

# Exploring understandings of Early Childhood Development: Developing culturally sensitive qualitative tools in African contexts

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## inequalities and justice:

influences, effects, intersections and evidence



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# Project overview

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- The provision of good quality ECDE programmes in developing country contexts is viewed as essential to ensuring a viable future for children growing up in poverty and with limited access to educational and learning resources(\*).
- However, if parents and other key stakeholders remain uninformed about the benefits of ECDE, there is likely to be little support for such activities and consequently poor implementation of such programmes.
- In order to develop culturally and contextually relevant ECDE programmes, activities and advocacy content, parents, teachers and other key stakeholders' perspectives on ECDE need to be understood

# Project aims

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- Develop a generic culturally sensitive and participatory methodology that can be used to generate information on ECDE knowledge attitudes, beliefs and practices in African contexts;
- Strengthen local capacities by training local ECDE community workers and professionals in these participatory methodologies; and
- Use this methodology to generate descriptions of perspectives (KABP) regarding ECDE within modern urban and rural traditional communities in each focal country with a view to informing the development of locally sensitive and appropriately targeted ECDE advocacy and communication content.

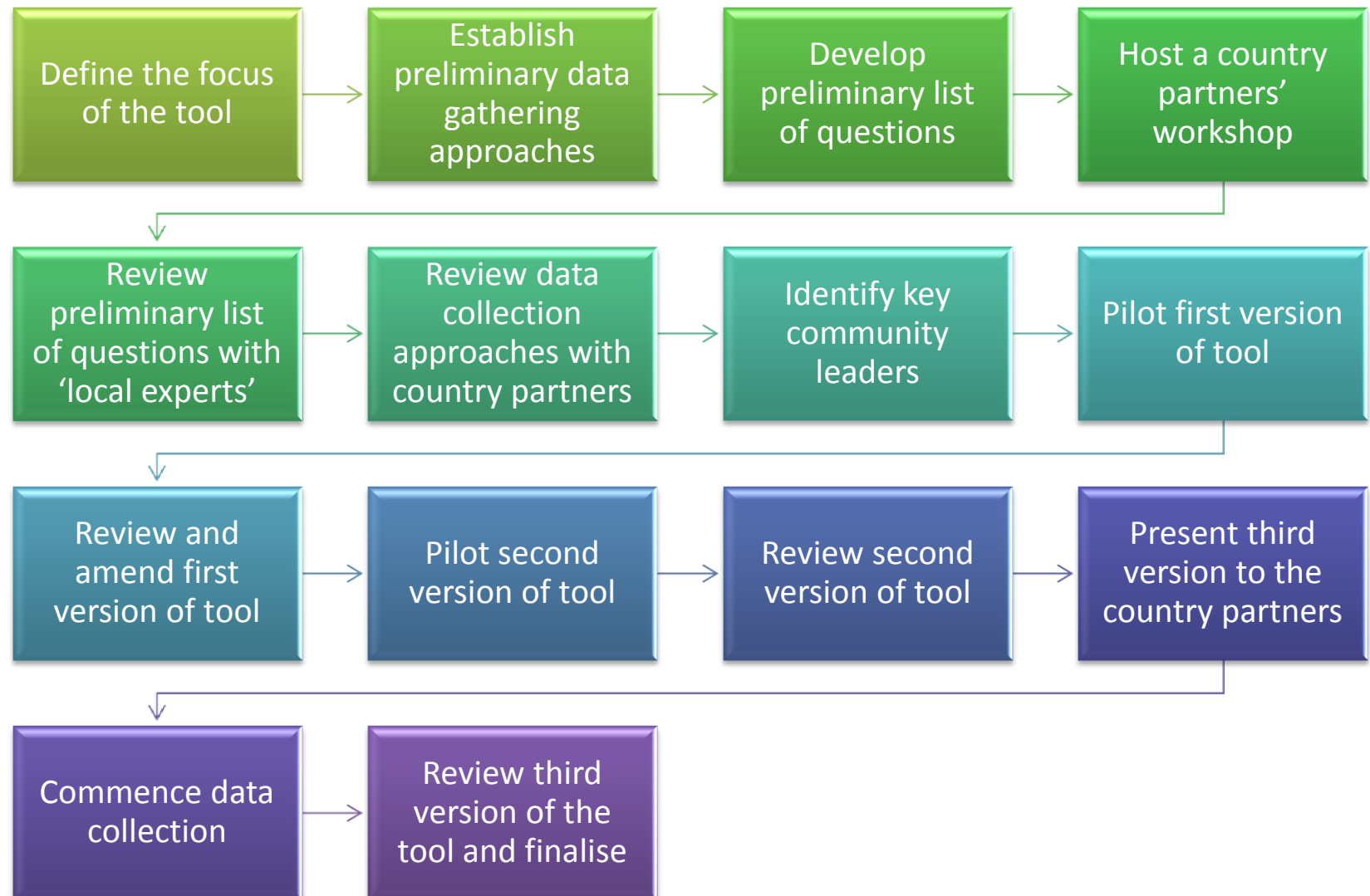


# Conceptual and methodological approaches

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- In order to develop a research tool that aims to holistically assess ECDE perspectives and practices, an integrated approach which considers social protection, maternal and child health, early education and localized ECDE policies is essential
- ECDE covers developmental phases from pregnancy to school-going age
- Qualitative participatory methodology
  - To explore, in great detail, contextual and cultural perspectives and practices around ECDE in African communities
  - Local community ECDE experts were recruited as co-researchers
    - Informed the development of the toolkit
    - Identified study sites and recruited participants

# Tool development: A multi-phase process



# Step 1: Define tool focus; initial data gathering approaches; preliminary list of questions

- The 'toolkit' was developed to explore various stakeholders' perspectives on ECDE practices and services in African communities
- Toolkit divided into three core sections/toolsets

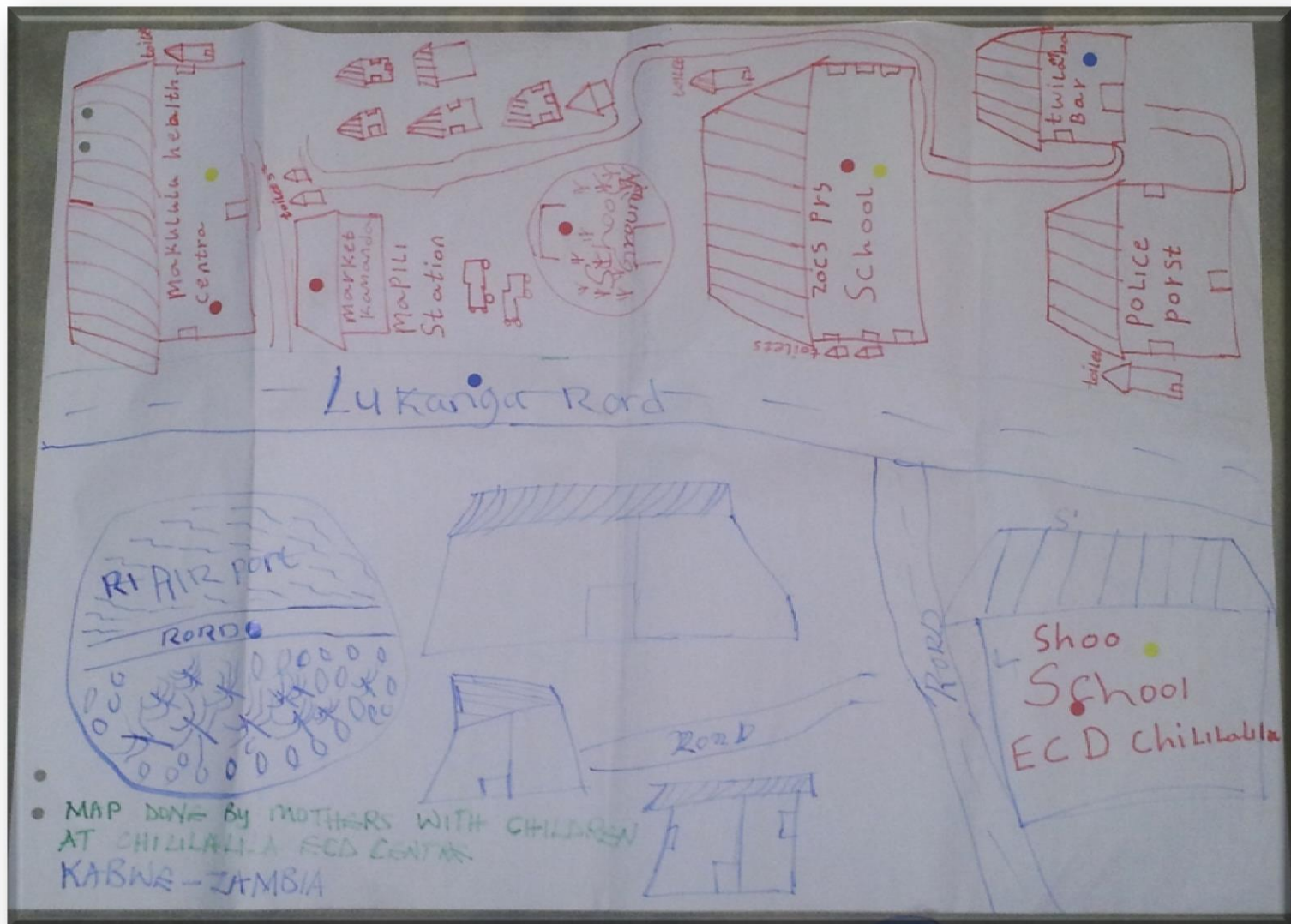
TOOLSET 1: EXPLORING PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES	TOOLSET 2: EXPLORING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES	TOOLSET 3: EXPLORING KEY LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES
		
 Focus group discussions	 Focus group discussions	 One-on-one interviews
 Developmental chart	 Semi-structured discussion guide	 Semi-structured interview guide
 Community mapping	 Community mapping	

# Example of the developmental chart

Timeline (birth to ten years)	Pregnancy	0-2 years	2-4 years	4-6 years	6-8 years
Local names					
Important life rituals					
What children need to do well					
Things that happen a lot					
Things that happen a little					
Important issues to attend to					
Things that can be easily achieved					
People responsible to achieve this					



# Example of community map





# Semi-structured discussion guides

## Discussion guide for teachers

- Availability and accessibility of ECDE services in their community
- Role of these services
- Challenges associated with these services
- Strengths associated with these services
- Needs of young children and pregnant mothers in their community

## Interview guide for key leaders

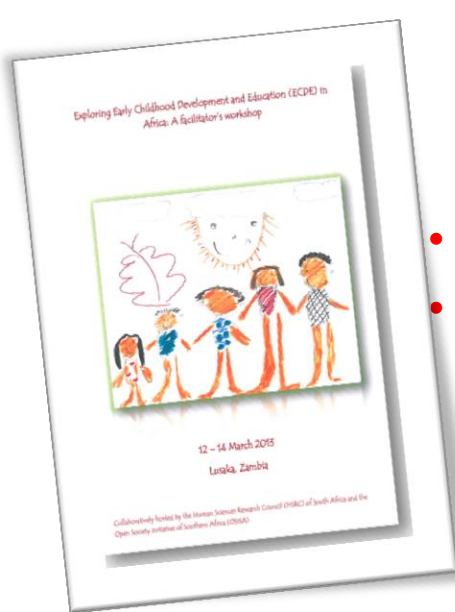
- Strong focus on policies and programmes
- Availability of policies, programmes and services in target community and country as a whole
- Sustainability of these policies and programmes
- The training needs of staff who implement these programmes and services
- Challenges associated with implementing policies and programmes
- Strengths of these policies and programmes
- Needs of young children and pregnant mothers in their community

## Step 2: Country partners' workshop

- Three countries: Swaziland, Malawi and Zambia
- Four country partners per country were invited to participate in the study

### Aims

- To train country partners as data collectors
  - To review tool content and data collection approaches
- The country partners used and reviewed the tool
    - Both the teachers' and the parents' toolsets were perceived as useful
    - The developmental chart to focus on 5 main phases of development
      - 1) pregnancy;
      - 2) the first few weeks of life;
      - 3) the first few months until the child starts walking;
      - 4) the first few years from the time the child starts walking until he/she is ready to start formal school; and
      - 5) school-going age



# Step 2 continued

Key leaders identified	Data collection strategy
- Public Health workers	One interview with a local nurse
- Religious/ spiritual and traditional leaders -	- One interview with a traditional leader - One interview with a religious/spirituals/church leader
- Traditional healers and birth attendants	One interview with a local traditional healer or birth attendant
- Local government representatives responsible for implementation of welfare, education and health services	One interview with a representative that has the most influence in the community you work
- National government personnel responsible for implementation of welfare, education and health services	One interview with a representative that has the most influence in the community you work
- Protection services	One interview with a representative that has the most influence in the community you work

# Step 3: Pilots

- **Pilot 1**

- Conducted in a peri-urban community in KZN, SA to review the teachers' and parents' sections of the tool
  - Review the usefulness of the questions and activities
  - Determine the length of the data collection sessions
- Main outcomes of pilot
  - Developmental chart activity perceived as a workshop activity-response bias
  - Developmental chart- a very lengthy exercise
  - Community mapping activity was well received by both groups but a lengthy exercise with teachers
    - Teachers ' discussion guide does not inquire about the challenges and strengths associated with the ECDE services that they represent



# Step 3: Pilots continued

- **Pilot 1** continued
  - Amendments
    - Replace developmental chart with a 'story-telling' activity
      - Aim of story-telling activity: to reveal commonly held perspectives and practices around ECDE, and services to promote the health and well-being of young children and pregnant mothers
    - Community mapping to be conducted with parent groups but not teacher groups- teachers to list services
    - Pictures to be excluded from the toolkit
      - Images may be prescriptive
    - Add questions on strengths and challenges associated with the ECDE service teachers/caregivers represent



# Step 3: Pilots continued

- **Pilot 2**

- Conducted in a peri-urban community with mothers
  - Review the usefulness of the story-telling activity
- Main outcomes
  - Story-telling activity proved to be useful and revealed cultural/traditional perspectives and practices around ECDE
  - Story-telling activity incorporated into the parents' section of the toolkit
- Full toolkit was then made available to the country partners to review and prepare for data collection phase





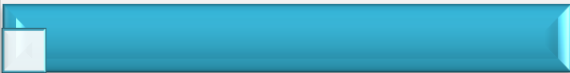


# Step 4: Data collection

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- Data collection sites
  - 2 sites per country
    - Swaziland: Peri-urban communities
    - Zambia: Peri-urban communities
    - Malawi: 1 rural and 1 (poor) urban community
- One country was visited at a time
  - Country partners were responsible for recruiting all participants and data collection sites
  - Meetings were held one day before data collection commenced
  - Country visits lasted around 5 working days
    - Facilitated the FGDs with the parents' and teachers'/ECDE caregivers' groups

# Step 5: Finalising the tool

- Full tool to be reviewed once all the data has been collected
  - Parents and teachers section has been finalised
  - Key leaders data collection still on-going

TOOLSET 1: EXPLORING PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES	TOOLSET 2: EXPLORING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES	TOOLSET 3: EXPLORING KEY LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES
		
<input type="checkbox"/> Mothers of young children who make use of ECDE centres	<input type="checkbox"/> Primary school teachers	<input type="checkbox"/> Public health workers and protection services
<input type="checkbox"/> Mothers of young children who do not make use of ECDE centres	<input type="checkbox"/> ECDE providers/caregivers	<input type="checkbox"/> National government officials
<input type="checkbox"/> Fathers of young children		<input type="checkbox"/> Local government officials
		<input type="checkbox"/> Traditional healers and birth attendants
		<input type="checkbox"/> Traditional and religious leaders

# Concluding comments and lessons

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- Lessons gleaned
  - The process highlighted the importance of participatory methodologies in working in unfamiliar contexts
    - Involve local ECDE experts in the development of tool and provide them with skills to further their own work
    - Identify country sites, samples
    - Review data collection approaches and therefore develop a contextually relevant and culturally sensitive tool
  - The importance of using a combination of established and novice research methodologies to explore ECDE in African communities
  - Qualitative work exploring ECDE should be informed by a conceptual framework that allow researchers to holistically unpack a range of issues including
    - access to ECDE services,
    - indigenous knowledge's around ECDE
    - indigenous caregiving practices that both promote and hinder the development of young children.

# Acknowledgments

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