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# CHILD TO CHILD PROJECT SCALING UP INCLUSIVE PLAY-BASED LEARNING FOR SMOOTH TRANSITION FROM PRE-PRIMARY TO EARLY GRADES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL

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**Policy Brief #1**  
**20 September 2023**



# CHILD TO CHILD PROJECT

**SCALING UP INCLUSIVE PLAY-BASED LEARNING FOR SMOOTH  
TRANSITION FROM PRE-PRIMARY TO EARLY GRADES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL**



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## Summary

**Problem:** Children's exposure to child-centred (i.e. child-initiated and child-led) play is limited in pre-primary and early grades of primary schools due to teacher-centred approaches that saturate the early childhood education (ECE) centres. This situation limits children's play, hence affecting their learning including the acquisition of numeracy, literacy, social, emotional, and motor skills, as well as their transition from pre-primary to early grades of primary schools.

**Solution:** This Policy Brief provides a succinct overview of the Child-to-Child (CTC) model being piloted in Zomba and Chiradzulu districts in southern Malawi. The Brief advocates for child-initiated and child-led inclusive play in community-based childcare centres (CBCCs) and home-based learning centres (HBLCs) as an alternative and effective pedagogical approach to children's learning to promote a smooth transition from pre-primary to early grades of primary schools.

**Key Message 1:** Children learn better through play.

**Key Message 2:** Children play and learn better through peer-led games rather than adult-led games.

**Key Message 3:** Child-centred/led play smoothens children's transition from pre-primary to early grades of primary school.

**Key Message 4:** The CTC Model/Approach is scalable as most play games children engage in are already existing in their local communities.

**Policy Recommendation 1:** Integrate developmental-tailored child-led play in the daily activities of children both in CBCCs and HBLCs.

**Policy Recommendation 2:** Promote active participation of parents and guardians in play materials making in the CBCCs and HLBCs to enhance caregivers-parent-child relationships.

**Policy Recommendation 3:** Scale up the CTC Model including the HBLCs approach as a key strategy for parental and community involvement is supporting the early learning of children.

## Context

Children start acquiring basic skills in self-care, communication, socialization and mobility through free/informal play in their homes and neighbourhoods as critical stepping stones for the transition to pre-primary schools. However, children's engagement in child-led and/or child-initiated play diminishes as they enter into pre-primary schools which are predominantly teacher/caregiver-led. This limits children's creativity and autonomy to initiate and lead play, which are the essential levers for the development of numeracy, literacy, social, emotional, and motor skills in children.

Several organizations and agencies have embarked on various approaches to promote play-based learning. However, such initiatives have focused more on teacher/caregiver-guided play rather than child-led play. Thus, the CTC Model espouses the integration of play-based pedagogy in children's day-to-day activities to promote their transition from pre-primary to primary school. This is to address the current status of minimal child-initiated and child-led play-based activities for young children in pre-primary and early primary schools. Moreover, extant evidence suggests that although learning through play fosters children's increased readiness for primary school, its use remains limited. Thus, the CTC model aims to address this lacuna.

## Purpose of the Brief

The purpose of the policy brief is to promote the CTC approach as an alternative to teacher-directed play-based approaches to learning among children in pre-primary and early grades of primary school. The CTC approach is an education model about how children learn through peer interaction. The current play-based learning in pre-primary is academic-focused and teacher-centred despite emerging evidence demonstrating that child-led play-based learning enhances children's learning outcomes. Thus, this policy brief introduces and advocates the CTC model/pedagogy as an alternative to enacting child-initiated and child-led play learning pedagogy that allows children to relate with one another through play as they learn, and enhances children's discovery of knowledge in pre-primary school, hence promoting a smooth transition to early grades of primary school.

Specifically, the brief provides a succinct overview of the CTC approach as an alternative approach to promoting child-led and inclusive play-based learning for a smooth transition to early primary school. It also introduces the CTC project and highlights the progress of project implementation, preliminary results and recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to improve early childhood development and education (ECDE) service delivery for optimal child learning outcomes. The main targeted policymakers and practitioners for the policy brief include: The First Lady of the Republic of Malawi as the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Champion, Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare, Ministry of Education, the donor community, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, higher education institutions, key/national ECD stakeholders, and community leaders and community structures such as Community-Based Organizations, Area Development Committees, and Village Development Committees.

### **About the CTC Pilot Research Project**

In Malawi the CTC model is being piloted as a research project in Chiradzulu and Zomba, using a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) design with 12 participating CBCCs (3 intervention and 3 comparison CBCCs in each district). The project's overall objective is to use a CTC approach to improve the quality of early learning, including the transition of children between pre-primary and early grades of primary school. Specifically, the CTC model aims to:

- 1) Generate contextually relevant knowledge on strategies to scale up play-based learning through the CTC Model to improve the transition of children from pre-primary to early grades of primary school, including those with disabilities.
- 2) Strengthen the capacity of young facilitators, parents, teachers/caregivers, and policymakers by actively engaging them as co-creators and leaders in the CTC Model to improve the transition of children from pre-primary to early grades of primary school.
- 3) Mobilize policy uptake of home and community-based CTC approaches for improved school transition from pre-primary to early grades of primary school for children in marginalized communities.

**Intervention Approach:** The project intervention draws on the CTC approach to learning where children are empowered and given tools to use to facilitate play activities and games with their peers. Through this approach, trained children (called Young Facilitators) transfer knowledge to fellow children through play in the CBCCs and HBLCs. The HBLCs are the common play areas in the community where children usually gather and play in the afternoon. This approach provides an opportunity for children who are not attending CBCCs to benefit from knowledge and skills that are out of their reach but are essential for transitioning from pre-primary to early primary school.

### **Current Status of the CTC Pilot Research Project**

The following are the major project outputs that have been achieved thus far:

- 1) Project inception at national, district, and community levels.
- 2) Baseline survey and report.
- 3) Production of CTC Activity Pack.
- 4) Production of CTC Caregiver Guide/Manual.
- 5) Production of CTC Project Leaflet.
- 6) Production of CTC Project Policy Brief.
- 7) Capacity building for Trainers of Trainers.
- 8) Capacity building for caregivers.
- 9) Parent capacity development through (livelihood training): Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs).

### **Preliminary Results of the CTC Pilot Research Project**

**Result 1:** The CTC Approach demonstrates that children can teach one another things that parents/guardians and other adults cannot, for instance, things learnt in school such as words, numbers, names of things, how to write, and colours.

**Result 2:** The CTC project reveals that children learn more easily from their peers than from adults because they have the patience and the friendliness to teach each other as they identify with each other as people of a similar age cohort. Children face and interact freely with each other without the hierarchy of authority. Similarly, children are free to try and fail without any consequences when they play, making it easy and possible for them to learn through their mistakes, and make risk-taking a part of their learning process.

**Result 3:** The CTC project has reignited parents' strong willingness to support their children to engage in play and learning, including allowing them to be young facilitators. A strong commitment to making play materials for their children both in the communities/households and in the ECDE centres has been observed.

**Result 4:** The CTC project also shows that children themselves are enthusiastic about being part of the play circles, including leading their peers in play to support learning.

**Result 5:** The CTC project also reveals that parents and community members involved in the initiative have an increased understanding that play is educative, hence productive engagement for children in play is worth great attention and support.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** Integrate developmental-tailored play in the day-to-day activities of children both in CBCCs and HBLCs, allowing children to initiate and lead play.

**Recommendation 2:** Encourage active participation of parents in play materials making in CBCCs and HBLCs to enhance caregivers-parent-child relationships.

**Recommendation 3:** Scale up the HBLCs approach as a key strategy for parental and community involvement in supporting the early learning of children.

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