

# PlayMatters

Sparking Lifelong Learning Through Play

## Newsletter 2021 in Pictures



Welcome to this 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of the PlayMatters Newsletter!

The PlayMatters project seeks to improve holistic learning and wellbeing outcomes for 800,000 refugee and host community learners aged 3-12+ in Uganda, Ethiopia and Tanzania using learning through play methodologies. The PlayMatters consortium is led by the International Rescue Committee, and includes Plan International, War Child Holland, Innovations for Poverty Action, and the Behavioural Insights Team in partnership with the LEGO Foundation.

*The PlayMatters Consortium*

In partnership with



The LEGO Foundation

## MESSAGE FROM THE PROJECT DIRECTOR

Martin Omukuba



Welcome to the second edition of the PlayMatters Regional Newsletter! This festive season edition shares pictures from our work since we began implementation slightly over a year ago. Looking back, it feels like yesterday when we launched the project, kick-starting our commitment to improving holistic learning and wellbeing outcomes for 800,000 refugee and host community children in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Tanzania.

Soon after launching, we spoke to teachers, parents, community leaders, and actors within education service delivery to find out their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs on learning through play and its application in schools, at home and in the community. Through these insights and working with government stakeholders, we started an iterative process of developing and prototyping content aimed at promoting and supporting the integration of learning through play teaching methodologies. Learn more about how these interventions, which are at the heart of PlayMatters, are being developed, tested, and refined in collaboration with end-users in the human centered design feature on page 12-13.

In 2021, we also started our foundational work in research and learning, which is part of our commitment to generating evidence on how to develop and implement learning through play interventions in refugee contexts. The findings will continuously inform the content development process, ensuring that we deliver contextually relevant content that meet user needs, while strengthening the capacity of teachers, caregivers, and communities in promoting the use of learning through play.

A big thank you to the collaboration between the PlayMatters consortium, stakeholders and specifically the Ministries of Education in Uganda, Ethiopia and Tanzania. We have achieved a lot so far amid the challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we look forward to continuing this journey together in the new year.

Happy festive season!

MARTIN OMUKUBA  
PlayMatters Project Director

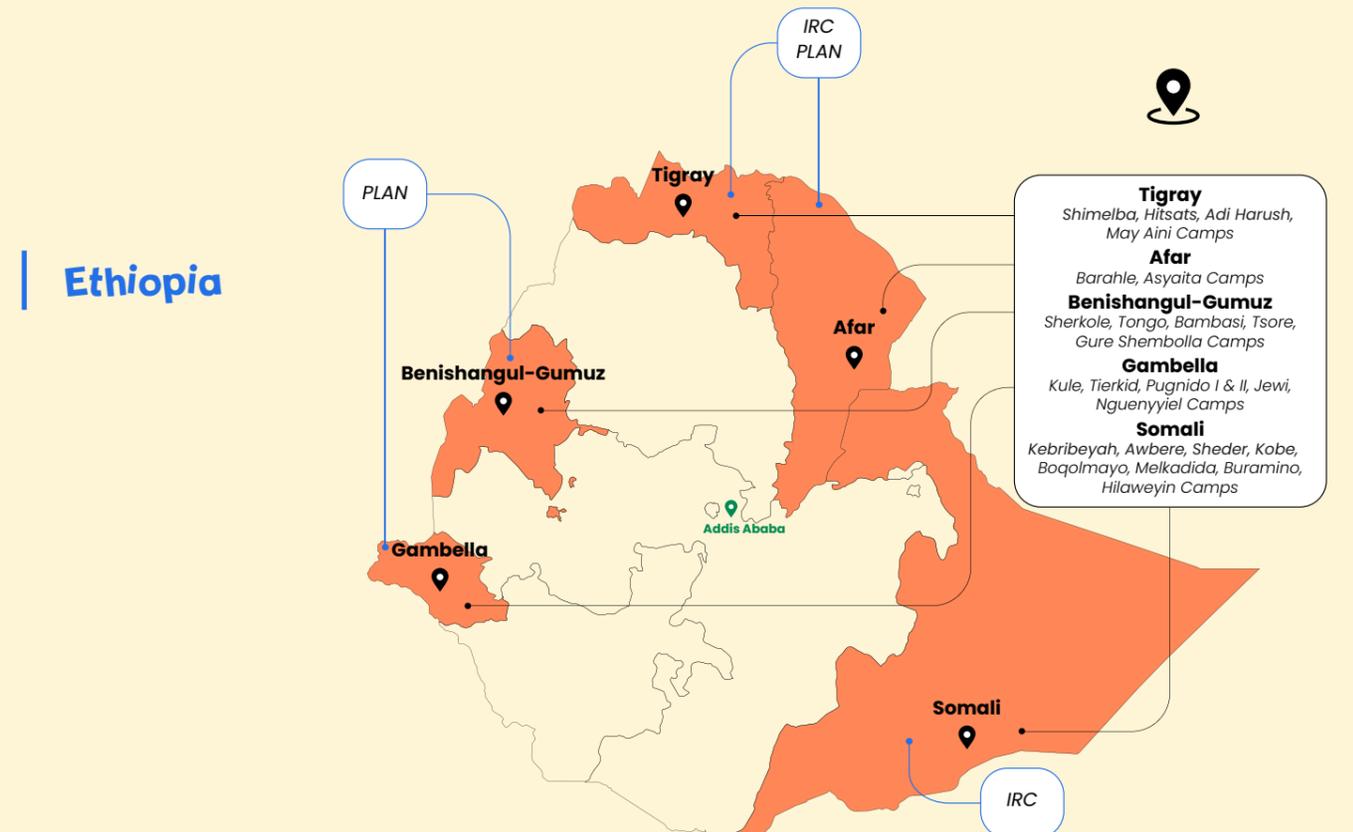
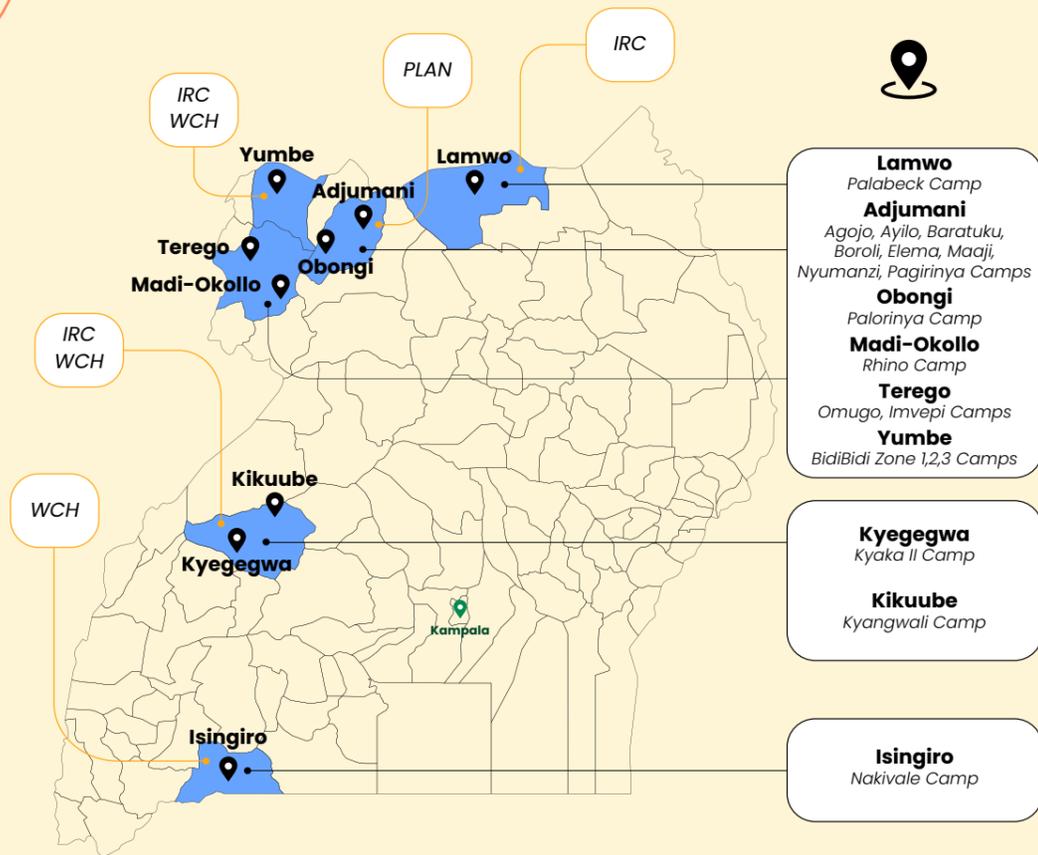


# Special Edition 2021 in Pictures

Sparking  
Lifelong Learning  
through Play  
in Ethiopia,  
Uganda &  
Tanzania  
PlayMatters

# Where we are Working

Using learning through play methodologies, the PlayMatters project will build children's social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and creative skills, contributing to improved learning and wellbeing outcomes.



International Rescue Committee (IRC)  
Plan International (PLAN)  
War Child Holland (WCH)

# Project Launches

Time flies. Slightly over a year ago, the PlayMatters project launched and began implementation in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. In this section, we take a look back at these launches, which marked the official start of our journey.



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



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



Shewaye Tike, the PlayMatters Ethiopia Country Coordinator showcasing various learning through play resources during the official launch of the project. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 18<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020



Looking back to where we started!

# Emergency Response

With the school closures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, PlayMatters developed and launched a family-friendly home learning program to support parents to transform everyday interactions with children into learning opportunities.



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.



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



## PlayMatters at Home Radio Series 1 - Our Bodies

This four part series contains activities caregivers can use to teach children about their bodies, and hygiene practices like handwashing to keep them safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.



# COVID-19: Schools closed but learning continued...

# Content Development Process

2021 saw PlayMatters develop “**starter pack**” content for the promotion of learning through play in school, at home and in the community. This content will be tested, refined, and eventually scaled in collaboration with government and end users.



Joshua Mwesigwa, a PlayMatters illustrator based in Uganda sketching illustrations contained in our “starter pack” content.

**This content supports:**  
Teachers in integrating learning through play in school.

Parents and guardians in promoting learning through play at home.

Community leaders in advocating for learning through play in the community.



A teacher in Mvugwe primary school in Kasulu district, Tanzania trying out a “color wheel”. This wheel is part of our educator content that will be tested for incorporating learning through play in lesson planning.



**Build  
Test  
Learn**

## Human Centered Design and what it means for the PlayMatters Content Development Process

**Human centered design** is a problem-solving approach that begins by cultivating a deeper understanding of a challenge or context and places end users at the center of the design and implementation of the solution.

PlayMatters is following this approach in our pathway to scale, by involving end-users and other stakeholders in drafting and iterating learning through play content.

What this means for our interventions:

- ◆ **Meeting user needs**

No expert has more knowledge than teachers, parents, and community leaders in refugee settings on how learning through play can be successfully implemented their context.

- ◆ **Inclusivity**

For our interventions to be effective, we have to consider the full complex, dynamic and interconnected system in which children learn. This helps us find the right entry points of influencing adult behaviors in order to reach children with playful learning experiences.

- ◆ **Designing to hand over**

Right from the start, our interventions are developed, tested, and refined in collaboration with government and end-users. This approach promotes local ownership and can ensure long term sustainability.



A community leader speaking to PlayMatters about how to best include people with disabilities in learning through play interventions. Kasulu, Tanzania, November 2021.

**Our interventions  
are developed,  
tested, and  
refined in  
collaboration  
with end-users.**



Participants from the PlayMatters consortium testing learning through play content and getting feedback from teachers, community leaders and parents during a design sprint. This included an educator workbook, an audio show, and a storytelling calendar among others. Mvugwe Primary School, Kasulu, Tanzania.



**In 2022, PlayMatters will test, refine, and retest various content with users, leading to the development of the core package which will be scaled in the years to come.**

# Working with Stakeholders

In 2021, we continued collaborating with district, national, regional, and global stakeholders in sharing knowledge and experiences from our work, and in supporting learning through play and its application for refugee and host community children through policy & program decisions.



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



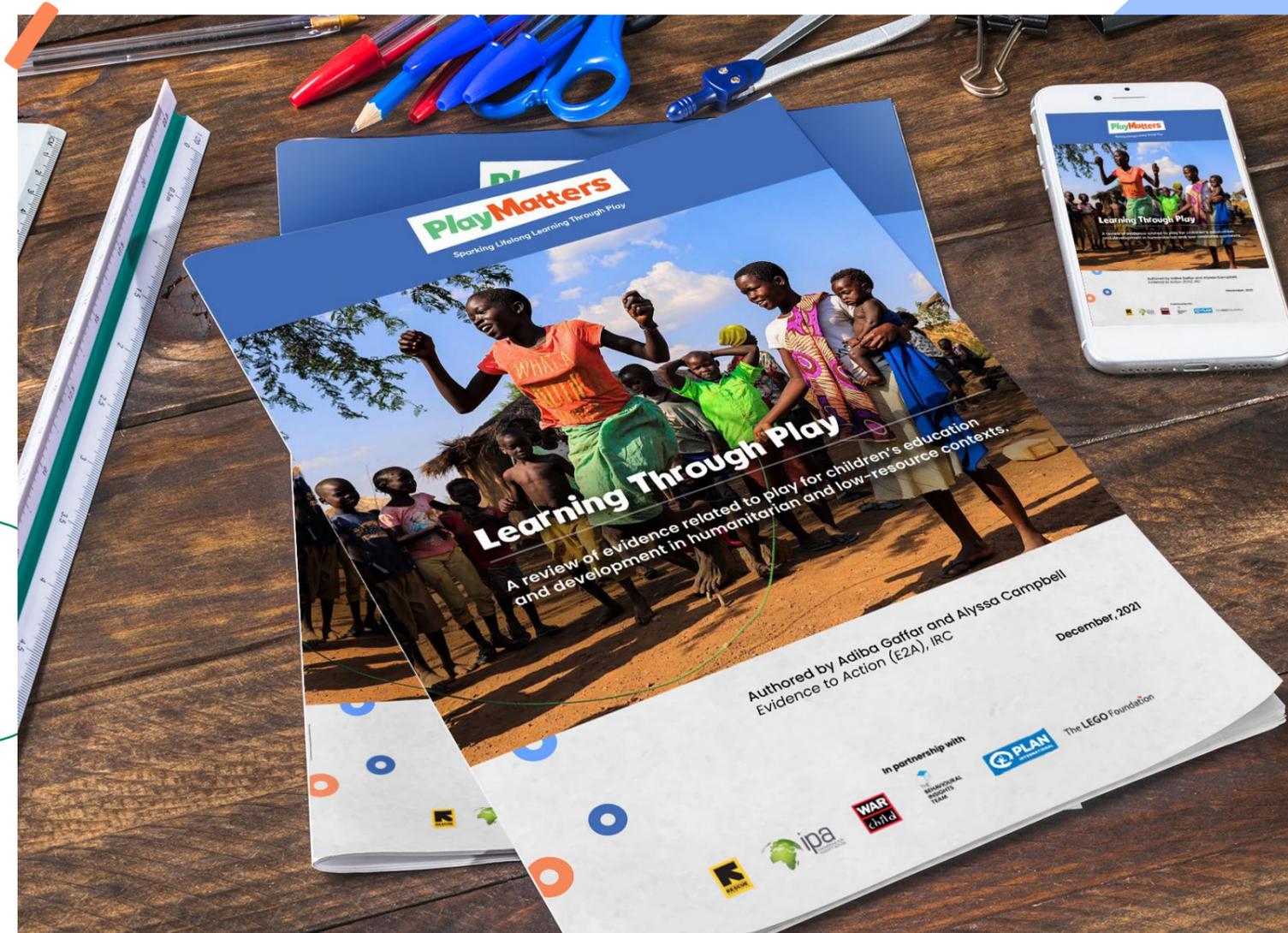
District leaders and officials from the Gambella Regional Education Bureau in Ethiopia reviewing PlayMatters "starter pack" content as part of our collaboration with stakeholders in our content review and validation process. Gambella, Ethiopia, November, 2021.



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

# Research

PlayMatters is one of the first large-scale projects to advance learning through play approaches in developing countries & refugee settings. As such, we are generating evidence on how to develop, implement, and evaluate learning through play interventions in this context. This is with a dual purpose of contributing knowledge and building insights on how to scale and sustain similar interventions.



The cover of a research publication titled "Learning through Play: A review of evidence related to play for children's education and development in humanitarian and low-resource context." The report, which will be published in January 2022, presents findings on how promising and/or effective learning through play approaches can be delivered through educators, caregivers, communities (in pre-primary, primary school, community and/or home settings), and how these interventions can be integrated within wider education systems.

# Events



Commemorating World Teachers Day and World Children's days in Gambella, Ethiopia. In 2021, PlayMatters held various events in the three countries to commemorate international days, creating awareness of learning through play and disseminating about the progress of our work.



**Creating awareness of learning through play in schools and communities.**

# Festive Season Greetings



# Happy Holidays

Sparkling Lifelong Learning through Play in Ethiopia, Uganda & Tanzania  
PlayMatters

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