Qualitative Research on Key Early Childhood Behaviors in Cocoa and Non-Cocoa Communities in Côte D'Ivoire

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Context of Engagement

TRECC contracted BUSARA and CCP to conduct formative research on one of their three pillars; Early Childhood Development (ECD), which is steered towards improving the practices and behaviors of parents, caregivers and families.
In February 2019, the BCT facilitated a technical workshop regrouping all of TRECC’s implementing partners as well as governmental structures intervening in child development.

During the workshop four clearly defined priority ECD behaviors were found for all ECD stakeholders in Ivory Coast:
- Breastfeeding
- Complementary Feeding
- Early Stimulation
- Positive Discipline

- Literature review conducted to assess specific research in West Africa and in Côte d'Ivoire to understand evidence base for the key ECD behaviors
  - Seeked to synthesize behavioral and structural problems faced by the four ECD behaviors
  - Classified the findings using the Social Ecological Model (SEM) framework

Existing local body of research found for breastfeeding and complementary feeding:
- Early Stimulation
- Positive Discipline

Two selected ECD behaviors with less local previous formative research:
- Early Stimulation
- Positive Discipline
The BCT first conducted a formative research using mixed qualitative research methods across 5 sites in Côte d’Ivoire, to understand current practices, perceptions, barriers and facilitators of early stimulation and positive discipline of children 0-5.

The research was concluded by a intensive 2-days co-design workshop with TRECC stakeholders to review and validate research insights, generate intervention ideas based on those insights, select best ideas for prototyping.
TOP 5 LOW-TWEAK RECOMMENDATIONS
Low-tweak interventions can be integrated into current TRECC ECD projects to improve their quality and potential impact with fewer costs, while corresponding to relevant insights.
#1 Reframing Discipline in the current parental programs

**Barriers Addressed**

Addresses the perceptions that:

- Although violence is bad, it is the social norm and necessary
- A child's behavior is dominated by their personality traits and cannot be changed
- Non-Violence is a Western trend and makes children more naughty

**Context of Intervention**

- Reframing of current TRECC curriculum and content by TRECC with the help of BCT,
- Reframing/testing messages about children's brain plasticity
- Less of “violence is bad” and more of “proper development from non-violent practices” messaging.
- Making it relevant to:
  - African culture
  - Educational benefits
  - Positive ECD practices being as/more effective to physical punishment

**Tools**

Tools used:

- **Metaphors:** e.g agricultural metaphor that relates to how seeds grow with proper nurturing conditions
- **Visuals:** Images and videos showing the impact of violence and non-stimulation on a child's brain and behavior
- **Educational Tools:** E.g Ladder of Discipline, shows different nonviolent alternative with gradient intensity levels (would need to be tested)
Next steps

With help from BCT:

1. Prototype new messages, visual content, and educational tools based on formative research insights

2. Test and refine these with target groups from the community, such as understanding which are common metaphors understood by the majority of the community or if new educational tools like the non-violent discipline ladder are convenient to use.

3. Finalize revised content and integrate into (i) trainings for facilitators (new and refreshers); (ii) re-print materials or print add-ins to existing materials; (iii) make sure guides are straightforward and that materials are durable and easy to use.
#2 Reframing Early Stimulation in the current parental programs

**Barriers Addressed**
- Although there are good practices in place they are not being taken seriously
- Activities are not being linked to learning opportunities
- Stress and intensive work are barriers to play and stimulation with children
- Social norms against extensive parent-children display of play (especially for fathers)

**Context of Intervention**
- Praising parents and reassuring them that early stimulation and play are already guiding their child towards a bright future (more emphasis on educational benefits)
- Incorporating new stimulation practices or activities into parent’s already established routines
- Could be shown with the help of community champions rec. #4 and through reframing of current TRECC curriculum and content (e.g., parent coaching materials, guides, educational tools, training modules etc.)

**Tools**
- Pairing stimulation practice with daily activities, for example:
  - Using bath time to sing and play together.
  - Story during bedtime
  - Learning to count while cooking together or taking a bath
Next steps

With help from BCT:

1. Test and establish which new simulation practices should be incorporated with which specific routine time and activity (ex. singing during bath time etc.) and how those practices can be augmented (e.g. more educational).

2. Test and implement specific cues that would prompt and encourage ECD practices to integrate themselves into the routines as a habit.

3. Finalize revised content and integrate into (i) trainings for facilitators and champions (new and refreshers); (ii) re-print materials or print add-ins to existing materials; (iii) make sure guides are straightforward and that materials are durable and easy to use.
#3 Reminders messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers Addressed</th>
<th>Context of Intervention</th>
<th>Tools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Acknowledges participants overload of information, which leads to forgetting what was taught</td>
<td>• Use SMS and Whatsapp groups to reinforce messages given during the training at key moment of the day</td>
<td>• Timed SMS reminders (inexpensive) during key day times</td>
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<td>• Need for social groups and a community to share relevant content</td>
<td>• WhatsApp online communities to normalize good ECD behaviors (within ECD parental groups).</td>
<td>• Whatsapp groups could be managed by program trainers and the SMS reminders can be programmed in advance to be sent at a specific key time of the day</td>
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<td>• Some moments in the day are more important in terms of discipline and stimulation practices</td>
<td>• Reminders can include stress management and relaxation strategies for key moments (e.g when parents arrive from working at the fields)</td>
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Next steps

With help from BCT:

1. Define and prioritize the key moments of the day and what messages to share at that specific time. For example, sharing stress management tools when parents get back from work or sharing songs when most families give their children baths.

2. Create prototypes of templates for messages, and how to create them, so that facilitators or managers can create clear and simple SMS messages to share in order for participants to recall and understand more easily.

3. Test messages on key audience target to determine whether or not messages are being understood and effective on encouraging action.
#4 Community Champions: Train community influencers as ECD champions

## Barriers Addressed
- Current opinion that ECD advice and practices are foreign practices
- There is a need to normalize ECD practices and for them to be seen culturally and socially desirable

## Context of Intervention
- Bring in community influencers to get involved in parental trainings (after having been trained themselves)
- Provide grandmother-specific trainings that is adapted to their reality

## Tools
- Possible community champions: nurses, teachers, midwives, religious leaders and grandparents
- Lead entire training sessions on ECD tools
- Follow-up with members of the community after the sessions
- Relay ECD messages during their daily occupations eg:
  - During sermons
  - During ANC or doctor visits
Next steps

With help from BCT:

1. Identify the relevant community champions in a given community (e.g. access to many people, respected, considered wise, is able to relate to others etc.)

2. Prototype and test intrinsic or extrinsic incentives to encourage influencers to join sessions, follow-up on participants and report back on activities

3. Create tailored trainings for them (e.g. grandmothers) on how to properly teach and guide their community members on relevant topics

4. Prototype and test materials for influencers such as pamphlets, pre-made guides/teaching lessons they can use during their daily practices sermons, speeches, meetings etc.
#5 Awards and Incentives

**Barrier Addressed**
- Participants are struggling to attend/complete full trainings due to time demands
- Attendance and participation in trainings is a problem for fathers
- Practicing non-violent discipline or stimulation practices is not seen as desirable or valued in the community

**Context of Intervention**

Providing micro-incentives or non-financial incentives to:
- Motivate participants to attend the training in its entirety, either by providing incentive after the end of each training/or at the end of the whole training program (depends on the incentive)
- Motivate participants to practice the behaviors at home and applying the learnings in their life,

**Tools**

- Test low-cost or no cost incentives such as:
  - rotating father/mother of the week trophy, vouchers, a certificate of attendance, completion, a prize if consecutive sessions attended etc)
  - Public recognition and community celebration
- For rewarding the practice applied at home, it could be monitored via recall of experiences or documenting that is fun and accessible
Next steps

With help from BCT:

1. Prototype and test which incentives/rewards are more likely to motivate full participation for the training, including for fathers (social proof related incentives, prize incentives, success measuring incentives etc.)

2. Prototype and test a simple and easy to use monitoring system that will most accurately recall experiences, participation, and at home use of teachings (e.g., journaling, “small homework” to take home and back, displayed attendance etc.) These tasks should not be time-consuming and fun.

3. Once incentives and tools have been chosen, help guide training facilitators on how to give out the incentives
TOP 5 NEW INTERVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS
In addition to low-tweak recommendations, the research insights have the potential to inform novel and innovative ECD interventions beyond what is usually practiced and delivered. We recognize that although in some cases new financing will be required, entirely new interventions might be effective at delivering the outcomes we seek. These ideas come from the BCT as well as from participants of the design workshop.
#1 Easy ECD Kit of Resources for Parents

## Barriers Addressed
- Parents report having a lack of physical materials at home
- Need of tangible activities and representations that tie in with concepts learned in training
- Need for play activities that are easy-to-use, attractive, and insert themselves in the daily routines of parents

## Context of Intervention
- Resources Kit
- Could include materials that address all four of the Cote d'Ivoire's Priority ECD behaviours or only positive discipline and early stimulation behaviours
- Could be distributed through the TRECC parenting programs, but also through health professionals and pre-primary education institutions.

## Tools
- Could include user friendly, low literate, engaging and culturally relevant tools, games, songs, reminders, and other products
- **Examples:**
  - Posters and stickers (songs, games, feedback tool etc.)
  - Visual Aids (cue-to-action, reminders, alternative to violent discipline)
  - Wearable tangible items for positive ECD behaviors
Next steps

With from BCT:

1. Understand which resources/tools parents already exists, if they are addressing the formative research results, and which ones are parents in need of.

2. Prototype and test new or modified materials and assess their usability, simplicity and usefulness and ensure they need little or no orientation to use.

3. Decide which community champions/institutions/local organizations/etc would benefit from receiving the materials

4. Finalize revised content/materials and strategies to (i)distribute to both the institutions and how they will distribute to parents; (ii) print/ produce materials or print add-ins to existing materials; (iii) make sure materials are easy to use
#2 A Comprehensive Multi Channel SBCC Campaign

## Barriers Addressed
- TRECC interventions are limited to interpersonal communication in community training.
- Extensive SBC research shows that repeated exposure to a message from as many different channels possible, increases behaviour change.

## Context of Intervention
- Edutainment approach to help begin chip away at social norms surrounding TRECC behaviors.
- Could integrate into DMIs current edutainment platforms (radios, mobiles and social media) regarding TRECC’s key behaviours.
- Additional to that the campaign would reach targets through other channels.

## Tools
- A fun, mainstream multi-media show that tackles Ivory Coast’s priority ECD behaviours while not making it a focus on the show.
- Possibly paired with IVR (Integrated Voice Recording) platforms.
- “go-viral” designed short videos for Social Media.
- Community radio support with guests such as community opinion leaders (rec. #3).
Next steps

With help from BCT:

1. Prototype different show storyline and topic options to attract to targets tastes and preferences. Also test short videos and special guest speakers.

2. Develop media plan based on local media consumption patterns confirmed by research

3. Develop media monitoring plan to ensure airing

4. Plan and implement complementary activities to the content being aired at a given time
#3 Adding Community Voices to the Mix

### Barriers Addressed
- Research of a needed channel for ECD messaging, to overlay the existing interpersonal communication interventions.
- Could be combined with rec. #2
- Participants need to be reached where they already are rather than asking them to come to us

### Context of Intervention
- Developing a guidance and a system to recruit, train and support influential opinion leaders
- Influential leaders will integrate ECD messages into their everyday routine, to captivate audiences with babies and toddlers
- Like community champions they’re there to behave in a way that will influence the community’s perception of ECD practices. As a difference, they would intervene beyond the scope of the parental program and organize lecture, demonstration and events in commonly frequented community places.

### Tools
- Influencers such as:
  - close family, health professionals, religious leaders, social workers, teachers.
- Messages would be integrated to
  - Sermons
  - routine doctor visit
- Places where they could intervene:
  - Market
  - courtyard
  - clinic
Next steps

With help from BCT:

1. Create a list of locations and activities where community member can be often reached such as churches, pre-educational learning facilities, healthcare centers etc and determine the leaders within those places.

2. Prototype and test tailored trainings for influencers on what it means to be a community champion for ECD, how community champions for ECD act and are revered. Additionally, prototype extrinsic and intrinsic incentives that would encourage influencers to promote and report back on positive ECD behaviors.

2. Organize schedules of when influencers will be able to share their messages to large audiences through different canal of communication e.g. coaching program, community event, radio shows etc.
#4 Address Caregiver Mental Health

**Barriers Addressed**
- A major insight found across formative studies was that parents are tired and stressed by meeting basic needs which makes parents de-prioritize stimulation activities and predisposes them to administering violent discipline.
- If parents are too stressed, tired (physically and mentally) they will not have the energy, right mood to follow other interventions advised.

**Context of Intervention**
- Develop a comprehensive Caregiver Mental Health component to add to existing interventions
- **Can be a standalone module or be integrated into current/ low-tweak ECD interventions such as:** adding into current trainings, SMS reminders at key stress times, incorporating mental health discussions to WhatsApp online community, adding mental health guide in tool kit, having community voice support mental health practice etc.

**Tools**
- Group therapy with a parental education group or vice versa
- Caregiver Mental Health relaxation tool kit that could include:
  - Stress managements tips
  - Anger regulation techniques
  - A section repositioning play as a, “de-stressing” opportunity during key moments of the day
  - An opt-in stress management reminder during times of the day with anticipated stress
Next steps

With help from BCT:

1. Decide whether a mental health standalone approach or an integration approach makes more sense given the current programs. For the integration approach there are several opportunities within the low-tweak interventions, such as tool kits, current training, SMS reminder etc.

2. Review stress management and emotional regulation techniques that have proven effective in a similar context.

3. Prototype, test and refine selected stress regulation and mental health techniques with target audience.
#5 Courtyards as Supervised Playing Zones

## Barriers Addressed
- Parents are very busy and cannot always be with their infant, thus small children are often left alone around the house, sometimes in the courtyard.
- Sometimes, other neighbors, grandmothers, or caregivers are called to look after children but it's not automatic.
- Making good ECD practice more community accepted.

## Context of Intervention
- Labeling and naming courtyards to make a visible community statement and legitimize an already commonly used playing space.
- Augmented space with painted reminders/visual aids to play.
- Utilizing resource people to supervise and institutionalize rules.
- Non-violence rules in the playing zone.

## Tools
- Small signs to label courtyard as “Supervised Playing Zones”.
- Stickers or other visual aids throughout courtyard for reminders.
- Community champions as helpers (e.g. grandmothers, neighbors).
Next steps

With help from BCT:

1. Identify 1-2 pilot courtyards and prototype labels, painted visuals and reminders etc, and find proper places for them within the courtyards. Pre-test “supervised zones” and other possible titles to determine if it resonates with the community before printing labels and materials.

2. Test and refine materials, such as making them visible enough to be noticed, clear rules to be understood etc.

3. Find, train and assign community champions to “supervise” and uphold newly place courtyard rules. Think about testing different incentives for them.
Covid-19 Remote Research Strategies

Due to Covid-19 restrictions BCT can support TRECC with alternative methods of remotely conducting research. Here are a few examples of remote prototype testing methods:

- **Remote Kit**
  - **Description:** A box containing toolkit items mailed to a community or individuals to be mailed back to the organization on completion. The kit should contain a complete set of facilitation resources such as: list of activities and materials with clear and visual instructions, reporting and recording supplies with instructions, prototypes and any other materials needed.
  - **Application:** For virtual workshops, prototyping and testing in remote scenarios and when removing any facilitators in order to encourage a natural creative process and response.

- **Mobile Phones/ Existing Platforms**
  - **Description:** Use existing mobile platforms(e.g. Whatsapp) that people might already be on to facilitate remote sessions. This would work where a level of real time participation would be required and where setting up an interview/ workshop time would be necessary.
  - **Application:** Share questions and answers through voice notes, texts. Photos and videos can also be shared in order for participants to share their activity stage. Can be combined with the remote kit.
Contact us for more information

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