



**Knowledge hub**  
-  
**Collection of best practices**

**Summary of the best practice**

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) \*

Early Childhood Refugee Education in Tanzania: The Little Ripples Program

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented \*

Tanzania

### 3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to \*

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

### 4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) \*

Plan International Tanzania  
iACT

### 5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. \*

Pre-primary education; refugee education; social-emotional learning; psychosocial wellbeing; play-based; mindfulness; trauma-informed; community-led; children ages 3-5

### 6. What makes it a best practice? \*

The Little Ripples program is a play-based framework that can be integrated into any existing ECD program and used to guide any academic curriculum. It addresses issues of teaching and learning quality, as well as factors that are specific to refugee contexts. By using a trauma-informed approach and focusing on creating peaceful and positive learning environments, the Little Ripples program provides promotive factors that can support refugee teachers and students recovering from trauma to engage more meaningfully in teaching and learning. By incorporating positive behavior management and strategies, the Little Ripples program can also help to improve teacher-student relationships, build trust and comfort in the learning environment, and offer ways for teachers and students to cope with stress and adversity. By focusing on social-emotional learning, the Little Ripples program can also help students build skills and competencies that will help them both inside and outside of the classroom. And by incorporating reading and storytelling, the Little Ripples also provides promotive factors for early-grade reading and academic achievement more broadly

## Description of the best practice

### 7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? \*

There are still over 145,000 refugees, who fled political violence in Burundi, living in Tanzania. A robust education system was launched in the Tanzanian refugee camps, but only at the primary and secondary levels. As such, these communities experienced a lack of ECE for its youngest members. Recognizing that the earliest years of life are a critical time for individual growth and development, and can impact long-term health and wellbeing, Plan International Tanzania (Plan) began providing ECE to Burundian refugees in 2017. In early 2018, Plan partnered with iACT to adapt and launch iACT's Little Ripples program in Tanzania, supporting the healthy development and wellbeing of Burundian refugee children ages 3-5 there, and ensuring these children are prepared to enter and succeed in primary school.

The Little Ripples program has its origins in the refugee camps in eastern Chad. iACT's founder began visiting these camps in 2005, and, over the years, developed friendships with many of the people he would see year after year. In 2012, the refugee community in camp Goz Amer expressed that they saw a critical gap in early childhood education for their children. Listening to this, iACT worked with experts in early childhood education and with Darfuri refugees to co-create a play-based, trauma-informed ECE framework that could meet ECE minimum standards not only in eastern Chad, but also in the global North. As a result, Little Ripples is a community-led, play-based and trauma-informed ECE program. The Little Ripples framework guides refugee early childhood teachers to deliver play-based learning activities that foster social-emotional development and psychosocial wellbeing, while using positive behavior management techniques, including mindfulness, and integrates elements of peace education. Little Ripples trains refugee men and women to comprehensively support the needs of refugee children, and to lead and expand the program in their communities. Teacher trainings take place over the span of 18 months, are experiential, and are play-based themselves. After completion of the first set of training, trainees are equipped to begin teaching and leading the ECE program. The program can be hosted in formal school settings and in home-based centers. Little Ripples has now been operating through the leadership of refugees since 2013, and has been the only ECE program in eastern Chad for all these years. Its longevity is the result of its approach: trauma-informed, play-based, and refugee-led.

## 8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation? \*

In April 2018, iACT sent two U.S.-based trainers to Tanzania to train 40 Burundian refugee men and women in the Little Ripples pedagogy. These refugee men and women were already employed by Plan as ECCE teachers and, while some of them had been teachers prior to displacement, most of the ECCE teachers had not taught prior to displacement and had received little teacher training up to that point. The training took place over four days and covered content including: the Little Ripples values, creating a safe learning environment, play-based learning, trauma-informed teaching, positive behavior management, emotional literacy, reading and storytelling, mindfulness, health and hygiene, lesson-planning, and creating daily routines and schedules. Plan staff also attended the training to not only support logistics and translation, but also to understand the Little Ripples values and pedagogical style. The refugee teachers then received a follow-up refresher training in May 2019. The refresher training focused on challenges that teachers were facing in using the Little Ripples pedagogy and identifying solutions.

As of April 2018, Plan was providing ECCE in eight child-friendly spaces across the Mtendeli and Nduta refugee camps. ECCE lessons were delivered from 8am-11am, Mondays through Fridays. The ECE lessons followed the Burundian pre-primary curriculum, using the Little Ripples pedagogy, and supported children at three different learning levels with the aim of preparing children to enter and thrive in Grade 1. At the end of each academic year, students were assessed using a standardized question-based assessment tool, collaboratively developed by the Burundian refugee teachers and NGO staff. In December 2021, the Mtendeli camp was closed and the refugees residing there were relocated to the Nduta camp. Currently, Plan still delivers ECCE in the Nduta camp, using the Little Ripples pedagogy, in five child-friendly spaces in the Nduta camp.

## 9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? \*

Plan's Education in Emergencies team in Tanzania currently supports the running of the Little Ripples program and regularly monitors program quality and impact. Since 2018, the Little Ripples program in Tanzania has reached 5,973 children (3,001 girls & 2,972 boys) and 64 teachers. Upon completing an impact evaluation of the Little Ripples program five months after the initial training, Plan found positive results. From April 2017 – May 2017, regular attendance in ECCE activities increased by 65%, reaching more than 6,500 children. Also, after analyzing the results of individual student assessments, it was found that 90% of all Little Ripples students passed the assessment. Additionally, 20% of Level 3 ECCE students transitioned into Grade 1 of the formal school system, with that percentage expected to increase through ongoing enrollment.

Through focus group discussions and surveys, children participating in the Little Ripples program said they enjoyed coming to ECCE lessons and felt safe and happy there. All ECCE refugee teachers surveyed found the Little Ripples training relevant and useful, while 93% of surveyed teachers reported regularly using mindfulness in their classrooms. 100% of teachers surveyed saw an improvement in their students' academic learning and behavioral interactions. Teachers specifically attributed these improvements to the use of mindfulness exercises and positive discipline, which helped their students feel more confident and concentrate more during lessons. Teachers also reported fewer student conflicts and a happier, more cooperative and peaceful feel to their classrooms. Additionally, 95% of refugee parents surveyed reported an improvement in their children's behavior and learning at home since participating in ECCE. Furthermore, 86% of parents surveyed felt that mindfulness was helping their children to learn better and cope with stress, as well as reported seeing their children using mindfulness exercises outside of the classroom.

## 10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? \*

In order to achieve the positive results outlined above, it was important for Plan to recognize that its ECCE program needed to improve, as well as acknowledge its gaps in capacity to improve on its own and the support that a partner like iACT could provide. It was also necessary to identify a quality and adaptable pedagogy/program approach that incorporated social-emotional learning in order to address both the academic and social-emotional needs of ECCE students. Furthermore, it was critical to get refugee teachers' buy in and support for using the Little Ripples pedagogy during the initial teacher training, as well as ensure their appreciation for and understanding of mindfulness. Finally, it was vital to ensure regular monitoring of the program and assessment of the students.

Through the different implementation experiences so far, we are convinced that a community-based approach, which involves the community at all stages and engages its members in decision-making processes, is necessary in establishing program longevity. This approach is appropriate because it enables the community to maintain the functionality of ECCE centers even after humanitarian actors have left. We believe that this will provide breakthrough momentum in increasing ECCE access and in solving the problem of the severe lack of ECCE opportunities in crisis and displacement contexts.

## 11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? \*

The Little Ripples program is an approach that can be integrated into any existing ECD program and used along-side any academic curriculum. The program requires a short teacher training and can be done with adults who have no previous teaching experience. The program can be delivered through learning activities that take place in formal learning spaces, non-formal learning spaces, and home spaces. Little Ripples addresses issues of teaching and learning quality, as well as factors specific to refugee contexts. By using a trauma-informed approach and focusing on creating peaceful and positive learning environments, Little Ripples provides promotive factors that can help refugee teachers and students recover from trauma and engage more meaningfully in teaching and learning. By incorporating positive behavior management as well as mindfulness tools, the Little Ripples program can also help to improve teacher-student relationships, build trust and comfort in the learning environment, and help teachers and students cope with stress and adversity. By focusing on social-emotional learning, the Little Ripples program can also help students build skills and competencies that will help them both inside and outside of the classroom. And by incorporating reading and storytelling, the Little Ripples program also provides promotive factors for early-grade reading and academic achievement more broadly. As refugee teachers and students often face cyclical displacement and adversity throughout their lives, ECCE and the Little Ripples pedagogy can help to provide a strong foundation for young children at the time when they need it the most.

## 12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. \*

<https://www.iact.ngo/publications-and-resources/>