

Working at District Level to Create Systems Change in KZN

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Ilifa's work in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) aims to demonstrate the delivery of an Essential Package of services for young children, through collaborative interventions that have the potential for systemic impact. In March 2013, Ilifa Labantwana (Ilifa) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the KZN government, committing itself to a three-year partnership to improve access to such an Essential Package for children in the province. The partnership involves the active participation of five government departments: Health, Social Development, Education, Arts & Culture and Sports & Recreation. These departments comprise the Social Cluster in KZN. The Essential Package promoted by Ilifa comprises five areas of intervention, namely:

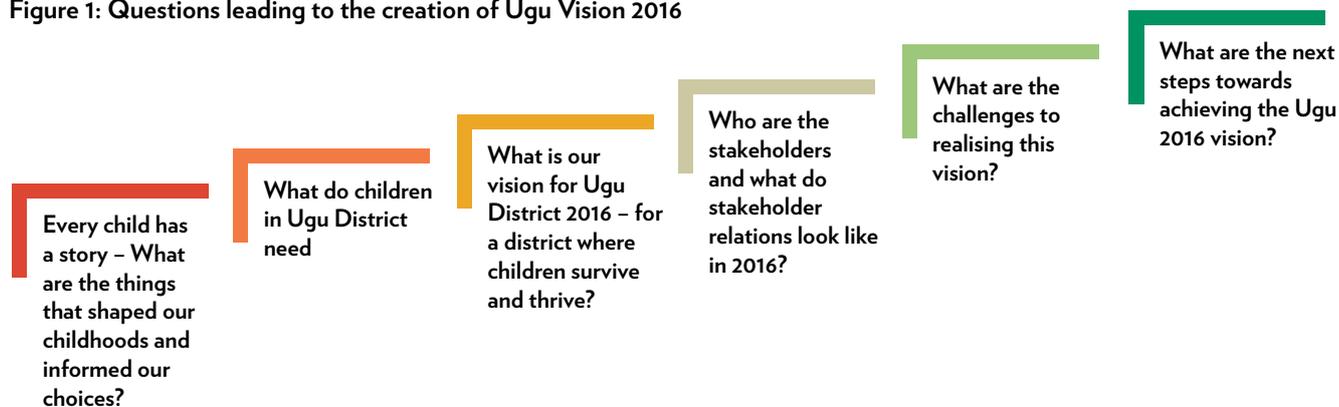
- i. Primary level maternal and child health interventions
- ii. Nutritional support
- iii. Social services
- iv. Support for primary caregivers
- v. Stimulation for early learning

Ilifa's engagement in KZN takes place at all levels within the system, from provincial to ward levels, but the primary focus is on the district level. Four district municipalities were selected as

geographic areas of focus for the partnership, in consultation with the Social Cluster. These are: uMkhanyakude, Zululand, uMzinyathi and Ugu. The decision was taken to begin in Ugu District, with a purposive approach to knock-on implementation in other districts over time. As the first Ilifa "demonstration district", Ugu has provided us with the platform to develop, pilot and refine our approach. While the approach remains iterative and evolving, some key features have emerged which will inform Ilifa's activities in subsequent districts.

Strong departmental leadership and governance at all levels is essential for systems change. The active participation and leadership of the Department of Social Development (DSD), and other relevant departments, is integral to the achievement of the objectives set out in the Ilifa MOU. A provincial Integrated ECD Committee has been established to inform and monitor the partnership and to report directly to the Social Cluster. This structure is mirrored at district level, with an integrated district implementation team representing all key stakeholder groups. In Ugu, the district team met for the first time in October 2013, when representatives of each department attended a two-day creative visioning workshop facilitated by Ilifa. Figure 1 describes the key questions that guided the creative visioning workshop.

Figure 1: Questions leading to the creation of Ugu Vision 2016

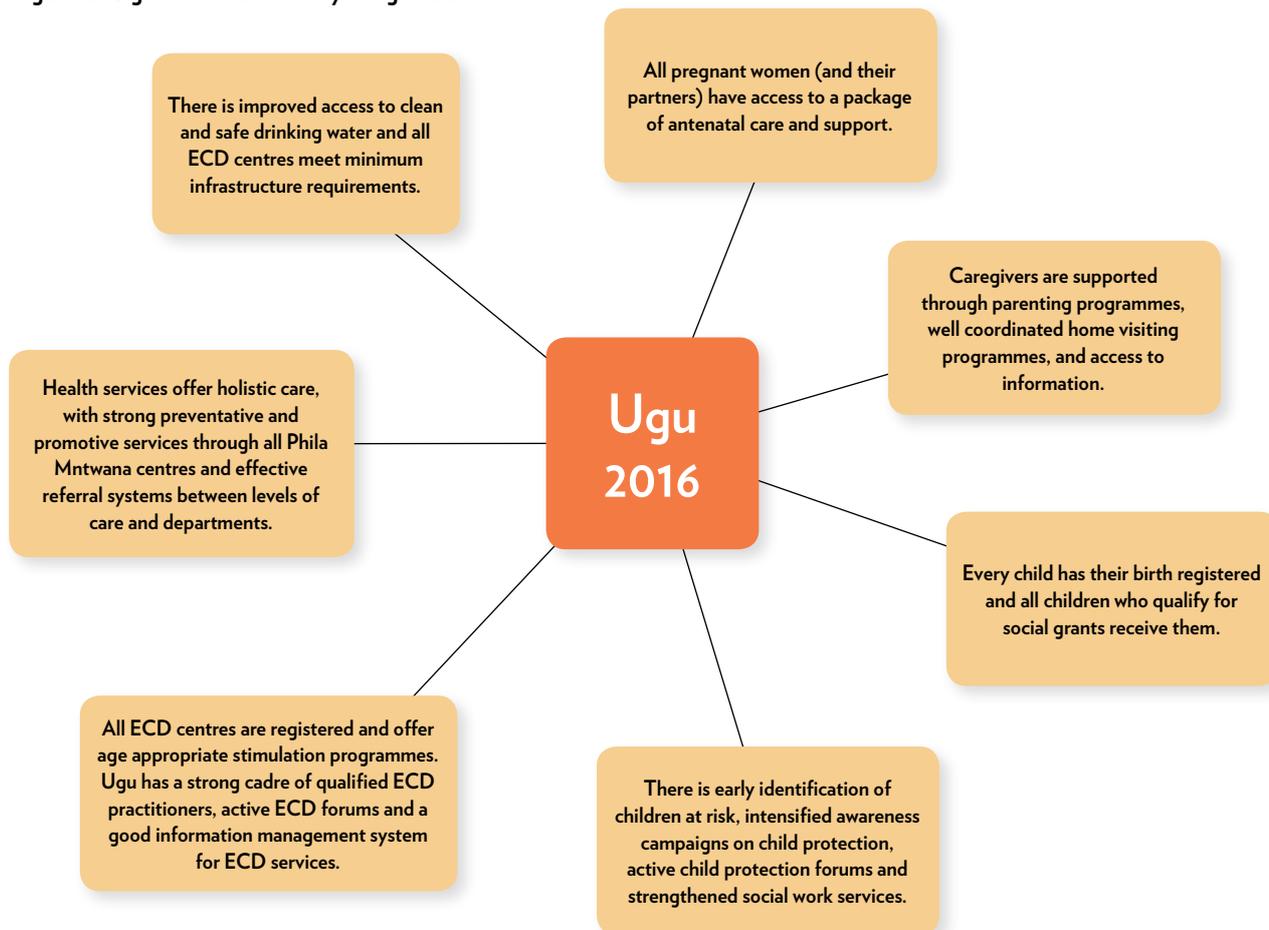


Participants generated the following vision for Ugu in 2016:

“Ugu 2016 is a district that works together to provide comprehensive, integrated services that are *appropriately resourced and well monitored*, in order to meet the health, nutritional, social wellbeing and stimulation needs of all young children.”

The vision for 2016 encompasses a cluster of services which span the period from pregnancy to age 6 years and which address the full spectrum of needs of young children in Ugu. These are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Ugu Vision 2016 for young children



The vision has begun to inform annual planning processes in the district (thus far for 2013/2014 and 2014/2015) and provide the basis for regular review and reflection. Similar processes are now being planned as the entry point for Ilifa’s work in the other three selected districts in KZN.

Ilifa is placing great emphasis on district level capacity building, including in the areas of planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation. Our intention is to work with district teams towards the submission of strong annual budget bids that are aligned to a district integrated ECD plan and monitoring and evaluation framework.

In addition to capacity building, consultation with a range of

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stakeholders and a review of ECD services within the district enabled Ilifa to identify practical areas of intervention that have the potential for systemic impact. In selecting areas of intervention, the key criteria were considered, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Key criteria for selecting Ilifa intervention areas at district level



Using the selection criteria, three exciting initiatives are currently underway in Ugu.

1. Information Management System Improvement

Based on a review of ECD centre and programme registration and funding systems, Ilifa identified the need for improved information management as the first step towards better ECD service planning and regulation. Ilifa is working with the district team in Ugu to develop and model an Information and Work Flow Management System in KZN that facilitates population level planning and provisioning of ECD services within DSD. The system will:

- Create an online repository for information that is currently kept in paper files at service offices;
- Build on and ensure updates to the national ECD audit data;
- Provide easy access to information;
- Enable officials to generate necessary reports efficiently and accurately; and

- Facilitate use of information at various levels for planning, budgeting and bidding, monitoring, registration systems enhancements and ECD massification.

2. Stimulation Interventions for Early Learning

An important component of the Essential Package is stimulation for early learning, including programmes offered through ECD centres, playgroups and home visiting. All children should have access to stimulation programmes and special effort needs to be made to ensure that the most vulnerable children, including those with disabilities and other barriers to learning, are not excluded. In recognition of this, the KZN Provincial Integrated Plan for ECD and the Ugu Integrated ECD Plan have a specific objective to ensure the inclusion of children with special needs in ECD services. Ilifa is supporting DSD in its efforts to design, pilot and cost these interventions in Ugu, with the following goals:

1. Develop and implement a training programme to equip ECD practitioners to support children with disabilities in early learning and to create ECD Hubs of Inclusion within each local municipality.
2. Support parents of children with disabilities in their caregiving roles, including encouraging interaction and play with their children, and as advocates for the rights of their children.
3. Build community awareness of the importance of access to early learning opportunities for all vulnerable children, particularly those with disabilities.
4. Strengthen referral networks and pathways between services being provided to young children.
3. Support the development of a strong ongoing monitoring system for Phila Mntwana.
4. Utilise the Phila Mntwana platform to pilot a screening tool for maternal mental health that can be administered by community caregivers.
5. Develop/adapt and pilot the introduction of a maternal mental health intervention in selected well-functioning sites.
6. Evaluate the feasibility and appropriateness of scaling a maternal mental health intervention through primary health care settings.

The process will be closely monitored and documented, a resource pack will be developed and the final model will be costed and human resource requirements mapped for scale.

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3. Primary Level Maternal and Child Health Interventions

In July 2013, the KZN Department of Health launched an initiative to establish child community diagnostic centres in the province – Phila Mntwana Centres. These wellness centres serve as health promotion and disease prevention sites for children in the community and are linked to the provincial government flagship initiative, Operation Sukuma Sakhe. Consultation with provincial and district level Phila Mntwana partners and visits to Phila Mntwana sites have highlighted areas in which Ilifa can add value to this promising initiative.

Over the next 12 months, Ilifa is working in partnership with the Department of Health and several NGOs to:

1. Undertake an evaluation of the Phila Mntwana programme, with a focus on the 29 sites in Ugu.
2. Draw on the evaluation to inform Phila Mntwana implementation across the 11 districts in KZN.

The Challenge of Taking a Systems Approach

Adopting a systems approach to ECD service enhancement has several inherent advantages – most notably the opportunity to achieve significant scale for interventions that are proven to be effective. A systems approach also, however, brings many key challenges. In most instances, the systems with which Ilifa is working are “nested” within broader systems at various levels of government. So, while Ilifa is focusing on district level improvements, the existence of “nested systems” means that change at district level requires shifts within broader systems higher up the service chain and across departments. Change at this level is difficult to effect and concurrent active engagement with stakeholders across departments and levels of governance is essential.