play to learn

INTEGRATING VIDEOS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN INTO MULTI-SECTORAL INTERVENTIONS:
What We're Learning from Pilots in Bangladesh, Colombia, and Kenya

JUNE 2023

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 education[1]. 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 area[2]. 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 behavior[3]. 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.

SESAME WORKSHOP
Watch PLAY Learn

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 partnering 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 is 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 will provide 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.
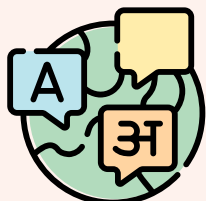
About *Watch, Play, Learn*

140 5-minute segments
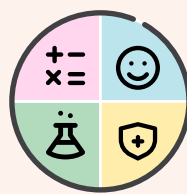
4 content areas
Math; science; socio-emotional learning; and child protection, health, and safety

19+ languages
WPL is (or will be) dubbed into 19 languages: English, Rohingya, Spanish, Levantine Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Zulu, Sesotho, South African English, Somali, Swahili, Urdu, Ukranian, Russian, Bangla, Hausa, Hindi, Telugu
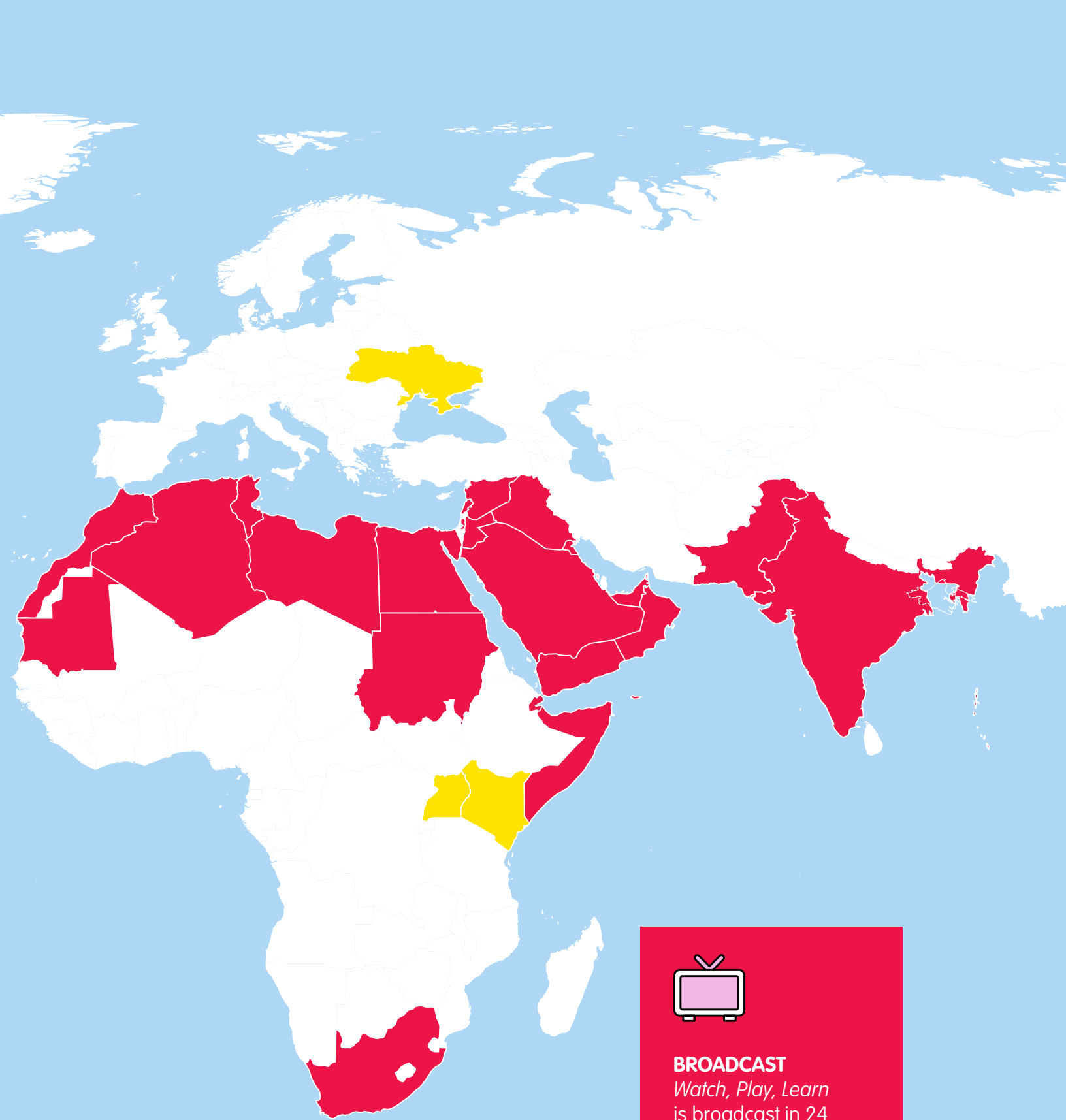
WATCH, PLAY, LEARN IN ACTION

DIRECT SERVICES

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

BROADCAST
Watch, Play, Learn is broadcast in 24 countries

WATCH, PLAY, LEARN PILOTS AROUND THE WORLD

Sesame Workshop is partnering with educators and social service providers to pilot the use of the *Watch, Play, Learn* videos in different locations around the world. Our goal is to learn how to facilitate 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 engage a diversity of partners, including national actors and international organizations. Finally, the videos will be used in programming rooted in different sectors, providing insight into their contribution to different areas of early childhood development. Additionally, we have partnered with New York University to measure the impact of our content on children's learning in Colombia, and we are planning to release the results by the first quarter of 2024.

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 May 2023

Video subjects: Social-emotional learning

Video language: Rohingya

Program participants: Facilitators and children from Rohingya refugee communities

Dosage: 2 videos per week

Technology: Projectors and the *Watch, Play, Learn* offline Android-based application

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

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 will be played during each facilitated psychotherapy session with caregivers (at minimum one video per week)

Technology: Caregivers will use their personal smart devices to access videos that are available on a private Facebook group

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 June 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 hopes to generate learnings around the following factors:

- Feasibility for scale
- Ease of use

- Durability
- Issues related to safety and privacy

- Impact on outcomes

Sesame Workshop looks forward to collaboratively and iteratively learning more about the technologies used in the *Watch, Play, Learn* pilots and continuing the conversation with stakeholders around the world.

WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

We have different learning priorities for each pilot, as well as lessons we're hoping to learn across all three. Topics we're hoping to learn about include:

Colombia:

- How integration of the videos into the existing caregiver support program improves caregiver self-efficacy and mental health

- How integration of the videos into the existing caregiver support program supports child-caregiver emotional relationships

- How watching the videos supports children's developmental outcomes

- How easily caregivers are able to use the video content at home with their children

- How much children enjoy the videos—and how caregivers perceive the videos

Kenya:

- How well the video content aligns with the national curriculum and can be integrated into classroom lessons

- How easily teachers can use the necessary technology to play the videos, and what their attitudes are around technology use in the classroom

- How use of the videos in the classroom impacts attendance and engagement of children

- How use of the videos in the classroom impacts inclusion of children with disabilities

- How integration of the videos impacts the overall quality of the program

Bangladesh:

- How easily facilitators can use the necessary technology to play the videos, and what their attitudes are around technology use in their program

- How well the video content can be integrated into existing lessons

- How engaged children are when watching the videos, especially across age groups

- How well children can understand the content of the videos

- How well our custom app for playlist creation and offline video play functions in this context

- How much of a value add the videos and associated resources are to child protection actors and donors working in this space

EARLY LESSONS LEARNED

Through analysis of the data from ongoing integration of content in our pilots in Kenya and Bangladesh, we have identified several early lessons:

Improvements in children's engagement

- In both pilots, teachers, facilitators, and/or caregivers expressed their belief that integrating *Watch, Play, Learn* content added to their children's engagement with their teachers, their peers, and the content of the lesson. As a teacher in Kenya said: "Most children demonstrated excitement and cheerfulness during video watching and *Watch, Play, Learn* activities—smiling, laughing, and engaging in a joyful manner."

- Attendance data for three out of five implementing partners showed an increase in attendance rates of at least 10% when comparing the two months before *Watch, Play, Learn* integration with the two months after it.

Adapting technological expertise

- Planning to integrate new technologies needs to consider the right mix of hardware and software technologies to enhance a program's effectiveness in achieving its intended learning outcomes without disrupting partners' existing processes.

- Integrating, testing, and finalizing new technologies took more time than expected—in future pilot programs, we will allocate additional time for planning, adapting, and integrating technology.

Feasibility and reception

- All implementing partners agreed that the integration of *Watch, Play, Learn* distribution technologies and content is feasible and have expressed interest in continuing to use the videos in their programming beyond the pilot period.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE WITH US

Interested in *Watch, Play, Learn* and want to know how your organization can engage with this work?

Watch clips and examples of the *Watch, Play, Learn* video content on YouTube:

Click here to watch! ······▶

Integrate the *Watch, Play, Learn* video library into your programming:

Want to include *Watch, Play, Learn* video content in your programming? Reach out to us and let's talk about how we can work together!

Learn from our pilot findings:

Check back with Sesame Workshop in late 2023 to hear what we've learned from the pilots featured here. We are dedicated to generating practical lessons and to sharing what we've learned with the wider ECD community.

Use our Technology Decision Roadmap to select appropriate technology solutions:

The Technology Decision Roadmap is a tool that facilitates a step-by-step process to help programs determine the most appropriate technology solutions and partnerships for distributing video content to children in low-connectivity and crisis-affected communities. The tool helps teams understand the contextual factors that might affect technology use, select appropriate technology solutions based on those factors, and analyze potential operational challenges that may arise from the chosen technology.

Look out for the upcoming *Watch, Play, Learn* toolkit:

Sesame Workshop is currently creating a toolkit to support front-line service providers to effectively use the *Watch, Play, Learn* video content in humanitarian and development settings. The toolkit will be designed for use by ECD-focused implementers including governments, community-based organizations, and international NGOs. Among the resources included in the toolkit will be sample lesson plans and developmentally appropriate activities for use alongside the videos, strategies for integrating video content into ongoing activities, training resources for facilitators focused on effectively using videos, draft workplans and other program management tools, access to an Android-based application for delivering the videos, and more. The toolkit will be publicly available in mid-2024.

Generate new evidence with us:

We hope to scale our integration of the *Watch, Play, Learn* videos in additional contexts in the future to keep learning about its implementation uses and impact. Additional questions we hope to answer with future projects include:

- Can the videos be used at scale?
- What are the child-level learning and wellbeing outcomes that result from watching the videos? What are the outcomes for caregivers or facilitators?
- To what extent does the content facilitate wider humanitarian sector goals?
- How does use of the *Watch, Play, Learn* toolkit facilitate use of the videos?
- How can the videos be used to facilitate inclusivity within classrooms?
- What settings and modalities are most effective for delivering the videos?

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.

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. Play to Learn is reaching families affected by the Rohingya and Syrian refugee crises through educational media and direct services in homes, play spaces, health centers, and more to provide the essential building blocks of play-based learning and nurturing care. Ultimately, Play to Learn aims to establish play-based early childhood development as an essential component of humanitarian response for all children and caregivers affected by crisis.

TO LEARN MORE, PLEASE CONTACT:

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