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## **LGT Venture Philanthropy extends partnership with SmartStart to increase access to quality early learning in South Africa**

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LGT Venture Philanthropy (LGT VP) is excited to announce the renewal of its partnership with SmartStart, a South African non-profit dedicated to expanding access to quality early learning in low-income communities while creating employment opportunities for women. This renewed grant will see SmartStart to the end of its 2021-2026 strategy with a focus on supporting the organization in enhancing its systems for scale.

**Despite the proven benefits of Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs, one million children aged 3-5 in South Africa (SA) lack access.** While access to preschool is envisaged to be universal by 2030, implementation plans are still unclear, and the current ECD system faces challenges with infrastructure, regulations, and quality management. Founded in 2015, SmartStart addresses these gaps by partnering with franchisors, traditionally NGOs, to recruit and train women from disadvantaged backgrounds as franchisees, providing structured early learning in their communities. SmartStart also collaborates with the government and leads advocacy efforts to strengthen national ECD commitments.

### **A proven model with significant impact**

SmartStart has built one of Africa's largest ECD networks, with 12,000 franchisees reaching over 110,000 children. Since its launch, the organization has enrolled 266,000 children, with over 150,000 graduates. An independent evaluation found that 65% of SmartStart children are developmentally on track, surpassing the national average of 46%.

SmartStart's advocacy efforts have led to key policy wins, including the recognition of home and community-based care in the National ECD Strategy. The organization is now working to unlock government subsidies for home and community based Early Learning Programs through registration, which will enhance the financial viability of programs particularly in lowest-income communities. By 2026, SmartStart aims to grow its network to serve 250,000 children.

### **Alignment with LGT VP's education strategy**

LGT VP's education strategy focuses on addressing the learning poverty and employability crisis by supporting scalable solutions that provide access to quality early childhood development, basic education and skills development in underserved communities across Sub-Saharan Africa and India. SmartStart boosts children's school readiness while empowering women through training and micro-enterprise opportunities, helping them secure employment. Nava Anvari, Investment Director at LGT Venture Philanthropy, says: "We are proud of what SmartStart has achieved and their scale

over the years we have worked together. We are eager to witness the catalytic effect their systems change efforts could have in further expanding access to ECD in South Africa and beyond.”

Grace Matlhape, CEO of SmartStart notes: “SmartStart is looking to ensure that all children have an equal start in life to lay a strong foundation for learning and lifelong success. We appreciate organizations like LGT VP, which have demonstrated a significant understanding of the cost of inaction in ECD in our country by their renewed contribution towards our five-year investment strategy. Our focus for the next investment phase is to grow a solid and sustainable network supported by strong micro-enterprise development and infrastructure partnerships. We thank LGT VP for partnering with us to close the funding gap and to enable SmartStart to be the delivery platform that brings systems change for universal access to early learning.”

***SmartStart** is a non-profit delivery platform that recruits, trains and supports women to deliver a defined, quality daily routine for children in their communities, to expand access to Early Childhood Development in South Africa. For more information, please visit [www.smartstart.org](http://www.smartstart.org).*

***LGT Venture Philanthropy (LGT VP)** is an independent charitable foundation established in 2007 with teams in Switzerland, Sub-Saharan Africa, and India. The Foundation strives to improve the quality of life of people facing disadvantages, contribute to healthy ecosystems, and build resilient, inclusive, and prosperous communities. LGT VP focuses on strengthening the capabilities of locally rooted organizations that deliver effective, scalable solutions across health, education, and the environment, contributing directly to the SDGs. For more information, please visit [www.lgtvp.com](http://www.lgtvp.com).*

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