firelight™

Designing Innovations for Early Childhood Development:
Community-Driven Systems Change for Early Childhood Development

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June 2022

About Firelight

▶ Firelight is a multi-donor public charity fund that raises money from foundations, individuals and institutions to support community-based organizations (CBOs) that are working with their communities to drive systems change for children and youth in eastern and southern Africa.

▶ Firelight supports catalytic community-based organizations that are working with their own communities to build smart, sustainable, and potentially scalable solutions to the challenges faced by children and youth in eastern and southern Africa.

www.firelightfoundation.org

Firelight's commitment

- Firelight is deeply committed to community-driven systems change (CDSC) - an approach to development and social transformation that emphasizes the insight, leadership, and ownership of the people who are living and experiencing issues at the community level and their work to create lasting change in the systems and root causes that underlie critical issues they seek to address.

Community-Driven Systems Change (CDSC)

Community-Driven   ## Systems Change

Community-Driven

- Who – community

- How – participatory, collaborative (methodologies can be participatory learning and action, PRA, etc)

- *Brings in the value of solidarity*

- Community-driven work can be
  - charity,
  - service delivery,
  - mutual support, OR
  - justice work, systems change work,
  - etc.

Systems Change

- What – analysis of systems, stakeholders, root causes

- What – action on/with systems, stakeholders, root causes

- *More aligned with justice / rights*

- Systems change work can be
  - participatory, community-driven OR top-down
  - policy level OR community-level
  - etc

A more preferable community-driven systems change should be;

Relevant, impactful, and sustainable change at the community level comes when –

- Community members determine, own, and drive the change process; and

- Change actions focus on addressing the underlying systems and root causes that cause the issues of concern – rather than only reacting to symptoms.

CDSC

Community-driven systems change is NOT…	Community-driven systems change IS…
• Developing a proposal without the input of community and government stakeholders, submitting it to a funder for approval, and then delivering the proposed program to the target community.	• Working with community and government stakeholders to surface key issues, share indigenous knowledge, map out systems and stakeholders, understand root causes, prioritize issues, and develop a shared action plan – in which the CBO is one of many actors. • Together implementing, evaluating/reflecting on, and adapting that shared action plan.
• Starting with the premise of replicating/ scaling a program or rolling out a pre-packaged model or tool.	• Developing actions or interventions, with community stakeholders, in response to the issues and root causes identified in the community – drawing on available experiences, indigenous knowledge and practices, and internal and external tools and resources as appropriate to respond to the need.
• Starting with and being guided by a static linear log-frame or logic model. • Being evaluated according to a predetermined set of outcomes.	• Being open and sensitive to both expected and unexpected outcomes, and looking for intermediate indicators of progress. • Using data and evidence to learn and improve action.

CDSC

Community-driven systems change is NOT…	Community-driven systems change IS…
• Implementing an isolated intervention.	• Thinking about the whole system, the context, different stakeholders, relationships, and dynamics. • Different stakeholders recognizing and acting on different entry points. • Investing time and resources into convenings and exchanges that build community cohesion, shared analysis and learning, and collaborative action.
• Only service provision.	• Actions that aim to create lasting changes in systems – such as advocacy, normative change, strengthening existing community or government structures. (May also include some responsive service provision if the CBO and community deem it an urgent priority.)
• Trying to reach a large number of direct beneficiaries during a short funding/project cycle without creating meaningful long-term change.	• Recognizing that it takes time and investment to create true shifts in systems that will last, that this change may not be immediately visible. • Recognizing that beneficiary numbers in a given year are not an indicator of systemic change.

How have different stakeholders worked together

- Identifying potential grantees with support of local government officials and community leaders

- Identifying root causes of challenges affecting children and jointly prioritizing solutions + visioning with the community

- Different stakeholders are taking up different roles in the initiatives that are aligned to their work - recognizing that no single organization can mitigate all the issues alone

- Leverage custodians of indigenous knowledge and grounding capacity building what already exist in the community

Our ECD work

- Work with our grantee-partners to promote outcomes for children in under-resourced communities

- We support CBOs to engage marginalized population groups to design inclusive activities for all children with special focus to vulnerable children

- We facilitate CBOs to work with different stakeholders in a systems thinking approach to promote center quality in ECD centers

- Different stakeholders play their respective roles to promote age appropriate early learning opportunities and to effectively prepare children for transition into primary schools

Lessons we are learning…

- There are benefits when <u>different stakeholders work collaboratively</u> to co-create goals, activities, and indicators for the initiative

- <u>Trust</u> that <u>communities</u> know what they need

- It is important to have a <u>meaningful program duration</u>, security and predictability, and phased approach for the partnership.

- <u>Capacity strengthening</u> needs to focus on CBOs' true needs, be collaboratively planned, and make use of multiple forms of mentorship and technical support.

- <u>Participatory evaluation and learning methods</u> are valuable for skills transfer, adaptation and understanding progress, successes, and challenges in community-driven systems change.

- It is essential to <u>"begin with the end in mind"</u> (preparing for transition and sustainability of impact).

- <u>Networks and communities of practice</u> are important spaces for cross-learning and can lead to strategic action for systems change.

Challenges

- Getting funders who can give patient funding to support the Community-Driven Systems Change approach

- It is a messy BUT exciting process

- Results will not be achieved overnight- Need to trust the process and realize that sustainable change will take time

- Supporting grassroot organizations and communities to feel confident in taking drivers seat in prioritizing solutions that would promote children outcomes

Recommendation

- Allow for <u>meaningful duration</u>, <u>security</u> and <u>predictability</u>, and <u>phased approach</u> in partnerships*.*

THANK YOU!!!