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**EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT:
FROM SCIENCE TO ACTION**

CASS

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Early childhood is the foundation of future life. Optimum early childhood development can ensure a healthy & prosperous future generation with better performance and less crime. Globally, policymakers are today focusing on ECD.

Maximum brain development occurs in the first 3 years of life, starting from conception and is dependent on the child's genetic constitution, his health and nutrition as well as numerous environmental factors like psychomotor stimulation, proper parenting and emotional support. Neglect/abuse, poverty, war / famine, alcohol/ substance abuse and maternal depression are common deterrents of ECD. Genes provide the blueprint while environment gives final shape to the brain. 80% of brain development occurs now, with neuronal connections developing at an exponential rate of 1000/second and more. Brain development occurs in domains like motor (Gross & Fine), cognitive, language, social & emotional simultaneously. By three years, with adequate stimulation, the individual's ability to learn, adapt to change, develop psychological resilience and acquire emotional stability is already determined.

A child's brain development is influenced most by the parents & family and they can be directly reached by field level health workers. Unfortunately, knowledge, skill and awareness regarding a child's development, signs of delay, and early intervention methods is grossly lacking. Each community has its own focus areas in ECD and its own problems in implementation, but for none is it an easy task. It requires delivery of a highly refined and technical skill in a very down-to-earth, doable manner, made available to all children. The service providers must have adequate training and skills and access to supportive supervision and referral service.

Children from the under-privileged section of society are the worst hit due to lack of early stimulation. There are 250 million children below 5 years who fail to meet their cognitive developmental potential in the first 5 years of life.

Our team of developmental specialists, ventured into a rural community in India with a pilot project to reach out to parents through FLWs by

- Providing training to FLWs on ECD
- Promoting incorporation of developmental care into existent home-based health care delivery by FLWs
- Empowering parents through awareness programs
- Constant monitoring and handholding.

We share here the results and discuss the scalability of the methods.

A positive change is visible, and we look forward to long-term follow-up results.

References

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