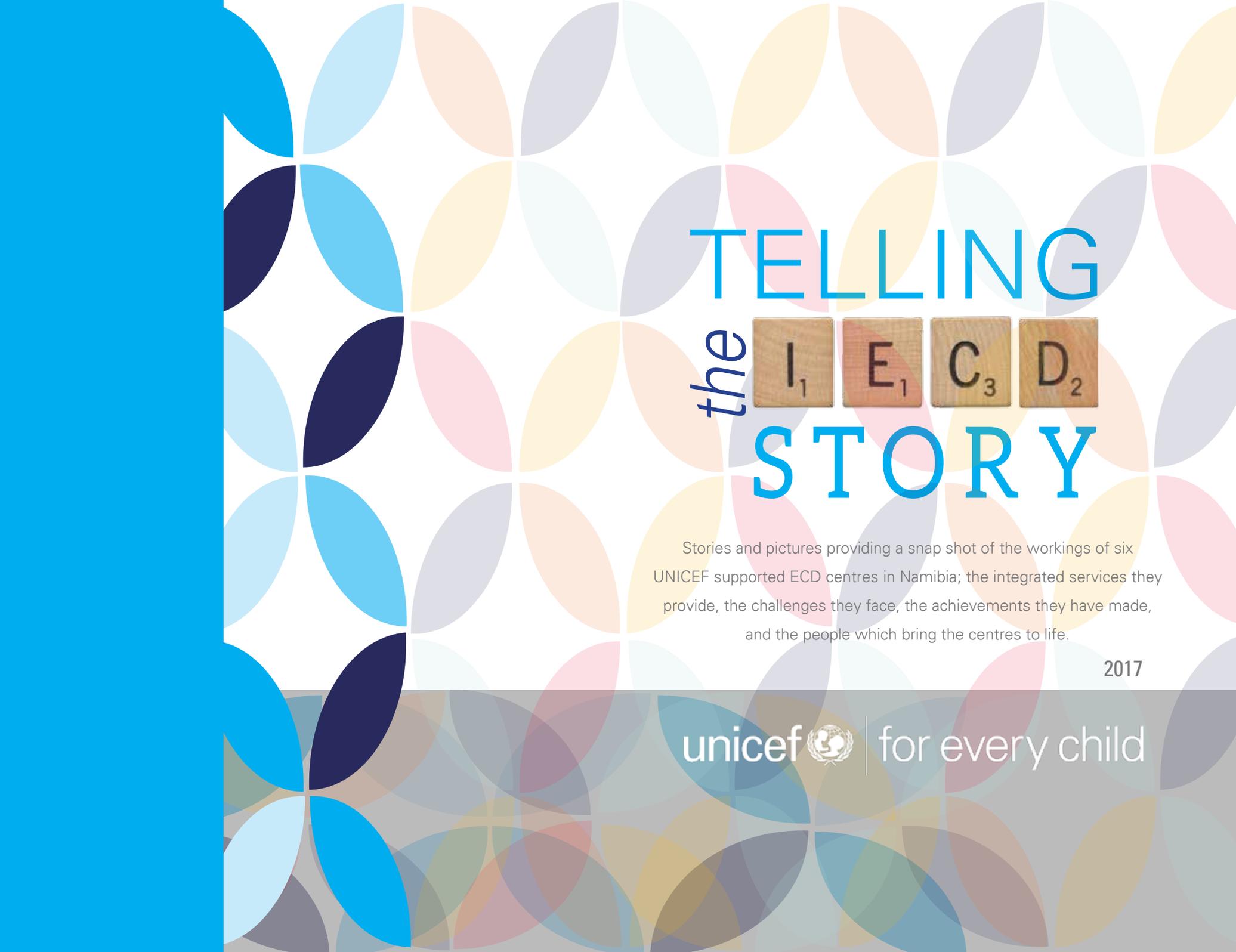




REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA  
Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture

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# TELLING *the* Integrated Early Childhood Development STORY



# TELLING *the* I<sub>1</sub> E<sub>1</sub> C<sub>3</sub> D<sub>2</sub> STORY

Stories and pictures providing a snap shot of the workings of six UNICEF supported ECD centres in Namibia; the integrated services they provide, the challenges they face, the achievements they have made, and the people which bring the centres to life.

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# Background



Early Childhood Development (ECD) is the period from conception of a child, through to eight years of life. It is considered to be the most rapid period of development, which forms the foundation for lifelong learning. Integrated early childhood development (IECD) views all aspects of children's development holistically including cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.

ECD is the most crucial stage in a child's development, when the child needs to receive proper health care and nutrition, care and protection, and stimulation in order to develop emotionally, physically and cognitively. This is also the stage when the child's disabilities or other special needs are identified and early interventions provided to avoid future developmental and cognitive delays and challenges.

The role of parents, siblings, caregivers and community members becomes vital during this period of a child's development. At this stage, a child needs to be provided with opportunities to explore and interact with their environment, especially through play and socialisation.

Research has demonstrated that investing in ECD yields both immediate and long-term benefits for the child as an individual and for society.

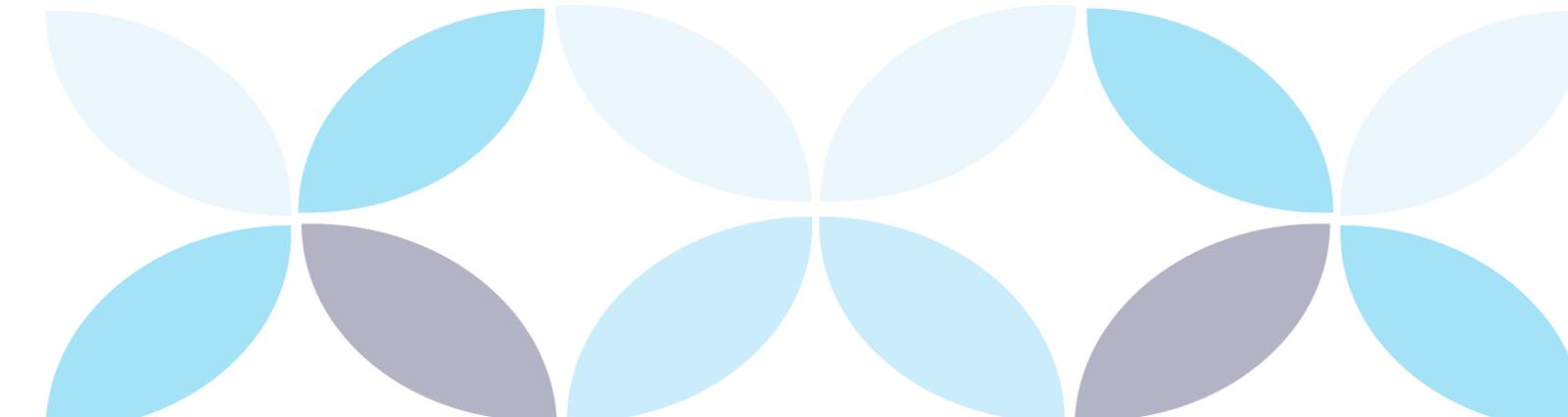
However, the provision of integrated ECD services is extremely limited in Namibia, especially in rural areas. Only 31 percent of children between the ages of 0-4 years old were benefitting from some ECD services according to the National Population and Housing Census of 2011. Where services exist, they are usually centre based and run primarily by the community or private individuals with little or no government funding. These centres also have weak linkages, if any, with education, health and nutrition and child protection programmes.

UNICEF Namibia in partnership with the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGE CW), the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC), and the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS), provided technical and financial support to six centres in five regions of the country in order to pilot an integrated approach to ECD with focus on promoting:

- health and nutrition
- child care and protection
- early identification of disabilities and special needs
- stimulation and early learning
- parental and community engagement
- capacity development of the caregivers.

Further support was given to facilitate community sensitization on the importance of ECD.

Lessons learnt from the centres have been very encouraging, and some of the centres' stories are told in this collection of stories. In collecting information for this booklet, UNICEF visited the ECD centres, spent time with the children, the educators, the management and the parents to provide an opportunity to speak to and understand the day-to-day lives at the centres and the people that run them. The stories reflect a cross-section of these lives. While the content of this collection is qualitative in nature, there were clear trends and threads which were relevant throughout the visits. We hope that through the voices of the children educators and parents, we are able to gain some insights into the success of the programme and some of the challenges that still need to be addressed.



*ECD is the most crucial stage in a child's development, when the child needs to receive proper health care and nutrition, care and protection, and stimulation in order to develop emotionally, physically and cognitively.*

# Talem: A thriving home for integrated ECD services



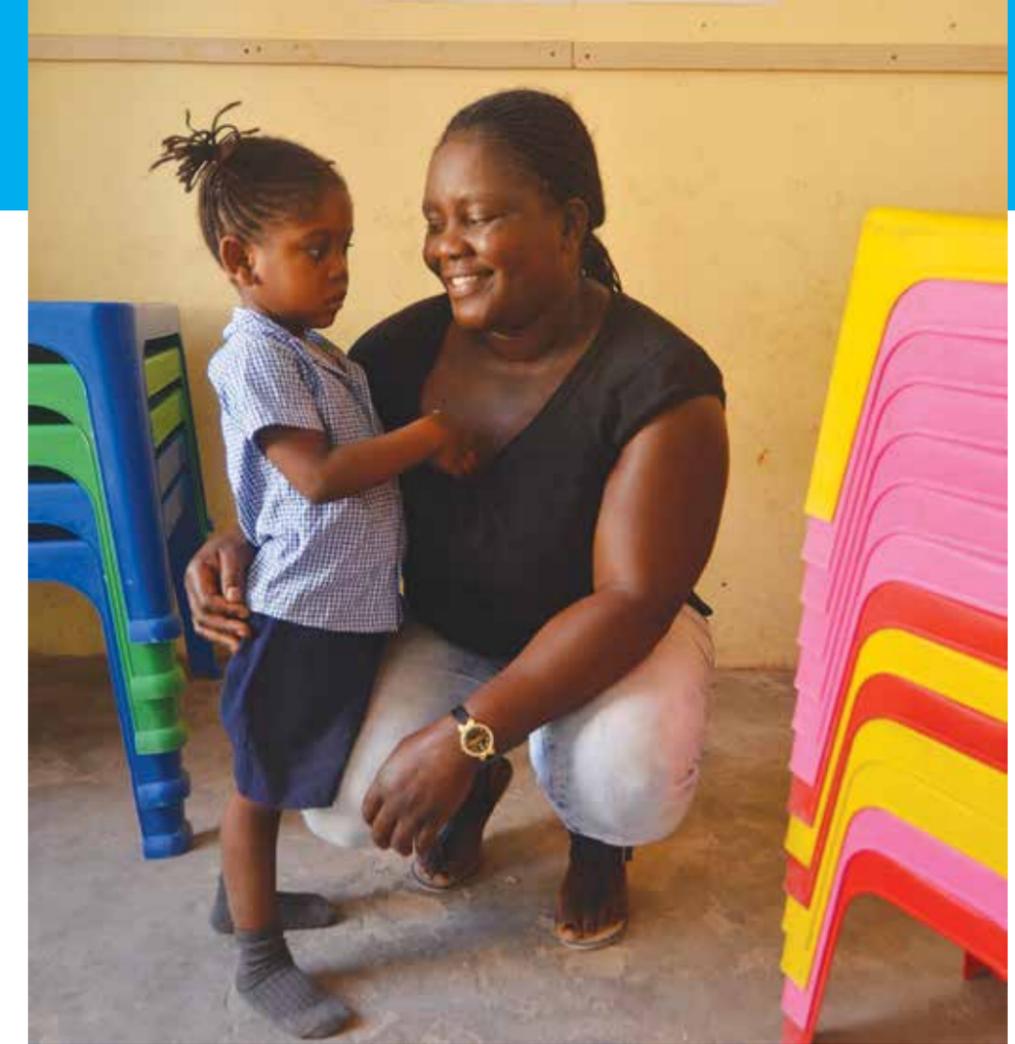
Susana's village is just 15 minutes' walking distance from Oshikango Town. The once rural setting has become a crowded peri-urban zone, which does not allow for much farming. Susana, therefore, remains reliant on her small business of selling fruit, vegetables, mobile phone credit and shoe polish on the side of the road.

Susana has a 3-year-old daughter, Agnes who attends Talem Early Childhood Development (ECD) Center. Working long hours, Susana is extremely grateful to Talem, and the range of services they are able to provide to both Agnes and herself as a mother. For Susana to get to the nearest clinic, she had to either walk for two and a half hours each way, or she has to pay for a taxi. Her meagre income from vending makes it difficult for her to get excess cash.

The integrated services offered at Talem make it a truly exceptional centre. While health, child protection and social services are offered in the general community, the centre has gone out of its way to create personal relationships with these service providers to ensure regular visits, and long-lasting partnerships for the benefit of their children and the families.

At least once a month, a Ministry of Health and Social Services district nurse visits the centre. During these visits, the children are weighed and measured. Any inconsistencies in growth will be noted, and the health workers will follow up these cases, addressing concerns of malnutrition or illness. The parents, guardians, families and extended community members are informed of the nurses' visits in advance, and they are encouraged to attend. These visits have a large turnout, especially as they mitigate the need for a taxi journey to the clinic.

Social workers from the Ministry of Health and Social Services, as well as those from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare regularly visit Talem. With over half of the learners enrolled at Talem being categorised as Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs), these visits are hugely beneficial to the children and their caregivers.



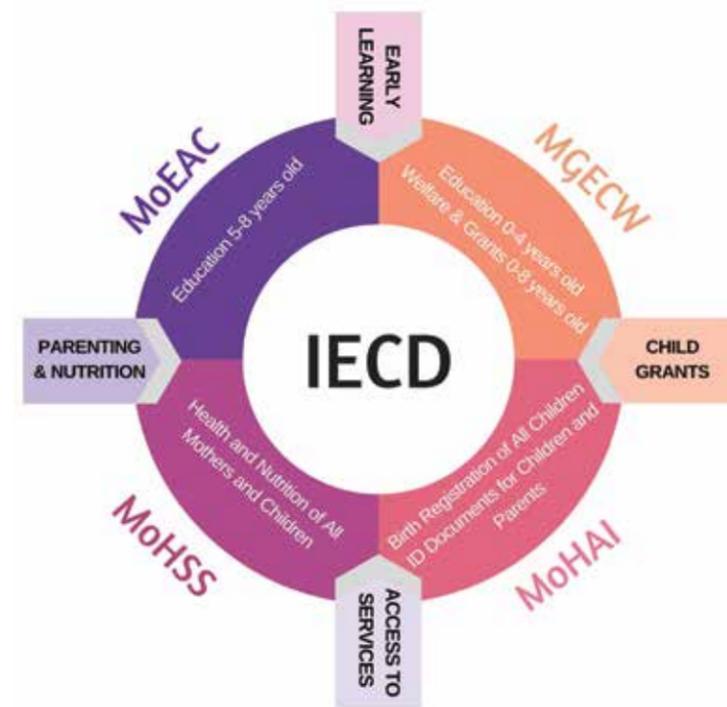
Oshikango Town has grown from being a quiet northern village of Namibia, bordering Angola, to a rambling, lively, somewhat chaotic town where inter-state business was booming, trade was vibrant and money steadily flowed. In 2015, however, the Angolan economy's inflated currency bubble burst, causing a crippling financial crisis. The population of Oshikango was sorely affected by the reduced business opportunities. Businesses in the town closed down, and jobs were lost. Much of the workforce returned to their rural villages and subsistence farms.

*A system of integrated ECD services provided in one centre is a model that the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Ministry of Health and Social Services in partnership with UNICEF are working towards, and hoping to establish across the country over the next five years. These services include health, hygiene and nutrition, child care and protection, and early learning and school readiness.*



These children are eligible for social grants from the government, but the application process and availability of documentation has often been identified as a bottleneck preventing access. At Talem, the staff work with the social workers and guardians to ensure that forms are filled out correctly, children are registered, and grants are received.

ECD services are mainly provided by the public, with churches, communities, or individuals starting and running centres. However, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGEWCW) is mandated to coordinate ECD services in Namibia, and ensure that standards are maintained. ECD-related services also fall under the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC), the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS), as well as, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare.



## “So much more than just a job”



As a pregnant teenager who left school in Grade 9, Cecelia started her working life as a domestic worker, a young mother doing what she could to put food on the table. When a friend of hers opened an ECD Centre in the informal settlement on the outskirts of Gobabis, a city in the east of Namibia nestled against the Kalahari Desert. Cecelia jumped at a chance to help. With no funds available to pay Cecelia, she remained an eager volunteer in her spare time.

Eventually, she decided to leave her cleaning job to do what she loved. For the first two years that she worked at the ECD Centre, Cecelia was not paid. A local pastor who heard about her dedication donated food, toiletries and other basic necessities to her, allowing her to continue to give her time to the children, most of them who are vulnerable. Seeing the need for providing a good start for these vulnerable children in the community, development donors started provided financial support, and Cecelia started to get a salary and training. “I was so happy and became more motivated when the community saw the need to support Tui Ni Duse,” says Cecelia.



The Tui Ni Duse centre where Cecelia works is located in the Kanan informal settlement in Gobabis. The settlement has an estimated 3000 households, and most of the settlement’s population is San. The settlement lacks basic amenities including flush toilets and running water, and the community struggles with social problems including substance abuse, domestic violence and wide-spread poverty.

The centre itself has 70 children enrolled, although this number fluctuates throughout the year, making income from fees unreliable. Centres like Tui Ni Duse receive little, or no, government support in terms of funding, so having passionate staff like Cecelia, who go the extra mile, is an invaluable asset.

Cecelia tries out new ideas every day. In the corner of one classroom, a small shop has been set up, ‘selling’ empty boxes and containers of common groceries. Each box has a ‘price’ which is a colourful shape. The children are given their own colourful shape ‘money’ which they trade for the goods. They take turns at being the shopkeepers and the customers. Through their game, they learn about shapes, colours, monetary value and expand their English vocabularies. This simple, but well-executed idea, embodies the thought and passion that the Tui Ni Duse educarers put into their work.



*Attracting people to become educarers has been a challenge in Namibia. It is not a well-known profession, and there is not an established path of progression for ECD training and career. The MGECW, in partnership with the MoEAC, are seeking to address this by developing courses leading to ECD qualifications through the national tertiary education institutions, with the hope to institutionalise and legitimise the profession.*

# Fathers building Strong Foundations



“We would never have seen this a few years ago” Gertie Fredericks, the Rocky Crest Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre manager states as she draws attention to a little girl walking to class hand-in-hand with her father.

Greeting the father, Gertie beams as the man helps his daughter place her small backpack in the cubbyhole, eases off her coat, and gives his daughter a goodbye kiss and a complicated handshake, which makes the child giggle.

There is a reason why this short, tender moment is worthy of attention. Namibia is a country which has, for many years, had deeply traditional gender roles, especially when it comes to the family. Children have largely been seen as the responsibility of the mother, to the extent that many fathers have perceived any emotional involvement with their children or caregiving to be ‘un-masculine.’

At the Rocky Crest ECD Centre, however, parental involvement is on the rapid rise, paternal involvement is encouraged, praised and greatly appreciated. Parent meetings are held regularly, and fathers are often the majority attendants. The fathers are also increasingly active at the centre’s fundraising events and activity days. The active involvement and caregiving that the staff are seeing from the fathers at the ECD centre is something new to them, and something that they are immensely proud of.



The phenomenon of ‘absent fathers’ is common. In 2013, the Legal Assistance Centre found that in Namibia only 25.8% of children in Namibia live with both of their parents. Twenty Seven percent have a living father, but live with their mother, and 31.9% live with neither parent. A 2014 report compiled by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Gender Equality and Family Affairs found that the issues of absent fathers’ causes long-term problems for children, from the inability to access social grants, to issues of cyclical abuse and neglect.

# Fresh Food in the Barren Desert



Most of the children attending Little Bugs Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centre are the children of families who have moved to the area seeking employment in the booming tourism sector. The centre itself is located on site of one such venture, in a collection of buildings surrounded by the vast desert, sitting small under the blazing sky.

Considering the long working hours of parents and the inflated costs of procuring a variety of nutritious food which has to be trucked into this desert community, the Little Bugs ECD Centre set out to provide their children with proper nutrition through charitable donations and proceeds from the income generation programme. With the assistance of UNICEF, a nutritionist was hired, who assessed what the children were getting at home, and designed a menu which added to and complemented their other meals. Being such a small community, the nutritionists visited individual families and provided information on nutrition and what to prepare for children. The menu focuses on fresh fruit and vegetables, healthy snacks, and a robust, filling breakfast.

Every day the children at the centre, at no extra cost, receive breakfast, a snack and lunch with dessert. The centre employs a cook who can be heard singing in the kitchen as she whips up the menu of the day, perhaps spaghetti bolognaise, hake and spinach, or chicken stir-fry. Parents are sensitised to the importance of nutrition and are provided with information on how to prepare healthy non-expensive meals for their children.

The effects of these solid meals are visible everywhere. The children look strong and healthy, there are no runny noses or coughs. Nationally, one in four children is stunted, but at Little Bugs the children here are not small for their ages. With full tummies, the children pay better attention to the educators and at break time there is an abundance of energy to put into an enthusiastic ball game.



*Nationally, children born in poor families have a threefold risk of being stunted or malnourished compared to those born in the rich families. Malnutrition and stunting is a serious concern amongst children below the age of 5 years old in Namibia. One out of every three children under 5 years old is stunted and one out of every three children of the same age is malnourished, translating to 24% in total and these children are risk of developmental delays.*

## Beyond simple child care



The neighbourhood of Okuryangava sits on the outskirts of Windhoek, nestled next to the township of Katutura. The area has ballooned since Namibia's independence in 1990, with sprawling settlements as a result of Namibia's high urban migration rate with people moving to the city seeking out work, education, and a better life. Thirty percent of Windhoek's citizens live in informal settlements like these.

Childcare is not easy in Okuryangava. Most parents work in the city or the neighbouring marketplaces. Without reliable public transport, the commute is long and expensive. Mothers are left to look for responsible adults to take care of their babies while they are away at work.

The Jonas Haiduwa ECD centre, started by the City of Windhoek in 2012, in the informal settlement, is an oasis of calm, order, cleanliness, play and learning. In an area where children's lives are burdened by poverty, the centre provides structure and consistency to the children and their families. Most of the parents at the Jonas Haiduwa ECD Centre are simply seeking supervision of their children, but they quickly realise the value of a good foundation in the early years of life.

The classrooms at the centre are bright and colourful, filled with stimulating pictures, activities and equipment. Some of these beautiful drawings and pictures are made by the children themselves and there is a lot of pride in having their work displayed. Amongst the learning aids that have been donated by the centre's funding partners, are creative and original items that the educators and the learners have made together.

Mothers living in the community speak of their concerns for child safety where there are alarmingly common instances of child abuse and neglect. While parents would like to have someone to care for their children, early childhood development (ECD) and early stimulation is not a high priority on the list of concern for many of the parents living in the informal settlement. Inequality remains a serious challenge in Namibia, with 34% of children living below the poverty threshold, according to the Namibia Statistics Agency's 'Child Poverty in Namibia' report.

The educators received training from the City of Windhoek, with some of the funds from UNICEF, in areas such as arts and crafts, musical movements, creativity, and the development of motor skills. In one of these courses, the educators were trained on how to make stimulating, educational toys and activities out of the materials from their surroundings. The results of these projects are everywhere. Brightly painted tree pods have been woven into hanging mobiles, tin cans have been filled, decorated and turned into rattles, while empty toilet paper rolls are turned into "fierce" little lions.

Sylvia, the mother of excited five-year-old Stefanus speaks about how happy they were as a family with their children's development. "They are learning to speak English!" Sylvia Nampadhi proudly says. "This gives him an advance in his life."

The parents feel welcome at the centre and they are encouraged by management to be actively involved in the child's development. Parents are invited to meetings in which they receive information about the nutritional needs of the children, as well as hygiene, child care and protection, positive discipline, and the importance of structured routines. Parents are also advised about the importance of obtaining birth certificates for their children.

Jonas Haiduwa is providing a valuable service to the community, but managing the centre is not an easy task. There are regular break-ins during the nights by people hoping to take blankets, mattresses or furniture. Some of the parents struggle with providing meals to their children, and while the centre has a kitchen it cannot afford to launch its much-needed feeding programme. For many of the parents, the N\$300 (roughly 20 USD) per month fees provide a challenge and cash flow is an ongoing concern. This is a reality many Namibian families and educators struggle with and anecdotal evidence suggests that financial burden is the main reason why children get excluded from ECD services.



Most children in Namibia receive education in their early years in their mother tongue and switch to English at when they reach senior primary grades. What the parents really like at Jonas Haiduwa is that the children are spoken to and taught in both their mother tongue Oshiwambo, which is the language predominantly spoken by the children at the Centre, as well as English.

## Prioritising Early Childhood Development amid Poverty



**N**ashikaku Pre-School and Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centre is in Oshivelo, a small settlement in the north of Namibia which grew from a South African army base, established during the Namibian Liberation Struggle. Today it provides an economic centre for the surrounding communal farms and is the gate post on the veterinary control line which separates the southern commercial farms from northern communal land. No animals are allowed to travel from the north of the veterinary line, which results in lack of trade and this loss of revenue has an impact on the local communities.

Penelawo's son attends the ECD centre, and she feels very thankful for the opportunities provided to her son. Penelawo is unemployed and Oshivelo has very few job options for her to pursue. The only income for the family is her mother's Government pension of N\$1200 (approximately 85 USD) per month, and whatever further income they can get from selling fruit and vegetables at the informal market.

Of the children aged 0 - 4 in Namibia, 87% do not attend ECD centres. Penelawo, however, is determined that her son should have access to ECD and formal education. She is grateful that the centre costs only N\$30 (approximately 2 USD) per month.

Unemployment poses a huge challenge to the community as a whole, and this impacts life at the centre. Most of the children attending are classified as OVCs, and many of the families rely on drought-relief food packages for their survival.



Economic hardships faced by the community were mirrored in the centre, prior to external support. The educators had limited education and experience in stimulating and providing holistic development to the children, there was a shortage of learning materials, the facilities themselves were not child-friendly, especially the bathrooms. Many of the children attending were under-fed and stunted, with poor levels of concentration.

With the support of UNICEF, in partnership with the key line ministries responsible for ECD, the centres received educational materials, structured activities for play and stimulation, as well as capacity building and guidance on how to develop relationships with service providers, parents, and the community. Further, through UNICEF guidance, the centre started providing the children with a meal a day. The children's weight has improved, as has their attention and overall health.



*The Nashikaku Pre-School and ECD centre has two classrooms and over ninety children. There are three educators, with only one having had formal ECD training. The centre has children from a range of different cultural and language backgrounds, with over 60% being of San origin.*

## Elephants for Empowerment in the Little Bugs Workshop



In a win-win initiative to expand their fundraising power, the Little Bugs Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre opened a small, bright workshop at their premises. The workshop creates colourful, high-quality soft toy animals which are sold in the surrounding lodges and craft centres around the country. The appealing designs and personal stories of the toys ensure that they are in popular demand.

Funds raised from the sales of the toys go directly to the ECD centre and are largely spent on their nutrition programme. An innovative element to this fundraising mechanism is that all of the toys are made by local community members, mostly women. At any time during the day, people from the community are welcome to come to the workshop. They are provided with the materials and the sewing patterns and they can work for as long, or as short, as they wish. Little Bugs then buys the finished product from the crafter, paying a competitive rate, of which the maker get 100%.

Often, items for sale to tourists at gift shops and craft markets are mass produced out of Namibia. Little Bugs makes it clear in their marketing that these are Namibian products made by Namibians, and benefiting Namibian families. The addition of a label which tells the story of the Little Bugs workshop makes the product even more unique and appealing.

When mothers come to the centre, they have the opportunity to quietly, unobtrusively get involved with their children learning. They interact with the educators, chat to the cook, and inquire about their children's developments. They meet their children's friends and have an opportunity to get to know their children's lives at school. The lions, elephants, and rhinos make their across the world with their new owners, having funded meals, and an element of freedom, for the children and women of Sossusvlei respectively.



Evidence collected by UN women and the World Bank, from a range of developing countries, shows that when women are earning a share of the household income, spending patterns change to have a greater benefit to children.

Source: 2012, World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development

*For the women working in the workshop, this income supplement is a blessing. It eases their financial strains, and for some women, it is the only income that they have which is not controlled by their husbands or partners. The women receive basic needlework training, and gain experience, enhancing their future employability. The flexible nature of the work allows them to fit their workshop sessions around their work and family lives with ease.*

## Promoting early inclusion at Rocky Crest ECD Centre



Educators at Rocky Crest ECD centre are patient and professional. The centre practices inclusive education, and without specialist training, they try to accommodate children of all backgrounds and abilities. They get to know the families of each child in their care, and to understand the conditions of the children's lives at home.

The educators work individually with the children during class activities, and they are able to identify children who they feel may need extra help, due to their unique learning abilities and/or behavioural problems. However, while the educators are able to identify general concerns, they are not equipped to diagnose or counsel.

In order to assist the centre and the children, UNICEF Namibia, working in partnership with the ministries responsible for ECD, provided technical and financial support to the centre's integrated service delivery. A child psychologist was hired to assist with diagnosing special needs in order to provide early interventions. The psychologist made referrals for children who needed support.

The psychologist also trained and sensitized the educators and the centre's management on the early identification of children with special needs and provided them with referral options to ensure that the children get the best care from as early as possible.

The Rocky Crest ECD Centre currently has five children diagnosed with emotional disorders and developmental disabilities. These children's cases are handled with great compassion and respect, and the children are in no way made to feel different from their peers. The centre has been able to integrate children with great ease. The educators intelligently provide them with the extra care and assistance they need, uniquely tailored to their own abilities.



Guidance and assistance from the psychologists have helped the educators greatly and in turn the children. Asteria Mukwilongo, mother of 5-year-old Andrew, is delighted with her son's progress at the centre. She explains how Andrew used to rarely speak, would have temper flare-ups and was not comfortable in social settings.

Today Andrew is chatty and confident. He leads the class in a song and receives a hearty round of applause for doing so.



More than 70% of ECD caregivers do not have the necessary qualifications and expertise in ECD which also has a negative impact in terms of the early identification of special needs and early interventions.

Source: 2012 Survey of ECD Centres, MGECW

*Disparities continue to persist in the provision of quality early childhood development services in Namibia, especially amongst the rural and poor communities. The situation is even worse for children with special needs and disabilities. According to the 2011 National Population and population of children with disabilities not attending ECD was higher in rural areas compared to urban areas, representing 72, 7% and 27, 3% respectively.*



## Conclusion



The stories in this collection provide a strong message about the value of investing in integrated early childhood development (IECD) programmes. They emphasize the importance of cognitive, psycho-social and physical development through access to enhanced play, health, protection, and communication activities for children. From the pilot, it was clear that the level of recognition in the value of a strong foundation is on the rise in Namibia.

While parents are starting to realize the value of a good start in life for their young children, [advocacy for IECD](#) is still greatly needed in Namibia to ensure that Namibia invests more in the provision of integrated early childhood development services, to educate parents and community members about the value of ECD, and to build the capacity of the educators to provide a continuum of quality services.

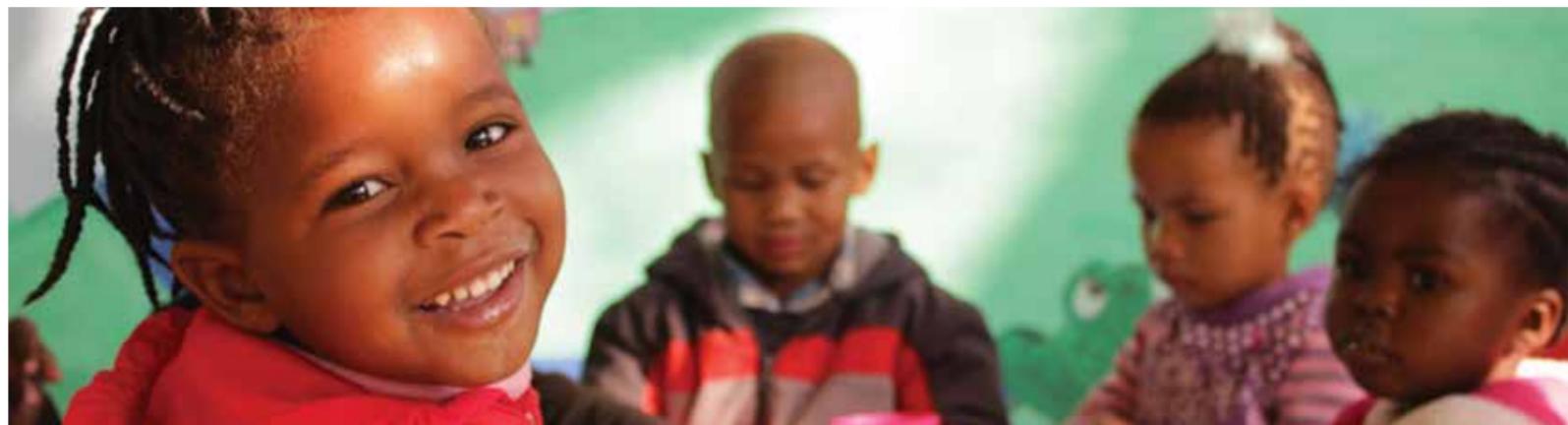
[Child nutrition](#) is a major concern in Namibia. 1 in 4 Namibian children are stunted, and many of the centres spoke of families who were unable to afford basic meals for their children. At every centre, the need for sustainable nutrition programmes was highlighted and in the absence of these, all the centres have made remarkable progress in their awareness of and advocacy for improved nutrition.

[Meaningful parental involvement](#) was one of the critical components of the pilot. All of the centres have started with regular parents meetings covering a wide range of issues, from positive parenting techniques, to child health concerns and the importance of early identification of children with special needs, child protection and ensuring that children

have birth certificates. Educarers have become very outspoken about their expectations from the parents, and have been happily surprised by the increase in parent involvement, commitment and support.

What stood out from the pilot was the [incredible passion and enthusiasm of the educarers](#). Most of the educarers working at the centres are either un-qualified or under-qualified with very few who have either completed or were undertaking a diploma in ECD. Despite the levels of dedication, the quality of teaching varies across the centres and this would be in-part addressed by improved in-service training, as well as the development on ECD curriculums for tertiary institutions nationally.

A major concern, especially for the centres in informal settlements, is the level of security that they can offer. Some centres have experienced break-ins and have had their materials, furniture and bedding stolen. The centres have also struggled with unauthorized persons entering the premises, and this is of special concern when there are instances of abuse, abductions and alcohol misuse in the families and communities.





The need for more [integrated services](#) are a priority that has been widely voiced by the centres as well as by the greater communities. The process of integrating services has started with great traction at some of the centres, but others are struggling. Further, the ECD centres do not have staff who have been trained in the [early identification](#) of children with special needs and disabilities. There is also a need to strengthen the national referral system to ensure ill and vulnerable children receive the care they need.

Increasingly integrated ECD is becoming a national priority, and UNICEF is proud to be providing support to ensure that new systems and services operate at a high a standard as possible. For this to happen, further partnerships and joint cooperation and collaboration are required, both at a national, regional and community level, and at the level of the individual centres. We hope that these stories have shed some light on the immense opportunities that ECD holds, not only for our very young children, but also for Namibia as a whole.





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