

LEARN Plus

Adapting, Piloting and Testing the Enhanced School Readiness Program in Tanzania

Gender Equality & Inclusion Assessment Summary Report



A girl playing volleyball at an enhanced SRP centre in Kisarawe District.



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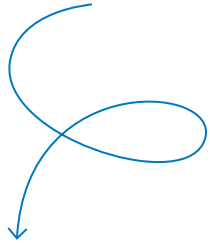


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Project Summary



The LEARN Plus project being implemented in Tanzania is part of a 3-country research project that aims to study the viability of a contextualized accelerated school readiness/pre-primary education (ASR/PPE) program as an alternative, interim, cost-effective program to support the expansion of quality, gender-responsive pre-primary education (PPE) in underserved communities. The project, led by Plan International with the Mother Child Education Foundation (ACEV) and the American Institute for Research (AIR), is collaborating with the governments of Cambodia, Laos, and Tanzania to tackle the challenges of access and equity in early childhood education (ECE). They are adapting, piloting, and testing an ASR/PPE program that aims to improve the school readiness of vulnerable 5–6-year-old children who have limited access to PPE and are about to enter Standard 1.

The ASR/PPE program is an 8–12-week intensive program designed to help vulnerable girls and boys who do not have access to ECE services prepare for standard 1 entry and success. Originally developed by ACEV to serve disadvantaged Turkish and Syrian refugee children, the program is holistic in nature and focuses on developing the physical, language, cognitive and socio-emotional skills of children. It involves 200–350 hours of active-learning, play-based indoor and outdoor activities. It incorporates gender-responsive and inclusive approaches, promotes healthy eating and good hygiene, as well as parental engagement. In Tanzania, it has been contextualized into a 12-week program by building on and enhancing the School Readiness Program (SRP) developed by the Government of Tanzania and EQUIP-Tanzania through the Tanzania Institute of Education. Launched in 2015, initially as a pilot, the SRP supported over 2,700 SRP centers across 7 regions. Findings of the SRP evaluation indicate that while the overall results show a clear pattern of children from SRP achieving substantially higher scores than those without access to ECE and even moderately higher scores than those from formal pre-school, there is more progress needed especially in the areas of emergent language and literacy and socio-emotional development as well as in community and parental involvement, active learning



Community Facilitator conducting a parent education session at an enhanced SRP centre in Kisarawe District.

through play, gender-responsive and inclusive approaches. Guided by these set of recommendations, LEARN Plus supported the enhancement of SRP by integrating the best practices from the ASR/PPE program from Laos and Turkey, in particular: strengthening the cognitive and socio-emotional domains, incorporating play-based, gender-responsive and inclusive approaches, promoting healthy eating and good hygiene practices and integrating a parent education component. As the enhancements were quite substantial, Plan International and partners called this contextualized program “enhanced SRP”.

About the Enhanced School Readiness Program (SRP)



WHO

- Delivered by trained Community Facilitators known as Community Teaching Assistants (CTAs) with support from standard 1 teachers and head teachers from mother schools and Ward Education Officers (WEOs)

WHEN

- Runs between 4 to 4 ½ hours a day, Mondays through Thursdays from September to December preceding the start of the new school year in January

WHERE

- Classes are held in any community spaces that are safe for use by children and with access to clean water and toilets.

HOW

- Uses CTA manuals, children's workbooks, story books and other teaching-learning materials.
- Follows a daily routine of play-based indoor and outdoor activities.
- Provides simple food and teaches handwashing, toothbrushing and proper respiratory etiquette.
- Includes a parent education component that aims to educate parents to support children's learning at home as well as on gender-responsive parenting and use of positive discipline at home.



In December 2021, a Gender Equality and Inclusion (GE&I) Assessment was conducted by the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania to explore the role gender power dynamics play in shaping parenting responsibilities, who has access to education and who progresses in the delivery of the SRP program in the overall educational trajectory of girls and boys in all their diversity. The primary objective of the GE&I Assessment was to provide evidence and recommendations for the project contextualization process regarding gender-responsiveness and inclusion in early childhood curriculum, pedagogies, and parental engagement. The contextualization process directly informed the enhanced SRP's gender-responsive and inclusive teaching/learning materials, teacher/CTA trainings and parental engagement sessions.

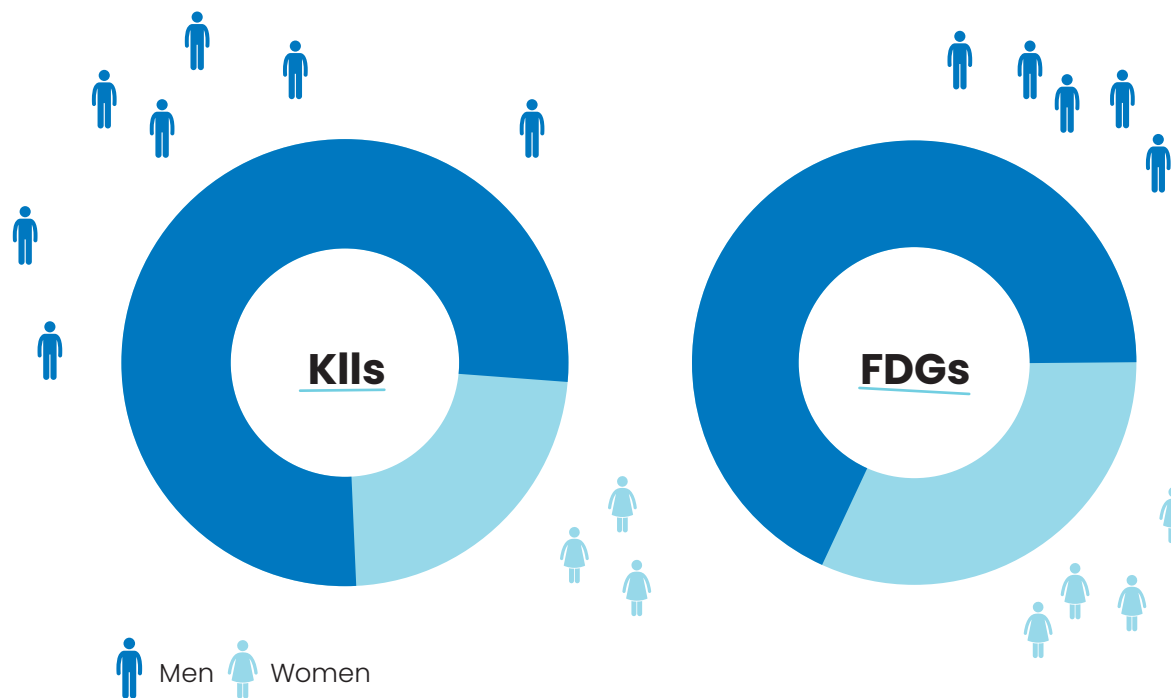


Parents and caregivers participating in a parent education session at an enhanced SRP centre in Kisarawe District.

Methodology



This GE&I Assessment was conducted in Kisarawe District, Pwani Region where the enhanced SRP is being implemented. The assessment used a combination of a literature review, key informant interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and classroom observation to collect data.



- **Desk review:** the research team undertook a review of all relevant documents in Tanzania that touch upon ECE, including national, regional, and international policy documents related to gender equality and inclusion. Furthermore, the research team reviewed SRP related documents such as training manuals, and children’s workbooks.
- **KIIs:** A total of **15 participants were selected to participate in KIIs, 11 women and 4 men.** The participants included officials from government ministries, the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), heads of schools, teachers and community leaders.
- **FGDs:** A total of **42 parents attended FGDs, 29 women and 13 men.** Parents who participated were those with children enrolled in the centers where the enhanced SRP took place.
- **Classroom observation:** A total of 4 enhanced SRP centres out of 10 during piloting phase were visited and 4 CTAs from participating centres were observed in at least one full-time classroom session. The focus of the classroom observation was on the physical setting, classroom arrangement, CTAs’ practices, instructional activities and gender-responsive teaching, and materials employed during teaching and learning.

Summary of Findings from the GE&I Assessment

GE&I Policy Environment in Tanzania

The findings reveal that there is a favourable legal and policy environment for promoting gender equality in Tanzania. An analysis of policy documents and guidelines reveal that much has been done by the Government of Tanzania to promote gender equality in policies, curriculum, and guidelines. For example, there are guidelines in place to ensure that curriculums and teaching and learning materials are gender-responsive. The PPE curriculum, syllabus and textbooks are informed by gender-responsive principles, such as considering gender stereotypes and how the roles of girls and boys are portrayed in materials.

However, specific guidelines to remind and provide classroom teachers with everyday hands-on gender-responsive pedagogical tips was missing. Dissonance between policy and practice at the community and class levels may be occurring due to various reasons including attitudes, lack

of gender equality knowledge and limited community sensitization. Thus, there is a need for stakeholders to advocate more for the enforcement of existing policies and guidelines to reach gender equality requirements in provision of social services, specifically education.



LEARN Plus MERL Officer welcoming and introducing Kisarawe District Council Education Officer to community members during a monitoring visit to enhanced SRP centers for school observation and participation in parenting sessions.



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During interviews, the CTAs acknowledged that they were trained on how to involve all children by considering their gender and learning needs in all classroom activities.



Gender-Responsive Practices in SRP Centres

Boys' and Girls' Participation in SRP

Findings from the assessment reveal that CTAs implemented gender-responsive pedagogies in teaching and learning activities. The CTAs treated both boys and girls fairly by providing them equal opportunities to all teaching and learning activities. It was observed during classroom learning sessions that CTAs interacted with both girls and boys

equally. For instance, CTAs called upon girls and boys equally to respond to questions, and during porridge time the responsibilities for boys and girls were distributed in a gender-neutral way, not based on traditional gender roles. CTAs gender sensitivity could be attributed to training on gender-responsive pedagogy prior to implementation of the enhanced SRP program. During interviews, the CTAs acknowledged that they were trained on how to involve all children by considering their gender and learning needs in all classroom activities.

During play time, it was observed that boys and girls were playing together except on a few occasions where they played separately. In addition, there was one centre where children were seated separately in the classroom. Separate groupings could be attributed to religious upbringing whereby males and females sit separately, which was reported in the KIIs with CTAs. There is a need for the enhanced SRP program to encourage CTAs to create activities and games for both girls and boys to play together, avoiding isolated activities.

Enrolment at SRP Centres

Girls are given less priority in education which can be seen in the disparity in enrolment between boys and girls in the SRP centres, where more boys were enrolled than girls. This puts girls at a disadvantage when they are denied access to early education due to girls' education being undervalued and parents considering it a predetermined loss to invest in girls' education.

From interviews with CTAs, it was noted that girls encounter challenges in accessing pre-primary and primary education, especially during agricultural seasons. School aged children are kept home by parents so they can assist in babysitting their younger peers and sometimes children are taken to farms with parents for farming activities. Children, particularly girls, were kept home to help with chores resulting in them being denied access to pre-primary education early due to involvement in caregiving and domestic chores.

In addition, it was found that most children with special needs were not enrolled in school. Parents had a perception that children with special needs could not attend school, as they will not receive special attention from the teachers. The findings also revealed that some parents



Community Teaching Assistant (CTA) leading an outdoor activity with children at an enhanced SRP centre in Kisarawe District.

undervalued education for children with disabilities, as such they were reluctant to enrol their children in SRP centres.

Availability, Accessibility and use of Teaching and Learning Materials

In all centres visited, it was observed that children, both girls and boys, were involved equally in all activities that took place in the classroom setting, such as writing, reading and numeracy activities. In addition,

teaching and learning materials provided to all eligible children to engage in the learning sessions. In the event where the number of materials were insufficient, children were encouraged to share and were observed sharing the materials in accomplishing different classroom tasks. Although, the findings indicated that there is still a need to strengthen CTAs knowledge and skills on strategies for identifying children with learning differences and providing them with appropriate interventions.

Parental Engagement

Findings from the GE&I Assessment indicated that fathers and mothers' engagement in the enhanced SRP centre activities and their children's pre-primary education varied. Mothers were more likely to be highly involved in their children's pre-primary education due to fathers considering their children's schooling affairs as issues related to mothers. Both parents reported that fathers were reluctant in engaging in children's schooling affairs.

It was further found through interviews and FDGs that fathers' reluctance can be attributed to limited awareness of the importance of their engagement in children's schooling affairs. In the event where parents' views were limited on the importance of education their involvement diminished.

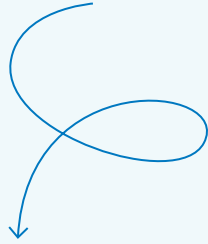
Some fathers, however, claimed that they were more engaged in economic activities while children's matters, including education issues, are left to the mother. CTAs added that most of the parents

engaging in school activities, such as attending meetings, following up on their children's school progress and learning, were left to mothers. Fathers claimed it was enough for them to be represented by their wives in the enhanced SRP related activities. Conversely, fathers were more likely to be highly involved in community-level meetings, construction of SRP centres' infrastructure, and family income generating duties. This could be attributed to defined community gender roles and responsibilities. The findings revealed that mothers and fathers' participation in the implementation of the SRP centres is a challenge and the parental education component of enhanced SRP needed to be strengthened by adapting a gender-responsive approach and promoting awareness on the importance of PPE.



Girls playing with a volleyball at an enhanced SRP centre in Kisarawe District.

Application of the findings from the GE&I Assessment



The enhanced SRP was able to leverage findings from the GE&I Assessment by informing the project contextualization process on gender-responsiveness and inclusion in early childhood curriculum, pedagogies, and parental engagement. The assessment's findings were shared with stakeholders, including members of the Technical Working Group (TWG), during a validation workshop to refine project materials, allowing for the findings to inform revisions to the enhanced SRP materials. The validation workshop was followed by the contextualization to refine project materials based on the findings from the GE&I Assessment and Implementation Research. Furthermore, the project refined the TWG members by including and working closely with the gender focal person from the Ministry of Education Science and Technology to ensure that the enhanced SRP materials

are aligned with existing gender-responsive national and pre-primary education guidelines and policies. These revisions included:

- **Incorporating specific guidelines and notes/tips in the CTAs manual** on inclusive education to remind teachers/CTAs on inclusive education/classrooms.
- **Encouraging CTAs to create activities and games** for boys and girls to play together and avoiding isolated activities.
- **Reviewing the enhanced SRP materials** to ensure they do not contain gender stereotypes and fully align with existing gender-responsive national and pre-primary education guidelines.
- **Reiterating gender-responsive pedagogy** tips fairly frequently to remind trainers and CTAs about gender-responsive practices.
- **Strengthening CTAs knowledge and skills** on strategies for identifying children with disabilities and providing them with appropriate intervention and support.
- **Refining pictures/illustrations and language** used in the enhanced SRP materials to ensure they consider GE&I.



A Community/hamlet leader
in Kisarawe District.



An Education Officer from Kisarawe
District Council participating in a
parenting education session.



Parents and caregivers
participating in a parent
education session in
Kisarawe District.

Based on the assessment findings, there was also a need for the parenting education component to be strengthened by adapting a gender-responsive approach, as some parents undervalued their children's education, particularly girls, and they were reluctant to enrol their children in SRP centres. Findings from the GE&I Assessment helped to frame elements of parent education programs, such as the profile of community facilitators, group activities, targeted participants to include both male and female parents/caregivers. The TWG refined the parent education sessions to align with national guidelines and standards (including 'A National Guide to Responsible Parenting in Tanzania: Care – Protect – Communicate, May 2022) and to ensure that the sessions promote equal participation and opportunity for both girls and boys, including children with disabilities, in all enhanced SRP activities. The parent education sessions are designed for both male and female parents/caregivers and it contributed to gender equality and inclusion through:

- **Mobilizing parents/caregivers** (both male and female caregivers) to support their children's education, particularly their participation in the enhanced SRP, transition and retention in primary schools.
- **Building the capacity of parents/caregivers** (both male and female caregivers) to support the holistic development of their children (girls, boys, including children with disabilities), especially those enrolled in the enhanced SRP.
- **Improving knowledge, attitudes and skills for parents/caregivers** (both male and female caregivers) in childcare areas such as protection, health, and learning.
- **Promoting community awareness for parent/caregivers** (both male and female caregivers) to value education for all children equally including girls, boys, and children with disabilities.
- **Encouraging male caregivers to become champions in the promotion of PPE and foster equal and joint parenting responsibilities.** The enhanced SRP use both male and female Community Facilitators who deliver parent education sessions to their fellow parent/caregivers in their respective communities. To ensure



Education Official from Kisarawe District Council speaking to parents and caregivers during a parent education session in Kisarawe District.

high participation and retention among male parents, male facilitators are usually selected by village leaders or elders who can rally both men and women behind the cause.

- **One of the parent education sessions covers topics on Gender Equality and Inclusion to ensure that parents/caregivers** (both male and female caregivers) have sufficient knowledge on GE&I and practice it in their daily life.

As part of raising community awareness, the LEARN Plus project engaged key influential stakeholders at the community level, including village and hamlet leaders. Community sensitization and mobilization meetings were conducted in all 29 intervention communities and covered roles and responsibilities of the community and parents/caregivers, including gender equality and inclusion, allocation and improving safe learning environment to all girls and boys, including children with disabilities, where the enhanced SRP centers will be implemented. The assessment findings recognized the critical role of the community leaders and the importance of engaging them to strengthen stakeholder engagement and ensure smooth implementation and sustainability of the project.



Girls and boys during break time at an enhanced SRP centre in Kisarawe District.



Children completing their assignments, as instructed by the enhanced SRP Centre CTA in Kisarawe District.



CTAs and children participating in class activities in an enhanced SRP centre in Kisarawe District.

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