The Township Educare Sector
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Introduction

The Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation’s (SLF) Formalising Informal Micro-Enterprises (FIME) project is undertaking primary research in townships within Cape Town, Gauteng and Durban. The research was conducted by means of a comprehensive business census of all sites, and the administration of questionnaires with thousands of business operators to obtain both quantitative and qualitative information. In this way, SLF has surveyed over 10,000 micro-enterprises in ten localities covering an estimated population of 325,000 persons.

Of the thousands of businesses encountered, community-based Educare was an important service offered to local residents. These businesses range from highly informal, very small enterprises providing day-care, to formalised and well established centres providing Early Childhood Development services.

THE RESEARCH SITE

Although Educares make up just three percent of township businesses identified in our research, they are important informal micro-enterprises, catering for over eight thousand children and employing some 650 people in our study sites. Educares fulfil an important social function in these communities, accommodating the children of working parents and providing a foundation for further education. Additionally, Educares are a business sector dominated by female South Africans. This synopsis describes the dynamics of the urban (township) community-based Educare sector across 10 sites, namely: Delft South, Vrygrond (Capricorn, Overcome Heights and Seawinds), Brown’s Farm, Sweet Home Farm, Imizamo Yethu (all Cape Town), Ivory Park (City of Johannesburg), Tembisa (Ekurhuleni) and KwaMashu (eThekwini).

Numbers and Spatial Dynamics of Educare Facilities

The FIME census of micro-enterprises identified 191 Educare facilities. Of these, 182 (95%) were included in the survey, while the remainder could not be included due to the owners being away or declining to take part in the research. It is apparent that in increasingly formal townships (e.g. Delft, Brown’s Farm, Tembisa) the numbers of Educares are higher per household. This not only reflects the space limitations in informal “slum” settlements (such as Overcome Heights) but also the poorer socio-economic position of most residents, who cannot afford Educare services for their children.

A spatial analysis of Educare centres reveals that they are typically scattered throughout settlements, rather than situated along the major transport routes or close to shopping centres. Nearly all of them are located on private residential property, in a variety of accommodation ranging from the main house or shack, to separate shacks and zozos, generally self-erected single-room corrugated iron dwellings), Wendy houses, garages or dedicated buildings next to residences. See Figure 2. The logic behind this positioning is often dictated by three principles: convenience, affordability and safety. These principles are of major importance to both Educare operators and their clients. Thus, working from home, in your local community where you are known and where there are no extra rental charges, was seen by interviewees as a huge advantage. Many Educare owners cannot raise finances to relocate away from their residences. As one respondent stated: “I had no support from anyone and could not afford to build or rent”. For others, home is still preferable, but they are able to allocate or build outbuildings for specific use by the Educare. As one such operator said: “I did not have a place to work from so I needed to open up the garage and work from there.” Others may want to relocate to a more suitable site but find it difficult to do so in the crowded township environment: “I couldn’t find a site to build on so I decided to run my business here while looking for a site.”

Figure 1: The number of Educares identified in each site during the FIME micro-enterprise census.

Educares commonly display signage, some of which are handpainted while some are professionally painted with sponsor logos (e.g Coca-Cola and Clover) included on them.
Physical Characteristics of Educares

Building Type

Of all building types, most Educare centres (47%) operate out of formal (brick) houses, especially in Delft, Tembisa and Ivory Park (90%, 75% and 50% respectively). The next most common form of accommodation for Educares is shacks (25%), which includes the readymade tin ‘zozo’ structures commonplace in sites such as Imizamo Yethu. In a few cases, Educare operators are also living in these shacks, particularly those who look after only a few younger children, though usually shacks are specifically placed in the grounds of a formal residence to act as a venue for an Educare Centre.

In some sites, particularly KwaMashu and Ivory Park, it is common for Educares to be located in brick non-residential buildings specifically dedicated to this purpose. It is not surprising that this pattern is most evident where Educares have been in operation for the longest periods of time, cater for the highest number of children, and are the most likely to be registered with the authorities (see below). A range of other types of structures are also used, including used shipping containers and wooden Wendy houses. In a few cases, containers have been donated by NGOs and may even be on land donated to the Educare Centre. Larger Educares also sometimes use a combination of three or four of these structures to accommodate their children.¹

PLAYGROUNDS

An important finding of this study is that only 50 percent of Educares across the sites have a playground. Field workers also noted that in most cases where a playground was present, it was small and inadequate, with many having little playing equipment. In KwaMashu, 88 percent of Educares have playgrounds as the spatial density of the settlement is much lower than many of the other sites. Seawinds, another formalised area, also has a high number of playgrounds (75%). However, for the majority of the case study sites, given the almost complete lack of safe public recreational spaces, the fact that most Educares have inadequate playing space is of great cause for concern.

![Figure 2: Most Educare centres (47%) are operating out of formal brick residential buildings (houses).](image)

Educare Owners and Employees

Nationality & Gender

While some sectors of the informal economy have become dominated by foreign nationals in recent years, this is not the case with the township Educare sector. Only one foreign national (from Mozambique) was identified within the entire study cohort. The research found that Educares are characteristically run by women (97%) and their staff, likewise, are predominantly female South Africans. Educare owners are also largely involved hands-on with operating these businesses, 83 percent of which are run by their owners. Employees run only 11 percent of Educares, while 3 percent (n=6) are run by a management structure.

BACKGROUND OF OWNERS/OPERATORS

One of the striking things about the Educare owners is how many of them have a genuine concern for the welfare of children. Commonly, they referred to how they wanted to protect children who they saw playing on the streets while their parents were at work, and supply a place where they could learn and be safe. While not many of the owners or staff appear to have formal training in Early Childhood Development (ECD), some have completed courses (ECD, First Aid etc.) through various NGOs. Most, however, cite their experience of bringing up their own children as their major qualification for the job. Despite the "calling" for Educare work expressed by many owners, a significant proportion also state that they went into business because of long-term unemployment or the loss of a job. Others started their Educare as one of a number of informal business ventures.
had the longest-standing Educares, with KwaMashu centres operating for an average of 13.5 years, followed by Tembisa (9.8 years), Ivory Park (9.1 years) and Brown’s Farm (7.4 years). Informal areas have both the fewest and youngest Educares, a finding that is indicative of the lesser demand for Educare in these areas as well as the fluidity and insecurity of the social and geographical environments (see Figure 3).

NUMBER AND AGE OF CHILDREN CATERED FOR

In total, the survey indicated that the number of children attending Educare centres in these ten settlements is 8,097. The average number of children attending each Educare centre is 46, but numbers range from one or two for the very small and informal operations, to over 200 for the few large centres. KwaMashu centres thus had the highest average number of children (96), followed by Ivory Park (62) and Capricorn (58). By contrast, Educares in Imizamo Yethu had only 17 children per centre, on average.

The ages of children attending Educares vary, with the majority being between one and five years old (64%). Children older than five years make up 24% of this population, while 12% are babies under one year of age.

SERVICES OFFERED

The majority of Educares focused predominantly on providing a safe place for young children to be left while parents are working. While further research is needed, indications from this study are that quality care, stimulation, play and education were limited in many of the centres in these sites. This is despite the best intentions of many of the owners who stated that they wished they had more space, facilities and resources for proper ECD programmes.

The sector is thus a significant employer in the township context, especially for undereducated middle-aged women who would struggle to obtain regular employment elsewhere.
Distribution of educare / crèches in context of all identified micro-enterprises
Tembisa, July 2012

Map legend
- Educare / crèches
- Liquor sales
- Street trader
- Spaza
- Hair salon
- Green grocer
- Recycling
- Take aways
- House shop
- Mechanical repair
- Business services
- Educare
- Public phones
- Car wash
- Religious services
- Tailoring
- Health services
- Agriculture
- Manufacture
- Shoe repair
- Appliance repair
- Personal services
- Building services
- Specialist shop
- Transport service
- Hawker
- Restaurant
- Butchery
- Community resource
- Park
- Gambling
- Game shop
- Drug dealer
- Art and entertainment
FOOD

An understandable expectation of the parents whose children are sent to Educares is that they will be fed. Despite constraints in space and equipment for the smaller Educares, 81% provide their children with cooked food. Typically, both breakfast and lunch are provided but some Educares require parents to provide a packed lunch, while many expect parents to supply an afternoon snack if the children are to stay late. Simple foods are most commonly prepared, including bread, soup, porridge and and rice or pap. In some instances, Brown’s Farm for example, NGOs such as FoodBank SA provide food to Educares, as well as training in growing their own vegetables and making nutritious meals. It was beyond the scope of this research to investigate the nutritional value of the food provided, but this is an important avenue for further research.

There are insufficient resources in South Africa to meet the above standards. The accepted norm is thus that grade R classes (five to six year-olds) should have a maximum of 30 children, while for younger children (post-infancy), the maximum class size is 20.5 The average ratio of full-time carers/teachers (many inadequately trained) to children across the ten sites, is 1 to 15, which is seemingly within the standards. However, when those Educares which care for large numbers of babies (under one year) are considered, there is cause for concern. In Delft, several Educares have between 25 and 40 babies, with carer to child ratios of one carer for 12-15 babies. This is better compared to Brown’s Farm, where the Educares with in excess of 10 babies have ratios of one carer to between 20-29 children. Baby-focussed Educares in Ivory Park and KwaMashu likewise have a high ratio of children to carers. Over half of these large Educares with high child to carer ratios are registered with the Department of Social Development (DSD) and, to a lesser extent, the Department of Basic (DBE).

CARE (BABIES AND OTHER CHILDREN)

Early Childhood Development experts recommend a high adult-to-child ratio and stable, competent and highly involved staff working in facilities designed to provide not only safety and nourishment, but a range of emotional, psychosocial and educational inputs. In the UK, it is legislated that children under one should have an adult to child ratio of at least 1 to 3, while for children over three a ratio of 1 to 8 is acceptable, and if a teacher is leading (rather than a child-minder), 1 to 13 is permissible.2 The unfortunate reality the world over is that “children from low-income families tend to be placed in lower-cost and lower-quality care” than those from families better-off.3

Stimulating play and foundational learning are very important for the majority of the children catered for in the surveyed Educares, 64 percent of whom are between the ages of one and five. As discussed above, issues of space, equipment, carer/teacher numbers and training limit this input. Educares are often decorated with educational posters and alphabets, but many face debilitating shortages of books, educational toys and outdoor equipment. Although some NGOs are known to be active in assisting Educares, only a few centres mentioned receiving support from organisations such as the South African Environment and Education Project (SAEP). Some Educare operators demonstrated a very committed attitude and great wisdom. One Imizamo Yethu owner stated, for example: “When you work with children, you must not walk like a peacock, but like a hen.” Others, however, demonstrated a concerning lack of skills or knowledge of how to develop young children, as with the owner who stated: “The children are too young to learn anything, so we do not teach them”.

Of the 44 Educares which have significant numbers of over-fives, only nine (20%) are registered with the DBE. In fact, 45% are
not registered with any authority, while the remaining 35% are registered only with the Department of Social Development (DSD). This means that 80% of the Educares are probably not receiving the support, guidance, funding and oversight to provide proper reception year teaching. Of the 12 Educares with large numbers of over-fives in Brown’s Farm, not a single one is registered with the DBE. By contrast, similar Educares in KwaMashu do tend to be registered.

**COST OF EDUCARE**

Educare fees were highest for babies and reduced for older children. The average monthly fees charged were R218 for babies under one, R177 for children of one to five years old, and R146 for children over five. Those who were offering aftercare also charged an extra fee for this service.

KwaMashu is cheapest, possibly because the Educare owners are able to capitalise on economies of scale, but perhaps also because more centres are registered and thus benefit more from a state subsidy. As can be expected, given their better socio-economic position, fees in Tembisa and Ivory Park are above average for the sector, but strangely, so are fees in poorer areas such as Capricorn, Overcome Heights and Delft. In Imizamo Yethu, there are a number of women offering child-minding services for one or two babies at almost double the average cost of baby care in larger Educares. This potentially indicates that there are middle-income parents present who are willing to pay a higher price for a better quality of care.

A major refrain from Educare owners, however, is that their clients are poor and that many of them default on their monthly fees. Most owners are reluctant to exclude a child for non-payment and also understand the predicament faced by their parents. As a result a significant number of their children attend virtually for free. This inhibits the resources they have for food, equipment and learning materials.

**REGISTRATION AND SUPPORT FROM GOVERNMENT**

Highlighting the informal nature of many Educare businesses, only 37 percent are currently registered with the DSD and only 18 percent registered with DBE. Most of the registered Educares are situated in the established townships. Nine percent claimed to be in the process of registering. To register, Educare owners need to fulfil certain requirements, such as being located in a suitable land use zone, having a fit-for-purpose building, meeting certain safety standards and providing a business plan. Many of the Educares in the surveyed townships cannot meet all, if any, of these regulations. Owners of Educares complained that registration was a long and difficult process, a fact which some used to explain why they had not yet registered. Others stated that “corruption” by government officials was a barrier to their registration. It is possible that some have been told that they may be registered if they pay an additional fee, despite not meeting all the criteria.

If a centre can meet all the requirements for registration, they can qualify for the state subsidy, which is R12-R15 per day per child, depending on the province of location. Registered Educares in this survey

*“When you work with children, you must not walk like a peacock, but like a hen.”*
deficient in facilities and resources. There is also opportunity for the government to improve its training of ECD practitioners and carers within the township Educare sector through offering accessible and affordable opportunities for skills acquisition.

Typically received a subsidy for up to three-quarters of their children, but seldom for more. Those receiving the subsidy felt that it did help them to purchase necessities such as food and equipment, but that it was often paid late by the DSD.

Only 19 Educares (10%) have ever received any form of support from their local municipal or metropolitan authorities. It would thus appear that local government, despite its important developmental and regulatory role in poor communities, and despite a Presidential directive that ECD be included in local Integrated Development Plans, is largely absent as a supporter of community-based Educare centres.

MAIN CHALLENGES FACED BY EDUCARES

The major challenges (and barriers to growth) faced by Educares in these ten townships revolve around lack of resources, inadequate facilities (buildings, playgrounds, ablutions), lack of space, inadequate learning and playing materials, difficulties in registration and accessing government support, competition from other Educares, non-payment and irregular payment of fees by parents, fluctuations of numbers between term and holiday time, lack of trained staff and crime (mostly break-ins). In addition, some Educares feared being closed down because they are operating from a house, or because new regulations might make it difficult for them to qualify to teach Grade R.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

In the township economy, there is clearly a great demand for community-based and residentially situated Educare services. Both national and provincial governments have largely recognised the importance of such services and pledged to register, fund and support them to some degree. The SLF FIME research indicates that with financial support and an appropriate regulatory influence, the identified limitations in many facilities’ infrastructure, care, childhood development and education, can be overcome.

The findings further indicate that regulatory barriers hinder business development and the transition to the formal sector, including registration with appropriate authorities. Potentially, as a result of setting the regulatory bar too high, many Educares remain informal and unregulated, whereas the business operates sustainably for years and meets the basic requirements of the parents for safe care and elementary learning. The approach to regulation should entail a process of progress, allowing the business owners to make continual adjustments to their facilities and invest in infrastructure as resources become available over time. As the carer/teacher to child ratios are too low in most instances, the state should see the granting of a subsidy as a means to redress this critical component in ECD without prejudicing emerging Educares in poor communities that typically are
deficient in facilities and resources. There is also opportunity for the government to improve its training of ECD practitioners and carers within the township Educare sector through offering accessible and affordable opportunities for skills acquisition.

ENDNOTES

1 The study did not specifically examine whether Educares had suitable water, electricity or toilet facilities. However, several operators – particularly in less formal/unregistered Educares – did indicate that toilets and electricity were a problem.


4 Atmore, E., Van Niekerk, L-J., & Ashley-Cooper, M. 2012. “Challenges Facing the Early Childhood Development Sector in South Africa”. In South African Journal of Childhood Education. Vol. 2, No.1. It should be noted that a “class” may have more than one carer/teacher present, which brings down the ratio.
Acknowledges the South African Breweries (SAB) for their contribution to the FIME research process.

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