

Early Childhood Development & Play Labs



Goal: To promote the cognitive, motor, social and emotional development of children through high quality, play-based learning.

11.5
thousand

Children currently enrolled in Play Labs

656

Play Labs in 3 countries: Bangladesh, Tanzania, and Uganda

30

Average number of children in each Play Lab session

Background

Early childhood is the foundation of a child's future health, growth, and development. Experiences during these early years shape brain architecture and have a direct impact on social, emotional and learning skills throughout a child's life. During the first five years of life, children's brains are twice as active as those of adults, with about 85 percent of brain development taking place during this period. Emerging evidence around the intersection of play, social emotional learning, resilience, executive function development, and self-regulation skills in early childhood has tremendous implications for catalyzing breakthrough outcomes for children globally.

Opportunity

Globally, the poorest and most vulnerable children are the least likely to have affordable access to high-quality, early childhood development programs.

Investment in these children can bring long-term, positive effects on learning, growth, and development, for the child, their family, and their community. Integrating play into caregiving and learning allows children to create their own worlds, develop new skills, increase their self-confidence, and cultivate the resilience they will need to address the challenges and obstacles they may face as adults.

Approach

BRAC's Play Lab is a model for low-cost, high-quality play-based learning for children ages three to five. Through 656 Play Labs in Bangladesh, Tanzania, and Uganda, the BRAC Play Lab project reaches 11,499 children every day.



A Play Lab in Tanzania. ©BRAC/Matt Kertman



Story time at a Play Lab in Bangladesh ©BRAC/Matt Kertman

Activities in the Play Labs are guided by a curriculum developed by an international advisory group, the Play Consortium, composed of international scholars and experts in early childhood development (ECD) and play-based learning. The curriculum is co-developed with local communities to ensure that content and materials are contextualized and culturally relevant. Using a combination of child-led play and play-leader facilitated activities, the curriculum helps ensure the holistic development and active engagement of all children. Play Labs take a holistic approach by facilitating the growth of self-regulation, language skills, playfulness, friendships, and social interactions.

With support from architects from BRAC University, our Play Labs are designed as safe, child-friendly, low-cost and sustainable learning spaces. BRAC has trained adolescent girls from local communities as Play Leaders for the Play Labs, creating a new career track for girls and young women in the community, and boosting the local ECD workforce.

Community involvement plays a central role in the Play Lab project. Through including caregiver volunteers in the Play Labs, facilitating monthly parents' meetings, and engaging community members in material development workshops to create low-cost and no-cost, contextually-appropriate play materials for the Play Labs, BRAC is helping to change community ideas about the importance of learning through play in ECD.

BRAC also works closely with local governments to support the implementation of playful learning approaches and curriculum into national education systems. In 2018, BRAC transitioned the management and operation of 30 Play Labs in Liberia over to the Government of Liberia, and worked with the Government of Tanzania to ensure the smooth transition of 1,160 Play Lab children into government primary schools.

Recognizing the potential of play to meet the critical needs of children in humanitarian situations, BRAC has also adapted the model for these settings. Through our Humanitarian Play Labs in Cox's Bazar, we serve more than 43,000 Rohingya and host community children through play.

Why BRAC?

Founded in Bangladesh in 1972 as a small relief effort, BRAC is now one of the largest development organizations in the world. With over three decades of experience working in education, BRAC has the knowledge and experience to create low-cost, high-impact education programs at scale. BRAC has been an innovator, advocate, and leader on the benefits of play in early childhood. As the Play Labs scale, they will generate an evidence base for the benefits of learning through play in low-resource settings, and expand access to high-quality play based learning for children and families around the world.

“**Play is now widely recognized as a key facilitator in the emotional development of children”** says Devon McLorg, Director, Education, BRAC USA. **“Children are able to explore their identity and increase learning and collaboration through play.**”