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CATALYZE ECCE TOGETHER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EVIDENCE *Task Force Country Updates and Research Projects*

BUILDING CAPACITY, TOGETHER

Data on early childhood education (ECE) is essential for improving pre-primary policies and programs. Reliable information on how children are learning and how teachers deliver instruction can be invaluable to stakeholders at all levels of an ECE system, from parents to policymakers. While there are many tools for measuring child development, early learning, and the quality of early education environments, less is known about how that data can be used to improve pre-primary systems over time.

[The USAID Together for Early Childhood Evidence \(T4ECE\)](#) Consortium on Pre-Primary Data and Measurement in Africa began in 2018 as an initiative to bring together government officials, researchers and other stakeholders interested in [pre-primary data and measurement in Africa](#). Since inception, T4ECE has supported country-level teams in Ethiopia, Liberia, Rwanda, and South Africa, and most recently expanded to include Malawi. Over the past five years, T4ECE has worked with government, academia, and civil society stakeholders across the five countries to identify their needs related to ECE data and measurement, drawing on global and regional expertise to address them.

In 2021-2022, T4ECE country-level research teams [implemented local data and measurement projects](#) to help inform programmatic and policy decisions facing ECE. In 2023-2025, the T4ECE Consortium joined the USAID CATALYZE ECCE Family of Investments¹. In Phase 3, the CATALYZE T4ECE initiative will build on the country teams' work by supporting a second round of country-level research projects to help teams continue to explore how pre-primary systems can better collect and use data to improve young children's early learning experiences.

As we move forward into this next phase of T4ECE, this brief provides an update on the important ongoing work from each of the five country T4ECE task force teams and an overview of the upcoming

¹ Together for Early Childhood Evidence is convened by [ECD Measure](#) at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), College of Public Health, with funding from The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in partnership with Palladium.

country-led T4ECE research projects focused on addressing gaps in evidence and data-driven decision making in sub-Saharan Africa.

ETHIOPIA: ECDE Knowledge Hub Strengthening and Capacity Building in Early Childhood Education and Development

In April 2023, the revised National Policy Framework on Early Child Development and Education in Ethiopia was approved. All public schools across the country are now encouraged to provide pre-primary services. Given the size and diversity of Ethiopia, there is a wide array of providers working and supporting ECE, using various resources, trainings, and curricula. Under the last phase of T4ECE, the Ethiopia T4ECE task force team developed an online repository for early childhood development (ECD) data and resources from organizations located in Addis Ababa, including early childhood research, policy, and program documentation. This [Knowledge Hub](#) has proven to be a valuable online platform for collaboration and learning for early childhood stakeholders.

Under this next phase of T4ECE, the Ethiopian T4ECE Task Force team is interested in expanding the Knowledge Hub to accompany the renewed commitment from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs and partner organizations to scale up preprimary services and develop new resources nationwide. The project will be led by Ethiopia School Readiness Initiative, in partnership with Addis Ababa University and Educational Assessment and Examination Service (EAES). In the first phase of development, the Knowledge Hub focused on collecting resources primarily from organizations in Addis Ababa City. This year, the research team will focus on strengthening and scaling up of the existing Knowledge Hub, as it will broaden its reach to organizations and resources available nationwide to build the collective knowledge base of ECE throughout Ethiopia. Further, the team will work on building capacity and knowledge exchange efforts through producing syntheses of resources and policy briefs, enhancing the knowledge hub interface, and hosting several capacity building workshops to strengthen knowledge around early childhood data and measurement in Ethiopia.

LIBERIA: Piloting National Measure of Children's Learning and Development

Liberia is making great headway in building a data-informed early childhood system that will help to increase investment in ECE and strengthen policy and legal framework around ECE service delivery. In last phase of T4ECE, the Liberian T4ECE task force team mapped ECE centers in specific regions of Liberia and collected data on their quality. As Liberia works towards building a comprehensive data-informed early childhood system, the government and the Liberia T4ECE task force team have expressed interest in developing a standardized and national tool for assessing early learning outcomes and school readiness.

Recently, the Ministry of Education and partners contextualized the International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) tool, a global instrument used to measure children's learning and development, and aligned it with the Liberian Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS). In 2024, the Liberia T4ECE research team, led by the University of Liberia, will pilot the adapted IDELA tool as a feasibility trial to ensure it is relevant and feasible to implement in the Liberian context. This feasibility trial will serve as a foundational step for the Ministry's plans to develop a national early

childhood assessment tool for Liberia. We are excited to see Liberia move forward with its vision to create a national integrated ECD data collection and management system, including data on both ECE quality and learning outcomes.

MALAWI: Strengthening the Early Childhood Development Management System

Malawi is the newest member country of T4ECE. In recent years, Malawi has made notable progress in ECD programming which has resulted in improving access to pre-primary learning, including for vulnerable rural populations. However, the lack of a nationwide, coordinated data system makes it hard to make evidence-informed decisions in the planning and programming of interventions.

Building on the work done by the government and partners, the Malawi T4ECE task force team is interested in contributing to the development of a robust and user-friendly management information system that provides accurate and up-to-date data points for ECD programming across the country. With the support of T4ECE, a research team led by the University of Malawi will conduct a background study to strengthen Malawi's Early Childhood Development Management Information System (ECDMIS). The ECDMIS is currently under development and being used in a select number of districts in Malawi. The T4ECE research team will conduct desk review and stakeholder consultations to pinpoint data needs of ECD stakeholders, identify gaps in existing data, and make recommendations to strengthen the system. We look forward to learning from Malawi as it works towards strengthening their ECDMIS for the promotion and use of data for policy planning and implementation, decision making, monitoring and evaluating of ECD in Malawi.

RWANDA : Building a national early childhood measurement system

In recent years, Rwanda has made considerable headway in its early childhood data and measurement activities. Recently, Save the Children Rwanda, in partnership with the Ministry of Education conducted a national study of pre-primary student's learning and development outcomes using the IDELA instrument. As part of this study, T4ECE supported the Rwanda task force team in building government capacity to collect and use quantitative data about the quality of pre-primary classroom environments using the IDELA Classroom Environment Tool.

Building on the national IDELA study, the Ministry of Education, members of the Rwanda T4ECE task force team, and other partners have worked to define country-level benchmarks based on IDELA scores. The benchmarks will allow decisionmakers in Rwanda to understand the proportion of children who are classified as "minimally on track." Now that benchmarks have been created, the Rwanda T4ECE task force team has identified the need to further test them to be able to generalize the benchmarks to the Rwandan population.

In 2024, the CATALYZE T4ECE research project will support a nationally representative assessment with IDELA to pilot these benchmarks. The study will determine the emergent numeracy, literacy, socio-emotional, fine and gross motor skills for children completing pre-primary school, including the proportion identified as 'minimally on track'; and determine which factors of classroom quality are correlated with children's school readiness. This project will also build the capacity of government

officials from Ministry of Education, Rwanda Education Board, and National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA), who will use IDELA as a national early childhood measurement tool. Capacity building will support government officials in linking IDELA to existing government data systems and processes. We look forward to seeing Rwanda's progress as local early childhood experts move forward with the vision to institutionalize ECE data collection and build government capacity to collect and use national early childhood outcomes data.

SOUTH AFRICA: Monitoring what Matters

In 2021, members of the South Africa T4ECE task force team implemented the Thrive by Five Index, the largest survey of preschool child outcomes ever attempted in South Africa. The Index is the first in a series of surveys that will monitor over time the proportion of children who are on track for their age in key areas of development. Simultaneously, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has launched other initiatives to improve the availability of data including an ECD Census to document every Early Learning Programme (ELP) across the country, an ELP Baseline Assessment to rate the quality of the learning environments, among others. Alongside this increase in available data, the DBE and partners have invested significant time and resources in building the necessary administrative information systems and frameworks for early childhood, including data management tools and reporting systems.

Building on this progress, the South African T4ECE research team, led by Ilifa Labantwana, will identify a key set of indicators to be included in a new ECD M&E Framework for the National ECD Policy. Within this framework, various government departments will report collectively on progress of ECD service delivery and ultimately, improved child outcomes across all the domains of the nurturing care framework. The development of this new ECD M&E framework is a key step towards bringing all existing data sources and systems in a meaningful way that directly ties into the government's population-based planning process. This growing suite and shared infosystem of ECD data and information products places South Africa on excellent footing towards building a robust ECD information ecosystem and we are excited to learn from them as they move forward in this journey.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR T4ECE COUNTRY TASK FORCE TEAMS

We continue to learn a lot from each of the T4ECE task force teams and have seen impressive growth and progress in each of the countries as they develop and strengthen effective data-driven ECE systems. We are excited to continue this journey together as the research projects ramp up throughout 2024. We invite you to stay updated with the country teams' progress by following ECD Measure's [LinkedIn page](#), and to sign up for the CATALYZE ECCE T4ECE newsletter for [more updates](#) on our work.

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