhood care and education (ECCE) model center in Gisenyi village, Kibirizi cell in Mayange Sector of Bugesera district in the Eastern part of Rwanda. Intango Nziza Initiative will maximize impact by reaching and serving more disadvantaged children in rural poor communities through partnerships with local churches operating in communities without preschools but willing to open their places of worship on Monday to Friday for ECCE services.

**Other specific objectives include:**

- a) Ensure that children at the learning center have access to child age-appropriate curriculum and other learning materials that creatively stimulate their mental, social, and physical development while responding to each of their individual characteristics.
- b) Ensure that preschool teachers and assistant caregivers have essential competencies, training, support, and opportunities for growth. The quality preschool social experiences and academic achievement will ultimately depend on the inspiration and competencies of well educated, experienced, and competent staff.
- c) Ensure that families and communities are active participants in their children's learning and development. Parents, caregivers, and communities play a crucial role in the education of children through helping with home learning in the form of helping with homework, leisure reading, enriched family discussions and game activities, as well as advocating for their children's education. Other training for families and the community partnerships will include parenting skills, child protection, nutrition, sanitation and hygiene, and improved livelihoods. To ensure successful family and community partnerships, teachers need to receive in-service training to implement successful parent and community involvement programs.
- d) Ensure that there is a coherent framework for monitoring quality ECCE services and compliance with regulations. Monitoring and evaluation processes will be conducted to support children, families, and communities. All stakeholders,

including ECCE project staff, will be engaged, and empowered during the implementation of any monitoring and evaluation process. While monitoring can focus on the quality of structures, processes, and outcomes; a focus on the interest of the child, family, and staff engagement will strengthen the importance of looking at the quality of the processes used in ECCE settings.

- e) Ensure that children with disabilities have access to ECCE services. According to UNESCO's world education report 2015 "children with disabilities are still less likely to go to school, more likely to drop out early, and are less likely to learn key skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics than those without disabilities" (23). A ministry of health qualitative research on violence against children and youth with disabilities in Rwanda, revealed that "Many schools are not inclusive and do not admit children with disabilities..., stigma and social pressure may lead some families to keep their children hidden indoors; parents they may feel ashamed to register their child with local authorities and in declining to do so may miss opportunities for support and assistance" (17). Intango Nziza will work with families and communities to address stereotypes, prejudice, and stigma that contribute to the discrimination and exclusion of children with disabilities and their families. The ECD centers will be designed its programs and premises to make learning for children with disabilities fun and enjoyable.

### **Project Implementation Strategy**

The project will involve constructing 5 classrooms and 1 administration block, 4 sanitation facilities, 2 staff quarters, landscaping for outdoor activities and games, one drop-in-

center for community meetings and training to support and advance family and community well-being. A part of the land will have a farm to produce needed food supplies for the school as well as a demonstration farm for the community. To ensure quality teacher-child interaction and responsiveness, the center will serve up to 150 children. Each class has a maximum ratio of 1 teacher to 30 children, with the support of an assistant. The school timing will be a maximum of 4 hours of learning. If the number of children and families willing to enroll for the program are many, the center will run two sessions - the morning session from 8:30 am to 12 pm and the afternoon session from 1:30 pm to 5:30 pm. In collaboration with the community health workers, after a three-month interval, health check-ups will be performed for every child. The project desires to develop meaningful relationships with each child's family and community, therefore, a series of on-going training on different topics of concern raised by the community and those in the interest of the child will be provided for continuous learning and development.

### **Educational Materials and the learning environment**

Keeping in mind the vision for holistic development of the child, age-appropriate educational materials for preschool learners will be in place. Monsalvatge et al., write that "early childhood program is a play-based program that educates young children through indoor and outdoor play, giving children many opportunities to explore and have valuable learning experiences" (23). The center will carefully plan to put in place indoor and outdoor learning resources to create a rich learning environment that is interesting, interactive, safe, comfortable, and appropriate for the child. The learning center will have access to outdoor play facilities and creative activities that invite children to explore, experiment, re-build and move around in contact with the natural world.

The teaching methodologies will be designed in such a way that fosters a learning environment that encourages critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, communication, embracing others, and social responsibility. Since each child is unique and learns differently, it is important to incorporate different learning styles involving exploration, manipulation, and experimentation with real objects that foster learning by doing and hands-on-experiences.

The center will have in place indoor learning environment planned with the interest of each child's learning uniqueness. Indoor or physical classrooms will provide learning/activities spaces fitted with different learning materials including, poetry, rhymes, storytelling, dancing, songs, reading, and writing, community walking, gardening, and nature exploration, as well as using computer-based learning materials.

### **Early Childhood Care and Development as Copowerment.**

According to Forrest Inslee, Professor of International Community Development at Northwest University, copowerment is a dynamic of mutual exchange through which both sides of a social equation are made stronger and more effective by the other (MICD - Oxford). Different studies have indicated that teachers, families, and preschool center settings are important factors in early childhood learning, growth, and development. Key among the studies is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which shows that the children's learning, growth, and development is influenced by the interconnectedness of different types of environmental systems including the child's immediate environment like the intimate home or family system, to the larger systems such as the school system, and the more expansive systems like the local community, national, and global systems (37). The child's ecological system emphasizes the importance of the child's immediate environment in which she or he lives. The interactions in the immediate system involve personal relationships with the parents, caregivers, teachers,

classmates, and the community peers. Taking this theory into perspective, our ECCE centers will adopt a child's learning framework that supports the child, the teachers, the parents, caregivers, and the community as the key influencers of the child's wholistic learning, growth, and development.

Teachers play an important role to set the stage for children's learning through classroom and play-based learning. Robert Pianta and Megan Stuhlman write that "the quality of teacher-child relationships play a role in the children's ability to acquire the behavioral; social and emotional skills, and academic competencies necessary for success in school" (444). While the teacher-child relationships are important, parental participation and involvement in planning for early childhood care and learning is equally important. Chrysa Pui Chi Keung, and Alan Chi Keung write that "families are the key setting in which children's characters are shaped, and parents are their first teachers. The development of children's personality, self-image, values, and attitudes is greatly influenced by parents and other family members" (630). Parents as primary care providers are key stakeholders in the child's learning, growth, and development. Care in this case refers to the practices and behaviors of parents and other caregivers to offer appropriate and adequate food, healthcare, mental stimulation, physical and emotional support needed for the child's learning, growth, and development. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "child health and development outcomes depend to a large extent on the capabilities of families to provide a nurturing, safe environment for their infants and young children. Unfortunately, many families have insufficient knowledge about parenting skills and an inadequate support system of friends, extended family, or professionals to help with or advise them regarding child rearing" (598). Grantham-McGregor et al., show that "an estimated more than 200 million children under 5 years fail to reach their potential in cognitive development



because of poverty, poor health and nutrition, and deficient care” (60). Children living in poor rural conditions face a triple jeopardy; their parents suffer poor parenting skills, and they are more likely to have negative attitudes toward early childhood education thus less likely to support early learning because of poverty conditions. Children from such backgrounds have high chances of stunting and malnutrition which is closely associated with poor cognitive and educational performance. Structural obstacles hinder attaining good education, health, nutrition, social protection, and other social services from the earliest years and continue on in later years presenting challenges in achieving equity, inclusion, and earnings.

Intango Nziza will put emphasis on hiring qualified teachers, building teacher assistants and volunteers to equip them with essential attributes that will ensure quality learning and relationships building between children and their families. How teachers relate, share, and strategize learning in the classroom and play-based learning can maximize the child’s learning outcomes and its continuity over time. Intango Nziza also recognizes that families have a primary influence on their children’s learning and development. Therefore, children learn best in the context of their families. Even though teachers play a big part in educating the children, they will do so in a family-centered model through home-visitations; during which teachers will work collaboratively with families recognizing them as equal partners, supporting them in their children learning and development.

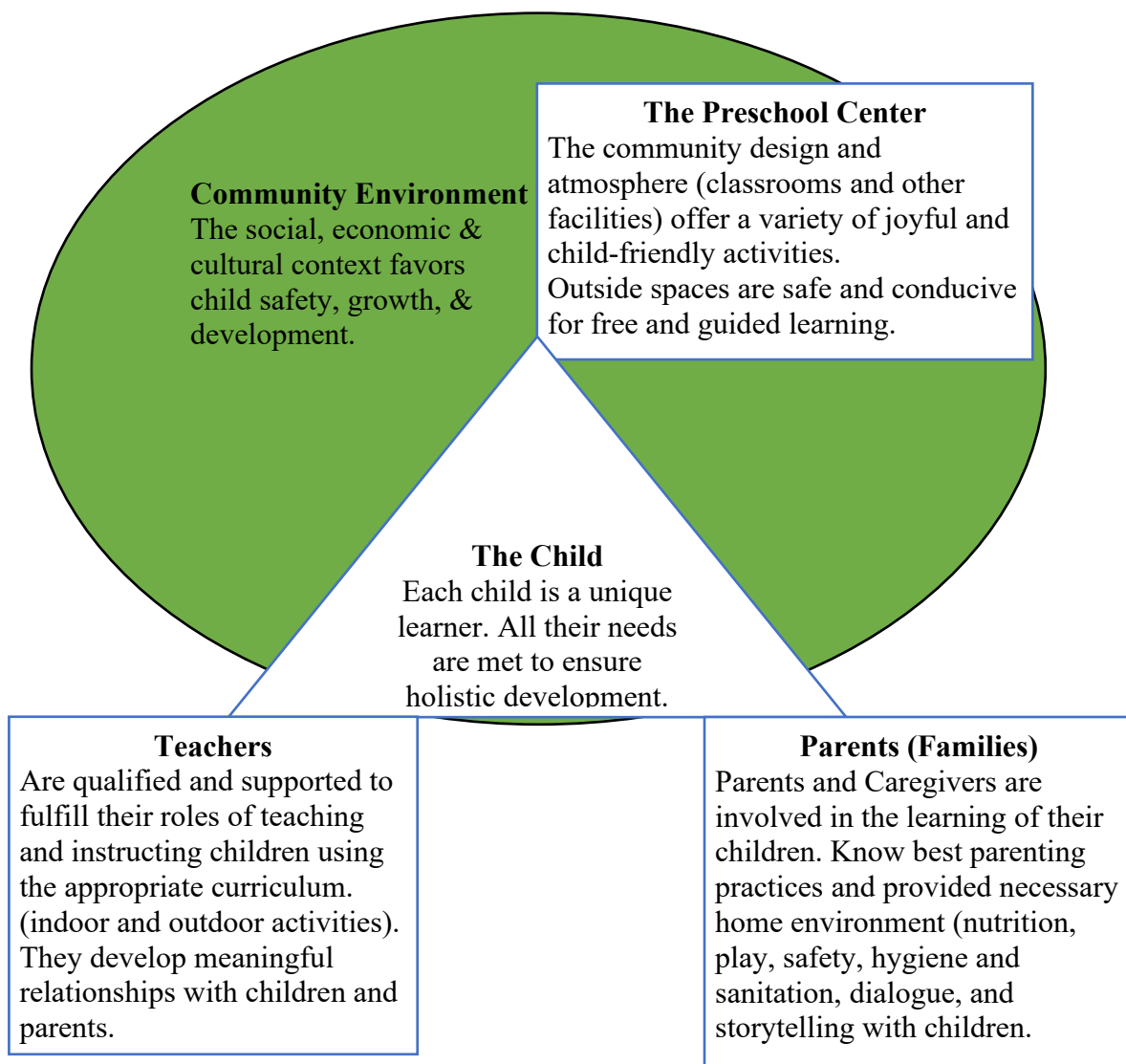


Chart 1: A Framework for Maximizing Early Childhood Development

## Project Location

The pilot project will be located in Gisenyi village of Kibirizi Cell in Bugesera district. Bugesera is one of the seven districts of the Eastern Province in Rwanda. The district covers total surface area of 1337Km<sup>2</sup> inhabited by a population of 361,914 people (NISR 2). Mayange is the third highly populated sector with 29,835 residents. 31.6 percent of the district's population are below the age of 9 while 62.1 percent are below the age of 25 (NISR 4-5). Kibirizi cell the

project area has 5 villages with 6,600 total residents mostly children according to according to Celestin Minani, the executive leader.

### **Project Beneficiaries**

The main beneficiaries for these project activities are children from disadvantaged communities. A total of 2,250 children, boys and girls will under the project. Families with children living with disabilities will be encouraged to enroll their children, with incentives. Other beneficiaries include, parents, caregivers, teachers and project support staff, community people and local organizations with the community.

### **Project Outcomes**

- I. 2,250 children will be provided with quality preschool education
- II. 15 early childhood learning centers will be established, equipped, and adequately staffed
- III. The project will contribute to the government's goal to provide education for all.
- IV. Economic strengthening and resilience for families and communities through improved livelihoods and savings initiatives.

### **Project Impact**

The project has the opportunity and possibility of nurturing caring, capable and responsible future citizens thus contributing to the nation's need for a capable human resource for national development. The project will focus on the children of 3-6 years of age, therefore learning and developmentally appropriate materials for this age group will be considered for the child learning areas and competencies.

Key Learning Areas	Competencies
Personal, Social, and Emotional development	<p><b>Competency 1:</b> Children will develop a positive sense of self-identity as well as strong emotional strength for life.</p> <p><b>Competency 2:</b> Children will learn to share and work collaboratively with their peers, teachers, family members, and neighbors regardless of their differences. Developing social skills will enable to thrive in a world of diversity.</p> <p><b>Competency 3:</b> Children will have a sense of citizenship and appreciate their culture.</p> <p><b>Competency 4:</b> Children will develop a sense of responsibility for self and others at school, home, and community.</p> <p><b>Competency 5:</b> Children will develop an understanding of ethical (social and religious values and practices) like respect, accountability, apologizing, forgiving, honesty, empathy, and accepting others.</p>
Language and Literacy	<p><b>Competency 6:</b> Children will develop language skills enabling them to express themselves and to communicate confidently.</p> <p><b>Competency 7:</b> Children will be able to identify, sort, classify, and describe objects.</p> <p><b>Competency 8:</b> Children will develop listening skills through telling stories, poems, and rhythms</p> <p><b>Competency 9:</b> Children will learn to recognize letters and familiar texts.</p> <p><b>Competency 10:</b> Children will learn to use pictures, symbols, and letters used for different purposes.</p>

Basic Mathematical Concepts	<p><b>Competency 11:</b> Children will develop basic logical and creative problem-solving skills by understanding different attributes of objects such as color, size, texture, and weight.</p> <p><b>Competency 12:</b> Children develop basic understanding of simple numbers and counting 1-50.</p> <p><b>Competency 13:</b> Children demonstrate understanding of shapes and recognize objects in their surroundings.</p> <p><b>Competency 14:</b> Children will develop simple measurement skills.</p>
Physical development	<p><b>Competency 15:</b> Children will develop of sense of balance, agility, and body coordination</p> <p><b>Competency 16:</b> Children develop a sense sensory use and ability to handle tools and materials.</p> <p><b>Competency 17:</b> Children will develop a sensory motor skill.</p>
Health, Hygiene, and Safety	<p><b>Competency 18:</b> Children will develop a sense personal safety and security.</p> <p><b>Competency 19:</b> Children will develop a sense of personal healthy, sanitation and hygiene practices.</p>
The World Around us	<p><b>Competency 20:</b> Children will develop an understanding of their families, people, and places around them.</p> <p><b>Competency 21:</b> Children will learn to differentiate living things and non-living things.</p> <p><b>Competency 22:</b> Children will learn to recognize basic habitants in their environment like plants, animals, and birds.</p> <p><b>Competency 23:</b> Children will develop a basic understanding of weather and seasons.</p> <p><b>Competency 24:</b> Children will develop a caring attitude towards their environment and recognize natural resources around them.</p> <p><b>Competency 25:</b> Children will interface with basic technology</p>

Creative Arts	<p><b>Competency 26:</b> Children will learn to express themselves through the use of drawing and coloring.</p> <p><b>Competency 27:</b> Children will learn to use locally available resources like sand, water, banana fiber, cloth, wood and sticks to make projects of the choice.</p> <p><b>Competency 28:</b> Children will develop a sense of observation, experimentation, and imagination to foster critical thinking and creative problem-solving.</p> <p><b>Competency 29:</b> Children will develop and build self-confidence through socio-dramatic play activities.</p> <p><b>Competency 30:</b> Children will develop essential skills like hand-eye coordination, hand strength, and precision through paper cutting, tearing, and pasting.</p>
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Table 1: A Summary of learning areas and competencies for preschool children

Intango Nziza has a vision that sees each child as happy, healthy, and confident. Each child has a unique identity and giftedness with individual strengths and capacities. According to Leticia, Aquino et al., in their work levels of competency in the learning domains of Kindergarten entrants, “Early Childhood Education (ECE) provides a foundation upon which schooling builds in order to create employable, compliant, and responsible citizens of the nation” (38). Intango Nziza desires to lay those foundations that will enable each child to grow, to learn, to explore, to enquire, create self-discoveries making them self-regulated, lifelong learners.

To ensure that each of these learning domains (areas) and competencies are undertaken, the center will identify themes/topics from the different development domains; integrating them in planned daily, weekly, and yearly activities. Some of the topics and themes include:

1. **Identity and relationships** - Self, family, and community
2. **Well-being** – Food, body, health, hygiene, cleanliness, and safety.

3. **Nature** – Plants, animals, birds, insects, fruits, and vegetables.
4. **Physical Environment** – Air, water, earth, universe, and seasons.
5. **Social Environment** – My country, festivals, religion, celebrations, neighborhood, and transport.

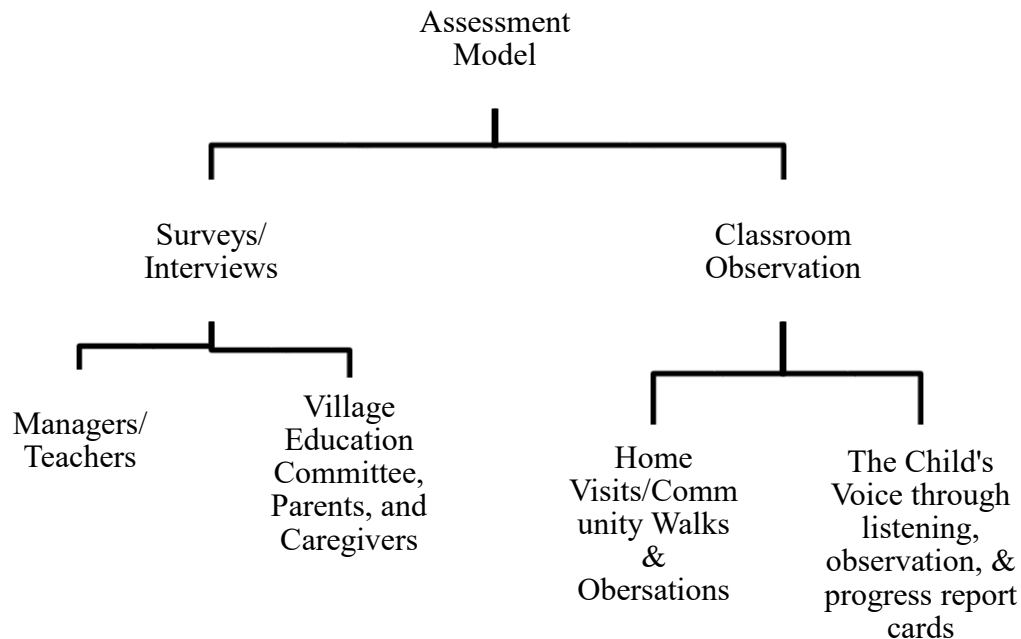
Teachers are responsible for making sure that each of the themes above are integrated in the weekly age-appropriate lessons and play-based activities. Examples of daily routine and weekly schedules as reference for planning include the following:

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Frid	Saturday
9:00 – 9:30am	Welcome					Teachers and caregivers engage in activities at the center and homes to strengthen child learning abilities
	Checking Personal Hygiene					
	Attendance, national anthem, & Prayers					
	Warm up – physical activities – walk, dance, exercises					
9:30 – 10am	Theme/topic related learning domains					
10am – 10:30am	Indoor play – free and organized					
10:30 – 11am	Snacks					
11am – 11:30 am	Activities related to any learning domains					
11:30 – 12:00pm	Creative activities related to any learning domains					
12:00 – 12:40pm	Outdoor play – free and organized					

Table 2: An example of a daily and weekly schedule

## Project Monitoring and Evaluation

Assessment will be an essential and integral part of the ECCE activities to ensure that we remain child-centered, family and community focused, with all planned activities and experiences aiming to bring out the best in the child. Regular assessment and evaluation (monthly, quarterly, and annually) will be conducted to inform Intango Nziza and the center management whether or not the project is efficiently and effectively meeting its goals. Lynch and Walls write that measuring impact helps to know whether we are making a difference in the world and our supporters care that we are doing so. They further write that social impact metrics help to find better, faster, more efficient ways to deliver to the world what it needs from us (130-131). As part of being accountable, findings will be shared with all stakeholders: parents, staff, and community leaders, to know and understand how we are meeting the targets and standards. Information will be gathered as follows:





**Project Activities and timelines**

No	Main Activities	Time
1.	Registration of Intango Nziza with District and National Authorities	End 2021
2.	Building a resource support network	”
3.	Land Surveying and developing architectural plans.	”
4.	Community engagement (church leaders and local authorities from the project area).	2022
5.	Site construction	2023
6.	Community orientation	”
7.	Reporting	”
8.	Advocacy and Networking with other like-minded NGOs & ECD centers	“
9.	Appropriate staff selection	”
10	Preparing appropriate curriculum and other learning resources	“
11.	Target children selection	“
12.	Classroom formation	“
13.	Capacity building for teachers, teaching assistants, and other staff	”
14.	Reporting: Monthly, Quarterly, Completion and M&E Special reports	”
15.	Special training for the parents and the community – Nutrition, WASH, SGs & Child rights	Ongoing
16.	Child health checkup	Ongoing

Table 3: Tables showing project activities and timelines.



*ECD Logical Framework*

SITUATION	INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
<p><b>Program:</b> Early Childhood Care and education program serving rural low-income families with children 3-5 years old.</p> <p>Core activities:</p>	<p><b>Internal</b> Preschool facility, staff, materials, equipment, curriculum,</p> <p><b>External</b> State license, training, other service providers, partners, and funding.</p>	<p><b>What:</b> Creative curriculum, hands-on activities, day-week-year around activities, teaching strategies, assessments, nutritious meals.</p> <p>Education for parents in healthy and nutrition for children, child rights, financial literacy, and livelihoods copowerment.</p> <p>Home visits by teachers and assistants.</p>	<p>Numbers of children enrolled, number of children assessed, number of service hours, number of days programmed, number of meals served, demographic statistics, number of staff outreaches to families, number of parents attending program enrichment activities, number of children</p>	<p>Children improve language, cognitive, literacy, and mathematical skills.</p> <p>Children regulate their emotions, sustain positive relationships, and cooperate in a group.</p> <p>Children have appropriate balancing, fine and gross motor skills.</p>

		<p>Workshops for parents and children on creative play.</p> <p>Family planning, immunizations, and baby care.</p> <p><b>Who:</b></p> <p>Children, Teachers, families, and community health-workers.</p>	<p>immunized, number of savings groups formed, surveys, and evaluations</p>	<p>Children are ready to enter primary school and successful in early years of formal education. Children demonstrate reading and behavioral levels.</p> <p>Parents knowledgeable about parenting, low or no cases of child abuse, number of children enrolling for ECCE,</p>
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				number of children ready for primary education, number of parents using community healthcare services, families with a positive and nurturing home environment for preschoolers.
ASSUMPTIONS			EXTERNAL FACTORS	
Need of the children and families			Schools	
Importance of early childhood care and education			Parents and families	
Challenge of the cost associated with ECD services			Funding	
			Competitors	

*ECD estimated start up budget*

Budget Items	Item	Details	Unit	Unit Cost (Rwf)	\$USD – XR 973 <a href="http://www1.oanda.com/currency/converter/">www1.oanda.com/currency/converter/</a>
Early Childhood Center	Construction & Equipping	Classroom blocks	05		
		Administration block	01		
		Classroom & Office supplies	01		
		Drop-in Hall	01		
		Kitchen & Store	02		
		Washrooms (Toilets)	05		
		Nap Room	01		
		Staff Quarter	02		
		Child-Play Equipment	05		
		Landscaping	01		
	One-time biogas installation	Cooking & Lighting	01	900,000	925
	Fencing		01		
	School Farm & Chicken Coop		02		
Ongoing Costs	Staffing	2 qualified preschool teachers	12	50,000	\$670
		3 Assistant teachers	12	30,000	\$370

		1 Support Staff	12	10,000	\$124
	Communication	Text and Internet	12	15,000	185
	Collaboration & Advocacy	Quarterly	04	80,000	83
	Teacher Training	Quarterly (4)	05	75,000	100
	Annual Feeding of 150 children	300rwf/24days *10month	150		
					<b>\$12,532</b>
Family and community engagement activities	Economic Empowerment	3 days Yr *50 people	150	5000	750
	Parenting & Child rights	3 days Yr *50 people	150	5000	750
	Nutrition & Health Check up	3 days Yr *50 people	150	5000	750
	Water, Sanitation & Hygiene	3 days Yr *50 people	150	5000	750
	Follow-up Costs	4 times a year	4	150,000	600
	Bank Fees (Taxes & inflation)	1	10%		

*Project Site Map*



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<sup>i</sup> Interview translations from Kinyarwanda to English were done by the author.