



Photo by Alejandra Arias

A Year in Review

2020



GLOBAL CENTER
for the Development of *the Whole Child*



UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME



Dear Friends,

As I reflect on this year, I am struck by the word ‘unprecedented.’ The term has certainly made its way into our everyday jargon with news reports sharing unprecedented stories of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have led to unprecedented work from home and virtual event plans, unprecedented holiday celebrations, and unprecedented decisions at the global, national, and family levels. Indeed, this year is in many ways ‘unprecedented.’

While shocking, large-scale school closures, however, are not unprecedented. Every year, nearly 75 million children experience disruptions to their education due to natural disasters, political strife, and disease outbreaks (ODI 2016). At the Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child (GC-DWC), we recognize that pandemics, conflict, and displacement are often unpredictable; yet we believe that how educational systems respond to them should not be. We must continue to strive for a world in which all children and adolescents have the opportunity to thrive regardless of the adversity they face.

This year has shown us more than ever the importance of our work to empower communities across the globe to create pathways out of adversity for children and youth, and to equip our partners with practical measurement tools and top-tier impact evaluations that ensure their programs are effective and have the highest impact. Large-scale school closures in 2020 have illustrated even more the importance of incubating, rapidly evaluating, and refining innovative, whole child development (WCD) approaches before we attempt to scale them in adverse contexts. COVID-19 has also exposed the glaring inequalities that children on the wrong side of the digital divide face, and highlighted the need to rethink how education systems must address all aspects of child well-being in times of crisis and normalcy, which is why in 2020, the GC-DWC renewed our commitment to producing actionable evidence for WCD.

Our year-end review walks you through the ways we have renewed and rethought our commitment to WCD in 2020, and shares some of our concrete practitioner-oriented tools, student-centered programming, publications, and reports. We hope you find inspiration in our work as we have found inspiration in the children and adolescents we have served this year.

Onwards!

Neil Boothby

Professor and Director

Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child

University of Notre Dame

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SHARE

SUPPORTING HOLISTIC AND ACTIONABLE RESEARCH
IN EDUCATION

Notre Dame's [Pulte Institute](#) and the GC-DWC were awarded a \$40 million cooperative agreement from the [U.S. Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](#) — one of the largest federal grants Notre Dame has ever received— to lead a five-year program to advance USAID learning priorities in the global education sector. The program is built upon a deep appreciation of local capacity and ownership as the cornerstone of effective development practice. The Notre Dame team will mentor a coalition of partners in higher education across Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia to implement the program. Beginning in August 2020, the work has focused on convening critical country-level and regional stakeholders to identify pathways to address learning agenda questions around education in crises and conflict, foundational learning skills, youth and workforce development, and higher education. In the future, the program will offer a series of capacity-strengthening actions — including training sessions, workshops, mentorship, and technical assistance — to ensure that individuals and institutions engaged in the research generation, translation, and utilization ecology are equipped to work together to advance education interests. [LEARN MORE](#)



In September, [Dr. Nancy Rydberg](#) joined the GC-DWC as a research specialist lead on the SHARE initiative. Nancy has a PhD in Educational Policy Studies and in Development Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an MA in Development Management and Policy from Georgetown University.



COVID-19 RESPONSE

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted nations all across the world with profound implications for education. Yet, as has been seen with previous pandemics, this virus is not an equal opportunity killer: it disproportionately targets the most vulnerable in society because they are more exposed, more fragile, and more impoverished. The same inequity is true for those children who can no longer attend school. The digital divide has long since impacted low-resource and rural schools' responses to crises that necessitate distance learning, and children in remote and rural parts of countries are often excluded from internet-dependent learning programs and are disproportionately adversely affected by school disruptions and closures. Recognizing this reality, the GC-DWC launched its COVID-19 education initiative in April 2020 in partner countries to rapidly identify innovations and promising practices to ensure children in remote, rural, and marginalized communities are able to continue their learning and meet food security needs. Learning from global partners was shared in real-time on the GC-DWC [website](#) and highlights not only the challenges but also the innovative responses to these unprecedented circumstances to help inform future distance learning systems development. GC-DWC teams in Peru, Colombia, and Haiti launched additional research initiatives in relation to their specific contexts and experiences of COVID-19. [LEARN MORE](#)

HAITI

Given Notre Dame's leadership role in the education sector in Haiti, the GC-DWC launched a comprehensive research initiative to develop a national roadmap on how to close the digital divide, including fostering new partnerships between a global internet provider, a Haitian technology company, and education providers within the GC-DWC network. These partnerships are in the process of creating distance learning resource hubs to make digital learning accessible to learners living in low-tech environments in Haiti for use in times of crisis and normalcy. The GC-DWC looks forward to finalizing and sharing more of this Haiti COVID-19 research in 2021. Read more about the GC-DWC's [radio-distance learning](#) response in the Haiti program update.

COLOMBIA

In April, the GC-DWC's Colombia-based team initiated a comprehensive study of the impact of COVID-19-related school closures on rural schools in Colombia. With the support of Educapaz, the team conducted key informant interviews and over 2,500 surveys in five regions of the country to identify challenges and innovations in relationship to at-home learning, including the emotional impact of the pandemic on principals, teachers, parents, and students. The team then hosted webinars with hundreds of participants on their findings to connect actors and share important ideas for increasing access to education and resources for rural learners and their families. A formal report will be released in 2021.

PERU

In light of the pandemic, the GC-DWC's Peru-based team conducted a series of key-informant interviews at the national level to better understand the challenges facing the education sector and innovations that emerged within the first few months of the pandemic. Interview participants shared that although the Peruvian government's response, "Aprendo en Casa" or "I learn at home" (an online learning platform), was timely, it faced several challenges that affected quality, learning outcomes, and access. [Read the report.](#)



A rural school in Colombia. Rural Colombian schools had to develop innovative solutions to distance learning in low-tech environments during COVID-19 school closures.

HAITI

In collaboration with the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) Haiti, this year the GC-DWC launched the Strong Beginnings initiative, which continues Notre Dame's early-grade literacy efforts in Haiti and includes early childhood development programming to ensure that children between three and six years old have a nurturing developmental environment and are ready for school. Through the support of an \$8 million award from USAID, the GC-DWC is creating pre-literacy materials for early childhood development facilitators and parents, parenting education for parents of pre-primary school children, and training for local church leaders on early childhood development, with partners from Catholic Relief Services and the Episcopal Commission for Catholic Education. Strong Beginnings also includes an innovative learning lab that works with community partners to identify intractable issues that affect child development and learning, develop community-driven solutions to these issues, and test these solutions before scaling them up in other areas.

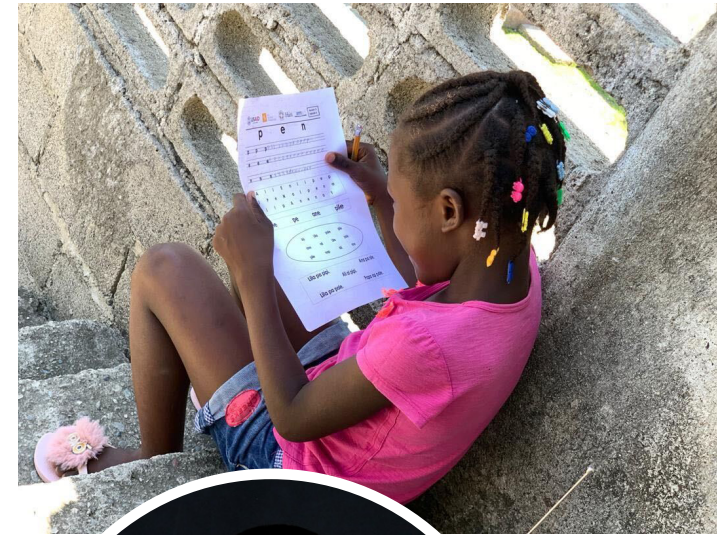
In response to COVID-19-imposed school closures, ACE Haiti and the GC-DWC piloted an [innovative radio-distance learning program](#) based on ACE Haiti's pre-existing [Je Parle Bien Francais and M'ap ni let ale curriculum](#). The program developed over 65 episodes and distributed 15,200 solar-powered radios to families to facilitate engagement. The episodes provide backing for social and emotional learning, interactive activities for younger students, and strategies for parents to support young learners at home. Programming for pre-K students and parents began broadcasting in June on 14 radio stations in five departments in Haiti, providing families and children with opportunities to learn and grow while schools were closed due to the pandemic.

As a branch of the GC-DWC's COVID-19 research on the digital divide in Haiti and radio-distance learning program, in August, the GC-DWC launched "Alo Manan," or "Hello Mama," an empowerment initiative to give mothers social and parenting support as they listen to the GC-DWC radio program. As the program grew, a weekend, community-based positive parenting course developed to equip parents with tools and strategies for nurturing parenting. These activities will continue throughout 2021. [LEARN MORE](#)



Above: A mother participates in an in-person session of "Alo Manan" and shares her version of her dream home.

Top right: First-grader, Cesnie-Flores listens to the Read Haiti/Strong Beginnings radio program and completes an accompanying comprehension worksheet.



In September, [Danta Bien-Aimé](#) joined the GC-DWC as a project coordinator in Haiti. Danta holds a Master of Medical Sciences in Global Health Delivery from Harvard Medical School, acquired on a Fulbright Scholarship, and a bachelor's in nursing science from the Episcopal University of Haiti.

COLOMBIA

In partnership with [Educapaz](#) and six additional in-country programs, the GC-DWC team concluded research on a two-year project to identify resilience building factors in conflict-affected schools in Colombia. The team assessed quantitative school indicators of both adversity and positive school performance and selected schools that consistently demonstrated exceptionally high performance in post-conflict settings to participate in the study. However, due to COVID-19, the team had to pivot from an in-person study to developing a case study, leveraging surveys and virtual interviews. Ultimately, the case study created a bank of resilience in education practices and a working group focused on program improvement for rural conflict-impacted schools. A formal report will be released in 2021, and the GC-DWC will continue to directly serve as an adviser to the Ministry of Education in Bogota, Colombia on whole child development. [LEARN MORE](#)



Teachers, principals, and school officials missed seeing students fill the classrooms and yards of schools in Colombia during COVID-19 closures.

PERU

Working with [UNESCO Horizontes](#), the GC-DWC concluded a two-year study on community perceptions of social and emotional skills in two rural regions of Peru. The UNESCO Horizontes program in Peru seeks to foster social and emotional development in rural, indigenous youth in Peru and looks to better understand how such competencies are best defined, fostered, and measured. The two-year study resulted in a culturally-specific social and emotional learning (SEL) evaluation tool and a working guidebook for understanding how child resilience and SEL competencies are understood, measured, and acted upon in Peru. Additionally, the locally-grounded SEL tool identified 25 different culturally-relevant SEL skills that will allow Horizontes to assess the impact of their programming on the development of these skills.

In addition to this research, the GC-DWC launched a Community of Practice (COP) in March 2020 in partnership with UNESCO Horizontes and [Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya](#). The COP has served as a space for actors in education, including the Ministry of Education (MINEDU), academics, and practitioners, to share Peruvian knowledge and experience in the SEL space and collaborate. In 2021, the GC-DWC will continue to directly serve as an adviser to the Ministry of Education in Peru on whole child development. [LEARN MORE](#)



A panel at the first Community of Practice, hosted in Peru in early March.

A view from a rural community the GC-DWC team visited during the interview phase of their SEL research.

UGANDA

The GC-DWC commenced work on a new project in Uganda as a member of USAID's [LASER PULSE initiative](#). The GC-DWC's research-practice consortium—with the [Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education](#) and [Save the Children](#)—will engage a diverse group of teachers from settlement and non-settlement contexts in Uganda to co-create a contextually-appropriate teacher well-being measurement tool. Paying greater attention to teacher well-being, especially how to assess and better support teachers' well-being in low-resource and displacement contexts, is a key step in providing equitable, quality learning opportunities for students, and is thus at the core of this research. Data collection for the project is underway with more to come in 2021. [LEARN MORE](#)

KENYA

The GC-DWC continued to support the [Juhudi Youth Development Initiative](#) in the Mugunda Ward of Kenya throughout 2020. Activities that emerged from this partnership include:

- Skills workshops for Kenyan youth in blogging and photography
- A pen-pal program with the Notre Dame track and cross country teams
- Development of smart agribusiness manuals
- Refinement and support of youth mentorship programming
- Continuation of youth-centered activities

The GC-DWC remains actively engaged in Kenya's TVET program and opportunities to support holistic, youth-centered activities. [LEARN MORE](#)

TANZANIA & DRC

The GC-DWC has partnered with the Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) in a four-year study on academic resilience related to the NRC's "catch-up education" programs in Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Catch-up education programs, such as the NRC's accelerated education programs, fill an important gap for children and adolescents in crisis. However, there is little significant documentation on the impact of such programming, including how they contribute to learning achievement and how successful they are at facilitating pathways between accelerated programming and formal and non-formal education. This study seeks to address some of these information gaps by taking into account individual student learners and their affiliations to people, schools, and wider communities. In 2020, the GC-DWC completed its third year of data collection for this qualitative study. Study findings will be available after the completion of the project in 2022. [LEARN MORE](#)



A youth volunteer tends to her crops as part of the Juhudi Initiative's agribusiness initiative.



A teacher participates in a workshop in Uganda.

PROJECTS, PUBLICATIONS, & EVENTS

Beyond country-specific activities, the GC-DWC remained active in 2020 with promoting evidence-based practices for whole child development through a variety of events, publications, and learning opportunities.



GUIDE ON FOSTERING RESILIENCE

As a result of three years of on-the-ground research and programming focused on fostering resilience in low-resource contexts, the team published a new guidebook in November: *Fostering Resilience for Children in Adversity: A Guide to Whole Child School-Community Approaches*. The guidebook presents evidence for adopting a school-community approach to fostering resilience for children living in poverty and other forms of adversity. Designed for practitioners and educators, the guide shares robust, global examples of interventions implemented at the home, school, and community levels that take a holistic approach to their programming and concludes with key considerations for research and learning agendas. [READ THE GUIDE](#)



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Dr. Nikhit D'Sa, Senior Associate Director of Research, Evaluation, and Learning, joined the LEGO Foundation as an expert instructor in its online course, "Coping with Changes: Social-Emotional Learning Through Play." The course guides learners through mental health and psychosocial support and SEL strategies to support children and adolescents with coping with change through play. You can see Dr. D'Sa in Week 8 of the course: "Caring for Teens and Adolescents." [LEARN MORE](#)



PRACTICAL MEASUREMENT

The GC-DWC released the Practical Measurement module, a self-paced, online video course that covers critical issues that practitioners in low-resource and fragile contexts need to consider when measuring the learning and development outcomes of children and adolescents. **Dr. Nikhit D'Sa** hosts the course and guides users through the self-paced modules, sharing practical measurement and evaluation guidance, insights, tips, and resources based on his more than a decade of experience in the field.

The team looks forward to providing this resource in additional languages in 2021. [TAKE THE COURSE](#)



UNESCO MOBILE LEARNING WEEK

In October, **Dr. Anasthasie Liberiste-Osirus**, Associate Director of Language and Literacy Education, led a breakout session at UNESCO's annual Mobile Learning Week featuring the Read Haiti/Strong Beginnings radio program. Her session, "A Whole Child Approach to Radio-based Distance Learning," taught participants how to transform the home into an active learning environment that benefits learners and families in both times of crisis and normalcy. The workshop encouraged participants to look beyond times of disruption and unpack the role that radio can play in creating a more resilient education system that reaches all learners moving forward. [WATCH THE SESSION](#)



MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

The GC-DWC continued its leadership role of the Measuring what Matters Learning Partnership, a consortium of Porticus Foundation grantees, country-specific and global, working to embed whole child development (WCD) in education systems. The team hosted a series of six webinars on a variety of topics ranging from the education sector's response to COVID-19 to how to strategically frame the concept of WCD in communications and advocacy materials.

Despite having to pivot from gathering in Cusco, Peru, in April due to the pandemic, the GC-DWC successfully hosted the second MWM-LP weeklong convening entirely virtually, covering topics from practical measurement to global trends in WCD. While 2020 marks the end of the three-year MWM-LP, the GC-DWC is grateful for the opportunities it provided to foster opportunities for collaboration and learning dissemination through regional conversations, connecting global partners to country programs, and creating learning summaries and publications. The team looks forward to engaging with partners in a Global Learning Community moving forward. [LEARN MORE](#)



BRIEF ON DEFINING WHOLE CHILD DEVELOPMENT

As part of the GC-DWC's commitment to evidence-based communications and advocacy around whole child development, the team published a brief on what is meant by the term 'whole child development' and why it's needed to address child development and learning for children growing up in adversity. [READ THE BRIEF](#)

ACADEMIC JOURNALS

The GC-DWC team authored and co-authored several publications in 2020.

[Causes of family separation and barriers to reunification: Syrian refugees in Jordan](#)

Hannah Chandler*, Neil Boothby*, Zahirah McNatt, Margaret Berrigan, Laura Zebib, Patricia Elaine Freels, Hamza Alshannaq, Noor Majdalani, Ahmed Mahmoud, and Esraa Majid

[Organising primary grade literacy environments in Mozambique](#)

Jeongmin Lee, Stephanie Simmons Zuilkowski, and Nikhit D'sa*

[Integrating new knowledge into everyday practices: teacher pedagogy in early grade literacy in rural Mozambique](#)

Jeongmin Lee, Nikhit D'sa*, and Stephanie Simmons Zuilkowski

LOOKING AHEAD



PROJECT SAMPOORNA

The GC-DWC will serve as the anchor organization in Project Sampoorna, a four-year project focused on improving the Telangana Social/ Tribal Welfare Residential Education Institution Societies' (the "Society") ability to support students, from historically marginalized backgrounds, using curricular and extracurricular activities in approximately 380 schools. The GC-DWC will support and advise key educators and members of the Society, including teachers and principals, on how to develop and integrate a whole child development (WCD) framework into program activities. The GC-DWC will also strengthen the Society's capacity to adopt a WCD lens in programming by offering best-practice workshops on WCD and training on how to measure the efficacy and impact of their programs. The inclusive design of the research process strives to ensure the sustainability of project activities long after the project period.



CREATION OF WHOLE CHILD DEVELOPMENT COURSE

As part of its efforts to close the gap between evidence and action, the GC-DWC, in collaboration with the Institute for Educational Initiatives, plans to develop a course and practicum around WCD for undergraduate students at Notre Dame.



LEARN MORE

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