



The Child Grant Plus programme in Nepal:

**Impact study of
parenting behaviours
based on direct
observation**

- » This brief presents the findings from a qualitative study following a parenting initiative implemented with mothers in Nepal who receive the government Child Grant cash transfer programme. The parenting intervention aims to boost parenting behaviours that are recognized as crucial for children’s socio-emotional and cognitive development. Based on direct observation of mother-child interactions, the findings indicate that the programme was successful in significantly improving parental behaviours related to all four domains studied, i.e., affection, responsiveness, encouragement and teaching.

BACKGROUND

The Child Grant is a Nepal government cash transfer programme for children under 5 years introduced in 2009 to prevent malnutrition. The programme is currently universal in one third of the country while it is extended to all Dalit¹ households in remaining areas. Given the evidence that cash alone is not enough to improve nutritional outcomes of children² and that focusing only on nutrition would be limiting children’s holistic development in the early years,³ a parenting programme along with nutrition awareness and family budgeting sessions, known as the Child Grant Plus programme, was introduced by Save the Children for households receiving the Child Grant. A total of 6809 parents have since 2018 participated in this initiative. Evidence suggests that the programme has resulted in positive impacts on caregiver behaviour, feeding practices, nutritional status, as well family budgeting practices. The programme has also influenced socio-emotional, cognitive, language, and motor development of children.⁴

In 2023, the Child Grant Plus programme was implemented with 1806 caregivers in four districts, i.e., Jajarkot and Dailekh in Karnali province and Mahottari and Sarlahi in Madhesh province. The parenting sessions are based on the International Child Development Programme (ICDP) which aims to promote parenting practices that support child development outcomes through group sessions and home visits. More details about the contents can be found in the facilitator guide.⁵ In addition to a quantitative survey carried out in 2023 to determine the impact of the sessions on parenting behaviours based on caregiver reporting, a qualitative study was

conducted with selected caregivers to validate the findings and to better understand nuances of potential behaviour change. This brief presents the findings of the qualitative study.

METHODOLOGY

The merits of direct observation as an instrument to understand details of behaviour change is well known. While survey reports carried out on the Child Grant Plus programme point towards a positive trend in desirable parenting practices, qualitative research in the form of e.g. direct observation can be a powerful addition to strengthen the validity of the findings. The Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist of Observation Linked to Outcomes (PICCOLO) tool is globally validated⁶ and based on a checklist of 29 developmentally supportive parenting behaviours related to the domains of affection, responsiveness, encouragement, and teaching. It is a practical and reliable tool that shows how parents/caregivers interact with and support their children’s development.

The PICCOLO tool was used with a total of 21 mother-child dyads who were randomly selected out of the mothers who would be participating in the parenting programme.⁷ The pre-assessment was conducted in January 2023 before initiating the parenting sessions and the post-assessment was completed in November 2023 after all sessions had been delivered. The average age of the children was 11 and a half months at the time of the post-assessment.

1 A social group facing discrimination and marginalization since centuries.

2 See e.g. [Effectiveness of cash-plus programmes on early child outcomes...](#)

3 [Nurturing Care Framework](#)

4 See e.g. [Impact Evaluation of the Child Grant Parenting Programme](#)

5 [A Parenting Programme for the Child Grant](#)

6 See e.g. [Validity of the PICCOLO Tool in Childcare Settings: Can it Assess Caregiver Interaction Behaviors?](#)

7 Mothers’ play a critical role in the first years of the child’s life as they are generally the persons with most frequent interaction with the child. The parenting programme therefore focuses on mothers. Separate sessions are given to fathers when time and budget allows.



Overview of the sample

	DISTRICTS	MUNICIPALITIES	SAMPLE SIZE	CHILDREN
1	Mahottari	Aurahi, Loharpatti and Bhangaha	8	Girls-4, Boys-4
2	Sarlahi	Haripur and Ishworpur	6	Girls-3, Boys-3
3	Dailekh	Thantikandh	5	Girls-2, Boys-3
4	Jajarkot	Shivalaya	2	Girls-2, Boys-0
	Total		21	Girls-11, Boys-10

The PICCOLO tool was used to observe and score mothers based on an activity that they carried out with their child in their own home. A list of activities was prepared that the mothers could choose from including cuddling, playing, oil massaging, feeding or dressing the child. If they had other ideas of activities that they preferred, they were also free to select those. The activity was video recorded after making sure that the mother was comfortable with the exercise. The recording of the activity was carried out prior to as well as post the parenting sessions. The activity was then scored individually by three ICDP /parenting trainers⁸ based on the video recording. The scores provided by each of the trainers were averaged to arrive at a final score for each specified behaviour. The same process was repeated during the post assessment. The scoring was based on the extent to which a caregiver behaviour could be found and measured by a 3-point scale provided in the PICCOLO tool, i.e., 0- absent, no behaviour observed; 1- barely, minor or emerging behaviour, and; 2 - clearly, definite or frequent behavior.

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⁸ Staff of Save the Children in Nepal working with Child Sensitive Social Protection who have also been certified as ICDP trainers.

The objective of the Child Grant parenting programme is to strengthen the relationship between parents and children and to encourage parenting behaviours that support children's social, emotional and cognitive development.



FINDINGS

The figures below present the findings of the data obtained using the PICCOLO tool. The first figure is a summary of the pre and post data of all the domains whereas the remaining figures display the data of each domain.

OVERALL FINDINGS

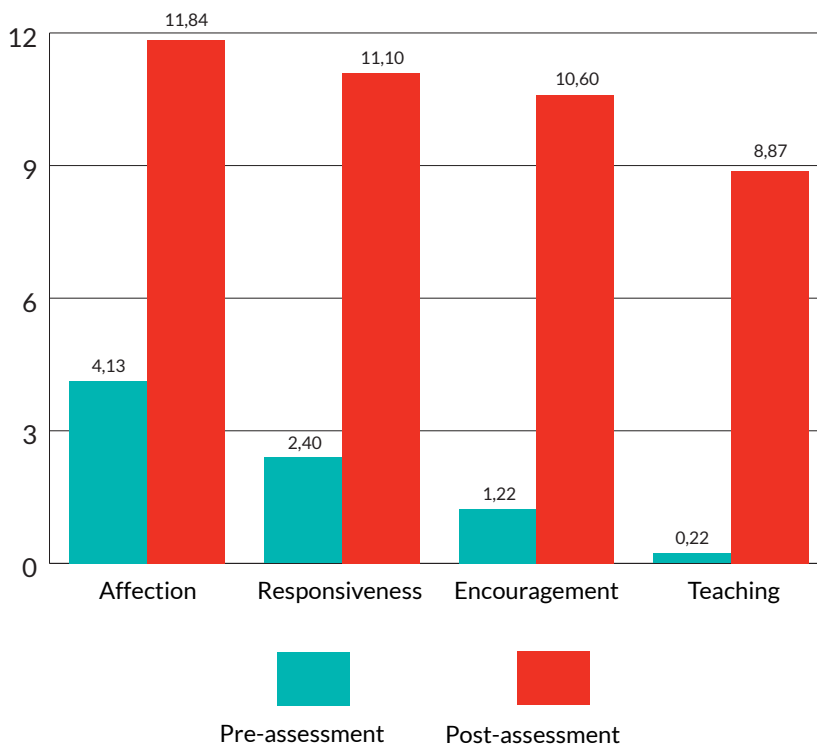


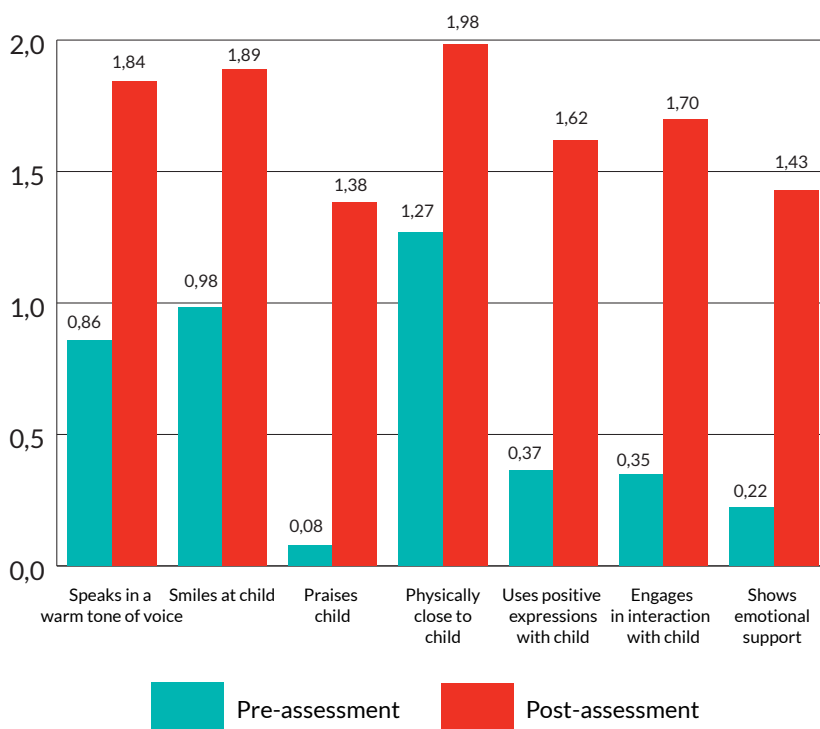
Figure 1 shows that there was a significant improvement in caregiver behaviour in all PICCOLO domains, i.e. affection, responsiveness, encouragement and teaching at the time of the post assessment. The numbers in this figure are an average of the total scores of each of the four domains.

Figure 1: Changes in parenting behaviour pre to post intervention based on the four PICCOLO domains.

Massaging the baby stimulates brain development and strengthens the bond between the mother and the child through eye-to-eye contact.



AFFECTION



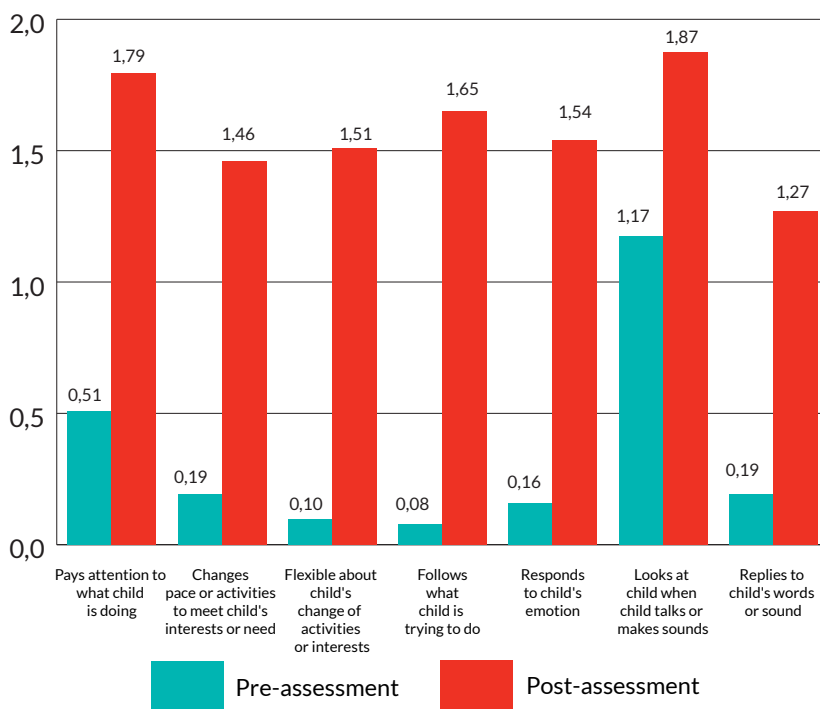
The figure illustrates the details of the 7 behaviours observed that make up the affection domain. The findings show that there was improvement in all caregiver behaviours during the post assessment with a notable difference in praising, showing emotional support, and use of positive expressions with the child.

Figure 2: Changes in parenting behaviour in the affection domain pre to post intervention.

Children cannot develop without love. Not only do they need it for emotional security and confidence but also for their physical and cognitive development.



RESPONSIVENESS



Responsiveness measures how well the caregiver responds to or follows clues given by the child. The baseline was quite low on many of the 7 behaviours that form part of this domain whereas the post assessment pointed towards substantial improvements. Vast changes can be noted in, for example, responding to the child's emotions, activities, and sounds.

Figure 3: Changes in the responsiveness domain pre to post intervention.

ENCOURAGEMENT

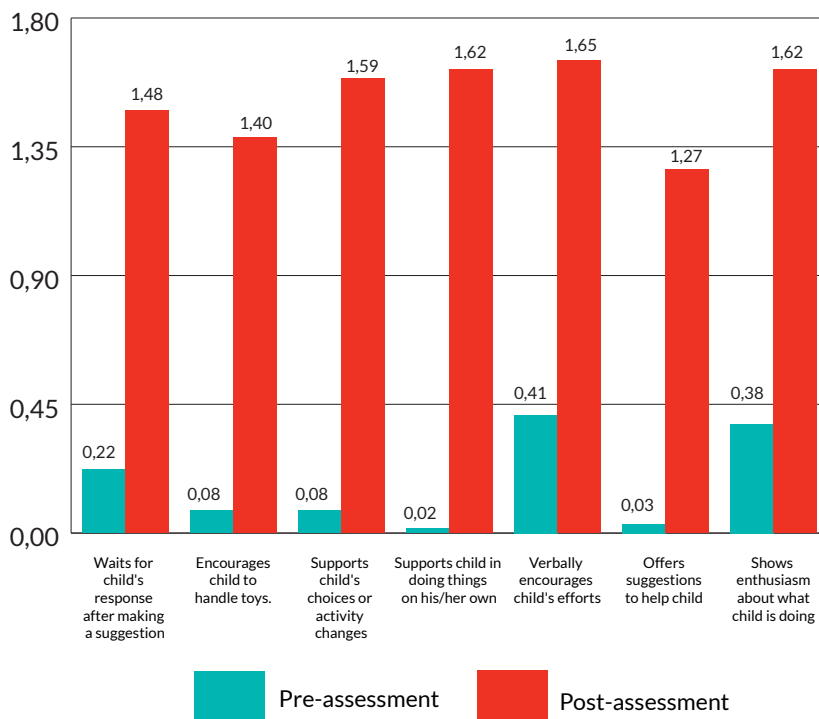
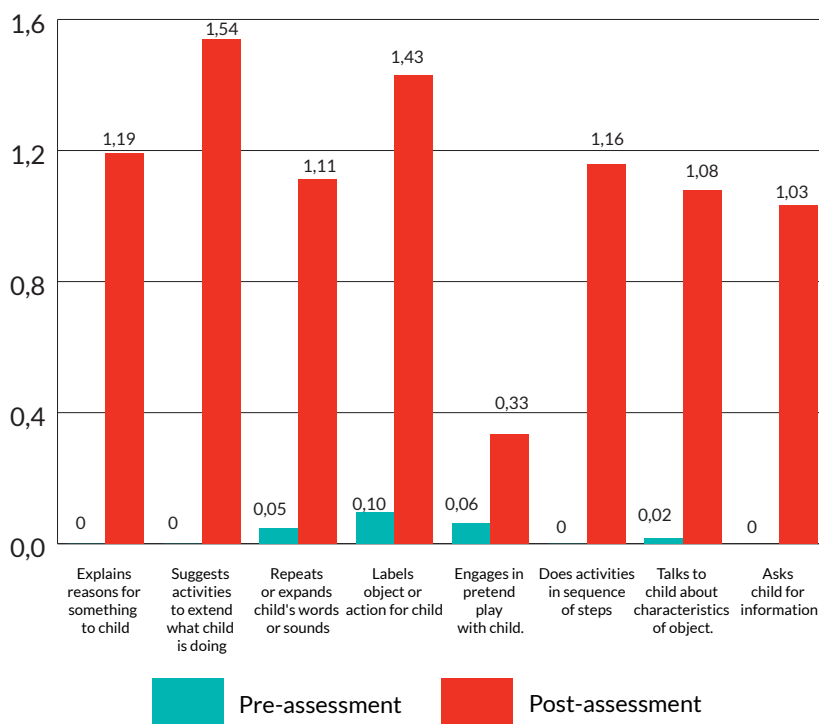


Figure 4 illustrates substantial gains in positive caregiver behaviour related to encouragement of the child following the parenting sessions. After participation in the programme, caregivers have become much more aware of how they can encourage the child by, for example, expressing enthusiasm, praising, and offering support.

Figure 4: Changes in the encouragement domain pre to post intervention.

TEACHING



Teaching involves taking opportunities to support the child to learn new things through engaging in shared conversations and play, providing explanations of concepts, and asking questions that support cognitive stimulation. There are notable improvements in all 8 behaviours studied suggesting that parents picked up several ideas from the sessions that can be adopted to expand learning.

Figure 5: Changes in the teaching domain pre to post intervention



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With support from
Finland's development
cooperation