

Regional NEWSLETTER



Year 2: The Year of Simplicity and Sustainability

Page 3

Highlights from Year 1

Page 5

Stories from the Field!

Page 11

PlayMatters Wall of
Fame!

Celebrating Achievements and Embracing New Beginnings in Year 2



Martin Omukuba

Project Director

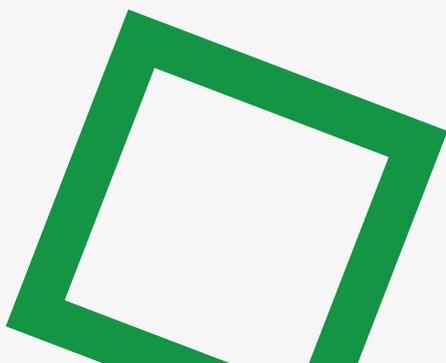
As we get busy with our work this Year 2, I am filled with pride and gratitude for each one of you who has contributed to the success and impact of the PlayMatters project. Reflecting on the past year, it's evident that our collective dedication and passion have brought us closer to our vision of transforming the lives of children through the power of play.

In Year 1, PlayMatters reached new heights, expanding our initiatives to reach more communities, and touching the lives of countless children. From distributing Six Bricks in Uganda and Ethiopia to getting approval for our educator content in Tanzania, it is evident that our commitment to quality early childhood education and play-based learning is reaching our target clients. And listening to teachers and children telling stories about the impact of our work shows the positive influence the project has had on their lives.

We cannot do all this amazing work alone. I am proud to say that our engagement with Education System Actors from Ethiopia, Uganda, and Tanzania has been the cornerstone of our success. When we met with them in Dar es Salaam, the fruitful discussions that we had were an indicator that our cause is a shared journey.

As we plan for this new year, let's know that now more than ever, we have a shared goal. With your continued dedication, I am confident that we will achieve even greater milestones. Let's build on the successes of Year 1 and continue to create hope for the children we serve. Your commitment to the PlayMatters project is what makes it extraordinary.

Here's to another year of play, growth, and transforming children's lives!



Some Highlights from Year 1



System Actors' workshop, a renewed energy for collaboration

To enhance collaboration with government, the PlayMatters consortium, along with representatives from education ministries in Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Uganda, convened for a three-day System Actor's workshop in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. This workshop aimed at fostering collaboration and charting a path forward for the PlayMatters project within the three implementation countries. The workshop was an action-packed event in which project achievements, learnings, and prospects across the three countries were discussed. The stakeholders unanimously agreed that Learning through Play is important in the classroom and expressed the need for innovative approaches to educating children, moving beyond traditional methods. PlayMatters is hopeful that these expressed commitments can be transformed into policies, and continued partnership to supporting teachers through training opportunities, material resources, and ongoing pedagogical and managerial support. Read more [here...](#)



Six Bricks training in Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania: Bricks in schools in Uganda and Ethiopia

The Six Bricks are already in schools in Uganda and Ethiopia as teaching and learning materials adopted to support teachers in Learning through Play. Six Bricks is a concept created by Care for Education and is based on the creative application of LEGO Bricks to educational activities. The Six Bricks are integrated into mainstream teaching for pre- and primary classes as an active engagement and hands-on appropriate methodology relevant for teaching and learning. Children are supposed to use the set of Six Bricks to do short, simple exercises or games designed to stimulate the brain and get the child learning, moving, thinking, and remembering.

See [pictures](#) of how teachers are integrating Six Bricks in the classroom.

Some Highlights from Year 1



PlayMatters Good practice published by UNHCR

PlayMatters was published by the UNHCR as a good practice for the Global Compact on Refugees during the Global Refugee Forum (GRF). PlayMatters was originally a GRF pledge years ago by The LEGO Foundation and the project has accomplished so much since then!

What is a Good Practice:

The UNHCR describes good practices as practical ways that the international community can translate the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees into action at the local, national, regional, and global levels. Through sharing good practices, stakeholders can learn from one another about what works well, what can be replicated in other situations, and what can be scaled up with further support to better the lives of refugees and host communities. Sharing good practices can inspire others to develop innovative and impactful pledges and contributions for the Global Refugee Forum.

Read more [here...](#)



SUBMIT A PLEDGE

SHARE A GOOD PRACTICE

- About
- News & Stories
- Good Practices
- Pledges & Contributions
- The Compact in Action

Home / Good Practices

GOOD PRACTICES

PlayMatters: Sparking Lifelong Learning through Play

Improving holistic learning outcomes and well-being for children in refugee and host community contexts in Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania



© PlayMatters

Stories from the Field

Meet Teacher Shukuru



Teacher Shukuru is a caregiver at Bukere Primary School in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement where she teaches Top Class. She is a mother of five children, two boys and three girls, and one might think the evidently jovial mood in which she teaches her class is because of this. But motherliness aside, teacher Shukuru credits her behaviour in the classroom to the training she got on Learning through Play (LTP) in 2022.



Previously, I used to teach using just flashcards and writing on the blackboard. Today, I use songs and various teaching and learning materials. If I am going to teach shapes for instance, I use a song, mummy making chapatti, samosa and they guess which shape it is like chapatti for circle and samosa for triangle.



Teacher Shukuru

Meet Teacher Mohammed



When the team from the International Rescue Committee registered teachers at Melkadida Host Community Primary School to participate in a training on Learning through Play in 2021, little did Teacher Mohammed know his teaching style was about to change.

Teacher Mohammed, who has been teaching primary school for 33 years, eight of which have been at Melkadida, was about to learn

that teaching is not just about a teacher instructing but also about making learners enjoy the lesson.



Learning through Play training has totally changed the way I teach. I now use locally available materials in class and have practical games to demonstrate.



Teacher Mohammed

Stories from the Field

ERM gave Children another chance at Learning



Fifteen-year-old Meisha Mohammed (above) is a leader at her school, Derek Woira Primary School in Dessie, Ethiopia. She raises awareness among fellow learners about water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and especially best hygiene practices. She uses poems, drama, and songs that she organizes for events at her school to share her messages. Meisha’s participation in WASH activities started in September 2022 when she joined the WASH club. But previously there was no WASH club in her school. It started with the implementation of the PlayMatters Emergency

Response Mechanism (PM ERM) following the conflict in Ethiopia that destroyed her school facilities and homes.

Implemented by the International Rescue Committee, Plan International and 10 sub-grantees, PM ERM improved access to WASH services, health & nutrition and child protection services for children affected by conflict and disaster in Amhara Region, Ethiopia. And Meisha’s school was among the many that had been destroyed by the conflict.



Our school had been damaged due to the war. But now school has changed. We received scholastic materials like books and bags and now I am always happy to come to school.

Semaegzer Asasegu

She, together with other children, who benefitted from the PM ERM, received items such as bathing and laundry soap, underwear, and reusable sanitary pads from Concern Worldwide, one of the sub-grantees on the programme.

Read more [here...](#)



Work planning: Year 2, the Year of Simplicity and Sustainability

At the start of the year the regional PlayMatters team, outcome leads, PMCs and partners convened in Entebbe, Uganda. The agenda – work planning and learning workshop for the PM 2.0 Year 2. The workshop was the start of the project’s annual work planning process, which will conclude with the submission of agreed deliverables to LEGO Foundation to get approval for the project to transition into Year 2 on April 01, 2024. The theme of Year 2, spoken about in two-fold is Simplicity and Sustainability. The last one month, PMCs and section leads have taken time to plan for the year while hinging their deliverables and budgets on the theme proof that the workshop was not in vain.



LEGO Foundation team visits Ethiopia, expresses admiration for PlayMatters work



Representatives from the **LEGO Foundation**, PlayMatters project funder, paid a visit to the Ethiopia office recently where the team spoke of their great admiration for the work the project is doing. Paul St John Frisoli, who led the team and Leah Anyanwu, the ECD Specialist, were hosted at the PlayMatters office at the International Rescue Committee (IRC), in Addis Ababa.

To receive them was the project team lead by Shewaye Mengistu, the project coordinator at IRC and Rekik Getahun the project lead at Plan International. The visit included speeches and presentations on PlayMatters activities in Ethiopia specifically in Shire, Sheraro, Jigjiga, Mekadida, Afar, Benishangul areas



PlayMatters team and the visiting LEGO Foundation team pose for a photo at the International Rescue Committee offices in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

and Gambella refugee and IDP schools and communities. To appreciate the flexibility of Lego Foundation was Yohannes Gebreselassie, coordinator for the recently concluded PlayMatters Emergency Response Mechanism, who spoke about the benefits of multisectoral approach in supporting the refugees and IDPs' needs through education in emergencies program.

"In places like Ethiopia where the current situation remains fluid and everchanging, the flexibility of Lego Foundation was well appreciated," he said.

The LEGO team also presented the Foundation's 2024 - 2026 strategy which mainly focuses on Learning through Play. The team also expressed admiration for the activities done so far and pledged to stick to Lego's commitment to respond to emergency situations in accentuating PlayMatters intervention if it doesn't affect the overall strategy. Also in attendance was Paolo Cernuschi, Country Director, IRC - Ethiopia and Hiwote Simachew, Country Director, Plan International-Ethiopia who both gave welcoming remarks.

Comparative and International Education Society Conference 2024 gives PlayMatters more Visibility



The PlayMatters project had an opportunity to participate in the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) 2024 annual conference.

The project was represented in four panels on teacher professional development in the humanitarian-development nexus, LtP in Emergencies, Creativity and Soft Skills Measurement, and caregiver well-being. These panels sparked inter-agency discussion on the complex financial and operational environments that PlayMatters (and others)

works in. Attendees also raised questions related to the application and measurement of LTP in both emergency response and protracted refugee responses, the integration of gender and well-being into PlayMatters programming and tools, and opportunities for further research.

Additionally, PlayMatters factsheets were distributed at an IRC table in the organizational expo to further increase PlayMatters visibility. PlayMatters' participation at CIES provided an opportunity for mutual learning and evidence dissemination,



and increased visibility of PlayMatters to strengthen PlayMatters' leadership of Learning through Play in East Africa.

PlayMatters at the Eastern Africa Regional Early Childhood Conference

PlayMatters was represented at the Eastern Africa Regional Early Childhood Conference, an annual event organized by the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN) alongside its member organisations. AfECN was created to develop and advance coherent ECD policy development and implementation throughout the African continent. International Rescue Committee is a member through the Uganda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia national networks for ECD.

PlayMatters and Kulea Watoto are committed to contributing to the African Union Agenda

2063 that gives attention to enhancing equitable access to quality early childhood education and development (ECED). The agenda called for universal access to quality early childhood, primary and secondary education. At the conference PlayMatters and Kulea Watoto led discussions in two round table sessions and one side event on; **system strengthening for continuous professional development in early childhood education (ECE) using learning through play** where PlayMatters defined Learning through Play as an active teaching and learning method in which children learn through guided, hands-on, meaningful, play-based interactions in safe and inclusive environments. The project also led on the **championing the two-generation approaches to Early Childhood Development in the refugee setting**.

The aim was to strengthen collaboration between the government and non-government actors implementing ECD interventions.



PlayMatters Wall of Fame

For the next newsletters starting with this one, we shall be highlighting members from the PlayMatters field teams on our **“Wall of Fame”**. We are drawing inspiration from what motivates them to do their work and hope they can inspire all of us.

Mohammed Kelif Bulle

Education Manager, Somali Region, Ethiopia



I was driven by passion for vulnerable people especially women and children to join humanitarian work. And I do not see myself leaving this work any time soon!

Tatu Said

Educacion in Emergency Officer, Kibondo, Tanzania



I am motivated by my passion to change the community through delivery of quality education to children and imparting knowledge to teachers on how to use Learning through Play approaches.

Upcoming Events

Technical Workshop in Q1

There will be a regional technical & evidence workshop and learning event in June in Entebbe, Uganda.

The Goals:

- To allow time for workstreams including all three outcomes, MEAL, Research, Comms/Multimedia, and Program leadership/management to sit together to build capacity, develop tools/plans, and discuss technical issues and progress in-depth, with a focus on improving quality implementation and opportunities for scale and sustainability.
- Allow time for all workstreams to come together to share learnings and progress, with a strong focus on building alignment and connections across workstreams.

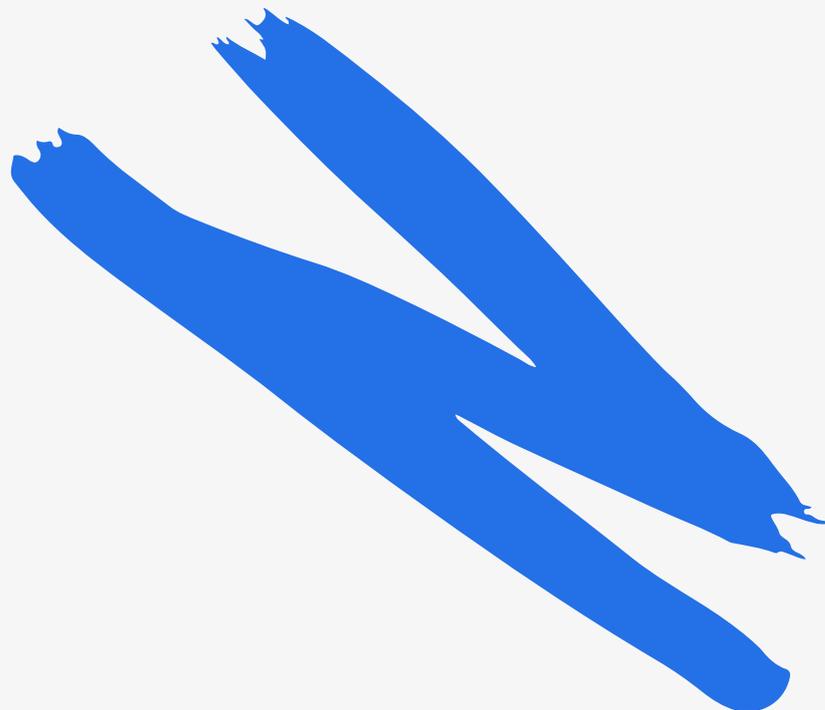


Photo Gallery



PlayMatters and the Lamwo district leadership commissioned four newly renovated classrooms in Palabek Refugee Settlement in Lamwo District. The primary schools that benefitted include Glory Land, Aywee, Bright Future and Beyogoya. See related [story here...](#)



PlayMatters hosted Kurt Tjossem, IRC's former regional vice president for East Africa and bid him farewell during his visit to IRC Uganda.



Participants at the communications workshop pose for a photo after a day's session. The three-day workshop included discussions on communications, multimedia and behavioural change communications.



Left: PlayMatters regional team takes a photo with Lauren Schimdt on her last day at work.



Right: Martin Omukuba, the PM project director, represents the team to bid farewell to Paul Muliika a former member of the MEL team.



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

www.playmatters.org

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

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

In partnership with



The LEGO Foundation