



READY TO REPLICATE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HIGH QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT MODEL IN UGANDA

The model we have created together with **Children on the Edge Africa** in Loco Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centre, has been developed in partnership with **Madrasa ECD Programme**. This initiative has over 25 years of experience in developing an approach that makes a real difference in children's cognitive development and later success in school. In this document we discuss how their approach, in conjunction with our own 28 years of experience working with vulnerable children, has produced a successful model that is **ready to replicate** to new and different areas.

1. COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP



One of the reasons Madrasa's approach fits so well with the work of Children on the Edge, is their emphasis on community ownership.

We prioritise ownership in all of our programmes and this was the foundation for the ECD work in Loco.

Loco ECD Centre was built over the summer of 2016 and opened to two classes of 30 young children each, all from the most vulnerable households.

A previous pilot Centre in neighbouring Masese II had showed how partnering strongly with the local people through voluntary Child Protection Teams, brings about significant transformation for struggling communities.

Child Protection Teams (CPTs) are groups of 10 volunteers trained to create a protective environment for local children and act as a link between their community and local services.

In all Madrasa programmes, communities are encouraged to reflect on their strengths and challenges, to consider how best to leverage local resources and to decide where and how to set up a local pre-school. Loco CPT were the catalyst for the ECD Centre, and are pictured on the left, standing in front of the building before the roof was put on.

The involvement of the CPTs goes way beyond the establishment of the Centre. They work to identify the most vulnerable households to ensure that those children benefit from the education offered, they encourage local families on the importance of education and support parents and children throughout the term, ensuring high retention rates.

CPTs also oversee the running of 'education loans', which are small business loans that make it possible for struggling households to send their children to school.

Throughout the term they work closely with the ECD teachers, who refer cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to them, to be followed up. In this way, the ECD Centre becomes part of the wider development of child protection in the area.

Communities are fully engaged through regular parent meetings, termly workshops and annual 'speech days' for the whole community to celebrate progress. They support the Centre as individual households, but also work together to problem solve.

Another way to establish strong local links has been to recruit and train local teachers and to partner extensively with the local primary school. Teachers begin their employment by having conversations and workshops to gain a deeper understanding of the community.

The ECD Centre and the Ugandan Railways Primary School have shared teacher training, assessments and materials, introducing a more interactive way of learning to the traditional primary school environment to smooth what can be a difficult transition from nursery to primary.

They also work together to prepare children for the transition to primary level at the end of their time at the Centre. The Primary School Management Committee includes parents and teachers from the ECD Centre and a CPT member, so they benefit from their views in shaping the school.

2. FOCUS ON LOCAL CULTURE



Madrasa makes sure that each programme's operational framework is based on the social conditions, values and expressed needs of the community. This framework creates a pre-school system that is economically, socially and culturally appropriate.

In Loco the teachers worked to establish which language is most commonly used amongst Centre intake and adapted materials accordingly. They draw upon available local resources through all areas of teaching and learning, and focus on the strengths of local culture and values.

Making scrapbooks about national life and teaching local dances, songs and stories are all ways of linking learning into familiar Ugandan culture.

Our CPT model complements this approach perfectly, as volunteers are strongly embedded in the community and, together with COTE Africa and the teaching staff, can ensure that children are educated in a way that is appropriate to their own background.

"Many early childhood programmes are initiated without the understanding of the communities' actual needs or consideration of culture, religious beliefs or traditional values. As a result many communities do not participate in the programmes as fully as expected."

Bi Swafiya Said, First Trainer, Director and Co-Developer - Madrasa Programme

3. QUALITY CREATIVE CURRICULUM



Madrasa state that the effective ECD 'enables children to develop sound foundational skills in literacy, numeracy and reasoning as well as help them gain critical social and problem-solving skills that will assist them in their daily interactions with peers and adults in their communities and beyond'. To do this we use the Ugandan ECD Framework which was developed in consultation with UNICEF and Madrasa, which is a detailed curriculum of five core areas and an assessment framework to ensure children are learning and developing.

This is an approach that is mirrored in our other ECD and refugee education work around the world and the focus here is children learning through creativity and play. Instead of rote learning, a regular day at the Centre will feature songs, dances, craft and games.

All our 'Child Friendly Spaces' around the world are colourful, fun places for children to feel welcomed, where they can feel safe, develop their potential, develop friendships, learn to express themselves and be valued as an individual.

Regular training, mentoring and support from Madrasa sustains the quality of teaching and the prioritisation of child friendly learning, which teachers regularly share ideas and experiences, and learn new techniques and methods.

4. HEALTH, NUTRITION & SOCIALISATION



The programme here has a holistic approach which not only covers Early Childhood Education but ensures all round health and socialisation.

There are initial and termly health checks at the Centre (in liaison with the Jinja Hospital Children's Ward) where any concerns are addressed. Every six months the children are tested for HIV and AIDs, they are dewormed and given full treatment for any disease or illness identified.

Children's nutrition levels are also assessed and if malnutrition is picked up, it is targeted with ongoing provision of high calorie porridge and other snacks. Parents are also given advice about how to feed their children and ensure they get the necessary supplements until they gain weight.

Teachers focus on health and hygiene in class, with songs, rhymes and regular routines to establish a good habit of hand washing. If children arrive in a dirty uniform or not meeting the standards for cleanliness, they are taken home and the parents are spoken to.

The Centre has clear rules and expectations and a timetabled routine to encourage the children to adapt for the transition to primary school, improve behaviour, develop strong friendships and enjoy a peaceful learning environment.



RESULTS OF APPROACH

1. EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

The August 2018 report from COTE Africa showed a significant improvement at the ECD Centre in terms of the children's education development. This was shown in their hand writing and their reading, both from the blackboard and the charts of letters and words in the classrooms. Programme Manager Edwin Wanabe says "Most children can now identify their belongings, tell where they and their friends come from and also some now know their parent's names and tribes".

Core skills and learning have improved significantly. This is evidenced by the local primary school teaching staff reporting how in the past they would have to act as a nursery and primary teacher with the youngest children, as they had no reading or writing knowledge at all and were unable to cope within a classroom environment. Now they arrive prepared to learn at the right level.

The local teacher training college sends its trainees to Loco ECD Centre because of its good practice and it is currently being considered for designation as a centre for excellence in the Eastern Region.

2. VALUING EDUCATION

The external evaluation highlighted how timely the input of the ECD Centre was in shaping parents attitudes towards education while their children were in such a formative stage.

In August 2018, a report by COTE Africa identified that the good working relationship between the teachers and the Loco CPT

yielded tremendous results in terms of attendance. The CPTs closely followed-up children seen loitering in the community instead of being at school and by organising several meetings with the social worker, teachers and parents to assess why their children weren't attending. The meetings also focused on reminding parents of the importance of their children's education and their roles and responsibilities.

3. CHILD PROTECTION

CPTs not only play a great role in the functioning of the Centre, but have been key in ensuring that child protection cases are followed up, bridging the gap between the Centre and the parents. CPTs follow up on cases identified by the teachers and often make home visits.

One teacher describes how "...we give them chance at times to speak in vernacular... yes they tell us, mummy fought with dad at home. So you take note of such news from a child. You then talk to the CPT members. At times they are not aware of that. So they have to go and make further inquiry into the matter, find out why they have been fighting so as to help deal with that violence".

The Centre has also worked with parents to ensure better safety, after a spate of kidnappings in the area. After reminding them of their responsibilities in protecting the children, parents started escorting their children to school in the morning and picking them in the afternoon. As many of them work, they established a system where community members take turns walking groups of children to school.



4. HEALTH AND NUTRITION

After a few months of being at the Centre, children were visibly healthy, despite being on the edge of malnutrition when they started.

One teacher describes how *“The health workers help us to know each child’s status. Here, many parents do not take their children for treatment. So it is good that health workers come here at school. They help us treat the children”*.

The hygiene of children attending the Centre has also improved.

“By the time we got them, it was terrible. If you were not a parent, you couldn’t let those children get close to you. The environment wasn’t good, their skin was bad. At the beginning we could take them and bathe them as a remedial measure. But we started advising the parents that every child must bathe in the morning. If we asked them if they bathed and someone said I didn’t bathe, we started sending them back home to bathe, so the parents picked our message” (ECD teacher).

5. SOCIALISATION

The external evaluation identified huge progress with the socialisation of the children, with a teacher reporting that *“Children’s discipline has changed. The way our children behave is not the way other children in the community who don’t access ECD or who attend other ECD Centres behave”*.

Many of the teachers put this down to paying attention to children as individuals and spending time at the start learning about the community and backgrounds of each child.

One teacher describes how this initial research helped: *“Research was to guide us in our planning and to determine how we could help these children. This is because the way I handle Rita is not the way I handle Mercy or Gerald depending on where they come from... although they have their different cultures in their communities and families, once they came to our school, we had to change them so that behave relatively uniformly since we also have our own culture. In their communities and families, if you found a child beating another, the other child would fight back but when they came here, if someone beats you, you come to report, if you report to the teacher, the teacher will ask the other child to say sorry”*.

A quarterly report in May 2018 showed that children had learned to control their tempers, becoming gentle with their friends instead of fighting.

This socialisation is not just important for a harmonious atmosphere, but to aid the children in their transition to primary school. Within a few terms, the children had adopted the ‘school culture’ i.e. responding to the bell, praying before eating, asking for permission before going out of class.



CASE FOR REPLICATION

This ECD model was initially piloted in Masese II community with transformative results. Seeing similar results in Loco over the last few years is evidence, not only that the approach works, but that it is replicable and adaptable to different situations.

An external evaluation identified that “The sustainability of the project first of all lies in the project design built around the currently recognised CPTs, and integration of existing structures.”

Combining the high quality education and community based elements of Madrasa with an effective, established CPT model has been evidenced as a reliable basis for strong provision of ECD in vulnerable communities.

WANDAGO

A December 2017 needs assessment in neighbouring Wandago slum showed that there was no ECD provision. Children on the Edge and COTE Africa began working in the new community, successfully established and trained a new CPT and have built a new Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centre, due to open at the start of the new school term in February 2019.

Teachers are being trained by Madrasa, alongside current Loco ECD teachers and will partner with the new Wandago CPT in the same manner as Loco staff do. All CPTs in the area regularly meet to share ideas and discuss problems, so Loco CPT will be able to train Wandago CPT on the nuances of working with an ECD Centre

KYAKA II

After a number of trips by our International Director and COTE Africa to Kyaka II refugee settlement, we identified that there are limited safe spaces for young children. Refugee children here are incredibly traumatised after fleeing from the Democratic Republic of Congo and whilst there are a number of organisations providing primary education, only Windle International and Save the Children are providing minimal ECD services in certain locations.

COTE Africa worked alongside Madrasa, to conduct a needs assessment of 30 refugee communities and any existing provisions in the Kyaka II area. Once the report has been finalised, we will present our findings to the Prime Minister's Office and ask for permission to begin work.

Working with some long term UK based funders, we have raised 50% of the full costs needed to begin work here. Starting next year, we hope to develop a model ECD Centre, working with the local organisation 'Youth Initiative' who currently have one ECD Centre up and running with limited resources but with a high level of community engagement. We are hopeful that over time, this model Centre will become a training centre where Congolese teachers from all 30 centres can come to learn and develop their teaching skills, and improve the quality of early childhood education for refugee children across the region.