

Ghana Education Service (GES) Lively Minds Programme

Community dynamics: Drivers of success and challenges

Report

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This study explores the community-level dynamics of the Ghana Education Service Lively Minds programme (GES-LM) — an early childhood care and education intervention at kindergarten and parenting level.

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Abbreviations

ECCE	early childhood care and education
ECD	early childhood development
EMIS	education management information system
GES	Ghana Education Service
GES-LM	Ghana Education Service – Lively Minds programme
LM INGO	Lively Minds international NGO
PTA	parent-teacher association
RCT	randomised control trial
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene

Executive summary

This study explores the community-level dynamics of the Ghana Education Service Lively Minds programme (GES-LM). This parenting-focused early childhood care and education (ECCE) intervention aims to address two key challenges for child development in Ghana: low quality kindergarten education and limited parental knowledge and practice of ECCE at home. Currently, GES-LM is implemented in 3,500 schools/communities across northern Ghana, reaching just over 250,000 children and 127,500 mothers.

GES-LM centres on: (a) training women ('mothers') to facilitate play-based learning ('Play Schemes') in kindergarten classes; and (b) strengthening the ECCE knowledge of parents through monthly Parenting Workshops and weekly radio broadcasts, to provide nurturing care and learning at home. It does so through a 'train the trainer' model, using existing government structures. Trained kindergarten teachers ultimately train and mentor the engaged mothers, while parent-teacher association (PTA) executives are tasked with engaging community leaders to build local support and engagement. The mothers' engagement is unpaid. This is both to enable sustainability at scale (the GES cannot financially incentivise thousands of mothers) and because GES-LM aims to strengthen parenting, with emphasis that it is the parents' own children who benefit. Instead of payment, the participating mothers attend a monthly Parenting Workshop where they receive training on parenting topics such as hygiene, sanitation and nutrition.

Complementing a randomised control trial (RCT) on the child development outcomes, and a study on the government implementation processes, this study explores the community-level dynamics of the programme, focused on the following key questions:

- What are the community-level drivers and barriers for successful implementation?
 - What are the enablers and barriers for good quality Play Schemes?
 - What motivates and demotivates the engaged mothers, and what are the outcomes for them and their families?
 - What motivates kindergarten teachers to engage, and what are the benefits and challenges of the programme for schools?
 - What role do community leaders play in the success of the implementation?
- How could the GES improve community-level engagement in the programme?
- What generalisable lessons about the implementation of ECD parenting programmes might be applicable in other countries?

The study provides a deep-dive qualitative analysis based on the comparison of 12 communities, across 2 regions of northern Ghana. These were purposively sampled,

to include some where community support and implementation has been strong, and others where it has been weak.

Key findings

Based on the lived experiences of community stakeholders, the study identified notable positive programme outcomes

Key among these were the empowerment of the engaged mothers (enhanced parenting capacities, confidence and self-belief), and improved sanitation, hygiene and health as well as stronger parental engagement in schools. Parents also perceived that their children were much more willing to attend kindergarten, due to the more nurturing, play-based environment and the presence of their mothers. They also perceived more positive child development outcomes, such as greater inquisitiveness, creativity and social skills. Across the sampled communities, kindergarten teachers were also motivated by GES-LM (as the mothers provide much needed classroom support, while the Play Schemes promote learning) and this has improved kindergarten teacher attendance and punctuality at school.

While these outcomes were similar across the sampled communities, the mothers' motivation was more varied

Low motivation has affected the reliability and punctuality of mothers at the Play Schemes, which ultimately presents risks for sustainability. The findings on motivating and demotivating factors were quite nuanced. Most mothers were motivated by the intrinsic benefits of the programme (personal empowerment, improved household health, child development and their new status as a 'teacher'). But participation in the programme has costs: opportunity costs (time that would have been used for farming or trading); tensions at home due to this (especially in rainy season) and social costs (some community members have criticised the women for working at the school unpaid).

Two-thirds of mothers felt that the GES-LM model of not providing additional material or financial incentives to participate in Parenting Workshops was fair

While most mothers felt they gained knowledge and other intrinsic benefits from participating in the workshops, one-third of the mothers felt it was unfair and focused on the costs of participation in their responses. Some communities had a larger share of the 'more frustrated' mothers – we found correlations between the mothers' motivation, community leaders' engagement, and community critique of GES-LM.

- Where community leaders were more actively engaged, they had often counselled mothers and husbands who were demoralised with GES-LM, strengthened community recognition of the mothers' work, and reduced community critique of the programme.

- Where community leaders' engagement had been limited, we found more open community criticism of the mothers, less support from husbands and relatives, and subsequently challenges with the mothers' reliability and punctuality at the Play Schemes.

Most mothers re-enrolled in the programme after two years: engaging a new set of mothers would extend the notable female empowerment and positive household outcomes to a wider set of families

We asked the mothers who were frustrated why they remained in the programme. Alongside the intrinsic benefits, the large majority explained that they are hanging on for the incentive which they believed will 'eventually come' (payment, employment, etc) and feared that, if they leave the programme, this incentive would be given to the new set of participating mothers. Due to this, most mothers had re-enrolled in the programme after two-years. While re-enrolment is easier and maintains the quality of the Play Schemes, engaging a new set of mothers every two years should extend the notable female empowerment and household-level outcomes to a wider set of families.

Strategic implications

Further work may be needed on the incentives model

While the findings on mothers' motivation were nuanced, there were indications that the programme might benefit from further work on the incentives model. GES is already considering the provision of livelihood training for the engaged mothers. Another popular suggestion was training and support for the mothers to establish savings and loans groups. More broadly, our research suggested that the mothers value community recognition of their work, and the GES may consider routes to promote such recognition.

Engaging a new set of mothers every two years could extend the notable female empowerment and household-level outcomes to a wider set of families

Engaging a new set of mothers every two years should extend the notable female empowerment and household-level outcomes to a wider set of families. However, a decision to more actively promote the engagement of new mothers should include an exit strategy for the current mothers.

The research highlights the importance of in-depth community engagement that sensitises the wider community

Engagement needs to extend beyond PTAs, to sensitise the wider community and place community chiefs in a leadership role. This is central to the current model but is not always implemented.

The study identified the need to further promote the role of fathers in early childhood care and education

We found that GES-LM is helping fathers to appreciate the value of early childhood care and education and parental roles in it – but many fathers do not see themselves as capable agents. Instead, they were thankful that their wives had gained this capacity and respect them for it. Many community leaders suggested that the engagement of fathers be approached through existing men's groups and institutions – rather than creating new spaces such as Parenting Workshops for men.

The Lively Minds radio programme, which aims to reach a wider group of men and women, is constrained by lack of access to radio sets

In our sample, the radio intervention had been most impactful where communities have communal information centres with a functioning radio, and where this promoted peer discussion. In communities without such information centres, some mothers suggested that the GES could share recordings of the radio programme with a teacher or parent committee member, so they could facilitate group listening and discussion.

Learning that may be applicable to other countries

Taking a parenting approach to early childhood care and education can improve child development outcomes

The study shows that training mothers on subjects such as child engagement and hygiene, and guiding their practice of these skills in classrooms, can strengthen their parenting practices at home. This has also required a nurturing of confidence and self-belief.

Engaging parents requires careful consideration of how to motivate and sustain their participation in culturally appropriate ways

Planning for a programme like GES-LM would ideally include community-level scoping on expectations, challenges and potential models for motivating parental participation that can be sustained at scale.

Although focusing the intervention on one caregiver, it is important to engage wider family members

In Ghana, engaging mothers has worked well, but with the unexpected consequence that men tend to see early childhood care and education as their wife's role.

Local ownership is key: nurturing this requires thoughtful messaging and engagement

Where external actors (such as international NGOs) are involved, a low profile may be important.

Introduction

Good quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) is critical to children's development and success in adult life.¹ Ghana's provision of ECCE is relatively advanced compared to other sub-Saharan African countries.² The government developed its National Early Childhood Care and Development policy in 2004, which made kindergarten part of the basic education system. In 2008, it introduced 2 years of free, compulsory kindergarten education for all children aged 4–5.³ Despite these advances, two key barriers persist.

- **Low quality kindergarten education**, which is affected by challenges such as large class sizes,⁴ low teacher-pupil ratios, teacher absenteeism,⁵ a lack of teacher training in ECCE (until recently),⁶ an overuse of rote-based teaching and an absence of play-based learning resources.⁷ These challenges are compounded by limited funding for basic education.⁸
- **Limited parental knowledge and practice of ECCE at home**, where children of kindergarten age spend most of their time. In rural areas, 24% of women have had no formal education, rising to 57% in the Northern Region.⁹ Many parents struggle to provide good quality, nurturing care and learning opportunities because they lack access to the knowledge skills to do so.¹⁰ In many cases, this is compounded by low self-esteem and low confidence in parenting.¹¹ A survey in rural northern Ghana (Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) (forthcoming), RCT on GES Lively Minds) found that only 30% of primary caregivers had conducted any form

¹ Cawley et al. (2001) and Heckman et al. (2006), as cited in Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) (forthcoming).

² Pence et al. (2023), cited in IFS (forthcoming).

³ Ackah-Junior et al. (2022); Horsham et al. (2022).

⁴ In Ghana, the average kindergarten class (nationally) has 31 pupils, with a peak of 64 children per kindergarten class in Savanna Region (Education Management Information System (EMIS) 2021).

⁵ UNICEF (Akseer and Játiva 2021) found a rate of 14.6% of absenteeism among kindergarten teachers in Ghana (the highest rate in all levels of education).

⁶ As of 2016, only 66% of kindergarten teachers had been trained, with most being trained in general primary instruction with no specialised training in ECE.

⁷ Annan (2020); Wolf (2020).

⁸ In Ghana, basic education funding has fallen from 7% of GDP in 2012 to 3.8% in 2022 (UNICEF 2022). The funds are largely allocated to salaries, hampering efforts to improve the quality of teaching. Kindergarten education is further neglected, receiving only 0.25% of the Ministry budget.

⁹ Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) (2015).

¹⁰ Ackah-Junior et al. (2022); Aurino et al. (2020); Kabay et al. (2017).

¹¹ Wolf (2020).

of play or stimulating activity with their child in the previous three days,¹² and that this adversely affects their school readiness.¹³

These challenges result in poor learning outcomes: a World Bank analysis (2021)¹⁴ estimated that a child in Ghana entering school at age 4 could expect 12.1 years of schooling, but only 6 years of learning.

Recognising these challenges, the Ghana Education Service (GES) updated its Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy in 2021,¹⁵ which now includes a strong focus on play-based learning. GES is gradually rolling out teacher training on the new play-based curriculum, with development partner support. Ghana's ECD provision also now promotes the provision of ECCE information to parents and caregivers of young children.¹⁶

In support of these objectives, the GES is implementing the GES Lively Minds (GES-LM) programme. This ECCE parenting intervention targets both of the key barriers outlined above: the low quality of kindergarten education, and limited parental knowledge and practice of ECCE. The GES-LM programme centres on: (a) engaging and training ordinary mothers ('engaged mothers') from communities to facilitate play-based learning ('Play Schemes') in kindergarten classes; and (b) strengthening their ECCE knowledge through monthly Parenting Workshops and encouraging them to use this knowledge at home. The programme is implemented by the GES in public schools, with the support of kindergarten teachers who train and mentor the engaged mothers, and work with school parent-teacher associations (PTAs) to build community support and engagement. The programme was initiated by the international NGO, Lively Minds (LM INGO), in 2008 and adopted by the GES in 2019, which is now scaling up the programme across Ghana – starting in the poorer northern zone.¹⁷ As at mid-2025, it is implemented in 3,500 kindergartens across 64 districts.

The GES-LM programme provides a unique opportunity to learn lessons about taking a parenting ECCE programme to scale through a government education system. Moreover, the GES is committed to using evidence to strengthen implementation of its programmes. To the best of our knowledge, there is no conclusive evidence on the effectiveness of interventions that aim to improve both parental practices and pre-school quality, except for GES-LM.¹⁸ To contribute to the global evidence base, a

¹² IFS (forthcoming). *GES Lively Minds: Improving health and development through play – an RCT evaluation of an ECCE programme at scale in Ghana*.

¹³ Ibid: On the IDELA school readiness index, 30% of children were identified as 'struggling'.

¹⁴ Cited in IFS (forthcoming).

¹⁵ Ghana's ECD policy: https://ges.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Main-ECE-Policy_Final-Camera-Ready.pdf

¹⁶ Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) (2018); UNICEF (2018).

¹⁷ In northern Ghana, 60%–70% of the population were classified as poor in 2017, compared to 8% nationally. The prevalence of chronic malnutrition is nearly twice as high as the national average, at 33% and 19% respectively (USAID 2021). IFS (forthcoming) analysis of the Ghana District League Table (2021) also highlights that districts in northern Ghana perform worse on measures of education, sanitation and water.

¹⁸ An efficacy trial RCT was conducted in 2017 (Augsburg et al. 2022) across 80 schools. This found that the programme improved children's cognitive and socio-emotional skills and

randomised control trial (RCT) has been undertaken to measure the outcomes of GES-LM, including its impact on child development,¹⁹ while Thrive has also reviewed the process of government implementation.²⁰

Complementing these studies, this report explores the community-level drivers and barriers for successful implementation of GES-LM. As a parenting ECCE programme, understanding these community-level dynamics is crucial: mothers' sustained engagement and behavioural changes are key to success, and processes to build this are integral to the design: such as engagement with community leaders, husbands and PTAs, and a radio programme to build community support. There is a need to build the evidence base on such community processes as they are crucial to the success of an ECCE parenting programme, and yet beyond the GES implementation touch points and monitoring.

Study objectives and research questions

This study provides a deep-dive analysis of the community-level drivers and barriers for successful implementation of GES-LM, focused on the community stakeholders who support or effect delivery. It is based on primary qualitative research. Responding to the evidence gaps identified above, the research has three key objectives:

- to identify community-level drivers and barriers for successful implementation
- to identify further opportunities for the GES to improve community-level engagement in the programme
- to identify generalisable lessons about the implementation of ECD parenting programmes that might be applicable in other countries.

The high-level research questions, and key themes that were explored under each question, are outlined in Table 1.

health. The unique hybrid features of Lively Minds distinguished it from other ECCE intervention models and were crucial in achieving these impacts. The observed impacts were mediated by changes in parental behaviour.

¹⁹ IFS (forthcoming).

²⁰ Munday and Zubero (2024).

Table 1: Research questions

High level question	Key themes/Sub-questions
Community drivers What are the drivers of success and barriers for implementation at community level?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interventions: What were the community-level enablers and challenges for successful implementation of the key interventions (Play Schemes, Parenting Workshops and the radio programme)? Outcomes for engaged mothers: What were the outcomes of participation for the engaged mothers? Engaged mothers' motivation to engage: What enables and motivates mothers to engage in the programme, and what are the barriers and demotivators? (Are husbands and female relatives supportive? Reactions of the wider community? Perceptions of the programme incentives model?) School-level: What motivates kindergarten teachers to play active roles in GES-LM? What are the benefits and challenges of implementing GES-LM for schools? Has the programme affected community engagement in schools? What role do community leaders play in GES-LM success, and what are the enablers or barriers for this? How do the mothers' families and wider community perceive GES-LM, and how does this affect implementation? What has encouraged or discouraged their support?
Policy implications How have the drivers of success and barriers at community level been influenced by programme activities? How can GES further strengthen community engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which programme activities and design features have been most important in supporting the community drivers of success, and intervening in barriers at community level? How can GES further strengthen community engagement? What are the lessons for other countries that wish to implement a parenting ECCE programme?

The GES Lively Minds programme

GES-LM has been gradually rolled out in planned phases over a 4-year period (starting in September 2021), in 3,447 public preschools across 64 districts of northern Ghana. The programme is designed to provide 3 to 6-year-old children with the foundations they need to succeed in school. It aims to unlock the potential of parents and teachers, by training and empowering them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to run educational Play Schemes in kindergarten classes, and to provide better care and stimulation at home, using locally available materials. The key components of the programme at community level are outlined below.

- **School preparedness and training:** The GES district teams conduct a six-day training-of-trainers course for kindergarten teachers and headteachers, focused on the importance of play-based learning, classroom management, how to use

and make games, and how to enrol and train the mothers in the programme. The school's PTA chair attends two days of the training.

- **Community engagement:** In each school, headteachers, kindergarten teachers and PTA chairs are tasked with delivering a community meeting to sensitise community leaders and caregivers to build support for the programme, and to enrol 30–40 mothers to run Play Schemes. There is no requirement for the mothers to be literate, and they need not be mothers of kindergarten-age children. The early engagement includes appointment of three or four GES-LM community ambassadors, who support community engagement and monitor implementation. These Ambassadors are usually well-respected people in the community.

GES-LM has been strong in the message that no incentives should be given to the engaged mothers — no payment, gifts or gifts-in-kind, and no refreshments at the Play Schemes or parenting workshops. The reasons for this include:

- the substantial costs for GES of providing incentives to mothers at scale is not sustainable
- giving an incentive and then stopping may be more demotivating.

The GES-LM model for incentivising mothers is:

- emphasising to mothers that these are their children, their community is benefitting
- explaining that parenting workshops are an opportunity for mothers to gain knowledge.

- **Training of mothers:** The kindergarten teachers and headteachers who participated in GES-LM training then train the enrolled mothers, using a scripted curriculum. The training consists of eight two-hour participatory workshops, and a final graduation community meeting. The training is designed for women with no formal education or literacy and is conducted in the local language. Participants who complete at least six workshops receive certification. Topics include the importance of education and play, how to make and play games with kindergarten-aged children, child-friendly teaching, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices.
- **Play Schemes:** The trained mothers are divided into 4 groups (of around 10 women), and each group is allocated 1 day of the week to deliver Play Scheme in the kindergarten classes, for around 1.5 hours. The Play Schemes consist of 5 stations: matching and sorting; numbers; size, colours and senses; books; and building. Each station is led by a different mother, who uses discovery-based teaching methods to teach children in small groups (around five per station). The remaining mothers facilitate active play outside (songs and games). Kindergarten teachers supervise and mentor the mothers.
- **Parenting Workshops:** The kindergarten teachers deliver a monthly Parenting Workshop for enrolled mothers using a scripted curriculum. These are designed to strengthen their knowledge on issues such as nutrition, hygiene, play-based learning, communication, malaria prevention, financial awareness and self-esteem; and to reinforce new behaviours and encourage their commitment to the

programme. This is an official GES parenting course, created as part of the GES-LM programme, and the mothers receive a GES certificate to recognise their participation in the course. Fathers are invited to one workshop per term although their participation is currently low. GES data suggests that an average of six fathers attend the sessions, although in our sample it was lower (between zero and three).

- A **radio programme** for parents (Lively Minds Together) is also broadcast weekly. GES teachers are trained to broadcast parenting episodes in local languages (based on scripts) to teach parents cost-free ways to increase learning and care at home. Topics include early learning, child health, and child safety and protection as well as parents' wellbeing, life skills and social norms.
- **GES oversight and support.** The GES district teams monitor the Play Schemes and training sessions, as part of their usual supervisory roles. They also provide training twice a term for kindergarten teachers who are in the programme, to prepare them for the monthly Parenting Workshops (such as training them on new games to introduce to the mothers) and to discuss challenges

The roll out of the programme has been staggered, with six districts joining each term. There are three phases of implementation:

- a 'Set up' phase –when district teams, schools and parents are sensitised and onboarded)
- an 'Embed' phase – a focus on implementation and monitoring, with LM INGO coaching and performance management support
- a 'Sustain' phase – when the programme is managed by GES with limited LM INGO support.

Figure 1: GES Lively Minds delivery model

The delivery model



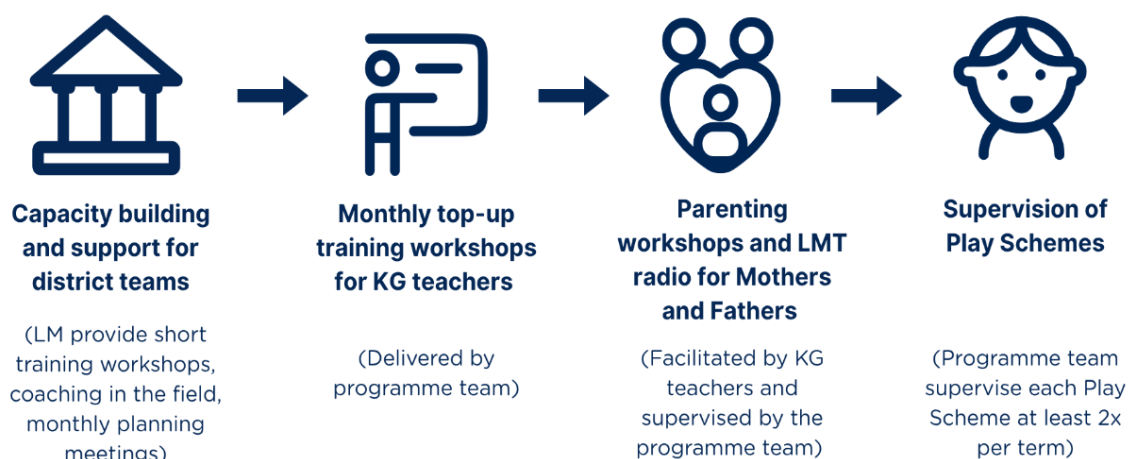
Set-up phase



The delivery model



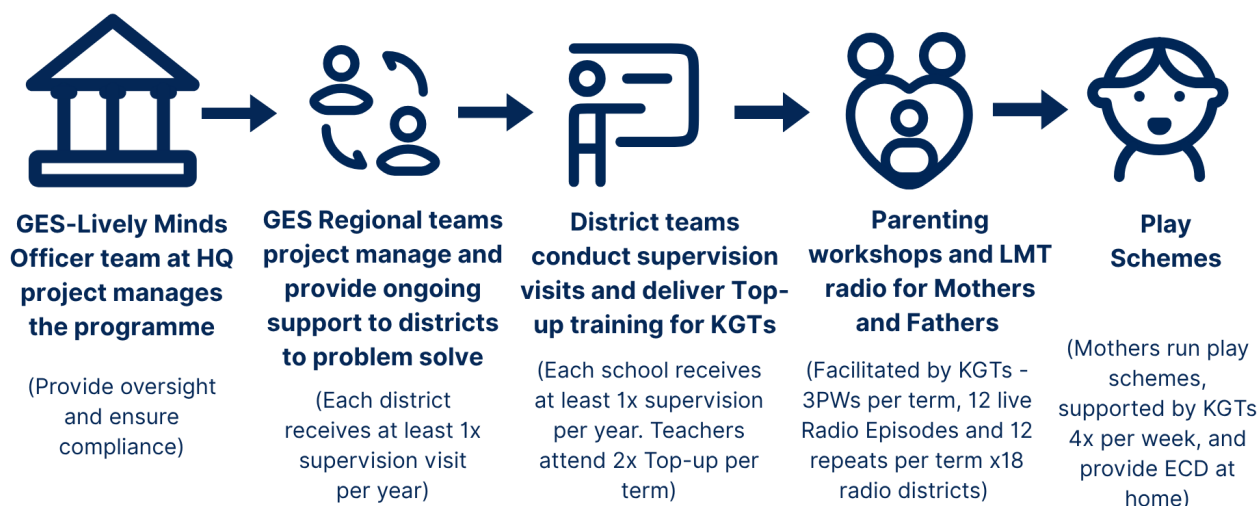
Embed phase



The delivery model



Set-up phase



Source: Lively Minds

Study design

The study used a comparative case study approach to determine the drivers of success and barriers.²¹ This involves synthesising patterns (similarities and differences) across a sample of communities (cases), and identifying common factors for success, and insights on how different combinations of factors work together to produce results or impede progress.

Sampling

The study was undertaken in 12 communities/schools, in 4 districts and 2 regions of northern Ghana (Table 2). The sampling was purposive and designed primarily to compare locations where the community engagement has been stronger and weaker, to enable learning on the contributing factors. The regions and districts were purposively sampled by LM INGO, based on criteria provided by the research team: two districts that were 'implementation success stories' and two that were less successful (Table 1), in terms of adherence to systems and sustained strong ratings in GES-LM monitoring. All four districts were among the first set to implement GES-LM and are now in the 'sustain' stage of the programme, meaning

²¹ Goodrick (2014).

that the district now implements the programme with limited technical support from Lively Minds NGO.

Table 2: Sample of schools, districts and regions

Regions	Districts	Schools / communities
Region 1	District 1 (implementation success story)	1 community engaging strongly in GES-LM
		1 community with average engagement
		1 community with engagement challenges
	District 2 (less successful implementation)	1 community engaging strongly in GES-LM
		1 community with average engagement
		1 community with engagement challenges
Region 2	District 3 (Implementation success story)	1 community engaging strongly in GES-LM
		1 community with average engagement
		1 community with engagement challenges
	District 4 (less successful implementation)	1 community engaging strongly in GES-LM
		1 community with average engagement
		1 community with engagement challenges

The communities were purposively sampled by GES district teams, using the following criteria.

- Four communities identified as 'implementation success stories' in regard to the active involvement and support of community stakeholders (mothers, fathers and chiefs for example); four where community engagement is perceived as weak; and four 'average' communities.
- None of the communities/schools were to have an especially strong or weak kindergarten teacher. This was to control for the known effect of high-capacity, motivated teachers over implementation success; in order that the study would focus on other (less known) factors and dynamics that the programme might influence.
- Across the sample, we asked for the inclusion of four remote communities, six rural (not remote), and two peri-urban communities. GES-LM was designed for rural areas and is not implemented in municipal districts.²² However, the scale-up includes rural districts with peri-urban areas, and these have often been included in the programme.

Overall, 479 community stakeholders were interviewed and 15 district officials (Table 3).

²² LM INGO has found that in urban areas, where many women have business livelihoods, they lack the time to support teaching in schools.

Table 3: Stakeholder sampling and research methods

Domain	Stakeholders	Target per community	Total sample (actual)	Of which female	Methods
Community/ school level	Head teacher	1	11	1	Key informant interviews Review of GES-LM monitoring data for the school
	Kindergarten teachers	1	12	12	
	Mothers	20	283	283	2 focus group discussions per community
	Husbands of enrolled mothers	3	36		In-depth interviews
	Female relatives	2	24	24	
	Community leaders (chiefs, assemblymen, GES-LM community ambassadors)	1 chief 2 ambassadors	31	13	
	PTA chair	1	15	2	
	Wider community members	5	68	36	
District government	District education director	1 per district	4	0	Key informant interviews Analysis of GES policy on community engagement
	GES-LM coordinator	1 per district	4	1	
	GES circuit supervisor	1 per district	3	0	
	School engagement officer	1 per district	4	1	
Total			494	407	

The stakeholder sampling was conducted as follows.

- **‘Enrolled mothers’ who participate in GES-LM.** The total population of (around 40) mothers per community are organised into 4 groups (with 10 mothers in each) who run Play Schemes 1 day per week. We asked headteachers to invite the two groups who run Play Schemes at the school on Mondays and Thursdays.
- **Kindergarten teachers and headteachers.** We alternated between Kindergarten-1 and Kindergarten-2 teachers.²³
- **GES community ambassadors.** There are 2–4 in each community. We invited all of them for an interview, with a target of engaging at least 2 per community.
- **Husbands and female relatives of the engaged mothers.** We asked the headteachers to select three husbands and two female relatives for interview, two of whom should have expressed concerns about GES-LM at some point over the implementation period.

²³ Kindergarten-1 classes are typically for children age 4–5, while Kindergarten-2 classes are for children age 5–6. In practice, however, some children are older.

- **Wider community members** were randomly sampled.²⁴ These interviews explored wider perspectives on parenting, ECCE and GES-LM, to enable comparison and triangulation with the views of participating families.

The research tools and sampling process were piloted in one community and school. This led to some changes to the tools and process, including: (a) revisions to the Likert scale on mothers' motivation; and (b) adaption of some local language translations of 'motivation' to avoid meaning remuneration.

Data collection and research tools

The interviews and focus group discussions were facilitated by twelve researchers, who collectively speak the various languages of each focal district. The team liaised with the headteachers in advance, who called many of the key stakeholders to the school for the focus group discussions and interviews. On entering each community, the team first sought the permission of the local chief to undertake the research and interviewed elders and senior stakeholders.

Permission to undertake the research was obtained from the GES, and the Ghana Ministry of Health provided research ethics approval. Permission to carry out and record the interviews/focus group discussions was sought from all respondents by means of a consent form that was read out loud in their local language.

Respondents were informed of the nature of the study and that the researchers would use the information to write a report, but that their names would not be identified. Participants were not given incentives and were told that they could withdraw from the interviews at any time. Some mothers did leave the focus group discussions before they ended, often to console their infants. Some wider community members also declined to be interviewed.

The focus group discussions with mothers and community ambassadors included some participatory tools, such as ranking of motivation (using stones to represent strength), and 'balloon and stone' analysis of motivators and demotivators (representing what 'lifts you up', and 'drags you down/ makes you feel heavy'). Such tools help people of low literacy to express themselves and analyse their experiences. The interviews with teachers, headteachers and PTA chairs included ranking the mothers' motivation, using a 5-point Likert scale. All key questions were asked to at least three stakeholder groups, to enable triangulation and analysis from different perspectives.

All interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in local languages. Each interview/focus group discussion was summarised in handwritten notes and recorded digitally. Transcripts were typed in English. A random sample of transcripts were cross-checked against the recordings, which resulted in some researchers being asked to improve the accuracy and depth of their transcripts.

²⁴ Six enumerators worked in each community (three men, three women). Each enumerator interviewed one wider community member of their own sex. The enumerators all walked through the community in a different direction (starting at the school) and selected the 25th house. If they were unable to secure an interview in that house, they asked in the next house and so on, until an interview was done.

Data analysis

The analysis was supported with use of *NVivo* software for qualitative analysis, which enables systematic coding and identification of relational trends in the data. A preliminary coding framework was developed based on the key research questions, but the coding was largely inductive, with codes created in response to themes arising in the data.

The coding was done daily during the fieldwork period. This enabled real-time quality assurance: identifying and supporting researchers who were not probing sufficiently or not writing good quality transcripts. It also enabled an iterative analytical approach: as key findings emerged, additional probes were added to the research tools, to promote deeper exploration of important issues and challenges. This dynamic responsive approach to the research was also enabled by daily sensemaking meetings with the research teams, in which emerging findings, and issues that required deeper explanation, were identified.

Co-creating the policy implications

GES was engaged throughout the study. The GES leadership shaped the high-level questions and reviewed the concept note, while GES technical staff reviewed the research tools. This helped to build GES ownership of the study and potential use of the findings. The findings were presented to the GES in various forums: GES senior leadership; GES-LM working group; and two wider disseminations that included GES technical staff. Through these engagements, and dedicated feedback, the policy implications were co-created with the GES.

Boundaries and limitations of the study

- **The study does not measure outcomes for children**, as this is the main focus of the RCT. However, some parental perspectives on child outcomes are explained in the report, as they are a factor in their motivations to support the programme implementation.
- **The study does not explore the role of the GES district or regional teams in any depth**, as these were the focus of the Thrive study on government implementation of GES-LM.
- **The study is based on a small sample of communities. This enabled deep-dive analysis of the programme dynamics in situated settings, but the sample is not representative.** Instead, the purposive sample includes varied implementation contexts, and communities where the programme is perceived to be going well and less well, which are compared to identify lessons on what works and challenges. Additionally, the interviews with GES officials and LM INGO staff explored wider trends across the districts, and perceptions of common enablers and challenges. The findings of this qualitative study will be combined with the RCT findings, to provide a mixed-method analysis – in which the qualitative analysis will help to explain processes, pathways, trends and anomalies.
- **The sample of ‘wider community members’** (five per community) was too limited to gain a full picture of wider community opinion. This was due to budget

constraints. These interviews were used to gain a snapshot of wider perspectives on GES-LM and especially the radio programme (from people who are not directly involved in implementation) and to triangulate the findings. The RCT included a larger representative sample of 'wider community members', which should help to strengthen the analysis.

Engaging communities

In practice, the approach to engaging communities during set up phase has varied, with some district GES teams taking a more in-depth approach (see Table 4).

Box 1: GES-LM community engagement model

The PTA chairs are the GES-LM entry point to community engagement. They are invited to the initial GES-LM sensitisation workshop for school staff and are tasked with briefing the community chief and other 'opinion leaders' (locally influential people) to gain their support for the programme. **Through liaison with chiefs and opinion leaders,** PTA chairs are asked to mobilise community members for a sensitisation meeting about GES-LM, at which mothers are encouraged to participate, and their husband's support is sought. PTA chairs are also integrated into ongoing implementation: they are asked to attend the monthly Parenting Workshops and to visit the Play Schemes at least weekly (to encourage the mothers and provide feedback), and to facilitate discussion on GES-LM at PTA meetings.

Each community is asked to nominate three to five GES-LM community ambassadors (usually opinion leaders) to play a local leadership role for the programme. This role includes promoting GES-LM to the community, and (in liaison with community leaders) helping to resolve problems that arise with community engagement. The ambassadors are expected to visit the GES-LM Play Schemes once per week (to encourage and coach the mothers) and to attend the monthly Parenting Workshops (to show local leadership and provide feedback).

- **The most in-depth approach (Districts A and C) involved ongoing multiple engagements.** In addition to PTA and community meetings led by local leaders, there were separate meetings for mothers and fathers (to promote support for their wives' participation), house-to-house visits and the use of local radio to raise wider awareness. In these two districts, we found that this more in-depth approach laid the foundations for wider community appreciation of GES-LM and more active engagement from community leaders (Box 2), which have been enablers for success.
- **The most limited approach (identified in District B) focused only on the PTAs,** which inevitably comprise parents who are already more involved in the school. Where this lighter-touch approach was used, community chiefs had been informed and gave their consent for GES-LM, but we found that they lacked ownership of GES-LM and have not played an active role in implementation. Wider community appreciation of GES-LM was also generally lower in Districts B and D, compared to Districts A and C. **As shown in Table 4, where community leaders are less actively involved we generally found greater challenges with the reliability of the participating mothers** in running the Play Schemes (such as

periodic non-attendance and unpunctuality); and some issues with sustaining the support of husbands. In Table 4 the green, amber and pink shading relates to 'strong', 'moderate' and 'weak' engagement. These rankings are based on the primary research. The rankings for the mothers' reliability are based on kindergarten teacher scores, using a Likert scale (1–5), coupled with the focus group discussions with mothers.

- **As this suggests, in our sample, the approaches to community engagement taken by different GES district teams affected later implementation dynamics,** with more extensive engagement being a building block for successful implementation. Table 4 shows particularly strong correlation between extensive community engagement during *Set Up* phase, the active involvement of community leaders' and more reliable participation from mothers in running the Play Schemes (communities 2, 3, 7 and 8).
- **The different approaches were also shaped by the type of community.** In smaller, remote communities, the engagement was often simpler. But the complexities of 'community' were greater in large villages and peri-urban areas. For example, in two of the larger remote communities, PTA chairs explained the challenges of ensuring that the various neighbourhoods and their leaders were all equally involved: in one village, some leaders had been overlooked and later '*refused to participate*'. Such complexities are exacerbated in peri-urban areas, as a GES official explained:

In [a peri-urban area], I don't even know what 'the community' is! The kindergarten children come from all over, they don't all live around the school. And in that case, which community leaders do you engage; where do you hold a community meeting? So we told the teachers to just hold a PTA meeting to explain GES-LM and recruit some mothers. We later asked them to involve some opinion leaders, but it was difficult... Without community leadership, we have struggled to keep the mothers engaged. (GES district official)

Mothers' time to engage in GES-LM is also generally lower in peri-urban areas, due to the predominance of trading livelihoods.

- **In all but one of the sampled communities, GES-LM ambassadors were actively engaged, and their commitment was generally rated as 'strong' by kindergarten teachers and mothers** (Table 4). This has often included participating in Parenting Workshops; regular monitoring of the Play Schemes; coaxing the mothers to attend, and counselling those who start to disengage. Most of the sampled ambassadors had some status in the community (as educated businessmen, women leaders, Assemblymen, etc), thus their presence and active involvement has helped to symbolise recognition of the mothers' work, and the importance of the programme to the community.

Table 4: Mapping engagement approaches against stakeholder participation

	Community	Initial engagement of communities: what meetings were facilitated?					Engagement in implementation (at time of study)			
		PTA meeting	Women's meeting	Men's meeting	Wider community engagement	Met community leaders	Engaged mothers' reliability at Play Schemes	Local leaders	GES-LM Ambassadors	Husbands' support
District A	Community 1 (large, remote)	✓	✓	✓	Meeting led by PTA (no chief present)	✓	(3) 20% late/absent → often cancel PS		✓	
	Community 2 (large, remote)	✓	House visits	House visits	Meeting led by chief, radio, house-to-house	✓	(5) Good reliability	✓	✓	✓
	Community 3 (remote)	✓	✓	✓	Several meetings, led by chief	✓	(5) Good reliability	✓	✓	✓
District B	Community 4 (rural)	✓	X	✓	X	✓	(4) Many late, 20% absent		✓	✓
	Community 5 (peri-urban)	✓	X	X	X	Some informed	(4) Many late, 20% absent		✓	
	Community 6 (peri-urban)	✓	X	X	X	X Not informed	(2) 50% drop-out out. Many late or absent		None engaged	
District C	Community 7 (rural)	✓	✓	✓	Meeting led by chief. House visits and radio	✓	(5) Good reliability	✓	✓	✓
	Community 8 (remote)	✓	✓	✓	Several, led by chiefs and radio	✓	(5) Good reliability	✓	✓	✓
	Community 9 (rural)	✓	✓	✓	Yes, chief came. Radio sensitisation	✓	(3) 20% late or don't attend. Drop-outs		✓	✓
District D	Community 10 (rural)	✓	X	Later, met unhappy men	Meeting led by chief	✓	(4) Many late, 20% absent	Declining	✓	
	Community 11 (remote)	✓	X	X	Meeting led by chief.	✓	(4) Many late, 20% absent	✓	✓	✓
	Community 12 (large remote)	✓	X	X	Meeting led by PTA (no chief present)	Some engaged	(3) 50% late or don't attend		✓	

Key: Green = strong; Amber = moderate; Pink = weak

Box 2: Contrasting cases of strong and weak engagement from community leaders

Strong (Community 8, rural):

The endorsement of the chief and opinion leaders was crucial. They facilitated discussions, guided selection of mothers, and they sometimes motivate the women with small items like soap. Sometimes if the chief hears that women have stopped coming to the Play Schemes, he will counsel them and talk to their husbands. Then we observe that things get back to normal. ... The [GES-LM] ambassadors are active, yes, they ensure the Play Schemes run smoothly by overseeing activities and mobilising the mothers to turn up. They provide boxes and sticks for educational tools and visit the school daily to monitor attendance of the mothers... All this is why the programme is going well here. (PTA chair)

Weak (Community 6, peri-urban):

I was not consulted about Lively Minds. They told me about it much later, but I am not involved in it. (Community leader)

No, the community leaders are not supporting Lively Minds, and it's because the community engagement was not done well: the leaders were not engaged. It was the job of the PTA executives, but they do not take Lively Minds seriously. This is why we struggle to get the women at the Play Schemes, as there is no leadership from the community. Half of the women dropped out as they complained about the lack of incentives. We had to recruit some new mothers, but the old mothers have even told them not to 'put their all' in as there is no pay. So their punctuality and attendance are worse than the first set of women. (Headteacher)

Community leaders: what worked?

Community leaders had varied reasons for supporting the programme, yet some influences and barriers were widely mentioned, across most of the communities (Table 5).

Table 5: Enablers and challenges of engaging community leaders

What worked to engage community leaders	Challenges with engaging local leaders
<p>Messages that piqued initial interest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local children would become more brilliant • shaping better future for the community • GES-LM use of local (minority) languages • local mothers working in the schools. <p>Factors sustaining interest in implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children now more fluent in local language • greater kindergarten attendance and child development • Better hygiene practices in community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mindset that teaching is the responsibility of teachers • Beliefs that PTA executives or the head/teachers are embezzling the money intended for the participating mothers • Lack of incentives offered for engaging • Complexities of 'community'

What piqued their interest?

The message about GES-LM shaping 'a better future for the community' was widely mentioned as an influencing factor and was underpinned by hopes that local children might get into lucrative careers (such as business, law, medicine) and bring benefits to the community.

GES-LM's use of local languages (which are often minority languages) piqued the interest of many community leaders and also wider community members. In addition to enabling the mothers to teach and children to learn, the interviews highlighted that use of local languages symbolises their importance and has helped to build local ownership of GES-LM. For some chiefs and elders, this was reinforced by GES-LM teams asking them to identify local words (for colours and shapes for example) that had been forgotten over time due to the 'mixing' of languages and the use of English in schools. Perhaps due to 'mixing', some parents described occasional challenges in communicating with their children. In this context, elders and parents across the communities were enthusiastic about the impact of GES-LM on children's fluency in their mother tongue and described this as an important community development outcome.

For some leaders, the engagement of local mothers as teachers raised their interest. As one explained, 'What really attracted me to Lively Minds is how it trains local mothers to teach and uses the local language: It is good for our women to learn how to teach, and I thought it would motivate the children to learn' (opinion leader).

Most of the sampled community leaders also explained that their interest and belief in GES-LM has grown as outcomes have started to materialise. In this regard, the most frequently mentioned outcomes were greater fluency in local languages, increased kindergarten attendance, progress with child development (such as becoming more confident, social, creative and inquisitive), and better hygiene and sanitation practices at schools and around the community.

What were the challenges?

Building the interest of community leaders took time, and there were challenges.

While the engagement of local mothers piqued the interest of some community leaders, it was a point of contention for others. As one PTA chair explained, 'It wasn't easy convincing the opinion leaders at first. Some had the mindset that teaching is the teachers' responsibility, so they saw Lively Minds as the teachers trying to avoid work.' Some community leaders were also demotivated by the lack of incentives offered (to both themselves and the mothers) for their engagement, and some had suspicions that the school staff or GES were embezzling the funds. Several GES officials explained that expectations for incentives have been raised by the international NGO and United Nations programmes that do provide them. Another challenge for engaging community leaders (reported in some areas) has been the weak interest or capacity of the PTA executives or headteachers to do so.

Maintaining the active engagement of community leaders has also required ongoing advocacy in some communities. In two communities, the local leaders' involvement and attendance at Parenting Workshops had gradually dwindled, which teachers believed to be affected by the lack of incentives and refreshments. In many

areas, the local leaders' engagement in GES-LM has also dipped in the rainy season, when farming is intensive.

What encouraged mothers to enrol?

Across the communities, the factors that initially encouraged mothers to join the programme were similar. Some of these aligned with the programme messages, while others highlight the influence of community leaders, or an undercurrent of hope that their work in the school would eventually lead to remuneration, personal benefits or opportunities.

Figure 2: Dominant themes in mothers' explanations of why they enrolled in GES-LM



Note: Text size corresponds with the frequency of that word in mothers' explanations.

Motivations that align with programme messages were dominant in mothers' stories, such as seizing the opportunity to 'help our children have a better future' and 'contributing to the development of the community'. These explanations were often peppered with optimism that children would 'become future leaders' and 'bring fortune to the family'. For some, there was also a sense of responsibility to the community, as one woman explained: 'We discussed that if we don't accept to do this work, the community would lose out.'

Some mothers had been inspired by the use of their mother tongue in the Play Schemes, and wanted their children to become more fluent, or for the language to be recognised in the education system.

I enrolled as I heard about the benefits the programme would bring to my children. Just imagine if my child could speak Konkomba fluently, count correctly in Konkomba, and identify colours, what a joy that would be! (Enrolled mother)

Currently, there is no Sissali [language] in the BECE examination, but if the children study Sissali now, it might one day be included in the curriculum, which would reduce the struggles of our children – of having to learn in other languages. (Enrolled mother)

Hopes for personal benefits: Although mothers were told (from the start) that they would never receive payment or gifts-in-kind for participation in GES-LM, expectations of such benefits were nonetheless an underlying motivation for many women.

I was told that participating in this programme will help me to one day become a teacher. If someone calls you to do some work for them, will you say no? No! You will agree to do it, as something will surely come of it. (Enrolled mother)

When they said there would be no pay, we knew that they wanted to see how well we will work before they give us something. Even though now, still nothing is given to us directly, we are still hoping that someday, they will look into our faces and give us our dues. (Enrolled mother)

Across the communities, mothers explained that some women had declined to participate or had left the programme when they understood that there would be no remuneration.

Another common theme in mothers' explanations was being encouraged to participate by community leaders or opinion leaders. It was notable that a number of engaged mothers were the wives of PTA chairs or community leaders, some of whom explained, 'We could not ask other men to allow their wives to give up their time for the programme, if our own wives were not doing it too.' (PTA chair)

An intended motivator that was seldom mentioned were the GES certificates, which the mothers receive for completing a series of Parenting Workshops. While a few mothers said that they were a source of pride, an equal number said that they have 'no use' or 'bring no benefit'.

Gaining the support of husbands

In the northern Ghana context, fostering the support of husbands has been key to enabling the mothers' participation. In most of the communities, this **required targeted discussions with men to overcome their concerns**, which revolved around three key issues: (a) their wives not being available for farmwork while at the Play Schemes; (b) the lack of incentives; and (c) questions about how their wife would teach if she's illiterate. Two key messages were widely mentioned by husbands as influencing their support: (a) that the programme would 'brighten the children's future', which would eventually support the family and community; and (b) that the mothers' involvement was crucial because young children learn best in their mother tongue – so local women have a skill that is needed in kindergarten classes.

Key interventions: enablers and challenges

This section explores the enablers and challenges of the three main interventions: Play Schemes, Parenting Workshops and the Lively Minds Together radio programme.

Play Schemes

Perceptions of quality

Across the sampled schools, teachers reported that mothers are delivering 'good quality' Play Schemes. Commonly referenced elements of 'quality' were the mothers' arrangement of the children in groups, ensuring that the learning materials (picture cards, etc) face the children (not the mother), and 'making sure that the children take turns and can see, touch, hear and practice what is presented to them'. Teachers also defined quality in terms of the mothers' engagement with the children, such as a 'calm, friendly manner', providing clear guidance, demonstration, listening, asking questions and gently correcting mistakes. Some teachers also described 'quality' in terms of child engagement outcomes, such as children now being more eager to attend kindergarten, more child peer interaction (such as asking each other questions about the learning tasks) and improved listening, attention and behaviour. The mothers also referred to new handwashing norms as integral to the Play Schemes and their quality.

There were some perceived weaknesses in the quality of the Play Schemes. The most commonly reported challenges were a lack of effective classroom control, and the mothers' fluctuating punctuality and attendance – which affects the quality of implementation. For example, numerous mothers described occasions when they had managed two play stations, or larger groups of children, because other mothers were absent. Most of the teachers also explained that a few of the engaged mothers 'still lack patience' and a small number have 'insulted or hit the children'. Both kindergarten teachers and GES-LM ambassadors explained that they intervene when this happens and guide the mothers on managing stress and calm interaction. Capacities to teach also inevitably vary: some mothers were described as 'less engaging' or as not understanding the more complex games (e.g. Tagrams²⁵). These challenges were described as areas for ongoing mentoring and support from kindergarten teachers.

²⁵ Tagrams are puzzles that require the arrangement of geometric shapes within a given outline.

Enablers for good quality

Both mothers and teachers felt that the quality of the Play Schemes has been underpinned by the initial training for mothers, but moreover through learning-by-doing, ongoing mentoring and top-up training. Mothers widely explained that the initial training helped to build their confidence (to speak publicly and to learn), and self-belief in their ability to teach and to ‘take on an important job’, as well as building their understanding of ECCE, the Play Scheme concept, and how to facilitate games and learning. Yet many mothers had felt shy and unsure of themselves when they started facilitating the Play Schemes. They gained the skills and confidence for teaching gradually – through practical experience, supported by mentoring and supervision from teachers and their peers.

When I first started, I was confused and did not know how to handle the Play Schemes. But the teacher was patient, she took the time to explain everything, guided me, and encouraged me. Before long, I was able to catch on quickly.
(Engaged mother)

Every day, before the mothers start the Play Schemes, I do a refresher on the games they will use that day, by having the mothers practice the games. That helps a lot, as many of the mothers have short memories about the games. ... When they are playing the games, I go around to make sure the mothers are being interactive and encouraging the children, and I congratulate them and correct them when needed. ... We were taught to do it like that by GES, in the trainings for teachers. (Kindergarten teacher)

The monthly Parenting Workshops were also identified as a key space in which the mothers’ capacity to run the Play Scheme was strengthened. In addition to learning new educational games each month, the workshops have provided an important space for the mothers to reflect on the Play Schemes, and to share challenges and gain feedback and support from teachers and their peers. Peer support among mothers was emphasised as important for capacity building, as one mother explained, ‘We women know our challenges, we know how we learned to do it better, so we help each other and correct each other – sometimes that is more comfortable than being corrected by the teacher’. Numerous mothers also identified the Parenting Workshop sessions on time management and stress management as helping to build their capacity to deliver good quality Play Schemes.

During the stress management workshop, we were encouraged to share our worries with the other women. I shared that I felt stressed managing the children, and that sometimes I felt I may get angry and shout. That helped to ease the burden because a problem shared is a problem half-solved. Other women confessed they felt the same, and we discussed it, and the teacher gave advice. It brought us together and taught us how to manage stress. I felt more confident teaching after that. (Engaged mother)

I have seen many changes in the mothers since participating in Lively Minds. Some mothers were very harsh on the children during Play Schemes. We had to take them to the side and advise them severally, we coached them to stay calm. Most are not harsh on the children again. Some mothers didn’t like to be

corrected, but now they mostly accept the corrections as guidance and learning.
(Teacher)

The use of local languages in the Play Schemes and training was also widely identified as an enabler for quality, as it has supported the engagement, learning and confidence of both the mothers and children. A large number of mothers explained that the use of their mother tongue helped them to 'believe that we could teach, even though we have not been to school and don't speak English'. Many parents similarly felt that their children are more comfortable engaging in their local language and that it 'makes the classes more interactive and fun,' which has made children much more willing to attend kindergarten.

However, in several of the sampled communities (rural and urban) there were various languages, and this has presented a challenge. As one mother explained, 'The Fulani and Dagbare mothers in the programme find it very difficult to speak Sissali. We try to group the children and mothers who speak the same languages, but it is not always possible.' Some GES officials asserted the need for more ethnic diversity among enrolled mothers – to improve child inclusion. But they also noted the practical difficulties of facilitating training and play sessions in multiple languages.

Beyond capacity building, a clear contributor to the quality of the Play Schemes has been the commitment of many of the enrolled mothers. Table 4 (in the previous section) shows that in 8 of the 12 sampled schools, kindergarten teachers and headteachers rated the mothers' commitment to the Play Schemes as strong or very strong (4/5 or 5/5, with '5' representing 'very strong commitment'). The factors that affect the mothers' motivation are critical to the programme's success and are explored in a later section ('Mothers' motivation'). But regarding the Play Schemes specifically, a clear finding of the research (across the communities) was that mothers enjoy running the Play Schemes, and have derived considerable confidence, pride and self-esteem from the experience.

Play Scheme implementation challenges

The most widely noted challenge has been the poor punctuality and unreliability of some of the mothers. Table 4 (in the previous section) provides an indication of mothers' punctuality and attendance, based on the ratings of kindergarten teachers. It shows that in 8 of the 12 communities, there have been persistent challenges, with, on average, 20% of mothers being absent and 50% being late. These challenges have been worse in the rainy season when farming is intensive, which also affects their husbands' support.

Poor punctuality results in the Play Schemes starting late. Consequently, the mothers who arrive on time are often at the school for over three hours. This contradicts the intended model, which is based on mothers working at the school for 1.5 hours, on the assumption that this would not greatly impinge on their time. Punctuality is affected by weak time management skills, and many mothers do not have a watch or phone. Yet it is also affected by motivation. The factors which affect the mothers' motivation are explored in later sections ('Outcomes for the engaged mothers' and 'Mothers' motivation').

A related challenge mentioned by many kindergarten teachers and GES-LM ambassadors has been the ongoing need to coax and remind the mothers to come to the school on their assigned day. Some teachers spoke of doing so nearly every day, which has been a burden on their time. Thus, while the Play Schemes are being implemented each week, this has not happened smoothly. In all locations, the mothers' attendance has been weaker during the rainy season, when they are needed at the farm. It is also affected by unexpected family events (such as burials and illness) and broader dips in motivation affected by the lack of incentives, the opportunity costs (e.g. farming work), fluctuating support from husbands and other dynamics.

These challenges are frequently discussed in the monthly Parenting Workshops, where mothers and teachers reflect on the Play Schemes. In some communities, stakeholders have made adjustments to help manage the challenges, such as holding the Play Schemes earlier in the morning (e.g. 7am to 8am, before school), so that the mothers can also farm that day.

Many teachers and mothers also complained that the GES-LM teaching and learning materials were 'worn out' or 'spoiled' and so less engaging for the children. The teaching and learning materials were designed to be made and repaired locally. Yet many mothers were frustrated that they are unable to make durable games, and 'spend too much time repairing games in the evenings'.

Parenting Workshops

The Parenting Workshops are facilitated by kindergarten teachers for the engaged mothers. They have various functions: (a) a space for feedback and discussion on the Play Schemes, congratulating the mothers for their work, and peer mentoring on teaching skills and challenges; (b) training the mothers on the new 'game of the month'; and (c) an educational session on a parenting topic, such as nurturing interaction, nutritious meals, hand-washing and malaria prevention, or broader skills such as time management and managing money.

In each of the sampled schools, the Parenting Workshops have been taking place monthly, and the mothers' attendance has been strong. This is driven by the value that mothers derive from the workshops, which is explored in 'Parenting Workshops'. GES-LM has tried to involve fathers in some of the workshops, but this has been a challenge. In the sampled communities, fathers' attendance has ranged from just a few fathers to none. Where they do attend, this has sometimes been encouraged by a male figurehead (such as the PTA chair or community leader) who has attended the meeting himself. Sampled fathers generally explained that they are 'too busy'. Some teachers felt that workshops targeted specifically at men may attract them, and the GES is already working towards this.

Implementation enablers

LM international NGO staff emphasised that kindergarten teachers' commitment and facilitation skills vary, which affects the quality of the Parenting Workshops. Several teachers explained that the presence of community leaders, GES-LM

ambassadors or the PTA chair at the workshops can, ‘... make things smoother, since they can intervene if the women argue or don’t understand something’. Some mothers also noted that the ambassadors’ participation makes them feel recognised and ‘... shows that the community leaders and elders support the programme’.

Some teachers noted that combining several functions into the Parenting Workshops has been an enabler, as it is efficient. **Providing a space for group feedback and mentoring** was seen as crucial, by many mothers and teachers, as it has helped to strengthen the mothers’ skills and ownership of the programme. This has encouraged them to reflect and share their progress and challenges, and to provide peer mentoring. In that regard, some teachers emphasised the importance of **creating a safe space, in which the mothers feel comfortable talking**. This has inevitably taken time to nurture and, in the view of several teachers, has been supported by taking a ‘jovial approach with clapping and singing’, ‘not forcing anyone to speak but encouraging them’, and ‘congratulating the mothers when they speak up to share experiences or advice’. Some teachers also explained that it is important that ‘we are very transparent with the mothers during the workshops, so they know what the programme entails, and we don’t raise expectations.’

In most communities, the mothers jointly define the day and time of the next workshop, which has promoted convenience and a sense of ownership. In some cases, this has led to the workshops being held in the evenings, or on the day before market day (when women do not farm) and not during school hours, as suggested by the model.

Challenges and issues to consider

While the Parenting Workshops have been successful in each of the sampled communities, three key challenges were commonly described.

- **Finding a suitable time for the Parenting Workshops has been a challenge in some schools** (one-third in the sample), especially smaller schools with fewer teachers and classrooms. It is intended that Parenting Workshops be facilitated during school hours (as kindergarten classes end two hours before older grades, thus leaving a two-hour window during their working day). Yet where kindergarten children share a classroom and teacher with higher grades, holding the Parenting Workshop in school hours has disrupted lesson time: ‘We have to take a teacher and classroom for the Parenting Workshop, so the children are sent outside’ (Headteacher). To side-step this challenge, some schools have held the workshops in the evenings, which is therefore outside of the kindergarten teachers’ working hours.
- When asked how the Parenting Workshops could be improved, **many mothers complained that the lack of refreshments was demotivating**, and some teachers felt that it was culturally inappropriate. As one explained: ‘How can we invite people to a meeting and not even give them water?’ In some schools, the headteacher or ambassadors try to ensure that water is provided, as well as occasional bottled drinks and snacks to show appreciation of the mothers’ work (see ‘Teachers’ experiences and outcomes for schools’), even though this is not recommended in the GES-LM model.

- **Another challenge mentioned across communities has been the poor punctuality of many mothers.** As with the Play Schemes, this makes the sessions very long for mothers who do turn up on time, while, 'Some mothers who are late miss important information'.

Mothers' suggestions for improving the Parenting Workshops

In some communities, where the engagement of local leaders has been limited, mothers emphasised that the Parenting Workshops would be strengthened by their presence. A key theme in this regard was encouraging the participation of husbands and their support for the household behavioural changes that are promoted in the parenting sessions. Some mothers also felt that if local leaders regularly engage in the workshops, it may strengthen their support for the programme: 'If they came to the workshops, they might replace the Play Scheme materials that have spoilt'; and 'If the chief came, he might appreciate us or bring refreshments.'

Most mothers felt that all of the topics covered in the workshops so far had been useful in their lives, although a small number had been less interested in the sessions on gender roles and numeracy. The gender roles session had encouraged mothers to engage their boys in tasks like washing plates. Some women had done this and were excited to share the experience, while others felt it was 'not how we were brought up'. **In regard to additional topics, the vast majority of mothers requested training on livelihoods with small start-up costs,** such as making soap, shea butter, pastries, gari or groundnut paste, as well as training on business start-up and management. GES had promised livelihood trainings for enrolled mothers some time back, and there was some frustration among mothers that it had not yet materialised.

Radio programme

The Lively Minds Together radio programme is broadcast weekly on 18 radio stations in 16 districts, in local languages. Using scripted discussions to promote behavioural change, the programme covers topics such as fathers' roles in ECCE, calm interaction with children, nutrition and hygiene. There are also regular episodes to teach educational games that parents can play with pre-school children, and opportunities for listeners to call in to ask questions and share testimonials. Where it is implemented, the radio programme is led by the district GES teams and teachers, using translated scripts written by the Lively Minds international NGO.

Reach and access

We found that the radio programme was being implemented by 2 of the 4 sampled GES district teams, and that the radio broadcasts reach 9 of the 12 sampled communities (with 3 receiving the broadcasts from radio stations in neighbouring districts). In the 9 communities that do receive the broadcasts, **only one-third of respondents (n = 232) had ever listened to the programme.** In the 9 communities that do receive the broadcasts, the main reasons given for not listening to the programme were as follows.

- **Almost half of the respondents had no access to a radio.** These were mainly from six communities (in two of the districts), and a slightly higher proportion were female.
- **Around one-quarter were unaware of the programme,** which suggests the need to increase awareness raising.
- **Around one-tenth said that the time of the programme was inconvenient.** The timing varies per district (from 5pm to 8pm) but it is generally intended to be after people have returned from work. However, some men reported that the programme is aired when they are praying, or when they have not yet returned from the farm.
- **Around one-tenth said they are too busy to listen to the programme.**

These findings suggest that access to a radio is the most notable barrier. Indeed, the only communities where most respondents had listened to Lively Minds Together were those with a communal information centre (three communities, all in one district), which both women and men had used to listen to the programme. To increase the potential audience, the radio programmes are repeated at other times in the week. Mothers in one community suggested that the GES could perhaps record the radio programmes and send it to the headmaster, so that the mothers could convene and listen to it together.

Changed perceptions and practices in wider communities

Most 'wider community members' who had listened to the radio programme said that they found it enjoyable and useful, and that it has changed some of their perceptions and practices. The most commonly mentioned changes were as follows (in order of frequency):

- **Greater understanding of the importance of ECCE,** which encouraged them to enrol their children in kindergarten or to ensure that they attend more regularly.
- **Encouraging all family members to wash their hands and not leaving water uncovered.**
- **Greater awareness of their own roles, as parents, in their young child's learning.** Numerous parents explained that, 'Before, we thought that teachers do all the teaching that is needed' (Male community member).
- **Playing educational games with young children at home** (e.g. counting yams and identifying colours) and asking their preschool children what they have learned at kindergarten.
- **Efforts to be calmer** and more patient with their children.

Yes, we use the suggestions from the radio programme. My wife usually asks my children to bring her things that are yellow or green from around the house. And when I am less busy, I also do counting and colours with the children. (Male community member)

I enjoy the programme because the language is clear and the airing time is perfect. I ask my grandchildren to listen with me. Yes, we do follow some of the advice. We sometimes give meat to children now, and we don't leave drinking water uncovered for so long. We also wash our hands very well after toileting. (Female community member)

- **Better understanding and prioritisation of nutrition**, including the need for young children to eat proteins and vegetables. A few men also reported that the radio programme had encouraged them to give their wives money to buy nutritious foods.

Enablers for engagement and outcomes

Interviews with wider community members pointed to several factors that have supported these outcomes. Most notably, **the interactive nature of the programmes has promoted parent and child engagement**. As one father explained:

The presenter sings songs about addition and subtraction in Sissali [local language], and we sing along with the children. After it ends, I gather my children again to sing the song together.

Several fathers and mothers have also been **attracted by the scenarios and moral stories** through which information is shared. One father explained:

I like the way they put up interesting scenarios, like shouting at a child, then listeners call-in to advise on the better way to resolve the issue. It makes it funny and interesting.

Some responses also indicated that promoting simple 'do-able' actions has been effective. For example, encouraging parents to 'Dispose of rubbish far away from the house, so that the children don't play in it. This was not difficult to do' (Female community member). Similarly, many parents spoke of replicating educational games using readily available items, such as yams, peppers and corn.

Links between the radio programme and other components

While the radio programme is a route to engaging wider community members, the theory of change also anticipates that enrolled mothers would listen to it, and that this would consolidate their learning from the Parenting Workshops. This effect was noted only in the three communities with communal information centres. Few of the sampled mothers in the other nine sampled communities had ever listened to the radio programme, either because the radio broadcasts do not reach their area, or they have no access to a radio.

The links between the radio programme and other components of GES-LM were quite strong in the three communities with communal information centres. For example, a large number of the enrolled mothers in these communities had first heard about GES-LM from the radio, and numerous men said that messages shared on the radio programme had compelled them to support their wives' participation. Some community leaders also explained that the ongoing radio programme had strengthened their understanding of the programme.

Some mothers in these communities explained that the radio programme had consolidated the learning from the Parenting Workshops, such as 'which local foods give us nutrients' and 'reminding us about home sanitation'. Some mothers have also found it motivating to 'listen to the experiences of mothers in other districts – it excites me a lot!'

Teachers' experiences and outcomes for schools

Kindergarten teachers' experiences of GES-LM

All sampled teachers said that they enjoyed the Play Schemes and found GES-LM motivating, with strong agreement on the reasons for this. We found very little variation across the schools.

Figure 3: Positives and challenges of GES-LM for teachers

Positives	Challenges
✓ Mothers' assistance in classroom reduces teachers' workload	❖ Mothers being absent or late; constantly having to coax them
✓ Play Schemes makes teaching easier as children are more creative and learn faster	❖ Dealing with mothers' complaints about the lack of incentives
✓ GES-LM is strengthening the bond between teachers and parents	❖ Feeling obliged to use their own money to incentivise the mothers.
✓ Increases teachers' access to teaching and learning materials	❖ Meagre transport allowance given to teachers for training
✓ Teachers are gaining skills from GES-LM	

- **The mothers provide much needed support in the classroom**, enabling kindergarten teachers to effectively manage large classes. Some teachers contrasted this with the situation before GES-LM, when they felt overwhelmed, which was causing burn-out and demotivation.
- **Many teachers said that they enjoyed their relationships with the mothers**, and the experience of having other adults to collaborate with and share classroom experiences.
- **The Play Schemes create a lively and engaging learning environment, which kindergarten teachers enjoy**. Most kindergarten teachers spoke of child laughter and happiness as the new norm in their classroom. As one teacher explained:
Before GES-LM, we would shout at the children and expect them to recite after us [rote learning]; some of them would cry and refuse to come to school. But now they are enjoying the learning, and you see them happily running to school.

- **In this regard, many kindergarten teachers referred to transformation of their teaching practices**, based on a new understanding of how to effectively engage children and facilitate learning. These skills and effectiveness were, again, described as motivating.
- **All sampled kindergarten teachers perceived faster child progression as a result of the Play Schemes**, which they described as generating pride, job satisfaction and motivation.
- **Some teachers also reported that more parents are now committed to bathing and feeding their children before school**, with effects on increasing child energy and focus.
- **Some teachers also felt that GES-LM had raised the status of kindergarten within their school, due to the resourcing of the programme and the interest it generates.** As one teacher expressed:

Before, kindergarten was the lowest status grade; many even saw kindergarten teachers as less intelligent and say that we just babysit the children! But Lively Minds has raised the status of kindergarten, as they see the resources that GES is putting in, teaching and learning materials, monthly trainings, visits from GES and even foreigners come to see the Play Schemes.

Driven by these benefits, the programme has notably improved kindergarten teachers' attendance and punctuality, according to headteachers across the sampled schools. This is partly because engaged mothers come to the school each morning, so the teachers feel compelled to attend too and to be punctual, as they need to set up the Play Schemes before the mothers arrive. In this regard, several teachers emphasised that the mothers are not paid so, 'Teachers need to be on time and to perform well, to keep the mothers coming'.

The teachers' motivation was evident in the effort they are putting into the programme. Beyond training and supervising the mothers, most of the kindergarten teachers have invested in building relationships with the mothers, visiting them at home, and counselling them or their husbands when their attendance at the Play Schemes dwindles.

Yet these required efforts were also described as a challenge by many kindergarten teachers. Most sampled teachers felt that the need to constantly coax the mothers has been a burden on their time. It has also been a burden on their pockets, as most of the teachers (9 of the 12 schools) feel obliged to occasionally incentivise the mothers with small gifts or refreshments (see 'Kindergarten teachers' experiences of GES-LM'), both to motivate the mothers and to demonstrate their appreciation of their work.

Benefits for schools

Increased kindergarten enrolment and attendance

Headteachers in each of the sampled schools reported that kindergarten attendance has increased since GES-LM began, while five of the schools reported increased child enrolment. This was

verified by parents across the communities, who widely reported that their kindergarten-age children are now eager to go to school. This was compared to the situation before GES-LM when numerous parents said that their children, 'refused to go to school', or would 'roam around instead of staying there'. As this suggests, decisions to attend school are often quite child-led, as many parents are at the farm at that time. Parents' explanations as to why their children are now more willing to attend kindergarten were similar: the children feel more comfortable at school with their mothers or aunties in the classroom and learning in their local languages, and they enjoy the lively, nurturing classroom environment. This was compared to the earlier kindergarten environment, where rote learning and discipline were the norm.

The Play Schemes and the presence of mothers in the school are making other women curious and piquing their interest. You see them sitting on the wall there, watching the outdoor games. And a few will cross the yard and look in the classroom windows. This is all new. I think they feel more comfortable at the school now their colleagues are here daily. (Headteacher)

This programme has made us more comfortable with the teachers, and we can interact with them easily, even outside of school. (Mother)

Effects on community engagement in the schools

Prior to GES-LM, most teachers explained that parents seldom visited the school other than for PTA meetings. Similarly, many parents recalled that, previously, they had not known their child's teacher (or even their name) and 'did not know that we could visit the school' (mother). Some parents recalled a fear of the school and feeling apprehensive about talking to teachers.

Across the sampled communities, GES-LM was described as having a positive effect on parental engagement in the school, with strong similarities in accounts of this. A key component and driver has been the daily presence of mothers in kindergarten classes. This was widely described as promoting a better understanding of the challenges and joys of teaching, and as garnering empathy and relationships with kindergarten teachers for a sizeable group of mothers in each community and (often) their husbands and some other relatives too.

The research found that mothers' presence in the classroom has also started to promote changes in wider parents' perceptions of the school and their willingness to engage. In most of the sampled communities, teachers noted that a number of parents have started to come into the school to 'see what is going on', such as watching outdoor games and peering through windows to watch the Play Schemes. Teachers generally felt that this had stemmed from parents' new sense of familiarity with the school – as a space where mothers could also play a role. As one headteacher explained, 'GES-LM has really encouraged parents to be part of the

school and to see school and community as part of each other'. This was also evident in teachers' personal stories of their everyday lives in the communities. Most of the teachers mentioned that parents now more readily stopped to talk to them in the street and invite them to family events, which has strengthened their sense of belonging and recognition in the community.

Another commonly referenced symbol of the closer relationship has been increased parent willingness to support the school and child learning. For example, numerous teachers mentioned that parents (beyond the enrolled mothers) now more readily responded to requests to buy pencils for their children, or to send them to school with food. PTA chairs also reported increased parent attendance at PTA meetings (in 8 of the 12 sampled schools). This was largely attributed to the participation of some of the enrolled mothers and their family members, as the meetings often include discussion about GES-LM. In six of the communities, the engaged mothers have also become intermediaries in their neighbourhoods, encouraging children to attend school, teaching them in the evenings and, in some cases, 'informing the school if a family faces challenges'.

Challenges for schools

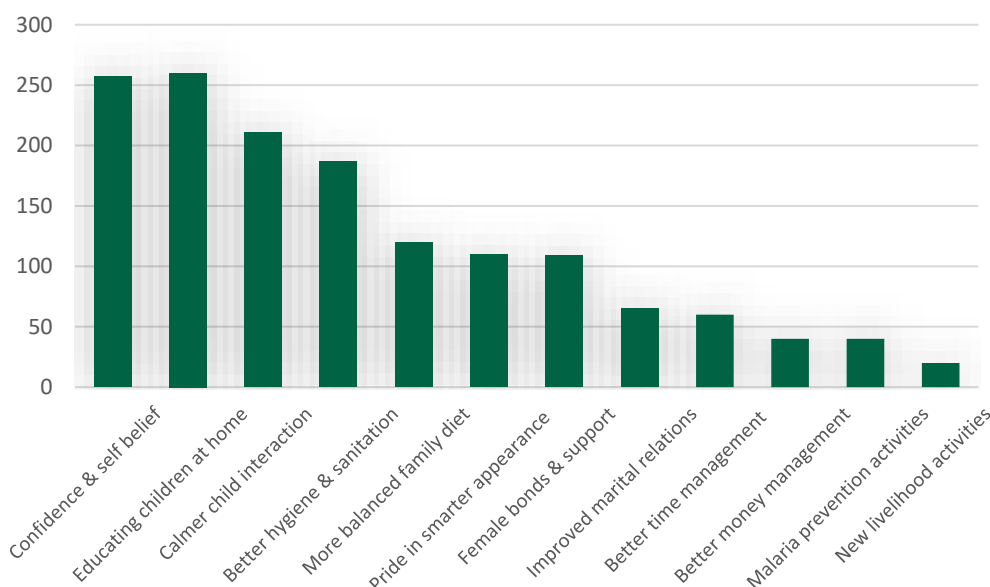
In most of the schools, GES-LM has involved some implementation activities outside of school hours. For example, in some communities, the Parenting Workshops take place in the evening, when mothers have returned from the farm. Similarly, some schools now run Play Schemes *before* school hours, so the mothers can also go to the farm that day. Additionally, nearly all sampled kindergarten teachers spend some time in the evenings reminding and coaxing the mothers to attend the Play Schemes.

The twice termly teacher top-up training (for which kindergarten teachers travel to the GES district office, or to a circuit) also creates some challenges for class cover, especially in smaller and remote schools with notable teacher absenteeism. In one of the sampled districts (a remote area), GES officials reported that almost half of the posted teachers had never reported for duty. Due to this, classes have been merged and headteachers are already covering for staff absence. kindergarten teachers' absence from school to attend the GES-LM top-up trainings is a challenge in this context.

Outcomes for engaged mothers

As a parenting ECE programme, GES-LM aims to promote empowerment and behavioural changes among the mothers who participate. The research highlighted that the programme has often promoted such outcomes, and pathways to these have been supported by the combined effect of participating in the Play Schemes and the Parenting Workshops.

Figure 4: What behavioural changes did engaged mothers find most notable?



Note: This chart shows the proportion of mothers (n=283) who chose to emphasise a specific behavioural change in response to open questions about whether GES-LM has catalysed any changes in their lives (with no prompting about what type of effects to consider). The graphic indicates the most notable changes.

Self-confidence and self-belief

Greater confidence and self-belief were pinpointed by the vast majority of the mothers as an outcome of participating in GES-LM. This was most commonly attributed to the knowledge gained from the Parenting Workshops, speaking up in that setting, and running the Play Schemes. The most common forms of increased confidence highlighted by the mothers were a **new ability to speak up in public, and greater belief in their own capacities to teach, to manage their households, nurture their children, and to imagine their lives differently.**

I used to feel shy when talking to people. On the first day of Lively Minds training, when they asked me to talk, I was shaking. But participating in Lively Minds has changed how I see myself. I have gained knowledge, and I feel more confident about what I can do. I can now stand in front of a crowd and express how I feel without fear. And I feel more respected now because some in the community call me a teacher. (Engaged mother)

The Lively Minds mothers have changed entirely from how they were before. They dress well now, and they hold their heads with pride. It comes from the responsibility of teaching, of showing that they can do that, and interacting with teachers. They get knowledge from this programme, about nutrition and sanitation and other things, which makes them more confident about their responsibilities at home. (Female relative)

I learned to make time for my younger children in the evening – for games or singing. It has changed our situation, the children come closer to me and are developing faster. (Engaged mother)

Now, I ask them what they learned at school, and I play games with them, like asking them to identify mango leaves and guava leaves and different colour fruits. (Engaged mother)

I now speak to my children calmly and kindly. I learned from the parenting workshops that shouting and insulting doesn't correct a child's behaviour, it only creates stress and worry. (Engaged mother)

For some mothers, this increased confidence has catalysed wider-reaching changes. For example, some women have become 'more involved in the community', such as facilitating evening Play Schemes in their neighbourhoods or speaking up at public meetings. For a few women, the new confidence and self-belief has enabled them to imagine their lives differently. One mother explained, 'I feel like I can achieve more in my life. I am thinking of cultivating a large farm of soybean since I have the knowledge and skills to achieve a very good yield.'

Many mothers also spoke of the happiness they gain from engaging with the children at the Play Schemes, which were described as 'lively', 'fun' spaces. As one explained, 'The children are always laughing and smiling at the Play Schemes, and that makes us enjoy it and feel happy too'. Many mothers also remarked that they enjoy their **friendships with the other mothers**, and the kindergarten teachers, and derive happiness from new status and sense of fulfilment that teaching brings them. A few of the mothers went further to explain that this has generated a new sense of purpose and satisfaction with their lives.

More nurturing engagement with their children

Another commonly referenced outcome for engaged mothers has been more educational interaction with their children, and their increased capacity and willingness to do so. This change has been iteratively fostered by both the Parenting Workshops and the Play Schemes, underpinned by increased confidence and self-belief. Most of the enrolled mothers said that they now spend more time with their

preschool children and engage them in educational activities at home, such as singing, building and games. Some mothers have found that this also attracts children from neighbouring houses. **A few husbands reported that they also facilitate educational activities with their younger children, yet it was apparent that many saw this as their wife's new skill and role.**

Many mothers and fathers also reported that they are now calmer and more patient with their children and compared this to the past when they would quite frequently shout and hit them. In this regard, a number of teachers reported a difference between the parenting styles of mothers who engage in the programme and those who do not.

Many of the engaged mothers, across the communities, perceived that their children are developing faster as a result of the Play Schemes and more nurturing engagements at home. The most frequently mentioned dimensions of this were an improved ability to listen, concentrate, retain information and follow instructions; improved capacities to socialise; greater creativity (e.g. in building and drawing); and new skills in counting, identifying colours, singing songs and articulating clearly. Some parents also noted that their children respect them more and are better behaved, such as being more willing to bathe, wash their hands, and listen to their parents.

Since my wife has been going to the parenting class, she doesn't leave food out anymore, she covers it from flies. She always tells the children to wash hands. This has drastically reduced our visits to hospital. And monies that would have been used to buy drugs have been used on other ventures or for solving family problems. (Husband)

Through the parenting workshops, I got to know much on what foods we need, so now I always try to feed my family not just cassava but beans and vegetables and eggs too. It has helped a lot, especially my children because they used to go to school with empty stomachs but now, I make sure they eat balanced meal which has improved their health, and they fall sick less often now. (Engaged mother)

Improved household sanitation, hygiene and nutrition

Across the sampled communities, improved household sanitation and hygiene were frequently mentioned by mothers as impactful behavioural changes, with many reporting decreased rates of household illness. Sanitation and hygiene have been a focus of the Parenting Workshops, reinforced by the emphasis on handwashing at the Play Schemes. Mothers spoke of changed behaviours such as washing their hands frequently and encouraging their family members to do the same; covering cooked food; cleaning cooking implements immediately (not the next day); and keeping the cooking area clean and free of stagnant water. Many mothers explained that, prior to the Parenting Workshops, they 'didn't pay much attention to personal hygiene', and 'used to leave the cooked food out overnight and eat it again in the morning'. A smaller number of mothers and fathers went further to explain that improved hygiene and sanitation had reduced their household medical bills.

Providing their families with a more balanced, nutritious diet was another commonly mentioned behavioural change, which mothers attributed to the Parenting Workshops. A notable number of mothers (in both sampled regions) reported that cultural beliefs had previously deterred them from giving meat and eggs to their children, but that they now understand children's need for such 'body building' foods (proteins) and 'protective foods' (fruit and vegetables). The discussions indicated that using such simple, relatable terms to explain nutrition has enabled the mothers' understanding. Many mothers spoke proudly about the meals they now provide, and that their 'children no longer go to school with an empty stomach'. Some challenges were also noted, however, such as the cost of meat and eggs. In this regard, a few husbands reported that the GES-LM radio programme has encouraged them to give their wives money to buy nutritious foods.

Changed social relationships

Female bonds and support

Across the communities, a large number of mothers placed notable value on the social opportunity that the Parenting Workshops and Play Schemes offer, and through which they have developed female friendships, unity and support networks. Mothers' stories of togetherness included supporting each other through the loss of a loved one, helping each other weed and harvest, walking together to the school, and sharing their troubles and worries. In two of the communities, the mothers had established savings and loans groups, through which they have supported each other financially, especially at times of need.

Women's descriptions of change focused heavily on the role of conflict resolution in building or maintaining female bonds: 'At first, quarrels amongst mothers were rampant but now it has reduced to minimum. We now follow meeting rules and respect each other's views during meetings.' Many women also described that the Play Schemes require the mothers to set aside their differences for the sake of teamwork: 'If you are quarrelling with your rival [co-wife] but you are paired for the Play Scheme, you quickly let go for the sake of the children – we cannot fight at the school.'

The mothers have also gained the respect of many wider women in their communities, some of whom call them a teacher, or send their children to learn with them in the evenings. Mothers generally explained that this makes them feel proud and has increased their confidence. A counter dynamic identified in all of the sampled communities, but to different degrees, has been some female criticism of the mothers for working in the school unpaid, and 'being lazy' by 'avoiding farm work' (see 'Demotivating dynamics').

Marital relationships

A fairly large number of engaged mothers and husbands reported improved marital relationships as a result of the programme. The pathways to this were often similar.

Numerous mothers explained that they had developed patience and tolerance, and learnt how to better manage anger, through both the stress management sessions at the Parenting Workshops and regularly practicing these qualities at the Play Schemes. Some mothers had taken these skills home, which has promoted calmer relationships not only with their children but also their husbands and co-wives. Many husbands reported that their wives' 'calmer and more respectful' behaviour had led to 'peace in the house'.

I used to have daily quarrels with my husband, but the workshops taught me how to create a peaceful home and how to ignore issues that irritate me. At the Play Schemes too, I am continually learning to be patient. (Mother)

Some women and men described changed marital relations as stemming from educational interactions with children, which had changed the home environment. In some cases, this has been reinforced by husbands' heightened respect for their wives, due to their work at the school, their GES certificates, and the knowledge they bring home. As one mother explained, 'When I teach the children at home, it makes me feel proud and confident, and it has improved my relationship with my husband, as we now have more to discuss and share.'

Another pathway has been mothers' greater efforts in home sanitation and childcare, as a result of the Parenting Workshops, which has increased the level of respect from their husbands and reduced marital arguments. This pathway was described particularly by husbands. A few husbands described that the changes in their wives had encouraged them to help her more. As one explained, 'She has changed the way she talks, so now we live cordially, and due to that, I help her in the farm to carry yam or firewood home.'

I have seen huge changes in my wife due to Lively Minds. I used to always quarrel with her for leaving dirty bowls and not bathing the children, but now she does it without me telling her. I see her with children holding books and talking, but I don't know anything about books, so I am happy that she now understands what our children are doing in the school. (Husband)

My husband speaks harshly to me on the issue of this programme. He said they are deceiving us, that how can I have certificate and teach at the school for no pay. I told him that it does not concern him. He told me if I didn't go away he would beat me. I felt demotivated and sad. (Mother)

In a smaller number of cases, mothers described that the programme had worsened their marital relationships. This was more common in the two districts where the community engagement process had been lighter touch (see Table 4). Such problems had always arisen from tensions over the mothers spending more time at the school instead of the farm, coupled with the lack of incentives offered by GES-LM. Periodic tensions over this were fairly common across communities, but it had sometimes developed into deeper marital problems. For example, a community member explained:

Some of the co-wives get annoyed because one wife keeps going to the school. She gets all dressed up and then the other wife is left with the work. And then sometimes the husband says he only has one wife.

Economic empowerment and time management

A smaller number of mothers said that their livelihoods had improved as a result of the programme.

In the study, these women were clustered in the two communities where headteachers had provided livelihoods training for the enrolled mothers. In one of these locations, many women explained that

they had learned how to start a business with 50 cedis (selling shampoo, soyabean drinks, and so on) and to gradually grow the business by reinvesting the profits. Some had also formed savings and credit groups (*Susu*) with women in their Play Scheme groups, which has been an enabler for starting small businesses.

When we have been assigned to work on Monday, I wake up early, prepare my children for school, do my chores and try to report on time for the play session. If I cannot make it, I call a colleague to fill in for me. (Engaged mother)

Improved time management was also mentioned by a number of mothers. In this regard, some mothers explained that (at the Parenting Workshops) they were ‘taught how to plan the next day, before going to bed – this has helped me a lot because it has enabled me to manage my time properly and get more done’. Others explained that the Play Schemes had made them more time-conscious and able to multitask. This was also noted by numerous husbands, who made comments like:

Since Lively Minds, my wife manages her time better and does things more quickly. In the past, she could spend over an hour sweeping, often stopping to chat. Now, she sweeps quickly, so she can get to school, (Husband)

Despite the varied depth of community engagement, the outcomes for mothers were remarkably similar across the communities. The only notable exception to this were changes in social relationships, which tended to be less positive in the communities where chiefs and communities were less engaged.

Mothers' motivation

Given the central role played by mothers in the programme, it is important to understand motivations for staying, as well as the challenges and demotivating factors.

Motivations: intrinsic benefits and recognition

When mothers enrol in the programme, they are asked to commit for two years. Yet in all 12 communities, most mothers had re-enrolled at the 2-year point. GES-LM data showed that this had also been the trend in wider schools.

A key reason for strong retention has been the intrinsic benefits of the programme for the engaged mothers. When we asked mothers what motivates them to continue, they overwhelmingly focused on their newfound confidence, pride and self-belief; changed relationships at home and new respect from their husbands; joy in seeing their children develop and pride at their role in that journey; and the notable improvements in their household sanitation, hygiene and health, which had arisen from their participation in the programme.

Additionally, across the communities, a clear finding of the research was that mothers enjoy the Play Schemes and the Parenting Workshops, experiencing them as empowering spaces where they can socialise, learn and demonstrate their capacities. Many mothers described the Play Schemes as a fun, lively space, and explained that they enjoyed engaging with both the children and the teachers. Mothers also expressed pride in their new status, such as being referred to as 'madam' by children. A good number of mothers also explained that they appreciated their time at school, as 'time away from the hardships of farming in the hot sun' and described this as a change in their lifestyle.

Table 6: What motivates and demotivates engaged mothers?

Motivators		
Personal gains	Relational changes	Child benefits
Enjoy the Play Schemes and Parenting Workshops	Mothers have gained respect from family and community	Developing faster: cognitive, concentration, behaviour
Pride, fulfilment	Improved marital relationships	Healthier with more energy
Feel confident and capable	Improved mother-child relationships	Gaining social skills
Practice of new knowledge has benefitted households	Stronger female friendships	Will have a brighter future and bring fortune to family
Demotivators		
Personal challenges	Relational challenges	Child-focused challenges
Opportunity costs of participation in Play Schemes	Periodic marital tension (husbands and co-wives), especially in rainy season	None mentioned
Expenditures for participation	Social costs: community jeering	
No payment		

Being appreciated and recognised has also been crucial to the mothers' motivation. Key to this has been the ongoing encouragement they receive from kindergarten teachers and GES-LM ambassadors, and the relationships that mothers have developed with these respected stakeholders. Many mothers also spoke of their pride at receiving public appreciation, at PTA meetings and in their graduation ceremony, at which they also received certificates. While few of the mothers referred to the certificates as a notable motivating factor (relative to the intrinsic benefits of participating), the certificates were mentioned by numerous husbands as a symbol of their wife's new status. In some communities, recognition has been strengthened by community leaders, through their presence at GES-LM events, public words of appreciation, and efforts to counsel and encourage mothers when they feel disillusioned.

In most of the communities, local stakeholders have also given occasional gifts to the engaged mothers (Table 7) to show appreciation of their work and to encourage them to continue. Despite the modest nature of the gifts, they were central to the mothers' depictions of being appreciated, and it was clear that such symbols of recognition are important. In that regard, the value of the gifts (as symbols of recognition) was affected by who has provided it. Where the gifts were regular and provided by the community, they symbolised public appreciation of their work, which was highly valued by the mothers. In contrast, when the same gifts (e.g. biscuits) were provided more privately by teachers, their effect on recognition was less significant. Notably, where the gifts had reduced in frequency, this change was widely referenced as a demotivator for not only the mothers but also their husbands.

Table 7: Gifts provided to the engaged mothers by community stakeholders

Community	Gift	Provided by	How often
1	Party with bottled drinks	PTA chair	Once
2	None	-	Never
3	None	-	Never
4	Soap, drinks, salt, spice biscuits	Community leader, teacher,	4 times
5	Malt drink and biscuits	Headteacher, teacher, PTA	Once
6	Bottled drinks	Headteacher	Twice
7	Soap	Community donations via PTA, promoted by ambassadors	Termly
8	Soap and bottled drinks	Community donations via PTA, promoted by ambassadors	Every 2–months, when mothers frustrated
9	Soap, spices, small money	Teachers, ambassadors, PTA	Tried termly, now occasional (reduced)
10	Uniform, soap, drinks, party, livelihoods skills & start-up funds	Assemblymen, headteacher, teachers	Termly
11	Soap, biscuits	Teachers	Monthly
12	Soap	Headteacher, PTA, chief and elders	4 times but not in the past 6 months (reduced)

Key: In the right-hand column, darker green shading indicates more frequent gifts.

Demotivating dynamics

While the vast majority of sampled mothers spoke enthusiastically about the intrinsic benefits of participating, most were also vocal about the challenges and factors that demotivate them.

The unpaid nature of the work and general lack of incentives was the most widely mentioned demotivator. In this regard, mothers distinguished between occasional gifts from community stakeholders, and an expectation or hope for more regular incentives from ‘the programme’ – those who ‘asked them to do the work’: GES or the school. While some women anticipated remuneration, most had more modest ambitions such as occasional gifts of soap or yams and refreshments – to show recognition and appreciation of their work. **The non-provision of refreshments was sometimes described with some affront and as confronting cultural norms:** ‘Even water they cannot give us, we are not children!’; ‘How can someone come to your house, and you give them nothing?’ Despite clarity from the start that there would never be incentives, another common thread in these discussions was an expectation of eventual reciprocation: ‘If someone asks you to work for them, should they not give you something for that work?’

Many mothers also interpreted the **recent reduction in GES monitoring of the Play Schemes** (from termly to annual visits)²⁶ as reduced GES appreciation of their work.

Some mothers shifted the frame towards being compensated for the costs of participating, especially the need to wear smart, clean clothes for the Play Schemes – as well as the need to frequently wash these as the Play Schemes are messy

²⁶ After five terms, districts move into the ‘sustain’ phase. At this point, LM INGO technical support is reduced and the government takes on more of the implementation costs. LM NGO support shifts to districts that are just onboarding.

(causing greater expenditure on soap). Some mothers also said they took transport to the school or bought food and water while they were there.

The programme messages confront these expectations by reinforcing that it is the women's own children who are benefitting from the Play Schemes and that 'participation is an opportunity' for the mothers to strengthen their parenting skills and shape a better future for their families. Yet, a few mothers countered the logic in these messages by noting that, 'Teachers also have children at this school, but they are paid', or, 'Other parents have children at school but don't use their time to run the Play Schemes'.

The latter refers to the opportunity costs of participating in GES-LM: many mothers explained that they are unable to engage in productive work, at the farm or market, on the days when they run the Play Schemes. While the Play Schemes are intended to be a light time commitment, the poor punctuality of some mothers extends the time that they take overall. Mothers also explained that if they are going to the farm, they go at sunrise: 'We cannot start going to the farm when the sun is already hot'. Due to this, a number of mothers emphasised that, 'The Play Schemes do not put food on the table' (i.e. they do not satisfy their immediate basic needs). **This has caused occasional friction in some households, especially in the rainy season,** when farm work is more intensive. Some husbands spoke of the challenge of keeping peace in the household, when one wife goes to school while others 'dig and sweat in the hot sun'. **More broadly, some female relatives complained that they are left with larger workloads on days when their co-wife or daughter-in-law runs the Play Schemes,** such as looking after their children or cooking. Some relatives stopped providing such childcare when they realised that the Play Schemes are not paid work, so they would not receive downstream benefits. Support from husbands has also sometimes dwindled with their gradual realisation that their wives will not be remunerated. As this suggests, **disbelief that the work would really be unpaid has created distrust and fluctuating support.** In some communities, there were rumours that the teachers embezzle the money intended to remunerate the mothers.

Such tensions have contributed to another undercurrent: some wider community members (mainly women) criticise the mothers for working at the school unpaid. This dynamic was present in all twelve communities, although to varying degrees. In five communities, the criticisms have been publicly aired, with some women

At the start our husbands supported us to join but after a while, when they saw us bring nothing to the table, they started complaining and discouraging us. (Engaged mother)

I used to leave my baby with my mother-in-law when I go to the Play Scheme. But she started complaining that I leave the baby with her to do a job with no pay, so what is the point of her labour? Now she tells me to take my baby with me. (Engaged mother)

Some of our family think that the teachers are chopping [taking] the money we should be getting for working at the school. (Engaged mother)

Some women call out as we walk to the school, they say we are lazy and have nothing to do (Enrolled mother).

When I am at the farm, they call out insults: they say my okra is rotting, so why am I at the school when I have work to do? (Enrolled mother).

Some community members criticise the women, saying they are illiterates and what business do they have with teaching? (Husband).

regularly jeering at the mothers as they walk in groups to the school. In the other communities, the criticisms have been less frequent, fluctuate, or are less overt (gossip rather than public jeering). Yet **the negative comments have been very similar across the communities: depicting the mothers as 'lazy' (avoiding farmwork and housework) and 'foolish' (for working at the school unpaid) or mocking their capacity to teach.** Some respondents felt that the negative reactions may be partly driven by jealousy and intended to intervene in the respect that the mothers have gained. Yet the insults cut deep and affect the mothers' motivation and pride and have resulted in some women leaving the programme.

Do mothers see the incentives model as a 'fair deal'?

We asked the mothers: 'As GES cannot pay you, they are providing you with knowledge and skills through the Parenting Workshops. Is that a fair deal'?

- **Around two-thirds of mothers said, 'Yes, it's a fair deal'.** When explaining why, these mothers emphasised the intrinsic benefits of programme (they enjoy the Play Schemes, the friendships, pride, knowledge and personal growth, and appreciate the changed family life and child learning and development).
- **Around one-third said, 'No, it's not a fair deal.'** These mothers' explanations focused on the opportunity costs, social costs (jeering) and direct costs of participating, and emphasised that 'Parenting Workshops don't put food on our tables'. This group were also more likely to emphasise that they feel unappreciated and unrecognised for their work.

As shown in Table 8, some communities represent a larger share of the women expressing discontent, who are predominantly in Districts 2 and 4. Three variables help to explain the trends:

- **The balance between community appreciation (including gifts) and criticism.** More mothers were frustrated with the terms of engagement where there has been more open criticism of their work.
- **The depth of the initial community engagement.** In the two districts where this was extensive, it promoted wider community awareness and appreciation of the mothers' Play Scheme work, as well as more active engagement from community leaders.
- **The extent to which community leaders play an active role in the programme.** In the two districts where more mothers were disillusioned, community leaders had played a limited role. In contrast, where community leaders were active, they had often helped to dissipate community criticism and promote the benefits of the programme and have successfully counselled mothers and husbands when they have felt disillusioned.

Table 8: Variables affecting whether mothers feel that the terms of engagement are a 'fair deal'

	Community	Are the terms of engagement a 'fair deal'? Proportion of mothers who said Yes and No		Variables which affect engaged mothers' satisfaction with terms of engagement			
				Depth of initial community engagement	Community leader's involvement	Community criticism of the mothers	Gifts given to mothers
District 1	Community 1 (remote)	Yes	No	Extensive (multiple meetings, house-to-house)	Moderate	Occasional	Once
	Community 2 (remote)	Yes	No	Extensive	Strong (promotes programme, counsels mothers, etc)	Occasional	Never
	Community 3 (remote)	Yes	No	Extensive	Strong	Occasional	Never
District 2	Community 4 (rural)	Yes	No	Limited (just PTA and informed chief)	Moderate	Widely mentioned as a demotivator	Four times
	Community 5 (urban)	Yes	No	Limited	Weak	Occasional	Once
	Community 6 (urban)	Yes	No	Limited	Weak	Widely mentioned as a demotivator	Twice
District 3	Community 7 (rural)	Yes	No	Extensive	Strong	Occasional	Termly
	Community 8 (remote)	Yes		Extensive	Strong	Occasional	Often (reactive to frustrations)
	Community 9 (rural)	Yes	No	Extensive	Moderate	Widely mentioned as a demotivator	Was termly, now occasional
District 4	Community 10 (rural)	Yes	No	Moderate	Initially strong but declining	Occasional	Termly
	Community 11 (remote)	Yes	No	Moderate	Strong	Occasional	Monthly
	Community 12 (rural)	Yes	No	Moderate	Moderate	Widely mentioned as a demotivator	Was termly but now reduced

Key: **Green** = strong; **Amber** = moderate; **Pink** = weak

Why do mothers who are frustrated remain in the programme?

We asked the mothers who felt the programme was not offering a ‘fair deal’: ‘If you are so frustrated, why do you keep participating in the programme?’ Across the communities, there was one very predominant response, based on a common perception:

- **Most of the mothers perceived that ‘one day, the benefit will surely come’** (i.e. a paid job, livelihood training or funds to start a small business, for example). A sizeable number of mothers emphasised that they believed this was partly because the programme was associated with a foreign organisation.
- **A large number of mothers who felt frustrated explained that they were ‘hanging on’ for this anticipated benefit.** Notably, many of these mothers explained that they had not left the programme at the two-year point, as they feared that the ‘benefit that would surely come’ would be given to the new set of mothers who enrolled in the programme.

This raises some important questions for the GES to consider. Firstly, it highlights lingering issues with the mothers’ expectations and raises questions about how to achieve greater clarity about the non-paid nature of the programme. Secondly, it highlights questions about whether the programme could achieve greater impact if a new set of mothers were engaged every two years, and how this might be promoted and managed. These issues are discussed in the concluding section.

Lessons learned and strategic implications

We asked community stakeholders whether they feel that GES-LM has been successful overall, and what 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' looks like to them. The vast majority felt that it has been successful. Four key themes were dominant in their explanations:

- their children are developing faster, showing curiosity and creativity, and are socialising more confidently and listening to their parents
- mothers are continuing to participate in large numbers and have become 'teachers'
- parent-child relationships are becoming more interactive and imbued with patience, which is bringing children closer to their parents
- children now willingly attend and stay at kindergarten.

Their depictions of 'unsuccessful' elements of the programme focused on two main issues:

- mothers' demotivation due to the lack of incentives and the constant need to encourage and counsel the mothers and remind them to come to the Play Schemes
- criticism and jeering from some community members.

We also asked community stakeholders what they felt contributed most to making the programme successful. There were three dominant themes in their responses:

- Parenting Workshops have catalysed positive outcomes in households (sanitation, hygiene, nutrition, improved health) and raised mothers' confidence
- mother-teacher relationships and unity among the engaged mothers
- teaching in the local language has enabled mothers to teach and children to learn and has catalysed and sustained community interest.

Strategic insights about GES-LM

Which programme activities and features have been most important in supporting the community drivers of success and intervening in barriers?

The table below summarises the key drivers and barriers at community level, which frames the discussion in this section.

Parenting Workshops — mothers' behavioural change and intrinsic benefits of participating

Mothers described most of the positive personal outcomes of the programme as derived largely from the Parenting Workshops, such as greater self-confidence and self-belief (based on increased knowledge and participating in a learning space), **changed parenting practices**, and improved household health, hygiene, sanitation and nutrition. The mothers placed high value on these personal and familial outcomes and saw them as **intrinsic benefits** of participating in the programme, which has been the main driver for their continued engagement. The workshops have also been a key space for **reinforcing local ownership** of GES-LM, through group reflection and peer learning, in the presence of community leaders.

Table 9: Key drivers of success

Key drivers of success	Key barriers and challenges
✓ Active engagement, underpinned by the intrinsic benefits	❖ Low literacy and self-belief
✓ Iterative building of ECCE skills, self-belief and confidence through guided practice at Play Schemes	❖ Already overburdened: opportunity costs of participation and expectations of incentives
✓ Use of local languages	❖ Unreliable attendance and punctuality
✓ Motivated kindergarten teachers	❖ Community jeering/ teasing mothers for working at the school unpaid
✓ Community leadership and ownership	
✓ Community recognition	

Play Schemes: guided practice, realising the benefits of early childhood care and education, and parental roles

Building on the initial training, the mothers iteratively developed the **confidence and capacity to teach** through ongoing practice and guidance at the Play Schemes. Successfully delivering the Play Schemes has gradually built the mothers' **self-belief and realisation of the benefits of ECCE**, which has encouraged them to replicate the games at home. This has fostered pride and respect from children, relatives and many community members. **Building the kindergarten teachers patience and capacity to work with the mothers** has been key to success, such as instilling the importance of encouragement and praise. This has helped to build supportive relationships and teamwork between the kindergarten teachers and mothers, which have been a key motivator on both sides. **Appointing GES-LM ambassadors to monitor the Play Schemes** has also been important, as it has demonstrated community leaders' interest and recognition of the mothers' work.

Use of local languages: localisation and pride

When reflecting on the programme, most community respondents emphasised the use of their local language as key to success – it piqued community interest and highlighted the importance of their languages in early learning, and the role of native speakers in ECE. Particularly for husbands, the latter helped to justify why local women would give up time on their farms to support kindergarten teaching, without payment. Increased fluency in the local language, among both children and mothers, was also widely emphasised as an important outcome of the programme.

Mobilising the support of community leaders: ownership, problem solving and recognition

Where community leaders and opinion leaders have actively engaged, this has been a key driver for success, particularly through resolving challenges and tackling barriers. Key among these barriers have been the opportunity costs of the mothers' participation (especially farm work) and periodic marital tensions about this (especially in rainy season); unmet expectations of incentives and suspicions that these are being embezzled; and community criticism about working at the school unpaid. Together, these barriers and challenges affect the mothers' motivation, attendance and punctuality, which fluctuate. **When mothers' motivation has been low, community leaders have often been the drivers of change**, by counselling

mothers and husbands, emphasising the intrinsic benefits of the programme, and intervening in community gossip. Local leaders have also been key to fostering community recognition of the mothers' work. **Strong engagement from community leaders had often arisen from in-depth community engagement processes, in which they were positioned to play a leadership role**, which helped to build local ownership.

How might the GES further strengthen community engagement?

While the findings on mothers' motivation were nuanced, there were indications that the programme might benefit from further work on the incentives model. The GES is already considering the provision of livelihood trainings for the engaged mothers, and our research highlighted that such trainings would be valued, especially if focused on businesses with small start-up costs, and capacity building on how to start-up and run a business. Another common suggestion, which had been done in some of the sampled communities, was training and support for the mothers to establish *savings and loans (Susu) groups*. More broadly, our research suggested that the **mothers value community recognition of their work**. In addition, the moral encouragement from local leaders, and publicly appreciating the women, small gifts as symbols of recognition have been an important dynamic in motivation. Aware of this, several GES district officials suggested that community forms of recognition might be promoted via community peer sharing (perhaps through the radio programme), with a focus on forms that should be sustainable. They shared some examples, such as allowing Play Scheme mothers to skip the queue when collecting water, and mobilising PTAs to donate one yam per household per term. The risks of introducing incentives have shaped the existing model, so the GES could consider whether it makes sense to promote community recognition through peer sharing, or instead best for communities to organically develop local solutions.

There are also strategic questions around whether community engagement and outcomes might be strengthened by engaging a new set of mothers every two years, rather than re-enrolling the existing mothers. While re-enrolment is easier and maintains the quality of the Play Schemes, engaging a new set of mothers should extend the notable female empowerment and household-level outcomes to a wider set of families. However, a decision to more actively promote the engagement of new mothers should include an exit strategy for the current mothers, as the research indicated that some of them are 'hanging on for a benefit' that they believe 'will eventually be given' (despite programme messages to the contrary). Kindergarten teachers also explained that the engagement of new mothers is best done gradually, so that they can learn from the experienced mothers.

Table 10: Re-enrolment versus engaging new mothers (kindergarten teachers' perceptions)

Benefits of re-enrolling existing mothers	Challenges of re-enrolling existing mothers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Easier to work with existing mothers ✓ Less supervision/ training needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Risks of greater expectations for incentives if mothers are enrolled for a long time ❖ Punctuality will worsen due to familiarity
Benefits of engaging new mothers	Challenges of working with new mothers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ More mothers and families will be reached by the programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Harder to train new mothers from scratch, and they need a lot of supervision ❖ Harder to convince new mothers about the lack of incentives

The research highlights the importance of in-depth community engagement that goes beyond PTAs to focus on sensitising the wider community and placing community chiefs in a leadership role. This is central to the current model but is not always implemented, especially in peri-urban areas where 'the community' of relevance to the school can be nebulous. The GES might consider updating its guidelines on community engagement to include specific suggestions for engagement in peri-urban areas.

Community leaders' advice on strengthening community engagement focused largely on using established groups and structures to share information and training on ECCE. Examples included youth groups, clan meetings, market groups, tailoring associations, farmers associations, church groups, using the national faith councils to cascade ECCE information, and running Play Schemes at markets.

Further promoting the role of fathers: Our study indicates that GES-LM is helping fathers to appreciate the value of ECCE and parental roles in it, but that many fathers did not see themselves as capable agents in ECCE. Instead, they were thankful that their wives had gained this capacity and respect them for it. This suggests the need for further work to build fathers' ECCE skills and self-belief so that they can contribute. Few fathers have attended the Parenting Workshops so far, and many men we interviewed said they 'lack time' for such meetings. The GES is considering separate workshops for men, and our study suggests the value of encouraging community chiefs to take leadership roles in this. Many community leaders also suggested the use of existing men's groups and institutions.

The radio programme aims to reach men in their everyday spaces, and this is achieving some outcomes, yet our study suggests that there are challenges with access to radio sets. In our sample, the radio intervention had been most impactful where communities had communal information centres, and where this promoted peer discussion and interactive engagement. In other communities, some women suggested that the programme could share recordings of the radio programme (via the schools), for teachers or GES-LM ambassadors to facilitate group listening and discussion. In its feedback on the findings, the GES noted that teachers would not welcome an additional responsibility, so they suggested that each community might instead nominate someone (such as the PTA chair or an ambassador) to receive a recording of the radio programme and facilitate group listening. Building on this idea, GES staff also explained that community markets and motor parks tend to

have loudspeakers, which might be used to broadcast key messages, as another route to reaching men.

Considerations for other countries

- **Taking a parenting approach to ECCE can enable child development outcomes.** The study shows that training mothers on matters such as child engagement and hygiene, and guiding their practice of these skills in classrooms, can iteratively strengthen their parenting practices at home. Beyond skills building, this has required nurturing the mothers' confidence and self-belief in their capacities to teach and be change-makers.
- **Building parent capacities to play this role takes time and can be nurtured through ongoing mentoring, peer support and feedback.** Creating spaces and processes for such iterative capacity building is important. In Ghana, ongoing supportive supervision was key, as was peer sharing and feedback.
- **Engaging parents in this role requires careful consideration of how to motivate and sustain their participation in culturally appropriate ways.** The Ghana study highlights some possible challenges, including the opportunity costs and potential for tensions at home, as well as cultural expectations of hospitality and symbols of appreciation. It also shows that offering educational sessions (Parenting Workshops) can be an incentive for parental participation, while also contributing to child development outcomes. Early planning for a programme like GES-LM would ideally include community level scoping on expectations, challenges and potential models for motivating parental participation that can be sustained at scale.
- **Where parenting ECCE interventions focus on one caregiver (mothers, grandmothers and so on), it is important to also engage wider family members.** In Ghana, engaging mothers has worked well, but with the unexpected result that men tend to see ECCE as their wife's skill and role. Intentional inclusion of all key caregivers is likely to strengthen outcomes.
- **Local ownership is key and nurturing this requires careful messaging and engagement.** In Ghana, the active involvement of community leaders has been an important driver of success, which has strengthened local ownership and recognition of the mothers. Where external actors (like international NGOs) are involved, a low profile may be important.
- **The study points to the need for additional research** on effective ways of engaging fathers in ECD, and how parent-powered ECD interventions might be designed to be culturally appropriate and effective in different country contexts.

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Thrive

Thrive is a multi-country research programme that aims to support countries to turn what we know about positive early childhood development into practical, scalable, low-cost programmes, able to transform societies over multiple generations. Working closely with policymakers and other stakeholders, Thrive aims to build understanding of early childhood development service delivery models and how they can be provided cost effectively and at scale, and how these systems can innovate, improve, and better serve children and communities in low- and middle-income countries.

Our five focus countries are Bangladesh, Ghana, Kiribati, Sierra Leone and Tanzania.

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