

MEDIA-ENHANCED DIRECT SERVICES:
Deepening Impact of
Early Childhood Interventions



Early childhood development (ECD) opportunities lay the foundation for nurturing children’s wellbeing and lifelong learning. Yet millions of children around the world have little access to ECD opportunities that support their early learning and holistic development—more than 175 million children around the world are not enrolled in formal pre-primary education¹. This problem is compounded when families are affected by crises that disrupt children’s lives and learning—one in six children worldwide lives in a conflict-affected area². Substantial evidence shows that prolonged adversity during the critical early years of life can disrupt brain development, with devastating, long-term effects on health, learning, and behavior³. Finding cost-effective and timely ways to secure consistent access to resources that reinforce learning and wellbeing amidst these crises is a critical challenge. For early learning and development to take hold, children and their caregivers need tools that can support these goals at home, in early learning centers, or even on the move during times of displacement.

To respond to this need, Sesame Workshop created a library of globally tested educational media content—*Watch, Play, Learn: Early Learning Videos*—designed to bring playful early learning to children everywhere. While aiming to offer a relevant learning experience to all children and families, the *Watch, Play, Learn* resources were designed with the needs of crisis contexts in mind. These are settings where media content ready to use in education programming—as well as across other critical sectors for ECD such as mental health and child protection—could be uniquely valuable. And we know that play is an essential component of ECD, especially for children in crisis contexts, as playful experiences offer a positive outlet to reduce anxiety and stress and promote resilience.

Creating *Watch, Play, Learn*

Created as part of the Play to Learn project funded by the LEGO Foundation, *Watch, Play, Learn* videos feature beloved Sesame friends like Elmo and Cookie Monster and provide a foundation for math, science, and social-emotional skills as well as health and safety through a set of 140 five-minute animated video segments designed for children ages 3 to 8.

To create *Watch, Play, Learn*, Sesame Workshop undertook a rigorous formative research process with displaced populations and host communities in nine countries and consulted with a global advisory council of early childhood development specialists from around the world.

The *Watch, Play, Learn* videos were specifically designed for flexible use—they can stand alone or be integrated into existing mental health, education, or child protection programming and can be used both in multi-sector direct service provision and broadcast.



OUR LEARNING AGENDA

We know that creating joyful, contextually relevant resources was only the first step. We are engaged in continuous learning and research to ensure consistent and easy use of the videos to promote the greatest impact, especially in locations with limited infrastructure and high levels of need, where it can have significant impact.

Sesame Workshop is partnered with organizations around the world to integrate *Watch, Play, Learn* into programs reaching children and families in different locations, paired with evaluations to better understand the experiences of using the videos from the perspective of teachers, ECD facilitators and program implementers, parents and caregivers, and children.

Our learning agenda across these pilots was designed to help us answer specific questions about effective approaches for using educational media to support children's learning and development at scale in humanitarian contexts and beyond.

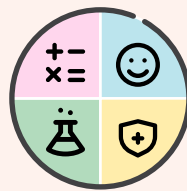
Together, this piloting portfolio provides lessons on

- The effectiveness of *Watch, Play, Learn* in humanitarian settings in promoting children's engagement in learning spaces;
- Facilitators' ability to utilize the content and related technologies to aid classroom management;
- Caregivers' capacity to utilize the content for improving their children's developmental outcomes;
- The feasibility and uptake of a variety of technologies in contexts that can be hard to reach with other kinds of direct programming;
- The success of integration strategies into ongoing programming;
- Costs associated with different aspects of integrating the videos into programming; and
- Other factors that could affect the use, impact, or reception of the videos in the future.

About *Watch, Play, Learn*



140 5-minute segments



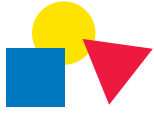
4 content areas

Math; science; socio-emotional learning; and child protection, health, and safety

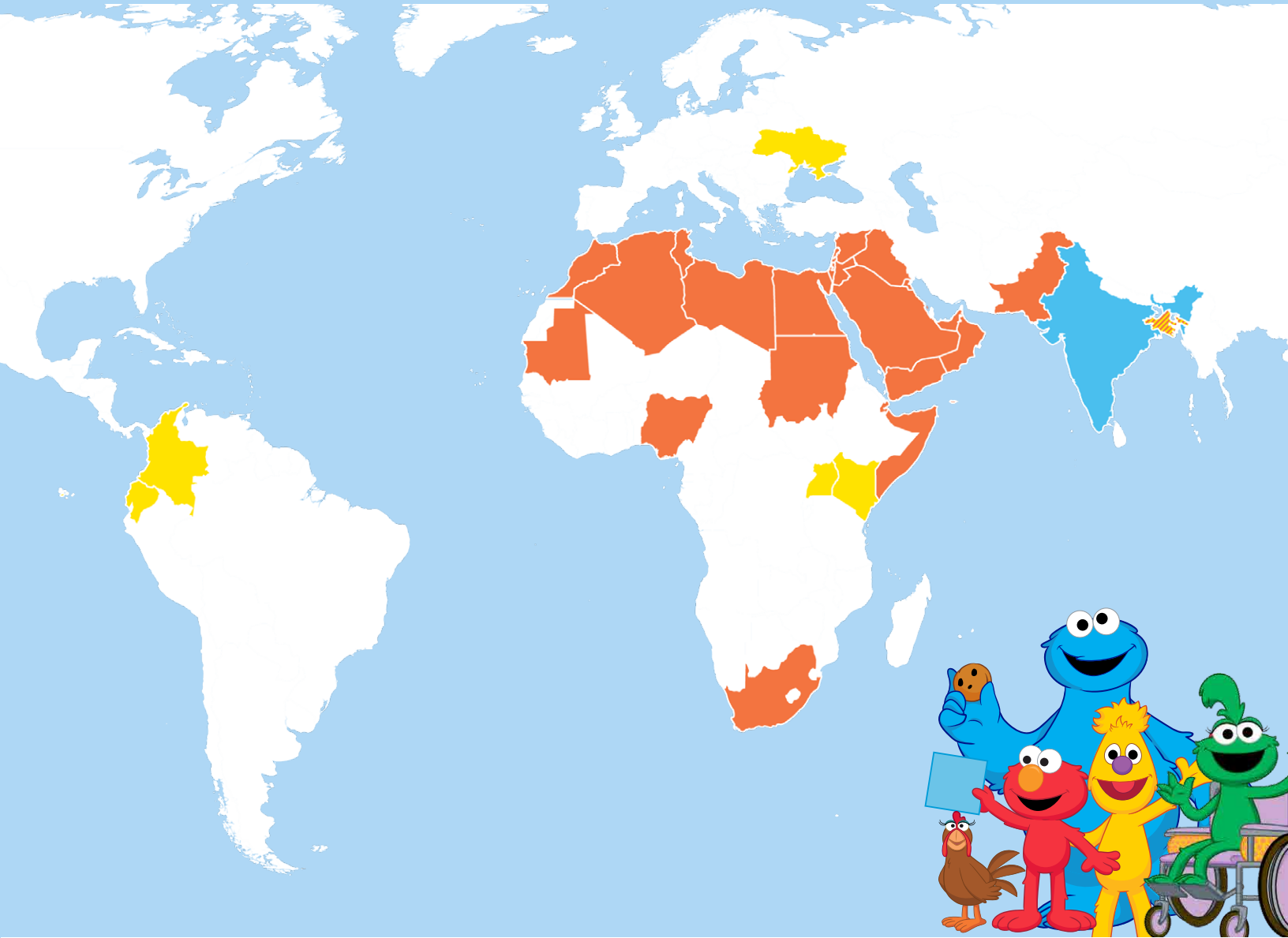


27+ languages

WPL is dubbed into 27 languages including : English, Rohingya, Spanish, Levantine Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Zulu, Sesotho, South African English, Somali, Swahili, Urdu, Ukrainian, Russian, Hausa, Hindi, Telugu and more.



WATCH, PLAY, LEARN HAS REACHED APPROXIMATELY 30 MILLION VIEWERS



DIRECT SERVICES

Watch, Play, Learn is used in direct programming in six countries.



BROADCAST

Watch, Play, Learn is broadcast in 24 countries



DIGITAL

Watch, Play, Learn is shared on digital platforms in India

WATCH, PLAY, LEARN PILOTS AROUND THE WORLD

Sesame Workshop partnered with educators and social service providers to pilot the use of the Watch, Play, Learn videos in different locations around the world. We learned how to facilitate the use of the videos to bring joy and learning to children while providing a convenient and efficient experience for service providers and caregivers. The three pilot locations were chosen to provide a diversity of contexts from which to learn, including within refugee camps and in urban settings that have access to a spectrum of technology and infrastructure. The pilots engaged a diversity of partners, including national actors and international organizations. Finally, the videos were used in programming rooted in different sectors, providing insight into their contribution to different areas of early childhood development.



BANGLADESH

Objectives: The integration of the *Watch, Play, Learn* content aims to:

- Offering children targeted opportunities to engage with developmentally appropriate and contextually relevant content that is visually appealing and complements partners' programming
- Improve children's attendance, engagement, and content knowledge
- Enhance children's interest in continuing their pursuit of learning opportunities
- Offer a cost-efficient tool to reach more children in an environment where funding is often stretched

Location: Refugee camps in Cox's Bazar

Implementing partner: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)'s child protection implementing partners, including Community Development Center (CODEC), Relief International (RI), Save the Children, and Terre Des Hommes (TDH)

Program design: Videos are used in Child-friendly Spaces and Multi-Purpose Centers with facilitated learning before and after viewing

Sector: Child Protection

Pilot duration: October 2022 to November 2023

Video subjects: Social-emotional learning, child protection and health & safety

Video language: Rohingya

Program participants: Facilitators and children from Rohingya refugee communities

Dosage: 2 videos per week

Technology: Projectors showcasing the *Watch, Play, Learn* content through an Android-based application developed by Sesame Workshop to offer possibilities for offline delivery of content





COLOMBIA

Objectives: The integration of the *Watch, Play, Learn* content aims to:

- Strengthen caregivers' understanding of children's social-emotional development
- Increase caregivers' use of age-appropriate social emotional managements strategies for children
- Improve caregiver self-efficacy and mental health
- Improve child-caregiver emotional relationships
- Improve children's developmental outcomes related to social emotional learning and wellbeing

Location: The cities of Tumaco and Jamundi

Implementing partner: Universidad de los Andes, Semillas de Apego program

Program design: Video content is integrated into an ongoing caregiver-facing psychotherapy intervention in which caregivers view content with trained facilitators, then view the content at home with their children

Sector: Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

Pilot duration: March 2023 to Dec 2023

Video subjects: Social-emotional learning

Video language: Spanish

Program participants: Primary caregivers of young children ages 0-4 who live in communities affected by armed conflict or who have been forcibly displaced.

Dosage: At least one five-minute video played during each facilitated psychotherapy session with caregivers (at minimum one video per week), caregivers were asked to watch the videos with their children

Technology: Caregivers used their personal smart devices to access videos that are available on a private Facebook group, monitored with engagement by partner staff; videos for at-home viewing with children were distributed via WhatsApp groups and private Facebook groups



KENYA

Objectives: The integration of the *Watch, Play, Learn* content aims to:

- Provide children with a playful, inclusive and engaging learning environment to develop a love of learning
- Offer children access to digital devices, with culturally relevant content in their own language to generate interest in learning and encourage their engagement
- Offer teachers opportunities for leveraging technology and video content to build their knowledge, attitudes, and skills in classroom management and to provide an inclusive and engaging learning environment

Location: Refugee camps in the town of Dadaab

Implementing partner: Save the Children

Program design: Videos are integrated into the Kenyan national curriculum for the early childhood development and education program at a school in the Dadaab refugee camps, including learning facilitation sessions before and after video viewing

Sector: Education

Pilot duration: July 2022 to August 2023

Video subjects: Social-emotional learning and math

Video language: Somali

Program participants: Teachers and children from Somali refugee communities

Dosage: 2 videos per week—one math video during their formal schooling sessions, and one SEL video during their unstructured sessions

Technology: Tablets, using a platform called Moodle to play content

TECHNOLOGY

The *Watch, Play, Learn* pilots are enabling a deeper understanding of various technologies used to reach children living in communities with a wide range of technological access and familiarity, from refugee camp settings with minimal access to technology to urban settings where caregivers own personal smartphones. Choosing the right technology for the right context requires an analysis of many factors that affect technology access and use, such as the goals of an intervention (including monitoring and evaluation), reliability of internet and electricity, affordability, social and gender norms, digital literacy, comfort and trust levels with various technologies, and local regulations about technology use.

To decide what hardware and software would be used in each pilot, Sesame Workshop and each implementing partner analyzed the landscape and discussed the positives and negatives of various technology choices using the Sesame Workshop [Technology Decision Roadmap](#) created in partnership with DAI.

For each technology solution used across the pilots, Sesame Workshop generated learnings around the following factors:

- Feasibility for scale
- Durability
- Impact on outcomes
- Ease of use
- Issues related to safety and privacy

Sesame Workshop has collaboratively and iteratively learned more about the technologies used in the *Watch, Play, Learn* pilots and has updated the Technology Decision Roadmap, as well as added supportive tools for its use, based on learnings from the pilots





WHAT WE LEARNED

How does *Watch, Play, Learn* support the goals of humanitarian organizations engaged with children? Learnings from our pilots provide insights into the successes, the experiences of users, and how we can strengthen this work going forward.

1. WPL promoted interest in and engagement with learning for children in crisis settings.

Facilitators in the pilots reported that integrating WPL content aided children's engagement with teachers, peers, and lesson content. In Bangladesh, a majority of our implementation partners saw an increase in attendance rates of more than 10% when comparing the two months prior to WPL with the two months after. Additionally, many new students — those not registered in the partners' database — started attending sessions. In Kenya, girls' attendance specifically increased 11% from pre-WPL levels. Partners also reported examples of children asking content-related questions and applying what they were learning in practice. In response to high interest in WPL sessions, all partners took steps to accommodate increased enrollment and attendance and avoid overcrowding.

“Most children demonstrated excitement and cheerfulness during video watching and Watch, Play, Learn activities—smiling, laughing, and engaging in a joyful manner.”

–Teacher in Kenya pilot

2. WPL supported children's social-emotional development.

In a randomized control trial of 311 caregivers, our partner Semillas de Apego in Colombia found statistically significant improvements in caregiver-child relationships between those who engaged with WPL and those who did not. Caregivers in Colombia reported that children formed emotional connections with characters and referenced video content to identify and express their emotions and those of others. The videos also helped caregivers connect with, communicate, and nurture their relationship with their child. Partners reported that caregivers were better able to recognize children's emotions and provide support in the regulation process.

“I learned to recognize my emotions and those of my child. Many times, we get frustrated too. When the children are in crisis, so are we. Many times, they cry or throw a tantrum and I don't understand why. Now with the videos, we learned that they also feel emotions, that they also have their bad days and can feel sadness.”

– Caregiver in Jamundí, Colombia

3. WPL is adaptable, enabling partners to tailor content and technology to local needs.

Pilots demonstrated the adaptability of WPL across diverse contexts and resource levels. We adapted our approach based on the resources and local context needs. In our Bangladesh pilot, for example, we added customized content featuring Rohingya Muppets to the videos to better connect with Rohingya children. In programs where customization wasn't feasible due to limited resources, we encouraged facilitators to leverage local and available resources, such as using WPL character cutouts in their lessons. Across all settings and programs, our Technology Decision Roadmap helped partners align technology to their needs. In Colombia, where personal smartphones are common, partners chose to share content on Facebook and WhatsApp. In Bangladesh, which has a different technology infrastructure, partners opted for Projectors with the feature of showcasing content offline.

4. WPL can help build teacher capacity.

Teachers and facilitators using Watch, Play, Learn reported they could be more creative and enhance instruction in their classrooms, particularly in our Kenya pilot. Partners there told us that working with WPL content, tools, and resources bolstered teachers' digital literacy and improved teaching efficacy and classroom management, particularly around the quality of teacher-student interactions. Notably, these teachers also gained the knowledge and ability to create their own materials to extend the learning for their classrooms.

“The use of technology in teaching has enhanced good classroom control. Though the tablets are few, they are very useful to both the teachers and the ECD learners.”

— ECD officer, Kenya.

5. Our operational and technical support makes implementation easier.

Partners were able to overcome hurdles and smoothly adapt WPL to their setting with our ongoing guidance, tools, and in-person support. For example, in Colombia, where some caregivers could not access Facebook Groups, we moved program communication and content to WhatsApp based on their need. Partners also mentioned that they valued the Technology Decision Roadmap, which guides them to choose appropriate technology solutions for their context. In Bangladesh, facilitators said the presence of technology support representatives allowed them to focus on running sessions instead of setting up technology. Some needs required bespoke solutions. To aid users with limited literacy or technology resources in Bangladesh, Sesame Workshop led the creation of a mobile app that made WPL content accessible on newer and older phones, tablets, and projectors.





LOOKING AHEAD

Watch, Play, Learn will continue to influence our work in humanitarian contexts through Welcome Sesame, our global initiative dedicated to delivering comfort and learning to young children and their caregivers affected by crisis and conflict. Now we're applying lessons learned from our pilots to our future plans. Watch, Play, Learn is a key building block of Welcome Sesame, our initiative uniting programs around the world with a shared goal of delivering early learning and nurturing care to young children and caregivers affected by crisis. With improved WPL assets and tools as part of Welcome Sesame, Sesame Workshop can rapidly deliver ready-to-use educational, technical, and operational resources to direct services partners anywhere they're needed. Enhancements include updating the WPL app created for Bangladesh for use in more contexts and creating an online content hub that lets organizations preview WPL content to support partnership decisions. Our new WPL Toolkit, available in Arabic, Bangla English, and Spanish, will support program design and rollout, facilitation, monitoring, contextualization, and sector integration.

Learn More about *Watch, Play, Learn* and the power of media!



[Watch, Play, Learn Early Learning Videos: A Practitioner's Toolkit](#)



[Watch, Play, Learn Case Study – Ukraine](#)



[The making of Watch, Play, Learn: Early Learning Videos – Formative testing](#)



[The Value of Educational Media in Crisis Settings](#)



[Global Process Evaluation](#)



[Play Around the World](#)



[Watch, Play, Learn Case Study – Colombia](#)



LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Watch, Play, Learn is an opportunity for partners across the humanitarian sector to collectively advance early childhood development in crisis settings. As we expand the program, we invite partners, implementers, and donors to collaborate with us. Help us bring critical educational resources to children in crisis and ensure they have continuous opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive. Together, we can make a lasting impact.



Learn more by looking at our [Welcome Sesame partnership opportunities](#). To connect and start a conversation, email our International Social Impact (ISI) department Operations team at SIOperations@sesame.org.

SESAME WORKSHOP™

Sesame Workshop is the non-profit organization committed to helping kids grow smarter, stronger, and kinder. Sesame Workshop delivers high quality early childhood programming in more than 150 countries.

play to learn

Play to Learn is an innovative program from the LEGO Foundation, Sesame Workshop, BRAC, the International Rescue Committee, and NYU Global TIES for Children that harnesses the power of play to deliver critical early learning opportunities to children and caregivers affected by conflict and crisis

ENDNOTES

- 1 UNICEF, "COVID-19: Trends, Promising Practices and Gaps in Remote Learning for Pre-Primary Education," 2020.
- 2 Østby, Gudrun; Siri Aas Rustad & Andrew Arasmith (2022) Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990–2021, Conflict Trends, 2. Oslo: PRIO. <https://www.prio.org/publications/13256>
- 3 National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, "The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do," 2007.