



Impact Report

fiscal year 2019

(july 2018-june 2019)

COMMUNITIES LEARNING FOR ACTION

OUR MISSION

Firelight builds the capacity of catalytic **community-based organizations** (CBOs) that are enabling community action to build smart, sustainable, and scalable solutions to the challenges faced by **children and youth in southern and eastern Africa**.

OUR VISION

Children and youth in southern and eastern Africa live in safe, strong, nurturing environments where they can thrive.

70,270

children, youth, parents and caregivers, professionals, and community members were **directly impacted** by the community-based organizations we supported in the last year, and

87,957

were **indirectly impacted**



Where did we work and who did we support?

Firelight supported **7 geographic clusters** of **52** community-based organizations in **5 countries** in eastern and southern Africa. These organizations tackled issues ranging from early childhood development (ECD) to secondary education to child marriage to girls' empowerment.

12

CBOs in **Tanzania** enabling community action to fight child marriage

6

CBOs in **Rwanda** enabling community action to empower young women

23

CBOs in **Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania** enabling community action to improve ECD quality and early learning

4

CBOs in **Malawi** enabling community action to improve girls' secondary education

7

CBOs in **Lesotho** enabling community action to develop stronger child protection systems



What did we do?

Firelight provided our CBO grantee-partners with **flexible capital** as well as **tailored capacity building** in areas ranging from organizational development, to programmatic effectiveness, to learning and evaluation, to networking, to social accountability, to communications, to resource mobilization, to financial management – depending on their organizations' needs and priorities and those of their communities. Importantly, we also worked with them to collect, analyze, validate, and share data to demonstrate impact, to learn, and to adapt.

In this impact report, we share some critical learnings from our grantee-partners and evidence of their impact on communities, children's lives, and the systems in which they all live.

How does Firelight think about learning and evaluation?

Firelight is committed to gathering evidence about the power of community-based organizations (CBOs) and community-driven solutions, in partnership with CBOs themselves every step of the way. Firelight believes that learning and evaluation should:

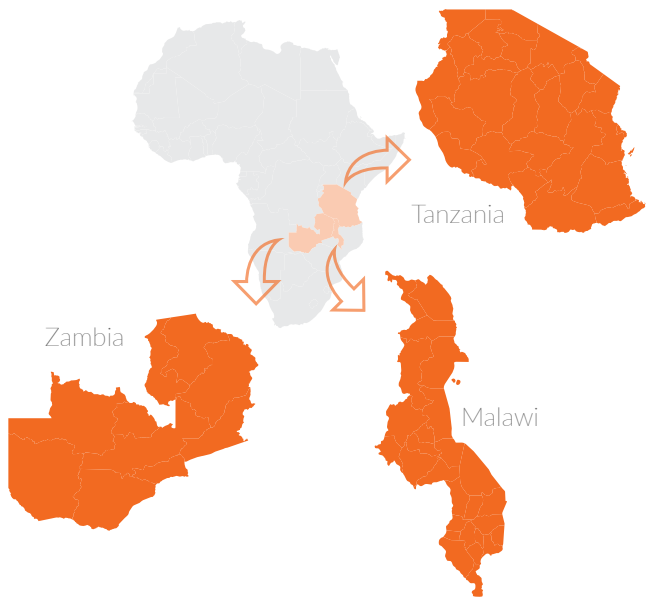
- Actively involve the participation of communities
- Integrate learning with action so that data guides program improvement
- Be transparently shared with the organization and community members, as well as external donors or academics
- Contribute to the field of knowledge around the role of CBOs, communities, and community-driven solutions in development
- Maintain rigor and contextual relevance

What do we measure at Firelight?

Firelight believes that measurement and learning are critical for adaptation, achievement, and progress. In close collaboration with community-based organizations, communities themselves, and technical advisors, Firelight works to develop indicators of progress that include:

- **Improvements in organizational outcomes for CBOs** – for example, services that are more resilient, stronger, more responsive, scaled, more impactful, and/or better quality
- **Increased community awareness of and value for** the importance of childhood and adolescent protection, rights, and nurturing
- **Achievement of better practices and environments for children** and youth through community-led action
- **Measurable changes in outcomes** for children and youth
- **Increase in the number of CBOs that have access to and are able to participate in vibrant communities of practice** for children and youth
- **Number of Lead Partners, Community Grantmakers, and community mentor organizations** seeded by Firelight

Supporting early childhood development systems | Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia



With funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the Bainum Family Foundation, and co-funding from Comic Relief and the UK Government's Department for International Development, Firelight is supporting **23 community-based organizations** in Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia to engage their communities to strengthen early childhood development (ECD) centers and family-based empowerment programs that promote children's holistic development, especially in areas that are affected by HIV. ECD is critical to children's ability to thrive in their early years and also impacts their ability to succeed in school, but only **12% of children in sub-Saharan Africa currently have access to quality early childhood services**. And even where ECD centers do exist, they often operate more as a daycare for parents during work hours, rather than a robust support to children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. In the last year, Firelight has been concentrating on two major areas: **improving ECD center quality in Malawi** and **empowering families of children from birth to age 3 in Tanzania and Zambia to promote their children's cognitive development**.

With capacity building from the Madrasa Early Childhood Program (MECP), our CBO grantee-partners in Malawi have been establishing and **strengthening ECD centers** – including building basic **infrastructure**, creating **supportive learning environments**, and **training ECD center caregivers** – to serve the needs of children from ages 4 to 5 and of their families. In Malawi, we have also piloted a **training program of ECD personnel** that includes classroom coaching and ongoing mentoring from local experts in child development.

In Tanzania and Zambia, with capacity building from MECP and worldwide ECD expert Beatrice Matafwali, our CBO grantee-partners have piloted the WHO/UNICEF **Care for Child Development curriculum** to empower parents and caregivers to strengthen their children's cognitive development from birth to age 3. Our grantee-partners have also integrated a variety of holistic programs that serve children's and families' multi-faceted needs, including **savings and loans groups** to promote families' economic empowerment, **feeding programs** to provide basic nutrition to children at ECD centers, **voluntary counseling and testing for HIV and AIDS** through community health activities, and **income-generating activities** to sustain some of the expenses involved in running the ECD centers.

10,459

children from birth to 5 years **directly** served by the CBO grantee-partners we supported in Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia



10,403

parents and primary caregivers **directly** served by the CBO grantee-partners we supported in Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia



15,871

community members **directly** served by the CBO grantee-partners we supported in Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia



HOW COMMUNITIES IN MALAWI IMPROVED QUALITY OF LOCAL ECD CENTERS

In Malawi, our CBO grantee-partners have been working to improve quality at **51** local community-run ECD centers (called community-based childcare centers, or CBCCs) to ensure that these centers are serving as active learning environments.

After a baseline conducted by independent academic researchers at the beginning of the initiative, results from the midline evaluation showed:

- Improvement of **CBCC physical infrastructure and program curriculum**
- Improvement in **adult-child interaction and inclusiveness**
- Increased **presence of locally-made learning and playing materials**
- **Motivation from parents and community members to improve quality at their CBCCs**

HOW CBOs EMPOWERED PARENTS IN TANZANIA AND ZAMBIA TO PROMOTE CHILD DEVELOPMENT

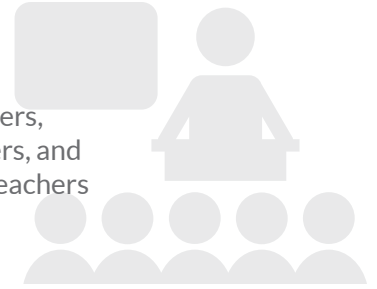
Our CBO grantee-partners in Tanzania and Zambia have been using the internationally recognized Care for Child Development (CCD) curriculum as a way to empower parents/primary caregivers to strengthen their children's learning at home.

This past year, we engaged external experts to conduct a progress evaluation of the implementation and impact of the Care for Child Development curriculum. Together we learned:

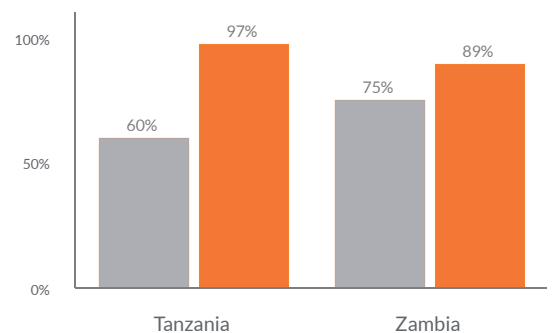
- CBOs **raised awareness among families** and communities about the critical importance of the first 1000 days of life – resulting in **increased demand for ECD programs**
- Parents reported **increased frequency of positive care/development practices** – including telling stories and reading books, playing together, singing songs, and creating homemade play materials with their children.

495

ECD center caregivers, professional teachers, and para-professional teachers **directly** trained



From **baseline** to **progress evaluation**, the percentage of parents/caregivers who had sung songs to their children in Tanzania and Zambia **INCREASED**.

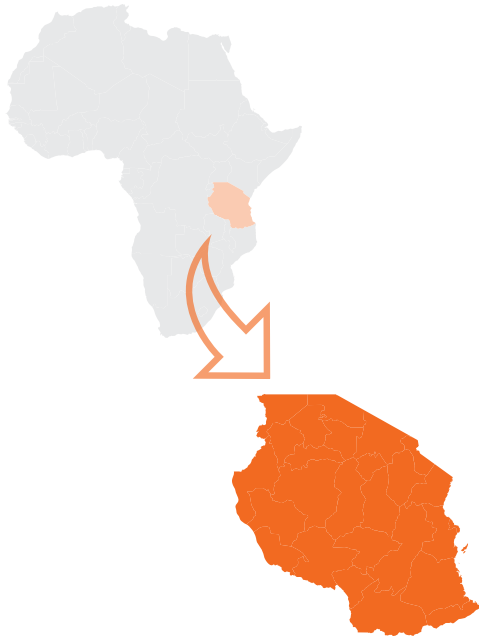


BUT THERE IS STILL ROOM FOR INVESTMENT:

In the coming year, Firelight and our CBO grantee-partners will look to invest in:

- The **need to increase fathers' involvement** in responsive caregiving for young children
- The **need to retain ECD centers workers and caregivers**
- The need to further increase opportunities in ECD centers to engage in **free-choice indoor play, learning activities that promote literacy and numeracy, and inclusion of children living with disabilities**

Strengthening primary education | Tanzania



With support over time from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Flora Family Foundation, Firelight has been supporting **five community-based organizations and five youth groups** to improve children's school readiness, literacy, and numeracy outcomes in Tanzania. Although Tanzania has made impressive strides to increase enrollment at the primary school level, the rapid increase has not included sufficient investments to improve education quality, leaving children without age-appropriate reading, writing, or arithmetic skills.

Our CBO grantee-partners in Tanzania have been piloting and iterating on a variety of **innovative models** to support young children's learning, from establishing **in-school remedial classes**, to running **community-based afterschool learning centers**, to training **out-of-school youth as academic tutors** for primary school children. Because of the link between early learning and primary school outcomes, two of our CBO grantee-partners are also supporting **community-based early childhood development programs**. In the last year, **8,174** children in primary school were directly impacted by Firelight's CBO grantee-partners.

HOW CBOs HELD GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABLE FOR EDUCATION SERVICE DELIVERY

Despite the efforts of the Tanzanian government, development partners, and civil society to reform and reorganize development strategies over the last 13 years, progress has been slow and yet to translate to substantive improvement in education service delivery at the community level. For example, the Tanzanian Controller and Auditor General reported serious misallocation and mismanagement of funds in development projects, especially at the local government level.

In the Tanzanian education sector, this means that thousands of children attend poorly equipped, overcrowded schools with highly overburdened teachers. Yet, often, communities and CBOs do not have the right tools, capacity, and information to engage effectively with governments to monitor their expenditure and hold them accountable for effective service delivery.

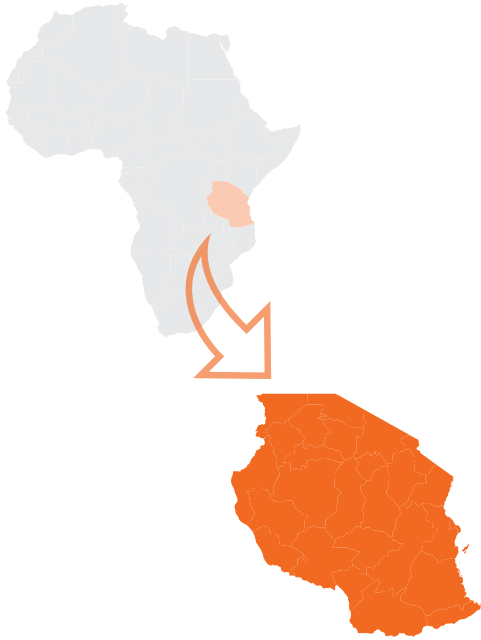
Firelight's CBO grantee-partners in Tanzania recognized the essential need to increase their capacity in **empowering their communities to actively participate in budget/planning processes, to oversee government officials' activities, and to hold local authorities accountable for misuse of funds or poor service provision**. In response, since 2015, Firelight partnered with Tanzanian education advocacy expert Haki Elimu to train our CBO grantee-partners in social accountability strategies.

At Firelight, we believe that CBOs – rather than making up for systemic failures – can enable community action to hold government accountable. With the right tools and capacity, CBOs can use social accountability strategies to increase community agency, to improve communication between government and communities, to increase government accountability, and to vastly improve service delivery.

In fact, this is exactly what we found. **All five of our primary education CBO grantee-partners have noted that applying social accountability strategies is critical for them to achieve their goals in improving the education system. Since being trained, CBOs have empowered their communities to reform government expenditure in their schools, to build new school facilities (such as a clean, hygienic kitchen), and to co-create government engagement strategies.**

However, in addition to formal training, CBOs report that they need adequate funds to support their activities in social accountability, monitoring, and advocacy in a way that helps them sustain the long-term impact of these strategies. They also report that it takes time and expertise to maintain the delicate balance between maintaining collaborative relationships with government officials and being able to hold them accountable for their duties.

Ending child marriage | Tanzania



With funding from the Oak Foundation, Dorothea Haus Ross Foundation, and an anonymous donor, Firelight has been supporting a cluster of **twelve community-based organizations** that are fighting to systematically eliminate child marriage in the Shinyanga region of Tanzania, where 59% of girls under 18 are still forced into marriage.

Our grantee-partners are deploying a variety of holistic approaches to end child marriage in the region. Their approaches include **economic strengthening** for families, **psychosocial support for children** rescued from child marriage, **educational support, vocational training, and family re-integration** for children rescued from or at risk of child marriage, **skillful parenting and counseling assistance** for families, **cultural awareness** raising, **law enforcement** interventions, strengthening local **child protection teams**, establishing **youth clubs for children in school**, and **training teachers** on child protection.

Communities have already reported **reductions in child marriages and teenage pregnancies** and have seen a significant **increase in local understanding of the problems of child marriage**. Organizations have likewise reported increases in parents' **desire to end child marriage** and community members' **cooperation in reporting and stopping cases** of child marriage.

HOW CBOs LED THE FIGHT AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE IN TANZANIA

In July 2018, Firelight engaged the expertise of technical consultants from the AfriChild Center at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, to conduct a comprehensive progress evaluation of Firelight's support to the twelve CBO grantee-partners supported from 2015 through 2018 under our initiative to end child marriage in Shinyanga, Tanzania. As part of this evaluation, the AfriChild team interviewed CBO staff members, beneficiaries of the programs, child protection committee members, and stakeholders from local and regional government offices, amongst others.

Child marriage was reported to have reduced, particularly in urban areas. Some of the key findings from the research showed stunning results at the community level, including the following:

- reduction in members of the child protection committees seeing infants abandoned by mothers
- increased number of children passing standard seven and continuing to secondary school
- decreased rate of teenage pregnancies
- reduction of defilements of girls which used to occur during traditional dances, at water wells, bushes and on the way to school and homes
- increased numbers of girls going to school
- increased numbers of girls – those who had left school for marriage or other reasons – returning to school
- increases in men's support of girls' education
- new bylaws banning child marriage adopted by community leaders and councils
- increased household incomes, allowing parents to support their girls' education

16,074

children, parents, community members, CBO staff, and government officials **directly** impacted by the CBO grantee-partners we supported in Shinyanga, Tanzania





Firelight has been supporting a cluster of **six community-based organizations and one local Community Grantmaker** in the Gisenyi region of western Rwanda, an area deeply affected by the Rwandan genocide and nearby conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Our grantee-partners have been working with **501** of the most vulnerable girls in Gisenyi – girls with disabilities, girls who live on the street, girls who have been forced into sex work, and girls who are young mothers – to provide them with seed funding to start their own **businesses and savings collectives** or to help them **re-enroll in formal education or vocational training**. Our grantee-partners complement girls' financial empowerment with social empowerment by also ensuring that girls are educated about **sexual and reproductive health**, have access to **HIV and AIDS services**, and are supported with **psychosocial counseling and community mentors**.

HOW CBOs EMPOWERED GIRLS TO BE LEADERS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

We are actively building the evidence base of community-based solutions for girls' empowerment and sharing this knowledge with others. Along with the documentation of the program models of our six CBO grantee-partners in Rwanda, a survey of girls in the program showed:

- **57%** increase in girls owning their own businesses, which allows them to save and plan for the future
- **322%** increase in girls' ownership of livestock, which allows them to have a sustainable source of income and pass on livestock offspring to other vulnerable girls
- **51%** increase in girls' membership in a business cooperative or collective
- **33%** increase in knowledge of how save and use money effectively
- **125%** increase in girls owning their own money, which allows them to meet their basic needs and those of their families – houses, clothing, health insurance, food
- **45%** increase in girls knowing how to take care of their health, including sexual and reproductive health
- **64%** increase in ability to reach out to a non-family member if experiencing harassment
- **44%** increase in self-confidence and health knowledge

2,823

girls, children, family members, and community members **indirectly** impacted by the six CBO grantee-partners and 501 girls directly supported in Rwanda through, for example:

- **Increases in family incomes** that allowed girls' young children to attend school and have their basic material needs met
- **Trainings in reproductive health knowledge for other girls** in the community, conducted by girls in the program themselves
- **Pig and goat pass-on programs** that cascaded to other community members

As Father Niyonsenga Longin from CBO grantee-partner Inyenyeri Star noted:

*"In the community, girls have begun to have value, and are not just seen as the source of problems. **People know that girls can be leaders, go to school, and perform just as well as boys.**" And at the same time, "Girls in the program go back home, meet their friends and neighbors, and talk about what they have gained from the program" – thus cascading knowledge to countless other girls.*

To our foundation and individual donors –
on behalf of our CBO grantee-partners and the children they
serve, the Firelight team sincerely thanks you.
This impactful work would not be possible without you.

Though we have made incredible progress, we still have a long way
to go in addressing the systemic challenges facing children and
youth in eastern and southern Africa.

If you would like to learn more about Firelight's work and/or how
you can support us, please e-mail Executive Director Nina Blackwell
at nina@firelightfoundation.org.

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Visit blog.firelightfoundation.org to learn more about our CBO
grantee-partners and the progress they are making in building
brighter futures for children and youth.

