

ECD COVID-19 Response Project



BRIDGE Community of
Practice Presentation

25 March 2021

Securing an *equal start*
for all Children



Purpose of the ECD COVID Response Project

The ECD Response to COVID-19 Project launched in September 2020 to address the following problems brought about/worsened by COVID:

- Children facing acute food insecurity
- ECD programmes facing closure and the ECD workforce facing job losses and severe income insecurity (by August, attendance had dropped to an 18-year low)
- There was no clear plan for reopening the sector
- Programmes serving the most vulnerable children would struggle the most to meet COVID-19 compliance requirements
- Government systems were not designed to reach vulnerable children and ECD service providers at scale

Key interventions of the project



- Support unregistered ECD sites serving poor children with basic health and hygiene packages, helping them meet the requirements to reopen.



- Testing ECD sites serving poor children as nodes for delivering nutrition interventions for 0-5 year olds, directly stimulating local food economies by linking to spazas through electronic vouchers.



- Supporting the ECD workforce and ECD enterprises by providing some income support in covering food costs, attracting children back to ECD programmes – hopefully reigniting some fee payment – and through provision of R250 monthly vouchers for all staff.



- Supporting sites with improved access to and storage of clean water for hygiene purposes.

Project Reach to date

- **Monthly staff vouchers** have reached more than 3000 ECD staff since October 2020
- **ECD site vouchers:** To 1750 ECD sites located around South Africa (every 2 weeks since October)
- Tracking data indicates that over **30 000 children** have been regularly fed with these food vouchers (cooked meals or food parcels).
- **COVID compliance packs:** To all project sites in November 2020, followed by a top-up in March 2021.
- **Water support:** Delivered water tanks or drums to 262 of the ECD sites.



Long term systems changes we are testing

- Demonstrating an alternative to the National School Nutrition Programme for children 0-5 years to inform a national nutrition strategy.
- Government can effectively use ECD sites as nodes for delivering nutrition interventions for 0-5 year olds, irrespective of registration.
- Government nutrition support programmes can utilise electronic voucher systems linked to local food traders to establish virtuous food value chains
- Nutrition (a variable cost) can be managed separately in a public ECD programme funding system from core fixed costs such as salaries
- ECD NGOs can be leveraged to assist in delivering various types of government support to bona fide unregistered ECD programmes and ECD workforce

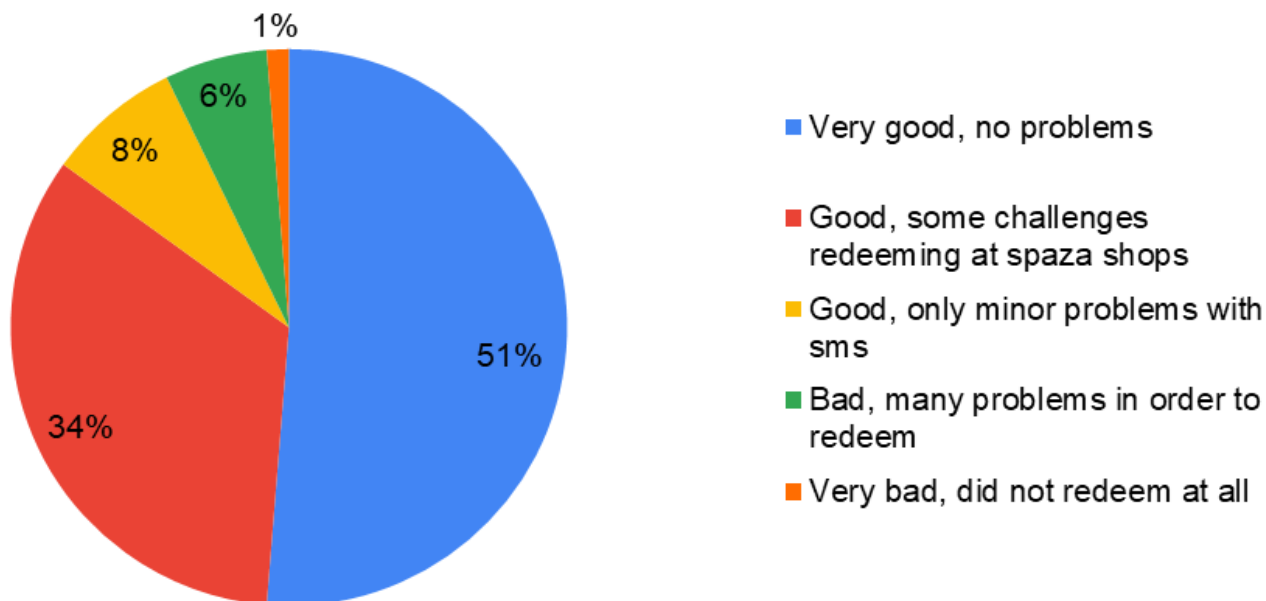
Lessons arising from the project

Food voucher System (CoCare):

- Voucher system complexities
- Used Flash network of spaza shops (170 000)
- SMS voucher to verified beneficiary
- It can work:



Beneficiary voucher experiences



Lessons arising from the project

- In places with good cell reception and close enough to big enough Flash stores – works well
- Starts to break down where people in areas without good cellphone connection and far away from spaza shops.
- Requires commitment from ECD staff
- The project made a huge contribution to learning and improving the system – currently being developed
- With sound security, more user friendly, can be scaled-up etc

Lessons arising from the project

ECD Feeding dynamics:

- Calculate voucher sizes based on child numbers.
- Is complex and needs to be flexible and based on realistic verified numbers attending.
- Also based on a per-child/per-day amount – R7 in our case
- We had 10 voucher sizes for ECD programmes ranging from under 5 children three days a week to around 150 children five days a week
- System needs to be flexible to allow for voucher sizes to be revised if child numbers fluctuate.

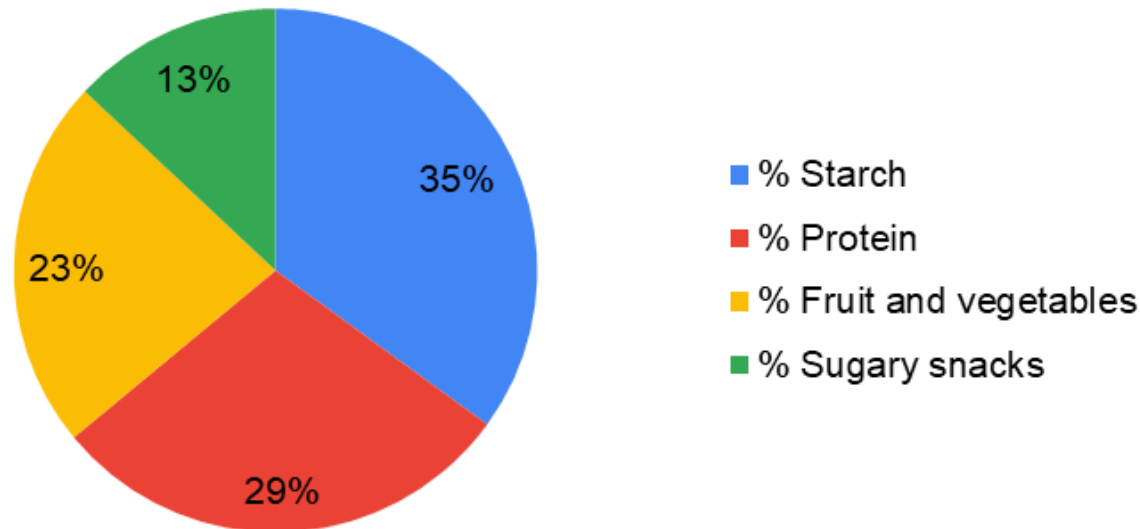
Lessons arising from the project

- ECDs need guidance on nutrition
- Shared '10 best buys' – high protein and nutrition foods (eggs, pilchards, beans etc).
- We added vegetables, which are important for ECD
- Shared feeding scenarios document, menus and meal plans (DoH ECD feeding guidelines).
- ECD staff and managers are committed and can play a major role
- Spend significant amounts on transport
- Fed cooked meals, made food parcels, even fed community children

Lessons arising from the project

- Foods purchased – roughly in line with the recommendations, but included things like sugar, cool drinks, sugary cereals and snacks, which were not recommended. Meat also bought.
- People also purchased gas, electricity and two-plate stoves
- Vegetables were purchased and demand was created in shops

ECD Meal Proportions



Lessons arising from the project



Lessons arising from the project

Role of NGOs:

- Beneficiary identification and authentication key
- Needs strong M&E systems, strong relationships and local presence on the ground
- Very challenging getting and storing up to date information on beneficiaries (making changes to voucher lists a problem)
- Need good monitoring of NGO workers too
- Importance of NGOs to support ECD sites with paperwork - good training for formalisation
- ECDs can become nutrition hubs with right support