



AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)



7x returns

Every dollar invested in pre-school education returns up to US\$ 7



30 years

The AKDN has worked in ECD for over 30 years in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe



Government adoption

The AKDN early learning model is adopted nationally in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kenya

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Early Childhood Development and CSR

The brain develops most rapidly in the first five years of a child's life. Yet, worldwide, 250 million children are not reaching their potential during these years. In developing countries, hundreds of millions of children do not have access to pre-school; they live in areas affected by armed conflict and climate-related disasters; and their growth is stunted, which harms their brain development.

For over 30 years, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) has worked with governments and communities to ensure that hundreds of thousands of girls and boys have a good start in life, by influencing the environments in which they are growing. A good start means healthy pregnancy, safe delivery, nurturing bonds and proper nutrition; it means children growing up happy, healthy, and confident and caring, with opportunities to play and learn.

Increasingly, this work has also involved the business community's investment in early childhood development (ECD). Companies in the private sector are responding to the idea that the smartest investment their business can make – to see greater returns in education, health, productivity and economic growth – is early in a child's life. Several AKDN project companies, for example, have early childhood initiatives and family-friendly workplace policies that provide their employees the means to improve and safeguard the development of their young children, thereby providing them the foundation for success.

Spotlight: On-site childcare at Frigoken

Over one-third of 3- and 4-years olds in Kenya are not reaching their cognitive and socioemotional

milestones. While the national enrolment rates in pre-primary school have reached 74 percent, access to these programmes and early learning outcomes differ by socioeconomic background.

Established in 1989, Frigoken Limited is one of the largest export-oriented horticultural processors in East Africa, engaging thousands of small-scale farmers in its value chain. Frigoken is a part of the agro-industry sector of the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED). Its vegetable processing facility employs 3,000 workers, 90 percent of whom are women. The facility is located in an area surrounded by low-income settlements, where many families cannot afford to have parents stay at home with their young children. As a response to this challenge, in 2002, Frigoken opened an onsite crèche facility for its employees' children. It provides a substantial subsidy so that parents pay for 20 percent of the cost for care. This contribution acts as a form of commitment for the parents to bring their children to the crèche consistently and attend parent information and education sessions. Since the establishment of the crèche, Frigoken has seen increased employee retention, particularly after maternity leave. In addition, based on anecdotal evidence, the company has observed that the majority of children that “graduate” from its crèche go on to be high achievers in primary school and beyond.

The programme's success has resulted in increased demand for the service, which led Frigoken to partner with the Aga Khan Foundation and Daraja on the “Babycares Project”, which aims to build the capacity of local childcare centres in the surrounding



Left: In Baba Dogo, Nairobi, Kenya, employees are at work in the vegetable processing facility of Frigoken Limited (an AKFED project company). The employee to the right is shown on the cover image picking up her child at the company's onsite crèche after work. **Right:** Frigoken also supports the “Babycares Project” that is strengthening local childcare centres in the surrounding settlements.



In Kwale, Kenya, a caregiver reads from a storybook borrowed from a mini-library that was established by AKF's Reading for Children programme. Mini-libraries – also launched by Serena Hotels throughout East Africa – are complemented by workshops for parents, to build their skills and confidence in interacting with their children and making reading an enjoyable experience for all.

settlements to give employees additional childcare options.

Spotlight: Promoting early literacy through Serena

Only 2 percent of primary schools in Kenya have libraries and most of these schools are located in urban areas, which means many young Kenyans do not have access to diverse, age-appropriate books. The lack of accessible reading materials can hinder children's long-term learning and development, as reading and hearing stories helps children develop a love for reading and expands their vocabulary, knowledge and curiosity. Children who have been read to during their early years are consistently shown to do better in school.

In partnership with the Aga Khan Foundation's Madrasa Early Childhood Programme and Lions International, the AKFED project company Serena Hotels has implemented a Reading for Children Programme, launching 43 libraries in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda with more than 20,000 beneficiaries. Serena sets up "mini libraries" in schools, community centres, health clinics, places of business and homes, and trains a local community member to serve as a librarian. The mini-libraries can be simple – even just a trunk or box – but each is filled with 100 culturally relevant storybooks.

The programme also offers multi-day workshops for parents, teachers and community members about the importance of engaging with young children through reading, storytelling and signing, to help them develop skills and confidence to support their child's development. To protect the growth and sustainability of the initiative, Serena published its own set of children's storybooks in 2015. Proceeds from the books, which are sold at the hotel's gift shops, go to purchasing and developing more books for the mini libraries.

Spotlight: Parent training in Côte d'Ivoire

In Côte d'Ivoire, only 5 percent of children have access to formal early childhood education and more than half of all children across the country are at risk of poor development. This situation is aggravated by the fact that parents often work long hours and do not have time to spend with their children. Thus, spending the time they do have together in a way that promotes children's development is critical.

The AKFED project company Filtisac is a leading provider of storage and packaging solutions located in Abobo, one of the poorest communes of Abidjan, the capital of Côte d'Ivoire. As a main stakeholder in the community, Filtisac's leadership understands how the national ECD situation affects its employees' families.

Therefore, when the Aga Khan Foundation and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation approached Filtisac in 2016 to propose an ECD-oriented intervention based on a public-private partnership model, the company quickly agreed.

During the pilot, 105 Filtisac employees with children aged 0-5 years were trained. The trainings included topics such as how to communicate with children, how to promote learning through play, critical health and nutrition interventions for young children, and ways to read to children to promote literacy. Moreover, the pilot reached an additional 362 caregivers through supplementary sessions and awareness-raising activities across Abobo. Subsequent to their training, a large majority of caregivers reported that they were now more likely to read with their children and had a greater understanding of the importance of communicating with their children.

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Sources

Spotlight information adapted from Investing Smart, Investing Early: A Business Guide to Early Childhood Development in Kenya, published in 2017 by the Global Business Coalition for Education.

Cover page infographic "7x returns" based on a report by The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity: "Studies find total returns on early education are very high – in some cases up to \$7 for every \$1 spent – and returns on early nutrition can be many times higher".



Kirawira Serena Camp in Tanzania provides library books to a local school.

Development Partners

- Bernard Van Leer Foundation
- Christensen Fund
- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- Daraja Academy
- Department for International Development
- European Commission
- Global Affairs Canada
- Johnson & Johnson Corporate Citizenship Trust
- Lions International
- Porticus
- Rizwan Adatia Foundation
- Tata Trusts
- UNICEF

Support the AKDN

Partnerships

When the AKDN refines its development approach in a given area, it looks to partners to help expand the scale. A significant portion of the funding for its activities therefore comes from national governments, multilateral institutions and private sector partners. For more information, visit: akdn.org/partners

Individuals

Individuals can support the AKDN. For more information, visit: akdn.org/support

For more information

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About AKDN

Founded and guided by His Highness the Aga Khan, the **Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)** brings together a number of development agencies, institutions, and programmes that work primarily in the poorest parts of Asia and Africa. **It works in over 30 countries for the common good of all citizens, regardless of their gender, origin or religion.** A central feature of the AKDN's approach to development is to design and implement strategies in which its different agencies participate in particular settings to help those in need achieve a level of self-reliance and improve the quality of life.