

Media Release

What matters most for early childhood development two awards worth 1.2 million Swiss francs show

The Jacobs Foundation announces the recipients of the 2016 Klaus J. Jacobs Awards endowed with 1.2 million Swiss francs. Professor Orazio P. Attanasio, Head of the Department of Economics at University College London (UCL) and Research Director at the Institute for Fiscal Studies, receives 1 million Swiss francs for his use of economic models and field experiments to assess and shape early child development programs and policies in low income countries. 200,000 Swiss francs go to ICS-SP in Kenya for their Skillful Parenting Program in East Africa aimed at improving early childhood development, parenting and agricultural practices in rural areas.

Zurich, October 12, 2016 – The early years of childhood set the course on key counts for the development of cognitive and social skills and significantly influence success in adulthood. It is therefore important to understand what matters most for early childhood development: How successful are interventions? At what age should they be implemented? The Zurich-based Jacobs Foundation continuously pursues answers to these pressing questions by promoting research and showcasing best practice in the field of child and youth development with the Klaus J. Jacobs Awards. The 2016 awards will be presented on December 2, at a festive ceremony at the University of Zurich in Switzerland.

Prof. Orazio P. Attanasio – 2016 Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize Recipient

Professor Orazio P. Attanasio, Head of the Department of Economics at University College London (UCL) and Research Director at the Institute for Fiscal Studies in London, has pushed research frontiers by using economic models in combination with field experiments to assess and shape health and education policies in early childhood development in low-income and middle-income settings. Inspired by a home-visiting program in Jamaica, Prof. Attanasio and his team designed a stimulation and nutrition program delivered through home visits for communities in 96 Colombian towns, including the largest evaluation of a program of this kind. After 18 months the children in this program had significantly higher cognition and language skills. The research team could show that the developmental improvements were due to the parents “investing” in more time with their children (important for socio-economic skills) and in stimulating materials such as toys and books (important for cognitive development).

Prof. Orazio P. Attanasio says: “250 million children under age 5 in developing countries are at risk of not achieving their developmental potential. We want parents to invest in their children by stimulating them. It is crucial to understand how these parental investments shape children’s development as this will impact the design of effective programs and policies”.

With the Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize money, Attanasio will implement and evaluate an intervention in rural India to provide children with better quality childcare in different settings and for different age groups. This will generate new evidence on the interaction of early interventions at home and center-based interventions for older children.

ICS-SP – 2016 Klaus J. Jacobs Best Practice Prize Recipient

Children need a safe and caring home to grow up healthy and happy, but this is far from reality for many children in developing countries. Multiple risks include poverty, lack of nurturing and responsive care, poor nutrition and violence. A growing body of research from low-income and middle-income countries shows that parenting programs can be effective for reducing levels of violence against children and promoting optimal child development in low-resource settings. ICS-SP combines evidence-based parenting programs with agribusinesses in rural parts of East Africa.

Beatrice Ogutu, Director ICS-SP in Nairobi says: “In Kenya, two out of three children experience physical violence during childhood, and in Tanzania almost three quarters of girls (72%) and boys (71%) are victims of physical violence during their childhood, often by the hands of their parents. Our Skilful Parenting Program targeted towards mothers, fathers and other caregivers, starts from local perspectives on parenting and family and builds on community structures for delivery and adaptation. We combine it with our agribusiness program. The results are therefore not only increased farmer productivity but also improved family relationships and more equal gender roles”.

ICS-SP is a co-founder of the Parenting in Africa Network and has pushed governments, civil society, the private sector and the donor community to prioritize and invest in parent support services. In the past few years, parenting has gained prominence in East Africa, and there is an increasing interest of governments in parenting programs to prevent violence against children and to promote early childhood development.

The Klaus J. Jacobs Best Practice Prize recognizes the work of ICS-SP, and ICS-SP will further strengthen its evidence base and program design, and seek new partnerships within the public and private sector to achieve the ambition of 1 million parents and caregivers by 2020.

The Klaus J. Jacobs Awards

In memory of its founder, the entrepreneur Klaus J. Jacobs, who passed away in 2008, each year since 2009 the Jacobs Foundation has presented two awards for outstanding achievements in research and practice in the field of child and youth development. The awards are endowed with a total of 1.2 million Swiss francs. The Jacobs Foundation attaches great importance to practical application of scientific findings achieved through interdisciplinary research.

The **Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize**, which comes with one million Swiss francs, honors scientific achievements that are of exceptional social relevance in promoting the development of children and youth.

The **Klaus J. Jacobs Best Practice Prize** recognizes extraordinary efforts by institutions or individuals to implement, in a practical setting, innovative ideas related to child and youth development. This prize is endowed with 200,000 Swiss francs.

About the Jacobs Foundation

The Jacobs Foundation is active worldwide in promoting child and youth development. It was founded in Zurich by entrepreneur Klaus J. Jacobs in 1989. The Foundation's endowment in 2015 totaled 4.5 billion Swiss francs (\$4.8 billion), and it allocates a budget of some 45 million Swiss francs per year to fund research projects, intervention programs and scientific institutions.

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