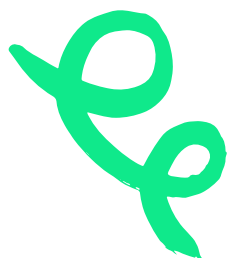


OUR JOURNEY

A visual story of how the PlayMatters project has evolved



The Power of Play

Right from infancy, children have a natural potential to learn about their environment through play. As they grow up in today's dynamic world, it becomes more important for them to build holistic skills which can help them thrive in future.



● Where we work (Ethiopia, Uganda & Tanzania)



Foreword by the Project Director



Martin Omukuba

Project Director

As the Project Director for PlayMatters, I am honored to present a visual journey of our progress over the past four years. Our efforts have made a significant impact in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda, where we have worked tirelessly to support vulnerable children in both refugee and host communities.

Each year, PlayMatters partners with the Ministries of Education in these three countries to organize the System Actors workshop. This important event brings together education stakeholders, including ministry officials and humanitarian actors, to explore and commit to integrating the Learning through Play methodology into their education systems. We are proud to have hosted two successful workshops so far—first in Kampala, Uganda in 2022, then in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 2023—and now in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia where we are eagerly anticipating deliberations from our third event under the theme, “**Achieving Quality Education by Teaching & Learning through Play.**”

One of our major project milestones was our response to the conflict in the Tigray region in 2022. In response to the crisis, PlayMatters launched the Ethiopia Emergency Response Mechanism (PM ERM) to provide urgent support in education, WASH, protection, health and nutrition to vulnerable children facing conflict. The multi-sectoral one-year intervention, which concluded in 2023, successfully reached **177,405 children** across **201** integrated pre-primary and primary schools, ensuring their safety and access to quality education during that challenging time.

Another major milestone for our project has been the finalization of the PlayMatters core package for schools, including safety renovations, materials distributions and the LTP content packages for teachers, school leaders, and community leaders last year, in collaboration with Care for Education (CFE), we introduced the Six Bricks concept, which utilizes six **LEGO®** bricks for interactive educational activities. According to the teachers we have interacted with, this approach has proven to enhance children’s social skills, such as sharing, turn-taking and cooperation, as they engage with these bricks under the guidance of their teachers.

As the content in this book shows, we are excited to share these achievements and more with you and look forward to continuing our work with you to create supportive learning environments for children across the three countries.

About

PlayMatters seeks to build sustainable capacity in existing education systems to integrate Learning through Play (LtP) approaches for **800,000+** refugee and host community children ages **3-12+** in Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania. The objective is to give children the opportunity to improve holistic learning and wellbeing in contexts of crisis and poverty.

Our Approach

Learning through Play is at the heart of PlayMatters. We work with local and national education stakeholders to improve and secure the quality of education in schools, in refugee camps and in host communities. We do this by training teachers and educators in play-based teaching methods that aims to strengthen children's creative, emotional, social, physical and cognitive skills.

At the same time, PlayMatters challenges a traditional approach to education based on rote learning, and works with parents and their local community to strengthen understanding of play for children's development, well-being, learning and education.

Consortium

The PlayMatters consortium is led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and is being implemented in collaboration with Plan - Børnefonden/Plan International (Plan), War Child Holland (WCH), Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) and Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) in partnership with the **LEGO Foundation**.

Project Profile

Funding



USD **\$100 Million**
In partnership with the **LEGO Foundation**

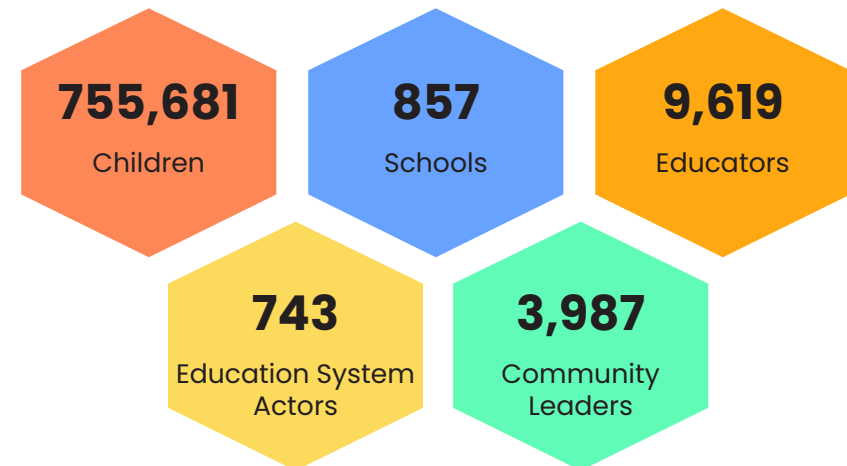
Timeline



Start: 1st January 2020
End: 31st March 2026

Our Reach

(August 2024)



Learning through Play Definition

Learning through Play (LtP) is an **active teaching and learning method** that capitalizes on a child's natural desire to engage in play. Core elements include:



Learning through Play (LtP) is an active teaching and learning method in which children learn through guided, hands-on, meaningful, play-based interactions in safe and inclusive environments.

PlayMatters Core Package for Schools

The Core Package for Schools includes six intervention components as laid out in the figure below. The Core Package should be implemented in a school for one full school year (beginning of school year to end of school year), including foundational teacher training at the beginning of the school year, a follow-up training midway through the year, and continuous professional development (i.e., observations, coaching and peer learning) provided throughout the school year.

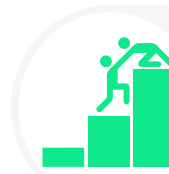
Skill-Building

Teachers Training



Teachers/facilitators in the school or center participate in training on LtP methods and practices. These trainings are led by highly qualified Trainer of Trainers (ToTs) through a cascade model.

Teacher Continuous Professional Development



Head teachers & other lead teachers are supported to lead and promote continuous professional development activities on LtP, including supportive supervision, coaching, peer learning, and supportive messaging. These are done collaboratively between school-based instructional leaders and local government education actors.

School Management



School/Center Management Committees (SMCs/CMCs/PTAs) participate in training on how to build a positive school environment and engage school communities in LtP. These trainings are led by highly qualified Trainer of Trainers (ToTs) through a cascade model.

Community Engagement



Members of the school community actively participate in supporting Learning through Play activities, concurrent with contextually relevant awareness-raising mobilization initiatives.

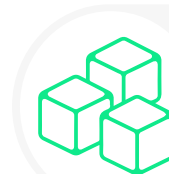
Materials/Infrastructure

Enabling School Environment



Where possible, the school/center meets minimum LtP quality standards (MQS) for safety and client inclusion (may require some level of rehabilitation/direct service provision) based on a standardized MQS assessment.

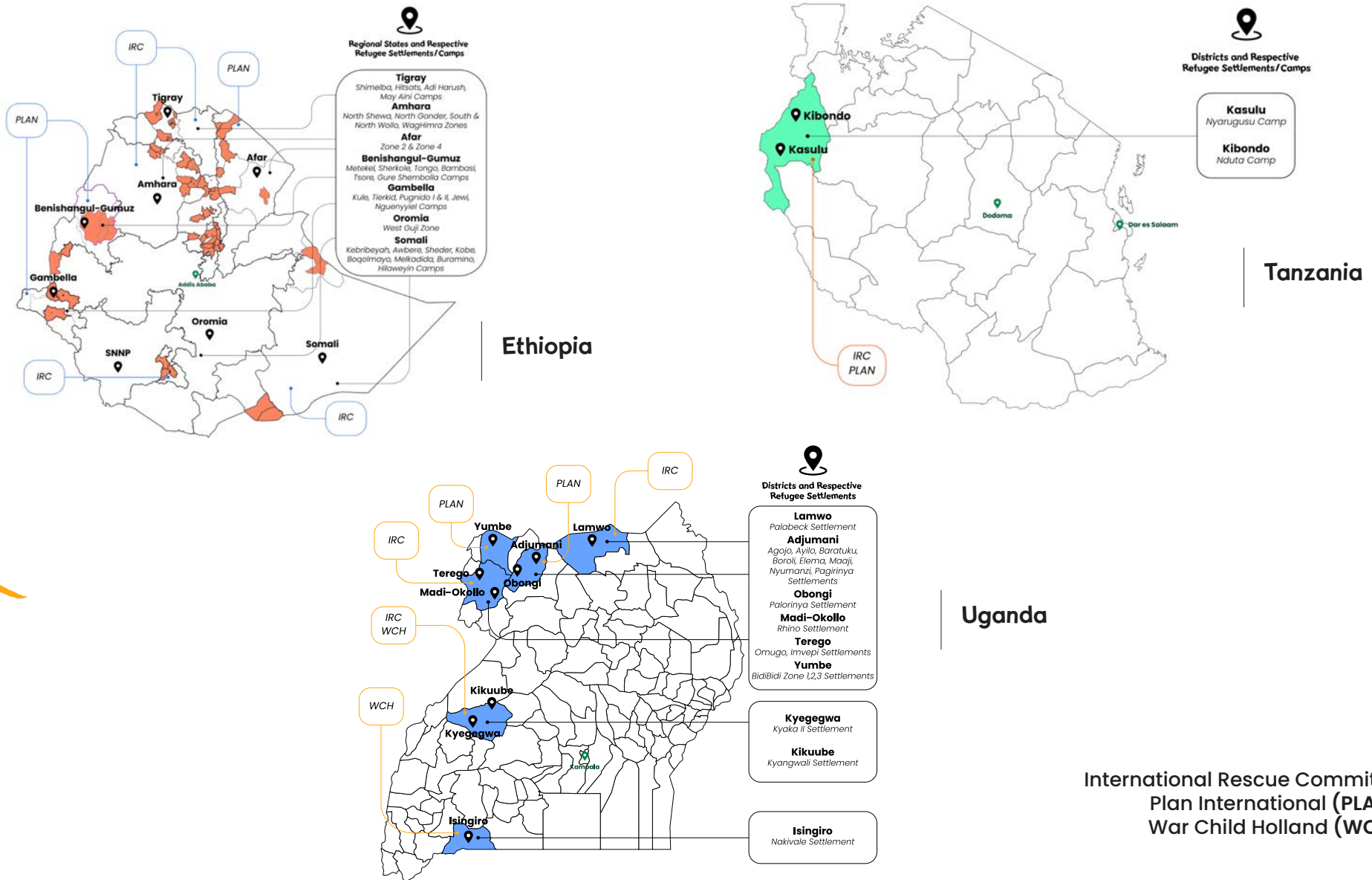
Teaching & Learning Materials



Teachers and pupils are provided with basic teaching and learning materials (including Six Bricks for every child) for LtP and support with the local creation of Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs).

Where we work

PlayMatters supports sustainable education change in refugee and IDP-hosting areas of Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania.



The PlayMatters project was launched across Uganda, Ethiopia and Tanzania marking the official start of implementation.

2020 Project Launches



The PlayMatters launch in Uganda was officiated by the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports Janet Museveni. State House, Entebbe, Uganda, 29th Oct 2020.



Shewaye Tike, PlayMatters Ethiopia Country Coordinator showcasing various Learning through Play resources during the official launch of the project. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 18th Dec 2020.



Participants attending the PlayMatters Tanzania project launch. This included representatives from the consortium, government and other implementing agencies. Kigoma, Tanzania, 15th Jan 2021.



IRC Ethiopia Deputy Country Coordinator displaying a commemorative signature plate at the sidelines of the official launch in Ethiopia.



Andrew Mbega, PlayMatters Tanzania Project Coordinator displays Learning through Play resources during the launch in Tanzania.

2021 Covid-19 Emergency Response

With school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, PlayMatters launched home learning program to support learning.



Our emergency response included producing and distributing play-based interactive learning booklets in 18 languages and airing educational radio shows in 8 languages. These reached over 200,000 children in the three countries.



Teachers Jerome (left) and Anyungu (right) of Tumaini Primary School in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp when they first received the learning packets together with eager students surrounding them. Tanzania.



Our response also supported the resumption of learning in parts of Tigray, Ethiopia affected by Covid-19. This included distributing learning supplies like school books, pens, crayons, pencils among other learning materials in three IDP sites in Shire.



Mary playing "rope skipping game" with her peers. BidiBidi Refugee Settlement, Uganda.



Mary playing "tossing rock game" with her peers. BidiBidi Refugee Settlement, Uganda.

Emergency Response Mechanism - Ethiopia 2022-2023

In response to the crisis in the Tigray region in Ethiopia, PlayMatters launched the Ethiopia Emergency Response Mechanism in 2022 to provide urgent support in education, health & nutrition to vulnerable children facing conflict. The multi-sectoral one-year intervention, which concluded in 2023, reached 177,405 children across 200 integrated pre-primary and primary schools.



Yohannes Gebreselassie (left), the Emergency Response Coordinator, IRC at the textbooks handover event held at the Regional Bureau Education Offices. Amhara Region, Ethiopia, April 2023.



School children enjoying energy biscuits as part of the nutrition services provided by the PlayMatters Emergency Response Mechanism Project. Amhara Region, Ethiopia, June 2023.



School going children use water services installed by the PlayMatters Emergency Response Mechanism project in schools destroyed by conflict. Amhara Region, Ethiopia, June 2023.



As part of the health intervention, children were screened and given supplements to boost their immunity.



Zenebech Yesuf, interacts with learners during a mathematics lesson. Dessie, Kombolcha, Ethiopia, 2023.

Working with Stakeholders

PlayMatters works with Ministries of Education across the three countries to ensure Learning through Play is supported through education policy and systems.



PlayMatters consortium members in Tanzania pose for a photo after a meeting with government representatives during an annual reflection and learning workshop. Kigoma, Tanzania, July 2021.



In June, PlayMatters Ethiopia celebrated International Day of Children while conducting a national research conference in collaboration with Jigjiga University under the theme of Play-Based Learning: Advocating for Every Child. The event was done in collaboration with Ministry of Education and key partners such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and USAID, among others.



Participants from various departments in the Ministry of Education pose for a group photo during a PlayMatters content review and validation workshop. Jinja, Uganda, December 2021.



Content Development

PlayMatters has developed professional development content for teachers focusing on Learning through Play using a build-test-learn approach with innovative play-based teaching and learning methods. These materials will be handed over to ministries of education, education institutions and schools among others.



Joshua Mwesigwa, a PlayMatters illustrator sketching illustrations contained in the teacher professional development content. Kampala, Uganda.



PlayMatters technical team during a content development working session in Kampala, Uganda.



A teacher in Mvugwe primary school in Kasulu district, Tanzania trying out a "color wheel". This wheel is part of PlayMatters educator content that was tested for incorporating Learning through Play in lesson planning.



A parent using Learning through Play education content with her son. Kasulu, Tanzania, 2021.



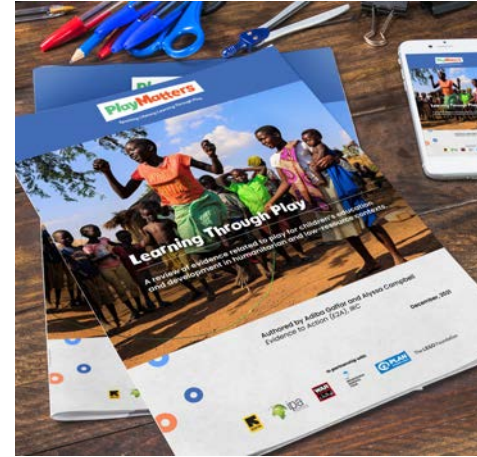
A teacher reads through the Learning through Play teacher workbook during a teacher professional development training. Terego District, Uganda, January 2024.

PlayMatters Research Work

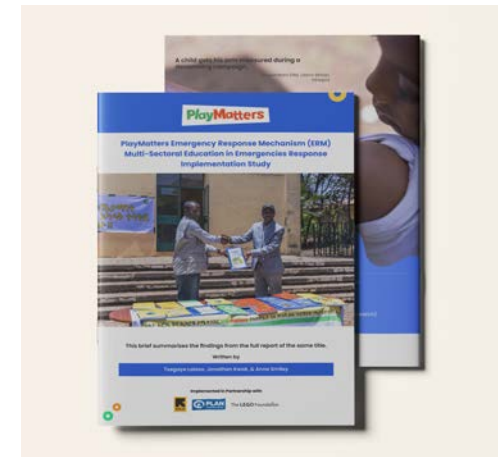
PlayMatters generates evidence on how to develop, implement and evaluate Learning through Play interventions in refugee contexts.



Tsegaye Lolaso, Emergency Response Mechanism Research and Learning Specialist, IRC, interviewing learners during data collection in a focused group discussion. Erebti Primary School, Afar, Ethiopia, January 2023.



PlayMatters research staff conduct baseline research interviews with school going children and their teachers in Ethiopia. Benishangul Gumuz, Ethiopia, February 2022.



A look at some of our research and evidence products developed so far.



A look at various research study products from Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania and key findings from each.

Understanding Children’s Perceptions of Play

PlayMatters used the photovoice methodology, a form of participatory action research, to understand children’s perspectives of play in northern Uganda. Children were provided with cameras and engaged in picture capture sessions, participated in qualitative debriefing sessions, and engaged in a community photo exhibition. Findings were triangulated to deepen understandings of refugee and host community children’s perceptions of play.

■ Key Findings

To children, play is social and joyful, largely physical, and can facilitate learning.

Understanding Interactions of Children and Caregivers and their Perceptions of Play

PlayMatters conducted three phases of mixed-methods surveys, observations, and vignette-based discussions to gain insight in child-caregiver interactions in Uganda’s Imvepi refugee settlement.

■ Key Findings

Opportunities for supportive interactions that will positively influence the holistic development of children and revealed barriers to supportive interactions that are vital for children’s holistic development.

Caregivers understand that learning occurs both at school and at home, and they view their role as crucial for this process. However, they face barriers such as stress and other emotional challenges.

Strengthening psychosocial support is crucial for addressing the most critical barriers in human-centered design.

Research Product Summaries

Understanding Positive LtP Practices in “Best Practice Schools”

PlayMatters identified 12 Positive Deviant ‘best practice’ case study schools in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda to learn about existing perceptions of play, examples of learning through play, and barriers and enablers to integrating learning through play into schools.

■ Key Findings

The word ‘play’ is a barrier, with many viewing play as not appropriate in classroom settings.

We also developed a typology of LtP practices from the data, the first typology to connect LtP with global active learning literature.

Baseline Diagnostic Assessments

PlayMatters conducted a baseline assessment of teachers baseline instructional practices and well-being and children’s holistic learning outcomes and well-being in project locations in Ethiopia and Tanzania. This study took place in both primary schools and ECD centres in refugee and host community contexts.

■ Key Findings

Children exhibit relatively low levels of learning outcomes, particularly at higher order skills.

Mixed-Methods Research of PlayMatters Implementation

PlayMatters is currently conducting mixed-methods implementation research to learn from its current round of implementation, to test the PlayMatters theory of change, and to assess the quality and fidelity of implementation. This research is taking place in the Somali region of Ethiopia, Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Tanzania, and the Northern and West Nile regions of Uganda. To date, baseline technical reports have been published for Ethiopia and Tanzania with additional findings and publications forthcoming.

PlayMatters Policy Insights Article in a NORRAG Special Compendium on Refugee Teachers

This global reflection is part of a compendium of policy insights on the importance of refugee teachers in the global refugee education response edited by NORRAG. This piece reflects on PlayMatters' implementation lessons learned on the importance of a systems strengthening support with refugee teachers.

PlayMatters ERM LtP Promising Practices Study

PlayMatters conducted a learning study to understand the feasibility and relevance of Learning through Play methodologies in an education intervention as an emergency response. This study took an exploratory qualitative approach with a semi-structured classroom observations followed by interviews with observed teachers.

■ Key Findings

LtP is feasible and possible in emergency response.

Teachers perceived LtP as a valuable tool in supporting children's lesson acquisition, engagement in learning, and psychosocial recovery.

PlayMatters ERM Implementation Study

PlayMatters conducted a mixed-methods learning study to evaluate the implementation of an Emergency Response in four crisis-affected Regions of Ethiopia with a particular focus on the multi-sectoral (Education, Child Protection, WASH, and Health & Nutrition) programming in emergency response.

■ Key Findings

The PM ERM addressed children's physical and psychosocial needs, supported increased access to education, and supported children's holistic learning.

To access all our publications, please log onto:

www.playmatters.org/publications



From the Field

Here are some photographs from the field, showcasing the incredible work of teachers and learners in Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania. These photographs capture the interactions between teachers and learners and the colourful classroom environments fostered by PlayMatters as well as highlighting the dedication and enthusiasm of both teacher and their learners.



Teacher Beatrice teaches her class using locally made teaching and learning materials thanks to the training on Learning through Play methodologies. Tanzania.



Zenebech Yesuf, a pre primary school teacher interacts with learners during a Mathematics lesson. Dessie-Kombolcha, Ethiopia.



A child learns vowels using the LEGO bricks to create the shape of the letters. Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, Uganda.



Omar Abdi demonstrates to the class steps in handwashing during a science lesson. Melkadida, Ethiopia.



A pupil holds a number card she has identified during a Maths class. Bukere Primary School, Uganda.



A teacher in Tanzania uses locally available items to teach a numbers lesson. Kasulu, Tanzania.



A teacher demonstrating numbers to learners during a lesson. Tsore Refugee Camp, Assosa, Ethiopia.



Brian Areeba (Center), TeamUp Trainer, WCH, joins the children during a TeamUp session at Lugede Primary School, Uganda.

Training

PlayMatters empowers teachers through professional training sessions. These are designed to equip teachers with innovative Learning through Play strategies and methods, enhancing their classroom practices. PlayMatters is making vibrant learning environments by training teachers to adopt new teaching methods.



Content training, Kasulu, Tanzania



Teacher refresher training, Terego, Uganda.



PlayMatters staff and teachers during an educator content training, in Kasulu, Tanzania.



System actor refresher training, Kigoma, Tanzania.



Teacher training, Kyaka, Uganda.



Teacher training on World Teachers Day, Kebribeyah, Ethiopia.

In 2023, PlayMatters introduced the Six Bricks concept. The approach was created by Care for Education and is based on the creative application of six LEGO® bricks to educational activities.

LEGO Bricks introduced to Classrooms in 2023



Upper primary learners at Itambabiniga Primary School in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement in Uganda use LEGO Bricks to make the different structures found in a community.



Teacher Godard uses the bricks to teach learners at an Early Childhood Development Centre in western Uganda.



Teacher Enid uses LEGO Bricks to teach letters.



Classroom Block Renovations

PlayMatters research showed that Learning through Play requires a safe physical environment. To support this, PlayMatters carried out some considerable physical repairs to classrooms and schools.



A renovated classroom block for pre-primary learners at Bright Future Primary School in Palabek Refugee Settlement in northern, Uganda.



Teacher resource center in Kasulu, Tanzania.



Over the years, PlayMatters has organised and been part of some events crucial to the project objectives. Here's a snapshot of some of the key moments and events the project has experienced across Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania.



Children participating in the Great Ethiopian Run - Children's Races. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2022.



Students and teachers celebrate World Teachers Day in Kigoma, Tanzania.



In 2022, PlayMatters held a high-level discussion on ways of strengthening the implementation of play-based learning in Ethiopia. The event was attended by dignitaries from Ethiopia education ministry and other stakeholders.



The District Education Officer for Lamwo, Barnabas Langoya, commissions one of the blocks renovated by PlayMatters in a ceremony attended by other district officials and partners.



Elijah Okeyo, Country Director, IRC Uganda (right) hands-over a vehicle donated by PlayMatters to Roger Irumba Kaija, the Undersecretary Ministry of Education (left) in Kampala, Uganda.



PlayMatters staff took part in the first ever National Play Day event in Kampala, Uganda



PlayMatters Tanzania in May participated in the Global Action Week for Education (GAWE)

LEGO Visits

We were thrilled to host LEGO Foundation for visits in Uganda and Ethiopia. LEGO is a key partner in the PlayMatters project which makes their visit a wonderful opportunity to showcase the collaborative efforts and shared commitment to transforming education through play.



In April, PlayMatters Uganda hosted the LEGO Foundation in two of the project implementing schools in northern, Uganda. This was the first time the LEGO Foundation was visiting a PlayMatters project site to see firsthand Learning through Play in practice within a school environment.



Jan and Casper visit schools in Uganda.



Jan Christensen speaks at the National Play Day in Kampala in June. During their visit to Uganda, LEGO Foundation's Jan, a Facilitation Specialist and Casper Jensen, Senior Facilitation Specialist participated in the National Play Day event.



Joe Savage, the Head of Strategic Portfolio Impact at the LEGO Foundation visits the PlayMatters project Regional office in Kampala, March 2022.



In February, PlayMatters Ethiopia hosted LEGO Foundation at the IRC office in Addis Ababa. Paul St John Frisoli, the Team Lead, together with Leah Anyanwu, the ECD Specialist, met with the project consortium staff and learnt about the project progress of the various presentations shared.



Staff Moments

A look at some of the PlayMatters staff engagements that have transpired across Ethiopia, Uganda, and Tanzania over the years.



Safety and security training for staff to equip them with basics on how to protect themselves from potential threats in the field.



Participants from Uganda, Ethiopia & Tanzania attending the PlayMatters Educator Content Rollout Training of Trainers. Entebbe, 16th February 2022.



PlayMatters staff take part in a First Aid training at the regional office in Kampala, Uganda



PlayMatters staff visited LEGO Foundation in Billund, Denmark for a strategic interaction with the donor in 2021.



Annually, the PlayMatters team meets to learn and play in team building activities.



To better acquaint them with the Six Bricks concept, PlayMatters staff received training on the concept in South Africa in 2022.




In order to build synergies across teams, PlayMatters project team met in Entebbe for a Technical & Evidence learning workshop in June.



PlayMatters staff met for a work planning workshop to plan for Year 2 of implementation.





Peninah Asimwe
(Communications Specialist)
Email: Peninah.Asimwe@rescue.org

Derrick Taremwa
(Creative Designer)
Email: Derrick.Taremwa@rescue.org



PlayMatters Regional Office

Plot 8, Lower Naguru East Road, Kampala, Uganda
+256 (0) 394 822 224
+256 (0) 200 900 697

www.playmatters.org
www.rescue.org/playmatters