



supporting informally working mothers and their children

Women and children are some of the most vulnerable members of society, and women working in the informal economy and their children are even more vulnerable than most. The spaces in which they live and work are unfortunately not often designed to meet their needs which leaves them disadvantaged in many respects. The first 1000 days of a child's life are essential with regard to ensuring optimal development; *'early childhood development is crucial to society as a whole. Should children not receive a good foundation during this time, their development potential may be severely hampered'* (IDP, 2019).

Asiye eTafuleni (AeT) means 'bring it to the table'. AeT is a non-profit organization, based in Durban, collaborating closely with informal workers and allied professionals to develop inclusive urban spaces that support sustainable livelihoods for informal workers. AeT was founded in response to the widening gap between Durban's urban agenda and the realities faced by inner-city informal workers. AeT advocates for investment in appropriate urban infrastructure, and deep consultative and participatory processes. Since its founding, AeT has continued to play an influential role, challenging cities worldwide to develop creative and integrated approaches to the informal economy.

AeT has been working with an international collaborative, uLiNCs (Urban Livelihoods and Nurturing Care projects), for over 2 years to identify approaches to improve time, space and support for women working in the informal economy to sustain their livelihoods, protect their health and care for their children. Together with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and partners in other African and Indian cities, a number of contextual interventions are being developed relevant to all the cities involved. In Durban, AeTs initial focus is on 'creating safer spaces' for the children (6 months – 3 years old) who are being brought up on the streets and in the markets of Warwick Junction.

Improving the development potential and the health of women and children benefits the city as a whole. Designing spaces which work for women and children means designing spaces which will work for everyone. Warwick Junction is a bustling, yet neglected, part of the city of Durban. A large number of the traders who enable the functioning of the markets of Warwick Junction are women, and many of these women are mothers as well. Research reveals that children are being brought up on the streets and in the markets because their mothers have been left with little choice other than to bring their children to work with them. This is due to the fact that there are limited facilities available and those that are, are either unaffordable or the quality of the childcare is not likely to be high. The counterfactual in this case is that the children spend their days on the streets, with minimal stimulation and protection from the dangers that their environment poses.

In response to this reality on the ground, and with the aim of creating an environment which is conducive to child health, safety and development, AeT will be piloting two micro childcare facilities based within the Warwick Junction markets. These childcare facilities will transform underutilised portions of the market into safer spaces in which children can play and be cared for under the supervision of a trained caregiver. The micro childcare facilities will give mothers an option for childcare which does not compromise their income, nor their child's health and development potential, and which allows the mother and child to be in close proximity to one another. It is imperative that children are given the opportunity to engage in activities which will promote their development and that they are given access to spaces which ensure their basic needs are met, the ripple effect of investing in childcare results in higher educational outcomes, lower levels of unemployment and less dependence on the health system.

AeT has identified potential sites for the micro childcare facilities and has secured funding for their creation. AeT will arrange for the training of caregivers who are likely to be the mothers of the children who attend the childcare facility. The facilities will have a secondary function as they will also act as spaces where the working mothers of Warwick Junction can rest, breastfeed and change their children's nappies in a private setting. The promotion of breastfeeding is another very important aspect of the uLiNCs collaboration as exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of a child's life is associated with positive outcomes with regard to development of the child and the health of both the mother and child.

An initial step in the implementation plan of this project was to demonstrate the micro childcare facility prototype to street vendors and market traders from Warwick Junction. The 'pop-up' facility is made up of a tent structure and mobile storage boxes for ease of assembling and storing each day, mimicking the infrastructure already used on the street. It is micro-scale because it is designed to accommodate 6 children. The positive and eager feedback received, affirms how this enabling infrastructure will appropriately support informally working mothers and their children.



Photo's: Micro childcare facility mobile pop-up unit



Photo's: Street vendors and market traders first preview and demonstration of the micro childcare facilities

Through participatory processes, together with uLiNCs partners, AeT continues to develop interventions that will create safer, more stimulating environments for children in urban spaces, as well as support their mothers whose challenging experiences have gone largely unrecognised.

[Feature photo: Mother and her baby at the Bovine Head Market. Photo credit: Jonathan Torgovnik]

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