

## “We raise these children with them”: Enhancing father engagement in a parenting programme with and for street-connected families in Kenya (2022-2024)

### The Issue

**We know** that, globally, children and youth leave their homes to make a life in the streets primarily because of poverty, family dysfunction, and child abuse, among other reasons<sup>1</sup>. **We also know** that once on the streets, young people are subject to harsh living conditions, and must often engage in substance use, survival sex and other means to survive<sup>2,3</sup>. As a result, some young people do not return home, and in many cases have children of their own and raise them on the streets. With frequent violence experienced among the street community<sup>4</sup>, children raised on the streets risk being caught in a cycle of intergenerational violence<sup>5</sup>; one of the very reasons that lead young people to the streets to begin with.



Street-connected mothers who helped adapt the first Malezi Bora programme. Photo shared with their written consent

### Supporting Street-Connected Parents through a Positive Parenting Programme

In 2018, our team at the University of Toronto and Moi University, with the University of Oxford, worked together with street-connected mothers in Eldoret, as well as social workers, healthcare workers, researchers, and community-based organizations who support the street community, to adapt the evidence-based [Parenting for Lifelong Health<sup>1</sup> programme<sup>6</sup>](#). Some of these partners included AMPATH-Kenya, Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital, Berur Street Care International, Clowns Without Borders South Africa, and the Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya. The locally adapted programme was called, *Malezi Bora na Maisha Mazuri* (translated to: “Good Parenting for a Good Life”, a name chosen by mothers themselves)<sup>7</sup>. This 12-session programme used collaborative problem solving, role plays, story-telling, and other participatory and play-based activities to help strengthen the mother-child relationship, reduce parental stress, and encourage positive, non-violence discipline strategies<sup>7</sup>. Importantly, it recognized and celebrated the tremendous strength and resilience that these mothers display each and every day.

<sup>1</sup> The Parenting for Lifelong Health programme is a suit of programmes created in partnership with the University of Oxford, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, Clowns Without Borders, the University of Cape Town, and Stellenbosch University

## Engaging Male Caregivers: The Other Half of the Equation

While the programme was a success, mothers themselves suggested they are only one half of the equation. **We know** that engaging fathers in parenting can serve as a protective factor against child maltreatment<sup>8</sup>, improve child developmental outcomes<sup>9</sup>, and strengthen the co-parental relationship between caregivers<sup>10</sup>. It is also an opportunity to challenge harmful gender norms that create and uphold gender inequities<sup>11</sup>, often associated with intimate partner violence<sup>12</sup>. **What we don't know** is how best to tailor the programme so that it responds to the needs and preferences of both mothers *and* fathers, to ensure that it is feasible, safe, effective, and sustainable.

## What's Next?

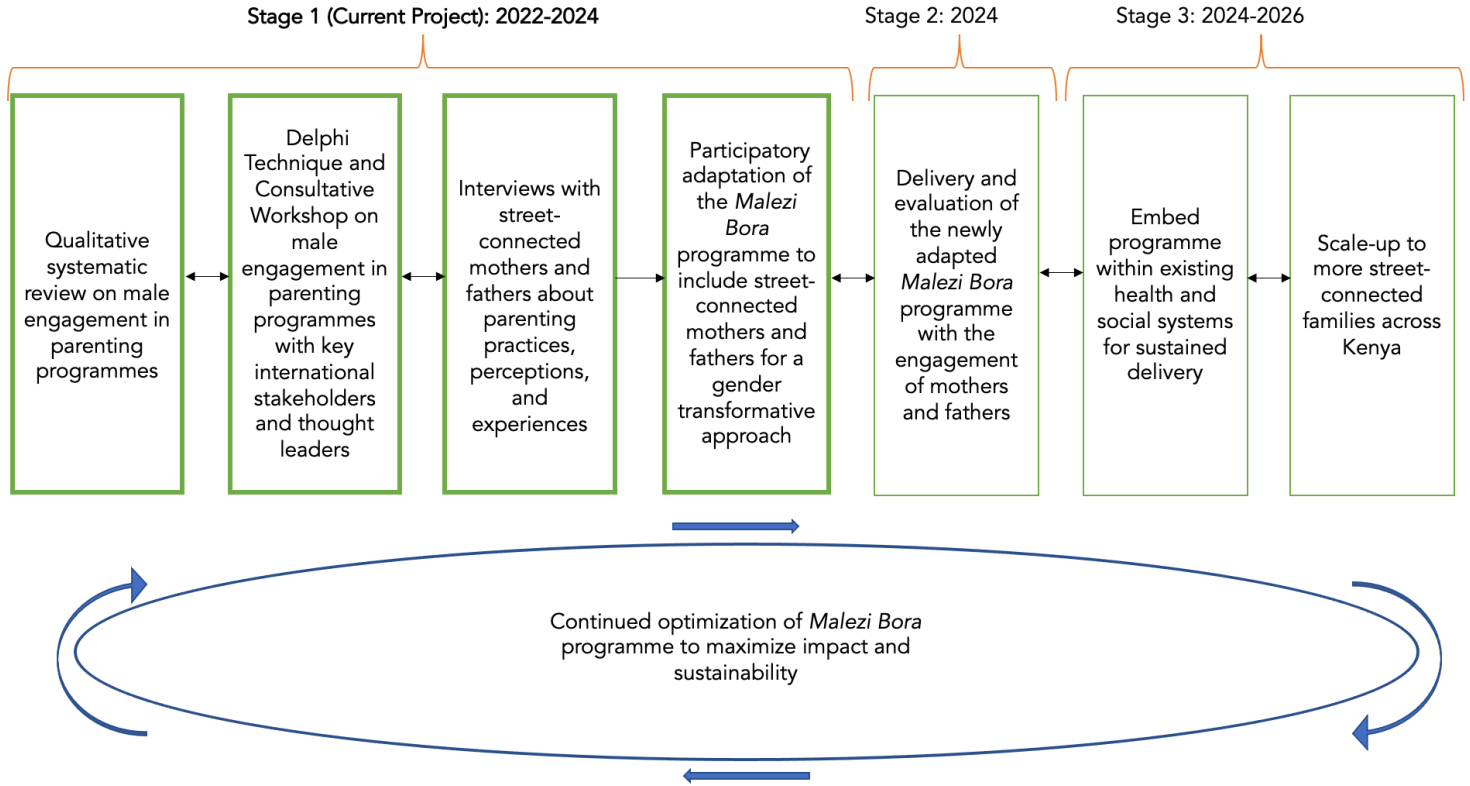
With the meaningful, active, and ongoing participation of the street-community in Eldoret, and in close collaboration with our community and international partners, we plan to:

- (1) Undertake a systematic review of the global literature to understand the barriers and facilitators to father engagement in parenting programmes for low-income families;
- (2) Engage local and international thought leaders through a Delphi study, to uncover important considerations for engaging fathers in parenting programmes, including for street-connected families;
- (3) Conduct qualitative interviews with street-connected fathers and mothers in Eldoret, Kenya, to explore the gendered perceptions, practices, strengths, and needs of street-connected parents, and how the next iteration of the *Malezi Bora* programme can benefit the family unit as a whole; and
- (4) Further adapt the *Malezi Bora* programme for the inclusion of street-connected mothers and fathers with and for the street community in Eldoret, including strengthening the content on intimate partner relations.

## Why is this Important?

Never before has research sought to understand the parenting perceptions, experiences, and practices of street-connected parents in Kenya, nor in any majority world country, despite this being a reality for many. By working with and for street-connected mothers *and* fathers, we can understand how to strengthen the *Malezi Bora* programme so that it is effective in supporting positive parenting, reducing child maltreatment, challenging gender norms, and reducing violence against women; critical steps toward supporting the health and wellbeing of street-connected families.

## Project Timeline



## Project Team

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Community celebration for street-connected mothers in *Malezi Bora* programme



*Malezi Bora* Implementation Team

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