Learning under the Tree
An evaluation of the Skillful Parenting Program in West Kenya ICS

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Evaluating Skillful Parenting Program in West Kenya

ICS

Full Evaluation Report

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Summary

The central purpose of this evaluation is to determine if and how the Skillful Parenting Program (SPP) effects the parenting of its participants. In addition, it aims to determine how the parenting program was adapted to the West Kenyan setting, and how the specific content and processes of the SPP determine the program's effects and outcome. Integral to this research was to understand the context in which in the program was implemented, and discover how the program both influences, and is influenced by the local ideas and values. The ultimate goal is to understand how the program works and why it has the effects that it has, both in an effort to determine its effectiveness and discern how the program can be up scaled beyond its specific context.

The results show that parents become to feel more competent as parents, and report better communication with their spouse and child after having participated with the SPP in West Kenya. The role division between parents has changed, where father and mother now share more in tasks. Parenting is still found to be difficult, but parents say they feel like they are better parents than they were before the training. In addition, parents include more elements and traits into the definition of parenting. These new ideas are not experienced to be conflicting with the parents' ideas about parenting pre-training, and primarily expand on their earlier definition of parenting. For parents in more extreme situations, such as situations of excessive violence in the family, the program is found to be less effective.

It is likely that the connection to local definitions of parenting has made the program relatable and accessible for parents. The participants attribute great value to the discussion of gender roles, which has led to changes for both mothers and fathers. This effect is also closely related to program's focus on family relations, which teaches parents to communicate differently with their children, and with each other. Parents report that they have changed the manner in which they discipline their children, and say they use techniques such as listening to better understand their children's needs, which results in improved relationships. Aside from this improvement, parents experience more control over their children as well, allowing parents to be more informed about their children's lives and making the children easier to direct. By setting up a group based program, which stimulates discussions amongst its participants, parents can engage in the exchange of ideas and practices between each other and the facilitator. Parents are not told what to do, are being respected in regards to their own values, and are presented with ideas and practices that they can implement

based on their own preference. This methodology seems to foster ownership and a tendency amongst parents to spread the newly learned knowledge and skills spontaneously among other community members, which has potential to result in a community wide and sustainable change in the domain of family dynamics and parenting.

When considering the upscaling of the Skillful parenting program, it can be said that the program is characterized by several distinctive key elements that lend itself for a more general dissemination in de African continent, such as the interactive formats, its inclusive approach as well as the possibility to include notions of parenthood that fit the local context . The program relies on participants' input as well as on local facilitators to formulate and contextualize the training's content, inherently strengthening the adaptability of the program itself. The specific adaptations made in this regard may be less applicable within different contexts, as these are relatable to specific (Western) Kenyan issues and concepts related to specific cultural norms and social issues

Content

Introduction

This document is the full report of the evaluation of the Skillful Parenting program by ICS as implemented in Kenya, and was carried out by Utrecht University, the Netherlands. The goal of the evaluation was to investigate the effectiveness of the skillful parenting program in its specific setting. The field work that was carried out for this evaluation took place in the areas of Busia and Kakamega county, West Kenya.

Even though many different parenting programs have been implemented and evaluated over the world, including in the US, Great Britain and Western Europe, as well as in Australia (Clarke & Churchill, 2012), considering a similar parenting program within the distinct context of Kenya is a different matter. Regarding the skillful parenting program by ICS both the intervention and its setting are significantly different from 'standard' skillful parenting programs. In order to be able to investigate the effectiveness of a parenting program, it is important to understand the context in which the parenting practices of the target group take place, for instance by identifying which ideas and practices are prevalent within the respective context. This dimension of understanding local norms and values will therefore be a substantial part of this report, as they allow one to understand how changes reported by respondent be must be seen against the general background of cultural and social issues related to parenting in the region. This document will primarily describe the findings of the research, with little emphasis on methodology. The components of the report are organized according to the main research activities: survey & interview; and in-depth interview.

1. Parenting in Kenya

Before discussing the research and its results we will briefly review family life and parenting in (West) Kenya from the literature, highlighting elements of what parenting entails within the research setting, as well as which issues and challenges parents in these communities face. This information will allow one to better understand the underlying reasons for the implementation of the program. This review will also serve as a framework to better understand the research data presented later in this document.

Families in Kenya

Here follows a brief overview of 'traditional' family life and parenting within (Western) Kenya. It is an illustration of relatively conservative family dynamics. The overview primarily serves as a basis to understand traditional family life in Western Kenya. Many contemporary influences such as globalization have influenced this traditional life. These influences and changes will be discussed later under *challenges*.

When speaking about parenthood and parenting in Kenya, it must be acknowledged that one is addressing a society that can be split up into many different tribes and clans. There are a total of 42 ethnic communities in Kenya, which are characterized by (partly) distinguished cultural practices (Mburugu & Adams, 2005). These communities mostly reside in areas that are considered their so called 'ancestral land', such as the areas around lake Victoria for the Luo and the lands in the Rift Valley of Western Kenya for the Kipsigis. Because of internal migration however, these days ethnic communities are more mixed (especially in the urban areas) (Akinyi, Fiti & Iasser, 2013).

Kenyan family units consist of next to the so called 'nuclear' family, also of an extended family. This is especially true for families that live in the rural areas, which are relatively isolated from the more urbanized regions. Traditionally, the family lives together on a 'homestead', where the oldest man ('mzee') acts as the head of the household. He ideally resides there with his wife and sons. When a woman in these areas marries, she is expected to move into the house of the man and live with her new husband and his extended family. This means the mzee's own daughters are married away, and his daughters in law live with his sons. In addition, depending on the tribe the family belongs to, the man can have one or multiple wives, although polygamy is not highly common in Kenya (16% of the national marriages) (Wilson & Ngige, 2005).

Within the Kenyan household, in most cases, there is a clear distinction between the tasks

and roles of both the men and women. In most cases the Kenyan men regard themselves as 'the head of the household', making them the leaders, guardians, and providers for the family, and are also recognized as such (Mburugu & Adams, 2005).

Within marriage it is regarded the wife's task to be a 'good African woman', implying she keeps her household together, makes sure things are in order, raises the children, makes sure she is a good host, and produces as many children as possible. From a western perspective the role division based on gender can take on extreme forms, where a man cannot remove a pan from the fire (despite the fact that the food is burning) because it is the wife's task to do so (Mburugu & Adams, 2005; Wilson & Ngige, 2005).

As a married couple, man and wife are expected to bare or even adopt at least one child, in an effort to expand the family (Wilson & Ngige, 2005). Children are perceived of great value because they contribute to family life as well as continue the family lineage (Njue, Rombo, & Ngige, 2007). With such great emphasis on the importance of family, it is perceived that an adult person would be considered incomplete without having children (Wilson & Ngige, 2005).

Children are considered of great value given how offspring is related to lineage and it often occurs that marriage is aimed at securing offspring, over the interest of romantic love. This is tied to the idea that being married and having children is integral to the identity of being an adult, and that many of the rights associated with adulthood are achieved through marriage. This is especially important for younger parents, who often desire the transition to adulthood and autonomy, which is primarily achieved through marriage and having children. Within this context, having a family becomes instrumental to coming of age (Karp & Masolo, 2000; Njue, Rombo, & Ngige, 2007).

Historically and across almost all tribes, Kenyan families have been large. However, the desired number of children has consistently declined from 6.2 in 1977, to 5.8 in 1984, 4.4 in 1989, and 3.8 in 1999. An explanation for this trend are both the strong economic and social strains as well as the influences of the Kenya mass media, which has actively advertised the many merits of smaller families versus the challenges of larger families in modern Kenyan society. However, more recent data show that the Western Province had a total fertility rate of 6.4 and 5.6 in the respective years, indicating that not all family sizes are dwindling (Mburugu & Adams, 2005).

Being a Parent and raising Children

These relatively large families result in the parents' responsibility of care over multiple children, which usually befalls on the mother. Childcare is perceived as a challenging task for women with young children, and about 75% of women see raising their offspring as difficult, especially amongst rural respondents (Mburugu & Adams, 2005).

In a stark contrast with Western notions of childhood, in rural Kenya children are originally not perceived as agents and are not attributed much personal thoughts and emotions. Even if the child's experiences are considered, they are not taken very much into account as independent agents (Adams, 1983). Instead, children are viewed to be economical assets, contributing to the household by doing labor and chores, which are often selected and delegated based on gender roles (Wilson & Ngige, 2005).

As with most tasks, mothers and fathers are customarily implicitly assigned distinct, gender related, child rearing roles. Usually mothers are charged with children's basic training, and with taking care of the infants, up to the moment they can operate independently. Before becoming independent, children mostly reside at home with their mothers who provide care for the children and the household (Akinyi, Fiti & lasser, 2013). Even when working, most mothers retain the responsibility over young children. Many women also report they have family members (other than

their husbands) to take care of their children. Often this is an older daughter who minds the young child during the mother's absence (Mburugu & Adams, 2005).

For male children, after gaining some independence, fathers are expected to provide a significant contribution to his sons' upbringing. After the boys gain some independence, the father as well as other male family members will start associating with them more. Through these interactions the boys are taught about the traditional sex roles, and what it means to be a man. This process is very similar for girls, who spend more time with their mothers as a woman as they grow older, next to female relatives and other female community members and learn more about their responsibilities (Akinyi, Fiti & Iasser, 2013).

In regards to specific socialization techniques, children in rural areas are almost exclusively raised through observation and imitation. The children are shown how practical as well as social tasks are done, and how one is expected to behave. Parents, other family members, as well as older siblings, serve as (gender specific) role models. Throughout this socialization process the child is systematically exposed to many adult activities, such as farming, herding, cooking or child rearing, resulting in the fact that many Kenyan children in rural communities grow to be independent in their performance of such tasks at a young age (Adams, 1983).

The extended family members primarily relate to the children by temporarily usurping the childrearing role of the parent of their respective gender. It is expected that younger family members participate more in the child´s upbringing than elderly family members, who primarily take up incidental advisory roles in the child´s life (Akinyi, Fiti & Iasser, 2013). This role of advisor often manifests itself in telling stories and cautionary tales, teaching the children moral lessons and good ethics (Njue, Rombo, & Ngige, 2007).

The child's engagement with the community increases when it becomes older and more independent. Children maintain a strong attachment with their nuclear and extended family throughout this period, as they gradually become the responsibility of all in the community as well. Some of the members of the community play a vital role in the socialization and development of the child. An example is that of the youth sexuality counselors that organize instruction sessions for young people. These forms of education are usually part of a larger coming of age ritual, such as teeth extraction for the Luo girls and boys (Akinyi, Fiti & Iasser, 2013).

In sum, in Kenya, children symbolize the legitimacy of the parents' marriage, and with that, their status as an adult. Within the rural communities, offspring is expected to contribute to the household, and strengthen the family unit. Young children are not perceived as autonomous agents and do not contribute to any collective decision making processes. Children learn by being around

their elders, by observing and copying tasks and manners. Moral education seems to be mainly provided by older community members such as grandparents. When the children grow older, they develop their own place within the community, while remaining closely attached to the nuclear family.

Challenges

Many families in Kenya are facing challenges such as consistent poverty, disease and violence (Wilson & Ngige, 2005). These issues have varying effects on parenting. Here follows a brief overview of the broader social difficulties that Kenyan parents face.

Over one half of Kenya's population lives beneath the absolute poverty line, lacking access to all kinds of services such as those related to health, education or access to markets for selling their goods. Poverty is still on the rise due to inflation, shortfall in agricultural production and constant climatic issues such as floods and droughts. Poverty is more severe in rural areas. Infant mortality rate in Kenya was 79 in 1,000 in 2003, with a rate of 95.8 for the poorest 20 percent of the country's population, which is strongly represented in West Kenya (Wilson & Ngige, 2005). More current sources state that child mortality has dropped from 59 to 49 between 2011 and 2015, indicating improvement for Kenya as a whole (World Bank, 2016). However, no specific data regarding economic status and IMR was presented in these reports.

Globalization and the increasing contact with other cultures and communities across the world has influenced the ideas and practices of many Kenyans regarding childrearing (Akinyi, Fiti & Iasser, 2013). In urban areas families have become more nuclear with less emphasis on the extended family, and the amount of children born within households has decreased over the last decades, as illustrated before (Mburugu & Adams, 2005).

Many schooled Kenyans, of medium and high socioeconomic background, embrace western culture, and orients themselves towards Western middle class practices of child raising. This interest is stated to manifests itself in partial 'abandonment' of their ethnic-cultural practices in family life. This change is especially true for the current generation and may be largely attributed to the mass distribution and availability of information through multiple forms of media (Akinyi, Fiti & Iasser, 2013; Wilson & Ngige, 2005). However, more than half of the lesser schooled, illiterate and poor members of the Kenyan population remain true to customary practices and 'traditions', especially those that relate to the norms regarding marriage and social relations (Wilson & Ngige, 2005).

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Members fitting that description are widely represented in Western Kenya (Mburugu & Adams, 2005).

Along with the shift towards more 'western' family structures, parents complain about a lack of display of respect from children. They report their children refuse to listen to their elders, as they once did. This concern is not unique to Kenya as a country, but it is unclear to what extend this issue is a historical novelty in the country. Regardless, it is mentioned by parents that they experience a lack of control over their children, which they feel is connected to the lack of respect (Mburugu & Adams, 2005).

Aside from changes in the relationship within the family, parents also experience challenges regarding to domestic organization. Mass education has effected family dynamics , as children typically gain access to public education at age six, attending (free) primary school. This implies that children are no longer present throughout the day to contribute to work, and the household. In addition, as older children proceed through grades, they are no longer available to care for their younger siblings (Adams, 1983; Akinyi, Fiti & lasser, 2013).

In addition, parents are faced with the challenge to pay small contributions for school, materials and uniforms, resulting in financial strains that especially the unschooled, poorer members of rural communities can barely cover. This, combined with the correlated absence of the children as workforce, as well as the removal of older siblings as caregivers, puts exponential pressure on parents (Mburugu & Adams, 2005).

Within this new arrangement of domestic organization it seems women get the short straw. In accordance with many African traditions women have responsibility over the household, the care of children, as well as obligations to their husband (Wilson & Ngige, 2005). As the contribution of children in the household diminishes, mothers gain a larger workload (Mburugu & Adams, 2005). The mothers' difficulty is combined with the fathers increased burden of providing finance for their children's school. This results in many fathers looking for work outside the rural areas, leaving women responsible for the homestead in their absence. In addition, the increased lack of control over children puts parents in a stressful position.

On top of these difficulties, many families in the rural areas are exposed to certain levels of social or physical aggression, domestic violence, which is mostly directed at women (Wilson & Ngige, 2005). Mburugu and colleagues (2005) state in their research, that over half of the Kenyan women report physical abuse, as well as verbal abuse and emotional, with more than one third reporting sexual abuse. Children in these areas may also be subjected to physical punishment as well (by both parents), which often is considered normal practice and is primarily implemented to enforce the respective child's respect for the parent (Akinyi, Fiti & lasser, 2013). A report regarding violence against children in Kenya from 2010 reports that almost two-thirds of the respondents experienced

physical violence before the age of 18 years, ranging from being slapped, pushed, punched, kicked, whipped or beaten with an object (UNICEF, 2012). However, because children often do not report abuse, it is difficult to estimate the exact extent of maltreatment amongst Kenyan youth.

Aside from poverty, domestic violence and the issues related to the pressure on the household, its social dynamics and child rearing practices due to external influences, Kenyans in rural areas are also dealing with the threat of HIV. During its epidemic, which started in 1984, HIV has demanded many casualties. Throughout this period it strongly impoverished clans, families and households due to medical and funeral expenses (Wilson & Ngige, 2005).

According to the presented sources families in Western Kenya are confronted with a variety of challenges. The issues of poverty, violence and the remnants of the HIV epidemic make life difficult for parents. Aside from these more stereotypical factors of Kenyan life, social change also results in new ideas and practices, and facilitates a shift in local family dynamics. Even though the life of both parent and child in the Western Kenyan communities is not only problematic, the presented factors illustrate the difficulty that many local families face.

2. Skillful Parenting

As mentioned in the prior chapter, there's a considerable line-up of influences and challenges that are affecting family life including parenting in Kenya. Though most of the listen challenges are negative in the sense that they are undermining family structures and lead to the increased jeopardy of parent and child, not all influences lead to harmful changes. Having said that, most rural families in West Kenya are indeed under pressure of widespread poverty, violence, and social change, that is reportedly making life more difficult for parents and children in this era.

As a reaction to these challenges and in an effort to bring sustainable change, ICS and their local partners, is implementing several interventions, one of them being the Skillful Parenting program. This program works with groups of parents and provides both a platform for parents to share concerns as well as advice with each other, and present parents with information and skills to learn.

To better understand the implementation and its intended goals it is paramount to briefly discuss what parenting programs are in general, and to discuss the program by ICS more specifically. The following section deals with a brief overview of what parenting programs are considered to be and how the intervention by ICS distinguishes itself based on both its target group, its location and setting, as well as its specific program design.

Parenting Programs

Parenting programs are group based interventions aimed at changing parenting practices by 'training' and/or supporting parents. Though variations and adaptations to this general design exist, as well as more extensive setups such as home-visits, parenting programs are usually categorized as interventions that rely on group oriented trainings. Examples of more well-known programs are the Australian Triple P, and the in the US developed Webster Incredible Years program. The programs may differ between target group, setup/design and the underlying learning theory. The general traits of these programs will be discussed, highlighting some of the deviations where relevant.

In general the term 'parenting program' refers to an intervention which uses a format in which the main purpose is to train parents to apply certain techniques to improve the parents' childrearing practices while, in some cases also addressing the family system as a whole (Kane et al, 2007; Cottam & Espie, 2014).

Several different types of parenting training can be identified. Typically, the programs are

distinguished as behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, relationship-based, relationship-emotional and multi-model trainings. Behavioral training is focused on teaching parents different techniques to better handle their children, such as positive reinforcement. Cognitive-behavioral designs usually encompass similar behavioral training techniques as the behavioral but includes the application of cognitive strategies to change the ideas and assumptions parents have about their children in an effort to break negative behavioral patterns. Relationship-based programs put emphasis on training communication and listening skills, while they teach parents to understand behavior in the context of relationships. The relational-emotional design attempt to deal with emotional stress by focusing on the parent-child relationship, and the multi-model designs encompass programs that combine several or all the aforementioned designs (Bunting, 2004; Barlow, Smailagic, Huband, Roloff, Bennett, 2012; Richardson & Joughin, 2002; Richter, 2013). A specific position can be claimed for community based approaches in which parenting is considered as a part of community development programs, such as Proud2be in South Africa or Families Matter! Program (FMP), in which it is explicitly stated that improving parenting is a civic issue that cannot be isolated from more general citizenship and community issues such as the socialization and civil society approach of de Winter (2012) in the Netherlands.

When observing the different parenting training designs and models there are a few general resemblances that can be named. Most programs focus on training parents new skills and techniques and on stimulating consistent use of these skills (Baker, Cook & Borrego, 2010). In addition, most programs are set up with groups, promoting discussions and sharing advice amongst its participants (Foolen & Daamen, 2013). The programs also commonly benefit from providing a time out from daily routines for parents, and provide them with an opportunity to reflect on daily life with the help of the course facilitators. Arguably, this opportunity for shared reflection leads to insights and possible solutions, and stimulates self-confidence in parenting and facilitates the normalization of the parents' problems (Clarke & Chruchill, 2012). Specific techniques used in parenting programs include techniques such as discussion, role play, watching video vignettes and giving out homework for the parents (Barlow, Smailagic, Huband, Roloff, Bennett, 2012).

The underlying ideas of parenting programs are that parents have a crucial role in their children's development, and are considered the prime responsible for their child's behavior. Programs focus on training parents' techniques and skills to help relate, and communicate differently, with their children in an effort to adjust the child's behavior (Kaminski, Valle, Filene, Boyle, 2008). Though these programs deal with parents directly, they aim at

affecting the children indirectly. In addition to this, the programs do not directly confront the alternative social influences that attribute to the child's behavior and focus on what a parent can do to provide changes in the way their child acts (Clarke & Churchill, 2012).

Overall, parenting programs have been found to be effective. For example, long term effects of trainings indicate parents experience reduced stress and increased confidence (Barlow, Smailagic, Huband, Roloff, Bennett, 2012). In addition, parenting programs may aid in increasing the parents' sense of parental competence (Graff, Grumm, Hein & Fingerle, 2014). Effect of the programs can be attributed to the opportunity to discuss the way parents think about their role and the way they behave. It allowed them to reflect on themselves, and change their behavior accordingly.

A report published by the World Health Organization (2013) on the implementation of parenting programs in low-income countries discusses the different elements (of both program design and context) that are relevant to the effectiveness of said programs. It is concluded that important factors that determine program effect are the opportunities for parents to practise new skills, teaching parenting principles, rather than prescribing them with techniques, the teaching of particular (non-violent) disciplining techniques that are age-appropriate, strengthening parent-child relationships, as well as considering difficulties in the relationships between adults in the family .

Parenting programs have also been implemented in Sub-Sharan countries such as Kenya and Mozambique (Poulsen et al., 2010; Skar et al., 2014). In Kenya specifically an American program called Families Matter! Program (FMP), focusing on improving the parenting skills and communication about sexuality was implemented. The program was reviewed and adapted to the local context (Poulsen et al., 2010). The participating parents attended a group-based program that contained five meetings. Program effect was measured by using interviews with multiple choice questions both before and after the program. The results showed that parents as well as the children reported an increase in parental positive reinforcement and higher levels of parental monitoring after the program. Children also reported an improved parent-child relationship (Vandenthoudt et al., 2010).

It is widely perceived that programs should be based on 'proven' content and theory base. Currently there is a strong emphasis on 'evidence-based-practice', underlining the value of evaluated programs in contrast to none evaluated programs. The necessity of evidence based practice may result in the need to resort to often standardized established programs such as Triple P, that focus on techniques of managing child behavior. However, Clarke and Chirchill (2012) state that this standardization often makes it difficult to respond to the emergent needs of course participants,

especially within a different cultural context. Despite the aforementioned effects, parenting programs implemented in different cultural contexts as compared to those for which they were developed, are not always successful. In more extreme circumstance, such as in corroded family systems because of deteriorated relationships, pathological issues with parents and/or child, extensive exposure to (severe) stress and in dealing with violence, the programs are found to be less effective (Clarke & Chruchill, 2012).

In sum, parenting programs are varied, and when evaluated proven to be successful in effecting parent behavior and experience. However the amount of studies done to evaluate parenting programs is limited. Parenting programs have been implemented across the globe, though most of the programs are adapted versions that find their origin in Western setting. Though it is generally claimed that programs are adapted to the local context, it is not always clear to what extend the adaptation are made, and if adaptations also respect the more fundamental differences that exist between Western oriented parenting and those that clearly deviate from Western parenting. In addition, most program evaluation use quantitative data and highly standardized measurements, making it hard to distinguish both the level of adaptation, as well as provide a more in depth understanding of the program's specific effects. As mentioned, extreme challenges are determinant to the effectiveness of Skillful parenting program. Considering the Western Kenyan setting, proper program modification to the prevalent issues should be taken into account to ensure proper program effect.

Skillful Parenting

When considering parenting programs as an intervention to bring sustainable change in the family life of parents and children in West Kenya, the issue of local context and proper program adaptation should be considered. Within cultural contexts that strongly deviate from Western settings both in beliefs and practices, as well as serious widespread issues such as poverty and situations in which social change have destabilizing effects on parenting practices, parenting programs may not have the expected effects. In the following section we will discuss the Skillful Parenting program as designed by ICS and delivered by local partners, and briefly review how ICS and partners have designed its parenting program to make it more suitable to the Western Kenyan context.

ICS has, together with local partners, developed and implemented the Skillful Parenting program in rural areas of Western Kenya. The goal of the program is to work with parents on strengthening them in their parenting role in the aims to prevent and diminish child abuse, neglect

and family disintegration.

The program design is based on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2012), next to international literature regarding the effective components of parenting programs. This theory states that participants will change their (parenting) behavior if they are convinced of the need for and their capability to change. The program contains five modules, dealing with the topics family relations, parental roles and responsibilities, self-care & self-esteem, values & discipline, and communication, respectively. Please note that currently two modules have been added, namely child protection and family budgeting. However, at the time of the research these modules had not yet been fully implemented and are therefore not subject to evaluation.

Each group of participants ideally consists of 18-24 members (manual Skillful Parenting program, 2012). The specific modules are led by one facilitator at any given time, though two facilitators are involved with one particular group during the groups participation.

Considering the aforementioned different types of parenting programs the Skillful Parenting (SP) program is considered 'multi-modal', as it contains both relation-based and cognitive-behavioral elements. The focus of the program is primarily on the parents and their behavior and ideas, in an effort to indirectly influence child behavior. Compared to other parenting programs SP does not necessarily focus on 'high-risk' parents (e.g. caretakers of children with problem behavior), but essentially includes any type of parent from the rural areas of Kenya where ICS is present. In other words, it is a community based program as opposed to a program based on target groups that addresses exceptional cases. It drives on the idea of 'civic driven change' which contrary to interventions by professionals, assumes that social change must or will happen as a result of 'civic agency' (Fowler & Biekart, 2011). Participation is voluntary, and ICS works with many pre-existing farmer groups registered with Agrics, as well as recruiting individual parents trough sensitization and information campaigns.

Though the program does not target parents that are profiled as 'high-risk' in particular, it must be noted that considering the different issues of poverty, violence and social change, most participants in fact experience considerate difficulty in parenting.

The program is embedded in the local context and upholds the idea that change cannot be forced. The program was developed to respect the culture and the local habits of the parents, and at the same time to share new information and skills with them (B. Ogutu, personal communication, February 22, 2015). An example of adaptation is that the module on the subject of family relations includes the broader community, since it is common that more people are involved in raising a child.

Also, the program uses examples that relate to the lives of local parents and apply to their personal framework. For example, family activities described by the program facilitator during the program's modules would include working on the farm and living on a homestead. Also, materials often used in other trainings such as video presentations are not present in SPP sessions as the resources such as electricity may often not be available on site. Other examples of adaptation are the facilitator discussing the expression of affection with the parents, instead of prescribing them ways to do this (e.g. kissing and hugging that is often recommended in international programs does not fit the local traditions).

In summary, the Skillful Parenting program is an intervention that shares similarities with other programs by similar names, but is specifically modified to its rural east African target group in both the module setup, materials, content and process. Considering this adaptation, the program requires its individual evaluation. The following sections will include description of the Skillful Parenting evaluation, and will shed light on if the program works, why it works, and how the program relates to the lives and challenges of its target group audience.

3. Evaluation: Goals and Research Questions

The research before you aims at creating an increased understanding of the workings of service provision and programming directed at the support for parents in the Sub Saharan context, in particular through the Skillful Parenting Programs as supported by ICS. More specifically, ICS has identified the need to improve the design and implementation of its skillful parenting program as a combined effort with her partners.

The Skillful Parenting program is implemented to enhance parental competence, as well as to strengthen the larger social units in which children are raised as related to child rearing. The program aims to tackle concrete problems such as child neglect and abuse, and family disintegration amongst the participating parents. The efforts to prevent child abuse are considered the core purpose of the program, where it introduces parents to alternative ways of raising their children, and provides them with a setting to discuss and reflect of the parenting behavior and ideas.

These goals are attempted to be achieved through working with parents directly, providing them with knowledge and training them skills. By providing this support to parents it is predicted that stronger family bonds will develop, more positive and conscious parenting practices will develop, along with the development of stronger networks directed at the care of children, which will benefit the situation of children in the respective households.

Considering the importance of evidence based practice the Skillful Parenting program was evaluated. The evaluation is directed at investigating the program's effect on parents within its respective context, and also at how (if so) the program works in reaching those effects.

Research problems and questions

Considering the adapted nature of the SPP and the underlying ICS program goals, the research problem is defined as two-fold as followed, the main focus being on the first aspect.

1. What impact does the Skillful Parenting program have on the parenting of the participating parents and caregivers in ICS projects in Kenya?

2. How was the parenting program, that was based on international concept of parenting, adapted to the West Kenyan situation? How can we understand the effects of the program on

parenting competences (that results from 1) given this contextualized approach of the Skillful Parenting Program?

The research questions that follow from this problem definition are:

1a. What is the effect of the Skillful Parenting Program on the parenting competencies of the participants (parents and other caregivers)?

1b. (How) do different background characteristics of the parents/caregivers moderate this effect (such as schooling level, age of the parent, age of the children, family size)?

1c. How can we describe the effects of the Skillful Parenting Program in qualitative terms, both in terms of its context and in terms of over time effects?

2a. How was the Skillful Parenting program implemented in Kenya by ICS and her partners? How was the parenting program, that was based on international concepts of parenting, adapted to the West Kenyan situation?

2b. How can we understand the effects of the program on parenting competences (that results from 1) given the implementation of the Skillful Parenting Program as described under 2a?

3. What recommendations can be formulated for further improvement and implementation of the Skillful Parenting program in Sub Saharan Africa? What are the obstacles and opportunities to Skillful parenting?

A mixed method approach

To evaluate the impact of the Skillful Parenting Program, a pre-and post-test design was used involving parents and other caregivers from the ICS program in Kenya. This design was combined with a process-based approach in which the specific underlying mechanics of the program were observed over time, to determine not only program outcome but also which elements attribute to the intervention's effects. The process based method design strengthens the pre-/post-test set up through cross-verification. On the one hand, the effects of the intervention were inferred from a parenting survey that measures (self-identified) competencies pre and post the intervention. On the

other hand, the effects will be inferred from an in-depth study of how the program impacts upon the competencies of the participants. In the in-depth study, participant observation and mini-ethnographies will be used. These methodologies describe the impact of the program in terms of qualitative change in situ and over time, and in relation to the specific socio-cultural contexts in which the parents and caregivers take on the task of improving their parenting skills. At the same time, the qualitative approach allows the participants to have an active role in the research process, so that the interpretations and experiences of the participants will be included in the final results.

Sampling and set-up

As part of the research a stepwise sampling procedure was carried out.

Sample 1: A first sample of 113 participants was drawn from the parents and caregivers who participated in the Skillful Parenting program in the year 2014. The sample was drawn from a region in which ICS had not been active yet with the SP program, in order to avoid 'contamination' effects. Most parents participating in the Skillful Parenting program first took part in an agricultural program of ICS focused on improving farming skills.

These parents and caregivers were selected from 5 groups who were already participating in the AGRICS program of ICS, which is an agricultural business intervention which focuses on the financial empowerment of local farmers, through education, resource management and table banking. Ideally, participants of the AGRICS program enroll in the Skillful Parenting program after the first program is finished. Respondents were recruited from the two main areas of Busia and Kakamega, divided into the five smaller areas of Shibuye, Shidodo, Namalenga, Amungura and Olepito. In each group at least 20 participants were selected for the research. During sample selection the languages spoken were also taken into account, where respondents needed to be able to have a minimum skill in verbal Kisawhili. The caregivers were selected in such a way that they were representative of the target group for ICS, taking into account equal representations of gender, schooling level, age, family size, caretaker role and relevant ethnic characteristics.

Sample selection was based on scientific standards, as well as realistic expectations. Respondents were drawn from different parenting groups from the areas of Busia and Kakamega. Five parenting groups were selected based on the criteria of not having participated with other parenting oriented interventions (whether by ICS or another NGO). Please note that all respondents were expected to have participated with Agrics, which is an agricultural business that focuses on

education and facilitation regarding farming and table banking, and preludes participation with the Skillful Parenting program.

The sample involved five groups total given during one training period. At the end of the training period a total of 90 parents participated with the post test. Numbers were lower because of program dropout or reluctance to participate with the program because of personal reasons of the respondents, such as time investment issues or personal problems.

Sample 2: From the larger first sample, a stratified second sample of 30 participants was taken for the in-depth interviews, taking into account an even distribution (as far as possible) in terms of the personal characteristics mentioned under sample 1. The participants of this sample took part in a more extended interview post-intervention and a second interview 3 months after the program has ended.

Sample 3: From the second sample of 30 parents, a third sample of 10 participants was taken. With this sample, mini-ethnographies were held. This allowed the researchers to do parent behavior observations in the everyday settings their parenting takes place in while also creating more in-depth insights in the development parents went through while attending the program.

All participants were informed about taking part of the research as part of the program. Respondents were asked for both permission to use their reported information as well as the use of voice recording during the survey and interviews.

In the following sections the findings will be discussed per measurement instrument, while also providing information on the methodology. This document does not include and expanded explanation of the, tools and means of analysis, or underlying theories, as it would result in a too expansive document.

First the survey and the accompanying interviews will be discussed. The program evaluations will be mentioned after this, followed by the in depth-interview results. Lastly the ethnographic results will be presented.

4. Survey & Interviews

As part of the research a survey was conducted in combination with interviews. The main focus of the survey and interview was to include a pre- and post-intervention measurement, and to determine whether the participating parents reported a change in their experienced competence as a parent, as well as a possible change in their experienced social support for parenting, after the training.

In the following section the general design of the survey and interview will be discussed. To provide a better insight into the adaptations made to the instruments to make sure the instruments fit the socio-cultural setting, the pilot that was conducted as part of the research designing process will be discussed as well. The results of the survey and interview, based on the original research questions, will be presented at the end.

The term 'interviews' is used to distinguish between the shorter interviews that were part of the survey, and the in-depth interviews that were used as research instruments during later phases of the evaluation. The in-depth interviews will also be discussed later.

Design

Both in the survey and in the interview the experienced level of parental competence was a key factor. How the participants perceive themselves as a parent, in particular how competent they experience themselves before and after the respective training is commonly deemed an indicator for the effects of parenting programs. In addition, we included the level of social support, both experienced by parents and provided by parents, as this takes into account that parenting is not per see only an individual endeavor and is a measure that looks at how the training possibly effects the networks of parents that are relevant for their parenting.

Again, the experienced social support of parents would be compared before and after the training, in an effort to determine a relation between participation with the Skillful Parenting program, and possible changes in their so called 'social capital' for parenting.

In addition, the interviews were setup to explore how parents define what a parent 'is', and what a parent should do in both descriptive and prescriptive terms, in an effort to better understand what being a parent means within the local discourse.

The research questions that are central to both the survey and interviews are as follows:

I.   Do parents experience and increase in parenting competence after attending the skillful parenting program?

II.   Do parents experience and increase in experienced social support after attending the skillful parenting program?

III.   How is a parenting competence defined by the parents during pre- and post-test?

IV.   How is experienced social support defined by parents during pre- and post-test?

Both parenting competence and social support will be measured by using the existing subscale(s) of parenting surveys used in other international research on parenting. Adaptations of the subscales *competence* and *social isolation* from the NOSI (Nijmeegse Ouderlijke Stress Index, the Dutch version of the Parenting Stress Index (PSI) (Abidin, 1983) Brock e.a. 1992) have been included in the survey and interview design. The subscales exist of an average of ten items, and in each item a statement on parenting is presented and respondents are asked to what degree they feel the statement is true for them or applies to them on a six-point Likert scale. The NOSI has been successfully used in inter-ethnic comparative research and the relevant subscales measure the extent to which the parent feels competent to act skillfully towards the child (subscale competence), and the extent to which the parent experiences support when acting as a parent (subscale social isolation), have been adapted to the specific socio-cultural context, while at the same time keeping an eye at comparison with the international literature. As for subscale Y we practically had to redesign the scale to make the instrument relevant for our purpose, while subscale X remained close to the original. The instrument was first translated into English, and discussed with several Kenyan researchers for socio-cultural relevance and (mis)understandings, which lead to small adaptations. Then, as a next step, a translation to Kiswahili was made.

All items of both instruments were first translated from English to Kiswahili, and then translated back to English. Both translations were done by two independent bilingual Kenyan professionals. After all items had been translated back to English a small discussion group was set up to discuss any discrepancies within the translations, and what originated these differences. Based on that discussion new translations were made, which were also checked independently trough cross translation. Eventually this process resulted in a selection of translations in Kiswahili that could be translated back to English to match the original question accurately. The actual data collection including the pilot was carried out by the UU researcher assisted by a Kenyan research assistant who spoke several local languages and Kiswahili.

With respect to the survey, in an effort to make the six-point scale as comprehensible and accessible to the respondents as possible, it was decided to implement an audio-spatial element, where respondents were asked to walk up and down six specific material objects that were placed in a straight line and stand at the specific object they felt provided an answer for the relevant question. In most cases the objects were sticks or stones of an equal length or form.

Parents would be introduced to the idea that the objects formed an imaginary line, which ends represented total agreement on the one extreme to total disagreement on the other. This information would be relayed by the field researcher walking up and down the points, narrating the meaning of each position.

Two pilots were done to check the quality of both the interview and the survey. During the first pilot 6 parents aged 40 to 70 participated (which were partly self-selected by the community, and which included both trained and untrained parents, and 5 men and 1 woman). For the second pilot 8 parents were selected. Of these 8 parents half were male, and half were female. The sample was further divided into half of the participants being trained and half being untrained. The age of the participating parents ranged from 26 to 64. The second pilot sample was more diverse in age and social economic class and was generally perceived to be more representative of the target population. The participants of the second pilot were selected by the researchers, where the participants of the first pilot were selected by local community facilitators assigned by ICS. In between the two pilots the instruments were adapted based on the findings, after which they were tested again during the second pilot.

All pilots were done at the respective parents' homesteads because it was expected this would provide a more familiar setting for the participants. In addition, most respondents did not have the means to reach alternative locations. Because different issues were raised during the first pilot and second pilot, the two pilots will be briefly discussed separately.

The main finding of the first pilot concerned challenges regarding language and instruction. It was found that most parents did not have a good grasp of either English or Kiswahili, which obviously severely complicated the interview and survey. This issue is related to the wide diversity of languages spoken between tribes and clans in Kenya. However, it was deemed unwise to account for the different languages spoken based on the extent of its diversity, as well as the interest of standardization of the instruments and its application. Based on this challenge it was decided that only parents with a minimum of understanding in either Kiswahili or English would be included in the research, in an effort to guarantee the quality of the data to be collected.

The second pilot was done with Kiswahili speaking parents. The six-point scale was determined to be accessible and understandable, and the audio-spatial element was easily adopted and even dubbed 'fun' and 'engaging' by some parents. Based on these findings the instruments were approved and ready for implementation.

The aim of the study was to select 100 caregivers participating in the Skillful Parenting program, for both the survey and the interview. Since a dropout of some parents was accounted for, 113 parents were selected to participate in the study, see also sampling and set-up. The 113 parents participated in the pre-test. However, despite various attempts of the researchers to reach parents at their homestead, 90 of these parents participated also during the post-intervention measurements. This means that we have been able to use 90 pre- and post-test surveys. Due to the low quality of some of the transcriptions from the interview the total sample for this particular measurement was lower than that of the survey. Only the interviews of 77 parents could be used for the data-analysis.

The interviews and surveys were carried out by Kenyan research assistants trained by the UU researcher. The research assistants were selected from a group of local applicants; post-graduates with full grasp of both the English and Kiswahili languages. Assistants were expected to originate from the local area and have affiliation with the local culture and/or language. The candidates were selected based on experience and skill. All assistants had at least one bachelor's degree and a minimum in interviewing experience.

The assistants received several days of training (Van Esch, 2014) in order to familiarize with the instruments and gain additional interviewing skills and knowledge of the research procedure. The focus of the training was on properly understanding the instrument and safeguarding standardization, as well as to improve on communication skills. The training consisted of three modules: scientific integrity; familiarizing with the instruments; and interviewing skills. The training was concluded with several role-play exercises.

As part of the training the assistants received extra teaching on how to properly explain, present and apply the six-point Likert scale. An elaborate strategy including how to inform and familiarize the parents with the scale was provided, as well as techniques on how to help the parents properly use the scale without influencing their decision making process. This particular training required quite some time, but was deemed paramount.

Analyses

In order to determine whether there was a difference on the scales *experienced competence*, and *experienced social support* between the pre- and post-test, a repeated measures design, applying a one-way ANOVA with SPSS, given the dependence of the two groups pre- and post-test as well as the possibility of including factors into the analysis. Factors that were included in the analyses are: gender, age group, marital status, number of children, education, and profession, to account for any underlying factors that may influence the experienced competence or social support scores. All tests have been done using a Games-Howell Post-Hoc analysis.

Assumptions for the repeated-measures ANOVA were checked. All scores on the related scales are ratio variables, satisfying the assumption that dependent variables are of a continuous level. Boxplots were used to test for outliers. No cases were removed. The assumption of normality was checked by applying a K-S test to the distribution of the scores on the two variables of *experienced competence*, and *experienced social support*, on both pre- and post-test. A significant result was found on the *experienced competence* during pre-test, $D(90) < .96$, $p < .01$. A repeated ANOVA is known to yield reasonable accurate p-values when normality is not substantially violated.

Considering the fact the sample is large (n>30) and the sample is neither thick-tailed or heavily skewed normality was not considered an issue.

It was found that the Cronbach's alpha for both the pre-test scales *experienced competence* (α = .44) and experienced social support (α = .57) were deemed rather low, where a reliability of > 0.70 is preferable. However, both scores for the post-test were within more acceptable ranges, where Cronbach's alpha for the items within the experienced competence scale was .70, and .62 for the items of the experienced social competence scale, respectively.

Upon further inspection it was found that removing items in an attempt to increase the related Cronbach's alpha was ineffective. After testing it was found that removal of items from pre- or post-test scales to bolster reliability always resulted in a decrease in the opposing pre- or post-test scale. No items were removed.

A low reliability implies that there is a limit to the extent that the found effects can be ascribed to the respective construct. This means that any significant effect found on either of the two scales does not necessarily imply a difference in either *parenting competence* nor *experienced social support as measured by these subscales*. Therefore, we based our analyses of the survey only on individual items.

The interviews are analyzed using content analysis (Boeije, 2009). The interviews were coded using Nvivo. Based on our research question, we used the first 20 interviews to select representative topics and concepts for the coding of the other interviews. Secondly, overarching themes were selected to investigate the possible change in experienced parental competence. Where possible the outcomes were quantified to study the differences between pre- and post-intervention interviews. During the process of analysis the individual codes as well as the context of the entire interview were used for interpretation.

Results

In the following section all research results regarding the survey and interviews will be discussed. Survey questions for both the *parenting competence* and *experienced social competence* scale are listed below. Please note that all items are numbered differently here from the original survey design. All the results are presented per item in the table further below.

Parenting competence:

1. You often think you are doing well in bringing up my children.
2. You think bringing up children is a lot easier than you first expected.
3. Thinking about how to raise your children helps you to be a good parent.
4. Being a parent is more difficult than you originally expected.
5. You often think: "other parents are better parents than I am".
6. You are trying very hard raising your children, BUT you sometimes feel that you are not doing a good job.

Table 1. Parenting competence scale individual items effects. N.B. a higher score means that parents feel MORE competent as initial scores have been recoded.

Item	M (pre)	M (post)	F	p
You often think you are doing well in bringing up my children.	4,46	4,86	2.06	$\alpha = .08$
You think bringing up children is a lot easier than you first expected.	3,18	4,34	3.60	$\alpha < .06$
Thinking about how to raise your children helps you to be a good parent.	5,10	5,14	1.30	$\alpha = .28$
Being a parent is more difficult than you originally expected.	2,98	4,20	0.79	$\alpha = .56$
You often think: "other parents are better parents than I am".	3,19	3,57	3.18	$\alpha = .01$
You are trying very hard raising your children, BUT you sometimes feel that you are not doing a good job.	3,02	3,23	3.12	$\alpha = .01$

Experienced social support:

1. Even though you may not necessarily agree on how others view parenting, it is easy to find someone close by who has knowledge about raising children.

2. You often feel that you are supported (by others) in bringing up your children, even though the support is not exactly what you may want.

3. It is easy to find someone within your community who would want to help you with raising your children.

4. There are always enough people close to you who have knowledge about raising children, though it may not be the advice you want.

5. Challenges in raising children are more easily solved when you talk about them with others, despite the fact that their views may differ from yours.

6. Regardless of whether you agree with the way others view parenting; there is always someone close by to assist you with the upbringing of your children.

For the *parenting competence* scale significant result were found on items 5 and 6, which means that parents scored significantly higher on these items after the training. Results are presented in table 1. No significant effects were found, based on the factors of gender, education, marital status or profession.

For the *experienced social support* scale significant results were found on items 3 and 4 as can be seen in table 2. For both cases, the results on post-test were lower than on the pre-test. There were no significant differences on the respective scores based on the background variables of gender, age and social economic status.

No statements can be made based on the scales as a whole due to the low reliability of both scales, meaning that the items do not represent one (homogeneous) concept. However, significant differences have been found on individual items between pre- and post-test. Even though these findings do not provide a basis for a definitive conclusion, they do indicate a possible effect in the form of increased scores on both scales. In particular, with respect to parental competence, these findings suggest that parents experience the task of parenting as somewhat more effective (item 6), and consider themselves as better parents as compared to others (item 5), while probably not thinking more lightly about the task of parenting as a whole (item 4). With respect to social support, the item based results do not provide a clear pattern. The interviews discussed in the next section may provide a deeper insight into the possible changes parents experience regarding parenting competence and experienced social support.

Table 2. experienced social support scale individual items effects

Item	M (pre)	M (post)	F	p
Even though you may not necessarily agree on how others view parenting, it is easy to find someone close by who has knowledge about raising children.	3,83	3,80	1,52	α = .19
You often feel that you are supported (by others) in bringing up your children, even though the support is not exactly what you may want.	3,81	3,72	1,87	α = .11
It is easy to find someone within your community who would want to help you with raising your children.	2,97	2,48	2,73	α = .03
There are always enough people close to you who have knowledge about raising children, though it may not be the advice you want.	3,71	3,50	2,77	α = .03
Challenges in raising children are more easily solved when you talk about them with others, despite the fact that their views may differ from yours.	4,60	4,73	0,01	α = .92
Regardless of whether you agree with the way others view parenting; there is always someone close by to assist you with the upbringing of your children.	4,10	3,83	2,27	α = .06

Findings regarding parenting competence are discussed first, followed by experienced social competence.

In general, the respondents' answers during the interviews illustrate that they view

parenting at the start of the program mostly in terms of providing children with food and education, and making money or farming to be able to do so. In this 'economic perspective' parenting is seen as the way to ensure the physical survival of children and to help them to get a better life, by sending them to school. For example, one mother says

> *"One thing I want to do as a parent is to enlighten my children by educating them, to cloth them and provide them shelter".*
>
> F, 30

In accordance with this mother's statement, parents also mention providing clothing, shelter and healthcare (in addition to food and education) as experienced competences or difficulties, although less frequently.

Though parents believe that providing for their family makes them good parents, more than half of the parents state that they have difficulty doing so. Parents especially struggle with paying school fees for their children. Whether parents find parenting difficult or not, their reasoning is almost in all cases (86%) related to the ability of providing basic needs to their children or having the income to do so. Because of the economic perspective financial resources take a central role in parenting, as is illustrated in the following excerpt in which a mother underlines the importance of finance to both pay school fees as well as feed the child.

> *"It helps me because I farm and when I get the harvest I sell and get school fees, eee…and feeding the children because a child cannot go to school without eating well".*
>
> F, 39

After attending to the Skillful Parenting program the economic perspective on parenting was mentioned less often. Though the provision of basic needs and the necessity of doing farming was still deemed important it was not mentioned as frequently. The importance of the economic perspective on parenting seems to decline after the program, with less emphasis on providing food and doing farming.

After the training respondents report to be more invested in the social, emotional and cognitive development of their children. Parents now include communication with children, disciplining of children, guidance of children or the parent-child relationship, as a parents responsibility, where before the training this was hardly mentioned by any parent (less than ten percent). Regarding communication parents mentioned speaking to their children in a respectful or friendly manner, listening to their children and thanking their children if they did something well. When a father was asked about which lessons of the program had been most valuable to him, he stated:

> *"To improve on my communicating skill on children also okey to improve on my responses to the stages of a child".*
>
> M, 34

Parents say that they use less physical punishment and instead talk with their children to correct them. This is illustrated by a mothers answer on the question what she has changed after the training:

> *"I don't beat my children when I am angered, when they have done wrong I sit down with them and talk to them".*
>
> F, 35

When parents are explicitly asked what changed for them as parents after the program, their increased awareness of an pedagogical perspective is indubitable. Parents state that due to the program the communication (48%) with their children changed (they speak friendly, listen, show love), they use less physical discipline (34%) and are able to guide their children better (13%). Also, almost one-fifth of the respondents report that they feel they have an improved relationship with their offspring and say they show them more love and respect.

However, during post-test parents (25%) still report providing their children with healthy food and sending them to school after the training as a parent's responsibility, which supports that provision of basic needs remains important.

Even though elements such as parent child communication, disciplining children and parent-child relationships are now included as elements that determine parenting competence, the

experienced competence in regards to these elements did not necessarily increase for all parents. For example, a selective few other parents state they were not properly correcting their children as much as they'd like to as is evidenced by the following statement of a parent who obviously struggles with the issue of how to correct her child:

> *"What I would like to do better as a parent, is how I guide my children to be well behaved"*
>
> M, 50

When comparing the way parents describe their parenting behaviors during pre- and post-test from yet another perspective, it shows that parents at the start of the program report parenting practices that are more external to their own involvement with their children. For example, parents feel competent about, or would like to do better at, their farming skills, their income or whether their children have food or go to school. These are all parenting practices that influence the environment in which children develop but not issues that are related to how they are parents can impact upon the development of their child more directly. At the end of the program, however, parents report behaviors that are related to the interaction between themselves and their children. Parents seem to feel empowered in influencing their children, and start to talk in terms of teaching or guiding children, as is reported by a mother:

> *"I have big children who had no manners so through the training I have been able to teach them to be obedient".*
>
> M, 50

Parents seem to notice what effect their behavior has on the behavior of their children. The next two examples show that parents see both their change in communication and discipline influence their child's behavior.

> *"I see a lot of changes even if I talk to my children they listen"*
>
> F, 42

and another mother (60 years) tells about discipline:

> *"One thing that has made me happy, in the past when my child makes a mistake, I would beat them with anger but after the training I was advised not to beat my children when am bitter because I can end up killing the child instead I should talk to the child which I see is working very well".*
>
> F, 60

In sum, it seems that at the start of the program parents do not frequently seem to think about themselves as actors in relationship to their children, but as actors in building the right conditions around their children to grow up. This changes after the program when parents report to be actively involved with their children.

In conclusion, before the training parenting is primarily described from an economical perspective and is focussed on providing physical needs for the child, such as food, clothes, shelter and school fees. The responsibility of a parent is primarily to facilitate resources in the child's environment. More than half of the parents state that they find it difficult to provide for their children in this manner. After the training, parents start including elements such as communication and the relationship with their children into the responsibility of a parent. Parents display consideration regarding their disciplining behavior, and report concern on how their own behavior affects that of their children. Where before the training parenting seemed to be defined primarily as responsibilities regarding the resources that children (and the family) have access to, after the training parenting also includes the relationship parents have with their children, and the consideration of how parent behavior influences their offspring. However, the economical perspective does not disappear, where parents still include their task as provider as an important part of parenting. Lastly, it seems that the shift in the definition of what parenting is does lead to an awareness of new learning goals for parents, , as some parents mention wanting to do better regarding the newly included tasks of parenting.

When comparing the different behaviors attributed to good parenting between the pre- and post-test it can been seen that respondents move away from a more economically perspective, towards a more pedagogical perspective. Respondents now include parent-child communication as well as socialization through proper disciplining as tasks associated with parenting, where they did not before. The inclusion of new elements into the domain of parenting makes it difficult to discern whether the experienced competence of the parents changes. Since parents have added new elements to their understanding of what a good parent should do, which did not exist before the training, parents are not able to compare themselves pre and post training on these elements. As new elements of parenthood come up, parents might experience themselves as beginners rather than as (more) experienced for these elements.

The following section discusses the results of the interview analysis regarding social support.

Both at the pre- and the post-test all (but one) parents report they talk with others about raising their children. One mother explains at the start of the program:

> *"Yes, you may experience some difficulty concerning your child and you approach someone in your community and you tell him/her I'm troubled with my child and then you assist each other with your community concerning the child."*
>
> F, 39

However, other parents state that they experience it difficult to find someone to help you out with your children. Some parents report that they cannot approach their family since they live far away or that a family member they relied on in the past died. There are also only a few accounts of parents mentioning to get support specifically from their spouse. When parents were explicitly asked about if they talked to professionals or teachers they would state they did not do so. When asked if parents experienced support from their own parents (in law) most would respond that they did not, based on the fact that they do not live with them.

Some parents mention to prefer to talk to other parents who are doing well with their children. For example, this mother answers to the question who she talks to regarding parenting:

> *"Those who have managed to uplift their children..... Have managed to educate them in a way that.... made them reach a certain level."*
>
> F, 45

In accordance with this stated importance of talking to respected people, some parents mention to not speak to other parents because these parents are "drunkards" or are not "uplifted".

Overall, respondents say they experience social support in the sense that they give and receive advice from others. However, finding sources for good advice is experienced to be difficult. Getting advice from someone also seems based on whether the person is seen as respected or not, further minimalizing the experienced social support.

During post-test, respondents report different forms of improvement in the relationship with people in their community. Also, parents report behaving differently towards others which has affected his/her social network and the relationship with others. Below the most relevant findings regarding social support are presented.

Almost two thirds of the parents report an improved relationship with their partner after participation with the program. Parents mention to have better communication with their partner, have fewer disagreements, and show more love and respect towards their partner.

> *"Personally what it has changed a lot in me about Skillful parenting, as in the way we used to stay, there were times we would disagree and at times agree but now with the training it has been very important because it has brought us closer and there are very few cases were we disagree which we talk about calmly as parents."*
>
> F, 45

For a very small amount of parents this improved partner-relationship led to different allocation of tasks within the household. A change in task division is only reported by fathers. Two fathers report to be more involved in tasks they considered before as their wife's duties, like this father explains:

> *"What I have seen change is there were responsibilities that that I didn't consider to be performed by me because I used to believe they should be done by my wife, like bathing the children. I now bath them when I am at home and it has brought changes."*
>
> M, 43

One father mentions to involve his wife in his decision making process:

> *Another thing is that before I do anything, I must consult with my wife and agree on what to do for example talking about spending money to buy something and how it will be of our benefit.*
>
> *M, 44*

In addition, some mothers report to behave differently towards their husband. They welcome their partners when their partners arrive at home, iron the clothes of their husband or thank their partner if he brought something to the house. So both more traditional and modern patterns of task division are mentioned by parents after participation in the program, with fathers experiencing the clearest shift in responsibilities.

Overall, parents report they share ideas with others on how to raise children, both at the start and the end of the program. Frequently parents report to have a conversation with others about parenting in which advice is given. Respondents report to *get advice*, as well as *give advice,* to others. The frequency of getting and giving advice changes after participation in the program.

Both during pre- as well as post-test parents report on conversations with others in which somebody gets advice. During pre-test 44 percent of these parents report to get advice, 26 percent of these parents reports to give advice and 30 percent reports on both getting and giving advice. During the post-test 13 percent of these parents report to get advice, where 76 percent of these parents reports to give advice and 11 percent reports on both getting and giving advice. On the whole, data shows that before the program parents report getting advice over giving advice, where after the program parents reporting to give advice to others are more prevalent.

The respondents who say to give advice during post-test frequently mention to share their experiences and knowledge with those who did not attend the Skillful Parenting program, like one mother explains:

> *"The information given is going to help me now and even in future. I will also teach other parents who were not able to come to the training."*
>
> F, 52

Moreover, parents mention to give advice about specific parenting behaviors; they give advice to others about disciplining children or guiding their behavior, educating children, and communicating with the partner. For example, one mother says:

> *"I tell them to sit down with their children and tell them the importance of education. And also not to beat their children when they have done wrong but sit down with them and talk to them."*
>
> F, 53

Regarding the getting of advice, the frequency of almost all categories of persons that parents get advice from drop after the training (as compared to at the start of the program). Parents only report to get advice from professionals as frequently after the training as before; suggesting that it is mostly the *informal forms of getting advice* on parenting that decrease after the program.

After the program several parents report an improved relationship with their neighbours and communicate better with them, suggesting stronger community ties. In addition, one parent explains that he learned during the training that he can involve others (in this case local leaders or professionals) in raising his children:

> *"As a parent what I can do well, right from the training I learnt that I can do better. When I am a parent at home there are so many people that I can involve in bringing up my children like teachers, religious leaders."*
>
> M, 46

Another parent also mentions that she now knows how to talk to her child's teacher, so that the teacher can help her.

In conclusion, before participation with the Skillfull parenting program experienced social support seems to be low amongst respondents. However, parents say they receive and give advice, but they prefer to receive advice from someone that is a respectable source. After the program, parents state they experience an improved relationship with their spouse, which relates to the sharing of tasks and inclusion in decision making processes. It can be argued that this shift in relationship leads to the sharing of burdens such as those of parenting, as well. Aside from this change in relationship within the family, some parents state that they are more inclined to discuss parenting with their child's teacher and religious leaders. In addition, parents report an improved relationship with their neighbours as well, strengthening their network. The most distinct finding relates to the reports regarding a change from the respondents to getting information, to respondents providing information to others. Parents clearly report to be advising others regarding parenting, specifically in sharing information about the parenting program.

Overall, parents explain that they have changed the way they relate towards their spouses, and how they relate to community members. Respondents also seem more inclined to include others regarding discussions about parenting. However, in relation to experiencing a higher level of

advice from other regarding parenting, the respondents report to more often advice and inform others, especially trough sharing the lessons learned during the program.

Conclusion

Parents describe parenting from an economical perspective, and place emphasis on providing resources for their family. Respondents say this responsibility can be difficult to fulfill. After participation with the program parents report to feel more competent, and uphold an expanded view of parenting responsibilities. Parents now include communication and the relationship with their children as an important element of parenting. Respondents express more concern with how their behavior affects their children, and say they adapted their behavior accordingly based on what was taught in the program.

Social support is reportedly low amongst respondents. Parents say they prefer to receive support from someone who is reliable, and that such a person can be hard to find. After participation the experience of social support has improved. This is attributed to a better relationship between spouses, as well as involving other community members in the parenting of their children. Lastly, respondents report to be more inclined to advice others after participation in the program as well, during which they would inform others on the information they themselves were provided during the Skillful Parenting program.

Regardless of the fact that the survey results are no indefinite indication of significant change amongst respondents, the interviews indicate that parents do in fact experience an effect after participation with the Skillful Parenting program. It is seen that the definition of parenting has expanded, placing more emphasis on the interests of the child and including an increased awareness of how parent behavior affects their children. In addition, after the program parents state that they tend to refer to additional sources for support in parenting in contrast to before the training, and have themselves become more active as advisors in their community, regarding parenting. Respondents attribute these effects to the program, showing both an effect on parenting competence and social support based on findings from the interviews.

5. In-depth interview

The in-depth interviews were implemented as a means to gain a more thorough and in depth image of how the program was affecting the participants. The aim of the interviews was to identify the specific effects of the skillful parenting program, while taking into account (social) changes that have influenced local ideas and practices about parenting. By taking these changes into account, one can better understand the local context in which the intervention took place and the influences and challenges that parents face. Furthermore, in this way it becomes possible to determine with more detail and precision, what the effects of the skillful parenting program are specifically, but also how these effects tune into already ongoing social processes.

In order to reach this goal, next to questions about what parents learned from the program, interviews addressed where the prevalent parenting practices within the local communities come from, and how they have changed. Information regarding these changes illustrates the complexity of parenting within the respective the local context and its setting, as well as the parents' interests and concerns.

Design & instrument

As mentioned, a total sample of 30 respondents was selected. The sample of respondents for the interview, consisted of a subsample of the larger sample used during the survey. To achieve a sample of 30, five respondents were specifically selected from the five aforementioned locations, with ten men, and twenty women total. A higher women to men ratio was representative of the total observed participants of the program. All interviewees had participated with the skillful parenting program.

All participants were interviewed twice, once immediately after participating with the program, and once several months (3-4) after. During the second interview a total of 25 parents were interviewed due to drop-out. Extra effort was made to ensure parents would continue to participate with the interviews. However, drop out was caused by varying reasons, such as some parents' reluctance to participate with any further interviews without returned favors, men prohibiting their spouses further involvement in the research, and evasiveness from some parents.

The interviews are semi-structured, containing a set of themes, related questions and follow up questions. The interview set-up contained English and Kiswahili formulated questions, see annex 2.

The interview set up was led by three central research questions, as presented below:

I.   How is parenting defined and experienced by respondents before and after their participation with the program?

II.   What effects of the skillful parenting program do the respondents report, and why?

III.   Which processes led respondents to learn/adopt the program's lessons?

Four interview sections form the basis to answer these respective interview questions. The four parts are: Definitions of parenting; Family relations, Development; and Training concepts. The different parts contained varying sets of questions and follow up questions.

The first part of the interview revolves around the respondents' views on parenting, which serves as a means to establish a narrative by which serves to identify the meaning and value parents give to the concepts of *parenting.* This part also includes questions regarding experienced change in parenting by the respondents, without relating directly to the program itself.

The second part of the interview is that of parenting in family relationships, in which it is tried to gain a better understanding of how the local family dynamics work, how the parent views the roles and responsibilities within the family, and how this relates to parenting. Also, again parents were asked if and how parenting in family relationships has changed (through the program). Here there was an emphasis on family system, role distribution, gender based task division, and both parent-parent and parent-child communication and relationships.

The third part focuses specifically on development and is primarily about how parents have learned to be a parent. The answer to the related questions provides insight into how parenting views and practices are developed, where respondents originally get their education from, and also illustrates how the Skillful Parenting training relates to both those matters.

The last part deals with a selection of concepts (terms, definitions, knowledge and skills) as discussed during the training program's modules. In a broader sense the questions refer to how the parent reflects on the respective concepts, what they mean to him/her, how the introduction and possible integration of those concepts has affected her as a parent, and how this in turn has affected her family situation. In a more direct sense the concepts allow parents to discern what elements of the program the parents personally valued most, and why.

The different parts and the questions of the interview were subject to a specific design regarding the line of questions. During the first interviews it was found that the measurements of the learning process regarding parenting ideas and processes underlying the changes that

respondents attributed to the Skillful parenting program were challenging to discern. Originally it was assumed that the reported behavioral changes were accompanied by a change in ideas and views of the participating parents. Essentially, it was expected that respondents would change their behavior based on the validity they attributed to the program's modules. However, throughout the first set of interviews parents did not report on any distinct form of re-evaluation of their own ideas and values before adopting some of the program's skills and techniques, and reported to have applied the suggested behavioral changes presented seemingly without the intermediate processes we were presupposing.

On the whole, parents did not refer to a change in thinking that preceded behavioral change. Even though the program provides content with information, and appears to stimulate critical thinking, parents did not report changes in their attitude towards parenting before they started adopting the skills and techniques presented during the program's modules. Instead, respondents would reflect on themselves as having changed behaviorally without referring to a changed way of thinking. However, some parents would mention that they had noticed that others had observed changes in their behavior, which made them realize they had gone through a process of change. In addition, respondents stated they had a positive attitude towards the programs modules based on the experienced beneficial effects of the behavior adopted, after they had already implemented the changed behavior.

This finding suggested that respondents had changed their behavior without first changing their attitude. However, it was not assumed that respondents instantly agreed with the information they were presented during the training and immediately changed their behavior before any reflective process. Therefore, in an effort to understand how the respondents feel towards the content of the program and what drove them to change their behavior, parents were presented a line of questioning that would illustrate their process of change. A brief description is found below.

The first question asked was regarding the respondents' current behavior, followed by if and how that behavior is/was different from the behavior before the training. After this, respondents were asked how they felt about this change, and whether this change was perceived as positive or negative. If respondents replied the change was positive they would be asked, seeing as they view the new situation as better than the prior situation, why they never decided to change the prior situation regardless of the training. This set of questions determined how the respondents relate to their behavior after the training and helps discern which factors play a role in motivating, and allowing them to change (or not).

The interview during the second interviewing phase maintained a design very similar to the

first interviews. However, a set of questions from the interview during the first phase were not included due to repetition. Based on lessons learned during the first interviews, the second interview was adapted accordingly. The second interviews were implemented to measure reported long term effect of the training, as well as include inquiry regarding the wider social context of the program. This second objective was implemented in an effort to also move away from the more individual program experience and to help understand the Skillful Program in a cultural and historical context. This knowledge would provide information to discern the social relevance of the program. In addition, by identifying traditional practices of the development of parenting one can better understand how the program's process of changing ideas and practices distinguishes itself from the prevalent learning processes present amongst the local communities not involved with the training.

Interviews were done by the head field researcher and a translator. The head field researcher was English speaking and of Dutch origin, where the translator was proficient in both English as well as Kiswahili. The translator was recruited from the area, but because of the wide diversity of tribes and clans, she had only access to the specific local languages of a small selection of respondents. The interviews were done in Kiswahili or English, depending on the individual respondent's preference. For practical reason, the English transcriptions will be presented in this report.

Because of the explorative nature of the research, mostly an inductive approach was applied for the analyses, using a bottom-up approach in an effort to support an open, non-biased approach of the data. It was aimed to make sense of the parent's narratives in order to capture their discourse and frame of reference . At the same time, use was made of existing conceptual frames of reference, such as the reviewed studies on parenting in Africa taking into account the socio-cultural setting in which these take place, as earlier described in this report.

Results

    I.   How is parenting defined and experienced by respondents before their participation with the program?

What Parenting Means

As a first step, respondents were asked what they felt it meant to be a good parent before their participation with the program. Almost all parents believe that providing the food, shelter, care, and

education were key to good parenthood. These concepts were expressed differently by parents, who also referred to access to 'hospital', 'medication', 'clothes' and 'books', as means that they should provide to their children and the family. Parents often expressed that they felt parents need to 'bring up' their children, while referring to providing material resources, without explicitly referring to socialization tasks.

The summary of attending the needs of their children strongly resembles the reported ideas that prior local generations had, namely that of providing children with food and shelter. During the second round of interviews it was inquired how respondents had experienced the parenting of their own elders. Respondents would state that their own parents would focus only on providing food and shelter, but did not strongly invest in sending their children to school. In contrast with earlier, more traditional practices the element of education is found to be important amongst respondents as well.

> *"[…] now that she is educating the children she wants them to complete their education get jobs and support her."*
>
> F, Namalenga, 37

The value that is attributed to the education of children is twofold. For one, the importance of education is derived from the idea that an educated child will get a job and make money. This is perceived to be a good thing, as many parents mention that they experience consistent financial strain. Considering this, parents also report they would like their children to be a doctor, manager, or teacher, referring to professional positions within their communities that enjoy social economic status both in wealth, as well as respect.

Aside from the benefit to the child itself, parents want their children to get a job so they can support the parents. Considering the fact that most parents mention experiencing financial strain and the fact that poverty results in a lack of preparations for retirement, parents require their children to ensure they are taken care of during their older years. Overall, parents refer to this particular benefit of their children's education more than they do to the benefits of education to the children themselves.

Parents were asked what they felt the roles of children are, and what children should learn. It was said that children are perceived to play a role in the household, and need to contribute to working in and around the house, as well as in the farm and other chores. Parents also expect their children to take care of them, the same way they themselves have taken/take care of their own

parents. The child's current and future services are considered its inherent responsibilities, and deemed a return of the investment of resources into the child's development by the parents.

The perceptions that respondents had before the training, regarding the teaching of tasks, and the division of chores in regards to their children, strongly resemble that as was reported about their own parents of prior generations. The participants explain that they taught tasks to (their) children by example, and that different chores are done by children of different gender. The teaching of specific skills and understanding responsibility are still seen as important lessons that will prepare the children for adult life.

Aside from the more practical contribution to the household, children are expected to be obedient. Obedience from children is perceived to be especially important because it also shows respect towards their elder. Aside from showing respect within the household, children of both genders are also expected to display proper behavior towards their elders outside the household as well. Even though the importance for this behavior is expressed, the specific reason for it is not explained. It seems to be generally perceived that children should show a sense of subordination to their elders, and do as is asked.

Aside from the more utilitarian role of the children in the household and the importance of good behavior and paying respect, parents also report the desires they had for their children and their lives. Occasionally parents mention they wanted, and still want, their children to be 'good people'. However, even if parents formulated these goals for their offspring, they did not directly identify themselves as having a responsibility in the development of their children into being good people, nor do they mention specific practices of doing so.

Despite parents having a clear idea about what they expected from their children, they did not identify themselves directly as the ones to teach or instill the corresponding values. This can be related to the fact that respondents reported that the act of socialization of children was originally primarily viewed to be an act done by grandparents. For example, when respondents were asked who it was that taught them about wrong and right, and who taught them how to behave, they explained that active socialization; support in personal development and providing moral guidance, was a task primarily done by grandparents, instead of the actual biological parents. The respondents would identify a distinction of specific roles, where the parents trained the children in tasks and skills, and grandparents were perceived as the mentors in moral and social guidance.

The teaching done by grandparents is described as a practice where the grandfather and mother would collect all the grandchildren from the homestead and teach them collectively. Teaching was done through the telling of stories, which would include (moral) life lessons, such as cautionary tales. The parenting done by the grandparents seemed to be primarily identified as education on good conduct and morality. When asked about the relevance of children learning these things, it was stated that both the practical teachings of the parents, as well as the socialization done by grandparents would provide a preparation to adult life.

Throughout the interviews respondents would identify the aforementioned socialization process by grandparents as a traditional practice that is currently no longer present. Few respondents report a similar level of involvement from the grandparents in the socialization of their own children. When asked, it is mentioned that the involvement of grandparents has waned. An explanation that was provided was that most families no longer live on homesteads together, and that the nuclear family (husband, wife and children) tends to live away from the grandparents. The distance interferes with close involvement from the grandparents as part of the parenting process. Regardless of the grandparents' absence in these matters, respondents did not state they engaged in similar socialization tasks with their children themselves.

When several parents were asked about their opinion on the subject of child socialization by grandparents, they responded that they found this -now rare- practice to be a positive thing. Socialization by parents alone is deemed lacking, or inferior to a combination of the socialization done by both generations. The lessons the children receive from their elders helped them to develop social and more values, which impact upon their disciplinary practice as a parent.

In summary, parents see their task primarily as a provider of resources, where they provide for the food and health of their children. In addition, parents feel it is their responsibility to send their children to school, based on the prospect of their own, and their child's future. Moreover, parents expect their children to contribute to the family and do different tasks and chores in an

around the household. Parents mention teaching their children by showing them how to work, and expect them to follow the example. Lastly, parents expect their children to show respect for their elders and obey their parents, as a display of good values. However, when asked about a more conscious, direct socialization regarding social behavior respondents state that this task was originally fulfilled by grandparents. This practice is now no longer common based to changes in family organization, where grandparents often do not live close to their grandparents. Parents did not report practicing the same child socialization tasks they attributed to grandparents, even in the grandparents absence.

How is Parenting Learned

Aside from discussing what respondents perceived parenthood to be before the training, the respondents were asked about when, how, and from whom they learned ideas and practices that referred to nurturing, childcare and child-socialization. This information is particularly relevant because it sheds light on the origin of the respondents' initial views and practices and how they developed their ideas and skills. Using this information will illustrate how the parenting program relates to where the parents' ideas prior to the training come from, and why they exist. Overall, respondents reported that they got their information from their childhood experience, their parents in law, the hospital, and from the church. Most parents identify the birth of their first child as a specific start of their learning path regarding parenting.

When respondents considered the parenting ideas and practices that they developed throughout their lives, they would often refer to the influence of the traditional parenting they experienced as children. When respondents were asked to reflect on the origin of their own ideas and practices, as well as those of their forefathers, the respondents would often rest on the notion that things simply were that way, and had been. In general, the respondents believed that traditional ideas and practices were handled down from generation to generation. They themselves had simply copied most of it from their own parents. Respondents mentioned they did not know why the practices had been there, but simply stated that it was the way it was. A mother said:

> *"I feel it was a tradition because I think it was being carried from one generation to another. Because I think those grandparents of ours were also being handled the same way with their grandparent's just behind. So it came on up to maybe today."*
>
> F, Namalenga, 52

Considering the influence of their parents, respondents state that the road towards the development into a parent started at childhood. Several parents explained how they were exposed to child caring practices in their household when they were young. They received some information from this, but commonly add that these youth lessons were only a small part of their total learning process towards becoming a parent.

> *"So she's saying that when she was taking care of the sister's child, she was just carrying the baby and seeing the sister breastfeeding the baby but she didn't learn much. She came to learn when she got her baby."*

When respondents were asked when they think it was that they started to learn about being a parent, they commonly referred to the moment they got married and had children. The question "When did you start learning about parenting" often made parents blush, as within the local discourse this seemed to refer more to the act of making children, instead of rearing children.

The development as a parent seems to include different experiences for women than for men. Women often refer to the influence their mother in-law had on their first experiences, as the mother-in-law was mentioned several times to be a strong presence during the first period after childbirth. She would be involved as a caretaker of both mother and child, and would educate the new mother on practices deemed important in regards to the infants' care. Seeing as women are often married away from their family, the mother-in-law would be the nearest involved senior female with experience in child-care.

Most men also identify the birth of their first child as the moment they began learning about parenthood. However, they do not report the specific experiences with the infant, and refer more generally to the fact they then realized they had a (financial) responsibility to the family. In this sense, fathers more commonly reflect on a moment of realization as a learning process, where women mention learning tasks such as feeding and washing the infant.

Another factor that is mentioned as a place where respondents learn about parenting is the church. A father mentions the following:

> *"[…] he is saying that the place to learn about parenting is church and he is giving a verse in the bible where the children need to respect their parents and also the parents need to take good care of the children not to mistreat the children."*

It is often reported that in church parents learn about what a family is, and how they should live together, as well as about the role of men, women and children in society. Parents often do not extrapolate much on the specific content of the church lessons, nor the method in which it teaches, but it is occasionally mentioned that church urges the respondents to 'stay well with the family', and to have peace in the household. Church is perceived to advocate values, but no education in specific parenting knowledge is mentioned.

A few mothers mention the role of the hospital as a source for information on parenting. The mothers refer to education they received about the physical and medical connotations of pregnancy, childbirth, and the infant's health and development. The local hospitals provide check-ups for pregnant women, and provide them with the information they need to safeguard their pre-maternal and post-maternal processes. There is no specific data on the availability and quality of the hospital's medical services in this regard.

As part of the inquiry about where parents learned how to raise their children, parents were asked who had influenced or taught them about how they should deal with their children aside from the more physically oriented care such as that regarding child's health. As a finding, parents address the fact that they were never really deliberately taught on how to parent or communicate with their children and felt they just copied what they had seen others do.

> *There was no mentor or a teacher, they* (the people) *were just seeing how people were doing and they do (it too).*

As a last note, the researchers initially expected to receive accounts of the influence of interventions in addition to the skillful parenting programs. Respondents did give accounts of programs that had influenced them, but related none of the programs directly to parenting. There

were accounts of awareness of the existence of, as well as participation with interventions that focus on the prevention of disease and child abuse, as well as the reduction of poverty amongst local households. However, respondents explained that most of the programs focus on farming, and providing information, and did not experience their influences were significant determinant for their parenting practices in comparison to the experienced effects of the Skillful parenting program.

As a summary, respondents explain that they learned parenting from their own parents. Most of the practices of their elders were copied from the way the respondents were raised themselves. Aside from childhood experience, respondents say they learned about parenting when they received children, and mothers experienced mentorship from their mother-in-law. Aside from this, information on the care of children, and the responsibility of parents, was also learned from institutions like the hospital and the church. Hospitals provide healthcare information regarding children's early life, and churches seem primarily invested in preaching lessons regarding parenting behavior according to Christian ideals and beliefs. In addition, parents do not report to have received significant prior training on parenthood from other organizations, such as NGO's.

Aside from childhood experience and the influence of the mother-in-law, there is a contrast regarding the understanding of the nature of parenting by the respondents, and the manner in which they receive information regarding parenting practices. Most respondents display a grounded and 'material' understanding of parenting that seems mostly focused on the physical development of their children. However, the lessons from the church and hospital seem informative in nature, and do not include practical instructions. Considering this, most respondents have not received practical knowledge from outside their community on how to behave or deal with children and the practical side of childrearing therefore is primarily influenced by local standards.

How Parenting is Experienced

As part of the interviews, respondents were asked whether they felt that they were good parents. This question was somewhat difficult, because based on local norms it was hard for respondents to admit whether they felt they were good parents or not. Most parents say they felt like good parents before the training. It was explained by the parents that even though they experienced difficulty, they did not reflect on their position much and accepted things the way they were. In general, parents experienced, and still experience, that they cannot provide enough for their family, such as sending their children to school and provide food, and/or medicine, which compromises their sense of success as a parent.

Considering the role division of genders and the role of the father as provider, fathers tend to be more frustrated with themselves. The father's role is based on providing for the family, which most parents find hard to achieve. Therefore men tend to identify themselves less often as good parents as compared to women, who also appraise their worth as a parent based on their activities related to child-care.

One of the major challenges that all respondents face is poverty. The lack of currency is considered one of the greatest challenges, because it impairs the access to different services such as school and medical aid. The following statement from a mother sums up the consistent theme of financial strain that most parents address:

> *"She is saying that the needs of the children are so many and she is not well able to meet all the needs of the children because aside from the books there are some other things that the children need and she is not able to meet them."*
>
> F, 37, Namalenga

When respondents speak of the need for money they usually refer to the costs of education. In general, supporting children to go to school is experienced as difficult, and multiple parents give examples of their children being send back from school during the day because the 'school fees' have not been paid. It is explained that the parents would often get mad at their children because of the frustration of financial pressure. The additional costs of uniforms and materials add to these difficulties as well.

Other serious issues that respondents speak about are that of crime and disease. Considering the economically deprived settings in which most rural parents reside, the presence of theft and other forms of crime is very real. Several respondents spoke of incidents that jeopardized them, their household and their family. On one occasion the interviewer visited a parent for an interview to find most of the homesteads furniture stalled outside, covered with burn markings. During the interview it became apparent that a thief had broken in and had physically threatened the ten year old daughter. Upon discovery by surrounding community members, the thief had locked himself in the house and as a means of defense had started burning the furniture, clothes, harvest, tools, and paperwork of the family. After the authorities had come and gone, the thief was eventually physically overcome by men from the community, dragged outside, and killed on the spot.

> *"Everything in the house was burnt by a thief."*

The parent who told the story spoke calmly and seemed relaxed; she did not express distress. Even though the woman said it had happened only a few days before, she was welcoming towards visitors and invested in the interview. This behavior suggested an attitude that was initially difficult to comprehend for the interviewer. When asked, the mother said she was sad, but also pleased that no-one from her family got hurt. Regardless, it must be closely observed that extreme incidents such as mentioned are not uncommon, and plague many citizens community wide. This is the reality that parents face, and complicates their lives.

When parents are asked about what they would like to see change in their community, they occasionally refer to prevention of disease. Disease is primarily identified as STD's, with an emphasis on HIV. Kenya has a history of numerous HIV infections, and some parents consider it a real threat up to this day. Most respondents say they warn their older children against diseases, though they did not mention in what specific way they educate their children on this subject.

The women who were interviewed sometimes mentioned the difficulty of being a mother in regards to the role division in the household. When asked about hardships, female respondents tended to refer to difficulties with their husband. The difficulties expressed would vary between a lack of shared burden regarding parenting and child-care, and violent conflict with their spouse.

Mothers would refer to experiencing a lopsided division of roles and tasks in the household, and said that men tended to not contribute much. Women are expected to care for the homestead and child care, where men should provide for the family. Currently, most provision is manifested as finances, but unemployment leads men to falter in their contribution. Regardless, women are still burdened with primary responsibility over the care of the children, despite lacking financial means. Mothers feel that in this scenario, they are the ones that run the homestead and care for the children in the men's absence, but men do not manage to provide enough.

The second issue that is mentioned regarding the relationship between men and wives is that of conflict and violence. Both men and women often report that they experienced strain on their relationship, and occasionally spoke about animosity and occasionally violence, even on a personal level. Physical correction of children (and women) is commonly practiced, and physical abuse is considered a substantial issue within the respective communities. However, divorce is not a

common practice, and respondents who would refer to a difficult relationship with their spouse still remained married. Accompanying the topic of domestic violence is that of alcoholism. The excessive abuse of local (often poisonous) brews such *changaa* is prevalent amongst unemployed men, and personal accounts of domestic violence by women are often directly related to their husband's substance abuse.

In general, the respondents experience parenting in current times to be complicated. Where many respondents claim they copied most of their practices from their elders, they are now coping with a changing society in which those practices are difficult to implement. The personal experiences of the respondents in this regard differed, but many parents did confirm changes in their communities.

When deliberately asked, respondents occasionally comment they feel that change in parenting practices is necessary. During a few interviews respondents referred to traditional practices to be somewhat violent, which was condemned. In addition, parents reflect on the fact

that children feel a discrepancy between what parents teach them, or how parents think, and what the children themselves consider relevant in these times.

"They look down upon you and tell you, you will not tell me anything especially the digital ones. They say that you, you learned typewriting you never learnt computer."

(F, Namalenga, 52)

This notion illustrates that the ideas that the respondents have are changing, as well as that there is an awareness regarding a new generation who uphold new and sometimes different values.

Despite the fact that respondents report influences of societal change regarding ideas and practices in parenting, as well as occasionally condemning older practices that they feel are in need of change, it is also expressed that these practices tend to remain because of the local circumstances. When parents were asked whether the 'new' or 'old' ideas about parenting were more prevalent in their community, almost all parents said that the old ideas were 'still there' or 'slowly changing'. The reasons for the absence of change despite the 'outside' influences were summarized as a lack of (access to) information as well as the consistent transition of traditional practices across generations.

"[…] of course they copied that and they know the only way of correcting a friend is either by beating or may be by quarreling, telling that person bitter words so you find that those people who were brought up in the traditional way of parenting are very hard to change […]"

(F, Olepito, 39)

In summary, regardless of what kind of parents the respondents are, they agree that being a parent in their current situation is difficult. Their reported deprivation manifests itself in poverty, the presence of disease, and their communities are occasionally troubled with violence. Women regularly experience particular strain, based on the notion of unequal task division, and a lack of contribution from their husbands. Overall, parents report they notice that younger generations have different ideas from them, but also express that ideas about parenting are only slowly changing.

II.   What effects of the skillful parenting program do the respondents report, and why?

In general, the parents who participated with the research and thus participated in the program would (still) express both difficulties in fulfilling their role as parents after the program, but also report on multiple effects of the Skillful Parenting program. Overall, all parents feel that the Skillful parenting program has provided them with skills and understanding that has helped them feel like better parents.

When discussing the skillful parenting program the respondents stated that the program has taught them one or more lessons that have affected their daily lives. Almost all respondents report at least one form of changed behavior, and mostly report that this new behavior is seen as better than it was before the training. The impact of the program differs per parent, but overall the elements of communication, self-care, stress-management and child developmental stages appear to be the most prevalent.

Based on the self-report of the respondents, communication is the most important element of the skillful parenting program. Respondents all testify to experience changes in their communication with their spouses, children, family and even other community members, which they felt, led to changes in their relationship with all respective people. When not asked specifically, respondents would occasionally refer to a change on their own accord, reflecting on their changed communication with their spouse over that of communication with their children. When asked specifically, respondents would confirm changes in communication both with their spouses and children. Despite more often reporting changes in spousal communication on their own initiative, respondents were able to elaborate more on the specific changes they made in their communication with children. It can be argued that for many respondents the change in the way they relate to their husband or wife is of more significant impact to their lives.

Regarding communication between spouses, women who experienced difficulties regarding their husbands prior to the training stated that their relationship improved, and that their husband expressed appreciation of the wife's changed behavior. Men too stated they felt that communication with their spouse had improved, which had benefitted the family situation. Behavior that had reportedly improved the relationship was being more welcoming for women, where they would try to be kind and patient towards their husband and ensure that he would be served food and have clean clothes. Men stated they would try helping their wives in household tasks, and including them in decision making processes regarding finances. These behaviors were said to be learned in the parenting program.

Improved communication between spouses was commonly expressed as 'coming together',

where the respondent explained an extra effort to relate to their spouse, and attempt to avoid conflict. Both male and female respondents state that they attempt to be more receptive to their spouses, and engage them more in conversation. This experienced change is relevant considering the fact that outside the interviews a participating father once explained he had not had a decent conversation with his wife in years. Based on the respondents' reports it has become evident that before the training communication between spouses was generally experienced to be poor, and often resulted in difficult home situations. In contrast, the information parents receive from the program regarding communication, as well as the discussions, reflections and exercises regarding this topic are are therefore experienced to be greatly influential.

In more extreme situations the element of communication is still perceived beneficial, but less effective. In several cases mothers would report on consistent domestic violence, also after the training. These women stated that knowing how to avoid conflict aided them in having a more peaceful household with less violence, but they reported upholding the ideas and practices learned from the program was difficult without cooperation from their husband. Despite the relatively smaller effect, it must be noted that the SPP does provide change for said mothers.

The change in the communication between spouses is closely related to gender roles. For example, several men explain that they try to include their wives in financial decision making. Financial responsibility is considered within the domain of men, and not women. When asked how the respondents feel about the reported respective change in roles, most male as well as female respondents approved. The underlying reason for the benefit of the change was that it made their lives easier, and led to 'peace in the homestead'. No conflict with original values regarding gender roles was expressed. By sharing responsibility in these matters respondents feel less burdened. When asked why the respondents did not abandon gender-based task and role division regarding the discussed matters (such as inclusion in financial decision making) prior to the program considering the fact that they perceive the new situation to be better, respondents explain that they simply 'did not know' how, or that they could.

Even though communication between spouses was addressed more often on the initiative of the respondents, all parents reported changed communication with their children when prompted. The improved communication manifests itself in sitting down with children, listening to them, instructing them, and properly disciplining them.

When discussing child communication respondents commonly address the importance of knowing the needs of their children, and that it is important to make the child feel close to you so it will express its needs, and listen to the child so one can know what the child's needs are. When

asked, respondents state they learned this from the program. The importance of knowing the needs of the children is primarily attributed to trying to ensure their wellbeing. Respondents argue that trough monitoring the child the parent can know what it needs, such as food, care or school fees.

Respondents were asked about the difference between their communications with their children before the training. The most common answer was that parents felt that they were originally 'harsh' to the children. Respondents tended to say they would *kiboko* (cane) the children when they made a mistake, and often struck out of anger. When discussing the topic of disciplining their children after the training the respondents still believe that psychical disciplining can be necessary, but that they punish their children less often and less severely, and state that they try to ensure the child knows why it's being punished. Respondents also said not to discipline their children when the parent is angry, explaining they attempted to refrain from hurting a child out of anger.

> *"So she's saying that after going through the training she's taught the children. Even if the child has done a mistake she doesn't shout or hit them. She tells them that such and such a thing you did wrong and I don't want you to do it again. And the children have responded well."*
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> F, Olepito, 35

When discussing the change in communication, most respondents express having a better relationship with their children. This is applies to both men and women. In general, respondents are happy about the improved relationship with their children. It is often stated that parents feel good about being close to their children and that it's good that their children did not fear them like they themselves feared their parents.

Respondents were questioned about their appreciation regarding the changed relationship with their children. As with the communication between spouses, the new communication with children was preferred. Based on this, respondents were asked if they considered changing their communication behavior before the training. As with communication between spouses the respondents explain that they were not aware of any alternatives in communication, nor aware of the effectiveness of those alternatives. It was commonly agreed that the new skills and knowledge regarding communication were very positive, and that it aided them in monitoring and caring for their offspring.

Aside from the element of communication the lessons on *self-esteem* were deemed

relevant. Respondents would claim they learned to reassert themselves as parents. Generally, it is formulated that before the training the respondents often felt parenting to be difficult and felt frustrated with their responsibilities. However, during the training they had learned that regardless of your resources as a parent, the most important thing is that they attempted to care for the children. This lesson had most effect on parents with little to no financial resources, who now felt that despite their inability or difficulty to provide materials and services such as clothes and medication for their children, they now regarded themselves as good parents for trying.

The reported changes persisted up to the second round of in-depth interviews. Though many parents did not remember all the content of the training, they had often internalized several specific lessons that were particularly relevant to them. Examples are a mother who primarily attributed value to keeping her homestead clean, and another mother who specifically valued parent-child interaction and explained being very grateful for being able to connect to her children. Overall, the elements of self-care and communication appeared to have the most persistent and long-term effect.

As mentioned, the respective parents reported different examples of challenges the local communities face, as well as instances of individual hardship. Based on the fact that the experienced difficulties of parents sometimes take on extreme forms the respondents claimed that lessons of *stress-management* aided them a lot. Respondents explained that the lessons regarding this topic taught them to understand when they are stressed, and to monitor themselves when they feel stressed. Respondents give examples of being stressed and deciding to talk to a friend, sleep, or listen to the radio. By doing so they would become less aggressive, and more receptive to their family. Several parents state that through managing their stress better they become less aggravated towards their spouse and children.

In sum, regarding the content of the skillful parenting program respondents state that they experience the most change in their behavior regarding communication, self-esteem and stress management. Parents communicate differently with both their spouses and children, and experience improved relationships with both. Improved communication is also reported to lead to better household climates, a better distribution of tasks and roles between husband and wife, and more effective child-rearing practices. Changing relationships are sometimes identified to undermine more stratified gender roles, but the respondents experience no conflict with what they personally find important. The session on communication are found to be less influential in cases of severe domestic conflicts. Self-esteem is reported to make respondents feel more competent as parents. The module on stress management is believed to be influential as well as they help parents

deal with the challenges they face, and be more social towards their family.

III.   Which processes led respondents to learn/adopt the program.

Here the specific didactics, methods that are part of the learning process will be discussed. Findings are based on how the respondents reflect on the way the training was presented to them, and which overarching elements helped them receive, and internalize the information that they received.

When asked what the respondents personally liked about the program they would often refer to specific topics. The description referred mostly to the content as discussed above. It seemed difficult to reflect on how the respondents had learned what they learned. As a solution, the respondents were asked to reflect on how they felt when present at the sessions, and how they experienced the way they were engaged by the facilitator. In addition, the respondents were provided with examples to reflect on, like how they valued the exercises and activities they had experienced during the sessions. Most respondents would still refer specifically to content, but a minority made accounts of methods and processes that they felt had help them learn and eventually change their behavior.

One of the more prevalent processes that were experienced as relevant to the learning process of the parents was that the program provided the respondents a place to speak. It was explained that the setup of the program, in which all respondents had the right to speak and the duty to listen to one another was important for what they learned during their participation.

At the start of the program the respondents are presented with a set of ground rules, including those that direct all participants to be open and honest, and provide everyone with a place to say what they want to say. This rule resulted in many respondents talking to other parents about things they do not usually share. The main value of this setup was that the respective respondents felt that they found other parents who were facing the same challenges they were, and share advice with one another. One example is a mother who was open about the alcohol abuse of her husband, and received advice from a few other mothers who shared this experience.

One mother commented on the fact that she felt that sharing her story had done her good. During the interview she discussed a serious conflict with her brother-in-law who had made her life difficult since her husband died ten years ago. The parenting program was the first time she fully discussed the matter with anyone else, and she explained that it had felt 'good' to share. When she was asked further she could not specify the feeling, but confirmed it had given her relief in general.

Respondents were asked to compare their learning experiences regarding parenting in general with the specific techniques that were used to teach during the program sessions. When a father had mentioned that he felt that he had learned about proper values in church, but also received important lessons on how to communicate from the skillful parenting program, he was asked to compare this learning experience in church with that of the program. The underlying aim was to collect data on how the specific teaching methods of the program relate to other learning process that the parents experience. The father explained that the specific examples and stories that were presented during the sessions felt relatable to him and his life, and this helped him understand the lessons of the program. It seemed the church's lessons were experienced to be less contextualized in comparison to the lessons of the Skillful parenting program, making the program's lessons more directly relevant and more accessible to internalization to the respondent.

Throughout later interviews this theme reoccurred when respondents state that the usage of examples and anecdotes make the respondents understand the content of the program, and connect it to their own lives. Examples that respondents provided included the facilitator discussing the practice of denying a child food as punishment, and the dangers of malnutrition. A respondent explained that she used to implement this practice to discipline a child and could connect the issue of malnutrition and child health to her personal life because of this example. In general, it can be stated that the method of the program includes using examples from the local context that the respondents find relatable to their life, increasing the perceived relevance and validity to the respondents, of the lessons provided.

Throughout the interviews it became apparent that many respondents felt that the knowledge as provided by the program was determinant for their personal change. During interviews parents were asked if they experienced any change, upon which they commonly stated they did. When asked how they knew they changed, the answer was usually based on the fact that someone (spouse, children, family, other) had responded to the respective parent that they felt their behavior had changed. Their sense of transformation was based on these observations from others, though when asked whether they themselves felt they had changed as well the respondents mostly agreed.

Upon this reported observation of others, as well as themselves, the respondents were asked whether they were content with the change they experienced. This too, was always the case. The respondents would often go on to state that their changes had made their lives better, and dubbed their new behavior superior to their old practices. When the respondents were asked why they initially had not decided to change their behaviour by themselves, almost all of them

commented that they just 'didn't know'.

The knowledge provided by the program appears to be one of great influence to the change amongst its participants. Generally, the respondents express they simply did not know alternatives to neither their behavior nor their thinking, and felt the program provided this information. Arguably, it may also have been the fact that parents did not think alternatives as acceptable, and felt that through dialogue with their peers and the introduction to new ideas, they could try new things.

Despite reporting that the knowledge as provided by the program was new to them, it was not experienced to be controversial to the original ideas of the respondents. When respondents were asked what they felt were modern and traditional ideas about parenting, they were also asked which of the two ideas of parenting they preferred. When asked which of the types of thinking (that they themselves described) was represented by the skillful parenting program, parents almost always related the program to their preferred type of parenting (traditional or modern). There was no consensus on whether the ideas of skillful parenting were viewed to be traditional or modern. In addition, respondents reported that they felt the program represented their own values which they had before the training (those they described as being good parenting) but felt the program helped extrapolate on those values and provided them with new ideas and tools on how to parent.

Amongst several parents was a very strong desire to share the information that they were provided with by the training. A few specific respondents were so taken with the program and invested in the distribution of its content that they were jokingly dubbed to be sharing the 'gospel of skillful parenting' during the interview. Overall, respondents stated they often tried to inform, advice, and teach other people.

Respondents stated they wanted to educate and help others who had not participated with the program about its content. The general reason for this sharing of information was that it had helped the respondents themselves, and they deemed it important to share this with others. Also, during the training the respondents were urged to share the information with others in their community was well, which implies that respondents put this in to practice.

In summary, aside from its content the skillful parenting program is also valued because of the specific way it engages with parents. Respondents state that the program provided them with a place to speak their mind, and in return hear from others. They feel that they've learned from other parents who were present to help deal with specific parenting issues. Also, the respondents say that the way the facilitator used examples and stories helped them relate the topic to their own life. Lastly, parents feel that the program presents them with knowledge they did not possess before. This knowledge would accommodate them in their desire to change or realize alternative ways of dealing with their parenting problems. Overall the knowledge provided during the program was not experienced to conflict with what the respondents felt were important values prior to the program.

6. Discussion & Conclusion

The central purpose of this evaluation is to determine if and how the Skillful Parenting program effects the parenting of its participants. In addition, it was aimed to determine how the parenting program was adapted to the specific West Kenyan setting, and how the specific content and processes of the SPP determine the program's effects and outcome. Integral to this research was to understand the context in which in the program was implemented, and discover how the program both influences, and is influenced by the local ideas and values. The ultimate goal is to understand how the program works and why it has the effects that it has, both in an effort to determine its effectiveness. Findings regarding ideas and practices prevalent in the local culture may also aid in understanding which considerations are relevant in discerning how the program can be up scaled beyond its specific context.

We asked the following questions:

1. What impact does the Skillful Parenting program have on the parenting of the participating parents and caregivers in ICS projects in Kenya?

2. (How) was the parenting program, that was based on international concepts of parenting, adapted to the West Kenyan situation? How can we understand the effects of the program on parenting competences (that results from 1) of the Skillful Parenting Program in West Kenia also taking into account its context?

In the following, we summarize and discuss the main findings while paying attention to both contextual issues as well as reported program effects.

Program Outcomes

As was evident from the pre and post intervention interviews, as well from as the in-depth interviews, the description of parenting used amongst the respondents has changed after the training. Respondents originally primarily refer to ensuring their children have enough to eat, are healthy, safe, and go to school. Parenting in this sense seems to be described as the facilitation of material resources. After the training, parents start referring to parent child interaction as a parent's

responsibility as well. In general, respondents display a consideration for the way their behavior effects their children that was not present before the training. In addition, the respondents reflect on different communication skills that they implement in an effort to better control and understand their offspring.

The expansion of parenting responsibilities does not seem to infringe upon the original ideas of parents. During the in-depth interviews respondents state they are pleased with the changes that the parenting program have brought. In addition, the expansion of responsibilities of parents has broadened the definition of what a parent is; allowing parents a broader perspective of themselves as caregivers and individuals. In this particular case the merit of this effect is that respondents can identify themselves not only as good or bad parents that can or cannot provide for their children, but also as caregivers that invest in the social and emotional wellbeing of their children. The statements parents make illustrates that being a good parent has become less dependent on whether they do or do not have sufficient resources, but is also measured by whether they invest in the social-relational aspects of parenting.

The inclusion of additional responsibilities in their definition of parenting may lead to the expansion of the level of accountability of parents, making them responsible for more factors than they initially considered to be part of parenting. Though no concern regarding this matter was expressed by any respondent, it is worth noting that the adding of responsibilities of a parent may complicate the lives of those who find difficulty in successfully upholding these extra tasks.

In regards to the effects of the program, from the pre and post-test interviews it has become clear that respondents state they feel like better parents after the training. Parents say that they did not necessarily felt like 'bad' parents before the training, but think that in hindsight they are now showing behavior that is superior to that which they displayed before the training. The survey results confirm these results given that we have seen significant increases on several items on the *parenting competence*. However, given the low reliability of the scales, in particular pre-training, it is difficult to pinpoint the underlying concept of competence that is responsible for the increase based on the survey data, especially given the changing meaning of parenting pre and post training. In combination with the interview data, the increased scores on the individual items of the survey, clearly indicate that parents start to see parenting as less troublesome, and start to think of themselves as better parents post training.

Though a general feeling of increased competence is reported, respondents continue to say that parenting is difficult. Persistent poverty remains a consistent issue that makes parenting hard, illustrating that both the economical perspective on parenting remains present, as well as that

financial strain remains a consistent issue.

The expansion of the definition of parenting as well as an increased sense of experienced competence is based on the different changes in behavior that respondents report. Parents state they feel like better parents based on how they behave towards their children, as well as their spouses. This 'new' behavior is primarily related to communication, between parent and child as well as between husband and wife.

Parent and child communication has reportedly improved. Parents say that they listen more to their children and are more inclined to ask their children, than to command them. In addition, parents discipline their children differently, where they say they are less harsh towards their offspring, use less physical punishment, and try not to discipline them when they are angry. Parents have adopted these new practices because, according the parents, they work, where children react well to the parents' changed behavior and are more obedient. Several parents also say that their new behavior has resulted in their children being closer to them, making the parents express gratitude for the improved relationship they now have with their offspring.

Fathers generally express they learned to be more involved with their children. Where there was originally a separation between the father and his offspring, where the father was an authority figure that did not immediately occupy himself with their children's wellbeing in the same way the mother was expected to. The program has reportedly learned fathers to be closer to his children, and communicate with them differently. Fathers prefer this new relationship over the old one, feeling they are more aware of their children's lives and experience higher levels of control.

In regards to communication between spouses it is reported that respondents try to be warmer to their husband/wife by being more accommodating, talking to them differently, and sharing in household tasks. Mother state they try and be kinder to their husband and doing things such as ensuring he is served food upon his homecoming, where fathers say they involve their wives in decision making and try to share in household tasks. Again, both men and women say they are pleased with the changes, where they now experience more peace in their homes, and have a better relationship with their spouse.

For both fathers and mothers it was reported that after the program the family role division had become less rigid, and parents tended to share more with one another. This was also related to an improved relationship between spouses, which originated from the program's modules about how to communicate and relate to one another. This finding also applies that, though the program provides different messages for mothers and fathers based on their role division, it also instigates a certain *blurring of lines*, diminishing the strong separation between men and women's tasks and

responsibilities, even though father's roles have shifted most.

Some of the respective changes seem in conflict with more traditional local ideas. An example is the change in role division between husband and wife, where men taking upon themselves household tasks are originally considered somewhat of a taboo. When asked about this, parents say that the changes may be conflicting with more traditional ways of thinking, but the effect of the changed behavior is experienced to be more important. Overall, the experienced improved relationship between parents, and parents and children, as well as reduced conflicts at home are considered superior to conformation to local norms regarding these relationships.

Respondents who were exposed to extreme problems, which mostly included women who reported consistent abuse by their husbands, reported less effect of the program. Though in these cases, parent-child communication between the mothers and children had overly improved, relationship with the husband remained difficult. The lack of co-operation from the partner undermines the implementation of the newly adopted parenting practices of the parent. In addition, mothers were less capable of ensuring child safety based on the risk factor of the husband's behavior. The program did have limited effect, but could not directly aid in dealing with these more extreme issues of domestic violence.

In regards to experienced social support respondents do not report more support from others outside the improved relationship with their spouse. In addition, parents say they are less inclined to take advice from others who have not participated with the SPP, based on the notion that these parents tend to uphold more traditional child-rearing practices. As mentioned, parents who participated with the SPP feel the 'new' practices are better than the 'old' ones, making the practices of those who did not participate inferior to their own. This requires a level of consideration, seeing as parents may become dismissive regarding practices alternative to those as provided by the Skillful Parenting program. This may make it more difficult for them to agree on how others would treat their children, making parents to accept support from other 'non participants'.

The most prominent effects of the program as found in the research have been discussed. Aside from determining the outcomes of the program, we will now reflect on how these effects might have been reached by focusing on the specific characteristics of the program. The inquiry regarding the specific effects of the program is divided into two questions. First, we will address the specific elements of the Skillful Parenting program's design, and see how these elements relate and differ from other programs. The elements discussed will include those commonly or less commonly found in intervention designs. The second question focusses on which unique adaptations have been made to the local context, also as related to more unique characteristics of the ICS parenting program.

What distinguishes the SPP from other parenting programs?

a) Strengthening parents- not teaching specific behaviors

When comparing the Skillful parenting program by ICS to the programs discussed in chapter three, a few clear distinctions can be found regarding the program. Where most of this type of programs focuses deliberately on directly training skills regarding both the cognitions and behaviors in relation to parent-child interaction, the Skillful Parenting programs' aims are somewhat wider. Behavior oriented skills such as providing positive feedback to children specifically by giving them compliments, giving them attention and listening are present throughout the SPP modules, but are essentially only explicitly incorporated in one out of five modules. Where other modules talk about parenting in a broader sense, such as family relations in general, self-confidence and self-care, and the discussion of (local) parenting values, the focus on stimulating *particular* child behaviour is less prevalent in the SPP by ICS as it is in many other, more Western designs This set-up allows parents to experiment with new techniques to impact upon their children's behavior, but does not prescribe them, while also leaving space for parents own ideas on what are 'best practices'.

The Skillful parenting program places less emphasis on training parents specific skills in how they can impact upon their child's behavior, and places more emphasis on strengthening parents as educators more generally. In contrast to more behavioral oriented programs as Triple P, direct instruction of *particular* parenting behavior and skills which aim to impact upon the child's behavior directly, is less prominent in SP. While communication skills with both the spouse as well as children are key elements in the training, the attention for a better stress-management, and an increased sense of self-esteem point to an approach which sees the parent him or herself as an agent of change and invests in strengthening the parent as a person. This illustrates that the program takes a broad definition of parenting as a starting point, where the program provides knowledge and teaches skills 'across the board', helping the participants develop both as individuals as well as caregivers.

b) Relation based.

Moreover, the Skillful Parenting program can be considered a typical relation-based program, in which the improvement of relationships and communication between those responsible for child raising is deemed essential for improving parenting. The program contains a strong emphasis on family relations beyond that of the relationship between the parent and child, including the discussion of the distribution of tasks based on gender roles and addressing communication between parents. It is believed that through strengthening parent relationships the home situation of respective family improves, benefitting both parents and child directly, and reducing risks of

stress and conflict, further facilitating a safe environment for children. Communication between spouses is mentioned more often by parents on their own accord than the communication with children, again highlighting the local relevance of this particular topic.

c) Community approach

In addition the Skillful Parenting program emphasizes a more community focused perspective on development, where it does *not* view parenting as practice detached from the wider community. In an effort to effect sustainable change in parenting the wider community is included, facilitating community members to engage in discussions within a group based intervention. By including men and women, fathers and mothers, from different ages but from the same locations and areas, an attempt at a more widespread and consistent change is made. Skillful Parenting can be considered as a community based program which seeks to improve parenting by including whole communities, and by raising general community issues as related to issues of child care.

d) Bottom up approach

The characteristics as mentioned above make that the Skillful Parenting program is not a prescriptive program, in the sense that it prescribes what particular activities or interactions are good in order to improve child raising or child outcomes. In practice this means is that the program does not teach its participants the *right way*, but instead presents its respondents with possibilities and options, and leaves it up to the parents to implement based on their own judgment. This does not imply that the program is solely suggestive in its education, but it simply provides new ideas and methods to the participants without infringing on their respective values and norms regarding parenting.

Respondents said that the program provided a place to discuss openly with others, allowing parents to share their concerns, voice their opinion, and learn from others. It was said by parents that during the program they had felt like they could share stories that they had not been able to share before. By doing so, they had experienced a sense of relief, as they had not publicly discussed these issues before the training. The element of open discussion as part of the interventions is common amongst many other group based parenting programs.

Respondents have also commented on the value of exchanging experiences as part of the program. During the interviews it was mentioned that parents learned during the training that some challenges that they faced were also faced by others. Other participants who have had similar experiences would occasionally be able to provide advice to other parents as well. This implies that aside from being provided with information and skills, the Skillful Parenting program serves as a platform for parents to share knowledge with each other.

When reviewing the specific characteristics of the Skillful Parenting program it can be

observed that the program both bears resemblance, and differs, to other parenting programs. It combines a parent focused approach, in which personal growth and development of the parent is key, with a relational-community based methodology. Aside from the characteristics mentioned here, ICS implements several very context specific adaptations to its local context, which distinguish it from other programs. These characteristics are presented below.

How does the SPP tune into the socio-cultural aspects of the local context?
The Skillful Parenting program attempts to include topics, themes, references and experiences relevant to its participants. Amongst others, this is achieved by providing respondents time and space to share their views with both the group and the facilitator. The presented information from parents is used to frame the learning outcomes, making its content more relatable to its audience. Aside from inclusion of the input of parents during the sessions, the program also deals with prevalent local issues such as poverty and gender roles that are connected to local discussions and concerns about parenting. When reflecting on topics such as gender roles, themes as the unequal work load between fathers and mothers are addressed (as expressed by respondents during the in-depth interviews).

As mentioned, the SPP places significantly more focus on the personal development of its participants in comparison to behavior oriented programs, and emphasize the development of person and relationship based assets such as self-confidence, stress management and the relationship between husband and wife. The inclusion of these elements can be seen as strongly in line with the local definition of parenthood, which strongly corresponds with that of personhood as mentioned earlier in this report. As explained, parenting in the local context is part of being or becoming an adult, is related to lineage and being a responsible member of the community which at the same time implies that being a parent is related to self-confidence, and other elements related to personal development. Based on this, the definition of parenting as something beyond childrearing would demand a program by that name to include more than parent-child interaction focused information and skill training. In the case of the SPP this is true, and the program relates to issues that are experienced as relevant to the participating parents by including these elements as they match with the socio-cultural notions of parenting as the parents experience them.

Aside from this, as explained, parenting is approached from a relational and community perspective, which fits with African notions of parenthood. The program's focus on strengthening relationships within the nuclear family as a whole, as well as the inclusion of community in an effort to create sustainable effects, show an emphasis on parenting in which child care takes place within a

wider social network apart from the care of fathers and mothers. This idea of parenting resembles the local practices, where originally multiple family members (parents, grandparents and siblings) are involved in child-rearing and active child socialization as well.

Although the program thus resonates with traditional aspects of African parenting, it also presents parents with novel and alternative ways of thinking. As mentioned by respondents, the program had provided them with knowledge and insights that they 'did not know' before. This awareness and experimentation of alternate ways of thinking provides participants not only with tools, but also a realization that different ways of thinking exist and can be fruitful, possibly stimulating their flexibility in the future.

Methodological considerations

When discussing the findings of the evaluation the methodology should be considered as well. During the research several challenges were faced, which has connotations for the interpretation of its results.

One of the key considerations is that the program evaluation bases itself primarily on self-reports by its participants, next to smaller scale ethnographic observations. Given the context of the research (working with already formed groups in the agro-business program of ICS, the undesirability of selection), random control trials and intensive over time term observations to measure changes in behavior from respondents was not possible. The lack of this type of measurement implies that considerations must be made when attributing the measured changes in ideas in attitude and experiences to the program. However, alternative explanations for these effects are unlikely. Moreover, our methodology allowed respondents to talk about parenting, and change in parenting, without reference to the program. For instance, respondents were not asked about changes directly, but were inquired regarding then and now, exploring the given answers extensively.

Lastly, during these interviews socially acceptable answers by the respondents had to be taken into account. Within the respective communities of the respondents participation with interventions by NGO's and government is seen as beneficial to both financial as well as social status. Openly 'criticizing' a program by reflecting on it may be seen as inappropriate or not preferable by its participants. However, additional effort was made to ensure respondents understood that all information they would provide was confidential. In addition, respondents were informed that their input could help to improve the program, empowering them to voice their

opinion regarding its content, implementation and effect. For some respondents this establishment of trust between them and the researcher required some additional time and effort, resulting in multiple visits and extended talks regarding varying matters, in an effort to ensure a sense of security between researcher and parent.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research several recommendation are formulated. These recommendations serve as feedback on the program design and implementation, and are presented to help improve on the Skillful Parenting program.

- ICS would benefit from investing in their program description and presentation in regards to stakeholders. The program is marginally profiled based on specific underlying theory, design and approach. In an effort to relate its quality to the stakeholders, as well as to underline its relevance as a parenting program, ICS should ensure SP has its own program theory in which it is outlayed why, that is according to what scientific principles the program works. Although this evaluation's aim was not to identify underlying principles, some of the underpinnings of the program as described in this report might be helpful in this respect.

- We advise to update the official program manual both in accordance with a (renewed) program theory while making use of successful training practices such as those in Kenia. Even though the manual covers the aims of the program, and its modules for the most parts, the manual does not clearly set itself apart from other programs. It was initially found that the manual provides little insight into the unique elements of the Skillful Parenting program, diminishing its prominence as an independent program in contrast to other parenting programs. In addition, many factors that attribute to the success of the program have not been included into the manual. If done so, the program may acclaim more success as a properly adapted program, based on its clear description of modifications based on the context in which it is implemented.

- The Skillful Parenting program is implemented as a follow up of the intervention of ICS's partner, the social enterprise *Agrics*. This is an agribusiness program that provides small loans to parents and educates them on farming, in an effort to improve their income and self-sustainability. Currently the connection between both programs are not explicitly thematized whereas important

opportunities exist to do so. For instance, how does economic change impact upon family dynamics and the position of children? And how might parents use this to re-establish family dynamics in favor of children?

- In regards to gender roles SP focusses primarily on the role of the father, and that of a parent in general. Considering the discussion of gender roles, the SP may wish to include a discussion of the role of the mother as well. However, this depends on the emphasis of the program. It may be argued that in an effort to effect change regarding the roles of fathers, a discussion regarding the re-evaluation of roles of mothers can be deemed beneficial as well.

In regards to more extreme family situations in which substance abuse or domestic violence are (consistently) present, the SPP encounters limitations to its effect. However, the SPP was not explicitly designed to improve on these extreme situations specifically. Considering this, upon the identification of more severe issues, SP facilitators ideally could refer said parents to more specialized aid in an effort to also support parents in such extreme situations.

- The SP may benefit from a follow up program to effect more sustainable changes within its communities. By implementing additional modules as well as organizing additional trainings and/or events the participants are reintroduced to its content, reminded of the lessons learned, and may draw in additional participants as well, further facilitating awareness amongst its active communities

- Lastly, as many interventions the SP is strongly merited by its trainers and facilitators. As most programs are only as good as its trainers, we assume the SP is no different. When considering the upscaling of SP, it is advised that extra attention is paid to ensuring extensive training and instruction to new trainers of the SP. In doing so, the quality of the SP can be ensured better. This specific consideration must be considered in conjunction with adaptations made to its design based on the respective context.

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