impact
an early start to poverty reduction

A glocal, systems approach to impactful
Early Childhood Development (ECD)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In South Africa, poverty is often a symptom of an inadequate and unjust education system, which traps many individuals in circumstances of deprivation. As gaps in learning, health and development appear in the earliest years, more attention needs to be paid to the preparation and stimulation that young children receive. In this context, quality early childhood development (ECD) which boasts significant returns to the individual (in terms of later income prospects) *and* society (Heckman *et al,* 2012: 2), could contribute to shifting the trajectory of poverty. Thus far, however, the South African state has made little progress in expanding quality ECD to those worst off, namely children in the rural Eastern Cape province.

We propose a mechanism to reach these children: a fully equipped bus, which will take a multidisciplinary team of ECD advocates and experts on a predefined route around the rural Eastern Cape. These individuals will work with a group of community champions – namely, grandparents and unemployed young people – at each site they visit, aiming to equip these champions with the resources and training to implement their own ECD interventions. This approach promotes a version of ECD where neighbourhoods and communities are not merely ECD recipients but are co-creators. Here, significance is placed on capacitating local communities, and specifically leveraging grandparents and unemployed youth as community assets. Ultimately, this innovation serves to increase the number of children from poor homes and in rural areas accessing ECD services, to boost their development and chances of success from the earliest of years. We believe that this intervention will contribute to better primary and secondary schooling outcomes, and, in turn, to the development of a skilled young population capable not only of escaping the cycle of poverty, but also of innovating more strategies to eliminate poverty altogether.

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1   THE INNOVATION TEAM

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2   GLOSSARY

Early Childhood Development (ECD): for the purposes of this paper ECD is understood to be the whole (physical, cognitive, socio-emotional) development of a child from birth up to the age of six (Ashley-Cooper, et al., 2019).

Stokvel: a savings group to which members contribute an agreed amount monthly. Members traditionally receive a lump sum on a determined date (Oxford Languages, 2022). In South Africa, these groups are sites of empowerment and socialisation, particularly among women.

Bantustans: an allocated area reserved for black inhabitants of South Africa under the National Party administration during apartheid. Bantustans are usually rural areas the black majority were forced to relocate (Madavo, 1971: 19).

3   PROBLEM STATEMENT

Poverty is generally associated with material deprivation, or lack of income – and the most common extreme poverty metric is the percentage of people living on less than USD 1.90 per day (United Nations, 2016). There are many causes of income poverty, such as unemployment, social exclusion, and the vulnerability of certain groups of people to disasters (United Nations, 2016).

3.1   UNDERSTANDING POVERTY

Globally, around 10 percent of all people currently live in extreme poverty, the majority of whom live in Sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations, 2020). In general, poverty in rural areas is more than three times greater than that in urban areas, and children in these areas are often worst affected (United Nations, 2020).

Poverty should not be conceptualised exclusively in material terms, or in terms of income only. Poverty encompasses a variety of deprivations, including poor health, inadequate education, insufficient living standards, disempowerment, poor work quality or threatening living environments. One should therefore pay attention to the various dimensions of poverty. A multidimensional measure of poverty considers access to education and basic infrastructure alongside income poverty (World Bank, 2022). The Human Development Index (HDI) for example considers various dimensions of human development: a healthy life (measured by life expectancy at birth), education (measured by the mean years of schooling for individuals aged 25 or older) and standard of living (measured by gross national income per capita) (World Bank, 2022). These measures help conceptualise the complexity of poverty, to better inform policies and policy reduction interventions (World Bank, 2022).

3.2   POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Poverty in South Africa is tied to the country's apartheid history. Apartheid racial segregation created a dual South African economy (Noyoo, 2017: 5). This economy consisted of an urban, white-dominated, modern sector and an underdeveloped and marginalised subsistence economy in Bantustans (Madavo, 1971: 19). During apartheid, the first economy enjoyed prosperity while the second economy endured poverty (Madavo, 1971: 19). In 1994, at the end of apartheid, this duality was made visible by the different Human Development Index (HDI) scores for black and white South Africans: the HDI of "white South Africa" was 0.878 (ranking 24th in the world) while the HDI of "black South Africa" was 0.462 (ranking 123rd globally) (Noyoo, 2017: 4).

Although poverty in South Africa declined after 1994, many black South Africans continue to feel the effects of the legacy of apartheid and endure a vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty. In

addition, the trajectory of poverty reduction slowed down and then reversed between 2010 and 2014 (World Bank, 2020). Approximately 55.5 percent of South Africans experience income poverty, earning below the national upper poverty line (ZAR 992) (World Bank, 2020). Updated data on poverty is limited but the most recent World Bank measure of extreme poverty in South Africa is 18.9 percent in 2014, up from 16.6 percent in 2010 (World Bank, 2020). These statistics have likely worsened in recent years, as one can expect that the Covid-19 pandemic has had economic consequences for the country, especially for those in already impoverished communities (World Bank, 2020).

Poverty in South Africa is exacerbated by inequality and unemployment. South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 0.63 (World Bank, 2022). Furthermore, approximately 71 percent of wealth is concentrated in the hands of the top 10 percent, while only 7 percent of the wealth in the country is held by the poorest 60 percent (World Bank, 2020). Many South Africans born into low-income households find it difficult to escape the poverty trap, and are often unable to find jobs in a country whose unemployment rate currently sits at 34.9 percent (Stats SA, 2021a).

In many ways, poverty and unemployment are symptoms of inadequate education. Unemployment is often a result of a labour market mismatch where there is a surplus of unskilled labour but a shortage of skilled workers. The shortage of skilled labour can in turn be traced back to a disparate and failing schooling system, at secondary *and* primary levels. 78 percent of South African Grade 4 children cannot read for meaning (Howie *et al*, 2016). This statistic indicates that, while our focus on education (under)performance tends to be placed on the final years of high school, more attention needs to be paid to the preparation and stimulation children receive before Grade 4, and before entering primary school. The challenge of transforming South Africa's poverty and unemployment rate levels requires one to turn one's attention to the very earliest of years, where discrepancies in terms of access to education and upskilling begin.

The need to focus on South African children is further emphasised by the fact that child poverty rates are consistently higher than adult poverty rates – and it appears that child poverty is on the rise, with child income poverty increasing from 63 percent to 67 percent in recent years (UNICEF, 2020a: 5). In addition, a UNICEF (2020a: 5) report has found that many South African children are multidimensionally poor. Children in the province of the Eastern Cape appear worst affected (UNICEF, 2020a: 6). The prevalence of child poverty in the Eastern Cape is unsurprising as the province is one of the poorest in South Africa, and is the worst performing province in terms of its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (Stats SA, 2021b), despite being the third most populous

province in the country (Stats SA, 2016). The per capita GDP in the Eastern Cape is well below average, contributing to the child poverty rate.

Finally, children in rural areas are most affected by child poverty (UNICEF, 2020a: 6). These children are twice as likely to be multidimensionally poor than children in urban areas (UNICEF, 2020a: 6). Rural children in the Eastern Cape, therefore, seem to have all the odds stacked against them. In this context, families and households (and communities in general) are significant in providing care for vulnerable children (Stats SA, 2021c). However, often government support for families is limited, and gaps in nutrition, care and learning begin to appear at the earliest ages (Stats SA, 2021c).

4   EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD): A CATALYST FOR CHANGE?

Children are often most vulnerable to the effects of poverty and should be at the forefront of poverty reduction strategies. When one puts children at the centre of poverty reduction strategies, access to quality early childhood development (ECD) seems potentially catalytic. The economist James Heckman (2008) claims that the greatest return to investment in education is in the early years, for children under six-years-old. Heckman (2008: 298) argues that early investments in cognitive and non-cognitive (e.g. socioemotional) skills for young children play an important role in determining future socioeconomic outcomes.
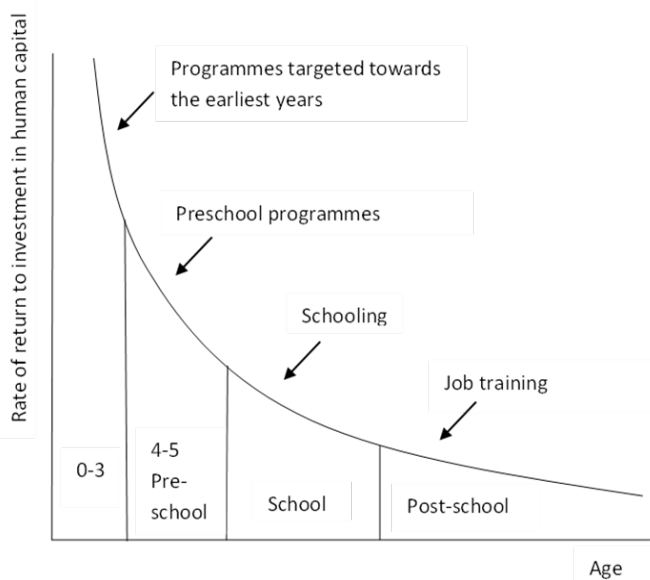
Heckman et al's (2012: 2) longitudinal study, tracking individuals who participated in the Perry Preschool Program in the United States compared to a control group, found that those exposed to quality early childhood development (ECD) programmes experienced significant returns (Heckman et al, 2012: 2). The estimated social return to this programme, or return accrued to the individual (in terms of later income prospects) as well as society (including the impact of the programme on crime, welfare

Figure 1 Total (social and private) return to a unit dollar invested at different ages, assuming one dollar initially invested at each age   Source: Heckman (2008: 312)

participation, and the resulting savings in social costs) is conservatively estimated at 10 percent (Heckman et al, 2012: 2). This return is greater than at other levels of education (Rea and Burton, 2020). This observation supports a theory of human capital intervention that is cumulative. Heckman

(2008: 298) argues that early skill formation provides a platform for further skill accumulation because childhood is a highly influential time for human development.

In addition, Heckman's longitudinal study indicates that returns to ECD are greater when these interventions target children from disadvantaged communities (Heckman, 2011: 34). In economics, the goals of equity and efficiency in society are often positioned as a trade-off (i.e., mutually exclusive), where society needs to give up some of one goal to achieve more of the other (Heckman, 2011: 31). In this case, however, it appears that investment in ECD may promote both fairness and efficiency, improving societal efficiency and providing the most benefits to those worst off (Heckman, 2011: 31).

4.1   GLOBAL ECD CONTEXT

Recently, there has been an increase in ECD policy legislation and interest, likely as a result of Heckman's findings as well as the establishment of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Target 4.2 under SDG 4 calls for all children to have access to ECD, care and pre-primary education (United Nations, 2015).

However, many countries continue to overlook ECD as a developmental issue: only about 70 countries globally have some form of national ECD policy or implementation plan (UNICEF, 2020b: 11). Among low- and middle-income countries, fewer than two in three children attend any form of learning prior to primary school (UNESCO, 2021: 3). Furthermore, the effectiveness of ensuring access outside of high-income countries is weak (McCoy *et al*, 2017: 482). In middle- and low-income countries, the ECD landscape tends to be marked by inequity, uneven access and variation (McCoy *et al*, 2017: 483). Furthermore, the average participation gap between the richest and poorest quintiles is 48 percentage points (UNESCO, 2021: 3).

Despite these challenges, one can find ingenious ECD innovations in developing countries coming from civil society organisations. In India, for example, Mobile Crèches (MC) is an NGO aiming to provide age-appropriate and holistic learning to marginalised groups (Mobile Crèches, 2021). MC focuses on health, nutrition, education and communication with local children and communities, to bring about holistic child and community development (Mobile Crèches, 2021). Its vision is to bring about a just and caring world for children from marginalised populations to enable them to develop into confident, competent adults (Mobile Crèches, 2021).

In particular, MC works with migrants who have moved from rural India into urban areas (usually in a nuclear family unit), in search of work opportunities (Venkateswaran, 2013: 6). Many of these migrants are absorbed as informal workers in the construction industry and construction sites often become temporary homes for workers (Pispati *et al*, 2017: 7). For this reason, MC deliberately aims to work with these specific communities, and are "mobile" crèches as a result of the temporary nature of construction sites. MC is context-specific, and illustrates a way of reaching underserved groups.

4.2   SOUTH AFRICAN ECD CONTEXT

In South Africa, the government has in policy recognised the potential role ECD can play in alleviating poverty in the country. The National Development Plan (NDP), drafted in 2012, outlines the government's vision to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012: 24). In the NDP, the South African government recognises that ECD is integral to expanding capabilities (Atmore, 2019: 124). The NDP links the provision of ECD to increased school enrolment and completion rates, higher earnings in the labour market, better health outcomes and decreased antisocial behaviour in children (Atmore, 2019: 124). Based on these benefits, the NDP sets out a state mandate to provide universal access to two years of high quality ECD to all children aged three to five (National Planning Commission, 2012: 30). This mandate is based on the acknowledgement that ECD should be a key priority in ensuring the long-term prospects of future generations (National Planning Commission, 2012: 69).

In 2015, the government introduced the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP), further outlining a state mandate to provide quality ECD programmes accessible to all young children by 2030 (Department of Social Development, 2016: 8). This policy positions ECD not only as a universal right, but also as a public good (Department of Social Development, 2016: 21) as it does not only contribute to the development of individual children but also to the growth and development of society as a whole (Department of Social Development, 2016: 13).

Furthermore, in the NIECDP, the government recognises that the expansion of ECD is central to the realisation of national development goals, and may alleviate poverty and inequality in the long term (Department of Social Development, 2016: 22). The government's role, according to the NIECDP, is to lead and coordinate the delivery of ECD in South Africa, alongside other partners (Department of Social Development, 2016: 9). This strategy suggests that the government should engage with civil society and should supply the leadership, resources and strategic vision for the implementation of universal ECD.

Currently, however, the ECD sector has made little inroads in terms of assisting in poverty reduction. ECD remains a neglected sector in South Africa, with the government largely absent. Several issues undermine the successful rollout of ECD services in South Africa, with children in low-income and rural areas most affected.

The ECD landscape remains predominantly uncoordinated and market-led, as primary providers are small businesses who charge fees for their services (Hickman, 2020: 2). These centres are only accessible to those from high- and middle-income backgrounds in South Africa, who can pay for services rendered, leaving low-income communities behind. In response to this coverage gap, the South African government has introduced some financial relief to ECD practitioners in poor communities. These practitioners can apply for a subsidy per child in ECD (R17 per child per day) (Department of Social Development, 2016: 96). Centres eligible for funding are identified in two ways: if they are providing services in under-served geographic areas (i.e., rural areas) and/or if they are providing services to children eligible for the child support grant (i.e., children from low-income backgrounds) (Department of Social Development, 2016: 97). However, ECD practitioner subsidies are limited, and often cannot even offer minimum wage to practitioners, meaning that ECD centres need to act as small businesses, with three quarters of the sector surviving by charging fees (Wills *et al*, 2020: 1). As a result, poor children, who appear to derive the greatest benefits from ECD, are most likely to lack access to these services.

Concerns about the quality of ECD services in South Africa are also significant. Results of the Thrive by Five Index, the first measure of the population-level impact of ECD programmes in South Africa, were recently released (Giese *et al*, 2022: 4). The index assessed more than 5 000 children between the ages of four and five, attending 1 247 ECD programmes, making it the largest South African survey of child outcomes (Giese *et al*, 2022: 4). The study tracked three child development measures: early learning, physical growth, and social-emotional functioning (Giese *et al*, 2022: 4). Findings indicate that 65 percent of South African children enrolled in ECD programmes fail to "thrive by five" (Giese *et al*, 2022: 4). For early learning specifically, 55 percent of all children in these programmes are not on track developmentally for their age, and 28 percent of all children are falling far behind the expected standard, in need of intensive intervention (Giese *et al*, 2022: 4). Over 25 percent of children in the study showed signs of long-term malnutrition (Giese *et al*, 2022: 4).

Quality and funding issues were exacerbated further by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the neglect of the ECD sector during this period. Government interventions in 2020 related to economic stimulus continuously overlooked the ECD sector (Hickman and Matlhape, 2020). This oversight has impacted the ability of early learning to resume after the initial harsh Covid-19 lockdown. When ECD centres were allowed to reopen in July 2020, almost 70 percent of sites remained closed, mostly due to financial reasons and the inability to afford personal and protective equipment (Giese, 2020).

The lack of planning illustrated in these cases calls into question whether ECD really is a priority for the South African government. Atmore (2019: 207) identifies the state's failure to coordinate and fund ECD as a signal of lack of political will, where ECD is in reality often not a political priority. Furthermore, Atmore (2019: 207) claims that the departments responsible for implementing ECD policy – the Department of Social Development (DSD), and Department of Basic Education (DBE) – suffer from limited leadership and government capacity. There is therefore a disjunct between the intentions and priorities of those who wrote South Africa's ECD policy, where inputs came from researchers, practitioners, academics, government officials, parents and the public, and the departments responsible for its implementation. If ECD is not a political priority, it will not be adequately financed and implemented.

In response to this issue, in 2019, President Cyril Ramaphosa shifted the mandate of ECD provision from the DSD to the DBE, and announced that an additional year of school (Grade RR) is to be made compulsory (Hall *et al*, 2019: 7). DBE therefore takes over the main responsibility for ECD from DSD. This announcement is significant as it signals that the government recognises that early learning is a critical component of education, and closer alignment with the DBE would hopefully result in more financing for ECD (Hall *et al*, 2019: 7). Education spending in South Africa is the largest single item in the budget, so the shift of the ECD mandate towards the DBE is significant in terms of funding access (Meier *et al*, 2017: 447).

At the same time, however, ECD is a multifaceted and holistic concept, and the danger of this function shift is a shift in focus to education only, neglecting other significant ECD components. In addition, the risks associated with this departmental migration are that nothing ultimately changes or that the government will turn to a centralised top-down model of provisioning. Without national, long-term vision and agency, the risk is that the opportunity to use this departmental shift to enhance ECD access and explore a model that brings in new forms of collaboration will be wasted.

The issues related to ECD in South Africa are varied, complex and often feel unresolvable. There are, however, several players, especially in civil society, who have introduced and championed various ECD innovations and interventions. Some of these players are highlighted below:

Table 1   (Some) Innovative ECD role-players in South Africa

Book Dash	Book Dash is a social impact publisher with a vision to provide every child with 100 of their own books before they turn 5 years old.
Earlybird Educare	Earlybird is a social enterprise which is building a network of high-quality Early Childhood Care and Education ('educare') centres. Earlybird employs a cross-subsidisation approach: revenue from high-income sites subsidises Educare centres in low-income neighbourhoods.
ForAfrika	A nation-wide feeding scheme focussed on early childhood centres to prevent stunted development.
Funda Wande	Funda Wande is a leading research-intensive non-profit in South Africa who is "prioritizing, thinking through and testing interventions that will lead to all children learning to read for meaning and calculate with confidence by age 10 by 2030" (Funda Wande, 2022)
Mobile Clinics	Several Mobile clinics exist in South Africa to service predominantly primary schools and elderly people in rural areas.
Nalibali	Nalibali (a isiXhosa word meaning 'here's the story') is a national reading-for-enjoyment campaign that work creatively to design, produce and distribute local stories on a national scale in local languages.
SmartStart	SmartStart is a social franchise that uses commercial franchising strategies to scale early learning services across South Africa. This model is based on a network of franchisees or "SmartStarters" trained and licensed by SmartStart to implement the early learning programme in their own communities.
Wordworks	A non-profit organisation focusing on early language and literacy in, predominantly under-resourced South African communities. They work closely with caregivers, family and community members to instil sustainable literacy practices.

There are therefore many valuable champions of ECD in South Africa. The problem, it seems, is about coordinating and bringing these players together to enable a comprehensive ECD package. This coordination is especially important to reach South Africa's most underserved children: those from low-income and rural backgrounds.

4.3 KEY COMPONENTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

ECD is a critical phase of human development. Any intervention that is established to support the human development of young children needs to adopt and appreciate the whole child and tackle the aspects of development coherently. Education is only one area of child development. A child's health and wellbeing and their social network and caretakers are other significant roleplayers in their full development – that need to be given equal attention.

Figure 2   Child development nexus

Poverty dramatically affects this early start and those who start on a backfoot tend to remain on a backfoot; further perpetuating intergenerational poverty.

5   GAP ANALYSIS

Our solution seeks to draw inspiration from several highly successful mobile interventions (e.g. Pheluphepha Train and Mobile Crèches in India) and use readily accessible local assets (i.e. grandparents and unemployed youth) to mobilise and support rural communities in the Eastern Cape to provide holistic, good quality early childhood development opportunities for their children. This solution aims to address 3 central features of South Africa's community landscapes:

5.1 CURRENT PROVISIONS FOR ECD SERVICES ARE UNCOORDINATED

There are currently several leading organisations implementing interventions and support in the ECD sector. They offer a broad spectrum of innovative services that aim to combat South Africa's challenges experienced in Early Childhood. However, these interventions seemingly are uncoordinated and incoherent with each other. The goal of this proposed solution is to be a coordinating force that encourages collaboration between organisations opposed to competition.

5.2 THE ROLE OF GRANDPARENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

In South Africa about one-fifth (21,3%) of all children do not live with their parents. 4.5% of households are skip-generation households in which grandparents lived with grandchildren, with no parents in the household. Eastern Cape has the highest percentage of skip-generation households (8.5%)(StatsSA, 2021d). This is predominantly due to labour migration of the parents as well as low

marital rates of mothers. Consequently, many children are raised by their grandparents or other relatives, especially in rural areas.

Grandparents in many South African cultures are revered as leaders of the family. families and extended families, especially grandparents who can share stories, skills and teachings, passing on cultural teachings and traditions, including language, to their grandchildren.

5.3   YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

South Africa has a young population with its median age being 27,8 years old (Worldometer, 2022) with 10 million youth (aged 15-24 years). Yet only 2,5 million are in the labour force. 37% of youth (aged 15-34 years old) in SA are not in employment, education or training (NEET). The majority (75,1%) of these youth are discouraged and have lost hope of finding a job. As a result many withdraw from the labour market entirely (StatsSA, 2022).

In response to the unemployment crisis in South Africa, the government established Expanded Public Works Programme which has created work opportunities for 400 000 youth in the 2021/22 financial year (Department of Public Works and Infrustructure, 2022) - a far cry to meeting the job demand in the country.

6   DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND CONSIDERATIONS

In designing a solution for meaningful poverty reduction we have considered 4 key design principles. First, that we draw on existing assets, second, that we consider communities as a system and the value this brings in rearing children as well as the roll that locally developed interventions can play in the sustainability of social change.

6.1   ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (ABCD)

ABCD moves away from deficit or needs based models that look at problems (things that must be fixed), what is not there, and who is to blame. Instead, ABCD focuses on possibilities, shared ownership, and what resources already exist in communities.

Identifying and using these assets is important, as it shifts the dialogue: communities are no longer passive clients, but become active citizens, who are able to drive their own development. An asset-based approach makes visible and values the skills, knowledge, connections and potential in a community It recognises and builds on a combination of the human, social and physical capabilities that exist within local communities (GCPH, 2012).

This approach brings people and communities together to achieve positive change using their own knowledge, skills and lived experiences. It is based on the idea that sustained positive outcomes will only occur when people and communities have the opportunities to control and

Start with what we have.
Build with what we know.

manage their own futures, and where all community partners are stakeholders. (GCPH, 2012). At its core this theory dictates that one cannot empower others – rather, one can only provide people with platforms to empower themselves, drawing on their own resources, skills and knowledge.

What are assets?

Assets are the collective resources which individuals and communities have at their disposal (GCPH, 2012) – these collective resources can be found in all communities. These are the skills, associations, networks and resources that add value to community life. There are 5

main types of assets (Ikhala Trust and Elamanzi, 2013):

Human assets: skills, knowledge, labour, health

Social assets: social networks, relationships of trust and reciprocity

Natural assets: land, water, fertile soil, animals etc.

Financial assets: cash, livestock, savings, pensions

Physical assets: roads, bridges, clinics, schools, transport, shelter, water supply

By encouraging pride in their achievements and a realisation of what they have to contribute, communities create confidence in their ability to be producers, rather than recipients, of development. Active and empowered communities and individuals, with their own resources and assets working for them, are in a stronger position to access additional external resources and to put them to the most effective and sustainable use (GCPH, 2012).

A key asset in most South African communities is social capital. Social capital is generated through relationships of trust and reciprocity. Social capital is a special kind of asset as it is readily available and multiplied the more it is used.

There are 4 aspects of social capital (Ikhala Trust and Elamanzi, 2013):

1) Strong relationships and networks between individuals and groups

    i) Bonding social capital: strong supportive ties that occur within a group, such as a family, club or church.

    ii) Bridging social capital: ties that connect people horizontally across groups

    iii) Linking social capital: linking communities with external resources and opportunities

2) Reciprocity

3) Trust

4) Norms and values

Social capital is an important asset, and research shows us that communities rich in social

capital are more likely to be successful (Ikhala Trust and Elamanzi, 2013). Institutions are important in mobilising social capital by gathering citizens and uniting around a common goal.

6.2 SYSTEMS THINKING FOR A BETTER WORLD

Systems thinking is different from conventional or linear thinking (Stroh, 2013: 14). Linear

thinking, which looks at different parts of a whole as separate items, works for simple

problems but is not well-suited towards complex social

problems (Stroh, 2013: 14). Systems thinking, instead, is about understanding the interconnections between the different components of a system, and how they work to

achieve, or fail to achieve, a purpose.

Systems thinking can be very powerful in attempts to bring about meaningful social change.

Systems thinking has four significant benefits in this space (Stroh, 2013): When people realise that they form part of a system that may be contributing to social problems or issues, this realisation motivates them to change their role in the system. Important here is the realisation that individuals do not exist in a vacuum but are connected to their communities.

Systems thinking catalyses collaboration: systems thinking shows how the interactions of individuals have a cumulative effect, and that often when people work collectively, rather than in isolation, solutions are more effective and sustainable. Systems thinking focuses people to work on bringing about a few coordinated changes at a time to achieve significant and sustainable system-wide impacts. Systems thinking encourages continuous learning. Since systems are complex, knowledge

is never complete or static. Addressing problems therefore requires continuous learning and adaptation. Systems thinking is a way of approaching problems that asks how various elements within a system influence one another. Under this approach, we do not just react to individual problems, but look at the relationships between components (and individuals) and patterns, and seek root causes rather than treating symptoms.

6.3   THINKING LOCALLY FOR GLOBAL IMPACT

Among other sustainment factors (Hailemariam, et al., 2019) an evidence based solution and the acknowledgement of the contextual limitations and assets are central. Assets and context need to be valued and utilised throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of the intervention; and consequently thoroughly documenting it for replicability sake. It is therefore necessary, particularly where African interventions (at large) are not designed, implemented and documented by local communities to be inspired by global perspectives and best practice yet design practical, local solutions.

This proposal draws on these three principles to implement a multidisciplinary travelling bus that aims to create locally responsive and globally relevant model for ECD intervention, connect local organisations and draw on our collective assets to address and reduce poverty at its earliest starting point.

7   AN OPPORTUNITY: IMPACT^x TRAVELLING BUS

We propose a multidisciplinary travelling team consisting of a teacher, social worker nurse/doctor and a researcher/journalist. Each specialist brings an aspect of expertise to the whole development of children (i.e. educational, mental and physical wellbeing and documentation of sustainable solutions for the future). This core team will travel in a fully equipped branded bus on a predefined route around the Eastern Cape province's rural areas. The route will initially be defined by community willingness and existing partnerships between universities and organisations that currently exist and seek to snowball recruit from these relationships. The aim of each stop will be to provide holistic services and training to a group of primary caregivers in the identified community (identified here as community champions). The champions in each community will be self-identified ahead of the team's arrival. It is anticipated that these champions will be drawn from unemployed youth and committed grandparents who have time to dedicate themselves.
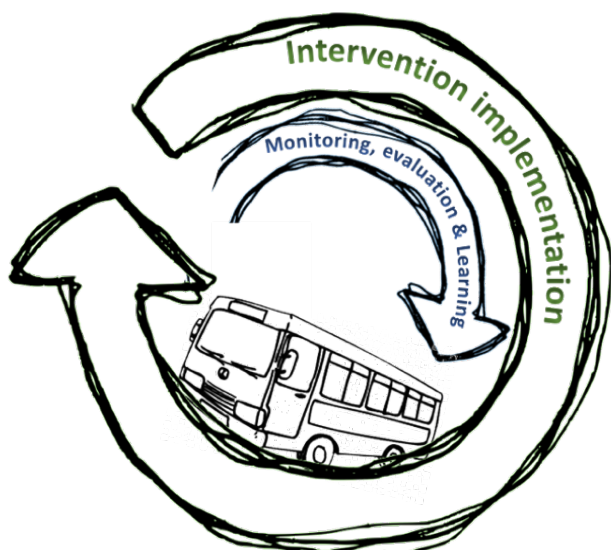
On its forward journey, the bus will establish partnerships and implement the training intervention. On its return route, the core team will offer follow-up support and conduct in-depth monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). In the interim between the community's initial training and the return visit the community champions will be equipped with multimedia packages that can be used in their respective communities to ensure ongoing delivery of key ECD services.

Figure 3   impact^x bus model

| PART 1 COMMUNITY CHAMPION TRAINING | PART 2 MULTIMEDIA SUPPORT PACKAGES |

A 5-10 day train-the-trainer (champions) session will be facilitated by the core team. Using the theoretical framing outlined by the design principles the training will address themes of educational stimulation (e.g. play-based learning, storytelling), nutrition (e.g. sustenance farming) and health (e.g. providing vaccinations to young children) in a practical and emergent manner that is responsive to community aspirations and goals. Ideally a local coordinator will co-facilitate with the core team of specialists. This will be beneficial for local participants as the offering could be presented multi-lingually, it builds trust and warmth between facilitators and participants which contributes to community buy-in and continuity.

The multimedia support package will consist of material drawn from open-access, South African produced media (such as those mentioned in table 1). These will be distributed via accessible, low-data or data free media channels such as WhatsApp, Facebook lite, Moya Messenger app, websites, radio, TV and various community groups (e.g. Stokvels) which have been shown to be high frequency media used in South African households (Galal, 2022).

The purpose of these support packages is twofold: first for the community champions to consolidate their learning from the training provided and secondly to ensure they are supported with mechanisms to snowball roll-out the support to other families in their community ensuring the sustainability of the intervention and empowerment of the champion.

Examples of what could be included in package: wordless picture books (BookDash), audio books (Nalibali), parent advice handouts (Wordworks), podcasts
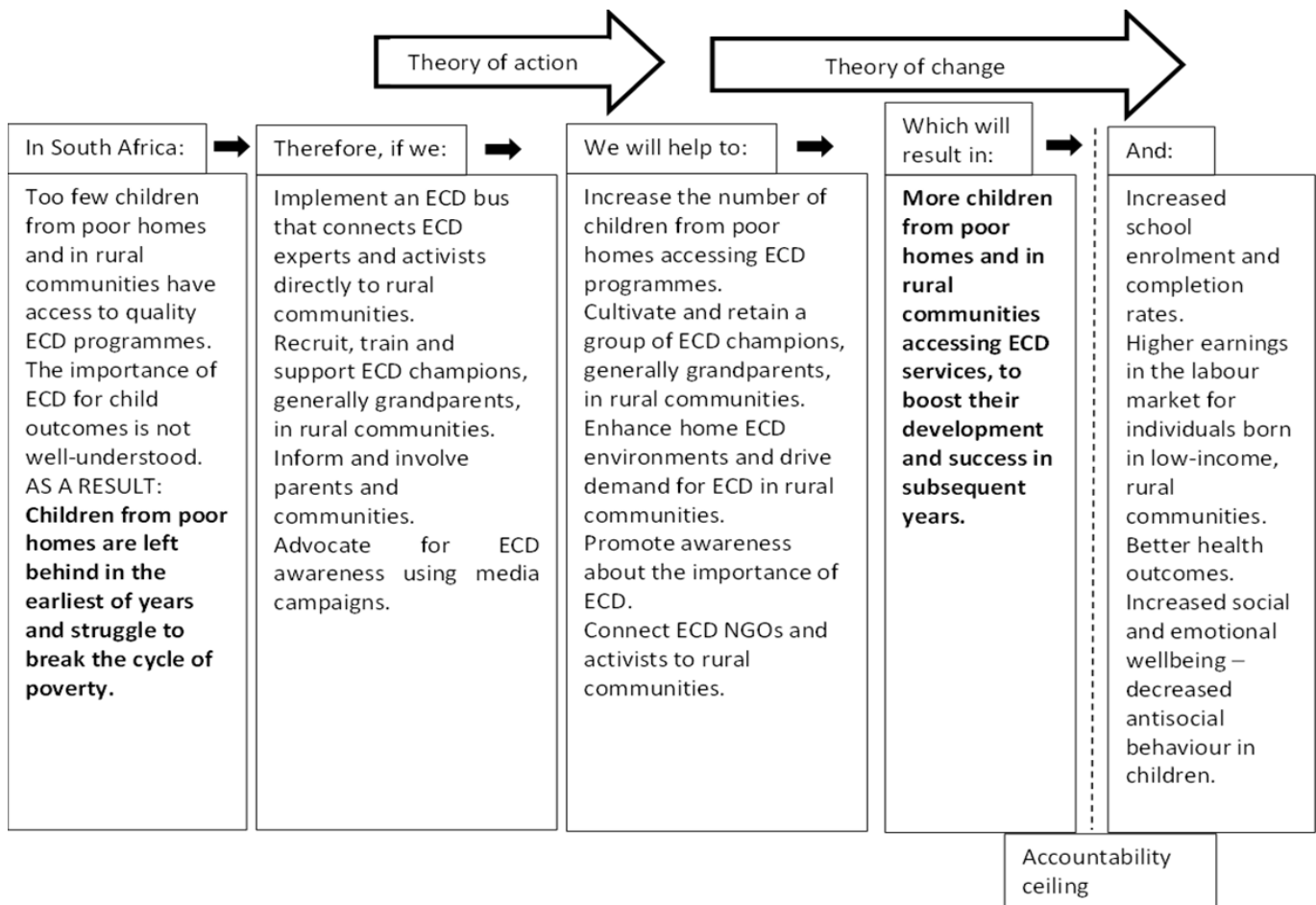
7.1 THEORY OF CHANGE

Below is our theory of change which details our vision for the future, and how we plan to effect the desired social change:

Theory of action →		Theory of change →		
In South Africa: →	**Therefore, if we:** →	**We will help to:** →	**Which will result in:** →	**And:**
Too few children from poor homes and in rural communities have access to quality ECD programmes. The importance of ECD for child outcomes is not well-understood. AS A RESULT: **Children from poor homes are left behind in the earliest of years and struggle to break the cycle of poverty.**	Implement an ECD bus that connects ECD experts and activists directly to rural communities. Recruit, train and support ECD champions, generally grandparents, in rural communities. Inform and involve parents and communities. Advocate for ECD awareness using media campaigns.	Increase the number of children from poor homes accessing ECD programmes. Cultivate and retain a group of ECD champions, generally grandparents, in rural communities. Enhance home ECD environments and drive demand for ECD in rural communities. Promote awareness about the importance of ECD. Connect ECD NGOs and activists to rural communities.	**More children from poor homes and in rural communities accessing ECD services, to boost their development and success in subsequent years.**	Increased school enrolment and completion rates. Higher earnings in the labour market for individuals born in low-income, rural communities. Better health outcomes. Increased social and emotional wellbeing – decreased antisocial behaviour in children.

Accountability ceiling

8   FEASIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION

The success of this innovation depends on its implementation strategy. In this section, we outline the key stakeholders of this innovation, the importance of partnerships, our monitoring and evaluation approach, and our funding model.

8.1   STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERSHIP

As stated earlier, our model is based on building on the assets that already exist in rural Eastern Cape communities to ensure sustainable social change. Grandparents, often the primary caregivers of young children, are therefore the lifeblood of this innovation. Another significant resource could be unemployed young people in these communities. Both of these groups can be potential champions for ECD in rural communities, and we hope to work closely with them in mutually beneficial relationships to ensure that children in their communities have access to holistic, context-specific ECD services.

Three permanent members of our bus are a teacher, social worker and nurse/doctor. These individuals will not bring ECD services to the communities they visit; we believe that an approach which brings resources and services into communities and leaves shortly thereafter, and where there is no community ownership over the projects implemented, is not sustainable. Instead, these individuals aim to equip local communities with further resources and training so that they can take control over this project and implement their ECD interventions in their own communities. Elders such as grandparents generally command a high level of respect in Eastern Cape rural communities, and are often primary caregivers for children, so, in many ways, they are best positioned to lead this process. The nurse/doctor, social worker and teacher are therefore not required to implement a top-down and technocratic ECD intervention, but to guide and work with residents to build a bottom-up and democratic ECD movement in their communities.

Our bus also seeks to connect these rural communities to community-based organisations and NGOs in nearby areas. The bus is a space for others to come in and plug in their offerings. If people from nearby NGOs are interested in joining for parts of our bus journey, there will always be a seat for them in the bus and space for them to bring their assets and resources to the table. These NGOs are likely to know the contexts of nearby communities better than the rest of the permanent team, and will assist in building relationships and connections with the communities we visit.

We hope to amplify the work that this bus does by broadcasting the activities of those on this journey with us. A crucial aspect of our approach is around advocacy and media. One aspect of the ECD problem in South Africa is that the importance of ECD for child outcomes is often not well-understood, and that there is a need to raise awareness about the value of ECD. Another key stakeholder and potential member of our bus team is therefore a media representative, or local journalist who can amplify the significance of ECD, and this innovation, in the local media. The bus itself can also function as an informative device. We envisage that the outside of our bus will be a colourful mural showcasing ECD, which will hopefully draw people in and encourage those that we encounter along the way to ask questions about what we are doing.

Partnership between various stakeholders is crucial. In South Africa, the ECD sector is made up of many players, as opposed to primary and secondary education where the government is the

leading provider. Therefore, the ECD space could become a platform for a prototype for a new form of collaboration that is more plural and that recognises the roles of various actors. ECD is inherently a **social good** as families and communities are pivotal in child raising. We need a version of ECD where neighbourhoods and communities are not merely ECD recipients but are co-creators. Local ECD champions, NGOs, journalists and interested parties will be essential to the success of this intervention.

Table 2　　　Stakeholders of our innovation

Stakeholder	Role
Grandparents and potentially unemployed young people	ECD champions responsible for providing ECD services to the children in their communities – the lifeblood of this intervention
Health expert and early learning expert	Equip local communities with resources and training so that communities can take control over this project
Local NGOs and groups	Share their own assets, knowledge and resource and provide a context-specific lens to this intervention in communities, assist in building relationships and connections
Journalist/media representative	Raise awareness for the significance of ECD, and this innovation in the local media

8.2　MONITORING AND EVALUATION

It is essential that our bus makes a return trip, in order to consider how our intervention has been implemented in various communities, and provide additional support if necessary. At its heart, our intervention is a learning model: it does not start with the assumption that we know what is best but learns from the experiences of others. Over time, the experience of implementation will inform improvements in our model, and enhance its successes. Return trips after several months also provide the opportunity to track the progress of children as a result of ECD. This kind of impact assessment is important as it enables us to determine the quality of ECD, and make any necessary improvements. Evidence of impact will also be essential in attracting long-term philanthropic financing, as well as other funding sources.

Monitoring and evaluation will be critical in identifying the most efficient use of resources and analyse the extent to which the intervention is successful (Gage and Dunn, 2009). It will also help guide strategic planning, and programme design and implementation (Gage and Dunn, 2009).

8.3 FUNDING

The sustainability of our innovation is dependent on financial viability in the long-term. External donations and grants are important sources of funding for the initial prototype. Thereafter, other sources of funding need to be considered for the viability of this programme. This will be especially important for any work done with unemployed youth in communities, as attaching a monetary value to the services ECD champions provide will not only assist in signalling the value of ECD, but may also contribute to reducing unemployment in communities. As this intervention aims to reach under-served and disadvantaged groups, as our bus becomes more established, there are a variety of sources of government funding that can potentially be accessed to provide a stipend to ECD champions who work to provide ECD services in their communities:

- Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP): Funds programmes that "can provide poverty and income relief through temporary work for the unemployed to carry out socially useful activities" (Public Works and Infrastructure, 2022). This work should contribute to Government Policy Priorities such as decent work and sustainable livelihoods, education, health; rural development; and food security (Public Works and Infrastructure, 2022).

- Jobs Fund: Co-finances projects by public, private and non-governmental organisations that significantly contribute to job creation (National Treasury, 2022). Jobs Fund involves the use of public money to catalyse innovation and investment in activities that contribute to employment creation (National Treasury, 2022).

- Community Work Programme (CWP): Provides stipends to unemployed and underemployed people in target communities working a minimum number of days each month, to supplement their existing livelihood (South African Government, 2022). Work should contribute to community development, and improve the quality of life for people in marginalised economic areas (South African Government, 2022).

In addition, costs of this innovation are deliberately kept low as it aims to draw on the assets and capital that already exist within communities, especially grandparents who already often perform a caregiving role for children.

There are certain challenges associated with our model, which we have identified and attempted to mitigate. Firstly, our approach will likely require government buy-in and financing in the long-term. While the South African government has outlined ECD as a national priority, the ECD sector is often underfunded, and the ECD subsidy is limited. We do hope to access other forms of government funding for our intervention, such as Jobs Fund, CWP and EPWP. This process, however, is likely to be slow, so start-up grants and external donations will be essential for the prototype of our project.

Another limitation is a potential lack of awareness of the significance of ECD.   Often, misconceptions exist in both low-income and high-income segments about the role of ECD, which, instead of being framed as an essential building block of human and national development, is often conceived of as "babysitting" rather than growth, development and education. For example, it is often easier to see the returns to primary school education as children demonstrate evidence of

literacy or numeracy. With respect to ECD, the evidence of children reaching milestones is less clear, unless one knows exactly what to look out for. These misconceptions and lack of awareness often have the effect of subduing demand for these services. A key component of our innovation is therefore the need to raise awareness of the value of ECD and stimulate demand for these services, where currently little awareness-raising exists.

A final limitation is that our innovation, in focusing specifically on human development in the earliest years, neglects other aspects of human development that can play various roles in mitigating poverty. One must certainly be careful not to present ECD as a silver bullet solution to South Africa's poverty, which is a complex and multi-dimensional issue. ECD programmes should not be considered silver bullets in isolation, but there is a sense that this space, if appropriately coordinated and managed, can significantly contribute to reducing South Africa's poverty crisis in the long term. Furthermore, this approach centres the importance of ECD not only in terms of the returns associated with the sector but also in terms of the progressive realisation of social justice and human rights. Herein is an approach that can connect the visions of various players in the sector which can be emulated in a variety of developmental areas.

Over half of all South Africans live in poverty (Francis and Webster, 2019). The country also experiences the highest levels of inequality and unemployment for any middle-income country, as well as racial discrimination (Francis and Webster, 2019: 791-793). In many ways, poverty in South Africa is a result of inadequate education, and gaps emerge early on. The challenge of transforming South Africa's poverty and unemployment rate levels therefore requires one to turn one's attention to the very earliest of years, where discrepancies in terms of access to the building blocks for future success begin.

Quality ECD programmes, which provide children with the tools for later success, hold the possibility to change the trajectory of many South African families in low-income and/or rural communities. However, too few children from poor or under-served homes have access to early stimulation, socio-emotional wellbeing and nutrition, and often the importance of ECD for child outcomes (beyond childcare) is not well-understood. As a result, children from these backgrounds often under-achieve at school and beyond, and may struggle to enter the labour market.

Our solution aims to enhance ECD access for these children. Our ECD bus provides a way of accessing rural children, while simultaneously promoting the significance of ECD around the Eastern Cape, South Africa's poorest province. This is not the first mobile ECD approach: in India, Mobile Creches reaches the children living on construction sites (Mobile Creches, 2022) and in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province of South Africa, Umhlabuyalingana local Municipality intends to use a mobile ECD bus to reach children in rural areas and in farming communities in order to ensure cognitive stimulation of young children (IOL, 2021). Where our approach differs is in the significance placed on **capacitating local communities**, and specifically leveraging grandparents, and potentially unemployed youth, as an asset within these communities.

Previous approaches have brought ECD services into communities, but have had to leave, resulting in unsustainable ECD access. In recruiting, equipping and training grandparents as ECD champions in communities, we aim to provide a sustainable and long-term solution, drawing on community strengths instead of focusing on community deficits. Furthermore, this approach directly involves families, serving as a way of informing them of the importance of ECD, stimulating demand for this service and putting communities at the centre of our solution.

Our vision is that this initiative increases the number of children in the rural Eastern Cape accessing ECD services. We aim to build and retain a number of ECD champions, predominantly grandparents, and drive demand for further ECD programmes and interventions. As a result, more

children will have age-appropriate social, emotional, cognitive and language skills when they start school. It is our hope that this intervention in the early, formative years will contribute to better primary and secondary schooling outcomes, and, in turn, contribute to the development of a skilled young population able to enter into South Africa's labour market.

This initiative is locally responsive and context-specific. At the same time, it has potential to be scaled beyond the Eastern Cape province and beyond South Africa. Many developing countries experience variations in terms of access to ECD as a result of income and wealth disparities as well as rural/urban divides (Rao *et al*, 2021: 4). Furthermore, in many developed and developing countries, grandparents already play caregiving roles and are therefore can be utilised as ECD champions (Kropf and Burnette, 2003).

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