

# PARENTING PRACTICES AND KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AMONG CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN UNDER TWO YEARS IN RURAL MOZAMBIQUE



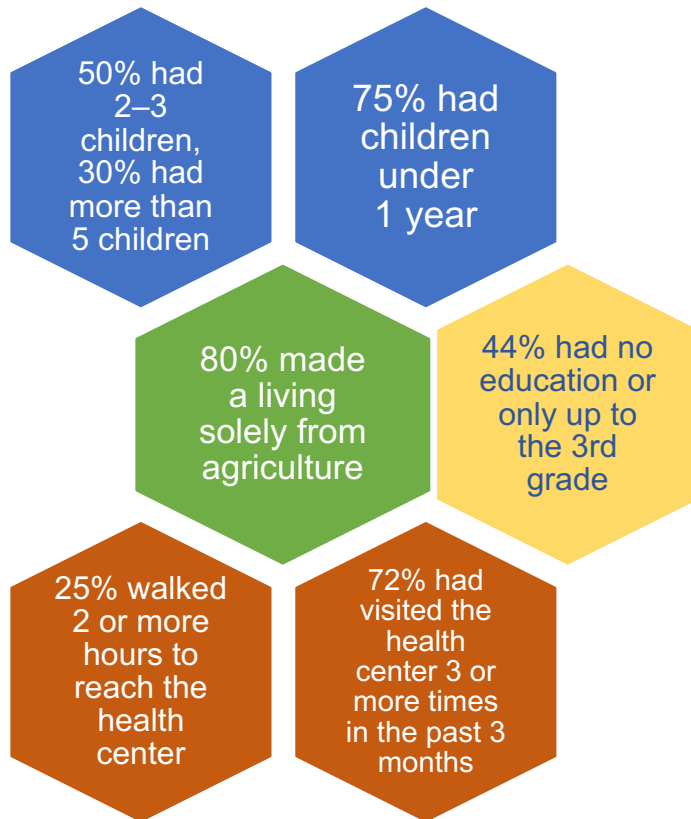
Insights from a human-centered assessment in Monapo District, Nampula Province, 2022–23



Sample: 32 caregivers (30 mothers and 2 fathers) who agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews while waiting for services in four health facilities (Carapira, Itoculo, Monapo Rio, and Monapo Sede) in October–November 2022.



## WHO ARE THE CAREGIVERS?



## WHAT ARE THEIR DAILY ROUTINES?

Daily routines rotate around household chores and caring for children, including:

- Working in the field or selling in the market.
- Fetching water.
- Cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the house.
- Feeding children.
- Bathing children.
- Taking a bath.

The remainder is social time and includes:

- Talking to neighbors or family.
- Watching videos (often at the neighbor's).
- Having dinner as a family.

Only seven caregivers (22%) mentioned playing with children as a component of their daily routine.

# TYPICAL DAILY ROUTINES

## **Abiba, 23 years, mother of a 4-year-old and a 1.5-year-old:**

“When I wake up, I go to the field. When I work, I let my 1.5-year-old daughter to sit on the ground and play on her own. When I come back, I prepare lunch and take a bath. I play with my daughter after lunch. Then I go to the church to practice songs. Afterwards, I go to the market to find something for dinner. I prepare dinner and then I rest.”



## **Fatima, 19 years, first-time mother of a 7-month-old baby:**

“When I wake up, I take a bath and go to fetch the water from the well. Then I wash the dishes and do laundry and prepare porridge for the child. I go and talk to my sister-in-law. Then I fetch some cassava leaves and prepare xima (porridge) for lunch. After lunch I go to fetch water again, and I take a bath while I am there. After I return, I bath my daughter, dress her, and give her something to eat. She takes a nap, and I sleep with her. After my husband returns, I prepare dinner. Then I go to the neighbor’s place with my friends to watch a video. After I return, I go to bed.”



## **Faizal, 40 years, father of 11-month-old twins:**

“I take a bath. I greet my children. If they are well, I go to work in the field. [If they are not well] I help the mother to take them to the hospital. When I return, I take a bath, have lunch, and talk to my children by telling them stories. Then I go for a walk, and when I return, I bring some food for dinner. After dinner, I watch TV with my children and then I go to bed.”



# IS THERE TIME FOR PLAY DURING TYPICAL DAILY ROUTINES?

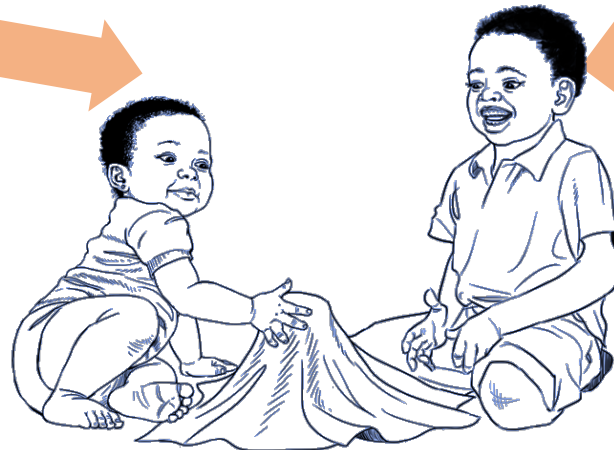
Almost 60% of caregivers mentioned leaving younger children on their own or to play with older children. They mentioned waiting for downtime to play with younger children.

*In all these moments, my daughter is playing with her siblings.*  
(Caregiver of a 7-month-old child)

*I play with my child after I am done with chores.*  
(Caregiver of a 10-month-old child)

*When I wash dishes, he plays alone with his toys.*  
(Caregiver of a 23-month-old child)

*I play with my child after lunch.*  
(Caregiver of an 18-month-old child)



# IS THERE TIME FOR PLAY DURING TYPICAL DAILY ROUTINES?

Nearly 40% of caregivers described using daily routines or chores to play and talk with young children.

*When I wash clothes, my son plays with the water that I use for washing.*

(Caregiver of a 12-month-old child)

*When I go to fetch water, I carry my child with me and I play with him while we wait in line.*

(Caregiver of a 6-month-old child)

*I play and talk with him while I am cooking or washing dishes.*

(Caregiver of a 6-month-old child)

*I play with him while I am selling at my [market] stall.*

(Caregiver of a 12-month-old child)



## HOW DO PARENTS PLAY WITH THEIR UNDER-TWO CHILDREN?

There is a lot of warmth and joy between parents and young children during playtime.

The main play activities that parents carried out with children under two years were:

- ✓ To call the child by name or by “papa” or “mama.”
- ✓ To bounce the child to make her/him laugh.



As children got older (18 months and above), caregivers often sent them on small errands as a form of play.

## HOW DO PARENTS PLAY WITH THEIR UNDER-TWO CHILDREN?

A few caregivers shared examples of questions they asked their children, to stimulate their thinking and language.

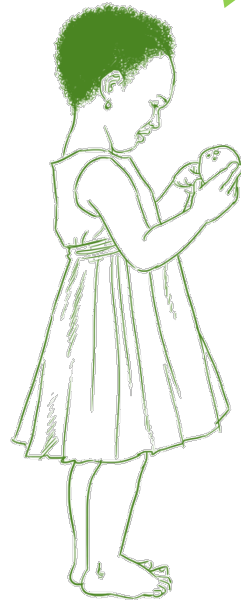
*"Do you want to play with your sister?"*  
(Caregiver of a 6-month-old child)

*"How are you feeling? Are you angry?"*  
(Caregiver of a 22-month-old child)

*"Where is your papa?"*  
(Caregiver of a 6-month-old child)

*"Do you like your papa?"*  
(Caregiver of a 6-month-old child)

*"Do you want to take a bath?"*  
(Caregiver of a 5-month-old child)



*"Are you sleeping?"*  
(Caregiver of a 22-month-old child)

Most questions simply required a YES/NO response, or could be answered with gestures.

# CAREGIVER PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

60% of caregivers felt that talking and playing with children is important because it helps children learn from their parents.

*"It is for her to learn to practice everything I teach."*

*"The child learns when we talk."*



50% of caregivers felt that play is important because it helps them notice whether the child is sick or healthy, or whether the child has a disability.

*"A sick child does not play."*

*"[When something is wrong] I see that the way she plays today is different from the way she played yesterday."*

One in five caregivers felt that play is important because it creates a bond between parent and child and helps with socializing the child.

*"... when you do not play with your child, she will be afraid of you..."*

*"... for him to learn to play like other children do..."*



## PRESENCE OF PLAYTHINGS AT HOME

All but two caregivers mentioned that a child has at least one plaything at home.

The most common playthings were:

- ✓ Shakers
- ✓ Dolls
- ✓ Cars
- ✓ Balls



Additionally, 30% of caregivers mentioned “unstructured” playthings such as bottle caps, plastic containers, pieces of wood, or cloth. A similar percentage of caregivers described showing pictures to children (for example, using books).

# KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT

## TALKING TO A CHILD THAT IS TOO YOUNG TO SPEAK

87% of caregivers thought that it made sense to talk to babies even if the babies were too young to speak because:

- *“Talking to them helps them to learn to hear and to talk.”*
- *“The child will become confident and close to the parents.”*
- *“The child will become accustomed to the presence of people.”*



However, 13% of caregivers believed that they should not talk to a child who was too young to speak because they felt that the child:

- Could not hear.
- Could not understand or respond.

*“It does not make sense to talk a small child, because he does not respond when you talk.”*

# KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT

## WHEN A CHILD STARTS TO SEE AND HEAR

Only 4% of parents knew that an unborn child can hear them and recognize their voices when in the womb.



However, 63% of caregivers knew that a child can see from birth.



# KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT

## FATHERS INVOLVEMENT WITH NEWBORNS

Most mothers agreed that fathers should be involved in taking care of newborns:

- It helps a child to get used to their father's presence and bond with him.
- It allows the mother to do other chores.
- It is the father's obligation.
- Fathers enjoy taking care of newborns.
- The involvement of fathers in caregiving facilitates the baby's development.



Only 16% of caregivers thought that the father should not touch a newborn:

- A father does not know how to hold such a small child.
- Other men (but not the father) should not touch the newborn.

## WHAT DO CAREGIVERS APPRECIATE ABOUT BEING PARENTS?

Most caregivers (over 80%) felt that being a good parent would ensure that their children would help them—now or in the future.

*It's good to be a mother. I like it because the children help with household tasks.*

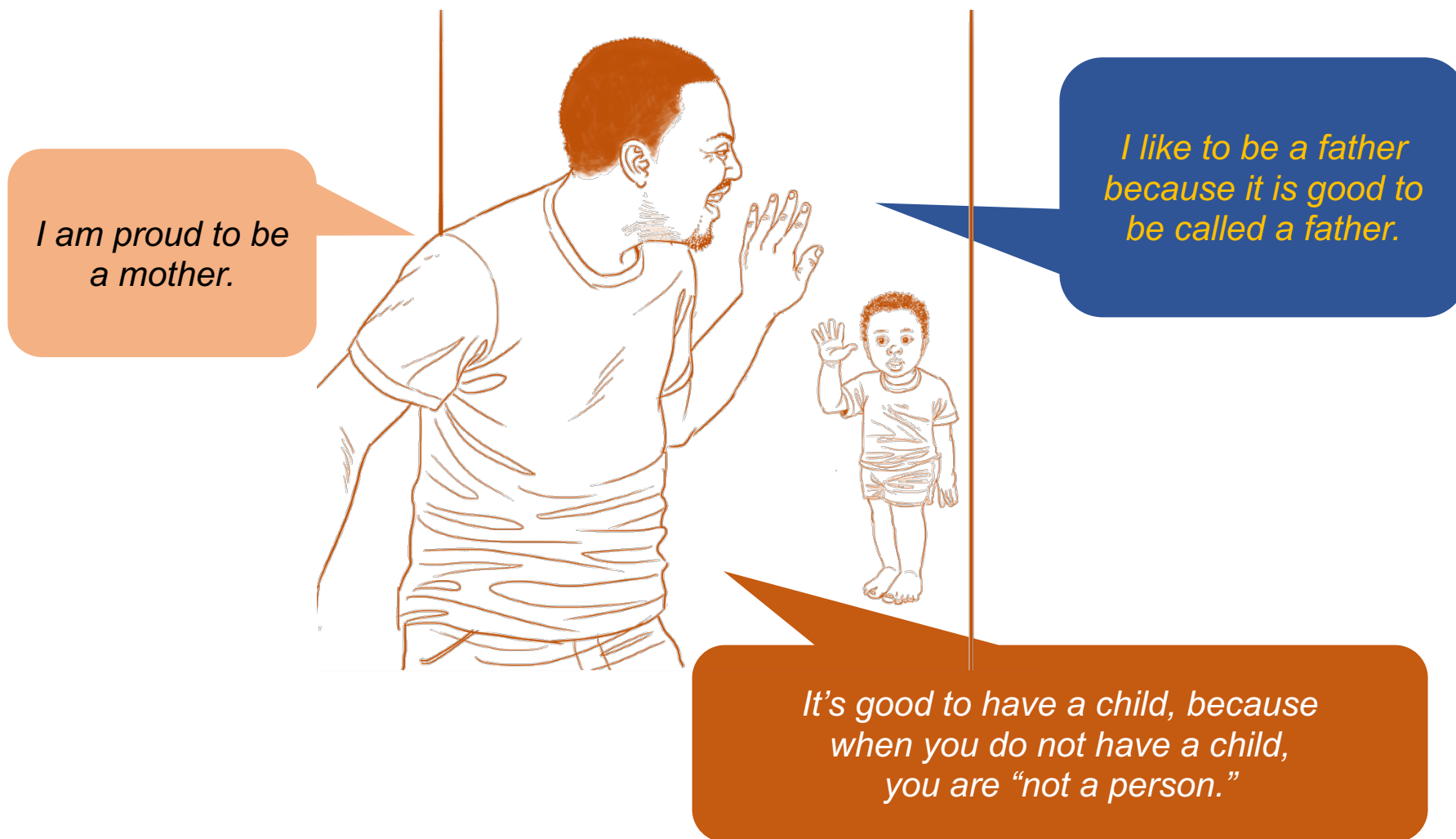


*I very much like to be a mother because I know that one day they will help me economically, and if I get sick, they will take me to the hospital.*

*I like to be a mother, because after my daughter grows up, I can send her to fetch water for me.*

## WHAT DO CAREGIVERS APPRECIATE ABOUT BEING PARENTS?

A quarter of caregivers felt pride in being called "mother" or "father."  
Some justified this sentiment by reinforcing the respected role of a parent in society.



## WHAT DO CAREGIVERS APPRECIATE ABOUT BEING PARENTS?

Finally, a small group of caregivers appreciated being parents because their children made them happy.



*I like to be a mother because the children often relieve me of sadness.*

*I like to be a mother most of all because I do not have my own mother, and so my children bring me joy.*

*I like to be a mother because when I play with him, I forget about sad things.*

## WHAT FRUSTRATES CAREGIVERS ABOUT BEING PARENTS?

30% of caregivers felt some frustration in their role as parents. The major cause of frustration was their perceived inability to nurture their children in an adequate manner due to high cost of living.



*A difficult life makes me dislike being a mother.*

*I do not see what to give to my child, because my husband abandoned me.*

*The cost of living is high, so I do not see what to give to my children to eat.*



## HOW ARE WE USING THESE INSIGHTS IN PROGRAMMING?



We have shared with caregivers examples of how they can feasibly integrate play into their daily routines.



We promote demonstration of age-appropriate play for caregivers of children—especially children over two years, who require more complex play activities.



During antenatal care, we counsel caregivers that the unborn child can hear *in utero* and explain the importance of talking to the baby before and after birth.



During antenatal care and in maternity wards, we counsel fathers to talk with and hold their babies.



During routine child health services, we promote counseling that addresses caregiver motivation to play with their children and caregiver perception of the importance of play.



We model rich conversations with children and suggest the types of questions that caregivers can ask children.



We ask providers to pay special attention to caregivers who seem to be struggling with parenting—for socioeconomic reasons or because they may be depressed.