

EMPOWERED AND RESPONSIVE PARENTING

CHILDFUND INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH BRIEF

THE STUDY

ChildFund has been active in early childhood development in Ecuador for over 25 years, with programming that aims to give vulnerable children ages 0-5 a start in life that will enable them to survive, thrive, and develop to their full potential. In 2013, ChildFund International conducted a process tracing study to examine two outcomes of its early childhood development program in Ecuador: empowered and responsive parenting, and child protection.

IN THE STUDY, CHILDFUND:

1. Reconstructed the program's logic;
2. Identified outcomes for evaluation with relevant stakeholders;
3. Assessed and documented interventions done to achieve these outcomes;
4. Evidenced the intended and some unintended outcomes;
5. Identified plausible causal explanations for the evidenced outcomes; and
6. Assessed the extent to which each of the causal explanations is supported by evidence.



THE ECUADOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

For the age group of 0-5, ChildFund has formulated a theory of change that outlines a holistic approach to child development. The impact goal is that children develop to their full potential; enjoy good physical and mental health; and live in stable families and supportive communities that interact in non-violent ways.

The theory of change postulates four domains for the development of healthy and secure infants:

1. Empowered and responsive caregiving;
2. Safe and healthy environments for children;
3. High quality health care and adequate nutrition; and
4. High quality developmental stimulation.

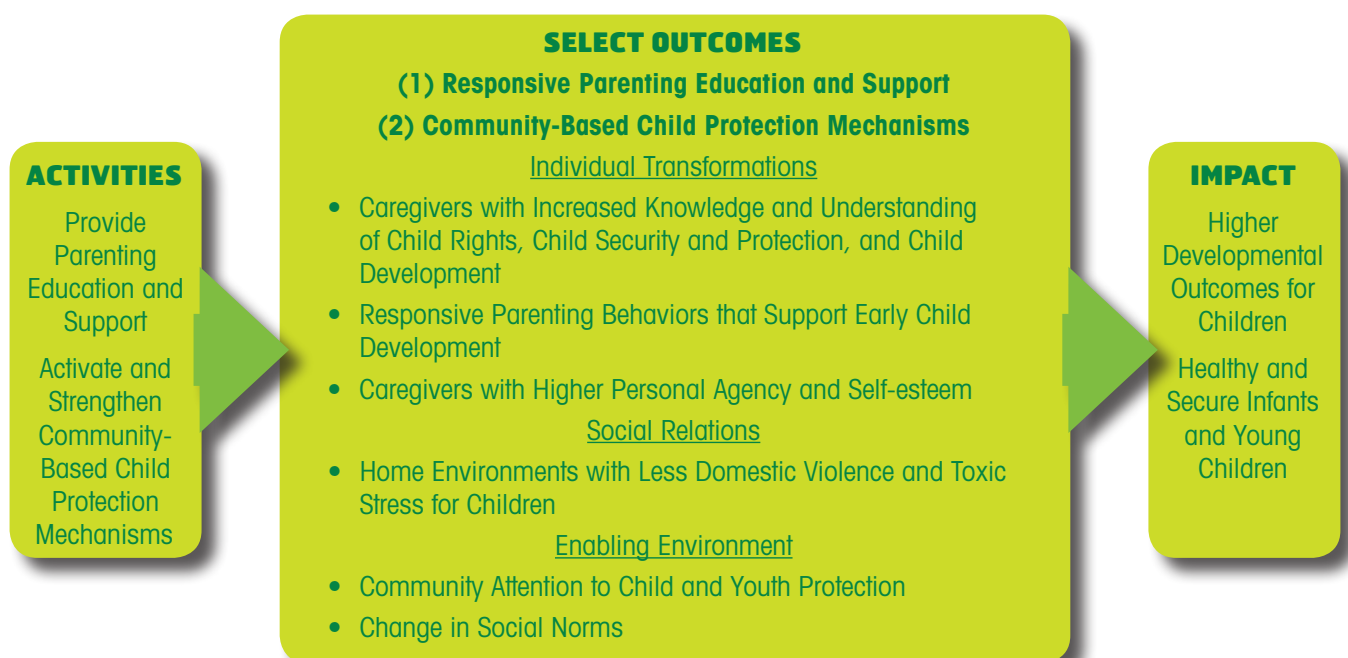


Key to this change are empowered caregivers and functioning child protection mechanisms. ChildFund Ecuador's early childhood development program is designed to help parents, caregivers, and communities:

- a. Improve their understanding of child developmental milestones, child rights, security, and protection;
- b. Practice the parenting skills and behaviors necessary to provide developmental stimulation to infants and young children;
- c. Cultivate home environments with less corporal punishment and violence; and
- d. Operate functioning community-based child protection mechanisms.

The program is carried out through two core components: parenting education and child protection mechanism work.

FIGURE 1: CHILDFUND ECUADOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM LOGIC





A) PARENTING EDUCATION:

ChildFund’s parenting education model covers all aspects of early childhood development: physical, emotional, social, and cognitive. It is organized in five units and contains 26 key messages. The model is based on participatory methodologies and adult learning theories, and on the United Nations Children’s Fund messages for care and development. The parenting education model is delivered in communities, as a training of trainers with volunteer Mother Trainers. The model is delivered along six steps.

FIGURE 2 – STAGES OF CHILDFUND ECUADOR’S PARENTING EDUCATION MODEL



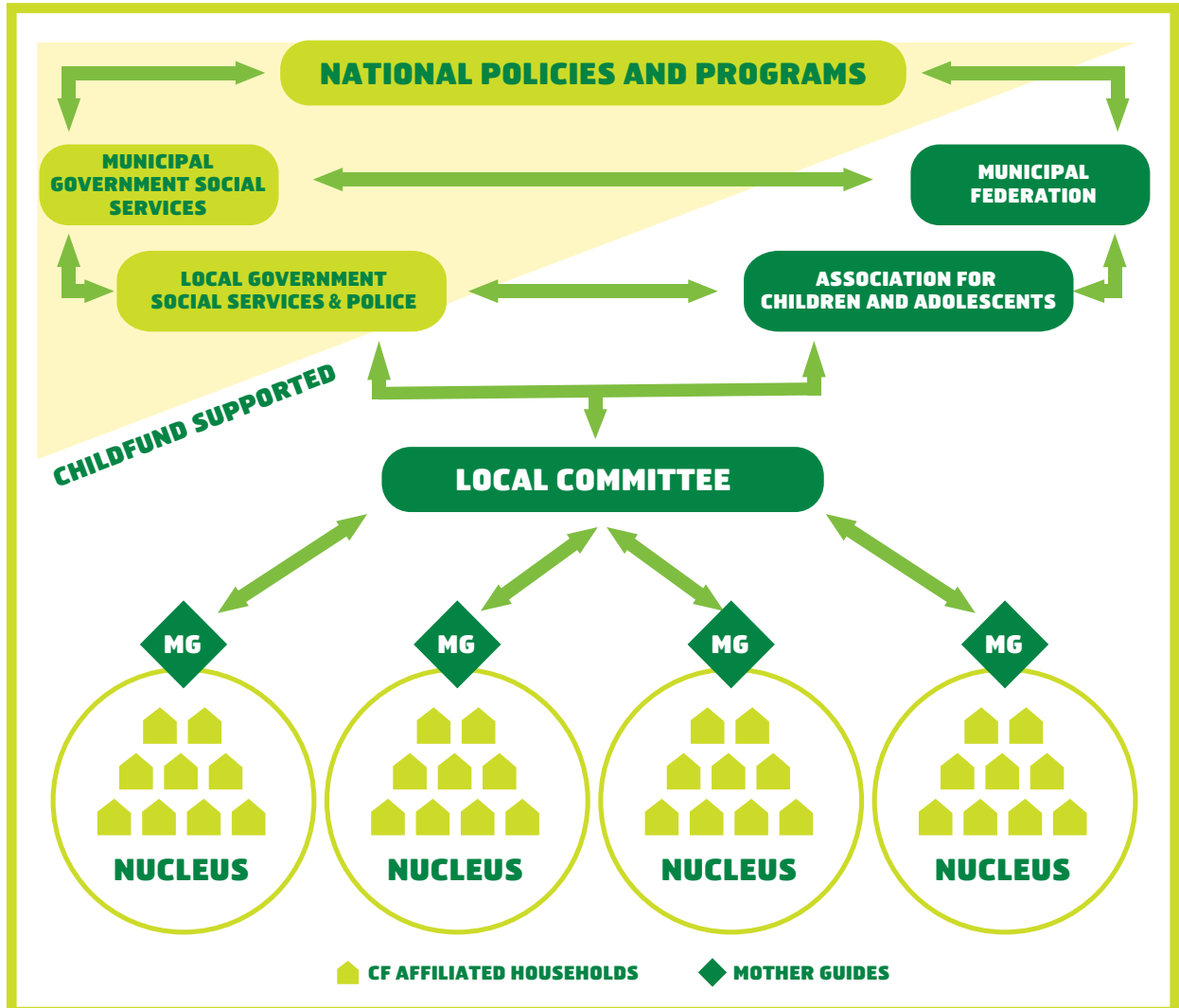
B) CHILD PROTECTION MECHANISMS:

ChildFund Ecuador also works to activate and strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms. These mechanisms are designed to promote, monitor, and protect the rights of women, children, and youth. They identify and address cases in which rights are being violated or ignored, most often where families are living in conditions of isolation, exclusion, and vulnerability. ChildFund’s main lines of work include:

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| <p>(1) Educating community members – in parenting workshops and other venues – on children’s rights and the impact that abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence have on child development;</p> | <p>(2) Encouraging communities to actively monitor and become engaged in the lives of children and households at high risk – by preparing a Mother Guide to work with families and report cases if severe; and</p> | <p>(3) Linking community-based child protection mechanisms to national-level structures that address cases of child rights violations.</p> |
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ChildFund’s support to these community-based child protection mechanisms is mostly in linking them to national-level child protection structures established by the Government of Ecuador. The organization helps articulate national-level frameworks that guarantee the rights, protection and welfare of children down to the local and community level.

FIGURE 3 - ORGANIZATION OF CARCHI CHILD PROTECTION ACTORS SUPPORTED BY CHILDFUND



THE FINDINGS

Study findings indicate that ChildFund’s work has contributed to more empowered and responsive caregiving and to stronger community-based child protection. More specifically, there is evidence that this contribution has worked by: (a) increasing knowledge and understanding of child rights, security, protection, and development; (b) supporting more responsive parenting behaviors; (c) cultivating higher personal agency and self-esteem of caregivers; (d) reducing domestic violence and toxic stress for children; (e) enhancing community attention to child protection; and (f) changing social norms on the rights of children and women and violence.

INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Findings suggest that caregivers participating in ChildFund Ecuador’s early childhood development program have increased their understanding of child development and how to promote it, child rights, and child security.

“I learned things that I had never learned before. I learned how to take care of my children, how to take care of my home and my surroundings, and I taught other people what I learned and I felt really good, and I continue to feel good because all of this has really served me well.”- Volunteer Parenting Education Mother Trainer

HIGHER PERSONAL AGENCY AND SELF-ESTEEM OF CAREGIVERS

Findings suggest that ChildFund's parenting education work promotes the self-efficacy of caregivers by creating a safe, supportive environment in which they are able to practice increasingly challenging tasks; observe other parents engaging in responsive parenting, public speaking, or community activities; and discuss fears or concerns within the context of the trusted group.

"We have seen mothers that have begun to lose their fear of speaking by attending the workshops. . .they are mothers that are more sure of themselves, with improved self-esteem." - **Program Staff Member**

RESPONSIVE PARENTING BEHAVIORS

The parenting education workshops address both positive parenting (e.g., how to provide developmental stimulation to very young children) and the negative effects of some parenting behaviors on the development of infants (e.g., corporal punishment, verbal abuse, etc.). Analysis of caregivers' letters of commitment to their children, written during parenting education workshops, reveals a focus on what participants call 'past mistakes': yelling, beating, not providing words of encouragement or affection to children. In interviews and focus group discussions, participants discussed learning how to treat children with more love, respect and patience; valuing children more; and having closer relationships with their young children.

HOME ENVIRONMENTS WITH LESS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND TOXIC STRESS

ChildFund Ecuador's programming addresses risk factors contributing to toxic stress for children: violence and corporal punishment; what constitutes abuse and neglect; and how to cultivate nurturing, consistent caregiving. These factors and behaviors are addressed through in-home support by Mother Guides, parenting education workshops, and child protection work. Findings indicate that ChildFund-supported communities have shifted away from the use of corporal punishment for discipline and are increasingly less tolerant of violence in the home. In focus group



discussions and commitment letters written in parenting education workshops, many mothers indicate that their use of corporal punishment has changed since they attended the parenting workshop.

"Before (the parenting education workshops) there were so many cases of abuse, cases of parents using belts – not now. Now talking is (considered) better. . .they now know what is good and is bad. . ." - **Volunteer Parenting Education Mother Trainer**

COMMUNITIES FOCUSED ON CHILDREN'S AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The research found evidence of empowered communities forming local child and youth protection boards as part of a national child security network that existed in government policy but not in local practice. Mothers and other community members learned about children's rights and the national framework meant to guarantee child protection. Concerned that the national structures had not reached their communities, they started forming and activating protection boards of their own, linked to the country-wide structure, and being more active in cantonal councils and local councils that take up cases of child abuse.

UNINTENDED OUTCOMES: SOCIAL NORMS ABOUT CHILDREN AND WOMEN

The study uncovered unintended outcomes of ChildFund's early childhood development program: social norms on the role of children and women in the family and society have begun to shift.

NORMS ABOUT CHILDREN

Prevailing social norms in Ecuador characterize children as small, helpless, and incapable of learning or expressing opinions. In interviews and focus group discussions, program participants spoke about the new value they place on encouraging children to participate and have opinions.

Existing Normative Beliefs about Children	Evolving Normative Beliefs about Children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are most often characterized as small, helpless, and incapable of learning or expressing opinions. A “good child” is a child that is quiet and does not bother adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young children are active learners even before they are able to communicate using words Playing, dancing and singing are important for children’s development. Children have rights and their opinions should be respected.

GENDER NORMS

Findings indicate that a similar shift is occurring with gender norms in participating communities. Traditional gender norms place women inside the home, to provide all primary care to children and be responsible for all household work, and men, outside the home to provide income and food. As heads of households, men also traditionally make decisions in the home, but remain relatively uninvolved in active parenting and developmental stimulation for infants and young children. In interviews and focus group discussions, participants spoke about how women have started participating in the community more; being viewed with more respect; and persuading some of their husbands to join parenting workshops, previously viewed as ‘women’s business.’

Existing Normative Beliefs about Women	Evolving Normative Beliefs about Women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women are responsible for childcare and household chores. Women do not hold leadership roles or participate in community organizations. Men are responsible for providing economic support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women and men share in parenting activities. Women are encouraged to pursue educational or economic opportunities outside of the home. Women are recognized as adding value to community organizations.

CONCLUSION

ChildFund’s early childhood development program in Ecuador supports empowered and responsive caregiving and active community-level child protection mechanisms. In Ecuador, there is a fairly extensive network of social services and child protection bodies on the national level, but they are slow to reach rural, marginalized and impoverished communities on the local level. ChildFund supports these communities to understand what services and rights children need and to create local bodies that act as the missing link that connects children in communities to national-level structures and services. Ecuador’s national frameworks on child protection and inclusive growth are essentially rights-based documents. Where the Government of Ecuador may focus on its duties in guaranteeing rights and providing services, the work of ChildFund empowers people and communities to exercise and respect rights, notably those of children.

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