A unique and scalable approach to transforming the lives of children and their families in rural areas of Africa.

ICS uses a unique, whole family approach to improve well-being of vulnerable children, youth and their parents in rural areas of Africa. At the core of our approach are economic strengthening, skilful parenting and social support. A sustainable increase in income together with special attention for parenting knowledge, skills and confidence brings major change in family functioning and child wellbeing. Our approach is characterized by a combination of public, private and non-profit efforts to achieve a scalable model for rural areas of Africa.

The backbone of our economic strengthening activities in East Africa are our social enterprises Agrics and Alizetics. Agrics sells quality agricultural inputs on credit to smallholder farmers, trains the smallholders on modern agronomic practices and offers additional services like traction for improved land preparation. Alizetics provides a transparent market for their produce. The combination of agronomic products and services and market linkage has a positive impact on smallholder farmers' yield and income.

ICS works with the same farmers on Skilful Parenting; a 12-week, group-based parenting programme designed for, and evaluated in, rural areas of Africa. The programme aims to increase parental competence, well-being and social support as well as children’s development and well-being. Under guidance of a local facilitator, trained and certified by ICS, parents and caregivers with children aged 0-18 come together on a weekly basis to gain knowledge and skills, reflect on their role and parenting style, and share their daily parenting experiences and dilemmas. Age-specific aspects are discussed throughout all modules, including a children’s development and needs during the early years. The group sessions are complemented with community awareness-raising events and serve as a basis for local government to work with parents on health, birth registration, education, etc.

**Skilful Parenting modules**

1. Family Relations
2. Roles and responsibilities of a Skilful parent (including stages of child development and milestones)
3. Self-esteem and self-care
4. Values and Discipline
5. Communication
6. Child Protection
7. Family Budgeting

Optional modules:
- Teenage & Parenting
- Fatherhood
Both the Skilful Parenting programme and the Agrics business model have been rigorously evaluated and have demonstrated strong evidence of improving outcomes for vulnerable parents and their children. An impact evaluation of Agrics shows that between 2013 and 2015, the average maize yields of Agrics clients in Western Kenya increased from 570 kg/acre to 1,022 kg/acre representing a 79% growth, driven by increasing use of certified seeds and fertilizer and knowledge and skills in crop production. An evaluation of the Skilful Parenting programme in Kenya by the University of Utrecht found that parents feel more competent and experience a more positive communication and relation with their spouse and children after participation in Skilful Parenting. In addition, parents report a reduction in harsh discipline and an increased use of positive discipline methods. The University of Utrecht concludes that the positive effects of Skilful Parenting can be understood by the way it is grounded in local culture and local definitions of parenting, its participatory approach and the focus on the parent as an agent of change.

A pilot cluster RCT process and outcome evaluation by the University of Oxford, and a local research institute is underway in Tanzania to evaluate the impact of Skilful Parenting combined with Agribusiness and Skilful Parenting and Agribusiness separately on reducing the risk of child maltreatment and improving child wellbeing, with a specific focus on ECD outcomes. Results will be ready by the end of 2016.

Over the past four years, we have worked to establish a viable model of sustainable agribusinesses and a context-specific parenting programme that come together at community level. Agrics has grown from a mere 1,000 smallholder clients to over 20,000 in 2015, with a total turnover of USD 1.3 million in Western Kenya and Northern Tanzania. In those same areas ICS has reached over 15,000 parents with Skilful Parenting and advocated with local and national authorities to include parenting support as an integral part of social services.

Our priority for the coming years is taking our whole family approach to scale in Africa while maintaining quality and operational excellence. We are going to scale up in collaboration with our local entities in Africa - ICS-SP, Agrics and Alzetics - aiming to reach 100,000 small-holder farming families by 2018 with the combined model of Skilful Parenting and agribusiness in East Africa. Building on the success of a pilot project in 2015 in which government social workers were trained and supported to deliver Skilful Parenting, we will further expand our collaboration with governments to include Skilful Parenting services as an integral part of social services. In addition, we will explore possibilities to move into other parts of (Anglophone) African countries by seeking new partnerships with social businesses and/or NGOs with an economic strengthening programme. Agrics is attracting financing from impact investors to accommodate this growth while ICS is working with both governments and donors to fund the scale-up of Skilful Parenting. In addition, we offer training and consultancy to organisations and social businesses around the world to incorporate Skilful Parenting in their programming. When looking at the horizon we envision part of Agrics’ profit to be used for Skilful Parenting implementation.

"One thing that has made me happy, in the past when my child makes a mistake, I would beat them with anger but after the training I was advised not to beat my children when I’m bitter (…) instead I should talk to the child which I see is working very well”. 60-Year-old mother

Our ambition: Realizing scale and operational excellence

Agricons & Skilful Parenting: A mutual beneficial partnership between Agrics and ICS

Skilful Parenting is a unique selling point for Agrics: “Farmers choose to work with Agrics, and not with its largest competitor One Acre Fund, because it comes with Skilful Parenting”.

Agrics facilitates mobilization of parents and caregivers for the Skilful Parenting programme, especially critical for participation of fathers, and mitigates poverty as a cause of stress and conflict among the target families.