

CHILDREN IN CROSSFIRE TAKING TO SCALE QUALITY PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION



Since 2014, Children in Crossfire (CiC) has developed a niche in Early Childhood Care and Education in Tanzania, with a particular focus on the Pre-Primary Education (PPE) class (first year of basic education targeting children aged 5-Yrs). Programming has evolved to take on a systems strengthening approach that can be implemented at scale, contributing to the improved school readiness of tens of thousands of young children. Partnering with local organisations Tanzania Home Economics Association (TAHEA-Mwanza), Community Development Organization (CDO), and Maarifa ni Ufunguo, as well as the government at national, regional and local levels, CiC's PPE programming has reached more than 250,000 young children in >1,250 schools across Mwanza, Morogoro, Kilimanjaro and Dodoma regions.

The Case for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

It is globally accepted that the foundations for learning are laid in the earliest years of life. Inequalities in development and learning start early and often persist throughout life. Access to inclusive and quality Early Childhood Care and Education is an important and transformative enabler of wellbeing and holistic development. It builds foundations for lifelong learning, gender equality, social equity, and sustainable development where all children can have the opportunity to reach their full potential [UNESCO, Tashkent, 2022].

Background - Tanzania's 'Positive Emergency' in Pre-Primary Education

In 2016, Tanzania integrated Pre-Primary Education (PPE) within fee-free Basic Education, taking important steps in creating access that resulted in an immediate enrolment surge. However, such rapid expansion also exacerbated existing challenges of poor infrastructure, overcrowding, age-mix, and high pupil-teacher ratios, prompting ECCE stakeholders to declare the quality deficits as a 'positive emergency' given the context of increased access.



PPE Policy Dialogue Brief



Enrolment progress exacerbated quality challenges in PPE



In this challenging context, Children in Crossfire launched its flagship Pre-Primary Education programme in 2016 known as Fursa kwa Watoto, funded by Dubai Cares and in technical partnership with Aga Khan University and local implementing CSO partners TAHEA Mwanza and Maarifa ni Ufunguo. The programme piloted a model for building quality in the prevailing overcrowded and under-resourced settings, aligned to government systems. The PPE model took a systems strengthening approach and components included in-service training of all actors involved, from the classroom, school through to ward, council, regional and national levels. Improvements in learning environment and school management were made and a parent partnership programme was initiated.

An independent evaluation conducted by Mathematica and CSR Group Africa known as the Learning Agenda studied the impact on children and the programme's ability to inform policy for quality improvement of PPE at scale. The findings observed significantly improved teacher practices, and gains across all measures of early learning for children, including impacts in pre-literacy, social-emotional development, and executive function. Furthermore, widespread spillover was reported due to community and local government efforts to replicate the approach. The Learning Agenda is considered as one of the more significant independent evaluations of pre-primary education in Tanzania.



Learning Agenda website

FINDINGS OBSERVED SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVED TEACHER PRACTICES, AND GAINS ACROSS ALL MEASURES OF EARLY LEARNING

WIDESPREAD SPILLOVER POINTED TO COMMUNITY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEMAND FOR SCALING OF THE PILOT MODEL

During dissemination of the Learning Agenda and seeing the impact of the PPE model, the government issued a call for the programme to be taken to scale. Children in Crossfire secured UKAID Impact funding to develop a scaling approach through existing systems, to regional scale. The scaling programme – known as Watoto Wetu Tunu Yetu [Our Children Our National Treasure] - was initiated in 2020 and is implemented in Dodoma Region owing to its comparatively poorer education performance. This region is also uniquely positioned as host of Tanzania's administrative and political capital, facilitating greater access of policy-makers to the initiative.



PO-RALG Deputy Permanent Secretary interacting with PPE children



Watoto Wetu Tunu Yetu: Children in Crossfire's Model for Quality Pre-Primary Education in Schools

Watoto Wetu Tunu Yetu establishes and operationalizes model 'Talking Classrooms' that catalyse change through learning for children, teachers, parents, and school leadership. It enables quality classroom structure and process, leading to better learning outcomes, within the existing systems and available school and community resources. Based on the tenets of learning through play, and aligned with the National PPE Curriculum, the core components of the model are as follows:

TEACHERS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Most teachers assigned to Pre-Primary Education class have no pre-service or in-service professional development in early childhood development and learning. Recognizing this need, the programme offers continuous professional development for teachers, prioritizing developmentally appropriate practice, learning through play and equity in the classroom

- » Building pre-primary teaching competencies [aligned to the national curriculum]
- » Deepen understanding on how to create a safe play-based learning environment
- » Continuous professional development on ECD/E concepts through Communities of Learners, and peer learning opportunities
- » Approaches to managing overcrowded PPE settings, and promoting gender and disability inclusive learning
- » Supportive supervision and mentorship by Head Teachers and Ward Education Officers



PPE teacher training conducted in a PPE Demo Class



PPE teachers collaborating through communities of learning

TRANSFORMING THE CLASSROOM – BUILDING A PLAY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The learning environment is at the heart of the talking classroom. A classroom rich in print and manipulative materials, books and toys creates opportunities for exploration, experimentation, and learning. The organization of space and the materials in the learning environment are key for teachers and children to fulfil their parts in the learning process

- » Learning Kits provided with basic materials to support classroom set-up
- » Chairs and tables removed, Learning Areas set-up [as per national curriculum]
- » Stock and replenish Learning Areas with low-cost/ no-cost materials (made locally by teachers, parents, and children)
- » PPE teachers can create and resource their own setting (anything safe and clean is a playing and learning material for children)



PPE children playing with locally available materials



PPE 'Talking Classroom'

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

School leadership and management are critical stakeholders in PPE as they are the decision makers. A shift in the understanding and prioritization of PPE in schools is only possible if school leadership and management understand the importance of learning through play and long-term transformational change it can bring in the lives of children

- » Levels of leadership engaged:
 - School Leadership (Head Teachers, School Management Committee)
 - Ward (pivotal level of local government school quality assurance)
 - Council, Regional, National education leadership
- » Promote the Science of ECD and build transformative understanding of PPE
- » Ensure inclusion of PPE in local government and school development plans
- » Ensure school feeding programmes and outdoor play environment
- » Cascade mentorship and supportive supervision for quality PPE at all levels



Council, ward and school leadership learning the importance of play



School feeding provision for PPE children

PARENT PARTNERSHIP

The parent partnership component recognizes the importance of responsive care and positive parenting in the lives of young children. It builds parents' understanding of childhood development, empowering them to shift away from traditional perceptions of formal learning by rote and encouraging learning through play in the home

- » Parents awareness of the Science of ECD and Learning through Play
- » Create consistency of learning at both school and home
- » Mobilize parents support to PPE e.g. materials for indoor and outdoor play, school feeding, child protection, etc.



Parents partnership meeting for the PPE class



Parents helping to make PPE teaching and learning materials

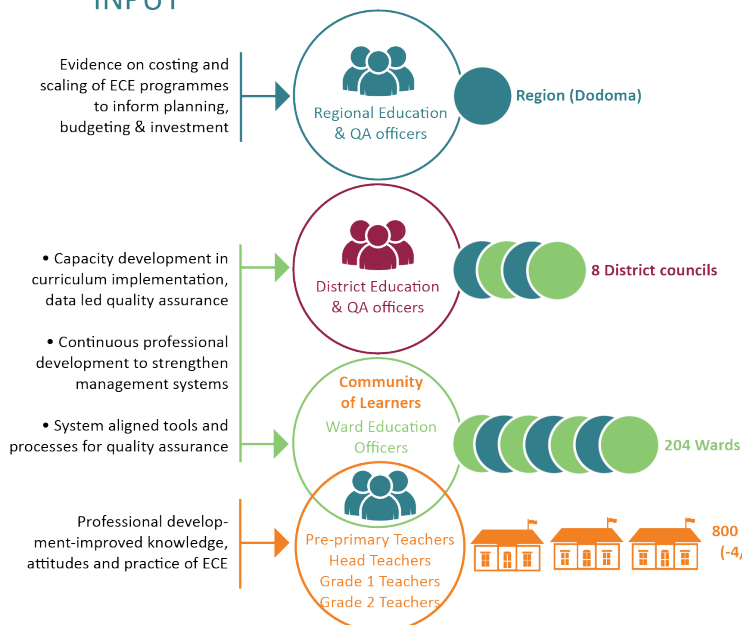
Children in Crossfire's System Strengthening Model for Scaling Quality PPE

The '**hub and spoke**' **scaling model** ensures continuous quality improvement at scale, enabling transfer of the model rapidly through existing system structures and processes. Ward education officers use the model school (hub) to scale 'talking classrooms' in all schools (spokes) in their ward. Their training, combined with the community of learners, ensures that the system continues to improve classroom practice. Technical support, and tools are introduced to activate quality assurance systems and PPE specific planning and budgeting, such that local government can continue to adopt, adapt, and scale the innovation. The Watoto Wetu Tunu Yetu model is being scaled to all 800+ government schools in Dodoma Region, across 204 wards and 8 councils.

- » CiC and local government teams engage directly with hub schools [one to a ward] and ward education officers to initiate quality improvement. These hub schools become models of quality-improved PPE in their locality
- » This creates a critical mass of system actors across school-ward-council who have the knowledge and motivation for PPE quality improvement
- » Quality assurance and accountability are integrated within existing education system processes – continuously adding momentum to quality improvement
- » Pre-primary teachers of the hub schools and WEO then facilitate the transfer of knowledge and practices for quality PPE across all remaining PPE settings within their wards [spokes: government primary schools and satellite centres]
- » In this way the programme reaches all government primary schools within a council (average 100+ schools), and within a region (800+ schools in Dodoma)

**PPE QUALITY ROLL-OUT IN
PROGRESS ACROSS ALL 830+
GOVERNMENT PPE CLASSES OF
DODOMA REGION**

**ROLL-OUT PROCESS EMBEDDED
AND LED-ON BY LOCAL SYSTEMS
ACTORS FROM SCHOOL – WARD –
COUNCIL – REGION - NATIONAL**



- Transition from policy to practice-universalisation of quality ECE
- Evidence informed regulation and standards
- Trained ward and district level workforce fulfill their existing mandates-improving ECE in schools through specific in-service teacher development, ensuring play-based learning environment in classrooms
- They sustain quality improvement at council and regional scale, using standard tools and processes of quality assurance, initiating data led planning at the Ward level, and cascading data upwards for council and regional planning and budgeting
- Plan, do, reflect, adjust-ongoing innovation and learning in teaching practice-improved quality of ECE provision and learning outcomes for children



Training of Trainers at scale (PPE teachers & Ward officers)



Ward-level teacher & school leadership roll-out PPE training

Generating Evidence on the Scalability of the PPE Model

At the interim stage of scaling, when 232 schools (2 councils) were implementing the intervention, and prior to scaling implementation across the next phase of ~600 schools (six remaining councils), a Baseline Study was conducted. This study sought to understand the impact of the intervention in the two initial councils and establish the baseline status of quality PPE in the 6 scale-up councils. It was designed as a repeated cross section study to allow tracking of the same measures at different evaluation milestones. The primary tools used were BEQI to measure structure and process quality of ECCE provision, and IDELA to measure school readiness outcomes. Pre-primary children and Grade 2 children were sampled to assess learning outcomes.

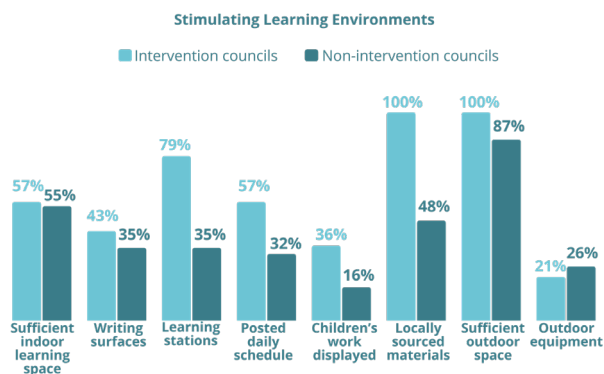
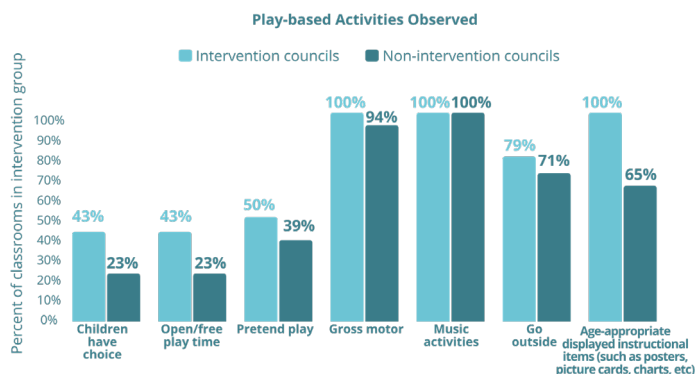
Findings validate proof of concept for a systemically aligned approach to scaling quality-improved Pre-Primary Education in prevailing overcrowded and resource-constrained contexts

HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS

The baseline shows clear differences in both quality of inputs and learning outcomes, when comparing the two midterm impact [pilot] councils with the six baseline [scale up] councils

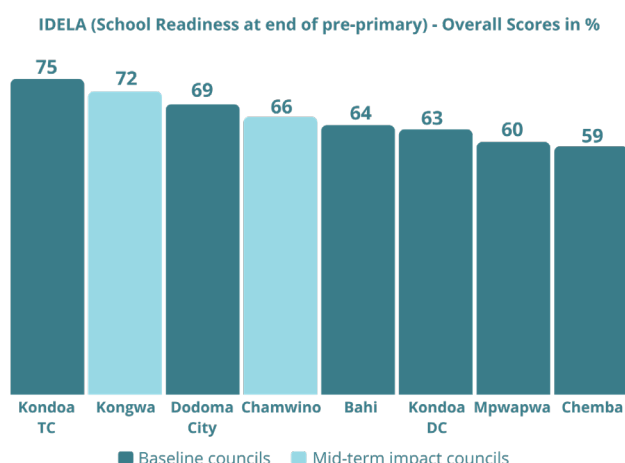
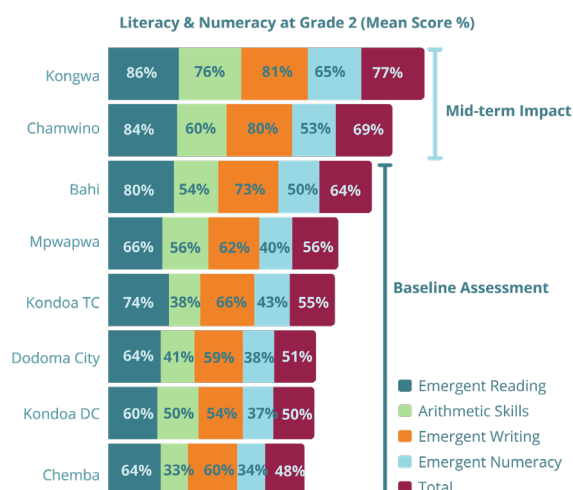
» The programme has contributed to **improvements in provision quality** in Pre-primary classrooms of pilot councils across the following aspects:

- better classroom and school environment – children engaged with pretend play, blocks and educational toys
- better teacher practices, notable improvement in teacher-child interactions with fewer instances of negative interactions
- play based practices more prevalent
- Higher rates of children working in pairs and small groups



» The programme contributed to **improvements in children's learning outcomes** in midterm impact schools as compared to baseline schools:

- Better and statistically significant gains in school readiness at end of pre-primary. Biggest effect sizes in area of social and emotional learning. Urban effect (better outcomes) in Kondoa Town Council and Dodoma City
- Better and statistically significant gains in foundational literacy and numeracy at the end of Grade 2. Gains made in pre-primary continue to accrue into early primary grades including greater effect sizes. Urban advantage disappears by end of Grade 2



Complementary initiatives

INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

Children in Crossfire recognizes that infrastructure development is traditionally the purview of governments. However, in a context of substantial infrastructure deficits the programme endeavours to provide catalytic infrastructure support. As well as construction of PPE classrooms and toilets, a popular component of the CiC programme is to provide a nominal contribution (averaging US\$80-100) towards the renovation of the model hub PPE classes which is leveraged by school resources and community labour to improve the physical environment. As of 2024 Children in Crossfire has supported:

- » the construction of 58 pre-primary classrooms
- » the renovation of more than 450 pre-primary classrooms
- » other infrastructural support including toilets & WASH facilities



Newly constructed PPE classroom

SUPPORTING NATIONAL PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION CURRICULAR DEVELOPMENT

Watoto Wetu Tunu Yetu, endorsed by the government, brings the national curriculum to life in overcrowded and resource-constrained settings. It integrates nurturing care, health, nutrition, and protection into parenting partnership and school management platforms. The innovation demonstrates quality at scale within limited resources. The current phase scales across all schools in a region, maximizing value for money. The chosen optimal level of regional scale leverages existing government structures based on geographic, administrative and cost considerations, and creates the potential for replication nationwide.

Model building on the ground is complemented in parallel by advocating regionally and nationally for an enabling PPE policy environment. The programme's location in the capital region of Dodoma facilitates easy field access for senior policy-makers to see for themselves the transformation of classrooms, alignment to policy and curriculum, and enthusiasm of school communities – bringing the macro directly to the micro, significantly contributing to national government PPE commitments. Close technical engagement of Watoto Wetu Tunu Yetu in national policy and curricular processes ensures that the implementation learnings inform PPE curricular improvements and policy decisions.



National PPE Technical Dialogue Forum



PO-RALG Deputy Permanent Secretary speaks to Ward-level teacher & school leadership training



Ministry of Education national leadership interacting with PPE children learning through play



PO-RALG Deputy Minister visiting a PPE Demo Classroom

Children in Crossfire extends our appreciation to the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania and all our donors for supporting our ECD programming in Tanzania



For further info please visit: www.childrenincrossfire.org/tanzania/ or contact: info@childrenincrossfire.org