



# THE LABE STORY

## Empowering Marginalized Communities to Sustainably Implement Home Based Early Childhood Education.

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Learning and becoming literate in the early childhood years serve as an important foundation for subsequent literacy development (Neuman & Dickinson, 2001). This is because literacy unlocks access to the wider curriculum (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006), increases individual's opportunities in life, lays the foundations for lifelong learning, and inbuilt in persons socially acceptable behaviour. While it would be good to know that children are benefiting from literacy instructions in many early childhood settings in Uganda, different studies keep showing that not all children are achieving the desired competences as expected.

A study conducted to evaluate performance of children in literacy across the East African countries by UWEZO (2013) established that for the case of Uganda, only 38% of P3 Ugandan children compared with 63% for Kenya and 50% for Tanzania can pass a P2 combined literacy and numeracy test. The situation is even worse in rural communities in Northern and West Nile regions of Uganda that have low coverage of early learning initiatives that can lay a firm foundation for children's early learning.

### **The Problem**

High quality early childhood education programmes help to lay a firm foundation for all children' irrespective of their social-economic disadvantage, children from marginalized communities gaining most from the interventions. However, only 25% of children in Uganda are currently accessing ECD services, despite increased investment in it. The situation is worse in rural and marginalized communities who are struggling to find food or shelter before they can go for the luxury of sending children to school. In such communities, parental involvement and engagement to support learning is low and any attempt is usually met with discouragement from parents who do not see themselves as able to sustain such initiatives.

In Uganda, Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy allows ECD to be operated as homebased, community-based or as institutionalised nursery schools or kindergartens. While there are government guidelines on how to set-up ECD centres and about how they should be managed, there are no government managed ECD centres. While the nursery schools have been more popularly used to provide ECD services in many urban settings, the cost of running such centres is prohibitive to many poor rural parents.

## Home-Based Early Learning Centres

The other alternative is the home based learning centres, a concept largely supported by NGOs in marginalized communities. Home based ECD now is largely seen as a cheaper alternative to the Centre based ECCE, although centre based approach is considered better due to better performance in mathematics and language (Myers, 2006).

There is growing evidence which shows the importance of home-based child care in supporting young children and families (Rusby, Jones, Crowley, & Smolkowski, 2013). Recent research reveals a more positive impact of home-based child care in supporting the care for young children particularly in the transition from preschool to schooling (Melhuish, Gardiner & Morris, 2017). If we are to see our children benefiting maximally from early learning interventions, we need to do more to ensure that we provide such services sustainable in places they can access even among the most marginalized. It is important to note that even when communities are supported to initiate and maintain home based early learning centres, such centres are usually left by communities to collapse as soon as the funding ends.



## Literacy and Adult Basic Education (LABE)

It is from this perspective that Literacy and Adult Basic Education (LABE) initiated the Home Based ECD in Northern and West Nile regions of Uganda. LABE is an indigenous Ugandan NGO founded in 1989 by a group of adult education students from Makerere University. Their dream was to put into practice what they learnt in class into reality to support marginalized communities. LABE works with different partners including the government at district, local, and national levels to promote literacy practices that increase access to information particularly among children and women in local communities. LABE is currently implementing educational projects focusing on children and parents in the districts of Gulu, Nwoya, Obongi and Koboko to help achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets 4.2, 4.5 and 4.6.



## **Building and Strengthening Integrated Community Support (BASICS)**

Building and Strengthening Integrated Community Support (BASICS) was planned for two-years (1st April 2020 - 31st March 2022). It is a project funded by Comic Relief and implemented in the districts of Gulu, Nwoya, Koboko and Obongi. BASICS for Scaling Up Children's Readiness and Retention (SURE) sought to ease transfer of home-based ECD countrywide, this project followed on from government approval of the informal ECD Complementary Learning Framework based on LABE's work in Northern Uganda and the West Nile regions of Uganda. This intervention simplified the use of the approved curriculum and illustrated how integrated community support can be delivered, inclusively, in marginalized communities.

The project aimed to provide holistic ECD for 2,750 learners, building the capacity of parent educators and Home Learning Centre Management Committees (HLCMC), parents, government officials at the local and national level to support inclusive access to quality ECD in Uganda. BASICS delivered the following outcomes:

**1**

Improved learning outcomes for pre-school children attending HLCs.

**2**

Enhanced parent educators (PEs) capability and motivation to provide inclusive quality home-based ECD to children in marginalized areas.

**3**

Supported parental and community engagement in HLCMCs

**4**

Supported ongoing holistic ECD provision in existing HLCs

**5**

Worked with local government extension staff and ECD service providers to be more coordinated, inclusive and responsive to the needs and demand of quality informal ECD.

**6**

Achieve improved awareness and expansion of the home-based ECD model in marginalised areas of Uganda.

## **BASICS Achievements**

- BASICS programme, worked with parents, district officials and national level policy makers, thus promoting stakeholder engagement.
- Centres were using local materials for constructing the learning shelters, additionally they used local everyday materials for play and learning for and worked with local community members as PEs.
- Parents reported anecdotes of their children doing better in the primary schools as compared to those who never went to the home learning centres.
- Parents formed savings groups that met regularly and levied themselves some funds that was used to maintain the HLCs and also pay the PEs
- The community development officers have been able to link home learning centres to access government support that have been used to strengthen the community role in the centres.
- More model adopters are coming after learning about HLC concept from LABE at either national forums or local communities close by.

## **Recommendations for Policy Action**

To improve mechanisms that empower communities to sustainably manage and implement HLC in their areas, the following policy options are suggested:

1. Some communities lack information on what to do and how to do it. More information on home based ECD as an alternative model for providing quality ECD services needs to be provided to all communities in the language they understand periodically.
2. Communities that show interest in particular ECD service delivery options should be supported with adequate training and resources for them to start off. The support should be phased to allow communities learn from every step and to avoid turning the support into an income generating activity.
3. Savings groups need to be encouraged in all home based centres as a mechanism to raises funds for the centre and keep together a united community who are able to contribute towards their own centre development.
4. Attempts should be made to make sure that the local council leaders are part of the home based centre management committee to help support enforcement of agreed guidelines in the communities.
5. ECD focal point persons should work with sub-county community development officers to sensitize communities on their roles and also provide support supervision periodically for quality assurance.

## **Reference**

Melhuish, E., Gardiner, J., & Morris, S. (2017). Study of early education and development (SEED): Impact study on early education use and child outcomes up to age three. London: Department for Education.

Neuman, Susan B., & Dickinson, David K. (2001). Introduction. In Susan B. Neuman & David K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 3-10). New York: Guilford Press.

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