



Application Pack



# Impact at Scale Labs: Early Years in Kenya and Tanzania

Improving access to quality childcare in East Africa

June 2026

[www.globalschoolsforum.org](http://www.globalschoolsforum.org)



## 1 Why Early Years?

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, only 27% of children are enrolled in pre-primary education - roughly half the global average - and just 54% are developmentally on track (UNICEF). An estimated 249 million children under five across the region are at risk of not reaching their full potential due to poverty and lack of access to quality early care (The Lancet Regional Health - Africa, 2026).

Evidence from across the region points to significant and persistent developmental risks. In Kenya, for example, 38.3% of children aged 3–4 are not reaching expected cognitive and socio-emotional milestones, while in Tanzania, more than half of children aged 24–59 months are already falling behind in critical early outcomes in health, learning, and psychosocial wellbeing (Thrive Policy Alignment Analysis Brief, 2024; 2022 Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey). This evidence reflects broader challenges faced across similar low- and middle-income contexts.

There is growing momentum across the region. Governments are increasingly prioritising the early years through policy reforms and national strategies, while locally led organisations are pioneering innovative childcare solutions that are improving access, quality, and affordability proving what is possible. This programme is designed to accelerate this progress - supporting innovators who are strengthening childcare systems, generating evidence, and building the case for greater investment, stronger policies, and provision that reaches children at scale.

## 2

## About the Impact at Scale Labs: Early Years in Kenya and Tanzania

The [Impact at Scale Labs: Early Years in Kenya and Tanzania](#) supports locally led organisations improving access to quality childcare for children aged 0–5 years across Kenya and Tanzania. The Labs has demonstrated that strong childcare models can be designed, tested, and validated - and applications are now open for the second cohort. - and applications are now open for the second cohort.

We are looking for locally led innovative childcare and early childhood education and development (ECED) organisations with a bold vision for scale and the ambition to grow their impact. This is an opportunity to access catalytic funding, dedicated technical support, and a powerful network of partners, funders, and government actors to help you scale your impact.

## 3

## Who will the Lab work with?

We work with organisations across a diverse range of childcare delivery models - from centre-based facilities such as daycare centres, crèches, market based, faith-based settings to home-based providers, workplace-supported crèches, and community-based care delivered through local networks. We also welcome mobile and flexible models serving ASAL and humanitarian contexts, education-linked services integrated within schools and TVETs, and inclusive models intentionally designed for children with disabilities and diverse needs.

Rather than prescribing a single model, we recognise that the most effective solutions are those that are contextually grounded, financially sustainable, and designed with the needs of children, caregivers, parents and communities at their centre. Across all model types, our focus is on supporting initiatives that prioritise gender responsiveness, improve affordability, accessibility, safety, developmental outcomes, and caregiver empowerment - particularly in underserved contexts where formal childcare options are limited or non-existent.

## 4 Eligibility: Who should apply?

We are looking for bold, locally led organisations in Kenya and Tanzania delivering quality childcare for children aged 0–5 years in low-income communities. If you have a proven model, a committed team, and the ambition to scale your impact sustainably, this programme is designed for you. Please review the eligibility criteria below before applying.

Component	Criteria
<b>Geographic focus</b>	Kenya and Tanzania
<b>GSF membership requirement</b>	Both GSF members and non-members are eligible to apply. Organisations selected to the Labs who are not already GSF members will be required to join the GSF community upon selection.
<b>Organisation stage of development</b>	<p>We recognise that the childcare sector in Kenya and Tanzania is at a nascent stage, and we welcome applications from organisations at different stages of development. An organisation may be a strong fit for the Lab if it is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An established ECED organisation expanding into or deepening its work in childcare for children aged 0–5</li> <li>2. An organisation with an existing childcare programme that is ready to test, validate, and scale sustainably</li> <li>3. Scaling a new or innovative childcare model with a compelling approach and early evidence of impact</li> </ol>

Component	Criteria
<p><b>Locally led</b></p>	<p>The organisation is locally led and demonstrates a strong understanding of the childcare context. This includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Team &amp; leadership: An experienced local programme leadership team with lived experience in delivering childcare solutions within the stated local context.</li> <li>2. Operations: The childcare solution or key components of it has been operational in said context and/or similar contexts for at least two years, and you have evidence to demonstrate the impact.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Childcare model types</b></p>	<p>Organisations delivering affordable, accessible, scalable, and high-quality childcare solutions in low-income communities and ensuring children’s safety, well-being, good health, nutrition, and holistic development. These may include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Centre-based childcare facilities (daycare centres, crèches, early learning centres, faith-based, in markets and in prison);</li> <li>2. Home-based childcare providers caring for children other than their own in their own homes;</li> <li>3. Workplace-based childcare (employer-supported crèches and facilities);</li> <li>4. Community-based (care delivered through community spaces and local networks)</li> <li>5. Mobile and flexible childcare models in ASAL, remote, humanitarian and emergency contexts;</li> <li>6. Education-linked childcare services (integrated within public or private schools, TVETs, and universities);</li> <li>7. Inclusive childcare services intentionally designed to support children with disabilities and diverse needs.</li> </ol> <p>We are also interested in organisations pursuing innovative approaches to scale, including social franchising, licensing models, digital platforms, and public-private partnerships that extend quality childcare to underserved communities.</p>

Component	Criteria
<b>Beneficiaries</b>	<p>The programme takes a dual-generational approach, targeting two interconnected groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children aged 0–5 from low-income communities in Kenya and Tanzania, with a focus on ensuring access to safe, nurturing, and developmentally stimulating childcare regardless of gender, disability status, or family circumstance.</li> <li>• Women and girls as primary caregivers, recognising that unpaid childcare falls disproportionately on women and that improving access to quality childcare directly unlocks women's economic participation, agency, and well-being.</li> </ul>
<b>Management</b>	<p>Private individuals or non-government organisations who own and operate these institutions independently, without government control or political ties.</p>
<b>Pricing model</b>	<p>Low or no-fee solution targeting low-income communities in Kenya and Tanzania</p>
<b>Compliance</b>	<p>Organisations must be legally registered and hold valid operational licences in Kenya or Tanzania. They should also have established child protection and safeguarding policies in place.</p>
<b>Innovation type</b>	<p>New and established approaches to improve inclusive childcare.</p>
<b>Innovation stage</b>	<p>The innovation should be early or growth stage.</p>

Component	Criteria
<p><b>Gender Equality and Social inclusion (GESI)</b></p>	<p>Innovation that integrates and demonstrates <a href="#">gender equality and social inclusion (GESI)</a> in model design, workforce, and community engagement.</p> <p>We believe that childcare sits at the structural intersection of women’s unpaid care responsibilities, labour force participation, income generation, and child well-being. Restrictive cultural and gender norms that place childcare responsibilities mainly on women continue to limit women’s economic empowerment, leadership opportunities, and full participation in society. Therefore, scaling childcare models without embedding gender responsiveness risks replicating and entrenching inequalities at greater reach.</p>
<p><b>Evidence</b></p>	<p>The innovation must be theoretically grounded and have a clear plan for impact evaluation focusing on child development for children aged 0–5, specifically:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A documented Theory of Change linking activities to intended developmental outcomes (e.g., cognitive, motor, language, socio-emotional)</li> <li>2. Design and delivery should reflect evidence-based principles drawn from early childhood research or best practice</li> <li>3. There should be some early monitoring data or descriptive evidence (e.g., uptake, engagement, satisfaction)</li> <li>4. The team must have a realistic plan to generate impact evidence in future stages.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Participation requirement</b></p>	<p>Participating organisations must have a fully committed team including organisation’s Lead, MEL, Programme Management, Finance Lead.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The team must be willing to commit time to the Labs.</li> <li>2. Senior leadership participation in key programme convenings in Kenya and Tanzania is strongly recommended.</li> </ol>

## 5 Application process

Applications are open to both current GSF members and non-members who meet the eligibility criteria. Applicants will be required to submit information on their programmes for early years through an online application. Shortlisted candidates will then complete a due diligence process and interview with the Investment Committee.

Start your application journey by downloading the form below.

[Download the application form here](#)

## 6 Submitting your application

Submit your application along with other relevant supporting documents via the application portal below. Please take note of the deadlines.

[Visit the application portal here](#)



Shortlisted organisations who are not GSF members will be invited to complete GSF membership requirements as part of the due diligence process. Existing GSF members, or organisations that have recently applied for membership, do not need to reapply. Additional guidance will be shared with organisations that progress to this stage. Learn more about the GSF community and steps to apply for membership using the link below.

[Learn more about the community here](#)

## 8 Application timelines

The timeline below sets out the key milestones from launch through to contracting and programme start.



## Meet our grantees from the last cohort

The [first cohort](#) of the Impact at Scale Labs: Early Years brought together four locally led organisations in Kenya, each working to transform access to quality childcare for children aged 0–5 years in low-income communities. Over 18 months, these organisations received catalytic funding, dedicated technical support, and access to GSF’s global network of funders, government actors, and ecosystem partners. Here is what they are building.

### **TotoCare Hub — Nawirika Foundation Nairobi, Kitui & Nakuru Counties**

TotoCare Hub is tackling the childcare crisis in low-income communities through a dual-generational approach that empowers women economically while ensuring children aged 0–3 receive a strong foundation for lifelong development. By training and supporting women to become quality childcare providers in their communities, TotoCare Hub creates livelihoods for caregivers and safe, stimulating care for children simultaneously. Currently operating across three counties, TotoCare Hub supports 500 caregivers and reaches over 7,500 children with high-quality early care and learning services.

Through the Labs, TotoCare Hub launched two new childcare centres demonstrating the potential of diverse partnership and delivery models at scale. The first is a government partnership with Nakuru County to provide affordable, quality childcare at Naivasha Market - bringing care directly to where working mothers and traders need it most and demonstrating how county government can play an active role in expanding childcare access for low-income working families. The second is Mashiara Park, a private sector childcare model that shows how employers and private investment can be leveraged to fund quality childcare, making the case for businesses and private actors as viable partners in expanding provision.

### **Education for Empowerment for Rural and Urban Slums Initiative (EERUi) Uasin Gishu County**

Before the Labs, EERUi was advancing holistic child development in Kenya’s most underserved communities through its flagship 1st 1000 Days Campaign. Working within homes and communities, EERUi strengthened low-cost early childhood education and development providers, equipping caregivers with the knowledge, skills, and resources to give children the best possible start in life. To date, EERUi has empowered 500 caregivers and positively impacted over 6,000 children in Uasin Gishu County.

Through the Labs, EERUi developed a scalable social franchising model built around the Caregiver Champion — trained home-based providers elevated as community leaders who drive peer learning and spread best practices from within their own networks, delivering impact at significantly lower cost than formal childcare. EERUi also created a school transition pathway bridging home-based care and formal ECDE centres, formalised a partnership with Uasin Gishu County Government, and is now exploring expansion into Bungoma County through early engagement with county leadership.

## **Lake Region Development Programme (LRDP) Kisii, Migori & Homa Bay Counties**

LRDP champions early childhood wellbeing in rural Kenya, working across three counties to create nurturing environments for children under five. Through a combination of child protection systems strengthening, household resilience building, and policy advocacy, LRDP takes a holistic approach to improving the conditions in which young children grow, learn, and thrive. LRDP has supported over 3,000 children and continues to advance policy change across Kisii, Migori, and Homa Bay Counties.

Through the Labs, LRDP pioneered an education-linked childcare model in partnership with Rongo University - establishing a childcare facility on campus specifically designed to support student mothers as they access higher education. This model recognises that access to quality, affordable childcare is not just a child development issue but an education equity issue, enabling young women to remain in and complete their studies without having to choose between their education and the care of their children. The Rongo University partnership demonstrates the potential of higher education institutions as an underexplored but powerful platform for delivering quality childcare at scale.

## **Jackfruit Finance Countywide – Kenya**

Jackfruit Finance is bridging the finance gap that prevents low-income private schools and childcare providers from improving their learning environments. By offering affordable, accessible loans tailored to the realities of low-fee providers, Jackfruit enables schools to invest in infrastructure, materials, and quality improvements that directly benefit children. Jackfruit has disbursed over USD 3.6 million in loans to 317 schools across Kenya, reaching 137,921 early learners aged 0–6.

Through the Labs, Jackfruit developed and validated a first-of-its-kind financial product specifically designed for formal early childhood development centres. Beginning with a market feasibility study, Jackfruit identified standalone ECDE centres as a viable but underserved segment - and took the bold step of revising its own credit scoring criteria to unlock access, reducing the minimum learner threshold from 100 to 50 and the years of establishment requirement from three to one. A pilot with 15 ECDE centres achieved a 100% repayment rate, with 10 centres returning for subsequent loans. By October 2025, Jackfruit had reached 46 ECDE centres serving 1,713 learners with zero defaults - cementing both the product's viability and the creditworthiness of a previously overlooked market.



## Download the application form

[Download here](#)

## Visit the application portal

[Access here](#)

## For urgent questions, send us an email

[Contact us on labs@globalschoolsforum.org](mailto:labs@globalschoolsforum.org)

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