Midterm Evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative – Together for a good start in education

Draft Malawi Evaluation Report

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

SRI	School Readiness Initiative
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ELK	Early Learning Kiosk
CBCC	Community Based Childcare Centre
MDGS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
PEA	Primary Education Advisors
RFF	Roger Federer Foundation
AAM	Action Aid Malawi
AECDM	Association of Early Childhood Development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
IP	Implementation Partner
CACD	Continuous Assessment of Child Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
KII	Key Informant Interview

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Roger Federer Foundation's (RFFs) School Readiness Initiative (SRI) contributes to the Early Childhood Development (ECD) landscape in Malawi through its aim to improve the early educational experiences of young children by ensuring a smooth transition from ECD to Standard 1. The programme has three objectives: firstly, to establish processes of joint responsibility for children among key stakeholders in early learning; secondly, to improve the quality of the learning environment for early learners; and thirdly, to improve the capacity of educators in establishing play-based learning. These objectives are achieved through the SRI's programme components, including the Early Learning Kiosk (ELK) app (KnowHow course, ChildSteps and Toolbox), learning groups and peer-to-peer groups, advocacy efforts and the establishment of a caregiver incentive fund. In Malawi, ECD programming is conducted by caregivers, who operate on a volunteer basis. Since caregivers are not paid, this often results in a high turnover rate, minimising gains in ECD sector in the country overall. In response, RFF established the Caregiver Incentive Fund, which provided $200 to every CBCC as seed money.[1] The aim of the fund was for caregivers to borrow from the fund in order to establish income-generating activities. In addition, it was intended for them to receive some business and entrepreneurship training to complement the establishment of the fund. This report evaluates all the aforementioned components of the Malawi programme, with regards to the DAC criteria. This is expanded upon in more detail in the sections below.

Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of this mid-term evaluation is to assess the success of the SRI in achieving its goals of providing a successful start to primary school by developing the school readiness skills needed for formal learning for vulnerable children through supporting quality education at ECD level, preparing schooling facilities appropriately to care for children, and building stakeholder capacity and advocacy. The evaluation provides a reasoned and independent review of the SRI in Malawi.

Additionally, the evaluation focus is placed on improving understandings of the ECD ecosystem in Malawi, including stakeholder engagement, detailing how the innovative elements of the programme contribute to the programme objectives, identifying how the programme has addressed the needs of stakeholders and beneficiaries, and reviewing the roll-out and effectiveness of the combination of intervention components.

KEY FINDINGS

Relevance

The evaluation found that all components of the ELK (ChildSteps, KnowHow,Toolbox) are relevant for each of the stakeholders involved in the programme. For caregivers, the SRI succeeded in meeting their needs, largely through the provision of a structured curriculum, the provision of a platform to collect administrative details such as attendance registers, as well as the provision of reports that provide data on developmental milestones of children. The introduction of the ELK has also piqued the interest of parents, indicating its relevance - they have become significantly more engaged in the development and education of their children. The only component that limits the relevance (and effectiveness) of the ELK is the fact that it is in English. However, RFF has emphasized that the cost for translation is prohibitively high.

The evaluation found that learning groups are relevant to caregivers because it creates a safe and collaborative space for them to learn from other caregivers, mentors and primary school teachers. It also creates an important link for

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[1] SRI Malawi Comprehensive Proposal Start-Up Phase

caregivers to support structures throughout the programme. The learning groups are not as relevant for primary school teachers however, who often do not attend learning groups because it is outside of their working hours (in addition to a full school day, yet they are expected to attend the learning groups to teach caregivers as well), emphasizing lack of incentives to participate. In addition, the evaluation found that the programme was relevant for other stakeholders including national and local government stakeholders, and the implementation partners, since it aligns with their internal strategies, policies and future objectives.

Coherence

The evaluation found that the SRI programme is strongly aligned to the various policies and efforts across the country. Specifically, SRI built on the comprehensive ECD project that had been successfully implemented in Malawi between 2011 and 2021, and that it aligned with the national government ECD curriculum and strategies going forward. This specifically includes the Government of Malawi's National Early Childhood Development Policy (2017) and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (2017-2022) (MDGS). This, in conjunction with regular meetings with government stakeholders has resulted in national government buy-in at large - this is indicated by the partnership between RFF, the World Bank and the Malawian government. However, some regional government stakeholders indicated that in addition to the meetings conducted with them, they found regular communication on the project from implementation partners lacking, and would appreciate more frequent communication going forward. This is to ensure that all stakeholders are well versed on expectations and details, as well as anticipating challenges as soon as they arise.

Effectiveness

The SRI is making good progress in achieving its three objectives. Components of the intervention that have been effective in contributing to the SRI's three objectives are detailed as follows.

Objective 1: Establishing processes of joint responsibility

The ELK was productive in engaging parents in these communities more effectively, bringing them into the programme more fully through the natural playgrounds and parent engagement activities, and establishing a greater sense of joint responsibility of the programme and the education of their children. In addition, the design of the programme has increased coordination between a number of stakeholders such as parents, caregivers, child protection officers, mentors and national and government stakeholders. This in turn, supports the effectiveness of the programme overall.

Objective 2: Improving the quality of the learning environment

The establishment of natural playgrounds as well as bringing in community stakeholders to improve CBCC/centre infrastructure was effective when it occurred. However, the evaluation found that improvements to facilities differed according to region and hadn't been implemented in a significant percentage of CBCCs.

Objective 3: Improving the capacity and capabilities of educators

The evaluation found that the SRI programme was effective in the roll-out of the tablets at scale, resulting in reaching a significant number of ECD centres, learning groups and caregivers. The evaluation also found that there was high uptake of the KnowHow course by caregivers, indicating that the programme was effective in creating pathways for caregivers to improve their teaching competencies and skills. It is important to note however, that there is still a shortfall with regards to outcomes from the ELK - principals have indicated that caregiver capacity could be further improved. In addition, an impediment to the effectiveness of the ELK is the long times it takes to sync the tablets to ensure that they are up to date, largely the tablets are also not synced as often as is required.

The evaluation found that the learning groups are an effective mechanism for caregivers to improve their knowledge, as well as serve as a collaborative space where caregivers and teachers can come up with solutions together. This is particularly so considering that a programme of this scale was implemented at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time where meeting in person was difficult, and where disruptions to everyday activities were frequent.

Efficiency

The evaluation found that the overall implementation of the SRI programme was efficient. This is indicated by the fact that the use of tablets and the digitisation of the curriculum is low-cost approach to reach the desperate need. In addition, the ratio of tablets to caregivers remains low, indicating that there was an efficiency with regards to how the apps were designed to be used, and the tablets assigned. The number of tablets lost or damaged also remains low, emphasising the effective implementation of the roll-out.

The overall design of the SRI is efficient because it succeeds in bringing in as many stakeholders as possible in an organic manner in order to meet the various objectives – sharing the responsibilities. This can be seen by the fact that parents are brought in to assist in establishing the natural playgrounds and the learning toys, which succeed in meeting two objectives, objective 1 related to joint responsibility, and objective 2 related to improving the learning environment in which the SRI operates.

The evaluation found that the roll-out of the Bridge to School programme could have been more efficient - some communities only received the resources and materials at the time of the data collection process of the evaluation. However, it remains important to acknowledge that the Bridge to School programme did not have a planned timeline of release. While keeping this in mind, there still remained a significant gap between when the materials were conceptualised/developed and when communities received them, indicating that had the roll out been more efficient, the impact observed may have been greater.

Sustainability

The evaluation found that although there is buy-in from stakeholders and beneficiaries, the sustainability of the programme following the end of the SRI should be considered. The fact that the programme was established during COVID-19 meant that a lot of the work was undone as a result of disruptions to teaching and learning. As a result, the evaluation found that the institutionalizing SRI programme will only be able to become sustainable, once it is fully and adequately implemented and the right foundation is laid which will likely only be possible after the Covid-19 related restrictions are lifted.

There are already a number of mechanisms in place that have the potential to support sustainability of the programme, once the right foundation of the programme is laid. This consists of the establishment of mentors, child protection officers who have advocated for the programme, as well as the ECD advocacy week established by RFF, which brings together governments and donors - these networks can be leveraged to support the sustainability of the programme.

One of the most significant risks to sustainability of the programme are the socio-economic conditions of a number of regions in Malawi. Prior to the establishment of the SRI programme, there was limited funding available for ECD, which is unlikely to change. In addition, factors that impede the retention of caregivers, ability to get to learning groups, maintenance of CBCCs, and the establishment of feeding schemes, are all related to the socio-economic conditions of Malawi. This is not indicative of the programme design but contextual factors that must always be considered as influencing the appropriateness of any activities and expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following sections provide a summary of the recommendations by identifying which processes and components of the SRI are working and which are not working. This informs an understanding of what the SRI should *continue* with, and what processes/components should be *introduced* or *adjusted*.

What to continue - It's working

It is recommended that the ELK apps and learning groups continue to be used as the core programme

components of the SRI. These are relevant to stakeholders and beneficiaries, and are effective when used consistently and when educators are able to meet in person for learning groups. It is also recommended that RFF and IPs should continue to engage in advocacy efforts and use existing structures such as the ECD advocacy week to continue to support the focus on school transition, the introduction of free compulsory ECD education for children, feeding schemes in all ECD centres and the importance of ECD and the role that the SRI can play in this.

This engagement should continue at a district level, where IPs should continue engagement with child protection offices, CBCC management committees and community members. This is largely because the SRI can help advocate amongst stakeholders in the ECD system to better understand how the SRI is building the capacity and knowledge of caregivers to address the perceptions around the quality, professionalism and knowledge of integrated ECD amongst caregivers in Malawi.

Another key element of the programme that should be continued is the improvement of the learning environments in which the SRI operates, as the need for improved CBCC infrastructure remains high, particularly in Malawi. The design of the programme overall remains particularly productive, largely because it brings in stakeholders at a variety of levels to participate in the programme fully, increasing the likelihood of achieving objective 1 of increased joint responsibility amongst stakeholders.

What to introduce - Ways to enhance success

The effectiveness of the programme can be improved by monitoring caregivers who are leaving learning groups and to replace and train them accordingly. The reporting systems which monitor the attendance of the learning groups, can further be used to record the learning that takes place, the challenges that caregivers and standard 1 teachers face. Advocacy efforts, such as the engagement with the Ministry of Education and the World Bank can be enhanced by documenting a communication plan and channels which can be used to keep government officials at all levels informed of the programme. In addition, IPs should further engage the staff of the Ministry of Basic Education at national level, to inform new staff of the SRI and its objectives.

The design of the programme in Malawi is focused on the use of self-made toys as opposed to the provision of a resource box. As a result, the facilitation of the rapid distribution of resource boxes in Malawi may complement the self-made toys and combat some of the socio-economic challenges that prevent parents from participating fully. While the natural playgrounds and toy making has supported the improvement of the learning environment, there are still some challenges. Collaboration with other donors on programmes who are also focused on improving the learning environment means that resources can be pooled and reach expanded. Ensuring that CBCCs, are conducive environments for vulnerable and marginalized children including disabled children, is in the context of poverty and lack of resources remains a challenge. The ELK component can be used to make these environments more inclusive, such as consideration can be given to include a module on integrated ECD in the ELK. This can include how to identify learning or physical disabilities, child safety, learning disabilities.

Recognising the costs associated, it would be remiss not to make note of the fact that the pros and cons of having the material only in English should be reconsidered, and potentially prioritise the addition of only certain parts of the material being made available in English. Alternatively, elements which detail the content of the apps can be translated. Including translated stories and songs proved very helpful in other contexts where the SRI was implemented. Work with the standard 1 teachers and mentors to understand which components of the Childsteps/Knowhow caregivers most frequently have challenges with understanding, and use this to guide the areas for translation.

While a 'train the trainer' approach is a recognized approach for training, in Malawi there are contextual challenges that impede the effectiveness of this approach, these relate to the literacy levels of caregivers and the length of the training (2 days). It should also be considered to provide Standard 1 teachers with a tablet. This will support the important role that these teachers play in knowledge transfer in learning groups for caregivers and mentors as well as provide an incentive for active and continued engagement in the learning groups. In addition, there should be an increase in the

number of incentives provided to primary school teachers - reward outstanding teachers/caregivers to motivate the consistent and effective use of the ELK. The reward could be resources for the centre or advanced training in ECD.
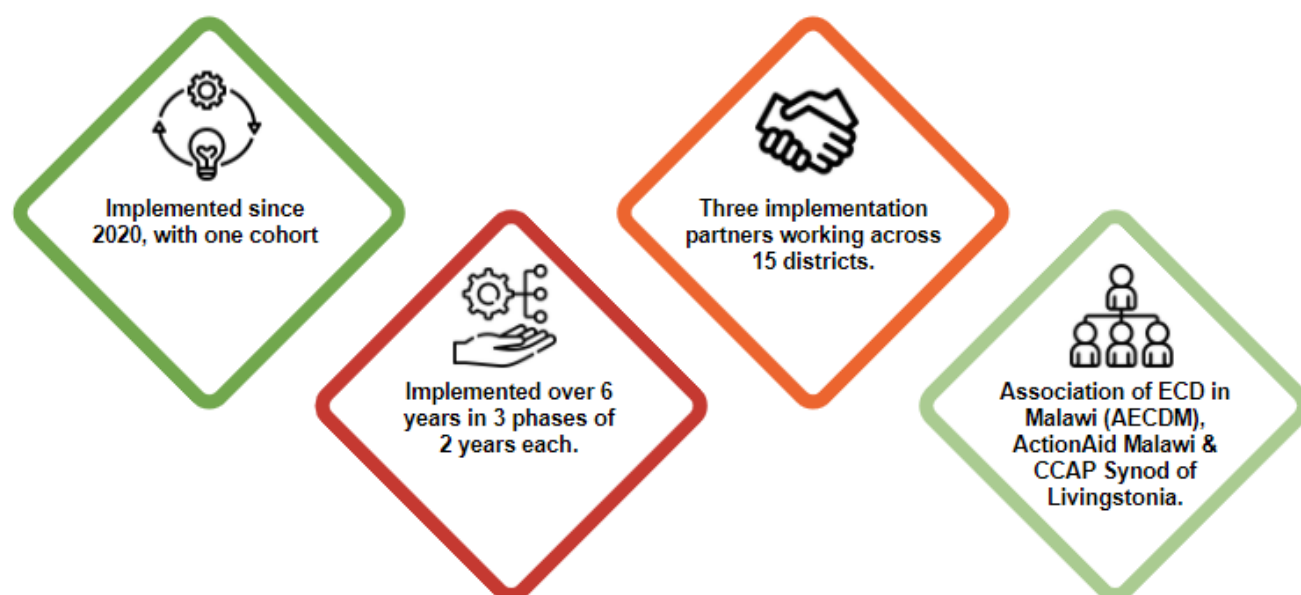
1. INTRODUCTION

The Roger Federer Foundation (RFF), through its School Readiness Initiative (SRI), aims to give children a good start to primary school by preparing them effectively towards school readiness in pre-primary class (the year before Grade 1), establishing a smooth transition into Grade 1. The SRI has three main objectives:

1. Joint Responsibility
Establish processes of joint responsibility of early learners among key stakeholders in the early learning sector (members of government, parents, ECD educators, school development committees, and community members.

2. Improved learning environment
Improve the quality of the learning environment for early learners to ensure that learning facilities for children are adequately resourced and are able to provide effective ECD services.

3. Capacitate educators in early learning education
Improve the capacity and abilities of educators in establishing play-based early learning, and effectively monitoring the development milestones of children.

The SRI is currently implemented in six countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, which include Namibia, South Africa, Lesotho, Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

This evaluation report presents the evaluation findings of the SRI as implemented in Malawi, where the programme sought to reach an initial cohort of 900 pre-primary institutions.

- Implemented since 2020, with one cohort
- Implemented over 6 years in 3 phases of 2 years each.
- Three implementation partners working across 15 districts.
- Association of ECD in Malawi (AECDM), ActionAid Malawi & CCAP Synod of Livingstonia.

1.1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide a reasoned and independent review of the SRI in Malawi.

The scope of this evaluation includes all SRI programme activities conducted by the three implementation partners in Malawi: Action Aid Malawi (AAM), Association of Early Childhood Development Malawi (AECDM) and Synod of Livingstonia, and covers the first cohort of the start-up phase during the period July 2020 to January 2022 across six regions of the SRI initiative.

The evaluation utilized the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria as the evaluative framework, and the evaluation questions were defined according to the respective criteria. Table 1 displays the comprehensive evaluation questions.
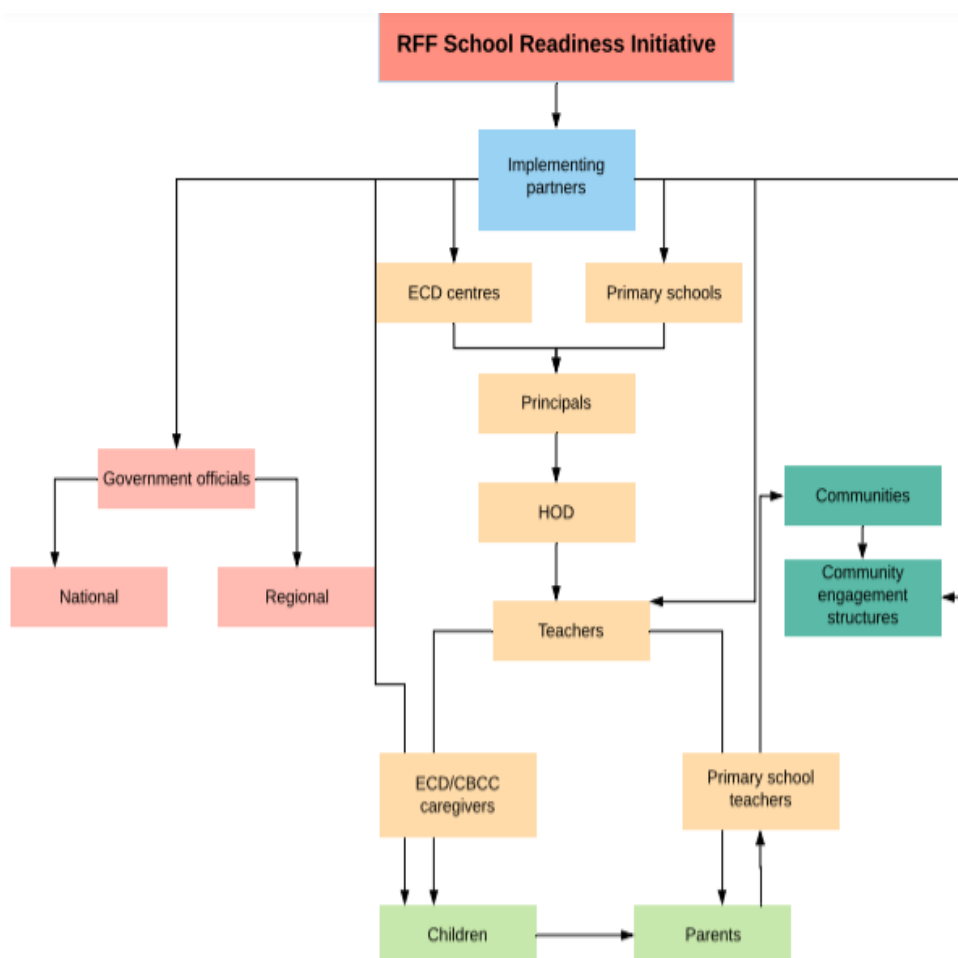
Table 1: Evaluation Matrix for the midterm evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative

Criteria	Evaluation questions
Relevance	Is the SRI responding to the needs of stakeholders (government, parents, communities, implementing partners)?
	Is the SRI responding to the needs of beneficiaries (ECD centres, primary schools, children, teachers and principals)
	Is the programme intervention in particular the Early learning Kiosk relevant to stakeholders (government, parents, communities, implementing partners)?
	Is the programme intervention in particular the Early learning Kiosk relevant to beneficiaries (ECD centres, primary schools, children, teachers, principals)?
	Does the innovation element of the intervention package contribute to making the programme relevant to stakeholders and beneficiaries?
	To what extent did the SRI address the ECD challenges faced by beneficiaries and other stakeholders
Coherence	How does the SRI align with other programmes in the sectors?
	How does this project align with or complement previous or current initiatives by Foundation?
	How well did the project's interventions align with the local and national governments strategy for ECD? (Principals, gov, donors, IP)
Effectiveness	Is the School Readiness Initiative as designed leading to the desired outcomes against the set indicators Did the programme intervention package lead to achievements of the project? SRI leading to desired outcomes: If yes, how many teachers are using the Early learning Kiosk? If not, what challenges did they encounter?
	Did the programme lead to the continuous and better assessment of child development?
	Are learning groups effective?
	Are the self-guided KnowHow course effective as a learning tool
Efficiency	Were activities to date conducted in the most cost-effective way? Including a focus on the use of self-guided KnowHow course in learning groups
	How well were SRI resources used to deliver the target outputs?
	Was the project implemented in a time efficient manner?
	How important is it to introduce the Kiosk at the very beginning of an academic year?
	What is the learning process (feedback loop for monitoring)? Are there learning processes integrated into the programme to adapt? Was the project able to timeously adapt to changing contexts and needs?
Sustainability	Are there elements of the SRI which have been incorporated into the regular day to day activities of beneficiaries?
	Have other organisations taken on intervention based on their interactions with SRI?
	Early learning Kiosk in use after 1 year after implementation.
	How are implementing partners ensuring the continuous use of the Kiosk
	How are schools ensuring the continued use of the ELK?
	Are new educators motivated to conduct KnowHow courses? Has the KnowHow course been Integration into the existing systems/processes? Is the course part of the induction process for new educators?

The regions covered by the evaluation aligned to each implementation partner are as follows:

- AAM: Mulanje, Balaka and Lilongwe rural

- AECDM: Blantyre and Salima

- CCAP Synod of Livingstonia: Mzimba

Figure 1 : Ecosystem SRI stakeholders

Source: Genesis Analytics

Evaluation stakeholders

The SRI is a multi-stakeholder initiative, and the evaluation focused on eliciting perspectives across key stakeholder groups. The evaluation audience comprises of primary and secondary audiences, namely;

1. **Primary evaluation audience**: Roger Federer Foundation, and the three implementation partners in Malawi.

2. **Secondary evaluation audience:** Community Based Childcare Centres (CBCCs) and primary schools, communities, parents and children, and government officials from the Ministry of Education, In terms of the evaluation stakeholders, and aligned to the value of ensuring equity and accountability, Genesis proposes that at a minimum the evaluation results are shared with the additional stakeholders, particularly those who contributed to the evaluation. These stakeholders include educators, school principals, community members, and parents.

2. CONTEXT

This section provides: 1) an introduction to SRI programme and its approach; 2) a brief literature review on the value of ECD; and, 3) country context for Malawi, one of the 6 countries in which the SRI programme is implemented. The purpose of this section is to provide contextual framing for the evaluation findings.

2.1.   OVERVIEW OF THE SRI PROGRAM

The Foundation through its School Readiness Initiative (SRI) aims to give children a good start for primary school by preparing them well towards school readiness in pre-primary class, establish a smooth transition and assure their effective transition from ECD care into Grade 1. The SRI has three main objectives:

1. **Establish a process of joint responsibility of early learners among key stakeholders in the early learning sector**. These key stakeholders include members of government (national, regional and constituency level, parents, ECD educators, school development committees, and community members;

2. **Improve the quality of the learning environment for early learners** to ensure that learning facilities for children are adequately resourced and are able to provide effective ECD services;

3. **Improve the capacity and abilities of educators in establishing play-based early learning, which also effectively monitors the development milestones of children.**

The objectives are expected to be achieved through the delivery of a series of core components:

1. **The Foundation facilitates this through tablet-based technology, the 'Early Learning Kiosk'**. Educators use these tablets or 'learning kiosks' to complete self-guided courses that improve their capabilities (KnowHow Course). In addition, these tablets are used to facilitate the user-friendly Continuous Assessment of Child Development (CACD), to track the child's development by means of specific indicators (ChildSteps). Finally, the Early Learning Kiosk also has a Toolbox which provides educators with various content including how to engage parents in education and play-based activities, for example, making toys using resources around the home.
2. The Foundation established a caregiver incentive fund in a bid to mitigate caregiver attrition rates.

Figure 2 : Early Learning Kiosk Conceptual Model

Source: The Roger Federer Foundation, Summary presentation January 2021

4. **ChildSteps covers the ECD Grade R curriculum**. There are four principal areas covered: Home Language, Mathematics, Life Skills and General and Perceptual Skills. Each area of the curriculum is broken into four terms with expected learning outcomes and lessons from each area. Each 'learning outcome' has the resources needed for the lesson, the context of the lesson which explains to the teacher exactly what is needed and how to facilitate the lesson as well as three assessment levels.

5. **The KnowHow App** is the teacher training app comprising 10 modules. Each module has learning outcomes, four units; each of which has an activity which can be made up of three to five different parts and a module quiz at the end.

6. The **Toolbox App** supports parent engagement. Each country may have different elements of the toolbox as well as including for example Government ECD curriculum as is the case in Malawi. The following are examples of what is included in the App:

● **The Natural Playgrounds Toolkit** helps to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of play in early learning and provides teachers, parents and communities with the knowledge and skills to build a playground for young children out of locally available resources.

● **Practical Manual on how to involve parents of children preparing for Grade 1:** Practical Manual on how to involve parents of children preparing for Grade 1 The manual is designed to help teachers empower parents to provide the best support they can for children in ECD and through the transition into primary school. The emphasis in this manual is on showing parents that playing means learning and that playing is crucial for school readiness and educational success.

● **Toy toolkit;** detailing how to make educational toys using materials found in the immediate environment.

The impact pathways for the three pillars of the programme are as follows:

● **Policy makers and implementers**: The main change this component of the SRI contributes is that ECD policies around school readiness are developed and those that exist are better implemented. Policy makers are able to make these changes as they have a greater understanding and awareness of the importance of ECD.

● **Pre-primary Teachers and CBCC practitioners**: The desired change is that the quality of teaching is improved and thus more children are developmentally on track. This is achieved through providing the ELK Knowhow course, with learning groups, mentors and peer-to-peer learning used to enforce this learning. In addition, the ChildSteps app supports the tracking of the developmental progress of children.

● **Learning environment (schools):** The SRI aims to improve the enrolment of children in pre-primary by supporting the existence of age-appropriate learning facilities and learning materials are developed as well as established procedures for a smooth transition. The programme achieved this through the Toolbox in particular but also the ChildSteps and KnowHow course, in which parents and communities are engaged to form part of their child's education building for example playgrounds which support learning through play at schools.

The SRI TOC (Appendix 1) sets out the Foundation's understanding of the context, the implementation strategy, the assumptions, and the expected changes which the programme is trying to achieve.

2.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF ECD

ECD refers to initiatives that contribute towards the healthy development of young children (particularly between the ages of 0 to 3)[2] and is informed by the idea that a child's early experiences lays the foundation for educational achievement, economic productivity, responsible citizenship, lifelong health, strong community relationships, and successful parenting of subsequent generations, later on in life.[3] This is largely because more than 90% of a child's brain develops before the age of five.[4] UNICEF emphasizes that due to the intensity with which brain development

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[2] RFF includes children up to the age of 6 years as part of ECD
[3] Harvard University Center on the Developing Child (n.d.) *What Is Early Childhood Development? A Guide to the Science*, Available: https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/what-is-early-childhood-development-a-guide-to-the-science/
[4] Borgen Magazine (2019) Increasing Access to Early Childhood Education in Africa, Available: https://www.borgenmagazine.com/increasing-access-to-early-childhood-education-in-africa/

occurs in early stages of life, the quality of the child's experiences makes a critical contribution to potential future success.[5] As a result, the importance of early childhood development cannot be underestimated, especially in Africa, which remains the youngest continent, according to the age of the population.[6]

2.3. MALAWI CONTEXT

During these first crucial 1 000 days of a child's development, Malawian children face a number of challenges related to poor health care, inadequate nutrition and limited early childhood stimulation or education.[7] The access to ECD in Malawi is insufficient - more than 70% of eligible children currently lack access to early childhood education.[8] A number of factors contribute towards poor ECD provision in Malawi, namely inadequate infrastructure, lack of training facilities for caregivers, poorly designed curriculum and lack of funding for the sector.[9] UNICEF highlights that in Malawi parents and guardians do not have the opportunity nor adequate knowledge and skills to "develop positive and responsive parenting skills". This has contributed to late enrolments in grade 1, about 48% of children enrol late, and there is high repetition at the early primary grades, estimated at 25 % and 20 % for grades 1 and 2, respectively.[10]

However, despite these challenges, over the last 25 years the country has made significant progress around the achievement of key maternal, child health, nutrition, education, water, and sanitation interventions, leading to improvements in early childhood development (ECD) outcomes, including the reduction of the stunting rate to 37% in 2015 from 49% in 1990.[11] The prevalence of wasting declined from 6% to 2.7% between 2010 and 2015.[12] Malawi's first ECD policy was developed in 2003 and was revised in 2006, 2009, and updated in 2018 in order to provide guidance on the provision of Integrated ECD. ECD is also a key priority for the Malawian government, highlighted as a key strategy in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) III.[13]

Table 2 below provides a summary of the key ECD and child well-being statistics in Malawi.

Table 2: Summary of ECD and child well-being statistics in Malawi

Indicator	Malawi
Population children (in millions)	Ages 0-14: 8 million (2020)[14]
Under 5 Child mortality rate	38.6 per 1000 childbirths[15]
Diarrhoea treatment - percentage of children (under age 5) with diarrhoea who received ORS (packets or pre-packaged fluids)	51%[16]

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[5] UNICEF (n.d.) Early childhood development, Available: https://www.unicef.org/early-childhood-development

[6] Kariba,F. (2020) The Burgeoning Africa Youth Population: Potential or Challenge?, Cities Alliance, Available: https://www.citiesalliance.org/newsroom/news/cities-alliance-news/%C2%A0burgeoning-africa-youth-population-potential-or-challenge%C2%A0

[7] UNICEF, Pillar 1-ECD https://www.unicef.org/malawi/pillar-1-early-childhood

[8] Tembo,K. (2017) The state of early childhood education in rural Malawi, *Rural Reporters*, Available: http://ruralreporters.com/the-state-of-early-childhood-education-in-rural-malawi/

[9] Ibid.

[10] World Bank: Investing in Early Years for Growth and Productivity in Malawi https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/172701545534083794/pdf/MALAWI-PADf-11302018-636811128679250963.pdf

[11] World Bank: Investing in Early Years for Growth and Productivity in Malawi https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/172701545534083794/pdf/MALAWI-PADf-11302018-636811128679250963.pdf

[12] UNICEF, Pillar 1-ECD https://www.unicef.org/malawi/pillar-1-early-childhood

[13] Malawi Growth and Development Strategy 2017-2022: https://malawi.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Malawi-Growth-and-Development-Strategy-MGDS-III-2017-2022%20%28low%20res%29.pdf

[14] World Bank (2020) Population ages 0-14 - Malawi, Available: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.0014.TO?locations=MW

[15] UNICEF (n.d.) Malawi, Available: https://data.unicef.org/country/mwi/

[16] UNICEF (n.d.) Malawi, Available: https://data.unicef.org/country/mwi/

Adjusted net attendance rate, one year before the official primary entry age[17]	63%[18]
Completion rate for children of primary school age[19]	47%[20]
Stunting[21]	40.9%[22]
Percentage of children accessing ECD	39%[23]
Educarers trained	17,888[24]
Average government spending per child per year	MK355 per child accessing ECD services[25]

3. EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODS

The following section presents the approach employed in the evaluation. This section also includes the limitations and the implications thereof.

3.1. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

This evaluation was grounded in a comprehensive evaluation framework. The evaluation framework outlines the evaluation questions and sets out the parameters which guided data collection including stakeholder consultations. This framework is also used to analyse and interpret the findings of the evaluation, thus ensuring objectivity and consistency throughout the process. The evaluation framework is guided by the overarching criteria developed by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) namely relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.[26] The comprehensive evaluation framework is presented in Appendix 3.

3.2. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The evaluation made use of mixed methods (both qualitative and quantitative) to collect and analyse primary data and analyse secondary data, which are described below. Additionally, the evaluation used a process of triangulation, which refers to the practice of using multiple sources of data when conducting data analysis to enhance the credibility of research findings.[27] Data sources used in this process include secondary data from document reviews, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data from the three IPs made available to the evaluation team and primary data collection, all of which are used to collectively explain and validate the findings. Based on our identified stakeholders/beneficiaries (CBCC caregivers, primary school teachers, Principals, regional steering committees and parents) we triangulated the data by identifying common themes which emerged. Previous evaluations of the SRI have been accounted for in the data analysis process and presentation of the findings.

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[17] Defined as: The participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex as defined as the percentage of children in the given age range who participate in one or more organized learning programme, including programmes which offer a combination of education and care. Participation in early childhood and in primary education are both included

[18] UNICEF (n.d.) Malawi, Available: https://data.unicef.org/country/mwi/

[19] Defined as: Percentage of a cohort of children or young people aged 3-5 years above the intended age for the last grade of primary education who have completed primary education

[20] UNICEF (n.d.) Malawi, Available: https://data.unicef.org/country/mwi/

[21] Defined as: Percentage of under-fives falling below minus 2 standard deviations (moderate and severe) from the median height-for-age of the reference population

[22] Global Nutrition Report, Malawi, Available: https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/africa/eastern-africa/malawi/#:~:text=Malawi%20has%20made%20some%20progress,5%20years%20of%20age%20affected.

[23] UNICEF (n.d.) Malawi, Available: https://data.unicef.org/country/mwi/

[24] SRI Malawi Comprehensive Proposal Startup Phase - 1 July 2020

[25] UNICEF (2021) Safeguarding Public Investments in times of COVID-19, Available: https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/9001/file/UNICEF-Malawi-2020-2021-Education-Budget-Brief.pdf

[26] *Evaluation Criteria, OECD (2022) https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm*

[27] Triangulation. (2010). Encyclopaedia of Research Design. https://methods.sagepub.com/reference/encyc-of-research-design/n469.xml

Secondary data

Desktop review

The evaluation included a comprehensive review of **context-relevant literature**. The literature review highlighted the factors which are important for ECD as well as the constraints faced by the ECD sector in Malawi. This literature was instrumental in contextualising the findings from the evaluation. In particular how the SRI programme objectives align with the challenges experienced in the ECD sector in Malawi, including access, quality education and teacher development and training.

In addition, the evaluation consulted all **relevant programme documentation**, including quarterly and annual reports. This review built an understanding of how the programme has evolved over time, the activities, and services the programme offers, and the systems in place to measure the programme's progress and impact, including the recent introduction of the DCIS. Documents reviewed are listed in Appendix 4. Finally, we analysed all the programme data received from RFF across all centres and schools including monitoring indicators and other programme and performance data collected by the IPs and collated by RFF.

It should be noted that the evaluation team did not validate any of the reported data received as per RFF's collation.

Primary data

Primary data collection consisted of focus group discussions (FGDs) with educators, parents and local government officials, and key informant interviews (KIIs) with HODs/ Principals, CBCC management committees, IPs, national government officials, mentors, child protection officers, caregivers, RFF staff and traditional authorities.

Sampling approach followed

The team used purposeful sampling in the selection of CBCC centres and the associated primary schools which form part of the learning groups.

When determining the number of qualitative interviews to conduct, our aim was to reach data 'saturation'. Saturation is described as the point in data collection and analysis when new incoming data produces little or no new information to address the research question. Research suggests that data saturation can occur between 6 to 20 interviews.[28]

Sampling of institutions (CBCC)

Our approach to the sampling of institutions is based on the following:

1. Ensuring sufficient variation in the institutions selected based on implementing partners, regional distribution, rural/urban spread, and cohort.

2. Balancing efficiency in terms of data collection and coverage based on the timeframes relating to closure and opening of schools as well as set timelines related to producing the programme deliverables.

Leveraging learning groups to engage with educators

Given the timelines and the need to reach 20% CBCCs, the most efficient manner to do this was identified as the learning groups. The benefit of using the learning group as a structure for obtaining insights is as follows:

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[28] A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. (2020). PLOS ONE.
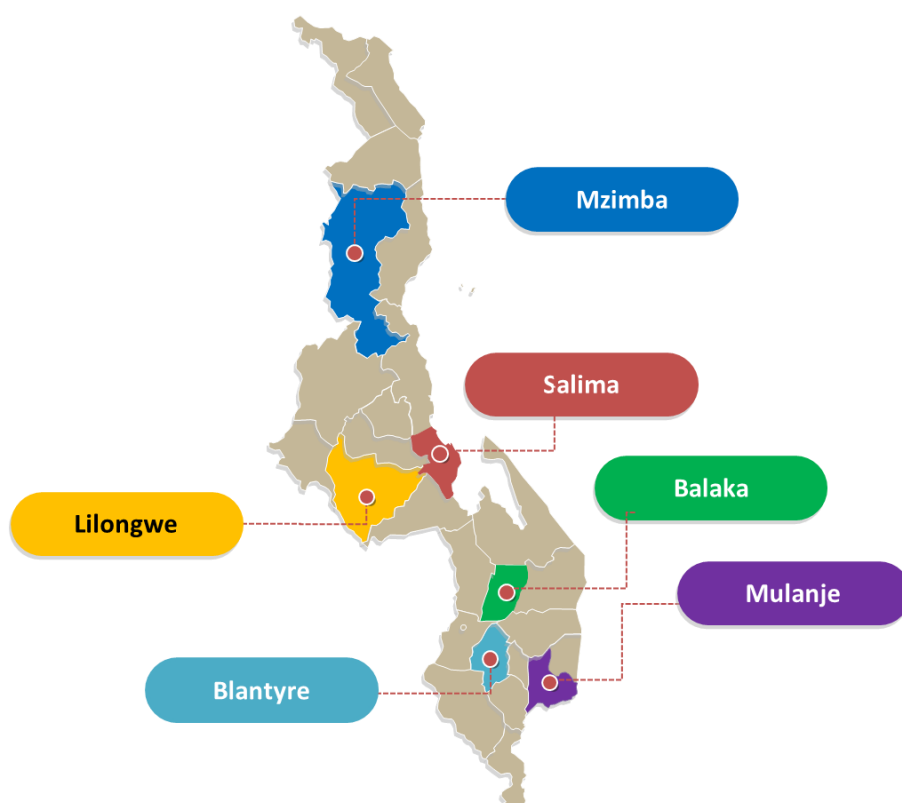https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0232076

- Each learning group represents a primary school with a number of CBCCs. The learning group comprises a standard 1 teacher, a mentor and a number of CBCC caregivers.

- Each learning group can represent between 1 primary school to one CBCC up to eight CBCCs.

Regions covered

- The fieldwork covered the 6 regions where the SRI was implemented namely Mulanje, Balaka, Liliongwe rural, Blantyre, Salima, Livingstonia and Mzimba

We believe this spread provided the diversity to understand the regional distribution and rural/urban spread to identify the differences in experiences as per these contextual factors. Figure 3 indicates this in more detail.

Figure 3: Regions covered by evaluation data collection

The evaluation team had planned to reach 84 institutions (CBCCs) and reached 80 CBCCs.

Ethics and in-person engagements during Covid-19

Aligned to international best practices and standards of ethical conduct in an evaluation, the team obtained written consent from all FGD participants and verbal consent from participants in the KIIs. In addition, the team adhered to Covid-19 protocols including mask wearing and social distancing.

In-depth interviews

The evaluation relied on a series of key informant interviews (KIIs) with a range of stakeholders, conducted both in person and via zoom. These stakeholders included: National government officials; the Roger Federer Foundation; the three implementation partners; and principals/HODs at primary schools where learning groups for the evaluation met. In total, 28 KIIs were conducted for the evaluation.

Focus group discussions

The FGDs gathered information from learning groups, parents, the regional steering committees, Principals and HODs. In total 29 FGD were conducted across 6 regions. Table 3 details the number of KIIs and FGDs held per region.

Table 3: KIIs and FGDs held per region

District	Implementing Partners	No of KIIs Actual (Expected)	No of FGDs Actual (Expected)	Number of CBCCs reached
Mulanje	ActionAid	5 (5)	5 (5)	4
Blantyre	AECDM	4 (4)	5 (5)	16
Lilongwe	ActionAid	4 (4)	4 (4)	13
Salima	AECDM	3 (4)	5 (5)	14
Mzimba	Synod of Livingstonia	7 (6)	6 (6)	23
Balaka	ActionAid	5 (5)	5 (5)	10
Total		28	29	80

3.3.   LIMITATIONS

As with any evaluation, there were limitations originally identified and there were further limitations that emerged during implementation. The evaluation team is confident that the limitations were managed, and did not have adverse effects on the findings and outcome of evaluation. Therefore, we do not believe that the quality of the evaluation was affected by the limitations listed below.

- While not a limitation of the evaluation itself, all stakeholders indicated that the effects of COVID-19 mitigated the full effects of the SRI throughout 2020 - 2021. This must be kept in mind while viewing the findings. COVID-19 similarly affected the data collection activities in early 2022 during an infection wave.

- In some instances, primary school teachers were not included in the focus group discussions since they were at school teaching during the same time.

- The data analysis is based on data made available to Genesis regarding all regions and learning institutions – there is some data missing.

- During fieldwork, the Genesis team visited two different learning groups as the ones that the team originally intended to visit became inaccessible due to flooding that prevented specific roads from being used.

- There were only 3 KIIs conducted in Salima because a government official was not available for the interview, follow-up interactions telephonically were unfortunately unsuccessful due to training commitments of the official.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The evaluation findings are presented according to the evaluation framework criteria namely Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability. The findings and analysis represent the views and insights expressed by the relevant stakeholders engaged through FGDs and KIIs and the data received from RFF. The evaluation team has made an effort to triangulate and validate all independent perspectives during the analysis and sensemaking processes.

4.1. RELEVANCE

Objective 1: Establish a process of joint responsibility of early learners among key stakeholders around the child

The programme has made progress towards establishing joint responsibility of the programme and ECD largely through the establishment of the communities of practice (the learning groups) and through engaging stakeholders such as parents and traditional leaders together to establish the natural playgrounds, feeding programmes and making educational toys. In addition, community members in general such as district officials, mentors and child protection officers remain engaged with the programme. SRI has limited ability to holistically address the socio-economic circumstances of these beneficiaries and stakeholders, which sometimes prevents the stakeholders from participating fully. For example, some stakeholders indicated that the establishment and maintenance of feeding schemes in certain regions were affected by the lack of upward mobility in the communities of focus. In addition, there have been challenges in aligning incentives for some stakeholders like primary school teachers which means that they don't always participate in learning groups.

Objective 2: Improve the quality of the learning environment

Improving CBCC facilities, which is a core objective of the SRI programme, is a priority for all stakeholders. In addition, bringing in stakeholders such as parents to assist in establishing the natural playground, developing feeding schemes and the learning toys is succeeds towards this objective, while simultaneously contributing to the establishment of joint responsibility amongst stakeholders. However, the ability of the programme to fully support the parents is hindered as the socio-economic conditions of the parents and caregivers is not within the control of SRI. Stakeholders noted that parents cannot always afford maize for the feeding programme, and so consideration for other alternatives may be required to ensure this is fully operational.

Objective 3: Improve the capacity and abilities of educators

Building the capacity of caregivers is critically needed in Malawi and is fully appreciated by all stakeholders. In this manner, the approach of the programme is relevant, as well as the design of the ELK. However, due to circumstances, there has been insufficient training on the use of tablets and the singular language of support being English has affected the potential impact and benefits.

Relevance Overall

The evaluation found that all three components of the ELK (ChildSteps, KnowHow, Toolbox) are relevant to caregivers, parents and government officials. Caregivers felt that the ELK, when utilised, provided structure in the form of tangible curriculum that they were able to use on a daily basis. Previously, there had been no specific lesson plans, which meant that often what was taught on a particular day was based solely on the individual decision made by

a caregiver. This finding also aligns with the baseline report conducted by AECDM in Malawi, which found that only 33% of CBCCs had a daily routine programme aligned to the accepted curriculum. This is particularly important since it contributes towards standardisation of the curriculum, within local communities, as well as across regions where the SRI programme is implemented. Caregivers also enjoyed the diversity of the curriculum, including the stories and songs, which made lessons more stimulating for children. In addition, the ELK provided much needed administrative support specifically with regards to logging attendance, as well as through the provision of the status reports that were produced from ChildSteps. Caregivers, in particular. also felt that the ELK provided them with the support needed to be better teachers.

The ChildSteps app assists caregivers to identify when a child has disabilities, learning or otherwise. This has meant that caregivers are better prepared to alert parents, while simultaneously accommodating the child in lessons. It also provides caregivers with a means to keep track of a child's progress, and to identify areas of concern before they could escalate to more serious problems.

A significant impediment to the relevance and effectiveness of the ELK is that it is in English, as opposed to local regional languages. Many of the caregivers do not have a full grasp of English, and thus miss the full benefit of the ELK as a result of the language barrier. One implementation partner indicated that they had found a way to translate materials into local languages, which had yielded positive results. This indicates that translation into vernacular languages can increase the value of the ELK.

One of the aims of the SRI programme is for implementing partners (IPs) to work with CBCCs across the region to establish an age-appropriate learning environment (school meals, playgrounds, child friendly classrooms, absence of violence at school) that is conducive for childhood development. This includes bringing parents into the programme to contribute towards making the natural playground and the indoor play materials. In the baseline studies conducted by the implementing partners, the conditions of CBCCs around Malawi varied, however all of them required significant improvements to infrastructure overall.

The evaluation found that the improvement to the learning environment was a priority for all stakeholders and beneficiaries in the programme, as the previous standard of ECD facilities was cited as a significant impediment to the provision of quality ECD in the country. Often caregivers and parents would indicate that prior to the SRI programme, they had no choice but to conduct classes underneath trees without real facilities.

The learning groups were productive and a relevant learning channel for caregivers - they used the sessions to solve problems collaboratively, as well as to receive support from mentors and primary school teachers whenever they were struggling with understanding the content and concepts of the KnowHow course. However, the learning groups faced some challenges which made them less relevant for all participants. Some of these challenges are as follows:

- Since the learning groups are made up of a number of people from different centres/areas, **caregivers have indicated that there are high costs associated with travel to and from learning groups**. As a result, some indicated that they would benefit from some form of transportation such as bicycles to make travelling to meetings easier;
- In all regions and all centres, **all stakeholders indicated that caregivers had little incentive to participate in the SRI programme and the learning groups since they were doing so on a voluntary basis.** They also emphasized that these caregivers were quite poor and were likely to move onto other initiatives that will provide monetary benefit;
- Often primary school teachers would miss sessions as it was beyond their working hours and **they were provided with no particular incentive to participate**.

The evaluation team acknowledges that two of these challenges (the costs associated with travelling to and from learning groups as well as the lack of a caregiver incentive) is a systemic issue that is out of the SRI's control and mandate, however; the RFF team and its IPs has made considerable effort in attempting to mitigate some of these

systemic issues through the establishment of a caregiver revolving fund. However, the fact that despite this, there were still significant complaints about the lack of incentives for caregivers indicates **that there are deeper systemic issues as it pertains to ECD as a profession / serious career option in the country.**

4.2.   COHERENCE

Holistic and comprehensive ECD is a priority for the Government of Malawi and is informed by the National Early Childhood Development Policy (2017) and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (2017-2022) (MGDS). The Malawian government aims to ensure that all eligible children have access to ECD services by 2030. However, an impediment to achieving this goal is the lack of funding in the sector as well as the absence of an ECE (Early Childhood Education) Act. It is important that the SRI programme aligns with government programming to ensure that a unified ECD approach is taking place in the country. **The evaluation found that the SRI programme succeeded in aligning itself with government programming, contributing towards the aforementioned unified ECD approach.**

Objective 1: Establish a process of joint responsibility of early learners among key stakeholders around the child

One of the key aims of the SRI programme is to establish joint responsibility, which includes bringing in government stakeholders to take ownership of the project. The progress in this regard is mixed. In some areas, there is a growing acknowledgement that the Malawian government is responsible for ECD especially at regional levels e.g. For example, in one region, the child protection officers were encouraging CBCCs not connected to the RFF programme to engage in the natural playgrounds so that there would be uniformity amongst CBBCs. However, in other regions, some district government officials believe that the project is the responsibility of IPs. In addition, progress in this regard is impeded by lack of consistent communication between IPs and regional government stakeholders.

Objective 2: Improve the quality of the learning environment

A significant action-item of Malawi's National Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Development (2009-2014) is to improve the infrastructure of the CBCC learning environments throughout the country.[29] This specifically involves mobilizing local and external resources in order to do so.[30] As a result, RFF's focus on improving the quality of the CBCC learning environment, is strongly aligned with the Malawian government's priorities and legislative mandates. RFF is adding good value by supporting the learning environment, because while it is a priority of the Malawian government limited financial resources reduce the government's ability to practically and realistically make significant progress.

Objective 3: Improve the capacity and abilities of educators

A significant action-item of Malawi's National Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Development (2009-2014) is to improve the capacity of stakeholders to develop and implement ECD programmes.[31] Specifically, this involves training full-time caregivers in basic ECD.[32] Again, a limitation to achieving this is as a result of limited financial resources available. Additionally, all government stakeholders (both National and District government officials) indicated that what was taught in the ELK was aligned to the National Early Childhood Development Policy and Malawi's pre-primary curriculum.

Coherence Overall

The SRI programme is a successor to the RFF's Comprehensive ECD project, which was established in 2011 and implemented with assistance from the government of Malawi and ActionAid. **Both government stakeholders and the**

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[29] National Straetgic Plan For Early Childhood development, *The Government of Malawi & UNICEF*, Available: https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/malawi_ecdstrategicplan.pdf
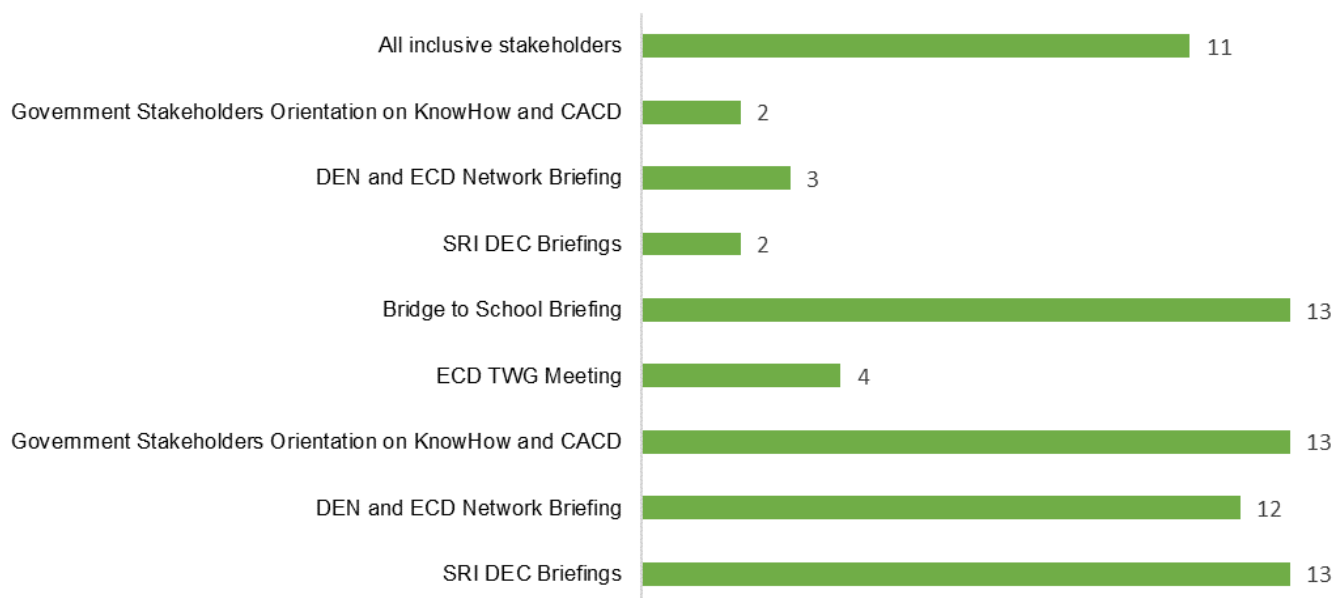[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

implementation partners refer to the programme positively, emphasizing its importance in the sector especially with regards to its focus on transitioning from ECD to primary education.

The SRI programme is focused on the engagement and participation of government stakeholders. Figure 4 below indicates the number and type of meetings that were undertaken between RFF staff and government stakeholders. Data shows that RFF continuously engaged with government stakeholders on a number of components of the programme, including the granular detail of the programme such as the ELK and the Bridge to School initiative.

Figure 4: Engagements held between RFF and stakeholders

Source: Data provided by RFF

The consistent engagement has yielded progress at national level - most recently, a partnership has taken place between the Malawian government, the World Bank and the RFF team, which has resulted in an additional availability of 3 000 tablets in the ECD sector in Malawi. However, although there have been a number of meetings held at regional level as well, the establishment of joint responsibility by all stakeholders especially at regional levels, has yielded varying results. For example, some district government officials indicated that they felt that the responsibility for the programme sat with IPs opposed to them, while other stakeholders such as child protection officers attempted to bring more CBCCs into the programme by encouraging them to build a natural playground.

In addition, there were some implementation issues that impeded outcomes despite coherence with the Malawian government mandate. W**hile the programme engages with government officials at the regional/district level, some district government officials indicated that they would appreciate more communication throughout the implementation of the programme including more regular updates as the programme progressed.** Regional and district stakeholders felt that if this communication had been done earlier, certain issues could have been avoided and they could have assisted more effectively. For example, in one instance, a situation where one of the IPs went to a school and attempted to involve head teachers without government consent. The head teachers were reluctant to participate because they needed approval from the Primary Education Advisors at the district government level.

Although policies and objectives are aligned, and a series of meetings were held, some of the government respondents felt that there needed to be improved clarity of roles and responsibilities for government officials and the IPs. Although this point does not speak to coherence exclusively, it remains an important example of how the programme may sometimes misalign with the regional government if consistent communication is not present.

4.3. EFFECTIVENESS

Objective 1: Establish a process of joint responsibility of early learners among key stakeholders around the child

Increased coordination amongst stakeholders has contributed towards an increased sense of joint responsibility for the child. This is especially so because of the ELK which promotes parental involvement. Initiatives like the Bridge to School cards presented to parents in English, who have very low literacy levels, also limited parental use. It was determined that when parents were able to utilize the resource, they did find them to be effective. Overall**, the programme has been effective in establishing a process of joint responsibility.**

Objective 2: Improve the quality of the learning environment

The learning environment that the SRI programme established was effective and a highlight of the programme. This is especially valuable considering that the learning facilities before SRI was implemented were either non-existent or under-resourced. The use of the tablets, and the resultant organisation that it brings has also been **effective in establishing a conducive learning environment.**

Objective 3: Improve the capacity and abilities of educators

The design of the ELK, with the exception of the main language of instruction being English, is highly effective. It succeeds in providing structure, as well as capacitates caregivers so that they can teach better. However, the low uptake of the KnowHow course mitigates effectiveness overall. The learning groups in particular is **an incredibly effective component of the programme design, which has resulted in improved caregiver teaching abilities.**

Roll-out of tablets

The SRI programme has been effective with regards to the number of schools, ECD centres, learning groups and educators the programme has reached. Table 4 indicates the number of stakeholders reached in 2021, only a year since the beginning of implementation in the country. In addition, this reach has been spread relatively evenly throughout 14 districts in Malawi, highlighting that RFF and its implementing partners have been intentional in reaching communities that ordinarily would have limited access to ECD services.

Table 4: Stakeholders reached in 2021

Number of schools	Number of CBCC centres	Number of Learning Groups	Number of educators
444	903	428	5 533

Source: Data provided by RFF, on behalf of implementing partners

This reach extends to the number of tablets that were bought, registered, synced and distributed by the implementation partners in 2020. These numbers can be seen in greater detail in **Table 6** below:
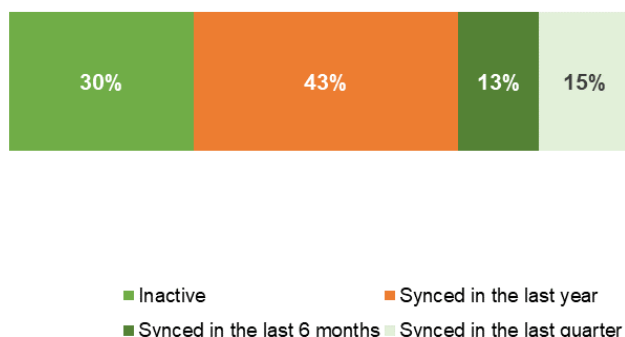
Table 5: Tablets purchased and % synced in 2020

Implementing Partner	Number of tablets purchased	% synced in the last year (2020)
AAM	1 010	91%
SYL	120	50%
AECDM	240	44%

Source: Data provided by RFF, on behalf of implementing partners and is most current available

Figure 5 indicates that although the number of tablets provided is extensive, only one implementing partner had synced the majority of tablets (91%) 2020. Similar trends can be seen for 2021[33]. It indicates that approximately 30% of tablets were inactive and only 43% had been synced in the last 6 months.

Figure 5: Indicates the proportion of tablets synced in 2021

Source: DCIS PowerBI Dashboard

These findings show that tablets are not synced as often as is required, one of the functional requirements for the effective application of the tablets is that they should be synced every 4 weeks, impeding the effectiveness of the programme. Insights from focus group discussions also confirm this, with some stakeholders claiming that sometimes there had been long waiting periods for tablets to be repaired or synced. This also indicates that the way in which the implementing partners attend to issues on the ground is not standardised, affecting the effectiveness of the programme overall. However, the percentage of tablets lost or damaged remains low at only 3%.

Use of the ELK

One of the SRI's key objectives involves improving the capacity and ability of educators through self-directed training through the KnowHow course which is intended to assist caregivers to monitor the development milestones of children. This is largely dependent on whether caregivers engage with the ELK on a regular basis. Table 6 indicates the % of educators participating in the KnowHow course, as well as the % of educators who have completed at least 8 out of 10 modules for 2020.

Table 6: Caregivers progressing through the KnowHow Course and completion rates (8 of 10 modules)

Implementation Partner	Region	% of educators participating in the KnowHow course	% of educators who have completed at least 8 of the 10 modules
AAM	Balaka	87%	77%
	Chitipa	21%	91%
	Dedza	20%	100%
	Lilongwe Peri-Urban	67%	79%
	Lilongwe Rural	51%	74%
	Machinga	72%	100%

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[33] The data provided on the DCIS is only representative of 108 tablets. As a result, this is a sample of the total number of tablets. This must be kept in mind when reviewing the data.

	Mchinji	83%	100%
	Mulanje	100%	100%
	Neno	23%	100%
	Nsanje	95%	56%
	Ntchisi	45%	100%
	Phalombe	100%	66%
	Rumphi	100%	100%
SYL	Northen Mzimba	98%	80%
AECDM		100%	96%

Source: Data provided by RFF, on behalf of implementing partners

The data shows that 71% of educators who had access to the KnowHow course participated, and 88% of educators who had access to the KnowHow course completed at least 8 out of 10 modules. This indicates that the programme has been effective in providing the caregivers with the means to develop their skills. In addition, many caregivers in the FGDs emphasised that they felt empowered by the KnowHow course.

Despite these successes, principals indicated that although the abilities of children that had transitioned to standard 1 had improved, some that came from CBCCs still did not meet the Standard 1 requirements. Principals indicated that they believe that a minority of caregivers still lack meaning and comprehension of modules in the KnowHow course. This could point to a need for additional training that focuses on this element of teaching. In addition, in FGDs, it was indicated that primary school teachers and principals often don't view caregivers as sufficiently competent.

The evaluation found that the introduction of tablets resulted in increased interest in the programme from caregivers and people in the community. This was largely because it was something completely new with regards to ECD. In addition, caregiver engagement with parents remains high, despite the impact of Covid-19 - since the establishment of the programme, 62.5% of caregivers undertook all four parent events from the ToolBox manual and 89.06% of caregivers discussed child development with parents. This reinforces the notion that when the ELK is used, it is effective especially with regards to improving parental engagement. This also aligns to the data gathered through the FGDs and the KIIs, which indicates that there was an increased ownership for SRI amongst parents with parents indicating that they see the importance and value of the programme in their relevant areas.

The evaluation found that the programme has improved coordination between all stakeholders, including parents, caregivers, Standard 1 teachers, principals and mentors overall. Coordination had been seriously lacking before the introduction of the SRI. While very much improved, there remains a need for continued coordination between IPs and government at implementation in order for the programme to be most effective, as noted by the stakeholders themselves. This indicates that the programme has been effective with regards to achieving objective 1, namely establishing joint responsibility of the programme.

The evaluation found that although training on the use of the ELK is provided, challenges remain. The training provided on the use of the tablets was insufficient considering that caregivers are not highly educated and digitally literate. Stakeholders indicated that approximately 1-2 caregivers from their CBCC would be sent to training and then would have to come back to the group and train them on how to use the tablet. The main issue with this was two-fold:

1) **Pre-primary educators (that have higher education) that had attended the training struggled to train caregivers on how to use the ELK effectively** because these caregivers are not themselves trained to teach other adults.

2) Since there is a high caregiver turnover, **it was common for caregivers who had been to the ELK training to leave with no one to fill the gaps.** This could be addressed by having refresher training on a semi-regular basis.

Learning Groups

The evaluation found that the learning groups are an effective mechanism for caregivers to improve their knowledge, and serve as a collaborative space where caregivers and teachers can come up with solutions together. Primary school teachers and mentors who attended the learning groups were able to translate English words into local languages for caregivers, as well as answer any questions posed by caregivers. However, it is important to note that despite this support, this did not solve the language barrier issue which limited the effective use of the ELK overall.

Table 7 indicates that engagement in the learning groups remains high, with approximately 74% of caregivers engaging in the process. This participation rate is particularly positive considering that the programme was implemented at the height of the pandemic, a time where there were a number of disruptions to everyday activities. The data does indicate that there are disparities across regions in participation in learning groups. For instance, some areas have a 20% participation rate while others have a 100% participation rate. These outliers affect the overall effectiveness of the learning groups.

Table 7: Indicates learning group participation for 2020

Implementation Partner	Region	Number of learning groups established	Average number of learning group sessions	% of educators participating in a learning group
AAM	Balaka	17	8	87%
	Chitipa	45	9	89%
	Dedza	11	10	20%
	Lilongwe Peri-Urban	26	8	67%
	Lilongwe Rural	21	8	51%
	Machinga	35	10	72%
	Mchinji	16	10	83%
	Mulanje	17	10	100%
	Neno	12	10	23%
	Nsanje	32	7	95%
	Ntchisi	33	10	45%
	Phalombe	21	7	100%
	Rumphi	56	10	100%
SYL	Northern Mzimba	37	3 per month	76%
AECDM		49	4 per month	100%

Source: Data provided by RFF, on behalf of implementation partners

Effectiveness Overall

The evaluation found that the programme has been largely effective with regards to achieving overall objectives. The DCIS data provided by RFF indicates that 75% of children are now developmentally on track, indicating that the SRI programme is largely effective in meeting goals related to early childhood development.

The programme had minimal effects on enrolment rates. Data provided by RFF and the implementation partners showed that enrolment rates (children in organised learning one year before Grade 1) increased by 3.88% from 2020 to 2021 and by 2.71% from 2021 to 2022. However, it is important to note that since the programme was implemented during COVID-19, there were a number of lockdowns and it is difficult to have a clear picture of what enrolment would have looked like throughout the establishment of the programme had it not been during the context of Covid-19.

The evaluation found that although effective when implemented, a number of schools/centres are still lacking playgrounds and learning materials. In 2020, only 50% schools/centres had built natural playgrounds, 57% of schools/centres had built a natural playground that received a rating of 3 or 4[34], and 68% of schools/centres had learning materials. In addition, some stakeholders indicated that not enough emphasis had been placed on ensuring that learning facilities accounted for those that had disabilities, such as through including wheelchair ramps, which mitigates the effectiveness of this component of the programme.

The establishment of the natural playground, learning materials and the feeding scheme in of itself serves the needs of stakeholders, however; the feeding scheme has struggled to fully consider the deep needs and socio-economic conditions of the regions, specifically that many parents and caregivers are deeply impoverished and cannot afford to buy maize to meet these needs. As a result, aspects of this component do not completely account for the challenges faced by beneficiaries limiting its effectiveness. The same barrier is noted in relation to the creation of the learning materials. Some stakeholders indicated that they struggled to afford materials to make and maintain these materials. This is exacerbated by the fact that stakeholders in Malawi were not provided with a resource box.

210 caregiver funds were established in Mulanje, rural Lilongwe and Balaka respectively, while 479 caregiver funds had been established in other districts as a result of the comprehensive ECD programme, which existed prior to the SRI programme. Considering that there were 903 CBCCs reached through the SRI programme, this means that caregiver funds had been established in approximately 76% of total CBCCs, indicating that the amount of caregiver funds established was extensive. The evaluation found that although some communities did indicate that the establishment of a caregiver fund had succeeded in decreasing attrition rates of caregivers in their communities, the caregiver funds have not completely mitigated caregiver attrition, as this remains high in a number of regions around the country. **As a result, the evaluation found that the establishment of a caregiver fund was only partly effective in mitigating caregiver attrition rates.**

The evaluation found that the Bridge to School cards were effective for those parents who were able to engage with them. However, there were a number of parents who were both illiterate and unable to understand the words in the book, limiting the initiative's effectiveness.

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[34] A 3 is a rating of satisfactory, while a 4 is a rating of excellent.

4.4.   EFFICIENCY

Objective 1: Establish a process of joint responsibility of early learners among key stakeholders around the child

The design of the programme was efficient in that it specifically brought in stakeholders to participate in programme components, which improved joint responsibility, including parents to assist with building natural playgrounds, learning tools and sometimes participating in feeding schemes; learning groups that bring together teachers, caregivers and mentors.

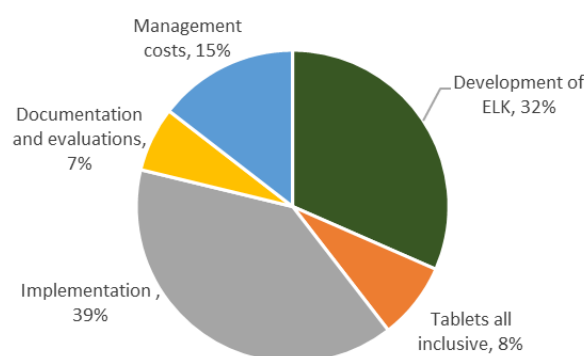## Objective 2: Improve the quality of the learning environment

Tablets and the digitisation of the curriculum has been an efficient and low-cost approach that has improved the learning environment overall. Bringing in the community to establish the natural playground and learning tools was also a cost-effective way to improve the learning environment of the CBCCs.

Objective 3: Improve the capacity and abilities of educators

The learning groups remain an efficient and cost-effective way to support capacity development of caregivers. It provides a space for them to fill in any learning gaps while also providing a space to collaborate with other caregivers and pre-primary teachers to strategise. Challenges related to the efficiency of learning groups consist of insufficient training in FGDs, stakeholders indicated that if the person who was trained on using the tablets was not present then that particular learning group would go to waste; and that a minority of caregivers mentioned that transportation to learning groups was an issue.

Efficiency Overall

Two elements of the SRI were by design aimed at achieving cost effectiveness, namely the tablets used for self-directed learning and the learning groups. This is especially true when the two elements are combined; for example, the learning groups are designed to support educators as they progress through the KnowHow Course.

Figure 6: Expenditure components: Start-up phase: January 2018-December 2019[35]

Source: SRI Status report July 2019

Figure 6 details the allocated expenditure exponents identified through the document review; 15% of total expenditure was allocated to management costs and the majority of the expenditure was dedicated toward implementation (39%) development (32%) and procurement (8%) of the ELK and tablets. The upfront development costs of the ELK were not excessive, with subsequent years only requiring the updating of the ELK content and efficiencies realised over

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[35] This is the most current data available.

subsequent years of continued use. This indicates overall efficiency with regards to programme design and implementation.

The evaluation found that the ratio of tablets to pre-primary educators is 1:2, indicating that the distribution of tablets appears reasonable. In addition, the use of tablets and the digitisation of the curriculum is efficient and a low-cost approach to distributing the needed materials at scale overall. Engaging the community to build the natural playgrounds and learning tools succeeded in achieving two components of the SRI programme, the objective related to joint responsibility, as well as the objective related to improving learning environments. This indicates efficiencies related to project design and strategy. This further indicates efficiencies in the programme design.

The Bridge to School cards (an adaptation during Covid-19) were approved for implementation by the RFF in April 2021. The evaluation found that Bridge to School cards were only distributed recently in Malawi (with some organisations only receiving it in the middle of January 2022). Stakeholders indicated that this was because books were printed in South Africa as a result of COVID lockdowns in Malawi. **As a result, the evaluation found that while the Bridge to School can foster parental engagement during and post Covid-19 it was less effective supporting parental engagement with children during school closures as a result of the pandemic – thus still adding value, but not directly addressing the immediate need as experienced during Covid-19**

Lastly, the programme was implemented at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time that disrupted daily life as well as organisations around the world. As a result, the RFF team and the implementing partners were dealing with a number of external unprecedented challenges in attempting to implement the SRI programme. Despite this, the programme was implemented effectively in a number of regions, reaching 5,533 educators. As a result, the implementation of the SRI programme as a whole was done in a time-effective manner, especially with regards to the budget and the pandemic.

4.5. SUSTAINABILITY

Objective 1: Establish a process of joint responsibility of early learners among key stakeholders around the child

There has been buy-in from both beneficiaries (caregivers and parents) and government stakeholders and there has been improvement with regards to joint responsibility of the project - for example, in some regions, traditional leaders have begun mandating certain actions to get people to participate in the programme, there have been parent-caregiver meetings held, caregivers have gone to parents houses to follow up on lessons and they have had a graduation ceremony for kids. However, despite this buy-in, the SRI is not yet at a point of sustainability such that it would be maintained in absence of RFF's support.

Objective 2: Improve the quality of the learning environment
Although the learning environments have been improved, there is no guarantee that this will be maintained long-term. It was emphasised across stakeholder groups that the socio-economic context in which SRI operates is very poor and communities do not have financial resources. Considering that a number of stakeholders struggled to contribute towards the feeding scheme, it is unrealistic to expect that any necessary funding will be forthcoming from the community that is required to maintain what has been built and developed.

Objective 3: Improve the capacity and abilities of educators

Although the capacity and abilities of caregivers have improved, perceptions of their competencies are impacted as it is thought that they do not have a comprehensive understanding of ECD as a whole, and they are not provided with any accreditation.

Sustainability Overall

The SRI programme aims to contribute towards improved ECD outcomes in Malawi overall. This requires buy-in from a number of stakeholders and beneficiaries (caregivers and parents). It also means that the components of the programme must be institutionalised in the way the CBCCs and caregivers operate and must ensure that the government also takes sufficient ownership alongside other stakeholders.

The SRI programme has already ensured gains in some areas. One of which can be seen through the ECD annual ECD advocacy week, organised between various stakeholders and government stakeholders. The second can be seen through the partnership established between the Government of Malawi, the World Bank and the RFF Foundation, which is intending to capacitate all caregivers in the country through mentors.[36] The intention is to train one mentor per ECD centre to mentor 3 caregivers from CBCCs in the surrounding areas.[37] They will be supported by the Child Protection Workers and the District ECD Officers. This indicates that productive attempts at sustainability have been made largely through ensuring buy-in from government stakeholders and donors.

The evaluation found that although there is buy-in from stakeholders and beneficiaries (parents and caregivers), the sustainability of the programme following the end of the SRI is not currently guaranteed. This is largely due to the Malawian context in which the programme is implemented. Government stakeholders in particular have raised the fact that the programme is currently dependent on actions of implementation partners such as needing them to fix and sync tablets. Some government stakeholders indicated that the SRI programme was successful in filling the gaps in their work related to ECD by doing the work on their behalf. This relationship has the potential to affect sustainability of outcomes since there is a real risk that in some areas, responsibility of the programme remains with IPs only. As a result, a focus should be on the medium to long term plan with regards to institutionalising the SRI programme – and is understood to be the next phase of implementation.

Stakeholders indicated that the effects of COVID-19 on the project were severe, in particular that the pandemic undid a lot of the work that the SRI programme was trying to achieve. For instance, caregivers indicated that they, as well as the children they taught, needed to repeat the syllabus when they came back from the various lockdowns. This indicates that more work needs to be done before the project can be scaled and institutionalised. **As a result, the evaluation found that the institutionalizing SRI programme will only be able to become sustainable, once it is fully and adequately implemented and the right foundation is laid which will likely only be possible after the Covid-19 related restrictions are lifted.**

Lastly, one of the most significant risks to sustainability of the programme are the socio-economic conditions of a number of regions in Malawi. Prior to the establishment of the SRI programme, there was limited funding available for ECD, which is unlikely to change. In addition, factors that impede the retention of caregivers, ability to get to learning groups, maintenance of CBCCs, and the establishment of feeding schemes, are all related to the socio-economic conditions of Malawi. As a result, Malawi's socio-economic conditions must be considered with regards to the sustainability plan.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The following section presents the conclusions stemming from the evaluation, detailed according to the three objectives of the programme.

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[36] School Readiness Mentorship Proposal
[37] Ibid.

ESTABLISHING PROCESSES OF JOINT RESPONSIBILITY FOR EARLY LEARNERS

The objective to establish joint responsibility is focused on the relevant stakeholders that centre around the child. In Malawi, these include parents, caregivers, local communities, child protection officers, traditional leaders, child protection officers, pre-primary teachers, mentors, and government officials. The ELK has facilitated productive relationships between parents and caregivers. In addition, bringing in stakeholders such as parents and community members to build natural playgrounds and natural learning tools has succeeded in creating greater ownership of the project as a whole. However, the vast majority of stakeholders indicated that caregivers attrition rates remain high because they are working on a voluntary basis, despite the introduction of a caregiver revolving fund. More joint effort needs to be done with regards to aligning incentives and framing ECD caregiving a viable career path in Malawi Incentives are not necessarily only monetary, but could also consist of other incentives such as accredited training. It is also important to emphasise that this speaks to the deep systemic issues related to poverty in Malawi opposed to issues in the programme itself. As a result, RFF should not be the sole provider of these incentives but there are also options to investigate that could leverage additional resources from the government or other donors to mitigate caregiver attrition rates, such as training and career pathway options.

The evaluation found that the SRI programme aligned strongly with national government ECD strategies in Malawi, namely the National Early Childhood Development Policy (2017) and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (2017-2022) (MGDS). Regular meetings with government officials also meant that there has been buy-in from the Malawian national government, indicating that there is an acceptance and appreciation of the project in the ECD system as a whole. The partnership between the RFF, the national government and the World Bank indicates that national government stakeholders are willing to support scaling the SRI, suggesting further buy-in of the project at national level. However, this does not translate into ownership and adoption of the project by all Malawian government stakeholders, as some regional government officials have indicated that RFF has been successful in often filling in gaps on their behalf. Thus more work needs to be done in ensuring that regional government stakeholders actually recognise the programme as an initiative that belongs to them. In addition, regional government stakeholders indicated that although they supported the project, they required more regular communication from implementation partners in order to take part in the programme fully. Ensuring committed government buy-in is important as it affects the sustainability of the programme.

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

SRI's focus on improving the learning facilities in which the programme operates is an effective one. In a resource-constraint country like Malawi, it is of particular importance. All stakeholders emphasized how greatly needed improvements to the learning environments are. However, despite the overall effectiveness of the SRI at improving the learning environment, implementation of this component has not been consistent across regions and implementation partners. The evaluation found that the average percentage of CBCCs/centres that built natural playgrounds, the percentage of CBCCs/centres that had built natural playgrounds that received a rating of 3 or 4, and the percentage of CBCCs/centres that had learning materials, was less than 70%. This indicates that this component is still to be effectively implemented in all areas. However, it is not entirely clear whether COVID-19 may have affected the extent to which this element was able to be implemented. One particular area that has been neglected to date is towards ensuring that children with disabilities are considered in these physical improvements of CBCCs/centres.

The establishment of the natural playground, learning materials and the feeding scheme serves the needs of stakeholders. The natural playground and learning materials specifically assisted in allowing parents to engage in their children's education . However, some of these components such as the feeding scheme have struggled to fully consider the deep needs and socio-economic conditions of the various regions, that many parents and caregivers are impoverished and cannot always afford to buy maize to meet these needs. This means that communities don't always have the means to ensure that the learning environment is adequately resourced. This is exacerbated by the fact that

communities in Malawi did not receive the resource box, like other countries where the SRI programme was implemented. There could be potential to procure funding from other donors in order to democratise and ensure equity.

IMPROVING THE CAPACITY AND CAPABILITIES OF EDUCATORS

Several components of the SRI have worked to improve the capacity and capabilities of educators. The ELK in particular provided them with a central administrative function, where data related to enrolment and child development milestones could be kept. This ease of organisation assisted in improving educator competencies, as well as contributed towards the outcomes of the project. In addition, being able to track development progress of children meant that caregivers could pick up when a child had specific disabilities early on and could alert parents accordingly.

There has been high uptake of the KnowHow course, which has supported the caregivers in improving their teaching abilities. However, the training provided was only provided to pre-primary educators, who were then intended to teach caregivers. High attrition rates within this beneficiary group meant that when educators left, there was no one to train new caregivers who had joined the programme. This was exacerbated by the lack of refresher training. In addition, many stakeholders indicated that sometimes success of working through the KnowHow course was based on memorisation rather than legitimate understanding. The evaluation also found that the learning groups were effective in addressing a number of gaps regarding teacher capabilities which assisted in improving educator capacity as well. The learning groups are also an effective component in laying the foundation for the sustainability of the programme as it brings in mentors and teachers to fill in learning gaps. The main issue that still exists is the high caregiver turnover, which was only partly mitigated through the caregiver revolving fund. The high turnover limits gains related to educator capacity and capability, as these caregivers leave and don't use the skills that they've learned in the programme as a result.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the evaluation, the following recommendations have been made to support the implementation of SRI going forward. They have been divided into five separate categories: (1) Improved implementation quality and success, (2) monitoring, (3) Objective 1, (4) Objective 2 of the SRI programme, and (5) Objective 3.

Following from the findings of the evaluation, and taking into consideration the ecosystem in which RFF works and its sphere of influence, the following recommendations have been made to support the implementation of SRI going forward in Malawi. Recommendations are prioritised according to an urgency and importance matrix to guide implementation timing, detailed in **Figure 8** below. Circles with corresponding colours are placed next to each recommendation to indicate the corresponding prioritisation category (red is urgent, while orange is important and should be prioritised, but SRI will continue regardless of these changes). Responsible actors are also highlighted after each recommendation. No timeframe has been indicated for action on each recommendation, but it is encouraged that RFF and IPs work as the consortium to identify relevant timelines for implementation of adopted recommendations, as RFF and IPs are best placed to do so.

Recommendations to achieve improved implementation quality and success:

While the SRI has key components that are sustainability focused, (including the ELK, learning groups and the approach to community engagement) it is important to develop a strategy focused on institutionalizing the SRI. This strategy would identify the future expected roles and responsibilities of government stakeholders at the national and regional level. In addition, the evaluation would propose documenting how government engagement outcomes and impact can be measured beyond the recording of meetings. This would build on the existing structures that the SRI is involved in at various levels: community, district and national level.

Recommendations related to Monitoring:

- IPs would benefit from monitoring caregivers/mentors turnover and consider implementing a mechanism to ensure that new caregivers and mentors are trained soon after beginning in their new positions.

- Tracking the use of the ELK and its components more regularly would highlight where further support and intervention from IPs can take place to improve maintenance procedures including synching of tablets, use of registers, breakdown of tablets, access to tablets by pre-primary teachers.

- IPs should monitor the attendance of the learning groups, record the learning that takes place, the challenges that caregivers and standard 1 teachers face and the solutions that are presented should also be included. This content can form the basis for Communities of Enquiry in which learning groups can involve into over subsequent phases of the programme.

Recommendations related to Objective 1:

- The joint responsibility and partnership approach would benefit from an established a clear and mutually agreed communication strategy for ongoing engagement between RFF, IPs and government stakeholders at the various levels.

- RFF and IPs should continue to engage in advocacy efforts and use existing structures such as the ECD advocacy week to support the focus on school transition, the introduction of free compulsory ECD education for children, feeding schemes in all ECD centres and the importance of ECD and the role that the SRI can play in this.

- RFF might consider increasing advocacy efforts to encourage the Malawian government to consider improved incentives such as a stipend to promote ECD as a viable career option.

Recommendations related to Objective 2:

- The design of the programme in Malawi is focused on the use of self-made toys as opposed to the provision of a resource box. Although we acknowledge that the RFF team made a decision on a cost and sustainability basis to not include resource boxes, these boxes may be effective in allowing the caregivers to teach by playing, while also enhancing parental engagement. As a result, the provision of these resource boxes should be reconsidered, even if provision is dependent on procuring funding from an external source.

- While the natural playgrounds and toy making has supported the improvement of the learning environment, there are remaining challenges. Continued engagement with communities to focus on improving the learning environment in the absence of government funding will be crucial, as such existing community engagement structures should be used. Collaboration with other donors on programmes who are also focused on improving the learning environment means that resources can be pooled and reach expanded.

- Ensuring that CBCCs, are conducive environments for vulnerable and marginalized children including disabled children, is in the context of poverty and lack of resources, remains a challenge. The evaluation found that the ELK component can be used to make these environments more inclusive for all children, however; it is currently not prioritised.

Recommendations related to Objective 3:

RFF should consider translating the material and apps into vernacular languages to improve the accessibility, and effectiveness of the learning groups and apps. Given the cost of translation, review those courses in the KnowHow which have low pass rates and consider translating these sections, this should be followed by a review of the pass rates after translation to determine the impact of the translations.

IPs could work with the standard 1 teachers and mentors to understand which components of the Childsteps/Knowhow caregivers most frequently have challenges with understanding, and thus use this to guide the areas for translation.

While a 'train the trainer' approach is a recognized approach for training, in Malawi there are challenges that impede the effectiveness of this approach, these relate to the literacy levels of caregivers and the length of the training (2 days). If this approach is continued to be used, RFF and IPs should consider the number of training days be extended.

IPs could investigate the inclusion of a module on integrated ECD in Malawi, that assists in identifying learning or physical disabilities, child safety, and learning disabilities.

RFF could consider providing Standard 1 teachers with a tablet. This will support the important role that these teachers play in knowledge transfer in learning groups for caregivers and mentors as well as provide an incentive for active and continued engagement in the learning groups.

RFF and IPs might consider reward outstanding teachers/caregivers to motivate the consistent and effective use of the ELK. The reward could be resources for the centre or advanced training in ECD. A set of criteria would need to be developed and explained to the teachers/caregivers involved in the programme and a monitoring system put into place that would assess the participants fairly and transparently.

APPENDIX 1: THEORY OF CHANGE

School Readiness Initiative:
get children a good start into education

FOUNDATION

Theory of Change

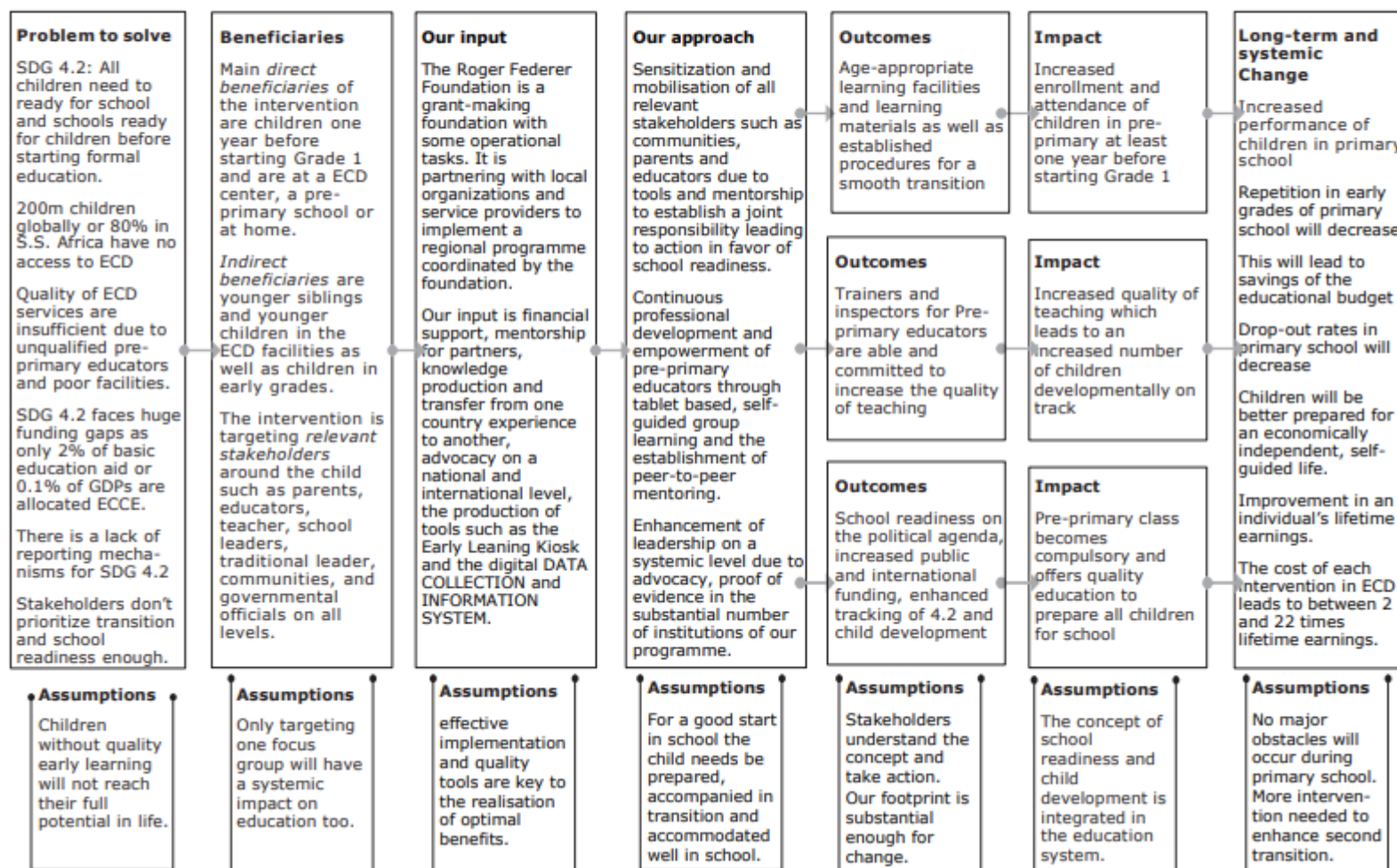| Problem to solve	Beneficiaries	Our input	Our approach	Outcomes	Impact	Long-term and systemic Change
SDG 4.2: All children need to ready for school and schools ready for children before starting formal education. 200m children globally or 80% in S.S. Africa have no access to ECD Quality of ECD services are insufficient due to unqualified pre-primary educators and poor facilities. SDG 4.2 faces huge funding gaps as only 2% of basic education aid or 0.1% of GDPs are allocated ECCE. There is a lack of reporting mecha-nisms for SDG 4.2 Stakeholders don't prioritize transition and school readiness enough.	Main *direct beneficiaries* of the intervention are children one year before starting Grade 1 and are at a ECD center, a pre-primary school or at home. *Indirect beneficiaries* are younger siblings and younger children in the ECD facilities as well as children in early grades. The intervention is targeting *relevant stakeholders* around the child such as parents, educators, teacher, school leaders, traditional leader, communities, and governmental officials on all levels.	The Roger Federer Foundation is a grant-making foundation with some operational tasks. It is partnering with local organizations and service providers to implement a regional programme coordinated by the foundation. Our input is financial support, mentorship for partners, knowledge production and transfer from one country experience to another, advocacy on a national and international level, the production of tools such as the Early Leaning Kiosk and the digital DATA COLLECTION and INFORMATION SYSTEM.	Sensitization and mobilisation of all relevant stakeholders such as communities, parents and educators due to tools and mentorship to establish a joint responsibility leading to action in favor of school readiness. Continuous professional development and empowerment of pre-primary educators through tablet based, self-guided group learning and the establishment of peer-to-peer mentoring. Enhancement of leadership on a systemic level due to advocacy, proof of evidence in the substantial number of institutions of our programme.	Age-appropriate learning facilities and learning materials as well as established procedures for a smooth transition **Outcomes** Trainers and inspectors for Pre-primary educators are able and committed to increase the quality of teaching **Outcomes** School readiness on the political agenda, increased public and international funding, enhanced tracking of 4.2 and child development	Increased enrollment and attendance of children in pre-primary at least one year before starting Grade 1 **Impact** Increased quality of teaching which leads to an Increased number of children developmentally on track **Impact** Pre-primary class becomes compulsory and offers quality education to prepare all children for school	Increased performance of children in primary school Repetition in early grades of primary school will decrease This will lead to savings of the educational budget Drop-out rates in primary school will decrease Children will be better prepared for an economically independent, self-guided life. Improvement in an individual's lifetime earnings. The cost of each intervention in ECD leads to between 2 and 22 times lifetime earnings.
Assumptions Children without quality early learning will not reach their full potential in life.	**Assumptions** Only targeting one focus group will have a systemic impact on education too.	**Assumptions** effective implementation and quality tools are key to the realisation of optimal benefits.	**Assumptions** For a good start in school the child needs be prepared, accompanied in transition and accommodated well in school.	**Assumptions** Stakeholders understand the concept and take action. Our footprint is substantial enough for change.	**Assumptions** The concept of school readiness and child development is integrated in the education system.	**Assumptions** No major obstacles will occur during primary school. More interven-tion needed to enhance second transition.

APPENDIX 2: STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

Stakeholder Type	Name/Position
Roger Federer Foundation	Janine Haendel, Carien Vorster, Veli Mnqayi, Martha Khonje, York Lunau, Fortune Thembo
National Government	**Ministry of Gender:** McKnight Kalanda
Implementation Partners	**ActionAid Malawi:** Anderson Moyo, Clement Banda, Chrissy Banda **AECDM:** Clement Silungwe, Natasha Chingwalu, Wanangwa Pasidya **Synod Livingstonia:** Nicolos Mwakasula, Walusungu Chagara, Caroline Kachilika Phiri

APPENDIX 3: ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Questions	Secondary Data		Primary Data			
		Document Review	Programme performance data	KII: Programme Staff	KII: IPs	KII: National Government	FGDs
Relevance: *The extent to which the programme activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor.*	Is the SRI responding to the needs of stakeholders (government, parents, communities, implementing partners)?	x		x	x	x	x
	Is the SRI responding to the needs of beneficiaries (ECD centres, primary schools, children, teachers and principals)?	x		x	x	x	x
	Is the programme intervention in particular the Early learning Kiosk relevant to stakeholders (government, parents, communities, implementing partners)?	x			x	x	x
	Is the programme intervention in particular the Early learning Kiosk relevant to beneficiaries (ECD centres, primary schools, children, teachers, principals)?	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Does the innovation element of the intervention package contribute to making the programme relevant to stakeholders and beneficiaries? 1. Innovation through Early learning kiosk (3 elements child-steps, toolbox and Knowhow course) increases relevance to stakeholders. 2. Knowhow course: Innovation Peer-to Peer and learning groups	x	x				x

	3. Toolbox: Innovation for engagement with parent e.g., building toys and playgrounds 4. Childsteps: Innovation related to continuous child monitoring 5. Bridge to School: Innovation during Covid to foster parent engagement (Namibia) (Covid 2020/2021) 6. Caregiver fund (Malawi)							
x	Is the innovation being applied/used by relevant beneficiaries?		**x**				**x**
x	To what extent did the SRI address the ECD challenges faced by beneficiaries and other stakeholders?				**x**	**x**	**x**
Coherence: *Measures how well the intervention fits with other interventions in the ecosystem.*	How does the SRI align with other programmes in the sectors?	**x**				**x**	
	How does this programme align with or complement previous or current initiatives by Foundation?	**x**			**x**	**x**	
	How well did the programme's interventions align with the local and national governments strategy for ECD? (Principals, gov, donors, IP)	**x**			**x**	**x**	
Effectiveness: *The extent to which a programme activity attains its objectives,*	Is the School Readiness Initiative as designed leading to the desired outcomes against the set indicators a. Number of teachers trained b. Number of teachers consistently using the Kiosk. c. Number of teachers progressing through Knowhow course d. Frequency with which ELK used. e. Min sync every 4 weeks • Measure perceived quality of competence (incl self-identified) and assessment based (review existing M&E data) • % of children developmentally on track • % of children who attend organised learning one year before primary school (enrolment rates) • % change in children attendance rate		**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**

	• % change in children repeating early grades (movement to grade1,2,3 country specific) • Engagements with local and national governments translating into changes/implementation improvements in ECD policies. (The % of schools with child-friendly environment) • Learning groups are established and sustained						
	Did the programme intervention package lead to achievements of the programme? What were the key contributing factors in delivering on the successes of the programme, as well as challenges experienced?		x	x	x	x	x
	SRI leading to desired outcomes: If yes how many teachers are using the Early learning Kiosk? If not, what challenges did, they encounter?		x				x
	Did the programme lead to the continuous and better assessment of child development? Did teacher use the CACD App (ChildSteps)? If yes, how many teachers used CACD App? If not, what challenges did they encounter.		x		x	x	x
	Are learning groups effective? If yes, are the learnings groups operating as expected? If not, what are the challenges which have been experienced?		x		x	x	x
	If yes, are the peer-to-peer groups functioning as expected. If not, what are the changes which have been experienced?		x		x	x	x
	Are the self-guided KnowHow course effective as a learning tool. If yes, is the tool being used as expected. If not, what are the challenges being experienced?		x		x	x	x
Efficiency: *Measures the outputs, qualitative and quantitative, in*	Were activities to date conducted in the most cost-effective way? Including a focus on the use of self-guided KnowHow course in learning groups (i.e., had impact)	x		x			
	How well were SRI resources used to deliver the target outputs? (How could activities be improved to get same results without spending more money)	x		x	x	x	x

relation to the inputs	Was the programme implemented in a time efficient manner? (Measured through a process evaluation)				x	x	x	x
	How important is it to introduce the Kiosk at the very beginning of an academic year (Timing of intervention to ensure programme delivered efficiently)							x
	What is the learning process (feedback loop for monitoring)? Are there learning processes integrated into programme to adapt? Was the programme able to timeously adapt to changing contexts and needs?				x	x	x	x
Sustainability: _This measure whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn_	Are there elements of the SRI which have been incorporated into the regular day to day activities of beneficiaries? (E.g., new educators conduct the KnowHow course, sustained use of ELK)							x
	Have other organisations taken on intervention based on their interactions with SRI?				x	x		
	Early learning Kiosk in use after 1 year after implementation. (Observe cohort 1 and 2 school still using the tablet)		x					
	How are implementing partners ensuring the continuous use of the Kiosk?				x			
	How are schools ensuring the continued use of the ELK?							
	Are new educators motivated to conduct KnowHow course? Has the KnowHow course been Integration into the existing systems/processes? Is the course part of the induction process for new educators?				x	x		x

APPENDIX 4: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Documents Reviewed
Contract between ActionAid Malawi and Roger Federer Foundation
Contract between AECDM and Roger Federer Foundation
Contract between Solina and the Roger Federer Foundation
School Readiness Initiative Baseline Report AECDM - 2019
SRI Malawi Comprehensive Start-up Phase Proposal
SRI Malawi Status Report - July to Dec 2020
ROGER FEDERER FOUNDATION School Readiness Initiative: Status Report - August 2021
ROGER FEDERER FOUNDATION School Readiness Initiative in Malawi - Start-Up Phase Proposal
ROGER FEDERER ROGER FEDERER FOUNDATION School Readiness Initiative: Status Report - February 2021
AECDM SRI Bi-annual Report - Aug 2021 to Jan 2022
Solina ECD Bi-annual Report - January 2022
SRI First Bi-annual Report 2021
SRI Start-up Status Report - August 2021
Solina ECD Bi-annual Report - July 2021
Solina SRI Baseline 2020
Solina Start-up Report - January 2021
ROGER FEDERER FOUNDATION Monitoring Framework
Toy Booklet (Toolbox content)
Transition Guide (Toolbox content)
Practical Manual on how to involve parents of children preparing for Grade 1 (Toolbox content)

APPENDIX 5: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

KII GUIDE – DISTRICT GOVERNMENT OFFICALS

District education manager (Dept Educ), District Commissioner (Dept of Educ), District Social welfare officer (Dept Gender), District ECD officer (Dept of Gender)

Hello, my name is _____. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We are conducting a mid-term evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative.

Everything we discuss today will be kept strictly confidential. There are no right or wrong answers and nothing you say will be attributed to you in our reporting. We will be taking notes during the conversation to assist us with data analysis later, but these will not be shared beyond the team. Is it okay with you if we record this conversation?

Do you have any questions for us, or are you happy for us to proceed?

Start of FGD Questionnaire (Total 60 min)

Introduction (Time 10 min)

1. Please introduce yourself, and your role at the [*organisation name*]?

Program design and background (Time 15 min)

2. Are you aware of the Roger Federer Foundation School Readiness Initiative?
3. From your understanding, what was the main problem in your country that the SRI was designed to address?
4. In your assessment, to what extent has the program addressed these problems and achieved its goals?
5. Based on your knowledge of this programme, is the SRI aligned to the regional government strategies/policies/curriculum around ECD? What other programmes exist which address the ECD problems you mentioned above? How does the SRI compare?

For probing as required

- *Do you believe the SRI has been an effective programme or not? Give reasons for your answer.*
- *How do you think the programme could be improved?*

Engagement with the programme (Time 15 min)

6. Can you please tell us about who (and how) you engaged with as part of the SRI Programme?

For probing as required

- Implementing partners (mention the names in each country). *Probe on regional steering committees, how they function, were they helpful, challenges, aspects which worked well.*
- Roger Federer Staff. *Probe on regional representatives*
- Teacher and principals involved in the SRI.
- Parents/Communities/ CBCC Feeder Schools.
- Other district ministry officials

- Any other stakeholders.
- Children
- Any difficulties? Suggestions of how to overcome these?
- Suggestions as to how to strengthen these interactions with stakeholders?

Covid-19 (Time 10min)

7. How has Covid-19 over the last 18 months affected your institution, and the ECD sector?

For probing as required

- *Has Covid-19 affected your engagement with the stakeholders mentioned above? Please can you tell us how?*
- *How has Covid-19 affected the ECD sector in your country? Probe on effect of COVID-19 on children, nutrition, their development in all areas and school readiness., as well as impact on policy and decision making.*
- *Has SRI helped to support Education outcomes in your country despite COVID?*

Adaptation and learning (Time 10 min)

8. Have there been any changes made in your department/ Ministry (or policy) based on your involvement with the SRI?

For probing as required

- *Are there changes you would like to see being made in your organisation or policy, based on your involvement with the SRI? Please explain what these are and how the SRI programme has brought these to your attention?*
- *What challenges have you observed with regards to the programme?*
- *How have you or would you overcome these challenges?*
- *What aspects of the SRI do you think would be valuable for other stakeholders implementing similar programs to learn from and why? Probe different component*
- *Looking ahead, what do you think will be the challenges facing the ECD sector in the future?*
- *How do you think these challenges could be addressed?*
- *How could the RFF support this??*
- *How could organisations such as the RFF be more efficient and effective?*

9. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered in the questions above?

We appreciate your participation in this discussion.

Thank you.

TRADITIONAL LEADERS

Hello, my name is _____. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We are conducting a mid-term evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative.

Everything we discuss today will be kept strictly confidential. There are no right or wrong answers and nothing you say will be attributed to you in our reporting. We will be taking notes during the conversation to assist us with data analysis later, but these will not be shared beyond the team. Is it okay with you if we record this conversation?

Do you have any questions for us, or are you happy for us to proceed?

Start of KII Questionnaire (Total 60 min)

Introduction (Time 10 min)

1. Please could you introduce yourself and tell us more about your main roles and responsibilities in this community?
2. What is early childhood education currently like in your community? *Probe challenges around parent involvement, quality of teachers, quality of the facilities.*

Program design and background (Time 15 min)

1. Are you aware of the Roger Federer Foundation School Readiness Initiative?
2. From your understanding, what was the main problem in your community that the SRI was designed to address?
3. In your assessment, has the programme had an effect on the people in your community? If yes, can you expand on this please?
4. Does the programme align with the short-term and long-term goals of the community?

Engagement with the programme (Time 5 min)

5. Can you please tell us about who (and how) you engaged with as part of the SRI Programme?

Systemic effectiveness (Time 10 min)

6. Has the SRI programme influenced how you lead in the community?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered in the questions above?

We appreciate your participation in this discussion.

Thank you.

KII GUIDE – CHILD PROTECTION OFFICER

Hello, my name is _____. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We are conducting a mid-term evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative.

Everything we discuss today will be kept strictly confidential. There are no right or wrong answers and nothing you say will be attributed to you in our reporting. We will be taking notes during the conversation to assist us with data analysis later, but these will not be shared beyond the team. Is it okay with you if we record this conversation?

Do you have any questions for us, or are you happy for us to proceed?

Start of KII Questionnaire (Total 60 min)

Info for moderator: Oversee and support CBCCs within a Traditional Authority

Introduction (Time 10 min)

1. Please introduce yourself, and your role at the Ministry of Gender?
2. What are the short-term and long-term responsibilities of your role?

Program design and background (Time 15 min)

3. Are you aware of the Roger Federer Foundation School Readiness Initiative?
4. From your understanding, what was the main problem in your country that the SRI was designed to address?
5. In your assessment, to what extent has the program addressed these problems and achieved its goals?
6. Based on your knowledge of this programme, is the SRI aligned to the regional government strategies/policies/curriculum around ECD? What other programmes exist which address the ECD problems you mentioned above? How does the SRI compare?

For probing as required

- *Do you believe the SRI has been an effective programme or not? Give reasons for your answer.*
- *How do you think the programme could be improved?*

Engagement with the programme (Time 15 min)

7. Can you please tell us about who (and how) you engaged with as part of the SRI Programme?

For probing as required

- Implementing partners (mention the names in each country). *Probe on regional steering committees, how they function, were they helpful, challenges, aspects which worked well.*
- Roger Federer Staff. *Probe on regional representatives*
- Teacher and principals involved in the SRI.
- Parents/Communities/ ECD Feeder centres.
- Any other stakeholders.
- Children
- Traditional Authorities

- Any difficulties? Suggestions of how to overcome these?

- Suggestions as to how to strengthen these interactions with stakeholders?

Covid-19 (Time 10min)

8. How has Covid-19 over the last 18 months affected your institution, the community you work in, and the ECD sector?

For probing as required

- *Has Covid-19 affected your engagement with the stakeholders mentioned above? Please can you tell us how?*
- *How has Covid-19 affected the ECD sector in your country? Probe on effect of COVID-19 on children, nutrition, their development in all areas and school readiness., as well as impact on policy and decision making.*
- *Has SRI helped to support Education outcomes in your country despite COVID?*

Adaptation and learning (Time 10 min)

9. Have there been any changes made in your department/ Ministry (or policy) based on your involvement with the SRI?

For probing as required

- *Are there changes you would like to see being made in your organisation or policy, based on your involvement with the SRI? Please explain what these are and how the SRI programme has brought these to your attention?*
- *What challenges have you observed with regards to the programme?*
- *How have you or would you overcome these challenges?*
- *What aspects of the SRI do you think would be valuable for other stakeholders implementing similar programs to learn from and why? Probe different component*
- *Looking ahead, what do you think will be the challenges facing the ECD sector in the future?*
- *How do you think these challenges could be addressed?*
- *How could the RFF support this??*
- *How could organisations such as the RFF be more efficient and effective?*

10. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered in the questions above?

We appreciate your participation in this discussion.

Thank you.

KII GUIDE –PRINCIPALS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Hello, my name is _____. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We are conducting a mid-term evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative.

Everything we discuss today will be kept strictly confidential. There are no right or wrong answers and nothing you say will be attributed to you in our reporting. We will be taking notes during the conversation to assist us with data analysis later, but these will not be shared beyond the Genesis team. Is it okay with you if we record this conversation?

Do you have any questions for us, or are you happy for us to proceed?

Start of KII Questionnaire (Total 60 min)

Introduction and Background (Time 5 min)

1. Please introduce yourself, your role at the [*primary school name*]?
2. Can you tell us a bit about your school? *Probe: Size of school. Number of children. Ratio of teachers to children*
3. What challenges have you experienced with regards to CBCC?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *the development and capabilities of teachers in your CBCC or school?*
- *measuring the performance of children against set milestones?*
- *Parent engagement in the education of their children?*
- *children being school ready/prepared for grade 1?*

Program performance (Time 10 min)

4. How did the SRI programme address these challenges? **Moderator note:** Discuss each challenge
5. How did the CBCC Caregiver/Primary school teacher in your school use the Early Learning Kiosk to address the difficulties you were experiencing?
   Probe on how used each element of the program Early Learning Kiosk to address the problem:
   - KnowHow course
   - Child-steps
   - Toolbox

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *What aspects of the SRI were most valuable to you?*
- *Which aspects of the SRI do you feel could be improved? How and why?*

Parents engagement (Time 10 min)

6. Have you noticed a change in how parents of children at your school are engaging?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *How much do your parents understand about ECD? Do they understand how significant it is in the future education of their children? How have you ensured that they do?*

Implementation (Time 10 min)

7. Can you tell us your experience of the learning groups, peer to peer learning and mentorships?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *Have you seen a difference in the way educators view their own professional development through using the Knowhow course, learning groups and peer-to-peer learning?*
- *Do you, as principal or HOD, believe the learning groups and peer to peer learning are effective? If so, why? If not why? probe on: Who sets these up? How do they run? Are they face to face or online? Do teachers say they find them effective. If so, what makes them effective or not effective in teacher professional development?*
- *Has there been a change in how teachers view the role of parents in a child's development? Probe increased awareness of ensuring parents are involved?*
- *Has there been a change in how teachers view the monitoring of children's development? Probe on: Is this being translated into formal assessments or reporting on the children? Is it being fed back into the ECD curriculum in place, to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is constantly improving?*

Covid-19 (Time 5 min)

8. How has Covid-19 affected your school over the last 18 months?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- How has Covid-19 affected yourself, your school, the children, the parents and communities? Probe: Feeding programme? Nutrition of the children attending the school after COVID 19?
- *Has the Bridge to School programme helped your school to support children and parents during Covid-19?*

Outcomes (Time 10 min)

9. Can you tell us about how the programme has supported children's transition from CBCC to pre-primary and Standard 1 (1st year in primary school)?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *Are SRI feeder CBCCs children different to other CBCCs (better prepared etc)*
- *Is the focus on supporting transitions a new area of focus, has it been helpful to focus on this?*
- *Have you noticed a difference in the school readiness of the children as a result of the programme?*
- *Have you seen a change in children repeating grade 1 due to participation in the SRI?*
- *Higher enrolment rates (more children entering ECD)*

Learnings and adaptation (Time 10 min)

10. Has being part of the SRI resulted in you making any changes within you school?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *Have you incorporated the elements of the SRI in the processes of you organisation? E.g., new teacher is assigned a learning group and supported to undertake the KnowHow course. Probe: Included in Teacher orientation? Mentorship? Baseline assessments of teachers before and after the self-study? Do principals and HODs believe that self-study is effective? If so why or why not?*
- *Have you made any changes in your organisation based on you being part of the SRI?*
- *What are the challenges you experienced with regards to the SRI?*
- *Can you tell us about the successes?*
- *What has been the most helpful thing about being part of the SRI?*
- *What has been the least helpful element of the being part of the SRI?*
- *Is there something you would like to add to the SRI? If so, what is it? How can the RFF assist?*

11. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered in the questions above?

We appreciate your participation in this discussion.

Thank you.

FGD GUIDE – CBCC CENTRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Hello, my name is _____. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We are conducting a mid-term evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative.

Everything we discuss today will be kept strictly confidential. There are no right or wrong answers and nothing you say will be attributed to you in our reporting. We will be taking notes during the conversation to assist us with data analysis later, but these will not be shared beyond the Genesis team. Is it okay with you if we record this conversation?

Do you have any questions for us, or are you happy for us to proceed?

Start of FDG Questionnaire (Total 60 min)

Introduction and Background (Time 5 min)

1. Please introduce yourself, your role at the [*insert CBCC centre*]?
2. What are the main responsibilities of the centre management committee?
3. What are the centre management committee's short-term and long-term goals?
4. Can you tell us a bit about your CBCC? *Probe: Size of school. Number of children. Ratio of teachers to children, profile of parents in the school.*
5. What challenges have you experienced with regards to ECD in your school and the community you serve?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *the development and capabilities of teachers in your CBCC or school?*
- *measuring the performance of children against set milestones?*
- *Parent engagement in the education of their children?*
- *children being school ready/prepared for grade 1?*

Program performance (Time 10 min)

6. Are you aware of the SRI programme? From your knowledge what challenges is the SRI programme designed to address. How did the SRI programme address these challenges? **Moderator note:** Discuss each challenge
7. Are you aware of the Early Learning Kiosk? How have the caregivers in your CBCCs use the Early Learning Kiosk to address the difficulties you mentioned above?

   Probe on how used each element of the program Early Learning Kiosk to address the problem:
   - KnowHow course
   - Child-steps
   - Toolbox

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *What aspects of the SRI were most valuable to you?*
- *Which aspects of the SRI do you feel could be improved? How and why?*

Parents engagement (Time 10 min)

8. Have you noticed a change in how parents of children at your school are engaging?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

● *How much do your parents understand about ECD? Do they understand how significant it is in the future education of their children? How have you ensured that they do?*

Implementation (Time 10 min)

9. Can you tell us your experience of the learning groups and peer to peer learning including the role of mentors?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

● *Have you seen a difference in the way educators view their own professional development through using the Knowhow course, learning groups and peer-to-peer learning?*

● *Do you, as principal or HOD, believe the learning groups and peer to peer learning are effective? If so, why? If not why? probe on: Who sets these up? How do they run? Are they face to face or online? Do teachers say they find them effective. If so, what makes them effective or not effective in teacher professional development?*

● *Has there been a change in how teachers view the role of parents in a child's development? Probe increased awareness of ensuring parents are involved?*

● *Has there been a change in how teachers view the monitoring of children's development? Probe on: Is this being translated into formal assessments or reporting on the children? Is it being fed back into the ECD curriculum in place, to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is constantly improving?*

Covid-19 (Time 5 min)

10. How has Covid-19 affected your school over the last 18 months?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

● How has Covid-19 affected yourself, your school, the children, the parents and communities? Probe: Feeding programme? Nutrition of the children attending the school after COVID 19?

● *Has the Bridge to School programme helped your school to support children and parents during Covid-19?*

Outcomes (Time 10 min)

11. What changes have you noticed as the learning committee with regards to the teachers and children in your CBCC?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

● *Has quality of teaching improved?*

● *Can you tell us about how the programme has supported children's transition from ECD to pre-primary and standard 1 (first year in primary school)?*

- *Have you noticed a difference in the school readiness of the children as a result of the programme?*
- *Have you seen a change in children repeating grade 1 due to participation in the SRI?*
- *Higher enrolment rates (more children entering CBCCs)*

Learnings and adaptation (Time 10 min)

12. Has being part of the SRI resulted in you making any changes within you school and your role as CBCC Management committee?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

1. *Have you incorporated the elements of the SRI in the processes of you organisation? E.g., new teacher is assigned a learning group and supported to undertake the KnowHow course. Probe: Included in Teacher orientation? Mentorship? Baseline assessments of teachers before and after the self-study? Do principals and HODs believe that self-study is effective? If so why or why not?*
2. *Have you made any changes in your organisation based on you being part of the SRI?*
3. *What are the challenges you experienced with regards to the SRI?*
4. *Can you tell us about the successes?*
5. *What has been the most helpful thing about being part of the SRI?*
6. *What has been the least helpful element of the being part of the SRI?*
7. *Is there something you would like to add to the SRI? If so, what is it? How can the RFF assist?*
- *Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered in the questions above?*

We appreciate your participation in this discussion.

Thank you.

FGD GUIDE – PARENTS OF CHILDREN IN SCHOOL LINKED TO THE LEARNING GROUP.

Hello, my name is _____. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We are conducting a mid-term evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative.

Everything we discuss today will be kept strictly confidential. There are no right or wrong answers and nothing you say will be attributed to you in our reporting. We will be taking notes during the conversation to assist us with data analysis later, but these will not be shared beyond the Genesis team. Is it okay with you if we record this conversation?

Do you have any questions for us, or are you happy for us to proceed?

Moderator instructions

*All text after **note for moderator** in italics is for probing and should not be asked as questions.*

Moderator background information

Ensure that all parents have joined the FGD. Ensure that masks are worn and that social distancing is observed. Start with an introduction of the programme and why we are speaking to parents.

Guidelines on FGD procedure

We have been contracted by the RFF to conduct an independent evaluation/review of the SRI which has been implemented by [Insert name of IP] in your area.

Before we begin, there are a few rules of engagement we ALL need to agree on:

- *There are no right or wrong responses to the questions we ask;*
- *We all need to respect each other and everyone's opinions;*
- *Only one person can speak at a time – raise your hand when you want to speak;*
- *What is discussed today, stays between all participants and should not be shared outside this discussion; and,*
- *If at any point during the conversation you are uncomfortable with answering a question, you may choose not to share your views and are free to leave the discussion.*

Do you have any questions regarding these rules of engagement?

Start of FGD Questionnaire (Total 60 min)

Introduction (Time 15 min) (When persons answers, they can say name and which school their child attends

1. Can someone tell me what challenges you have experienced related to ECD? Does anyone have anything else to add?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *How did you hear about this centre/school?*
- *What do you think is particularly good about this centre/school? Why?*

- *What would you like to be changed about this centre/school? Why?*
- *How important do you think quality ECD schooling is for your child? Give reasons for your answer.*
- *What are the challenges you have experienced in:*
    - *accessing quality ECD/primary schooling for your child?*
    - *engaging with the CBCC facility / school and/or your child's teacher?*
    - *understanding your child's development and progress at the CBCC facility / school?*
- *What does the term school readiness mean to you?*
- *Do you think your child is being sufficiently prepared to enter grade 1?*
- *Have any of your children repeated a grade? If so which grade and why?*
- *Are there any other challenges you would like to talk about with regards to your child's current schooling?*

Program performance and outcomes (Time 15 minutes)

2. **Moderator to ask:** Who here know about the School Readiness Initiative? **Count number of hands**
3. Can someone tell me how they think the School Readiness Initiative addressed the challenges you mentioned above? Any other comments?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *Do you think you have a better understanding of the importance of ECD for the future success of your child? Why?*
- *Do you think the SRI programme is significantly improving the quality of ECD in your school? Give reasons for your answer.*

Toolbox/ChildSteps/KnowHow engagement with parents (Time 20 minutes)

4. **Moderator to ask**: Who here has been involved in a parent event run by the school? **Count number of hands**
5. Can someone tell me more about these events?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *What aspects of the events were valuable to you? What was the most important thing you learned from these workshops?*
- *If not, why were you not involved in these parent workshops?*
- *Have you seen or used the Tool Box book about making toys from household items or waste?*
- *If so, did you find these ideas helpful and have you used any of them?*
- *Have you seen the app about how to use Natural Playgrounds?*
- *If so, did you find this app helpful? Have you been able to use any of the ideas suggested in this app?*
- *Do you think that you are more able to assist your child in his or her development as a result of attending the workshop, using the book or app? Give reasons for your answer.*
- *Is there any other information you would like that would help you to assist your child with school readiness?*
- *Are there any other activities or ideas about how to engage you, as parents, that you would like to share with us?*

Covid-19 (Time 10 minutes)

6. How has Covid-19 affected you, your children and the CBCC your children attends over the last 18 months?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- Does your school have a feeding programme? Did this continue throughout the pandemic?
- *The Bridge to School was developed to counter the impact of the Covid-19 (Only in August 2021).*

  Has the programme helped you to continue to interact with the school during Covid-19.

We appreciate your participation in this discussion.

Thank you.

KII GUIDE – MENTOR

Hello, my name is _____. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We are conducting a mid-term evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative.

Everything we discuss today will be kept strictly confidential. There are no right or wrong answers and nothing you say will be attributed to you in our reporting. We will be taking notes during the conversation to assist us with data analysis later, but these will not be shared beyond the Genesis team. Is it okay with you if we record this conversation?

Do you have any questions for us, or are you happy for us to proceed?

Start of KII Questionnaire (Total 60 min)

Introduction (Time 10 min)

1. Please introduce yourself, and tell us from which CBCC or school you are from?
2. Please can you tell as what your role as mentor entails?
3. Can someone tell me what challenges you have experienced related to ECD? Please explain to us what your role as mentor entails.

For probing as required

- *your own development as an CBCC care-giver?*
- *measuring the performance of children against set milestones?*
- *engaging with parents and communities in order to highlight the importance of their involvement in the education of their children?*
- *children being sufficiently prepared to enter standard 1?*
- *children repeating grades at primary school?*
- *the size of your class (teacher/child ratio)*
- *Any other challenges you would like to talk about? Special needs children? Vulnerable children?*

Program performance (Time 10 minutes)

4. How did the SRI program address the challenges?
5. How did you as the CBCC caregiver/Primary school teacher use **Early Learning Kiosk** to address the difficulties you were experiencing?

    Probe on how used each element of the program Early Learning Kiosk to address the problem:
    - KnowHow course
    - Child-steps
    - Toolbox
6. What were the most helpful parts of the apps or toolboxes? Why did those apps/toolboxes help you the most?
7. Which parts of the apps/toolboxes have you not used? Why?
8. How have these tools supported your role as mentor?

For probing as required

Are there any other challenges you as teachers, caregivers have experience that have not been addressed? (Probe on requiring a different app, or information). If so, can you suggest ways in which the RFF can assist you? When listing the challenges these gaps should emerge

KnowHow Course (Time 10 min)

9. How did you use the KnowHow course in your role as a mentor?
10. How was your experience of mentoring?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *Issue of the content in English is it a barrier?*
- *Did you undertake a self-study of the Knowhow Course? How easy was it for you to undertake self-study, what problems did you experience, how did you solve them?*
- *Do you think your abilities as a teacher has improved since taking the Knowhow Course? Why do you say that?*
- Do you think the learning groups have been effective in supporting your development as a teacher and discuss the content from the KnowHow course? Probe on How were the learning groups organised? Where, when and how often do they meet? What is discussed? Opinions on if participants think these learning groups are valuable and add to their development as an ECD practitioner?
- Do you think the peer-to-peer learning has supported your development of a teacher? Probe on How were the peer groups organised? Where, when and how often do they meet? What is discussed? Opinions on if participants think these peer learning is valuable and add to their development as an ECD practitioner?
- In your CBCC or school Is the KnowHow course part of your initiation for new teachers? If so, who supervises this? How do you know whether or not a teacher has fully understood the programme and is able to use and apply it in the classroom? Is there mentorship made available to new teachers?
- *What has been the most helpful thing about the KnowHow course?*
- *What has been the least helpful element of the KnowHow course?*
- *Have there been any challenges in using the KnowHow Course?*

Engagement with parents (Time 10 minutes)

11. Can you tell us how you have been engaging with parents?

12. Have you used any of the tools to help you engage with parents?

For probing as required
- *Have you had any difficulties in engaging with parents?*
- *If so, can you explain what these were and how you overcame these difficulties?*

- *Did the toolbox /ChildSteps and Knowhow support you with engaging with parents? Why do you say that?*
- *Do you see the value in engaging with parents in order to support the education of children? Did the toolbox provide you with ideas as to how to engage your parents? Are there any other activities or ideas about how to engage parents that you would like to share with us?*
- *Have parents been active in some of the tasks you have requested them to be involved in e.g. making of toys and playgrounds by parents and communities? Why do you think they have or have not been participating? How do you think you could further improve parent participation in your school? Is there anything the RFF can do to assist you?*
- *How often do you use the toolbox?*
- *Have there been any difficulties in using the Toolbox?*
- *What has been the most helpful thing about the Toolbox?*
- *What has been the least helpful element of the Toolbox?*
- *Is there something you would like to see added to the toolbox?*

Continuous Monitoring (ChildSteps) (Time 10 min)

13. How do you monitor the development of children in your class?
14. What are you looking for when you are assessing how a child is developing?

Note for moderator: For probing as required
- *Do you think the Child-steps app has helped you to monitor the development of children in your class? (Define development)*
- *Can you give me an example of how this app has helped you?*
- *How often do you use the app?*
- *Has using the app made you more aware of how important it is to track children's developmental progress? Why do you say that?*
- *How have you used the results from the app? Probe e.g. children not performing well e.g. speak to headmistress to see what changes can be made?*
- *Have you included the results of your app in any formal or informal assessments/reporting of the child?*
- *Has this app helped you to diagnose learning difficulties with children in your school?*
- *Have there been any difficulties using e.g., the App?*
- *What has been the most helpful thing about the Child-steps?*
- *What has been the least helpful element of the Child-steps?*
- *What do you think could be added to this app to help you further?*

Covid-19 (Time 5 min)

15. How has Covid-19 affected you, your school and your role as mentor over the last 18 months?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *How has Covid-19 affected yourself, your school, the children, the parents and communities?*
- *Does your school have a feeding programme? Did this continue throughout the pandemic?*
- *The Bridge to education was developed to counter the impact of the Covid-19, has the programme supported you to continue to interact with parents and children during Covid-19.*

Outcomes (Time 10 min)

16. Have you seen more enthusiasm about the importance of ECD?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *Have you noticed a difference in the school readiness of the children as a result of the programme?*
- *Have you seen a change in children repeating grade 1 due to participation in the SRI?*
- *Higher enrolment rates (more children entering ECD)*

Lessons learnt (if still time)

17. What has been the best part of the SRI?
18. What would you say has been the most challenging aspect of the SRI?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered in the questions above?

We appreciate your participation in this discussion.

Thank you.

FGD GUIDE – TEACHERS WHO FORM PART OF THE LEARNING GROUP

Hello, my name is _____. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. We are conducting a mid-term evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative.

Everything we discuss today will be kept strictly confidential. There are no right or wrong answers and nothing you say will be attributed to you in our reporting. We will be taking notes during the conversation to assist us with data analysis later, but these will not be shared beyond the Genesis team. Is it okay with you if we record this conversation?

Do you have any questions for us, or are you happy for us to proceed?

Guidelines on FGD procedure

Ensure that all teachers have joined the FGD. Ensure that masks are worn and that social distancing is observed. Start with an introduction of the programme and why we are speaking to teachers.

We have been contracted by the RFF to conduct an independent evaluation/review of the SRI which has been implemented by [Insert name of IP] in your area.

Before we begin, there are a few rules of engagement we ALL need to agree on:

- *There are no right or wrong responses to the questions we ask;*
- *We all need to respect each other and everyone's opinions;*
- *Only one person can speak at a time – raise your hand when you want to speak;*
- *What is discussed today, stays between all participants and should not be shared outside this discussion; and,*
- *If at any point during the conversation you are uncomfortable with answering a question, you may choose not to share your views and are free to leave the discussion.*

Do you have any questions regarding these rules of engagement?

Moderator instructions

*All text after **note for moderator** in italics is for probing and should not be asked as questions.*

Moderator background information

SRI in Malawi

- *The SRI programme in Malawi is intended to run over a period of 6 years in 2 year tranches*
- *First phase began in July 2020 and is set to end in July 2022*
- *Programme implementation began in the midst of COVID so there is no perspective of what the programme was like prior to COVID*
- *As a result, implementation of the programme in Malawi was slow but uptake has accelerated ever since Sept 2020, when COVID restrictions were reduced*
- *All stakeholders have received tablets and all tools, though learning groups are at different stages of progress*

Start of FGD Questionnaire (Total 75 min)

Introduction (Time 10 min) Use a black board to write down the points, take a photo

1. Please introduce yourself, and tell us from which CBCC or school you are?
2. Can someone tell me what challenges you have experienced related to ECD? Does anyone have anything else to add:

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *your own development as an CBCC caregiver/ teacher?*
- *measuring the performance of children against set milestones?*
- *engaging with parents and communities in order to highlight the importance of their involvement in the education of their children?*
- *children being sufficiently prepared to enter grade 1?*
- *children repeating grades at primary school?*
- *the size of your class (teacher/child ratio)*
- *Any other challenges you would like to talk about? Special needs children? Vulnerable children?*

Program performance (Time 15 minutes) Discuss each challenge listed above

3. What was your experience with regards to training on the SRI program?
4. Did the SRI program (ELK) address the challenges?
5. How did you as the CBCC caregiver/Primary school teacher use the **ELK** to address the difficulties you were experiencing?
   Probe on how used each element of the program Early Learning Kiosk to address the problem:
   - *KnowHow course*
   - *Child-steps*
   - *Toolbox*
6. What were the most helpful parts of the apps or toolboxes? Why did those apps/toolboxes help you the most?
7. Which parts of the apps/toolboxes have you not used? Why?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

Are there any other challenges you as teachers, caregivers have experience that have not been addressed? (Probe on requiring a different app, or information). If so, can you suggest ways in which the RFF can assist you? When listing the challenges these gaps should emerge

KnowHow Course (Time 15 min)

Moderator speak: How many of you have the tablet, please waive it in the air? Do you have all the tools loaded on it**? *Moderator: Record how many tablets you see***

8. How did you use the KnowHow course?

9. What was your experience of peer-to-peer learning?
10. Tell about your learning group and what was your experience of your learning group?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *Issue of the content in English is it a barrier?*
- *Did you undertake a self-study of the Knowhow Course? How easy was it for you to undertake self-study, what problems did you experience, how did you solve them?*
- *Do you think your abilities as a teacher has improved since taking the Knowhow Course? Why do you say that?*
- *Do you think the learning groups have been effective in supporting your development as a teacher and discuss the content from the KnowHow course? Probe on How were the learning groups organised? Where, when and how often do they meet? What is discussed? Opinions on if participants think these learning groups are valuable and add to their development as an ECD practitioner?*
- *Do you think the peer-to-peer learning/mentoring has supported your development of a teacher? Probe on How were the peer groups organised? Where, when and how often do they meet? What is discussed? Opinions on if participants think these peer learning is valuable and add to their development as an ECD practitioner?*
- *In your ECD centre or school Is the KnowHow course part of your initiation for new teachers? If so, who supervises this? How do you know whether or not a teacher has fully understood the programme and is able to use and apply it in the classroom? Is there mentorship made available to new teachers?*
- *What has been the most helpful thing about the KnowHow course?*
- *What has been the least helpful element of the KnowHow course?*
- *Have there been any challenges in using the KnowHow Course?*

Engagement with parents (Time 10 minutes) (Write down the responses to the whiteboard, take photo)

11. Can one person please tell us how they have been engaging with parents?

12. Have you used any of the tools to help you engage with parents?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *Have you had any difficulties in engaging with parents?*
- *If so, can you explain what these were and how you overcame these difficulties?*
- *Did the toolbox /ChildSteps and Knowhow support you with engaging with parents? Why do you say that?*
- *Do you see the value in engaging with parents in order to support the education of children? Did the toolbox provide you with ideas as to how to engage your parents? Are there any other activities or ideas about how to engage parents that you would like to share with us?*
- *Have parents been active in some of the tasks you have requested them to be involved in e.g. making of toys and playgrounds by parents and communities? Why do you think they have or have not been*

participating? How do you think you could further improve parent participation in your school? Is there anything the RFF can do to assist you?

- *How often do you use the toolbox?*
- *Have there been any difficulties in using the Toolbox?*
- *What has been the most helpful thing about the Toolbox?*
- *What has been the least helpful element of the Toolbox?*
- *Is there something you would like to see added to the toolbox?*

Continuous Monitoring (ChildSteps) (Time 10 min)

13. How do you monitor the development of children in your class?
14. What are you looking for when you are assessing how a child is developing?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *Do you think the Child-steps app has helped you to monitor the development of children in your class? (Define development)*
- *Can you give me an example of how this app has helped you?*
- *How often do you use the app?*
- *Has using the app made you more aware of how important it is to track children's developmental progress? Why do you say that?*
- *How have you used the results from the app? Probe e.g. children not performing well e.g. speak to headmistress to see what changes can be made?*
- *Have you included the results of your app in any formal or informal assessments/reporting of the child?*
- *Has this app helped you to diagnose learning difficulties with children in your school?*
- *Have there been any difficulties using   e.g., the App?*
- *What has been the most helpful thing about the Child-steps?*
- *What has been the least helpful element of the Child-steps?*
- *What do you think could be added to this app to help you further?*

Covid-19 (Time 5 min) only add additional points after input from one person

15. Individual question: how did Covid affect you over the last 18 months?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *How has Covid-19 affected yourself, your school, the children, the parents and communities?*
- *Does your school have a feeding programme? Did this continue throughout the pandemic?*
- *The Bridge to school was developed to counter the impact of the Covid-19, has the programme supported you to continue to interact with parents and children during Covid-19.*

Outcomes (Time 10 min)

16. Have you seen more enthusiasm about the importance of ECD?

Note for moderator: For probing as required

- *Have you noticed a difference in the school readiness of the children as a result of the programme?*
- *Have you seen a change in children repeating grade 1 due to participation in the SRI?*
- *Higher enrolment rates (more children entering ECD)*

Lessons learnt (if still time)

Note for moderator: This process can be done anonymously with a piece of paper with the relevant questions. This can then be put in a box at the end, to be analysed later. A paper and pen is required.

17. What has been the best part of the SRI?
18. What would you say has been the most challenging aspect of the SRI?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered in the questions above?

We appreciate your participation in this discussion.

Thank you.

FIELD OBSERVATION CHECK LIST

- Observation of tablet (working order, power cable, apps downloaded and updated)

- Data quality and data monitoring: Observing data collection tools for M&E

- Ask to see resource box: Take photo, one box per school?

- Take photos of whiteboard and of the FDG groups.

FDG CHECKLIST

- Covid-19: App moderators and participants wearing masks

- Social distancing (6 meters apart)

- Attendance registers of participants

- Consent (written/verbal) to participants as well as have image taken

- White board

- Take Photos

- Paper and Pen