



International Child
Development Initiatives



ESD



Happy young learners

Psychosocial well-being of
young children in Ethiopia

Summary report

Introduction

This report summarizes the main findings and recommendations of a research and practice project about the **psychosocial well-being of five year-old children**.

It took place between 2016 and 2018 in two regions in Ethiopia: Amhara and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR). It consisted of: 1) a **research study**, 2) a **programme to improve the quality of four preschools** in the study areas, and 3) the making of a **short documentary** film called "Happy young learners in Ethiopia". All of these actions took place to inform Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) practice, teacher education and policy in Ethiopia.

The project was a collaborative effort between **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)**, in Ethiopia and **International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI)**, in the Netherlands.

Suggested Citation:

Both, R., Cortellesi, G., Gebre, K., Kernan, M., Mussie, A., Sehalu, A. (2018) *Happy young learners: psychosocial well-being of young children in Ethiopia*. Summary report. Addis Ababa: ESD and Leiden: ICDI.

All activities were financially supported by the **Dioraphte Foundation**.

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Psychosocial well-being is the developing capacity of young children to form **close and secure relations** with adults and peers; experience, regulate, and express **emotions** in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and **explore the environment and learning** – all in the context of family, community and culture (Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, 2008).

Paying attention to psychosocial well-being is integral to the quality of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and is an important contributor to **children's long-term positive outcomes**, emotionally, socially, academically and economically.

Lack of attention to psychosocial well-being is harmful to children's capacity to learn and to thrive.

The focus of the research study were **1000 five-year-old children**, 526 girls and 474 boys. They were all attending preschool classes in urban, semi-urban and rural areas in North Shoa Zone in Amhara and in Sidama Zone in SNNPR. Information was gathered about their psychosocial well-being via interviews with their teachers using the **Universal Psychosocial Indicator for 5 year-old Boys and Girls (UPSI-5)**, an instrument developed by ICDI. Background information about the home and school life of young children in the two study areas was also gathered via interviews with school principals, and group discussions with parents, teacher trainers and education officials.

What is
psychosocial
well-being?

What did the study
consist of?



Key findings

- The most common everyday challenges young children faced at home were: **poverty**, growing up in a **single parent family** or without a parent at home, and **lack of books and toys**.
- A major concern for parents living in **urban areas** in North Shoa was that young children had **no places to play freely and safely** close to home.
- Compared to their urban counterparts young children living in **rural settings** had more freedom to play with siblings and peers outdoors, were often **more independent** and had more responsibilities at an earlier age.
- **Poor preschool attendance rates** were reported in both study regions. There was a tension for parents on the one hand, to comply with the requirement to send their children to preschool, whilst on the other hand, many parents felt unable to provide adequate clothes, food and school materials for their children.
- The average **class size** in study settings was 51 children, the group size in rural areas was larger than either urban or semi-urban.
- There was general concern about **teachers' lack of knowledge on child development** and pedagogical skills in relation to working with young children, as well as a lack of educational materials and resources and poor classroom conditions.
- There was 'reason for concern' about the psychosocial well-being of **37 percent** of the 1,000 five-year-old children participating in this study and it was higher in urban areas compared to rural or semi-urban areas.



Recommendations

Psychosocial well-being: from theory to practice

Recommendation: for teachers and teacher trainers



It is recommended that greater attention is paid, in both **pre-service training** courses in Colleges of Teacher Education and **in-service training**, to training teachers **on psychosocial well-being** of young children and how to promote it. The focus should be on understanding psychosocial well-being, why it is important and how to create supportive learning environments indoors and outdoors.

Families, communities and (pre)schools working together to support psychosocial well-being

Recommendation: for teachers and teacher trainers



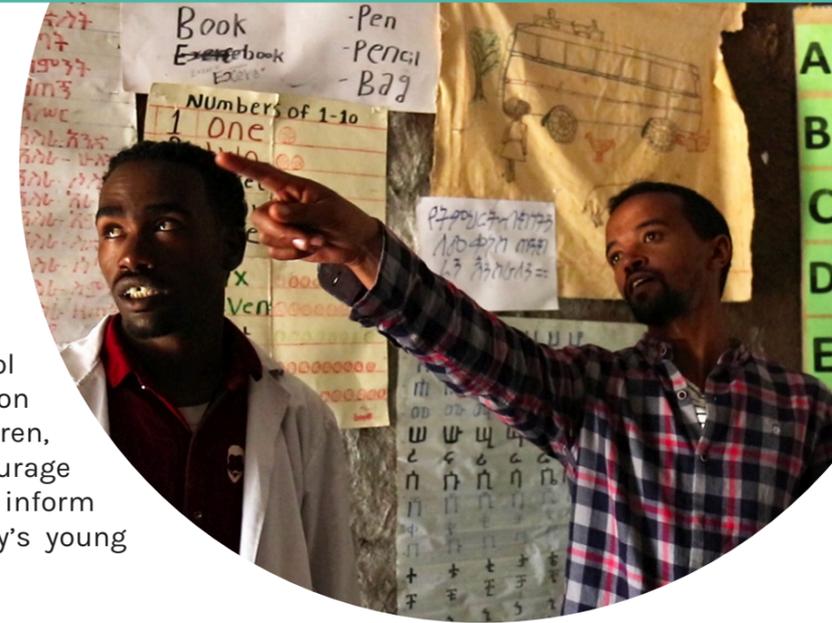
It is recommended that teachers are provided with specific **training to work positively and respectfully with families** and communities. This way they can work together so that children can form close and secure adult and peer relationships. They can also ensure that there is a **connection between children's daily life at home in the community with their experience at preschool**.

Keeping psychosocial well-being on the policy agenda

Recommendation: for local and national policy makers

It is recommended that the **UPSI-5 survey is repeated at 2 year intervals** to measure change over time and to keep psychosocial well-being of children high on the agenda of education policy makers' priorities. It is recommended that the UPSI-5 survey is extended to other regions in Ethiopia.

Regularly recurring surveys at (pre)school level will lead to an increase of attention to the psychosocial well-being of children, strengthen and create new policies, encourage innovations, stimulate more research, inform training and of course serve the country's young children.

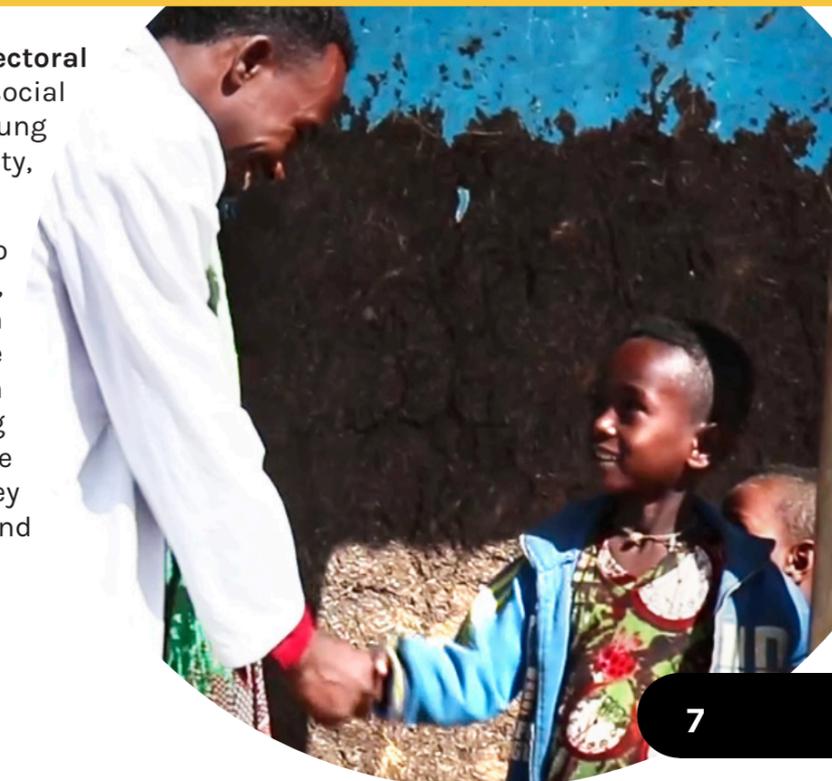


Promoting a systemic approach to children's well-being in Ethiopia

Recommendation: for local and national policy makers

It is recommended that a **cross-sectoral approach** is taken to improving the social and physical environments in which young children grow and develop, at community, village, zonal and regional levels.

A joined-up strategy and commitment to young children's well-being is needed, which involves health and education officials and leaders, as well as those responsible for rural and urban development. This would ensure that young children have regular health checks, safe places to play outdoors close to where they live, safe walking routes to preschool and stimulating preschool environments.



Quality improvement programme

Following the research study, parents and teachers worked together to develop **plans of action** to improve the quality of four preschools in North Shoa and Sidama, with a focus on children's psychosocial well-being at school. 300 young girls and boys benefitted.

The **actions** identified by parents and teachers included:

- involving parents in improving the school environment using local materials
- improving the safety and attractiveness of the outdoor space
- providing training for preschool teachers



The following **results** were achieved:

Results for schools and teachers:

- The training courses given to preschool teachers have **enhanced their teaching skills**, and improved their relationship with children. They are able to provide much more varied activities for children with the new materials and have more pleasure in teaching.
- The **preschool buildings have been upgraded** using locally available materials: there is now more furniture and equipment, different focused "corners" in the classrooms, more indoor toys and learning games, and more outdoor playground equipment.
- The preschool buildings are **safer**: potentially hazardous materials have been removed, and the preschool grounds are now fenced.

Results for children and families:

- **Parental involvement** has improved: parents show much more willingness and interest in supporting preschool activities.
- Children are given more opportunities and time to learn and play **indoors and outdoors** and less time is invested in formal education activities. As a result, children are happier at preschool, have better communication skills, are better able to play with their peers, have **improved self-confidence and health** and reduced fears.



Voices of children and teachers

1. Misrakber primary school, Misrak - Hawassa Town



I see that more indoor and outdoor games play a big role on children's general well-being, and give them more opportunities to play and create relationships with their peers. Even for us, as teachers, the school time has become more pleasant and rewarding: we see that by working with children we can bring great success also to the community.

Tadelech, teacher

I love to play with my friends, especially playing on the merry-go-round and sliding are my favorite games.

Yosef, 6 years old

2. Kurda primary school, Tula



We had very little in the past, and now we can improve the quality of our services and provide children with more games and playing time. I see the positive impact that this has on the children every day. We are really making a difference in the future of these children.

Peteros, teacher

I am very happy to see how beautiful our classroom became. I like to play with my friends on the tires in the school playground. It is so good!

Mamush, 6 years old

3. Andinet preschool - Debrebirhan city

I am so surprised: we achieved an impressive number of results with limited resources and in a short time. I learned that many things can be changed with joint effort of teachers and parents and that using local materials can simplify our life and help solve even complex problems.

Yeshe, teacher

I am very happy with my teacher and my school, we have nice toys and our teacher treats us like a mother. I like to spend time with her.

Bekele, 5 years old



4. Dire preschool - Syaderbrnawayu district

Many of the problems of the school are solved, and now children are much happier when they are here.

Alemwesen, teacher

I like to be at school, sometimes I don't even want to go back home!

Bereket, 6 years old



**Want to
know more?**

To find out more about this project,
please contact:

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If you wish to read the full research report
and view the "Happy young learners in Ethiopia" documentary film,
visit our websites:

www.esdethio.org 

www.icdi.nl 

Supported by:

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