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Adding up to more

Statement for CCPCJ Thematic Discussion Session 3

Speaker: Judy-Ann Cilliers (Communications Manager & Researcher at MathMoms)

“When I hold a gun, I don’t feel so powerless. I feel like I am somebody.” These were the words of a 12-year-old boy in our programme.

MathMoms’ programmes are implemented at primary schools in under-resourced communities in Cape Town, South Africa. Learners in these schools have a 50% likelihood of being multi-dimensionally poor, a 64% likelihood of living in an income-poor household, and only a 47% likelihood of being employed. Opportunities are few and far between, and the crime rate is correspondingly high. In the Cape Flats communities we serve, where gangsterism is prevalent, almost all are victims of crime. Many children, like this boy, feel like nobodies for whom the gangs provide the only gateway to become somebodies.

What we do is to show a different way for every child to discover that they are indeed a somebody. Our efforts are supported by the Global Initiative’s Resilience Fund, which has not only enabled us to build some resilience against crime, but also connected us with an international community of civil society groups for learning opportunities and collaborations. We address many of the root causes of crime and violence and aim to empower women and youth to become agents of positive change, efforts the Kyoto Declaration recognises.

MathMoms provides training and employment to previously unemployed women, who then become mathematics tutors to foundation phase learners. Our classes become safe spaces where healthy and supportive intergenerational bonds can be formed, creating structures of belonging. We achieve this by:

- Providing holistic and trauma-informed training that includes practical skills, pedagogical and subject knowledge, and trauma and mental health support
- Using maths as a vehicle to nurture belonging and connection
- Enabling women to gain working experience – we see our programme as a steppingstone, and many participants have since enrolled in tertiary studies or found permanent employment
- Enabling learners to gain a higher quality education – they receive individual attention and a solid grounding in the fundamentals of mathematics and literacy (which is not a given in our schools). They learn through play, which helps them learn effectively and also builds the relationship with their MathMom

We speak of placing learners in ICU: *I see you* – they not only receive an education, but also recognition and a sense of agency and confidence in their abilities. Their chances of staying in school, finding a job, or furthering their education is improved, and they are recognised as Somebodies who can positively contribute to their communities and country.