MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS: LEARNER, TEACHER, CAREGIVER, AND COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRAMMING AND IMPACT

FINDINGS FROM QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FEATURING THE NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL'S BETTER LEARNING PROGRAMME IN KAKUMA, KENYA

Report authored by Tess Olwala and Jennifer Flemming, PhD
The MHPSS Collaborative

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACRONYMS

AEP	Accelerated Education Programme
BLP	Better Learning Programme
BOM	Board of Management
EiE	Education in Emergencies
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoK	Government of Kenya
I/NGO	International/ Non Government Organization
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Services
KII	Key Informant Interview
LMIC	Lower and Middle Income Countries
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NACONEK	National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PSS	Psychosocial Support
PSS/SEL	Psychosocial Support and Social Emotional Learning
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RA	Research Assistant
RC	Research Coordinator
RQ	Research Question
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SLEC	Student Learning in Emergency Checklist
TSC	Teacher Service Commission
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissions for Refugees

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the end of 2022, 40% of the nearly 110 million persons forcibly displaced people globally were children under the age of 18.[1] Displaced children face acute and chronic adversities that significantly threaten their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.[2] The urgent needs of children in humanitarian crises underpin various policies and programmatic approaches that include increasing attention to both mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services broadly[3] and in education approaches specifically.[4] MHPSS in education in emergencies (EiE), including social-emotional learning (SEL), has been identified as an important pathway to address both children's mental health and psychosocial needs and to improve learning outcomes.[5]

There is increasing recognition that quality education is reflected not just in academic outcomes such as literacy and numeracy, but also in those indicating learner psychosocial wellbeing.[6] Learners are embedded within a context of specific relationships, environments, and systems that notably influence their daily lives, learning, and holistic wellbeing. These socio-ecological factors are complex and context-specific, and can have a significant impact on the efficacy of an intervention aimed at supporting children's growth and learning.[7]

Improved understanding of this social ecology around learners can lead to more relevant and impactful program design and implementation. The perspectives of children, caregivers, teachers, and relevant community and education system stakeholders are critical to understanding not just if an intervention is effective, but how, why, and for who.

This research set out to examine the enabling environments for MHPSS interventions delivered in education settings in humanitarian contexts, with specific focus on the Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) Better Learning Programme (BLP) implemented in Kakuma, Kenya.

	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
1	To understand what contributes to an enabling environment for MHPSS interventions and approaches to improve holistic wellbeing, from the perspective of children, teachers, caregivers, and other education actors.
2	To understand the role of education systems, including schools (and formal and nonformal programmes), and educators in contributing to children's holistic wellbeing from the perspective of children, teachers, caregivers, and other education actors.
3	To describe similarities and differences of enabling environments for MHPSS interventions across diverse contexts, including both geographic location and type of emergency or adversity.
4	To understand how an MHPSS intervention may be useful and relevant in dynamic contexts, such as in the case of education interruptions, and what the role of schools is in supporting children's holistic wellbeing.

5	To understand the perceived impact of NRC's Better Learning Programme in Colombia, in order to contribute to organizational and programmatic learning and implementation.

NRC's BLP is a PSS/SEL programme which is integrated within education programming in crisis affected communities. BLP is a holistic approach to supporting children's recovery from traumatic events experienced during conflict and from the impacts of displacement on both displaced and host communities, by improving conditions for learning. The programme mobilizes a child's support network of caregivers, teachers, and counsellors, encompassing a multi-layered approach to restore a sense of normality and hope. BLP-1 is a general, classroom-based PSS approach targeting all children and young people; its implementation in targeted locations in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kalobeyei Settlement, and host community schools was the focus of study for this research.

METHODS

To achieve the research objectives, the target population for participation in the research included children, teachers, caregivers, implementing organization staff, school administration and boards, community-based education actors, and education officials (at local, regional, sub-national, and national level). The research team collected data from 232 total participants across Kakuma and Kalobeyei. This included data collection via 31 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 27 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) at 9 distinct schools (five schools in Kakuma camp, two schools in the host community, and two schools in Kalobeyei settlement). FGDs were conducted with learners (18 FGDs), caregivers (4 FGDs), and teachers (9 FGDs). KIIs were conducted with MOE/TSC officials (n=3), NRC partner organization members (n=3), NRC staff members (n=3), school board of management members (n=9), and school administrators (n=9). The participating learners were aged 6-18 and included both refugee and host community children.

KENYA CONTEXT

Kenya has long been a host to refugees from neighbouring countries; in 2023 the number of registered refugees and asylum seekers within its borders was approximately 655,000.[8] Refugees are spread across three primary camps (Dadaab, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei integrated settlement), and are also integrated into host communities in both urban and rural settings.

As of September 2023, Kakuma and Kalobeyei (the sites of this research) hosted approximately 276,000 individuals.[9] Kakuma hosts refugees from South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Burundi, Sudan, Uganda, Eritrea, and others. Children make up approximately 55 percent of refugees in Kakuma.[10]

Currently, all camps face challenges related to overcrowding, limited access to basic services (such as healthcare, adequate food, education, and clean water), and poor economic opportunities. Refugees often face significant mental health challenges due to the traumas they have experienced prior to arrival in Kenya, including exposure to violent conflict, displacement, and extreme loss.[11] Many refugees suffer from conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. These challenges are exacerbated by the uncertainty of their situations, lack of resources, and limited access to healthcare, often leaving affected populations underserved.[12]

The need for MHPSS services for refugees in Kenya is notable, and information related to prevalence of mental health and behavioural problems is lacking. While Kenyan law extends certain rights and protections—including the right to access health services and education—to its refugee residents, there are few official policies that explicitly speak to MHPSS concerns of the refugee population at large.

MAIN FINDINGS

Understanding and responding to context of intervention

Understanding the dynamic context and ongoing challenges of Kakuma and Kalobeyei is essential in order to design and implement effective and appropriate MHPSS programming.

- In Kakuma and Kalobeyei, families and communities cope with both acute and long-term challenges in daily life, including struggle to meet their basic needs and to build towards sustainable futures.

- Overall, schools are perceived as a safe and secure space for learners. While research participants agreed that there was a general sense of security for children, particular infrastructure-related challenges were described frequently in many schools.

- Contextual challenges—often related to the unmet basic needs of families and communities— pose notable educational risks. The most commonly described education impacts of such risks were school drop-out and nonattendance, with particular risks for girls including early pregnancy and marriages.

- While schools were broadly described as safe and accessible, there are significant challenges too for these schools to provide quality, holistic education to all learners including extreme overcrowding.

- Importantly, there were real barriers to inclusivity, with particular emphasis on students with disabilities and relevant programming for overage learners.

> *Lack of adequate support or enough basic needs can lead a [female] child to move out of her home [for] early marriage or prostitution to meet her needs. This in return affects their performance in class and causes school dropout.* **[Caregiver FGD]**

- Across locations and actor-type, research participants were able to describe MHPSS resources that were accessible to them in Kakuma if learners were in need of general or targeted support to their emotional and psychological wellbeing. Still, such resources were often insufficient for the number of learners, and not consistently available.

Perceptions of holistic wellbeing and the role of education

This research underscores the significant role of education in contributing to learner wellbeing and highlights diverse perceptions of educational community members on the value and purpose of school.

- Research participants of all actor-type recognize that safety and security are an essential foundation for children being able to learn, and it is an important role of schools to provide a safe learning environment, as well as to assure that children's basic needs are met. Both of these set the foundations for learner's holistic wellbeing and contribute to children being 'learning ready" at school.

- The perceived value of school is strongly linked to holistic wellbeing and development of learners. In addition to providing safety and access to basic needs for learners, schools build skills and opportunities for the future, and support learners to develop themselves as humans.

- Children perceive a sense of wellbeing, as well as their own physical and emotional safety, from their close relationships (particularly with family, friends, and teachers), their immediate environments (homes, religious spaces, and schools), and activities which help their "quiet their minds" and find relief from challenges of their lived context.

  When they are in school, things are supposed to feel positive and hopeful. They are supposed to feel peace in their minds to ensure that they gain skills and knowledge. This helps them to have hope in their lives and plan for the future. [Teachers FGD]

- There is a strong sense from parents, teachers, and education actors that schools serve a critical function in providing social, emotional and psychosocial support to learners.

- Relatedly, teachers—as well as other education actors and parents— believe that supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their students is a critical part of their job.

- Teacher wellbeing is seen as critical to providing support to the wellbeing of their learners, as well as to their efficacy in creating a conducive learning environment in which their learners can succeed.

Perceptions of impact of NRC's Better Learning Programme (BLP)

- BLP is viewed by all education stakeholders interviewed for this research as an important contribution to education programming in Kakuma because of its holistic approach, which actors describe as highly relevant and appropriate for the learners in this context.

- Teachers and school staff underline the usefulness of BLP activities in providing playful, child-centered activities different to that of the traditional classroom. Educators describe how BLP activities help bring life and energy into the classroom.

- Learners enjoy BLP activities both when they are incorporated into the lessons or done before the lessons. They describe many reasons why they enjoy BLP, most commonly that it helps them to relieve stress, anxiety, and restlessness.

  After doing the exercises, you don't wander in your thoughts. You put those thoughts aside and are thinking about the BLP exercise. After doing those exercises, the body relaxes and even if you had pain somewhere, you become okay. [Learners FGD]

- According to teachers, parents and school administrators, there were a number of clear outcomes perceived as a result of BLP that relate to children's holistic wellbeing. These included: improved strategies for coping with stress and difficult situations; improved strategies for calming and clearing the mind; greater satisfaction and happiness while at school; and less conflict with peers.

- According to teachers, caregivers, and school administrators, there were a number of clear outcomes related to academic learning as a result of BLP. These included: better concentration and increased engagement with learning activities; an improved conducive learning environment; overall improved capacity to learn; and lower school dropout and nonattendance rates.

There are so many students in my classroom so it is… easy for things to become very loud and for students to lose attention. When I see this happening, instead of yelling at learners or trying to punish them… I use BLP. We all do the exercise and it helps learners to calm down. They are less energetic and then they will be able to focus more. **[Teachers FGD]**

- Teachers describe BLP as having a positive impact on their own wellbeing. This includes teachers using BLP exercises to manage stress, as well as an overall improved understanding of their own psychosocial needs.

- Education actors note that with improved teacher wellbeing, as described above, comes with an increased ability for teachers to do their job effectively. This positive impact of BLP means that their teaching improves, as well as their ability to provide adequate and appropriate support to their learners social emotional needs.

- Education actors, learners, and caregivers note that children bring the BLP activities home, which has a positive impact on family and the community beyond the school.

- As currently implemented, many BLP activities and exercises are not inclusive for learners who have particular requirements, such as learners with disabilities. Education actors—especially teachers and school administration— described how it was often impossible to adapt certain activities to be inclusive to all students in their classrooms.

- As currently implemented, BLP is often not perceived by learners as applicable to older adolescents and youth, despite there being frequent overage learners in BLP classrooms.

- There are a number of school or classroom level challenges to the successful implementation and positive impact of BLP across the research locations.

- There are challenges to effectively supporting and maintaining the BLP teacher workforce, and high rates of teacher turnover.

- BLP is not a standalone program and is intended to be integrated into other programming and lessons; but there are challenges to doing so effectively, including overall messaging about *what exactly* BLP is and what it requires of teachers and schools.

- NRC's current sustainability strategy aims at the institutionalization of BLP into the formal education system, with adoption by the Ministry of Education and eventual integration into all schools in Kenya, not just those targeting refugee learners.

Call to Action

To effectively implement MHPSS programs such as BLP, **implementers should focus on creating standardized approaches with the flexibility to adapt to regional and cultural nuances.** This calls for the development of contextualization tools to address unique local needs, as evidenced by the BLP implementation in Kakuma. BLP offers important examples of openness and support of programming to such contextualization, which other implementers of MHPSS programming could learn from.

Additionally, **advocating for the integration of MHPSS into national curricula, training, and policies is crucial to ensure continuity and sustainability**. NRC's work with the Kenya Ministry of Education to

institutionalize BLP as the country's select SEL approach offers notable opportunity to learn about such processes, and should be further explored and learned from. Implementers are urged to document and share best practices, lessons learned, and case studies to build capacity and facilitate knowledge exchange both on a national and global scale. While mental health of children is often reflected in national education policies, refugee-specific policy for education, health, and mental health are still lacking. Additionally, the financial and political commitment required to assure that MHPSS policy translates to action at the school level should be encouraged for all children.

Recognizing the value of local knowledge is essential; programs should be led or co-led by local entities to ensure cultural relevance. This assures adherence with the localization agenda of many I/NGOs in humanitarian contexts. By integrating local partners and leaders early in implementation — including programs designed or co-designed by local or national actors — such knowledge and leadership can inform implementation across the program cycle and beyond. Furthermore, a focus on sustainable models is vital, including the integration of MHPSS into teacher training and linkage to national risk management plans with cascading models. **Interdisciplinary collaboration is key, as MHPSS intersects with education, health, and social work.**

Lastly, **a context-sensitive approach is crucial for effective implementation.** This involves understanding the specific challenges, needs, and capacities of each community. Ensuring safety, both emotional and physical, is foundational for MHPSS interventions. This includes creating safe environments in schools, providing secure transportation, and fostering relational safety. Cultural sensitivity and contextualization should be integrated into program planning, adapting to local beliefs and practices, and addressing logistical challenges for dynamic refugee populations.

The recommendations included in this report aim to optimize the impact and sustainability of MHPSS programs, emphasizing the need for standardized yet flexible approaches; policy integration; local knowledge utilization; and a context-sensitive, safety-focused implementation strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

At the end of 2022, 40% of the nearly 110 million persons forcibly displaced people globally were children under the age of 18.[13] A growing evidence base shows that displaced children face acute and chronic adversities that significantly threaten their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.[14] Research emphasizes that children exposed to war and displacement exhibit a range of distress and stress reactions, including specific fears, dependent behaviors, psychosomatic symptoms, and aggressive behaviors.[15] The urgent needs of children in humanitarian crises underpin various policies and programmatic approaches that include increasing attention to both mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services broadly[16] and in education approaches specifically.[17]

Education is a basic right and access to quality education for refugee children is underlined via strategic priorities and policy by major humanitarian actors and governments hosting significant refugee populations.[18] The provision of quality education has important overlaps with child protection priorities and includes efforts to address children's wellbeing in humanitarian contexts, such as promoting a sense of stability and normalcy, providing important relationships with peers, and opportunities for building life skills.[19] MHPSS in education in emergencies (EiE), including social-emotional learning (SEL), has been identified as an important pathway to address both children's mental health and psychosocial needs and to improve learning outcomes.[20] There is widespread interest from a range of actors in this type of programming, as well as increasing recognition that quality education is reflected not just in academic outcomes (such as literacy and numeracy) but also in those measuring learner psychosocial wellbeing.[21]

This clear interest in MHPSS programming across EiE is not currently matched by the evidence base. This includes a dearth of evidence to support effectiveness in terms of type of MHPSS in EiE intervention or implementation method; what groups/subgroups of children may most benefit; and how interventions can or should be adapted for specific contexts. Further, although research in high income and stable contexts shows influence of environmental and ecological factors on children's mental health and

learning outcomes,[22] there is limited understanding of what aspects of classroom, school, household and community environments influence children's wellbeing and learning in humanitarian settings.

Support for classroom-based MHPSS and SEL interventions is based on the proposition that such interventions can improve children's mental health and learning outcomes. The specific factors surrounding these interventions (in terms of delivery of the interventions, and the socio-ecological factors influencing children beyond the intervention itself) are complex and often poorly understood.[23] In addition, children, caregivers and teachers are more likely to actively participate in and benefit from classroom-based MHPSS interventions if the programs are relevant, acceptable and feasible.

This research is based on a social ecological framework that considers the complex interplay between the individual learner; their home and school environments; their community; the relationships built across these levels; the systems and institutions around them; and finally the policy and funding environment of humanitarian and education programming broadly.

Children learn in an environment that is situated within a larger "ecosystem." Their lives and wellbeing are notably influenced by their relationship with families or caregivers;[i] with friends and peers; with teachers and school administrators; and with other community members such as religious leaders. Schools are a critical site of influence, and learners, teachers, and families see the role of education as contributing to holistic wellbeing, human development, and learning that includes both academic and life skills. Such education relies on actors and action in the education system largely, including education and health policies that reflect mental health and wellbeing of children as clearly articulated priorities.
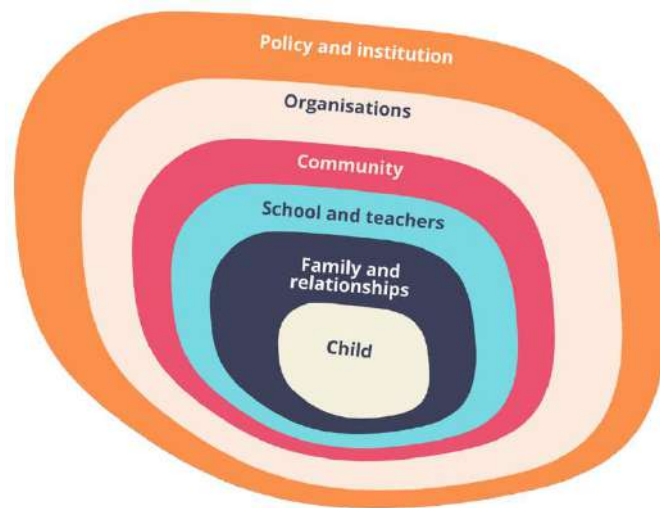
Figure 1: The social ecological framework for understanding children's psychosocial wellbeing in education contexts

Improving understanding of this social ecology around learners can lead to more relevant and impactful program design and implementation, and provide the building blocks for future study of impact.

1.2 "MHPSS IN ACTION" RESEARCH INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

This research set out to examine the enabling environments for MHPSS interventions delivered in education settings in humanitarian contexts. The study consisted of two phases. The first phase included

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[i] Throughout this research we used the term caregiver to encompass any adult with significant responsibilities of care for children in their lives. For the majority of data collection in this project, the term indicates parents or other close related family members living with the children.

a significant desk review (culminating in the publication of a Realist Review of current evidence), an MHPSS global programme mapping exercise, and targeted expert interviews.[24] Key learnings from Phase 1 directly informed the design of Phase 2, consisting of primary qualitative data collection in Colombia, Kenya, and Greece. The research focuses on key aspects of an enabling environments for MHPSS programme efficacy. Five primary research objectives underpin phase two of the project:

Figure 2: Research Objectives

The MHPSS Collaborative partnered with two implementing organizations to conduct the research. This included the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Kenya and Colombia to study their flagship PSS/SEL programme, the Better Learning Programme (BLP). In Greece, the team partnered with Amal Alliance to study their SEL programme, Colors of Kindness. For each country, specific Research Questions (RQs) were crafted based on the overarching research objectives. Additional RQs were developed in collaboration with the two implementing partner organizations via in-person workshop prior to the start of data collection. Country-specific sections of this report elaborate on the RQs per country.

For each country of study, the research team produced both a full research report and a learning brief which overviews key findings. In addition, the team summarizes key learnings and comparison from

Kenya and Colombia in a synthesis report in order to contribute to organizational learning about BLP. All reports and briefs can be found in full on the MHPSS Collaborative's website.[ii]

1.2.1. NRC'S BETTER LEARNING PROGRAMME

NRC's BLP is a PSS/SEL programme which can be integrated within education programming. It is NRC's flagship classroom-based PSS intervention for children in crisis affected communities. The BLP is a holistic approach to supporting children's recovery from traumatic events experienced during conflict and from the impacts of displacement on both displaced and host communities, by improving conditions for learning. The programme mobilizes a child's support network of caregivers, teachers, and counsellors, encompassing a multi-layered approach to restore a sense of normality and hope. The BLP consists of three components of programme intervention. The first, BLP-1, is a general, classroom-based PSS approach targeting all children and young people. The BLP-2 is a small group intervention to support resilience amongst a more specific target group of academic underachievers. The BLP-3 is a specialized PSS approach to address nightmares, which many children experience as a chronic symptom of traumatic stress. Finally, BLP for Youth is a combined intervention integrating both BLP1 and BLP2 implemented through participatory approaches and targets learners 17-24 years old. The BLP-1, and its implementation in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya and in targeted locations in Colombia, was the focus of study for this research.

BLP was first implemented in 2012 in Palestine and has since grown current implementation to 33 countries worldwide. This implementation is supported by various programmes in each country, as well as by a regional and global level BLP unit. Resources to support country offices in implementing BLP 1 include: Guidance and Tools to Implement BLP 1; a Monitoring and Evaluation/Research Toolkit; and a Classroom Sessions supporting document.

1.3. APPROACH AND METHODS

1.3.1. RESEARCH TEAM

The research team was comprised of a six-person core team at the MHPSS Collaborative, plus enumerators or research assistants in each site. Figure 3, below, depicts the make-up of the research team. The team is comprised of both "global" and "country-specific" levels. While there is some indication of oversite amongst members in the table, the team was strategically structured to be a collaborative, non-hierarchal group of notable technical and contextual expertise. While Research Coordinators (RCs) in each location were, in first instance, responsible for their specific location, there was also strategic collaboration amongst the RCs as well as amongst the global and country-level teams.

In addition, for Kenya and Colombia, NRC composed a project Research Technical Committee comprised of both NRC BLP Unit staff, regional staff, and external experts. In addition to the country-specific staff

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[ii] See: www.mhpsscollaborative.org

inputs and support (described in subsequent country-specific section 2 of this report), this global steering group provided significant inputs to the research approaches, priorities, and products.

Figure 3: Research Core Team Makeup
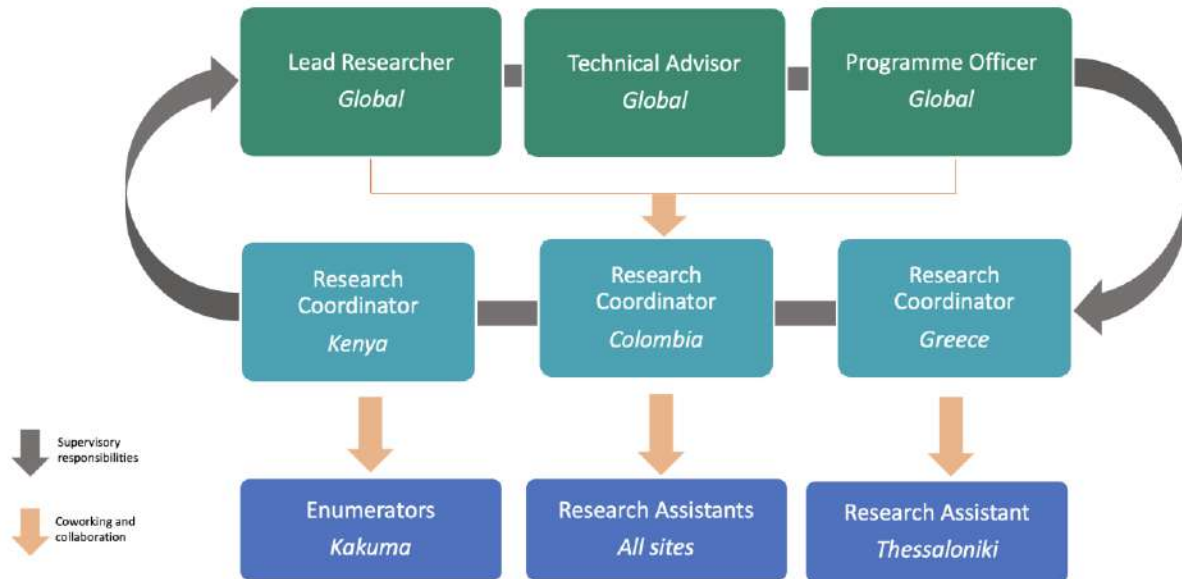
1.3.2. DATA COLLECTION

Across all sites, the target population for participation in the research included children, teachers, caregivers, implementing organization staff, school administration/boards, community-based education actors, and education officials (at local, regional, sub-national, national level). The sample sizes per location were based on most relevant principles of sample size for qualitative research (i.e. purposive sampling, maximum variation, and saturation). This allowed for disaggregation of the data by subgroups (e.g. gender, age) in each location as relevant for analysis.

The methodology used was a qualitative study of purposefully selected participants in Kakuma refugee camps, host communities, and the Kalobeyei settlement in Kenya; in five municipalities in Colombia; and in six locations/communities in Greece. In all locations, the sample included both learners that had and had not received the PSS/SEL intervention (BLP or Colors). The amount of exposure to the intervention differed by location, and is further described in the corresponding country section of this report.

Primary data collection was conducted by the RC, Research Assistants (RAs), and enumerators in all countries, supervised by the Lead Researcher.

The research team recorded all data collection activities and performed translation (when necessary) and transcription. Enumerators and RAs completed note-taking forms which were submitted upon completion of daily data collection activities. All data was input into the data analysis software MAXQDA.

1.3.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, via team collaboration amongst the lead researcher and all RCs. The framework for analyzing data was both inductive and deductive in nature. All research objectives and questions informed the creation of initial codes; the team additionally partook in two facilitated preliminary analysis activities, in which RCs brainstormed new and emerging themes based on initial data review and the rest of the team fed back with additional probing questions. Based on this iterative process, a finalized coding scheme was crafted. Validation workshops with the NRC or Amal team members provided additional inputs into points of interest, potential missing codes/themes, and areas to unpack or examine further.

All coding was conducted by the RC for their respective country. The lead researcher additionally reviewed all data and completed two reliability exercises with the coding scheme. Findings were triangulated across the data sources whenever possible.

1.4. LIMITATIONS, ETHICS, AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This research project demanded careful attention to ethics, with particular attention paid to the participation of children as well as others currently living in displacement contexts. In order to assure that ethical protocols were observed, all research team members involved in data collection participated in a specific training module on research ethics.

All three study sites were approved by Save the Children USA's internal ethical review board process. Additionally, in Kenya ethical approval was received through the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation and United States International University of Africa. All protocols were approved through these processes, and further reviewed/refined by implementing staff in location. All research team members adhered to Save the Children International Child Safeguarding Policy.

There were limitations in carrying out this research at both the global (across all three countries) and individual country level. Country specific limitations are included in the subsequent section of this report; notable shared limitations across all locations include the following:

- In all locations, a notable amount of flexibility was critical due to the dynamic nature of the contexts. While initial targeting and sampling strategy was created, it was necessary in all countries to adapt these plans once in the field. For any significant adaptation, additional IRB approval was sought. Often, however, this meant that the research team needed to be flexible and adapt protocols on the spot. This included, for example, the number of participants in an FGD; the number of learners or caregivers participating in total; the sites that could safely be visited; and the exact actors with whom interviews could be conducted.

- The number of participants is not equal across all sites (within country) of data collection; thus the research in each country is not intended to be representative of all locations equally. For this reason, the data analysis did not include "counts" of any kind that would represent an attempt to quantify responses.

- The implementation of BLP and Colors is intended for learners ages 6-16 (BLP) and 5-12 (Colors) and so the initial research plans mirrored this; however, on the ground, teams found that often there was a larger age range of children receiving the intervention. Thus, the sample reflects a larger age range overall (5-18) and age disaggregation is again not representative across all locations.

- There were some limitations in recording interviews, based on safety concerns, surrounding noise, or poor recording quality. In all countries, at least one data collection activity relied on the notes of the RAs or enumerators. In anticipation of this, multiple ways of recording data was planned for all events. However it does mean that not all events prompted high quality transcripts for coding. In these cases, the team coded their in depth notes to be analyzed. This creates some limitations, again, with regard to representation across sites.

- Translation was necessary for a majority of data. Translation was completed by RAs or the RC in each country. Back translating and check was conducted for a sample of the data in each country and reviewed in order to mitigate translation subjectivity, but it is noted that such subjectivity cannot be completely controlled for.

2. MHPSS IN ACTION IN KENYA: STUDYING NRC'S BETTER LEARNING PROGRAMME

2.1. KENYA COUNTRY CONTEXT AND REFUGEE POLICY

Kenya has long been a host to refugees from neighbouring countries; in 2023 the number of registered refugees and asylum seekers within its borders was approximately 655,000.[25] Refugees are spread across three primary camps (Dadaab, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei integrated settlement), and are also integrated into host communities in both urban and rural settings.

The Dadaab refugee complex in northern Kenya, established in 1991, is one of the world's largest refugee camps and has housed generations of Somali refugees fleeing conflict, drought, and insecurity. Kakuma refugee camp was established in 1992 in northwest Kenya and hosts refugees from various countries, including South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Congo, Burundi, and others. The Kalobeyei integrated settlement was established in 2015 20 kilometres from Kakuma camp as an alternative and innovative model aimed at promoting greater self-reliance and development for refugees and host community.

As of September 2023, Kakuma and Kalobeyei (the sites of this research) hosted approximately 276,000 individuals.[26] Kakuma hosts refugees from South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Burundi, Sudan, Uganda, Eritrea, and others. Children make up approximately 55 percent of refugees in Kakuma.[27]

The Refugees Act of 2006 established legal refugee status and outlined basic rights for refugees in Kenya, including the right to work.[28] The 2013 Basic Education Act included refugees in its guarantee of the right to education for all children in Kenya.[29] In 2014, the Government of Kenya (GoK) introduced an encampment policy formally restricting the mobility of refugees outside of the Dadaab and Kakuma camps, which has implications for both education and livelihoods access.[30] The Refugee Act of 2021 updates the 2006 policy towards greater "rights, protection, and solutions for refugees in Kenya," such as an increased focus on the integrated settlement model currently implemented in Kalobeyei.[31]

At the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, Kenya reaffirmed its support for refugee and host community education with the introduction of updated policy, the Education and Training Policy on the Inclusion of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education has since partnered with the GoK to implement the Kenya Primary Education Equity in Learning Program 2022-2025, aimed at improving access and decreased inequity in quality education in Dadaab, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei.[32]

Currently, all camps face challenges related to overcrowding, limited access to basic services (such as healthcare, adequate food, education, and clean water), and poor economic opportunities. Refugees often face significant mental health challenges due to the traumas they have experienced prior to arrival in Kenya, including exposure to violent conflict, displacement, and extreme loss.[33] Many refugees suffer from conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. These challenges are exacerbated by the uncertainty of their situations, lack of resources, and limited access to healthcare, often leaving affected populations underserved.[34]

2.1.1. EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE LEARNERS

Education programming for refugee learners in camps in Kenya are overseen and funded by UNHCR and international non-governmental organizations (I/NGOs). Education programming follows the Kenyan national curriculum, including official curriculum for both formal and non-formal programming, respectively. Refugee learners sit for national exams and are awarded official Kenyan certification in both primary and secondary education.

Primary and secondary camp schools are led by Teacher Service Commission (TSC)-registered principals. Many teachers in the camp schools are refugee teachers (paid via remuneration policy) who largely hold secondary education degrees. Kenyatta University and Masinde Murilo operate satellite campuses in Dadaab and Kakuma camps to provide training for refugee teachers.[35]

Refugee learners face specific barriers and challenges to accessing quality education. A notable challenge in the Kenya context is that many learners have missed out on portions of their education due to displacement or lack of options in their home country, and are thus overage for the level of education attained. Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs) are designed as flexible, alternative education pathways which cater to (often overage) students whose education has been interrupted.[36] AEPs provide condensed learning whereby students attain necessary literacy and numeracy skills, as well as receive appropriate psychosocial support. Learners are prepared to transition into the formal education system or other education/vocational/livelihood training options. Since 2019, AEPs have been integrated into Kenya's national refugee education policy, assuring certification, support for transition to formal schools, monitoring and evaluation, and alignment with national curriculum.[37]

There are significant challenges to all refugee children accessing quality education in Kenya. Despite substantial improvement in enrolment over the past decade, as of 2023 almost half of school-aged refugee children in Kenya remain out of school, according to UNHCR. While primary school enrollment rates are 92%, enrollment drops significantly after, with only one third of refugee children enrolled in secondary and less than one sixth at tertiary education (including university, as well as technical and vocational training programs).[38]

According to UNHCR's 2023 Refugee Education Report, the efforts of the Government of Kenya to integrate refugee learners into the national system are commendable. Still, camp-based education systems that are implemented via international actors have established an alternative delivery system with its own unique challenges and barriers to assuring access to quality education for all.[39]

2.1.2. MHPSS FOR LEARNERS

The need for MHPSS services for refugees in Kenya is notable, and information related to prevalence of mental health and behavioural problems is lacking. While Kenyan law extends certain rights and protections—including the right to access health services and education—to its refugee residents, there are few official policies that explicitly speak to MHPSS concerns of the refugee population at large.

There are, however, notable policies and law that cover MHPSS for children in Kenya broadly. Kenya is signatory to numerous global and regional conventions outlining the needs and rights of children.[iii] These charters have been ratified domestically through the Children's Act of 2001[40] and subsequently the National Children's Policy Kenya of 2010.[41] The 2010 policy codifies the right of children to protection from physical and psychological abuse, as well as for access to high standards of health. However, there is no explicit mention of mental health or wellbeing of children in official children's rights or protection policy documents.

The 2009 National School Health Policy Education explicitly addresses the mental health of children in schools, requiring child-friendly environments that promote mental health, as well as mental health promotion and services.[42] It also requires all schools to have a department of guidance and counselling. However, school-based departments of guidance and counselling—in compliance with the national policy—are often not operational.[43] Studies have shown such policy to be inadequate since it, thus, relies on teachers having both the skills to identify the mental health needs of learners, as well as the resources and knowledge to offer appropriate intervention resources.[44]

The 2016 Kenya Mental Health Policy explicitly underlines the importance of mental health as a determinant of overall health, as well as key barriers to adequate access to mental health services for Kenyans generally.[45] This policy includes the need to account for health and social needs of individuals and families across the life course—from pregnancy to older age—and mentions children and adolescents explicitly under vulnerable groups.

In Kenya, the prevalence of different mental health problems of children and adolescents in schools has been estimated between 10% and 50.5%.[46] Such evidence is lacking for refugee learners specifically. However, due to the contextual and past lived experiences of refugee children, they are notably vulnerable to mental health problems.

2.2.   BLP IN KENYA

The primary objective of NRC's BLP in Kakuma and Kalobeyei is providing psychosocial support, given the emotional challenges experienced by refugee children in this context. The program aims to provide all learners with tools and resources to cope with the challenges of their current context and contribute to their overall social emotional growth and wellbeing. BLP is a universal PSS/SEL programme, meaning it is

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[iii] This includes the global Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990).

delivered to all children in a classroom regardless of their psychosocial profile. Children in need of targeted mental health support are referred for specialized services at the school or elsewhere.

BLP-1 was first implemented in Kenya in 2019 when it was piloted in four AEP centres run by NRC. This piloting involved training all AEP education staff; contextualization of BLP to the Kakuma context including translation; and classroom observation, coaching and mentorship. In 2020 this was scaled to an additional eight AEP centres, where 40 more teachers were trained. In 2021, due to COVID-19 school closures, NRC turned its educational programming to radio broadcast, which included support to both learners and caregivers. This included BLP-content posters distributed in communities. The BLP App was piloted in Kenya in 2022 to increasingly involve parents in the process of supporting children's wellbeing, resulting in creation and strengthening of BLP after-school clubs and within the community.

BLP in Kakuma emphasizes innovative teaching methods to create engaging and inclusive classroom environments. These methods often include play-based learning, interactive activities, and approaches that cater to the diverse learning needs of children in Kakuma. NRC provides trainings and continuous technical support to the program teachers to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to support the psychosocial well-being of their learners and implement effective teaching strategies.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) have been integral to NRC to assess BLP impact, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that it has effectively addressed the needs of learners. The Student Learning in Emergency Checklist (SLEC) tool is used in Kakuma to collect data at the beginning and end of a cycle of BLP (typically a term) within the school year to assess program effectiveness and inform decision-making.

In Kakuma, NRC has implemented BLP across three chronological phases. These phases allowed the program to build and scale after its initial 2019 pilot. These phases include specific components and objectives for the NRC team, outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Phases of BLP implementation in Kakuma

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Psychosocial Support	Continuation of Psychosocial Support	Sustainability and Expansion
Teacher Training	Academic Support	Monitoring and Evaluation
Play-Based Learning	Life Skills Training	Advocacy and Policy
Community Engagement	Parent and Caregiver Engagement	

At the time of this research, NRC had implemented BLP-1 in 20 schools in Kakuma, reaching a total of 9560 learners and training 306 teachers between 2019 and 2023. This included learners in classrooms as outlined in Table 2, below.

Table 2: Learners reached with BLP in Kakuma, 2019-2023

		Girls	Boys	Total
NRC AEP classrooms	Refugee learners	*894*	*1240*	*2134*
	Host community learners	*187*	*282*	*469*
	Total	**1081**	**1522**	**2603**
Formal school classrooms		**2573**	**4384**	**6957**
			Total	**9560**

2.3. APPROACH AND METHODS IN KENYA

2.3.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

At the start of the research, the MHPSS Collaborative team held an introductory workshop with the NRC field team in Kakuma. A key objective of this workshop was to facilitate feedback on the content and methods of the project, most notably to add or adapt key research questions based on the needs and interests of NRC at both the country and field office level in order to assure the research results were useable and relevant to the implementation teams. The addition of site-specific questions emphasized this collaborative approach and application-based priorities of the research itself. Based on this workshop, an adapted set of research questions was developed for Kenya. These are indicated in Table 3, below.

Table 3. Research Questions for Kenya

Research Questions	
1	What do children, caregivers, and teachers perceive to contribute to creating safe learning environments that promote holistic wellbeing and learning?
2	What do children, caregivers, teachers, and community members perceive is the role of education/schools/educators in contributing to the improved holistic wellbeing of children?
3	What are the overall perspectives of teachers and caregivers of BLP; specifically, what is BLP? What does it cover? Why is it used in classrooms?
4	What is the level of satisfaction with, and perspectives of, BLP amongst different stakeholders in Kakuma (including the MoE, I/NGO and UN staff, teachers, other community actors, school management boards, etc.)?
5	What is the perspective of partners organizations who are implementing BLP with training and support from NRC?
6	What is the sustainability of BLP? What is its future in the Kakuma contexts, and how is NRC considering support for its adoption by national actors?

7	What is the role of BLP and MHPSS programming more broadly during education or school disruptions (such as COVID, but also due to displacement)? What did NRC do to deliver BLP during COVID-19 school closures? What worked and what did not, and what can be learned from this?
8	What is the impact of BLP on the wellbeing and learning of participating <u>children</u>, *from the perspective of children, caregivers, teachers, and communities?*
9	What is the impact of BLP on <u>families</u> of participating children, *from the perspective of caregivers, teachers, and communities?*
10	What is the impact of BLP on <u>communities</u>, *from the perspective of caregivers, teachers, and communities?*
11	What is the comparison of BLP in the AEP centers versus the formal schools?
12	What is the impact of BLP on the wellbeing of AEP learners in particular?
13	Are there any gaps in implementation and if so, what are these gaps?

2.3.2. LOCATIONS OVERVIEW

The research was conducted in schools in Kakuma refugee camp, in the Kakuma host community, and in Kalobeyei settlement—all of which are located in Turkana County in northwest Kenya. Across these three locations, there are currently 13 pre-schools, 21 primary, and 5 secondary schools which has enabled approximately 56% of pre-primary, 92% of primary and 6% of secondary eligible children to enroll.[47]

This section offers a brief overview of the research locations and their specific populations, needs, and challenges as relevant to the research.
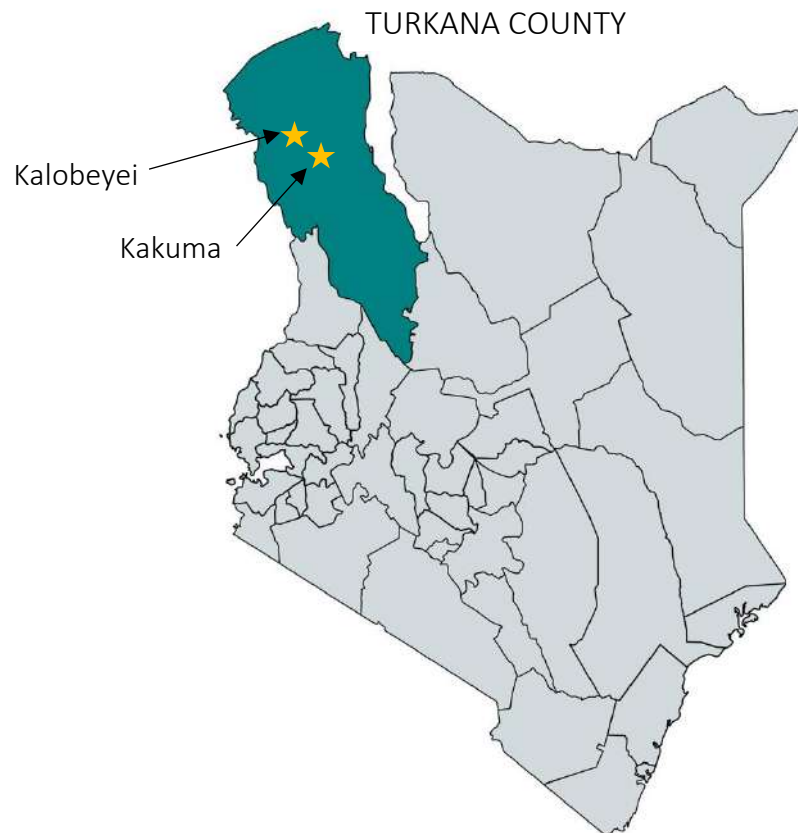
Kakuma Refugee Camp Schools
Kakuma refugee camp is divided into four camps: Kakuma 1, 2, 3, and 4. Each has delineated boundaries and services. Kakuma 1 and 2 host mainly Sudanese refugees; Kakuma 3 primarily South Sudanese; and Kakuma 4 refugees from other countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. All four camps face similar challenges such as overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to basic services like education and healthcare. Kakuma 4 faces additional challenges related to its more diverse population, such as language barriers, cultural differences and the need for specialized support for specific populations.

Across the four camps, Kakuma has a total number of 21 primary schools and 5 secondary schools, which is an inadequate number of facilities for the growing population. In 2023, approximately 94,000 learners were enrolled in primary and secondary education, with a teacher to pupil ratio of 1:150.[48] UNHCR holds

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responsibility for education services in the camps, and basic formal education is delivered through two implementing partners, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Jesuit Refugee Services. NRC implements education programming through AEPs in 20 schools, which operate as centers with separate classrooms and teachers to the formal school.

Image 1: Market streets in Kakuma 1

Image 2: FGD with learners in Kakuma camp school

Image 3: FGD with learners in Kakuma camp school

NRC implements BLP in its AEP classrooms in nine schools in Kakuma. BLP is implemented in all AEP classrooms run by NRC. Additionally, BLP is implemented by partners (LWF, HI) in formal classrooms in an additional 8 schools. BLP activities are also done at school assemblies, so many children have been exposed to BLP even if not by a trained facilitator. For the research, we visited five schools in Kakuma and collected data from learners, caregivers, teachers, and school administrators. The majority of research participants had either direct exposure to BLP in their classroom or school, or indirect exposure through assemblies or school clubs. A small selection of participants had not interacted with BLP in any capacity.

For this project, the research team visited five schools in the Kakuma camps. Table 4 provides overview of the school and its learners.

Table 4: Kakuma schools visited

	School name	Type of learners	Languages spoken	BLP Implementation notes
1	NRC Center	Refugees	Lotuko, Dinka, Nuer, Arabic, Kibembe, Toposa, Somali	BLP implemented in all classrooms

2	Unity AEP Center	Refugees	Kirundi, Amharic, Arabic, Dinka, Nga'turkan	BLP implemented in NRC-AEP and some formal classrooms
3	Al Nuur AEP Center	Refugees	Somali, Dinka, Nuer, Arabic, Kibembe, Kiswahili, Toposa	BLP implemented in NRC-AEP and some formal classrooms
4	Kadugli Primary	Refugees	Lotuko, Dinka, Nuer, Arabic, Kibembe, Toposa, Somali	BLP implemented in some formal classrooms
5	Gambella Primary	Refugees	Lotuko, Dinka, Nuer, Arabic, Kibembe, Toposa, Somali	BLP implemented in some formal classrooms

Kalobeyei Settlement Schools

Kalobeyei Settlement is approximately 35 km north of Kakuma. It was established in 2015 as an innovative approach focused on integrating refugees and host communities through planned economic and social activities. Its aim was to provide a more sustainable and integrated approach to hosting refugees. While the integrated approach has several benefits, it also presents unique challenges. Kalobeyei camp hosts 2 secondary schools and 6 primary schools.

Image 4: Temporary shelters in Kalobeyei settlement

Image 5: FGD with learners in Kalobeyei camp school

BLP is implemented in AEP classrooms in three schools in Kalobeyei Settlement, facilitated by Finn Church Aid (FCA). The research team visited two schools and collected data from learners, caregivers, teachers, and school administrators who had been exposed to BLP, noted in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Kalobeyei schools visited

	School name	Type of learners	Languages spoken	BLP Implementation notes
6	Future Primary	Refugees	Nuer, Dinka, Lotuko, Arabic, Kibembe, Kirundi, Somali	BLP in AEP classrooms only
7	Joy Primary	Refugees and host community	Arabic, Dinka, Nuer, Kirundi, Amharic, Gambela, Toposa	BLP in AEP classrooms only

Host Community Schools

The host community has a total of 16 primary schools and 3 secondary schools. These serve both the refugee population and the local Kenyan community living in and around the Kakuma area. Education in host community schools can be an essential part of the integration process for refugee children. It helps them learn the local language, customs, and culture, which can facilitate their long-term integration into Kenyan society. The research team visited two host community schools, noted in Table 6 below.

Image 6: NRC AEP Classroom in host community school

Image 7: FGD with learners in host community school

Table 6: Host community schools visited

	School name	Type of learners	Languages spoken	BLP Implementation notes
8	Pokotom Primary	Refugees and host community	Ng'aturkan, Arabic, Dinka, Kiswahili, Nuer	BLP in AEP classrooms only
9	Kalemchuch Primary	Refugees and host community	Arabic, Ng'aturkan	BLP in AEP classrooms only

2.3.3. PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

The research team collected data from 232 total participants across Kakuma and Kalobeyei. This included data collection via 31 FGDs and 27 KIIs at 9 distinct schools (five schools in Kakuma camp, two schools in the host community, and two schools in Kalobeyei settlement). FGDs were conducted with learners (18 FGDs), caregivers (4 FGDs), and teachers (9 FGDs). KIIs were conducted with MOE/TSC officials (n=3), NRC partner organization members (n=3), NRC staff members (n=3), school board of management members (n=9), and school administrators (n=9).

The research team collected data from learners ages 6-18 and included both refugees and host community children. Tables 7-11 provide demographic information on learner participants.

Table 7: Total Participants from Kakuma and Kalobeyei Refugee Camp schools

Type	FGD participants (F)	FGD participants (M)	KII (F)	KII (M)	Total
Learner	54	54	5	1	114
Teacher	18	49	0	0	67
Caregiver	15	9	0	0	24
School administration	0	0	5	4	9
School BOM	0	0	0	9	9
Other stakeholders	0	0	6	6	6
NRC staff	0	0	3	0	3
Totals:	**87**	**112**	**19**	**20**	**232**

Table 8: Participants from 5 Kakuma Camp community schools

Type	FGD (F)	FGD (M)	KII (F)	KII (M)	Total
Learner	30	30	3	0	63
Teacher	12	28	0	0	40
Caregiver	6	6	0	0	12
School administration	0	0	2	3	5
School BOM	0	0	0	5	5
Total	**48**	**64**	**5**	**8**	**125**

Table 9: Participants from 2 Kakuma Host Community schools

Type	FGD (F)	FGD (M)	KII (F)	KII (M)	Total
Learner	12	12	0	0	24
Teacher	3	9	0	0	12
Caregiver	6	0	0	0	6
School administration	0	0	1	1	2
School BOM	0	0	0	2	2
Total	**21**	**21**	**1**	**3**	**46**

Table 10: Participants from 2 Kalobeyei settlement schools

Type	FGD (F)	FGD (M)	KII (F)	KII (M)	Total
Learner	12	12	2	1	27
Teacher	13	2	0	0	15
Caregiver	3	3	0	0	6
School administration	0	0	2	0	2
School BOM	0	0	0	2	2
Total	**28**	**17**	**4**	**3**	**52**

Table 11: Total Participants by type

Participant Type	Female	Male	Total
Learner	59	55	114
Teacher	18	49	67
School administration	5	4	9
School BOM	0	9	9
Caregiver	15	9	24
Education stakeholder	0	3	3
Partner Organizations	0	3	3
NRC staff	3	0	3
Totals:	**100**	**132**	**232**

2.4. KENYA SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

In addition to the broad limitations indicated in the previous section, there were specific limitations of the research encountered in Kenya. These include:

- We were not able to interview all the education stakeholders as per the initial sample and work plan, especially from the Ministry of Education and the Teacher Service Commission because of conflicting activities.

- This research is not an impact assessment. However, it was intended to capture and report the perspectives of the educational communities on the impact of BLP. NRC's MEL systems are

intended to offer specific indication of impact; this research was intended to complement such data with in-depth and context-specific description.

- Although BLP-1 is intended to be implemented with children of 6-16 years, the implementation in Kakuma includes young people from ages 6-20 or older. This is largely due to AEPs explicitly targeting overage learners. For this reason, the results include answers both from children and adolescents. This is reported on when possible.

- Some recordings were not useable due to the context of the activity (including ambient noise like wind or children at recess); in these cases we relied heavily on the notes from the research team to generate data.

- The enumerators hired for data collection did not have past experience collecting qualitative data. Due to logistical challenges, it was only possible to conduct a one-day training with them. In our opinion, this was an insufficient amount of time to assure they were equipped with the skills necessary for interviewing, facilitating focus groups, data collection with children, and notetaking. In order to assure their preparation, we considered the first day of data collection as a pilot (and added an additional school to the end of the data collection plan) in order to support and provide feedback in real time. For the first 5 days of data collection, all data collection events were supervised directly by either the Lead Researcher or the Research Coordinator. Enumerators were able to collect data starting in week two on their own. While this was an adequate solution, it was only possible due to the presence of both Lead Researcher and RC. It is also an important note that assuring adequate time for preparation of data collectors is absolutely critical.

- There were some sampling challenges due to the logistics of planning field visits to nine schools and requiring school administrators to support in recruiting learners, caregivers, and teachers to participate. Data collection had to be planned around the school day, and often changes had to be made because of school schedule or the changing availability of participants. This led to some FGD groups comprised of a mix of BLP and non-BLP learners, teachers, or caregivers. Additionally, it meant that it was challenging to separate groups (for example AEP learners and non-AEP learners) for comparison. For data collection, the research team was able to adjust questionnaires and activities to assure that all those present in FGDs could take part and contribute through smaller group work or slight rephrasing to make questions relevant to all. For data analysis, the sampling challenges meant that some comparisons the team set out to make were not possible.

3. FINDINGS

This report summarizes the perspectives of students, teachers, caregivers, school administrators, BOM members, BLP partners, NRC staff, and education program implementers of Kakuma on the enabling environments to implement MHPSS programs in education settings. It refers to the actors that participated directly in interviews or focus group discussions of this study. Findings are organized into three sub-sections: (1) context overview; (2) holistic wellbeing and the role of education in context; and (3) BLP implementation in Kenya. A summary of all findings is presented as Table 12, below.

The sections build from the general to the more specific of the studied intervention (BLP) itself. An important foundation of this research was to create a holistic picture of the enabling environment around an MHPSS intervention, thus it is critical to report on contextual constraints and enablers, as well context-specific perceptions and understanding of wellbeing and MHPSS programming. These findings are constructed to be relevant to a broad audience of actors interested in MHPSS programming in Kakuma specifically, but also Kenya more broadly. The final section of findings presents the key findings of the specific, studied intervention (BLP) for this research, which is intended as relevant to both the same broad audience but also specifically for NRC program and organizational learning.

Table 12. Findings

Findings: Context overview	
1	Families and communities in Kakuma face unmet basic needs which impacts mental health and wellbeing at the most fundamental level.
2	While schools are perceived as a safe and secure space for learners, infrastructure challenges were frequently cited.
3	Unmet basic needs pose risks to education access including school drop-out and nonattendance.
4	While schools are perceived as safe and accessible, there are significant challenges for these schools to provide quality, holistic education to all learners.
5	Many schools face challenges around inclusion of all learners, particularly accessibility for children with disabilities, and relevant provision for overage learners.
6	Across all types of actor, research participants were able to describe MHPSS resources that were accessible to them in Kakuma if learners were in need of general or targeted support to their emotional and psychological wellbeing.
Findings: Holistic wellbeing and the role of education	
7	Research participants of all actor-type recognize that safety and security are essential prerequisites to learning, and that schools must provide safe learning environments and ensure children's basic needs are met.

8	The perceived value of school is strongly linked to holistic wellbeing and development of learners.
9	Children perceive a sense of wellbeing from their close relationships, their immediate environments, and activities which help them "quiet their minds".
10	There is a strong sense from caregivers, teachers, and education actors that schools serve a critical function in providing social, emotional and psychosocial support to learners.
11	Teachers, caregivers, and other education actors believe that supporting mental health and wellbeing of students is a critical part of a teacher's job.
12	Teacher wellbeing is perceived as critical for teachers to be able to provide support to their learners and create a conducive learning environment.

Findings: BLP implementation and impact

13	BLP is viewed by all education stakeholders interviewed for this research as an important contribution to education programming in Kakuma because of its holistic approach, which actors describe as highly relevant and appropriate for the learners in this context.
14	Teachers and school staff emphasize the usefulness of BLP activities in providing playful, child-centered activities different to that of the traditional classroom.
15	Learners enjoy BLP activities both when they are incorporated into the lessons or done before the lessons.
16	Teachers, caregivers, and school administrators perceive a number of clear outcomes related to children's holistic wellbeing as a result of BLP.
17	Teachers, caregivers, and school administrators perceive a number of clear outcomes related to academic learning as a result of BLP.
18	Teachers describe BLP as having a positive impact on their own wellbeing. This includes them using BLP exercises to manage stress, as well as an overall improved understanding of their own psychosocial needs.
19	Education actors note that with improved teacher wellbeing, as described above, comes better ability for teachers to do their job effectively.
20	Education actors, learners, and caregivers note that children bring the BLP activities home, which has a positive impact on family and the community beyond the school.

21	As currently implemented, many BLP activities and exercises are not inclusive of learners who have particular requirements, such as learners with disabilities.
22	As currently implemented, BLP is often not perceived by learners as applicable to older adolescents and youth, despite there being frequent overage learners in BLP classrooms.
23	There are a number of school or classroom level challenges to the successful implementation and positive impact of BLP across the research locations.
24	There are challenges to effectively supporting and maintaining the BLP teacher workforce, and high rates of teacher turnover.
25	There are challenges to the effective integration of BLP into other programming and lessons, including clarity among teachers are schools about what exactly BLP is and what it requires from them.
26	NRC's current sustainability strategy aims at the institutionalization of BLP into the formal education system, with adoption by the Ministry of Education and eventual integration into all schools in Kenya, not just those targeting refugee learners.

3.1. CONTEXT OVERVIEW IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MHPSS PROGRAMMING SUCH AS BLP

In order to better understand the research findings, this document starts with context findings as a foundational step, ensuring background and environmental understanding in order to fully grasp the subsequent findings and recommendations. In Kakuma, these context findings—related to the lives of learners, families, and communities outside of school, as well as challenges of the education system more broadly—are relevant to understand the implementation of the program, both in terms of logistics around implementation and impact. This includes description of the sociocultural and economic issues faced by the target population, as well as how such details affect their mental health and wellbeing. These details are also relevant for planning the logistical aspects of programming, such as access and materials.

Finding 1: **Families and communities in Kakuma face unmet basic needs which impacts mental health and wellbeing at the most fundamental level.**

Across all research sites, participants described the vulnerability of communities living in the camp settings and that many are unable to meet their basic needs. These basic needs— including access to sufficient food, clean water and hygiene, and adequate shelter—were emphasized as the foundation for assuring health and wellbeing of communities across the Kakuma camps, Kalobeyei settlement, and host communities. Elements of the camp infrastructure including roads, shelter, health care services, water and sanitation facilities and security and safety are not adequate to support the growing population.

In the **four Kakuma camps**, the following challenges were most often described as impacting the daily lives of refugee communities: **insufficient space and overcrowding**, which strains access to clean water and sanitation facilitates, as well as increased competition for resources such as water, food and shelter. **Healthcare facilities** are limited and often insufficient to meet the needs of the growing population. Access to medical care, for both chronic conditions and emergencies, can be challenging, leaving residents both frustrated and vulnerable. Residents of the Kakuma camps also note **food insecurity** as a persistent concern for families, with food rations provided by humanitarian agencies often not sufficient to meet the nutritional needs of children and families.

While residents describe their unmet basic needs, they also emphasize that there are **limited economic opportunities** due to restrictions on work in the formal economy for refugees in Kenya; this has led to continued dependence on aid in the camps.

In **Kalobeyei**, host community and refugees encounter many similar challenges to residents of Kakuma. This includes **lack of access to basic services**, such as clean water, sufficient sanitation facilities, and adequate healthcare services. Similar to Kakuma, the ongoing and rapid influx of both newly arrived refugees as well as a growing host community place growing strain on these resources. **Food security** is also a challenge. While residents of Kalobeyei are encouraged to engage in agricultural and other livelihood activities, they are often faced with the difficulty of securing enough food for their families and communities (such as during times of drought).

In terms of infrastructure, Kalobeyei is still under development. This includes the building of roads, housing, and public service facilities—such ongoing development impacts the quality of life of residents. When refugees arrive in Kalobeyei, there is a process of registration followed by moving groups from semi-permanent to permanent structures. Eligibility for permanent structures is determined by various criteria such as vulnerability, family size, and specific needs. Refugees living in Kalobeyei do not receive the standard food ration as in Kakuma, but instead 100% of their monthly food ration is provided as an electronic voucher to be used in the integrated market in Kalobeyei. Often, these vouchers are insufficient to cover the needs of families.

Insufficient access to resources poses challenges to **social cohesion,** a notable objective of the Kalobeyei settlement. Competition for resources and opportunities amongst residents and host communities can sometimes lead to tension and conflict, and balancing the needs and interests of both refugees and the host community is a complex challenge for supporting organizations.

In both the Kakuma camps and Kalobeyei, in addition to unmet basic needs, there have been **security challenges** in recent years including violent crime. Residents noted some concern for their security and safety. However, **across the research sites there was significant reference to the relative safety of children, families, and communities in comparison to their countries of origin.**

Learners who had recently arrived in Kenya described greater safety and security than in their countries of origin and transit. Participants noted that children and families have often been exposed to acute violence including loss of family members. They have experienced the loss of their homes, as well as the experience of displacement often long distances. When they have arrived in Kakuma, they may experience relative safety and stability in comparison to the circumstances of their home country. Caregivers emphasized this point, as well, noting that this was also true in terms of meeting some of their basic needs.

Kenya is better, yes. Because we are safe here and there is some food or vouchers provided. We do not have to pay school fees for the children to go to school. *Caregiver FGD*

Simultaneously, many learners in Kakuma were born in Kenya. This includes both host community children and those that come from multigenerational-Kakuma homes (i.e. children have been born in Kakuma to refugee parents.) For these learners, the contextual challenges of Kakuma today are the most significant stressors in their lives.

These contextual challenges impact the mental health and wellbeing of communities (such impacts are elaborated on in subsequent findings). For learners, they have unique psychosocial profiles based in both their past experiences and current living situations, and the multiple stressors compound with each other. While many have been exposed to significant traumatic events and will need targeted support, others have fewer acute issues but nonetheless struggle with the daily challenges of Kakuma. There are, thus, a variety of psychosocial support needs both within communities and within classrooms.

Finding 2: While schools are perceived as a safe and secure space for learners, infrastructure challenges were frequently cited.

Schools are perceived as a largely safe and secure physical space for learners by all types of actor that participated in this research, and **this safety contributes positively to learner wellbeing.** Education actors (teachers, school administrators, BOM members) all describe key factors that impact safety including security guards, adequate fencing surrounding the school, and safety procedures/rules including the removal of sharp objects such as broken glass and stones. Teachers additionally noted the need to have and enforce bans on corporeal punishment in classrooms as essential to learner safety, as well as processes in place to prevent and address bullying.

We have good structures, and we have a safe environment although we have some pits there that are still under construction. *School Administration KII*

My child is safe at school because there are rules and regulations in the first place, even when children are playing, they will make sure that they don't hurt themselves because they are following the school rules and regulations. *Parents FGD*

However, education actors including teachers, school administrators, and school BOM member describe additional things—for example adequate toilets for both genders, adequate infrastructural facilities for learners with disabilities, availability of water in the schools, and secure fences–as things that contribute to a safe learning environment but are often inadequate in the Kakuma and Kalobeyei schools.

Our school is not very safe. Although we have a fence, the fence is not encouraging because sometimes the learners cut some parts of it, and then can go through those parts…The classrooms are also worn out now. The dust is too much now and because the classrooms are built in such a way that there are no windows, the air comes in with too much dust. *School Administrator KII*

The toilets don't have doors and we don't have adequate water as of now. *School Administrator KII*

Education administrators in multiple schools noted that it is a priority for the school to uphold particular standards in the classroom and wider school. This includes an adequate number of toilets for both boys and girls; maintaining an appropriate teacher to learner ratio; sufficient learning materials such as books and classroom materials such as desks; and school infrastructure such as fencing and security guards. In many schools where this research was conducted, these standards were not fully realized.

Still, learners overwhelmingly stated that they feel safe in school. They stressed that they feel safe because there are few fights; they have friends; the teachers and the school administration are a source of both emotional and physical safety; and they are provided with food and water at school.

Finding 3: **Unmet basic needs pose risks to education access including school drop-out and nonattendance.**

The most commonly described risks for learners include the presence of child-headed households (which can lead to even greater lack of basic needs); child labor; lack of parental care and support; substance abuse in both parents and children; early marriage and pregnancy; and bullying at home and in the community. These risks have implications for the mental health of school-aged children, including both younger adolescents and teens, which affects their education and mental health / wellbeing.

Research participants—in particular school administrators, head teachers, and other education actors— describe child labor as a significant contributor to children not attending school. Faced with the unmet basic needs of their household/family, children often work to meet their basic needs, as well as those of their families.

> [There are many] necessary items that they lack at home. Because they come from these poor backgrounds. So, most of them, when they go away from the school, they don't have food, they don't have the necessities, they live in very bad conditions. Some [children] go to work because they are looking for money. They [find jobs] washing utensils and clothes in the camps. A lot of children go to work. *School Administrator KII*

Early marriage and teen pregnancy among girls in Kakuma and Kalobeyei camps are significant concerns and pose several challenges and risks. These issues are often caused by the need to better meet basic needs, and the perception of a lack of other options. Traditional and cultural norms in some refugee communities may encourage early marriage and discourage girls from pursuing their education. These norms can perpetuate the cycle of early marriage and teen pregnancy, which can lead to health risks, interrupted education, psychosocial and emotional impact, limited decision-making power, and poverty and dependency.

> Lack of adequate support or enough basic needs can lead a [female] child to move out of her home [for] early marriage or prostitution to meet her needs. This in return affects their performance in class and causes school dropout. *Caregiver FGD*

> You find that here girls are disadvantaged in the sense that some still drop out of school either due to teen pregnancy or early marriage. So, if families would be more supported, then… the girls [could be] protected from this. *Education Stakeholder KII*

Risks for drop-out for girls in Kakuma increase substantially after primary school. In 2022, 40 percent of girls enrolled in primary school completed national exams; at the secondary level this drops to 27 percent.[49] Evidence indicates that safe spaces for girls, as well as separate latrines and support for menstrual health and hygiene, are effective in allowing girls to fully participate in school.[50]

Research participants—in particular school BOM members, school administrators, NGO staff, and education authorities—describe how schools and NGOs work together to try to address the issue of out-of-school children. This includes strategic community outreach in both host communities and in the camps, for example through back-to-school campaigns. The BOM members, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members, and teachers additionally work to identify school-aged children who are not in school or have dropped out and strategize to bring them back to school.

> *When you have meetings with our teachers, well we know these teachers come from this community so we tell them that when they see children who are just at home and not in school… go there and tell them to come to school.* **Headteacher KII**

> *When there is no food in this school… most of the learners here will drop out. It is needed to support their basic needs or they won't come.* **Teachers FGD**

The shortage of secondary schools in Kakuma camp, as well as limited educational options for teens and youth generally, can have significant and far-reaching impacts on the education trajectories and the overall well-being of younger children as well. The discrepancy between the number of primary (21) and secondary (5) schools means that not all primary completers will be able to access the next phase of their formal education. This can also lead to higher dropout rates and nonattendance, as students lose motivation or feel that there are limited prospects for them.

Finding 4: **While schools are perceived as safe and accessible, there are significant challenges for these schools to provide quality, holistic education to all learners.**

Language is a notable and significant barrier to full participation in (and understanding of) both educational and MHPSS activities in Kakuma and Kalobeyei schools. Arriving learners generally do not know Kiswahili or English, which creates communication barriers when they enter the classroom. Schools have different approaches to address the challenge of language, including afternoon sessions where non-Kiswahili speakers return to repeat the morning classes in their mother tongue.

> *We do what we call the Tafsiri project, whereby the kids, maybe they are taught in the morning in math or environmental… Yeah, they come back to school later in the afternoon and now it's taught in their mother tongue. Oh, so that's why it's called Tafsiri. But still, remember, this child still has a lot of psychological issues. That's why we partnered with NRC, so that we basically marinate them into a place whereby they look forward to enjoying math or environmental studies.* **BLP Partner KII**

> *A main challenge is the language barrier, because not all of the learners know English and Swahili, because some of them have just come from their home [countries]. So, whenever you do the BLP exercises, it is very hard for you to explain or to tell them what to do.*

When you are giving instructions, it is very hard for a learner who doesn't know English and Swahili to follow what you are telling them to do or why. So, there is a disconnect in communication between the teachers and the learners. **Teacher FGD**

Many of the teachers in the camp schools are refugees themselves, which can be an advantage when these teachers can support the language and translation needs of particular learners. However, with the diversity of countries of origins, it is most often the case that there will be a variety of languages present in a single classroom. This leads to many learners unable to engage in activities and at risk of falling behind. Teachers describe that this lack of engagement can lead to disruptive behaviors, as well as ultimately to nonattendance amongst learners who cannot follow or fully understand the material.

In addition to multiple languages, schools in Kakuma have challenges such as notably large class sizes and high teacher turnover. The average teacher learner ratio in Kakuma is 1:150, significantly above the national recommended average of 40.[51] There was a wide range of this ratio across the school sites for this research: in one school, the administrator described an average of 50-60 children per classroom; NRC noted that for AEP classrooms the aim is 50 learners maximum; at another school visited a teacher noted: "*I have 189 students in my classroom. Can you imagine that?*"

Such overcrowded classrooms are challenging for engaging learners, effectively using child-centered approaches, controlling disruptive behavior, and providing for individualized needs of learners, all of which impact the learning environment. Teachers and school administrators describe that a key component of providing support to their learners' wellbeing is being able to understand the individual needs and circumstances of the students in their classroom; this is enormously challenging with such overcrowded classes as described above.

In addition, overcrowded classrooms mean there is insufficient space for learners to use chairs and desks as intended. For learning activities that require movement or space (such as many of the BLP activities described later in this report), this is a notable limitation. In Kakuma schools, teachers specifically described the lack of adequate space in the classroom as a severe limitation to doing some of the targeted BLP activities.

Relatedly, the lack of learning materials (such as books, pencils, backpacks) and uniforms was described at all schools visited as a challenge for engaging learners, as well as retaining them. One teacher noted that *"if students don't have the books or pencil to do the exercises, they don't pay attention. They don't learn. And then often they don't come back to school at all."*

Multiple respondents explained that uniforms are an important way to keep learners coming to school. Caregivers described that it makes them feel included in something, and gives them a sense of pride. They also noted that *not* having uniforms while classmates do makes children self-conscious and often unwilling to go to school. Teachers and school administrators echo that sentiment, noting that assuring children have adequate learning materials, backpacks, and uniforms is a key way to encourage them to come back and to participate fully.

Uniforms can help with the safety of children, too. If they are in the community wearing a uniform, we can tell people in the community to recognize them and send them to school.

Otherwise they just disappear into the society with other children who don't go to school.
School Administrator KII

Finding 5: **Many schools face challenges around inclusion of all learners, particularly accessibility for children with disabilities, and relevant provision for overage learners.**

Education actors—including teachers, school administrators, NGO staff, and education authorities—noted the importance of creating classrooms and learning environments that are accessible and welcoming for all children. This includes providing resources for **children with disabilities** and ensuring that schools are safe and free from discrimination. Many refugee children face challenges accessing education, but refugee children with disabilities are especially vulnerable to exclusion from school environments as well as other social settings.[52] Evidence notes that barriers related to learner disability impacts access to and success in education as well as opportunity and ability to form relationships with peers. This, in turn, impacts their overall psychosocial wellbeing.[53]

In the Kakuma schools, education actors emphasized that assuring inclusivity for learners with disabilities was a key priority, and also a notable challenge. While students with disabilities in Kakuma are often mainstreamed into general classrooms, education actors (such as education administration, teachers, other education authorities) note that there must be considerable investment in the appropriate infrastructure, training, and materials necessary for those children to succeed. In Kakuma—as well as many refugee contexts globally—this is a considerable challenge due to resource constraints, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of targeted support.

In addition to students with disabilities, there was significant discussion about **overage learners** across actors in this research. As of 2023, 45 percent of total enrolled students in Kakuma are overage learners, many of whom are older adolescence and youth, sometimes over the age of 18.[54] This situation is often a result of various factors related to displacement and limited access to education in their home countries or while in transit. As a result, young people may have missed several years of formal education. Additionally, many learners in this study described being held back or placed in earlier grades due to their lack of language skills. They are, thus, years older than many of the children in the classrooms.

Overage learners in primary schools are often considered at higher risk of drop out and nonattendance. This is often due to dropping out to take part in livelihood generating activities; frustration at slow progress, often due to factors such as language; and lack of engagement with classroom activities due to sharing learning space with younger learners.[55]

NRC's AEPs are a specific response to the issue of children who have missed out on periods of schools, often overage learners. Classrooms, thus, often have children with a range of ages. AEPs aim to assure overage learners are able to learn core competencies in basic literacy and numeracy, and eventually transition to the formal school system or additional education, vocational training, or livelihoods programming.

In terms of psychosocial support and needs, it is important to note that younger adolescents will have significantly different profiles and current stages of development than older teenagers and youth. In the

context of Kakuma, this means that in a single classroom there can be learners with notably different needs in terms of psychosocial support.

> *Negative attitudes can come about from some learners who are older. When you perform certain activities, they may feel like it is childish, and so they take it negatively.* **Teachers FGD**

While BLP is intended to target primary-aged learners (6-12), it is often implemented in classrooms with overage learners. During data collection for this project, there were multiple FGDs with learners in BLP classrooms up to and above age 18.

Finding 6: **Across all types of actor, research participants were able to describe MHPSS resources that were accessible to them in Kakuma if learners were in need of general or targeted support to their emotional and psychological wellbeing.**

While it was outside of the scope of this study to understand the landscape of available MHPSS programming and its efficacy, it was notable that all actors—including learners, teachers, caregivers, school administration, and other education actors—were able to describe some type of MHPSS support that was available. Notably, research participants often described both targeted mental health support (such as referrals to counselling or trauma-focused specialty care delivered mainly by NGOs), as well as broader psychosocial support initiatives and resources (such as school clubs or religious-based support).

NGOs and churches engage in community development projects, such as providing vocational training or skills development programs. Parents see these initiatives as opportunities for self-sufficiency and improving their families' lives.

> *My child gets mental health support through organized seminars and coaching initiated by NGOs in the camp.* **Caregivers FGD Kakuma Camp**

> *We have a counseling department. We identify learners that need that kind of counselling and if it is beyond us, we also have counsellors from LWF who visit the school on Wednesday and Thursday for a general talk.* **School Administrator KII**

> *There are centers for children in the camp, where they have a place to play and have activities outside of school. They have special people who are trained to support their problems. It is a space for them to share their feelings and have interaction with a trained person if they need support.* **Caregivers FGD**

Education officials noted that the provision of dedicated school counselors is a crucial element in the effective support and well-being of students, especially in challenging environments like Kakuma. They noted that schools are supposed to have a counselor, but that these positions are often vacant or too parttime. Much of the counseling and guidance support thus falls on the teachers.

> *Right now, the government relies on guidance and counselling departments. These guidance and counselling departments don't have professionals. So, it is the teachers who*

must double up as counsellors in the process of supporting these learners. They may not have adequate time, but at least they are doing something. **Government Stakeholder KII**

School administrators expressed concerns about the shortage of qualified staff for guidance and counselling. They also noted that there is inadequate infrastructure and adult support (typically teachers after school hours) for the clubs, which are a main source of social emotional support and safety for children after school hours.

While education officials may recognize the importance of having school counselors in each school, the reality of resource constraints often result in teachers taking on the role of providing counseling and support. Education officials, school administrators, and teachers all expressed an understanding of the critical role of psychosocial support and emphasize the need for counseling services to help students cope with trauma, stress, and emotional challenges resulting from displacement. Still the key challenge of delivering such services sustainably is the limited available resources.

WHY ARE THESE CONTEXT RELATED FINDINGS IMPORTANT IN RELATION TO MHPSS PROGRAMMING?

For actors that wish to address the MHPSS needs of the Kakuma and Kalobeyei communities, there is a need to understand how context interrelates with specific MHPSS challenges. In order to implement a successful MHPSS program, it must be context-sensitive, leading to certain questions that are critical to ask before implementation:

- What are the specific challenges of this community and the impacts these challenges have on community members?
- What are the specific needs of this community that are not met, and how can a program contribute to them?
- How does the program consider the current education system, including its limitations and challenges in relation to any school-based MHPSS intervention?
- How does the program consider the diversity of the communities, their cultural references and values?
- How can a program assure inclusivity from the outset, and in particular in a context where there are specific children who may be more difficult to reach/include such as overage learners, learners with disabilities, and girls?
- What MHPSS services are available and how can the program generate coordination to facilitate access to them?

Overall, these context findings in Kakuma emphasize how, ideally, MHPSS programs need to be accompanied by interventions that help meet the basic needs of the population in order to truly improve mental health and wellbeing. In addition, there are significant current challenges within the education system itself that will persist as obstacles to the success of a school-based MHPSS intervention. It is critical to consider how an intervention implemented in schools may itself be impeded by those same challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms or barriers to reaching learners

with disabilities. Ultimately, the goal is to effectively and inclusively reach children in the context of these challenges.

3.2. UNDERSTANDING HOLISTIC WELLBEING AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN CONTEXT

Wellbeing and the role of education in supporting children's holistic wellbeing were a central topic of the research. The second group of findings emphasizes the perceptions of educational communities around learner wellbeing and how it is related to school. When implementing MHPSS school-based programs, it is crucial to understand how different actors perceive school, and in particular what space and support are available for non-academic activities and how such activities are valued.

Finding 7: **Research participants of all actor-type recognize that safety and security are essential prerequisites to learning, and that schools most provide safe learning environments and ensure children's basic needs are met.**

In addition to their physical safety and security, schools in Kakuma play a vital role in meeting the basic needs of learners, given the challenging circumstances faced by the refugee population. Schools regularly provide learners with food, clean water, sanitary towels, soap and even clothing. Research participants emphasize that the foundation for learner wellbeing is assuring basic needs and safety, which ultimately lead to readiness to learn at school.

> *[A key to the] wellbeing of learners is when the children are provided with all their basic needs, such as, food, water and clothing, to ensure that they are not distracted from learning.* **Caregivers FGD**

Education actors—such as teachers, school administrators, and BOM members—emphasize that physical security is only one element of what makes a school a "safe learning environment." They stressed that a safe learning environment must be inclusive, welcoming, and respectful of the diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds of the student population. Schools should foster a sense of belonging and acceptance for all students.

> *I can say yes, we have well-constructed fences in most of the schools and we also have security personnel who provide protection for these learners. This is important. And school is a safe environment for learners because we have the school administration and teachers to look after these children, to care for their safety. Also, here the learners come together and learn about each other's background and culture. This helps them to feel included.* **Teachers FGD**

> *In school, we have refugees and host children, children from different background… But what we normally instill [in them] is that we are all one. We are a family. There is no need for fighting, we want to ensure that you get the education that you need. So, let's ensure that we live peacefully and if there is an issue, let's come together to solve it together.* **School Administrator KII**

Teachers stress that a safe learning environment means many things beyond just the physical safety of the children. They emphasized that the holistic wellbeing of children must be assured in order for learning to take place. Teachers describe the following aspects as critical to a safe learning environment:

- Good classroom arrangements that create a cohesive and non-disruptive learning environment;
- Child-centered class activities that ensure that children are engaged and feel supported in their learning;
- No corporal punishment;
- Strict security outside of and within the school, including policy and rules for ensuring safety;
- Adherence to safety protocols, including removing stones, glass, and rocks and addressing issues of disruptive behavior and bullying;
- Encouraging good communication, strong relationships, and trust building between learners and teachers;
- Dedicated teachers and school staff who believe that their learners overall wellbeing is essential, and they have a role to play in supporting this.

BOM members, who are community members and often parents of learners in the school, also emphasize the holistic nature of a safe learning environment. These research participants described the following as critical aspects of a safe learning environment:

- Adequate number of teachers and teacher/student ratio
- Sufficient amount of learning materials, classroom furniture, and uniforms
- Learners feel free and have good, positive relationships with other learners
- Friendly, positive relationships between teachers and parents
- Enough classrooms and grades for all students to be in conducive learning environments
- Security personnel and fencing of the school to assure safety from the outside
- Parents bring their children to school and understand/promote the importance of education.

All actors in this research underlined the critical importance of assuring that schools are safe, while also acknowledging that a safe learning environment includes more than just physical security. This holistic view of the learning environment, and the centrality of key relationships (between students, students and teachers, teachers and parents) reflect an overall recognition of the importance of education in promoting positive social relationships, emotional and psychological development and regulation, life skills such as communication, and community cohesion.

Finding 8: The perceived value of school is strongly linked to holistic wellbeing and development of learners.

Across the research, participants described schools as not just places of learning but also crucial hubs for building life skills, nurturing resilience, and sowing the seeds of hope for a brighter future. Schools and education broadly are viewed as a key pathway to greater opportunity for refugee learners. There is acknowledgement that academic achievement is important, but also that the development of learners into good humans with skills to navigate relationships and opportunities in the future is equally valuable.

Education is generally agreed upon to be a key to unlocking a better future, and both academic learning and social and emotional learning are integral to this.

> *When they are in school, things are supposed to feel positive and hopeful. They are supposed to feel peace in their minds to ensure that they gain skills and knowledge. This helps them to have hope in their lives and plan for the future.* **Teachers FGD**

Learners also describe education as a pathway to improve their lives and create a brighter future. They believe that education will help them gain skills and qualifications that help build towards jobs and a better life. They overwhelmingly emphasize a desire to support their families and their parents, and they understand that school is an important pathway to such opportunity.

> *I go to school so that I can help my parents in the future.* **Learners FGD**

> *I like reading and school a lot. First I want to become a Kenyan citizen. Then after that I would like to become maybe a teacher or a doctor. Because if I am a doctor, maybe I will help children. If I become a teacher, I will help the children by teaching.* **Learners KII**

School is particularly valued in terms of teaching tolerance and about difference, including unifying refugee students from different backgrounds as well as from host communities. This is critical in a setting like the Kakuma and Kalobeyei camps where there is diversity of country of origin, language, religion, and culture.

Research participants describe how such difference can lead to potential conflict, both inside and outside schools. However, there is agreement that school is an absolutely essential place for the development of tolerance and cross-cultural understanding for learners.

> *Living in a place with so many people, and from very different places, can be challenging. But we all face the same challenges in our daily lives. At school, we try to teach the children that, to understand that they can come together and solve problems together. They can play together and learn together. When children see that they are the same as someone with a different religion or a different language, it is an important thing we have done.* **Teacher FGD**

> *Sometimes a child is in trouble for fighting, they don't get along with others who are different. But then after they are in school together for a while they learn that they are more the same than different. They don't have to fight, they are all kids who want to play and learn and run around. Then there are no more problems with that child.* **School administrator KII**

Schools in the camp provide a unique setting where students from diverse backgrounds come together, and education actors (teachers, administrators, NGO staff, BOM members) emphasized the critical importance of education to do so. They want students to learn about others' cultures, celebrate diversity, and gain a broader perspective of the world. In their classrooms, students collaborate on projects, share stories from their respective backgrounds, and learn from one another's perspectives. The experience of learning side by side with students from diverse backgrounds promotes empathy, cultural exchange, and

the breaking down of stereotypes. Teachers and school administrators believe it is an important part of their job to support such growth in their learners.

> *We have religion clubs, they are popular. So on Mondays, the Church Club opens the assembly and sings their songs which are happy and energetic. Then on Fridays the Muslim prayers are said at the assembly. We make sure to have both and include all of the children and the activities of the clubs.* **School Administrator KII**

> *School is an important place to provide support to these learners about tolerance. Here they find time to interact with one another, to get to know each other, and to learn about each other's cultures. They don't normally learn from each other in the community, especially when they are [isolated in their own] community.* **Teachers FGD**

Education actors (teachers, school administrators, NGO staff, education authorities) note that non-academic activities make a positive impact on learner wellbeing, and schools have different ways to try to integrate such activities to promote social emotional learning. Teachers and school administrators emphasize the positive effects on learner wellbeing that participation in such activities have. Most schools in Kakuma and Kalobeyei have after school clubs, though many of these clubs are inactive due to lack of consistent financial support for adult supervisors and coaches, and the infrastructure or materials needed for activities.

Teachers emphasized the social and emotional learning that can take place in clubs, in addition to healthy activities that emphasize physical, psychological, and social wellbeing. The clubs described included: sports clubs, games clubs, BLP club, religion clubs, clubs to support young mothers, peace club, inclusion club, protection club.

> *I am not trained on BLP, I am a physical education teacher. I feel a lot of similarities. The way we talk about children…being calm after the activities. The breathing and stretching. This is like what happens with PE. They get along together, they work together. They are calm and of sound mind. The activities help them to take care of themselves, of their minds and their emotions.* **Teacher FGD**

School Administrators also advocated for clubs where students learn specific skills that may be relevant for their future. This is particularly important in a setting like Kakuma where there is limited access to secondary education. Teachers and administrators describe the usefulness, for example, of the agriculture club. This club supports agricultural learning and experience, so that when learners finish school they may have immediate usable skills that are relevant in the Kakuma context.

Finding 9: **Children perceive a sense of wellbeing from their close relationships, their immediate environments, and activities which help them "quiet their minds".**

Importantly, learners emphasize that feelings of safety come from the **trust** in their relationships with teachers, principals, and other school administration adults. Learners feel cared for by their teachers and can share emotions and issues freely with them. Additionally, they are surrounded by their friends and peers while at school, and they value these relationships and the time spent with friends as a source of wellbeing. Learners described that when they are sad or stressed, they feel comfortable going to their

teacher to talk; and then also turn to their friends at school for support. Some learners even noted that bad things do not happen when they are at school.

> *Maybe sometimes you might come from home while stressed and maybe if you stay at home the stress continues adding up, but when you come to school, it reduces because in school I have the opportunity of meeting a lot of people. When you are with friends you can't be stressed for too long. That's why when I am in school, I feel safe.* **Learners FGD**

Through a series of drawing and share-out activities, learners described the people and places in their lives that make them feel safe, what they do when they are stressed, and who they turn to when things are hard. Examples of these drawings and the descriptions shared by learners in front to the FGD are included below.

*"I feel safe when I am with my teachers and my friends. When I am playing, I don't have stress. When I do activities where my body moves around and I breath, I feel calm."*

"I feel the best when I am playing football. I am with my friends. When I am running around there are no other problems… Sometimes we [peers] can get in a fight but then we just play more and I'm not angry. It is when I am the

"I feel the most support from my mother. And I feel my best when I am helping her in the house doing chores. When I am helping sweep the house I feel calm. I can do breathing exercises at the same time and that is when I feel the best. I can stop thinking about bad things and my head feels quiet."

"I feel safe in church. I feel safe because the [pastor] is always nice to me and I feel like I can talk about my problems....I would go to [him] if I was having a hard time. I know that he would help me. So I feel safest going to church."

if I am non Learn I am not happy.
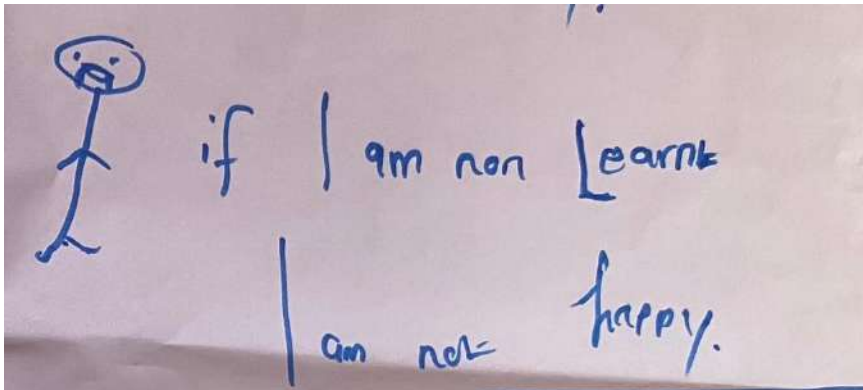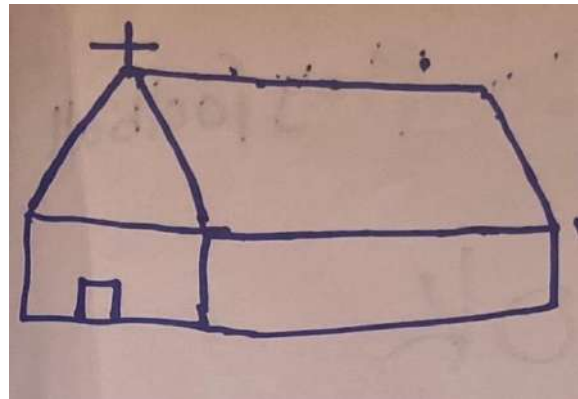
"If I am not learning, I am not happy. I feel my best when I am in school and my mind is there."
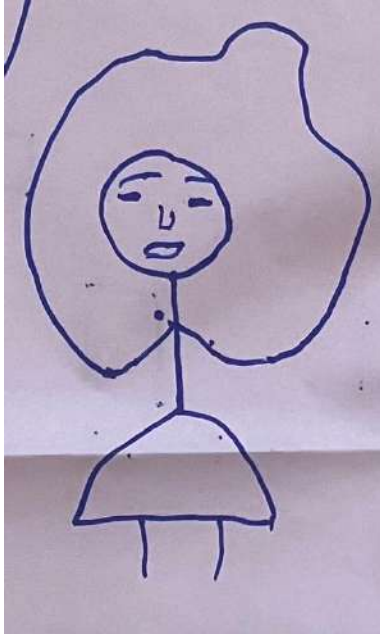
"I drew myself alone because sometimes…it feels good to be by yourself to have your own thoughts."

"When I am having a hard time, sometimes I want to be by myself where it is quiet. I like to be alone, to sit under a tree. This helps me to clear my head and not be angry or yell at my brothers."

Some physical activities, for example playing football or running, are perceived by children as beneficial for their mental and emotional health. Some learners describe how being alone in the quiet can help them feel calmer, too. Negative social interactions, such as bullying and family separations or conflict, adversely affect their sense of safety and wellbeing. Table 12, below, summarizes responses from learners participating in the research activities.

Table 12: Learners perceptions of safety, relationships, and wellbeing

Where do children feel safe?	What relationships are most important to children?
• **Home Environment**: Many children mentioned feeling safe at home with their families. The presence of family members and strong support networks within the family and community is a source of safety and well-being for children. • **School**: Some children mentioned finding a sense of safety and well-being in their schools. These environments often offer psychosocial support, a structured routine, and the opportunity to interact with peers and caring teachers and school administrators. • **Church:** Places of worship in the camps and host communities offer children a sense of belonging and community. These spaces can serve as hubs for social activities, cultural events, and emotional support.	• **Family:** The family, especially parents, siblings are a source of support and connection. Family relationships are central to a child's emotional well-being and development. • **Peer Relationships:** Friendships with peers are essential for children's social and emotional development both at home and in school. Children often form close bonds with peers who share similar experiences. These friendships provide companionship and a sense of belonging. • **Teachers:** Teachers and school administrators play a significant role in children's lives. They provide not only education but also guidance, mentorship, and emotional support. A positive teacher-student relationship can have a lasting impact on a child's well-being.

What do children do to feel safe?	Which experiences contribute to children's wellbeing?
• **Forming Friendships:** Children build friendships with peers who share similar experiences. These friendships provide emotional support, a sense of belonging, and companionship, helping them navigate challenges. • **Attending school:** This can provide a structured routine and a sense of purpose. Education is seen as a pathway to a better future, and children feel safer when they are learning and developing skills. • **Engaging in Play and Recreation:** Whether organized or spontaneous, allows children to have moments of joy and relief from stress. These activities promote emotional and physical well-being. • **Engaging in Religious Practices:** For many children, religious practices and participation in religious activities provide comfort and a sense of spirituality. This can offer a source of hope and guidance.	• **Education:** Access to quality education is one of the most significant contributors to children's well-being. Schools offer structure, skill development, and a sense of purpose. Psychosocial support also helps children cope with trauma. • **Play and Recreation:** Play is essential for children's well-being. Child-friendly spaces, playgrounds, and organized recreational activities provide opportunities for children to have fun, release stress, and develop social skills.
	Which experiencea harm children's wellbeing?
	• **Separation from Families:** The separation of children from their families, either due to displacement or other circumstances, can harm their emotional well-being and sense of security. • **Bullying and Peer Conflict:** Bullying and conflicts among peers in schools or within the community can harm children's emotional well-being and sense of safety. • **Substance Abuse:** Children may be exposed to substance abuse within the camp, which can lead to addiction and associated health and social problems. • **Family Stress and Conflict:** The stress of displacement and limited resources can contribute to family conflicts, negatively affecting children's emotional well-being.

Finding 10: There is a strong sense from parents, teachers, and education actors that schools serve a critical function in providing social, emotional and psychosocial support to learners.

Teachers note that school is often the primary place where learners can find a supportive adult that they trust to share their problems and express their needs. Caregivers, as well, describe that sometimes their own children feel more comfortable turning to a teacher or principal. Caregivers expressed feelings of trust in school staff to provide support to their children, and noted.

I feel that my child is safest in school because I know that she is with the teacher, who cares for her and can support her with her problems. Sometimes if she is has [emotional problems], she will go to the teacher first. **Caregiver FGD**

Administrators underlined this point, with many explaining that the overall wellbeing of their learners was their own responsibility. This is a critical role of the school.

This is [an] important part of my job, the most important. The school needs to provide support to the learners needs, and they often have many needs. They have a hard life at home. We need to be there to support the learner in all of their needs here. **School Administrator KII**

We have a counseling room, we have afterschool clubs, we have teachers who are trained to support the learners' psychological needs. It is important to do all of these things for our learners. **Head Teacher KII**

In addition to the support provided in the classroom and through counselors, clubs were noted as a strategy to reach students with specific needs or to target specific social emotional goals, such as the tolerance taught in peace club. Clubs are also used as a strategy to keep learners engaged in and attending school. For example, at one school the administrator described the young mothers' club, which does outreach to teenage mothers in order to bring them back to school after giving birth. The goal of this group is the provision of social emotional support, both by teachers and fellow peer mothers.

Right now we have around ten mothers in the club. The important part is to bring them together, to offer support. But mostly they are able to identify with each other and talk… I see such positive impact of this, because so many of them had given up on school. They felt very negatively about their life, felt like giving up. But when we bring them together, they start to open up and to heal. We have one new mother, she gave birth maybe two months ago. We encouraged her to come back, she has spent time with the other mothers. She is in Class 8 right now and is going to sit for her KCPE exam this year. **Head Teacher KII**

Finding 11: **Teachers, caregivers, and other education actors believe that supporting mental health and wellbeing of students is a critical part of a teacher's job.**

The role of teachers extends beyond traditional classroom instruction. Teachers emphasize that it is an integral part of their job to support their students holistically. This includes being there to listen to learners, and to be a trusted person in their lives to come to when they have problems that require support. Teachers note that they often take on a level of responsibility that they are not entirely qualified for, namely providing some elements of counseling and support for their students. They describe that such roles are often necessary due to the shortage of dedicated school counselors or mental health professionals, as well as lack of funding for clubs in many schools.

Teachers are well-positioned to identify students' emotional and social needs based on the amount of time spent in the classroom together. Additionally, they note that they have confidence that their learners trust them, and view them as a key source of support in their lives. They describe offering a listening ear, encouragement, and advice when students are dealing with personal or emotional

challenges. Teacher participants in this research fully agreed that they play a significant role in providing emotional support to their students.

> *Learners often believe that teachers are the only people that they can… share their problems with. It is maybe better than other people outside of the school. They know and trust us.* **Teachers FGD**

> *My role as a teacher is to encourage them through having a positive attitude. You are supposed to make the learners feel encouraged and positive to make them have hope in life.* **Teachers FGD**

Teachers note that they have different kinds of learners with varying backgrounds and needs, and so it is the role of the teacher to take care of each learner according to these needs. Teachers describe providing emotional, physical and mental support by assuring that learners are comfortable in school. This includes the setup of the classroom, pedagogy and teaching practices, and the way they relate to learners. It is important to teachers that learners feel comfortable coming to them to express their learning needs. The teachers also emphasize their role in ensuring that the learners receive quality education. Their main role is to ensure that a learner is in a healthy and happy state of mind so they can learn in a conducive learning environment.

Finding 12: Teacher wellbeing is perceived as critical for teachers to be able to provide support to their learners and create a conducive learning environment.

This is particularly important in Kakuma where many teachers are themselves refugees, too. Refugee teachers often have similar past experiences as learners prior to arriving in Kenya. As noted previously, there are advantages to such shared experience—from language abilities and cultural understanding to an ability to identify with and relate to the challenges that learners have faced through displacement.

Teachers live with the same contextual challenges of living in Kakuma as their students, such as unmet basic needs and limited options for the future. Working in overcrowded schools and with classrooms of, for example, 189 learners, add stress to their professional lives. Many have also been exposed to traumatic events prior to arrival in Kenya, for which they may also need psychological support.

When teachers are emotionally well, they can better address the emotional needs of their students. It is a significant job to teach, offer guidance, provide care and empathy, and maintain a nurturing classroom environment conducive to learning. Assuring their own wellbeing and offering support to their wellbeing is essential.

School administrators, government officials, and I/NGO staff all described the need to offer such support to teachers. Notably, this was most often described as the provision of additional training. This included training around teaching practices, classroom management, and pedagogy.

> *[It is important to have] more trainings for the teachers. This empower teachers so that they can do their job well. It helps them contribute something to the learners, capacity build them, around how to behave and to manage stress.* **Government Stakeholder KII**

These same actors emphasize that when teachers prioritize their well-being, they can serve as role models for students. This includes demonstrating resilience, self-care, and effective stress management techniques which are valuable life skills to impart on learners. Additionally, teachers who are mentally and emotionally well are better equipped to deliver high-quality instruction.

> *When I have stress or a lot of challenges in my life, I do not want to take that to the classroom. When I am having stress, this [affects] the classroom. When a teacher releases stress, it means they can approach teaching from a positive place. Then I can manage my learners.* **Teacher FGD**

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND PERCEPTIONS OF HOLISTIC WELLBEING, AS WELL AS THE ROLE OF EDUCATION, IN CONTEXT?

Interventions and programs that seek to address holistic wellbeing in school must consider what those concepts mean to the communities they are working with, in order to assure that the intervention is relevant and addresses the perceived needs of the communities. The values held by communities will directly relate to their engagement and commitment to the program and activities, which will ultimately define the possible impact of the intervention. As seen in the findings of this section, this perceived value of MHPSS programming and the roles of education in relation to it, varies among actors. Understanding perceptions of holistic wellbeing and education should foreground the work of implementers in the planning stages of a program. In order to do so, potential implementers of school-based MHPSS programming should consider certain questions:

- How can the program support communities to build a shared vision of school that includes the needs of all actors?

- How can the program build value of MHPSS into the perception of actors that still do not prioritize it? Why are they not currently prioritizing it? This question is especially important in terms of the involvement of education authorities at both local and national levels, who ultimately lead the way in what schools can implement and what support they receive.

- What would be needed for all actors to perceive school as safe?

- How can programs take into account where and what makes children feel safe? How can programs integrate the perception of children in terms of what supports their wellbeing and mental health?

- How can an implementer enhance coordination to improve existing MHPSS services and assure complementarity in new interventions?

- If teachers are the frontline support for educational communities, how can programs provide psychosocial support for their own mental health and wellbeing?

3.3. BLP IMPLEMENTATION

In addition to study of the relationship between education and MHPSS programming, this research specifically studied NRC's BLP implemented by the NRC Kakuma field office. This section of findings shares key learning about perceptions of BLP broadly, about the perceived impacts, and other relevant implementation details.

3.3.1. PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROGRAMME

Finding 13: **BLP is viewed by all education stakeholders interviewed for this research as an important contribution to education programming in Kakuma because of its holistic approach, which actors describe as highly relevant and appropriate for the learners in this context.**

Overwhelmingly, participants in this research who had experienced or were aware of BLP expressed **very positive** views of the program. This included noting its relevance for children in Kakuma due to the past trauma and ongoing daily stressors in their lives. Participants described positive impacts of BLP on learners, as well as on teachers, parents, and communities (described in the subsequent findings) which they attribute to its implementation in classrooms.

> *Yes, BLP is necessary for most of these learners in the camp, they come with a lot of issues…If you see what made them leave their country, they are often very traumatized. And the environment here itself is also hard. In school, where they play, where they live, it's also traumatizing and so they need lots of emotional and psychological support from the school... it is important to integrate programming that deals with the wellbeing of learners into the schools.* **Government Stakeholder KII**

> *Most of the people in the community have children here. They see BLP positively because it is also impacting them positively. They see sense in it for their children. I didn't know about [BLP], but when I came to this school, they were doing it. I became very interested and it has really helped me a lot.* **School Administrator KII**

> *BLP is wonderful. Whenever I feel like I'm not feeling okay, I go to that safe place, release that stress then come back and feel better.* **Teachers FGD**

> *BLP is a good program because NRC comes and trains teachers on how to ensure safety in classrooms and to ensure that the learners are safe out of schools…it teaches skills that learners really need here. This training empowers teachers to [support learners] better than the way they were doing it before.* **Teachers FGD**

Since BLP is implemented in classrooms by teachers, it happens more consistently and reliably than other psychosocial support, including counseling or afterschool clubs. As noted previously, the regular presence of these other programmes are impeded by resource constraints and the availability of counselors, coaches, and other qualified professionals. A key advantage of BLP, according to education leaders (county actors, school administrators), is that it takes place in the classroom and is, thus, part of/integrated into daily education activities and learning.

Teachers emphasize how valuable it is that BLP recognizes emotional wellbeing as essential for effective learning. BLP activities include active and student-centered learning methods, which help teachers to create a classroom environment that is most conducive to learning. Teachers participating in this research expressed **an overwhelmingly positive perception of BLP**. This, in turn, leads to their full commitment to incorporating it into their daily classroom activities.

> *Having the buy in of the program by the teachers makes it easier for them to implement the program, which becomes easier for them to get the learners through the program because they appreciate it themselves.* **NRC Staff KII**

BLP includes teacher training in psychosocial support and trauma-informed teaching. Teachers described that they have learned how to create a safe and supportive classroom environment where students can thrive emotionally and academically. They emphasize how they have been supported to learn and incorporate that learning into their classrooms. BLP is viewed as having a very positive influence on the school environment.

Overall, the adults that have experienced the value of BLP in their own life are the ones who speak most positively about its impact. For teachers, this means they are especially committed to using BLP activities with their students and understand its purpose and potential impact. But this perception of the programme extends to school administrators, principals, and even caregivers as well.

> *Parents are also…interested in knowing much more about BLP. Whenever they come to school, we always take them through its purpose and [the activities] again and they also feel it is good for them, too. So, it has also impacted on them positively. They do it whenever they feel they have that negativity in them. They do them at home, together with the learners.* **School Administrator KII**

Finding 14: **Teachers and school staff emphasize the usefulness of BLP activities in providing playful, child-centered activities different to that of the traditional classroom.**

BLP activities were described as notably different from the traditional teaching methods in a classroom and offer new tools for teachers to engage their students.

> *It breaks the monotony of the class from one lesson to another…When you introduce the lesson, maybe start with [a BLP activity] like singing or belly breathing. Then the learners are enjoying class from the start.* **Teachers FGD**

Through NRC training, BLP introduces innovative and student-centered teaching methods that differ from traditional rote learning. These methods encourage interactive activities, group work, hands-on projects, and creative expression, making learning more engaging and enjoyable. They also incorporate elements of play and fun into the learning process. Teachers describe how these playful activities can reduce stress, boost motivation, and enhance students' enthusiasm for learning.

We go outside to do the activities then come back [to the classroom]... You get a chance to play with your friends and you make stories, something like that. That is why you are happy in class. **Learners FGD**

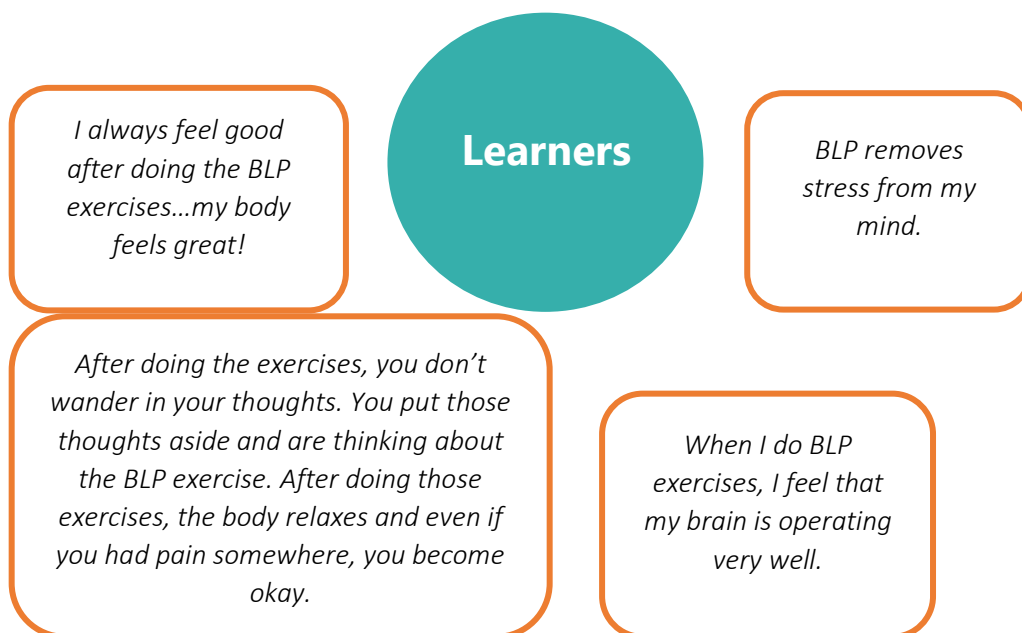*I feel like I am energetic after doing BLP exercises.* **Learners FGD**

Teachers describe the BLP activities as a set of tools that they have to manage their classrooms in order to assure a conducive learning environment. They explain that when there are disruptive behaviors or a lack of engagement with learning, they may use an exercise in order to reengage students.

There are so many students in my classroom so it is... easy for things to become very loud and for students to lose attention. When I see this happening, instead of yelling at learners or trying to punish them... I use BLP. We all do the exercise and it helps learners to calm down. They are less energetic and then they will be able to focus more. **Teachers FGD**

When learners can focus then they feel more interested in learning. There can be many distractions in the class so learners feel discouraged and lack motivation. It is the teacher's job to encourage... learning. We can use BLP to help with that. **Teachers FGD**

Finding 15: **Learners enjoy BLP activities both when they are incorporated into the lessons or done before the lessons.**

After participating in BLP activities, learners describe feeling a range of positive emotions and experiences. Some common feelings and experiences.

I always feel good after doing the BLP exercises...my body feels great!

Learners

BLP removes stress from my mind.

After doing the exercises, you don't wander in your thoughts. You put those thoughts aside and are thinking about the BLP exercise. After doing those exercises, the body relaxes and even if you had pain somewhere, you become okay.

When I do BLP exercises, I feel that my brain is operating very well.

Engaging in creative and interactive BLP activities can serve as a form of stress relief for learners. It allows them to temporarily set aside worries and focus on the task at hand. The activities also often require

focused attention, which can improve learners' ability to concentrate not only during the activities but also then on academic tasks. Such positive experiences in the classroom foster a sense of hope and optimism about the future as learners experience success and personal growth.

> *Singing a song, especially when you want to start a class, makes them pay attention and become awake. At the beginning of class, you find that if they were sleeping or not interested, and then you tell them let us sing a song together to start, then they become active and involved.* **Teachers FGD**

Overall, learners describe that they feel better and free from stress after participating in the BLP activities. These positive experiences contribute to a more conducive learning environment and support their overall well-being.

3.3.2. PERCEPTIONS OF IMPACT OF BLP

Finding 16: **Teachers, caregivers, and school administrators perceive a number of clear outcomes related to children's holistic wellbeing as a result of BLP.** Key perceived outcomes of BLP include:

- **Improved strategies for coping with stress and difficult situations:** Teachers, caregivers, learners, and school administrators all describe how the integration of BLP into class activities has provided learners with coping strategies for better managing stressful situations. Specific BLP activities—for example belly breathing and tense and release—were mentioned frequently by all actors as specific tools that learners have integrated into their own coping strategies.

> *If I am angry, if I am stressed, when I do BLP these feelings disappear.* **Learner, Girls FGD**

- **Improved strategies for calming and clearing the mind, which helps focus on the present:** Teachers and learners, in particular, describe positive feelings of calmness and a clear mind as the result of BLP exercises.

> *Once we do [the BLP exercises] we feel great…the mind stays calm. When [a learner] comes from home, there are a lot of things that have happened at home. Because of this, when he gets to school, he can't learn if he hasn't done BLP. But BLP makes his mind become calm.* **Learner, Boys FGD**

> *We have been told that when you feel angry, don't think of what is ahead, or of where you are coming from. When you get mad…first of all breath in and out, in and out… When you do the breathing activity, you feel clear then.* **Learner, Girls FGD**

> *This [belly breathing] is to be done when you have a lot of strong feelings and a lot on your mind. It is like you are a balloon, and when you remove the air from the balloon, you become less tense and free.* **Learner, Boys FGD**

- **Greater satisfaction and happiness while at school:** As described above, the learner-centered approach practiced in BLP classrooms has led to increased student happiness at school, according to teachers, learners, caregivers, and school administrators.

> I love BLP very much. It helps me reduce stress… it helps a lot to be happier. We sing, we draw. I love school. **Learner, Girls FGD**

- **Less conflict with those around them:** Teachers, school administrators, and parents all describe how learner behavior – especially in relation to conflict with their peers—has decreased with use of the BLP exercises. Research participants emphasized that this was due to students having better coping, anger management, and stress management skills. In addition, the learner-centered classroom activities encourage emotional expression, communication, and teamwork. Teachers describe how using BLP to relieve stress amongst students reduces disruption and conflict in the classroom.

Finding 17: **Teachers, caregivers, and school administrators perceive a number of clear outcomes related to academic learning as a result of BLP.** Key perceived outcomes of BLP include:

- **Better concentration and increased engagement with learning activities in class:** Teachers and school administrators emphasize that BLP activities help students to better concentrate during class time. They note that BLP has promoted the use of interactive teaching methods that promote student engagement, such as group activities, discussions, and hands-on learning. Such activities enhance concentration and engagement in the classroom.

> BLP is like exercising, it brings the mindset of the children from afar back to the classroom. So, if they have been traumatized, they have been having stress all along the way or at home, they forget it. It makes them focus and brings their mind back to the classroom and so it [allows] the learning activities to take place. Like for instance, in my class, before I start the lessons, I have 3 to 4 exercises that we do. One of them is belly breathing. Children breathe deeply in, we feel our stomachs with air, then we breathe out in a period of 2 to 3 times. Then from there we have what we call tense and release. The children also use strength from their bodies, they strain the muscles, the neck, the head and then we release it. As they are doing it, they are also breathing in and out. One thing is that as they do these activities, they become relaxed, and they take it to be fun and they enjoy it. Then from there, the classroom becomes very interactive and lively. **Teachers FGD**

> In BLP, we used to have one exercise which we call 'mind and body connect.' It helps the learner to get their mind off of the things happening back at home…this can bring them to be in the present moment. And that makes the learner concentrate on what you are teaching them. So BLP is very important because it helps those learners in such situations so that they can learn. **Teachers FGD**

> *During BLP, I am used to answering questions. So it gives me courage to answer questions during [non-BLP] class time too.* **Learner, Girls FGD**

In addition, when students feel emotionally supported and secure, they are better able to concentrate on their studies without being overwhelmed by stress or anxiety. As described above, BLP has positively impacted learners' stress management in ways that benefit them in the classroom.

> *Previously my grades were so low because I was stressed all the time. But since BLP was introduced, I have started performing well.* **Learner, Girls FGD**

Teachers trained in BLP note that they feel equipped to provide better support to students who may struggle with concentration or other learning challenges. BLP's emphasis on a supportive and inclusive classroom environment can contribute to a sense of belonging and motivation to excel academically.

- **Conducive learning environment:** Teachers and school administrators describe how BLP contributes to a positive learning environment, which makes it more conducive to learning. They note that an effect of learners' increased concentration is often improved classroom behavior. When students are focused on their studies, disruptive behaviors tend to decrease, creating a more productive learning environment.

  > *Most of these [BLP learners] behave very well. If you see them compared to children not in this program, they are better behaved.* **School Admin KII**

  According to education actors, learners display improved manners and respectful interactions with teachers, peers, and other members of the school community, which they note fosters a more positive and harmonious learning environment at the school level.

  Additional aspects mentioned were the positive relationships built between students and teachers; amongst students; the engaged and dynamic atmosphere in the classroom; fewer distracted learners disrupting lessons; teachers equipped with positive classroom management practices; and learner feelings of safety and security in the school. Education actors describe how each of these aspects contribute to a healthy and conducive learning environment where children can succeed.

- **Overall improved capacity to learn:** Teachers, caregivers, learners, and school administrators describe improved academic performance of learners that they attribute to BLP presence in the classroom. These actors note that the increased ability to concentrate, greater engagement in learning activities, and the overall improvement in conducive learning environment have led to notable gains in academic performance.

  > *Some of the learners did not perform well in class, but when BLP was introduced, it really improved in their studies.* **Teachers FGD**

  > *BLP has improved the learning progress of my children since they can concentrate well in class and so their academic progress is going up every day.* **Caregiver FGD**

There is a positive impact through BLP, especially during lessons. You know sometimes they get distracted. You... notice when a learner's mind has strayed off. When you include BLP while you are continuing the lessons or maybe you started the lesson with a BLP activity, you see they come back to concentration. And then there is improvement in their performance. **School Administrator KII**

- **Lower school dropout and nonattendance rates:** Teachers and school administrators note the larger potential impacts of the outcomes described above. While the schools did not offer specific data points related to this assertion, education actors (teachers, school administrators, BOM members, I/NGO staff) did emphasize that when learners have more positive experiences in school, they are more likely to continue to attend.

    You have to provide for their basic needs. If there is no food, many children will not come to school. You have to support their wellbeing and their emotional needs. This makes them feel that school is a safe place and a place to come to with their needs. Sometimes you have to go get them and encourage them to come back...You have to make a good learning environment so they can learn well. All of these things are needed for good outcomes for learners. **School Administrator KII**

Finding 18: **Teachers describe BLP as having a positive impact on their own wellbeing. This includes them using BLP exercises to manage stress, as well as an overall improved understanding of their own psychosocial needs.**

The positive impact of BLP activities on the wellbeing of teachers was described extensively across the research activities. Education actors—teachers, school administration, NGOs, and education officials—emphasize that the positive impact on teacher wellbeing is an important aspect of BLP's effectiveness. Teachers in all research locations, like students, described the benefits from the psychosocial support and student-centered teaching approaches that BLP promotes.

    BLP is wonderful for teachers too. Whenever I feel like I'm not okay, I also go to that safe place, release that stress then come back and feel better. **Teachers FGD**

    Personally, BLP has really helped me. Before I used to have so much stress. I used to go home after work and just sleep for the rest of the day... But now I can manage this stress better. **Teachers FGD**

    [BLP] has helped me a lot. We learned about the different types of stress. I never knew that having a headache could be because of stress! But after going through BLP training, I have learned a lot, and this one is helping me personally a lot. **Teachers FGD**

Teachers have benefited from the continued support and training provided by NRC. This has included specific efforts to support teacher wellbeing alongside that of their students, such as through the "supporting the supporters" trainings organized by NRC as well as training by partner organization professional counselors. Education administrators, teachers, I/NGO staff, and NRC staff all emphasized the strong interconnection between teacher and learner wellbeing.

Through trainings, we are able to help teachers to cope with their own stress better so that they can continue to support their learners. This is a priority. **NRC Staff KII**

Finding 19: **Education actors note that with improved teacher wellbeing, as described above, comes better ability for teachers to do their job effectively.**

Teachers describe how, once their own mental health and wellbeing have been prioritized, they are able to be more effective educators. They note that the BLP exercises which have helped them to manage their own stress then equip them to be energetic and engaged teachers.

I feel like I can say that BLP was meant for all. It's not just learners…As a teacher when you come in the morning and when you enter the classroom [sometimes] you find that you are stressed out.. But when you use the BLP techniques on yourself, it becomes better. I believe that I have to be in a well state of mind before I can deliver anything to my students. **Teacher FGD**

BLP has assisted me in a situation that I'm able to understand myself. When I'm stressed and I feel I can't go to class and teach, I know that I should go somewhere and calm myself before going to class. Because there are some times when [you] go to class when you are stressed out, and you end up [reacting badly] to learners. So, I can understand myself now, and when I need to take care of myself first. **Teachers FGD**

Teachers and school administrators both describe how the social emotional wellbeing of students and teachers in a classroom feed off of each other; stressed and disruptive students cause stress to teachers, who then are less effective in maintaining a conducive and engaging learning environment for everyone. In contrast, when BLP exercises are done and both students and teachers benefit from the calm and stress-free effects, a more positive classroom environment is fostered and better learning can take place. When students' emotional needs are met, it can lead to fewer disruptions in the classroom, reducing sources of stress for teachers.

Teachers additionally emphasize that, through their training to deliver BLP, they have come to better recognize, understand, and cope with negative behaviors of learners in their classroom. When teachers have learned ways to care for their own wellbeing, they have greater capacity to support the wellbeing of their students. Simultaneously, such awareness helps to foster healthy, trusting connection between students and teachers. As noted previously, many students identify their teachers as a key relationship in their life and a person they would go to with their problems. These relationships contribute to feelings of safety and security for learners while at school, which is a foundational component of effective learning environments for all learners.

I would say that BLP has assisted me, in terms of identifying the learner's stress and how to make them release the stress. Because sometimes when the learners are stressed and you are going to teach, you want to be able to deliver the concept or the content that you have for them. But once you know how to manage them and make them release the stress, now, you will also feel free, and you'll be able to deliver the content. **Teachers FGD**

In addition to the "supporting the supporters" training described previously, NRC provides teacher training and professional development opportunities, with a focus on teacher empowerment. These trainings enhance teachers' pedagogical skills and provide them with new strategies for managing classroom dynamics, which can lead to less stress and more effective teaching.

Finding 20: Education actors, learners, and caregivers note that children bring the BLP activities home, which has a positive impact on family and the community beyond the school.

Learners, teachers, caregivers, and education actors all emphasized that learners frequently share what they have learned through BLP—including the exercises, their purpose, and when to do them—with parents, siblings, and others in their home. Caregivers describe how this has had a direct impact on them and their own wellbeing.

> *BLP has had an impact on me as a parent because my child is able to teach me how to control myself in case of any stressful moments.* **Caregivers FGD**

> *BLP has extended to our homes and our children are teaching and coaching others on the importance of this activity to be stress free.* **Caregiver FGD**

> *Before we didn't know about BLP. Our parents also didn't know about it. But since it was introduced and we are taught in school, we are also able to teach our parents at home. For example, when you go home and find your mom is stressed, we would teach them about BLP and tell them it's a way of reducing stress.* **Learner, Girls FGD**

> *You know parents are also interested in knowing much more about BLP. Whenever they come to school, we always take them through it again and they also feel it is good for them too. So, it has also impacted on them positively. They do it whenever they feel they have that negativity in them. They do [the exercises] at home, together with the learners.* **School Administrator KI**

3.3.2. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND SUSTAINABILITY OF BLP

Finding 21: As currently implemented, many BLP activities and exercises are not inclusive of learners who have particular requirements, such as learners with disabilities.

Inclusive education is a fundamental principle that ensures that all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have equal access to quality education. As currently implemented, there are many challenges to ensuring inclusivity of all learners in all BLP activities.

Teachers described that this was an issue for students in their classrooms with visual and hearing disabilities, as well as children with mobility challenges (for example, activities that involve standing or moving your body around). Large class size further compounds this issue, due to space being limited in general for all children and thus there is little extra space to create an alternative activity.

Those with disabilities cannot do some activities. For example, those that are in wheelchairs and don't have legs. So, when you tell them to do tense and release, they can't do [it all]. So, you need to leave some activities out or include some others for their sake, like activities that involve minimal movement. **Teachers FGD**

There are those that have hearing impairment and so when you do [safe space] they can't hear what you are saying and what the rest of the children are doing. They are just there and can't participate. **Teachers FGD**

Importantly, education actors—especially school administrators, BOM members, partner organizations, and education authorities—recognize that inclusivity is a key challenge for the schools in Kakuma generally. The need to have more resources available to assure that students with disabilities have access to the same educational opportunities and quality was emphasized across almost all sites of this research.

For a safe learning environment, we would need to provide space that allows for more movement. We need to better accommodate various learners' needs. We have learners with special needs, such as in wheelchairs or mobility challenges. We must provide them with adequate space to move freely and participate in all of the activities. **Teachers FGD**

Finding 22: As currently implemented, BLP is often not perceived by learners as applicable to older adolescents and youth, despite there being frequent overage learners in BLP classrooms.

Teachers and school administrators noted that a challenge for successful implementation of BLP in their classrooms was that older adolescents and youth often dismiss the activities as "too young" or "for the little children." This has led to less buy in and participation in BLP from teenagers.

A problem is the old learners, they do not want to do the activities sometimes. They think the activities are for the little children, and they dismiss them. Even if you explain that it is for everyone, they do not do them. **Teachers FGD**

For NRC, BLP has been largely implemented to date in AEP classrooms where there are frequently overage learners. Teachers describe finding ways to make the BLP activities seem appropriate to older adolescents, but note that often they will not fully participate in the exercises. There are implications of this, as well, since it often means older learners have disengaged from classroom activities and may be challenging to reengage after. Teachers expressed concern that activities which reinforce age disparity can further alienate learners who are already at risk of disengagement.

Finding 23: There are a number of school or classroom level challenges to the successful implementation and positive impact of BLP across the research locations.

Many of these challenges reflect challenges of the schools more broadly, and have been noted throughout this report. This includes overcrowded classrooms, lack of adequate teaching and learning materials, and multiple languages spoken by learners in the classroom. Teachers described the ways in which such challenges tied directly to their ability to effectively deliver BLP lessons or activities.

According to teachers, class congestion is one of the main barriers in implementing many of the BLP activities as there is just not enough space in their classrooms. They note that crowded classrooms are stressful places, where the benefits of BLP have potential to be particularly useful in calming the students and encouraging a focused environment.

> *Congestion of the learners is a major barrier to doing BLP effectively. For example, if you wanted to start a lesson with BLP exercises, you might want learners to stand for an activity because you know moving around is what they need...but the space is not enough for them to move freely. So some activities that are most appropriate, you cannot do.* **Teachers FGD**

> *Nowadays the classes are so congested, so you cannot manage to fulfill all the BLP techniques. So maybe you can only do the belly breathing, just to make sure that they have felt a bit relaxed. But it is not enough to just have this one that works for the class.* **Teachers FGD**

Additionally, there are numerous languages spoken by refugee learners in the classrooms across the Kakuma schools. Teachers described language barriers as another key challenge to successfully carrying out BLP lessons. When many newly arrived refugee students enter the classroom, they do not speak nor understand English or Kiswahili and thus struggle to engage with material in the classroom. For BLP, teachers note that some activities may be possible without full understanding of the instructions. However, they explain that it is very important to be able to communicate the purpose of the exercises to learners, as that is how learners come to understand and appreciate the value of the activities.

> *A major challenge of introducing BLP in a class is the language barrier. Because most of the learners, they are poor in English. They cannot understand or communicate in English. So they cannot understand the instructions, but sometimes this is ok because there are activities where you can demonstrate and they can watch. But they don't know why we are doing this. And also there are only some activities that work without instructions, so we find we repeat these activities for those learners.* **Teachers FGD**

Finding 24: **There are challenges to effectively supporting and maintaining the BLP teacher workforce, and high rates of teacher turnover.**

NRC works closely with schools and education authorities to align the BLP teacher training schedule with the official school calendar. This involves coordinating training sessions, workshops, and other BLP activities to minimize disruptions to regular classes and training. School administrators, teachers, and NRC staff all note that this can be notably challenging because of an already-busy school calendar. All actors agree that additional training and ongoing support for teachers is essential, but that there are currently barriers to doing this well. Teachers and NRC staff described the numerous trainings that have been provided for teachers, including the "supporting the supporters" sessions aimed at teacher's own wellbeing.

While the value of ongoing training is acknowledged, it is simultaneously mentioned that teachers are often overwhelmed by a seemingly unending list of additional work events to complete beyond their

regular workload and schedule. This poses a challenge for implementers such as NRC: how to find the right balance of support without overdemands on teacher time.

There is a high rate of teacher turnover in Kakuma schools generally, and this is also true for teachers trained in BLP. Such training represents a large investment in terms of time and financing, and challenges the sustainability of BLP going forward. BLP implementors and partners noted this high teacher turnover, and described their frustration at the time and cost of investing in training teachers only to have them leave soon after.

> *I would say the teacher turnover has been a major challenge, because you capacity build the teachers and then within a very short time some leave NRC. So, you must continue to replace those teachers who have left, and capacity build new teachers again. So usually there is that gap that comes with the teachers leaving the organization before new ones are fully trained. This is a problem for consistently applying the program as intended.*
> **NRC Staff KII**

High teacher turnover in Kakuma camp schools, like many refugee settings, can be attributed to a combination of complex factors. These factors include: inadequate compensation (based in national remuneration policy for refugee teachers); work stress related to the challenges of refugee classrooms, such as major overcrowding; other economic/livelihood opportunities that offer greater benefits; and changing personal or family circumstances. Many of these are out of the control of education actors such as NRC.

Finding 25: **There are challenges to the effective integration of BLP into other programming and lessons, including clarity among teachers are schools about what exactly BLP is and what it requires from them.**

Teachers, school administrators, and other education actors note that there are challenges (especially for newer teachers) to integrating BLP into their curriculum. Teachers had various opinions on the best ways to integrate BLP. Some note it would be easier if fixed as its own lesson in the weekly timetable, while others appreciate the flexibility of integrating exercises and lessons as they felt most appropriate. However, teachers, school administrators, and other education actors did note that having a clear guidance strategy for integration is effective for growing awareness about BLP. There is an emphasis on the need of being able to communicate clearly exactly what BLP is and how a teacher can use it.

> *BLP is not recognized as a subject. So, this is a challenge that we are facing as teachers when we want to plan for it. We have to show that we are using the curriculum, so it not always clear how much BLP we can do, or when we can do it. This is… challenging when we talk to other teachers, we are not sure how much we can do it and if it is enough.*
> **Teachers FGD**

> *I think we should have a BLP timetable, which should be fixed in the overall timetable. It should be included as a lesson, this would be much easier [for me] and for new teachers. It would be easier to start with BLP so more classrooms could do it.* **Teachers FGD**

Teachers—often already overworked from overcrowded classrooms and long days—may be easily overwhelmed with the request for a new set of activities to be integrated. Research participants described that, initially, most AEP teachers asked to train in BLP were hesitant and concerned about being more overburdened in the content they had to cover. Once they understood its purpose and how to integrate it, teachers were overwhelmingly positive about its impact and good in the classroom. Still, this indicates potential future challenges, especially for teachers in formal schools who may not receive as consistent or ongoing support for use of BLP.

This is a similar concern for education system and Ministry buy in. For BLP to be successfully integrated into the formal school system, there should be clarity on how that is accomplished. Research participants (I/NGO staff, education officials) noted that currently this is not well understood, and thus there may be hesitation from schools and education authorities to adopt BLP.

> *Our normal schools have established curriculum to be followed and implemented as is. But now in the BLP and the other programs… I don't know whether you have guidelines or have a full curriculum, I'm not sure about this. How does it work with the established curriculum and how do these go together?* **Government Stakeholder KII**

Finding 26: NRC's current sustainability strategy aims at the institutionalization of BLP into the formal education system, with adoption by the Ministry of Education and eventual integration into all schools in Kenya, not just those targeting refugee learners.

It was outside of the scope and timeline of this research to explore both the stages of this integration and its adoption (trainings with Ministry staff were occurring just as field work concluded). However, the integration of BLP into national refugee education strategy in Kenya is a notable and important step towards the program's sustainability.

NRC staff described how BLP—originally only implemented in Kakuma—has subsequently been adapted and introduced in Dadaab refugee camp under similar implementation as Kakuma. Simultaneously, NRC has engaged the MOE and other government actors such as the National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya (NACONEK) to prepare for pilot implementation in the formal schools, specifically targeting nomadic communities such as in Turkana and Garissa counties. After this pilot—and based on findings of impact—NRC will further advocate for adoption of BLP as the preferred SEL approach in national curriculum.

NRC provides significant technical support to government actors through training in BLP practices, effective implementation strategy, and MEL. NRC stresses how teacher training is a crucial entry point to introduce BLP activities and approaches into classrooms, and one that does not provide significant additional burden to teachers themselves. As was noted in the previous finding, significant change to curriculum will take time and have significant impact on education actors. Based on inputs and description of BLP from teachers, integration of BLP approaches and activities via teacher training offers the opportunity to integrate BLP without overly burdening educators.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research is based on a social ecological framework that considers the complex interplay between the individual learner; their home and school environments; their community; the relationships built across these levels; the systems and institutions around them; and finally the policy and funding environment of humanitarian and education programming broadly.

Children learn in an environment that is situated within a larger "ecosystem." Their lives and wellbeing are notably influenced by their relationship with families or caregivers; with friends and peers; with teachers and school administrators; and with other community members such as religious leaders. Schools are a critical site of influence, and learners, teachers, and families see the role of education as contributing to holistic wellbeing, human development, and learning that includes both academic and life skills. Such education relies on actors and action in the education system largely, including education and health policies that reflect mental health and wellbeing of children as clearly articulated priorities.

Increased understanding of these priorities—and actionable commitment to them—is required across all levels of actors described above. This importantly includes Secretaries of Education, Ministry of Education, and other policy and decision-makers that influence such policy. It also includes external humanitarian actors, such as implementers from NGOs (both at national and global level) and donors.

This final section presents enabling factors and recommendations for actors of different levels of this social ecological framework, **acknowledging that, in order to enhance the impact of a program in the mental health and wellbeing of communities they work with, a comprehensive approach that involves all actors of the system is required.**

It is important to acknowledge that qualitative research provides a snapshot of a specific context with specific actors, and does not provide a comprehensive approach that could apply for "all children", "all children in Kenya" or even "all children in Kakuma." Many of the recommendations may not apply to all MHPSS programs, due to different contexts of implementation. Also, some recommendations may be out of the scope of what is possible for implementers, but are still included in order to provide a comprehensive picture of what is needed to enhance enabling environments for MHPSS programming.

4.1 ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS FOR MHPSS PROGRAMMING: ACTION POINTS FOR IMPLEMENTERS AND EDUCATION ACTORS

This section summarises enabling factors for wellbeing from the perspectives of the participants in this research. The enabling factors have been structured around a socio-ecological model, as described above, which help us to understand the wellbeing of any individual as a collective issue that is influenced by the structures and people around them. The perspectives of participants (a) learners (b) caregivers (c) teachers and principals, and (d) the wider community, and have been summarised around key actions and question prompts which are designed to provoke deeper thought about *how* a particular action might be met. These are not intended to be fully comprehensive processes, but starting points for

discussion amongst key stakeholders. Suggested key stakeholders have been listed at the end of each action.

4.1.1 LEARNER LEVEL ENABLING FACTORS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Ensure that learners' basic needs are met. Participants across all sites in this study spoke of the daily challenge of unmet basic needs including adequate food, drinking water, clothing, and hygiene products. Child-headed households face even greater challenges in meeting basic needs. It is imperative that programs are aware of the basic needs of learners and their households and either provide a response or make referrals to external services.
- o What is your program's policy on school-feeding? How might your school introduce a school-feeding program?
- o What referrals systems are in place between the education and health, nutrition, psychosocial, and protection services? How can these referrals be strengthened?

Key stakeholders: School administrators, educational authorities, country directors of NGOs or I/NGOs, sector working groups, security services, local governmental actors.

Develop supporting, trusting relationships between learners, teachers and their caregivers. Learners in this study shared that they feel emotionally and psychologically supported by the close, consistent relationships with adults in their lives, mainly teachers and caregivers.
- o List out all the activities – whether in the classroom or the wider school community – which foster interpersonal relationships for learners. This could be part of the daily routine or weekly or monthly activities.
- o What opportunities are there to build and strengthen these relationships inside and outside of the classroom?

Key stakeholders: Learners, school administrators, teachers, program implementers, caregivers.

Support learners to develop positive relationships with peers. Learners spend considerable time in interaction with their peers, and these relationships can be both a source of support and happiness (with friends) and also of stress and fear (with bullies or students from different backgrounds).
- o What types of skills do learners in your context need to develop to strengthen relationships with their peers e.g. conflict management skills, active listening, developing tolerance

o What opportunities are there to model and practice these types of skills within your program or school? List out some examples of activities that might promote these SEL skills.

Key stakeholders: Learners, teachers, caregivers

Support learners to recognize and talk about different emotions. Learners who participated in this research were consistently able to recognize and talk about stress, its impact on them, and ways to manage it (e.g. BLP activities).
o How do learners in your setting currently recognize and talk about emotions?
o What further opportunities could be provided to them to be able to identify and name different emotions and feelings?
o What type of coping strategies do learners in your setting use to deal with big emotions?
o What contextual or cultural factors need to be taken into consideration during such activities?

Key stakeholders: Learners, teachers, school counsellors

Engage caregivers in supporting their children at home and in school. Caregivers recognize the value of school in promoting children's psychosocial wellbeing, and engaging caregivers in these programs or activities can support a more holistic approach, ensuring learners receive support across both environments.
o How could the content of MHPSS programs be shared with caregivers so they can continue some activities or strategies at home?
o What would caregivers in your school need to feel confident to support their children at home with some of these techniques?

Key stakeholders: caregivers, teachers, program implementers

Ensure that spaces are safe and accessible for all learners. Learners in this study perceive that schools are safe and accessible, and it is essential that this the case for all learners. Safety and security are foundational to learners' holistic wellbeing and the job of ensuring this safety and security involves multiple stakeholders.
o List out any barriers to accessing schools or learning environments in your context.
o Which groups face additional barriers and what are these specifically? E.g. No access ramp for learners or teachers who use wheelchairs. Lack of separate WASH facilities for girls.
o What opportunities are there to ensure that access routes to school are safe, secure, and accessible for all?

Key stakeholders: learners, teachers, program implementers, school administrators, education authorities

Provide adequate learning materials for all learners. Learners spoke about a lack of access to sufficient learning materials which impacts their engagement and retention. Providing the appropriate materials so that learners can participate fully in programming is part of creating an enabling environment.

o   What are the minimum required materials for learners to participate fully in your program?
o   Who provides these materials or provides funding for these materials? Is it sufficient? If not, what are some solutions?

Key stakeholders: School administrators, educational authorities, country directors of NGOs or I/NGOs

Provide opportunities for play and recreational activities: Learners shared that they experience joy and relief from stress when they are engaged in play or recreational activities. These activities promote emotional and physical wellbeing.
o   List out the opportunities your school already provides for children to participate in active and engaging activities.
o   Who are the adults or young people in your school community that could introduce or lead some new activities?
o   Describe any opportunities for integrating playful activities into the school day.

Key stakeholders: Learners, teachers, program implementers, caregivers

4.1.3 CAREGIVER LEVEL ENABLING FACTORS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS
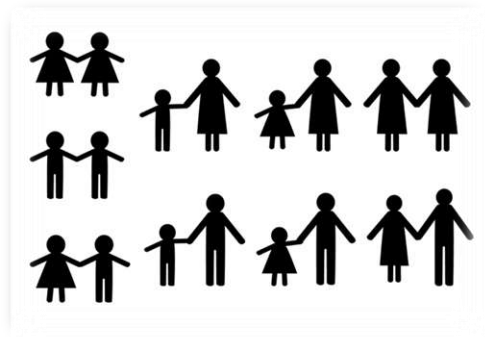
Provide MHPSS for caregivers. Learners shared that their homes contribute to them feelings emotionally and psychologically safe. It is important to ensure that caregivers are provided with support that can help them to support the children they care for. This could include sessions on parenting skills and positive reinforcement, sessions for learners which involve their caregivers, or activities for caregivers to provide them with some respite.
o   What kind of caregiver sessions or activities does your program offer?
o   What are some opportunities to involve caregivers in the delivery of some MHPSS interventions, which supports both caregivers and learners?
o   Make a list of any activities involving caregivers that have worked particularly well in the past. Think outside the box – what new activities could you try?

Key stakeholders: Caregivers, program implementers, teachers, school administrators

Ensure active and transparent participation of caregivers in school life. Caregivers expressed that they trust school staff to provide support for their children and understand the critical role schools play in children's wellbeing. It is important that caregivers are given opportunities to actively participate in school life, from providing feedback to involvement in decision-making.

- o List all the ways that caregivers are already involved in school life.
- o What are some creative ways that caregivers can be given opportunities to participate further? E.g. caregivers are involved in teacher training sessions on MHPSS, or teachers deliver dedicated caregiver sessions
- o How are caregivers currently involved in decision-making at the school?

Key stakeholders: caregivers, teachers, program implementers

Strengthen relationships between caregivers and the wider community. Stronger community connections support can support the wellbeing of caregivers as well as learners, and schools can be an important place in the community to bring people together and share information about ongoing activities.

- o List all the current ways your school involves outreach to the wider community e.g. events, outreach, volunteering
- o What are some opportunities for bringing caregivers and the wider community together?

Key stakeholders: program implementers, community leaders, teachers, caregivers

Ensure that programs are sustainable and continuous. Caregivers emphasize the importance of consistency in the programs. They believe that for MHPSS programs to be effective, they need to be consistent and continuous. They also express a desire for continuity in terms of educators and tutors, suggesting that having the same teacher can offer stability to learners.

- o What is the duration of current MHPSS programs in your school?
- o What are the opportunities to extend these and what would be needed in terms of resource, capacity, and time?
- o Which MHPSS activities could be embedded within the school day and/or the curriculum?

Key stakeholders: donors, education authorities, program implementers

4.1.2 TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEVEL ENABLING FACTORS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS
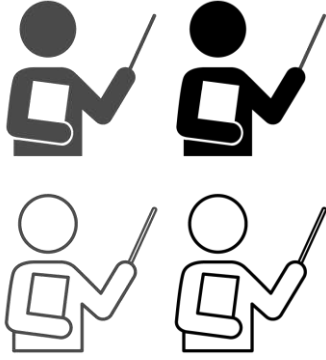
Ensure that schools are physically safe and secure. Teachers said that while schools were generally safe environments, there were also particular structural concerns that pose risks to learners and teachers alike. Safety and security are foundational to holistic wellbeing.

- o List out any physical risks the school building poses to the school community e.g. no perimeter fence, cracks in walls, lack of or inadequate WASH facilities
- o What are the priorities for improving the safety of the school environment?

Key stakeholders: School administrators; interagency working groups; implementing organisations; local education authorities

Create environments that are engaging and conducive to learning. Teachers spoke about overcrowding in classrooms and a lack of teaching and learning materials as barriers to child-centred and active pedagogies. Using creative classroom management techniques could support with this issue.

- o What is the current teacher:learner ratio in your classroom(s)? What do local guidelines suggest?
- o What techniques could be used to divide the learners into smaller groups? Are there any opportunities to give leadership opportunities to older learners?
- o Which activities do your learners find most engaging? How can these be delivered most effectively in your given context?

Key stakeholders: teachers, school administrators, implementing organisations

Provide continuous training and professional development for teachers. Education actors acknowledge the value of ongoing training and professional development, and connected the provision of training with teacher wellbeing.

- o What type of training, mentoring, coaching or professional development is currently available to the teachers in your context?
- o What are the main barriers to continuous support and professional development?
- o List out all the ways that teachers could be provided with opportunities for professional development – teacher learning circles, workshops from I/NGOs etc.
- o What would an ideal training calendar look like for teachers in your context?

Key stakeholders: Teachers, program implementers, school administrators, external MHPSS service providers, health authorities, education authorities

Prioritize teacher wellbeing. Teachers of BLP have described the positive impact programs like these have on their own wellbeing. Teacher wellbeing is an important outcome to support in and of itself, in addition to how it impacts learner wellbeing.
   o   What support systems are currently in place for teachers in your school?
   o   What systems, services, or activities could be put in place to provide more support for teacher wellbeing?
   o   How can MHPSS for learners also integrate elements of support for teacher wellbeing?

Key stakeholders: Teachers, program implementers, school administrators, external MHPSS service providers, health authorities, education authorities

Integrate MHPSS and SEL activities into the curriculum. Integration ensures a sustainable approach to the provision of MHPSS and SEL, and teachers and schools require support and guidance on integrating activities and approaches into their planning and daily routines.
   o   What are some ways in which MHPSS, SEL, or any activities you think support children's wellbeing are already being integrated in daily or weekly activities?
   o   What is working well, and how could this be expanded upon?
   o   What type of support do teachers and school administrations need to make this integration standardised?

Key stakeholders: Teachers, program implementers, school administrators

Center inclusion and ensure MHPSS activities are relevant for all learners. This research highlights once again the multiple barriers to inclusion within education settings, in particular for learners with disabilities, overage learners, and girls. MHPSS activities must be designed with inclusivity at the centre.
   o   Which groups are most marginalized in your setting and what are the main barriers to inclusion?
   o   What are some inclusive practices that are already being applied?
   o   What type of support is required to adapt activities to be fully inclusive of all learners?

Key stakeholders: Teachers, program implementers, school administrators, inclusion specialist

4.1.4 COMMUNITY LEVEL ENABLING FACTORS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Strengthen relationships between schools and the wider community. Community-outreach is already an important component of schools' and organizations' approaches to addressing issues like out-of-school children. Stronger relationships between schools and the community can offer significant mutual support and can be an essential source of strength and resilience which supports learner wellbeing.
   o   List all the current ways your school involves outreach to the wider community e.g. events, outreach, volunteering

- o What are some opportunities for involving the wider community in MHPSS activities or programming?
- o Are there any common needs across the wider community and the school community that could be addressed by a common solution?

Key stakeholders: program implementers, community leaders, teachers, school administrators

Support non-school-aged community members to access MHPSS services. Just as with support for caregiver and teacher wellbeing, support for the wellbeing of the wider community can have a big impact on learners.
- o What are the MHPSS needs of the wider community? Where could you access this data, if it already exists?
- o What MHPSS programmes or activities exist for the wider community?
- o List out any possible activities or ways of involving members of the wider community in existing MHPSS activities – could any activities for caregivers be adapted or expanded, for example.

Key stakeholders: program implementers, community leaders, teachers, school administrators

Strengthen relationships between the school and other community-based institutions and spaces. There are many spaces within communities that support the wellbeing of community members, such as religious spaces or community centers. Relationships between these spaces and schools allow for children to have streamlined, cohesive support across multiple trusted adult actors.
- o Which community spaces are more important to the learners in your setting?
- o In way ways do the teams who runs these spaces interact with one another currently? Is there any information sharing, or referrals that happen?
- o How could these relationships be strengthened? List out all the possible ways these spaces could collaborate, e.g. hosting joint events, or using community centres to conduct MHPSS activities.

Key stakeholders: program implementers, community leaders, teachers, school administrators

Provide access to MHPSS for older adolescents and youth. Due to factors such as limited access to secondary school in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, older adolescents and youth may be out of school and without access to MHPSS activities or services. Research participants shared that they do not perceive programmes like BLP to be suitable for this age group, therefore it is important to adapt or innovate to meet the needs and interests of older learners.
- o What opportunities are currently available to older adolescents in your setting? Do these include MHPSS activities?
- o What are the interests and needs of this age group? If not known, what type of assessment might be needed and appropriate to gather this information?
- o How could members of the wider community support with developing opportunities for older adolescents?

Key stakeholders: program implementers, community leaders, teachers, school administrators

Provide access to MHPSS for adolescent girls including young mothers. A research participant described the value of having a young mothers' club which provides emotional support for teenage mothers and helps them to access school again after giving birth. In the interests of centering inclusion it is essential that groups at high risk of marginalization are given the opportunities not only to participate but to also shape programming.

- o What opportunities or spaces exist for adolescent girls in your setting?
- o What are the school attendance and drop-out rates like for this group?
- o List out all the possible opportunities for consulting with adolescent girls and developing programming that serves their interests and needs.

Key stakeholders: adolescent girls, caregivers, teachers, program implementers, community leaders

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING ACTORS

Based on the findings and building from the perspectives of the interviewed stakeholders, the following section provides recommendations for global-level implementers (such as international NGOs such as NRC), national-level implementers (such as national actors, education system actors, and national offices of INGOs), and donors.

4.2.1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTORS AT A GLOBAL LEVEL

Recommendation 1: Provide sufficient time, support, resource, and guidance for contextualization of MHPSS programs. The findings of this research reinforce the idea that what is needed and what is possible in terms of MHPSS programs is very dependent on context. Where an organisation has developed an MHPSS program or approach, ensure that clear contextualization processes accompany the program materials, and that implementing teams are provided with the sufficient time, support, resources, and guidance to conduct meaningful contextualization of the materials.

For BLP specifically, both contextualization and adaptation of the BLP techniques, concepts, and activities should be clearly supported and documented to assure that objectives remain consistent and subjective implementation is avoided.[iv]

Recommendation 2: Advocate for integration of MHPSS into policy and curriculum at a national level. In the interests of both sustainability and equal access to MHPSS services and activities within schools, global actors must advocate and work with national governments, education authorities, and health authorities for integration into policies and curriculum. Ensure that advocacy efforts amplify the voices of affected populations, and are cross-sectoral (health, protection, education, WASH, nutrition, GBV).

Recommendation 3: Center localization in MHPSS programming. The knowledge of local implementers about the context is critical to the success of MHPSS programming such as BLP. This includes recognizing the value of local knowledge and expertise, and encouraging programs to be led or co-led by local or

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[iv] For implementation of BLP, NRC guidance notes to apply the four BLP-1 sessions using activities that vary according to context. NRC provides a 2-page guidance document to support contextualizing the BLP materials in order to assure that the underlying objectives are reached.

national actors, ensuring cultural relevance and community buy-in. MHPSS programming should consider all aspects of localization which includes capacity strengthening of local and national actors.

Recommendation 4: Ensure sustainability of programming. Prioritize programs and strategies that have sustainable models, such as the integration of MHPSS into teacher training modules with educational authorities or linking them with national risk management plans.

Global or national level implementers can work with local authorities to develop capacity sharing approaches and a sustainability plan to hand over implementation to local education actors. Implementers can also offer support and advice to education authorities for integrating MHPSS into education, present the program as a policy initiative to ensure it is integrated into annual plans and create guidance to standardize practices based on the specific needs of the population.

NRC, for example, provides significant technical support to government actors in Kenya through training in BLP practices, effective implementation strategy, and MEL.

Recommendation 5: Engage in cross-sectoral collaboration. MHPSS is a cross-sectoral intervention which requires collaboration with actors from across Health, Education, Protection, Child Protection, Nutrition, Food Security, WASH, GBV, Mine Action, and Camp Coordination. Implementers of MHPSS programming in education must seek out interagency working groups or other relevant forums and ensure that programming complements ongoing efforts across sectors.

This recommendation is relevant for global and national actors.

Recommendation 6: Develop and maintain an effective monitoring and evaluation framework. Develop comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks for MHPSS programs, assuring that outcomes measured reflect the objectives of the program. Use qualitative data to both supplement measurements, and to assure that MEL tools are measuring the most important impacts of a program. Test MEL tools and allow for flexibility and adaptation over time.

4.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL LEVEL IMPLEMENTERS OF MHPSS PROGRAMMING

Recommendation 7: Align MHPSS outcomes with the national curriculum. Ensure that the MHPSS programs are aligned with the national curriculum framework, learning objectives, and educational standards. If national curriculum do not include explicit PSS/SEL components, assure that activities and

approaches of the MHPSS intervention are cohesive with national curricula and can be integrated without significant additional burden to teachers, school administrators, and principals.[v]

Recommendation 8: Recognize and address the foundational need for basic services and security.
While MHPSS implementers will not have control over certain contextual risk factors such as local violence by armed actors, neighbourhood gangs, or poverty, there are actions that can be taken to strengthen protective factors. Many of these actions are addressed above in section 4.1 and include improving safety and security within and on the route to schools; creating a safe classroom environment; strengthening interpersonal relationships; and collaboration with other sectors including health, nutrition, and WASH.

Recommendation 9: Contextualize and adapt programs to meet the needs of your setting. Many MHPSS programmes and materials have been designed outside of the context in which they are used, and it is essential that materials are adapted before implementation. Global actors should provide contextualization guidance to support this process (Recommendation 1). This is a key feature of global guidance for BLP.

Recommendation 10: Center inclusion in MHPSS programs. In Kakuma, there were significant barriers to inclusivity in the schools themselves, which means these barriers will also exist for the interventions delivered in school settings. Programs should seek to accommodate all students and their needs into the activities and materials of the MHPSS activities. This includes ensuring that there is space for students with mobility issues (especially in regard to overcrowded classrooms), alternative activities to be adopted for mixed groups, activities for students with hearing or visual impairments, and support to teachers to adapt activities and approaches as needed to their specific classroom.

For resources on inclusion in psychosocial programming, see: https://pscentre.org/resource/different-just-like-you-training-manual-english/

Recommendation 11: Strengthen coordination between schools and MHPSS services. A very positive finding of this research was that all actors were able to describe some type of MHPSS support that was available to them in their community. NGOs and I/NGOs are often more likely than schools to have access to mappings of the external services that might be available in their area. Organisations have an important role to play in terms of facilitating coordination and referrals between schools and service providers, whether bilaterally or through Clusters and working groups, and conducting awareness sessions so that *all* community members know what services are available to them.

Recommendation 12: Facilitate dialogue around a shared vision of how schools support wellbeing.
Finding 8 revealed that in the contexts studied in this research, all actors perceived that the value of school is strongly linked to holistic wellbeing and development of learners. It is important to establish for each schools the ways in which the environment, teachers, caregivers, and learners can contribute to improving wellbeing, and where the limitations lie. MHPSS programs can support school leaders to work

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[v] As described previously, NRC's work in collaboration with the Ministry of Education to institutionalize BLP via its adoption as Kenya's overarching SEL strategy offers a notable example of such work that offers opportunity for learning in the future. Such learning will be relevant to NRC as well as other international actors seeking to support the institutionalization of PSS/SEL into national systems.

on unifying a shared vision on what wellbeing is for their communities and what can school contribute to it.

Recommendation 13: Include children's own healthy coping strategies in MHPSS programs. As the findings show, learners have clear ideas about what supports their wellbeing and have developed their own coping strategies accordingly such as playing with their friends, moving their bodies, helping their families, spending time at church, or finding time and space to be alone. By listening to children and involving them at the assessment phase, programs can ensure that they build on the existing strategies used in a given context – meaning that strategies are locally-led and already context-specific.

Recommendation 14: Develop transparent recruitment processes and provide continued support and professional development. Collaborate with the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) in Kenya to address teacher turnover in Kakuma camp schools. Strategies should be developed to recruit and retain qualified teachers, including incentives and professional development opportunities. They should be equipped with the skills and resources needed to effectively implement MHPSS activities, particularly in the Kakuma camp schools with overcrowded classrooms and overage students. NRC currently conduct continued teacher professional development, especially in regard to BLP. Such support should be continued, and ultimately grown to support the training of BLP facilitators across all classrooms in Kakuma This could include collaboration with local organizations to provide teacher training and professional development opportunities.

Recommendation 15: Provide support for teacher wellbeing. As mentioned throughout this report, the teacher plays an essential role in supporting learner wellbeing but it is equally as important to support teacher wellbeing as an outcome unto itself. Teachers must be given opportunities to learn about and be given support for their own mental health and psychosocial wellbeing through access to MHPSS and ongoing training and development.

For Kakuma, see the contextualization of INEE's Teacher Wellbeing Guidance Note for further recommendations https://inee.org/resources/inee-teacher-wellbeing-guidance-note-contextualization-kakuma-refugee-camp-kenya.

Recommendation 16: Actively engage caregivers and the community in MHPSS programming. Different actors mentioned the importance of engaging caregivers in BLP, as they are the main source of support for children and their referents of emotional management. The impact of any program can be enhanced when the home environment reinforces it. Ensure that caregivers are a part of any MHPSS programming for learners, whether through caregiver specific sessions, or by engaging them in their children's activities and progress.

Recommendation 17: Explore opportunities for resource mobilization and partnerships. Programmes can be more sustainable when they involve partnerships with mutual benefits for all those involved. This could be around resource mobilization, and involve partnering with local organisations or relevant government agencies.

Recommendation 18: Collaborate and share resources, learnings, and expertise on MHPSS implementation. MHPSS is a growing field, and the more that can be documented and shared from one organisation or one school to another, the more effective it can become. Innovate ways of sharing

lessons learned and expertise between organisations, whether through a formal Cluster system, or a similar interagency forum.

Recommendation 19: Provide more, multi-year and flexible funding for MHPSS programs. MHPSS programs often require sustained interventions to be genuinely effective and build resilience within communities, especially in protracted displacement settings such as Kakuma and Kalobeyei.

Funding must cover a comprehensive needs assessment and analysis phase, and be flexible for programming to respond to the results of the need assessment.

In the interests of localisation, funding should be allocated as directly as possible to local or national actors.

Recommendation 20: Fund institutional capacity strengthening. In the interests of promoting localization and sustainability of MHPSS programming, funding is required for training and ongoing professional development for education actors including teachers, principals, and education authorities.

Recommendation 21: Fund multi-sectoral programs. Understanding that MHPSS is multi-sectoral, and that access to basic security and services is fundamental to the outcomes of any program that supports wellbeing, funders should consider the increased impact of funding programs that take a multi-sectoral approach.

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