play to learn

Playful Foundations

Core elements that led to success in the Play to Learn project

play to learn

THE PLAY TO LEARN PROJECT

Play to Learn is an innovative humanitarian program from Sesame Workshop, BRAC, and the International Rescue Committee that harnesses the power of play to deliver critical early learning to children and caregivers affected by the Rohingya and Syrian refugee crises. Made possible with the support of the LEGO Foundation, Play to Learn reaches families in their homes, health centers, and play spaces—providing them with the tools needed to foster nurturing care and help children learn and thrive. Partnering with NYU's Global TIES for Children as an independent evaluator, we are measuring the program's impact on children's development and caregivers' mental health and well-being. By generating tested, scalable, and transportable approaches and educational content, Play to Learn is laying the foundation for transformational change—allowing us to reach generations of children affected by crisis, no matter where they are.

THIS RESOURCE

Report Development: This report was produced by Childhood Education International, with input and collaboration from the Play to Learn Consortium. The report is a comprehensive analysis of Play to Learn programming and programs, providing a conceptual framework for understanding the diverse portfolio of work undertaken by partners. The report shares experiences, challenges and insights, and key takeaways. The report was developed through close cooperation, information exchange, and mutual efforts between the consulting team and the Play to Learn Consortium.

Client Review: The report has been subject to two reviews: an initial draft review by Sesame Workshop, and a subsequent review of a revised draft by the Play to Learn Consortium. Feedback from both reviews has been incorporated to enhance the accuracy and relevance of the content. This iterative review process is an integral part of our commitment to delivering a report that aligns with Sesame Workshop's expectations.

External Sharing: This report is intended for external use by the Play to Learn Consortium (Sesame Workshop, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), BRAC, New York University (NYU) Global TIES for Children, and the funder, the LEGO Foundation) and is designed to be shared with the public. Its primary aim is to be a transparent and informative document for early childhood development in emergencies (ECDiE) practitioners that communicates the impact, progress, and key learnings from the Play to Learn project.

SESAME WORKSHOP   brac   INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE   NYU GlobalTIES for Children   Childhood Education International

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

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Contents

Introduction

Play to Learn is an innovative humanitarian project from Sesame Workshop, BRAC, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) that harnesses the power of play to deliver critical early learning to children and caregivers affected by the Rohingya and Syrian refugee crises. Made possible with the support of the LEGO Foundation, Play to Learn reaches families in their homes, health centers, and play spaces—providing them with the tools needed to foster nurturing care and help children learn and thrive. Partnering with New York University (NYU) Global TIES for Children as an independent evaluator, the project also measured the impact of specific programs on children's development and caregivers' mental health and well-being. By generating tested, scalable, and transportable approaches and educational content, Play to Learn is laying the foundation for transformational change—allowing us to reach generations of children affected by crisis, no matter where they are.

As of 2023, the Play to Learn project has reached over 2.5 million children, caregivers, and professionals through a diverse set of over 30 early childhood development (ECD) programs that were customized and tailored for young children on the move and their families in Lebanon, Jordan, Bangladesh, and beyond. Play-based programs varied in audience (young children, caregivers, or a whole family approach), intensity and frequency (from on-demand content accessed for a few minutes a week to multi-year programs), use of technology, and sector (child protection, education, health, and mental health and psychosocial support).

The Play to Learn Consortium commissioned this report in order to identify the foundational principles and building blocks of play-based ECD programming that enabled implementing partners to design and deliver models to support children and families affected by conflicts and crises. These principles and building blocks were derived from a structured analysis of research, program materials, reports, and data, accompanied by interviews with partner staff to elevate the evidence and learning drawn from experience. This report complements the rigorous research projects completed by NYU Global TIES for Children.

What's Unique About ECD Programs for Families Affected by Conflict or Crisis

The Play to Learn project designed, implemented, and tested contextually-relevant early childhood programs to respond to complex challenges in multiple countries. Partners reached children and families in refugee camps and host communities in Bangladesh, Jordan, and Lebanon, in addition to refugee camps in Kenya, cities hosting displaced children and their families in Ukraine, and families with young children affected by violence in Colombia. The humanitarian, political, environmental, and social contexts in each of the three core countries influenced the way in which Play to Learn partners worked.

Based on the experiences of the Play to Learn project, there are three unique considerations when designing or delivering ECD programs in places affected by conflict or crisis or for children and families on the move.

Children and families who have been displaced live at the intersection of multiple political, social, and cultural systems. In places like Bangladesh, government authorities for the large refugee camps in Cox's Bazar and the humanitarian system work in coordination with the local Bangladeshi government and the robust network of civil society organizations that provide social services. Rohingya families aim to preserve their own cultural heritage and language while also raising their children to know and understand the Burmese culture and language they may need to live and work within. When Play to Learn designed program content, curriculum, and implementation strategies, the contextual analysis had to correctly identify and understand the interactions of these systems. We also had to design services that could serve children or caregivers in multi-lingual or multi-cultural environments.

Holistic ECD services need cross-sectoral integration, yet most of our humanitarian and host government systems are based on single sector service delivery. Holistic ECD services that reflect the Nurturing Care Framework require collaboration between multiple sectors, including education, nutrition, health, mental health and psychosocial support, and social protection. Play to Learn implementing partners piloted and prototyped several program models that integrated health, nutrition, or mental health and psychosocial support into early learning programs as well as programs that leveraged modular, play-based early learning or ECD content within primary health or mental health and psychosocial support programs. Our sector integration models were successful because: (1) partners had the technical and operational capacity to pilot and prototype over the course of one to two years, delivering services while also continuing to adjust components for increased engagement and impact; (2) implementing partners participated actively or led local coordination groups; and (3) the length of the Play to Learn grant allowed partners to build cross-sectoral partnerships with health, nutrition, protection, and mental health and psychosocial support service providers within host governments and the humanitarian system.

Communities that host displaced children and families remain vulnerable too. Play to Learn primarily worked in countries that are hosting large numbers of people displaced from the Syrian, Rohingya, and Venezuelan crises: Bangladesh, Jordan, Lebanon, and Colombia. The families that we served live in diverse contexts, from refugee camps in Cox's Bazar to rural and urban host communities in Lebanon, Jordan, and Colombia. During the length of the project, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut explosions, the Lebanese economic crisis, the Israeli attacks, and regular cyclones, floods, and fires in the Cox's Bazar District in Bangladesh, affected clients as well as staff. Play to Learn partners designed and delivered play-based ECD services that could be resilient to these types of shocks and stresses as well as meet the needs of the youngest children, whether they were displaced or members of host communities. Partners focused on preparedness, modular content, flexible delivery approaches, and strategic partnerships in order to rapidly adapt and maintain continuity of services.
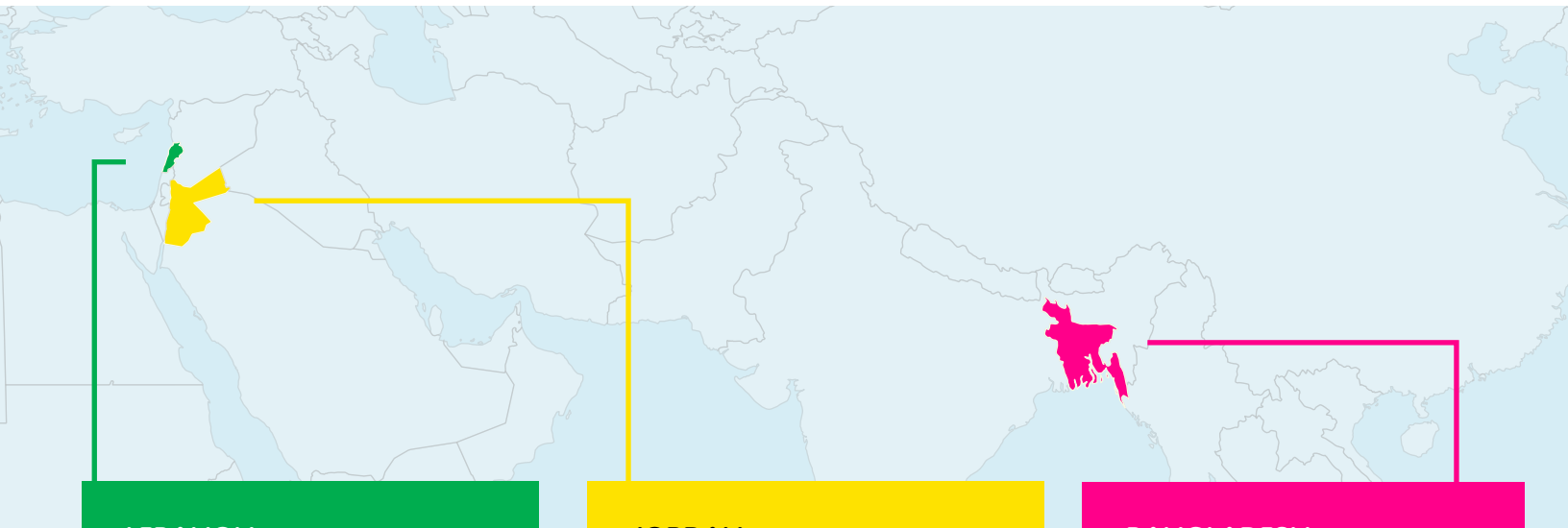
LEBANON

Lebanon hosts more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees, most of whom live in camps in the Bekaa region and face extreme poverty. The country has faced a series of worsening crises, including the 2020 Beirut explosion, an ongoing serious socioeconomic crisis, and most recently, Israeli airstrikes in the south and the Bekaa region, impacting both refugees and host communities.

JORDAN

Approximately 730,000 refugees reside in Jordan, primarily Syrians displaced by the war that started in 2012, along with others from neighboring countries like Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, and Somalia. While some refugees inhabit the main camps of Azraq and Zaatari, the majority live within urban areas among the host communities. The persistent challenges faced by Jordan's refugee populations include constrained economic and educational opportunities, a situation that has endured for over a decade of displacement.

BANGLADESH

After fleeing Myanmar in 2017, almost a million Rohingya live in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, and about half of them are children. The camps are crowded, with limited space for services and increased risks of fire and exposure to hazards, in a flood-prone area of the country where host communities are also vulnerable. Regulations allow for only temporary shelters, and the Rohingya population depends on humanitarian aid for all essential services. Camps have no internet or data connectivity. The Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner approves all programming.

The House that Play to Learn Built

Analysis of Play to Learn programming, including interviews with partner staff and a review of research, program materials, reports, and data, revealed four foundational principles and four building blocks that played a pivotal role in programmatic success in Bangladesh, Jordan, Lebanon, and beyond. They enabled positive child and adult outcomes, as well as program scaling, innovation, and learning.

Foundational Principles are a set of core approaches that underpin and guide the design and implementation of Play to Learn programs. They were found across all programs and throughout the program cycle from assessment to research. These are:

- Working across sectors
- Centering the community
- Valuing play-based learning
- Being flexible, adaptable, and iterative

Building Blocks are fundamental elements in the design and implementation of Play to Learn programs. They are key ingredients that enhanced the potential for effectiveness and impact. Building blocks were used across multiple programs as appropriate for the population and context. These are:

- Adopting a multi-generational approach
- Integrating psychosocial well-being
- Leveraging media and technology
- Scaling through multiple pathways

Put another way, the foundational principles are like the foundation of a house, providing support, while the building blocks are the structural elements that can be applied and combined in different ways to create different types of houses. In this analogy, while each house, or ECD program, is unique, the foundational principles and building blocks represent common elements of success. While foundational principles and building blocks play different roles and will be described separately in this report, in practice they were interconnected and interwoven within the various Play to Learn programs.

FIGURE 1. PLAY TO LEARN'S CORE ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

Play to Learn Foundational Principles

It is widely recognized that a child's environment significantly influences their development. Children need support across a range of areas to help them grow and thrive or their development can be adversely affected. The Nurturing Care Framework emphasizes the importance of multi-sectoral support for young children through its five components.[1] Internationally, responsibility for ECD is embedded across the multi-sectoral Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and at the national level effective services typically span and engage actors from ministries of health, education, and social protection, at a minimum. Support for children in humanitarian contexts, however, is often siloed and can lack coordination, particularly for the youngest children.[2] Play to Learn addressed this challenge by implementing multi-sector programs and promoting coordination both internally and externally.

FIGURE 2. THE NURTURING CARE FRAMEWORK[1]

PLAY TO LEARN'S EXPERIENCE

Play to Learn combined multiple components of the Nurturing Care Framework within single programs to address the interdependent needs of children and their caregivers: For example, in Bangladesh, the IRC program Gindegi Goron integrated health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, well-being, and early learning, and provided support to children, their parents, and their grandparents in host and refugee communities. Also in Bangladesh, BRAC embedded para-counselors in Humanitarian Play Labs, enabling an additional focus on psychosocial well-being in an early learning environment. Humanitarian Play Labs were implemented under the child protection sector and linked to nutrition and health services, ensuring young children benefitted from all components in the Nurturing Care Framework. Finally, Sesame Workshop partnered with a range of organizations to use the Watch, Play, Learn: Early Learning Videos in child protection programs (Bangladesh), psychosocial support programs (Colombia), and education programs (Kenya), demonstrating the successful integration of early learning media content into other services.

Play to Learn embedded ECD content or program components within government services: Where relevant, Play to Learn programs were designed or delivered in partnership with government services that benefitted host and displaced families. In the IRC's ECD integration into health centers in Jordan, Ministry of Health nurses and midwives were trained to provide ECD tips and advice during medical consultations to enhance children's social-emotional development and early learning. Partnering with the Ministry of Health enabled integration and improved sustainability and potential for scale.

In Bangladesh, BRAC is offering specialized trainings and consultations with government officials to integrate play-based ECD and social-emotional learning into the national education system. BRAC also partnered with the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and the Directorate of Primary Education to offer specialized training on ECD and play-based learning to more than 2,000 government education officials across the country. Looking forward, BRAC plans to continue serving as a trusted government partner on priorities such as developing guidelines for contextualized outdoor play activities, facilitating trainings on play-based ECD for head teachers, and enhancing parent and community engagement in government primary schools.

Play to Learn initiated or (co-)led humanitarian coordination groups at the camp or settlement levels: In both Bangladesh and the Middle East, Play to Learn's leadership and participation in coordination groups resulted in outcomes including facilitation of agreements on the remuneration of Rohingya and Syrian staff and validation of localized multi-sector ECD standards for the Rohingya camps.

LESSONS LEARNED

Staff awareness of multi-sector benefits: Investing in staff knowledge about ECD across sectors such as health and education can increase opportunities for multi-sector programming.[3] In Play to Learn programs, staff reported improved collaboration and perceptions of greater potential for impact when we created opportunities for sharing needs or coordinating internally and externally around ECD programs across sectors.

Additional components can be hard to fit into existing schedules: The IRC ECD integration into health centers was a promising opportunity to integrate early learning information into primary health clinics. However, an implementation study[4] by NYU Global TIES for Children found that though midwives and caregivers found value in the information, it was difficult for them to find time to deliver them in an already packed consultation.

INSIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

Play to Learn's approach to working across sectors unlocked new pathways and provided opportunities to strengthen service provision for young children in crises.

Planning to work across sectors: Integrated programs were implemented by partners who were able to operate in multiple sectors: education, nutrition, health, or child protection. It is important to consider possible synergies across sectors during the program design phase and consider implications for implementation. To learn more, visit Play to Learn's Best Practices in ECD Coordination from Crisis Contexts website.

Closing ECD knowledge and collaboration gaps: Gaps in ECD knowledge and collaboration are common. Closing these gaps both within agencies and between sectors could contribute to more integration among programs.

Local coordination groups: When staff from different stakeholders are active participants in coordination groups, coordination can increase enabling factors for ECD programming like favorable working conditions for staff, sector-wide standards, and increasing collective advocacy opportunities. To learn more, visit the Play to Learn ECDiE coordination resource page. Play to Learn partners were active in ECD working groups in several countries.

Donor support for collaboration: Donors can support humanitarian agencies to invest more staff time in coordination and provide multi-sector funding opportunities to drive collaboration.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE 2:
Centering the Community

Research indicates that community engagement in ECD programming helps ensure ownership and sustainability, reduces risks, provides a deeper understanding of contexts, and produces more culturally relevant and useful support.[5] Engaging communities not only builds trust, but also shifts power, allowing communities to participate in decisions that directly impact their lives. Play to Learn partners have actively engaged communities in every phase of the program cycle from design to evaluation to advocacy. Communities have been co-decision-makers for curricula, implementation modality, data collection, and advocating for change to decision-makers. To learn more, visit the Play to Learn resource page on Community Engagement and Co-creation.

> "When you reach the community, ask about their needs and strengths, you (will) find that they have a lot of solutions."
>
> – BRAC

PLAY TO LEARN'S EXPERIENCE

Soliciting community input feedback as part of its initial assessments: This helped the Play to Learn project identify novel solutions, program content, and ideas. For example, the IRC discovered an unexpected need in Iraq for greater information on children's sexual development through early parent group assessments, so they included relevant content in the Iraq curriculum. Assessments in Bangladesh and the Middle East enabled Play to Learn partners to better understand Rohingya and Syrian displaced populations' access and use of phones and other digital devices. In Bangladesh, these assessments indicated that each family had only one phone, and it often remained with the father who left the house for work, which helped BRAC and IRC Bangladesh identify the best times of day to deliver their phone-based programs. In order to create the *Watch, Play, Learn* videos, Sesame Workshop researched what play looks like around the world and also extensively tested[6] draft animations with children and parents in nine countries. This formative testing included respondents from displaced and host communities and assessed what topics, themes, messages, and visuals were globally appealing and relevant to bring learning to life through the eyes of a child. Finally, communities were directly involved in interpreting research results through workshops held prior to finalizing research reports in Colombia, Bangladesh, Lebanon, and Jordan.

Foster community leadership: Offering opportunities for community members to take leadership roles like group facilitation led to greater participation. BRAC's Mother-Child Dyad Model for children ages 0-3 included mother peer-to-peer groups initially supported by BRAC para-counselors. Over time, the para-counselors encouraged mothers in the group to take over and lead the sessions as mother volunteers, which created a strong sense of ownership. Each mother group could also determine where, when, and how long they would meet. This meant that mothers were more likely to participate actively and continue meeting once the official program ended, promoting sustainability. Play leaders, the people responsible for managing Humanitarian Play Labs and facilitating and preparing activities, were also members of the community.

Co-create culturally relevant stories, topics, toys, trainings, and characters:
Many Play to Learn programs created characters, stories, toys, and other content that mirrored the cultures, languages, and interests of the children and families we aimed to reach. In both the Middle East and Bangladesh, Sesame Workshop developed new Muppet characters that represent lived experiences of children who have been displaced and children who are welcoming new neighbors into their communities.[7] In Bangladesh, BRAC involved community members in every aspect of program design. BRAC and community members identified content for curriculum, like traditional rhymes and games called kabbiyas and kissas, designed and decorated the spaces with familiar materials and culturally relevant art motifs. They also collaborated to understand the emotional literacy of community members and wove that into the program approach and conducted workshops with mothers and community members to co-design the spaces and play materials used as part of their home-based programs. The IRC launched a series of booklets providing information about common disabilities in the Middle East, based on demand from service providers in the region. In Bangladesh, the IRC worked with caregivers to provide contextually and culturally appropriate toy making training and guidance so that they could make low- or no-cost toys with materials they had in their houses.

LESSONS LEARNED

Plan ahead for assessments: Play to Learn partners invested considerable time on assessments, recognizing the importance of gaining deep cultural insights and building more authentic community partnerships. Play to Learn partners benefitted from having adequate time in the project to conduct these assessments, and this required adequate time being allotted during planning.

Prioritizing flexibility was beneficial for families, challenging for evaluators: In some programs, parents were given flexibility about how and when to engage with the program. For example, mothers' groups could meet at a time of their choosing or parents could watch *Watch, Play, Learn* videos at their convenience. Offering this type of flexibility drove engagement with Play to Learn programs, yet it required creativity and innovation to measure and evaluate the relationship between dose and impact.

Power imbalances between international non-governmental organization (INGO) staff and communities: Play to Learn partners acknowledged that power imbalances were sometimes present across the many program models and countries, and they expressed a desire to reduce them. Play to Learn partner staff shared that genuine collaborative partnerships demand "humility and equal power," which require intentional planning and support to be successful.

INSIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

Play to Learn partners found that communities offered answers they would not have otherwise found in designing and implementing programs and that the time spent collaborating was a good investment.

Community ownership for continuity and sustainability: Community ownership not only ensured greater program continuity during COVID-19 disruptions but also set the stage for sustained programs, shifting decision-making power towards local actors.

Community engagement streamlining implementation: Community engagement improved Play to Learn's implementation speed by helping to facilitate community leadership approvals for work and ensuring smooth participant recruitment for programs.

Early and continuous community collaboration for effectiveness: Working directly with the community early and often brings unexpected solutions or uncovers unaddressed problems that, with acceptance and flexibility, can make programs more effective. As a BRAC colleague noted, "[t]he community has the solutions."

Engaging community members in monitoring, evaluation, and advocacy: Extending community involvement beyond implementation to monitoring, evaluation, research, and advocacy is vital. Participatory research methods were used both in program design by BRAC and the IRC, and in evaluation work done by NYU Global TIES for Children.

Foundational Principle 3: Valuing Play-Based Learning

Play is natural and a fundamental way young children explore the world, try new things, and learn. It is meaningful, joyful, engaging, iterative, and socially interactive.[8] Learning through play is when children learn content informally through free or self-directed play, or more formally through guided play (with a teacher) or a structured game. Research indicates that in humanitarian contexts, play can buffer against stress and trauma,[9] and relationships and stability emerging from play can alleviate anxiety and promote psychosocial well-being.[10] Play to Learn partners have encouraged play-based learning across every project program and found it created unique opportunities to address cultural differences and build children's resilience.

Cultural adaptations to create meaning: Play to Learn prioritized research into understanding cultural perceptions of play and put effort into adapting play experiences to cultural nuances. NYU Global TIES for Children's research exploring play from the Rohingya cultural perspective—the first of its kind in that context—found that children enjoy learning and playing through song and rhyme, they self-organize their play in multi-age groups, and their play is both formal and informal.[11] These insights, highlighted in the box on "Perspectives on Play" on page 8, illuminate culturally-specific characteristics of play and the need for activities, curricula, environments, and staff training that reflect these characteristics. Another example is Sesame Workshop's significant work in designing six new Muppets for two contexts through the Play to Learn project. BRAC's approach to contextualizing the Humanitarian Play Lab, Mother-Child Dyad, and Fathers' Engagement Model curricula incorporated traditional play and rhymes to preserve cultural identity, build resilience, and foster healing.

NEW MUPPETS FOR PLAY TO LEARN

In developing new Muppets, Sesame Workshop thoughtfully designed them with community input. Each Muppet has their own personality and backstory, and they represent the lived experiences of children in the Rohingya and Syrian refugee camps, including examples of play. For example, Noor and Aziz, six-year-old twins, live in the Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh. In the Middle East, Basma, Jad, Ma'zooza and Ameera are the four main characters of Sesame Workshop's *Ahlan Simsim* television show.

Play to address different needs: Play to Learn found that embracing learning through play improved program uptake for all children, including those traditionally marginalized, such as those with disabilities. Using play as part of the teaching process created more natural opportunities for children to engage at their own ability level and, in the case of the Rohingya where multi-age play groups are natural, allowed for learning between older and younger children. All partners invested significant time and effort in training staff at all levels on disability inclusion to ensure that opportunities to address this major need in their context were being addressed, both in play spaces and by managers. Visit the disability inclusion resource collection to download and use training or programming materials from Play to Learn in Bangladesh and the Middle East.

An environment that enables play: One component of play-based learning is physical materials and space. Play to Learn partners across contexts, including BRAC and the IRC, actively engaged mothers and families in making culturally relevant toys using local materials, a shift that proved cost-effective and sustainable. NYU Global TIES for Children's research in Rohingya camps found that the close proximity of facilitators and children to Humanitarian Play Labs enabled a continuity of learning through play outside of scheduled Humanitarian Play Lab sessions.[12] The environment in these cases supported children in their play. Play to Learn offers design prompts and examples for how to co-create play materials and design playful ECD spaces.

LESSONS LEARNED

Adaptations of play require resources: Play to Learn programs took time at the beginning of the project to work with communities to understand play in each local cultural context. This investment of time and effort allowed Play to Learn partners to build libraries of activities, materials, and training that could be adapted and repurposed if there were acute emergencies within the same country. In Bangladesh, partners co-created a large library of print content, including storybooks that preserved stories from Rohingya culture. Visit the Content Use Partnership program page to see an example of how this content was used throughout multiple program models within and outside of Play to Learn. Some content, like the *Watch, Play, Learn* videos, were created to be universally appealing and culturally rich. Formative research from multiple countries indicated that while play is contextually unique, some toys and games appeared in many countries.

In some contexts, safe spaces for play may be limited or children and adults may have different perspectives on safety. Many children participating in Play to Learn programs did not have parks or playgrounds available. Caregivers living in Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar shared their concerns about whether children could play safely or without close supervision.[13] As part of multiple programs in Rohingya camps, families receive ECD home kits to ensure children and their caregivers could play at home. Visit the Play at Home program to see an example of the resources provided to Rohingya families.

INSIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

Play-based learning is a foundation of the Play to Learn project, and it has unlocked new ways of relating to children and adults affected by conflict or crisis.

Cultural adaptation of play-based learning: Adapting play-based learning to local contexts and cultures by engaging communities is essential to ensure that programs are accessible, appealing, and have meaning for participating children and adults.

Flexibility of play-based learning for inclusion: Settings designed for play-based learning need to provide flexibility to include all children. This is especially important for children with disabilities who may need additional supports or adaptations to participate.

Environmental considerations in play opportunities: Considering children's and adult's relationships to the environment and materials is important when planning opportunities for play—and these are likely to vary by community.

Investment in contextual research for play-based learning: Donors should allocate additional time and funds for contextual

Foundational Principle 4:
Being Flexible, Adaptable, and Iterative

Worldwide, 69 percent of displaced families live in a neighboring country,[14] and countries hosting families who are displaced can be vulnerable to crises caused by things like weather patterns, climate change, economic downturns, or violence. Sometimes these crises are cyclical, like monsoons in Bangladesh, and sometimes they are unexpected, like the 2020 explosion in Lebanon. ECD programs need to adapt to be able to provide consistent access to quality services. Research has shown correlations between organizational flexibility and improved humanitarian effectiveness.[15] Programs and financial resources that are flexible, adaptable, and iterative can quickly be adjusted and re-directed in response to changes in the context. Play to Learn found, based on staff feedback, that this approach enabled higher quality services rooted in communities, even if it took longer to scale to more people.

> ## "Be in love with the problem, not the solution."
> – IRC staff

PLAY TO LEARN'S EXPERIENCE

Donor flexibility and adaptability: Play to Learn had a flexible and adaptable donor in the LEGO Foundation that allowed implementing partners to make rapid changes to their programs and deliverables as conditions in different countries evolved. For example, with the onset of COVID-19, programs, monitoring and data collection, research questions, and timelines all had to change. The six-year grant term provided sufficient time to support flexibility and adaptation of programming in response to shocks and changes such as COVID-19 or to develop and pilot new content such as Watch, Play, Learn and many of the programs delivered under Play to Learn.

Human-centered design: Human-centered design, both an approach and a mindset, tackles complex problems by placing children, families, and "users" of a solution, good, or service at the center.[16] Human-centered design starts with an assessment and understanding of the problem with those persons affected. This generates an initial design which is subsequently tested and re-designed. The process can continue with different versions of the design multiple times. For example, the IRC's Gindegi Goron program tested a pilot version and three prototype versions of the program in the Rohingya refugee camps with continuous input from communities. Through the process, the IRC learned that success revolved around three lessons: taking the time to gather participant feedback; thinking creatively to explore and test new solutions; and having system and operational flexibility to easily incorporate changes and make improvements.[17] The IRC also used human-centered design for their Remote Early Learning Program, a short summer program for children without access to pre-primary education.

Data as a tool for iteration: Throughout implementation, Play to Learn partners collected data on their programs, and in some cases were able to make adaptations to their programming based on the data. For example, after launching their Pashe Achhi phone-based program, BRAC collected data to understand how well the initial approach was working. They then adjusted the call approach and scripts based on the feedback from communities. This was part of an ongoing commitment to use data throughout the project cycle. As part of Gindegi Goron, the IRC initially only sent automated calls once per week. Based on the recommendation of community members, they updated the schedule to call participants up to three times in a week, if they had not yet been reached.

LESSONS LEARNED

Design expertise and trust building: Human-centered design requires a team who works to build trust with the community while taking steps to co-design, prototype, test, and re-design with them. The approach also requires experienced designers who are familiar with humanitarian contexts. Both factors need to be carefully considered in planning for co-design.

Summarizing diverse data points: Play to Learn partners implemented diverse strategies for testing and designing programs, along with distinct monitoring and evaluation systems. This diversity presented challenges in aggregating data for grant reporting without losing important details across the extensive and varied program portfolio. Moreover, the imperative to develop new tools and approaches for measuring and evaluating play-based practices in tandem with program delivery added an extra layer of complexity to summarizing the overall impact.

Iteration versus reach: Testing new program approaches can come with both successful and unsuccessful prototypes that will impact its reach. While flexibility around different pathways for program design and scale-up is required when working in humanitarian contexts, clear goals can help to ensure that iteration is used wisely.

INSIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

Play to Learn partners appreciated the opportunities for flexibility, adaptation, and change in response to contextual conditions and the preferences and desires of children and families.

Cultural relevance: Human-centered design and other processes resulted in more culturally relevant services and promoted community ownership and sustainability.

Human-centered design requires planning and expertise to execute: It is important to consider the impacts that investing in cycles of design and prototyping will have on reach, budget, and staff time versus other approaches to program improvement, such as continuous iteration and adaptation.

Organizational-level intentionality for flexibility: Flexibility and iteration extend beyond the technical aspects of program design. Being intentional at all organizational levels—from management to field staff—about the appetite for flexibility will enable greater success and reduce friction associated with introducing new ways of working.

Donor support for flexibility: Donors should be willing to offer longer, more flexible grants in terms of consortia structure and success metrics. Donors should also allow grantees to propose justified changes to programming in response to changes in the operating environment or needs.

Play to Learn Building Blocks

Building Block 1:
Adopting a Multi-Generational Approach

Evidence suggests that the education level, interest, and responsive engagement of a child's main caregivers (parent, grandparent, or other) impact a child's outcomes, relationships, and well-being both in the short-term and long-term.[18] Yet, adults who have left behind their homes, belongings, support networks, and employment because of displacement may be severely impacted and unable to care for their children as they did before.[19] A multi-generational approach means the inclusion of multiple family or community generations (i.e., child, parent, aunt/uncle, grandparent) in the same ECD program for the benefit of all generations. Play to Learn learned that multi-generational approaches, especially gender-sensitive and gender-specific approaches such as involving fathers and grandparents in humanitarian contexts, hold promise for improving children's outcomes.

PLAY TO LEARN'S EXPERIENCE

The family as a unit: Through program testing, some partners learned that programming addressing families, considering their distinct roles, might be more effective than focusing on only one member. For example, the IRC's Gindegi Goron program, initially designed for children and mothers, evolved during piloting and prototyping. Mothers in the program requested the involvement of fathers and their in-laws, recognizing the need for family-level decisions in certain activities. In the Middle East, the IRC's Ahlan Simsim Families program focused on primary caregivers, ensuring they had the knowledge and confidence to parent their young children. Finally, a pilot in Colombia expanded the existing Semillas de Apego program for mothers by introducing videos to provide more direct support for children, reinforcing the program's family-centric focus.

Fathers' Engagement Model: In programs specifically targeting fathers, engagement was positive, and participation was active. When developing their Fathers' Engagement Model, BRAC focused on skills to enhance the emotional literacy of fathers and provided a gender-specific space for peer support. NYU Global TIES for Children found, through an impact evaluation of this model, that the program had positive effects on several family dynamics known to improve child outcomes, including fathers' engagement with their wives, parenting practices including reduction in harsh discipline and increased responsive, nurturing care (like reading, counting, or singing to their children), and fathers' beliefs about play and the importance of their role in nurturing parenting. In interviews with fathers and mothers, both said that the program helped fathers to manage their anger and be less violent in the home. The IRC in Bangladesh also reached out to fathers, providing them tailored information through automated phone calls and messages about their role as a parent, caregiver mental health, and positive parenting.

Community as children's caretakers: In the Rohingya context, NYU Global TIES for Children's research highlighted that the responsibility for children's care and socialization extends beyond parents and immediate family members.[20] This emphasized the importance of designing ECD programs to include individuals beyond a child's biological parents. NYU Global TIES for Children suggests future ECD research should focus on the role of in-laws/grandparents and the immediate community of a child.

LESSONS LEARNED

Recruitment and motivation: Given that many ECD programs do not include fathers, grandparents, and adolescent girls, among others, partners had to develop tailored and unique recruitment and participation strategies for these groups. This involved designing programs or content tailored to their unique needs and interests, planning the program schedule based on their availability, and understanding how household decision-making and other cultural factors worked.

Delivery modality variations: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the IRC trialed a variation of the Gindegi Goron program that engaged adolescent girls in delivering the program; however, once schools were fully reopened, adolescent girls returned to their education and this model was no longer efficient. The brief one-month pilot revealed several barriers to the participation of adolescent girls, emphasizing the necessity for an adjusted delivery modality to better meet their requirements for participation.[21]

INSIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

Including multi-generational and gender-sensitive approaches is relatively new in humanitarian and ECD settings. Building on initial research indicating the benefits of these approaches, Play to Learn tested various methods, gaining valuable insights from the experience.

Facilitating adult engagement: Play to Learn tested the inclusion of fathers, grandparents, and adolescent girls, yielding mixed results. In the future, thorough planning to understand motivations and interests when engaging new adult groups is likely to enhance overall engagement.

Multi-generational, gender-sensitive approaches increase participation: Play to Learn's experience highlights that adopting a multi-generational, gender-sensitive approach to ECD, particularly involving fathers, holds the potential to increase participation rates for both caregivers and children. This approach motivates caregivers to actively engage in the early learning of their children.[22]

Exploring new caregiver groups: Play to Learn partners highlighted the inclusion of grandparents, fathers, and adolescent mothers as frontiers for exploration in ECD programs.

Building Block 2:
Integrating Psychosocial Well-being

During a child's early years, elevated levels of stress can be detrimental to normal growth and development, impacting not only brain development but also immediate and long-term physical and mental health.[23] Given that young children depend on their parents and other adults, the mental health and psychosocial well-being of these adults, whether positive or negative, can significantly impact a child's growth and development.[24] When young children and their families are affected by conflicts and crises, the need for psychosocial support is significant, with the World Health Organization (WHO) noting that "almost all people affected by emergencies will experience psychological distress."[25]

Psychosocial aid is "any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental disorder."[26] Services can be individual or group-focused, ranging from treating mental illness to helping individuals cope with day-to-day stressors to engaging in play-based healing activities. Play to Learn's approach of providing targeted, non-specialist psychosocial well-being support greatly improved the project's ability to address the well-being needs of both children and adults in its operational contexts.

PLAY TO LEARN'S EXPERIENCE

Activity and curriculum adjustments: Play to Learn integrated psychosocial well-being into ECD programs by intentionally including culturally relevant music, dance, and sports activities for children, along with peer-to-peer parenting groups.[27] These activities were designed to foster peer and community connections and provide opportunities for self-expression and non-verbal communication, acknowledging the psychosocial needs of both the Rohingya and Syrian populations. For example, the Ahlan Simsim Families program had a range of modular activities that supported social-emotional skill development and well-being

Targeted, non-specialist psychosocial support: As part of the Humanitarian Play Labs, BRAC used para-counselors trained to identify and support children and adults on an individual basis in coping with daily stressors and challenges. BRAC also relied on psychologists and mental health experts working in child protection to supervise, refer cases as needed, and provide regular coaching to help para-counsellors improve their skills.[28] Through this approach, BRAC learned that mental health and psychosocial support could be set up quickly, and expanded, with minimal additional financial and human resources. In addition to para-counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists, community members and staff involved in Humanitarian Play Labs and other models received training in psychosocial support approaches and how to identify children or families needing additional services.

Psychosocial well-being and social-emotional learning: In Colombia, Universidad de los Andes integrated Sesame Workshop's *Watch, Play, Learn* videos focused on social-emotional learning into their existing community-based psychosocial program for caregivers called Semillas de Apego. This adaptation aimed to enhance the impact of an already successful psychosocial program by introducing a child-centric early learning component—an innovative integration of two programs. The *Watch, Play, Learn* videos cover activities like naming feelings and belly breathing that help children cope with emotions and contribute to building resilience. Program staff reported that there were even several instances of children reminding their caregivers of these skills when the children noticed stress in their caregiver, highlighting how the integration strengthened the overall psychosocial support goals of the program. These same videos on social and emotional learning were also integrated into the Humanitarian Play Labs, reinforcing the psychosocial aspects of that curriculum as well.

Tailored monitoring and evaluation approaches: Play to Learn partners adapted and created various measurement tools and indicators that are trauma-informed, adapted to community cultures and languages, and sensitive to anticipated changes from collective programs. These approaches and techniques were validated and implemented by trained and experienced staff on the ground but required intentional planning to execute.

Access to experienced staff: Incorporating expertise in psychosocial support should be a deliberate consideration from the inception of the program and during budget planning. However, access to psychosocial or mental health expertise can be achieved creatively. BRAC was able to effectively integrate psychosocial aid for caregivers by leveraging their existing child protection program and the presence of mental health experts on staff in other programs. This existing staff capacity, paired with BRAC's extensive implementation network across multiple sectors within Cox's Bazar, supported transferring mental health and psychosocial support skills into the multiple ECD services offered through Play to Learn.

INSIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

There is a growing recognition of the importance of psychosocial support to adults and children in early childhood programs. Play to Learn's work incorporating a focus on psychosocial well-being yielded positive results for the participants.

Integration of psychosocial well-being and skills development: Activities that promote psychosocial well-being can be integrated easily into existing ECD programs, not just for children but also for parents and caregivers. The Be Ready, Be Strong program has a workbook of activities that use play to support children's wellbeing used in the aftermath of crises in the Middle East.

Refugee-led psychosocial support: Employing refugees to support other refugees can be more culturally relevant and sustainable if proper training and programs are developed to leverage skills for basic aid.

Cross-sectoral integration: Early learning, responsive caregiving, and psychosocial well-being are complementary components of work with young children and families. Engaging existing partners focused on psychosocial well-being to identify new opportunities for program integration can be a promising approach that goes beyond adding psychosocial supports to programs that serve young children across child protection, education, nutrition, or health sectors.

Staff expertise and support: Staffing for psychosocial knowledge and experience when developing ECD programs that serve communities affected by conflict and crises can help to ensure models are trauma-informed from the start as you collaborate with communities. This can extend to the establishment or support of staff systems of care that can assist staff tasked with providing psychosocial support.

Building Block 3:
Leveraging Media and Technology

The use of technology, including computers, phones, TVs, and radios, for learning has been on the rise over the last five years, and the global impact of COVID-19 propelled its use around the world.[29] In settings where people are displaced or on the move, or during health crises like COVID-19, in-person approaches may not always be viable. Moreover, media and technology can provide delivery models that operate at large scale as well as programs that serve distributed or mobile populations. Play to Learn's use of contextually-appropriate and relevant technology and media were key ingredients in the project's response to COVID-19 and demonstrated their effectiveness as innovative solutions for future applications.

PLAY TO LEARN'S EXPERIENCE

Integrated media approach: Sesame Workshop collaborated with Play to Learn partners to co-develop multimedia content designed for mass media distribution as well as support its seamless integration into both in-person and hybrid remote early childhood education programs. For example, the Remote Early Learning Program in Lebanon integrated multimedia content, such as video and songs, to reinforce key messages within its curriculum. Sesame Workshop also created the *Watch, Play, Learn* video library, comprising 140 animated segments each lasting five minutes. These videos can serve as a standalone or complementary program. Tailored for children ages 3-8, these videos promote proficiency in globally relevant areas: math, science, social-emotional skills, and health and safety. Deployed in Colombia, Kenya, and Bangladesh across diverse program models, these videos were dubbed into languages children use and can understand and were accompanied by play-based activities that targeted a spectrum of learning outcomes. The delivery utilized various technologies, including hybrid approaches, in-person sessions with Pico projectors that did not require a power source or internet connection on-site, digital platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp messaging, and automated digital platforms like Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems or chatbots. Rigorous impact evaluations conducted by NYU Global TIES for Children underscored the positive impacts of these approaches, revealing favorable outcomes in emotional development for both the Remote Early Learning Program and watching *Watch, Play, Learn* videos. Visit Play to Learn's resource page on the Value of Educational Media in Crisis Settings for more information and resources.

Technology can help deliver services to hard-to-reach populations:
During the COVID-19 pandemic, all in-person programs were closed due to government restrictions in all Play to Learn countries. All partners used telecommunications or digital technologies to reach children and caregivers, who were also at home. The IRC developed the Remote Early Learning Program in Lebanon, an 11-week multi-media early learning program designed for children ages 5-6 to provide accelerated school readiness. An impact evaluation from NYU Global TIES for Children showed significant impacts on various aspects of child development, including emergent literacy, numeracy, social-emotional and motor skills and play, and relationships among caregivers, children, and ECD workers. The results were comparable to in-person implementation, but it cost less, indicating that this could be a viable alternative to in-person preschool when on-site implementation is not feasible.[30] In Bangladesh, the IRC pivoted from an in-person home visiting model to an IVR model that automatically called and text messaged participants from Rohingya and host communities.

> **SPOTLIGHT ON FAMILYCORNER IRC**
>
> The IRC chose to leverage the most popular social media channels among parents in Jordan, Lebanon, and beyond to reach an even greater audience with parenting and early childhood content.
>
> The FamilyCornerIRC channels on Facebook and Instagram have grown to over 249,000 and 39,000 followers respectively as of September 2023, and they continue to see high engagement in their content. Visit FamilyCornerIRC on WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, or Telegram.

Adapting in-person programming to remote delivery: In response to COVID-19 challenges, partners adjusted their programs to function remotely. For example, BRAC's Humanitarian Play Labs could not operate during the COVID-19 pandemic in accordance with government regulations. Responding swiftly, the BRAC team developed Pashe Achhi ("Beside You" in Bangla), a phone-based remote model for psychosocial support, which allowed BRAC to reach beneficiaries without in-person services. It included live phone calls and recorded audio calls. As BRAC noted, with COVID-19 "[o]ne door closed (in-person), then another door opened." BRAC was also able to extend their work by providing training to staff who were not previously experienced in using digital technology. Similarly, the IRC's Gindegi Goron program, originally based on the Reach Up and Learn home visiting model, adjusted its approach to use weekly pre-recorded IVR, text messages, and live phone calls, to guide parents and caregivers in supporting their young children at home.[31]

LESSONS LEARNED

Accessibility and digital literacy: While many people had access to some form of technology, the availability of sufficient data for phones was not always guaranteed. In both the Middle East and Bangladesh, men often kept phones with them when they left the house, so engaging women was sometimes a challenge. This challenge also extended to knowledge and skills in using different applications such as Facebook or WhatsApp, which was more common for some than others, depending on individuals' prior access to phones.

Difficulty of virtually replicating some in-person activities*: The IRC learned that with their audio-only parenting programs, they could not replicate all activities, particularly the ones that required demonstration.[32] Modifications were needed for specific content and careful consideration of the most appropriate frequency for the program in the virtual format.

INSIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

Play to Learn partners advanced several new technology and media approaches in an effort to meet children and parents where they already are.

Innovative technology solutions can support learning in crisis: In contexts where some populations cannot access in-person services or are on the move, virtual ECD services could provide an expedient solution. Services like Pashe Achhi, Gindegi Goron, or the Remote Early Learning Program illustrate that it is possible to reach and engage caregivers and young children remotely. Visit the [Design principles for remote and hybrid services] page to see research compiled by Play to Learn over the past six years that can inform and guide program design.

Technology can enhance program staff support: The IRC created Kadr, a facilitator desktop application, for staff in the Middle East to provide access to program materials and resources both online and offline, greatly improving their ability to use the materials. The IRC also created a chatbot in Bangladesh which facilitators can query at any time to support implementation. Sesame Workshop created an application, accessible online and offline, featuring a simplified interface for facilitators to use *Watch, Play, Learn* videos in Bangladesh. These showcase the potential of technology in supporting program staff and implementation.

Strategically assess the technology landscape: Before initiating programs, understanding the technology and media landscape is crucial, including existing user behaviors. See Sesame Workshop's Technology Decision Roadmap, which offers a comprehensive planning guide for technology-based programs.

User behavior influences impact: Technology can be useful in several situations, but media and technology programs are most effective where technology is well-aligned with user behavior. For example, Gindegi Goron's phone calls were a highly effective delivery method during COVID-19 when families were predominantly at home. However, as men began to venture out of the home with the family phone, the timing of messages had to shift to ensure that the IVR system delivered texts, prompts, and quizzes when fathers were at home.

Building Block 4:
Scaling through Multiple Pathways

Scale is defined as expanding quality services (with demonstrated success) to maximize reach, effectiveness, and impact through sustainable, systemic change.[33] Scaling is also a tool to respond to the need of people affected by conflict and crisis, to have greater impact, and strengthen systems. Yet, scaling of early childhood programs that can reach all families is not easily accomplished. Key challenges to scaling in humanitarian contexts include:

• Inadequate consideration of scaling during the initial phases of program design and implementation;

• Limited knowledge and skills within the humanitarian sector regarding scaling practices;

• Insufficient grant length for scaling in humanitarian contexts as most projects are short term; and

• Insufficient evidence demonstrating the impact of multi-sectoral ECD in emergency programs.

Play to Learn found success tackling these challenges by using multiple pathways to scale rather than relying on one fixed scaling strategy.[34]

PLAY TO LEARN EXPERIENCES

Horizontal scaling (more people and places): Horizontal scaling is the most common type of scaling. The goal of horizontal scaling is to reach as many people and locations as possible with high quality programs. Several key programs by BRAC, the IRC, and Sesame Workshop, such as Humanitarian Play Labs and Ahlan Simsim Families, used this strategy. As the Play to Learn project approaches its conclusion, however, there is a need to scale down and reduce the size of some programs that are solely funded by this project and not integrated into government services, taken up by other agencies, or sustainable through community-led approaches or the provision of open-source tools for replication. The end of grant-funded projects represents an intrinsic risk of defining success in scaling only through reach, and is a primary reason Play to Learn chose to also use other scaling pathways to achieve impactful outcomes. Visit the resource page on Scaling and Sustaining Impact to see tools and resources developed and used by the IRC in the Middle East.

Vertical scaling (policy adoption): Vertical scaling concentrates on working with government systems for longer-lasting change through policy modification and/or adoption. This was a strategic objective since the inception of the Play to Learn project. Early engagement with government counterparts was crucial to this approach. BRAC leveraged its decades-long relationship with the national government in Bangladesh to provide technical assistance in ensuring that play-based learning and mental health were integrated into the national pre-primary curriculum, while the IRC built on the government relationships strengthened through the Ahlan Simsim initiative funded by the MacArthur Foundation. For example, the IRC's collaboration with the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health resulted in the roll-out of co-developed standards for nurseries to all private nurseries across Lebanon in 2022. In Jordan, the Ministry of Education is integrating social-emotional learning and learning through play into the continuous professional development of Kindergarten (KG) 2 to Grade 3 teachers.

Organizational scaling (strengthening capacity): Organizational scaling, or strengthening capacity across a sector, is not always prioritized, but it can often be the easiest to achieve and aligns well with advocacy efforts. Play to Learn has many examples of organizational scaling. In both Bangladesh and the Middle East, Play to Learn partners exercised leadership in establishing and leading coordination groups that included peer organizations and local authorities. While this demanded dedicated staff time and investment, it resulted in a stronger understanding of ECD among peer organizations and local participating authorities. Moreover, the multi-year Play to Learn grant enabled consortium partners to strengthen their internal organizational capacities in designing and delivering ECD programs, learning through play, human-centered design, and more.

Using a modular approach: Organizations often assume that whole models should be fully scaled. The IRC, recognizing the need for sustained impact, adopted a different approach. In Jordan, where existing ECD models and policies were already in place, partner ministries were able to choose to implement and scale only the relevant components of the Play to Learn ECD work, encompassing areas such as responsive caregiving, learning through play, and social-emotional learning. The focus was on impact and sustainability, equalizing power dynamics, and ensuring government ownership. This approach was acknowledged as having the potential to facilitate broader and more sustainable scaling beyond the IRC's direct programs. A similar approach was used by BRAC in Bangladesh, providing technical assistance to support the government to incorporate play-based learning, social-emotional learning, and mental health into the national pre-primary curriculum, and focusing on integrating the most relevant components of their Humanitarian Play Lab curriculum.

LESSONS LEARNED

Prioritize shared problem-solving: The IRC in the Middle East found that focusing on problems shared by government and other stakeholders generated more buy-in and interest in co-designing future solutions. This approach proved more effective than presenting pre-packaged solutions without engaging the government in addressing the identified problems.

Early stakeholder engagement: Successful scaling with partners or governments requires robust relationships and a comprehensive understanding of systems and stakeholders. In one example from Play to Learn, a social network analysis was conducted in the initial stages of the project to identify key stakeholders, contributing valuable insights to the process. In other contexts, where similar analysis was not performed, Play to Learn self-assessed missed opportunities with critical stakeholders, a situation that needed to be subsequently redressed.

INSIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

Scaling is a complex but promising opportunity for all stakeholders to increase both their coverage and impact of ECD programming. Play to Learn had significant learnings when it came to scaling.

Early planning for scale: With multi-year grants and sufficient financial resources, scaling goals should be considered early in the program design and implementation, ideally in collaboration with partners. Relatedly, planning for advocacy can be a key step to support scaling efforts.

Diverse scaling forms: Scaling can take many forms, and not every scaling type will be relevant for each organization or program. Creating simple scaling criteria and tools for assessing readiness to scale can help implementers decide on the most appropriate scaling pathway.

Contextual understanding: It is important to take time to fully understand the context and potential scaling pathways. Building strong relationships with local communities and allies, along with identifying alternative approaches, when necessary, were critical components for successful scaling.

Adaptive scaling: Scaling requires making regular modifications, which can include pausing the scaling process or temporarily scaling down rather than moving consistently toward scale-up. Both BRAC and the IRC scaled up and scaled down at different points in their programs based on learnings that indicated areas of improvement, responses to COVID-19, or in accordance with project plans.

Conclusion

Over six years, the Play to Learn consortium innovated, tested, learned, and succeeded in providing young children affected by the Rohingya and Syrian crises and beyond with a better start in life than their circumstances might otherwise have dictated. The substantial investments from the LEGO Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation resulted in the creation of the largest ECD program to date that particularly served children and families affected by conflict and crisis. The consortium's learning and reflection journey has generated insights that are crucial for enhancing its initiatives as well as contributing to the improvement of others' work in the field.

The principles described in this report illustrate the importance of creating a strong foundation that recognizes that ECD programs and interventions take place within and across systems, center the needs of communities, value play-based approaches, and intentionally design for the flexibility, adaptability, and iteration that are critical to intervention success. In building different programmatic models, Play to Learn initiatives found success in trying multi-generational, gender-sensitive programming, responding to and integrating psychosocial well-being, leveraging technology and media for programs, and pursuing multiple pathways for scale. Ideally, learnings from the Play to Learn experience will contribute to helping more young children in crisis contexts to survive and thrive.

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