

OUR JOURNEY

In pictures

In partnership with



LEGO Foundation

About

PlayMatters seeks to improve holistic learning and wellbeing outcomes for 800,00 refugee and host community children in Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania using Learning through Play (LtP) approaches.

Our Approach

Learning through Play is at the heart of PlayMatters. For PlayMatters, Learning through Play is an active teaching and learning method in which children learn through guided, hands-on, meaningful, play-based interactions in safe and inclusive environments. Learning through Play has three characteristics:

- Intentional planning around learning objectives
- Active engagement with people and materials
- Safe, inclusive and joyful learning environments

Consortium

The PlayMatters consortium is led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and includes Plan International, War Child Holland, Innovations for Poverty Action, and Behavioral Insights Team in partnership with the LEGO Foundation.

Project Profile



Funding

USD \$100 Million
In partnership with the LEGO Foundation

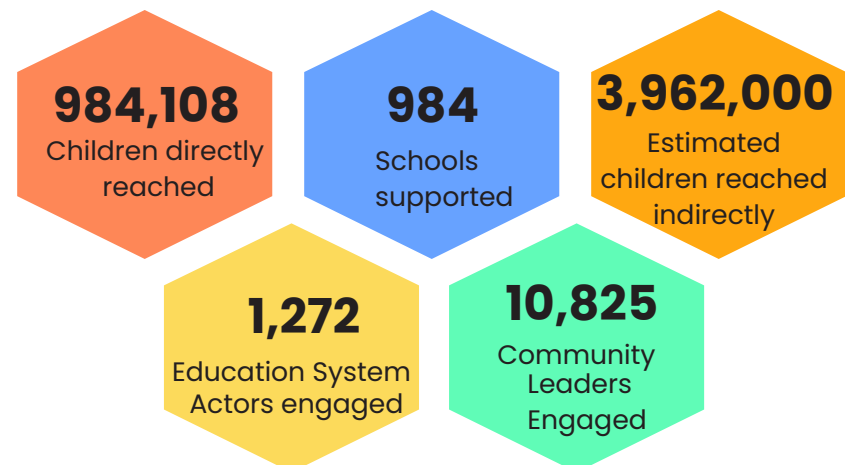


Timeline

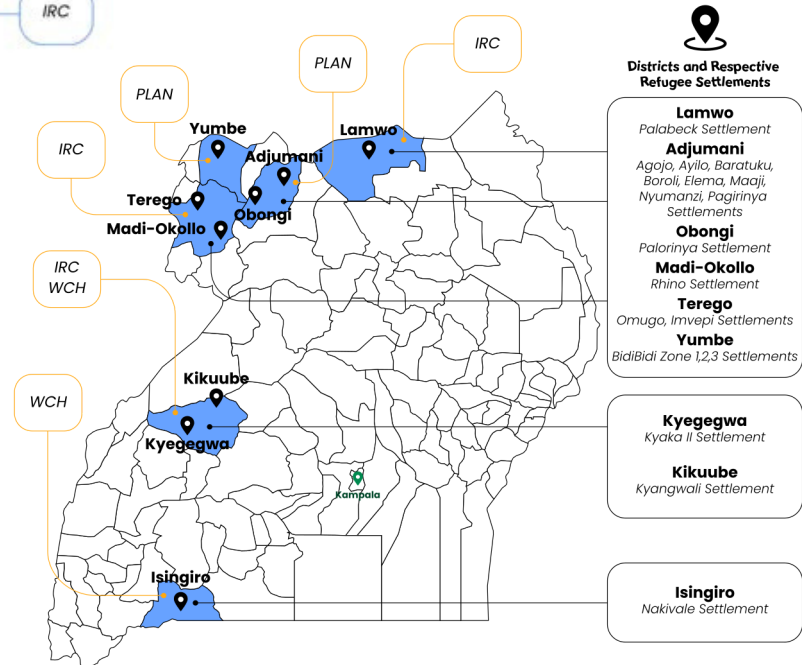
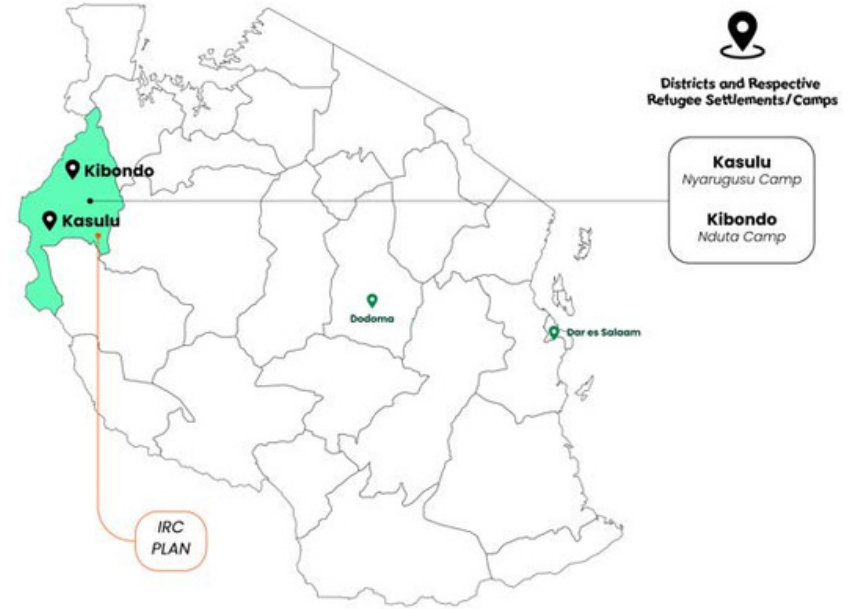
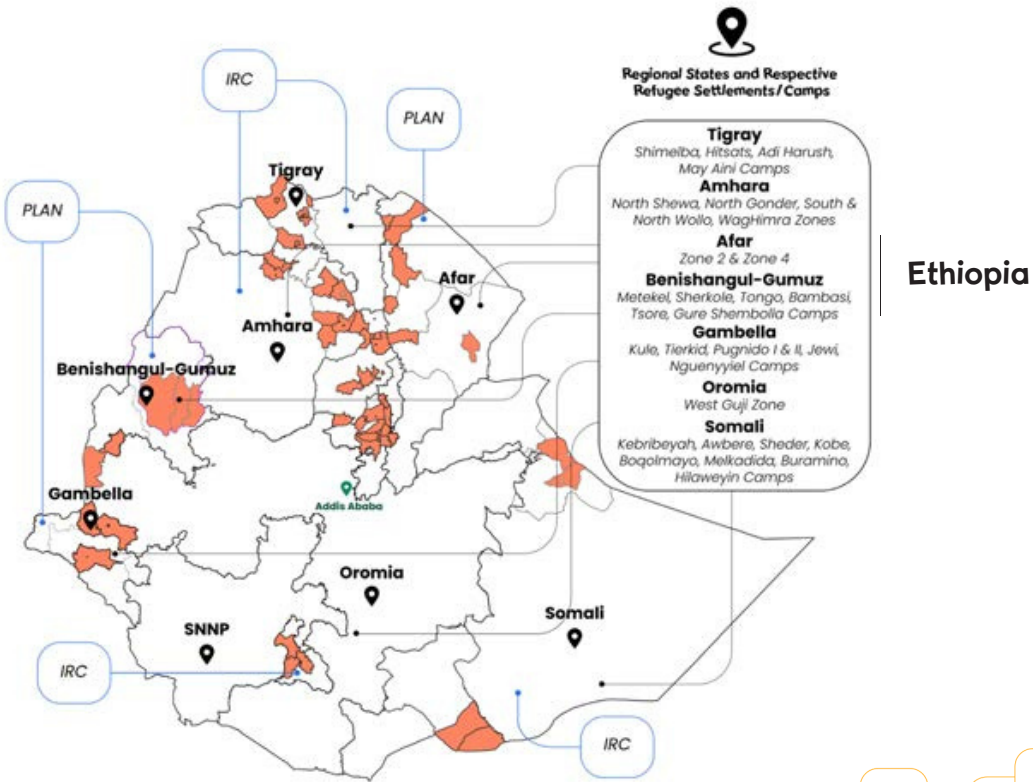
Start: 1st January 2020
End: 31st March 2026

Our Reach

(March 2026)



Areas of implementation



Uganda

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

PlayMatters Core Package for Schools

The PlayMatters Core Package for Schools includes six intervention components as laid out in the figure below. The Core Package was implemented in a school for one full school year (beginning of school year to end of school year), and it included 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 LEGO® Six Bricks for every child) for LtP and support with the local creation of Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs).

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.

COVID-19 Emergency Response

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



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.



A radio set playing "Dunga," a socio-emotional learning edutainment audio show



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

PlayMatters and the Ministries of Education developed teacher training packages, facilitator guides, teacher resource books, classroom support materials, school leadership training materials, school community engagement guides, and minimum quality standards for classrooms, among others to help facilitate the Learning through Play.

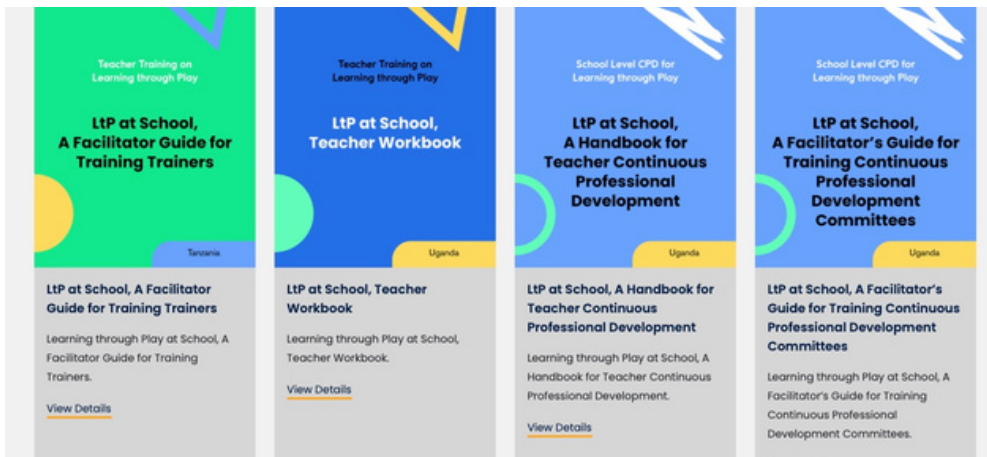
Content development



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.



Learning through Play training resources contained in the PlayMatters website LTP library



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.

In response to the crisis in the Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Oromia regions in Ethiopia, PlayMatters launched the Ethiopia Emergency Response Mechanism in 2022 to provide urgent support in education, health & nutrition to children. The multi-sectoral one-year intervention, which concluded in 2023, reached **177,409 children across 201** integrated pre-primary and primary schools.

Emergency Response Mechanism - Ethiopia 2022-2023



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 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.

Training

A snapshot from various teacher training sessions in the three countries.



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.

LEGO Bricks in schools

In 2023, PlayMatters introduced LEGO® Six Bricks in supported schools to be used alongside other teaching and learning materials. The approach was created by Care for Education and is based on the creative application of LEGO Bricks to educational activities.



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.



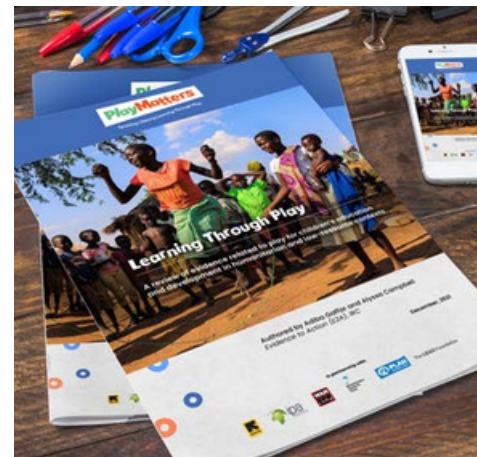
Teacher Enid uses LEGO Bricks to teach letters.



A snapshot of PlayMatters research and learning activities



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.

Evidence Brief: Community Engagement and Sustainability for Learning through Play

Global

Evidence Brief: Community Engagement and Sustainability for Learning through Play

Type: Implementation and Impact Research

Country: Global

Date: Feb 24, 2026

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Learning through Play to Improve Teaching, Learning and Wellbeing in Conflict and Crisis Findings from a Randomized Control Trial in Ethiopia

Ethiopia

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



Working with Stakeholders

PlayMatters worked 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.



Here are some photos from various classroom and school activities

From the field



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.

Classroom block renovations

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



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 Foundation visits

Hosting the LEGO Foundation presented opportunities to showcase the collaborative efforts and shared commitment to transforming education through play.



In April 2022, 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 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 Regional Office in Kampala, March 2022.



Mary Winters, Rikke Bruntse during a LEGO Foundation visit to PlayMatters Uganda in October 2025



In February 2022, 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 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.





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