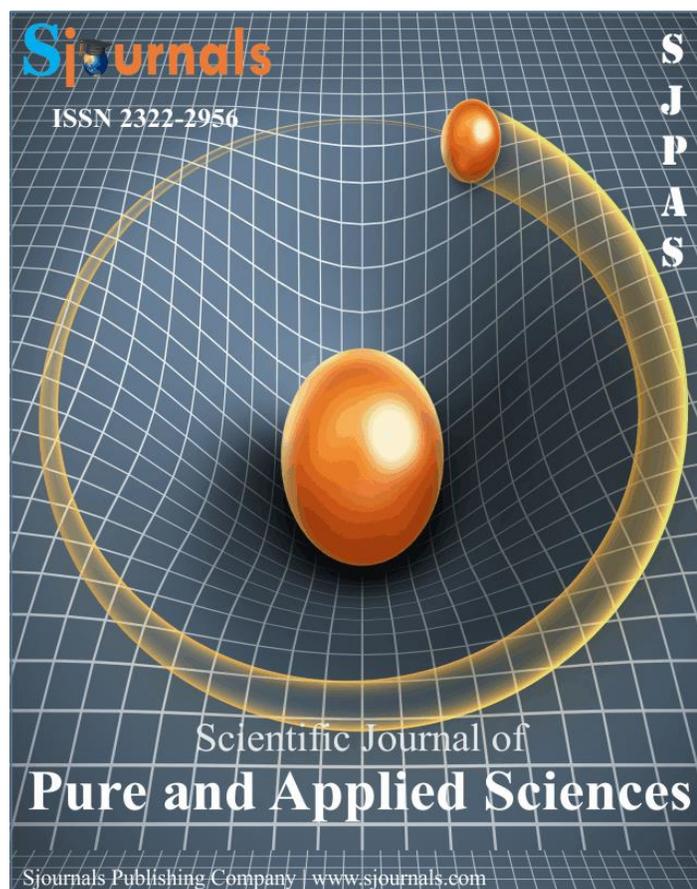


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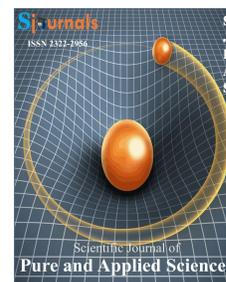
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### Case study

## Investigating the role of community organizations in advancing the early childhood development agenda: A case study of Nhaka Foundation Zimbabwe

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### ABSTRACT

Local organizations may sometimes be deemed as ones that don't know or have the requisite expertise to implement long lasting programs that leave an indelible impact on the communities. Furthermore, local organizations are able to clearly understand the challenges that local people face and therefore work to address these through inclusive community development processes that ensure that community members are involved and their "strengths" appreciated not only in the context of the project but in the well-being of the entire community. This case study looks at the Nhaka Foundation in Zimbabwe, founded in 2007 and working to implement ground up early childhood development (ECD) activities that have sustainability and local ownership as key anchors to programming.

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### 1. Introduction

Nhaka Foundation is a Zimbabwe-based non-governmental organization which has developed and implemented a series of interventions designed to bridge the gap between the government's capabilities and policies mandating the requirement for early childhood development (ECD) programming in primary schools and its ability to fully realize the implementation of such programs. Along with its partners, Nhaka Foundation provides access to education, basic health care and daily sustenance for the orphaned and vulnerable children in the communities it serves. It provides aid and support to ensure the creation of a physical environment conducive to

learning, growth and the optimal development of all children. This case study stems out of an internal impact evaluation process carried out by the organization.

### 1.1. Purpose of study

The internal impact evaluation study was carried out in order to look at the efficacy of the organizations theory of change as well as the impact on the communities served.

### 1.2. Objectives of study

The main of objectives of the study where to look at;

**a) Progress-checking function:** The evaluation assessed the progress that Nhaka Foundation made over the evaluated period in pursuing the targets of implementing its strategic actions (infrastructure development, school development committee (SDC) capacity building and service delivery) and identify the factors that have enabled or frustrated this. Part of the progress assessment relates to how people's lives have evolved (as opposed to remaining stagnant) over the project period due to Nhaka Foundation's efforts. Here the evaluation did a "before-versus-after" analysis, asking its participants where their lives could have been without the project's intervention.

**b) Performance measurement function:** The evaluation assessed the *relevance* of Nhaka Foundation and the evaluated project to the evolving and emerging needs of local populations and their schools. Its relevance was further measured against the standards of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as well as the priorities of the Government of Zimbabwe through MoPSE. The project's operations were further assessed for *efficiency* in view of timelines set for specific milestones, cost-effectiveness of its activities, coordination of its actions at the grassroots and management of financial, human, material and other resources. Jointly, the assessments of the project's efficiency were used to determine its value for money. The *effectiveness* of the project made up the third facet of its performance, and the evaluation here assessed the outcomes of project activities attached to each objective.

**c) Project significance assessment function:** 'Significance' here refers to the mark or legacy that Nhaka Foundation and its programs have left in the target communities, which will be defined by (a) the *impact* or transformation that it brought to schools and communities; (b) the ability of its impacts to outlast the project cycle (*sustainability*), and (c) *lessons* that the project's work has generated for communities and other development agents to learn from. Based on lessons learned from the project's work, the evaluation documented the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and strengths (SWOT) for Nhaka Foundation's guidance in designing similar or related initiatives in future.

**d) Direction-pointing function:** The evaluation used its evidence of implementation progress, project performance and significance assessments to point the directions towards which the organization should progress after the evaluation. Important decisions that the evaluation is expected to inform here include strategies of strengthening Nhaka Foundation's operational systems for project management and coordination, project implementation strategies, beneficiary targeting, and priorities for follow-up interventions.

## 2. Methodology

The research was an internal impact evaluation of the programs that were implemented by Nhaka Foundation in Goromonzi District of Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe. It is against this objective that the research was a qualitative research, which was interactive, creative and interpretive in nature. In carrying out this research, it was important to look at the objectives of Nhaka Foundation, if communities can implement them sustainably and that the programs are conducive to the local context and not imported ideas from western countries on the basis of colonial history as Zimbabwe was once a British colony. Smith (1999) argues that decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonization at various levels and researchers have to have a more critical understanding of underlying assumptions, values and motivations that inform research practices.

### 2.1. Qualitative research design

This study had to be exploratory in nature because a lot needed to be explored in order to evaluate the impact of the programs that were implemented by Nhaka Foundation. A qualitative research design was therefore

preferred for the study, which strongly borrowed from the Focus Group Discussions (FGD), questionnaire guided interviews and in-depth interviews through the involvement of ECD teachers, community leaders, parents and SDC members at large. Data was also gathered through desk review of such key documents like monthly evaluation reports, detailed implementation plan (DIP), baseline study report, minutes of key meetings and workshops and Project Indicator Performance Tracking Tables (PIPTT). Qualitative data informed explanations of the factors that inhibited or enabled program performance.

**Primary and secondary data mix:** Primary data was gathered from the programs beneficiaries, Nhaka Foundation staff, school teachers, different stakeholders and partners while secondary data was extracted from the listed above documents i.e. monthly evaluation reports and minutes of key meetings and workshops and so forth. Secondary data was collected to triangulate and validate the data that came from the primary data sources and vice versa.

**Group and individual engagements:** The project appealed to and involved people collectively, it is against this background that the evaluation also engaged them in groups. Focus Groups Discussion, Participatory simulations and in-depth interviews were conducted collectively.

The following are categories of information sources that this evaluation targeted in order to comprehensively respond to the objectives of the study;

**a) Program participants/beneficiaries:** Program participants and beneficiaries included the school teachers, community members and SDC committee members. These were engaged through focus group discussions (FGDs), questionnaire guided interviews and in-depth interviews. Participatory simulations such as the use of mock gossip, mock letters and mock debates were applied most strongly with this group, where verbatim quotations were captured through note taking and videography for inclusion in the report. The focus of data collection through these methods on these beneficiaries was:

- Beneficiaries' lived experiences in relation to the project's inputs (e.g., whether and how much they benefited from each project activity);
- Beneficiaries recommendations on the organization (how well it can improve its intervention and address their needs)
- Beneficiaries' social and economic characteristics that may have affected the project's effectiveness and impact.

**b) Program implementers:** Nhaka Foundation staff as well as any collaborating NGO's and local volunteers if any were classified as project implementers. Project implementers were involved in the evaluation through structured guided questionnaire interviews and in-depth interviews in order for them to shed more light on the project's design, including such issues like what criteria they used on choosing certain schools over others.

**c) Project stakeholders and/or duty bearers:** Project stakeholders and/or duty bearers encompasses those respondents who are outside both the beneficiary and implementers category but who have special interests in the project's programs as custodians. Examples of such include the school teachers including ECD teachers, school heads, Government ministries and departments the Ministry of Primary Education and Secondary Education (MoPSE), local traditional leaders (notably the Headmen and Chiefs) and other partner NGO's. This group respondent mostly to questions related to the project's relevance and significance, what the organisation did in their community, the changes that were brought to their communities and what they recommend to the organisation, how well the organisation's project aligned or complemented their policies and programs and how the duty bearers supported the organisation's initiatives. In-depth interviews were used to extract data from this group.

**d) Project partners:** The group of people who were regarded as partners by the evaluation include community based organizations (CBO's), individuals, funding partners and other non-governmental organizations. Project partners are defined by the role they play in complementing and supporting the organisation's project either through financial or technical support. Project partners were engaged through in-depth interviews.

**e) Key informants:** Key informants includes those individuals that possesses certain expertise and knowledge on a given technical subject. Key informant in this evaluation included academics, policy making officials (MoPSE),

ECD education experts and others. They were also engaged in the evaluation through in-depth interviews. Information gathered from this group of respondents was on their technical expertise on the issue of ECD learning and education as a whole.

**f) Project documents (secondary data):** To validate data collected from primary data sources, project and organizational documents were also reviewed. Background information of the organisation and the project was collected from these documents. For these purposes, the following documents were requested from Nhaka Foundation and reviewed:

- ◇ Previous mid-term evaluation report (if any)
- ◇ Minutes of key meetings and workshop reports
- ◇ Project annual work plans
- ◇ Monthly, quarterly and annual reports produced over the evaluated period
- ◇ Project monitoring and evaluation reports
- ◇ Any other relevant documents.

## **2.2. Data gathering techniques and tools**

This research relied heavily on primary data that was gathered in the field through focus group discussions (FGD) combined with a set of participatory simulations, in-depth interviews along with photography and videography. A three-day schedule of collecting data using these methods in all three constituencies in the Goromonzi District was set. To validate data collected from primary data sources the evaluation also did a desk review. These methods are described in detail below;

### **2.2.1. Focus group discussions**

Relevant members of the community (parents) were mobilized by the School heads to assemble at schools where the projects were implemented to partake in the Focus Group Discussions. At these points the FGD facilitator and the note taker drove the discussions with the parents in order to exhaustively explore all the information they had concerning Nhaka Foundation and its projects. The discussion would start with a brainstorming session on what Nhaka Foundation was all about in general (their contextual understanding of Nhaka Foundation as an organisation). FGDs were evaluation way of identifying what the parents knew about Nhaka Foundation and their perceptions towards the organization. Contrasting views and opinions were drawn from FGDs i.e. the relevance and significance of the organisation's interventions. FGDs also explored information concerning the exact projects that were implemented by Nhaka Foundation, what was benefitted through the projects by the parents and their children, what were the changes brought through the intervention of Nhaka Foundation and all the challenges they faced before and after the intervention of Nhaka Foundation.

### **2.2.2. In-depth interviews**

In-depth interviews (IDI) were used to gather information from the senior teachers, teachers in charge, ECD teachers, school heads, community leaders (councilors and headmen), SDC members and all other teachers who had the knowledge of the Nhaka Foundation projects. Semi structured IDI guide aided the engagements of these targeted respondents. The interviewers probed further to seek clarity or to deepen the respondents' explanations, using a series of "what", "why", "how", "when" and "where" prompts. Teachers discussed what they knew about Nhaka Foundation and what it did for their schools concerning ECD education. The focus of FGD's on teachers was on their knowledge concerning ECD education (e.g. what an ideal environment for an ECD learner was supposed to be), data on the benefits from Nhaka Foundation projects towards the ECD learners and themselves was also extracted through this tool. What programs were implemented targeted at them were also some of the key issues they discussed through these in-depth interviews. What needed to be done for the ECD learners and for them was also discussed in these interviews. The school heads and SDC members who were around during the time these projects were implemented discussed the full picture of the projects i.e. who were involved in the implementation, how and when it was carried out, some of the challenges they faced towards implementation of the project, how they managed to mobilize the parents and how the school and the parents helped towards the success of the projects. Community leaders like councilors and headmen discussed how they partnered with the organization towards the achievement of its projects and what their perceptions towards the agenda of the organization were.

The research team members steered these interviews like natural conversations to allow respondents the freedom to dictate the flow of discussions.

### **2.2.3. Setting the scene**

Inspiring the work of the Nhaka Foundation is Bronfenbrenner (1979) through the seminal work found in the ecology of human development to support the notion that children develop well in an environment where various systems promote their growth and well-being. This is a critical perspective that can be utilized to support the notion that the child does not exist in a vacuum but that there are several determinants that hinder their growth and development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) further argues that if the ecological framework is not balanced, that is, if there is no link and interaction between all the systems then child development is at risk. Nhaka Foundation through its programming has worked to make a deliberate connection of the systems that surround the child to ensure that access to the resources they need for them to develop is made easier particularly in communities hard hit by poverty and lack of access to basic services.

Rogoff (2003) argues that human development in cultural communities should be supported through initiatives that encompass child rearing, social relations, gender roles, attachment theories and cognitive development. In addition to this, the Convention on the Rights of a Child (UN, 1989) provides cover for all the children from around the world to access any and every right that should be accessible by them for the purposes of ensuring that their lives are dignified. The UN member states through this convention affirm that the family unit particularly children should be accorded protection and assistance so that they are able to be responsible citizens of their countries and of the world. The Convention also recognizes that children should be brought up in an environment of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom and equality where they are respected and are accorded what they might need for them to be happy.

To further give wings to the work done by the Nhaka Foundation through its programs, the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004) highlights that young children experience their world as an environment of relationships and these affect virtually all aspects of their development. Nurturing, stable, caring and involved relationships with adults help children in the early years contribute to secure attachments leading to love of learning, a comfortable sense of oneself, positive social skills and multiple successful relationships at later ages. These are critical elements of child development and organizations have to create programs that ensure the development of children through addressing all the facets of their development.

### **2.3. Nhaka foundation program areas**

In order to address the developmental needs of a child holistically, Nhaka Foundation worked out of a theory of change that was premised on increasing access to education and retaining children within the school system for longer through the following programs;

#### **1. Early childhood development classroom and playground renovation**

Nhaka Foundation partnered with government established primary schools in rural areas, parents and caregivers at these schools to create Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centers through the renovation of dilapidated classrooms. The classroom floors, windows, doors and roofs are repaired or replaced, and a fresh coat of paint is applied inside and out. Each Center had its own unique personality as the exteriors are then finished with hand-painted, age-appropriate drawings by local artists. As a part of the ECD center renovations program, Nhaka Foundation worked with the families and members of the community to plan and build, expand or repair the playgrounds and equipment using readily available and safe materials. Once restored to a like-new condition, the Centers were officially incorporated into the primary school system and sustained by the community through elected Pre-School Management Committees thus ensuring the children will continue to have clean and safe spaces in which to work and play.

#### **2. Parenting education**

With the support of school and community leaders Nhaka Foundation facilitated meetings with the parents and caregivers of children enrolled in the ECD Centers it serves. The meetings are designed to educate, support and engage stakeholders in finding solutions to building a better future for the children. Heavy emphasis was placed on building capacity and instilling a sense of community ownership and responsibility. The meetings covered various topics to include the importance of birth registration, immunizations, health record maintenance,

traditional games, the importance of mother tongue language, using locally available resources for play as well as parental involvement in the education of children. Nhaka Foundations' parenting education initiative strives to provide caregivers with the information and tools needed to better look after the children in their communities and also makes available a platform for voicing concerns and obtaining support from the school, the community, and the government.

### **3. Teacher training**

Nhaka Foundation works with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) to facilitate the ongoing training and development of the ECD teachers working in the Centers it serves. On a rotating basis, team Nhaka members accompany District Trainers to the field to monitor and evaluate teacher performance. Each teacher is observed at work, given an opportunity to ask questions and express concerns, and provided feedback for improvement. Following the classroom observations, the trainers craft and submit written reports that are shared with MoPSE and Nhaka Foundation. The program supported the teachers with increased skills and tools and at the same time promoted a cooperative environment to share information and resources, one that would result in a quality education and meet the developmental needs of the children.

### **4. Homegrown school feeding**

In response to the needs of the rural communities and the children it served, Nhaka Foundation developed an in-school feeding program. While Nhaka Foundation's work was focused on feeding children enrolled in ECD Centers, it simply could not ignore the remaining primary school students who were not part of the program and not accessing food elsewhere. Thus, the program provided sustenance each day in the form of a protein drink for all of the students in all of the primary schools it serves. In order to ensure sustainability of the feeding program at a community level, Nhaka Foundation partnered with another organization to establish nutritional gardens in schools and improve the children's nutrition through growing vegetables which would be used for the feeding program. Nhaka Foundation at each school aims to provide a permanent water source through the drilling of a borehole or deep well, establish a sustainable school garden by purchasing fencing materials, garden tools, organic fertilizers among other requirements listed by the community through an appreciative inquiry process.

### **5. Health assessment**

Nhaka Foundation as part of this model partners with the Ministry of Health and Child Care, District Medical Offices and local health clinic practitioners to facilitate health assessments of the children enrolled in the ECD Centers it serves. On a rotating basis, Nhaka Foundation staff accompany nurses from the rural health clinics to each school to evaluate the most basic and immediate health concerns facing the children. The assessments capture baseline information on height, weight, heart rate, immunizations, and personal hygiene as well as screen for common conditions such as ringworms, scabies, skin infections and cavities. The program is designed as a starting point to address basic medical conditions and to educate parents, caregivers and the communities on infant and child health care issues and preventions.

### **6. Psycho social support**

Nhaka Foundation works to provide an environment that allows children to grow and be assured of a bright and better future. The psycho-social support program addresses the children's emotional, social, mental, spiritual, intellectual and cultural needs—all essential elements of positive human development. Nhaka Foundations brings in both community and out of community facilitators to address identified topics such as home-school relationships, cultural and mental awareness among others as per interest from the children served.

### **2.4. Nature of operational landscape**

Goromonzi is a rural community 35 miles southeast of the country's capital city of Harare and covers an area of 35 square miles. It has an approximate population of 224,987. The people who live in the region are principally from the Shona tribe. Until 1999 the economy and many of the jobs of Goromonzi were based on commercial farms growing flowers and gourmet vegetables in greenhouses for export to Europe. These commercial farms are no longer operational due to the government land redistribution policy. Local unemployment is at 87% or more. Traditional farmers work on smallholdings growing corn, pumpkins and other crops that are dependent on rainfall. There are 66 schools in the Goromonzi area: 38 primary and 28 secondary schools that serve 6729 students, ages 5

to 22. There are 50 or more students in each class with one teacher. Textbooks, workbooks and other learning materials are noticeably absent. The school libraries are sparse. The cost of school fees, uniforms and textbooks are out of the reach of many families, so it is now unusual for a child to attend school without interruption or to complete all of their schooling.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Organizational relevance

The evaluation deemed the organization as relevant because of the following:

##### a) The organization's programs addressed genuine needs

The programs that were implemented by Nhaka Foundation addressed genuine needs for the schools in Goromonzi District. The Headmaster at Govera Primary school to signify the relevance of the projects by Nhaka Foundation was quoted during the interview saying *"Our school was nearly closed due to our poor classroom blocks which were not conducive for learners, but Nhaka Foundation managed to rescue us, it helped us to construct all these new blocks for the whole school and they should continue to do what they are doing not just for us but for other schools."* All schools which benefited from the projects of Nhaka Foundation were in need of classroom blocks and some of the services it provided like the supplementary feeding program. *"As much as we have School development plans (SDP's) we cannot afford to do some of the development programs in the plans like construction of blocks, due to low school fees rates we are forced as a school to downsize or totally abandon some of our development plans"*, this was according to one of the teachers interviewed at Rusike Primary school.

One of the parents who were part of the Focus Group Discussion at St Dominic said, *"Some of us are very poor we are not able to provide adequate food for our children, sometimes we only afford one meal per day failing to provide our children with food to eat at school during lunch time, however the intervention of Nhaka Foundation managed to lessen the burden for us"*. Another respondent said, *"Due to the provision of maheu and porridge by Nhaka Foundation at schools, sometimes our kids would come back home full. They would proceed with their playing and not bother us for food"*. This signifies the relevance of the feeding program that was being delivered by Nhaka Foundation.

One of the projects the organisation implemented was renovation of ECD blocks, it assisted schools in the painting and drawing of ECD blocks. *"ECD learners learn more through visuals, therefore the intervention of Nhaka Foundation through paintings and drawings made it easier for us to teach them, they are able to know some of the animals through drawings even without seeing the live animal"*, this was according to one ECD teacher at Kadyamadare Primary school.

Evaluation findings showed that most schools before the intervention of Nhaka Foundation did not have experienced ECD teachers. Almost all the schools had unquestionable enormity need for skilled ECD teachers, however, the government did not have the capacity to supply them with adequate teachers. After the ECD program was made mandatory by the government, the need for skilled ECD teachers skyrocketed which left many schools incapacitated in terms of service delivery to the ECD learners. Therefore, Nhaka Foundation in partnership with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education intervened providing with trainers. It is clear that this initiative addressed a need.

Other intervention schools were in dire need of clean safe water before the intervention of Nhaka Foundation. Borehole drilling and pump provision was one of the programs facilitated by Nhaka Foundation. Many schools in Goromonzi district were so in need of clean and safe water sources according to the research findings. Munyawiri Primary school according to the headmaster did not have access to clean and safe water, however Nhaka Foundation managed to drill a borehole for them which he said was a relief and life saver. Also at Kachuta Primary school the organisation managed to drill an electric borehole.

This above evaluation findings clearly shows that Nhaka Foundation projects addressed genuine needs of the schools.

##### b) The organization's programs complemented school development plans (SDP's)

The Headmaster of Govera Primary school outlined that as a school they are mandated to have School Development Plans (SDP's). As a school they should plan what they are going to do towards school development, it might be a year plan or more. Govera Primary plans involved infrastructure development specifically classroom

and toilet construction (all their classroom blocks were in shambles), however the school according to the research findings was facing financial problems to implement their developmental plans. Poverty among parents was one of the barriers affecting the school towards achievement of their plans. According to the headmaster an average of 25% parents pay fees which means the school was not capacitated to construct anything without outside help. Nhaka Foundation managed to help the school to construct all its classroom blocks. Building resuscitation at Kachuta primary school was also among the list in the development plans and Nhaka laid a hand in achieving this goal. The fact that the organization complemented the Schools programs not replacing them cemented its relevance for the locals. It played a complementary role for many schools, some had plans for the renovations of the ECD block that is painting and drawings but they were not financially capable which made Nhaka Foundation to chip in and help them achieve their developmental plans.

**c) The organization’s programs aligned with government’s policies and programs**

Some of the projects that were implemented by Nhaka Foundation aligned with government’s programs and policies. One of the ECD teachers at Kadyamadare said, *“The government has now mandated the ECD program primary school is now being attended 9 years, no child is allowed to go to Grade 1 without attending ECD for 2 years”*. This clearly shows how the government is now prioritising the ECD program, therefore intervention by Nhaka Foundation through building and renovations of ECD blocks aligned perfectly with the policy of the government. ECD teacher training also complemented the policy, workshops that were facilitated by Nhaka Foundation towards ECD teachers training improved the quality of education for the ECD learners. The forged partnership between the organisation and the government towards teacher trainings is evident enough that the organization’s programs aligned well with the government’s policy and programs. Nhaka Foundation in partnership with the parents managed to establish ECD Outdoor Playing Centers at many schools. Schools like Kadyamadare and Rusike were some of the beneficiaries of the program. The new curriculum mandated by the government requires the ECD learners to have OPC’s therefore their establishment by Nhaka Foundation meant that the organisation’s project aligned well with the government’s policies and programs.

The government was facilitating the feeding program through the provision of maize for schools however relish was not being provided. Nhaka to complement the government came up with the idea of nutritional gardens for the schools to self-sustain themselves when it comes to relish. *“The government was providing us with maize without relish therefore we were facing a challenge of unavailability of relish for the learners, however through the introduction of nutritional gardens by Nhaka foundation we are now able to provide relish ourselves, they are now eating new and health vegetables like lettuce and spinach they did not know before”*, this was according to the headmaster of Munyawiri Primary school. Complementing the policies and programs of the government clearly means that the organisation’s programs were so relevant.

**a) Program partially fulfilled the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s)**

**Table**

How the organization fulfilled some of the SDG’S?

<b>Structural development goals</b>	<b>What was done by Nhaka Foundation</b>
<b>SDG 1- End poverty</b>	The organization partly managed to achieve this SDG. The parents were taught new skills of farming by the organization which has a potential to boost their economic status in the long run. Their income through farming is likely to increase (few farmers are already enjoying increase profits from farming due to their new skills), however many are still living in poverty due to reasons beyond the organization’s scope like drought.
<b>SDG 2-Zero hunger</b>	Nutritional gardens, feeding program and new skills of farming were meant to eliminate hunger. ECD learners benefited from the feeding program, however in many schools the program stopped and some nutritional gardens are no longer functional.
<b>SDG 3-Good health and Well-being</b>	A lot was done by the organization when it comes to health and well-being of the beneficiaries. Hygiene trainings towards parents were facilitated by the organization. Provision of nutritious food like maheu and porridge was also part of the organization program. Health assessments towards the ECD learners, however the program stopped.
<b>SDG 4-Ensure inclusive and</b>	Infrastructure development made education accessible for the ECD learners and other beneficiaries. The organization was involved in capacity building for the ECD teachers to

equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	ensure quality education. Through workshops the organization was very instrumental in teaching ECD teachers new techniques on how to teach and handle ECD learners effectively.
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<b>SDG 6-Clean water and sanitation</b>	To ensure accessibility of clean water and proper sanitation the organization was so instrumental in the drilling of boreholes and construction of toilets in some schools, however not so many schools benefited from the borehole program and also the toilets are not enough in so many schools.
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**b) Nhaka Foundation’s programs offered holistic solutions to local ECD challenges**

The program by Nhaka Foundation was a holistic solution as it managed to solve many challenges that were inter linked. Apart from constructing ECD blocks for the ECD learners, the organization was aware that there was need for training of the ECD teachers. Teacher training and ECD blocks construction thereby complemented each other as they ensured quality education for the ECD learners. The organization facilitated nutritional gardens and trained the parents on new skills of how to manage the gardens sustainably. The drilling of boreholes managed to solve the problem of water unavailability, water borne diseases that would have emanated from drinking unsafe water and it also managed to deal with the problem of regular teacher transfers. According to the respondents the feeding program managed to solve the problem of food stealing by other learners.



**Diagram:** An example to illustrate how the organization’s programs were holistic.

The diagram above shows how infrastructure development responded to a lot of challenges that were being faced by the intervention schools. Drilling of boreholes and construction of quality classroom blocks and toilets managed to solve the problem of teacher transfers, increased the enrolment rates, and improved the quality of education and health for the learners.

**c) The programs enjoyed local ownership**

The organization enjoyed the buy in of communities, the parents and the community leaders were part of many programs that were implemented by Nhaka Foundation. Nhaka Foundation was very aware of the importance of community ownership therefore it involved them from planning to implementation. The organization engaged the SDC’s to help them mobilize parents for their much needed help in the implementation of the programs. The parents were heavily involved in the provision of locally available resources like poles and

tyres for the ECD Outdoor centers, they provided labour and bricks for the blocks construction in some schools. They were also heavily involved in the establishment of nutritional gardens through provision of labor. The willingness of parents to take responsibility and ownership for these projects meant that the programs by Nhaka Foundation were so relevant for them. Some parents currently are still volunteers working in nutritional gardens.

**d) The programs were tailor-made according to each school needs**

The organization did not offer a blanket solution to all the schools but it intervened according to their specific needs. Some schools like Munyawiri were in dire need of safe and clean water therefore the organization channeled its resources towards borehole drilling. Govera was in need of classroom blocks and toilets therefore the organization channeled most of its resources towards that need. It intervened in accordance with each school's need. This means its interventions were relevant as it addressed these schools priorities.

**e) The organization partially addressed some of the root causes of low enrolment rates**

The evaluation found that one of the reasons why there were low enrolment rates was because the parents were reluctant to send their children to ECD learning as they did not know its value. To counter this problem the organisation invested heavily in awareness campaigns and workshops to educate the parents on the importance of ECD education. Poverty among parents was also one of the reasons why they were not sending their children to ECD, therefore the organisation engaged them in income generating projects. Enrollments increases were noticed in many schools, according to the respondents this was partly due to Nhaka Foundation projects like the feeding program. Improved pass rates was also partly linked to the programs of Nhaka Foundation.

**3.2. Organizational effectiveness**

The evaluation measured the effectiveness of the organization by asking three principal questions.

- a) What was the prevailing situation before the organization's intervention?
- b) What programs were implemented in respond to the challenges?
- c) What situation resulted from the organization's efforts or what situation now prevails as a result of which actions of the organization?

The Nhaka Foundation identified and responded to a number of challenges namely the absence of infrastructure (classrooms, kitchens and toilets), poverty, lack of resources to cater for the ECD learners, lack of qualified ECD teachers, food insecurity, lack of parental interest in ECD children education, safe and clean water unavailability. The evaluation found these challenges to be related in a causal chain that culminated in low enrollments. For example, poverty, lack of parental interest, lack of qualified teachers and the absence of classrooms was found to result in low ECD learners' enrollment rates. Likewise, food insecurity and lack of resources to cater for the ECD learners had the same effect. The H framework described above was used to rate the Goromonzi project's effectiveness.

**3.3. Organizational efficiency**

The evaluation's impression of the organization's operations and their efficiency can be summarised as follows:

**a)** Implementing programs in Goromonzi North, South, West and Domboshava, yet with an administration and senior management in Harare needed highly efficient communication and coordination. In line with this, the evaluation concludes that Nhaka Foundation was efficient towards coordination and communication between the implementation team in Goromonzi and the Harare senior and management team. Smooth flow of supplies was also realised to the field team, they never missed the deadlines. The implementing team in Goromonzi regularly updated the Harare staff on the day to day running of programs. The organization also maintained the field officer in Goromonzi which added to the efficiency of all the operations in the field, *"I am the one who mobilises the community with the help of local leaders and I am also responsible for the smooth coordination between the organisation and the beneficiaries, for example I report to the organisation and the community whether the project is going as per plan ,the challenges being faced and also I impart knowledge to the local communities to enable their involvement in the implementation of the projects"* (Nhaka Foundation Field Officer)

**b)** The organisation faced a challenge of limited time in implementing some of its projects. To achieve its goals in time the organisation worked hand in hand with the communities (the community provided with labour

and locally available resources like bricks, sand and quarry stones). The construction of four classroom blocks and 2 Blair toilets and the Outdoor Center was completed within four months at Govera primary school due to the efficiency of parents and the organisation together. To maximise the efficiency of parents towards establishment of ECD centers the organisation invested heavily in capacity building first, equipping them with the necessary knowledge that was required, for e.g. the use of locally available resources in establishing ECD outdoor centers was an idea developed by the organisation, *"We were not aware that the ECD Outdoor Center can be established using wooden poles and old tyres, but when Nhaka Foundation came they taught and encouraged us on how well to use our own locally available resources"*, this was said by one of the parents at Rusike primary school.

c) Regular meetings and strategic planning sessions was meant to keep the staff updated and focused on the vision and goals of the organization. These meetings and strategic plans enabled the smooth running of programs and improved the efficiency of the staff as they would discuss the challenges they were facing and brainstorm solutions to move forward.

d) Most roads in Goromonzi rural areas are difficult to navigate whether it is during the dry seasons or the wet seasons. However, despite these difficulties the organization managed to complete its tasks in time especially the construction of classroom blocks and Blair toilets which were time demanding.

### **3.4. Organizational significance**

The evaluation found that the programs that were implemented by Nhaka Foundation in Goromonzi district were significant to the ECD learners, parents/guardians, communities, ECD teachers and SDC committee members gauging by the sustainability of some of the organization's programs and the impact realized.

Project impact encompasses the long term changes that were brought about by the organization's intervention whether socially, economically or environmentally. The organization's programs can impact people's lives directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally. A project can also have both positive and negative changes to peoples' social, economic and environmental lives. The following are some of the impacts that the evaluation realised:

#### **i) Cementing the relations between communities and schools**

Nhaka Foundation did not implement its projects in isolation rather it engaged different partners and stakeholders as well as the beneficiaries. The organisation in all its projects engaged the traditional leaders notably the headmen and councilors. SDC committee members and the parents were largely involved in implementation of all programs. The success of the organization's projects were largely due to the involvement of the local people. Schools and the parents were working hand in hand in all programs that were implemented by Nhaka Foundation, this cemented the relations between the community at large and the schools. The parents were motivated by the organisation to take ownership of the programs that were being implemented. Most schools' nutritional gardens and playing centers are being monitored and taken care of by volunteers (parents to be specific).

The awareness campaigns that targeted the parents made them realize that they were owners of the schools. School heads used to have a problem of parents isolating themselves from school developmental work however the intervention of Nhaka Foundation reduced this challenge, *"Nhaka Foundation has not come back for a long time but we are still volunteering to clean the classrooms, maintain the playing grounds and take care of the nutritional garden because we were reminded that it is our school"*, (one of the parents at St Francis Udebwe Primary school). The construction of new blocks at some of the schools restored trust and hope for the parents, this can be noticed by the increment of enrollments after and during the intervention of Nhaka Foundation.

#### **ii) Health improvements and prevention of potential water borne diseases**

Health awareness campaigns, construction of toilets, feeding programs, boreholes drilling and health assessments visits were some of the intervention programs that were implemented by the organisation. Health awareness campaigns raised awareness of parents on some of the preventative measures towards certain diseases. The introduction of the feeding programme towards ECD learners targeted to reduce hunger and improve health of the ECD learners, food insecurity was one of the serious challenges that was being faced by most parents therefore the introduction of the feeding program had a positive impact towards the health of the ECD learners. Maheu was one of the beverages that the organisation provided which was deemed nutritious preventing them from malnutrition. Construction of toilets partially solved the problem of open defecation. Borehole drilling improved access to clean and safe water preventing the potential outbreak of water-borne diseases like cholera and typhoid. The organisation with the help of local clinics and nurses did regular health assessments mostly on

ECD learners, the organisation would provide medication to learners in need which was so important as most clinics were incapacitated towards medication provision. However, for the health impacts to be fully realised a lot still needs to be done for example there is need for construction of toilets suitable for the ECD learners in most schools to solve the problem of open defecation, some of the ECD learners fear to use adult toilets ending up contaminating forests and open fields around those toilets. Most schools are still in need of clean and safe water sources.

### **iii) Economic empowerment**

One of the problems that were being faced by all schools was failure by parents to pay school fees due to poverty. The organisation to avert the challenge introduced new ways of farming (for example farmers were encouraged to use organic fertilisers in place of chemical fertilisers which is deemed cheap and yet effective. The organisation introduced new types of plants like carrots and onions and taught the parents how to grow them, *"I am now a genius when it comes to farming, because of the new knowledge that was imparted by Nhaka Foundation, I am now able to provide food for my family and sell surplus for money"*, (one of the parents at Kachuta Primary). The organisation also taught the parents agro business especially market linkages. To some extent the initiatives boosted the economic status of the parents, however most parents are still living in poverty as they realise small profits from farming mostly due to continuous droughts they experience.

### **iv) Complementing government ministries and departments towards fulfillment of their mandates**

The projects complemented and supported some of the government's programs and plans. Government policy has made ECD learning compulsory therefore the construction of ECD blocks, training of ECD teachers and parents about the importance of ECD made it possible for the government to partially fulfil its mandate towards social development. The organisation also tellingly complemented the government in some of the projects it was implementing for example the feeding program and furniture provision. One of the schools nearly closed due to poor infrastructure, however the government alone could not resuscitate the buildings which led to the intervention of Nhaka Foundation to construct new buildings. RDC, MoPSE (Ministry of Primary and Secondary schools) and MoHCW (Ministry of Health and Child Welfare) were all complemented with organization's projects.

### **v) Quality enhancement at schools**

The organization managed to bridge the gaps between schools in Goromonzi district, some schools were far much behind others in terms of infrastructure and service delivery which was problematic in some instances. Teacher retention for schools who had poor environments was nearly impossible, however the intervention of Nhaka Foundation in infrastructure development especially classroom blocks and borehole drilling and teacher training partially solved the problem. However, a lot still needs to be done in order to fully improve the quality of these schools in Goromonzi district for example cottage construction is a priority in many schools, *"The school is not able to accommodate all the teachers, we have 28 teachers with 12 houses, in 2017 I lost 9 teachers who transferred to better schools without any replacement"* (headmaster of Rusike Primary school).

### **vi) Quality education enhancement**

The intervention of Nhaka Foundation enhanced quality education, ECD learners benefited from equipment they require for their learning. ECD learners learn through play therefore Outdoor play centers and toys are important towards their learning. The organisation provided the ECD learners with charts (ECD learners understands concepts more effectively through visuals than lectures). ECD teacher training by the organisation in partnership with the government also enhanced quality education. According to Grade 1 teachers, Grade 1 learners who have passed through ECD A and B are easy to teach and they understand new concepts better than those who did not attend ECD. There is a great possibility of increased pass rates in the long run as ECD is the proper foundation for every child's development. However, quality education to be fully realised a lot still needs to be done for example there is a dire need of workbooks and reading books for the ECD learners at every school, parents and schools are all failing to provide the kids with these books, *"The ECD learners are required to bring 8 books which are very costly to us parents, we cannot afford to buy these book which are being sold at 16 dollars each and the schools do not want photocopies"*. Enrollment increment has led to high teacher-learner ratio, therefore there is need for more ECD teachers to comply with expected teacher-student ratio thereby enhancing quality education. There is also need for the expansion of Outdoor ECD playing centers and playing equipment increment. Rural learners in most of these schools do not have access to ICT technology (an area which needs serious attention).

#### 4. Discussion

Child development in Africa does not happen in a vacuum and it is therefore very important to be able to look at how communities can have capacity promotion initiatives that build up on their participation, local knowledge and desire for their children to do well. The case study has also shown that it is important to have holistic and integrated approaches to addressing child development at a community level.

Some of challenges were beyond the scope of the project which made it impossible to fully impact some areas for example quality education enhancement could not be fully achieved because the intervention schools lacked some stationery required by ECD learners like workbooks and ICT facilities. However, it is also important to recognize that quality should be looked at from the context of the communities served and not outside definitions. Moss and Pence (1994) take both an evaluative and analytic assessment of the meaning of quality and juxtapose this with various programs situated in different countries. They argue that quality should be defined by those that are having the lived experiences and realities of the programs or lifestyles they are leading. Defining quality therefore means that we have to understand what people, communities and societies go through and be able to create a value chain of how quality is created by them and for them. Through this study, the communities were able to define the quality themselves and this was seen through their participation in the various program areas.

#### 5. Conclusion

Serpell and Nsamenang (2014) argue that the design of ECCE services in Africa should focus on local strengths including indigenous games and music, emphasize community-based provision, incorporate participation by pre-adolescent children; use indigenous African languages and local funds of knowledge; and accord priority to inclusion of children with special needs. These aspects ensure that the communities weave a strong fabric of support for their young children. The voices of the locals or African communities become drowned when Western world headquartered non-profits bring to local communities what they call a "best practice" to the table. This presupposes that local organizations cannot work within locally defined parameters of quality.

This case study amplifies the fact that with enough resources local organizations can build upon the locally sustainable programs that are supported and owned by the communities way after funding has lapsed. Communities should be engaged, make decisions and be involved every step of the way when designing, implementing and evaluating community development projects.

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