Early Childhood Development in High HIV Prevalence Settings

In sub-Saharan Africa, the HIV epidemic has significantly affected those populations already made especially vulnerable by widespread poverty. And of those populations, millions of orphans and vulnerable children are left without adequate care and resources, the lack of which affects their development and opportunities for the future. In Zimbabwe, an estimated 9,400 children die annually from HIV-related complications and less than half (44%) of HIV+ children receive ART. A focus on Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions is an essential investment, not a cost. With 90% of brain development occurring by age 5, early interventions for children lead to improved child survival, health, growth, and cognitive and social development. Long term, adults who received assistance in early childhood are more likely to have higher employment and earnings, better health, lower levels of welfare dependence, and lower levels of crime. An investment and focus on ECD opportunities is one of the most cost effective approaches for breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality among vulnerable children.

Bantwana’s ECD Program in Zimbabwe

Bantwana partners with local ECD centers in Zimbabwe to support the long-term health, education, and cognitive and behavioral development of vulnerable children. This integrated model is successful, comprehensive, and helps to create community support and involvement. Some of the key features of the program include:

- In-service teacher training for para-professionals
- Early identification of and intervention for children with disabilities
- Providing linkages with PMTCT and Pediatric ART programs, including adherence, monitoring and support
- Nutritional gardens
- Psychosocial support through child case workers and child protection committees
- Community sensitization and outreach to increase ECD enrollment
- Internal savings and lending groups for caregivers to enhance their ability to cover school fees.

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**Zimbabwe Country Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Population:</strong></th>
<th>14.15 million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HIV Prevalence:</strong></td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Orphans and Vulnerable Children:</strong></td>
<td>1.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of Children Accessing ECD:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children Ages 0-14 living with HIV:</strong></td>
<td>170,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The Bantwana ECD program works with 11 local partners who support ECD centers in schools and community sites. Through this program, partners provide block grants to ECD centers in exchange for free ECD education.

**ECD Wraparound Services**

- Nutrition & Growth Monitoring
- Education
- Health Assessments
- Linking to HIV Testing & Adherence
- Case Management & Psychosocial Support
- Early Intervention for Disability
- Caregiver Economic Strengthening
- Parenting Skills for Caregivers

**Program Achievements**

Since its implementation in 2012, Bantwana’s ECD program in Zimbabwe is:

- Working with five community partners
- Supporting 83 community-based ECD programs; 45 in-school, 38 community sites
- Currently reaching 5,239 children