

Toys and Learning Materials Made By Parents for Children in Kenya

by Stephen Kisingi Lenaiyasa

Material development for both learning and play are a key component in the Early Childhood Care and Development program (ECCD). This is based on the fact that play and learning materials have a significant role in a child's growth and development. Such materials include swings, dolls, balls, and others. Christian Children's Fund Kenya has, through its early childhood development projects, encouraged development of play and learning materials using locally available resources within the community as a way of early stimulation for development. Play occupies a significant amount of time in a child's life. It is because of this fact that most of the home based and institutional ECCD centers are equipped with child friendly playing materials relevant to their immediate community. Objectives for play and learning material development include: to enhance socialization, to promote team work, and to appreciate and preserve cultural values that contribute to the resilience in children. Materials are produced in ECCD centers by caregivers, parents, volunteer parents, pre-school teachers, ECCD center committee members, and local leaders.

Building on the cultural strengths

For example, pastoralist communities have admirable child rearing practices through the loipi model, which CCF-Kenya helped the community to revive the strong values which were

disappearing and build on them. The loipi (shade) concept has promoted optimal nutrition and good health, reduced child mortality, enhanced physical, cognitive, and social growth, and stimulation for the children, as well as enhancing the school enrollment among the pastoralist communities.



The loipi system amongst the Samburu community is as old as the history of the Samburu people. The community uses it to mean a circular fenced off area in the shade of big acacia trees that serves as a day

care facility for children. Loipi (plural) can be translated as shades that provide refuge from the scorching sun. Traditionally, there were tree shades for men and for women, where they rested during the day. The shades were a famous meeting place in Samburu land as 75% of their land is hot and dry; this means that inside their huts was very hot, and thus not conducive for holding meetings or resting during the day. Within these places the parents use mud, shrubs, wood, animal skins, ropes, stone, waste, old and used fabric materials, traditional colors, beads, and shells to make the play materials.

The second example is of the sedentary fishermen of western Kenya. The community is called "Luo" where their culture demands that homesteads of dead couples should be abandoned to dilapidate and eventually collapse. Their settlements are densely populated, with a high level of poverty and high prevalence of HIV/AIDS coupled with land shortage. CCF-K utilizes these huts as home based child care centers for young orphans and children from the neighborhood. The community has at its disposal banana fibers, bottle tops, old tattered clothes, sisal, soil, ropes, stone, used paper bags, leaves, waste cartons, and sacks that are used to make the learning and play materials for the children.



Stephen Lenaiyasa is a long serving community development worker with special interest in child development studies and interventions. He served in his country Kenya for 24 years as a teacher and school inspector and as a community development worker in 42 communities working with CCF-K. He has a wide international exposure in Africa and outside Africa especially on children's issues. With his wide experience and interest in working with local communities for the well-being of children, he participated in the development of a number of intervention models and tools for children such as the UNICEF/Kenya MOE alternative approaches to ECD and the current CCF-K *Loipi* model for community participation for child development. He is a founding member of the Kenya national ECD network, a member of the National ECD policy review taskforce and a member of other national lobby groups for children's rights. (See the expanded version of this article at www.ChildCareExchange.com for more details about CCF-K.)

BEGINNINGS WORKSHOP



In other parts of central Kenya, local churches are utilized as daycare centers during weekdays. The learning and play materials are made in the church compound

by parents using local materials and given to children to manipulate while at the center.

Kamwimbi ECCD center (CCF-Kenya Ishiara project)

Play Materials

Indigenous - sanga liliou (Samburu) Akipunet (Turkana) Swing(s)

Construction: The structures are made using poles and loose suspended ropes. The structures vary in height depending on the age and height of children and materials used. Some swings are



made with or without sitting surfaces that vary in width and material used e.g. tyres or wood.

Usage: Children swing to and fro with the help of the rope moderating speed as one requires. The child can push him/herself or peers or caregivers can push to gain higher heights.

Benefit: Helps the children in strengthening the large muscles in their backs and hands;

development of own balance; builds confidence; keeps their minds engaged and increases concentration; promotes interaction and turn taking.



Indigenous - sirit, sirito (Samburu) Kiswahili (Ngazi) Ladder

Construction: The structures are made of wood. Two strong poles are erected on the ground, two on each side. A number of wooden planks are fixed across the two erected poles on each side, and then a flat wide pole is fixed at the meeting point of the four poles as a bridge.



Usage: Children compete as they run up and down the ladders while their peers cheer them. The children climb from one point to the other in turn.

Benefit: Helps stimulate the ability to withstand fatigue as they climb a mountain or raised grounds later in life; helps develop stronger muscles; children are able to climb up the trees faster in times of danger, e.g., when chased by wild animals; enhances the courage of children; builds confidence; recreational activity for socialization.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

Indigenous - Ngorimba, Nkirashai, Enkaji (Samburu) Akoi (Turkana), Kiswahili - Nyumba, Hut

Construction: This is a traditional toy hut for a Samburu community. The toy hut measures approximately one and a half meters from the group, and it serves all the family members. It's constructed using twigs of trees and plastered with ash mixed with cow dung and mud. It contains the bedroom (ruat), resting area (iture) and kitchen (akima). The hut has one door opening (nkutukengaji) which is the inlet and outlet of the house at the rear. It has an opening acting as a window (longu).

Usage: Children, especially girls, enter the house and imitate the role of mothers at home e.g. cooking, house arrangements

and tidying, while boys assemble stones and imitate the role of fathers by herding.

Benefit: Helps the children develop and appreciate their traditional setting and imitate parents as well as learn roles expected of them as they become future adults of the community; helps children develop and retain their in-born practices in contrast to modern lifestyle; enhances children's appreciation of own sexes and gender roles.

Indigenous - Lumwa (Samburu), Aloloty (Turkana), Tunnels



Construction: The structures are made using fresh twigs of trees, which are folded and fixed on the ground on both ends, a chain of the twigs is alternated varying from a taller to a shorter one and it continues (the twigs should be smooth to avoid injuries to children).

Usage: When children's play is in progress the children make a line on one side and run through the structure in turn. A song may be sung as they run from one end to another.

Benefit: Helps develop children's strong back muscles and flexibility in muscle coordination; develops social interaction skills; develops security and emotional satisfaction.

Indigenous - Nkasiri (Samburu), Puzzle

Construction: The puzzle is made using hard paper, where the caregiver makes sketches of different items and animals. The children use it and try to make up the animals and objects they know.

Usage: Different structured parts of the various items, e.g., domestic animals, houses, trees, dolls are mixed up and are given to the children to make up the full models. Always there are key parts of each item to guide the child. The caregivers always demonstrate.

Benefit: Enhances cognitive development; children are able to differentiate items as well as make them, enhancing physical and cognitive growth and development; enhances concentration span for children; children identify different textures; and develop manipulation skills.

Indigenous - Nkitanyanukot (Samburu), Kiswahili - Wanyama wa pori, Wild animal models



Construction: These are models of wild animals (elephant, ostrich, crocodile, giraffes) made of clay, wood, shrubs, and local paints.

Usage: The animal models are used during story telling by grandmothers and other caregivers in the centers. Children hide in them during pretend play.

Benefit: The modeled animals are used by the caregivers to educate the children on the wild animals within the community; children can be able to differentiate between the dangerous animals and the domestic animals; children are taught the value of the wild animals and the need to preserve them.

Indigenous - Ntames (Samburu), Kiswahili - Ngamia, Camel

Construction: The models of domestic animals help children to appreciate them and know how to keep them; this is critical for boys as they learn herding skills.

Usage: The model camel is used by the caregivers to educate the children on the benefits of camels.

Benefit: It helps the children to know the use and value attached to specific domestic animals; it gives children an opportunity to clearly distinguish between one domestic animal and another; it prepares the young children in advance of the roles expected of them in their adulthood; it gives children an opportunity to be pre-occupied and socialize as they herd in groups.

Indigenous - Nkurumba (Samburu), Kiswahili - Punda, Loaded donkey

Construction: The toy donkey is made using fresh twigs of trees and strong poles tied together using bark and pieces of clothes; the structure gives a portrait of



BEGINNINGS WORKSHOP

the traditional form of transport; hence the children load and unload the structure and lead it around.

Usage: Used for: learning and demonstrations by caregivers; story telling; learning the donkey roles; a resting place for younger children as caregivers rest and share experiences.

Benefit: It helps in stimulating and acquisition of migrating skills to young children, e.g., loading and unloading of the donkey structure, which acts as a traditional means of transport; helps children to know the use and value attached to specific domestic animals; it gives the children an opportunity to be pre-occupied and socialize as they help each other in loading and unloading; keeps them busy and makes them forget their mothers at home, hence they stop crying; it helps stimulate the child's exploration and discovery skills as they touch; stimulates imagination and abstract thinking among young children.

Indigenous - Loidi High jump

Construction: The structure is made using two either y-shaped or flat stumps erected on the ground 5 meters apart from each other and one horizontal stick loosely and temporarily placed on the y-points on both sides, the children then jump as high as possible to cross the horizontal stick. The top should be loose so as not to injure the child who is unable to jump over. It is also light in weight.

Usage: The children jump high across the horizontal stick, which is adjusted higher depending on the child's ability to jump higher.

Benefit: Helps develop children's body muscles and strengthening of their bones; builds confidence in children through encouragement; promotes competition among children.

Indigenous - Nkelde, Tyres and rings



Construction: Old car and bicycle tyres. The rings can be made using a flexible twig(s) which is bent and tied to make a circular ring.

Usage: Children play with them by rolling using both hands. Several children compete with each

other using their own nkelde (wheel). The competition may be within a given area.

Can also be used to swing across the waist.

Benefit: It helps develop hand coordination and enhances muscular development in young children. It promotes child to child learning and enhances concentration.

Playing wooden bars

Construction: The structure is made of firm wood; all ends are firmly fixed on poles that are attached to the ground. The wood is polished to eliminate injuries and then painted.

Usage: Children jump over the wood, crawl under the wings as they play, moving round and round. Children sit on the flat surfaces all around and use it as a resting area.

Benefit: Strong muscular development, especially the back muscles as the activity involves moderate bending; enables the children to withstand fatigue as the activity involves a lot of running and moderate bending.



See-saws

Construction: The structure has one strong short pole fixed firmly on the ground. A large hole is made near the top quarter of the pole, then a horizontal wooden bar is slid through and barriers fixed at both ends.

Usage: Children of different weights sit on the horizontal bar on either side and try to raise each other to a balance. The number of children on the see-saw depends on the weight of the peers and the strength of the bar.

Benefit: Develops eye-hand coordination; develops social interaction skills; promotes child ability to balance; develops self confidence.



For the expanded version of this article, visit our web site:
www.ChildCareExchange.com
under Training Resources Tab go to "Free Resources"