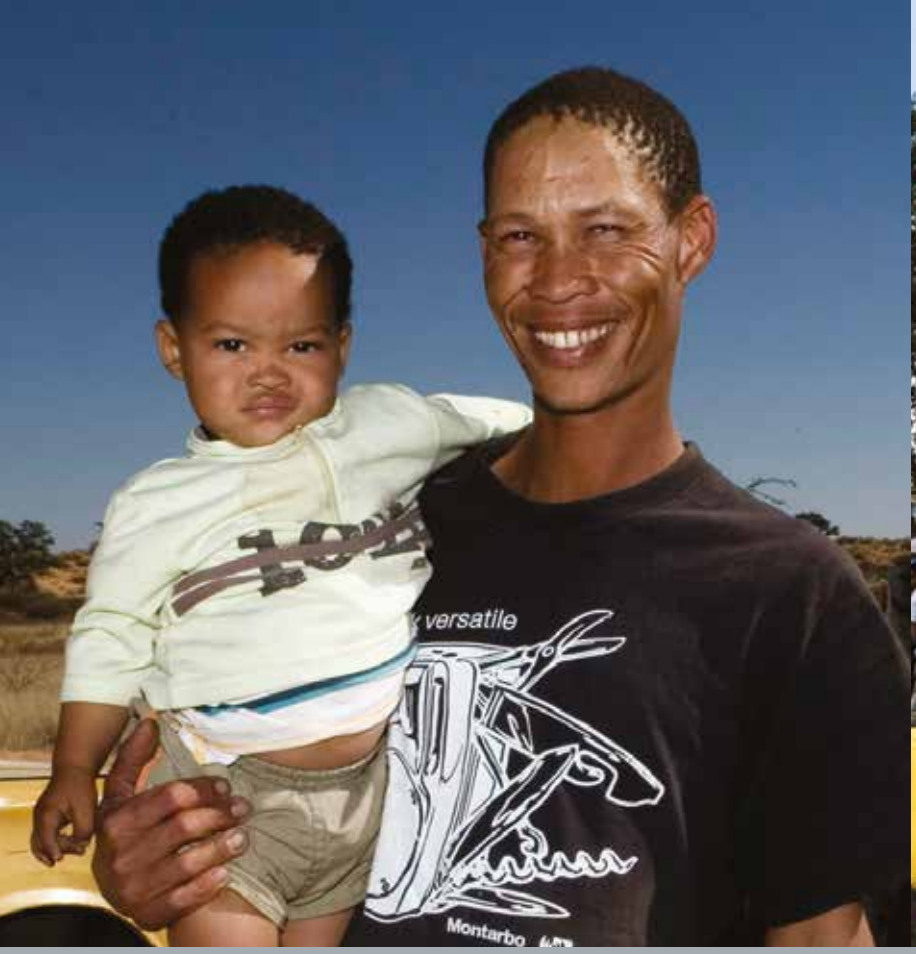


Formative Research

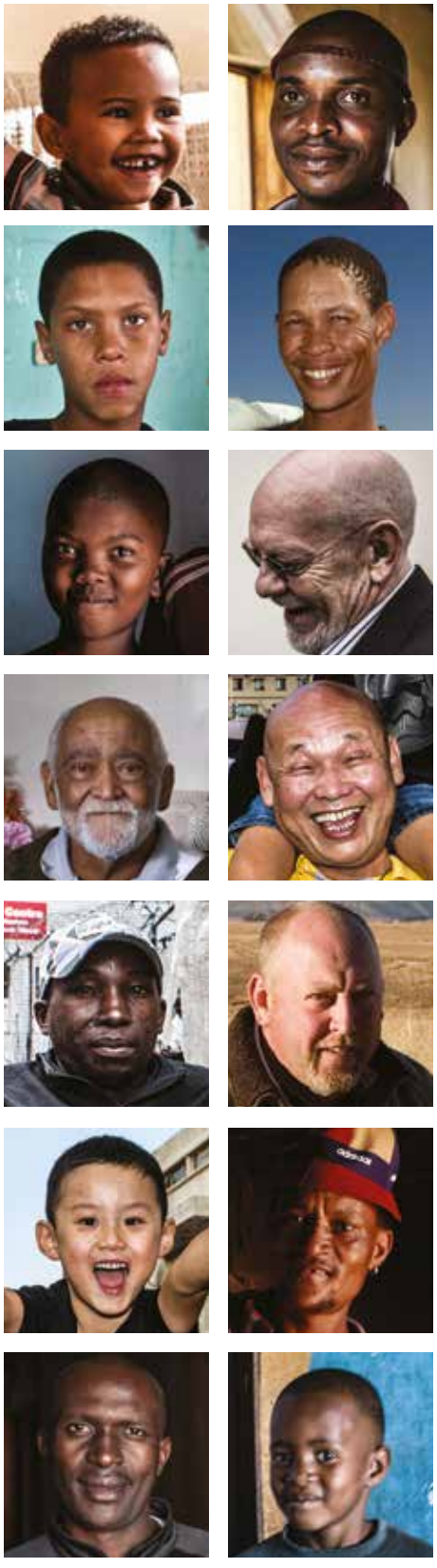
Understanding Fatherhood in South Africa

HEARTLINES

FATHERS MATTER

Definitions

Biological father	Male genetic contributor to the child.
Father	In the report, to avoid using the designation father/father-figure/men the term father is used broadly to encompass the role.
Fatherhood	The social role performed by men in relation to children.
Fathering	The activity of bringing up a child.
Social Father	Non-biological father-figure in a person's life. A man who is not the biological father of the child but takes on the role of a father. Can include uncles, family members, teachers, pastors or community members.



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An Edutainment Intervention

Heartlines, a South African not-for-profit company (NPC) that specialises in "Edutainment" based mass social change programming, is developing with local partners, an intervention to promote the active, positive presence of fathers/men in the lives of children. The Heartlines' overarching approach to developing values-based interventions uses best practice social change theories to inform and tackle issues that are of major societal relevance and which lend themselves to values-based approaches. Based on the Social Ecological model, Heartlines believes that the influences on behaviour are multifactorial and include personal, relational, community, and socio-political environment influences.


DON'T
MESS
WITH
BEST

Based on an extensive literature review, Heartlines has confirmed that fathers play a critical role in child development, emotional well-being, educational attainment and future productivity. Children who grow up without positively present and/or engaged fathers are at greater risk for negative consequences, such as:

- **Child abuse**
- **Perpetrating and being victims of violence as juveniles and adults**
- **Drug and alcohol abuse**
- **Teen pregnancy**
- **Being the victim of sexual violence or committing acts of sexual violence**
- **Mental health issues.**

Globally, and in South Africa, there is a lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of fathers being positively present and involved in their children's lives. In addition, there is a lack of awareness of the impact this involvement has on children's development, educational attainment and future productivity. This is true for fathers themselves, and for systems/institutions. On the individual level, men lack an understanding of their role as fathers, the impact of fathering and they often do not have the skills to actively participate with their children. At a systems/institutional level, many leaders (government officials, religious/cultural leaders, teachers) lack an understanding and awareness of the issue and they do not have the knowledge or the resources to address it.

Several key barriers to active participation by fathers have been identified. These are cross-cutting and result from institutional/systems, economic, political, social, and cultural factors.

As its next major societal issue to tackle, Heartlines has therefore chosen to promote the presence of fathers/men in the lives of children. As per the methodology Heartlines has used since the roll-out of its first programme in 2006, it will develop a series of edutainment interventions. These interventions will be driven by research and grounded in a formative research and consultative process which gained insight and understanding of fatherhood and fathering in South Africa.

The components of the formative research included:

- **Literature review (global, regional, South Africa)**
- **Key informant interviews**
- **Focus group discussions with targeted communities (both men and women).**

The formative research sought to unpack barriers to change and possible intervention points on a personal, relational and community level, as well as key socio-political and environmental influences.

This report details the findings of the formative research process. It provides insight into what it means to be a father in the South African context, as well as the barriers and challenges to active participation by fathers within this context. It highlights the way in which children internalise the role that their fathers play in their lives and how this impacts their ideas of future fathering and/or parenting.

Through their voices, the formative research report showcases the status quo of fatherhood in South Africa, highlighting the importance of active father involvement in family life, irrespective of marital or residence status.

The formative research report captures the voices of the research participants themselves, those of the targeted communities, and provides insights into their reflections, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes. Through their voices, the formative research report showcases the status quo of fatherhood in South Africa, highlighting the importance of active father involvement in family life, irrespective of marital or residence status. The report also highlights that absence is not necessarily defined by physical distance. Further, the findings highlight that the impact of having an actively engaged father counters expressions of masculinity that emphasise male control, lack of emotional availability and limited involvement in the family and home environment.

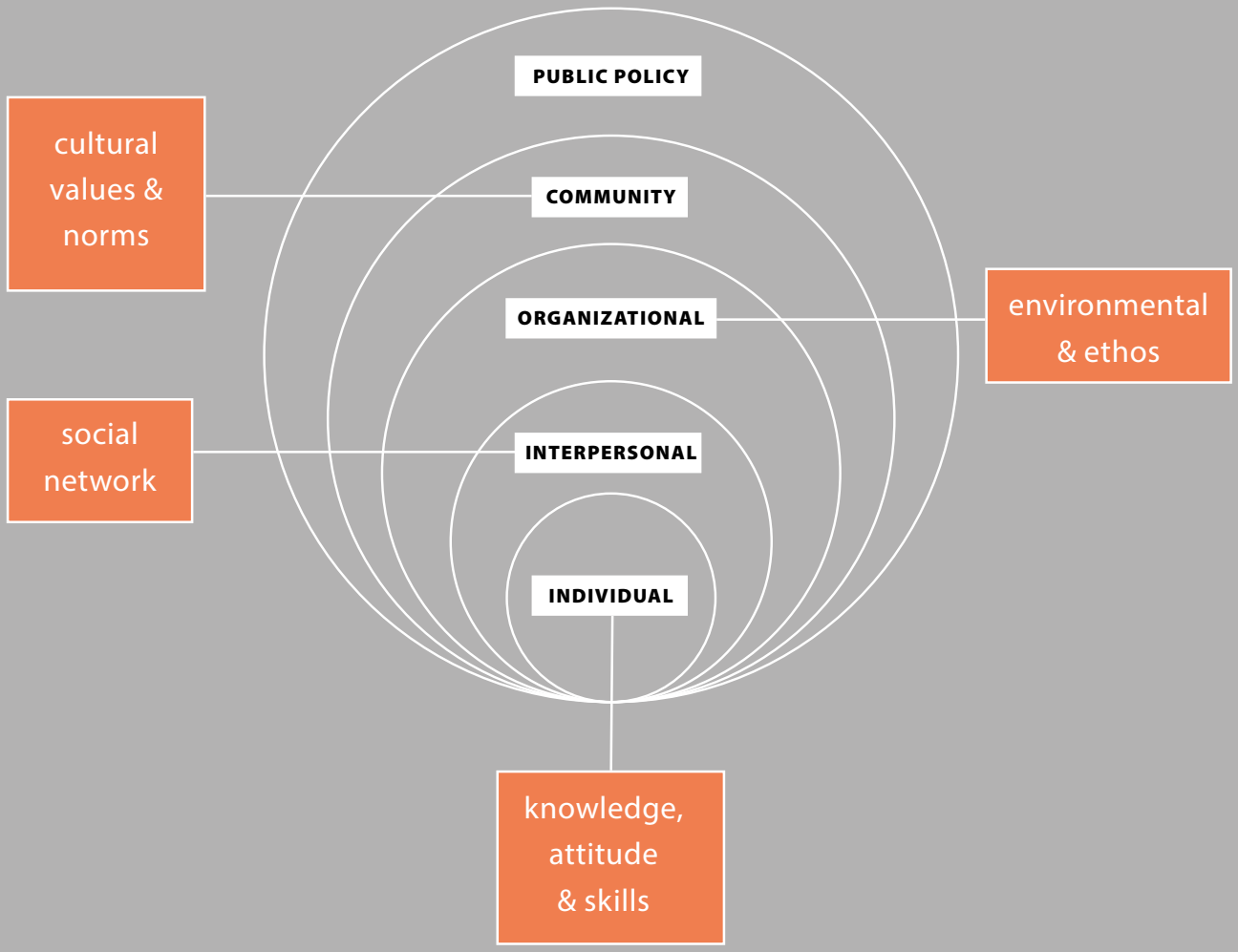
A message design workshop was conducted in October 2019 to develop the project message brief. This workshop provided an opportunity to present the formative research to a group of field experts, researchers, and implementers, to further synthesize the findings within the broader South African context and develop a message brief with key messages for the corresponding interventions and the campaign.

Overview of the Heartlines research approach

Heartlines is a social change organisation that encourages people to live out positive values. Its goal is to get individuals and communities thinking about their values – and empower them to live these values in their day-to-day lives.

While Heartlines, as an organisation, is not a topic expert on any of the issues that are tackled, its interventions raise the profile of the issue and create tools and supportive environments to promote behaviour change. Heartlines' first step in tackling any issue consists of a formative research and consultation process. This entails literature reviews, interviews with topic experts and practitioners working in the field and both focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with targeted communities. Based on the Social Ecological model, Heartlines believes that the influences on behaviour are multifactorial and include: individual, interpersonal, organisational, community and socio-political environment influences. The model emphasizes the idea that behaviours both shape and are shaped by the social environment.

Thus Heartlines' formative research process seeks to unpack barriers to change and possible intervention points at all these levels. As a result, the culmination of the formative research process is a high-quality research-driven project/topic message brief and intervention design. Thereafter, the formative research is integrated into messaging and storylines that are designed to resonate with the audience.


PUBLIC POLICY
COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATIONAL
INTERPERSONAL
INDIVIDUAL
cultural values & norms
social network
environmental & ethos
knowledge, attitude & skills

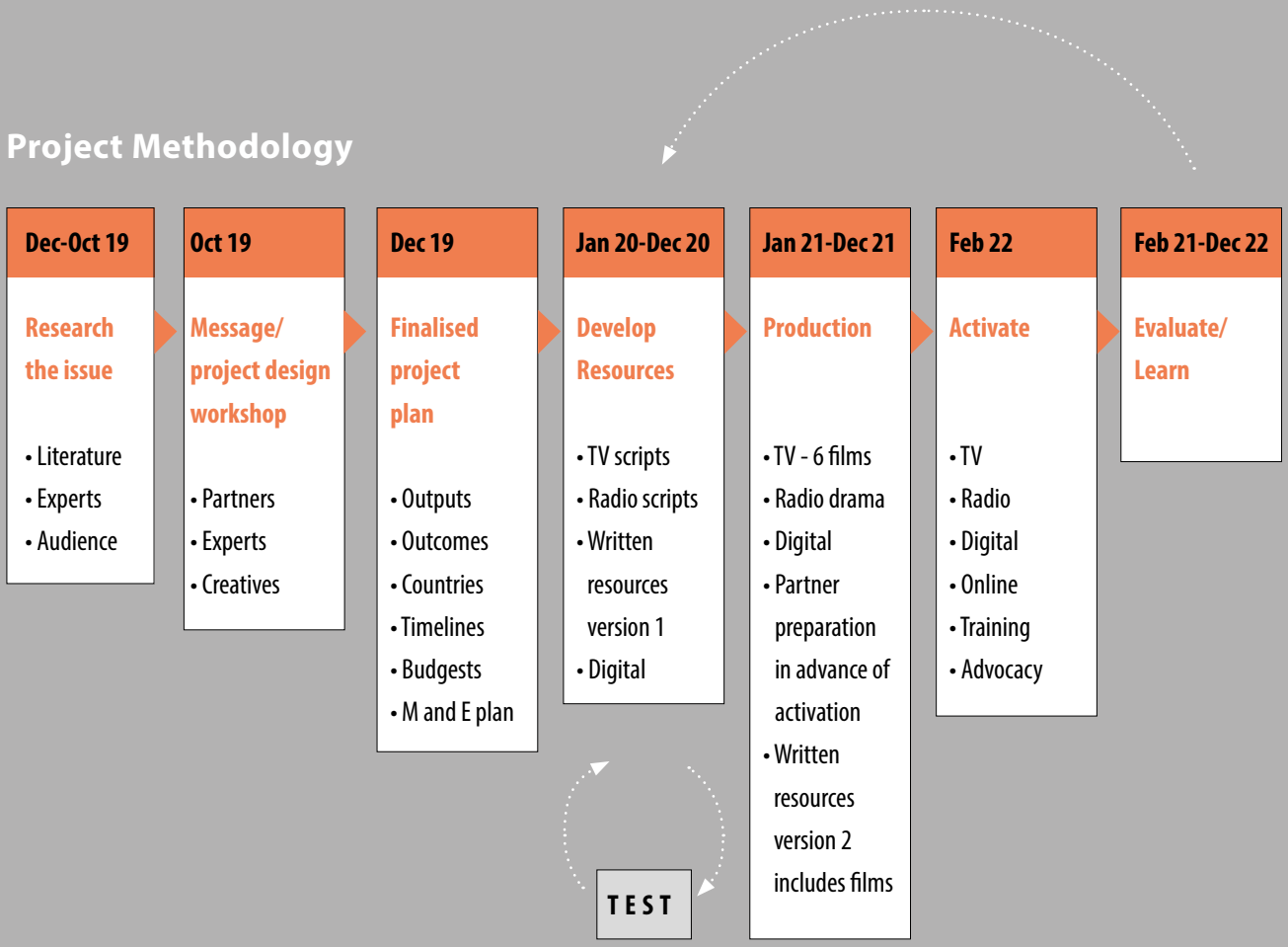
The fatherhood project formative research approach

The overarching intention and framework of the Heartlines initiative is based on research findings which show that the absence of a positive and active man in a child's life puts the child at increased risk socially, emotionally, and intellectually.

To address this issue and develop a research-driven intervention, the project methodology is presented below.

This report focuses on the first component of the project methodology, "research the issue" and provides insights into the impact of father absence on children, mothers, families and fathers.

Project Methodology



Why fathers matter: an overview of the literature review

It is a widely-held belief that fathers have positive influences on their children, although these influences do vary based on the sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts. On a global level, father involvement has played out quite differently by socioeconomic status. Employed fathers in middle-income and upper-income families have had the opportunity to expand their paternal roles into new areas, whereas fathers with limited job prospects and those in low-income families have been more likely to retreat from the father role altogether. Despite this, both groups describe their role similarly and are equally unlikely to be actively involved in raising their children.

Positive father involvement can:

- **act as a protective factor and promote child well-being**
- **positively impact children's social competence, later IQ and other learning outcomes**
- **decrease boys' negative social behaviour (such as delinquency) and girls' psychological problems in early adulthood[1].**

A father's influence, initiated during early childhood, plays a role in the formation of secure attachments, promoting social and emotional development, and influencing school readiness and success[9]. Children can be as equally attached to their fathers as they are to their mothers[4]. When both parents are actively involved with their children during the first 1000 days of life (which starts from conception), infants and children form strong attachments to both parents from the beginning of their lives[3,9]. These attachments lead to improved health outcomes in the first few days of life, examples of which include improvements in weight gain in preterm infants and improved breastfeeding rates.

Father involvement using authoritative parenting (loving with clear boundaries and expectations) leads to better emotional, academic, social, and behavioural outcomes for children. Research indicates that children who feel a closeness to their father are twice as likely as those who do not to complete schooling and go on to tertiary education, find stable employment after high school, 75% less likely to have a teen birth, 80% less likely to spend time in jail[4], and half as likely to experience symptoms of depression later in their lives.

The quality of the father-child relationship matters more than the quantity of time spent together. Non-resident fathers can have positive effects on children's social and emotional wellbeing, as well as academic achievement and behavioural adjustment. High levels of father involvement are correlated with higher levels of sociability, confidence, and self-control in children. This is true irrespective of whether the father lives in the house with the child. This is because it is the involvement, not the co-habitation that plays a crucial role in the child's wellbeing.

Children with involved fathers are less likely to act out in school or engage in risky behaviours in adolescence, they are 43% more likely to earn A's in school and 33% less likely to repeat a grade than those without engaged fathers[4]. Father engagement reduces the frequency of behavioural problems in boys while also decreasing delinquency and economic disadvantage in low-income families[4].

Research suggests that the absence of a positively engaged and participating father results in reports of diminished self-concept, and compromised physical and emotional security[9]. Children consistently report feeling abandoned when their fathers are not involved in their lives, they struggle to express their emotions and often have episodic bouts of self-loathing. Children with uninvolved fathers have more difficulties with social adjustment, and are more likely to report problems with friendships. In addition, studies highlight that children without positively engaged fathers/ father figures can develop hyper-masculine behaviours to disguise their underlying fears, resentments, anxieties and unhappiness. As mentioned above, lack of active participation by fathers plays a role in poor academic performance and high truancy rates. This is evident in 71% of US high school dropouts reporting that they did not have present fathers and children from father-absent homes reporting that they were more likely to play truant from school, more likely to be excluded from school and more likely to leave school by the age of 16 and less likely to attain academic and professional qualifications in adulthood[4].

Studies also indicate that children without positively involved fathers were more likely to smoke, drink alcohol, and abuse drugs in childhood and adulthood.

For many youth, the absence of a father played a role in behavioural factors such as delinquency and youth crime, promiscuity and teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, and exploitation and abuse[r]. Studies found that 85% of youth in prison in the USA had a non-participating father and that such children were more likely to be criminal offenders and go to jail as adults[9,4]. Children without the active participation of fathers were more likely to experience problems with sexual health, including a greater likelihood of having intercourse before the age of 16, foregoing contraception during first intercourse, becoming teenage parents, and contracting sexually transmitted infection[9,4]. In addition, girls whose fathers were absent often manifested hypersexual behaviours, experiencing the emotional loss of their fathers egocentrically as a rejection of them, becoming susceptible to exploitation by adult men[4].

Studies also indicate that children without positively involved fathers were more likely to smoke, drink alcohol, and abuse drugs in childhood and adulthood. Further to this, in the USA, 90% of runaway children reported having an absent father[4]. Children without actively involved fathers are at greater risk of suffering physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, being five times more likely to have experienced physical abuse and emotional

maltreatment, with a one hundred times higher risk of fatal abuse. A recent study reported that pre-schoolers not living with both of their biological parents were 40 times more likely to be sexually abused[4].

Physical and mental health is also affected by having an absent father. Children with absent fathers report significantly more psychosomatic health symptoms and illness such as acute and chronic pain, asthma, headaches, and stomach aches. Children without a positively involved father are more likely to die as children, and live an average of four years less over their life span. In addition, such children are consistently overrepresented on a wide range of mental health problems, particularly anxiety, depression and suicide. As adults, these children are more likely to experience unemployment, have low incomes, remain on social assistance, and experience homelessness.

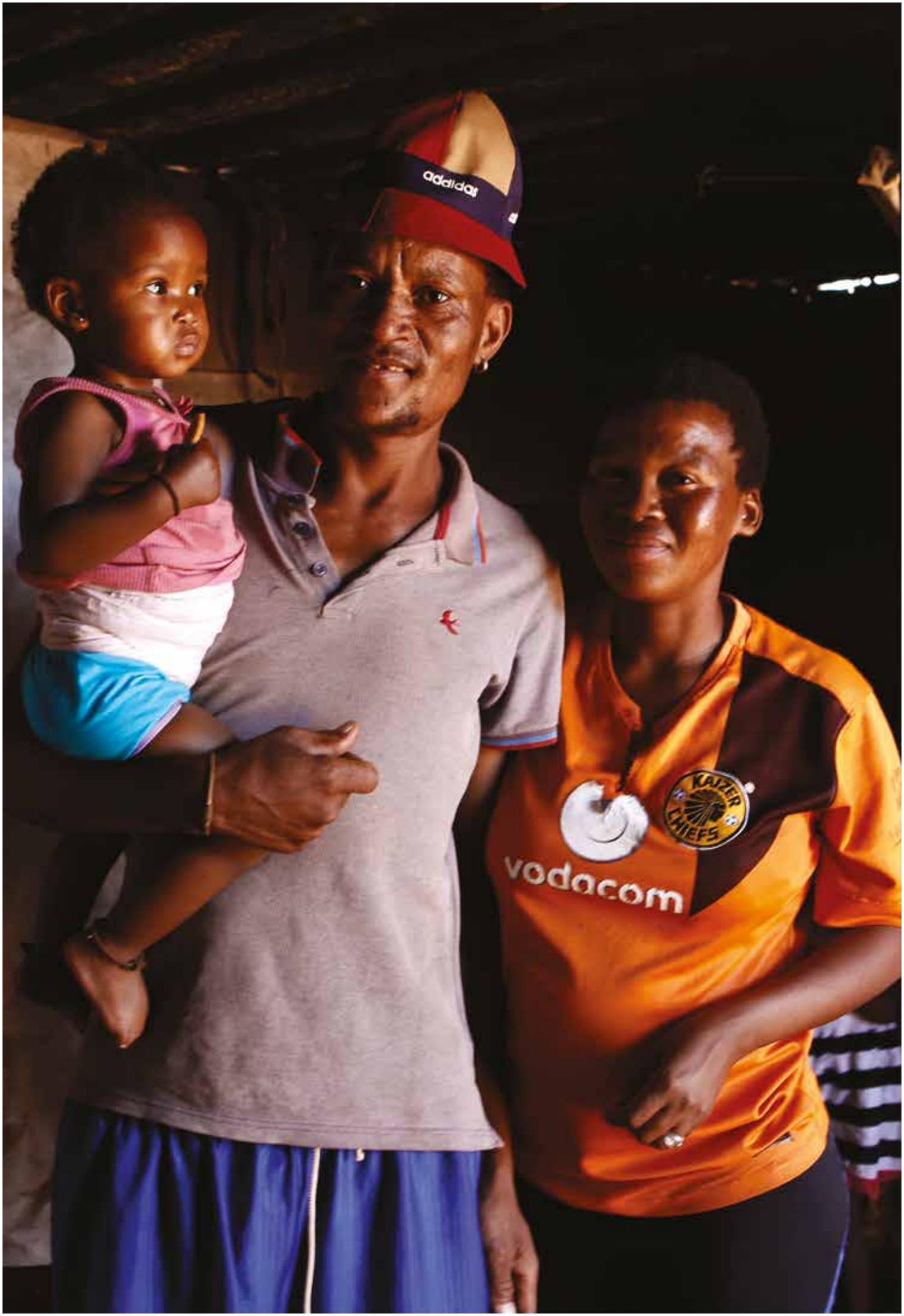
The literature highlights the importance of *economic resources* in enhancing child outcomes. Greater economic resources enable fathers to provide financially for children's basic daily needs, as well as to purchase the necessary material goods and services (clothing, medical care, quality child care, quality schooling, as well as books and toys that that improve both child outcomes and the child's development). In addition, fathers' financial support may function to increase or improve their non-pecuniary involvement with their children. Greater economic resources may also reduce a father's psychological distress around provision, which in turn reduces abusive and harsh authoritative parenting, and thus benefits the child.

Most of the research on the effects of fatherhood presented was conducted in the developed world. However, within the African region, including South Africa, research findings from The State of South African Fathers Report[10] highlights similarities between the research presented in both the developed and developing world. This highlights that the impact of a positively participating father is not only an issue for children in the developed world. South African children and adults are positively affected by their fathers' presence and negatively impacted by their absence.

South African fathers

There is no one typical type of father in South Africa, and as a result, it is difficult to classify fathers into distinct groups. However, based on the literature review, South African fathers can be loosely grouped into the following categories:

- **Absent father:**
  biological father who is neither physically nor emotionally nor financially present in a child's life.
- **Present-absent father:**
  biological father who is physically present but not emotionally or financially present in a child's life
- **Co-resident father:**
  biological father who lives in the same home as their children at least four days per week
- **Non-resident father:**
  father who is actively involved in their child's life but who does not live in the same household.
- **Social father:**
  father figure, self-assigned fatherhood by either the individual (who may or may not be related to a child), extended family or the community. This includes those who already have their own biological children.


adidas
KAIZER CHIEFS
vodacom

It is important to point out here that although these groups offer a way of classifying fathers, within each classification there is still significant variation based on culture, socio-economic status, race, and religion. It is important to point out that the concept of absent fathers is not a racial issue or one specific to a particular socio-economic group. Absent fathers play out differently in different racial and economic groups, and while the barriers to fathering may vary within these groups, the problem and the impact of the problem is universal.

The dominant view that South African children are growing up without fathers is driven by the fantasy of the nuclear family. In reality, few South African families fit this model. Co-residence data from Statistics South Africa shows that 36% of children live with their biological fathers in the same household; 34% live with both biological parents and a mere 2% live only with their biological fathers. The data alludes to the fact that 64% of children do not live with the presence of a father in the household. However, the co-residence data does not speak to the involvement and participation of non-resident fathers but only refers to children living in the same household with their biological father[9]. A father's co-residence is often mistakenly treated as equivalent to father involvement. Non-resident and non-custodial fathers are often not automatically uninvolved with their children. This is evident from the National Income Dynamic Survey which showed that a small portion of non-resident fathers is very involved in their children's lives and development. This usually happens when mothers and fathers ensure that both biological parents remain constructively involved in the child's development, regardless of the conclusion of the parents' relationship and changes in where children live. In addition, the data suggests that co-residence implies participation, and in many cases a father living with his biological child does not automatically actively parent his children or is involved in their childcare and wellbeing[9].

Co-residence data from Statistics South Africa shows that 36% of children live with their biological fathers in the same household; 34% live with both biological parents and only 2% live only with their biological fathers.

The data's overemphasis on biological fathers' absence also ignores the role of social non-biological fathers such as uncles and other men who take on a fathering role for children[9].

In South Africa, the norm is that children are mostly cared for by women. However, for the most part, there is usually a kinship network around the mother and the child which includes grandmothers, aunts, uncles, sisters and other family members who assist in raising the children[9].

Theoretical underpinning: The South African Context

Labour migration and residue of Apartheid

Apartheid affected and continues to influence patterns of fatherhood in South Africa. The inability to own land and low-paying wages forced men to work away from home, creating a labour migration system. Labour migration – which separates reproduction and production – became the main cause of the low rate of co-residence between fathers and their children in South Africa. Another impact was that the financial ability of fathers to send money home became exclusively important in determining and measuring 'good fathers'. Migrant labour continues to play a role in South Africa even after the advent of democracy. In most impoverished areas in South Africa there are limited opportunities to earn a living wage. This makes it impossible for fathers to support and live with their children and forces them to seek employment outside of where they live.

Poverty, unemployment

Due to high poverty and rising unemployment rates in South Africa, some men suffer damage to their identity, masculinity, self-esteem and confidence. This plays a significant role in how they father. Inability to provide financially and to support their children results in feelings of failure and inadequacy. Financial provision is deeply entrenched in masculine identity, and the cultural context of South African society, both practically and psychologically. Many men who are unable to provide financially are prevented from participating by mothers and families or distance themselves from their children and families to avoid criticism.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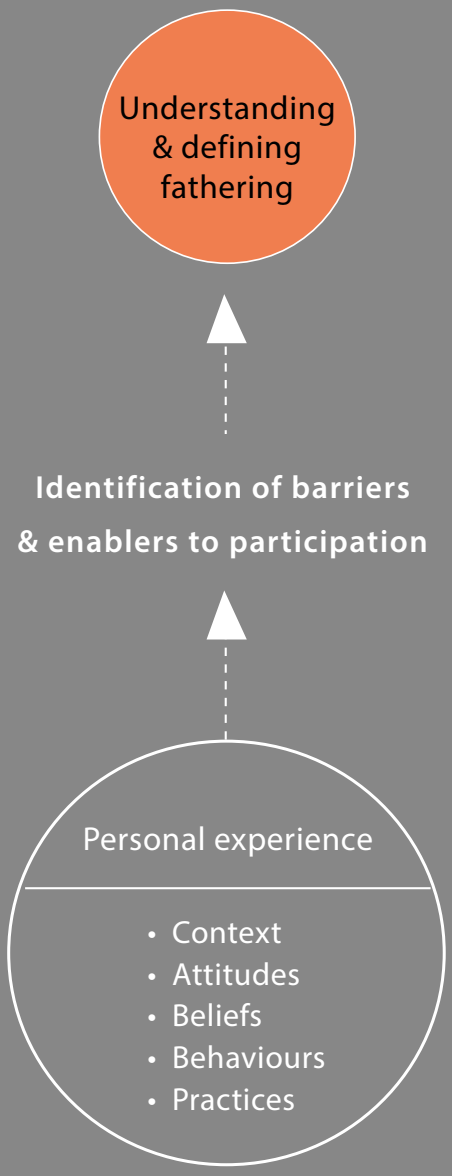
Programmatic Framework

The literature review provides insight into the fact that positive father involvement and participation is associated with improved outcomes for all family members.

The programmatic framework that forms the basis of the formative research is based on unpacking the factors that affect engagement and participation by fathers. These factors provide insight into the socio-economic and political context, co-residence status, access and expectations. To understand how this plays out for the individual, community and society at large, the programmatic framework examines the interplay of these factors for fathers, mothers, and children across the life course. This provides an in-depth understanding of the role that South African fathers play in their children's lives and the impact of their active engagement and/or lack of engagement and participation. Put simply, the formative research gathers personal stories to identify barriers and enablers to engagement and participation, which in turn leads to an in-depth understanding of what it means to be a father in South Africa.

Based on this description, the formative research theory, which is intrinsically linked to the Social-Ecological model – in that it seeks to understand the way in which fatherhood and fathering is shaped by and shapes the social environment – can be diagrammatically represented as follows:



Formative research questions

With the formative research theory as a backdrop, the formative research set out to address four key issues, namely:

1. **Describe and provide insight into what fatherhood and being a father looks like in the South African context**
2. **Determine attitudes, beliefs, practices and norms around fathering (personal experience)**
3. **Identify and understand barriers to father participation throughout the life course, as well as within different contexts**
4. **Understand the impact of father absence and presence**

A qualitative research methodology was applied to answer the formative research questions. The methodology included focus group discussions and key informative interviews. A purposeful sampling methodology was applied with both the key informant interviews and focus groups taking place across four provinces, namely, Gauteng (GP); Eastern Cape (EC); KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Mpumalanga (MP). The participant sample aimed to reflect the South African population, with most of the participants being African, and smaller samples being Indian, Coloured, and White. In addition, focus groups participants were from both urban and rural areas. All participants were 18 years of age or older, and included both males and females. Based on the geographic location of the focus groups and key informant interviews, as well as the racial configuration of the groups, the formative research was reflective of the larger South African population. To ensure that focus group participants could express themselves freely, groups comprised of a single gender, bar one mixed gender group of grandparents.

Key informant interviews were conducted with community leaders and influencers, religious leaders, and teachers, as well as individuals identified through the focus groups who had personal experiences or stories that could lead to an in-depth understanding of fatherhood in South Africa as well as provide an opportunity to further explore themes raised during the focus group discussions.

Written informed consent was given by all participants, and they consented to having the focus groups and interviews recorded. All focus groups and key informant interviews were translated and transcribed verbatim and the data was thematically analysed using Atlas Ti.

Group		EC	KZN	GP	MP	
16 -35	Urban		1 mixed general population	1 M (young fathers) 1 mixed (general population) 1 M (white 22-25) 1 M (coloured 22-25) 1 M (Indian 22-25)		6
	Rural	1 M (young fathers)			1 general population	2
5 – 50	Urban			1 mixed general population 1 M 1 F coloured/ Indian women		3
	Rural	1 M	1 M 1 F		1 mixed general population 1 M	5
Grand parents	Urban			1 mixed 1 F		2
	Rural	1 mixed	1 F			2
Total		3	4	10	3	20

Characteristics of in-depth interviews

		EC	KZN	GP	MP	
Teachers	Urban	0		2		2
	Rural	2	2		1	5
Religious leaders	Urban			3		3
	Rural	2	1		1	4
Other influencers or participants from groups	Urban			1		1
	Rural	1	1		1	3
Total		5	4	6	3	18

Formative research findings

The literature review provides insight into the fact that positive father involvement and participation is associated with improved outcomes for all family members. A programmatic framework was developed to understand the outcome of father presence and absence.

Answering the formative research questions:

1. Understanding and providing insight into what fatherhood looks like in South Africa

The formative research identified four different categories of fathers. These mirrored the categories of fathers identified in the literature review. The four types of South African fathers identified by the participants included:

a. Present fathers: those fathers who are both physically and emotionally present. Physical presence means that they reside in the same house.

> *"… If a kid can come up to you when they need something, however mundane… if they can come to you without hesitation, you are there, you are present as a dad, and it is as simple as that."*
>
> (GP, MALE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

> *"Dad would come home when I was asleep at times. I remember him fetching me and dropping me off at nursery school. It was not always my mom doing that stuff. Dad would fetch us and drop us off although he was busy with work, but he still put in time and effort when he had it. He made time even though it was rushed but he made time."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

b. Absent fathers: those fathers who are neither physically or emotionally present

> *"My father was absent. He abandoned me, his responsibilities as a father. We were six kids, and he left us at a very young age."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"I had a father who was also not present. My father was alive but not present. I did not really have a male figure in my life."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

c. Present-absent fathers: those fathers who are physically present but do not participate or engage in any aspect of child rearing

> *"I stayed in the same house with my father but we would go for two weeks without seeing each other. He would walk out of this door and I would walk out the other. Meet in the corridor; greet each other and that is it. I never really had a good fatherhood experience with him."*
>
> (MP, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

> *"I hardly remember one statement from my father pertaining to issues of life. He was there, like pastor is saying, but I don't remember a single day sitting down and discussing all these issues."*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

d. Absent-present fathers: those fathers who do not live with the child but do participate in various aspects of the child's life

> *"Every day I make sure. I never go to sleep without seeing my child, every day mama. I make sure- every day I [go to] see him. If I find him with poop I change his kimbie. I prepare his bottle, if I have some money I take them to Maponya (Mall) and we do our thing and they become happy."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"I went home last month and my child is currently in grade 1, my first-born child. I went to his school, I checked his exercise books, and how he's doing at school. In the mornings, I took him to school and fetch him after-school, that whole week…"*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

In addition, participants identified that in the absence of fathers, it was often mothers and their kinship networks - including grandmothers, aunties, uncles - who stepped in and filled the missing gap. This created a fifth category of fathers. However, due to the fluidity of the constituents in this group, it is difficult to define or name the group. Further to this, when delving deeper into the idea of "who fathers in the absence of a biological father" it became clear that participants were referring solely to the role of provision and/or being a provider when they described mothers and their kinship network as filling the missing gap of biological fathers.

2. *Determining attitudes, beliefs, practices around fathering (personal experience)*

In both the focus groups and in-depth interviews fathers were described both positively and negatively.

These descriptions provide context into fatherhood in South Africa, and provide a glimpse into people's personal and lived experiences of fatherhood.

Positive descriptions of fatherhood included the following:

In all focus groups and in all in-depth key informant interviews, the most prominent description of fatherhood was someone who provided financially for their children. A father was someone who covered the costs of basic needs such as food, clothing and schooling. Participants couched the positive description of responsibility, care and love within a blanket of provision. Fathers who provided were responsible, they cared for their children and they loved them. Attributes such as care, love, support were not based on a father's affection but rather on his ability to provide. Those who did not provide financial assistance were simply not fathers.

Following on from provision, participants described fathers positively using the following words:

- **Someone who is physically and emotionally present**
- **Being loving**
- **Being caring**
- **Being supportive**
- **Someone who is responsible**
- **Someone who is a hero**
- **Someone you can look up to**

For the participants who described fathers in negative terms, a resounding description was that many fathers were absent. This included fathers who lived within their households. They were unengaged and uninvolved and left all aspects of child-raising including attachment and connection to mothers. Unengaged and uninvolved fathers were described as "as good as dead" or "as good as not there." As with the positive descriptions of fatherhood, financial provision and the inability to provide financially played a huge role in the negative descriptions of fatherhood. The inability to provide was linked to being selfish, unstable, uncaring, and to not playing the expected role of a father.

Negative descriptions of fatherhood included the following:

- **Being physically absent, not living in the household, and not seeing or spending any time with a child**
- **Being emotionally absent**
- **Someone unstable**
- **Someone violent and abusive**
- **Someone distant**
- **Someone strict who disciplined**
- **Someone simply not there when you needed them.**
- **Someone distant who did not get involved in any capacity**
- **Someone who did not provide financially or offer to help financially**

In addition, for many of the participants, emotions of fear were connected to fathers. They feared their fathers because they were "violent", "abusive", "forceful" and "controlling".

As highlighted by the descriptions of fatherhood, provision and fatherhood were closely aligned and linked. Provision was also highlighted as an entry point to fatherhood. Provision was the defining factor of fatherhood.

> *"You don't become a father merely by having a child somewhere. There are certain things you have to do, that are your responsibility as a father."*
>
> (KZN, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"You can't call yourself a father if you can't provide for your child. A father is a father if he can provide."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

Participants elaborated on the definition of fathers as providers:

> *"Someone who brings things to the home so he can raise the children."*
>
> (EC, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

> *"The father is expected to support… and that is food mostly. I do see that lately even women do work, but mostly the father is looked upon at this side."*
>
> (EC, RELIGIOUS LEADER)

Families and communities contributed to the idea that fatherhood was linked to financial provision and providing for basic needs such as food, clothing, uniforms. Communities expected it to be the father who would provide financially. Despite high rates of unemployment, with a large proportion of fathers not working, communities placed a high expectation on fathers to provide financially, irrespective of employment status.

> *"The community mostly is expecting money… The community will tell you that you don't provide for your child, your child doesn't have pocket money because you are not working."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

> *"Communities expect fathers to be a provider. Then if you are a good father you are making sure that your kids do not go to bed hungry. Everything else is a bonus in most of the communities."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

The fathers themselves understood that having the ability to provide financially was both the primary entry point and sustained access point to fatherhood.

> *"If you don't have money, you will find the gate locked because they know you are coming."*
>
> (EC MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"You find that they don't even want to see the sight of you. They don't want you… Because you don't have money."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

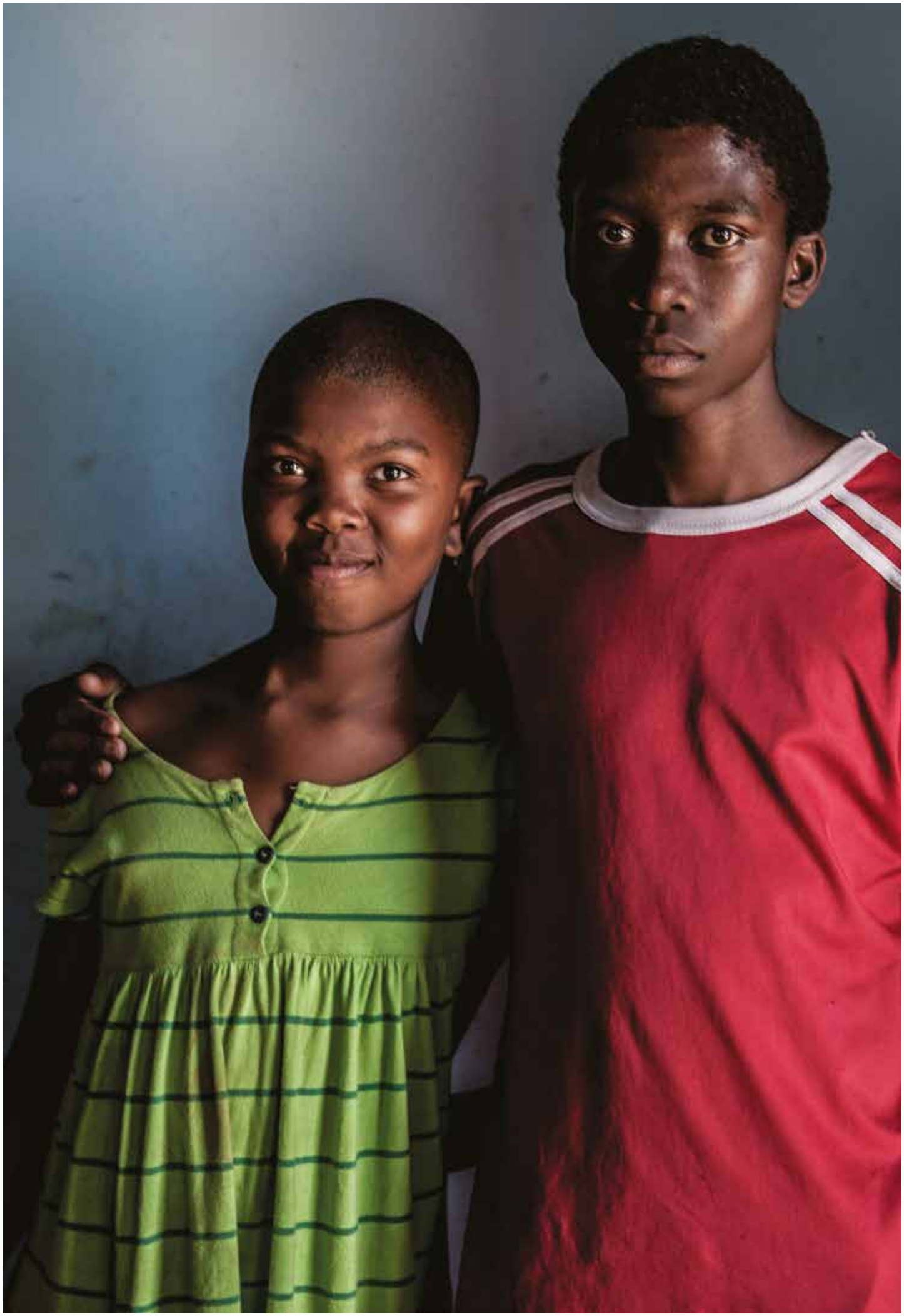
"We can all agree that now, it's all about money. Money talks."

(GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"When you don't have money, then you are not a father... The mother tells the child that the father is useless. 'What do you want from the father, as I do everything?' You are not a father without money. That is why we stay away."*
>
> (MP MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

> *"If we can get jobs, we can be better fathers as we will be able to support our kids".*
>
> (EC MALE FG PARTICIPANT 18-35)

Based on the above, it is evident that stereotypical gender roles of women as caregivers and men as breadwinners/providers are predominant in South Africa. High unemployment rates and poverty make it difficult for South African fathers to live up to the expectation of fatherhood.



The formative research highlights traditional gender stereotypes that place men/fathers at the head of the family. Participants expressed the importance of belonging to a family that was headed by a father. This is clearly seen by descriptions of fathers as "important", "responsible", "leads", "pillar", "in charge", "sets rules".

> *"A father is the head. He is someone who has big responsibility towards his family and towards his children. He controls the stages of their lives and the way in which they should be living in the family."*
>
> (MP, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

> *"By head, I mean he leads everything from providing, from support, from guidance…"*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"A father is the head, "kis thlotho ya mutsi" and then again he is also the protector."*
>
> (MP, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

The idea of a father being the head of the family and/or the household implies that a father has authority, sets rules, and leads. It also implies that a father must be looked up to and respected. This idea cut across racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups.

> *"I want to say that a father is the head of the home, a home must have a father. If there is a father and a wife it shows a certain status."*
>
> (MP, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

> *"Here I have a father, there's dignity and knowledge that my child will not struggle or have his home looked down upon because I am there as a father."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

Similarly, homes with absent fathers were viewed negatively by the participants.

> *"A father is the door (access point) of a home. A home without a father is …not respected as when there is a father. A home with a father has more dignity than the one without it, it is more dignified than the one with a father."*
>
> (GP, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, GRANDMOTHER)

"Because if you are not going to be there, it will be apparent that you are not there…and there will be a vacuum."

(GP, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, GRANDMOTHER)

"And even in the township you can see a fatherless home; you can see there is no father there (in that home)."

(GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, GRANDFATHER)

"Mostly amongst children, you can see their behaviour and the way they do things, you can see there is no discipline here."

(GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, GRANDFATHER)

"There is no order in a house without a father."

(KZN, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT,18-35)

Having a father as the head of the family, living in the house, meant that there was order in the house and in the family. It meant that everything in the household was the way it was supposed to be and the household and family ran the way in which they were supposed to and expected to. Households with absent fathers had an unfillable vacuum, they lacked leadership, direction and a moral compass.

However, many participants whose fathers were physically present and lived within their home, also experienced absence as their fathers were unengaged and did not participate actively. For these participants, the perception of having a father in the household masked their lived realities, and despite their physical presence, the fathers were in fact absent and unavailable emotionally.

"And that's because as I'm saying he's there physically, he comes home sometimes during the weekend, but emotionally, he's not there. Those children will grow up and end up like children who don't have fathers."

(MP, FEMALE TEACHER, IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT)

"I was raised by a father and a mother but my father did not communicate a lot of things with me. As a result, you grow up seeking a direction to follow at particular stages of your life."

(MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50).

"His focus was just work or his next relationship. Would just throw money at you to keep you happy instead of spending time with you. Definitely a big disconnect as well".

(GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

"…What frustrates me are the fathers who are there, physically, but not emotionally and otherwise. I had a case where a father had to tell…because his mind is out there with his affairs and whatever he is doing out there. When the child needs his attention, she feels like she is disturbing him when he is s itting down, he's busy with his phone."

(MP, FEMALE TEACHER, IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT).

A further major finding from the formative research was that a father's surname being given to a child at birth played a significant role in ensuring the child's identity. The paternal surname linked and connected the child to his father and ensured that the child had an identity linked to his ancestors. Children who were not given their fathers' surnames at birth were lacking an identity. Children who assumed their fathers' surnames could validate their links to their fathers, to their identity and their heritage. In addition, surnames were connecting factors between fathers and their children. When a child had the father's surname, fathers felt emotionally connected to the child. They lacked a sense of connection to children who were not given their surname.

"He gives a child identity. As all of us here, we use our father's surnames and our forefathers."

(EC, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

"And in the surname you will find customs… and through those customs you also want to be introduced to your ancestors."

(GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

"And you are able to tell anyone who you are and where you come from; you are able to represent yourself…your identity."

(GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

Surnames carried a significance in cultural personal identity. Participants highlighted that lacking surnames of their fathers led to problems in their lives and seemed to create a sense of perpetual dissatisfaction. For some of the participants, their inability to find and secure employment was linked to them not knowing who their father was and not having his surname.

"There are people who are today poor, who can't find jobs or anything all because of the issue of the surname… The surname is very important."

(GP, MALE, FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

Learning to father

The formative research findings identified three ways individuals learn to father. These include adhering to beliefs inspired by their faith (specifically the Bible), from personal experience and from seeing the way in which others father.

From the Bible:

> *"Let me put it biblically, in a way, a father is the head, 'ki thloho ya mutsi.'"*
>
> (MALE MP FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"It comes from the Bible that a father is the head…for a father to know that he must be responsible and provide and know what it is to be a father, it comes from God."*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

From personal experience of fatherhood:

> *"If a father is an abusive father, it will affect me. It might happen when I grow up and I also become a father, that thing might go from generation to generation."*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

From seeing how others father:

> *"You know in the community there are fathers that we look up to. The way they lead their lives and stuff."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

3. Identifying and understanding barriers to father participation throughout the life course, as well as within different contexts

Barriers

The formative research identified key barriers to active participation by fathers. These include:

- **Systems and institutional barriers, such as the health system, government, the legal system and religious sector.**
- **Being unemployed and not having the ability to provide financially for basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, transportation and costs associated with education**
- **Interpersonal relationships between fathers and mothers, as well as the relationship between the father and the mother's extended family**
- **Cultural and stereotypical definitions of masculinity including the way in which gender and gender roles are enacted.**
- **Migrancy and having to work far from home**
- **Substance abuse, particularly alcohol**
- **Cultural factors such as lobola (wife price); paying ihlawulo (payment of money for having a child out of wedlock); and cultural practices surrounding birth which require mothers to return to their family home with their newborns and remain separated from the father of the child.**


Bafana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Systems/Institutional barriers

Participants described the way in which systems prevented their active participation as fathers. During the first 1000 days of a child's life (which starts from of conception), the public health care system acts as a barrier for active participation by fathers and sets the stage for lack of further lack of engagement between fathers and children. The health system infrastructure is unwelcoming to fathers and together with attitudes of nurses and other women, keeps fathers away. This is continued during early child health visits, where the expectation is that the mother brings the baby for well-child check-ups and if she is unavailable, the grandmother or an auntie should step in.

Similarly, the legal system plays a role in preventing active participation by fathers, in the case of divorce, separation or having a child out of wedlock. Participants expressed a strong feeling that it was unlikely for men to get custody of children and that in the case of custody disputes, the courts would side with the mothers, even in cases where the father was the better parent and the better option for the child.

> *"I think the legal system sides with women more over men… It is assumed that men cannot do the job (of parenting) like a woman can... A man cannot be a maternal figure."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

Participants believed that where the courts got involved, the courts played a role in restricting access and visitation which resulted in men not being able to play an active role. Courts often mandate maintenance arrangements:

> *"Usually in a court battle between a mother and a father, the mother obviously gets the child, gets sole custody and the father gets visitation provided he pays maintenance."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

"Jobs are scarce…being a father to your kid is kind of very difficult because at times you don't get enough access because you don't provide"

(MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

Unemployment as a barrier

The formative research identified that feelings of shame and being useless were persistent emotions of unemployed fathers and often prevented them from engaging and actively participating with children.

"…you are not working then you are ashamed to see your child."

(GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

"…If I can be a good father, I have to have money…so just because of unemployment I end up like running away."

(EC, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

"When children ask why you abandoned us he'll say, 'I was not working.' All the fathers say the same thing and that's "I didn't work."

(GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

Participants felt that fatherhood was transactional, leading many fathers to feel as if they were ATMs. For fathers, this meant that when they provided money they could participate with their children.

"…reduce the participation of fathers in the family circle into an ATM. That our participation must only be when you provide money, then you're a father. If you don't have money, then you are not regarded as a father."

(GP, RELIGIOUS LEADER)

"So, you can be a decent father, but you need to have money. When you do not have money, they disrespect you at home. The kids will respect you when you have money. A father should always be able to provide otherwise he will be called names."

(EC, MALE FG PARTICIPANT 18-35)

Interpersonal relationships as barriers

The relationship between mothers and fathers plays a role in fostering the relationship between children and fathers. Personal stories from the formative research revealed that many mothers often prevented fathers from fathering when they had a bad relationship with the father, or when the father had a new "woman." Conflict within the home was often linked to money, and resulted in the mother belittling the father when he was unable to provide. As a result, fathers believed their children did not see them as authoritative figures and blamed the mothers for the children not respecting them.

In many families, the children become a pawn in the relationship between mother and father. Mothers used the children as a bargaining chip to get what they needed from the fathers.

> *"When I'm fighting with the mother, she says: 'This is not your child.' And when you give money, the mother is happy and then suddenly your child is yours again. And that's when you also start distancing yourself not understanding where you stand."*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

> *"… when you are no longer with the mother of the child, you are not given an opportunity to see your child as you wish but when there is a need for a child, you are notified. So, you punish the mother by ignoring her."*
>
> (EC, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

There was a sense from the participants that mothers played a role in clouding and influencing their children's feelings towards their fathers.

> *"And the bad names you say to the child about their father… The child will also grow up knowing… If you keep on saying: Your father is a dog. The child will also grow up knowing that my father is a dog."*
>
> (KZN, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"But moms, man…eish… -they will always tell you bad things about your father. They will never say your father is a good man and what-not my child, no. They will tell you… obviously, the father is always dirty/wrong in the eyes of your mother. She will tell you 'You see your father has left us, and I'm raising you and what-not' so with women we can never… you are always a bad person."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT 18-35)

Both mothers and their extended families acted as gatekeepers preventing fathers from actively participating and engaging with their children.

Families as gatekeepers:

> *"Ja, it's useless… don't bother anymore…you end up thinking what's the use of me continuing when they keep on shutting me out. So ja, they (the family) are some of the things that make some fathers not to be involved in the lives of their children…"*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

Mothers as gatekeepers

> *"…but some mothers sometimes use the children…*
> *If you have separated with her she denies you access to the baby. That's how they do it. Once you've broken-up, she doesn't want you with the baby."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"…if we have broken up with the father of my child then I want us to fight over the baby… Even when he says he wants his child, I refuse, and I deny him the child… And I create a rift between the father and his child. "*
>
> (KZN, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"Most of the time children live with the mothers… I have a 22-year-old son whom I last saw 8 years back… I try by all means…"*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

Gender as a barrier

Gender roles, expectations, beliefs and practices around being male are entrenched in South African society. The formative research highlighted the way in which gender is socially constructed within South Africa. The participants described being male and being a father in terms of being unemotional, unattached, unaffectionate. In addition, gender norms allocate the role of provision to fathers and caring and child raising to mothers and females. Showing signs of affection towards children, as well as changing, feeding, and caring for infants was just not seen as something that is done by fathers or men. The participants highlighted that if men were unable to provide then there was no other role for them, even in the absence of a biological mother. When mothers were absent, the expectation was that another female from the mother's kin network would step in and take care of the child.

> *"When you start playing with your kids, culture will say: 'This one is not man enough, he's busy with children' and at that time you're trying to be around your kids…-culture has a way of suppressing you by making you feel inferior as a man in the community."*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

> *"I remember walking, I was carrying my son on my back, and he was sleeping. I walked passed the taxi rank and some women who were in a taxi were shocked to see that."*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"The whole showing of affection to your kids, a lot of them don't show that. They struggle with that cause they think it's not something that's done. Like you're gonna make your kids soft. We had a lot of discussions about that, like, some dads saying being soft and affectionate to your kids, makes them soft in the world. So, you need to kind of toughen them up and stuff, and that's the only way they can succeed in life."*
>
> (GP MALE, FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

Violence and Abuse

Participants described a complex relationship involving abuse and violence. This was often based on preconceived notions of gender and the associated male behaviours. Even though participants were aware that both physical and emotional abuse was wrong, often the ability to provide and be present normalised the abuse and made it acceptable. Abusive fathers who could provide were able to actively participate, whereas non-abusive fathers who were unable to provide were prevented from fathering.

> *"You find that the father is abusive at home, so a father can hit a mother in front of us children and expect us to wake up each day and still call him dad."*
>
> (MP, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"My father was rough. He was a rough person, he had fury, but he loved us."*
>
> (KZN, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"…he would buy you a school uniform, then you get into a fight with him, he would take back the uniform and burn it…let's say he burnt it on a Friday and now you have to go to school. He will realise on Sunday that you don't have a school uniform and he would decide to go and buy you another one."*
>
> (KZN, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

Cultural barriers

Cultural norms such as the payment of inhlawulo (referred to widely by second-language English speakers as "damages" although it is recognised that this translation is contested) and lobola (bride price) compounded by family dispersal, economic insecurity and employment instability, contribute to the social and residential separation of biological fathers from their children. It is important to point out that although these cultural practices functioned as a barrier to participation, they are not practised universally. Cultural practices were more prevalent in the rural parts of KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. Urban families were less likely to engage in these cultural practices.

Cultural practice: ***Mother returns to her parent's home after giving birth***

> *"When the mother (after giving birth) takes the child and goes back to her parents for like 3 months…you get there and the mother and child have a routine and you can't really fit in to that. That's where I think the gap comes in."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

Cultural practice: ***Paying "damages"***

> *'I don't want him here; he has to pay damages…-He will not see this child… "*
>
> (GP, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, 50+)

> *"…the reason they run away is that they have to pay damages and all that."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

"Like when we have a child before marriage. My family wouldn't allow me to take my baby to her father's place if the father hasn't paid the damages… And he would also say he wouldn't provide for a kid that does not stay with him."

(KZN, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

Cultural practice: ***Lobola***

> *"You spend when you are a father… because you must pay damages, you have to pay lobola… All these things are your responsibility."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"Remember someone can impregnate me and pay the damages but maybe he doesn't want to take me as his wife but there are things that he should know that he must do for the baby, the baby's needs. Since he's a Zulu he needs to pay damages. If he wants the kid to live under him, he needs to pay lobola because without those things my father is the same as my child's father."* (KZN, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

4. Understanding the impact of father absence and presence

While many participants expressed that the only reality they knew was where their mother fulfilled all their parenting needs, some participants pointed out that in the absence of a father, or where fathers are unengaged, uninvolved and unavailable, children look to pastors, teachers, uncles, grandfathers or someone from the community to fulfil the missing role in their lives.

In the absence of a father or in situations where fathers did not participate actively, children often became angry and resentful. They expressed that having an absent father made them feel sad and they were acutely aware that they were missing out on something important and meaningful in their lives.

> *"It is a very sad life, because your father was not there."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT 18-35)

> *"For me as someone who did not have a father, I would love the small 'things.. Like someone to say, 'I love you' those small things."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT 18-35)

> *"Especially being a boy, and your father is not by your side, you are going to make many mistakes in life, because a father is supposed to guide you as a boy."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"It's difficult, when you see other children with their father and you just wish your father was there…"*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT 18-35)

> *"You can see other children taking photos with their fathers and wish that if only you were in the photos."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT 18-35)

> *"When a father is not there, children become resentful, they carry anger…if this anger burst, it bursts when you yourself are a father. What happens to you is like you're crying out for… for everything from your father…you feel like you are lost or not from this world. You feel like you are nothing."*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

5. Positive deviants

A few individuals, at risk of becoming absent fathers, followed uncommon, beneficial practices and consequently experienced better outcomes than their peers who shared similar risks. These men, known as positive deviants, expressed that it was their internal reflection of their lived experiences of fatherhood on the birth of their own children that forced them to confront what it meant to not have an engaged, available or responsible father. This realisation catapulted them to become fully engaged, available and responsible for their own children. For many men, this was in fact the pivotal moment when they consciously decided to be different types of fathers to the fathers that they themselves had. They did not want their children to experience absence, they needed to be different to their fathers.

> *"I think it is very important for me to be there for my son and my daughter because no one was there for me. That is very critical for me. I do not want them to have to figure things that an adult in their life was meant to figure out. When you finish matric, pass and are accepted in university and look to the adults in your life (for help). In my case, it was my mother and brother came along my mother while everyone was looking at each other and you can see there is no plan or idea. So, I do not want that for my children."*
>
> (POSITIVE DEVIANT GP)

What we want from our fathers

It is clear from the formative research that both men and women, irrespective of their age wanted more when it came to the participation of their fathers.

The participants expressed a yearning for connection and attachment with their fathers. They wanted their fathers to be engaged, available and responsible.

> *"I personally expect that father and son relationship or that father and son bond because being a father is something different from being a dad according to my understanding, cause anyone can be a dad. You can do anything to impress your child, do anything, whatever you can just to keep the child happy. But if there is no bond, or that connection it all becomes worthless or useless on my side."*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *For children, as they become adults and reflect back on their father, it is the simple things that matter most. "I feel like he owed me something, something he's supposed to give me, and that is the father's love. I don't want his money, I just wanted him around… and that is one thing he failed at doing, in everything."*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT 18-35)

> *"He should be there and play the role of being a father to his children even when he is not working or even if he can't afford (the maintenance) of the child."*
>
> (KZN, FEMALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"Create time, even if it is 30 minutes to talk to children, whether he is busy, he should give himself time, 30 minutes, 15 minutes. That would be enough. That's when I'll be able to tell him about the problems I'm having."*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

Participants believed that engagement (direct contact and shared interaction with children), availability (physical presence or accessibility to children) and responsibility (provision or the arrangement of provision for basic needs) formed the basis of positive, nurturing and participatory relationships between fathers and children. This was further supported by key informants and "positive deviants" who believed that to be considered a "dad" a father should

- **Communicate openly with his children**
- **Show affection**
- **Provide for his children**
- **Protect his children**
- **Support his children emotionally**
- **Run errands and participate in school meetings and events**
- **Share interests with their children**
- **Mentor and teach their children morals and values, as well as sport**
- **Share in their children's interests and activities**
- **Actively take part in raising their children**

Participants wanted their fathers to be able to express how they felt about them. They wanted them to show emotions, provide guidance, be involved and love, support and encourage them. Whilst they wanted their fathers to be responsible and to provide for their basic needs, they wanted them to fulfil more of an emotional and available role. Provision, while important, was less important than being engaged and available.

> *"You can give me a million, but most of the thing I need is the bond with you…like I need you, not what you have. I need you when I'm in need of a motivator, or when I need someone who will advise me, so I need you."*
>
> (EC, MALE FG PARTICIPANT 35-50)

> *"Most of the people thought that to be a father is just like to… it's just to give your child money, like support your child financially. Of which in real life it is not."*
>
> (EC, MALE FG PARTICIPANT 35-50)

> *"I think the expectation to provide should not be too heavy."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

> *"He must give you love and care if he can't provide financially, that's what is needed from a father… he must be available in your life."*
>
> (MP, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

Participants highlighted that they wanted fathers who could be role models and they could learn from.

> *"A father should be a role model. He should be a good example. Whatever he does, he becomes a figure the kids copy. He has to be a role model."*
>
> (EC, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 35-50)

Participants wanted fathers who set a good example. They wanted someone they could talk to; someone who was approachable:

> *"Looking back, I would like a father who would be more of a friend. Someone I will not be afraid of. Someone I would talk to…"*
>
> (KZN, MALE FG PARTICIPANT, 18-35)

They wanted homes and families based on love and respect.

> *"Fights are there but when you fix it, you should fix it with love. Love is important above all else."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANTS, 35-50)

> *"Love goes hand in glove with respect. If there's respect in the house then there will be love."*
>
> (GP, MALE FG PARTICIPANTS, 35-50)

Conclusion

The formative research highlighted that "being able to provide" above all else defined fatherhood and participation as a father. To be able to provide, a father needed to be employed.

For participants of all racial and socio-economic groups, being able to provide was the single most important issue ensuring access and entry into fatherhood. Since provision and employment are intrinsically linked, for many participants, employment has become an entry and restrictive point for access to participation with their children. In many instances, being employed and being able to provide was the only way to actively participate as a father. The notion of provision was upheld in (a) cultural values (paying inhlawulo, lobola); (b) cultural and societal definitions of gender roles; (c) the legal sphere in the case of disputes; (d) the family, by extended family members and the mother herself, and (e) on an individual level. On an individual level, fathers who are unable to provide feel ashamed, worthless, inadequate, lack self-respect and believe that their families and communities don't respect them. It also causes stress and pressure and results in them losing authority within the household, as the inability to provide prevents them from being decision-makers within the family.

However, despite the belief that being able to provide was equated to being able to father, participants felt strongly that they wanted fathers who were involved, engaged, and participated in their daily lives. They wanted their fathers to be more than providers.

Recommendations for programme design

Fathers are a diverse group and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the development of messages and interventions.

Based on the formative research, interventions and messages designed to address fatherhood are more likely to be effective if they consider the unique circumstances and needs of fathers and specifically target creating awareness around barriers and enablers for engagement, availability and responsibility. Furthermore, interventions aimed at skills development should target fathering skills as opposed to the larger umbrella of parenting skills. Interventions should be designed keeping non-resident fathers at the forefront and should be designed to support their limited opportunities for interaction with their children. Overall, intervention designs need to reflect the diverse fatherhood experiences, the quality of fathering experience and the different needs of fathers. While culture plays a role in fathering, interventions should reflect that over time culture and the way in which we interact with cultural practices can change, thus giving way to more culturally specific fathering practices that are beneficial to children, families and fathers. Messages and interventions developed will need to account for the diversity within families and ensure that messages target both men and women.

Next Steps

While the formative research component of the project is complete, the development of the interventions will further engage the findings. During the next 12-months, using the formative research findings, Heartlines will develop edutainment interventions.

Outputs based on the formative research

The following section of the report describes the outputs based on the findings of the formative research process.

Message design workshop

A message design workshop was conducted in October 2019 to develop the project message brief. Workshop participants included field experts, researchers, and implementers. This workshop provided an opportunity to present and discuss the literature review and the formative research conducted by Heartlines (presented in this report). The workshop discussion and inputs from the participants facilitated further synthesis of the formative research findings within the broader South African context. This resulted in the development of key themes that would underpin the content of the campaign. The 20 key themes identified in the workshop are listed below. These themes were then further synthesized for the development of the key messages.

Thematic analysis arising from the message design workshop

1. Presence is not only physical, but also emotional.
2. Although women do most of the care and provision work in children's lives, men matter in the lives of children.
3. A positive relationship between mothers and fathers, whether in the same home or not, is good for the wellbeing of children.
4. Being a good father not only involves provision, but also care. In South Africa provision is the entry to fathering.
5. The community as gatekeeper has a positive role to play in influencing the positive role of men in the lives of children.
6. Caring and care work for children can be learned by both men and women. It is not only a woman's role.
7. Women as gatekeepers – women have a role to play in allowing men to participate and care for their children.
8. Past experiences of parenting can be changed.
9. Cultural practices (e.g. "lobola and damages") should not prohibit men from playing active, positive roles in their children's lives. Cultural practices can be transformed to support men playing active, positive roles in the lives of children.
10. Men being involved in the first 1000 days should be encouraged and not ridiculed, especially by extended family and community.
11. Being an active father is good for men too.
12. Fatherhood is a life-long commitment.
13. Men should be encouraged and taught how to talk to each other about fathering.
14. The health, legal and other systems should be addressed to ensure that men and women can engage and participate equally.
15. In a context of mass unemployment, the legal framework should facilitate parents being active in their children's lives.

16. Advocacy efforts should be undertaken to encourage equality in maternal and paternal leave.
17. Service providers should view male involvement in child care positively, and be encouraged to not criticize it.
18. The role of fatherhood should be extended to the broader community.
19. Identity is central to fathering.
20. The church as a social network can encourage positive norms and behaviours in the fathering of children.

Development of key messages

Using the themes identified in the message design workshop, together with the formative research findings, Heartlines has identified three values that will underpin the project interventions, and corresponding key messages.

Values

The three key values that have been identified for the intervention package are:

- **Positive Presence:** based on the findings, the upcoming interventions will seek to promote the positive presence of fathers as important for the wellbeing of children and also for the benefit of the father and the mother.

- **Responsibility:** based on the findings and the context of high unemployment and poverty in South Africa, the interventions will promote father responsibility as more than financial provision. It will seek to shift the definition of fatherhood to one that embodies love, reliability, availability and support.

- **Empathy:** based on the findings, it is clear that not only children, but families and communities are also directly impacted by the active participation and engagement of fathers. In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid and migrant labour has played a significant role in fracturing family life. This cannot be ignored and should be addressed empathetically in dealing with fatherhood in South Africa today.

Key Messages

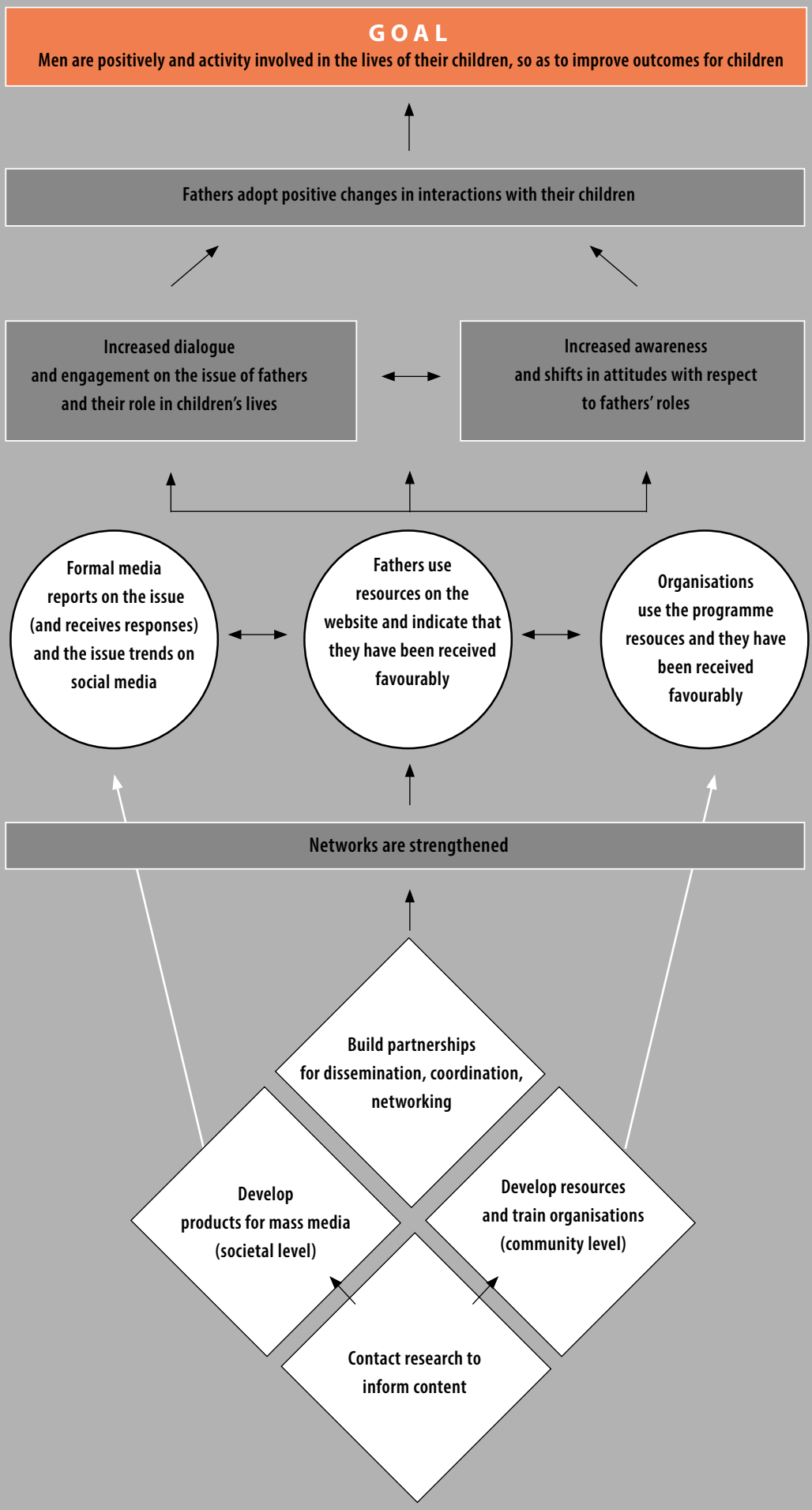
The key messages and the underpinning value for the intervention are presented below.

	KEY MESSAGES	Positive Presence	Responsibility	Empathy/ Healing
1.	A father's responsibility is more than just providing money.	✔	✔	
2.	Women should encourage fathers to play a positive role in their children's lives.	✔	✔	
3.	A father's involvement can act as a protective factor and promote wellbeing for children.	✔		✔
4.	Shared decision -making and good communication between parents is essential for the wellbeing of their children.		✔	
5.	Caring and carework for children can be learned by both men and women. Skills in parenting build confidence.	✔	✔	
6.	There are improved health and wellbeing outcomes when there is shared attachment in the first 1000 days but also throughout the child's life.	✔	✔	
7.	Social fathers can make a positive difference in the raising of children.	✔	✔	✔
8.	Supportive social networks such as the church can promote healing.			✔

Theory of Change

Based on the formative research, a theory of change has been developed for the project.

The theory of change is represented diagrammatically opposite.


GOAL
Men are positively and activity involved in the lives of their children, so as to improve outcomes for children
Fathers adopt positive changes in interactions with their children
Increased dialogue and engagement on the issue of fathers and their role in children's lives
Increased awareness and shifts in attitudes with respect to fathers' roles
Formal media reports on the issue (and receives responses) and the issue trends on social media
Fathers use resources on the website and indicate that they have been received favourably
Organisations use the programme resouces and they have been received favourably
Networks are strengthened
Build partnerships for dissemination, coordination, networking
Develop products for mass media (societal level)
Develop resources and train organisations (community level)
Contact research to inform content

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