

# EMPOWERED AND RESPONSIVE PARENTING

## CHILDFUND INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>DATA COLLECTION METHODS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>APPROACH TO ANALYSIS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHILDFUND ECUADOR’S EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: ITS LOGIC AND COMPONENTS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHILDFUND ECUADOR’S EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: CORE COMPONENTS</b>	<b>9</b>
Parenting Education	9
Child Protection Mechanisms	11
<b>EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT WORK IN ECUADOR: CAUSAL EXPLANATIONS.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>NATIONAL LEVEL: POLICIES VERSUS PRACTICES</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>NATIONAL LEVEL: (UN)EQUAL ACCESS</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CHILDFUND ECUADOR’S PROGRAM: TRACING THE STEPS.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>CAREGIVERS WITH INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD RIGHTS, CHILD SECURITY AND PROTECTION, AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>CAREGIVERS WITH HIGHER PERSONAL AGENCY AND SELF-ESTEEM</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>RESPONSIVE PARENTING BEHAVIORS THAT SUPPORT EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>HOME ENVIRONMENTS WITH LESS TOXIC STRESS DUE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FOR CHILDREN</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES WITH FOCUSED ATTENTION ON CHILDREN’S AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>APPENDIX A – CONSTITUTIONAL ARTICLES AND LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS ADDRESSING CHILD RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT .....</b>	<b>26</b>

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to examine the causal steps, following a process-tracing protocol, through which ChildFund has contributed to positive developmental outcomes for children in Ecuador. ChildFund has been active in early childhood development in Ecuador for about 25 years, with programming that aims to give vulnerable children ages 0-5 a start in life that will enable them to survive, thrive, and develop to their full potential. The organization aims to reach this impact goal by focusing on two main outcomes: empowered and responsive parenting and support and strong community-based child protection mechanisms. This study examines the evidence that ChildFund's work in Ecuador has significantly contributed to these outcomes of interest.

Since ChildFund began working in Ecuador, there have been significant transformations to the early childhood development landscape. In light of these transformations, the research team adopted a process tracing approach to examine how ChildFund Ecuador's early childhood development initiatives have contributed to the strengthened early childhood development system present in Ecuador today. The province of Carchi was used as the site of field research into ChildFund's approach. The research process included: drawing out and documenting ChildFund Ecuador's early childhood development program logic; outlining the causal steps through which this logic would have contributed to positive outcomes; and assessing whether or not evidence sufficiently supports the claim that these causal steps "worked" as intended to contribute to the outcomes.

Findings indicate sufficient support that ChildFund's work has contributed to more empowered parenting/caregiving and to stronger community-based child protection. More specifically, we have evidence that this contribution has worked by: (a) increasing knowledge and understanding of child rights, security, protection, and development; (b) supporting more responsive parenting behaviors; (c) cultivating higher personal agency and self-esteem of caregivers; (d) reducing domestic violence and toxic stress for children; (e) enhancing community attention to child protection; and (f) changing social norms around the rights of children and women, child protection, and violence.

The research for this report was commissioned as part of a broader effort by ChildFund International to systematically examine its long-running early childhood development programming in Ecuador. This is one of a number of research reports and evaluations that look at both the contributions ChildFund Ecuador has made to positive social change for children, families and communities as well as attributions of such change directly to ChildFund's work.

# METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on two outcomes of interest: (a) empowered and responsive caregiving for infants and young children (mainly in the home environment, before pre-school); and (b) community-based child protection mechanisms.<sup>1</sup> It traces the logical, causal steps through which ChildFund Ecuador sought to contribute to these outcomes, and then presents and assesses the evidence that ChildFund's work did indeed contribute to these outcomes, while also situating this work in the context of others' efforts and contributions to Ecuador's early childhood development achievements. The overall approach is theory-guided process tracing (in the vein developed by Andrew Bennett and Alexander George in the social sciences). This methodology is grounded in qualitative, case-study research to identify or propose causal mechanisms that have contributed to a particular phenomenon (cf. Mohr, 1999; Mahoney, 2012).

The process-tracing protocol generally involves the following steps (e.g., Oxfam GB Process Tracing Protocol):

1. (Re)construct the program's theory of change, in order to clearly define the intervention being evaluated: what outcomes it seeks to produce, how it works to effect these changes, and what assumptions it makes about how it will contribute to them;
2. Work with relevant stakeholders to identify salient outcomes for evaluation;
3. Systematically assess and document what was done under the intervention to achieve the selected targeted outcomes;
4. Identify and evidence the extent to which the selected intended outcomes have actually materialized and if, and to what extent, any unintended outcomes have occurred;
5. Identify plausible causal explanations for the evidenced outcomes;
6. Gather required data and use 'process verification' to assess the extent to which each of the explanations identified are supported by evidence.

While the steps are presented here sequentially, for the sake of clarity and thoroughness, in the practice of research they often occur simultaneously or iteratively. Further, some researchers formulate mutually exclusive causal explanations, or hypotheses, and then seek to eliminate one in favor of the other. Instead, based on anecdotal evidence from ChildFund's 25 years of work in Ecuador and on preliminary conversations with program participants and staff, we assumed that all the factors involved in producing positive early childhood development outcomes were not mutually exclusive, but rather built upon one another and worked together to produce the outcomes. So, instead of focusing on alternative hypotheses and their elimination, we focused our detailed efforts on the process verification step in order to carefully examine whether each causal step in our theory-guided approach had materialized and 'worked' to produce the outcomes.

## DATA COLLECTION METHODS

To collect the data needed to evidence outcomes, we engaged in both desk research – by reviewing ChildFund and secondary sources – and in field research, which involved various participants (see Figure 1 for a list). Documents reviewed during this process tracing exercise include: ChildFund program documentation, training manuals, data collected through program monitoring tools, commitment letters written by program participants, etc. Additionally, the research team reviewed a number of secondary sources, ranging from academic journal articles to institutional reports and publications.

Field research was conducted in Ecuador over a period of eight days in May 2013. The province of Carchi, located in the Northern Andean region, was selected by ChildFund staff as the primary site for data collection due to the accessibility of communities. ChildFund Ecuador currently serves 12,600 low-income and vulnerable children and parents out of Carchi's total population of 160,000.

<sup>1</sup> While the ultimate goal of ChildFund's Early Childhood Development program in Ecuador is impact on children, such as higher developmental outcomes, and healthy and secure infants, the scope of this research does not include those. Instead, this study is focused on outcomes related to empowered and responsive parenting, and to child protection. More information on this can be found in the section on program logic below. ChildFund is evaluating its impact on children in other research.

The area exhibits the typical living conditions experienced by low-income, rural, and often vulnerable communities, in which ChildFund Ecuador has traditionally focused its efforts. The area is predominantly rural; poverty levels are markedly higher than those in urban centers such as Quito; few people work outside of agriculture and most, on land owned by others; and few women earn an income outside the home. Government services, such as health care and schools, do exist, but are often operating beyond capacity, serving many more clients, patients or students than the mandated numbers. Carchi also has some unique elements, including a higher than average immigrant population, many of whom have emigrated to Carchi from neighboring Colombia as a result of violence and conflict.



During the field research phase, the research team selectively engaged a cross-section of 48 social actors relevant to early childhood development and children’s rights in Carchi, conducting eight focus group discussions and individual interviews. While many of the participants had served multiple roles as community leaders and parents, they were identified by their current role into the following categories of participants:

**FIGURE 1: CATEGORIES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY**

Type of Stakeholder	# of Participants	Description of Role
<b>Mother Trainers</b>	<b>16</b> (16 women)	Mother Trainers are volunteer mothers that have been selected by their communities to lead family training programs. They receive 8-10 months of training from ChildFund ECD staff and, while receiving training, they replicate the program content with a group of 9-15 mothers (and sometimes fathers) in their own communities.
<b>Mother Guides</b>	<b>8</b> (1 man; 7 women)	Mother/Father Guides are volunteer women or men that receive training from ChildFund and serve as community focal points for Child Protection. The Guides also support parents in working on positive growth and development for children: understanding developmental milestones; providing developmental stimulation; etc. The Guides conduct regular house visits and complete family surveys, share information about community events, detect and monitor risks, and work with the Local Committee to develop strategies to reduce risks.
<b>Participant Mothers</b>	<b>3</b> (3 women)	Mothers that participated in family training programs within their communities, but did not have leadership roles as Trainers or Mother Guides.
<b>Members of Federation of Community Associations for Children and Adolescents</b>	<b>10</b> (5 men; 5 women)	Elected leaders and representatives from local community organizations that meet together at the Provincial level to develop action plans and execute projects in the interest of improving the wellbeing of children and families.
<b>Early Education Teacher</b>	<b>1</b> (1 woman)	One teacher in a government-supported early education center that provides services for children beginning ages 3 to 6 years old.
<b>Local Development Committee President</b>	<b>1</b> (1 man)	President of the local organization that is responsible for community development projects (including economic development). <sup>2</sup>
<b>ChildFund Program Staff</b>	<b>9</b> (4 men; 5 women)	Regional directors, ECD technical staff, program managers, a former staff member, and the founder of the ECD program in Ecuador.

Direct observations were also carried out during: (a) training sessions with mothers and children; (b) a visit to a government-supported early childhood education center and to the home of a Mother Trainer; and (c) a program briefing by a member of ChildFund’s Early Childhood Development technical team to a ChildFund Ecuador Child Protection Federation.

<sup>2</sup> Many of the Mother Trainers and Mother/ Father Guides also held leadership roles within the local committee, but were not categorized as Committee Presidents, as they primarily spoke of their other roles as Mother Trainers, Mother/Father Guides or members of the Federation.

## APPROACH TO ANALYSIS

The analysis stage focused on the identification of causal mechanisms that led to observed changes in participant’s behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions, and the interaction between these changes and the development of strengthened early childhood support structures in Ecuador. Data collected through focus group discussions, interviews, and document review were first recorded and transcribed in Spanish, uploaded into NVivo 10, and coded by the researcher according to the salient themes that emerged from the program logic of ChildFund Ecuador’s early childhood development program. The set of causal steps that this program logic is comprised of was the theory that guided the process tracing and process verification steps. Additionally, research using secondary sources was done to examine other factors that would have contributed the positive outcomes we found. An overall assessment was finally made on whether sufficient evidence exists to support the claim that ChildFund’s work has contributed to the outcomes of interest with the understanding that other developments in Ecuador and the efforts of other actors have also played a part in such transformations.

## CHILD FUND ECUADOR’S EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: ITS LOGIC AND COMPONENTS

ChildFund’s work with children ages 0-5 years aims to give vulnerable children a start in life that will enable them to survive, thrive, and develop to their full potential. This approach is guided by the principles of (a) focusing on children as agents of change and on their experiences of deprivation, exclusion and vulnerability; (b) engaging families and communities in the development and protection of children; and (c) building a broad constituency of supporters dedicated to the well-being and rights of children.

For the age group of 0-5, ChildFund has formulated a life stage theory of change that outlines a holistic approach to child development. The impact goal here is that children develop to their full potential, enjoy good physical and mental health, and live in stable families who interact in non-violent ways and in supportive communities. The impact sought is impact on children: their developmental outcomes, their health, safety and security. At the same time, ChildFund’s theory of change aims to promote the role of parents, children and community in raising healthy, well-rounded children who feel secure and supported by their families and communities. The theory of change postulates four essential domains integral to the development of healthy and secure infants: (1) empowered and responsive caregiving; (2) safe and healthy environments for children; (3) high quality health care and adequate nutrition; and (4) high quality developmental stimulation. ChildFund’s theory of change also postulates a number of pathways to social change within each of these domains (Figure 2):

**FIGURE 2: CHILD FUND’S LIFE STAGE THEORY OF CHANGE FOR 0-5 YEAR OLDS**

Domain of Change	Pathway
<b>Empowered and Responsive Caregivers</b>	Caregivers’ livelihood security
	Decision-making power for primary caregivers
	Responsive parenting education and support
<b>Safe and Caring Environments for Infants and Young Children</b>	Community-based child protection mechanisms
	Healthy homes and environments
<b>High Quality Health Care and Adequate Nutrition for Infants, Young Children and Expectant Mothers</b>	Accessible quality healthcare
	Adequate nutrition for infants, young children, and expectant mothers
<b>High Quality Developmental Stimulation for Infants and Young Children</b>	Access to high-quality preschools
	Access to high-quality childcare options

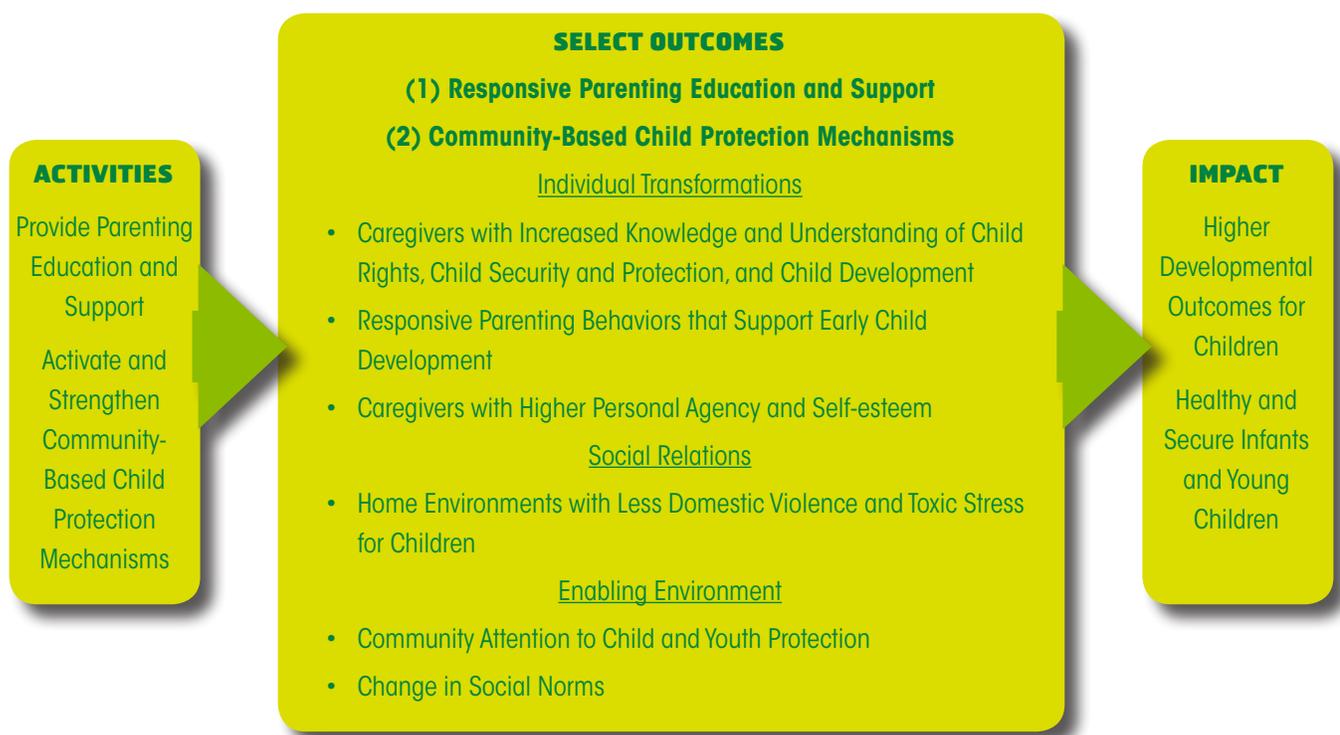
This global theory of change for the holistic development of 0-5 year old children is contextualized in ChildFund’s work in various contexts around the world, and different program strategies are designed to ensure that these outcomes are achieved, whether through the implementation of activities in the work of ChildFund’s local partners or by leveraging the work of others. In Ecuador, ChildFund implements programming designed to help parents and caregivers:

- (a) Achieve livelihood security and better provide nutrition, healthcare, and educational services for their child;
- (b) Participate in meaningful decision-making for their child; and
- (c) Gain the knowledge and skills needed to provide their child with appropriate learning opportunities and developmental stimulation.

This allows ChildFund to address the domains of Empowered and Responsive Caregivers and High Quality Developmental Stimulation for Infants and Young Children – both outlined within in its global theory of change. Furthermore, ChildFund Ecuador works to activate and strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms that promote child rights and establish healthier home and community environments for children to learn and grow. This in turn allows the organization to address the domain of Safe and Caring Environments for Infants and Young Children.

How specifically does ChildFund Ecuador’s work seek to contribute to social change in these domains and pathways? As part of the process tracing exercise, we reconstructed and systematized the program logic of the early childhood development program in Ecuador.

**FIGURE 3: PROGRAM LOGIC**



In its basic form, the logic is that ChildFund Ecuador delivers parenting education in order to empower primary caregivers to understand, support, and stimulate the development (physical, cognitive and socio-emotional) of their infants and young children, and to ensure that they access the appropriate services – health, early childhood education, and protection – their children need.

As Ecuador has a fairly extensive network of government-provided health and education services (and the program makes the assumption that the Government of Ecuador will continue its investments into this network of social services), ChildFund mainly works to ensure all families and children are linked to and able to access these services as needed. The parenting education also entails work on children's rights and protection in order to ensure that caregivers are responsive to children's needs and proactively engaged in addressing and preventing situations of abuse and neglect. ChildFund Ecuador also works to strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms and to link them to other institutions (e.g., national-level protection structures, police, the courts, etc.) in order to facilitate the resolution of child protection cases.

To focus on the outcomes that ChildFund seeks to facilitate, ChildFund's programming around the empowerment of caregivers functions along three main lines on the logic that each needs to be addressed in order for the social change achieved to be sustainable and lasting:

#### 1) Individual Transformations

- If caregivers have higher agency and self-efficacy based on increased knowledge and understanding of child rights, child security and protection, and child developmental milestones, then they will be better able to support the development of their children and protection of children in their communities;
- If caregivers learn techniques and parenting behaviors that stimulate the early development of their children (physical, cognitive, socio-emotional), then they will be better able to take advantage of the crucial years for child development and prepare their children for further development and learning in pre-school and beyond; and
- If caregivers have higher agency and self-efficacy, then they will be better champions for children's rights.

#### 2) Social Relations

- If traditional practices related to the position of women (who are most often the primary caregivers of children 0-5 years of age) in the household and to violence in the home (directed at both children and women/mothers) are changed, then children will experience less toxic stress and live in safer and healthier environments; and
- If women/mothers participate actively in decision-making in the household, then they will be better able to champion their children's rights, access services for them, and support their development.

#### 3) Enabling Environment

- If communities are actively engaged in child and youth protection, including the breakdown of stigma and taboos around discussing and reporting cases of abuse, neglect and exploitation, then children will live in safer and healthier environments; and
- If social norms around violence, the role of women/mothers, and the participation and rights of children, including those in the 0-5 age group, are changed, then children will have more champions in a safer environment.

The logic of ChildFund's program works to weave all these lines (Individual Transformations, Social Relations, and an Enabling Environment) together, and to provide or facilitate access to both information and services for early childhood development. The remainder of this section outlines what ChildFund does (in Box A: Activities, in Figure 3 above) in order to achieve these changes. We then turn to the outcomes of interest in this process tracing exercise (in Box B of the figure above). Note that in this research, we do not examine the overall impact of all the work, or how the outcomes may combine to add up to Box C in Figure 3. ChildFund has reserved this work for a separate evaluation using a different methodology. Also note that we here do not focus on impact on children or on child-level outcomes; rather, the focus is on select outcomes related to parenting and child protection, highlighted among other outcomes in ChildFund's program logic and global theory of change.

# CHILDFUND ECUADOR'S EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: CORE COMPONENTS

## PARENTING EDUCATION

ChildFund Ecuador's parenting education program aims to equip caregivers with the knowledge and skills necessary to support and stimulate early child development. Drawing upon participatory methodologies and adult learning theories, ChildFund has developed and refined a parenting education model, which evolved from the United Nations Children's Fund 12 messages for care and development. ChildFund's model includes a set of 26 key messages, organized into five units:

*Unit 1: General Messages* – Child development theories, the importance of parental roles in a child's life, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Rights of the Child;

*Unit 2: Physical Development Messages* – Maternal health and wellbeing, child nutrition, protection from risks, the importance of breastfeeding, the importance of home gardens and using the produce in healthy family meals, child growth monitoring, vaccines, and improving the household environment for children's wellbeing;

*Unit 3: Emotional Development Messages* – The importance of affection and physical contact with children, caregivers' emotional wellbeing, protecting children from physical and verbal abuse, and the importance of praise and recognition of children's accomplishment;

*Unit 4: Social Development Messages* – Strategies to help children develop socially acceptable conduct, and teaching children to be independent, to take care of themselves, and help and share with others and moral values; and

*Unit 5: Intellectual and Creative Development* – Encouraging children to use their five senses and explore the world around them, creating child-friendly spaces within the household or surrounding area, and communicating with children in a manner that is respectful and appropriate for their developmental abilities.

These messages and units are woven into a Parenting Education Program that is carried out through a six-stage process, as illustrated in the figure below:

**FIGURE 4: STAGES OF CHILDFUND ECUADOR'S PARENTING EDUCATION MODEL**



The family training program is delivered along these six steps:

### Stage 1: Participatory Community Diagnosis of Children's Home and Community Environment

The process of launching the family training program begins with a participatory community diagnosis of children's home and community environments. Utilizing community-based appraisals, dialogue, and reflection, program staff works with local stakeholders to identify conditions of deprivation, exclusion, and vulnerability experienced by children and their families.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The most common conditions that are uncovered include: domestic violence and toxic stress in the home, malnutrition, underutilization or lack of access to health services, lack of proper parenting knowledge and behaviors, and young parents who themselves exhibit gaps in their psychosocial development.

### Stage 2: Risk Socialization and Dissemination of Results

Drawing on the results of these participatory community diagnoses, ChildFund-supported Early Childhood Development Technicians hold meetings with local community committees to discuss their findings and present community risk maps. During these meetings, community leaders often identify other risks that they have noted as adversely affecting infants and young children. After these meetings are completed, local Child and Youth Protection Committees select families in their community whose children's health, security, and development are considered to be at high risk.<sup>4</sup> The results of these proceedings and the findings from the participatory community diagnoses are then disseminated throughout the community in order to raise awareness and garner community support and participation for the program.

### Stage 3: Community Selection of Mother Trainers

When it is the first time a Parenting Education Program is being implemented in a community, the ChildFund-supported Local Committee selects a Mother Trainer to run the parenting education sessions.<sup>5</sup> When the program has already been implemented, the Local Committee selects a mother who has previously participated in the training program.<sup>6</sup>

### Stage 4: Launch of Training of Trainers Program

Once selected, Mother Trainers receive training once a month for eight months, with each session lasting approximately 2-3 hours. Topics covered include participatory teaching methodologies and strategies, workshop development, monitoring and evaluation of participant progress, and the application of the core program curriculum.

### Stage 5: Formation of Participant Groups and Implementation of Parent Training Programs

After Mother Trainers successfully complete their trainings, they implement the parenting education program in their own communities with groups of 9-15 mothers and fathers. Each volunteer group participates in weekly 1-2 hour parenting education sessions and workshops. These sessions focus on themes of child development and children's rights, as outlined in the 26 key messages presented in the preceding paragraphs. Through discussions, brainstorming, and hands-on activities, the group analyzes their own beliefs and practices relevant to the key messages and reflects on strategies to improve parenting behaviors and cultivate more supportive environment for children's development. Over the course of the next week, parents apply what they have learned at home, and then return the following week to share their experiences. Throughout these sessions and workshops, several professionals are invited to attend and give presentations, run workshops, and answer questions. Participating professionals include doctors, psychologists, nutritionists and nurses.

### Stage 6: Program Monitoring and Follow-up

Members of ChildFund's technical team routinely conduct visits to parenting education sessions and workshops to see if Mother Trainers are effectively facilitating the sessions and appropriately utilizing the materials with participants. Throughout the program, Mother Trainers and Early Childhood Development Technicians also document participants' progress and assess the health and development of their infants and young children throughout the program.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Children considered to be at 'high risk' include: infants and young children who are: left home alone, often left in the care of their older siblings, not attending daycare and early childhood development centers or not participating in other child-related state programs and services, and those whose parents have a history of physical/psychological abuse or alcohol abuse. They also identify teenage parents who have not previously participated in the program, but who have children under five.

<sup>5</sup> In selecting a Mother Trainer, the committee takes into consideration: (a) whether a mother has sufficient time and a willingness to participate; (b) if the mother has a child under five years of age; and (c) whether a mother has leadership qualities and is recognized in the community for these qualities.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the aforementioned considerations, takes into consideration a mother's prior participation in the training program as well as family outcomes that have resulted from her participation, according to references provided by her workshop leader and an Early Childhood Development Technician.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to documenting materials needed, costs, and detailed lesson plans, monitoring efforts include Early Childhood Development Technicians conducting weekly follow-ups with Mother Trainers to identify challenges to program implementation and develop action plans to address these challenges; and Workshop Leaders maintaining scorecards used to identify the strengths, weakness, and challenges experienced during each workshop. Mother Guides and ECD Technicians also utilize a child development screening tool during the sessions. This tool serves to assess children's skills, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses in order to inform programming and better serve child beneficiaries.

## CHILD PROTECTION MECHANISMS

Besides parenting education programming, ChildFund Ecuador also works to activate and strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms. These mechanisms are designed to promote, monitor, and protect the rights of women, children, and youth by identifying and addressing cases in which rights are being violated or ignored and where families are living in conditions of isolation, exclusion, and vulnerability. The main lines of work include:

- Educating community members on children's rights and the impact that abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence have on child development;
- Encouraging the community to actively monitor and get engaged in the lives of children and households at high risk;
- Linking community-based child protection mechanisms to national-level structures that address cases of violations.



In practice, the parenting education and the child protection components are integrated, function together, and are delivered together to program participants. For example, during parenting education programs, participants first gain knowledge of risks related to children's wellbeing (e.g. domestic violence, malnutrition, etc.). They then begin investigating potential risks within their homes and communities. Once risks have been identified, participants and Mother Guides report them to relevant Local Committees. The Local Committees then work together with appropriate government institutions and social services to determine appropriate strategies to address a given issue. In this sense, the parenting education and the child protection components of the program are integrally connected. However, one aspect of the child protection work –strengthening child protection mechanisms on community level and ensuring they articulate with the work of higher levels up to national – merits further discussion here. ChildFund supports an extensive horizontal and vertical network of actors and mechanisms that tackle child protection and address cases. This network consists of the following actors:

### Community-Level Actors

- *Household-Level 'Nuclei'* – At the most grassroots-level of child protection structures are 'nuclei,' which consist of groups of ChildFund-affiliated households. Members of these nuclei are responsible for monitoring the status of children, youth, and women in the community. When rights are violated and where families are living in conditions of isolation, exclusion, and vulnerability, members of these nuclei document and report the cases to Mother Guides.
- *Mother Guides* – Mother Guides, trained through ChildFund's Parenting Education Program, act as the next link in the chain of the child protection structures that ChildFund actively supports. They are typically the first line of defense in cases reported by nuclei members and act as the first point of contact for persons involved in these cases. Where minor issues are observed (e.g., a parent's negative communication style toward their child), the Mother Guide tries to resolve the issue through counseling and supportive advice. In more severe cases (e.g., interfamilial violence), the Mother Guide shares this information with the Local Committee. The committee works to identify and refer the cases to an institution (e.g. schools, medical dispensaries, police, etc.) best equipped to address a given case.

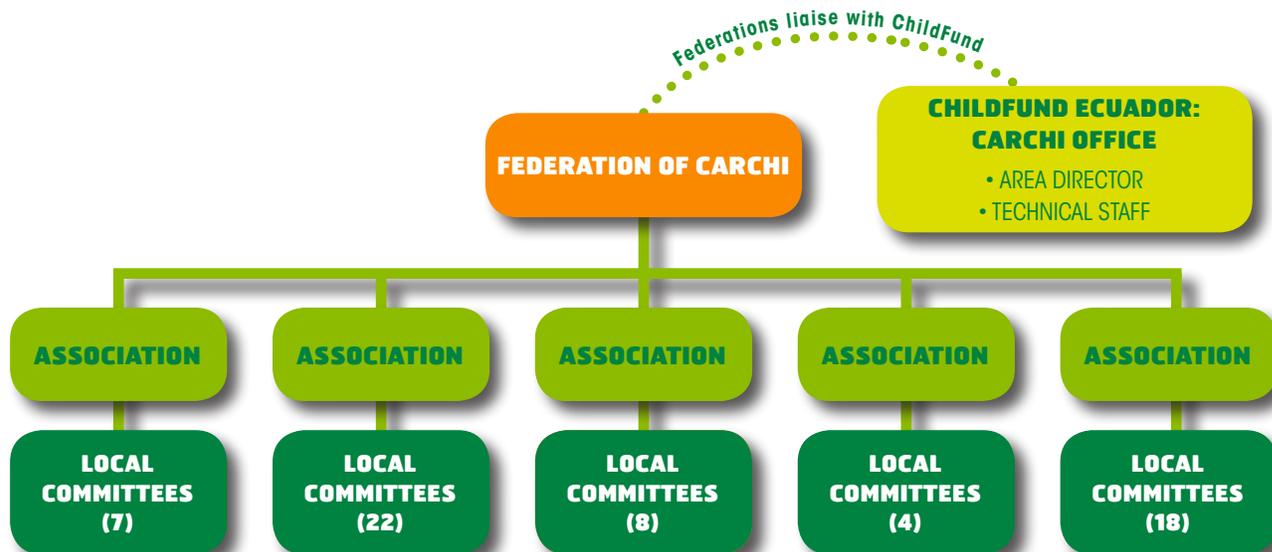
- *Local Committees* – These committees of elected members are often developed in response to a particular need (e.g., Water Committees, Health Committees, etc.). With technical assistance from ChildFund, Local Committees focus on projects designed to improve their community’s infrastructure, social services, healthcare, education systems, and economic development. But the Local Committees also represent a critical link between communities and district-level child protection actors. Mother Guides may turn to them in severe cases of child abuse, neglect, exploitation or violence that need to be reported and addressed by more than the Mother Guide alone. These Local Committees also provide a layer of protection to Mother Guides themselves, in communities where exposing violence in the home publicly may be taboo and those who do it may face negative consequences.

### Regional-Level Actors

- *Associations* – The Local Committees described above aggregate to another level of community representation and decision-making. Representatives from several Local Committees come together to form an Association, which is often based at the parish level. These Associations work together to develop project proposals and activities to improve the wellbeing of children and families within their parish.
- *Federations* – Federations, which are comprised of a few Associations, are the legal bodies through which ChildFund implements its community activities and programs. These Federations operate at the municipal level and consist of elected representatives from ChildFund-supported Associations. Federations are responsible for developing work plans, overseeing the operations of ChildFund programs within the region and developing strategies to establish and strengthen linkages with government or private sector services that would advance their objectives to improve the lives of children and families.

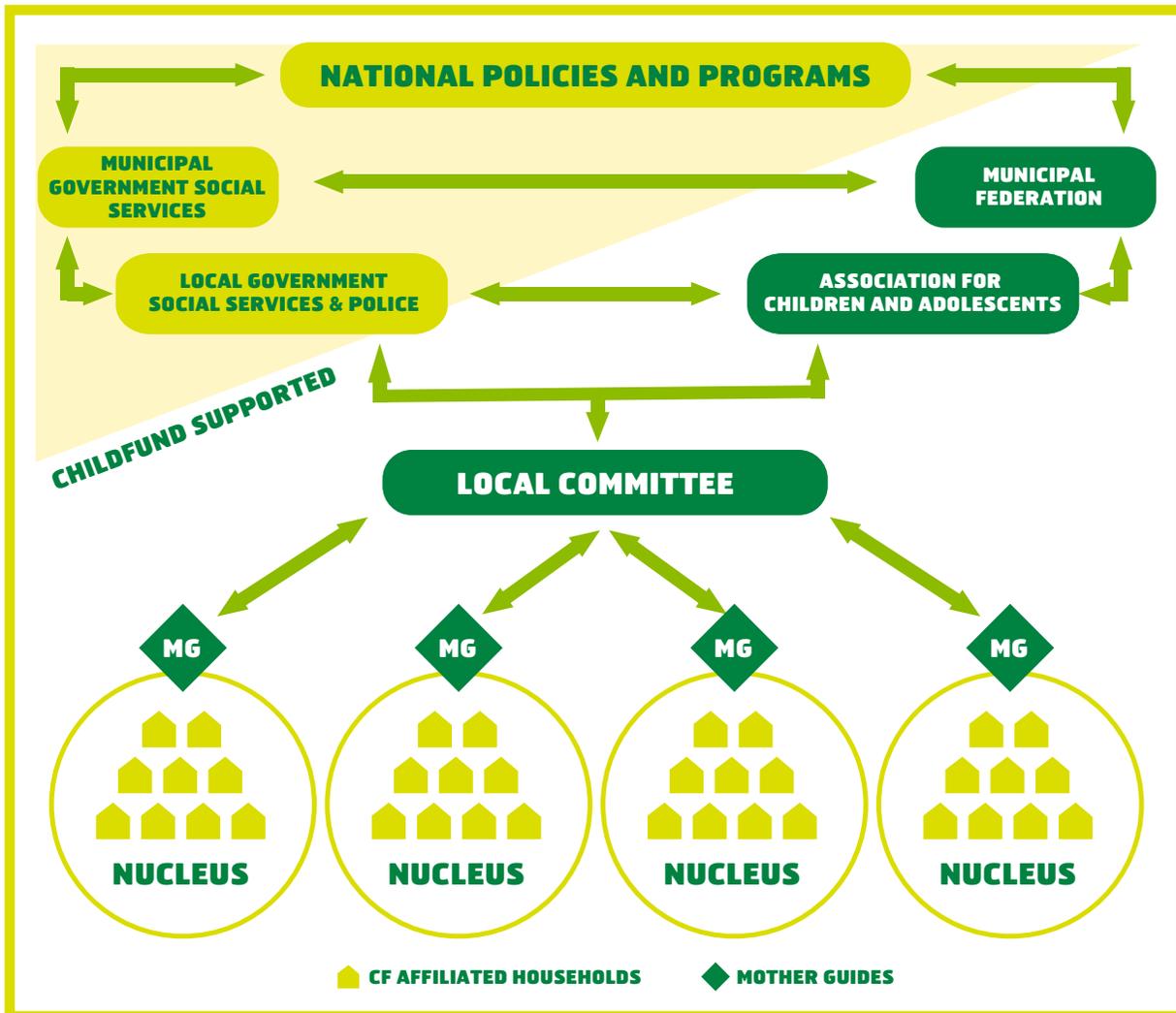
Figure 5 illustrates this structure, used for delivering ChildFund programming and for active child protection work. At present, there are five Associations operating in the Carchi program area, each of which has a varying number of Local Committees that operate under its umbrella. Just as each Local Committee is represented in the Associations, each Association is represented in the Federation.

**FIGURE 5: ORGANIZATION OF CARCHI CHILD PROTECTION ACTORS SUPPORTED BY CHILD FUND**



Overall then, ChildFund Ecuador supports a number of local actors and structures that become activated in cases of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, and generally work to monitor child protection and prevent it. The goal is to link these local mechanisms to higher level – municipal and national – structures for those cases that cannot be resolved locally – see Figure 6.

**FIGURE 6: LINKING LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION STRUCTURES**



Ecuador has fairly extensive national policies on children’s rights and child protection. However, as many of them are not well articulated and brought to the local level, ChildFund works to support local actors and mechanisms to bring cases to them. The program makes the assumption that the Government of Ecuador will continue to operate its municipal and national-level child protection framework, but also that active participation and empowerment on the local level is necessary in order for that framework to work for all children in the country. Therefore, ChildFund Ecuador’s program supports these local actors and structures – with information, technical assistance, and money – to articulate what is envisioned and works on the national level down to communities which tend to be remote, excluded, and marginalized. Since the Government of Ecuador has provided the legal guarantees for children’s rights and welfare, and has established national-level structures that have been slower to reach some communities (developments discussed in more detail in the next section of this report), the work ChildFund Ecuador does on empowered parenting and on child protection serves to articulate the connection between community levels and these national frameworks. More on this in the next section of this report.

Having completed the first three steps of the process-tracing exercise – (1.) Reconstructing the program logic; (2.) Identifying the outcomes of interest; and (3.) Documenting what was done under the program to reach these outcomes) – we now turn to the remaining steps of (4.) Measuring the extent to which these outcomes have materialized; (5.) Identifying plausible causal explanations for them; and (6.) Assessing the extent to which evidence supports each explanation.

# EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT WORK IN ECUADOR: CAUSAL EXPLANATIONS

The main impetus for undertaking this research was to answer the question of whether ChildFund Ecuador's work had achieved its purpose of contributing to the outcomes of empowered and responsive parenting and strengthened community-based child protection mechanisms. If the ChildFund Ecuador program followed the program logic described above, then did it accomplish its goal to significantly contribute to these two outcomes?

Alternatively, other actors – including, notably, the Government of Ecuador – have been making serious investments in the early childhood development network of policies and services in the country. Under the simple 'the tide is rising for everyone' logic, it may well be that these services are slower to reach more remote and traditionally excluded communities, but will eventually cover them as well (the way other services, such as health care, pre-schools, and education, arrive). In other words, the economic transformations and development processes occurring in Ecuador in the last 25 years may alone be responsible for the strengthening of Ecuador's early childhood development support system in places like Carchi, without any contributions from ChildFund Ecuador.

These causal explanations are formulated as alternative to each other, in order to bring some clarity and sharpness to the questions of interest here. However, as many practitioners of process tracing note, complex social realities are influenced by numerous interconnected factors, and it is more fruitful to examine how various factors contribute to producing social outcomes than it is to attempt to rule some of them out. In this case, the economic, political, and social developments related to early childhood development in Ecuador, on the one hand, and ChildFund's contributions, on the other, were not mutually exclusive stories, but rather a story of articulating national-level policies into community-level actions. Where the Government of Ecuador was making serious investments into policies and frameworks for children's rights and welfare on the national level, as a duty bearer among the various actors, ChildFund's work was empowering rights holders (caregivers, communities) to interact with the frameworks that guarantee the rights of children. Where the Government of Ecuador was making investments that did not reach all communities and children equally but left some marginalized and excluded from national-level accomplishments, ChildFund's work was empowering those in more rural, remote, poor, and marginalized communities to partake in the general momentum toward a better early childhood development environment in the country. So, instead of setting up mutually exclusive hypotheses – one on the work of actors such as the Government of Ecuador and one on the contributions ChildFund was making – we examined how the two developments functioned together on different levels (one national, one local in impoverished marginalized communities) to bring about positive outcomes for infants and young children.

## NATIONAL LEVEL: POLICIES VERSUS PRACTICES

In the last couple of decades, the early childhood development landscape in Ecuador has seen positive and encouraging developments. Perhaps the most dramatic transformation has been in the arena of policy formulation and dialogue. The first major indication of this shift came in 1990, when Ecuador signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – the first Latin American country to do so. Since then, Ecuador has signed and ratified most human rights instruments under the United Nations and Inter-American systems, which are largely harmonized with domestic laws and guarantee the rights of children (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).

Since then, Ecuador has developed a rather comprehensive set of policies for children. For instance, in 2003 the Code of Childhood and Adolescence was passed. It is the legal document that governs child protection, as well as adoption, custody, and the juvenile justice system. This Code replaced the more rudimentary Children's Code (1992), effectively enacting the principles of the Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in their entirety (Yale Law School, 2005). The various policies governing children, their rights, and their well-being that

Ecuador has adopted are reflected in the 2004 passage of the 10 Year Action Plan by the National Council for Childhood and Adolescence – the first such planning document with a rights-based approach (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). Under this general framework, a number of policies and bodies have been created to guarantee and work on the protection of the rights of children.

More recently, under Ecuador’s new Constitution (ratified in 2008) there are a number of basic laws that directly address the rights of children. Among other provisions, these include: anti-discrimination laws based on age; establishing that it is the governments ‘highest priority’ to protect the rights of children and families; and establishing the Decentralized System of Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (Child Rights International Network, 2012). This national system is “a cohesive and coordinated set of bodies, agencies and services, public and private, that define, execute, oversee and evaluate policies, plans, programs and actions in order to ensure comprehensive protection of children and adolescents; define measures, procedures, sanctions and remedies, in all fields, to ensure the recognition, exercise, enforcement and restoration of the rights of children and adolescents” (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).



In these efforts, the Government of Ecuador often invites and enjoys the contributions of non-state actors. Many of the various bodies in the Decentralized System of Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents have non-governmental members representing other actors involved in child protection efforts. For instance, when the National Council for Childhood and Adolescence was established, with members elected through a democratic process, the first such election was held by “calling upon all children’s organizations, groups, networks, or fora...to participate in the process” (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2008). Similarly, the Cantonal Councils for Children and Adolescents are comprised of equal members of the state and civil society entrusted with developing and proposing child-related policies.

With these efforts, Ecuador’s framework on the rights, protection, and well-being of children ranks among the more comprehensive ones in the world, and has garnered recognition for that. For instance, when the Code of Childhood and Adolescence was passed in 2003, UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy praised the country for its significant investment in children through legal guarantees of their welfare and increased social spending (UNICEF Press Release, 5 August 2003). At the same time, implementing these policies and guarantees and ensuring that all children in Ecuador are covered with basic services have remained a concern (UNICEF Press Release, 5 August 2003). There are two aspects that remain worrisome in Ecuador: the implementation of policies that guarantee child welfare provisions actually materialize; and the manifestation of equal access or equal coverage, so that the gap between services available in urban centers like Quito and in remote rural or largely indigenous areas like Carchi does not continue to widen.

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## **NATIONAL LEVEL: (UN)EQUAL ACCESS**

While Ecuador’s legal framework contains various guarantees and bodies to deal with the rights and welfare of children, in practice much of these remain only policies, not practices, and may be quite slow to reach from the national level to the local level of remote communities. When they are implemented, and services such as those guaranteed in policies provided, access is often quite unequal throughout the country.

<sup>8</sup> In this plan, there are nine policies that target children under the age of 6: Policy 1 – Health protection and care for women of reproductive age through free and universal care during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum; Policy 2 – ensure a healthy life for children under 6; Policy 3 – protection from natural and provoked disasters and risks; Policy 4 – ensure adequate and timely nutrition for all children; Policy 5 – ensure access by children under 5 to quality child development services, programmes and projects; Policy 6 – Ensure effective, universal and compulsory quality schooling for all children under 6 in initial education and first grade, consistently with the principles of equity, multi-culturalism, pluralism and solidarity; Policy 7 – Ensure that families have knowledge and skills needed to raise their children fostering to the utmost their emotional, intellectual, social and moral capacities with a sense of fairness and inclusiveness in a setting of affection and stimulation; Policy 8 – ensure for children a home in which to live in conditions of security, identity, freedom from violence and emotional stability, as well as fundamental conditions of protection; and Policy 9 – Prevention and care for all forms of mistreatment, violence, abuse and exploitation.

**44%** of the population is covered by the Human Development Grant (Bono de Desarrollo Humano), more than any other similar program in Latin American and the Caribbean.

To be sure, Ecuador has made investments in child services and welfare. Since 2000, Ecuador has substantially increased its social spending. Between 2000 and 2008, allocation and implementation of resources in social spending as a share of the total central government budget rose from 14% to 27.5%. These investments include maternal and child health services, food and nutrition programs, school feeding programs, and child development education (Carbonell and Zavala, 2009). Overall, the country has made some strides toward reducing poverty, providing more services to more people, and implementing inclusive social policies to address inequality. For instance, the country's conditional cash transfer program, the Human Development Grant

(Bono de Desarrollo Humano), has been praised for its targeting and coverage. It covers over 44% of the population, more than any other similar program in Latin America and the Caribbean. With regards to children, the Human Development Grant provides a monthly sum of \$35 conditional on 75% school attendance and health check-ups (Center for Inclusive Growth, 2012). Due to such expansions in social protection policies and programs, educational attainment is increasing, and the average number of monthly health checkups has more than doubled since 2006 (INEC, 2012; Schady and Araujo, 2008 cited in Center for Inclusive Growth, 2012). These achievements rest on two solid documents that deal with rights, including those of children. Both the 2008 Constitution and the 2009-2013 national development plan (Buen Vivir in Spanish; Sumak Kawsay in Quechua) are essentially rights-based documents that guarantee the rights of various groups, seek economic inclusion, and target the within-community inequalities that can outweigh between-community ones in Ecuador.

However, much like with child protection, these frameworks and policies are entrusted to sometimes cumbersome bureaucracies – as the Center for Inclusive Growth, among others, has pointed out about Ecuador, “the large bureaucratic machine appears to be a barrier to the efficient and timely implementation of policies” (2012:1). The very complex institutional framework has trouble coordinating and integrating the work of its various bodies, which leads to serious delays in implementation. With respect to child protection specifically, the government itself has admitted that, despite ratifying conventions and establishing policies, it has allowed long delays in developing programs to support children (reports to the United Nations by The National Council for Children and Adolescence in 2009 and 2010).

Further, when they work, many of these programs are criticized for having an urban bias. For instance, a recent addition to the Human Development Grant has been the Human Development Credit, a pro-poor loan that offers poor people access to affordable credit. About 70% of the beneficiaries of the Human Development Credit are urban; about 60% of the country's poor are rural (PPS, 2012; Salazar, 2009, cited in Center for Inclusive Growth, 2012). As UNICEF has continued to note, despite increases in social spending, social inequalities, and geographic and ethnic disparities endure to “undermine children's access to health, education, and social protection” (UNICEF Universal Periodic Review, 2008). For example, while annual teacher investments in Quito average up to \$1,200 per teacher, the same investments in the predominantly indigenous municipality of Guamote average \$83. Child mortality rates are nearly double the national rate in the poor remote areas of the country (at 28 per 1,000 live births nationally, versus 46 in the Amazonia – Orellana and 53 in Chimbarazo) (UNICEF Universal Periodic Review, 2008). The work of agencies such as UNICEF and of many development NGOs, including ChildFund, in Ecuador has therefore focused on marginalized, remote, often indigenous communities who are frequently excluded from national-level achievements found in urban centers like Quito.

When ChildFund began working with children and families in poor rural areas such as Carchi in 1984, high rates of poverty, disease, malnutrition, and child mortality were endemic to the majority of rural communities. Geographically isolated, these communities received limited education, healthcare, early childhood development and other social services. It is in these rural and indigenous areas that non-governmental organizations are filling gaps in government service provision – particularly in areas related to child nutrition and early childhood development. ChildFund Ecuador, WorldVision Ecuador, Plan International, Children International, and KNH, among others, work in these rural and indigenous areas to support children and their families with health and nutrition services (Carbonell and Zavala, 2009).

A similar story occurs in child protection, where the extensive and complex national system is slow to reach remote and marginalized communities. Such was the case of Montúfar County in Carchi. Although positive developments for child protection and welfare had been happening in Ecuador since at least 1990, by 2010 not much by way of child protection mechanisms had been established in Montúfar County. It was through the efforts of Montúfar women who participated in ChildFund programs and learned about child rights and the system for child protection in the country that a Board of Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents was finally formed in January 2010. With the assistance of ChildFund and the local Federation – in the form of training, information, and basic office support (supplies and furniture) – the women set up a proposal for establishing the Protection Board in Montúfar. As part of the official government child protection system, this Board in Montúfar was the living extension of the state system for child protection that had never reached the county.

Today, the Montúfar Protection Board is going strong, even issuing its own report of statistics on child protection cases by type of violation and number of cases that it has addressed. Between 2010 and 2012, the Board reported a marked increase in the number of reported cases of child abuse. The women who relayed this story noted that, whereas child abuse had once been the socially accepted norm, the work of the Board, stemming from learning about child rights in ChildFund programs, had raised consciousness and motivated people to report the cases of abuse. A 2013 report released by the Board also emphasizes that some cases of severe abuse – including sexual abuse – are reported directly to the police and the government office.

Generally speaking, ChildFund’s work falls within an improving policy, service provision, and social norms change context for child rights and early childhood development. It further serves to fill some gaps in national programs and services reaching rural, excluded, and marginalized communities and in mobilizing these communities to reach out to structures and services themselves. The logic of ChildFund Ecuador’s program makes the assumption that government services should and will continue to reach more people in the country, and it seeks to facilitate this extension for people – primary caregivers and community members – empowered to seek their rights. If this is the general landscape of different contributions to this social change, how does ChildFund do it? What evidence do we have that the logic of the program to empower caregivers and to strengthen child protection on the community level ‘works’ and has produced results?



# CHILDFUND ECUADOR'S PROGRAM: TRACING THE STEPS

When we started examining how ChildFund's work with families and communities on empowered and responsive parenting, and on child protection, had gone over the last couple of decades, we found a number of intended outcomes and a few unintended ones as well. We found higher knowledge of early childhood development and improved parenting behaviors; caregivers with higher self-esteem; and communities more engaged in a rights-based approach to active child protection. ChildFund Ecuador had intended to work toward all these outcomes. What the organization had not intended to do, but we found, was changed social norms – particularly those around gender – that communities, mothers and trainers drew our attention to. We now turn to describing the evidence for these outcomes, gathered in Carchi.

## CAREGIVERS WITH INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD RIGHTS, CHILD SECURITY AND PROTECTION, AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Qualitative findings suggest that those participating in ChildFund Ecuador's early childhood development program have increased their understanding of child rights, child security, and child development: the acquisition of new knowledge about child development, health, and nutrition emerged as a salient theme throughout interviews, focus group discussions, and the commitment letters program participants write upon completion of their training. Common risks to child development that were cited by respondents include: physical or psychological abuse, inadequate cognitive stimulation or learning experiences, environmental hazards within the home and community, improper breastfeeding practices, and malnourishment. The table below provides examples of statements that highlight how participation in ChildFund-supported early childhood development activities has led to increased knowledge and understanding of child rights and development among participants.

**FIGURE 7: EXAMPLES OF RESPONSES RELATED TO ELIMINATION OF RISKS AND ACQUISITION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE**

Stakeholder	Quote
<b>Mother Trainer</b>	"I learned things that I had never learned before. I learned how to take care of my children, how to take care of my home and my surroundings, and I taught other people what I learned and I felt really good, and I continue to feel good because all of this has really served me well."
<b>Mother Trainer</b>	"There were mothers that didn't understand before, and we are now helping them learn about the benefits of caring for their children this way, because there are moms that are nasty to their children—they mistreat them—and now we are showing them how they should stimulate their child, feed them nourishing foods and help them learn."
<b>President of Local Committee</b>	"The program has had many results and has enabled families to discover risks...and we have come to realize that these risks exist...The Mother Guides are the ones that share with the family...every guide knows the families, and they discover which children need some type of help with the family (for example) when there is abuse, and they inform the (relevant) local committee."

## CAREGIVERS WITH HIGHER PERSONAL AGENCY AND SELF-ESTEEM

Research in the field of cognitive psychology and social learning indicates that an individual’s sense of personal agency and capacity to effect change directly influences his or her actions (Bandura, 1982, 1997). The relevance of personal agency on child development relates to the important role it serves in empowering parents to pursue goals and challenges that lead to self-improvement: on the individual level, a strong sense of personal agency can assist in achieving economic and educational goals; on the family level, increased sense of personal agency can enable behavior changes that may be needed to improve the home environment and to practice responsive parenting behaviors. Applied to parenting, self-efficacy can increase motivation to persist in parenting strategies, such as disciplinary measures, and promote help-seeking behaviors in situations where extra support is needed. A growing body of research has been dedicated to the subject of parental-efficacy, which relates to parents’ belief that they are able to influence their child’s development (Shumow & Lomax, 2002). Some studies have indicated that mothers with higher self-efficacy reported fewer behavior problems in their infants and children (Sanders & Woolley, 2005), and tend to exhibit fewer hostile behaviors toward their infants (Pierce, et al, 2010).

Findings suggest that the strategies employed by ChildFund in its parenting education and child protection work promote self-efficacy by providing opportunities for participants to: (a) practice increasingly challenging tasks; (b) observe other parents engaging in responsive parenting, public speaking or community activities; and (c) discuss fears or concerns within the context of the trusted group. Creating a safe space for parents to speak openly and practice new skills – which begin as simple tasks and increase in complexity – allows participants in ChildFund Ecuador’s early childhood development program to gain improved self-confidence and self-efficacy.

For instance, mothers and fathers commented in interviews, letters of commitment, and focus group discussions that they gained: (a) an improved sense of self; (b) an increased understanding of the ways that they could influence change in their children’s lives; and (c) an improved self-esteem through participation in ChildFund Ecuador’s early childhood development program. One often-mentioned example of this was losing the “fear of speaking,” which many parents felt had previously inhibited their participation in community activities and even restricted their ability to express themselves within their own households. The responses included in table below highlight some of the participants’ experiences in improved personal agency and self-esteem:

**FIGURE 8: EXAMPLES OF RESPONSES RELATED TO SELF-EFFICACY AND SELF-ESTEEM**

Stakeholder	Quote
Member of the Carchi Federation	“Believe me, it hurt my heart to speak, it hurt my chest and my arms seemed like they would fall off, but slowly we have begun to overcome this... and I have achieved successes that I never believed that I would be able to achieve.”
ChildFund Staff Member	“We have seen mothers that have begun to lose their fear of speaking by attending the workshops...they are mothers that are more sure of themselves, with improved self-esteem.”
Member of the Carchi Federation	“ChildFund never gave me a penny, but they gave me something more valuable: desire; (The) Desire to excel and not stay static, the desire to learn...”
Mother Trainer	“It (participation in the parenting education workshops) has motivated me to study...I’m now in my second college course.”

## RESPONSIVE PARENTING BEHAVIORS THAT SUPPORT EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Qualitative findings indicate that participants in ChildFund’s parenting education program experienced a number of changes in parenting behaviors. These changes were reported through interviews, focus groups, and the mothers’ commitment letters to their children. The letters, in particular, provided personal testimonies to the ways in which the program had affected them as parents. Predominant themes in these letters include recognition of parenting errors (e.g., beating, yelling, not knowing how to behave as a parent, etc.), pleas for forgiveness from their children for past mistakes, firm resolutions of how they will now behave as parents, and hopes and aspirations for their children’s future.

In interviews and focus group discussions, mothers mentioned that, as a result of the parenting education workshops, they had become more patient and understanding and that they now treat their children with more love and respect. As one mother expressed:

*"The benefit has been for us and our families because before we used to treat our children differently, but now with these workshops we can provide stimulation. It has benefited us because we now know how to treat our children and how to value our children. Before, well, we gave them what we needed to give them...but never affection or a word of encouragement, and so now we are much closer with them."*

## HOME ENVIRONMENTS WITH LESS TOXIC STRESS DUE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FOR CHILDREN

Research from the field of neuroscience indicates that toxic stress – severe, prolonged or frequent exposure to stress-inducing risk factors – can alter a child’s brain architecture, particularly in the absence of nurturing, consistent caregivers (Shonkoff, 2010). Without adequate support, remediation, or intervention, the experience of toxic stress early in life can affect children’s central nervous system development and may have long-lasting repercussions. The risk factors associated with toxic stress for children include, among others, abuse and chronic neglect, the burdens of family economic hardship accumulated over time, and repeated exposure to violence in the community or within the family (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007:10). The focus of ChildFund’s work in Ecuador is explicitly on the risk factors contributing to toxic stress (parenting education addresses violence and corporal punishment; child protection work addresses what constitutes abuse and neglect; both address how children’s development is impacted). The parenting education and in-home support aspects also address the nurturing, consistent caregiving that helps avoid or mitigate toxic stress on children. As one example, we here focus on violence within the family and in the community.

Contributing to domestic violence, and thus toxic stress for children, in Ecuador are beliefs that corporal punishment is an appropriate form of discipline for children, and that violence between a husband and wife is normal and acceptable. Speaking candidly about domestic violence in Ecuador, one Program Director admitted, “it is a shame to say, but in Ecuador, unfortunately, abuse is part of the culture. You can even hear people telling wives, ‘even if he hits, even if he kills, he’s your husband.’” In focus groups and commitment letters, many mothers also indicated they used to use corporal punishment as a way to discipline their children more often than not. The negative effects of toxic stress related to violence have been a focus of the parenting education workshops that ChildFund supports. The topic of violence is approached through the lens of how it impacts children, and how it can slow or prevent their development. Caregivers also then learn techniques to discipline children without using corporal punishment or violence, including verbal abuse.

Findings indicate a shift away from the use of violence and corporal punishment, and less and less community acceptance of and tolerance for violence in households. The responses below illustrate some participants’ observations on how home environments in their communities are shifting toward less toxic stress and domestic violence:

**FIGURE 9: EXAMPLES OF STAKEHOLDER OBSERVATIONS RELATED TO HEALTHIER HOME ENVIRONMENTS**

Stakeholder	Quote
Program Participant	“There has been a lot of abuse, but since there have been these courses, the workshops talked about this and then it has stopped, well of course not all of it has stopped but, yes some has stopped.”
Mother Trainer	“Before (the parenting education workshops) there were so many cases of abuse, cases of parents using belts → not now. Now talking is (considered) better...they now know what is good and is bad...”

# EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES WITH FOCUSED ATTENTION ON CHILDREN’S AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS

On the community level, we found a sense of empowerment evidenced by involvement in the institutional Child Security Network and, more specifically, a role in forming, making contributions to, or participating in cantonal councils, local councils, local health committees, and local boards of protection. The most successful story is the one from Montúfar, in which women who participated in ChildFund programs learned about child rights and the system for child protection in Ecuador, became concerned that the structures the Government had outlined in its framework were not reaching their community, and formed a local Board of Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents (see page 16 above). This was a direct example, related with much pride by the women and former program participants, of people acting on their environment and on the structures in it that govern the well-being of their children.

Less direct and more surprising – by way of unintended outcomes – were findings about how social norms, and the understanding of the places of children and women in societies and families, have changed. Interview transcripts from this study reveal clear ways in which social norms are beginning to shift. Key shifts in normative beliefs mentioned by the majority of study participants included concepts of gender and children.

## Norms about Children

Prevailing understandings of the place and role of children in local culture most often characterize them as small, helpless, and incapable of learning or expressing opinions. A ‘good child’ is one who is quiet and does not bother adults. Concepts like child participation or stimulating children to form and express opinions as early as 3-5 years of age are not a strong part of the traditional child-rearing model. The notion that children are immature and incapable of learning or understanding in the earliest years of life was a prevalent belief for many of the mothers before they participated in ChildFund Ecuador’s early childhood development program. As one mother shared:

*“Before (participating), we saw them (children) as just little. We didn’t think that they could express opinions, and if they did try to express an opinion, we told them that they don’t know anything and to be quiet. We thought this because that is how the older generation treated us when we were young. Now we see the value of giving the opportunity to our children because they also have opinions about what they feel...”*

Similarly, a Program Director told us, “it was very common in Ecuador that the child is told to be quiet... people say, ‘what an adorable child, he doesn’t even bother us,’ but this is symptomatic of a child that is not developing well, because now we see that a child has to play, laugh, dance.”

Overall, many program participants spoke about their different way of viewing children, and the new value they placed on encouraging children to participate and to have opinions (see Figure 10 below). These reflections seemed to have started with an understanding of the cognitive and socio-emotional development of children, but to have also gone beyond individual child development to affect how people view the place of children in the family and society more generally.

**FIGURE 10: EXAMPLES OF REPORTED SHIFTS IN SOCIAL NORMS – CHILDREN**

	Existing Normative Beliefs	Evolving Normative Beliefs
<b>Children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children are most often characterized as small, helpless, and incapable of learning or expressing opinions.</li> <li>A “good child” is a child that is quiet and does not bother adults.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young children are active learners even before they are able to communicate using words</li> <li>Playing, dancing and singing are important for children’s development.</li> <li>Children have rights and their opinions should be respected.</li> </ul>

## Gender Norms

A similar shift seems to be occurring with gender norms in the communities. Traditional gender roles place women as primary caregivers to children also responsible for all household work, and men as workers outside the home to provide income and food. Men, as heads of households, traditionally also make decisions in the home, but remain relatively uninvolved in active parenting and developmental stimulation for infants and young children. As one ChildFund Program Director described these traditional gender roles around parenting, “Typically, care of the children is for the women. On the other hand, the father is responsible for producing and bringing resources, so we still have this in our society...and the mothers have a certain dependency.” Besides creating dependencies for women (few of whom have independent sources of income in Ecuador), this traditional model tends to divorce the power of decision-making for children, which rests with fathers/men/heads of household from the responsibility of primary care, which typically rests with mothers/women. It also does not encourage fathers and men to participate actively in the cognitive and socio-emotional development of infants and young children.

In places where ChildFund has not been implementing its empowered parenting program for long, traditional norms seem to persist. As one Program Director noted, “there is one community where we are just beginning to work, where we have been working for less than a year, and from what can be seen, women’s participation is very low because the husbands don’t let them (participate). On the other hand, in communities where we have been working you see great participation of the women, even the majority – 70-80% are women.”

More generally, participants spoke about women doing different things than what they used to do: participating in the community more; being viewed with more respect as Mother Guides; and getting some of their husbands to join parenting workshops, which are mostly viewed as ‘women’s business.’ The table below summarizes the themes that emerged from discussions:

**FIGURE 11: EXAMPLES OF REPORTED SHIFTS IN SOCIAL NORMS – GENDER**

	Existing Normative Beliefs	Evolving Normative Beliefs
<b>Gender</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women are responsible for childcare and household chores.</li> <li>• Women do not hold leadership roles or participate in community organizations.</li> <li>• Men are responsible for providing economic support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women and men share in parenting activities.</li> <li>• Women are encouraged to pursue educational or economic opportunities outside of the home.</li> <li>• Women are recognized as adding value to community organizations.</li> </ul>

Participants also commented on how this shift in gender norms is not always without tension or contestation, particularly on the household level. ‘Men or husbands asking questions’ about women’s increased activity outside the home while attending workshops is a positive outcome where men’s participation is concerned, but potentially a negative outcome where more conflict can accompany

more empowerment. Recognizing that shifting gender norms requires broad participation, ChildFund Ecuador has begun to expand the efforts in this area to include a focus on men. Some initiatives highlighted by ChildFund staff and community members aim to improve the engagement of fathers in their children’s development and education. By facilitating special training programs, recreational activities, and events, ChildFund has begun to focus efforts on the important role of fathers and men.





## CONCLUSION

Following a process tracing approach, this research has looked at the causal steps and approaches through which ChildFund has contributed to positive developmental outcomes for children in Ecuador. Overall, we find support for the intended outcomes of:

- (a) increased knowledge and understanding of child rights, security, protection, and development;
- (b) improved parenting behaviors;
- (c) higher personal agency and self-esteem of caregivers;
- (d) reduced domestic violence and toxic stress for children; and
- (e) better community attention to child protection.

Additionally, we find support for the unintended outcome of:

- (f) changed social norms around the rights of children and women in families and communities.

To be sure, the work of ChildFund Ecuador on empowered and responsive parenting and on community-level child protection is one of many factors shaping Ecuador's early childhood development landscape. The Government of Ecuador has made significant investments in an extensive legal and policy framework that guarantees the rights and welfare of children. The Government has also made significant investments in social protection and inclusive growth in the country.

Where ChildFund Ecuador contributes significantly is in articulating, to the local level within each community, the frameworks and structures that the government establishes on the national level. To the extent that nationally mandated and established structures for child protection, for instance, are slow to reach rural, marginalized, and impoverished communities, ChildFund supports these communities to act and build the missing layers that connect them to national structures and services. Ecuador's fundamental frameworks on child protection and inclusive growth are essentially rights-based documents. Where the Government may focus on its duties in guaranteeing rights legally and providing services, the work of ChildFund Ecuador results in empowering people and communities to respect and seek rights, notably those of children.

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# APPENDIX A – CONSTITUTIONAL ARTICLES AND LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS ADDRESSING CHILD RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT

## Sources:

CRIN, <http://crin.org/en/library/publications/ecuador-national-laws>

Yale Law School, <http://www.law.yale.edu/rcw/rcw/jurisdictions/ams/ecuador/frontpage.doc>

## National Laws on Children's Rights

Under the Ecuadorian Constitution, ratified international treaties and conventions including the CRC stand as the supreme law alongside the Constitution itself. Within legislation, basic laws that protect fundamental rights prevail over ordinary laws.

**Constitution:** The Constitution of Ecuador includes a number of provisions that directly address the rights of children:

- Article 23 prohibits discrimination on, among other things, the grounds of age.
- Articles 47 and 50 establish the government's obligation to protect children and adolescents, especially in precarious situations such as armed conflict.
- Article 48 establishes that it is the duty of the government, society and the family to give the highest priority to the comprehensive development of children and adolescents, to ensure the full exercise of their rights, and to give priority to the best interest of children in every possible case.
- Article 49 guarantees children and adolescents the right to social participation, to respect for their freedom and dignity and to be consulted on matters affecting them.
- Article 50 mandates that the government take measures to guarantee preferential treatment to children and adolescents with disabilities.
- Article 52 establishes the Decentralized National System of Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents.
- Articles 66 through 79 guarantee the inalienable right to education and place a duty on the government to provide for it.

**Legislation:** Ecuador's Childhood and Adolescence Code is the most comprehensive law addressing children's rights. Provisions relating to children's rights also appear throughout a number of other general legislative codes including the Criminal Code and the Labor Code. Other laws relevant to children's rights include, but not limited to:

- Law on Education for Democracy
- Organic Law on Health
- Law on Free Maternity and Child Care
- Special Education Regulations
- Executive Decree No. 179 on the Comprehensive protection of the rights of children and adolescents

**The Code of Childhood and Adolescence** is the legal document governing child protection, as well as adoption, custody, and the juvenile justice system. Passed in 2003, it replaced the more rudimentary Children’s Code (1992), effectively enacting the principles of the Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in their entirety. Article 12 of the CRC, giving the child the right to express his or her views in any proceeding affecting the child, is substantiated several times in Ecuador’s *Code of Childhood and Adolescence*, most directly in Article 60. Article 60 states:

*Children and adolescents have the right to be consulted in all of the matters that affect them. This opinion shall be taken into account in proportion to his age and maturity. No child or adolescent shall be obligated or pressured by any means to express his opinion.*

Relevant Books and Articles include:

- Book One – Children and Adolescents as Subject to Rights, Title III –Rights, Guarantees, and Responsibilities, Chapter V –Rights of Participation
  - Article 60 – Right to be consulted
- Book Two – The Child and Adolescent in Their Familial Relationships, Title II – On Parental Authority
  - Article 108 – Suspension of legal representation due to a conflict of interest
- Book Three - National System of Protection for Children and Adolescents, Title VIII – Administrative Procedure of Protection of Rights
  - Article 236 – Active legitimization
  - Article 238 – Hearing
- Book Three, Title X –The Justice Administration of Children and Adolescents, Chapter IV – Judicial Procedures, Section Two –The General Contention Procedure



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