PlayMatters
Sparking Lifelong Learning Through Play

Navigating the Humanitarian-Development Nexus:
Challenges and Opportunities for PlayMatters in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda

Introduction

Although there has been significant research on the program, including detailed studies on its implementation and impact, more focus should be placed on understanding the evolving process of designing and carrying out a large, multi-year education initiative in refugee and host communities. Specifically, the challenges and opportunities that arise when working across the humanitarian-development divide in different refugee-hosting areas with varying levels of commitment to refugee inclusion need more attention. **This study served as an internal process evaluation to examine the challenges and opportunities facing PM staff and partners working across the humanitarian-development nexus and strengthen education coherence in refugee and host communities in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda.**

Key Terms to Know

- **The humanitarian-development nexus** is the gap between humanitarian aid and long-term development, which lies in the need for collaboration to address human rights and support sustainable development. Nexus approaches involve humanitarian and development teams working together to provide immediate help, rebuild national systems and institutions, strengthen emergency response, and address the causes of crises.
- **Humanitarian-development coherence** occurs when different actors work together to analyze situations, set shared goals, and find ways to collaborate more effectively, using their strengths, principles, and missions.
- **Education coherence** describes the attainment of linkages across humanitarian and development spheres, including systems, ideas, people, and contexts, to deliver sustainable results that meet immediate education needs while building toward sustainable impact in refugee and host communities.

Humanitarian-development coherence is a valuable approach to ensure that all learners have access to uninterrupted quality education, which supports human development and sustainable peace. In the case of PM, addressing barriers and acting upon opportunities for coherence may help align short- and long-term objectives, improve efficiency, maximize PM's impact, and promote the use of LtP in the long-term through its integration into national policies and curricula.
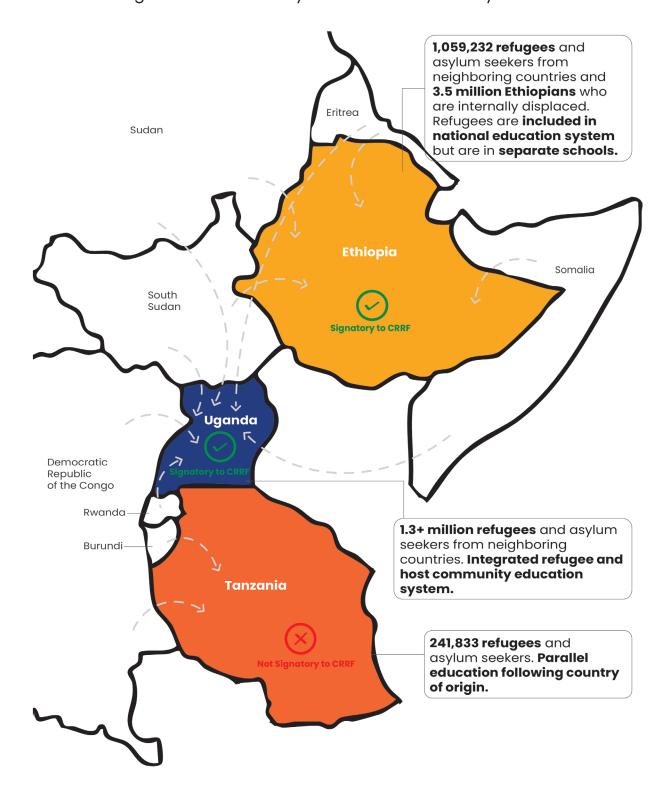
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Background: Refugee Inclusion

UNHCR offers three solutions for refugee populations' future:
1. Resettlement- resettling to a third country with a secure pathway to citizenship
2. Repatriation- returning to one's home country/country of origin
3. Inclusion- inclusion within the host country

In 2012, UNHCR focus shifted from repatriation to inclusion, which also included a shift in education focusing on the host country's national education systems.

Eritrea

Sudan

1,059,232 refugees and asylum seekers from neighboring countries and **3.5 million Ethiopians** who are internally displaced. Refugees are **included in national education system** but are in **separate schools.**

Ethiopia

Somalia

South Sudan

✓

Signatory to CRRF

Uganda

✓

Signatory to CRRF

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Rwanda

1.3+ million refugees and asylum seekers from neighboring countries. **Integrated refugee and host community education system.**

Burundi

Tanzania

✕

Not Signatory to CRRF

241,833 refugees and asylum seekers. **Parallel education following country of origin.**

* CRRF, or the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, led to the Global Compact on Refugees - a global framework for supporting refugee response through inclusion in host communities.

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Background: The PM Project

This study was conducted about three years after the project began. The project's initial design used a socioecological approach to support children's learning and well-being, focusing on educators, caregivers, community members, and system actors. The project aimed to provide technical assistance in complex refugee contexts, but its broad scope became challenging. Due to lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises, the project was re-evaluated, leading to a redesign from May to August 2022. The new focus shifted to a technical support model for integrating learning through play (LtP) into formal school settings. This study examines the implementation of the redesigned project known as PM 2.0.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative case study design of the PlayMatters project to understand better the opportunities and challenges for bridging the humanitarian-development nexus and strengthening education coherence (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). We conducted in-person and virtual semi-structured interviews between August - October 2023 to answer three research questions:
1. How is PlayMatters currently navigating humanitarian-development coherence in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda?
2. What challenges and opportunities does PlayMatters face in achieving humanitarian-development coherence?
3. How can PlayMatters leverage these opportunities and mitigate challenges in the remaining years of the intervention?

This study draws on data from a sample of 35 participants across the region, including both project staff and system actors (SAs).
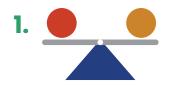
Overarching Findings

Comparative Advantages of PlayMatters
To address coherence, actors operate out of their "comparative advantages." Comparative advantages contributes to coherence by supporting the complementari-ty of interventions, efficient resource allocation, leveraging of specialized expertise, and coordination towards sustainable outcomes.
1. Expertise and experience on teacher professional development (TPD) and LtP.
2. Contribution to support government goals related to TPD and pedagogical changes toward LtP.
3. Strong relationships with SAs place PM at a strategic advantage to address nexus priorities.
4. Technical capacity and established national presence of consortium members support education coherence.
5. Flexible and responsive five-year (+1) financing allows PM to adjust to address current contextual realities.

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1.

Finding: Addressing education coherence in contexts that include both humanitarian and development needs requires balancing longer-term system level objectives and immediate foundational educational and non-educational needs.

Opportunities	Challenges
PM has promoted long-term LtP gains by integrating holistic approaches across humanitarian and development contexts. PM's programmatic shift to implement the PM Emergency Response Mechanism emphasizes holistic support through intersectoral programming. This includes integrating LtP into national teacher training and meeting children's basic well-being needs, such as health and education access. PM's advantage is in its intersectoral collaboration, donor flexibility, and adaptability, as well as working with national systems to ensure education coherence as crises emerge and long-term development efforts.	Implementing PM through LtP approach in contexts where basic needs are unmet presents significant challenges to immediate impact and long-term sustainability. Teachers and learners often struggle with unmet basic and educational needs, including food insecurity, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of resources. This undermines efforts to integrate LtP effectively, as teachers, demotivated by low pay and poor conditions, prioritize short-term needs over pedagogical innovations. Furthermore, inadequate donor investment and lack of coordination between stakeholders complicate efforts to address both humanitarian and development needs simultaneously.

2.

Finding: Navigating the humanitarian-development nexus to strengthen education coherence requires working with and through national systems.
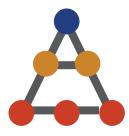
Opportunities	Challenges
PM staff and SAs valued the emphasis on capacity-building and coordination within the PM project, recognizing its role in enhancing sustainability and expanding the project's reach by integrating PM resources into education policies and curricula. Key opportunities for effective collaboration emerged through the alignment of policy and curricular priorities, as well as the timing of reforms, with SAs in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Tanzania	Although PM's strategy emphasizes collaboration with governments to ensure sustainability, weak institutional capacity, limited funding, and high SA turnover hinder effective program implementation. In countries like Uganda and Ethiopia, inadequate resources obstruct continuous professional development (CPD) and teacher supervision. Additionally, frequent SA turnover disrupts project timelines, delaying key activities. Coordination with

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noting how PM's goals fit seamlessly with national priorities. For instance, PM's support in refining child-centered learning methodologies and active learning within competency-based curricula helped SAs operationalize these methods, fostering deeper integration of LtP into national education systems. The timing of ongoing policy and curriculum reforms provided strategic opportunities for PM to contribute to policy development, further strengthening education systems.

different ministries is often fragmented, as seen in Ethiopia and Tanzania, where conflicting priorities create obstacles. Misaligned expectations between PM and SAs further complicate efforts, with SAs expecting PM to address foundational infrastructure issues outside the project's scope, such as inadequate school facilities. In Tanzania, this misalignment is particularly pronounced as SAs question how LtP can succeed without basic infrastructure.

3. **Finding:** The humanitarian and development aid systems present structural, cultural, and financial barriers to education coherence, but PM can leverage its resources, partners, and expertise to advocate for and address nexus issues.

Opportunities	Challenges
PM has opportunities to strengthen education coherence by leveraging partnerships with non-state and system actors, coordinating resources, and utilizing donor flexibility. PM has established mechanisms like the Community of Practice in Uganda to share knowledge and coordinate efforts between humanitarian and development sectors. External partnerships with organizations and projects implemented in partnership with donors like the LEGO Foundation and Education Cannot Wait allow PM to address gaps and scale its impact. Donor flexibility, particularly from the LEGO Foundation, has enabled PM to adapt to emerging crises and advocate for needed resources, such as funding for urgent needs like school renovations.	Participants highlighted key challenges in implementing PM, including selective engagement from system actors, competition among aid organizations, and unstable funding. Decades of reliance on foreign aid have left education systems vulnerable to external funding changes, making long-term sustainability difficult. Uncoordinated interventions from multiple aid actors overwhelm teachers and complicate efforts to strengthen education systems. The focus on short-term, measurable outcomes often conflicts with PM's long-term system-strengthening goals, which require time and collaboration. To succeed, PM must balance immediate results with sustainable strategies and better coordination among humanitarian and development actors.

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4. **Finding:** In order to address education coherence, programs require expertise of working across the humanitarian development nexus and cohesive operational and human resource systems.

Opportunities	Challenges
Participants in the PM consortium highlighted the opportunities, particularly through its consortium model, donor flexibility, and project redesign efforts. The collaboration among partners with diverse thematic expertise allowed for mutual support in addressing gaps despite tensions between humanitarian and development orientations. The donor's adaptability facilitated ongoing learning and adjustments to project strategies, enabling PM to respond effectively to emergent needs while clarifying the project's scope and partner roles. While the consortium structure creates complexities due to siloed approaches in the humanitarian and development sectors, the redesign process promoted a more holistic approach, blending immediate support with long-term system strengthening to enhance education coherence.	The PM consortium faces significant challenges in balancing its humanitarian roots with long-term development goals, leading to tensions between partners and staff. This lack of clarity has affected project coherence, with differing views on immediate emergency responses versus sustainable development outcomes. While the LEGO Foundation's flexibility as a donor offers some opportunities for innovation, the short timeline and insufficient engagement with governments raise concerns about the sustainability of systemic changes. Stronger partnerships, more precise communication, and a more strategic long-term vision are needed to ensure PM's success in navigating the humanitarian-development nexus.

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Recommendations

1. Balance long-term, system-level objectives with immediate foundational education and non-education needs driven by priorities defined at the national, community, and school levels.
2. Provide comprehensive support to teachers to help them effectively use LtP in their classrooms. Supporting teachers in this way is crucial for improving education consistency in both refugee and host communities.
3. A comprehensive system-strengthening approach aligned with humanitarian and development norms is crucial. It involves investing in national institutions, governments, and policies to close the gap between policy and practice. This approach helps improve education consistency across both refugee and host communities, addressing a key issue in the humanitarian-development nexus.
4. Working across the nexus requires professional development and learning about the nexus, i.e., "nexus capacity" building.
5. Working at the nexus requires strong, regular coordination and collaboration with government and non-state partners across ministries and levels.
6. Addressing the nexus requires donors to champion nexus approaches and substantially invest in enabling conditions necessary for a coherent education response.

To learn more about PlayMatters, go to www.playmatters.org or contact Anne Smiley, Deputy Project Director, Research & Technical, at Anne.Smiley@rescue.org

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