



***All In, All Learning!***  
**Longitudinal Evaluation**  
**Final Report - January 2024**



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office

**COMIC  
RELIEF**

# Contents

	Executive Summary	
<b>1.</b>	Introduction to AIAL	1
	About the AIAL programme	
	About the evaluation	
<b>2.</b>	Findings – Lasting Legacy	7
	Lasting legacy for children	
	Lasting legacy – systemic change	
	Lasting legacy – Organisational Strengthening	
<b>3.</b>	Findings – Learning	15
	Power of children supporting other children	
	Everyone playing their part	
	Reaching everyone – targeting the gaps	
	Organisational Strengthening	
<b>4.</b>	Findings – Programme Effectiveness	25
<b>5.</b>	Conclusion	35
<b>6.</b>	Recommendations	37
	<u><a href="#">AIAL case studies</a> (external linked resources)</u>	
	<u><a href="#">Annexes</a> (external linked resources)</u>	
	<b>I.</b> About the AIAL evaluation team	
	<b>II.</b> AIAL grants awarded	
	<b>III.</b> Evaluation sources	
	<b>IV.</b> Primary research protocols	
	<b>V.</b> Evaluation tools	
	<b>VI.</b> Digging Deep survey form	
	<b>VII.</b> AIAL revised Theory of Change	

---

Cover photo credit:

Uganda Society for Disabled Children 2022

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

## I. Partners

ACA	Able Child Africa
ADD	Action on Disability and Development
ADP	Actions for Development Programmes
AYDES	Association of Youth for Development in the Sahel
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
APPCO	African Partners for Child Poverty
CAVWOC	Centre for Alternatives for Victimised Women and Children
CCAP	Church of Central Africa Presbyterian
CEFORD	Community Empowerment for Rural Development
CST	Child Support Tanzania
CSU	Cheshire Services Uganda
CYECE	Centre for Youth Empowerment and Civic Education
DDIA	Deaf Development and Information Association
DDP	Disability and Development Partners
GENET	Girls' Empowerment Network
GMHD	Grassroots Movement for Health and Development
LABE	Literacy and Adult Basic Education
MECP	Madrassa Early Childhood Programme
RLP	Refugee Law Project
SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
SNEC	Syndicat National de l'Éducation et de la Culture
USDC	Uganda Society for Disabled Children
VSO	Voluntary Services Overseas
ZOCS	Zambia Open Community Schools

## II. Other

AIAL	All In, All Learning!
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CMC	Centre Management Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CR	Comic Relief

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations)
CwD	Children with Disabilities
DFID	Department for International Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HLC	Home-Learning Centre (ECD)
IE	Inclusive Education
IGA	Income-Generating Activity
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoE	Ministry of Education
MTR	Mid-Term Review
OPD	Organisations of Persons with Disabilities
OS	Organisational Strengthening
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RELI	Regional Education Learning Initiative in East Africa
RG	Reference Group
SMC	School Management Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
VfM	Value for Money



# Executive Summary

## About the *All In, All Learning!* Programme and Evaluation

The *All In, All Learning!* (AIAL) programme (2015-2024) aimed to improve educational opportunities for the poorest and most disadvantaged children, while building stronger and more inclusive education systems in sub-Saharan Africa (Comic Relief Evaluation ToR 2021).

The partnership between Comic Relief and FCDO covered two phases at a total projected cost of **£26,835,000** – 42% from Comic Relief.

- Phase 1 funded 26 partners in nine countries (73% in Tanzania and Malawi) across four areas (right).
- Phase 2 gave cost-extensions to six of them and funded seven new partners in Uganda to focus on the areas 1 and 2.

1. Helping children with disabilities get into, stay in and learn in mainstream schools
2. Providing and advocating for good quality early childhood education for disadvantaged children
3. Combatting sexual and other violence in schools to keep girls safe
4. Improving the quality of education for the most marginalised children

This longitudinal evaluation (2021-2024) aimed to assess AIAL performance and impact; and to identify learning and recommendations. The evaluation team<sup>1</sup> from Malawi, Uganda and the UK actively involved funded partners, Comic Relief and FCDO in a rich, participatory journey. They graded the quality of evidence for each project, triangulating data from the document review through peer learning sessions, polls, surveys, joint analysis, case studies and primary research visits. An evaluation Reference Group proactively shaped the approach, principles and content, as well as providing input on the changing context and its impact on projects and partners.

## Lasting Legacy

**140,394 marginalised children** (50% female) accessed school; **68,577** (64% female) improved learning outcomes; and **198,355** (50% female) experienced a safer, more inclusive environment<sup>2</sup>. Projects covered a continuum of work from infant stimulation through to secondary school; though more focused on ECD and primary in Phase 2. AIAL projects achieved lasting change in all planned **outcomes for children** (below). The programme had a strong focus on equity. Children with disabilities and other forms of marginalisation accessed ECD, and transitioned to – and stayed in – primary school.

---

<sup>1</sup> Elita Chandimba, Doreen Kwarimpa-Atim, Isabel Turner and Cathy James

<sup>2</sup> Comic Relief aggregated figures from partner reports – the same children may be counted across multiple outcomes and some partners did not disaggregate male and female at the start of AIAL.

Dropout rates declined at primary and secondary levels. Pregnant girls and young mothers re-enrolled in school. Pass rates in end of year exams improved and children attained better literacy and numeracy. Many projects created a more child-friendly, inclusive environment for marginalised children and significantly improved children's safety.



Putting children's voice and influence at the centre strengthened and sustained change – though partners and funders need to do this more. For example, participation improved attendance and performance in school and children's safety, as children became more confident, creative and better at problem-solving and reporting concerns.

Projects that left a lasting legacy embedded change **at a systemic level**. For example, communities passed byelaws on inclusive education which traditional leaders continue to enforce after projects ended. Strengthened local structures kept groups active and working together, such as School Management Committees, Parent Support Groups, Savings Associations, children's clubs and district level networks. Successful projects influenced policies, guidelines and budgets e.g. school capitation grants, district government financial support and monitoring, and national government provision.

Across both phases of AIAL, partner **organisations strengthened** their systems (especially financial management and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning - MEL), approaches and staff skills. The final years of the programme saw more connected work in these areas, linking to less visible areas like values, culture, leadership and relationships that will help organisations stay strong and relevant in the long-term. While a number of projects leveraged more resources and diversified income, financial sustainability proved to be a challenge still in the restrictive funding context.

## Learning

The evaluation found three overall success factors as critical for sustainable change:

- i) **Power of children supporting other children:** The most effective projects went beyond consulting with children to create space for them to voice their views, influence decisions, help peers, lobby government and become problem-solvers.
- ii) **Everyone playing their part:** Children can only do this safely though, if community, school and government also play their part from the start and throughout. Changing mindsets and deepening relationships fuel sustainability.

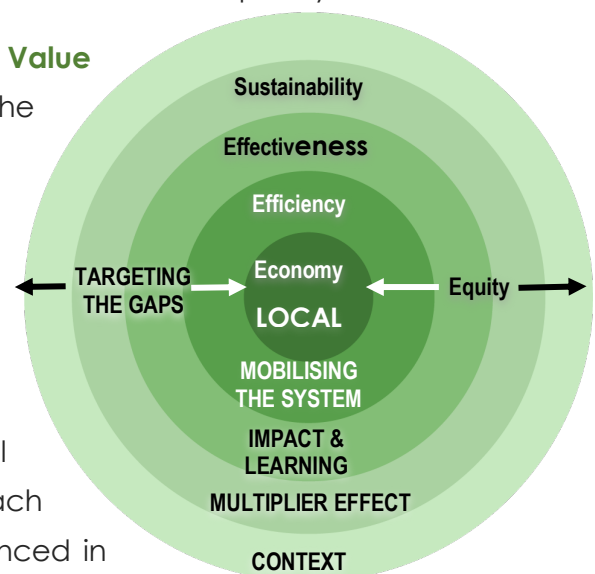
iii) **Reaching everyone - targeting the gaps:** AIAL projects helped children with multiple and complex issues, including those with disabilities, those affected by conflict and refugee children. They produced powerful evidence of how early intervention at age 0-3 can affect equity and enrolment. Effective work analyses children's unique issues, context and journey, tackling gender dynamics, holistic needs and key transitions.

**Organisational Strengthening (OS)** was most effective where it looked at the whole organisation and its journey. AIAL demonstrated the importance of the following: peer interaction; a learning, adaptive culture; empowering accompaniment; strategic funding; and planning for organisational sustainability from the start.

**AIAL networks** in Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda promoted collaboration, learning and inter-organisational relationships. They helped leverage resources and strengthened knowledge through learning studies. In Tanzania, the network increased partners' capacity in evidence-based advocacy and influenced national strategy. The evaluation showed that networks need a clear purpose, some form of accompaniment and sufficient resourcing. They also need to plan early on how to connect to existing networks and what can continue beyond funding.

Partners in Phase 2 rated **Comic Relief's grantmaking and management** as 4/5 or 5/5 in the AIAL evaluation survey. Programme set-up, shifting the power through the OS approach in Phase 2 and more direct funding created an enabling environment for partners – though the evaluation also highlighted more nuanced power issues e.g. from field to head office. Partners appreciated Comic Relief's flexibility, support for core costs and responsiveness to changing contexts. Core funding and devolved funding models were particularly effective, where relevant to capacity.

Overall the AIAL programme has offered good **Value for Money** because it effectively targeted the gaps, brought about systemic change, embedding work in community and government, and took holistic approaches that address children's overall well-being. The evaluation, using Comic Relief's reimagined **Value for Money** framework (right), demonstrates that true Value for Money lies not in individual examples of the '[four Es](#)' but in a holistic approach that catalyses ongoing social change – evidenced in AIAL projects' multiplier effect.



# Summary Recommendations

## I Set up for sustainability – take a systemic approach

Partner actions	Funder actions
<p>Right from the beginning and all the way through:</p> <p><b>Get everyone playing their part:</b> co-create work with children (according to their capacity) and duty-bearers.</p> <p><b>Build sustainability into your plans and budgets</b> in the initial design and ongoing planning, coordination and monitoring, taking more asset-based, partnership approaches to sustain change.</p>	<p><b>Prioritise systems change</b> in programme set-up, ToC processes, choice of partners and in relationship management.</p> <p><b>Maximise the set-up period</b> supporting partners to agree roles, responsibilities and relationships, and plan for sustainability.</p> <p><b>Turn MEL on its head</b> supporting partners to work out MEL with duty-bearers at community level (capturing roles, relationships, mindset change – the story from their perspective).</p>

## II Walk the talk – deepen practices

<p><b>'I see you':</b> work holistically with children, families and communities to involve those most at risk and tackle gender dynamics.</p> <p><b>Unleash the power of children supporting other children:</b> intentionally learn to create space for children's voice and influence at all levels, developing life skills and using participatory tools.</p> <p><b>Think beyond boundaries:</b> recognise the importance of early stimulation, transition points and understanding multiple needs.</p>	<p><b>Co-create learning networks:</b> offer accompaniment to agree purpose, links to other networks and resourcing – and to plan what happens after.</p> <p><b>Embed children's voice:</b> journey alongside partners to strengthen understanding of empowerment – investing programme resources into the process to make sure it happens.</p> <p><b>Links between programmes and funders:</b> consciously invest time and resources to enable cross-fertilisation of expertise and approaches, and to influence others.</p>
---	---

## III Grow resilient 'whole-hearted' organisations

<p><b>Nurture the heart of the 'Onion':</b> intentionally address and monitor the inner layers of identity etc. Negotiate (core) funding that aligns to your mission.</p> <p><b>Develop a culture of learning and adaptation:</b> make space for creative team reflection. Identify strategic peer learning and accompaniment opportunities.</p> <p><b>Plan for sustainability from the start:</b> develop roles, partnerships and approaches that mitigate dependence on project funding. Look at evidence of what works.</p>	<p><b>'I see you': understand the whole organisation and journey it is on</b> in grant making and relationship management. Continue the OS approach, using the Onion model from the start to delve into less visible areas.</p> <p><b>Find the right fit funding model:</b> move to more core and devolved funding. Continue direct funding but consider power dynamics and the importance of phases of funding for sustainability.</p> <p><b>Deepen and share learning for organisational sustainability:</b> draw together evidence about what really works. Support low-cost, sustainable approaches, linked to mission.</p>
--	---



# 1. Introduction to AIAL

## About the *All In, All Learning!* Programme 2015-2024

### I. What did the programme do?

'All In All Learning!' (AIAL) aimed to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for the poorest and most disadvantaged children in sub-Saharan Africa. It worked at all levels of society in order to build a stronger, more inclusive education system, so:

- marginalised children access and remain in inclusive, quality education
- parents, communities and civil society organisations are actively engaged in strengthening inclusive, quality education
- education systems and staff have the capacity to deliver safe and inclusive, quality education

FCDO and Comic Relief jointly funded the programme at a total cost of **£26,835,000**. Comic Relief contributed 42% and was responsible for grant making, management and supporting grantees to address organisational capacity gaps. AIAL worked in four areas of focus (see right) across two phases:

#### AIAL areas of work:

1. Helping children with disabilities get into, stay in and learn in mainstream schools
2. Providing and advocating for good quality early childhood education for disadvantaged children
3. Combatting sexual and other violence in schools to keep girls safe
4. Improving the quality of education for the most marginalised children



**26 partners in nine countries** carried out projects ranging in duration from two to five years across all four areas of work. 73% were in Tanzania and Malawi. Both countries set up AIAL networks for collective learning.



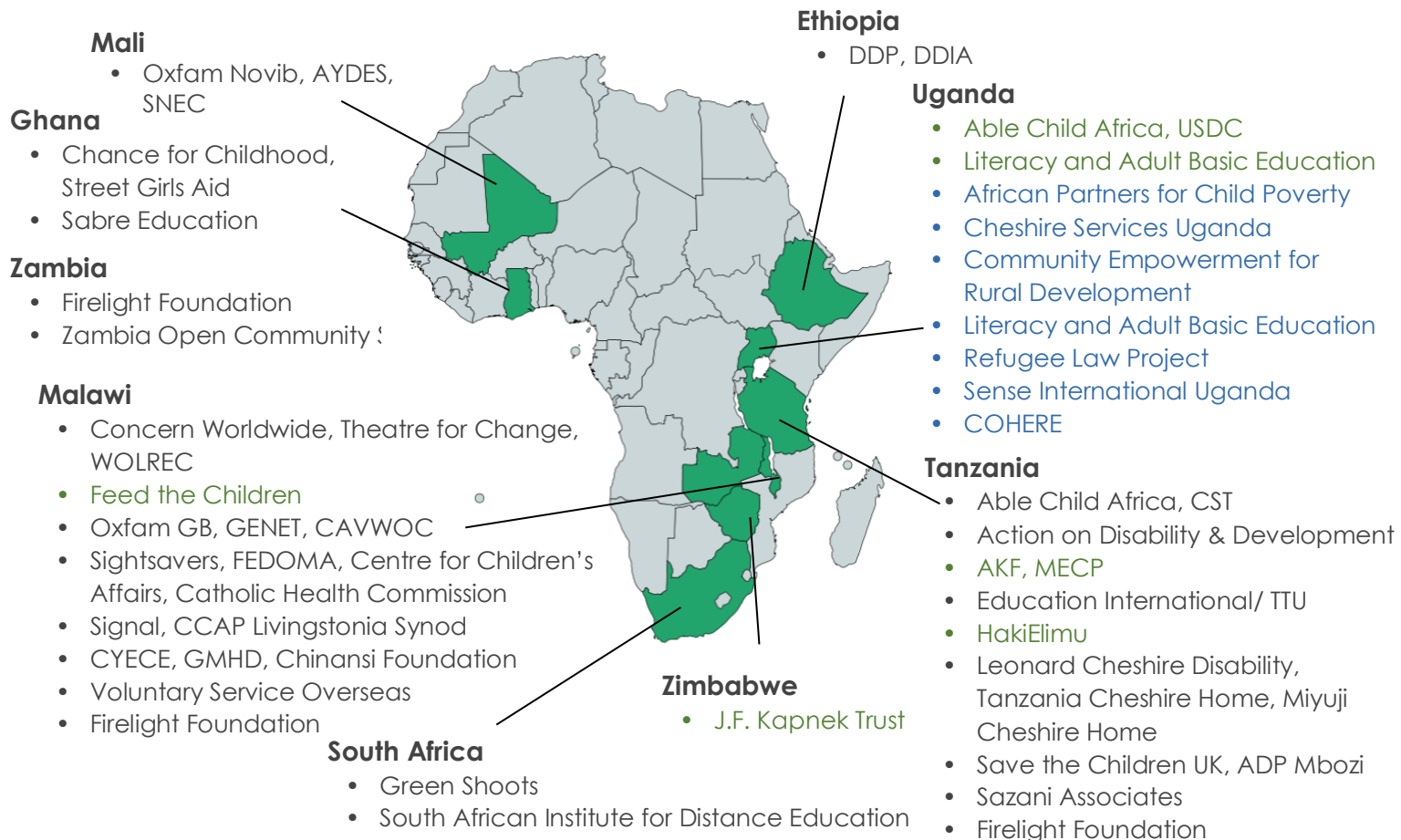
In Phase 2, **six Phase 1 partners** received cost extensions to consolidate, deepen, scale or learn from existing successful work.

**Seven new projects were funded** in Uganda. Comic Relief shifted to direct funding, narrowed the focus to the first two areas of work and expanded the programme's reach to remote areas. A new AIAL learning network formed in Uganda.

## II. Where did AIAL reach?

The programme made a total of 33 grants (annex 2). 58% of AIAL funded partners had received grants from Comic Relief before – some across multiple phases of their work, such as LBE and Able Child Africa with its partner USDC in Uganda. 13 partners were new to Comic Relief. The projects took place in nine countries (see below):

Phase 1 – 26 investments; Phase 2 - 6 extensions and 7 new investments



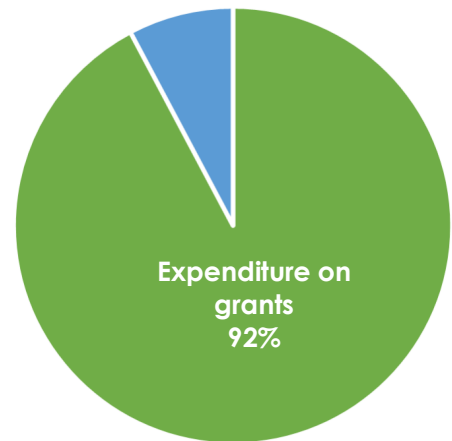
## III. What was Comic Relief's experience in education?

From 1996-2008, Comic Relief funded 173 projects with an education component under programmes for street-connected and working children, girls, disability, pastoralists, slum-dwellers, conflict-affected and those affected by HIV/AIDS.

In 2009, Comic Relief set up an education programme. It recruited a designated Education International Grants Programme Manager in 2011 and received the first tranche of FCDO match-funding. It awarded 20 grants to 18 partners across ten sub-Saharan Africa countries – including 'Special Initiatives' aiming to bring about systemic change.

#### IV. What did AIAL investment cover?

92% of total AIAL expenditure (£24,755,219) went on grants. This included Organisational Strengthening (OS) grants of up to £30,000 to six Phase 2 partners and £135,000 from Comic Relief for Cost-of-Living top ups in 2023. The rest of the expenditure went on the Humentum financial management capacity building support to Malawi partners in 2019, and on Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) and management costs.



#### V. How did the context change?

The AIAL programme period proved turbulent both in the external context and in terms of the civil society and funding context. The evaluation Reference Group (see p.5) helped the evaluation process to be cognisant of, and grounded in, the varying and changing contexts across countries and organisations. The report captures this in relevant sections and shows how Comic Relief supported partners through the challenges. Funded partners validated the following stand-out and inter-connected issues as the ones most affecting their work and organisations:



##### A. External context

**Government policy:** The AIAL programme proved relevant in a context where primary school gross enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa reached 98% but quality and inclusion lagged behind. Some international and national frameworks were in place, such as SDG4 (on inclusive, equitable quality education), but needed better budgeting and implementation in all project countries. Major gaps in policies, coordination and funding were notable in Early Childhood Development (ECD). For example, Tanzania's 2016-2021 National Inclusive Education Strategy included very little provision for ECD. However, the government was in the process of developing a new strategy, opening up opportunities for partners to influence its content.

**COVID-19** caused severe delays to project implementation and challenges across all countries and partners. Uganda was most affected as schools closed for almost two years and restrictions were more rigidly enforced. The impact in Uganda was further compounded by outbreaks of Ebola in October 2022, again causing some schools to close or finish early. This affected project activities and thus sustainability for some partners, as they had to compress work into a shorter period. However, COVID-19 also led to some partners making positive innovations (for example, see CSU case study p.24).

The **cost of living crisis**, worsened by the war in Ukraine, stretched budgets and reduced some activities, especially in Phase 2 of the programme. **Climate change impact** also affected all countries. For example, in Uganda, 2021-2022 was **“characterised by prolonged droughts and atrocious rains”** (LBE P2 final report); and in March 2023, Cyclone Freddy took a devastating toll on Malawi, affecting 14 districts (almost half the country) and leaving over one million people in need of urgent help.

## **B. Civil society and funding context**

**“In many of the partners...we found that there is a gap (and a frustration) between what they want to do and what they are funded to do.”** (2021 diagnostic report).

Tamarind Tree, the agency contracted by Comic Relief to facilitate the Phase 2 OS process, found that current funding models in the development sector push NGOs into models of operation, without time to reflect and choose. While wanting to work towards being advocates of inclusion and centres of excellence, funding and project mechanisms often lead them into service delivery and short-term focus. Many NGOs lack capacity in how to partner with government. Constraints in government capacity and budgets also force NGOs to plug the widening gaps in service provision.

Both Comic Relief and FCDO went through momentous changes during the AIAL programme. Comic Relief developed a new Social Change Strategy in 2018 and then a new OS strategy for Phase 2 in 2020. This aligned with its ‘Shifting the Power’<sup>1</sup> programme and an increase in direct funding to southern partners, instead of via a UK or International NGO. Comic Relief then went through a major restructure in 2022, including both redundancies and new roles to deliver a new strategy for 2023-2027. Section 4 analyses the impact of these changes on the partners and programme. In the short-term, the restructure caused temporary delays in responses to partners.

In 2020, what was then the Department for International Development merged with the Foreign Office to become the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). This brought together the aid budget and development policy with the global diplomatic network with the aim of driving a more integrated approach.

<sup>1</sup> The programme aims to support locally-led, southern-based CSOs to become more effective, sustainable and better represent local people's priorities.



## About the AIAL Evaluation

This longitudinal evaluation (from August 2021 to February 2024) aimed firstly to assess the programme's performance and impact. Secondly, it aimed to identify learning and recommendations for relevance, impact and sustainability; and about approaches and programme effectiveness.

The evaluation team of four (annex 1) included a cross-section of experience, age and nationality (from Malawi, Uganda and the UK). A Reference Group (RG) comprising partners, evaluators and Comic Relief staff strengthened the evaluation process, helping to shape its principles (see right), approach and outputs, as well as providing information on the context.

### I. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation team framed the process as a journey together through these stages:

#### Evaluation principles

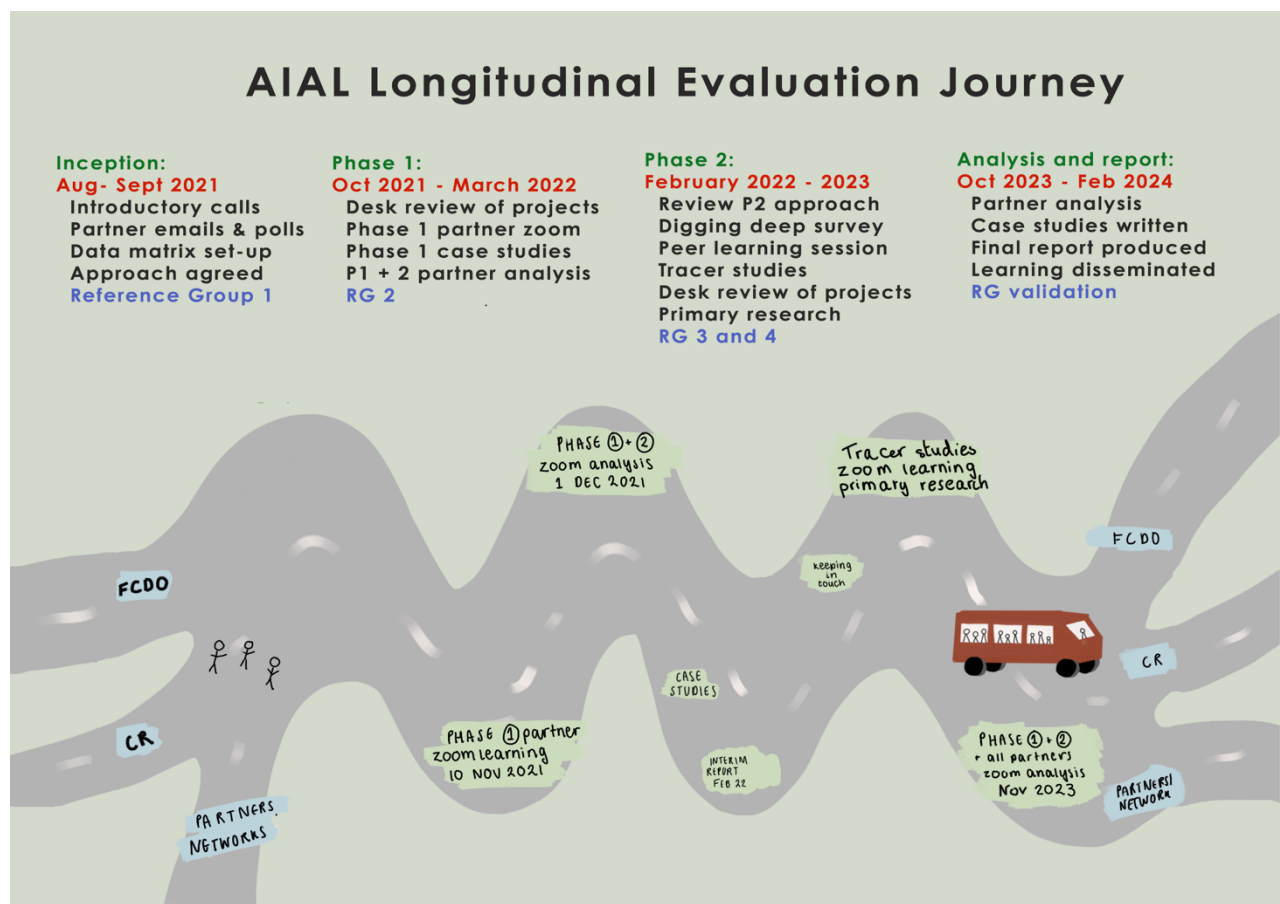
**Participation:** ownership by partners and funders; involving and feeding back to children

**Inclusion:** analysis of gender, disability and marginalisation across the evaluation process and data

**Appreciative inquiry:** asset-based approach that recognises and builds on people's strengths and skills

**Confidentiality and dignity:** transparency in information about the evaluation and consultation/ consent

**Feedback and referral:** mechanisms for feeding back learning and signposting to support where needed



Partners demonstrated great commitment, sharing experiences in peer learning sessions, polls, surveys, case study sessions and primary research visits. Phase 1 case study partners continued to engage in Phase 2, well beyond funding. Partners from both phases jointly analysed findings and shaped recommendations (annex 3 - sources).

The evaluation team assessed the quality of documented evidence for each project, compiling information in a data matrix and grading them as weak, medium or strong,



according to the rigour of partner reports and evaluations, and cross-checked with Comic Relief feedback (annex 3 – sources). The team deepened analysis and explored gaps in the data through the virtual sessions and the ‘digging deep’ survey. Ten case studies and primary research visits to two partners in Malawi, two in Tanzania and three in Uganda provided the opportunity to draw out children and community voices more and further triangulate evidence (annex 4 - research protocols).

The report draws on this range of sources in the data and analysis, so only specifies sources for quotations and highlights where attribution is an issue. All projects were rated strong or medium as they demonstrated corroborating evidence for their data.

## II. Interim evaluation report

In February 2022, at the end of Phase 1, the evaluation produced an interim report. Building on mid-term review findings, it recommended more attention to children’s empowerment and parents’ livelihoods. It also recommended that Comic Relief revise the AIAL Theory of Change (annex 7) to incorporate beliefs about **how** partners contribute to change and **how** Comic Relief creates an enabling environment.

The Interim Evaluation drew together findings in three overarching recommendations (right), particularly in relation to three themes:

- 1) how to mobilise local ownership and get everyone playing their part from the start;
- 2) how to reach less visible areas of organisational identity, culture, leadership and relationships;
- 3) how to create more space for children’s voice and influence.



The evaluation team shared two tools (annex 5) to help partners analyse progress in OS and children's participation – to supplement, not replace, their existing approaches.

### III. Evaluation report structure and limitations

This report examines AIAL's lasting legacy in relation to both projects and OS. It draws out the key success factors in projects and then assesses overall programme effectiveness, including the role of Comic Relief and exploring Value for Money. The final section outlines the conclusions and recommendations.

Delays, mainly because of COVID-19, led to some gaps in the data as five projects are still awaiting final evaluations and reports. AIAL learning networks have also not yet finished their research studies. However, other potential limitations to the evaluation were addressed by the sustained participation of partners, guidance from the Reference Group, close support from Comic Relief and the involvement of all key players, including FCDO, in validating the findings and developing recommendations.

## 2. Findings – Lasting Legacy

### Children Benefitting

Comic Relief's aggregated figures from partners' reports in by the end of November 2023 capture the total number of people supported and children benefitting:

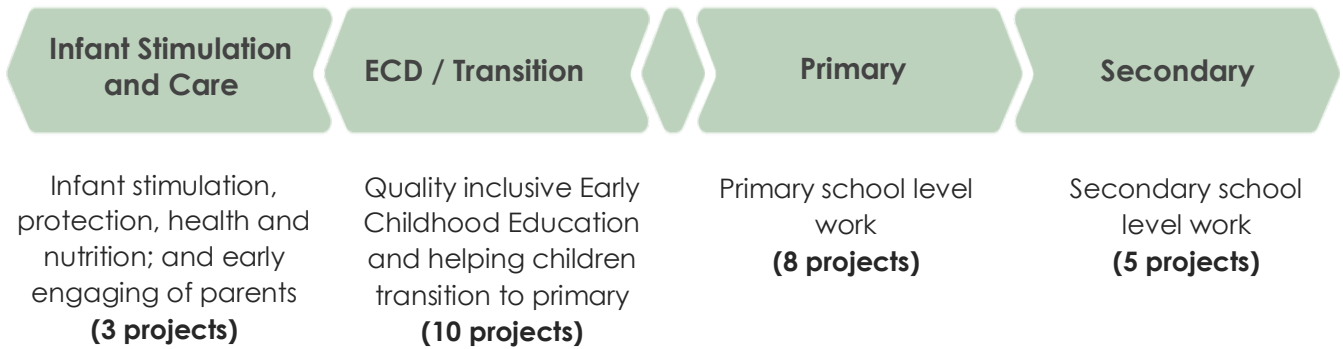
Indicator	Milestone Nov 2023	Total	Male	Female
<b>Total number of people supported in AIAL projects</b>	586,438	<b>841,667<sup>†</sup></b>	394,584	445,993
1.1 Number of marginalised children supported to be in school *	57,646	<b>140,394<sup>†</sup></b>	70,886	69,508
1.2 Number of marginalised children demonstrating improved learning outcomes and life skills *	57,400	<b>68,577<sup>†</sup></b>	24,781	43,764
1.3 Number of children who experience a safer and more inclusive learning environment *	104,831 <sup>o</sup>	<b>198,355<sup>†</sup></b>	91,849	98,876

<sup>†</sup> Totals of male and female show variance as not all partners disaggregated data by gender at the start of AIAL.

\* Figures show the number of children supported under each outcome – so the same children may be counted across multiple outcomes.

<sup>o</sup> Outcome 1.3 data collated to May 2022 as not a Phase 2 focus area, though many projects still worked on this as a relevant outcome.

The projects covered a continuum of work from infant stimulation and care through to secondary school – from age 0-18. Although not an explicit objective of the AIAL programme, these linkages proved to be important in creating opportunities for more sustained change across children's lifecycle. In Phase 1, projects covered this whole continuum, but in Phase 2, more projects focused on Early Childhood Development and transition to primary, and some focused at primary school level.



## Lasting Legacy – Changes for Children



AIAL projects achieved lasting change in all four of the planned outcomes (left).

**Children are in school:** Children with disabilities and marginalised in other ways accessed ECD and improved their transition to, enrolment and retention in primary school. Dropout rates in primary and lower secondary school declined. Pregnant girls and young mothers gained readmission to school.

**Children are learning:** Children accessed local materials, story books and other resources that impact learning. Pass rates in end of year exams improved. Projects enabled children at all levels of education and with multiple vulnerabilities to attain better literacy and numeracy. For example, literacy for marginalised girls increased from 39% at baseline to 82% at end-line in **Theatre for Change** and **WOLREC**'s work in Malawi (funded through **Concern Worldwide**). Children with disabilities in **Child Support Tanzania's** project (funded through **Able Child Africa**) improved their academic performance in ECD and primary school and transitioned to the next level.



**Children experience a safe and inclusive environment:** Many projects improved infrastructure, supported children with assistive devices and created a more child-centred, friendly environment for marginalised children. Projects also significantly improved children's safety, tackling corporal punishment, sexual and gender based violence and harmful practices – especially where children had a voice.

**Children are empowered:** Putting children's voice and influence at the centre reinforced other outcomes. Children learned life skills, took an active role in learning, assumed leadership roles, helped their peers and lobbied for change.

**GENET, CAVWOC and Oxfam's work in Malawi is a great example of the connection between children's empowerment and safety:**



**OXFAM**

### **CASE STUDY: GENET, CAVWOC, OXFAM MALAWI – COMBATING SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**



Against a backdrop of violence against girls, high teenage pregnancy and harmful practices, **19,667 girls and boys in remote hard-to-reach communities now feel safe in schools.** 87% of them say they are protected from sexual violence. They have reported 5,704 cases (3,726 by girls) to school authorities. Girls have become confident to speak out, are performing well in exams and teen mothers are returning to school. Child marriage and school dropout rates have gone down. Mothers' groups, fathers' groups, 'human rights defenders', teachers' and girls' clubs are now part of a sustained movement against sexual and gender-based violence, catalysed by OXFAM, GENET and CAVWOC. As a result of their actions, all the project communities have passed byelaws against harmful practices. And they are still taking action four years after the project has ended!

[See full case study here](#)



“ We are freer since this program came. In the past I couldn't speak up against someone who has been violent towards me. But now that we have the suggestion box, it means I can report anonymously. (18-year-old girl GENET - primary research)

A lot of us young people feel free to talk about issues through the suggestion boxes. The matrons and patrons open the box in their office to learn about what isn't working well in school. (18-year-old boy GENET - primary research)

## Other examples of interconnected lasting change

### **Problem-solving skills improve academic attainment – Sazani Associates Zanzibar**

secondary school students became more confident, creative and knowledgeable and better at problem-solving. They asked more questions, cooperated more and tracked their own progress. End-of-year pass rates rose to 79% average.

### **4,953 children are safer in school ; 1,980 advocate for change – HakiElimu Tanzania**

Children learn life skills that enable them to help each other, report violence and see it addressed. Child gender champions tackle issues such as child marriage.



“ We use the ‘Sauti Yangu’ box (My Voice) to share challenges and suggestions with the teachers... We shared about some students being cruel and violent, so bullying and violence in schools has gone down.

(HakiElimu girl - primary research)

### **Street-connected girls empowered – Chance for Childhood, Street Girls Aid Ghana**

Less social isolation and more participation in decisions that affect them resulted in increased confidence and resilience, improved communication, hygiene and health and helped children graduate from pre-school to primary school.

### **1,000 children with disabilities in mainstream schools – Leonard Cheshire Tanzania**

Child-to-child club participation increased primary school attendance, academic performance, confidence and inclusion in sports and reduced bullying and stigma.

## Systemic Change

AIAL projects in both phases achieved lasting outcomes among parents, communities and government officials – and in the relationships between them (right). Government staff, teachers, parents, caregivers, community leaders and members changed attitudes to inclusion and to the importance of ECD. They became more active in identifying out-of-school children, in monitoring attendance and in supporting marginalised children.



The evaluation found that projects that were most likely to leave a lasting legacy ensured interconnected change among children, parents/ caregivers, communities and government. However, they also had to ensure that those roles were embedded in the system, such as through strengthened structures for coordination like School Management Committees, Teacher-Parent Associations and district technical working groups. Improved budgets, plans, guidance, curricula and policies (including community byelaws) also embedded outcomes in the system.

**ADD's work with OPDs in Tanzania is a great example of a project directly impacting children with disabilities, while influencing wider changes in government budgeting and policy for inclusive education:**

### **CASE STUDY: ADD AND SHIVYAWATA TANZANIA – SYSTEMIC CHANGE FOR CHILDREN 'DOING WONDERS'**



1,441 children with disabilities in Tanzania enrolled in pre-primary school and 833 transitioned to primary school. ***"We can see our children do wonders in their performance."*** (parent). Thousands more children continue to benefit. ADD and its partner OPDs influenced the whole system – from family up to national government – to provide inclusive pre-primary education for children with disabilities. Thanks to their advocacy, alongside that of other development partners, the national budget for special needs has increased significantly over the five years. Government now requires all teacher training to cover inclusive education. It increased its training budget and committed to make parent-teacher guidelines more inclusive. Local level budgeting, partnerships and decision-making have changed: OPDs, district government, School Management Committees and parents work together to identify out-of-school children, plan and budget for inclusive education and improve school infrastructure. [See full case study here.](#)

### **Other examples of interconnected systemic change**

#### **7,049 African stories reach 262,178 learners to improve literacy – SAIDE, South Africa**

This ground-breaking digital initiative has enabled educators, children and illustrators to create stories in local languages that are published and shared on open licence.

#### **Attitude change embedded in systems – Signal, Livingstonia Synod Malawi**

The project created a long-term shift in attitudes to children with disabilities: 166 Parent Support Groups generate income for pre-schools; community byelaws protect special needs learners; and school improvement grants now budget for inclusion.

### **Inclusive exams and budget allocations – Child Support Tanzania, Able Child Africa**

Children with disabilities access pre-school and transition to primary, where they now may sit for modified exams. School capitation grants provide for inclusion and are tracked to ensure they reach the schools. District government officials plan and monitor implementation – a *“tremendous change in how they conduct their duties”* (CST evaluation).

### **First ECD network in Moyo district influences quality of provision – CEFORD Uganda**

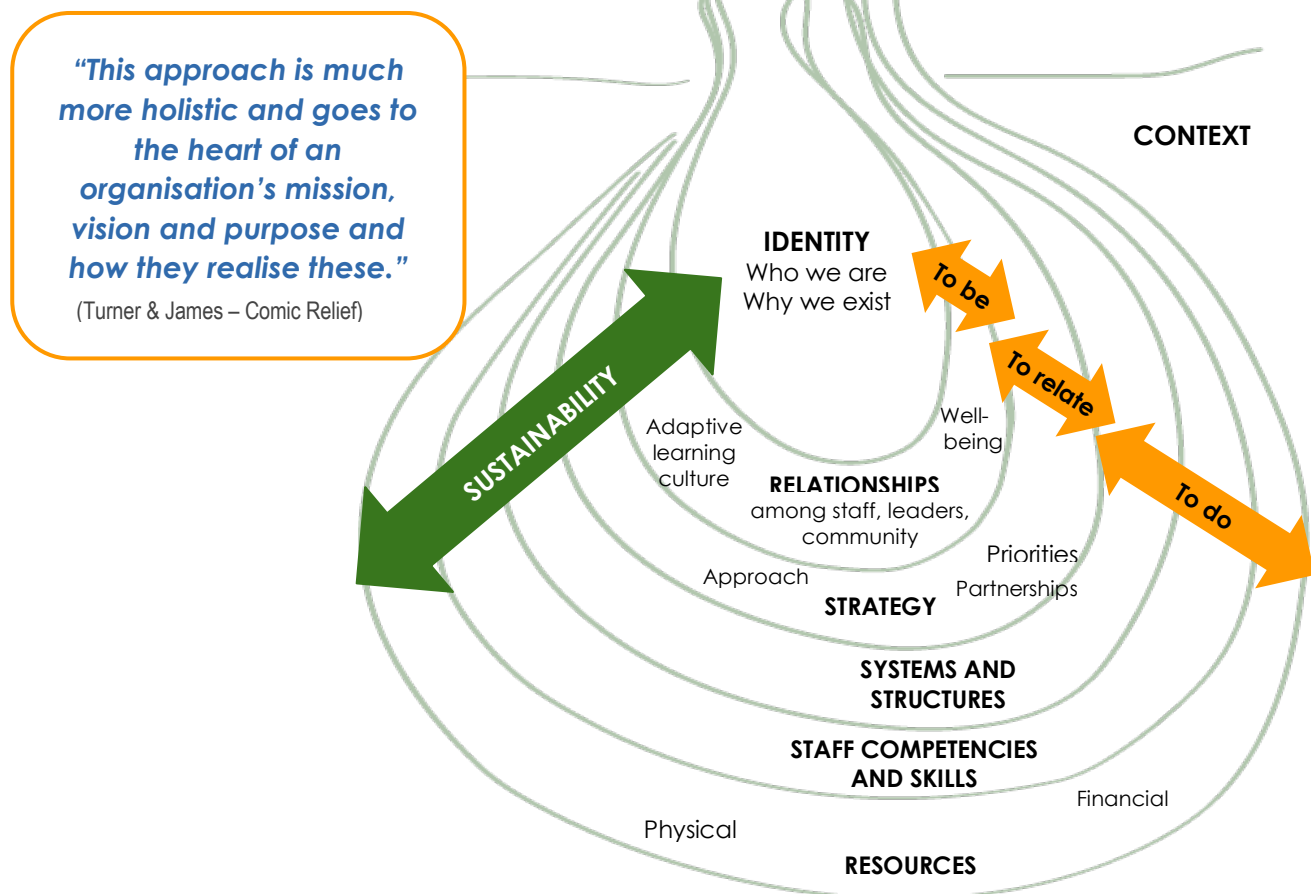
The project set up the network, bringing together ECD practitioners, government, parents and caregivers. District government uses the network to train and improve standards.

### **Government include ECD in the system and budget – Aga Khan Foundation, MECP**

80 communities in remote areas of Tanzania have quality ECD through innovative community-based Madrasa satellite pre-schools. Government is providing financial and technical support to them, showing recognition of their importance.

## **Organisational Change**

This evaluation uses and adapts the Onion model of OS (INTRAC) to assess outcomes in partners, aligned to Comic Relief’s shift to a well-evidenced, holistic, organisational approach, captured in their 2020 strategy for investing in OS.



The model highlights that OS work needs to address less visible levels in the heart of the 'Onion,' the **'to be'** aspects of an organisation, such as identity, values, mission, vision and leadership, as well as **'to relate'** – the culture and relationships that hold them together. Addressing the inner layers ensures that an organisation is consciously managing its identity even as it carries out projects, helping avoid mission drift and keeping staff motivated as they link their shared identity to what they do.

The evaluation team used the 'Onion' with partners in peer learning, case study and analysis sessions to help them to evaluate their own progress. They also shared guidelines with partners which they could adapt and use themselves during and beyond the project (annex 5 - tools).

### Changes in the outer layers

The interim evaluation found that most changes in Phase 1 took place in **1) partner systems** – particularly MEL and financial management; in **2) approaches** – improved advocacy and inclusive education work; and in **3) financial sustainability** – diversifying and leveraging more funding. Only five partners reported changes in the inner layers: three in relationships with communities and two in leadership/ governance.

A separate OS evaluation, commissioned by Comic Relief, is due in 2024. It used a similar but less visual 'Organisational Levels of Complexity model' (EASUN Tanzania) to assess changes. Its initial findings (Galvanising Africa June 2023) showed similar results to this evaluation: 70-80% of partners still focused on improving systems, resourcing and staff skills.

### Changes in the inner layers

Partners increasingly addressed inner layers of the 'Onion' in the last year of the programme and linked work they were doing at outer levels to those inner aspects – at least partly due to evaluation discussions (see OS learning p23). Some examples of effective and lasting organisational changes include:

#### ***"We are working on the inner part of the Onion."* – APPCO Uganda**

Since the start of the project, APPCO has grown in capacity to handle more complex and larger funding. It has strengthened systems and its resourcing, securing further funding. But it has also improved relationships and coordination in the team, developing peer-to-peer support mechanisms, instead of relying only on supervision.

#### **Organisations of Persons with Disabilities are confident and effective – ADD Tanzania**

After ADD tackled different levels of OS: 'to be', 'to relate', and 'to do', OPDs are ***"confident about their identity, have systems and deliver their work well."*** (staff case study session). ADD is helping people with disabilities into all levels of leadership and action.



## Cultural transformation from service-delivery to refugee-owned – **COHERE Uganda**

*“Over the [OS] process, we have changed: we now have a board led by refugees, informing our policies and approach; we have more staff who are refugees. I’ve changed my thinking as an individual too – every time we make a decision, we ask: is this something they can own? Is this being driven by the community?”* (peer learning)

## Redefining relationships, leadership and culture – **USDC Uganda**

Direct OS support has not only helped USDC improve financial management systems, but also rethink where they are, were and intend to be, including reflection on their relationships with parent support groups – *“we had to leave our titles”* (peer learning).

**Cheshire Services Uganda has successfully worked across different layers of the Onion to link who they are to the work that they do. This will help them manage their identity consciously, avoiding mission drift and contributing to long-term resilience and effective, responsive and relevant programming:**

### Cheshire Services Uganda

#### CASE STUDY: CHESHIRE SERVICES UGANDA – MULTI-LAYERED ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

- CSU has learned ways to listen to and learn from children, living out their core value of valuing the individual. It has captured children's voices in its final grant report and plans to integrate their feedback from baseline to completion.
- CSU has adapted and innovated during challenging times.
- CSU is working towards its identity as *“an advocate for inclusion”* (Tamarind diagnostic 2021).
- The governance team meets more often and takes a greater role in oversight.
- Staff capacity has improved in financial management, quality assurance, gender and social inclusion and joint decision-making, *“fostering collaboration, communication and long-term application of skills”* (CSU final evaluation).
- CSU has reviewed, updated and applied policies in safeguarding, Human Resources, financial management and procurement.

[See full case study here.](#)



#### CHILDREN'S INFLUENCE ON CHESHIRE SERVICES UGANDA

Listening to the children has helped us understand what approaches work.

Listening to children has highlighted the barriers they face that need addressing.

Children are now at the centre of what we do - their feedback can help us design new projects and pick out priority areas.

(CSU staff)



### 3. Findings – Learning

#### Power of Children Supporting Other Children

The importance of child participation, relevant to their evolving capacities, is well evidenced and a human right. Yet few partners demonstrated significant levels of experience in how to go beyond consulting with children to creating space for them to voice their views, influence decisions and become problem-solvers who can deal with new issues too.

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

(UNICEF, adapted from CRC)

**APPCO is a great example of an organisation committed to creating space for children to voice their views, influence decisions and become problem-solvers:**

#### CASE STUDY: APPCO UGANDA – CHILDREN AT THE CENTRE



*“When the children speak for themselves, it is more impactful and far-reaching in assessing what is necessary for them to have better educational outcomes.”* (APPCO staff - peer learning session). APPCO works with very young children and their families who are affected by conflict, close to the border of South Sudan – especially those with disabilities and trauma. It places children at the heart of its organisation, approach and advocacy. APPCO engages the children through play-based learning and sport. It actively draws out their perceptions and issues through activities like drawing their journey of life. Children speak out in advocacy events about the barriers they face and what needs to change. By working across levels and boundaries, APPCO gets the whole system playing its part, helping parents, communities, ECD committees, CSOs and local government take up their responsibilities. This, combined with children's voice, helps vulnerable children transition safely from infancy to ECD to primary.

[See full case study here](#)



**I was like a seed before I started school; now I am like a seed that has germinated.**

**I feel included and safe at school – by my teachers and friends; at home by my parents; and at church, by the church leaders.**

(Children at APPCO - primary research and peer learning)

## Children's participation scale

In AIAL evaluation surveys, partners highlighted that they wanted to learn how to bring in and amplify marginalised children's voices and enable them to analyse progress and advocate on their own and others' behalf. The evaluation team introduced the scale (annex 5) where children work together to draw their own image of progress and then use it to track voice and influence; inclusion in education; and safety from harm. The team used the tool in primary research visits. A number of partners also adapted it to use in their projects e.g. with young children and those with disabilities. **APPCO** was one of these (photo above) and shared their learning: **"When the children explain their drawings, it helps them think critically and increases our understanding of how the children view themselves and helps us understand their level and thinking."** (peer learning)

## Child-to-child approach creates change agents

A number of AIAL partners took a child-to-child approach where older children learn to support younger children and, in the process, become change agents themselves. **LABE Uganda** had a grant specifically to deepen their approach, making it central to their ECD work. Below, their young facilitators assess the changes in their own lives:

**I see myself as a role model who supports other children in the community**

**My skills and knowledge resulted in children joining Primary 1.**  
(LABE young facilitators aged 14-15)

*In stage one (now) I was the only child in the community - I didn't know what to do and was not safe*

*After the trainings for a year I was given practical and local skills to teach children at our H.C.*

*I see at my side and see models who support other children in the community.*

*I was a young learner at Adak H.C.*

*I was identified as a young facilitator at Adak H.C.*

*I was trained and I started teaching children at H.C.*

*My skills of teaching children increased and I became a perfect J.F.*

*Through my different skills and experiences I have increased the number of children at H.C.*

*My skills and knowledge resulted to children joining Primary 1.*

Peers supported children with disabilities in getting food, moving around, going to the toilet and getting to school (e.g. **Sense International Uganda** and **USDC**). Project evaluations endorsed this child-to-child approach as an important factor, **"the heart of success"** (USDC MTR), contributing to sustainability of the work.

## Creating space for voices

Children's clubs, councils and other fora proved an important mechanism, which actively helped children develop the knowledge, life skills and confidence they need to take part effectively in decisions, report cases of violence, strengthen relationships

with peers (including those with disabilities), solve problems and take up leadership roles. Some partners effectively amplified their voices to advocate at national level. **Refugee Law Project**, for example, linked children to national level discussions in Children's Parliament, an official platform to raise issues that affect them.

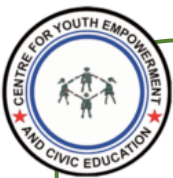
Reporting boxes in schools also proved to be a simple but effective way for children to share concerns anonymously – especially about safety. They worked best where they linked to official structures like School Management Committees.

## Everyone Playing their Part

Lasting legacy becomes a reality in projects that get everyone at all levels playing their part from the beginning.



**This case study shows how partners activated the whole system at community level so the work is still going over two years after funding has ended:**



### CASE STUDY: CYECE, GMHD AND CHINANSI MALAWI COMMUNITIES OF TRUST KEEP THE WORK GOING



Home visits by school and community members in Salima district, Central Malawi, have embedded a monitoring system that is less about policing and more about relationships of trust. Building that rapport has levelled power hierarchies and helped parents and children change attitudes to their school enrolment. 5,725 children with disabilities, street-connected children, orphans and girls are now in school and doing well. **“Our monitoring system didn't just aim at collecting data but at supporting the children”**. Teachers keep attendance registers updated. Back-to-School committees use smart-phones to capture data and pass it on to district authorities. A District Technical Advisory Committee links government officials with NGOs and another committee for community leaders links them to school and community structures, and to teachers. [See full case study here](#)



“ I was a school dropout but they [the school committee] brought me back. I started learning about my rights, which is why I am at this [final] stage now.

(Form 2 secondary school girl - primary research CYECE)

I dropped out because of violence at home... What really helped was the community committee came to my house to speak to my parents.

(15-year-old girl - primary research CYECE)

Learning from projects highlights three key ways to getting everyone playing their part:

### I. **Activating and sustaining structures at all levels:**

Children cannot influence effectively without change in people's attitudes to them and space for their voices to be heard and acted on. In a context where the cost-of-living crisis is constraining community time and resources, government and civil society need to take up their responsibilities too. It is vital to identify all the key players in the system in the earliest stages of design and involve them in activities and dialogues that help them understand the importance of inclusive education. Project evaluations and primary research visits highlighted some of the challenges in paying incentives once the project has finished. Everyone needs to agree transparently from the beginning about the costs and how to sustain them – not in an exit plan at the end of the project. A good example of this is HakiElimu's Friends of Education community movement. HakiElimu plans and budgets for its volunteer costs at project inception. Volunteers are also motivated through the strong links to government which recognises their role. Another effective strategy is Village Savings and Loans groups, which have helped contribute to ECD costs, for example with **LABE**.

### II. **Investing in long-term links and relationships:**

Projects with a lasting legacy went beyond partnership to create strong relationships of trust. The case study below shows how **HakiElimu** did this in multiple ways, enabling them to contribute to far-ranging systemic change:

#### **CASE STUDY: HAKIELIMU TANZANIA – LINKING AND LEARNING FOR LASTING LEGACY**



HakiElimu has forged connections across society to promote learning, amplify voices in advocacy and sustain community initiatives. As a result, girls are staying in school and learning; and child protection has improved across 99 schools in 17 districts. HakiElimu's **Friends of Education** movement of over 45,000 community members links children's voices with parents, school authorities, district government and national policy. HakiElimu has created "**a culture of shared learning and collaboration in advocacy**", (HakiElimu final evaluation) hosting the AIAL Tanzania network, working with strategic CSOs and producing a study on ECD in Tanzania, as well as published research on '**The Education We Want**'. Joining all these voices enabled them to influence the National Inclusive Education Strategy, a review of the Education and Training policy, the adoption of a re-admission policy for teen mothers and guidelines on how to set up child protection and gender desks in schools. So the whole systems works better to include and protect children with disabilities and girls.

[See full case study here](#) – it was multi-donor funded so only partly attributable to AIAL

The AIAL portfolio includes other notable examples of these deep relationships. **Zambia Open Community Schools** developed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education in its project – but its long-term positive relationship *“supports ongoing engagement beyond the grant.”* (ZOCs evaluation). Members of Parliament became ambassadors for Community schools, pushing for budget allocation from the Constituency Development Fund. **Refugee Law Project's** teacher training built understanding and empathy of the refugees' journey that changed attitudes and interaction between teachers and students.

### III. Embedding in the system:

Projects that built the capacity of communities, teachers, and government officials were more likely to leave a lasting legacy if they embedded roles in policies, structures and budgeting.

**HakiElimu Tanzania** not only contributed to ensuring the national inclusive education policy covered ECD fully for the first time and advocated for its implementation, but they also built the capacity of communities to monitor it.

**CYECE Malawi** rooted their work in the system through byelaws, a committee for community

leaders and one to bring together district government and NGOs. It also influenced local government to abolish exam fees for marginalised children. 100% of **Oxfam Malawi, GENET and CAVWOC** project communities developed byelaws and continue to enforce them four years after the project end: *“We as chiefs are in the forefront taking cases forward.”* (project final report).

**Tanzania Teachers Union with Education International** developed a competency profile for training pre-primary teachers as well as other key players.

*“The project shifted attitudes and understanding of teachers to early learning.”* (staff case study session)

But they also went beyond training to influence government to introduce a diploma for early childhood teaching and colleges to use their materials.

## Reaching Everyone – Targeting the Gaps

Projects in the AIAL programme have reached deep into layers of vulnerability. They supported children with multiple and complex issues and situation, reaching children otherwise overlooked. They have given attention to the one among the many. They have learned the importance of working with children in the context of their family and community relationships, as well as their life journey from infancy to adolescence. **The following case study from Refugee Law**

**Project Uganda** highlights one example of how projects have done this effectively:





## CASE STUDY: REFUGEE LAW PROJECT UGANDA – TACKLING DISPLACEMENT AND DISABILITY

**Targeting the gaps:** Over 500 refugee children with disabilities have enrolled in school. Retention rates are high as schools have become more positive and vigilant towards identifying and supporting children with special needs. The voices of refugee children are now being heard in more spaces, including national dialogues (photo below). This project has looked at the unique needs of refugee children with disabilities and their caregivers in two locations with different contexts and dynamics. It shows the critical need to begin with each child's home circumstances and understand why they end up hidden and missing out on their education:

*“Children with disabilities are often backstopped from accessing school, stemming from low expectations for success placed on such children and the fear and shame that comes with having a child with disabilities.”* (RLP staff – case study interview)

[See full case study here](#)



### I. Layers of lived reality:

AIAL projects reached children in remote areas, those affected by conflict, those with disabilities, those left out because of age and gender – and those that have unique experiences combining multiple layers of vulnerability. **Sense International**, **Leonard Cheshire Disability**, **DDIA** and **Sightsavers** targeted those with complex and multiple disabilities. Sightsavers won an award from the Ministry of Education for ‘Leave No Child Behind’. **LABE** reached children in remote, rural, post-conflict villages in northern Uganda and integrated children with disabilities, including those with complex needs. Projects evidenced the importance of follow-through for the ‘one’ as well as the cohort, training teachers to track progress through Individualised Education Plans and family action plans, such as **ADD**, **Child Support Tanzania** (Able Child Africa partner), **APPCO** and **Sense International** Uganda.

## II. Tackling gender dynamics

Projects that have taken an intentional approach to involving men and boys with deeper analysis of their roles and influence are more likely to sustain the work. Male caregivers play a key role in decision making which can positively or negatively impact girls' and boys' lives and education. Male caregivers can also play a positive role in promoting and modelling gender equality. This is important as gender 'socialisation' starts from birth; and children form gender biases (e.g. about roles and intelligence) as early as age six, often based on their interactions with adults. Projects that only looked at gender in terms of numbers benefitting, ended up working with mostly female parents/caregivers. Evidence shows that they need focused strategies to engage men, such as these examples:



**Save the Children's** work with **Mbozi Tanzania** found that male caregivers are more likely to engage with older children than those aged 0-3, so they needed a targeted approach to tackling deeper aspects of male patriarchy.

The project evaluation concluded that additional attention to power dynamics and household decision-making is likely to support sustained changes. The project reduced inter-partner violence and promoted listening, talking and encouraging and sharing household chores.



**HakiElimu Tanzania** ran a campaign addressing barriers to girls' education. It influenced government's re-entry to school policy for teen mothers. It positively altered community beliefs and practices towards girls' education. HakiElimu also researched effective ways to change social norms and behaviour around violence against girls in school. Their Champions' clubs created space for dialogue and to amplify voices against child marriages, teen pregnancies and harmful practices. Boys and girls learned to make reusable sanitary pads. The boys now see themselves as **“defenders of their sisters”** (Primary research).

**“ Boys have been trained to understand our challenges and how to work through them, so they now give us better support.**

(Girl, HakiElimu - primary research)

**GENET and CAVWOC Malawi** (Oxfam partners) ran positive masculinity initiatives, working with fathers' groups and male champions to change men's attitudes and behaviours in relation to girls' education and equal rights.

### III. A lifecycle, holistic approach

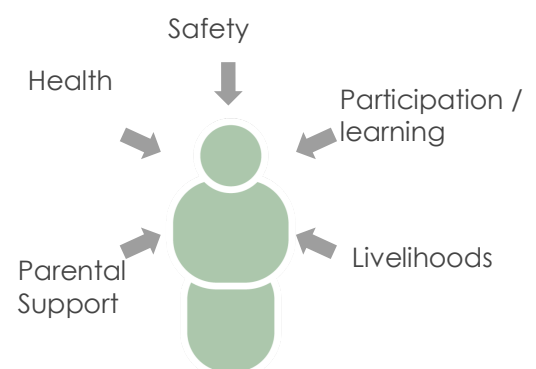
Projects produced powerful evidence of how early intervention in a child's life at age 0-3 can affect equity and enrolment, even in ECD. Successful projects gave attention to the transition across key periods of a child's life and education. **JF Kapnek** put pressure on government to carry out mobile registration and issue birth certificates, making it possible for families to access government schemes and support. **ADP Mbozi** in Tanzania (Save the Children partner) addressed issues from birth that contribute to school dropout and poor learning outcomes at primary school. They track children's milestones for each phase of life and work across a continuum from 0-8 years old.

Aligned to the 'Nurturing Care Framework', but relevant across other age-groups, effective projects addressed children's overall wellbeing, including health, nutrition, responsive caregivers, safety and learning. A number of projects provided psychosocial support to children experiencing trauma (e.g. as refugees or in conflict situations), including **APPCO**, **CEFORD** and **Refugee Law Project** in Uganda.

*"A lasting legacy of RLP and across all partners is the empowerment of caregivers/families and the mental/psychosocial impact on them in reduced stigma, shame, the hope that their children can become something by joining school."*  
(RLP staff)

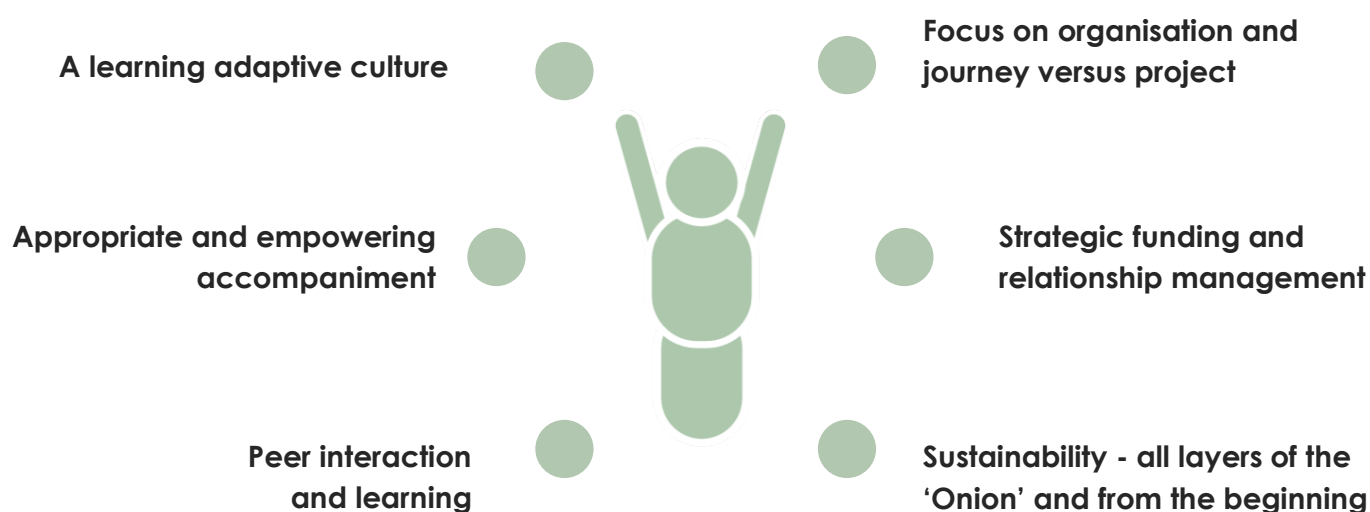
Projects in Phase 2 have also more intentionally supported parents' livelihoods. For example, **USDC** linked Parent Support Groups to Village Savings and Loans activities, kitchen gardens and government grants – the groups even registered as CBOs and ran their own income generating activities. **COHERE** Uganda linked parents and caregivers to other projects with a livelihoods focus.

While the Nurturing Care Framework is helpful in thinking about holistic approaches, the gap is that it does not include children's empowerment. However, this evaluation has shown the importance of incorporating empowerment in the approach, even from a young age. AIAL partners using the children's participation scale expressed surprise at children's capacity to articulate their ambitions, to reflect on changes that have taken place in their lives and to explain some of the barriers and challenges that they face. Adults often make assumptions about these children, but projects that intentionally made space for children's voices, all gained information to inform planning and programming.



## Organisational Strengthening Learning

In Phase 1, partners developed OS plans, funded within the overall budget. Partners in Malawi also benefitted from the Humentum financial management capacity support to manage specific risks in that context. In Phase 2, Comic Relief changed its approach: southern African OS consultants, Tamarind Tree, helped six partners assess and address OS needs through top-up grants of up to £30,000. Section 4 (p.32) analyses the effectiveness of these approaches at programme level. At project level, the evaluation highlighted six interconnected factors (below) that are important for effective and ongoing Organisational Strengthening that addresses all layers of the 'Onion'.



**A learning, adaptive culture:** Organisations that make time for reflection are able to respond more effectively to internal and external change, and apply their learning accordingly. For example, **LABE** runs internal reflection meetings and has constantly adapted and evolved its approach. Its experience also evidences the power of both formal and informal **peer interaction**, linking up with **USDC** and others to share expertise. **DDP** partners in Ethiopia and India also benefitted from South-to-South exchanges. Partners fed back positively on the impact of AIAL network meetings (see section 4 p25) and evaluation peer learning sessions too. For example, a number of partners commented that using the Onion model in the evaluation had helped them take their OS deeper.

*“We noticed that we had improved in the more external and obvious aspects; however, we had many gaps in the inner aspects. The guide [‘Onion’ model] helped us have our own conversation internally without external support and we found this very useful to us as an organisation.” (APPCO director - case study session)*

**CSU is a great example of an organisation using its learning to adapt its approach and achieve lasting impact with children:**



## CASE STUDY: CHESHIRE SERVICES UGANDA (2) – ADAPTIVE LEARNING CREATES MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE

In 2020, no government provision for early years existed in Amolatar district in Northern Uganda. Now, 73% of schools have ECD sections that actively include children with disabilities. CSU have grown in their capacity to learn, collaborate and adapt their approach, creating a momentum for change. This project worked directly with 300 children with disabilities and their parents/ caregivers and communities. When COVID-19 led to schools closing, CSU set up homebased learning centres instead, learning from AIAL partner, LABE.



After schools opened, they also worked with 19 mainstream government schools. 20 more non-project schools replicated the approach. [See full case study here](#)

**Appropriate and empowering accompaniment:** In Phase 1, some local partners benefitted from effective accompaniment by intermediaries, for example through the capacity building approaches of ADD Tanzania and Firelight Foundation. Phase 2 partners have been uniformly positive about the OS process and the impact that it has had on them in helping them self-assess their organisations and address gaps.

The challenge of tackling inner layers of the Onion, despite the effectiveness of the Phase 2 OS approach, highlights the importance of **focusing on the organisation and journey, rather than the project**. Partners still are often (sometimes unconsciously) bound by the project funding model and pre-conditioning to focus on aspects that strengthen project delivery. Good quality **strategic funding and relationship management** is therefore also vital to help partners do this (see p31).

***“An organisation needs to know its mission and vision, and stick to it even when all types of ‘funding options’ are floated around. Avoid mission drift at all cost!”***

(OS evaluation findings 2023)

The OS evaluation (Galvanising Africa 2023) highlighted partners' concerns about **organisational sustainability** as their top priority; yet something they found very hard to achieve. Partners are trying different approaches, e.g. developing resource mobilisation strategies or setting up organisational income generating activities – but often without real evidence about what works. Working on sustainability needs to be thought through from the start and integrated in every level of the 'Onion' – not just not just tackled at the outer layer in relation to financial and physical resources.



## 4. Findings – Programme Effectiveness

This section examines the AIAL big picture: the achievements and learning about the AIAL networks, Comic Relief's grantmaking and management and Value for Money. Comic Relief supported AIAL in the following ways:

### Comic Relief outputs agreed with FCDO

1. Grantmaking and management supports grantees to deliver their planned activities and outcomes
2. Support enables grantees to address organisational capacity gaps

#### Programme set-up

- In-country scoping
- Consulting, including with NGOs, governments and International Education Funders' Group
- Theory of Change workshops with potential partners

#### Investment

- Funding contribution to core costs, MEL, OS; and project costs
- Assessing applications in-country
- Top-up grants of up to £30,000 for OS and £15,000 for cost-of-living
- Southern-led, evidence-based holistic OS process

#### Programme/ relationship management

- Dedicated programme staffing
- Time and support to develop MEL and 'funding overview' form
- Review of six-month/ annual reports
- In-person and remote visits
- Good choice of diverse consultancy teams for OS and evaluations

#### Facilitating learning

- Supporting partners' MEL through contracted agency
- Nurturing the AIAL learning networks
- Investing in a longitudinal evaluation
- Connecting consultancy teams to share learning

#### Managing risk in relation to...

- Delivery e.g. partner capacity – ensuring viable project evaluations
- Fiduciary – including coordinating financial capacity development for funded partners in Malawi
- Safeguarding: capacity-building and in dealing with cases

#### Above and beyond...

- Adaptability of plans and budgets in response to changing context
- Moving from a 'mother' / 'inspector' to an accompanier and listener

### AIAL Learning Networks

The AIAL networks aim to strengthen partner learning in AIAL areas of work and their capacity in evidence-based advocacy so they can contribute to policy dialogue. Comic Relief initiated the networks and funded costs for network hosts, for meetings and for each network to undertake a learning study. It encouraged partners to own and shape the networks themselves. The Tanzania network, hosted by HakiElimu, began in 2017 and completed its study on 'Access to Inclusive Pre-Primary Education

for Children with Disabilities' in 2019. The Malawi network was set up in Phase 1 and the Uganda network began in Phase 2, hosted by CYECE and USDC respectively (alongside other Secretariat members). COVID-19 limited network activity. However, after Comic Relief's restructure in 2022, partners agreed a way forward with them where HakiElimu could help them design and facilitate delivery of the learning studies.

### Network achievements:

Many of the partners found the networks very helpful, though the impact has been uneven. Furthermore, partners in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia, Ghana and Mali had no access to an AIAL network as the networks were geographically clustered around a concentration of partners so they could meet in person.

Partners from all three networks reported that they have benefitted in some of the following ways: learning about, and achievements in, evidence-based advocacy; collaboration on common issues; forging new relationships or strengthening existing ones, so they know where to go for help and can adapt ideas and ways of working; and helping leverage resources. For example, **RLP** and **COHERE** in Uganda took on learning about ECD to strengthen their work with refugees. The networks have also helped some link into other wider networks, for example, **CYECE** in Malawi. While it is too early yet to see the impact of learning studies as the ones in Malawi and Uganda will only be finished in 2024, they have given a shared focus for learning about ECD in their own context and particularly in relation to children with disabilities.

***“We learned from one another how to do policy engagement, how to raise our voices, how to intervene with government without creating conflict.”***

(Child Support Tanzania – peer learning)

***“CYECE has strengthened its ability to work in a network with like-minded organisations to leverage resources, skills and competencies, to survive the competition. Hosting the network has also raised our profile.”***

(CYECE Malawi - evaluation survey)

### Network process:

Like outcomes, the process was uneven across the networks. The Tanzania network began pre-COVID and so in-person activities and convenings helped build relationships and momentum, supported by HakiElimu's expertise in evidence-based advocacy and strong relationships with government and networks.

**Why network?** In Uganda and Malawi, some partners commented that the networks failed to take off initially, at least partly because of concern about competition and lack of understanding about networking and its benefits – one partner had never been involved in a network before.

**Who owns and shapes the network?** Comic Relief shared draft Terms of Reference with the networks. Some partners felt it would have been difficult to say 'no' even if they did not have time to be involved, as the networks were funder-initiated. Comic Relief was keen for networks to shape their own purpose and process as part of its shifting the power strategy but, without sufficient direction and support, they struggled for a while. The Ugandan network decided to contract a consultant to provide training for them, which enabled them to move forward. When HakiElimu began helping with coordination of the learning studies, each network also contracted a 'Principal Investigator' to lead on the research – still underway in Uganda and Malawi.

**What is the future for networks?** Partners fed back that they think that the networks are unlikely to continue in their current form post Comic Relief funding. However they are keen to continue learning from each other. Reflection on what they can take forward and how that fits with the wider eco-system of networks and advocacy is important.

#### **LEARNING ABOUT NETWORKS** (combining AIAL learning with external learning from INTRAC – see [Interim Report](#))

The network needs a clear purpose right from the start, linked to opportunities in the context and partner priorities e.g. for advocacy, research or specific learning – and defined by members, rather than just seeing a ToR and having to engage with it.

Some form of accompaniment is useful to help members understand the benefits the network can bring, clarify its purpose and ways of relating and how to sustain momentum: HakiElimu played that role in Tanzania; the Ugandan network found a consultant to do that; and Malawi never had that support.

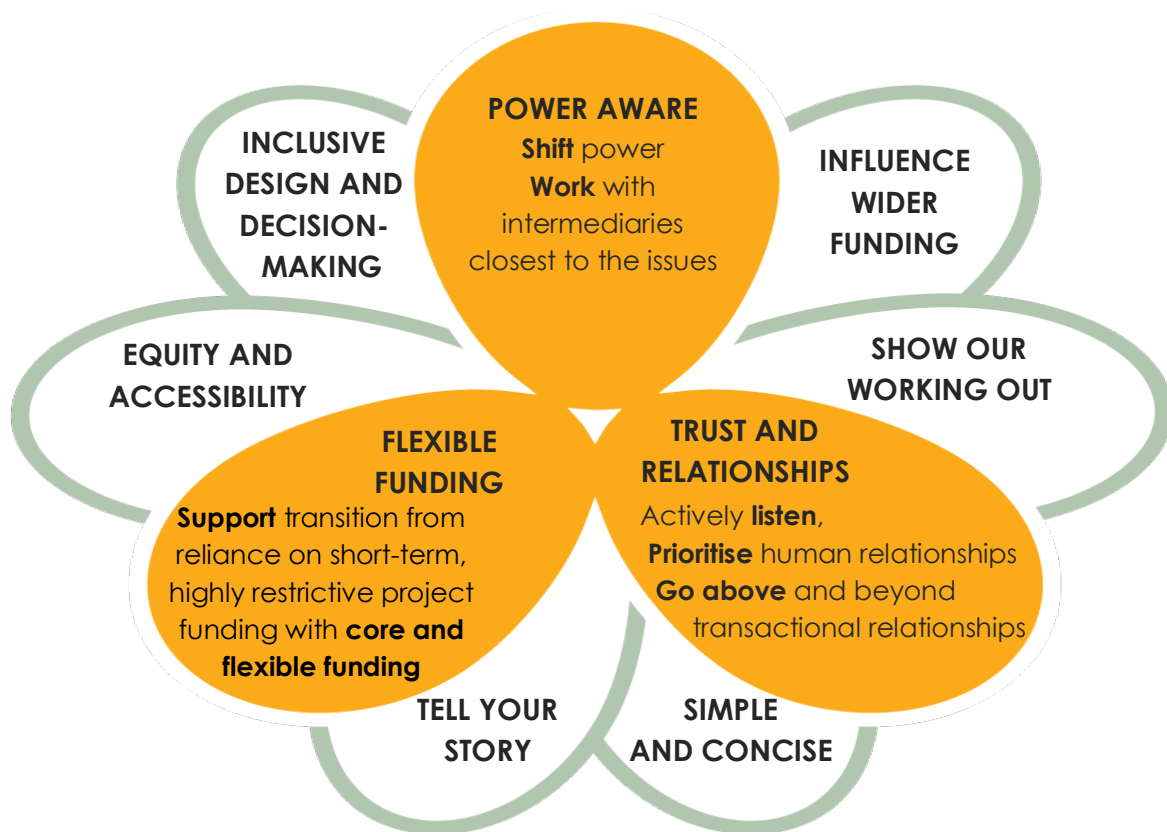
Sufficient resourcing is important – but there is also need for a conversation with partners early on about what is feasible to invest in energy and time and how they can promote organisation-wide commitment to mitigate loss of momentum.

The network's fit in the existing eco-system of networks needs addressing early on: **How does this network support/ feed into/ challenge (add value) to wider network priorities – and how can it intentionally connect partners into those networks?**

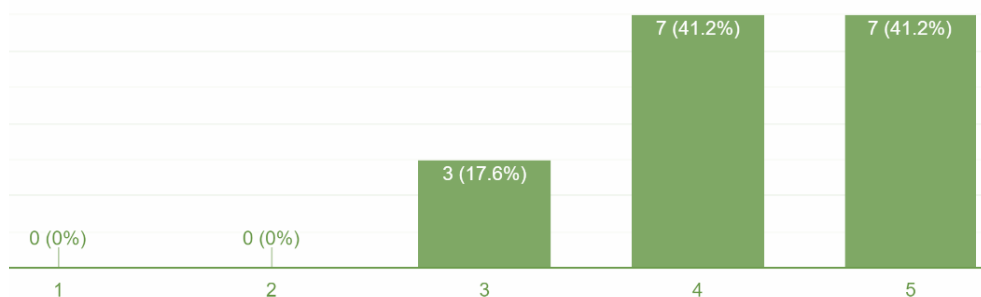
It is important to think through network future plans beyond funding from the start – it may not be about life for the whole network but a good question to ask is: **What skills, information, connections do network members have that can continue, with or without funding, and how can these best be supported?**

## **Comic Relief – Funder Plus?**

Comic Relief's 2022 Funders' Charter (summarised below) sets out its commitments to partners. In exploring the value that Comic Relief has brought to the AIAL programme beyond the funding, it is helpful to consider how it links to their Charter and especially to the three areas in orange: power aware, flexible funding and trust and relationships.

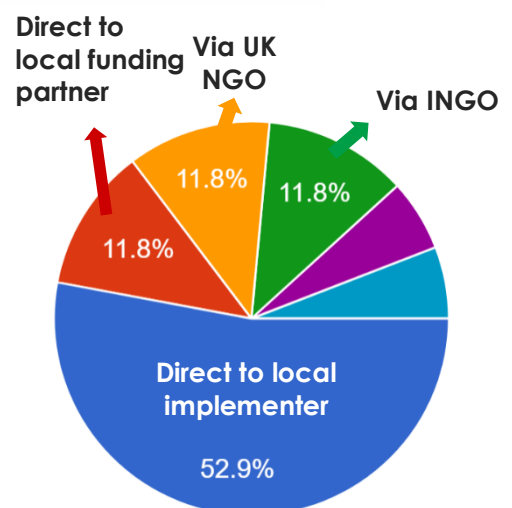


82% of partners in the evaluation Digging Deep survey (annex 6) rated Comic Relief's added value in helping them achieve their AIAL aims as 4/5 or 5/5 – particularly because of its strong relationships, its efforts to understand the organisation and context, and its direct funding, approach to OS in Phase 2 and access to the networks.



### I. Grant models

In the 'Digging Deep' evaluation survey in 2023, all but one of the partners (representing a range of grant models - see right), rated their model 4/5 or 5/5. The comments about **direct funding** were the most positive, however, summarising its benefits as:



- strengthening grant management capacity and therefore helping leverage other funding
- strengthening the relationship with Comic Relief
- supporting ownership and the development of local approaches with communities

These advantages, corroborated by the document review, case studies and primary research, endorse the effectiveness of direct funding in shifting the power. However, the primary research also highlighted other power dynamics that may be overlooked in too simplistic a view of direct funding. For example, local partners funded via another local agency raised similar concerns to local partners funded through a UK or INGO, including: delays in grant disbursements; less transparency; and lack of a direct relationship and communication with Comic Relief. In a similar way, partner field staff, situated in the project communities and a long way from the head office, also felt a degree of marginalisation, benefitting less from OS and network learning.

One of the value-adds of **funding through a UK or INGO** is the influence they can have in advocacy. The GENET case study demonstrated that linking into Oxfam's wider campaign 'Ending violence against girls' helped create a ripple effect in local government action against teachers and in wider community awareness (photo right). It also gave the project a place at the government discussions over national budget allocations. However, strengthening the capacity and collaboration of directly funded local partners also enabled them to have a significant impact on government policy and practice. The ADD Tanzania project illustrates a nuanced approach to funding through an intermediary partner. Unlike some INGO affiliates, their approach intentionally shifted the power to OPDs, focusing on strengthening their capacity and linkages to government so they could lead advocacy themselves going forward.

On the negative side, power dynamics were still evident in some intermediary AIAL partnerships, despite a commitment to shift power. In addition, funding through an INGO in one grant led to one of the key local staff leaving to join the INGO – an issue that been raised [in the sector](#) too.

***“Oxfam had networks at the high level of influence and with policymakers. This really complemented the work of GENET.”***  
(GENET staff - case study session)





All Comic Relief funding provides core costs, covering administrative and support staff – much appreciated by all partners. HakiElimu alone received a **core funding grant** that contributed to their overall organisational budget and strategy, rather than to a project. Their experience demonstrated the significant value of core funding. It enabled them to sustain staff for longer and to create space for learning and adaptation, especially responding to changes in the context, such as when the government moved location and more funds were needed for planned advocacy. ***“The nature of funding enabled us to be focused and implement our strategy. We were able to make adjustments as and when needed, as opposed to project funding, where all resources are put into delivering project outputs only.”*** (HakiElimu staff - primary research)

The AIAL programme also funded one organisation, the Firelight Foundation, through **devolved grantmaking**, which also proved highly effective as highlighted here:

### CASE STUDY: FIRELIGHT FOUNDATION – DEVOLVED FUNDING MODEL CATALYSES COMMUNITY ECD

21 community organisations in Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia are now running stronger quality and more impactful ECD in their communities. Comic Relief has partnered with an intermediary organisation, Firelight Foundation, to give small, catalytic grants to those wanting to reach more vulnerable children effectively. Funding and support has helped community organisations learn new and more participatory play-based approaches; link to local community and government resources, services and partners; and plan for sustainability. As a result, ECD has come closer to home and is helping a large number of marginalised children receive better care and be ready for school. These small community organisations will continue to design and implement solutions for issues affecting children beyond any project funding. ***“CBOs are catalytic in engaging and mobilising community action for ECD. With tools, resources and skills, CBOs can create measurable changes in the practices of parents and caregivers.”***(Firelight Learnings and Impact p15)

[See full case study here](#)



**Phases of funding:** While partners valued the direct funding and funding for core costs, survey responses indicated that Comic Relief could improve as a grantmaker by providing core funding to more organisations and more follow-on funding. Analysis from project evaluations and some Comic Relief visits showed that three years is not enough for sustainability – and does not fit with the Funders' Charter commitment to transition away from short-term restrictive project funding. In the core funding model too, HakiElimu received five years' funding, aligning well to their organisational strategy and thus helping them to plan for sustainability.

LABE Uganda is an outstanding example of how phases of Comic Relief's flexible funding over 20 years, enhanced by an excellent grant relationship, linkages to other partners and effective OS have created an environment for LABE to showcase much of what the AIAL programme set out to do:



## CASE STUDY – LABE UGANDA LOW-COST ECD TAKES OFF

24,116 disadvantaged children aged three to five, once hidden in remote, rural, post-conflict villages, are now in 68 home-based ECD learning centres in four districts – and transitioning on time to primary school. Older child facilitators play a vital role in identifying children most at risk of missing out, helping them enrol, stay in school and perform well – and in influencing caregivers, teachers and others. LABE's innovative, adaptive, low-cost approach is so effective that the Ministry of Education has integrated its Home Learning Centre (HLC) model into policy and is pushing to scale it up. LABE is a great example of the 'multiplier effect'. Its learning influenced other organisations including Save the Children, UNICEF, USAID, the Cotton On Foundation and other AIAL partners. At the same time, LABE keeps strengthening its own work, for example, deepening its learning on disability and children's empowerment and linking with universities in Uganda, Malawi and Ethiopia for action research to scale up the [child-to-child approach](#).

[See full case study here](#)

## II. Relationship management

In Phase 1, communication with Comic Relief was variable, but improved in Phase 2. In general, partners appreciated the feedback in reports and found monitoring visits helpful – now reframed as 'learning and support visits' (FCDO report June 2023). Two partners referred to Comic Relief in Phase 1 as 'mother', implying strong support but also perhaps directiveness. Report feedback was very detailed and came over sometimes as an examination – risking missing the big picture achievements amidst the targets. After a difficult period of communication during Comic Relief's restructure, communication has been good in Phase 2, becoming a shared journey with 'sisterly' accompaniment.

***“Comic Relief has been listening right from the start. They don't coerce but make us take a lead...The flexibility they have is where I see a lot of marks.”***

(CSU staff - case study session)

Partners have most consistently praised Comic Relief's flexibility and responsiveness – in enabling revisions to budgets, targets, plans and timing, including no-cost extensions. This has been invaluable in the challenging context, especially of COVID-19. It enabled partners to adjust their approaches too. For example, LABE's home-learning centres for ECD became hubs for community and health activities like vaccination, during COVID. Comic Relief linked CSU to LABE for learning, which led to them also trialling home-learning centres and continuing these post-COVID as they were so successful – enabling them to develop a two-pronged approach to ECD. Partners greatly appreciated the top-up grant of £15,000 in dealing with the economic challenges brought about by the global cost-of-living crisis.

Different grant models need different styles of relationship management. While Comic Relief has done this well, for example, in the core funding relationship, allowing HakiElimu to present their own annual reports instead of the project reports, it did not adjust its style for the Firelight Foundation devolved grant model. The intermediary relationship could have been strengthened by being clear about the purpose and strategic value of the partnership, nurturing the partnership as one of equals, understanding the complexity of a more layered 'devolved' approach and agreeing expectations, particularly in relation to outcomes and roles. As Firelight Foundation is a key player in the ECD ecosystem, Comic Relief missed opportunities for joint learning and advocacy.

### **III. Organisational Strengthening and learning**

Along with flexibility, partners rated Comic Relief's support highly because of the investment in OS, particularly the Phase 2 approach and in the collective learning through the AIAL networks. Interestingly, this does not form part of the Funders' Charter commitments. Malawi partners in Phase 1 also greatly valued the Humentum financial management consultancy support. This demonstrates the importance of separating approaches to compliance from OS, as compliance approaches can be more directive 'problem-solving' capacity building. These approaches ensure foundations are in place and avert risk to those benefitting as well as risks in misuse of funds. However, it would be interesting to see if the Phase 2 OS approach could still enable partners to address some of these foundational issues in a more holistic way.

The tendency of partners to focus more on outer layers of the 'Onion' even in Phase 2 shows the pressure of project funding and suggests that there is need for more attention to the whole organisation and its journey at the beginning and to use a model like the 'Onion' to help everyone reflect on work across different levels.

Feedback on the consultancy support for MEL in Phase 1 was mixed, but many appreciated Comic Relief staff support in the process of developing their framework and capturing it in the Funding Overview Form. Many strengthened their MEL processes, staffing and outcomes. Yet, the evaluation primary research visits showed that work on MEL at the head office did not always translate to effective practice at community level; and that the most effective MEL was embedded in community and government. For example, **USDC** in Uganda, supported by their partner, **Able Child Africa**, invested in improving their organisational MEL substantially in Phase 1. They have further strengthened their approach in Phase 2, though, by embedding MEL better in the community. Teachers carry out monthly visits to homes of all learners with disabilities – and their feedback informs teacher training provided by Kyambogo University. Children, parent champions, centre coordinators and district government officials all play their part too – [See ACA and USDC case study here](#).

***“MEL has created the biggest impact of the project. It brought visibility to USDC in the district. When the Education department needs technical advice and support on issues for CwD, they come to USDC.”***  
(USDC staff – primary research)

Project funding also propels partners towards project-level MEL that does not often provide a whole picture against organisational mission and identity. In keeping with Comic Relief's commitment to keeping things light touch where possible and inclusive design, there is a need to think through how to give more space for a simpler community-designed MEL process that will be more sustainable and effective.

#### **IV. Other funder commitments**

The AIAL programme emphasis on reaching very marginalised and vulnerable groups aligns with its value of equity and accessibility. Its approach to programme design, with in-country consultations and theory of change development, helped live out its aim of inclusive design and decision-making. However, it perhaps missed an opportunity to do more in helping partners tell their story by supporting their communication capacity and could do more to influence the wider sector, for example in strengthening children's voice and re-thinking Value for Money.

# Reimagining Value for Money

## I. An evolving approach to Value for Money

The 2015 AIAL business case sets out the DFID framework of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity – the four Es. The AIAL Interim Evaluation (2022) prompted Comic Relief to revisit Value for Money and move towards a more nuanced partner-owned approach. Comic Relief evolved its definition of VfM to capture *“the extent of social change catalysed through our investment”*.

## II. What Value for Money looks like

Learning from AIAL shows that **local ownership (economy)** at the core ensures that those benefitting value the work. It harnesses the vision, resources, energy and skills of the people most impacted right from the start, so they can drive change, even beyond the investment – enabling a problem-solving mindset.

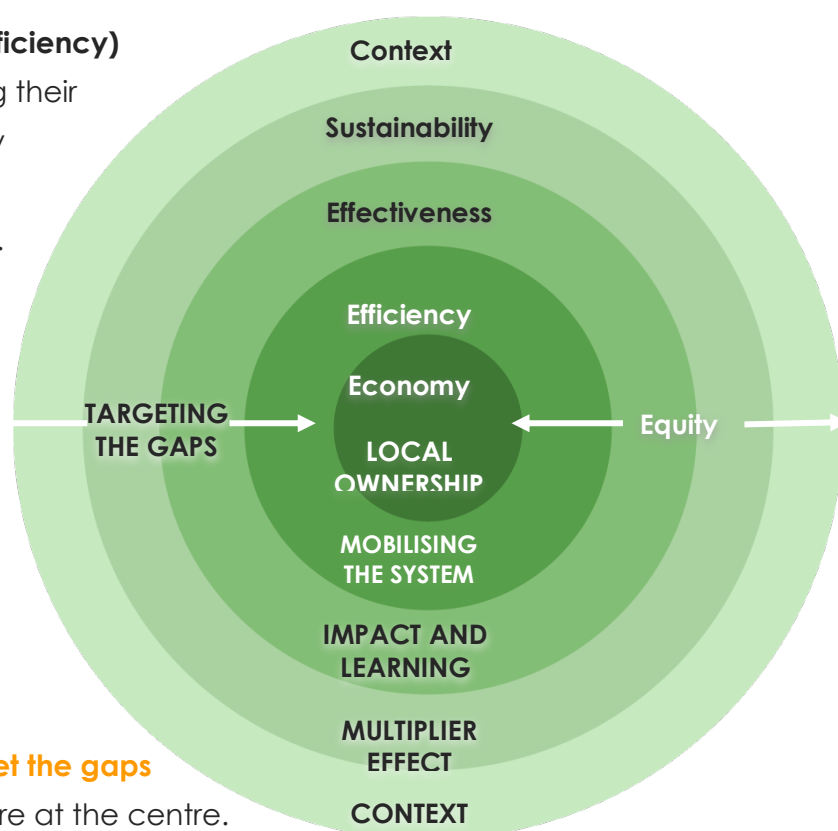
This in turn **mobilises the system (efficiency)**

getting everyone planning, playing their part and learning together, so they can choose the best possible approach and carry out their roles. It harnesses local resources, creativity in their use and sustained involvement of local structures.

This leads to greater **impact and learning (effectiveness)**

where communities, partners and funders assess the changes and what they can do better.

Across all layers, it is critical to **target the gaps (equity)** so those most impacted are at the centre.



The ultimate evidence of Value for Money comes when this process **unleashes the multiplier effect (sustainability)** so locally led, ongoing social change becomes part and parcel of what communities, civil society partners and governments do.



### III. The multiplier effect

A project can fulfil individual aspects of the 'Four Es', even redefined as above, and yet not demonstrate genuine Value for Money. The effectiveness of systemic change in many AIAL projects was demonstrated in that multiplier effect: their reports and evaluations showed that they had gone beyond planned outcomes to create a momentum for change that continues beyond project life and funding. **The RLP case study and examples below demonstrate this holistic approach to Value for Money:**

**Refugee Law Project Uganda** demonstrates Value for Money through:

**Local ownership - enabling a problem-solving mindset:** Prioritising the voice and experience of refugee children with disabilities and caregivers in child friendly spaces. **Children lead** on designing inclusive messages and speaking about issues that affect them, including successes and changes in their lives.

**Mobilising the system and getting everyone playing their part:** The project targeted **all relevant groups:** children, caregivers, school structure and personnel, local leaders, refugee groups, and government at all levels. It trained child protection structures in the community. Teachers now collect data and advocate for support.

**Impact and learning:** More refugee children are enrolling and 80% are staying in ECD. They have more confidence, better relationships with teachers and peers and are able to help each other and advocate for their rights. Teachers are more empathetic to their needs and use inclusive teaching methods. Caregivers and parents now see the potential of their children and send them to school.

**Unleashing the multiplier effect:** Headteachers and SMCs are now spearheading changes in practice at school. Established support groups led by caregivers continue to be a source of peer-to-peer support and survivor-led advocacy. A training guide on 'inclusive education in the context of forced migration' helps people understand how to work more effectively with refugee children with disabilities. RLP is now in a better position to take advantage of both community and national platforms to keep advocating for inclusive education for refugees.

[See full case study here](#)

#### **73% of schools in Amolatar district now have ECD sections – Cheshire Services Uganda**

20 non-project schools in Amolatar replicated the learning from 17 project schools. Over 9,000 children with and without disabilities are learning. A district network deals with safeguarding cases and other NGOs are incorporating disability in their work.

#### **Government and NGOs adopt low-cost home-based ECD approach – LABE Uganda**

LABE secured funding to extend the work from four to six districts. Two sub-counties in Gulu replicated the work and it has been taken up by six other organisations in Western and Northern Uganda and two in Central and Eastern Uganda.

## Reshaping Maths learning across 786 primary schools – Green Shoots, South Africa

Innovative use of technology provides real-time data from Maths exercises linked to the curriculum. Confidence and performance improve as learners assess their own performance and educators can target resources where needed. In 2018, when the AIAL project finished, 123,741 learners had benefitted – now it is 381,021, thanks to the low-cost accessible approach.



### IV. Programme Value for Money

Overall the AIAL programme has offered good Value for Money because it has effectively targeted the gaps; brought about systemic change, embedding work in community and government; and taken holistic approaches that address children's overall wellbeing, focus on the lifecycle of a child and key transition points; in some cases, enable work to evolve through phased long-term funding, such as with LABE. Other factors that contribute to programme Value for Money are:

- 91% of total AIAL expenditure went on grants.
- Over 100,000 children with multiple vulnerabilities are enrolled in school, learning, safer and more empowered.
- Many thousands more have benefitted because of the focus on systemic change, enabling inclusive education to become embedded in family and community, among officials and schools and in policies, plans and budgets.
- Even four years after projects have ended, the evaluation found evidence that communities are still playing their part thus demonstrating lasting shifts in mindset.
- The programme provides numerous examples of the 'multiplier' effect - a commitment to change that goes beyond project life and funding.
- AIAL has left partners stronger (a key programme objective), with improved approaches, advocacy, MEL, financial management and reporting, and more recently, a stronger sense of identity and values.

Comic Relief's programme design and relationships management has enhanced Value for Money in a variety of ways. The focus on specific countries has maximised understanding of the context, shared learning, advocacy, management and visits. AIAL has invested time and resources at the start e.g. in scoping, consulting widely, doing theory of change workshops and assessing partner organisations in-country. It has partnered with effective partners with a range of funding models that have

generated good learning. It has invested in organisations and learning networks; and it has actively encouraged partners to share experiences and learning, including through the longitudinal evaluation.

Value for Money could be further strengthened by:

- strengthening linkages between programmes and learning e.g. Maanda and AIAL on gender dynamics.
- creating more space for children's voice and influence through programme emphasis and learning, as well as partner actions. Children's empowerment is a key success factor in children going to school, staying in school, learning, and experiencing a safe and inclusive school environment.
- unleashing CR/FCDO's own multiplier effect a) doing more in helping partners tell their story e.g. by supporting their communication capacity and b) influencing the wider funding sector for example in relation to children's participation/voice and reimagining Value for Money.

## 5. Conclusion

### **AIAL relevance and impact**

Over 100,000 children with multiple vulnerabilities are enrolled in school, learning, safer and more empowered. Many thousands more have also benefitted because of the focus on systemic change, enabling inclusive education to become embedded in families and communities, among officials and schools and in policies, plans and budgets. Even four years after projects have ended, communities are still playing their part, demonstrating lasting shifts in mindset. Effective projects continue to have a multiplier effect, influencing other children, other areas and other organisations – and through this, demonstrate a more holistic and valid picture of Value for Money.

Organisational Strengthening benefitted partners in both phases in multiple ways. Towards the end of the programme, at least partly due to the evaluation process, partners began to move deeper than changes in systems, competencies and resources. They strengthened less visible, core aspects like identity and relationships, though organisational sustainability remains a challenge.

The programme was highly relevant to communities because of gaps in government policy and implementation for inclusive education and especially ECD.

### **AIAL learning about approaches and sustainability**

Projects that achieved a lasting legacy took a systemic approach, ensuring everyone was playing their part from the start, through and beyond funding. They also put

children at the centre of the work – **'I see you and your journey'**, recognising the child as a whole human being in a complex, interconnected context. This requires a nuanced, intersectional and holistic approach that tackles gender and family dynamics. The evaluation highlights the importance of early stimulation to achieve equity and of supporting children across key transitions in their life. It reaffirms that children have a part to play in their own and their peers' development journey, (even from a young age), which strengthens other outcomes and sustainability.

Positive relationships have fuelled sustainability across the programme, enabling everyone to continue to play their part from community to government, among partners and with Comic Relief – but are often under-articulated and under-measured. OS approaches also have to bring the whole organisation into view: **'I see you and your organisational journey'**, linking work across all layers of the Onion model. Effective OS has linked



work at all layers to identity and values. Organisational sustainability is a particularly pressing priority in the current economic and funding context that needs addressing from the beginning and throughout, rather than as an add-on at the end of a grant.

### **AIAL programme effectiveness**

This longitudinal evaluation has enabled partners, the evaluation team and funders to capture the legacy of Phase 1 projects and learn from other work and phases of funding. AIAL learning networks, where they had a clear shared purpose, provided a safe space for peer learning, adapting ideas, influencing government and linking to others. This could have been strengthened by bringing in partners from other countries without a network and by effective accompaniment across all the networks.

Comic Relief has created an enabling environment for partners by intentionally shifting power through more direct funding, by contracting independent southern consultants to support OS and by initiating the learning networks. Core funding and devolved funding models have been particularly effective. Partners have appreciated Comic Relief's flexibility, support for core costs, responsiveness to the changing context and a listening ear/ accompaniment over more directive management. More nuanced power dynamics still influence relationships, including from local funded partners to others and from field to head offices.

## 6. Recommendations

The AIAL evaluation process involved partners in shaping the recommendations for their own practice. The three overarching recommendations from the [Interim report](#) remain relevant for both groups but with additional, more specific actions under each category.



### Partner actions

#### I. Set up for sustainability – take a systemic approach

Right from the beginning and all the way through:

- 1. Get everyone playing their part** – co-creating work with children (according to their evolving capacity) and duty-bearers, including:
  - o changing mindsets and strengthening relationships through dialogue and participatory activities that surface underlying beliefs
  - o embedding work in government policies, budgets and structures and community and school structures and groups - and linking everyone up
- 2. Build sustainability into your plans and budgets** both in the initial design phase and in your ongoing planning, coordination and monitoring. Take more asset-based, partnership approaches to achieve and sustain change beyond project funding.

#### II. Walk the talk – deepen practices

- 1. 'I see you'** – work holistically with children, families and communities to analyse, identify and involve those most at risk, recognising the multiple issues affecting them and intentionally tackling deeper gender dynamics.
- 2. Unleash the power of children supporting other children** – intentionally learn from others and from experience to create space for children's voice and influence at all levels, developing life skills and using participatory tools.
- 3. Think beyond boundaries** – recognise the importance of early stimulation, transitions in a child's journey and their multiple needs, prioritising what you can do and teaming up with others for what you cannot.



### III. Grow resilient, 'whole-hearted' organisations

1. **Nurture the heart of the 'Onion'** – intentionally address and monitor the inner layers of identity, culture and relationships, even when working at other levels. Pay attention to your whole organisation, negotiating funding relationships that align to your mission and values and seeking core funding opportunities.
2. **Develop a culture of learning and adaptation** – make space for creative team reflection to respond to the changing context, identifying strategic relationships for peer learning and accompaniment.
3. **Plan for sustainability from the start** – do not focus on resources only but develop roles, partnerships and approaches that mitigate dependence on project funding. Look internally and externally for evidence of what works.

## Funder actions

### I. Set up for sustainability

1. **Continue to prioritise systems change (local and national)** – in programme set-up, ToC development and guidance, in choice of partners and in relationship management.
2. **Maximise the set-up period** – focus the first few months on supporting partners to agree roles, responsibilities and relationships, and plan for sustainability (transparency on incentives etc).
3. **Turn MEL on its head** – support partners to work out MEL with duty-bearers at community level (capturing roles, relationships, mindset change – the story from their perspective)



### II. Walk the talk – deepen practices

1. **Co-create networks** – set up accompaniment support from the start that helps with opportunity-mapping to spot gaps and agree a clear purpose, work out links to other networks, negotiate time and resources commitments, plan for what happens after and facilitate learning dynamics and momentum.
2. **Embed children's voice** – embark on a journey alongside partners to strengthen shared understanding of what good empowerment looks like through exchanges, linkages, programme documents, report feedback and MEL – investing resources into the process to make sure it happens.
3. **Linkages between programmes and funders** – consciously invest time and

resources for consultants and the internal team to enable cross-fertilisation of expertise and approaches and to influence other funders e.g. in gender, OS, child participation and in reimagining Value for Money.

### III. Find and grow resilient, 'whole-hearted' organisations

- 1. 'I see you': understanding the whole organisation and journey it is on** – Move away from project focus to look at the whole organisation in how you: select learning partners; fund; support MEL; feed back on reports; manage relationships (with all partners, not only just the one receiving funding); and continue the OS approach. Make more time from the start for partners to delve into less visible areas and encourage them to work across all layers, using the Onion model.
- 2. Funding models** – Find the right fit funding model for partners and programmes. Move towards more core and devolved funding, but clearly defined, managed and aligned to the initiative purpose and partner capacity. Continue direct funding but consider other power dynamics and assumptions e.g. in OS processes and relationship management. Recognise the impact of phases of funding on partner journeys, rather than one-off initiatives.
- 3. Deepen and share learning for organisational sustainability** – Draw together internal and external evidence about what really works and how to set up for sustainability from the beginning versus exit strategies and IGAs. Support low - cost, sustainable approaches that sustain mission and not just funding.

### And finally...

AIAL partners chose three words to summarise the AIAL programme in the final 'Feeding into Findings' session. They experienced the programme as transformational, empowering and impactful, with a strong emphasis on inclusion, collaboration and OS: (Feeding into Findings session Word Cloud)

