CONCEPT DOCUMENT

ParentText

A Multisectoral Partnership Between University of Oxford and UNICEF India

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1. BACKGROUND

Almost every family in the world has struggled to care for their children in the context of COVID-19. Over a billion children are cycling in and out of school or childcare due to COVID-19. Parents and caregivers are coping with movement restrictions, stress, illness and financial insecurity, with severe economic recession in the next two years (World Bank 2020). With families under extreme stress, UNICEF reports a global escalation of child abuse.

The University of Oxford's Department of Social Policy and Intervention (DSPI) and Parenting for Lifelong Health, has led a multi-agency emergency COVID-19 response with the WHO, UNICEF, UNODC, USAID, CDC, Global Partnership to End Violence, and other implementing and funding partners to respond to the impact of COVID-19 by providing positive parenting messages and resources designed to promote playful, nurturing caregiving and to prevent violence against children. The core programme materials comprise a set of open-source resource sheets, condensing evidence from multiple RCTs of PLH programmes in Africa, Asia and Europe. These materials have been developed and diversified for multiple media formats and distribution networks, with rapid scale-up reaching an estimated 134 million parents in 186 countries by December 2020.

This was originally designed as a short-term emergency response ending in 2020. However, COVID-19 and its impacts are not going away. Revolving lockdowns, severe economic shortage, and mental health distress will all lead to longer-term reduced parenting capacity and increased violence against children. As governments and organisations around the world similarly contend with this new reality, and work to provide support to families who need it, the learning and evidence-backed (and strengthened) approaches that will emerge through this work have the potential to provide much needed insight and support to other actors around the world.

We have been rapidly developing and piloting innovative human-digital modalities of parenting programmes that include 1) an interactive parenting text message system for parents of children ages 0 to 17 (ParentText), 2) online parenting support groups for parents of children ages 2 to 17 (ParentChat), and 3) media-based interventions. They are all open access and freely available and are being designed to adaptable to local contexts by governments, NGOs, and local organisations. This will provide much needed advice in the palm of the hands of millions of parents across the world.

2. PROPOSED PROJECT

2.1 Goals

This partnership will support the development, testing, and scale-up of ParentText in India. It will focus on strengthening the programme and learning about what works and for whom with the following overall goals:

- Enable caregivers to nurture their children's development through positive parenting in the context of reduced child-related services; and
- Protect children and support families to cope with the multiple stressors resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- Prevent violence against children.

2.2 Objectives

In order to achieve these goals, this project has the following objectives:

- To support parents by providing them with parenting tips, activities and urgent help via local referrals to in-person, phone, and online services

- To evaluate the impact of ParentText on positive parent-child interaction, physical and emotional abuse, child behaviour, parenting self-efficacy, and parenting stress.

- To integrate the programmes within existing service delivery systems in preparation for national scale-up.

2.3 Key outcomes

ParentText aims to achieve the following outcomes that are measured as part of the interactive experience with the chatbot:

- Increased positive parenting and involvement
- Increased parent self-efficacy
- Reduced physical and emotional abuse
- Reduced child behaviour problems
- Reduced parenting stress

We are also exploring methods of addressing intimate partner violence victimisation and perpetration given the strong linkages between violence against children and gender-based violence.

2.4 Key partners

UNICEF India: UNICEF India has been a key partner in navigating the COVID-19 pandemic by providing families and caregivers with accurate and reliable information on the best ways to keep families safe. UNICEF India translated the Parenting tip sheets into 10 languages and used them for capacity building within government systems through online training sessions, mainly focusing on Early Childhood Development (ECD) workers and caregivers. These tips were further adapted into a monthly calendar to be shared with parents along with training and informative activities. The tips were also developed into short videos that can be accessed on the Saathealth app. Additionally, UNICEF India shared the tips in approximately 70,000 WhatsApp groups, reaching an estimated million parents.

UNICEF India also launched project ADAPT that focuses on adolescents, and used the tips, with others, to create short videos that encourage intergenerational dialogue. They have also held multiple webinars with health care workers who have requested the tip sheets to print and display in their offices/surgeries. The Indian government has also been involved in sharing these tips on their websites and promoting them to parents, especially in rural villages.

Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford: The Department of Social Policy and Intervention (DSPI) at the University of Oxford (founded in 1096) is one of the world's leading institutions for exemplary research on social interventions and public policy. Its long-term strategic objectives are to address real-world challenges that face populations in low-, middle-, and high-income countries through rigorous and innovative research methods that provide practitioners and policy makers with evidence-informed solutions to these real-world challenges. Currently, there are approximately 25 separately- funded projects with more than 56 research and administrative staff and an annual turnover of more than £4 million in the department with a total University expenditure in 2018-2019 of £2,582.2 million.

Parenting for Lifelong Health: In 2011, members of DSPI, Dr Jamie Lachman, Professor Lucie Cluver, and Professor Frances Gardner, co-founded the Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) initiative to develop, test, and widely disseminate a suite of open-access, non-commercialised, and low-cost parenting programmes to reduce violence against children and improve child wellbeing in low- and middle-income countries. These programmes have been developed and rigorously tested through a collaboration between the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the Universities of Oxford, Cape Town, Bangor and Stellenbosch. Having showed positive results from numerous evaluations, the programmes are being scaled up in over 20 low- and middle-income countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, South-eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean, for approximately 250,000 beneficiaries by 2022. Additionally, studies of the programmes are currently underway to further develop the evidence base for these interventions.

Many programs globally have adapted PLH interventions to strengthen positive parenting and reduce all types of violence in families. Parwarish, an evidence-informed, group-based parenting program, also adapted the PLH Program for Adolescents (PLH Teens) to build on social learning and parent management training principles in India. Parwarish was implemented by teams from the Community development and Health programme (CHDP) of the Emmanuel Hospital Association, a non-profit organisation working across North and North-east India and reached more than 239 families.

IDEMS International: IDEMS is a legally registered Community Interest Company in the UK, which offers consultancy research services specialising in data sciences and technology implementations. IDEMS works with the African Maths Initiative (AMI) to support the capacity development of rural African youth – who also take part in the development of the PLH digital tools. Oxford has been working with IDEMS and AMI since 2019 on the PLH Digital study. IDEMS and AMI will provide IT development and technical support for the project including design and coding of ParentText and building online data collection and monitoring systems for the programme. This has the dual benefit of aligning high-quality technological support with in-depth understanding of the needs of low- and middle-income settings, with our commitment to building technological capacity in low-resource settings

2.5 About ParentText

Overview

ParentText is an automated text messaging service for parents of children aged 0 to 17. It is delivered using RapidPro, an open-source application serving low-income communities without smartphone access, and also through text messaging platforms such as Telegram, WhatsApp, and Facebook messenger. Text message and free social media messaging services have the potential reach to an estimated 70% of the world population, including those with basic handsets. Parents are recruited through social media, implementing partners, government agencies, schools, clinics, grocery stores, and radio and T.V. broadcasts. The application supports multiple languages, including English and local languages.

Recruitment of parents

In order to maximise engagement, enrolment is possible via multiple processes either by following a QR code, clicking on a weblink, or sending a message to a prespecified number. Once they have enrolled, parents with even basic feature phones are able to select the data usage package they wish to receive with free messages that can include both texts as well as images, GIFs, animations, and videos. Parents are also able to choose from basic, medium and high data use options. Parents without data packages may even receive text messages via SMS where available, especially if there are existing agreements between service providers and telecommunication companies for zero-rated messages.

ParentText can also be combined with existing programmes and services in a hybrid-delivery that involves both in-person support (e.g., home visits or cash transfers) and remote engagement via the chatbot.

Content based on stages of child development

ParentText targets parents with children aged 0 to 17 and contains specific content based on development stages for parents of children aged 0-23 months, 2-9 years, 10-17 years. Messages are delivered to parents over an average of 5 weeks depending on the frequency selected by parents. The content of the ParentText message delivery system is derived from the PLH evidence-based parenting programmes that have been rigorously tested in Asia. The messages are grouped into three main themes: 1) Relationship building by spending time together, 2) Positive reinforcement (i.e., praise, daily routines, and child behaviour management), and 3) Stress reduction for parents and caregivers. Additional content is available including specific support for parents of children living with disabilities, child development, online child safety, talking about COVID19 with children, family budgeting, family harmony, helping with schoolwork, and sexual violence prevention.

User experience

Parents experience the text message delivery system in three ways: 1) Scheduled text messages, 2) On-demand content, and 3) Weekly assessments.

Scheduled text messages include daily activities tailored by child age (e.g., "Spend 20 minutes of One-on-One Time each day with your children – tell them a story from your own childhood), reminders, ('Remember - 20 minutes of One-on-One Time with your child will increase their brain development') and responses ('You did it! Well done - you are a star!').
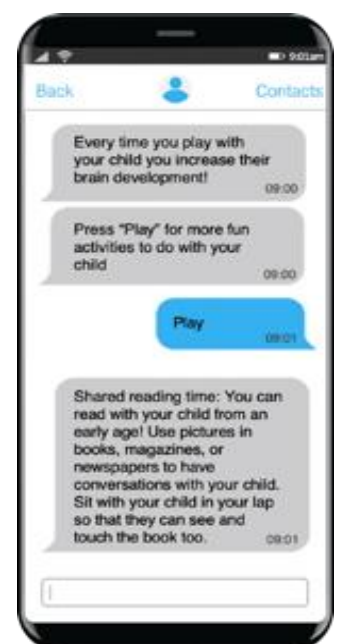
On-demand content allows for user-directed engagement in which parents and caregivers self-select content that is most relevant to their context and developmental stage of their children, as well as two-way interaction and feedback.

Weekly assessments examines the impact of the messages on parenting, parental stress, and child behaviour by collecting fully anonymised data (opt-in) at registration and weekly intervals.

The ParentText message delivery system also has the capability to help parents solve challenges with their children based on typical challenges faced by parents in similar situations, and information parents provide about their own circumstance. Much like a chatbot you may have interacted with through your banking system or when booking an airline ticket (although more empathic and engaging!), the system offers conversation-like tips in response to parents' requests. Lastly, the text messages provide opportunities for referrals to local resources (e.g., domestic abuse and mental health hotlines, health clinics, and child protection services).

3. Monitoring and Evaluation

3.1 Engagement and impact

Monitoring and evaluation of ParentText is an important element of the initial stages of deployment, especially in terms of user engagement and intervention impact on desired outcomes.

User engagement in the chatbot system will be based on key implementation indicators such as enrolment, participation, engagement, dropout, and completion. Enrolment rates will be based on the number of parents who sign up for ParentText. We will also examine engagement in ParentText by tracking response rates to interactive text messages. Dropout rates for enrolled participants will be defined as the percentage of participants who fail to attend at least two consecutive sessions and do not attend any sessions at a later stage. Additional monitoring and evaluation activities such as interviews and focus groups discussions can be conducted before the official pilot to refine the content and identify other technical systematic issues. PLH/Oxford would be happy to partner with local government and research teams to help create M&E plans and analyse data collected.

Programme impact will examined by embedding short weekly surveys as part of the user experience. These will be collected upon registration into the system and at weekly intervals during engagement. Outcomes will include abbreviated measurements of positive parenting, child maltreatment, parenting stress, parent self-efficacy, and child behaviour. Automated responses will be programmed based on the participants' responses with additional content and external referrals for those who are having challenges. Assessments on intimate partner relationships and violence can be administered using zero-rated hyperlinks to brief surveys embedded on the Internet of Good Things site where available. All surveys will be 'opt-in' with participants able to receive the interventions regardless of whether they choose to answer questions or not.

Additional **interviews and focus groups** with parents who enrol into ParentText can be conducted to provide further insight into the engagement, acceptability, and impact of the intervention. Individuals can be recruited either through implementing partner agencies or directly via messages inviting them to participate in interviews.

3.2 Safeguarding of Messages

Users of automated services often try to get other forms of help by messaging the chatbot and disclosing personal situations in the free text fields. These users might include women and children at risk and survivors of violence, whose numbers are increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Users

at risk of violence who attempt to disclose their situation or ask for help often receive no acknowledgement or support from typical chatbot services. Based on UNICEF chatbot safeguarding guidelines, ParentText is designed to recognise high risk keywords to detect possible disclosure of a dangerous situation in free text fields. After detection, the chatbot is automated to offer the user an empathetic and empowering response and contact details on where to access professional or urgent help (e.g. police, ambulance, hotline).

3. PARTNERSHIP ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

We have outlined the following proposed partnership roles and responsibilities for collaboration:

University of Oxford

- Provide ParentText global content and structure

- Provide support on technical development of ParentText via RapidPro

- Collaborate with UNICEF India on the development, local contextualization, deployment, and evaluation of ParentText

- Support translation and production process

- Assist UNICEF India in evaluating the engagement of digital parenting resources

- Assist UNICEF in defining the term of reference and creating an MoU with local partners

- Share findings regarding user engagement and impact of ParentText during initial deployment and scale-up, including creating policy briefs and summaries of results.

- Provide support to refine and improve resource

IDEMS

- Provide IT development and technical support for the project including design and coding of ParentText

- Assist in building backend M&E system

- Assist in analysing M&E of engagement and impact

UNICEF India in collaboration with other local partners

(UNICEF may want to subcontract or collaborate with other local partners to support them with the following steps required for deployment and dissemination of ParentText)

- Provide hosting and technical support of the ParentText on the RapidPro platform, including determination of messaging services (SMS/MMS, WhatsApp, Telegram, etc) and liaising with government and telecommunication partners for deployment.

- Determine local contextualization, production, dissemination costs

- Help identify translation and production team/volunteers for creation of the videos and audio messages

- Provide technical advice on the development, implementation, and evaluation of ParentText

- Provide guidance to local partners and Oxford on the dissemination and deployment strategy for ParentText

- Support local implementation by local partners and government, including setting a launch date and recruiting families/communities to be included in the pilot of ParentText.

- Provide guidance on the local contextualization of resources including referrals to services and hotlines and provide quality control and final sign off of content.

- Oversee initial test-drive of ParentText and provide feedback to improve preliminary technical bugs/glitches.

- Increase awareness by releasing information regarding digital parenting resources via social media, print and online media, in line with UNICEF India communication strategies.

- Support in the recruitment, enrolment and national scale-up of ParentText after the pilot in Gujarat.

- Collaborate with Oxford and partners to monitor and evaluate ParentText user engagement and impact on parenting, child behaviour, and other outcomes.

- Collaborate on the sharing of anonymized usage data from ParentText for processing and analyses.

4. SUGGESTED OUTPUTS AND ACTIVITIES

4.1 Main outputs

The four main outputs that are required to deploy ParentText are as follows:

i. **Local contextualization:** The first step towards deployment includes identifying local stakeholders (Government partners, local organizations, etc.) and establishing a partnership. Additionally, content for ParentText shall be reviewed, and the technical requirements necessary to pilot ParentText shall be finalized.

ii. **Production of content:** Comprises translating the text-messages into local languages and producing the multi-media component. ParentText offers videos and audio messages, along with text messages. Volunteers, existing parenting facilitators or professionals can assist with recording these videos and audio messages

iii. **Preparations for deployment**: Involves a collaborative effort from stakeholders to create deployment plans and dissemination strategies required to pilot ParentText. Stakeholders shall also identify the target number of families and create marketing collateral to recruit parents/caregivers for the pilot.

iv. **Product release/ Pilot and M&E:** Includes the official launch and delivery of ParentText and ongoing monitoring and evaluation, content refinement and optimization.

A Results Matrix is provided in the attachments, which further identifies each activity associated with the outputs stated above. The activities listed and the identification of responsible organisations in the attached Results Matrix are merely suggestions and can be changed based on each organisation's capacity and interest.

4.2 Budget and costing template

A costing template that UNICEF can use to determine the deployment and dissemination costs associated with ParentText is provided as an attachment. The line items are merely suggestions and can be adapted to account for the needs of the organization. Partners can input the local costs directly into the workbook and calculate the budget with a needs assessment tool and in-built calculation formulas.

4.3 Estimated timeline

The following Gantt chart represents a suggested timeline for each output described above. This timeline is merely an estimate and can be adapted based on the organizations capacity and needs.

S.no	Tasks/Weeks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
ParentText Timeline																									
1	**Local Contextualization**																								
1.1	Technical discussions	�	▮																						
1.2	Identify local partners/stakeholders		▮	▮																					
1.3	Local contextualization of content w/ partners			▮	▮																				
1.4	Create deployment and dissemination plan					▮	▮	▮	▮	▮															
2	**Production of Content**																								
2.1	Translation of text messages					▮	▮	▮	▮																
2.2	Production of Audio Visual Content								▮	▮	▮														
3	**Prepare for deployment**																								
3.1	Final preparation											▮	▮												
3.2	Create marketing collateral													▮	▮										
4	**Product Release/ Pilot and M&E**																								
4.1	Official Launch															▮									
4.2	Delivery of ParentText															▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮
4.3	M&E (ongoing)															▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮
4.4	Review, adjust and refine content (ongoing)															▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮