

2016 Klaus J. Jacobs Best Practice Prize

ICS-SP, Kenya

Director: Beatrice Ogutu

ICS-SP (Investing in Children and their Societies-Skillful Parenting) strives towards a better future for children in Africa. It uses a unique, whole family approach by simultaneously investing in social and economic opportunities and needs to improve the well-being of vulnerable children and their parents. The combination of economic strengthening and social support enable ICS-SP to reach a high number of farmers and make a true impact not only on poverty but also on early childhood development.

Unique Combination

A sustainable increase in income together with special attention for parenting knowledge, skills and confidence brings major change in family functioning and child wellbeing. The social enterprises address agricultural practices and also provide access to market the produce and therefore mitigate poverty as a stressor in the parenting process. ICS works with the same farmers on the Skillful Parenting program, which reinforces positive parenting practices and empowers parents to address the challenges they face in bringing up their children. By increasing parents' capacities in child development, communication skills and age-appropriate parenting, family relationships are strengthened, parents' self-esteem built, parental stress levels reduced, and child wellbeing enhanced.

The Program

The skillful parenting program is built upon evidence based understanding that changes in parenting can only be achieved through planned behavior change. Under the guidance of professional facilitators, skillful parenting is provided to parent peer groups consisting of fathers, mothers and other caregivers. The facilitators address basic parenting topics in different sessions providing parents with basic knowledge and opportunities for social comparison and joint reflection. The exact number and content of the sessions is tailored to the characteristics, needs and interests of each specific group of parents. Special fatherhood parleys are organized for fathers. The work with parent peer groups is combined with wider community awareness-raising campaigns on different topics on parenting and individual family follow-ups

Skillful Parenting Modules

1. Family Relations
2. Roles and responsibilities of a Skillful parent (including stages of child development and milestones)
3. Self-esteem and self-care
4. Values and Discipline
5. Communication
6. Child Protection
7. Family Budgeting

Optional modules:

- Teenage & Parenting
- Fatherhood

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The Evidence

An evaluation of the Skillful Parenting program in Kenya by the University of Utrecht (Netherlands) found that parents feel more competent and experience a more positive communication and relation with their spouse and children after participation in Skillful Parenting. In addition, parents report a reduction in harsh discipline and an increased use of positive discipline methods. The University of Utrecht concludes that the positive effects of Skillful Parenting can be understood by the way it is grounded in local culture and local definitions of parenting, its participatory approach and the focus on the parent as an agent of change.

Further Effects

ICS is a co-founder of the Parenting in Africa Network and has pushed governments, civil society, the private sector and the donor community to prioritise and invest in parent support services. In the past few years, parenting has gained prominence on the agendas of major donors and civil society organisations and there is an increasing interest of governments in parenting programmes to prevent violence against children and/or promote early childhood development; in part because of the efforts of ICS and its partners. In addition, the successful combined delivery of Skillful Parenting and agribusinesses in Kenya and Tanzania has created entry points with other private sector stakeholders throughout Africa to initiate similar models of collaboration.

The Future

With the Skillful Parenting programme, ICS has established an effective and scalable early childhood development intervention. Having reached 30,691 parents and caregivers in East Africa, ICS has already shown that the Skillful Parenting programme can effectively be delivered at scale in rural areas of Kenya and Tanzania in partnership with agribusiness and Community Based Organizations (CBOs). Over the next years, ICS aims at a further scale-up in East Africa and replication of its approach with the Coca Industry in West Africa.