SCALING UP

PLACE–BASED STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

SPRING IMPACT

ABOUT SPRING IMPACT

Spring Impact is a non-profit that focuses purely on scaling social innovations. Spring Impact was born out of the frustration of seeing social organizations constantly reinventing the wheel and wasting scarce resources. Using a combination of successful and tested commercial and social principles, while drawing on extensive practical expertise, Spring Impact helps organizations identify, design and implement the right replication strategy and business model for scale.

For more information on Spring Impact's methodology, see our open-source Social Replication Toolkit which has assisted organizations to better understand and approach scale: http://toolkit.springimpact.org/

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What makes a village, town, or district a healthy and happy place to raise a young child? There is a widespread understanding in the field of early childhood development (ECD) that the entire community plays a transformative role in the early life of a child, even before they are born. Our qualitative research draws together key examples of place-based community approaches to strengthen and build community early childhood systems. Diving into these examples, we present cohesive definitions, lessons learned, and practical frameworks to guide practitioners, funders, policymakers, and others seeking to empower every child to reach his or her full potential.

ECD refers to the healthy physical, emotional, social and cognitive development that occurs in children from prenatal to age 8. We define a **place-based community approach for ECD** as a cross-sector effort that is focused on improving outcomes for all young children in a specific geographic area. A place-based community approach addresses the needs and problems of families and communities by building on strengths at the local level, starting from the caregivers to the relevant ECD systems around them, even to the natural environment. The geographic focus of such an approach can be a neighborhood, municipality, district, county, province, or other sub-national area.

> **PLACE-BASED APPROACHES TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS**
> - Shift the focus from projects and programs to place (for example a county, district, or city).
> - Ask the question: How can a variety of actors work together to make this a great place for a child to be born?
> - Aim to empower people living in that place to meet the developmental needs of next generations.

Several trends lay the groundwork for place-based community approaches to have widespread impact. First, it has been well established that healthy child development is inextricably connected to the family and the community environment. Acknowledging this gives rise to new strategies that emphasize prevention, early intervention, and the value of social networks. Second, the adoption of the Nurturing Care Framework calls for multi-sectoral action addressing the holistic wellbeing of the child. Third, complex challenges preventing young children from thriving can be better addressed by integrated approaches and systems, rather than fragmented services.

This report and accompanying systems framework on page 13 can be used by people working to support healthy ECD to articulate what happens in practice. It illustrates how place-based community approaches collaborate across sectors and at multiple systems levels, change structures to create enabling environments for nurturing care, and shift mindsets to support sustainable systems change.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, APPROACH AND METHODS

At Spring Impact, our focus is on helping social innovations scale their impact in a more strategic and sustainable way. We define scaling social impact as the process of closing the gap between the real and ideal conditions related to a social need or problem. There are many pathways to scale, including replication, which is the process of taking an organization, program, or a set of core principles to other geographic locations or leveraging others to do so. Since place-based community approaches are inherently unique to each geographic location, we set out to understand what makes them work well, and how their impact might be scaled up.

This research was guided by three research objectives developed alongside the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation:

- To develop a set of evidence-based criteria and a framework for setting up and scaling up place-based community ECD approaches, based on in-depth field visits in African contexts, international literature, and relevant examples from around the world.
- To set up a framework to help assess the readiness of ECD interventions to replicate.
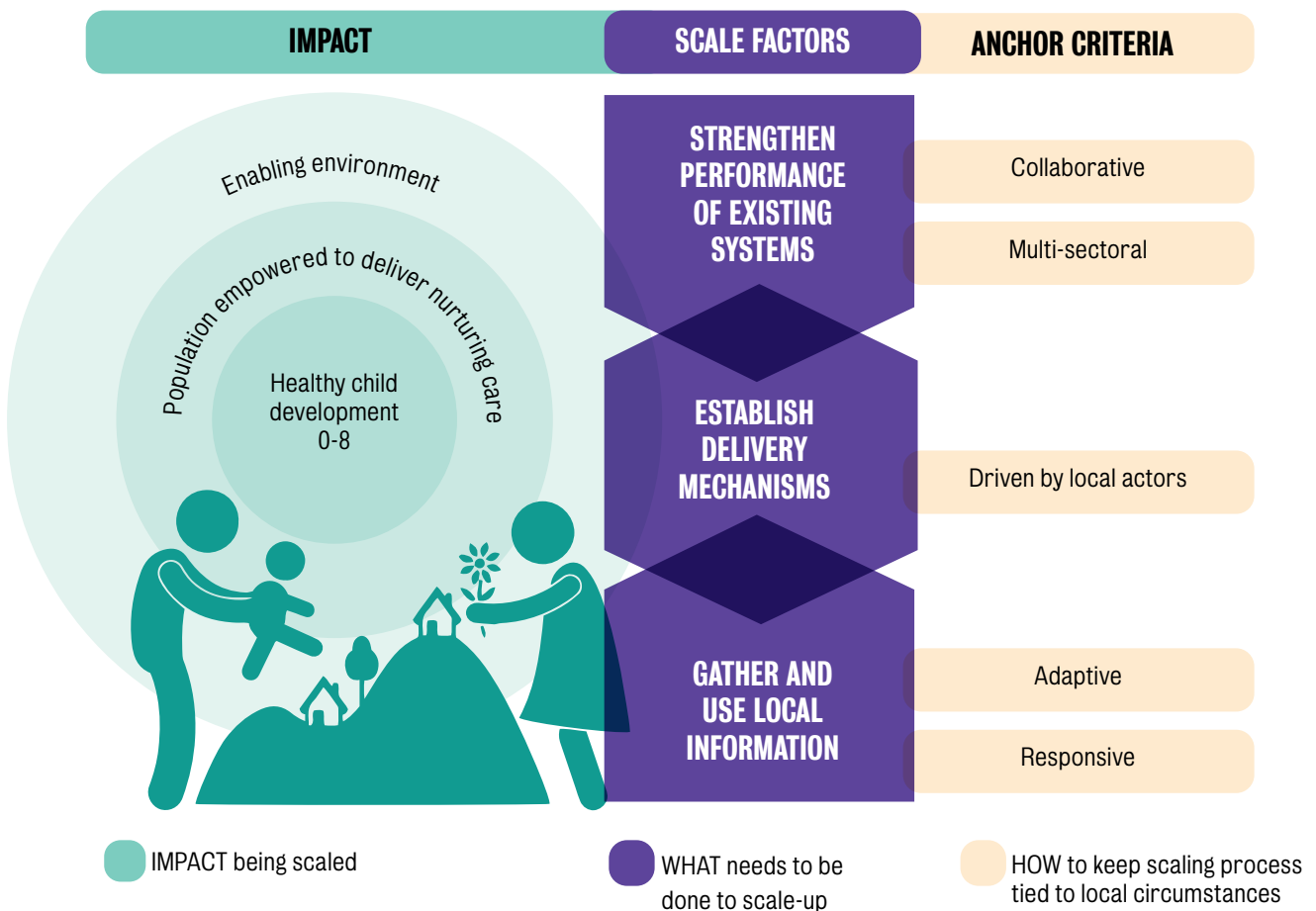- To catalyze and enable a movement for scaling up effective place-based models for ECD.

While the idea of cross-sectoral actors working together to address a single issue is not new, there is less published data and literature specifically on place-based and similar approaches to improving ECD that have successfully replicated from one place to another. With this in mind, this research focuses on the first and third objectives. Our methods included a literature review of existing international best practice, 15 remote interviews with practitioners and funders engaged in ECD in the Global South, and 3 field studies. Two of the field studies focused on ground-breaking ECD initiatives in Africa: Smart Start in Siaya County, Kenya and the Nurturing Care Partnership in Monapo District, Mozambique, while the third study examined the longer-running Urban95 Crezco con mi Barrio in Bogotá, Colombia.

IMPLEMENTING PLACE–BASED ECD: LESSONS LEARNED FROM KENYA, MOZAMBIQUE, AND COLOMBIA

Part 3 of this report features three in-depth case studies. From these examples, we gathered critical success factors, potential for further scaling up these place-based community approaches (community early childhood systems), and a set of key lessons, described in further detail in the body of the report.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- Embedding better support for healthy ECD into existing structures, roles, and systems can generate rapid social impact for children, starting with existing strengths and opportunities
- Committed leaders drive cooperative action and systems integration
- Explicitly connecting the development of young children to social and economic development is useful for building momentum and bringing a wide range of people on board
- Locally based actors are best positioned to drive healthy ECD outcomes for children

- Using local information and evidence is crucial to make strategic decisions that respond to the population's needs and aspirations
- Community ownership can drive organic growth and expansion of social impact by sparking unplanned local actions and support for nurturing care and ECD
- Strong relationships between a wide variety of people are crucial to success. Relationships that model positive reinforcement and mutually supportive learning practices boost impact
- Different entry points can be used to initiate place-based community approaches. The case studies include examples of how this has been done by government, NGO, and private sector stakeholders

IMPACT	SCALE FACTORS	ANCHOR CRITERIA
Enabling environment / Population empowered to deliver nurturing care / Healthy child development 0-8	**STRENGTHEN PERFORMANCE OF EXISTING SYSTEMS**	Collaborative / Multi-sectoral
	ESTABLISH DELIVERY MECHANISMS	Driven by local actors
	GATHER AND USE LOCAL INFORMATION	Adaptive / Responsive

IMPACT being scaled

WHAT needs to be done to scale-up

HOW to keep scaling process tied to local circumstances

FRAMEWORK FOR SCALING THE IMPACT OF PLACE–BASED COMMUNITY APPROACHES FOR ECD

As a result of synthesizing insights across our research, Part 4 of this report shares a framework for setting up and scaling place-based community approaches to strengthening community early childhood systems. It is comprised of the social impact that place-based community approaches seek, the actions needed to drive scale-up of this impact, and criteria that keep the scaling process tied to local contexts. The framework is illustrated in the diagram above.

One of the actions needed to drive scale-up is to establish delivery mechanisms driven by local actors to set collective empowerment for nurturing care into motion. Delivery mechanisms include:

- Shared vision imagining a better collective future for their children and communities
- Committed leaders who engage people in moving toward that vision
- Cooperative relationships that hold the initiative together
- Community ownership of actions to make their village or neighborhood a place where young children thrive
- Cultural change to embed support for nurturing care in local norms, values, and traditions.

These mechanisms drive expansion by enabling people engaged in place-based community ECD work to:

- Articulate the logic of the initiative, setting new ways of thinking into motion
- Share information, enabling responsive, adaptive support for nurturing care
- Generate demand, showing communities the value and potential benefits of accessing services and support
- Embed nurturing care into practice, creating sustainable long-term impact.

Some level of flexibility in scaling processes is important to nurture organic, unplanned forms of growth that spring from these mechanisms and enable the scaling process to leverage unanticipated strengths and opportunities. Section 4.2.2 (pg.42) articulates our observations of how these mechanisms operate in further detail.

PUTTING THE FRAMEWORK INTO PRACTICE

Acknowledging how place-based community approaches inherently vary from place to place, Section 5 offers guidelines for those interested in setting up and scaling up place-based community approach ECD initiatives based on the lessons learned from our research and the three scale factors detailed in the framework. Our intention is that this framework can be used when thinking about scaling in three different ways:

- **Improving** quality to produce greater benefits within the same location
- **Expanding** population reach of impact within the same location
- **Replicating** the impact of a place-based approach by adapting it in a new location

CONCLUSION

In highlighting place-based community approaches to strengthening community early childhood systems and three different case studies, the insights, frameworks, and tools presented here can lead to immediate action and engagement to start spreading the social impact of place-based community approaches for ECD. Opportunities for action include targeted workshops, collaborative discussions, research to develop tools for scale, and funding to further these approaches. We look forward to engaging with others around how these concepts can help more children, caregivers, and communities reach their full potential.