IDELA: FOSTERING COMMON SOLUTIONS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

IDELA

FOREWORD

As countries across the globe increase their investment in early childhood development (ECD) programs and policies, data on both children's learning and development and the characteristics of the contexts they live in are important in guiding investments. The clearest policy context for this currently is the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals related to ECD. In particular, Indicator 4.2.1 in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (the proportion of children that are developmentally on track in health, learning, and psychosocial well-being) represents an unprecedented global commitment to a multi-domain conceptualization of child development and learning in the first years of life. It sets an expectation that countries report nationally on the status of their young children's development and learning, as a spur to policies for human and sustainable development. In this way, the SDGs have recognized that a sustainable planet will not be possible in coming years and decades without investment in learning and development starting from birth.

Unfortunately, there have been very few direct child assessments that are feasible to use at large scale in global contexts (e.g., across a range of low- and middle-income countries). Although parent or adult report measures are an important component of an ECD measurement strategy, direct child assessment is an extremely important supplement due to the independent nature of observation. Save the Children's International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) is an important contribution to this limited area. Having been developed through a careful 3-year process, with piloting in multiple countries with thousands of children, the IDELA was released for public use in 2014. It has been assessed in programs in 45 countries. It has also shown strong psychometric properties across the domains of motor development, emergent language and literacy, emergent numeracy, and social-emotional development. The IDELA as a leading assessment of ECD is ready for use by an even larger number of countries.

The IDELA has shown sensitivity to intervention impacts not only for programs that Save the Children implements but also for programs implemented by other NGOs and governments. In addition, it is starting to be used in some countries as a national monitoring tool, in nationally representative samples. This report represents an important overview of the instrument and a set of case studies that show the range of uses for ECD program and policy implementation that the IDELA can facilitate. As such, it is an invaluable resource for policy makers and practitioners engaged in supporting the developmental potential of the world's children.

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For more information about the International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) please navigate to www.idela-network.org

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Cover photo:

Children participating in learning activities at a community ECE center in Vietnam.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evidence about the importance of learning opportunities in early childhood has been mounting in recent years, culminating with the inclusion of pre-primary education in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Despite the known benefits, global investment in Early Childhood Education (ECE) remains limited. A key constraint to investment is the lack of data on which ECE programs work for children and why. Save the Children's International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) is a tool aimed at plugging this data gap, with a view to ensuring appropriate ECE programs are in place globally.

What is IDELA?

IDELA is a direct child assessment that spans four developmental areas: motor functioning, language and early literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional development. The assessment can be used with children aged 3-6 years and takes ~30 minutes to administer. The majority of the assessment is done through tasks and games, for example on letter and number identification or measurement and comparison.

How is IDELA being used?

Since IDELA's public launch in September 2014, it has been used by Save the Children and 22 partners (research institutions, international aid organizations, civil society organizations, and government bodies) in projects across 45 countries—the uptake is growing by 1 country each month. Work in varied contexts proves that IDELA can be adapted to new settings, program needs, and diverse cultural and language contexts.

Impact: Exploring what works for children

Governments, academics, international NGOs, corporations, private schools, and local NGOs use IDELA to learn if and how ECE interventions work for children, with a view to improving and expanding future interventions. For example, using IDELA, a pilot conducted by EQUIP-Tanzania in 2015 found that the introduction of a 12-week school readiness intervention was comparable to results from the more traditional 2-years of pre-school programming. This success led to an expansion in the number of school readiness centers and community teaching assistants, benefiting 150,000 children across seven regions in Tanzania.

Equity: Understanding who is being left out and why

IDELA allows partners to identify groups of children who may lag behind peers or not have program access at all. For example, Lebanon is now sheltering over one million registered Syrian refugees; of the 126 thousand refugee children of pre-school age, 90% have critically unmet ECE needs. To respond to this the International Rescue Committee (IRC) began piloting a 4-month program, Preschool Healing Classrooms (PHC). PHC responded to the needs of young children experiencing distress and displacement by providing nurturing, safe, and consistent learning experiences through play, exploration, and social interactions. The pilot PHC program demonstrated impressive gains across all the IDELA developmental domains and in the 2016-2017 academic year IRC expanded its reach to 3,000 refugee children.

Collaboration: Building a common narrative around ECE

With partners using IDELA from across and within sectors and countries, it provides us with a common language, enabling us to easily collaborate. This can influence scale-able change for children that goes above and beyond any one organization's capacity to implement programs. One of the most powerful examples of organizations coming together across contexts has been with excluded groups of Roma children living in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Together, Open Society Foundations, Results for Development, Roma Education Fund, Save the Children, Step-by-Step Foundation, and the World Bank have been building evidence on ECE programming for Roma children in 14 countries in the region. While each team will have strong evidence for local programming, together their evidence in the region can be used at the highest levels of national and international decision-making.

Advocacy: Working for change in ECE policy

As countries set out to fulfill their commitment to providing quality early childhood care and development opportunities for all children, IDELA can help them identify areas for investment and solutions with promise. It also gives us evidence to articulate the mismatch between current systems and what children actually need to succeed. For example, The Ministry of Education, UNICEF, Save the Children, and other national partners in Bhutan collaborated on an impact evaluation of the national ECE program. This national assessment has led to new government and civil society initiatives to reach the most socially, culturally, and geographically marginalized children.

The future of IDELA

One of IDELA's greatest strengths and what sets it apart from other available ECE tools is its proven feasibility, adaptability, and rigor in varied contexts. IDELA can be administered consistently in low-resource settings and can quickly identify which strategies will most effectively improve results for children. To shift the reality of children in LMICs we need to leverage measurement that proves what works; IDELA is such a lever.

In 2017 and beyond, we look forward to seeing a continued and increased uptake of IDELA, and an improvement in ECE across the globe as a result. By doing this, significantly more young children will reach their developmental potential and enter school more prepared to succeed.

INVESTING IN THE FIRST 2000 DAYS

Young children learning to count at an ECE center in Bangladesh

Evidence about the importance of stimulation and learning opportunities in early childhood has been mounting in recent years, culminating with the inclusion of pre-primary education in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Early stimulation and learning opportunities through quality pre-school can support lifelong development and success, especially in Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) (Britto et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2015). There is substantial evidence regarding the importance of investing early to support future outcomes such as improved learning, improved inter-generational health, and breaking cycles of violence (Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Yoshikawa et al., 2013).

The global education community has a significant distance to go to meet SDG 4.2: all girls and boys having access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education. Despite the known benefits, global investment in Early Childhood Education (ECE) remains limited. Across high-income countries, pre-primary education investment stands at 0.6% of members' collective Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and varies from 0.1% in Australia to 0.8% in Denmark and Spain (Putcha & van der Gaag, 2015). In LMICs, public pre-primary investment differs similarly from 0.5% of GDP in Mexico to .01% of GDP in Indonesia (Levin & Schwartz, 2012).

A key constraint to increased investment is the dearth of information about which ECE programs work for children, why they work, and how to most efficiently diversify programs for varied sub-populations. In LMICs, there is limited guidance on the "how to" of programs: how to get a return on investment and how to boost children's early development, especially for children from socio-cultural minorities. Key questions to be addressed include:

- Which ECE programs work, when, and for which children?
- How do we understand which populations are being left out from ECE programs, or which populations are not advancing despite participation in ECE?
- How do we capture the current status of ECE in order to advocate for more investment and better quality programs?

An important issue in addressing these questions is the need for better data. Despite the existence of tools designed to measure early learning and development internationally, few tools have proven to be appropriate and feasible in LMIC contexts while also being psychometrically rigorous. The possible solutions to achieving SDG 4.2 are going to vary; researchers, practitioners, and policy makers need a tool to measure children's development feasibly and with rigor across different investment options.

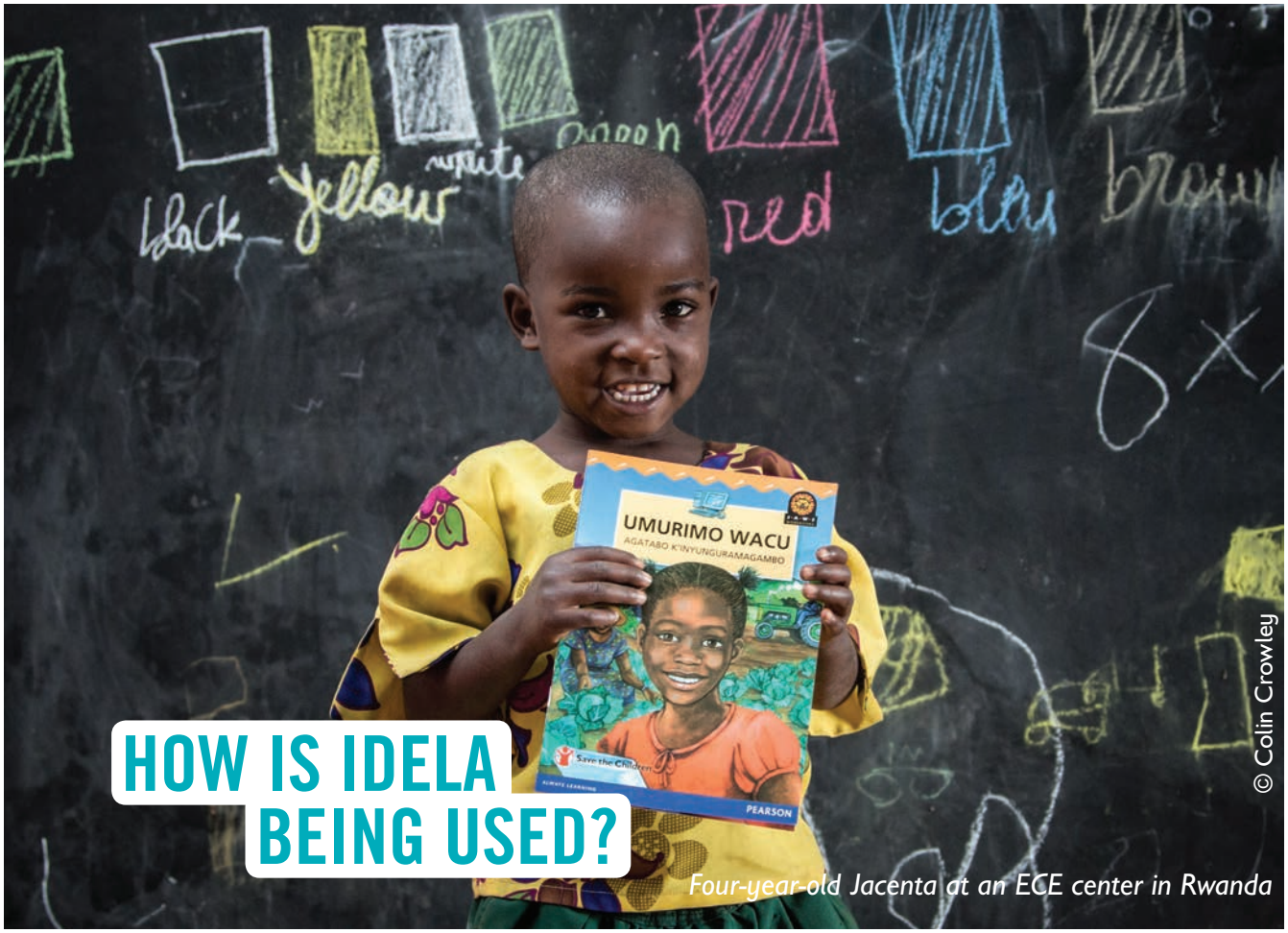
To ensure that this happens, the tool needs to be low cost, easy to use, reliable, and culturally relevant (Barrett, Sayed, Schweisfurth, & Tikly, 2015; Bartlett, Dowd, & Jonason, 2015; Chavan & Yoshikawa, 2013). It also needs to explore the multiple developmental domains—cognitive, social & emotional, academic, motor functioning—that children need to develop before they enter primary school (Snow & Van Hemel, 2008). Skills that children develop across these developmental domains, not just in the academic domain, are important for future success, especially for children from low-resource contexts (Heckman, 2006; Izard et al., 2017).

The International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) is a holistic, rigorous, open source assessment for 3-6-year olds. IDELA is a direct child assessment that measures motor development, emergent language and literacy, emergent numeracy, and social-emotional development. In Table 1 we present an overview of the main constructs and items covered by IDELA in these four domains. IDELA also includes optional questions related to executive function (short-term memory and inhibitory control) and approaches to learning (persistence, motivation, and engagement).

MOTOR DEVELOPMENT	EMERGENT LITERACY	EMERGENT NUMERACY	SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
☐ Hopping on one foot	☐ Print awareness	☐ Measurement and comparison	☐ Peer relations
☐ Copying a shape	☐ Expressive vocabulary	☐ Classification/ sorting	☐ Emotional awareness
☐ Drawing a human figure	☐ Drawing a human figure	☐ Number identification	☐ Empathy
☐ Folding paper	☐ Letter identification	☐ Shape identification	☐ Shape identification
	☐ Emergent writing	☐ One-to-one correspondence	☐ Perspective taking
	☐ Initial sound discrimination	☐ Simple operations	☐ Self-awareness
	☐ Listening comprehension	☐ Simple problem solving	☐ Conflict resolution

Table 1. Overview of constructs and items covered by IDELA

In practice, this means that assessors play a series of games with children where the child is asked to do things like draw pictures, listen to a story and respond to comprehension questions, count different quantities of beans, and identify ways to solve a conflict with a friend. Local materials can be used and community members like teachers, health workers, and university students can be trained to reliably administer the assessment. This flexibility means that IDELA can be easily adapted and contextualized to different national and cultural contexts. Evidence from IDELA gives us the ability to look into the impact of different types of programs for young children to determine what works and which investments to test at scale.



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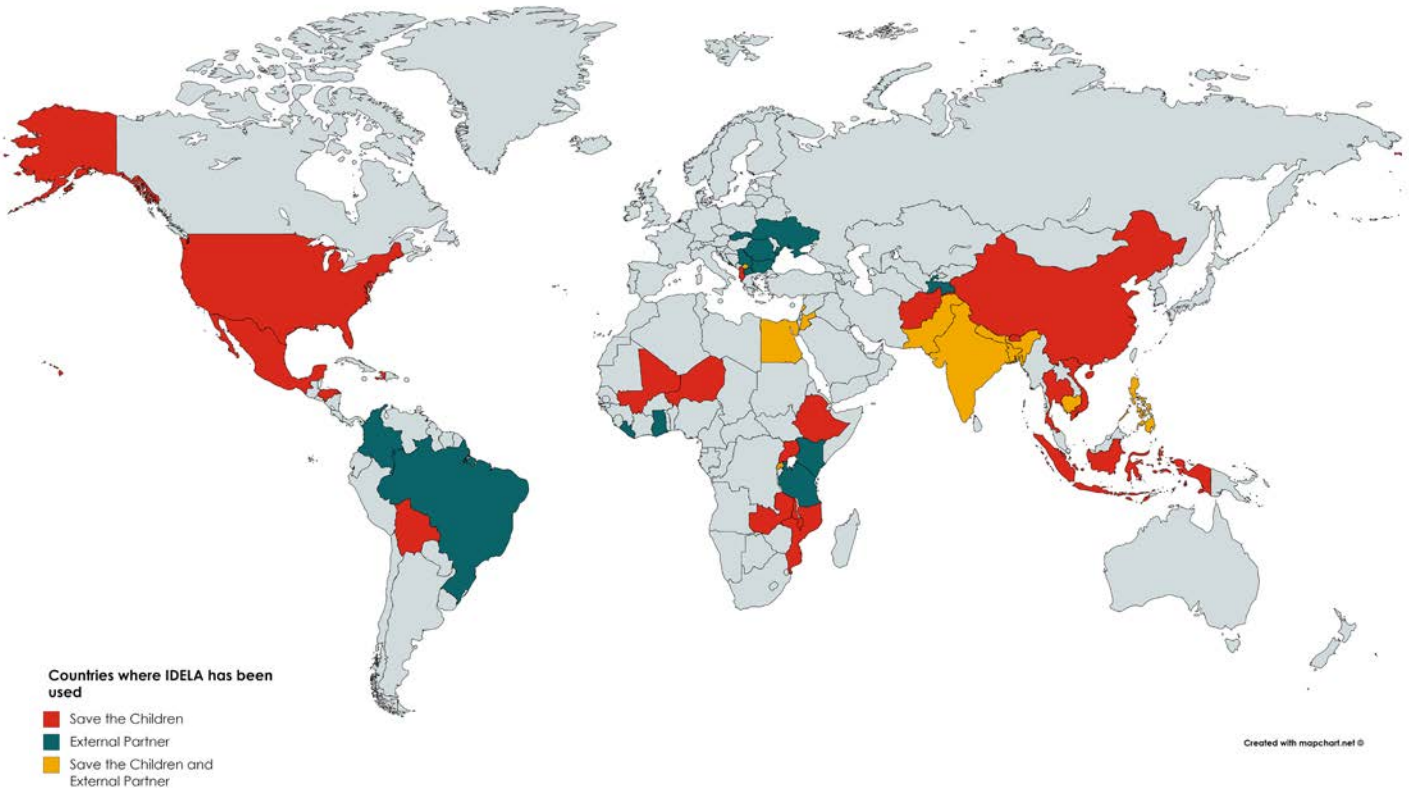
Four-year-old Jacenta at an ECE center in Rwanda

HOW IS IDELA BEING USED?

Since IDELA's public launch in September 2014, its uses and users have expanded, growing on average by one country each month. IDELA has now been used or is being used by Save the Children and by 22 partners (research institutions, international aid organizations, civil society organizations, and government bodies) in projects in 45 countries. See map below for an overview of countries where IDELA has been and is being used. Because of this expansive use, IDELA was highlighted in the Lancet's early childhood development series as an influential development in the ECE field (Black et al., 2016).

Although IDELA is built around a set of 22 core items, work in varied national and cultural contexts proves that IDELA can be adapted to new settings, program needs, as well as cultural and language contexts. For example, using IDELA with the Government of Bhutan added to the bank of questions around spiritual and moral development. Working on the first Chinese version added learning on how to adjust to character-based rather than alphabet-based languages. Collaborating with partners like Universidad del Norte in Colombia (see box), helped us understand protocols for adapting IDELA to better evaluate the social and emotional abilities of children, and for addressing issues children raised in their answers, like being sad when their parents hit them. IDELA is a living tool that continues to grow and expand in line with the increased attention to and investment in young children across the world.

Over the last few years, IDELA users posed a common question across programs: how do we know if our work helps young children reach their developmental potential and enter school more prepared to succeed? IDELA, with the consent and collaboration of thousands of children across the world, has provided users with the data they need to answer this question well. It has supported program evaluations, randomized control trials, iterative program improvement cycles, comparison of different ECE interventions, school entry assessments, national monitoring data, analysis of equity gaps, and evidence-based advocacy. In the rest of this report, we provide a description of four major ways IDELA contributes to our knowledge about ECE programming.



UNDERSTANDING CHANGE IN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DOMAIN IN COLOMBIA

During 2016 the Universidad del Norte (UNINORTE) in Barranquilla, Colombia trained, in partnership with the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF), 800 early childhood teachers in 8 departments of the country (San Andrés, La Guajira, Casanare, Putumayo, Cauca, Arauca, Caquetá, and Vichada) in the application of the Program of Psycho-affective Development and Emotional Education (Pisotón). Through its play-based techniques, Pisotón seeks to reinforce strategies that help children to recognize, express, and manage their emotions in order to adequately solve the common conflicts they face. The program also seeks to reduce the impact of risk factors such as violence, maltreatment, or neglect on children.

In order to document the impact of the Pisotón program on the children participating in the pilot implementation of the training process, UNINORTE conducted a research study focused on children's psycho-affective development across 7 departments of the country. Researchers used IDELA in a pre-post impact evaluation with two groups of children: those participating in the program and others not engaged in Pisotón. A detailed analysis of the study data is still in process, but preliminary findings show positive results of the implementation of Pisotón for the psycho-affective development of boys and girls. In the future, it is expected that IDELA will be used both to evaluate the characteristics of the children participating in the program and to continue evaluating program impact. Further research will also include all IDELA domains as primary outcomes of interest in order to account for possible effects of the program on other areas of development.

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IMPACT: EXPLORING WHAT WORKS FOR CHILDREN

Story time at a Head Start center in the United States

Governments, academics, international NGOs, corporations, private schools, and local NGOs use IDELA to learn if and how ECE interventions work for children. They also look to learn how to improve future implementation. Comparisons can mean considering impact across different delivery mechanisms, like understanding the effect of a 12-week school readiness intervention for children in Tanzania as compared to the more traditional 2-years of pre-school programming (see box). Understanding this successfully in a small trial can often lead to programming at a larger scale and retesting to ensure the benefits remain. With more programs running more trials with the same metric, solutions and consensus for ensuring young children's development will emerge faster than with many players using different yardsticks to demonstrate and evaluate progress.

IMPACT OF 12-WEEK SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM IN TANZANIA

EQUIP-Tanzania designed a school readiness pilot study in 2015 with an aim to address the under provision of preschool education services and the need to support children prepare for entry into primary school in Tanzania. The 12-week program provided a basic introduction to Kiswahili, essential because of the high proportion of children in the target population who did not speak Kiswahili at home. This preparation program was significantly shorter than the traditional one- or two-year pre-school program and was also different in its use of community support and volunteerism to enable its start-up and operation.

Using IDELA, the impact study demonstrated that children who participated in the 12-week school readiness program were on par with the children who had one or two years of pre-school programming across emergent literacy, emergent math, social-emotional, and motor development. The children's average scores were also considerably higher than children who had no access to a preschool program. This success has led to an expansion in the number of EQUIP-Tanzania school readiness centers and community teaching assistants so that as many as 150,000 children will benefit from quality learning opportunities close to their homes through approximately 3,000 school readiness centers in seven regions of the country.

RANDOMIZED CONTROL TRIAL OF EDUTAINMENT PROGRAM IN TANZANIA

Having identified the challenges that children face when entering primary school, UBONGO developed an ECE-focused education program for pre-primary children. This show *Akili and Me* was designed in part around the IDELA competencies and created in conjunction with a Tanzanian creative team to ensure that the educational cartoon complied with international pre-primary standards and was in an environment familiar to viewers in Tanzania.

Along with research partners from University of Maryland and Daystar University in Nairobi, the UBONGO team conducted a randomized control trial to assess the impact of *Akili and Me* on pre-primary children in Morogoro, Tanzania. The study took place in nine government primary schools and children were selected for the study based on the following criteria: (a) child was between the ages of 4-5 years, (b) Kiswahili was spoken by the child as a first language, and © child was from a low or middle-income family. The children were assessed using IDELA before and after a five-week intervention completed in the classroom.

After controlling for differences in age, gender, and children's baseline knowledge, the research team found that the average child in the intervention group demonstrated impressive gains in most of the IDELA developmental domains as compared to peers in the control group. For example, children who watched *Akili and Me* demonstrated a 9% gain in fine motor skills and a 13% gain in emergent literacy as compared to children in the control group.

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Gul learning to read at a community ECE center in Pakistan

PREPARING YOUTH TO SUPPORT SCHOOL READINESS IN PAKISTAN

Target 4.2 of the SDGs states that by 2030 we need to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. The shortage of early childhood trained educators in the workforce challenges the achievement of this goal. The LEAPS[1] project (Youth Leaders for Early Childhood Assuring Children are Prepared for School) was designed by the Aga Khan University in collaboration with researchers at Harvard and Yale Universities to address the early childhood care and education (ECCE) workforce gap in Pakistan by training female youth, 18-24 years, to deliver community-based ECCE services.

Implemented in partnership with the National Commission for Human Development in the district of Naushero Feroze, Sindh, Pakistan, this training, and mentorship program fostered knowledge and competencies among female youth to deliver quality ECCE as well as support their professional and personal growth. The program used an evidence-based ECCE curriculum, adapted to be locally relevant. Female youth delivered ECCE during one year to children aged 3-6-years. Each youth leader delivered two sessions per day lasting three hours (morning and afternoon shift). Young children attended class five days per week.

The pilot program evaluated benefits to both youth leaders and young children. Youth leaders were accepted as ECCE providers in the local community and their personal and professional growth was enhanced. Children's school readiness, assessed using IDELA, showed significant benefits in the intervention group compared with the children not participating in this program. The pilot project shows promise for a model that can benefit children's school readiness by addressing gaps in the ECCE workforce.

1 LEAPS was supported by grants from UNICEF and the Saving Brains Program, Grand Challenges Canada.

Five year old Vokti writing in a notebook in an ECE class in Bangladesh

When attempting to measure the impact of ECE programs it is important to consider whether the tool can validly measure child development and whether it is sensitive to changes through the course of an intervention. In the case of IDELA, is the tool able to measure child development at least as well as other international child development assessments? One of the most commonly used assessments in low and middle-income contexts is the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). IDELA was tested alongside the ASQ in a sample of 138 children in Bangladesh in 2015. IDELA's four developmental domains had strong and positive correlations with the domains measured by the ASQ (r = .33 - .61). This suggests that IDELA is measuring similar developmental domains as the ASQ. In addition, the IDELA tool displayed more normal distributions and was more sensitive to factors related to child development during multivariate regression analyses (see Figure 1 below).

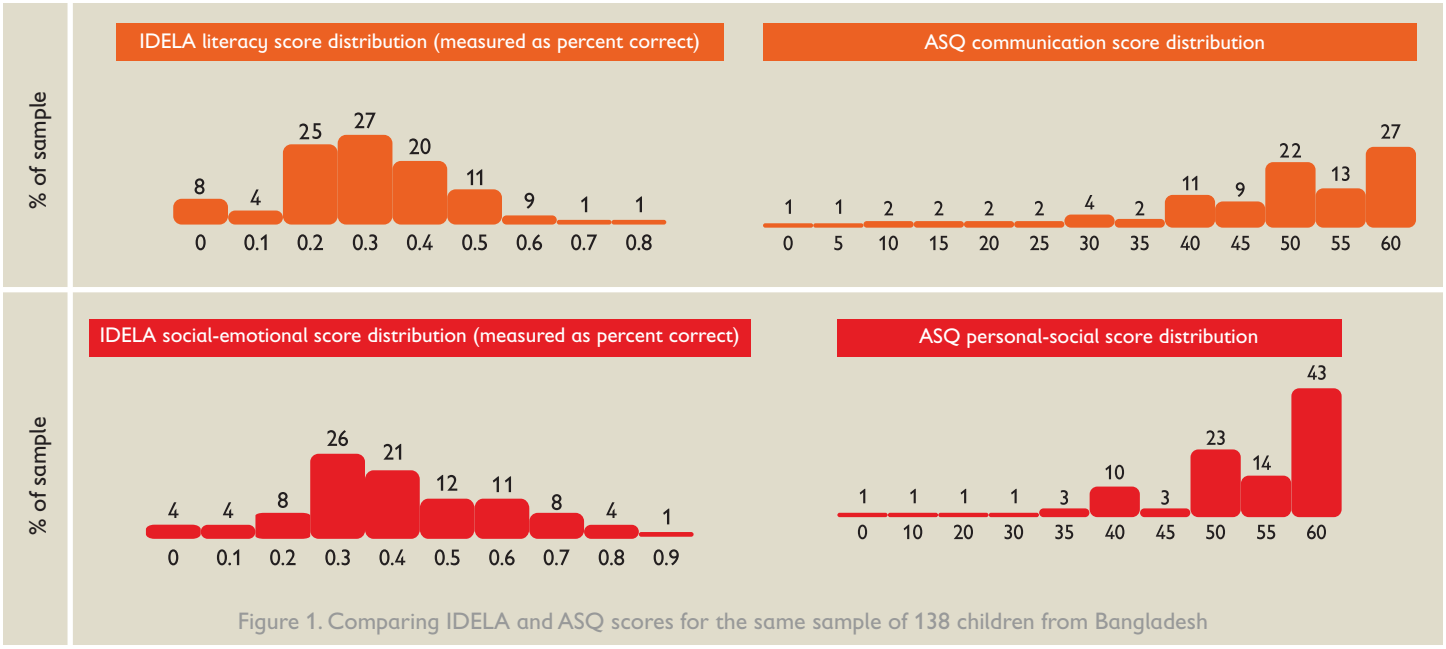

Figure 1. Comparing IDELA and ASQ scores for the same sample of 138 children from Bangladesh

Additionally, IDELA has been found to be sensitive to numerous environmental factors, intervention modalities, and intervention intensities. For example, the tool was able to detect the effects of a purely home-based (caregiver focused) intervention (Borisova, Pisani, Dowd, & Lin, 2017) and differentiate between environmental predictors of child development, such as poverty and stimulation levels (Wolf & McCoy, 2017). IDELA has also been used to test the impact of programs focused on promoting literacy and math skills like the Ready Set Go (RSG) program from the World Bank and Roma Education Fund in Romania, as well as social-emotional skills through programs like Pisotón developed by the Universidad del Norte in Colombia.

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EQUITY: UNDERSTANDING WHO IS BEING LEFT OUT AND WHY

Adamou and his friends in the Maradi Region of Niger

As a tool for continuous program improvement, IDELA allows leaders to reflect deeply on programmatic strengths as well as identify groups of children who may lag behind peers or not have program access at all. In its earliest uses, IDELA shed light on the early learning and development of children with and without access to ECE opportunities. In one such longitudinal study, children without access to ECE in Ethiopia barely registered a change in developmental status over five months, a shocking finding for a group of 5-year-old children (Dowd, Borisova, Amente, & Yenew, 2016).

Beyond binary access/no access comparisons of ECE programs, IDELA uses a Home Environment Tool to ask the caregiver about the context in which the child is growing. These data enable analyses relating to equity vis-à-vis household socioeconomic status, parental education, sex, language, and disability. The findings help practitioners and policy makers better understand whether girls or boys, rich or poor, or those who speak a minority language are falling behind in early learning and development.

This equity lens can illuminate the need for course correction, rendering interventions more effective for more children over time. For example, finding that children from minority language groups in Laos and Vietnam score significantly lower in literacy development than peers from the majority language group facilitates advocacy and additional inputs so the children reach the same skill level as their peers who speak the language of instruction in the formal schooling system (Save the Children, 2017). Attention to these equity issues at a young age when children's brains are most primed for learning is essential so that they can develop to their full potential.

MEASURING EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR ROMA CHILDREN IN UKRAINE

Four-year-old Natasha attends a Child Friendly Space in Eastern Ukraine

Education levels within the Roma population in Ukraine are persistently low. 24% of adults report having no education at all, and one in three Roma children do not attend school. Officially, primary and secondary education in Ukraine is free, but many Roma families report that they cannot afford the expenses associated with school such as books, stationery, and unofficial "contributions" for school renovations. In addition, approximately 12% of Roma families indicate discrimination as a reason for not sending their children to school. Providing equal access to quality education for all children, in particular for Roma children, in the context of child-centered, inclusive education, is one of the main strategic focuses of the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation (USSF).

Under the "Ensuring quality education for Roma children in pre-schools and primary schools" project, USSF has established parenting and teacher focused interventions to holistically support early education for Roma children in Ukraine. The parenting initiative encourages Roma caregivers to be more effective teachers and advocates for their children and raises awareness about simple yet effective strategies to increase children's interest and confidence in learning. To create supportive educational environments, USSF works with pre-school and primary school teachers to implement inclusive child-centered approaches, as well as introduce Roma classroom assistants and active cooperation with Roma parents. In this work, USSF discusses the issues of stereotypes, prejudices, and social stigma with teachers and helps them understand how to reduce these pressures in their daily work as well as how to prevent their formation in children.

One important step in this initiative was an assessment to identify the knowledge and skills of children and investigate how the project could reduce gaps between Roma children and their non-Roma peers. In cooperation with regional education departments, USSF used IDELA to measure the school readiness skills and development of children aged 4-6 years in the Transcarpathia and Odesa regions. Large differences were found between the skills of Roma children and their non-Roma peers at the beginning of the school year and these gaps persisted over time. With regards to basic math and literacy, Roma children showed roughly 20% lower results than their non-Roma peers. The lowest difference found during the assessment was in the motor skills domain (both gross and fine) where the difference was 7%.

Staff engaged with the program reflected on these findings, noting that it would be difficult for the Roma children to catch up with their peers, and also that it could be discouraging to compare themselves with peers who had stronger school readiness skills. In addition, they observed that many Roma children struggled with learning Ukrainian as a second language. While the study results displayed that there is still more work to be done to support Roma children's early education in Ukraine, the team felt that the IDELA tool helped to identify the most challenging domains and areas of development for the Roma children they served.

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF REFUGEE CHILDREN IN LEBANON

After more than six years of conflict, the Syria crisis is the largest humanitarian crisis of our generation. Lebanon, a nation of approximately four million citizens, is now sheltering 1,067,785 registered Syrian refugees, 54% of whom are children between 3-18 years of age (Government of Lebanon & the United Nations, 2017). This includes 126,406 young children of pre-school age (3–5 years old). To address this challenge, the Government of Lebanon developed and implemented the "Reaching all Children with Education" (RACE) Plan to deliver education opportunities for all children, including Syrian refugees. The objective of the plan was to ensure all children have access to quality learning opportunities in safe and protective environments. Despite having achieved significant results, considerable challenges remain. Around 287,000 Syrian children between 3-17-years remain out of school, including 114,000 young children with critically unmet ECE needs.

To respond to this need, in April 2016 International Rescue Committee (IRC) began piloting a 4-month program, Preschool Healing Classrooms (PHC), with 300 Syrian young children (ages 3-5) living in tented communities in Northern Lebanon (Akkar and Bekaa regions). The project aligned with the Government of Lebanon's national NFE Framework and the UN Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). The curriculum drew from the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) preschool curriculum and was focused on strengthening social-emotional skills to build young children's resiliency.

PHC responded to the needs of young children experiencing distress and displacement by providing nurturing, safe, and consistent learning experiences through play, exploration, and social interactions. Classes of approximately 22 children were co-led by 1 Lebanese teacher and 1 Syrian facilitator, all of whom received a 4-day training, weekly lesson plans, and regular monitoring and coaching. The program ran for 3.5 hours per day, 5-days a week, and provided children with play-based activities, using daily routines that included theme-based learning centers, circle time activities, free play, read alouds, and morning and closing meetings.

As a pilot program, the evaluation strategy did not include a control group, but rather a pre-post evaluation using IDELA. The aim was to understand if PHC could effectively support the developmental needs of refugee children. The pilot PHC program demonstrated impressive gains across all the IDELA developmental domains. The findings suggested that quality preschool programs can help improve young children's school readiness by developing critical cognitive, physical, and social-emotional skills. In the 2016-2017 academic year, IRC expanded its reach to 3,000 preschool-aged children in Akkar and Bekaa.

Four-year-old Farah playing outside in a refugee camp in Bekaa Valley, Lebanon

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COLLABORATION: BUILDING A COMMON NARRATIVE AROUND ECE

ECE facilitator engages children in outdoor activities in Bhutan

One of the aims of IDELA is to create a platform for dialogue across partners including practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and donors. By using common measures and indicators, partners form a shared language across and within sectors where none might otherwise exist. IDELA supports building a narrative of evidence, of successes and failures in supporting child development, which crosses multiple programs, implementers, and interventions. This common narrative can influence scale-able change for children that goes above and beyond any one organization's capacity to implement programs and thus better ensure that all children learn and develop to their full potential.

An analysis of 21 partner projects (see Figure 2 below) shows that the majority are using IDELA in impact evaluations (11) or program monitoring (7), and fewer are using it for national monitoring (2) or to inform program design (1). Most IDELA uses have focused on learning in pre-primary centers or schools (14), while a few looked exclusively at the home (2), and a handful combined home and center in their investigations (5). In partners' studies, IDELA uses have spanned many different types of programs and sectors, including cash transfers, child protection, education in emergencies, health, inclusion, primary education, technology, and youth. Many different types of programs affect children's early learning and development and it is clear IDELA meets these programs wide breadth of evaluation and monitoring needs.

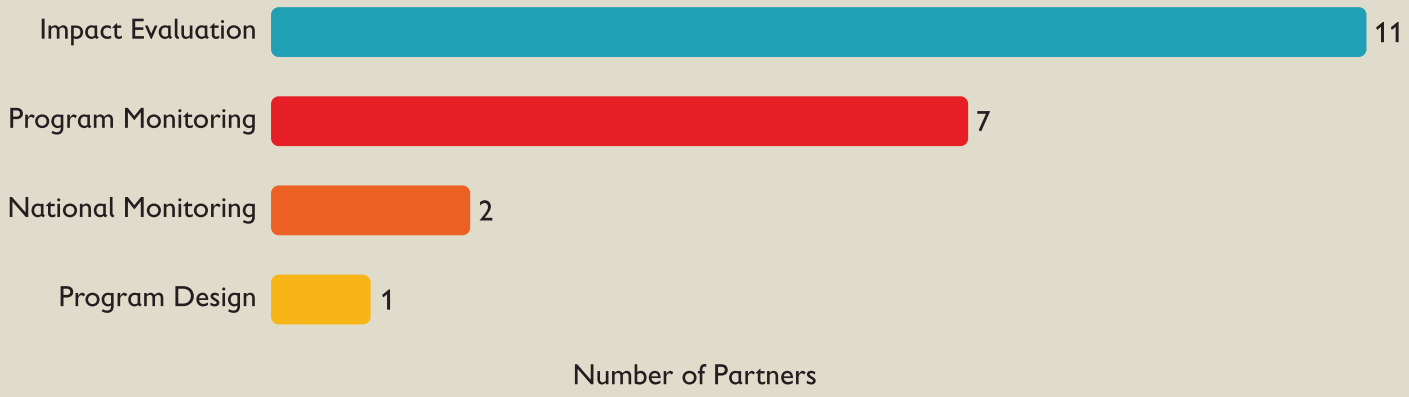

Figure 2. Different ways in which partners report using IDELA (n=21)

In order to ensure this breath of partner experience results in collaborative understanding around ECE programs, we have to ensure that IDELA validly measures the four developmental domains and that it measures the same underlying constructs in the same way across contexts.

In 2016, researchers from New York University (NYU), with funding from the World Bank, completed a study on IDELA's construct validity. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses using data from a project site in Ethiopia established that IDELA items were organized into the four hypothesized developmental domains—motor development, emergent language and literacy, emergent numeracy, and social-emotional development—and that scores from these domains could be reliably pooled into a total IDELA score (Wolf, Halpin, Yoshikawa, Dowd, & Pisani, 2017). Further analyses confirmed this factor structure in datasets from project sites in four additional countries: Afghanistan, Bolivia, Uganda, and Vietnam (report forthcoming).

Additional analyses by colleagues at NYU focused on whether IDELA measured the same skills in the four developmental domains in different countries. Because IDELA was designed to be adaptable, each team that uses it goes through a rigorous process of adaptation and contextualization. Given this, it was important to understand if IDELA was still measuring the same underlying skills in different contexts. The results displayed that while some items were consistent across countries, overall the assessment was measuring slightly different constructs in the different contexts where the tool was adapted.

No tool has yet proven to reliably measure learning and development for 3-6-year olds in a consistent way across contexts. IDELA is currently better suited to an in-country comparison of scores rather than comparisons across countries. In other words, it may not be appropriate to compare the emergent literacy score of Roma children in a project in the Ukraine with the emergent literacy score for Roma children in a project in Albania, especially if the tool is in a different language and has been adapted separately. However, this should not, and has not, stopped partners from using the common language of IDELA to start conversations about children's developmental needs, the kinds of programs that support children's early development, and the children who are being left behind.

One of the most powerful examples of different organizations coming together across contexts to use IDELA evidence to further advocacy and promote investment for a disadvantaged group of children has been around Roma children living in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Together, the Roma Education Fund, with support from the World Bank, and the Step-by-Step Foundation with support from Open Society Foundations, trained teams in 14 countries in the region to use IDELA to build evidence within their programs. The benefits of this work will be two-fold: on their own, each team will have stronger evidence for local advocacy, and together, evidence across 14 countries in the region can be used at the highest levels of national and international decision-making.

Building a strong body of evidence takes time, but we are already seeing collaboration and progress from these initiatives. For

example, a panel at the 2017 World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) conference in Opatija, Croatia shared a range of ways that IDELA is being used to measure the effectiveness of ECE programs for improving the school readiness of Roma children. Included in the panel was the evaluation of programming for Roma children in schools and communities in the Ukraine which is highlighted earlier in this report. The panel also included an example from Results for Development (R4D), which is using IDELA and a home environment tool in an impact evaluation of a Roma parenting program. The program is implemented in 15 communities throughout Serbia in collaboration with Deep Dive and the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy and Romanipen. At the same conference Save the Children presented findings from a study of an inclusive and integrated ECE program in Albania, funded by the Roma Education Fund and the MEDICOR Foundation. The IDELA study tested whether the program can address significant differences between the school readiness skills of Roma children and their non-Roma peers.

Six-year-old Othman learning to play football in a refugee camp in Lebanon

ADVOCACY: WORKING FOR CHANGE IN ECE POLICY

Children playing with blocks at an ECE center in Bhutan

IDELA provides a way to discuss intervention options for Indicator 1 of SDG 4.2: the proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning, and psychosocial well-being, by sex. As countries set out to fulfill their commitment to providing quality early childhood care and development opportunities for all children, IDELA can help them identify areas for investment and solutions with promise across four key developmental domains: motor development, emergent language and literacy, emergent numeracy, and social-emotional development.

More importantly, IDELA helps us conduct data-driven advocacy that can push governments to accomplish Target 4.2. By helping civil society and research institutions understand the effect of different program modalities and explore equity dimensions of the current ECE system, IDELA allows the ECE community to further effective data-driven advocacy to ensure that all young children receive quality ECE programming and/or pre-primary education. For example, in Bhutan, IDELA allowed all ECE providers to come together with the Ministry of Education to understand the effect of different program modalities and explore which children were being left behind (see box).

PROGRAM EXPANSION AND DIVERSIFICATION AFTER NATIONAL ECE STUDY IN BHUTAN

Phuntso playing with a puzzle board at an ECE center in Bhutan

ECE center programming has been steadily expanding in Bhutan, in accordance with the Government's Realizing Vision 2020: Education Sector Strategy. Although this policy states that "All children aged 0-5 years will be supported to enhance their intellectual, emotional, and physical development through a program that enables them to grow in their familiar and natural environment," no systematic evaluation had been completed to gauge the most impactful and sustainable model(s) for the country.

The Ministry of Education, UNICEF, Save the Children, and other national partners in Bhutan collaborated on an impact evaluation of the national ECE center program to understand the impact of various types of ECE program models across the country on children's learning. This study drew a random sample of different types of ECE centers—Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Community, and Private—as well as a sample of non-formal education (NFE) parenting programs and a comparison group of children who had no access to ECE programming. The aim was to explore which type of ECE center program, if any, supported stronger learning and development gains for children (Pisani et al., 2017).

This national study resulted in two government initiatives to help address school readiness and ensure that Bhutan can meet its SDG 4.2 target. First, the national study showed that early literacy and math skills were among the weakest skills and that a focus on these areas would be critical to preparing children for school. As a result, Save the Children launched a national Early Literacy and Math (ELM) program reaching all the ECE centers in the country, with the support of the Ministry of Education.

Second, the study brought to the fore the importance of ECE and the fact that the most socially, culturally, and geographically marginalized children had the lowest access to ECE programming. This suggested the need to focus on alternative models to ECE that strengthen parenting or community support for early learning for those most in need. The Government is now exploring different ways of reaching disadvantaged children in rural communities through alternative models. In 2017, Save the Children initiated a partnership with the Ministry of Health to pilot ELM at Home in combination with UNICEF's Care for Child Development program in areas where children do not have access to ECE centers.

More broadly, this initiative highlighted the power of using the same tool across implementing partners in a national monitoring study. With the limited government funding allocated to ECE, there are often multiple groups delivering ECE services based on the needs of children in different communities. A national monitoring study like this delivers information about children's early learning and development across implementing partners and provides a common metric and language for all actors to use to advocate together for further investment from the government and other funders. It also provides a benchmark against which to measure the success of future initiatives.

LEVERAGING AN ECE NETWORK TO REACH ALL CHILDREN IN BANGLADESH

Though the Government of Bangladesh has a long-standing commitment to ECE, in 2002 the UNICEF-supported ECE programs in the country reached only a small proportion of young children. This led UNICEF and Save the Children to form a national network of organizations working for young children. In 2005 this network grew into the Bangladesh ECE Network (BEN). It conducts advocacy, shares information and experiences, supports cooperation, and builds the capacity of ECE stakeholders through its 172 member organizations.

Advocacy from BEN played a key role in the government announcing a new National Education Policy in 2010, a policy that establishes pre-primary as the first stage of the education system. The aim of the policy was to include all 5-year olds in pre-primary programming, followed by all 4-year olds once the initial target has been reached.

While the government of Bangladesh made strides to provide quality universal pre-primary education, there were still important challenges that needed to be addressed. First, there was limited national-level evidence about the progress being made in ECE. Second, the children who were socially or geographically marginalized in the country had the least access to the universal pre-primary program.

BEN explored alternative pathways to reach children without access to formal ECE centers. Through the BEN platform, Save the Children pursued scale-up efforts of several programming models for children from marginalized communities, including ECE for garment factory children, school based pre-primary, Early Years Pre-primary for 3-4-year olds (EYPP), Early Literacy & Math (ELM), parenting education, alternative school readiness camps, and Reading for Children (RfC). Save the Children has drawn on IDELA-generated evidence of these programs to advocate for urgent transitional strategies. As Save the Children continues to advocate for the youngest and most marginalized children with the Government, IDELA will help build the body of evidence needed to support children with strategic focus and investment.

Coloring time at a community ECE center in Nepal

As our partners generate data they enrich a growing body of evidence to mobilize ECE stakeholders. Not only do we learn how to answer important questions about children's development, but IDELA also gives us evidence to articulate the mismatch between current systems and what children actually need to succeed. To shift the reality of children in LMICs we need to leverage measurement that proves what works; IDELA is such a lever.

Children at a childhood center in Sikasso, Mali

CONCLUSION

With an ever growing network of partners, IDELA actively supports the use of evidence to inform decision making and improve practices for dozens of ECE program stakeholders around the world. It is used to establish impact and explore equity, to harmonize the evidence base and leverage more voices for change. Using IDELA as a common platform builds evidence for ECE that has the potential to push programming and investment toward high quality, inclusive options. Its accessibility enables underfunded government ministries as well as small community service organizations to use the same tool as academic and multilateral institutions, thereby bringing them into the conversation. The established rigor gives all parties confidence that the results are meaningful and valid, enlivening partnerships toward the common goal of all children being ready for school and reaching their potential.

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Children coloring and drawing at an ECE center in Egypt