



# A digital tool for social emotional development and mental health of young children

*Mazi Umntanakho* is a project born out of the Connecting the Ed-tech Research Ecosystem network (<https://ceres.uci.edu>), which has brought together a team of experts from the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of California in Irvine and Riverside, and Chapman University in California.

## WHY DID WE DO THIS PROJECT?

This project responds to the limited awareness about social emotional development and mental health of young children in vulnerable South African settings. And that children who have challenges in these areas often don't get the help they need. Through our early childhood development work in these settings, we realised there is a need to build capacity amongst caregivers and community-based workers to promote social emotional development and mental health of young children (3-5 years). Digital platforms leverage the potential to reach a range of vulnerable settings, and therefore help more children.

The aim the project was therefore to co-design and pilot a digital tool for community-based workers that could assess the social emotional development and mental health of young children in vulnerable South African settings. This tool would provide easy-to-understand feedback on assessment results and relevant resources for caregivers of young children. For this project, we opted to work in partnership with community-based organisations (CBOs) who are already working in early childhood development in vulnerable settings.

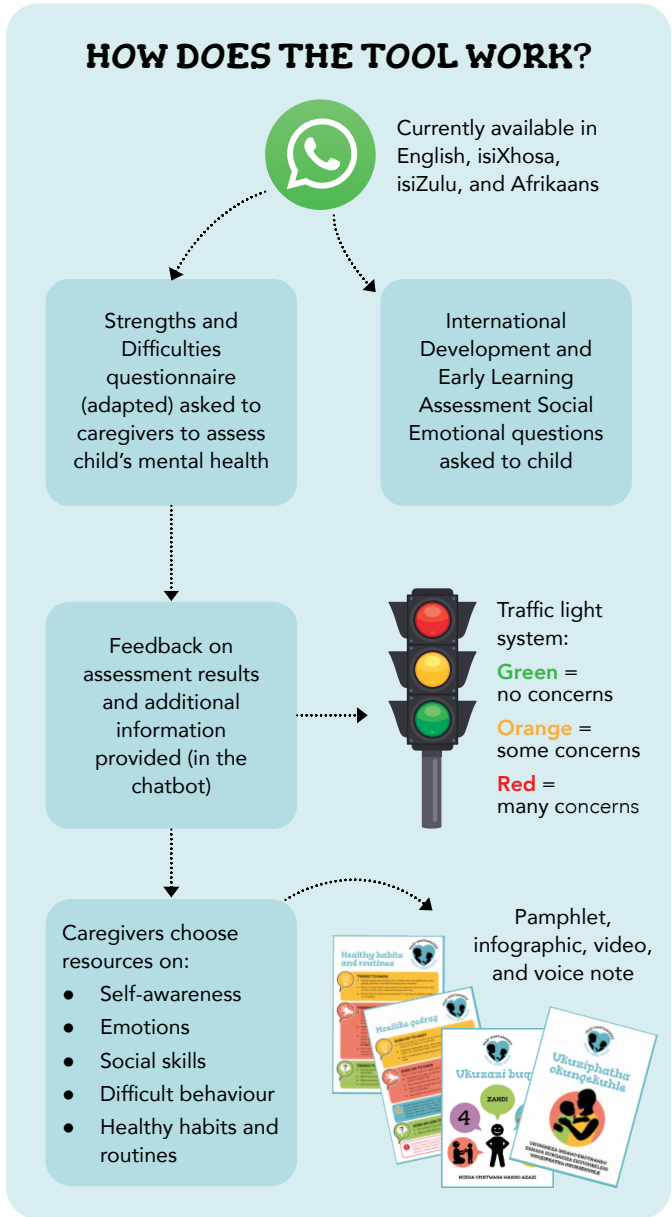
## CO-DESIGNING THE TOOL

- 1 Focus groups to understand CBO priorities and context
- 2 Development of tool prototype
- 3 Focus groups to obtain feedback on prototype
- 4 Finalising of tool for piloting
- 5 Training of CBO staff
- 6 Piloting of the tool
- 7 Pilot evaluation

# WHAT HAVE WE FOUND SO FAR?

- CBOs agreed that WhatsApp was the best digital platform for the tool given the resource challenges in their context.
- The tool should be available in their local languages.
- CBOs have affirmed that social emotional development and mental health of young children are important topics to address in their communities.
- The name 'Mazi Umntanakho' ('know your child') was given by one of the CBO staff who highlighted that caregivers needed to know their children.
- CBOs highlighted the stigmatisation of challenges in these developmental areas, as well as the lack of services for children with these challenges.

# HOW DOES THE TOOL WORK?



Pamphlets and infographics also available in Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga, with plans to make videos and voice notes available in these languages in early 2024. Look out for an invitation to hear about the findings of our pilot implementation of *Mazi Umntanakho* in early December 2023!

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