



CRPF Child Research and Practice Forum

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Editor's Note

Dear readers,

We are pleased to welcome you to the June 2023 CRPF quarterly newsletter. This edition presents two summaries of research presented at the monthly CRPF seminars. These are from papers on: 1) Space for 'Learning through Play' in Ethiopian Primary Schools. A Look into the Situation of Selected Refugee and Host Community Schools, conducted by PlayMatters, and 2) A Review of child sensitivity in social policies in Ethiopia, done by UNICEF Ethiopia and Policy Studies Institute.

It also addresses in the news story the presentation of Young Lives study on youth challenges during COVID-19 and war by Young Lives Ethiopia Country Director at the 18th ESSWA annual conference.

We look forward to your comments, suggestions and contributions.

For more information, please contact us via crpf.ethiopia@gmail.com or 011 1 540121



Evidence from Young Lives Study at the 18th Annual Conference of the Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists (ESSWA)

At the 18th ESSWA annual conference, Young Lives Ethiopia Country Director Dr Alula Pankhurst shared Young Lives study on youth challenges during COVID-19 and war. Young Lives Ethiopia has been using this platform to engage with professional debates on long-established social problems and emerging socio-economic challenges of the country with ESSWA's members who are practitioners, policymakers and academics that take part to deliberate on various thematic issues. Dr Alula spoke about perceptions about COVID and responses to protection measures, and the effects of COVID on education, particularly of girls, on employment, on food security, on perceptions of poverty and wellbeing, and the effects of war on mental health including gender differences with higher rates of anxiety among men and depression among women.

During the conference, Dr. Alula Pankhurst briefed the participants about the works of Young Lives and the forthcoming seventh round of research, and about the Child Research and Practice Forum which Young Lives

Ethiopia had been organizing monthly since 2010 for over 12 years in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs and UNICEF Ethiopia.



Research Summaries from CRPF presentations

Space for 'Learning through Play' in Ethiopian Primary Schools. A Look into the Situation of Selected Refugee and Host Community Schools

Ambissa Kenea, PhD and Abraha Asfaw PhD

Introduction

The study draws from PlayMatters Project formative study finding that adopted a positive deviance theoretical framework and a qualitative ethnographic design across four pre-primary and primary case study schools in Somali (in refugee camps and host communities) and Sidama (host communities) Regions. Given the positive deviance theory adopted to guide the study, criteria were developed to identify schools that have already integrated play-based approaches. Accordingly, an initial selection of case schools was made using a snowball sampling technique. Then, the selected schools were visited to finalize the site selection. Data were collected from 19 educators (14 females, 5 males), 61 school learners (29 girls, 32 boys), and 62 parents (38 females, 24 males) through video/photo-stimulated key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), as well as using classroom and free play/ recess observations. With a focus on a whole school approach the study covered guided-play activities, free play and recess both within and outside of classrooms. The research findings have helped identify meanings, practices, opportunities, and barriers of Learning through Play (LtP) for PlayMatters grounded in the realities of refugee and host communities' contexts.

Key Findings of Formative Research

Meaning of LtP

- Play was defined by the study participants in different ways. Many of them considered the meaning of play as happiness, joy, and amusement for learners.
- When asked about the significance of LtP for learners, educators had different views such as, "Play supports intellectual development; enriches thinking; makes learners happy; promotes physical development; enhances creativity; helps learners identify their own talents, strengths, and shortfalls; and promotes social and identity development."
- In general, the research identified that the educators understood the importance of LtP for learners.
- Parents and guardians did not encourage learners to play in schools, rather to focus on their curriculum, which will help them to the transition of adulthood stages.

Practices and examples of LtP

- ***As observed during the research, play-based learning was more commonly practiced by the educators in preschools than primary school.*** Educators showed significant efforts to make instructional and playful activities inclusive, though only in guided activities. Preschool educators have the capacity to engage learners in playful and joyful learning sessions: building blocks and use of flash cards. The primary educators prioritized content-focused teaching practices and not preparation of play-based teaching methods due to capacity limitations and misperceptions of LtP. However, as observed in the classrooms, primary educators used storytelling, singing and physical exercise-centred activities which were not related to the content of the lessons they provided in the classrooms.
- ***The school policies supported the practice of LtP; however, the educators indicated that preschools are more likely to integrate LtP in the lessons than primary schools as the focus of primary school is on the lesson content and use the time for full coverage of the daily lesson plans.*** The preschool curriculum and lesson plan integrate LtP as an integral element of learning. The school leadership at primary schools are inclined towards monitoring strictly from a supervisory standpoint instead of tailoring their support to align with LtP similar to the school leadership at preschools. Playful activities are determined by gender and age categories at school or community which is bounded by the process of socio-culturally constructed gendered play.

Opportunities and Barriers

- ***The findings show that the national education policy is supportive of LtP interventions in preschools and lower primary schools.*** In addition, existing cultural playful practices are a remarkable opportunity for educators to adapt them to the LtP intervention in the classroom and during free play at preschools and primary levels.
- The study indicated various barriers that can affect the effectiveness of LtP implementation. At the primary level, these include a lack of educators' capacity in playful activities and limited space available for LtP, weak leadership support for LtP,

large class sizes, negative parents' attitudes towards play-based learning, unsuitable infrastructure in the schools, hindering pedagogical belief and competence of teachers. Both preschool and primary levels highlighted limited budget and resources to implement LtP.



Policy and Programming Implications

The findings reveal the context and challenges as learning to deepen effective implementation of LtP. Though the theoretical ground (policy provisions and willingness of educators) is encouraging, the findings highlight a lack of practical strides in implementing quality LtP at primary schools. Here are some policy implications that emerge from the findings of the study:

Clearly Define LtP as a Method for Active Learning

- **Awareness creation and community mobilization are critical** - Work towards shifting the existing LtP perceptions through awareness-raising campaigns, information dissemination, and workshops on the importance of play for educators, learners, and Parents and Teacher Association (PTA), especially at the primary level. Community involvement in the planning and implementation of LtP is vital to get the acceptance of the intervention among parents and guardians when they understand the importance of LtP for children's holistic development and well-being.
- **Align LtP with the existing strategies:** Link the LtP strategies with the existing 'Active Learning Pedagogy' policy and strategies to be integrated and implemented by teachers in the lesson plans.

Strengthen Education Stakeholders' Capacity for LtP

- **Adapt cultural playful activities:** Provide capacity-building trainings for educators and stakeholders on LtP conceptualization, implementation, and adaption, including integrating different cultural playful activities and school context pedagogical options playing activities to enhance learners' participation in indigenous ways of learning acquisition.
- **Teachers Professional Development (TPD) training:** Provide continuous Teachers Professional Development (TPD) training on LtP with routine monitoring and support for educators. For the sake of ensuring sustainability, LtP should be integrated into the teacher education curriculum in colleges of teacher education for preschools and lower grades (Grades 1-4).
- **Create capacity to use locally available resources:** Encourage the educators' capacity to use locally available playgrounds and materials in the place where there are resource constraints to implement LtP at preschools and primary levels. This includes using free play as a beneficial learning experience for learners through an available natural environment. If budgeted, play materials should be purchased, stored properly, and used appropriately to fill the gaps of resource limitations.

Allocate Time and Resources for an Enabling and Equitable Environment

- **Create conducive learning spaces:** Ensure accountability and strong coordination of educators in the arrangement of a conducive classroom setting to implement LtP strategies and to manage the large class size.
- **Work on gender equality:** Involve girls as boys in various playful activities by minimizing the gender norms and barriers, creating a safe and inclusive classroom, and ensuring all girls can access the playful activities and support as boys in learning opportunities and environments regardless of their age and abilities.

Strengthen the National Evidence Base

- Further Research and implementation are needed: There is lack of literature on LtP in general and its implementation in particular in Ethiopia. Hence, donors, practitioners, and academics should conduct further studies to have a better understanding of LtP conceptions and practices in different contexts of Ethiopia and to get the attention of stakeholders to inform education/pedagogical policy, programmes, and practices.

Research Summaries from CRPF presentations

A Review of child sensitivity in social policies in Ethiopia

Jemal Mohammed Adem, PhD and Kaleab K. Haile, PhD

Introduction

Social policies address how nations respond to global, national and regional challenges associated with social, demographic and economic change. These policies are designed to meet the human needs for security, education, work, health and well-being and overcome the challenges caused by structural inequities – social, economic and gender-based.

Ethiopia has seen significant progress across development indicators at a much more accelerated rate than other countries in the region. The government is committed to increasing the country's recent economic growth trajectory. Simultaneously, the government has embarked on a range of socio-economic development programmes to achieve low-middle-income country status by 2025. Social protection has been at the centre of Ethiopia's development policy and has been instrumental in reducing poverty and increasing the resilience of the population.

However, despite the progress, the rate of economic growth has slowed slightly in recent years. The slow growth and the lack of public finance for children also affect the achievement of child-sensitive Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which has implications for approximately 50 percent of the population – 47.8 million youth – who are under the age of 19. The study provides a background of risk and vulnerabilities affecting children, adolescents and women in Ethiopia, and identifies the needs and gaps of social policies regarding child sensitivity.

Methodology

The study adopted an exploratory and primarily qualitative design to analyse the child sensitivity to social sector policies.

Key Findings

- **The education sector's** policies and strategies recognize children as rightsholders and account for their needs and perspectives more comprehensively. In terms of children's involvement in the policy process, the policies in the education sector are developed through a consultative process and address the needs of children. However, this does not translate well into programme and district implementation. While emphasis is placed on prioritizing equitable access to education, these priorities are not adequately reflected in the policies, as they do not clearly define the category, 'vulnerable groups of children', including children with disabilities, orphaned children and migrant children.
- **The health and nutrition sector's** policy development process is collaborative and incorporates the perspectives of children and caregivers. In terms of institutional arrangements, on paper, coordination mechanisms are mapped out. However, the policies are not entirely inclusive and do not adequately address the needs of disabled children, both in policy development and implementation. Further, the policies and strategies do not adequately respond to children's evolving risks and vulnerabilities and to the need for adaptation of support in the event of shocks.
- **The social protection sector's** programmes such as the flagship Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) have gradually improved in child sensitivity over recent years. However, in terms of policy development within the social protection sector, policies are relatively silent on the perspectives of children and adolescents and account for their voices indirectly (through evaluations and assessments). The social protection policy framework recognizes the high child and youth dependency ratios but places a disproportionately low emphasis on child poverty, multidimensional deprivations among children or the impact of household food and income insecurity on child-sensitive development indicators such as education.



- **The child protection sector** addresses the overall needs of children but does not adequately prioritize the various kinds of vulnerabilities and risks faced by migrant children, children with disabilities and those vulnerable to disaster risks. Further, there is a gap in addressing the gendered aspects of these risks. In terms of policy development, opportunities to engage community members, specifically rightsholders, are limited, mainly due to budgetary constraints. The National Child Policy (NCP) is the key policy for the coordination of children's rights, for which the former Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MoWCY) is responsible. However, MoWCY lacked adequate power, capacity or resources to ensure the integration of child protection in other sectors.
- **The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector** strategies are among the most child-sensitive. The strategies in the sector recognize the urgency in protecting children's rights, while also recognizing how gender impacts outcomes. In terms of the multisectoral approach, the strategy recognizes the multisectoral benefits of sanitation and also acknowledges that intersectoral collaboration with health, water, education and rural development sectors is required to achieve sanitation outcomes, and the strategy outlines mechanisms to achieve this. The sector maintains child-sensitive monitoring as a critical priority. However, consultations indicate that one of the critical issues regarding WASH is that there is no national database for WASH services. Consultations indicate that UNICEF is currently working on child-sensitive budgeting within the WASH sector.
- **The Disaster Risk Management (DRM) sector** strategies highlight the challenges faced by vulnerable groups, including children, recognizing that since these groups are the most vulnerable to the impact of hazards and related disasters, DRM activities need to consider their needs during implementation. In the policy development process, the extent of the inclusion of children's voices in policy programming is unclear. The policy mentions that DRM will be mainstreamed into every sectoral development plan and outlines the lead institutions and their roles. However, in implementation, emergency preparedness falls under the mandate of the national disaster and risk management committee and is not embedded across sectors.
- **In the culture and tourism sector** within the National Culture Policy, the involvement of key stakeholders, including children, in the development of the policy, is unclear. However, in terms of implementation, the roles are outlined. In terms of articulation, the policy mentions international and national standards for cultural services, as well as cultural cooperation to strengthen international and national partnerships. However, children are only referenced twice in the entire policy.

Key Recommendations

Education Sector

- In Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) policy - Recommend increased integration of WASH and child protection with mechanisms to ensure joint monitoring.
- National/subnational implementation strategies should explicitly engage with vulnerable groups, and funding be explicitly allocated.
- Complement strategies with a costed sector plan that outlines identifiable child-specific programmes, key activities, and costs associated source of financing.
- Consider leveraging integrated Management Information System (MIS) at the community level, building the trinity of Education, Health and Child Protection with robust monitoring of at-risk children.

Health & Nutrition Sector

- Strengthen the link between child protection - (MoWSA) and health (Ministry of Health) to ameliorate the risk of leaving vulnerable children behind.
- Improve accountability by coordination through a superstructure, i.e., a structure supervised by a higher authority with executive power.
- Policies must respond to the changing risks of children in bad circumstances (victims of conflict, and disasters). Localised implementation plans/strategies are needed to address these risks.
- Consider strengthening health-based interventions (adequate human resource capacity for Health Extension Workers (HEWs), to improve the handling of referred cases, and increase access to essential services for persons with disabilities and persons with special needs).



Social Protection Sector

- Expedite the recognition of MoWSA as the policy lead and coordinating agency for social protection; Capacitate MoWSA financially, with human and administrative resources.
- Capacity building for social protection must take place at all levels of governance.
- Develop a comprehensive, robust and child-sensitive social protection monitoring framework; Allocate financial, technological and human resources.
- Gradually scale interventions for PSNP once existing programmes achieve minimum required coverage and performance:
 - ✓ *Prioritise implementation of the interventions for pregnant women and children aged 0-2 years, before expanding coverage to children aged 0-5 years.*
 - ✓ *Cost the programme options and develop a government-led financing plan with necessary financial allocations to support the expansions.*



Child Protection Sector

- Strengthen the National Children's Policy as the foundation of the Child protection policy framework. As MoWSA begins to assume the role of the lead agency for securing children's rights, a comprehensive child policy will be instrumental.
- The policy must be complemented with a strong institutional and monitoring framework to ensure its implementation.
- Advocate, build awareness and strengthen capacity for integrating child protection, education and health to strengthen child protection at district levels.
- Reprioritise of the formalisation of the National Case Management System Framework for Child Protection - by building a network of social and case workers.

WASH Sector

- Mother and Baby WASH guideline implementation

identifies newborn corners in healthcare centres as a site to deliver WASH messaging. This initiative should be mainstreamed into the next Newborn Health Strategy.

- Increased coherence between education sector policies and WASH sector, to enable WASH sector to work with education to ensure access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (products and services) at schools. WASH sector needs to raise awareness and promote behaviour change for the use of WASH services.

Disaster Risk Management Sector

- Consider institutionalising rapid monitoring, evaluation, and response system for DRM. Develop an accountability framework with clear targets for monitoring the provision of emergency support, its timeliness, its adequacy, and drawing lessons through solid feedback loops.
- Ensure that DRM planning and programming, especially at the district level, include a multisectoral response (including health, education, WASH, and child protection).
- Explicitly highlight the role of social protection in the DRM and Response Framework as the primary instrument for disaster risk management.

Culture & Tourism Sector

- The culture policy must be adapted to respond to the goals outlined in the NCP:
 - ✓ *Constructing training centres where children can develop their talents and learn new skills in the fields of art, sport, science and technology;*
 - ✓ *Establishing child-friendly theatres, cinemas, libraries and cultural centres and strengthening existing ones;*
 - ✓ *Facilitating conditions for children to participate and exchange experiences on art at national and international forums.*
- The education and culture policies must be aligned.

Interested to Know about CRPF?

The Child Research and Practice Forum (CRPF) was established in 2010 to promote work on child research, policy and practice. CRPF makes use of monthly seminars, quarterly newsletters and annual publications as a means to achieve its objectives. The publications are also available at the Young Lives Ethiopia website. CRPF is organized by Young Lives with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs and UNICEF.

If you want to know more, please contact us via crpf.ethiopia@gmail.com