



GLOBAL CENTER
for the Development of *the Whole Child*



UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

Five YEARS OF THE GC-DWC

Research, Learnings, and Impact

Foreword

By Matthew Kloser
*Hackett Family Director, Institute for Educational Initiatives
University of Notre Dame*

The University of Notre Dame seeks to be a force for good in the world. This mission is reflected in the daily work of the Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child (GC-DWC), an integral part of the Institute for Educational Initiatives (IEI). Over the past five years, the GC-DWC has advanced research, fostered partnerships, and implemented innovative programs that have improved the lives of children and youth facing adversity in over 25 countries.

As part of the IEI, the GC-DWC embodies Notre Dame's dedication to educational excellence and full human flourishing, ensuring that every child—regardless of circumstance—has access to learning environments that nurture resilience, well-being, and opportunity. Through its interdisciplinary and collaborative approach, the Center's work takes the investment in and findings from research, translating insights into action through direct engagement with educators, policymakers, and communities worldwide. By working alongside these local communities, the GC-DWC develops and implements evidence-based solutions that strengthen education systems, design early childhood interventions, and support children affected by conflict and displacement.

One could point to any of the Global Center's implementation research initiatives for evidence of its impact: its work in Haiti has demonstrated the transformative power of mother-tongue literacy instruction, yielding significant improvements in reading outcomes; in India, Project Sampoorana is fostering safer, more inclusive school environments while integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into classrooms; across Africa and beyond, the Center's research-to-action initiatives, such as Supporting Holistic and Actionable Research in Education (SHARE), have influenced national education policies and equipped learners with 21st-century skills. This five-year research review offers a compelling look at the GC-DWC's contributions, from pioneering play-based learning models to informing policy decisions that create sustainable change. These efforts underscore the power of interdisciplinary collaboration and the impact of research-driven solutions in addressing complex global challenges.

On behalf of the Institute for Educational Initiatives, I extend my gratitude to the dedicated scholars, practitioners, and partners who have made this work possible. The Global Center's mission aligns with the broader research vision of the IEI—to advance educational opportunity, innovation, and social impact. As we look to the future, I am confident that the GC-DWC will continue to be a force for good, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Best,
Matthew Kloser



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Executive Summary

The University of Notre Dame's **Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child** (GC-DWC), established in 2019, is dedicated to enhancing the lives of children and youth facing adversity globally. Rooted in our work across 25 countries, we have leveraged evidence-based innovations to develop effective Whole Child Development (WCD) approaches to not only advance children's academic achievement, but also create safe, supportive, and equitable family, school, and community environments. Working with partners across the research-practice-policy spectrum, we iteratively develop and test WCD approaches, translating evidence into impactful programs. Our approach focuses on the relationships and settings that are most important in the lives of children and youth. By aligning knowledge, attitudes, practices, and policies within and across these settings—like the home, school, and community—we focus on how to best activate the systems which foster resilience and justice for children. We then use this learning and knowledge to advance policies which improve the lives and outcomes of children.

Since its inception, the GC-DWC has remained committed to research-driven action, employing a “learning by doing” approach, ensuring that evidence is at the core of its interventions. Utilizing Implementation science is central to the GC-DWC's work, enabling iterative improvements and shaping program design based on real-world feedback to ensure feasibility, scalability, and sustainability. For example, In Haiti, the GC-DWC has implemented a mother-tongue literacy curriculum alongside enrichment materials and educator professional development, with RCTs showing significant gains in reading skills. The Center also prioritizes activating the “L3 system” (home, school, church) to address children's holistic needs, with parent empowerment programs demonstrating positive outcomes in caregiving practices. In India, Project Sampoorana aims to establish a WCD model of education through comprehensive systems engagement in Telangana. Project Sampoorana promotes safe school environments through policy, training, and the integration of a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum. Furthermore, a WCD and SEL curriculum is being implemented across 70+ universities and colleges to train future educators.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the ADAPT project equipped learners with 21st-century skills, utilizing learning assessment data to influence national curriculum reform in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Through initiatives like Supporting Holistic and Actionable Research in Education (SHARE), the GC-DWC bridges the gap between research and policymaking, strengthening education systems in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) by fostering collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. The Center's innovative work also includes the co-creation of teacher well-being measurement tools in Uganda and the development of the Wellbeing ASSETS framework, which assesses the skills and supports necessary for teacher success.

Looking forward, the GC-DWC seeks to strengthen its role as a leading research hub for evidence-based childhood development strategies in low-resource and crisis contexts. Key goals include advancing its work in translating research into actionable programs and policies, strengthening practical assessment tools for programs and policymakers, and securing endowments to support leadership positions. This five-year review highlights the GC-DWC's achievements in implementation science, underscoring the Center's unwavering commitment to creating environments where all children can thrive.



Pathways out of Poverty

The Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child (GC-DWC) is dedicated to designing, evaluating, and advising on holistic programs and policies that will improve the lives of children and youth growing up in adverse conditions across the world. It unites the growing portfolio of global education and child development programs and research within Notre Dame's Institute for Educational Initiatives (IEI) as well as the diverse strengths of faculty, research fellows, and students from across the University.

The Center's goal is to create social ecologies that address the needs of the whole child by promoting not only academic learning, but also nurturing relationships, social-emotional skill development, and civic engagement. This approach is distinctive, as few education interventions for vulnerable children take a holistic view of their assets and needs, instead focusing only on the school environment. The GC-DWC identifies how homes, schools, parishes, and communities can together be altered to promote child development and learning by embedding breakthroughs in neuroscience, psychology, child development, and learning sciences in its implementation programs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America-Caribbean. It also carefully measures the results of nutrition interventions and student learning outcomes in communities where food insecurity is common.

The GC-DWC combines global reach with local impact. We employ a variety of research methodologies, ranging from REALM (Rapid Evaluation, Assessment, and Learning Methods); to QulP (Qualitative Impact Assessment Protocol); to Mixed Methods (that combine inductive and deductive thinking); to RCTs (Randomized Controlled Trials); to sentinel site surveillance (to track child and family health and nutrition trends). In India and Haiti alone, we are operational in over 770 schools, including 220 Catholic schools in Haiti, and an additional 78 universities and colleges in India. Our research-to-action programs benefit a combined 540,000 students, over 35,000 teachers and school directors, and nearly 100 university faculty. We also serve as Principal Investigators for the majority of research projects supported by a \$40 million USAID grant (SHARE) managed by the Pulte Institute in the Keough School of Global Affairs. Our studies are informing the US Government's foreign assistance education policies and practices.

In all of its work, the GC-DWC embeds a "learning by doing" approach, investing in promising practices and pruning less effective ones, so that research is translated into timely and thoughtful action. This commitment has shaped our five-year journey, with evidence driving every decision.



Our Team



Neil Boothby, Ed.D. Professor and Director

Neil is a Professor and the Director of the Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child at the University of Notre Dame. He is an internationally recognized expert and advocate for children affected by war, displacement and abject poverty. As a senior representative of UNICEF, UNHCR, and Save the Children, he has worked for more than 25 years with children in adversity in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.

Associate Director of Programs **Hannah Chandler**

Hannah Chandler provides project coordination, research development, and strategic direction for the GC-DWC's multiple country projects. Her own research interests focus on ways to improve health and development outcomes for vulnerable populations, most recently with Syrian refugees in the Middle East. She has previously supported the efforts of the Access Campaign at Médecines Sans Frontières (MSF) in vaccines advocacy, and the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security in preparedness for biological threats. Hannah holds a Master of Public Health from Columbia University where she specialized in population and family health along with qualitative methodologies for supporting displaced and vulnerable populations.



Nikhit D'Sa, Ed.D. Assistant Professor and Director for Research

Nikhit is a developmental psychologist and applied education researcher. He studies how the relationships and settings around children living in low-resource, crisis-affected, or fragile contexts can be leveraged to support their learning and development. He is interested in identifying modifiable patterns and routines within relationships and settings that can be directly targeted through practitioner-led interventions. His research has focused on how we better align child development messages across home-school-community, cost-effectively incorporate education technology in the classroom, and systematize social and emotional learning (SEL) approaches across the school. He has also worked with teachers to understand how their occupational well-being and agency affect their instructional practices and ability to support children's learning.

Director for Haiti and Senior Associate Director for Strategic Planning **Kate Schuenke-Lucien**

Since 2012, Kate and her team have implemented education programs in Haiti focused on early grade literacy, social-emotional learning, early childhood development, and community engagement. Kate led a mother-tongue early grade reading program, Read to Learn, in two Haitian dioceses from 2014 to 2016 that showed dramatic improvements in reading skills for participating students. The strong results of Read to Learn led to an investment of over \$30 million by public and private donors for programming in Haiti. Since 2016, GC-DWC Haiti programming in 350 school communities has benefitted over 120,00 students across five dioceses. Kate is fluent in both Haitian Creole and Spanish, and is currently a PhD candidate (ABD) in political science at the University of Notre Dame.



Fernanda Soares, Ph.D. Assistant Research Professor

Fernanda is a researcher, evaluator and technical advisor in the education and youth sectors with over 12 years of experience working in low-resource, crisis, and conflict settings. Fernanda has been the Principal Investigator (PI) on studies of teacher in-service and pre-service professional development, teacher wellbeing, student learning and youth development. Through her research and evaluation work, she has employed a variety of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches to conduct formative studies, impact assessments, implementation science research and development of measurement tools. Fernanda holds a PhD in Public Policy Analysis from Maastricht University and a Master's in International Development from American University with a concentration in program evaluation. She is a Brazilian native fluent in both Portuguese and Spanish.



Shwetha J Parvathy Research and Learning Advisor

Shwetha has eight years of work experience spanning across data analysis and program management, with a focus on education in developing countries. Previously, she worked on the program management team at Pratham and supported their education programs across multiple geographies. She holds a master's degree in Public Policy from Georgetown University and a bachelor's degree in Instrumentation Engineering from Kerala University (India).

Research Associate **Dakota Peterson**

Dakota has 5 years of experience in the education sector, both in the classroom teaching as well as in nonprofit organizations in data analyst roles. She holds a Master's degree in Global Affairs with a specialization in sustainable development and international education policy from the University of Notre Dame. At the GC-DWC, she contributes to research initiatives across multiple country projects, including India, emphasizing data collection and visualization.



Rubina Philip Associate Director, GC-DWC Telangana, India

Rubina is a development professional with substantial experience working on children's and women's issues in India. She has worked closely with survivors of violence especially those of trafficking and child marriage. In her tenure, she has ensured improved delivery of services and increased access to justice thereby ensuring economic, social, and emotional rehabilitation and reintegration for survivors. Rubina holds a postgraduate degree in Social Work from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and a bachelor's degree in Psychology, Political Science, and English Literature.

Associate Director of Language and Literacy **Tamara Doucet-Larozar**

Tamara is a passionate educator with over a decade of experience focused on improving learning outcomes and environment for vulnerable youth in underserved communities, and building local organizations' management approach and systems. Her dedication to vulnerable youth in underserved and low-income countries emerged from her Brooklyn immigrant roots, and from understanding and addressing students' learning gaps and corresponding behavioral learning challenges that were left unresolved, at times unidentified, within the poor primary education services received. Tamara holds a Bachelor's in International Relations and African Studies from the College of William and Mary and a Master's of Science in Nonprofit Management and Global Policy from the New School of Public Engagement. She is fluent in French and Haitian Kreyol along with basic Spanish.



Jeongmin Lee, Ph.D. Research Technical Advisor for SHARE

Jeongmin Lee is an educational researcher with over a decade of experience working in international education and development in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East with expertise in early childhood and primary education, teacher pedagogy and well-being, and education policy and program analysis. She has been the principal/co-principal investigator on studies of early literacy development, social and emotional well-being, teacher program development, and child and teacher assessment in low-resource and fragile contexts. Jeongmin is well-versed in quantitative research methods, including causal inference, structural equation modeling, and psychometric measurement as well as qualitative research methods, including discourse and content analysis and case studies. Jeongmin holds a Doctor of Philosophy in International Education Policy and a Master of Science in Educational Measurement and Statistics from Florida State University.



Cassandra Bissainthe Associate Director, Program Management, Continuity of Learning, Haiti

Cassandra has over 10 years of experience working with international organizations, such as CRS and Trocaire, managing programs and supporting emergency response efforts in major emergencies such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake, 2016 Hurricane Mathew in Haiti, 2019 Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas, 2021 La Soufriere Volcano response in St Vincent and the Grenadines and the 2021 Earthquake in Haiti. In her line of work, Cassandra is particularly passionate in the work with local partners, partnership and capacity strengthening with a focus on the "localization" approach, cross cultural learning, community engagement and Safeguarding. Cassandra holds a BA in International Relations and a Master's degree in Disaster Management from Florida International University. She was also an intern for the office of the general counsel at CARICOM (Caribbean Community) in Georgetown, Guyana during the summer of 2010. Her language skills include fluency in French, English, Spanish and Haitian Creole.

Assistant Project Director Madison Morris

Madison Morris is the Admin and Finance Director for the GC-DWC, managing grant coordination, financial management, contracts, and project proposals. She has prior experience working in the non-profit sector, serving at-risk youth in Greater Northwest Indiana by providing them with the tools they need to reach their full potential and become productive and caring citizens through educational, social, and emotional well-being programs.

Madison has her Master of Business Administration from Purdue University where she specialized in Project Management. She is passionate about bringing resources to children around the world who face adversity, so they may reach their full potential.



Brooke Parker Communications Associate

Brooke Parker is the Communications and Development Officer for the GC-DWC. She has marketing and communications experience in both the non-profit and private sectors. Brooke holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Grand Valley State University, and is dedicated to making the work of the GC-DWC digestible and accessible to a broader audience. Brooke's prior experience working in the non-profit sector included operating as the Marketing Director for a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, aiming to foster meaningful employment for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. She is passionate about the overall mental and physical wellness of the world's vulnerable youth, and is eager to communicate the various projects of the GC-DWC to partners around the globe.

SHARE Technical Associate Director Nancy Rydberg, Ph.D.

Nancy Rydberg is a comparative and international education policy researcher. She has conducted research on education policy, youth, and gender in Uganda, Argentina, and the USA and has supported research projects in Ethiopia, Malawi, and Egypt. She has worked as part of international teams designing, implementing, and evaluating educational initiatives and youth livelihood projects with Save the Children and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). Nancy is fluent in Spanish and Acholi (a dialect of Luo) and proficient in Portuguese. 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. She received her BA from the University of the South in Sewanee, TN.



Milaine Alexandre Senior Research and Pedagogical Manager, Haiti

As a lawyer and a graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Mme Alexandre studied gender and human rights at EQUITAS (Canada) and Strasbourg (France). She is currently a Senior Pedagogical Manager for GC-DWC Haiti's literacy and SEL programming in the South and Grande'Anse departments of Haiti. Milaine is a strong advocate for mother tongue, hands-on learning and has mentored members of her community in problem solving techniques and technology in order to provide high-quality learning opportunities to students. Her work has strengthened schools and communities throughout Haiti. She believes that a communicative language approach to teaching Creole will empower Haitian children to be active participants in their education. She has also been a consultant to the Provisional Electoral Council, a project manager for the relief effort in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, and a facilitator for Teachers Training Teachers (TTT).



Roseline Mézè Pedagogical Manager, Haiti

Born in Port-au-Prince in 1988, Roseline Mézè is the third daughter in a family of five children. As far back as she can remember, she has always gravitated towards education and is a teacher at heart, having studied education and journalism. Roseline has twelve years of teaching, supervision, and curriculum development experience including working with the MENFP. She is the co-author of three books on Creole communication for the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades and is in the process of developing several additional children's literature books.

Senior Technical Staff for Early Grade Learning, Haiti Rachelle Mathurin

Rachelle Mathurin has over 18 years of experience in education program design and management, Early Grade Learning didactic material development, youth capacity-building programs and accelerated learning, and curriculum design. In addition, she has over 25 years of teaching experience. She recently served as the Education National Administrator for UNESCO's Haiti office and previously as Project Director for the 5-year USAID literacy program: LRCP Haiti. She also worked with the World Bank, conducting education research and publishing diagnostic tools for instructional materials. She was a Governmental Liaison for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and held faculty positions at Benjamin Franklin College and Showa Boston College in Massachusetts.

Mathurin holds a Master's Degree in International Education Policy with a focus on bilingualism, literacy, and teacher quality from Harvard University. She holds a bachelor's degree from Berea College in Education, Communication and Social Justice. She is fluent in English, French, Spanish and Creole and she is conversant in Chinese and Russian.



Makenzy Voltaire Project Coordinator, Haiti

Makenzy Voltaire works as a trainer in literacy and social and emotional learning in various projects that the GC-DWC operates in Haiti. He also works as a trainer-supervisor in the Early Childhood Program (L3) and Innovation Communities in Cap-Haitien, Haiti. Prior to joining the GC-DWC, Makenzy worked as an SEL supervisor with the Read Haiti-Porticus project in Gonaïves. He has also worked as a pedagogical supervisor in Port-au-Prince and a literacy assessor for 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade students. Makenzy has his basic training in Social Work at the Faculty of Human Sciences of the Université d'Etat d'Haiti. He has worked as a Social Worker in several orphanages in Port-au-Prince where he provided psychosocial care for the reintegration of children into their families. He is currently completing a master's degree in education at the Haitian Institute for Training in Educational Sciences (Institut Haïtien de Formation en Sciences de l'Éducation/IHFOSED).

Education Coordinator, India Shalini Pathi, Ph.D.

Shalini is an educator, facilitator, and researcher with over a decade of experience in both the development sector and academia. She has worked as a facilitator with organizations such as LaunchGURLs and in research with Women in Informal Employment-Globalizing and Organizing(WIEGO) as well as working at the National Law School India University(NLSIU) and University of Bath. She was a fellow with Teach for India and also an Assistant Professor of Sociology teaching under-graduate students in South India. Her work at the GC-DWC encompasses support for field training and supervision within Project Sampooran's principal and teacher training, along with serving as the research academic lead with our partner organizations.



Saketh Gayam Senior Program Coordinator, India

Saketh Gayam is a Senior Program Coordinator at the Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child. He has worked extensively in the education and policy space for more than six years. He started his career as a Teach for India fellow, where he taught fifth graders in a low-income school and worked on multiple community development projects for two years. As a legislative assistant to a Member of Parliament in India, Saketh led research efforts on various government bills and policy issues. He has also worked in multiple capacities at Ed-tech firms to bridge the gap between education and technology in government and affordable private schools. Saketh holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, Delhi University. Over the years, he has also done significant volunteer work through organizations like Make A Difference, Bloodconnect, and AIESEC.



Lakshmi PM Shashi Stakeholder Engagement Officer, India

With postgraduate degrees in sociology and social work, Lakshmi has over 15 years of hands-on experience in community development programming. She has worked with hundreds of women and children from underprivileged backgrounds in order to raise their awareness of their constitutional rights and to help them understand the unique challenges they face including access to education, personal health and hygiene, violence, and tendencies for self-blame. Throughout her career she has developed and implemented a number of strategic tools to address risky behaviors in women and children as a result of these challenges. Most recently, she worked on a large-scale child health program in India: National Deworming Day. In this role, she provided technical support to the Department of Health & Family Welfare, Telangana by developing content and facilitating community mobilization events.

Field Coordinator, India **Lalitha Rangunath**

Lalitha Rangunath has five years of work experience in the education sector. She holds a Masters in Education with a concentration in Teacher Professional Development from Azim Premji University, Bangalore and a Bachelor's degree from Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli. Lalitha is passionate about Alternative Education, School Education and Teacher Education. She aspires to establish an alternative school for underprivileged children in the Indian Himalayan Region. In her free time, Lalitha is an active blogger who shares her noteworthy perspectives through her works on Societal Issues and Women's Issues in everyday India.



Abraham Noel Field Coordinator, India

Abraham Noel has substantial experience in the field of child development including working with children living with HIV and AIDS. He has also worked with government departments dealing with the overall well-being of children in childcare institutions. He has successfully translated learnings from the field to make recommendations to policy makers. He has a master's degree in public policy and governance from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad. He has conducted research on the well-being of persons with disabilities in scheduled caste and tribal communities.

Field Coordinator, India **Pooja Manda**

Before joining the GC-DWC, Pooja worked for two years in the rural development sector where she was a Project Coordinator for the NABARD project with tribal Communities in East Godavari (Andhra Pradesh). Pooja has also worked with the Dalit and Adivasi Communities to create awareness about health and education. She holds a master's degree in development from Azim Premji University, Bangalore and she is an alumni of the TSWREIS. She is passionate about working for people from underprivileged backgrounds.



Mani Chandana Field Coordinator, India

Mani Chandana is a Field Training Coordinator in India with the Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child at the University of Notre Dame. She has previously worked with the Andhra Pradesh Government SALT project supported by World Bank in research and development of content for training the teachers. She holds a Master of Arts in Education from Azim Premji University. Mani has been an active volunteer to fundraise and coordinate travel and medical support for migrant workers during the lockdown of COVID-19 in India. In addition, she has volunteered over the last several years to mentor and support the development of life skills in teenagers and young adults.

Senior Advisor, Social Enterprise **Chip Wirth**

Gilbert J. Wirth, Jr. (Chip) has been an advisor to the University of Notre Dame's Bon Sel Initiative (BSI) for the past 15 years. Chip —working alongside technical advisors from Cargill— assisted in the supervision of the design and construction of the project's salt processing plant in Port au Prince, Haiti. In addition to his work with the GC-DWC's Social Enterprise Initiative through the BSI, he is involved in several additional projects to serve the people of Haiti. Chip is one of the founders of the Maison Fortune Orphanage Foundation, a project that supports 230 underprivileged youth in the town of Hinche. He also worked with the University of Notre Dame Haiti to found the University's Bio Science Program, a first-of-its-kind program in Haiti.



Jessica Rigutto-Farebrother Visiting Scientist

Jessica Rigutto-Farebrother is a passionate human nutrition scientist interested in addressing health inequalities using innovative nutrition solutions and targeted implementation strategies. She is a Senior Assistant in the Laboratory for Nutrition and Metabolic Epigenetics, ETH Zürich, Switzerland, and has joined the Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child from January 1, 2023 as a visiting scientist, to develop the Global Center's research and implementation agenda to include nutrition. Jessica's research interests lie in improving micronutrient nutrition, with a particular focus on iodine, iron, and thyroid health through the life cycle. Her research studies have taken her to Kenya, Tanzania, The Gambia, Morocco, South Africa, and the Philippines, and most recently, Haiti where she has recently completed a study in collaboration with the GC-DWC and the University of Notre Dame Haiti-Hinche to assess population iodine status in remote, disadvantaged regions of the Central Plateau.



Fr. Michelet Dorescar, CSC General Manager, Bon Sel Initiative

Fr. Michelet Dorescar is the General Manager of the Congregation de Sainte Croix (CSC) Salt Facility affiliated with the University of Notre Dame's Bon Sel Initiative (BSI). Since 2007, he has led all salt-related activities within Haiti, directing salt procurement, processing, sales and marketing, and quality assurance. Fr. Michelet and his team of approximately 50 associates serve customers in four market segments (retail, foodservice, food-processing, and industrial) and coordinate the use of fortified-salt in the battle against lymphatic filariasis and iodine deficiency disorders with the Haitian Ministry of Health. In doing so, Fr. Michelet has established the Salt Facility as the leading supplier of processed salt in Haiti and as a recognized leader in improving the health of all Haitians.

Operations Manager, Bon Sel Initiative **Canes Camil**

Canes Camil is the Operations Manager of the Congregation de Sainte Croix Salt Facility affiliated with the University of Notre Dame's Bon Sel Initiative (BSI). Since 2016, he has directed operations at the Salt Facility, including oversight of two capital expansion projects in addition to day-to-day activities. Canes and his team of approximately 40 operations associates are responsible for all aspects of worker safety, salt processing, fortification, packaging, and quality assurance. In doing so, Canes has established the Salt Facility as the leading supplier of processed salt in Haiti and as a local leader in food and worker safety. Before joining the BSI team, Canes worked in numerous professional capacities including a technician for the National Television of Haiti (TVH), an engineering assistant for Siena College in New York, and a free-lance interpreter for various Haitian entities.



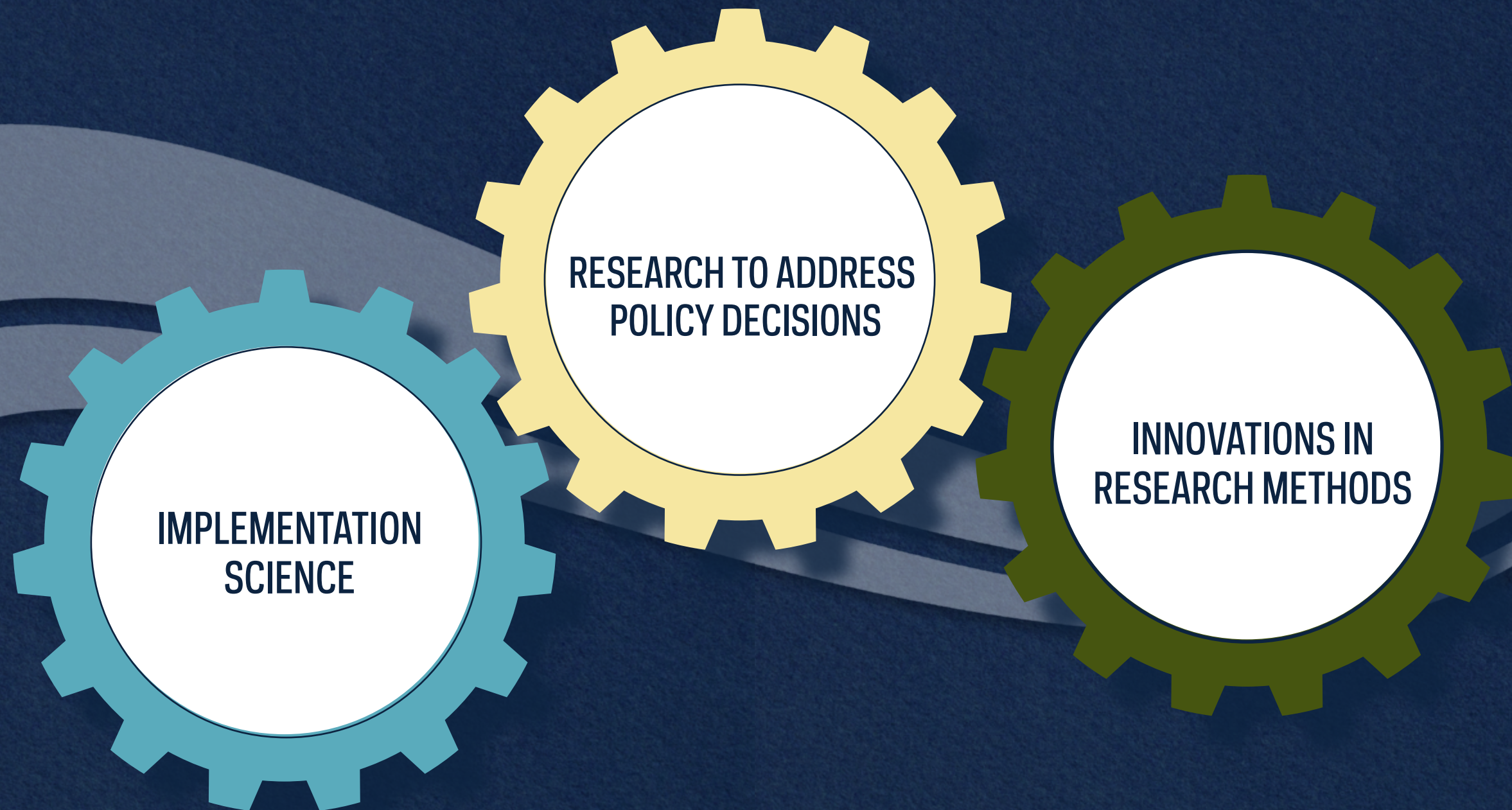
5 Years, 25 Countries: Our Reach

Since its inception 5 years ago, the GC-DWC has mobilized over \$100 million to create pathways out of poverty for children in adversity through intervention science initiatives, and has expanded its reach to 25 different countries—**Bangladesh, Cambodia, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mexico, Mozambique, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Uzbekistan.**



Innovating and Implementing: From *Research* to *Action*

Our work is grounded in the belief that effective change happens when research meets practice. Our research teams and global partners have come together to ensure that every child—regardless of their circumstance—has access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive. **The GC-DWC works across three key areas of research:**



IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE

Research to Address Practice

Integrating Research and Practice: The GC-DWC's Iterative Approach to Implementation Science

The GC-DWC's approach to implementation science allows for rapid, iterative improvements, where research shapes program design, and program implementation determines the next phases of research. Implementation science is dedicated to studying how interventions, programs, or practices are effectively integrated into real-world settings to improve outcomes. This type of research often focuses on ensuring that evidence-based solutions are not only effective in controlled environments, but also feasible, scalable, and sustainable in complex, dynamic, and resource-constrained environments. A key aspect of implementation science is iterative learning, a process where interventions are continuously refined and adapted based on real-world feedback to ensure the greatest impact.

In our implementation science programs—like Haiti and India—we begin with a limited number of innovation school communities where we support partners with program design, training, and rapid assessment methods. This incubation period is followed by a limited scale-up to early adopter school communities; in these communities, we invest in promising practices and prune less-effective ones. We conduct formal efficacy studies and randomized control trials when Whole Child Development (WCD) approaches are sufficiently mature, followed by evidence driven scaling system-wide. This research-to-action cycle comes full circle through dissemination of our learning through technical and non-technical resources, prioritizing the use of this learning by our community partners.

We also undertake applied research projects to build the evidence base on WCD. These education research projects are focused on different settings and relationships

around the child but they all have a common focus: how do we activate the system around the child to best support WCD? Our research is driven by three key principles:

- 1. Appropriateness:** whether findings meet the contextual, cultural, and developmental needs of children and their families.
- 2. Utility:** whether research will be useful to make reasonable decisions about an education or social program for children.
- 3. Feasibility:** whether the proposed evidence-based solution is doable given the logistical, operational, and systematic limitations that are in place.



Let's take a closer look at how this approach has been applied in two key sites—**Haiti and India**—where implementation science is being applied to tackle educational challenges in real-world contexts. These locations offer valuable opportunities to study how different interventions can be adapted to local needs and further scaled for long-term impact, particularly in resource-limited environments.



HAITI

Education has the potential to be a catalyst for change in Haiti, and an equalizer amidst a harsh legacy of colonial rule and racial inequities. However, without support for schools' financial security and for children's health and nutrition, academic learning, and social and emotional learning (SEL) in place, education will remain a fledgling pursuit in Haiti. Recognizing this opportunity, Notre Dame has partnered for over a decade with the Haitian Catholic Church and supporting actors to improve learning outcomes for students in 562 schools across eight of the ten departments in Haiti.

Addressing Haiti's Literacy Crisis: A Comprehensive Approach to Early Education

In Haiti, 49% of students cannot read a single word in Creole by the time they enter the third grade, which is reflective of a broader learning crisis in low-income and fragile contexts. Frequently, Haitian students are left to flounder in a classroom where the official language of instruction, French, is not their mother tongue, Haitian Creole. To complicate matters further, 80% of teachers have not received any form of pre-service training, and over half lack basic qualifications.

In response to these challenges, the GC-DWC Haiti team implemented a scripted, mother tongue literacy curriculum, created by Haitian and international educators with support from USAID in collaboration with the Haitian Ministry of Education, for first and second grade students: *M ap li nèt ale* (Haitian Creole) and *Je parle bien français* (French). To further augment the literacy curriculum, the GC-DWC Haiti team developed and added enrichment materials to the school-based program: classroom libraries with culturally relevant, mother-tongue books; summer reading camps led by the school community; and additional tutoring for the lowest-performing students.

Additionally, a robust teacher and school leader professional development program accompanies the literacy program. The professional development program includes residential educator training sessions at key points throughout the school year; professional learning community meetings; monthly coaching and observation visits by supervisors/coaches; and monthly teacher newsletters that share strategies and tips for classroom management and pedagogical best practices.

To date, the GC-DWC Haiti team's literacy program is the most successful literacy program in Haiti. Here is an example of a 2016 randomized control trial of the curriculum, which revealed statistically significant gains in 7 of the 8 Early Grade Reading Assessment indicators, including a 143% increase in letter recognition and a 49% increase in reading fluency. This evaluation not only offered critical insights into the literacy levels and effective interventions for children in Haiti, but also informed the design of subsequent interventions, shaping the GC-DWC's current approach to WCD in Haiti:

Improving Reading Instruction and Student’s Reading Skills in the Early Grades: Evidence From a Randomized Evaluation in Haiti

“Read to Learn”, an early-grade literacy intervention, was implemented and evaluated from fall 2014 through spring 2016 with the aim of improving students’ reading skills. Students were given learning materials in their mother tongue, teachers were provided with training and instructional coaching, and various supports for program implementation were established. In a randomized evaluation, the authors assessed students’ reading skills at the beginning of grade 1, and at the end of grades 1 and 2 in treatment and control schools.

Researchers examined the impact of Read to Learn, where students learn to read in Haitian Creole first and then receive literacy instruction in French. The authors estimated the impact of the program at the end of grades 1 and 2 with a hierarchical linear model and found positive effects on emergent reading skills and oral reading fluency, with effect sizes ranging between 0.19 and 0.79. The results of this study are an important contribution to knowledge about what works to improve literacy outcomes for students in Haiti and other fragile contexts, also adding to the literature on the impact of scripted curricula on reading skills.

Design and Methodology

A total of 1,189 students who began first grade (632 students in control schools and 557 students in treatment schools; 50% female; mean age = 5.9 years) were randomly selected from 94 Catholic schools in the regions of Gonaïves (732 students) and Cap Haitien (457 students) in Haiti. All students were of Haitian descent and came from homes where Haitian Creole is the dominant language. The Catholic school system was a reasonable context in which to test Read to Learn, as the overwhelming majority of Haitian students—approximately 80–90%—are enrolled in private schools (RTI International, 2015). The treatment schools participated in the Read to Learn intervention, which was implemented by the University of Notre Dame, the Haitian Episcopal Commission for Catholic Education, and Catholic Relief Services. The control schools continued to use the standard literacy materials available in Haiti for teaching Creole and French to first- and second-grade students: *Mwen Konn Li* and *Joupi* (*I Know How to Read, Yippee*).

Read to Learn incorporated a scripted early grades literacy program in students’ mother tongue, along with robust coaching and support systems for teachers. Through the design of the Read to Learn program, the partners in the Catholic sector addressed two major challenges of literacy instruction in Haiti: untrained teachers and inadequate curricular

materials available for literacy instruction in Creole (students’ mother tongue) and in French (students’ second language).

Findings and Insights for the Future

The study highlighted gains in foundational reading skills like letter knowledge, decoding, and sound recognition, which are linked to future literacy success. Furthermore, the program demonstrated notable improvements in reading fluency, which is strongly related to reading comprehension. This is especially significant, as no previous intervention in Haiti had achieved such gains in oral reading fluency. The study’s findings provide promising evidence for scripted literacy programs in resource-strained, multilingual settings, with potential applications for other least developed countries (LDCs) like Haiti, where literacy rates are low and multiple languages complicate education. The results of this study are an important contribution to knowledge about what works to improve literacy outcomes for students in Haiti and other fragile contexts. Despite many difficulties, the results demonstrate considerable gains in most literacy skill areas, and offer solid justification for a broader replication of this approach in more Haitian schools.



Read more: [**Improving Reading Instruction and Students’ Reading Skills in the Early Grades: Evidence From a Randomized Evaluation in Haiti**](#)

From Research to Action: Activating the Home, School, and Church Systems in Haiti

A letter from Kate Schuenke-Lucien, GC-DWC director for Haiti:

One of the most striking revelations in our research was that many children entering first grade in Haiti had never been exposed to books—they had never held a book, did not understand the concept of a page number, and had no comprehension of the relationship between text, words, and meaning. This was a fundamental gap in their early educational experiences. For a multitude of reasons, many of these children had not been read to at home and had limited exposure to printed material. As a result, they were starting their educational journey at a significant disadvantage.

However, through our early grade literacy programs, many students improved their reading scores dramatically despite these challenges. Even so, many students still struggled to read with fluency and comprehension after completing our two-year program for first and second grade. This highlighted a critical issue: many students entered the program so far behind that the gap was difficult to close in just two years.

This realization led us to a fundamental conclusion: to achieve meaningful and lasting change, we must start earlier—well before children enter formal school. We recognized that the academic interventions we were implementing in early grades were necessary, but not sufficient on their own. In order to better prepare children for school, we need to strengthen foundational learning in the home and in preschool settings so that children arrive in first grade fully prepared, without the need for extensive catch-up work. The earlier we can intervene in a child's life, the better chance we have of addressing and preventing learning challenges before they become entrenched. By focusing on early childhood development, we believe we can resolve many of the problems that manifest later in a child's academic career.

We also came to understand that school-based work alone could not fully address the needs of these vulnerable children. For the children we serve in Haiti, the learning system is not just the school; it's a broader system that includes the home, the school, and the church. In these communities, particularly within the Catholic context, there are no external agencies providing support for early childhood development. There are no Head Start programs or Early Intervention services. In fact, the home, the school, and the church are the primary institutions impacting children's development in Haiti.



Watch: [L3 Equity Initiative in Haiti](#)

This realization led us to the concept of the **"L3 system"—the powerful, integrated network of the home (lakay), school (lekòl), and church (legliz), or L3**—which can be harnessed to better support children. If we work within this L3 system to strengthen early childhood learning and development, we can lay a stronger foundation for academic and life success. The GC-DWC's work to activate these systems surrounding children in Haiti serves the purpose of meeting children's holistic needs at all three levels of their social ecology, by implementing intervention strategies such as parent and caregiver workshop initiatives, partnerships with local communities to establish learning centers, working with parish priests to integrate contextually relevant early childhood education materials into baptismal training, and more.

L3 Components

By activating the Haitian child’s most central networks, engaging key stakeholders, and leveraging culturally-relevant and engaging programming, the GC-DWC promotes a whole child approach to development that values the cultural richness of Haitian communities and will create a ripple effect throughout the country.



Whole Child Development

A whole child approach to development and learning engages a broad spectrum of support systems, including family, school, and community, to ensure children and youth reach their full potential. Whole child development (WCD) values all aspects of a child’s well-being—social, emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, and creative—to ensure they become active citizens and life-long learners. Therefore, GC-DWC Haiti helps parish-school communities to address concerns surrounding children’s nutrition and health, academic learning, mother tongue literacy, and SEL, and deploys curricular reform, teacher training, and effective investments to combat ethnic, racial, and gender inequalities.



Rapid Evaluation, Assessment, and Learning Methodology (REALM)

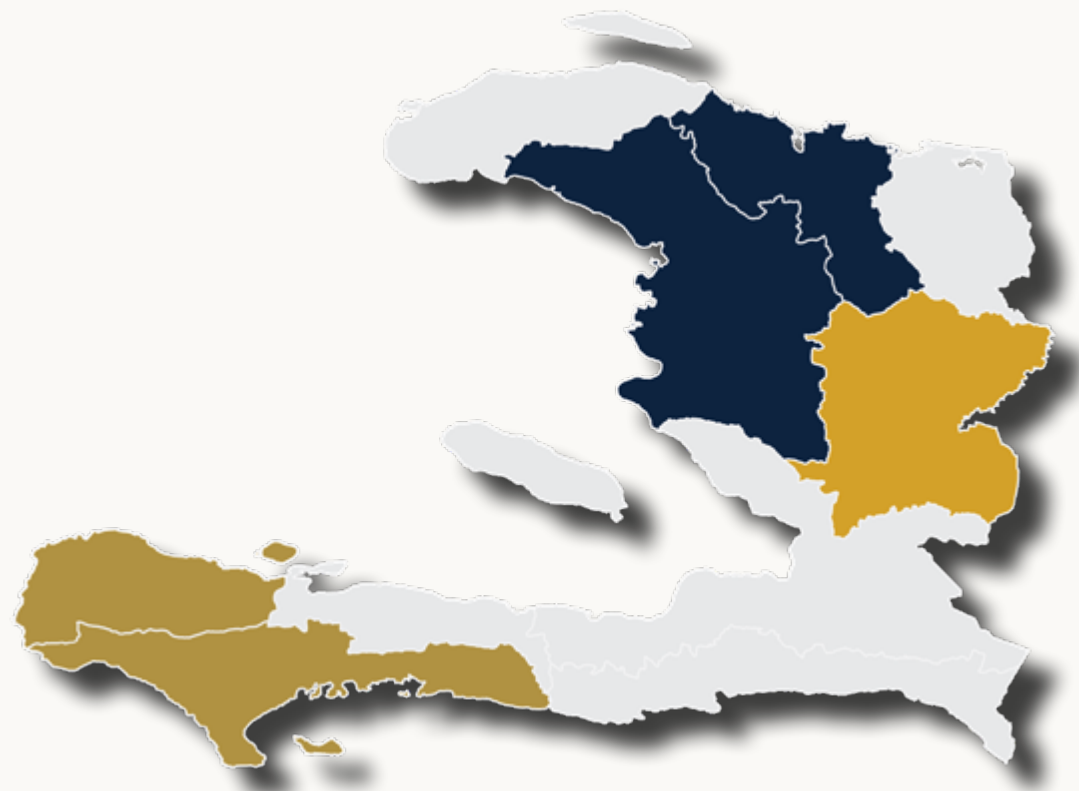
GC-DWC Haiti leverages learnings from its L3 system to identify the complex spectrum of issues affecting children’s learning and development and to iteratively test and scale community solutions to these issues, using a Rapid Evaluation, Assessment, and Learning Methodology (REALM). By feeding learning back into the community and to local stakeholders through REALM during program implementation, on-the-ground practitioners are able to refine and make adjustments to programming in the moment, ensuring maximum impact and efficacy.

Innovation Communities

Building on the reality that the Catholic church is deeply embedded in, and has influence over, the school, home, and broader community life of young children, the GC-DWC partnered with five parish communities in the Diocese of Cap-Haïtien in Northern Haiti to meet young children’s (ages 0-6) holistic needs across the L3. The aim is to not only increase the prevalence of WCD messaging and behavior change within the school, home, and church, but also coordinate approaches to addressing

across the L3 to ensure continuity of care across settings. This synchronization focused on five key themes and attached behaviors for caregivers of young children: responsive caregiving, positive parenting and discipline, nutrition, playful learning, and social and emotional development.

The five innovation communities provide a unique platform for developing and pilot testing WCD programs for young children alongside community members. After discussing WCD-focused needs and developing activities, programs are implemented in iterative short-cycle phases, continuously evaluated every 1-3 months using feedback from participants, reflection and learning from the L3 team, and data collected through surveys. Based on these, programs are improved to better help young children and their families. This model of community-driven learning allows our partnership to gather instant feedback and fail fast, constantly adapting to the data being collected as well as the needs of community members. The innovation communities also allow programs to be developed and tested on a smaller scale before being expanded to other parts of Haiti.



Case Study

Empowering Parents: Strengthening Haitian Families Through Science-Based Parenting Support

Parents are a child's first teachers. At the GC-DWC, we recognize the importance of the role that parents and caregivers play in their children's overall development and well-being, and strive to empower parents with science-based innovations and practices to support their children's growth inside and outside of the classroom. Families in Haiti face great obstacles in providing for the physical and emotional needs of their young children. In 2020, social and political upheaval closed preschools in Haiti and families were concerned about how to feed their children and attend to their learning needs. To better support parents, the GC-DWC worked with members of the five innovation parishes to develop and test a parent empowerment and support initiative.

Before the program was implemented, the GC-DWC worked with one parish to select community members who could serve as facilitators. These facilitators were trained to lead the parent empowerment initiative. In Version 1 of the program, the workshops were held in the Parish of Saint-Martin de Porres in Blue Hills on three Sundays after Mass. Main topics included the importance of the parent-child relationship; providing consistent and responsive care; connections between social, emotional, and cognitive development; wellbeing and self-care; and positive discipline. There was high satisfaction from parents with the program, and many of them mentioned behavior changes and stronger relationships with their children as well as a better ability to identify and manage their stress. Through a pre-post survey participants also reported using more positive discipline with their children. Based on feedback from those involved, Version 2 included a session on nutrition and an increased focus on incorporating play into daily practices with children. Version 2 was also expanded to all 5 innovation communities, had shorter workshop sessions, and parishes made sure to provide childcare to promote increased attendance.

In Version 3, conversations about cultural identity and gender equality were included in the series of sessions which spanned 10 consecutive weekends, and parents were given audio files and handouts of *Ti Lekol Lakay* (distance learning audio program developed by Blue Butterfly Collaborative) for continued engagement. Versions 2 and 3 also had high satisfaction; through a pre-post survey participants reported using more positive discipline and play-based practices in their homes after the training.

These parent and caregiver workshops have continued to evolve and expand, unpacking the importance and science of positive parenting, social care, alternatives to harsh discipline,

and school readiness through a seven to ten-week long course. Session themes include the importance of the parent-child relationship; consistent and responsive care; social emotional and cognitive development connection; self-regulation, discipline, and corporal punishment; wellbeing and self-care; and nutrition. The parents and caregivers leave these workshops with tips and tricks to effectively embed positive parenting into their daily routine.

In 2024, we launched parent workshops specifically formatted for fathers and male caregivers, as well as workshops designed for young parents and young potential parents. This ensures that all workshop sessions contain appropriate objectives for all kinds of parents and caretakers, establishing the best possible outcomes for children and their respective households.



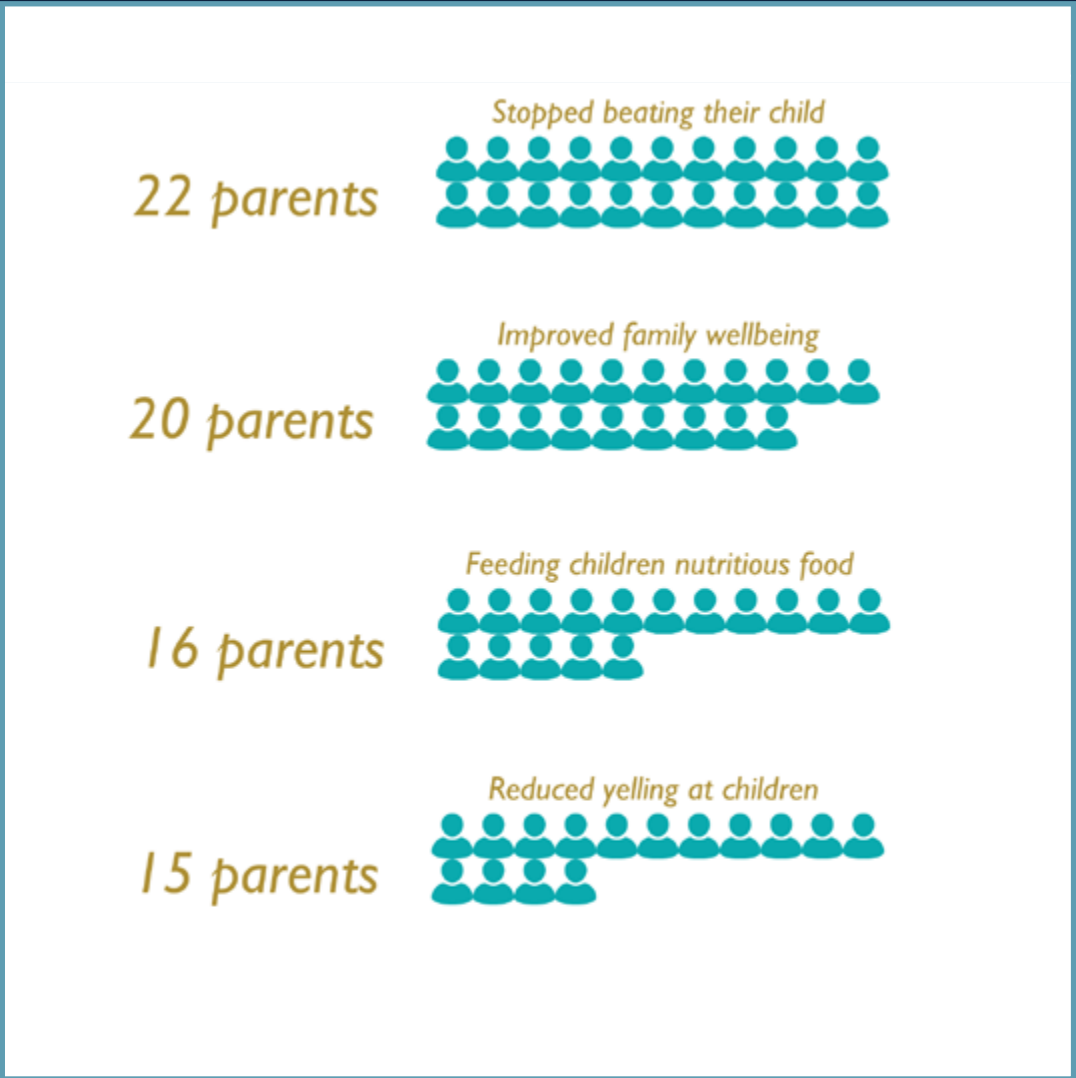
Parents attribute reduction in negative behaviors towards children and improvement in family wellbeing to the parent empowerment workshops

REALM supports the GC-DWC’s refinement and iteration of programming in the home, school, and church, but was not designed to measure whether the L3 ecosystem of the home, school, and church was being activated to support Whole Child Development (WCD) for young children. To measure whether the L3 system was being activated, in 2022, the GC-DWC undertook a holistic, system-wide evaluation (Qualitative Impact Protocol).

The Qualitative Impact Protocol (QulP) assesses the impact of interventions by collecting narrative statements from program participants. Through the use of open-ended and exploratory questions about changes in expected program outcomes, the QulP aims to disentangle possible sources of influence by avoiding questions that are specific to the

programs being evaluated. According to the QulP assessments, parent empowerment programs seem to be producing the most effective results. 33 parents were interviewed between June and July 2022, where open-ended questions about their caregiving practices, feeding practices, their understanding of the importance of early childhood development, etc. were asked.

22 out of the 33 parents said that they stopped beating their child after attending the parent empowerment workshops. The participants were a mix of parents trained at several rounds since the in-person parent workshops started in 2021. 15 parents said that they yell at their child less after attending the program and 20 parents reported an increase in their family well-being post attending the workshops. Interestingly, these findings align with the results from the pre- post survey conducted at the beginning and the end of the workshops, which showed reduction in negative behaviors. During the QulP interviews, 16 parents mentioned that they started feeding their children nutritious food after attending the parent empowerment program.



After scaling the parent empowerment program to Nippes, a qualitative study was conducted in August 2023, borrowing from the QulPs methodology. A randomly selected sample of 30 parents from the program were invited for focus group discussions (FDGs). While the focus group was not a double-blinded one, the questions asked were open-ended, similar to QulPs. Some of the parents attended workshops almost a year before the FDGs, and some attended workshops a few months before the FDGs. Many of the key learnings from the focus groups remained consistent with the QulP findings. Parents spoke about feeding children more nutritious food after the training, being more affectionate with their children and treating them better, and developing a better relationship with their children after attending the parent training. Parents also spoke about using play to help children learn. A sentiment analysis of all the excerpts of parents talking about shifts in behavior shows more negative sentiments in describing behaviors pre-training, and positive sentiments in describing behaviors post-training.

Here are some parent testimonials:

"...I myself had my own way of cooking for my children; while I was following the training, there are some things they showed us. They said you can wake up in the morning, if you have a box of beans, you can find a little squash to put in it, a seed of some vegetable, a bit of carrot as if you boil them together, mash it or make a little sauce of beans, and give it to the child to drink." The change is because of the UND parent empowerment program. Because I used to beat them all day, insult them, and their father. Now I don't do that anymore since I learned this from the program. I'm not into insults, I'm not into anything like that anymore."

— Female Participant, Parent Empowerment Program

"What changed in my home is the relationship between me and my wife. My child is here, and it is as if my wife is the only one who educates him. I went to work, and I did not have time for the family. Since the program, now my wife and I share the work. I support my wife and my child, and it seems that he's become my good friend now. I created time for us to play together but I didn't know how to do this before. Things have changed."

— Male Participant, Parent Empowerment Program

"I didn't know if the child didn't learn his lesson I should not whip him, sit down and discuss with him. I learned a lot. I improved and made a lot of changes because I used to whip him. If he reacted badly then I just whipped him. I did not take the time to discuss and explain to him how to react differently. Now I have been trained, if he has a bad behavior I take my time to explain to him what to do and he understands me better."

— Participant, Parent Empowerment Program

"In the past year, we learned things that we didn't know before, such as: you are supposed to play with your child, he is supposed to be able to make some choice, you are supposed to give him the love he deserves, and you are supposed to give him affection. I have learned that children have the right to choose what they want. I know that when they do something to me that I shouldn't beat them or push them, but instead I should talk to them, ask them what is wrong and what they want. Since the past year, I have been living something extraordinary. I never thought that there was something called the first thousand days, I didn't know that my child needed affection in the womb, but thanks to the training I found out that I must give love to my child since the womb, and that's how I learned the importance of the first thousand days in a child's life."

— Participant, Parent Empowerment Program

Meet Sr. Marie France

Sister Marie France, of the Daughters of Mary Congregation in Haiti, recently celebrated 25 years of being a nun. Education is integral to the Congregation's life and mission, and as such, Sr. Marie France has been involved with implementing GC-DWC Haiti's interventions, such as the Parent Empowerment Program, which aims to provide parents with evidence-based tools and techniques to support their children's growth both in and out of school. Recently, the GC-DWC Haiti team asked Sr. Marie France about her experience working with the University of Notre Dame (UND) and the GC-DWC to implement these programs. This is one of the testimonials she shared:

"...I think that (UND's) interventions are so rich that they should be expanded to other areas, social classes, and schools in Cap-Haitien who could also benefit from them. UND should not only stay in Cap-Haitien but should expand their training throughout the whole country because it is so deep, so rich, and so well adapted to the reality and needs of Haiti. If this type of training was given everywhere in the country, then we would have the Haiti that we are all dreaming of."

Watch: [Sr. Marie France's full interview with GC-DWC project coordinator for Haiti, Makenzy Voltaire](#) 🖱️



INDIA

India's economy is booming, but in doing so, there are groups that are being left behind. Children from underprivileged communities are not equipped to take advantage of the country's educational and economic progress, and are in serious danger of being perpetually overlooked. Telangana is the fourth-largest state in India with the 7th-strongest ranked economy. It has a thriving technology industry and boasts one of the largest cities in India: Hyderabad. Within the state, there is a 67% literacy rate and 70% numeracy rate for students in Grade 3. This is well above the national average of 20.5% for Grade 2 literacy and 25.9% numeracy for learners in Grade 3.

Project Sampoorna: Partnering to Build Safer Schools

In December 2020, the GC-DWC launched Project Sampoorna in Telangana. This project builds on the University of Notre Dame's 10 year presence in India leading research and programming in education, legislation, and climate change.

Project Sampoorna reaches 270,600 children and 1,398 teachers, and 239,400 students across 399 schools, with the overall goal to build, operate, and replicate a whole child development (WCD) model for education in India through holistic systems engagement. In Telangana, the Social and Tribal Welfare Residential schools (or Society) envision creating outstanding residential schools that provide high-quality, holistic, and value-based education to marginalized children that will enable social mobility and empowerment. As the anchor organization for Project Sampoorna, the GC-DWC matches the Society's vision with the tools and support they need to achieve their goals, refine their processes, and sustain them into the future.

The Society has a network of 451 schools, to support students in grades 5th - degree colleges, the majority of whom are from the Scheduled Caste (24.52%), Backward Caste (54.03%), and Tribal communities (13.8%), and are among the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups in India. When Society schools receive learners in the 5th grade, they have much to overcome. These students have grown up being labeled as 'untouchable', without the same quality of education, access to extracurriculars, or essential nutrition as their non-marginalized peers. Girls in particular navigate a highly patriarchal society where they are pushed into domestic roles, and child-marriage rates are high. Without access to the government-provided residential schools, many of these learners would not have access to adequate schooling, nutrition, or career pathways.

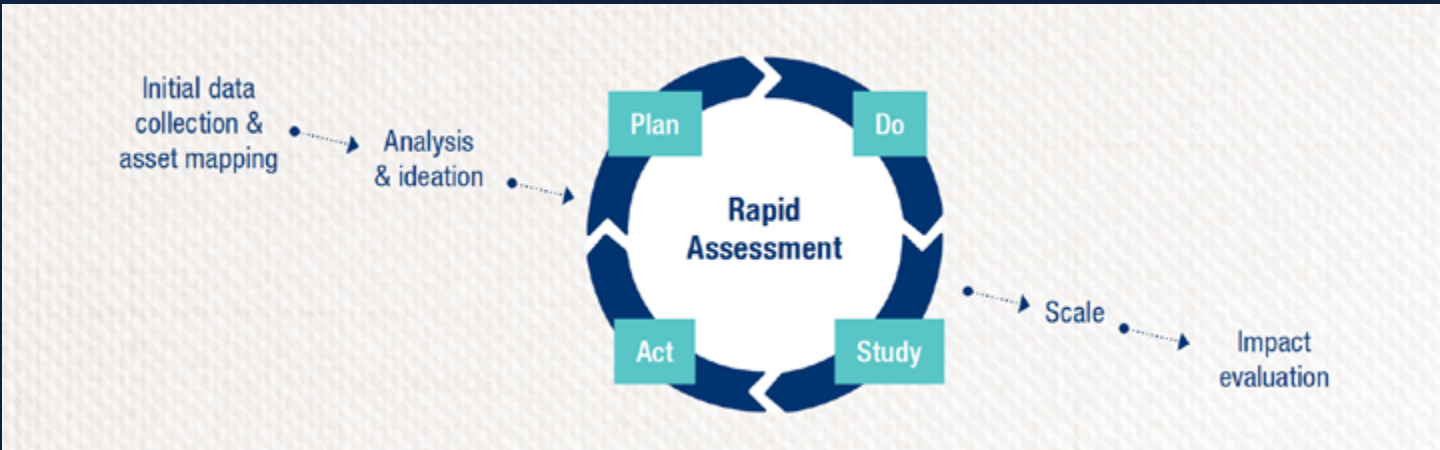
Within this context, the GC-DWC serves as a senior advisor to the Society, introducing global good practices, designing and implementing programming, and generating local evidence to inform Society's decision making and school level reforms and innovations. We have introduced a multi-dimensional approach to WCD which includes Safety and Protection, Health and Wellness, and Work Readiness in addition to a strong focus on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Academic Skills.

Promoting Safe and Inclusive School Environments

In response to increased reports of bullying and wellbeing concerns after COVID, the Society asked the GC-DWC to focus on the Safety and Protection portion of their framework and launch a Safe and Inclusive Schools Initiative (SISI) which promotes safe and empowering school environments. Through this initiative, implemented from November 2022 through March 2023, Project Sampoorna launched its WCD innovation package in 16 pilot schools, including:

- 1. **School safety policy with best practices** for teacher and student behavior expectations, consequences for violations, and reporting mechanisms. This is designed to directly address bullying and school culture.
- 2. **Development and wellbeing training** package for teachers.
- 3. **Integrated social and emotional learning (SEL)** curriculum training for teachers.
- 4. **Activities for students on positive peer interactions** and SEL skill development including: school assemblies to address bullying, body shaming, and other harmful behaviors, cooperative games to promote prosocial behavior, listening circles where students are encouraged to share big emotions, including when they return from home leaves, increased mentorship from teachers, and revised co-scholastic programming.

Embedded within these activities are Rapid Evaluation, Assessment and Learning Methods (REALM) to ensure learning for future iterations, and that the primary stakeholders are benefitting from learning. The GC-DWC also conducted a mixed-methods efficacy study with a comparison group in 2023/2024 to evaluate program effectiveness. In the 2023/2024 academic year, this intervention was scaled to 61 schools through full time secondment of 61 teachers paid for by the Society. In 2024/25, using the same training of trainers model, with 100 full time seconded teachers, programming will scale to a further 100 schools. This model will continue until all Society schools have embedded programming.



[Read the GC-DWC’s brief on REALM](#)

Short-term Effects of a School Culture Intervention: Results from a Mixed Methods, Quasi-Experimental Study in Telangana, India

In the third phase of Project Sampoorna (May 2023 – Feb 2024), the GC-DWC scaled school-wide activities and policies from 16 to 59 schools through a cadre of trained teachers, with activities focused on improving school safety and connection. Teachers implemented a two-prong program in their schools that included: (1) a comprehensive set of training, resources, and activities designed to cultivate a school culture where every learner thrives, and (2) SEL integration in the subject curriculum for grades 5-8.

Mixed-Methods, Quasi-Experimental Study Design

To understand the perceived effect of the intervention, GC-DWC researchers aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What do participants believe are the key changes in their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, and to what do they attribute this change?

RQ2. What trends do we observe in the change in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of participants (when compared to a non-randomized counterfactual)?

RQ3. What are the challenges/bottlenecks to the implementation of activities?

RQ1 and RQ3 were answered through data collected using focus group discussions and interviews with principals (n=6), teacher trainers (n=6), teachers (n=30), and students (n=78) from 6 schools that were part of Project Sampoorna. RQ2 was answered through a survey designed to collect teacher- and student-level outcomes across 30 intervention schools (randomly selected from the 59 schools that were a part of the project), and 29 comparison schools (randomly selected from 45 schools that applied to be a part of the project, but were not selected). The final sample for the study and the outcomes measured are provided below:

	Intervention	Comparison	Outomes Measured
Teachers	247	229	Positive school climate, peer relationships, teacher-student relationships, and inclusive facilitation
Students (Grades 5-8)	1,262	1,208	Positive school climate, peer relationships, student-teacher relationships, self-concept, collaboration, empathy, and literacy
Teacher Trainers	59		Knowledge and beliefs of training topics, confidence in administering activities, comfort with training teachers, and comfort with coaching teachers

What did we learn from this study?

Project Sampoorna is a behavior change intervention; it is trying to change the fabric of the culture in each school by supporting changes in interpersonal behaviors. But, behavior change takes time, especially in hierarchical, entrenched systems. We see compelling examples of perception change among participants in the qualitative data. Students, teachers, teacher trainers, and principals noted substantive positive changes in multiple areas that the project was focused on, and attributed these changes to specific activities in the program. However, when looking at the pretest-post-test survey data with students and teachers, we did not find any statistically or substantively important relationships between being part of Project Sampoorna and the outcomes at the post-test.

Key Findings on Participant Perception Change

- Participants perceived a positive change in the overall school and classroom environment and safety
- Participants noted improved discipline and accountability among students and teachers since implementing the We Succeed Together Agreement
- Students and teachers reported that the inclusive facilitation practices and school-wide activities created a positive learning environment
- Participants explained that the whole school activities helped improve peer and teacher-student relationships by breaking down silos and enabling more interactions throughout the school
- Students mentioned that Project Sampoorna activities helped them understand the importance of respect, unity, and helping others
- Principals and teachers highlighted the role of Project Sampoorna in fostering leadership skills among students

What do these learnings mean for the project?

Focus on increasing principal buy-in to affect culture change at the school level:

While we did not explicitly ask about the role of principals in the qualitative or quantitative study, conversations with the teacher trainers, and our team members’ observations during school visits highlighted that principals’ buy-in is important for a smooth and successful implementation of project activities, and in changing school culture. Future project Sampoorna implementation needs to more actively engage principals in school-wide activities.

Address challenges around content and implementation identified by participants:

Along with the perception changes captured through the qualitative data, we also asked participants to talk about what worked well, and what were the challenges in implementing

the activities. We have incorporated changes to the program and content based on participant feedback for the upcoming school year. This includes increasing the frequency of circle time implementation, including new topics for the thematic assemblies, and ensuring the SEL-integrated lesson plans are made available in alignment with the curriculum timeline.

Partner with schools for a longer period to ensure behavior change:

Six months of program implementation was likely too short to measurably change school culture. The findings from this study suggest that we need to take a longer view of school culture change that spans several years. To understand if a longer period of intervention leads to measurable change in the behavior change outcomes measured, we need to follow up with the same intervention and comparison schools—and students and teachers—during the next academic year.

Impact Stories: Project Sampoorna

“Project Sampoorna spent almost a year to understand our school’s ecosystems by engaging with students, parents, school staff and head office personnels. This helped them and even us to understand issues at the school level and actually build the Whole Child Development Framework and help us to understand that one major domain that we need to focus on is on safety and protection. They spearheaded a collaborative process to design a comprehensive program that would make schools a lot more safer, inclusive and empowering for our students. By involving school staff, students, parents, in the program’s development, the program ensured that diverse perspectives and needs were addressed from the outset. This inclusive approach not only tailored the program to our specific school environment but also fostered a shared commitment to its goals. As a result, the program has been effectively integrated into our schools, leading to noticeable improvements in both safety and inclusivity.” —Joint Secretary, Academics, Head Office Personnel

“Watching the skit on body shaming, centered around skin color, stirred a deep well of emotions within me. It reminded me of the bullying I had endured from my friends—when I tried to tell them how hurtful their teasing was, they brushed it off as nothing. The skit opened my eyes to the real pain of those judgments, and when I spoke up during the debrief, I felt both validated and heartbroken. My friends didn’t realize the impact of their words until they saw my tears, and in that moment, they too were overcome with emotion. They promised never to let anyone experience that kind of hurt again.” —Female Student, Tribal Welfare Girls School

"Prior to Project Sampoorna, I maintained minimal contact with students and engaged with them only during my classes. I felt my main responsibility to them was to complete the syllabus in time. It was only after I started doing various activities with the students, and also sharing my own experiences with them through circle time or debrief sessions, that I started understanding my students better. I feel activities like circle time have significantly strengthened the bond I have with my students. I have seen students open up more about their feelings and experiences, which has allowed me to better understand their individual needs and perspectives while also sharing my own experiences with them—helping them to see me beyond just as their teacher, but as someone who can be trusted and turned to in case they have issues in the school. This has not only enhanced our classroom dynamics and lessened disruptions, but has also built a stronger, more trusting relationship between us beyond just the classroom." —**Teacher Trainer (Mamatha, TGSWURJC, Luxettipet)**

"From the start, the Sampoorna Team engaged with students, parents, principals, and staff online during the COVID-19 pandemic. They collected input from all stakeholders, including our head office, and created a framework to address school challenges. This framework was refined and came to the discussions and came to a constructive framework. After that, they trained principals and staff on safety and whole child development. This training led to noticeable changes in how teachers interacted with colleagues and students. Teachers began to focus more on teamwork and improved their approach to dealing with all students, parents and, resulting in a more collaborative and effective environment.

Teaching and non-teaching staff, including watchmen, were all involved in the program. Previously, there was a lack of time and attention given to students' concerns, which even led to serious incident of a suicide. Now, staff are actively listening to and addressing students' problems, treating them as their own, and providing better support... When the Sampoorna Team introduced the Thematic Assembly and improved Circle Time, they integrated it into SEL info lesson plans and taught teachers how to use it effectively. This special program led to a positive shift in attitudes and behavior among both students and staff." —**Joint Secretary - Academics, Head Office Personnel**

Empowering through education: A pathway out of poverty for children in India



Learn more about Project Sampoorna by reading the article, [***Empowering through education: A pathway out of poverty for children in India***](#), and watching [***the video story by the University of Notre Dame***](#).



Empowering the Next Generation of Educators: A Groundbreaking Whole Child Development SEL Curriculum Across 70+ Universities in India

In a pivotal move to enhance child development across India, the GC-DWC partnered with the Telangana state government to roll out a transformative Whole Child Development (WCD) and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum. This initiative is impacting over 70 universities and colleges, aiming to equip future educators with the tools to foster holistic development in children.

The Whole School Approach to SEL: A Vision for Education

The new semester-long course, titled *A Whole School Approach to Social and Emotional Learning*, was developed by GC-DWC faculty and staff with the goal of helping students integrate SEL practices into school environments. At its core, the course seeks to teach future educators how to cultivate essential skills in children, including emotional awareness, empathy, and positive relationship-building—skills that are crucial not only for academic success but also for personal well-being.



SEL focuses on nurturing children's ability to manage their emotions, understand the feelings of others, and build positive interpersonal relationships.

"There is a large body of evidence that has linked stronger SEL skills in children to improved academic achievement, as well as a reduction in school dropout rates, conduct problems, emotional distress, and substance use," shared Nikhit D'Sa,

GC-DWC assistant professor and director for research. "Strong SEL skill development during childhood has also been linked to positive employment and health outcomes in adulthood."

By embedding SEL into the core of teacher training, this course represents a key step toward making these benefits a reality for students across India. The course is a requirement for university students majoring in Education—as the ultimate means of sustaining and expanding SEL statewide.



Before the course was introduced to students, the GC-DWC's Faculty Development Program equipped faculty members with the necessary knowledge and tools to teach it effectively. Held at Osmania University in Telangana, this training session brought together educators from across the region to dive into the curriculum and share best practices for SEL implementation.

Participants, eager to deepen their understanding of SEL and WCD, engaged in discussions, case studies, and collaborative activities designed to prepare them for the challenges and rewards of teaching these concepts. The enthusiasm of the faculty was evident, as many expressed their belief in the

power of SEL to reshape the educational landscape in India. As part of the ongoing support, the GC-DWC team hosts bi-weekly meetings to provide guidance to faculty and ensure a smooth implementation of the curriculum at universities throughout the state.

A New Approach to Teaching and Learning

The Whole School Approach to Social and Emotional Learning course also focuses on the most recent best practices and science on how SEL can be integrated within classrooms, across schools, and through partnerships with family and community. In doing so, the course starts by understanding the developmental foundations of SEL, how it is related to resilience, and the main criteria for using a whole-school SEL approach. Students engage in analyzing and understanding examples of SEL programs from India and around the world, and get hands-on experience with SEL activities and program components. To do this, faculty use a flipped classroom—students watch videos or do short readings before coming to class, and class time is spent on discussion, debate, and exploration activities. The course then ends with a two-day workshop where students engage in practical training on how whole-school SEL approaches are being integrated into the Tribal and Social Welfare Societies' residential schools for marginalized children in Telangana, through Project Sampoorna.

Looking Ahead: A Vision for Sustainable Change

According to Neil Boothby, Professor and Director of GC-DWC, the evolution of education in Telangana is necessary to keep pace with India's rapidly changing economy. As Boothby emphasized, "SEL skills are more important than ever, and embedding our courses into required training of all future teachers in these university education degree programs will advance this objective, and sustain them into the future."

As this groundbreaking initiative continues to unfold, the impact on the students, teachers, and communities involved is expected to be profound. By prioritizing SEL, India’s education system is laying the groundwork for a generation of learners who are not only academically competent but emotionally intelligent, resilient, and ready to thrive in a complex world.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

The monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan for this course is structured around two main elements: defining learning objectives/questions, and outlining methods for data collection to address those objectives. The learning questions are designed to assess two key areas: first, whether students are completing the course with fidelity, and second, how both students and faculty perceive the course’s implementation. Specifically, the plan seeks feedback on how the course can be improved from both perspectives to enhance the course design for future iterations. To gather relevant data, the team uses a combination of faculty surveys, faculty focus group discussions (FGDs), and student FGDs. These data collection methods will provide insights into the effectiveness of the course and identify areas for improvement based on direct input from both faculty and students.



To learn more about the Whole School Approach to Social and Emotional Learning curriculum and to access the faculty guide, visit the course lesson plan.

Faculty Testimonial

“I recently participated in a Faculty Development Program on the Whole School Approach to Social and Emotional Learning, and it was an enriching experience. The program highlighted the importance of integrating SEL into the entire school environment, fostering a supportive culture for both students and educators. It provided valuable insights into strategies for enhancing emotional well-being, communication skills, and a positive learning atmosphere. Looking forward to implementing these approaches in our school community!” — Faculty Participant, Faculty Development Program



In this image: Students from St. Jude’s College of Education learn about Social and Emotional Learning during the “Whole School Approach to Social and Emotional Learning” course.



Shaping Policy and Practice

The Role of Research in Shaping Policy Decisions

Policy decisions have far-reaching consequences that affect the lives of individuals, communities, and nations. As such, effective policymaking demands careful consideration of evidence, expert knowledge, and data. Research plays a crucial role in shaping education policy by providing evidence-based insights. It helps policymakers understand complex issues, identify effective strategies, and make data-driven decisions. This approach leads to more targeted and impactful reforms in education systems. (Sparx)

At its core, research bridges the gap between theory and practice, providing policymakers with the tools needed to make informed decisions that address pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. Whether through quantitative data, qualitative analysis, or case studies, this research highlights patterns, identifies issues, and offers solutions that can improve public outcomes. Moreover, it serves as a mechanism for accountability, ensuring that policies are evaluated based on their effectiveness and adaptability. The integration of research into the policy-making process is not merely an academic exercise; it is a practical necessity. Policymakers increasingly rely on evidence-based strategies to confront issues such as climate change, public health crises, economic inequality, and education reform. As such, fostering a strong relationship between research and policy not only enhances the quality of decisions but also ensures that policies reflect the evolving needs of society.

The GC-DWC's approach to informing policy and practice examines how evidence can shape policy agendas, influence legislative processes, and ultimately guide the formulation of laws and regulations that contribute to providing pathways out of

adversity for vulnerable children across the globe. By understanding the mechanisms through which research impacts decision-making, we can better appreciate its role in fostering sound, sustainable, and equitable public policies.



Through active collaboration with policymakers at both local and national levels, this area of GC-DWC research focuses on identifying the most effective strategies for advocating for systemic change. These policy efforts offer critical insights into how research can influence decision-making, ensuring that evidence-based solutions are not only adopted but also integrated into broader governance frameworks for sustainable, long-term impact. In this section, we'll delve into the GC-DWC's work in policy research, examining how our findings have been used to shape education policies in diverse contexts, with a special focus on addressing the unique challenges faced by communities in resource-constrained environments.



SHARE

While progress has been made in recent years to conduct research that strengthens education systems in low-middle income countries (LMIC), there continue to be significant barriers to the utilization of education research to inform policy and practice. Supporting Holistic and Actionable Research in Education (SHARE) brings together education policy-makers, practitioners, researchers, and knowledge disseminators to ensure education research meets the needs of and is accessible to key stakeholders in education systems. SHARE seeks to develop a replicable and adaptable model to advance efforts to strengthen education systems in low-middle income countries.

The University of Notre Dame implemented the SHARE activity in partnership with local higher education and research institutions from Aug. 2020 - Jan. 2025. This research was originally produced at the request of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Center for Education. Given its dissolution in early 2025, USAID was unable to offer a final review and approval of this document. As such, this section was independently prepared by the GC-DWC at the University of Notre Dame.

Supporting Holistic and Actionable Research in Education (SHARE)

SHARE is a cooperative agreement between USAID and the University of Notre Dame that advances global education priorities to improve learning outcomes. The program is built upon a deep appreciation of local capacity and ownership as the cornerstone of effective development practice. The Notre Dame team mentors an impressive coalition of partners in higher education across Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia to implement this program. The first year convened 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. Additionally, the program offers 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.

Goals, Progress, and Impact

Notre Dame’s overall goal for SHARE is to advance USAID learning priorities in international education to improve education system outcomes.

1. SHARE conducts primary research internationally in partnership with locally based research institutions with a commitment to capacity exchange. SHARE leverages the demonstrated strengths of local partners while offering partners the opportunity to strengthen research capacities through mentorship and accompaniment.
2. SHARE fortifies linkages between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to ensure research is designed to meet the knowledge needs of decision-makers and promote the movement of evidence to action, creating transformational change in educational and research landscapes.

3. SHARE is active in 19 Lower-Middle Income Countries (LMICs) around the world, with an aim to identify transferable findings & recommendations to inform educational development on a global scale.

SHARE Research Studies

SHARE engages in research around five high-priority areas for the global education community. These studies combine SHARE’s competencies in qualitative and quantitative research approaches while looking more systemically at how to foster a greater culture of evidence-based decision-making. Learn more about some of the SHARE research activities by clicking each link below:

- **Contextually Relevant Emotional and Social Wellbeing Tools (CREST):** CREST is conducting research on socio-emotional learning skills and teacher wellbeing that is grounded in the perspectives of teachers, children, and caregivers. *Study locations: Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, Liberia.*
- **Language of Instruction Transition in Education Systems (LITES):** The LITES study seeks to fill knowledge gaps in language acquisition by generating evidence surrounding language of instruction transitions and their relationship to learners’ first and second-language literacy skills. *Study Locations: Philippines, Senegal, Kenya, Mali, Rwanda.*
- **Learning to Improve Book Resource Operational Systems (LIBROS):** The LIBROS study explores the underlying conditions that improve book supply chains and identify policy and practice pathways to strengthen the primary education level book supply chains in low- and middle-income countries. *Study locations: Cambodia, Honduras, Rwanda.*
- **Higher Education Institutions Generating Holistic and Transformative Solutions (HEIGHTS) - Financial Stability:** HEIGHTS-FS aims to produce evidence-informed strategies that can strengthen financial sustainability in higher education (HE) systems in the contexts of low- and middle-income countries. *Study locations: Indonesia, Kenya, Philippines.*
- **HEIGHTS - Innovation Ecosystems:** This study explores how higher education institutions can positively influence an innovation ecosystem through a variety of roles while also considering resources, relationships, and social norms. *Study locations: Indonesia, Kenya, Philippines.*

Learning to Improve Book Resource Operational Systems (LIBROS)

Books are one of the most cost-effective enablers of children’s school achievement, yet the availability and quality of educational resources often remain inadequate in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The goal of the Learning to Improve Book Resource Operational Systems (LIBROS) study was to assist the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in identifying policy and practice pathways to strengthen primary education level book supply chains in LMICs. By focusing on case studies in Cambodia, Honduras, and Rwanda, LIBROS engaged with key stakeholders, including policymakers, authors, publishers, managers, and users, to document successful strategies for improving book supply chains.

The study examined the development and implementation of strategies designed to enhance book distribution systems, assessing their perceived impact and identifying the conditions that contribute to their success. By exploring challenges faced and strategies employed in these countries, the LIBROS team aimed to generate transferable lessons for improving book supply chains in other LMICs.

Research Goals:

- **Country-level goal:** Identify the characteristics and critical success factors of policy and practice strategies that have resulted in improvements to the primary education level book supply chain within Cambodia, Honduras, and Rwanda.
- **Cross-country goal:** Identify characteristics and critical success factors of successful book supply chain improvement strategies that can be transferable to other LMIC contexts that seek effective policy and practice strategies for the provision of quality book resources for young children.

Methods and Analysis:

The study assembled case studies from each study country. Data was collected through stakeholder workshops, in-person and virtual interviews, review of policy documents, and email discussions. The resulting data was then analyzed to generate rich descriptions of the characteristics of the selected improvement strategies and their perceived impacts on their respective book supply chain system. Data was also analyzed to identify critical success factors and contextual conditions that contribute to strategic development and implementation of the system, as well as persisting barriers and those that have been successfully addressed.

Research Questions:

- 1. What are the characteristics and perceived impacts of a specific strategy designed to improve the book supply chain?
- 2. How and under what conditions was the improvement strategy developed and implemented?
- 3. What challenges were observed and addressed during the process? What additional supports are required for the fuller success of the book chain improvement strategy?

Study Timeline:

Systems Mapping & Diagnostic—March 2022 - Aug. 2022—Increased understanding of the system to identify key improvements to the primary school level book supply chain and determined scope of each country-specific case.

Contextualization of Research Design—Sept. 2022 - Nov. 2022—Based on the results of the systems mapping & diagnostic, the research design was contextualized to each country’s context, zeroing in on key improvements.

Data Collection & Analysis—Dec. 2022 - June 2023—Conducted interviews and reviewed relevant documents to identify critical success factors (CSFs) and identify any remaining challenges & barriers.

Case Study & Recommendations—July 2023 - Dec. 2023—Case Study reports were generated for each country of study including recommendations for continued improvement.

Dissemination & Research Translation—Jan. 2024 - June 2024—Continued engagement with the book supply chain ecosystem to disseminate and embed the learnings; shared learning through workshops and meetings.

The findings from the LIBROS study provide valuable insights for strengthening book supply chains, improving primary education, and ensuring better access to quality learning materials in LMICs.

Partners:

Resilient Africa Network (RAN), Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), Francisco Morazan National Pedagogical University (UPNFM), University of Rwanda (UR)



Reading for Ethiopia’s Achievement Developed (READ)

The READ II (Reading for Ethiopia’s Achievement Developed) program, funded by USAID, was assessed for its effectiveness in supporting education continuity in the conflict- and crisis-affected areas of Afar and Amhara. The evaluation aimed to:

- 1. Measure progress and challenges in implementing READ II.
- 2. Identify barriers preventing children from returning to school.
- 3. Explore strategies to support student learning and teacher effectiveness.
- 4. Document beneficiary perceptions and needs for further interventions.

Key Findings

1. Barriers to School Re-Entry

The evaluation identified economic challenges, conflict-related trauma, beliefs and values about education, and gender-specific barriers as the primary obstacles to school re-entry:

- Economic Barriers: The inability to afford school materials, food insecurity, and the need for children to work.
- Conflict-Related Barriers: Psychological trauma, destruction of school infrastructure, and displacement of families.
- Beliefs and values about education:
 - Parents, especially mothers, support their children’s continued education
 - Some parents do not see the benefits of education, given the high unemployment rates of graduates or the need for children to work to support family
 - Adolescents express positive views of education
- Gender-Specific Barriers:
 - Girls face a higher risk of gender-based violence, early marriage, and domestic responsibilities.
 - Boys experience pressure to work or join the conflict, limiting their school attendance.

2. Support for Learning Continuity

The report emphasizes the importance of humanitarian and community support, school infrastructure improvements, psychosocial support, and teacher training:

- Basic Needs Support: Food provision, clean water, and school feeding programs significantly increase student attendance.
- School Infrastructure & Materials: Restoring damaged schools, ensuring access to sanitary facilities, and providing educational materials are crucial.
- Psychological Support: Teachers and community leaders need training to address trauma-affected students.
- Community Awareness: Promoting the value of education among parents and local leaders improves enrollment and retention.

3. Effectiveness of READ II Implementation

READ II has largely met its targets but faced challenges due to conflict, inflation, and security risks:

- Positive Impact: School materials distribution, psychosocial training for teachers, and awareness campaigns have been effective.
- Challenges: Insufficient materials, limited training for teachers, and logistical constraints due to market volatility.

4. Beneficiary Perceptions & Areas for Improvement

- Overall Positive Feedback: The provision of school materials and feeding programs were the most appreciated services.
- Concerns & Limitations:
 - The insufficient quantity of materials and food support.
 - Unequal distribution of services, leading to perceived favoritism.
 - Teachers require more direct training and incentives.

Recommendations for Future Programming

To improve education access and quality in conflict-affected regions, the report suggests:

- 1. Expand Material Support: Increase the supply of school resources, food, and psychosocial services.

2. Improve Infrastructure: Repair damaged schools and provide water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities.
3. Enhance Teacher Support: Increase salaries, provide housing assistance, and offer more training in trauma-informed education.
4. Strengthen Community Engagement: Conduct campaigns to change attitudes toward girls' education and emphasize the economic benefits of schooling.
5. Support School Feeding Programs: Continue and expand food assistance to reduce absenteeism.

The READ II program has positively impacted education in conflict-affected regions, but further efforts are needed to increase resource availability, support teachers, and address psychological trauma. A cross-sectoral approach integrating education, health, and economic assistance is essential to sustain progress and enhance learning continuity in Northern Ethiopia.



[Read the full report to learn more about the evaluation of the READ II program, including research questions, methodology overview, limitations, findings, and recommendations.](#)





Research to
Address Policy
Highlights



LIFE SKILLS COLLABORATIVE

Strengthening Life Skills for Youth in India

The Life Skills Collaborative (LSC) is a consortium of 40+ organizations focused on championing social-emotional and life skills for India's young people to thrive, through individual programs and advocacy efforts. These life skills are important for adolescents as they progress into the workforce, helping them manage the changing landscape of the labor market. Over the last decade, there has been a lot of development around the teaching and learning of life skills in schools and out-of-school programs in India; government institutions, non-governmental organizations, donors, and community development partners have advocated for a stronger focus on life skills and richer interventions that help children and youth learn and use these skills. There have also been important developments in how life skills can be assessed with children and youth.

LSC 1.0 (2020-2023) advanced life skills in India through the development of a shared glossary index, validation of two assessment tools, and an advocacy and engagement platform. Key successes included developing a common language for life skills and contextualized evaluation tools, though adoption among partners was limited. Reflections from members emphasized the need for more formative tools, bottom-up decision making, expanded collaboration, and stronger capacity building to drive policy influence.

Life Skills Collaborative 2.0

Building upon these efforts, LSC 2.0 (2024-2027) takes a practitioner-led, demand-driven approach, focusing on improving life skills interventions and generating evidence for large-scale adoption. To achieve this, LSC 2.0 is structured into two parallel tracks: the Narrative track, which focuses on storytelling, advocacy, and engagement, and the Evidence track, led by the GC-DWC and IDinsight, which aims to strengthen life skills interventions through evidence-based decision-making.

The evidence track seeks to accelerate LSC 2.0's vision by enhancing engagement and knowledge sharing among stakeholders and increasing the use of evidence across the collaborative by:

1. Supporting evidence needs for narrative strategies to ensure the narratives and strategies created are based on evidence
2. Strengthening the use of evidence the life skills work done by organizations across the collaborative

LSC 2.0 is a 3.5-year initiative with two phases aimed at enhancing life skills interventions in India. Phase 1, running from October 2024 to April 2025, focuses on aligning with the narrative track, strengthening the life skills ecosystem, and identifying barriers to evidence-based decision-making. It involves an evidence mapping exercise and forming an advisory group of practitioners, academics, and business leaders. Phase 2, starting in April 2025, builds on Phase 1's findings and focuses on strengthening evidence-driven decision-making. This phase includes capacity-building for partners, fostering collaborative learning, improving evidence use in advocacy, and conducting long-term research. It also emphasizes knowledge dissemination through case studies, open-access resources, and quarterly workshops to ensure widespread adoption and practical application of findings. The initiative aims to ensure lasting impact and large-scale adoption of life skills interventions across India.



Learn more about the Life Skills Collaborative: <https://lifeskillscollaborative.in/>





SUPPORTING FUTURE GENERATIONS

Supporting Future Generations: The Science Behind Investing in Adolescents

There are 1.2 billion adolescents aged 10–19 in the world today and nearly 90 percent of these girls and boys live in low- and middle-income countries. Realizing the rights of these adolescents, and investing in their development, contributes to the full participation of adolescents and young people in a nation's life, a competitive labor force, sustained economic growth, improved governance, and vibrant civil societies, accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (UNICEF, 2018).

While whole child development consistently refers to “child and youth,” adolescent development is virtually absent from the literature of evaluated programs. Whole child development requires attention to the life course, bridging early childhood development with adolescence and beyond. What do we know about adolescent development that can inform whole child development? How might these insights contribute to the whole adolescent development approach?

The Supporting Future Generations Adolescent Research Project

The GC-DWC's *Supporting Future Generations Adolescent Research Project* focused on and built upon research across three areas of adolescent development in adversity as follows:

- 1. Supporting adolescent mothers and their children:** The first study, Two-generation Programs for mothers and their children, set out to evaluate evidence on programs that prioritize the health and wellbeing of both mothers and their children, whose development outcomes are inextricably linked.
- 2. Advocating flexible learning approaches:** The second study, Flexible Learning Programs & Pathways Back to Education, focused on flexible learning programs within low- and middle-income countries for out-of-school adolescents that contribute to learning and social-emotional needs while also linking to formal and informal education systems.
- 3. Addressing mental health and well-being:** The third, Adolescent mental health and psychosocial support in the context of adversity, and the implications for education, reviewed programs that address the gap in youth mental health and psychosocial

treatment, including the shortage of mental health professionals and the lack of evidence-based support, policies, strategies, and funding.

Adolescence is a critical time in the course of a life. It is a unique opportunity for investment in adolescent health and well-being, quality education, and skills development for productive employment. Building on investments made in early childhood and/or making up for what was not yet built can foster adolescent resilience to positively shape the world around them. However, many adolescents in low- and middle-income countries are not able to finish school and are ill-equipped for productive labor in a modern society. Adolescent sexuality, pregnancy, and childbearing continue to be major health issues, and the consequences of gang and domestic violence are severe.

The Supporting Future Generations Adolescent Research Project reveals how important it is for effective development programs to begin early in children's lives. Working holistically and comprehensively to address the needs and aspirations of adolescents, these programs must adopt a whole child development approach that includes family, school, peers and neighborhoods. Clearly articulating the distinct needs of adolescents within the broader whole child development initiative is a key first step. A whole adolescent development program must also be gender-transformative, draw upon local knowledge and solutions, and be tied to national programs, systems, and policy outcomes. Furthermore, linking early childhood development and adolescent development portfolios together via two-generation approaches will add a life course perspective to the program, helping to build a brighter future for adolescents, their families, and their communities.



[Read the project summary that highlights the key findings and emerging themes of the Adolescent Research Project. It also provides a snapshot of good practices and lessons from the field.](#)



Advancing Education Through Innovation and Applied Research

Innovations in educational measurement and assessment are essential for improving learning outcomes, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and crisis-affected regions. These areas often face challenges such as limited resources, teacher shortages, and disruptions due to conflict or displacement, making it difficult to track student progress and ensure quality education. Applied research plays a crucial role in developing effective measurement tools and assessment methods that are contextually relevant, scalable, and inclusive.

By leveraging technology, data-driven insights, and culturally responsive approaches, researchers and policymakers can design assessments that provide a clearer picture of learning needs and inform targeted interventions. From citizen-led assessments that measure foundational literacy and numeracy to adaptive learning technologies that personalize evaluations, innovative methods are reshaping how education systems monitor student progress. Additionally, in crisis-affected settings where traditional assessments may be impractical, alternative approaches—such as mobile-based testing and hybrid digital-paper solutions—are helping bridge learning gaps.

As education systems strive for greater equity and effectiveness, future research must continue to refine assessment tools that are accessible, reliable, and adaptable to diverse learning environments. This ongoing innovation is critical for ensuring that all children, regardless of their circumstances, receive a quality education tailored to their needs.



The GC-DWC has been at the forefront of advancing educational innovations and applied research to improve learning outcomes in diverse and challenging contexts. Through its work, the GC-DWC has developed and implemented cutting-edge measurement tools, assessment frameworks, and capacity-building initiatives tailored to the needs of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and crisis-affected regions. By integrating technology, data-driven insights, and culturally responsive methodologies, the center has contributed to more effective and equitable education systems. The following sections highlight key areas of innovation and applied research that the GC-DWC has worked on, showcasing the Center's impact on education policy and practice worldwide.



TEACHER WELL-BEING

Teachers' well-being is context-specific and refers to how teachers feel and function in their jobs, including their affections, attitudes, and evaluations of their work. It is affected by varied individual (e.g., displacement status), school-level (e.g., limited resources), and contextual (e.g., community violence) challenges that often lead to emotional exhaustion, lower cognitive and social-emotional functioning, and ultimately hinder teachers' ability to help students develop social and emotional skills. Teacher well-being (TWB) is particularly important to consider in a context such as Uganda, where teachers' job satisfaction is low, teacher shortages are high, and the educational demands of both Ugandan and refugee communities have left the education system overstretched, reducing teachers' ability to address their own well-being or to support students' well-being and learning.

Be Well, Teach Well

Despite the global emphasis on improving student social and emotional learning outcomes, little attention is paid to teachers' well-being. Moreover, there are few validated, rigorous assessments of teachers' well-being that could be adapted for low-resource and displacement contexts. If the global education community is truly committed to providing equitable, quality learning opportunities for students, then more attention needs to be paid to teacher well-being, including how to assess and better support teachers' well-being in low-resource and displacement contexts, like Uganda.

Therefore, our research-practice consortium—the GC-DWC, Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education (LGIHE), and Save the Children—engaged a diverse group of teachers from settlement and non-settlement contexts in Uganda to co-create a contextually appropriate teacher well-being measurement tool. The study was composed of three phases that built upon each other.

Phase 1: Exploring perspectives of well-being

Brief ethnographic interviews were conducted with 150 teachers across five research sites: Palabek, Rwamwanja/Hoima, Kampala, Moroto, and Wakiso. This phase aimed to understand how primary grade teachers in Uganda perceived well-being.

Phase 2: Teacher-driven participatory research

A teacher research group (TRG) was established, consisting of 10 teachers (two per research site, with 50% female representation). The TRG met twice to review Phase 1 findings and co-develop an item bank that the research team used to design the teacher well-being survey. This phase facilitated teacher participation in defining well-being constructs that should be measured.

Phase 3: Validating the assessment

A pilot test was conducted with 300 teachers (60 per research site). A psychometric analysis was performed to assess the validity and reliability of the survey. As a result, a validated teacher well-being survey was developed, along with accompanying administration guidance.

Goals, Progress, and Impact

Our project goals were to:

- Ensure that key stakeholders have a common understanding of the importance of teacher well-being.
- Build awareness within the Ugandan, East African, and global education community about the participatory, co-design process through which contextualized measures of teacher well-being could be developed.
- Ensure that partners in Uganda know how to use the survey so that it could help further the understanding of teacher well-being in Uganda.

Expanding the Impact of Well-being ASSETS: A Global Approach to Teacher Well-being Assessment

The GC-DWC developed the contextually appropriate framework of TWB as well as a psychometrically rigorous assessment—Wellbeing Assessment of Skills and Supports that Enable Teachers to Succeed (Well-being ASSETS). This self-report assessment measures peer collaboration, preparation, support from administration, intrinsic motivation, sociability, teacher-pupil relationship, and subjective sense of well-being. The International Rescue Committee (IRC, a non-governmental humanitarian organization) has adopted the Wellbeing ASSETS as its primary tool for assessing TWB. They currently have Wellbeing ASSETS data from teachers in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda and will be collecting similar data from a sample of teachers in several emergency contexts (e.g., Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Jordan, Kenya, Nigeria, South Sudan, Syria) over the next two years. They have paired the Wellbeing ASSETS with a survey battery that collects demographic data, context information (e.g., safety), principal surveys, and classroom quality observations. They are creating the largest database of teacher information in the global south, with the Wellbeing ASSETS as a cornerstone of this effort.

Wellbeing of Teachers in Emergencies: Unpacking the Causes and Consequences of Retention and Burnout

GC-DWC assistant professor and director for research, Nikhit D'Sa, is partnering with the IRC in developing a research plan, analyzing the data, and disseminating learning through technical and non-technical fora. The partnership hopes to address three research questions:

- 1. Validity and reliability of Wellbeing ASSETS scores** – Using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess construct validity, criterion validity, and internal reliability of the survey scores.
- 2. Factor structure invariance** – Evaluating if the Wellbeing ASSETS model is consistent across subgroups (e.g., gender) and different country samples.
- 3. Relationship between Wellbeing ASSETS and teacher outcomes** – Using Latent Class Analysis to identify teacher subgroups and predict their impact on instructional quality, burnout, job satisfaction, and retention.

The findings will be translated into non-technical briefs and presentations, sharing these during global webinars with the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), USAID's Education in Crisis and Conflict Network, and UNESCO's Teacher Taskforce.

Research in Service of the Needs of Vulnerable Teachers in Emergencies

In 2024, the International Taskforce on Teachers made six recommendations. One focused on the need for more and better data about the status of teachers globally, including their well-being. Another focused on improving the working conditions for teachers by identifying drivers that affect job satisfaction. This study, the first of its kind in the global south, will respond to these recommendations while positioning the University of Notre Dame (UND) and IRC as a hub for academic research on teachers in emergencies. The underlying goal of this study is to use research in service of the needs of vulnerable teachers in emergencies. Teachers create pathways out of adversity for children in emergencies; to help children thrive, we must build a comprehensive understanding of how to support their teachers.



TEACHER AGENCY

Teacher agency refers to the capacity of educators to make informed choices and take actions that influence change within their classrooms and schools. It involves teachers exercising control over their professional practices, decision-making processes, and teaching strategies, ultimately shaping student outcomes and their own well-being. Recognized as a key component of effective education, teacher agency plays a crucial role in empowering teachers to adapt and thrive, particularly in resource-constrained environments where external support may be limited.

GC-DWC Researchers Embark on Study to Redefine Teacher Agency in Uganda

In an innovative study aimed at redefining teacher agency in Uganda, researchers from the GC-DWC and the Luigi Giussani Foundation (LGF) are exploring how this concept can translate into actionable strategies that enhance both Teacher well-being (TWB) and student success. Despite the established links between teacher agency—the capacity of teachers to make choices and take actions to effect change—and stronger student academic and social outcomes in high-resource contexts, its implications in the majority-world remain under-explored. Additionally, it is unclear how teacher agency overlaps and interacts with similar constructs, like TWB, or how teacher agency translates into action in low-resource contexts where teachers have limited external support. This study, taking place from May 2024 through April 2026, aims to address these gaps in the extant research about teacher agency to better understand how teachers can be agents of change within the challenging landscape of education reform within Uganda.

The research initiative, conducted in partnership with Schools2030, will focus on the primary objectives of understanding teachers' conceptualization of agency, evaluating the relationship between teacher agency and well-being, and exploring how these factors are associated with student learning.

"Teacher agency is a vital element of effective education, yet it is often overlooked in discussions about teacher development, especially in resource-constrained environments," said Nikhit D'Sa, principal investigator of this project and GC-DWC assistant professor and director for research. "Our study aims to fill this gap by providing a contextualized definition of agency directly from teachers, leading to tailored measures that reflect their unique challenges and opportunities."

The project is unfolding in three stages:

- 1. Group Model Building Workshop:** Over the course of the project, researchers will conduct a workshop with primary grade teachers from Kampala and Arua who have been engaged with Schools2030, where teachers will develop an understanding and visual representation of the interconnected factors affecting their ability to translate agency into action and draft a comprehensive definition of agency.

2. Development and Adaptation of Teacher Agency Measures: The team will conduct a literature review to find open-access teacher agency measures, and then select measures that best capture teacher agency as defined in Stage 1. The team will test the tool—Adapted Teacher Agency Measure (ATAM)—by conducting cognitive interviews with 10-12 new teachers from Schools2030 schools to ensure internal consistency and reliability. Based on the interviews, the tool will be adapted and contextualized for Uganda.

3. Surveying Schools2030 Teachers: The team will collect data from teachers across 30 Schools2030 primary schools using both the Well-being ASSETS (previously developed measure of TWB in Uganda) and ATAM tools. The team will analyze the results from the surveys using both a Structural Equation Model (SEM) to test the interaction effect of teacher well-being on teacher agency and multiple regression analysis to understand the association between teacher well-being, teacher agency, and the actions that teachers can take in their schools.



A two-day residential Group Model Building workshop recently concluded in Kampala, Uganda, bringing together 18 primary school teachers from both Kampala and Arua. Led by the GC-DWC’s partner organization, LGF, this workshop focused on understanding how a sample of primary school teachers from Kampala and Arua conceptualize agency in their roles within the classroom and school. Through collaborative sessions, participants identified and visually mapped out key factors influencing their capacity to make choices in their work and take action to change things in their classrooms and schools. Teachers also explored the intersection of their own definitions of agency with prior insights on TWB developed by Ugandan educators.

“Visiting Uganda and witnessing our partner team from LGF engage 18 primary

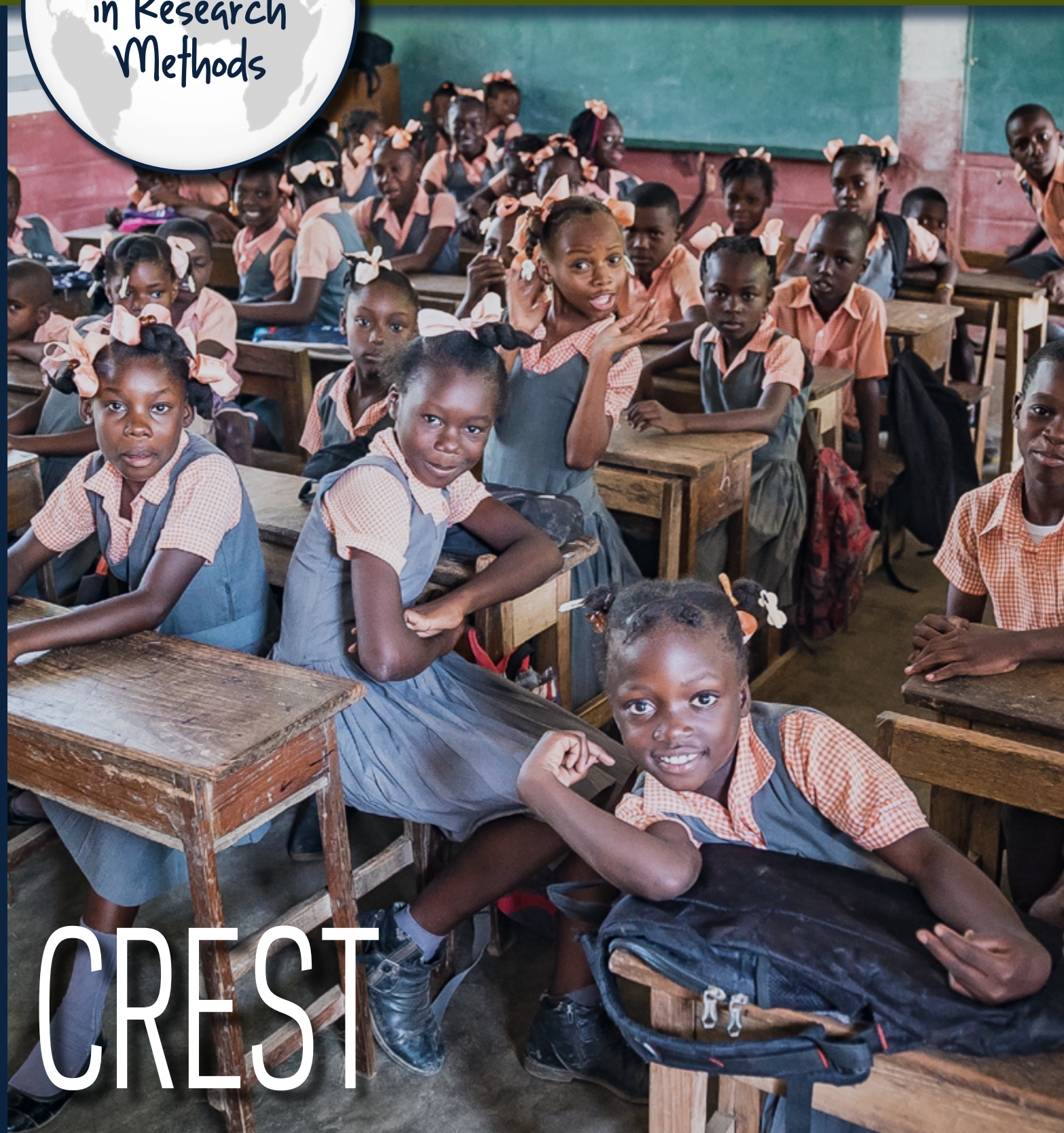
school teachers in such an energetic and collaborative workshop was a wonderful experience,” Dakota Peterson, GC-DWC research associate, reflected. “The greatest joy came from seeing the teachers connect, share their experiences, learn from one another, and enjoy many

moments of laughter over the two days. This workshop highlighted the vital role teacher agency plays in empowering educators to make meaningful and impactful decisions within their schools.”

This project will not only generate insights into teacher agency in Uganda, but also engage with local education experts to embed findings into existing educational policies and practices. Knowledge dissemination will include the development of tools, briefs, and reports, along with various webinars presentations at international conferences to promote broader discussions around teacher agency and professional development.



[Read the non-technical brief from the Group Model Building Workshop](#)



CREST

Contextually Relevant Emotional and Social-Wellbeing Tools (CREST)

CREST—Contextually Relevant Emotional and Social Well-being Tools—was part of a cooperative agreement between USAID and the University of Notre Dame, which advances global education priorities to improve learning outcomes. From 2021-2024, CREST focused on improving education and teaching for children and their caregivers affected by conflict in communities in Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, and Liberia.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) increases children's self-awareness, academic achievement, and positive behaviors in and out of the classroom. Effective SEL interventions require an approach that includes teachers, administrators, and others supporting students' development.

However, how SEL skills and teacher well-being are defined and operationalized in research and its translation into practice is inconsistent. Also, most tools for measuring children's SEL and teachers' well-being are not easy to use in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. Conducting qualitative research on children's SEL skills and teacher well-being in their environments is critical since surroundings play a primary role in support.

Research Questions

1. How do primary school-age children, parents, and educators define and prioritize the social and emotional skills they believe are important in the lives of children? What are the psychometric properties (validity and reliability) of a measure that is developed using this context-specific information?
2. How do primary school teachers define and prioritize teacher well-being and the factors that affect this well-being? What are the psychometric properties (validity and reliability) of a measure that is developed using this context-specific information?

Methods and Analysis

To address the research questions of this study, CREST researchers utilized a mixed-methods instrument development design. The research occurred side-by-side in each country with a dual focus on children's SEL and teachers' well-being in each stage.

- **Stage 1:** Exploring Context-Specific Perspectives of Child SEL and Teacher Well-being
- **Stage 2:** Converting the Perspectives of Child SEL and Teacher Wellbeing into Measures
- **Stage 3:** Field Testing the Pilot Child SEL and Teacher Well-being Measures

Research Goals

Country-level goal: Understand how children, parents, and teachers define and prioritize SEL and teacher well-being and produce context-relevant, validated assessments.

Cross-country goal: Develop a data-informed process that any country or activity, but especially those in crisis- or conflict-affected contexts, can use to develop feasible, reliable, valid, context-relevant, and conflict-sensitive child SEL and teacher well-being assessments.



The Impact

The Colombian Ministry of Education expressed interest in using the TWB measurement tool that the GC-DWC and Universidad de Los Andes team developed and validated. Members of the MoE invited the CREST team to present the TWB instrument to the well-being leads of all the district education offices in the country. This meeting generated significant interest and buy-in for the measurement tool. After a number of follow-up meetings and planning discussions between the MoE and CREST team, the MoE has decided to roll out the tool to all public school teachers across the country at the start of 2025. The MoE is planning to conduct similar country-wide TWB assessments every two years to understand the status of teachers across Colombia. Dr. Nikhit D'Sa from the GC-DWC team and Universidad de Los Andes will be helping analyze and report on this national data.



GC-DWC 2019 TO 2024

PUBLICATIONS HIGHLIGHT

↖ Linked Publication
GC-DWC Co-Author

↖ Adopt, contextualize, or adapt? Understanding the complexities of modifying or developing a measure of children's social and emotional competencies

Nikhil D'Sa

↖ "What's happening in Syria even affects the rocks": a qualitative study of the Syrian refugee experience accessing noncommunicable disease services in Jordan

Hannah Chandler & Neil Boothby

2019

2020

↖ Improving Reading Instruction and Students' Reading Skills in the Early Grades: Evidence From a Randomized Evaluation in Haiti

Kate Schuenke-Lucien

↖ Integrating new knowledge into everyday practices: teacher pedagogy in early grade literacy in rural Mozambique

Jeongmin Lee & Nikhil D'sa

↖ Organising primary grade literacy environments in Mozambique

Jeongmin Lee & Nikhil D'sa

↖ Causes of family separation and barriers to reunification: Syrian refugees in Jordan

Hannah Chandler & Neil Boothby

↖ "I can teach what's in the book": Understanding the why and how behind teachers' implementation of a social-emotional learning (SEL) focused curriculum in rural Malawi

Jeongmin Lee

↖ Developing and Validating the International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment: Evidence from a Pilot Test with Syrian Refugee Children in Iraq

Nikhil D'sa

↖ Leveraging community-based innovations during COVID-19 to strengthen the Haitian school system

Neil Boothby, Anna Hart, & Hannah Chandler

↖ What's faith got to do with it? A scoping study on local faith communities supporting child development and learning

Nikhil D'sa & Neil Boothby

2021

2022

↖ Early literacy skill development and motivation in the low-income context of Haiti

Kate Schuenke-Lucien

↖ "I always tell my children to learn from me": Parental engagement in social and emotional learning in Malawi

Jeongmin Lee

↖ Fluid Families and Harshness as Adaptation in Haitian Childcare: An Approach to Improving Life Outcomes for Haitian Children

Kate Schuenke-Lucien & Abigail Mills

↖ Child-led resistance in the streets of the global south: Decolonial perspectives of violence against children outside of family care

Neil Boothby

↖ "Well-being, that word is very wide": Understanding how teachers in Uganda define and navigate their occupational well-being

Nikhil D'Sa & Hannah Chandler

2023

↖ Applying the Science of Learning to Teacher Professional Development and Back Again: Lessons from 3 Country Contexts

Nikhil D'Sa

↖ The Effects of Adding Social-Emotional Learning to a Comprehensive Education Intervention in El Salvador on Teacher Well-being: a Mixed Methods Evaluation

Fernanda Soares

↖ Explaining Variation in Treatment Effects: An Impact Evaluation and Mixed-Methods Study of Variation in Early Grade Reading Program Effects

Kate Schuenke-Lucien

↖ Teacher RePlay and Children ReAct: pilot testing a formative toolkit to support playful learning in the classroom

Nikhil D'Sa

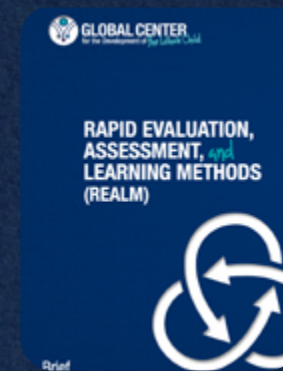
↖ The role of home environments in children's literacy skills in Ghana: Parents, siblings, and books

Jeongmin Lee

2024

A LEGACY OF *Learning*: BRIEFS, TOOLKITS, AND BOOKS

Over the past five years, the GC-DWC has published a wide range of research briefs, toolkits, reports, and books that continue to contribute to the field of early childhood development. Highlights include:



Rapid Evaluation, Assessment, Learning Methods (REALM)

Brief



Unleashing Youth Opportunities: A toolkit for community asset mapping

Brief



Leveraging the Home, School, and Church for Whole Child Development in Haiti: L3

Brief



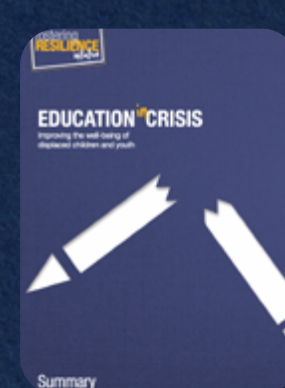
Investigating Community Perspectives to Early Childhood Programming: Qualitative Study in Nippes, Haiti

Report



Supporting Future Generations: The Science Behind Investing in Adolescents

Brief



Education in Crisis

Brief



Strong Beginnings for Children in Haiti: 2020-2024 Learnings Brief

Report



Invest in Our Youth

Book



Adversity and Resilience

Brief



Fostering Resilience for Children in Adversity: A Guide to Whole Child School-Community Approaches

Brief



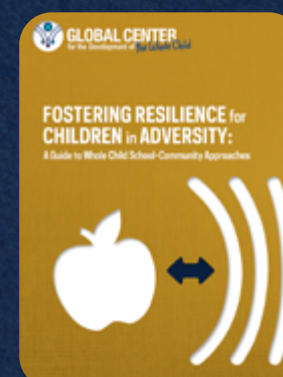
Practical Measurement Toolkit

Course



Education and Resilience in Crisis: Challenges & Opportunities in Sub-Saharan Africa

Book



Fostering Resilience for Children in Adversity: A Guide to Whole Child School-Community Approaches

Brief



Defining Whole Child Development

Brief



Looking Ahead: Our **Vision** for the **Future** and a Path Forward

Strengths, Challenges, and Pathways for Growth

Over the past five years, the GC-DWC has established itself as a leader in bridging research and practice in the fields of education, child development, and systems strengthening in low-resource and crisis contexts. The Center has made significant strides in advancing implementation research, which focuses on how to translate evidence-based practices into scalable, real-world applications.

One of the key strengths of the GC-DWC is its robust theoretical and methodological expertise in implementation science, as well as its deep understanding of children's learning and development within the interconnected contexts of homes, schools, and communities. The systems activation research led by the GC-DWC is a critical contribution to international development policy and research. This work bridges academic rigor, field experience in low-resource and crisis settings, and active participation in global policy discussions, allowing the GC-DWC to maintain a unique and valuable perspective on the challenges faced by children in adversity.

As the GC-DWC continues in its fifth year at the University of Notre Dame, the Center has successfully mobilized over \$102.7 million to support its implementation science programs and policy-oriented research. However, despite this success, the Center faces several challenges that could limit its future impact—its discretionary funds remain limited, and the Center currently lacks an endowment to secure long-term financial stability. To address these challenges, the GC-DWC is focused on securing endowments for key leadership positions, including the faculty director, the faculty research director, and the senior program director. These endowments would not only ensure the sustainability of the Center's leadership but also foster greater engagement with the Notre Dame campus, facilitating cross-university collaboration, the creation of new academic courses, and expanded opportunities for student involvement in research.

The current funding model, which is primarily program-specific, restricts the Center's ability to engage in long-term, longitudinal research and multi-country collaborations. Core support would enable the GC-DWC to overcome these limitations, ensuring that the Center can continue to make significant contributions to the field of child development and education.

Our Goals and Strategic Direction

Evidence from across disciplines—from neuroscience to biological and developmental science to economic science—has clearly demonstrated that investing in children's holistic well-being is a proven pathway out of adversity. Whole child development (WCD), and its multiplier effect, is one of the smartest, most cost-effective investments we can make to ensure the health and

prosperity of not only individual children and their families, but also of entire communities and societies. This focus on WCD is a cornerstone of the research we conduct at the GC-DWC. As we reflect on the vision for the GC-DWC over the next 10 years, we would like to champion this WCD approach to strengthening the systems within which we work, accounting for the realities of children who grow up in adverse contexts. We envision the GC-DWC becoming the premier research center focused on evidence-based methods in which to align messages, knowledge, and practices across settings to support childhood development and learning in low-resource and crisis contexts. This focus is closely aligned with the University of Notre Dame's strategic focus on poverty alleviation and research within the Catholic Church (one of the systems that our research focuses on).

In establishing ourselves within this niche, we envision two important pillars to our work:

- I. First, we foresee the GC-DWC building on its reputation for evidence-based program and policy translation; beyond communicating and disseminating results in a non-technical manner, we endeavor to co-create programs and approaches with stakeholders from the systems we work within.
- II. Second, we also expect to continue to build on the GC-DWC's reputation for practical assessments and measurement for programs and policy makers in the majority world. In focusing on systems strengthening, we have (and will continue to) pioneer practical and feasible measures of the impact of interventions on children, parents, and educators.

Opportunities for Growth

The ability to sustain our current efforts and realize our vision for the future is predicated on Notre Dame investing in the GC-DWC. We have a remarkable track record in securing grants; however, as a relatively new Center, we have not yet received core support or endowment. First and foremost, an endowment of key positions would allow us to sustain our ability to impact the lives of children in adversity through partnerships and research to action endeavors. An endowment would also make us more competitive for external grants, enhance our publication record, and ensure we will continue to be able to attract and retain a talented and diverse global team. Our ability to engage with students through course offerings, mentorships, and dissertation committees—all of which are limited due to the near total grant-based work—would be enhanced as well.

Core support would enable us to pursue a new early childhood development research to action collaborative in line with our vision for the future. "Activating Catholic Communities to Engage in Systems Strengthening" (ACCESS) Labs is envisioned as a long-term research initiative with partners in Catholic communities where Notre Dame faculty and staff have ongoing programs

and long-term commitments: Haiti, Uganda, South Bend, and Arizona. ACCESS would involve colleagues from the Mendoza School of Business, the department of psychology and neuroscience, and Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) program, American Indian Catholic Schools Network (AICSN), that serves indigenous communities. The focus will be on school readiness: how best to engage caregivers and households as a child's "first school" and parents as their "first teachers" in promoting pre-literacy, numeracy, responsive social care, and good nutrition.

- The household component will be linked to engagement of Church leaders in integrating key child development in baptism preparation, family ministries, and other routine activities such as sermons and media messaging.
- Our preschool focus will include play-based learning, SEL skill development, and facilitative teaching practices. Intervention packages will be developed and contextualized for each location.
- Outcome research will seek to assess the effects and impacts of these system strengthening practices in these diverse contexts.



Our Continued Commitment to Impact and Innovation

As we reflect on the past five years of work at the Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child, we are deeply inspired by the progress we have made and the transformative impact our research has had on children, families, and communities. The dedication and passion of our team have driven the successful integration of evidence-based practices into real-world interventions, and it is this sense of purpose that propels us forward.

Looking ahead, the GC-DWC team remains energized and eager to build on our successes. We are fully dedicated to expanding our interventions and research in ways that will have a lasting and meaningful impact on children's lives in low-resource and crisis contexts. The future holds tremendous promise as we continue to forge new partnerships, develop innovative approaches, and contribute to shaping policies that prioritize holistic child development. With a shared vision and deep commitment, we are excited to continue advancing these initiatives, confident that the work will contribute to lasting change for future generations.

We are inspired by the progress made in these first five years and are excited to continue advancing our mission with the support of the University and our global partners.

Join Us in Shaping the Future

The GC-DWC's work is far from over. As we enter our next phase, we invite you to be a part of our journey. Together, we can build environments where all children can reach their potential and become responsible citizens and life-long learners.

We are proud of what we've achieved, but there is much more to do—and we hope you will be a part of our next five years of change. With your support, we can expand our reach, deepen our impact, and continue pioneering innovative solutions that transform children's lives in communities around the world. Together, we can create a lasting legacy of progress, empowerment, and opportunity for generations to come.



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