

Humanitarian Education Accelerator Project Evaluation

The Little Ripples Programme in Chad

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Context of the Evaluation

This is the executive summary of an external evaluation undertaken by Oxford Policy Management (OPM) of the Little Ripples programme in Chad. Little Ripples is a programme created and run by iACT - an NGO based in California, United States.

Little Ripples is one of three innovations being supported by Phase 2 of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR's) [Humanitarian Education Accelerator \(HEA\)](#). The evaluation was commissioned by the HEA in order to:

- Identify good practices in, and lessons learnt from, the scaling process and to document evidence of impact in scaling; and
- Inform ongoing scaling and implementation, and to support evidence-based decision-making throughout the scaling journey.

The evaluation was undertaken from February to September 2022, and this executive summary captures important elements and highlights of the final report.

Overview of the Little Ripples Programme

The Little Ripples programme was founded by iACT in 2013 to provide early childhood education (ECE) to children ages 3 to 5 years living in camps for Sudanese refugees in Chad. It began in one camp and has now expanded to five. iACT provides training, employment, and technical support to local refugees so that they can manage, implement, and duplicate the Little Ripples programme in their communities.

The Little Ripples programme consists of a 10-month ECE programme. The standard curriculum and broader pedagogical model adopt a trauma-informed and play-based approach to early learning and development. The holistic aspects of children's development (in language, physical, cognitive, and social-emotional domains) are combined with context-oriented social-emotional learning (SEL) and activities to promote well-being. In each camp where the Little Ripples programme operates, a cohort of self-selected refugee women and men work to adapt the standard 'skeleton' curriculum to the local requirements and context.

Little Ripples operates in two kinds of locations: In classrooms in existing schools (only in Goz Amir); and in home-based environments known as 'Ponds'. A Pond is in an area selected by the refugee community in accordance with certain criteria. They are developed by iACT in close collaboration with the refugee community, following an initial campaign to raise awareness about the importance of early learning. Each Pond enrolls a maximum of 45 children living in the immediate vicinity of the Pond, in a dedicated area consisting of a covered porch, a tree and a clean outside space. Children attend the Little Ripples programme five days a week for around four hours, during

which they are separated into two learning groups: one for the younger children and one for the older children. Each group is led by a teacher. The children receive a nutritious meal prepared by two female cooks, who are trained and hired by iACT as part of Little Ripples. Women receive training on food safety and hygiene, as well as how to prepare nutritious meals for young children.

The Little Ripples programme rests on a co-development approach involving both iACT and the refugee community. This participatory approach has included both partners throughout the process from the initial development of Little Ripples up to the management of solutions by the refugee community (i.e. a 'bottom-up' development approach). The programme supports the capacity of refugee communities to provide the ECE service by training and employing refugees to manage the programme. Little Ripples staff are exclusively refugees, who are selected and hired among the communities in eastern Chad. The governance is a vertical structure, headed by the Programme Coordinator for eastern Chad, who oversees all Little Ripples activities across the camps and is the principal connection with iACT management. Under the Programme Coordinator is the Camp Coordinator, then the Education Director, then the Teachers.

The HEA grant was used to support iACT's initiatives to reinforce and expand Little Ripples in Chad, and to enable the provision of technical support for activities related to monitoring and evaluation. iACT works with refugee teams as technical and development partners in the Little Ripples programme. It has trained other NGOs in refugee areas in Cameroon, Greece and Tanzania to replicate the Little Ripples programme in their communities.

Scaling Little Ripples

Scaling Strategy and Theory of Scale

The iACT Scaling Strategy identifies three components to scaling up the Little Ripples model:

1. The expansion of Little Ripples within two camps (Goz Amir and Djabal) where Little Ripples is already operating; and launching Little Ripples in a new camp - Am Nabak. This involves the establishment of four new Little Ripples Ponds in Am Nabak, with capacity building support and the monitoring of the results for children provided by veteran Little Ripples teams (refugee leadership) from eastern Chad, with minimal iACT (US) technical support.¹
2. The inclusion of the Little Ripples programme model – or aspects of the Little Ripples pedagogical approach – in Chad's national policy for early childhood development (ECD) and learning.

3. The creation of a global platform for scaling the Little Ripples programme model through the creation of a website and a boutique consulting firm hosted within iACT.

At the time of the evaluation publication, scaling in Am Nabak was in progress. The second scaling strategy - working with the Chadian Government - is reported to have begun in November 2022. The third strategy has benefitted from the inputs of a consultant and is progressing.

In November 2021, iACT's Founder and Executive Director tragically both died in a car accident. This led to delays in implementing scaling activities under the HEA grant, including the development of the Theory of Scale. The Scaling Strategy is being revised, following the HEA Bootcamp in July 2022.

Scaling approach: Refugee-led scaling

iACT is using a refugee-led scaling model in Chad to reach more children and advance refugee leadership. iACT defines 'refugee-led scaling' as a process whereby members of a refugee community manage the resources, timelines, travel, training, and implementation of a programme within their community or to a different community. In 2022, veteran Little Ripples refugee

coordinators, education directors and teachers travelled to another camp (Am Nabak) to set up four new Ponds and facilitate three teacher training sessions. Beyond Chad, Little Ripples' refugee-led scaling pathway can be scaled via operational partnerships between iACT and NGOs, or via iACT providing ECE in emergency contexts technical advisory services to governments and NGOs.

¹ The initial Scaling Strategy also included scaling to another refugee community in southern Chad. However, this has been postponed until 2023 at the earliest, due to delays in current scaling activities in eastern Chad.



Evaluation Sources

The evaluation approach to data collection was largely qualitative in nature. The evaluation was based on the following material:

Secondary data:

- Documentation created through HEA support including the Theory of Change and Scaling Strategy;
- Desk research (for example, on ECE policies in Chad);
- No significant outcome monitoring data are being collected by Little Ripples so such data could not be reviewed.

Primary data:

- Key informant interviews (KIIs) with iACT and Little Ripples, staff of other NGOs, Government of Chad officials.
- Extensive field data collection involving focus group discussions (FGDs) and KIIs took place at two of the refugee camps where the programme is being implemented.

There were some significant limitations on the data available that limit the extent to which a few evaluation questions could be answered. Further, the programme has not systematically gathered evidence that can be used to analyse efficiency about programme outputs. Primary data collection was constrained by delays in the initial workplan, security concerns, and other factors, so only two camps could be visited. Field data collection ended up taking place during the rainy season, which meant many refugees had left the camps to work in the fields. This limited the extent to which field data collection could be representative of the refugee communities. It was not possible to observe teachers working with children in the Little Ripples school or Ponds because of the timing of the field visits.

In general, the evaluation has not sought to measure impact in the form of improved learning and development for children attending the Little Ripples programme, since the innovation team has not yet collected data that would allow such measurements to be made.

Main Findings of the Evaluation

Two elements were considered in the evaluation:

1. The education solution; and
2. The innovation process and scaling model.

In order to measure (1), the OECD-DAC six evaluation criteria were used: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.² To measure (2), ALNAP's criteria of comparative improvement, adaptation and learning, do no harm and uptake were used.³ The evaluation findings are captured below.

² OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation ([EvalNet](#))

³ Obrecht, A. with Warner, A. and Dillon, N. (2017) [Evaluating Humanitarian Innovation](#), HIF/ALNAP Working Paper. London: ODI/ALNAP

1. Evaluation of the Education Solution

Relevance

How appropriately designed is the Little Ripples education solution and its delivery model to achieve its intended results?

The Little Ripples programme operates as a high-quality preschool programme for children living in refugee camps in eastern Chad. Its design and delivery model are consistent with the available international evidence for ECE in emergency contexts, and with stakeholder needs and strengths.

Alignment with relevant national and international policies: The education approach is consistent with national ECE policies and plans, which are in development. Implementation coverage of ECE at the national level is weak and comparatively, Little Ripples stands above national programming, both in terms of quality and access. Little Ripples is also aligned with national priorities for access to ECE in rural areas and school preparedness, and for support for refugee education. However, KIIs with national and regional education officials from the Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Promotion Civique (MENPC) (Ministry of National Education and Civic Promotion) indicate that the main ECE stakeholders at the national level are not aware of the Little Ripples programme.

The Little Ripples programme and its holistic curriculum are of interest to national authorities and their partners, who are currently revising the national 10-year education strategy, the preschool curriculum, pedagogical guides, and student manuals. As such, the Little Ripples programme is highly relevant to national policies and priorities in Chad, beyond just considerations of service provision for refugee children but also extending to all populations in Chad.

The inclusion of ECD as a priority in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – Education - reflects international recognition of the importance of ECE for the promotion of child development outcomes, school preparedness, and life-long learning.

Needs of beneficiaries: The priority basic needs of children aged 3 to 5 years living in refugee camps in eastern Chad are education, health, nutrition, security, and protection, as identified by community members. The Little Ripples programme responds to these needs, and in doing so it

also responds to the needs of the parents/caregivers and community members at large.

As there are very few options for care and education services in the camps, young children are often left on their own, without parental supervision, or contribute informally to household livelihoods activities. The Little Ripples programme offers a safe and healthy alternative as regards promoting children's well-being and learning. The Ponds are filled to maximum capacity, and children continue to attend year after year until entry into primary school. Parents/caregivers and other community members have requested the opening of additional Ponds - a proxy that indicates the programme's relevance.

Addressing barriers: The Little Ripples programme was designed to respond to a set of key structural barriers to the provision of ECE services in the humanitarian context generally, and in Chad more specifically. These barriers include: a lack of financial and technical resources with regard to ECE development at the national Chadian level; low prioritisation of education – and ECE in particular – in emergency humanitarian settings; and the lack of refugee-specific policy, planning and budgeting for ECE in a protracted crisis situation.

The Little Ripples programme has enabled the following actions to strengthen local capacity development and address the following barriers:

- Structured and effective community governance;
- Goodwill of parents/caregivers;
- Refugee cohesion;
- High social value of preschool education;
- Educated women accepting opportunities for empowerment; and
- Active and proud engagement in traditional culture and vernacular language.

Accountability to affected populations: The Little Ripples programme involves community members and leaders in all stages of implementation, to obtain their opinions, buy-in, and support. For implementation purposes,

accountability mechanisms are in place, but these are not always formalised and do not always provide the opportunity for agency.

Theory of Change: The ToC was developed after the design and implementation of the programme. It is an

accurate representation of the programme design, but the links in the various components of the ToC could be articulated with greater clarity, and with a greater focus on evidence-based pathways.

Coherence

To what extent and how do interventions by other actors support or undermine the Little Ripples education solution?

The Little Ripples programme delivers essential ECE services in the highly under-served refugee camps in eastern Chad.

The Government of Chad has limited capacity to provide preschool services across the country. Partnered with UNHCR, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is the main education provider and operates preschool programmes in the camps where Little Ripples programmes are located, and in other camps. Attendance at the JRS preschools is of shorter duration (two hours, with no meals) and these preschools apply a more traditional, school-oriented curriculum.

JRS and iACT have partnered in order to reduce duplication and fill one another's gaps. New Ponds are purposefully developed in sectors of the camps where there are no open JRS preschools, to avoid competition and to provide services to a wider population. Importantly, the partnership enables iACT to use JRS's established and legal presence in Chad (iACT does not have a permanent in-country presence nor legal status in Chad). JRS staff have benefited directly from the Little Ripples partnership by participating in the Little Ripples teacher trainings on child mindfulness and teacher attitudes.

Effectiveness

To what extent is the Little Ripples education solution and delivery model producing its intended results?

The Little Ripples programme is currently producing its intended results in terms of the education provision model, with full classrooms and teachers available in every operating Pond. Little Ripples has strongly increased community demand for ECE services, with a focus on play-based pedagogy to support cognitive and socio-emotional learning: the community recognises the importance of ECE as a path towards successful futures and improved opportunities for their children.

Additional evidence is needed to determine the extent to which the learning outcomes set out in the ToC are being produced, although the KIIs and FGDs indicated significant progress among children participating in the programme. Objectives set for the HEA direct programme activity support have been met, albeit with delays due to the death of iACT's senior management members.

As of October 2022, 1,260 refugee girls and boys aged 3 to 5 years are attending the Little Ripples programme in 22

Ponds and six classrooms across the five camps in eastern Chad. The student population is purposefully balanced between girls and boys. Parents/caregivers reported that they enrol their children because of the safe, high-quality teaching and learning environment.

Through the iACT-supported daily nutrition part of the Little Ripples programme, nutritious age-appropriate meals are served to all students. Around 113 women, including pedagogical and cooking staff, are employed by iACT.

In general, the assumptions and relationships in the ToC appear to have been validated during implementation. However, the assumptions regarding the teacher-related outputs cannot be tested based on the data available. The positive results achieved as regards children's outcomes are due to the quality of the design, as well as the management practices, which are applied in a challenging context.

Efficiency

How well is the Little Ripples education solution and delivery model using resources?

The Little Ripples programme has been well managed and implemented by the refugees, in alignment with existing programme design and plans. Budgeting and financial responsibilities are shared between iACT and Little Ripples, although the refugee status of Little Ripples staff creates limits to this arrangement. The partner role of JRS is necessary to enable programme implementation and fills the gap created by the lack of iACT's presence or formal status in Chad. As refugees, Little Ripples staff have limited rights in Chad (e.g. movement can be difficult as can opening a bank account). While the partnership with

JRS has been essential, it does sometimes raise issues, for example, when salaries are not paid in a timely manner.

There is some evidence that cost effectiveness is relatively high due to low staff costs and reportedly positive child learning outcomes, but costing information is not available to make a full assessment. Opportunities for increased cross-sectoral collaboration with other service providers could lead to a more efficient use of limited resources in the camps.

Sustainability

How sustainable are the results achieved by the Little Ripples education solution?

The key requirements identified for sustaining results in the Little Ripples programme and taking forward a vision of expanding the programme are related to the following concerns:

- **Programme stability and fidelity:** Large distances across camps, weak communication channels and unreliable communication logistics (including difficulties to travel freely) do not allow Little Ripples management to regularly monitor and guarantee programme stability and fidelity. Similarly, regular teacher monitoring is not formally active.
- **Financing access:** Fundraising and financial management of the Little Ripples programme are exclusively performed by iACT, who as a small NGO, raise funds based on word-of-mouth. The Little Ripples programme lacks an organisational structure or a formal administrative status in Chad which can access funding directly and without this status, cannot not engage in fundraising or have the capacity to access external funding opportunities.
- **Refugee status:** Sudanese refugees have limited rights in Chad due to their refugee status. For example, it is difficult to open a business or a bank account, and the right to move between refugee camps and beyond Chad is restricted. Their refugee status also limits their ability to benefit from national and international opportunities (e.g. networking, fundraising).
- **Community support:** Community commitment to the Little Ripples programme relates directly to their capacity to sustain the programme. As many refugees in eastern Chad face extreme deprivation, it is currently unrealistic for them to provide resources to sustain the programme. Community members are enthusiastic to develop alternatives to contribute, but more livelihoods opportunities are required.
- **Trusting partnership:** The sustainability of the programme is based on a multi-directional partnership, whereby refugees are enabled as participating agents who bring their knowledge and capacities. Ensuring sustained community support requires effective accountability, engagement, and communication with community members. Trust is currently vested in individuals rather than in institutional or structural mechanisms.

Impact

What intended and unintended effects has the education solution produced?

There is evidence that the Little Ripples programme has provided significant benefits for the children attending, in terms of preparation for school. Various refugee community members (including a camp president, a school director, and community workers) reported that children attending Little Ripples are the best students arriving in the first year of primary school. They reported that these children stand out as being well-prepared for the school environment, have obtained the necessary social skills to be in a classroom, and are eager, alert, and quick learners.

An intended effect of the programme is to raise awareness of the importance of ECE for young children's development and future education pathways. Community leaders, Little Ripples staff, and parents/caregivers identified that positive development changes are observed in children

who attend the programme, although rigorous evidence of this is not available except in previous evaluation reports.

An unintended positive effect is the external validation of the quality of the curriculum and teacher training by the community. This has the potential to raise the quality of other ECE services. For example, JRS has requested that Little Ripples staff develop training materials and conduct training for non-Little Ripples teachers (e.g. those working in public secondary schools and JRS teachers).

An unintended negative effect is frustration within communities due to unmet demand for ECE services. The primary barrier to developing new Ponds is limited financial resources, which are related to iACT's fundraising capacity and the lack of alternative possible funding sources.

2. Evaluation of the Innovation Process and Scaling Model

Comparative Improvement

To what extent and in what ways does the education solution and its delivery model provide improvements in effectiveness, quality, or efficiency over current practices?

The Little Ripples programme offers a promising refugee-led alternative to standard top-down solutions for ECE provision in emergency contexts. The quality and effectiveness of the innovation have been proven across various sites in eastern Chad, whereby the programme management and service delivery models are replicated and adopted by the host communities.

The Little Ripples programme is participatory to the extent that it operates in partnership with community leaders and other members of the refugee community, and that Little Ripples' management is solely composed of refugees. Teamwork and empowerment are characteristic of iACT's work with refugees, and minimum standards for community engagement are largely met.

Adaptation and Learning

How effective was the Little Ripples innovation process in supporting adaptation and learning?

The iACT team received technical support from specialists to develop a ToC, workplans and scaling models, however, these benefits were not felt directly by key stakeholders such as Little Ripples staff and community members. The learning process occurred at a difficult time for the

iACT organisation, which suffered from the sudden death of its leaders and the visionaries of the Little Ripples programme. Adapting to this challenge created a pause in the innovation process but did not require programme adaptation.

Adaptation

- Little adaptation has occurred during programme implementation in new sites, as it was not deemed necessary by iACT or by Little Ripples' management. Small adaptations are made by refugee teachers (e.g. inventing songs), but the KIIs and FGDs reveal that ECE is a novelty in the community and that teachers appear to be content with the proposed curriculum. No specific challenges or constraints were identified during the innovation process that required adaptation.

Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL)

- Between 2015 and 2018, the Little Ripples programme was involved in several evaluations to assess child developmental outcomes, community learning, and family participation. Learning and reflection processes also take place involving iACT and Little Ripples staff in person during field visits, and these have shaped the design and planning phases for the innovation process.

- iACT's management wishes to strengthen the innovation process through the design and management of a MEAL framework. The MEAL system – which was codeveloped with NYU-TIES⁴ - cannot yet be judged as effective as it is still in the drafting phase, and has not been tested or implemented. To measure results against the ToC, a results framework was designed by iACT and NYU-TIES. It is understood that data collection began in November 2022.
- During the scaling in Am Nabak, a few refugees pointed to the fragility of the refugees regarding their ability to communicate concerns with trust and respect: that is, there was a fear among parents/caregivers and community members that the selection of Ponds would go to another community (or camp zone) if they raised too many questions. Thus, opportunities for mutual learning between community members and iACT are undermined to a certain extent by the fragility of the programme's accountability.

Do No Harm

To what extent and how was any potential harm caused to end users and primary beneficiaries by the innovation process identified and mitigated?

iACT has appropriate safeguarding and risk assessment policies and practices in place for working with vulnerable people. The Little Ripples operations manuals include such policies as sexual harassment, conflicts of interest and child safeguarding. International standards for ECE are not defined by a single normative document, so iACT (like many other NGOs) has chosen to adapt the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education for Younger Children (INEE, 2010).

Despite the inclusion of these safeguarding principles, it is not clear to the evaluation team whether they are used in training and hiring practices. There is no formal mechanism for, or training on, respecting safeguarding principles in the teacher training modules examined. Ongoing and regular monitoring of safeguarding and

quality principles by unbiased, independent community members (e.g. non-staff) is not included in the design of the programme. Mainstreaming child protection measures within the programme has not occurred. This could include regular participation of community health services, education monitoring mechanisms or other system strengthening measures.

The inclusion of refugees in the Little Ripples management is implicitly assumed to be a safeguarding mechanism to identify and monitor potential risk of harm. iACT identifies that working closely with and through communities from the outset of the Little Ripples programme was purposeful, with the aim of applying the humanitarian 'do no harm' principle and to ensure a protective partnership.

⁴ NYU-TIES was the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning mentor for HEA Phase 2.

Uptake

(1) To what extent are targeted end users and others taking on ownership of the innovation and adopting it?

The scaling process of the Little Ripples programme was delayed following the death of the Founder and Executive Director in November 2021. Below captures the progress against the three scaling strategies.

Scaling Strategy 1: Expansion of Little Ripples in eastern and southern Chad

Progress against this first scaling target - expansion of Little Ripples within two camps (Goz Amir and Djabal) where Little Ripples is already operating; and launching Little Ripples in Am Nabak - has been achieved, with full enrolment in all sites. Expansion into Am Nabak - with training led by the Little Ripples staff - is the first example of a refugee-led process of developing and expanding the Little Ripples programme. While the process has been the same as in previous camps (i.e. a 'listening' mission, community meetings, training, and hiring), this series of expansions is managed by refugees, rather than a combination of iACT staff and refugees. Motivation for initiating the refugee-led scaling is partly related to the travel limitations of Covid-19 and high international travel expenses for iACT staff.

The scaling originally planned in refugee communities in southern Chad has been postponed until 2023/4. iACT slowed down this expansion process with the objective of benefitting from lessons learned from the Am Nabak expansion. Specifically, iACT's management team wishes to stabilise and reinforce existing Little Ripples programme components (e.g. teacher training, monitoring and evaluation, community participation) to better understand sustainability factors.

Scaling Strategy 2: National network and knowledge management

The second scaling objective is to work with the national government on the inclusion of the Little Ripples programme model – or aspects of the Little Ripples

pedagogical approach – in Chad's national policy for ECD and learning.

Government ECE and refugee stakeholders, as well as their partner organisations, are not aware of the Little Ripples programme, or of iACT. It appears that they are aware of JRS, which is the main ECE actor in eastern Chad and which participates regularly in government activities around ECE. This finding reinforces the need for iACT and Little Ripples to establish a stronger identity – separate from JRS – if they wish to access greater advocacy and networking opportunities with national government agents.

Possible limits to progressing on this scaling objective relate to the status of refugees and the informal status of the Little Ripples programme. To achieve this objective, iACT and Little Ripples staff will require capacity building in terms of national advocacy skills and dedicated staff resources.

iACT reports that work on this scaling strategy started in November 2022 (after the conclusion of the evaluation).

Scaling Strategy 3: The creation of a global platform for scaling

Per the HEA project proposal, iACT has the objective of developing a new 'website with partnership, technical advising, and consulting information and materials, new PDFs for outreach, plan for outreach and promotion of business scaling models'. The business models would provide additional revenues to support Little Ripples operations and expansions. During the HEA grant period, iACT has worked with a scaling consultant to further define this scaling strategy. The focus has shifted from a monthly subscription-based service to a marketing approach, whereby the new website is built around iACT's capacity to provide technical advisory services. Supporting documents describe iACT's three areas of technical expertise (leadership development, sports for youth, and ECE).

(2) To what extent is the Little Ripple's innovation's scaling model and theory appropriate and its objectives realisable?

The Scaling Strategy is not yet fully articulated and requires an analysis and risk assessment of the three component strategies. There was a delay to developing the Theory of Scale as tragically the author of the Scaling Strategy died early in the HEA grant phase.

Strengths regarding scaling lie in the positive experiences of replicability of the Little Ripples programme thus far, as well as staff dedication and commitment to expansion. Financing, team capacity and challenges related to the status of refugees are major constraints and well-known challenges to scaling, particularly in humanitarian settings.

Sources of funding to support initial scaling were met by the HEA grant and other external sources. But sustainable

sources of funding to support the programme long-term or during scaling are not present. The Little Ripples programme is low-cost and requires low levels of fund commitment from external funders to bring the programme to scale in other environments (i.e. replication). Longer-term sustainable funding that does not depend on donor support will depend on fundraising by implementing partners or through income generation activities. Pushing through the other scaling strategies requires more understanding of budget implications, including human resource commitments. Government support to the ECE sector development is still nascent but could potentially include community-based programmes as government partners for expansion.

Conclusions

Little Ripples stands out as one of the few ECE service providers in eastern Chad, filling the need for a holistic ECD programme for 1,260 children aged 3 to 5 and their families. Refugees have been trained and capacitated to operate the Little Ripples programme, and iACT currently employs a majority female staff of 123 refugees across five camps. The programme offers new professional opportunities within the community, which otherwise are severely constrained.

The programme exemplifies a consistent, responsive, and equitable partnership between iACT and the refugee communities, providing high-quality early learning opportunities to young children in challenging settings. iACT's approach to providing technical and financial support to refugee communities has enabled the Little Ripples model to evolve within the community, leveraging the available assets and opportunities to mitigate and decrease challenges and threats, where possible. The low operating expenses per child (according to the lower-bound estimate made for this evaluation) reflect the simple operational structure of Little Ripples and low salary costs.

Little Ripples faces a set of systemic challenges, many of which relate to difficulties associated with the status of refugees in Chad. In terms of efficiency, while refugee community staff are empowered to lead decision-making, there is no structured governance entity or organisation. This leaves aspects of the governance and management of the Little Ripples programme across the camps in Chad

quite fragile. While governance and management are quite participatory, there are tensions related to the need for explicit and documented needs assessments with communities prior to the co-design of Ponds, including selection of the location. Furthermore, the long-term sustainability of the Little Ripples programme model has yet to be explored.

The active participation of community members is a critical factor for embedding Little Ripples in any refugee camp, and for the selection of the host families for Ponds. The level of community engagement thereafter remains relatively high, although accountability mechanisms are not always formalised or do not provide the opportunity for valid agency. Community cohesion in the camps facilitates local advocacy and support around the programme, although some minor tensions arise from the lack of sufficient Ponds. Little Ripples also builds on the individual capacities found in refugee communities, by identifying, hiring, and training motivated teachers and other management personnel to run the programme, in partnership with JRS.

The ability to expand Little Ripples in Chad through refugee-led establishment of new Ponds has been demonstrated and appears to be functioning well. Success in this expansion will require close follow-up and support to understand how and how well the partner refugee communities can independently implement the programme with fidelity, and to strengthen this.



Lessons

The Little Ripples programme has demonstrated that a strong partnership with a refugee-led orientation is able to deliver high-quality ECE services in low-resource, emergency settings in line with international standards. There are few global examples that have achieved this level of success in implementation. While this partnership, based on empathy, mutual learning, understanding, and equality, has driven much of the success of the programme,

barriers related to the status of refugees in Chad prevent stronger independence between iACT and Little Ripples. iACT and the Little Ripples teams require partnership with JRS, which has some positive aspects (e.g. positive spill-over, a strong advocacy partner etc.) but is also costly and can be seen as instrumental rather than transformative in nature.

Recommendations

Recommendations for ECD Programme Design

- Consider revising and updating the curriculum and training materials, in close collaboration with the refugees (staff and non-staff), to increase accountability, transparency, and ownership of the Little Ripples programme.
- Review available services and consider if it is possible to strengthen the holistic (multi-dimensional) approach to ECD by creating formal referral mechanisms between Little Ripples and other social service providers in the areas of child protection, health, and nutrition.
- Assess the needs and abilities of Camp Coordinators and Education Directors against their defined roles with a view to providing systematic training and coaching relevant to their specific roles and responsibilities.
- Assess teacher strengths, needs, and interests in relation to continuous professional development, especially pedagogical coaching and strengthening the peer groups/communities of practice.
- Review opportunities and interest among Little Ripples staff across camps regarding collaborating and learning together (management and pedagogical teams together or separately).

- Consider options to improve current assessment and monitoring practices relating to children’s learning outcomes, disaggregating by gender and disability, and provide transparency on programme achievements, which can be communicated to the communities.
- Strengthen the role of both parents/caregivers and communities across a range of supportive activities, including regular activities, community awareness campaigns, the creation of learning materials, and ensuring financial sustainability.

Recommendations for Community Participation and Accountability

- Formalise and strengthen accountability mechanisms further to ensure community participation in all phases of design, planning, and implementation.
- Consider the use of a community scorecard as a platform for community collaboration and governance of the Little Ripples programme. This can include regular, formal meetings between the Little Ripples team and stakeholders (including parents/caregivers and community leaders), with a focus on troubleshooting measures, and it could incorporate a risk mitigation framework.
- Revise and adapt criteria for the location selection for the Ponds and the registration of children. Enable valid community participation to mitigate risks of community tensions.
- Seek out and exploit opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the behaviour drivers underpinning parenting practices and beliefs that are critical for early learning, care, and development. Consider how to strengthen the social behaviour change dimensions of existing parent-engagement activities. Seek to formalise activities related to community sensitisation on ECD, generally, and ECE in particular.

Recommendation on a Financial and Administrative Framework

- Improve the costing model and data collection processes to ensure greater transparency, which can serve to improve efficiency, and for sustainability and scaling purposes.

Recommendations on the Innovation Process

- Improve the application of humanitarian and child safeguarding principles, in accordance with international legal framework and accountability mechanisms.
- Explore possible modifications in the governance structure of the Little Ripples programme in the camps to incorporate mechanisms for stronger accountability with stakeholders.
- Explore alternatives to the current partnership framework with JRS and develop a plan which emphasises refugees’ capacities.
- Strengthen communication and transparency through implementing a more structured governance mechanism that includes Little Ripples staff, JRS, and iACT.
- Increase the visibility of Little Ripples’ outcomes through improved data collection and advocacy.
- Develop an awareness/explanation tool for the programme for communities in the form of a flyer, short video, or in audio format.
- Finalise the revision of monitoring mechanisms to support decision-making around the quality and fidelity of the Little Ripples programme in each Pond.

Recommendations on Scaling

- For each scaling strategy, develop an analysis of the environment and state the risks which need to be mitigated.
- Encourage the development of each scaling strategy with relation to their relative timeliness and feasibility.
- Identify criteria which are essential across Little Ripples sites to enable programme replicability and sustainability in different contexts.



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