



iACT: Little Ripples

What problem is the innovation addressing?

For Darfuri refugee communities in the 13 camps on the Chad-Sudan border, wellbeing, learning and development of young children is a primary concern. Evidence shows early childhood is a unique period for resolving early inequities and achieving inclusive social and economic development,

peace and sustainability. However, in Chad, early childhood education is critically under-resourced. Where there is provision, the quality can be poor, with limited training for teachers and no formal pedagogy – a problem experienced in many humanitarian emergencies worldwide.

Innovation overview

In 2013, in response to discussions with the refugee community in eastern Chad, iACT co-created Little Ripples, a community-led, trauma-informed, and play-based early childhood education programme that improves the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of children ages three to five. The programme strengthens capacity and employs members of the refugee community to lead - from programme design and teaching, to daily management and programme expansion. Little Ripples began as a school and soon shifted to a home-based programme to decrease structural costs and reduce the barriers of distance, safety, and time for children and teachers. Nutrition is highly valued

by families and so Little Ripples provides a meal to all attending children.

The Little Ripples refugee team works in partnership with NGOs, such as Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), for administrative and logistical needs. iACT secures funding and facilitates the program by providing curriculum and pedagogical resources, capacity-building and brokering partnerships.

Implementation coverage of ECE in Chad is weak nationally. Little Ripples stands above national provision in terms of quality and access. It aligns with national priorities for access to ECE in rural areas, school preparedness and for support for refugee education.

Scaling Approach: Refugee-led scaling

iACT is using a refugee-led scaling model in Chad to reach more children and advance refugee leadership. iACT defines “refugee-led scaling” as a process whereby members of a refugee community manage the resources, timelines, travel, training, and implementation of a programme within their community or to a different community.

three teacher training sessions. JRS provided operational support, while iACT financially and technically supported as well as documented the scaling journey.

In 2022, veteran Little Ripples refugee coordinators, education directors and teachers travelled to another camp to set up four new in-home centres (“Ponds”) and facilitate

Beyond Chad, Little Ripples’ refugee-led scaling pathway can be scaled via operational partnerships between iACT and NGOs, or via iACT providing ECEiE technical advisory services to governments and NGOs.

Impact and learning

- Evidence shows parental and community acceptance, and all Ponds are filled to capacity. Children continue to attend until entry into primary school. Parents/caregivers and other community members request additional Ponds.
- Little Ripples has been replicated and adapted for refugee communities in Tanzania, Cameroon and Greece. In total, iACT has launched 56 Ponds, provided 12,892 refugee children with quality ECE, and trained over 350 teachers and 50 cooks.

At the end of 2022,
the programme employs

113 teachers,
education directors and
cooking staff, and reaches

1260 children
through six school-based
classrooms and 22 Ponds,
across five camps in
eastern Chad.



“Little Ripples children are well-trained and do well when they arrive in primary school and stand out from other children. [It] prepares children well in terms of knowledge, early childhood development, [...] health and especially through games that make children happy”.

Community leader in one refugee camp

Scaling questions

- How can Little Ripples retain a high quality ECE pedagogy while fostering refugee leadership and autonomy?
- How can costs be sustainably covered for Ponds, especially costs of staff and food?
- What is the most appropriate and effective way for iACT – a US-based NGO – to engage with the Government of Chad to build national buy-in for the program, to influence ECE policy and create an advocacy channel for refugee staff and parents?
- How can iACT establish a profit and purpose consultancy offering – sharing the pedagogy and community-based model while generating revenue to sustain Ponds?

What next?

iACT is seeking funding for Little Ripples refugee team to scale the programme to three more camps in 2023 as well as to southern Chad. They will also collaboratively create systems for maintaining quality as the programme scales, including producing a “train-the-trainers” training and manual, to improve capacity strengthening and support for current and future refugee scaling team members. Plans also include supporting the National Curriculum Center of Chad in finalising and implementing a preschool curriculum, teacher training and national preschool programme.

