

The Sponsorship Innovation and Learning Fund
A Creative, Strategic, and Evidence-building Resource
within Save the Children's Sponsorship Program

by

Charles Allegar

Jeffrey Edmeades

DEMOGRAFIX

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Abbreviations

AD	Adolescent Development
BE	Basic Education
CO	Country Office
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
SHN	School Health and Nutrition
ILC	Innovation and Learning Council
KEQ	Key Evaluation Questions
KII	Key informant Interview
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning
MNCHN	Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and Nutrition
SCUS	Save the Children US
SCUS IP	Save the Children US International Program
SILF	Sponsorship Innovation and Learning Fund

Executive Summary

Introduction

In 2009, Save the Children’s Sponsorship Program launched the Sponsorship Innovation and Learning Fund (SILF) to identify, build evidence for, and scale programs that solve problems for children in new ways, by leveraging existing programmatic expertise within the cross-country laboratory of Sponsorship programming. Over the past eleven years, SILF has disbursed over three million dollars in funding to 46 innovative projects in 19 countries. In 2020, Demografix was hired to evaluate SILF to help Sponsorship understand SILF’s achievements and accelerate long-term innovation and impact within Sponsorship.

The review focused on five thematic areas:

- The history of SILF in terms of organization and activities
- The guiding principles of SILF and how recipients of SILF awards (“innovators”) themselves perceive SILF
- The success of SILF-funded innovations and the determinants of success or failure for these projects
- The degree to which SILF has fostered learning
- The strengths and weaknesses of SILF, its overall value for money, and recommendations for improvement

Methodology

Between April and September 2020, we reviewed SILF documentation, collected a short survey from 38 innovators addressing 36 of the 46 projects, and conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) with 26 innovators. The latter conversations covered projects representing 92% of all SILF investment. The bulk of our findings come from thematic analysis of these interviews, but from the other data sources, we also built a SILF project database for descriptive analysis of key variables.

SILF history

SILF emerged from a broader effort within Save the Children to identify and build evidence for promising new programs. At first, only SCUS technical advisors submitted innovation proposals, which were funded from leftover technical assistance funds, selected informally, and kept small. With increased support from Save the Children Italy starting in 2012, the SILF could fund many more projects per year even at higher budgets, rising from \$46,500 in total funding for 2009 to around \$400,000 per year today. Since 2016, the transparency and accessibility of SILF has also increased. All Sponsorship staff are invited to submit proposals now, which are evaluated by diverse representatives from across Sponsorship, large donor country offices, and global thematic areas. Most funding goes to country offices in Asia (41% of total SILF funding) and Africa (33%). Innovators provide semiannual reports to the committee and may request repeat funding.

Guiding principles

1. **Solving everyday programmatic problems.** SILF is driven by a desire to solve problems that arise organically from program experience, the urgent everyday needs facing the communities Save the Children supports.

2. **Innovating incrementally.** SILF has focused on funding new pieces of programming and learning that create marginal value for existing Sponsorship offerings and then transplanting these solutions a few countries at a time.
3. **Aiming for scale.** SILF funds innovations that have potential to scale to multiple Sponsorship countries. SILF has often catalyzed program scale by funding key pieces of program expansion, such as pilot programs, evaluations, and adaptation guidelines.
4. **Embracing failure.** SILF tolerates failure, providing innovators with the freedom to push the envelope and experiment with new ideas more than Sponsorship typically allows.
5. **Facilitating participation through simple and flexible processes.** To encourage wide participation, barriers to entry are low. Application, selection, and reporting processes are light, and funding is not tracked.
6. **Harnessing existing expertise and experience.** SILF purposely relies on Save the Children's own in-house technical expertise and local knowledge to push solutions, taking advantage of pre-existing relationships between global technical experts and local country office staff.
7. **Linking innovation to Global Breakthroughs.** SILF has tied its selection criteria to overarching goals within Save the Children.

[Jump to Guiding Principles.](#)

Innovator feedback on SILF approach and processes

Innovators themselves described three key ways that SILF contributes to Sponsorship's mission.

1. **Creativity Outlet.** SILF injects enthusiasm into what is often seen as a "cut-and-paste" culture and leverages passionate and strategic staff to develop more nimble and impactful programming. [Jump to Creativity Outlet.](#)
2. **Bandwidth Cushion.** By funding strategic, incremental improvements of existing approaches or programs that may no longer be considered "innovative," SILF sometimes provides a critical buffer for innovators to advance programming by covering the time required to innovate and general budgetary flexibility. [Jump to Bandwidth Cushion.](#)
3. **Laboratory.** SILF encourages tweaking and tinkering with programming while generating evidence for what works. The evidence this generates allows innovators to more effectively promote programs for scale. [Jump to Laboratory.](#)

Overall, innovators deeply appreciated each of these functions and praised SILF's flexibility, transparency, and accessibility. On the other hand, they outlined a few complaints. These were 1) pressure to align their proposals to the perceived priorities of SILF leadership, 2) pressure to underestimate their budget needs for the sake of being selected, 3) frustration with the short, annual funding cycle, and occasionally, 4) a lack of ownership over their own SILF award disbursements. [Jump to Innovator feedback on SILF operations.](#)

Innovation success

We categorized all SILF projects by their success using four criteria. For all projects, we assessed projects' achievements relative to their stated objectives as well as their influence on program or strategic practice in Sponsorship or beyond. For programmatic projects only, i.e. those implemented in the field, we also assessed the extent of their scale and the strength of their evidence bases. Based on these criteria, we categorized projects as Very High, High, Medium, or Low success. [Jump to Defining success.](#)

Very High: Very High success innovations greatly exceeded their original project goals and had some measure of system-level influence on Save the Children or partner organizations, with wide scale and robust evidence.

High and Medium: High and Medium success projects still had significant achievements, legacies, scale, and evidence. Crucially, High and Medium success programmatic projects are further categorized by their relative success in scaling versus in building evidence, as these two criteria were often divergent for a given project.

Low: Most Low success projects failed to meet their own objectives, have little evidence of impact, and typically were discontinued.

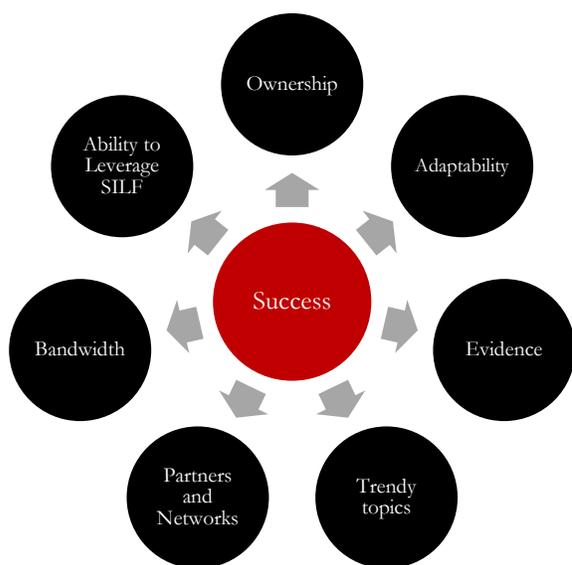
Table 2.1 lays out these categories more formally and in more detail. [Jump to Table 2.1.](#)

Table 2.2 shows the SILF innovations that fall into each success category. [Jump to Table 2.2.](#)

Overall, analysis of SILF funding patterns by success category show that allocates money well. Only 15.7% of funding supported Low success innovations, while 38.4% supported Very High success innovations. Moreover, even Low success innovations typically have positive spillovers that are difficult to track or quantify.

Determinants of success

Innovation is complex and rarely formulaic, but seven factors predicted program success:



- **Ownership:** Innovators’ personal passion for their projects greatly enhanced project success. Ideally, both the country staff and the technical advisors would share this excitement and commitment, but in general, country office ownership is more important for program pilots while technical advisor ownership is crucial for scale outside of the Impact Area. [Jump to Ownership.](#)
- **Adaptability:** Successful programs are flexible enough to work in multiple contexts, and innovators bolster such adaptiveness by conducting formative research, monitoring pilots closely, and adopting a “toolkit” design with a menu of optional, complementary program components. [Jump to Adaptability.](#)

- **Evidence:** Early, rigorous evaluations become powerful selling points to the stakeholders who can scale innovation programs. Most Very High success innovations were evaluated causally, while Low success innovations were unlikely to even have a formal MEAL plan. [Jump to Evidence.](#)
- **Trendy topics:** Sponsorship offices, governments, and donors are more likely to overlook shaky evidence in adopting a program if it addresses a trendy problem at Save the Children or in the international development community. As a result, these projects may receive additional funding or be taken to scale more rapidly than projects focusing on less popular topics. [Jump to Trendy topics.](#)
- **Partners and networks:** Innovators with greater access to and willingness to engage government and donor networks are better able to secure partnerships that leverage evidence to propel the program into larger arenas. [Jump to Partners and networks.](#)
- **Bandwidth:** Innovation projects falter more often from lack of staff time than lack of staff effort. Sponsorship office bandwidth limits program implementation; TA bandwidth limits program scaling. In particular, low bandwidth severely constrains MEAL and the dissemination of learning. Furthermore,

while Sponsorship is fortunate to employ many passionate innovators, innovations often depend on these individual champions, leaving promising projects vulnerable to turnover. [Jump to Bandwidth.](#)

- **Ability to Leverage SILF:** Innovations that rely exclusively on SILF are less likely to scale outside of the Impact Area, both because SILF awards are small and because the most driven innovators seek other support for their innovations. This is not an indictment of SILF’s value-add. Over half of the High and Very High success SILF projects were either “likely impossible without” or “significantly accelerated by” SILF. Rather, SILF plays dual roles. On one hand, it plants effective projects within individual Impact Areas, and on the other, it spurs pre-existing, co-funded projects by funding key pieces of their growth, such as a robust evaluation. Both are incredibly valuable functions. At the same time, SILF rarely bridges these two functions—i.e. it does not independently take its own promising local initiatives to scale. [Jump to Ability to leverage SILF.](#)

Learning

Learning is critical for spreading innovative ideas and amplifying the impact of SILF funding. To assess how well Sponsorship has learned from SILF projects, we break learning down into four functions: generating knowledge, documenting knowledge, disseminating knowledge, and systematizing knowledge.

Generation of knowledge. Only nine of 46 projects, representing 20.5% of SILF dollars, have rigorous causal evidence behind them. A further nine, representing 19.9% of SILF dollars, have formal MEAL reports with structured data analysis and sound inferences on program effectiveness. Factors that prevented adequate MEAL of SILF programs included low bandwidth, program collapse, and outcomes that were difficult to measure. [Jump to Generating knowledge.](#)

Documentation of knowledge. Innovators document lessons learned from their projects well. When projects have strong MEAL strategies, the knowledge generated is typically both more robust and better documented. However, even those projects without a formal MEAL strategy documented important lessons, usually just innovators’ informal observations and recommendations. [Jump to Documenting knowledge.](#)

Dissemination of knowledge is underfunded, because SILF innovators lack bandwidth for the time-consuming, iterative dissemination required to persuade stakeholders to act on program evidence. Many innovators conflated dissemination of learning with “advocacy,” revealing that to them, learning was more about pushing programs forward than reflecting. Indeed, innovators rarely shared lessons learned from failure.

The key medium for the sharing of knowledge about SILF projects, both inside and outside of Save the Children, is networking, including by word of mouth, through one-shot presentations, and, more rarely, through organized learning exchanges within Save the Children.

Systematization of knowledge is lacking. Innovators reported that there was no central cross-learning platform to house and share lessons from SILF projects systematically, and their single most common recommendation for improving SILF was to create one. They lamented missing out key takeaways from all SILF projects to help them find tips and ideas for program design and to avoid previous projects’ pitfalls. Relying on innovators to have the time, networks, and instincts to share lessons learned stunts the dissemination of learning and ultimate value of SILF. [Jump to Systematizing and disseminating knowledge.](#)

Conclusions

Over the past eleven years, SILF has shown that remarkable innovation within Sponsorship can powerfully advance the mission of Save the Children. SILF’s key functions are to provide staff with a creativity outlet, a

bandwidth cushion, and a laboratory. While most SILF innovations operate at a relatively small scale, some of them have had outsize impact within Save the Children and beyond, shaping SC Common Approaches, achieving national and international scale, enhancing the ability of the organization to raise funds around key issues, and cementing the reputation of Save the Children as a leader on challenges such as programming with very young adolescents, learning outcomes for young children, and menstrual hygiene management.

Despite the overall success of SILF, it can be improved. Low innovator bandwidth is a major constraint on innovation success, no matter how driven innovators are. Moreover, enhancing staff's ability to learn from the experiences of fellow innovators is key to achieving the full potential of the fund. Uncoordinated learning mechanisms within Sponsorship limit innovators' ability to rapidly inform and improve programming, reducing the ultimate impact of SILF.

Recommendations

1. **Increase SILF's budget.** SILF works. Expand it.
2. **Keep SILF's fundamental flexibility.** Continue empowering Sponsorship staff to realize their visions for supporting children. Do not restrict eligibility by more narrowly defining innovation, maintain light application and reporting processes, and advertise widely.
3. **Strategically advance promising SILF programs that have not reached their potential.** Identify strategic investments for Sponsorship that push forward SILF's existing portfolio. Fund evaluations for promising programs with more scale than evidence. Fund dissemination of learning for promising programs with more evidence than scale.
4. **Increase average award amounts, and continue guaranteeing two years of funding.** Currently, SILF awards are too small to take promising innovations to scale alone. Consider taking on that role by increasing award sizes for program innovations that have demonstrated pilot success.
5. **Help innovators fail faster and more successfully.** If SILF re-funds a project that has not accomplished much in the first year, as with a two-year guaranteed award, actively help innovators salvage or pivot from their original plans.
6. **Intentionally build dissemination and learning into SILF budgets.** The first thing that a bandwidth-constrained innovator will drop is dissemination. Enable innovators to iteratively share their learnings by explicitly funding this networking process. This will help them form partnerships for scaling. Ensure that MEAL plans include and are aligned with learning dissemination plans.
7. **Systematically accelerate learning from the SILF portfolio by funding new "public goods" for learning.** This was the single most common recommendation in KII interviews. Create an open-source platform for sharing lessons learned and require innovators to contribute key takeaways from their innovation experiences. Maintain a dynamic, transparent database of SILF projects. Fund more learning exchanges between program teams driving similar SILF or Sponsorship programs.
8. **Hire or restructure Sponsorship MEAL staff to empower, connect, and guide SILF innovators more actively.** With this staff, maintain active relationships with innovators, connect them with resources and expertise they might need, and enact recommendations 3, 5, and 7.

Introduction

The goal of this review is to understand what has been done the past eleven years of the Sponsorship Innovation and Learning Fund (SILF), how Save the Children staff view SILF, and what the impact of SILF has been. Based on the insights gained from this process, Save the Children will be able to ensure greater impact and innovation within Sponsorship. Demografix, a consulting firm based in Washington, DC, was hired to conduct the review.

Key evaluation questions

The review is guided by six key evaluation questions (KEQs), developed jointly by Save the Children US staff and Demografix:

1. What principles and goals have guided SILF’s approach to innovation? Do “innovators,” i.e. those who have won an innovation award, understand and agree with these principles and goals?

We address these questions in Section 1, “SILF Overview,” by outlining how both SILF leadership and innovators themselves understand SILF’s contributions to Sponsorship’s mission. We also summarize innovators’ feedback for SILF operational processes.

2. Which projects have been funded by SILF, and why?

We examine SILF’s basic operational processes, their evolution over time, and the individual and collective trajectories of innovation projects.

3. To what degree and how have SILF projects succeeded or failed?

In section 2, “Success of Innovation Projects,” we define success for both programmatic and learning projects according encompassing projects’ achievements relative to their own objectives, scale, influence in program or strategic practice in Sponsorship or beyond, evidence bases, and external demand and funding.

4. What are the determinants of success for SILF projects?

In section 3, “Determinants of Success,” we identify and analyze the common factors that seem to explain innovation success or failure, according to the criteria above.

5. How and how well have learnings been generated, documented, disseminated, and systematized for SILF projects, including learning from failure?

In section 4, “Learning,” we analyze the performance of SILF projects at four learning functions, generating, documenting, disseminating, and systematizing knowledge, and we outline the main mechanisms that facilitate learning from SILF projects.

6. What is the value of SILF project portfolio compared to the cost of investment?

In our Conclusions and Recommendations, sections 5 and 6, we assess SILF’s value for money as an institution and outline the dynamics that inform it and strategic choices that could enhance it. Due to the diversity and intangibility of many project outcomes, we were unable to conduct formal, quantitative value for money calculations for individual projects, but we discuss SILF’s overall contributions to Sponsorship and Save the Children.

Methodology

We use mixed methods to address our key evaluation questions.¹ Below, we describe this approach in greater detail and clarify what this report can and cannot conclude about SILF.

Data sources

We collected data on SILF in three ways:

1. **Desk review:** We first reviewed existing documentation on SILF’s operational processes and on each SILF project, including innovation project proposals, mid-year and end-year reports, and ancillary documentation.
2. **Short survey:** To collect background data not available from this documentation, we sent a short quantitative survey to “innovators,” key Save the Children staff and former staff involved in the 46 SILF projects funded between 2009 and 2020. 38 innovators completed it, addressing 36 of the 46 projects. The survey is copied below as [Appendix 5](#).
3. **Key informant interviews (KIIs):** Based on the desk review and survey results, we wrote an interview guide to explore the KEQs in greater detail with the innovators behind each project. We completed 26 such interviews² between May 25 and July 13, 2020, covering 28 innovation projects. This purposive sample prioritized innovators of projects with larger investments, representing 84% of SILF investment in total. Over email, we gathered qualitative input from a further six respondents on eight innovations, representing a further eight percent of the portfolio for 92% total.

Innovators were asked for their perspectives on a wide range of topics related to the KEQs. Our key informant interview guide, which closely shaped both interviews and email requests, is [Appendix 4](#). Interviews were recorded and detailed notes compiled shortly after each conversation.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed both the quantitatively and qualitatively:

Qualitative analysis

The bulk of our findings come from the KIIs. For each project, project documentation and survey responses allowed us to customize a set of relevant interview questions, as often the same informant provided both survey and KII input. After each KII, interview notes were organized into an analysis matrix template based on the KEQs. For the first few interviews, two interviewers (both of us) entered notes independently and then compared them to ensure consistency. Into this same analysis matrix, we mapped relevant excerpts from each project’s documentation. In this way, all qualitative data on a given project and theme was collated in one place.

As KIIs progressed, emergent themes were added to the analysis matrix. After completing all KIIs, we outlined our key findings, mapped the matrix notes to this outline, and then fleshed out the outline in the form of this report. We also developed criteria for categorizing the success of each SILF project, represented in the [“Success Typology” in Table 2.1](#).

¹ Ethical review of the research questions, plan and draft data collection tools used for this review was conducted and approved by Save the Children’s Ethical Review Board (granted exempt status).

² Due to the COVID pandemic, the 6 innovations funded in 2020 were delayed and not included in the round of interviews. A further 12 innovations had no clear individual available or were such small investments as to be unimportant.

Quantitative analysis

From project documentation and survey responses, we constructed a SILF project database including both annual award-level variables such as years funded and funding amounts as well as project-level variables such as benchmarks of scaling, MEAL rigor, partnership types, beneficiary groups, Core Program Areas, Cross-Cutting Themes, country offices, and more. Most of these variables were purely factual, but some required our judgment to categorize projects, such as MEAL rigor and overall success level. This database was refined and updated as KIIs revealed new information about SILF projects. See Appendix 1 for an abridged version of the database.

Due to the relatively small number of SILF projects (46), our quantitative analysis is descriptive, as shown in the charts and tables in the [Quantitative Snapshot of SILF Activities subsection](#). Beyond these figures, we calculated Pearson chi-square tests of independence between most variables. While these tests cannot demonstrate a causal relationship between different factors, they can show how strongly related they are to each other, especially as we cross-reference them with our qualitative findings. We discuss these associations primarily in the Determinants of Success section.

Data limitations

This study is fortunate to have rich and abundant data sources, lending confidence to our conclusions. Yet, several key limitations should be disclaimed. First, we could not contact informants for 12 projects, eight percent of SILF portfolio, three of which had no documentation at all. Second, typically, we could only interview one innovator per project, though sometimes more, perhaps limiting our analytical lens. Third, we only surveyed and spoke with people who have received SILF innovations—no one who applied but was rejected. Finally, our judgments of project success are not comprehensive evaluations, but rather our best estimates based on the data sources described above.

1. SILF Overview

Guiding principles

The Sponsorship Innovation and Learning Fund's (SILF) mission and approach to innovation have been remarkably consistent over its eleven years of operation. SILF aims to identify, build evidence for, and scale programs that solve problems for children in new ways, by leveraging existing programmatic expertise within the cross-country laboratory of Sponsorship programming. Within the broader ecosystem of Save the Children's innovation institutions, which we did not review, SILF's approach is more practical and programmatic than driven by a prescribed innovation framework. At the same time, seven key philosophical and strategic choices have shaped SILF's approach to innovation, both historically and today:

Solving everyday programmatic problems.

SILF is driven by a desire to solve problems that arise organically from program experience, the urgent everyday needs facing the communities Save the Children supports. For example:

- **Literacy Boost** emerged in response to literacy assessments in four countries that showed that access to education does not automatically improve learning outcomes for children. Building on the experience of existing programming in Bangladesh and other countries, the program developed an innovative approach to strengthening child literacy.
- Other examples of pragmatically motivated innovations include **Heart to HEART**, **Duta Baca**, **Raising Caregiving Capabilities**, **Support Children with Disabilities**, and **Gender Equality Toolkit**, which were each developed in response to needs assessments of existing approaches that showed poor performance or continuing high levels of need.

Innovating incrementally

SILF has focused on funding new pieces of programming and learning that create marginal value for existing Sponsorship offerings and then transplanting these solutions a few countries at a time. Accordingly, the funding cycle is short at one year, and funding amounts are relatively small and frequently complemented by regular Sponsorship funds or external donations. This incremental approach allows considerable flexibility for innovation projects to be tweaked and adapted based on their early performance.

Aiming for scale

To be funded, prospective program innovations need to demonstrate potential for scale beyond the Sponsorship impact area. The selection criteria for all eleven years have emphasized that innovation project concepts should apply to many Sponsorship country contexts, rather than only to their pilot contexts. SILF has often catalyzed program scale by funding key pieces of program expansion, such as pilot programs, evaluations, and adaptation guidelines.

Embracing failure

SILF tolerates failure, sometimes re-funding innovations that do not accomplish much in their first or even second years. The intent is to support a broader range of ideas by giving innovators freedom to take risks and then, in the case of failure, try again or pivot to another idea inspired from the experience. In the words of one innovator, “We didn’t feel like we always need to succeed; we learn from failure.”

Facilitating participation through simple and flexible processes.

Similarly, to encourage wide participation, barriers to entry are low. SILF employs relatively simple application, selection, and reporting processes, and does not closely track innovation project spending, instead folding it into country teams’ overall Sponsorship funds. Multiple innovators in the KIIs noted that the relatively low bar to participation was very valuable and allowed them to truly explore new approaches.

Harnessing existing expertise and experience

SILF purposely relies on Save the Children’s deep in-house technical expertise and local knowledge to push solutions that are squarely within the capabilities of Sponsorship staff. Pre-existing relationships that bring together complementary skills between global technical experts and local country office implementing staff are key to SILF’s innovation model. By capitalizing on its own experts, SILF has trailblazed in programming areas in which Save the Children has a comparative advantage, such as with very young adolescents or in menstrual hygiene management.

Linking innovation to Global Breakthroughs

Finally, SILF has tied its selection criteria to overarching, evolving goals within Save the Children—Priority Results in earlier years, then Signature Programs, and now Global Breakthroughs.

Innovator feedback on the SILF approach to innovation

The principles above come from the top; they are how the stewards of SILF have intended it to contribute to Sponsorship’s mission. Below are the key functions that innovators themselves—country office staff on the ground and their global technical advisors—saw as SILF’s value within Sponsorship.

Creativity outlet

SILF offers CO and global staff an opportunity to try something new in their jobs, injecting creativity and enthusiasm—“a breath of fresh air”—into a programming culture that innovators described as “prescriptive” and “cut-and-paste.” Advancing their own ideas motivates innovators, gives them ownership over their work, and promotes their reflection on the performance of existing programming.

First, it is hard to overstate many innovators' dedication to these projects, sometimes bordering on overwork, and this passion is an enormous productivity boost to programs. "I especially commend and respect [my CO co-innovator]," one TA praised, "who went far beyond and above his area of administration" to ensure the success of a pilot program. Another innovator described her efforts to pioneer new MEAL methods for a SILF project as "putting in an informal PhD." Interview after interview revealed innovators' passion and industriousness, fueled by their ownership over these projects.

Second, by empowering people who specialize in or are native to the program context to design new solutions, SILF grounds its programmatic projects in the needs of Save the Children communities. **Health Boost**, **Duta Baca**, the **Gender Equality Training and Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators**, **Building Brains**, and other programs leveraged in-depth staff knowledge to craft successful pilots. Innovators felt that SILF's tolerance of failure allowed them to "push the envelope," or experiment with new ideas more boldly than within regular Sponsorship programming, which is typically more risk averse. Third, the brainstorming that SILF proposal writing prompts among Sponsorship staff doubles as a check on existing program offerings. "It's always so exciting when [the annual call for SILF applications] comes out," gushed one innovator. "It's a great way to get new ideas percolating."

These dynamics have produced some truly spectacular programming. [Table 2.2](#) lists the innovation projects we have classified as "Very High success." As one pithy innovator pointed out, "Half of the cool stuff that [the Basic Education team] does is because of SILF." In other words, SILF really does advance innovation.

Bandwidth cushion

Sometimes, rather than promote something truly new, SILF merely increases a Sponsorship team's bandwidth. "Bandwidth" is a major theme of this report, and we define the term as Sponsorship staff's productive capacity to achieve programming and learning goals. It is an intangible resource encompassing time, skills, motivation, program budget, and social and professional networks. Obviously, the dimension that SILF enhances the most by far is budget.

In line with the SILF principle of pushing innovation incrementally, the institution often supports new applications of existing programs rather than always establishing truly new approaches—activities that individual COs have not done yet rather than activities that no one has imagined yet. This increases bandwidth: many innovators both admired SILF for creating new programs and also leaned on it as a strategic resource to bolster their existing programming. From one innovator, SILF is sometimes more about helping staff "pick the low hanging fruit" than trailblazing. For example:

- In 2016, the **Inclusive Education** project merely adopted a pre-existing set of special education interventions in Uganda. To the innovator, SILF was just a means to transplant the program.
- SILF continued to fund **Literacy Boost** and **Numeracy Boost** years after they had transitioned from innovations to established programs.
- **Household Economic Analysis** in Haiti, a 2020 project on hold from COVID, merely intends to adapt an established Save the Children technique—a Common Approach, in fact—to better understand host communities' economic decision-making.

Second, SILF also provides a bandwidth cushion through its flexible funding processes. Because SILF disbursements are simply combined with regular Sponsorship funding and are not tracked thereafter, innovators have significant flexibility in how they spend the money. "The flexibility is important," explained one TA. "It helps COs fill in programming gaps that they didn't anticipate the year before." Sometimes, these gaps are more mundane than innovative. For example, **Heart to HEART** unexpectedly used its SILF money

for rental cars to enhance monitoring and snacks to boost session attendance, both of which strengthened the program's pilot.

Overall, innovators appreciate SILF's flexible interpretation of "innovation" because it helps them advance their work. Our view as well is that funding new pieces of established programming enhances rather than cheapens the value of SILF, because these marginal additions to programming and learning can have outsize impact on Sponsorship's mission. Given their wild success, advancing **Literacy Boost** and **Numeracy Boost** is clearly a worthwhile use of SILF awards. Similarly, rental cars and snacks sound like efficient uses of flexible funds in a pinch. To ripen the analogy further, low hanging fruit is just as nutritious and rewarding as fruit that is harder to reach.

However, this opinion is not universal. A few innovators felt that SILF's purview should not include merely providing breathing room for existing Sponsorship programming, and, therefore, projects should only last a year or two before they are no longer eligible as innovation. Similarly, some of the same innovators advocated for more scrutiny of the feasibility of proposed projects. "There was this sunk cost fallacy," reflected one innovator on her Low success project. "We overinvested in this project because we had a need to make it work, not because it was still a good use of money by the end. SILF needs to fail faster and be willing to let bad ideas go." Crucially, the innovator was not proposing less flexibility in funding, but rather a willingness to move on if an innovation team does not quickly and creatively pivot away from a failed idea.

In sum, beyond sparking creativity, SILF simply helps Sponsorship teams accomplish more, for better or worse.

Laboratory

Lastly, innovators saw both SILF and Sponsorship as a whole as a "laboratory," a specific term used independently by multiple innovators of Very High success projects. They meant that Sponsorship's funding stream, comprised of individual donations from thousands of small donors, granted flexibility in programming, an opportunity to tweak and tinker with programs and build evidence around these adaptations with fewer repercussions to their funding.

Sponsorship is thus a logical home for an institution like SILF. SILF strengthens the laboratory of Sponsorship by enabling the tweaking and tinkering, but also by strengthening the evidence building. SILF strengthens MEAL efforts by expanding innovation teams' bandwidth to conduct robust evaluations. For example, SILF enabled causal evaluations for **Building Brains**, **CHOICES**, **VOICES**, and **PROMISES**, **Duta Baca**, and **IDELA** (for **Emergent Literacy and Math**). In turn, rigorous, documented results can become powerful selling points for promoting programs with the stakeholders who can take them to scale. The [Determinants of Success section](#) outlines these dynamics in detail and tells the stories of the aforementioned innovations.

The innovators who used the term "laboratory" represented some of SILF's most successful projects, showing that they were thinking big and thinking long-term. "We get USAID grants and all kinds of funds that we NEVER would have gotten, because our approaches were tried, tested, and refined," said one such innovator. "We have the confidence to sell because we have the privilege of this incubation." "Scaling within Sponsorship is one thing," said another, but "the more interesting question is can we sell this to bigger players because we have proven it works?"

Operational history

Over time, SILF has grown larger, more visible, more inclusive, and more systematic. Three discernible eras of the Fund are described below.

2009-2011: Early, ad hoc years

The Sponsorship Innovation Fund (SIF), as SILF was originally named, emerged from a broader effort within Save the Children US's International Program (SCUS IP) to identify and build evidence for promising new programs. In 2007, SCUS IP commissioned an internal review process, which flagged that SCUS lacked a purposeful, coherent innovation strategy, and so SCUS's 2008 "Getting to Great Strategy" aimed to fill this gap. Acting on this, SCUS IP leadership asked Sponsorship to produce a strategy paper on promoting and scaling innovations within Sponsorship programming specifically.

After consulting with department heads of its Core Program Areas (at the time, BE, ECCD, SHN, and AD), Sponsorship chose to closely align its early innovation funding to existing Sponsorship Core Program Area modules. Funding was drawn exclusively from leftover Sponsorship Technical Assistance funds, and so the total amount disbursed and the average award size were both small (e.g., \$46,500 total and \$9,300 per award in 2009). Therefore, SCUS technical advisors were encouraged to submit ideas that added supplementary value to on-going programs with existing funding streams rather than establish brand new programs.

The SIF application, selection, and reporting processes were bureaucratically light, informal, and US-driven during these years. The short, 3-4 page proposals were largely submitted by SCUS Technical Advisors (TAs) and not required for all SIF awards. For example, in 2010, proposals were only utilized for new adaptations of **Literacy Boost**; in 2011, only for ECCD programs. For award selection, SIF's manager relied heavily on senior leadership within Sponsorship to personally prioritize proposals, with projects for each Core Program Area funded roughly in proportion to its overall funding stream within Sponsorship. In 2009, SIF required a brief, descriptive report of funded innovation activities after 12 months, while in 2010 and 2011, SIF had no systematic reporting requirements.

2012-2015: Expansion with Save the Children Italy

In 2012 Save the Children Italy (SC Italy), enthusiastic about driving innovation forward and possessing a larger pool of discretionary funds than SCUS, began contributing substantially to SIF, tripling annual SIF funding from \$103,250.00 in 2011 to \$305,261.00 in 2012. Although still relying on co-funding from regular Sponsorship funding streams, SIF began to fund more innovation projects that were entirely new programs, not just supplements to on-going work. Beyond the Sponsorship Technical Assistance Fund, SC Italy remained SIF's only donor until 2016, and its annual contributions fluctuated, such that total SIF funding became unpredictable even while applications were being evaluated. Indeed, SILF funding fluctuated erratically about \$100,000 between 2012 and 2015.

During this period, the SIF application, selection, and reporting processes all became more consistent. Short proposals were required again for all innovation projects, spearheaded largely by SCUS technical advisors and reviewed by both SC Italy and the Sponsorship Technical Working Group (STWG) chair, with input from Sponsorship Core Program managers. These senior managers often pooled feedback from within their departments—sometimes the very staff who submitted proposals—to rank proposals. In 2014, these reviewers scored and ranked proposals according to the Signature Program assessment tool, part of a broader SCUS effort to identify, develop, and scale flagship Save the Children programs. By 2016, that tool was dropped (as SCUS had dropped the Signature Program initiative), but the practice of scoring and ranking proposals according to a rubric continued, with Sponsorship substituting its own criteria. Short semi-annual reports and two-page final briefs summarizing annual progress were required for all awards starting in this period.

2016-2020: Streamlining, formalization, and greater country office ownership

During the last five years, the Sponsorship Innovation and Learning Fund became a more structured and visible institution within Save the Children, with country teams driving innovation concept development more than in previous years.

At the 2015 global Sponsorship conference, SCUS, SC Italy and SC Korea agreed to pool contributions into the Sponsorship TA fund to stabilize the annual SIF amount at \$400,000, where it has approximately remained since, with slight increases of around 10% year-by-year. These three member offices have since jointly evaluated and selected proposals with increasing formality, with 10-member Innovation and Learning Council (ILC) collectively scoring proposals from 2018 onwards. To ensure alignment with broader SCI goals, the ILC is comprised of:

- Global Sponsorship Program representatives (3)
- Global Sponsorship Fundraising representative
- SC Italy representative
- SC Korea representative
- SCI Common Approach representative
- A Global Education Theme representative
- A Global Health Theme representative
- A Global Child Protection Theme representative

The scores given by each member of the ILC are weighted equally, with top-scored proposals then sent to the Global Sponsorship Steering Committee for feedback and approval. In practice, the steering committee rarely changes selection decisions, however, the STWG chair retains some creative license in final selection, mostly by trimming proposed budgets to enable more proposals to win funding.

In 2016, Sponsorship began advertising SILF more widely to all Sponsorship COs in an annual email, inviting them to drive concept development and proposal writing for new innovations. By 2018, deciding that COs' ideas were pragmatic but generally too localized to scale, Sponsorship leadership promoted close and early collaboration between CO teams and their global TAs on concept development. Moreover, responding to CO calls for greater predictability in funding, in 2016, SIF also began to guarantee some innovation projects two years of funding. Finally, during these years, the STWG loosened the requirement that innovation projects should be closely tied to Core Program Areas, instead promoting Cross-Cutting Themes, especially themes for which there was growing interest.

A number of changes have been made in the past two years. First, the STWG began advertising priority topics to prospective innovators. For the 2018 and 2019 innovations, the STWG announced it would fund at least one innovation project focusing on gender equality and technology, respectively. For 2019 and 2020 innovations, it sought to fund a public-private partnership. Second, in 2019, SILF added "Learning" to its name in recognition that building and sharing evidence were always key components of its value.

Finally, the timeline for the submission and approval of proposals was moved to an earlier point in the year to allow COs to include SILF funds and activities in their annual planning and budgeting process. While this enhanced the integration of SILF and broader program activities and providing additional flexibility to the innovation teams, it also required the decisions about refunding existing innovations be made before the final reports on progress were due, potentially increasing the number of poorly performing projects that received additional funding.

Innovator feedback on SILF operations

Overall, innovators praised SILF's increased transparency, accessibility, and fair selection, reporting especially that these recent changes have increased SILF awareness and participation in Sponsorship offices and diversity in the decision-making process. Innovators were grateful that Sponsorship Annual Plans are now due after SILF awards are announced.

Yet, innovators also had suggestions for improvement. The main themes that emerged in this regard were:

Pressure to align proposals to perceived STWG priorities

Some innovators reported feeling pressure to pander to what they think the selection committee will fund, which hinders organic innovation grounded in local realities. This dynamic is of particular concern when SILF advertises a focus on a particular theme, because it leads to inefficient awards. For example, the **Use of Technology in Basic Education** project in Afghanistan was conceived entirely because in 2019 the STWG chair announced SILF would fund a “technology” innovation. Partly because internet access is so precarious in Afghanistan, the project plan to arm teachers with electronic tablets was not well-conceived.

Similarly, some innovators perceived contradictory expectations to submit ideas that are both evidence-based and innovative, saying that evidence-based ideas will almost always be existing programming and, by definition, truly innovative ideas do not have evidence behind them yet.

Finally, one innovator suggested, intriguingly, that SILF should be open to funding innovation in operations rather than focus on programming exclusively—e.g., innovation in finance and accounting, innovation in business development, etc..

Frustration with short funding cycle

A number of innovators found that SILF's yearly funding cycle compromises efficient planning. Some teams struggled to develop follow-up proposals before finishing activities from the prior year's funding, and they struggled to plan their coming year not knowing whether their innovation projects would move forward. MEAL-heavy projects emphasized this dynamic the most, as some studies stretched across multiple years. Innovators saw the transition to granting more two-year awards as a positive step forward in this regard, as it allows them to plan more effectively.

Desire for larger awards, fewer projects

While there was broad consensus that SILF awards are very useful, many innovators found the budgets to be too small. They described a paradox in which, to increase their chances of winning, they underestimate the budget they will need in proposals, sometimes to an unrealistic degree. Innovators felt that these conservative SILF awards then limit scale and impact. Indeed, those programs that succeeded in scaling to many countries often required complementary funding from regular Sponsorship streams or external partners to do so, especially to build rigorous evidence and strategically disseminate it. “I'm torn,” said an innovator of a Very High success project. “Small awards can be valuable, but for sustainability, it would make more sense to identify programs that have the most potential to scale and give them more money.”

Occasional lack of budget control

Because funding for SILF awards is simply added to a CO's general Sponsorship funds, just a few CO innovators described limited access to and control over the money. In the most extreme case, **Waliku 2.0** lost 67% of its 2019 award because the Sumba CO spent the money on something else (global Sponsorship later reimbursed the project). This risk obviously depends on who controls the purse strings in the country office, and most innovators who raised this concern recommended that disbursements be channeled directly to the project team. To promote fiscal accountability for both COs and individual innovation teams, a few innovators even advocated for tracking more carefully how recipients spend SILF money.

Quantitative snapshot of SILF activities

This section quantitatively explores the full range of innovations that SILF funded between 2009 and 2020, primarily addressing KEQ 1, “Which projects have been funded by SILF, and why?” It aims to provide a broad, descriptive picture of characteristics of and patterns among SILF projects by funding, geography, Core Program Areas, Cross-Cutting Themes, participating community groups, partnerships, and innovation concept origins, as well as how these have evolved over time and how the average *project* evolves over time.

Funding

As shown below in Table 1.1, over the past 11 years SILF has disbursed over three million dollars³ in funding to 46 innovation projects in 19 countries. On average, innovations received \$77,000 over the course of their funding, median \$50,423, ranging widely from \$3,163 to \$305,622 in 2020 dollars. The total annual amount of SILF funding has increased significantly over the last decade. For a full list of the amounts allocated to individual innovations, see Appendix 1, noting that more recent innovations may continue to be funded, which means that their current “totals” are incomplete. Moreover, Appendix 2 shows all multi-year investments, again in 2020 dollars.

Table 1.1: High-Level Snapshot of SILF Funding, 2009-2020	
Total number of innovations funded	46
Number of Sponsorship countries receiving funding	19/21
Total funding disbursed (2020 US dollars)	\$3,555,554
Average amount of project funding (2020 US dollars)	\$77,295
Median amount of project funding (2020 US dollars)	\$50,423

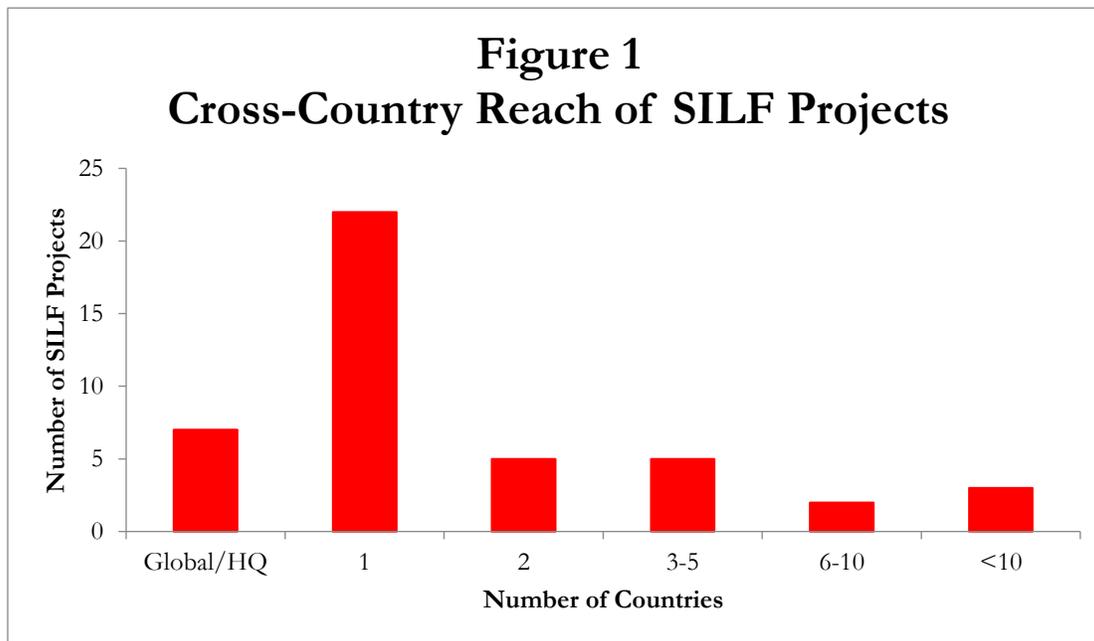
As shown below in Table 1.2, SILF innovations received roughly two years of funding on average, focused primarily on one Core Program Area, worked directly with mainly one community group, and was funded by SILF in an average of two countries. However, these average values obscure considerable variation across the innovations.

Table 1.2: Snapshot of SILF Innovation Characteristics		
Funding	Average number of years innovations receive SILF	1.96
Program Areas	Average number of program areas per SILF	1.2
Community Groups	Average # of Implementation Groups Directly Worked with	1.3
Partners	Total number of innovation project partnerships	48
Countries	Average number of countries in which SILF funded a given innovation project	2.0

³ All budget figures presented throughout this section have been adjusted for inflation so that they represent the value in 2020 US dollars.

Geographic distribution of SILF projects

SILF has funded innovations in 19 Sponsorship countries as well as “global” innovations not tied to a specific country. As displayed in the histogram in Figure 1, most projects stayed in only one country, but a significant minority expanded far beyond, to a maximum of 40.



Moreover, as shown in Figure 2, SILF-funded innovations are not evenly spread across countries.⁴ Malawi (12), Bangladesh (10) and the Philippines (10) hosted the highest number of SILF-funded innovations, while only one innovation was implemented in Bhutan and Guatemala. As might be expected, countries with more innovations also generally received more SILF funding overall (Figure 3), though not always. For example, six SILF innovations were implemented in Nepal, totaling \$353,000, while the 10 innovations in the Philippines received a total of \$245,000.

⁴ In cases where innovations covered multiple countries, they were counted for each country individually. As a result, the sum of all the country-innovation combinations is greater than 46.

Figure 2
Total Innovations by Country

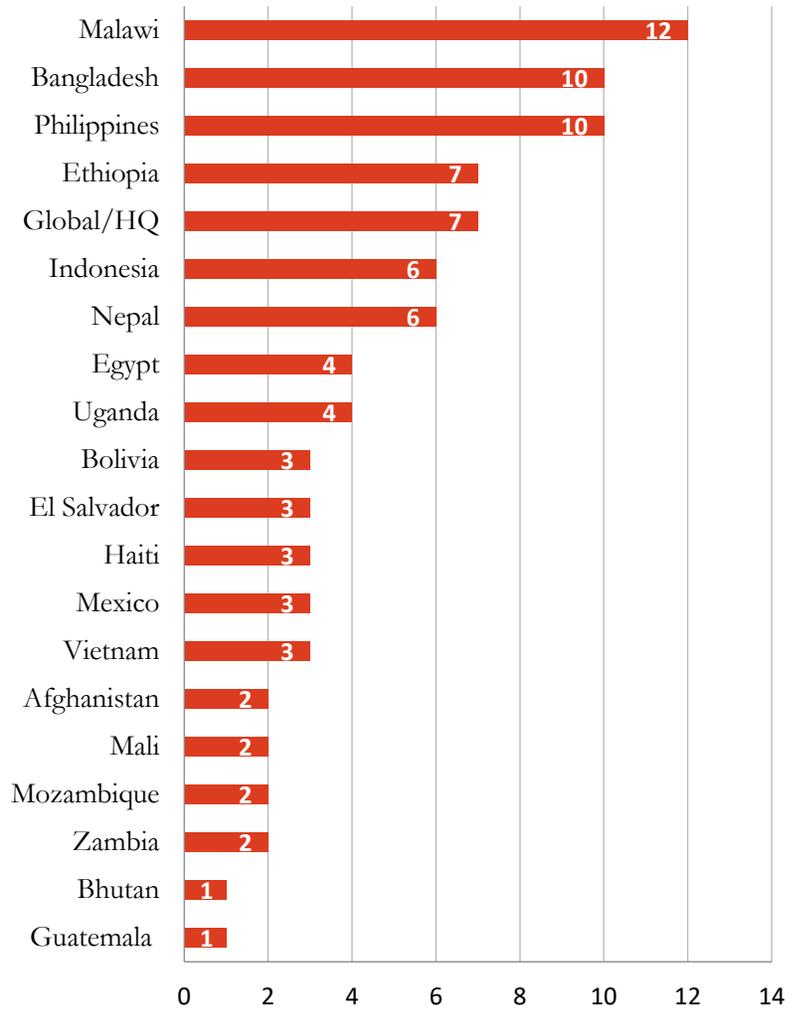
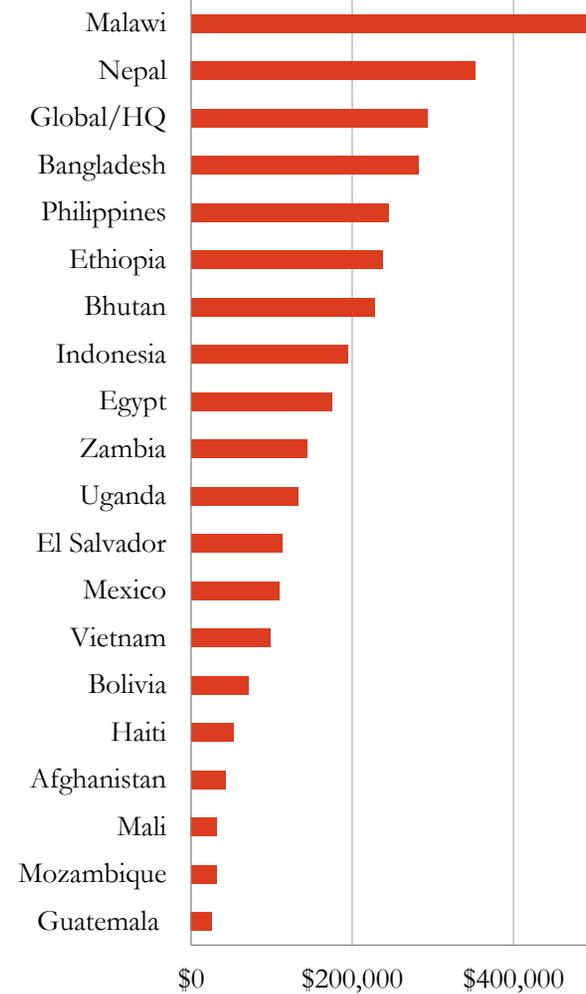
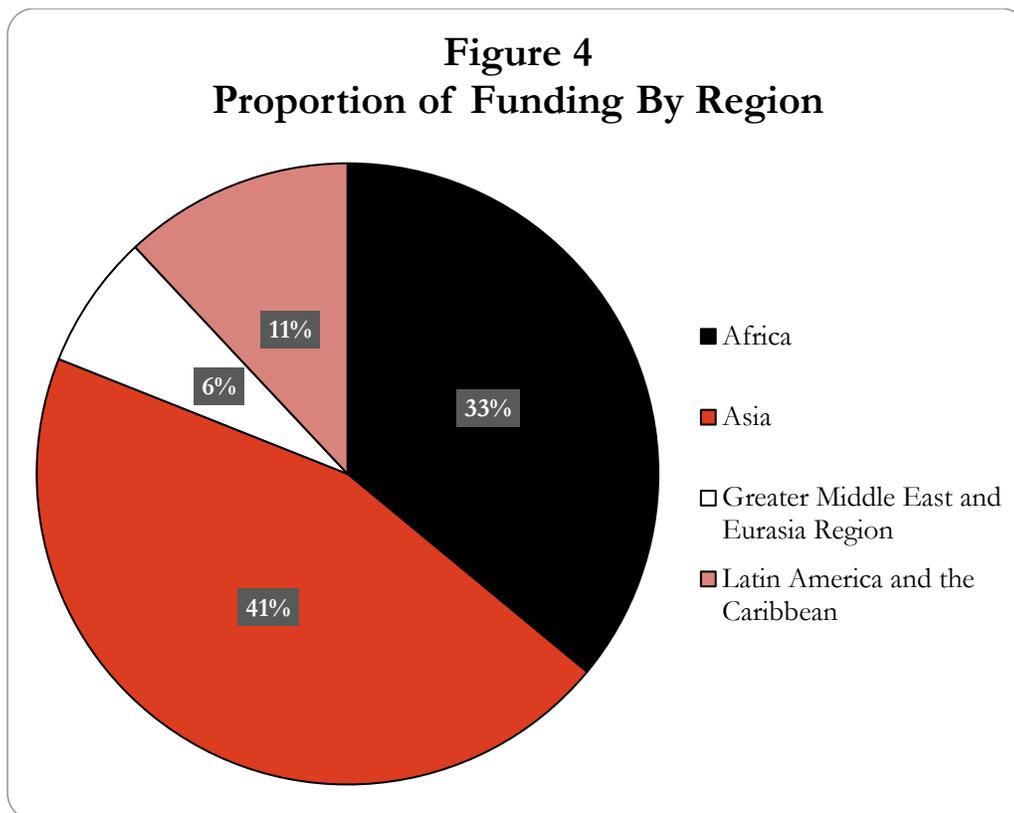


Figure 3
Total Funding by Country



The concentration of innovations and funding in specific countries is an important driver of broader regional differences in SILF funding, as shown in Figure 4. Almost two-thirds of SILF funding (74%) was directed to Asia and Africa, with funding in Asia largely driven by projects in the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Nepal and in Africa by Malawi. Similarly, funding in Latin America and the Caribbean is dominated by Mexico and Bolivia and the Greater Middle East and Eurasian region by Egypt.



Core Program Areas and Cross-Cutting Themes

SILF funding was used for innovation in each of the five Core Program Areas, as shown below in Table 1.3.⁵ ECCD received the most funding (\$1.38 million in 2020 US dollars), while MNCHN received the least (\$382,827 in 2020 US dollars), reflecting the fact that MNCHN is a Core Program Area in only six of the 21 Sponsorship countries. In terms of average funding per innovation in specific Core Program Areas, the highest average amount of funding was given to SHN innovations, driven mainly by the **Menstrual Hygiene Management** project, with MNCHN again having the lowest average funding.

⁵ For innovations that covered multiple core program areas, award amounts were counted towards each as there was not clear way to differentiate the proportion of funding dedicated to each area. As a result, this table should be used primarily to understand the relative amount of funding given to different core program areas rather than a strict accounting of total amounts of funding.

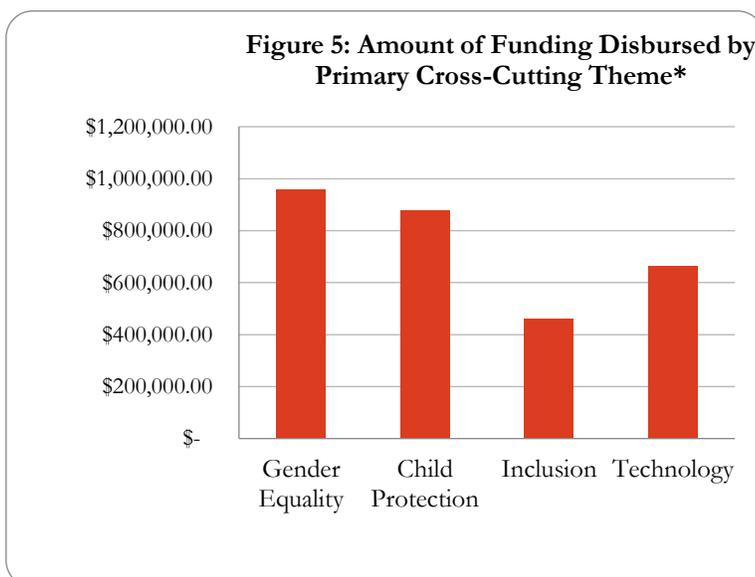
Table 1.3: SILF Funding by Core Program Area

Core Program Area	Total Number of Innovations Working in Program Area	Total Amount of Funding 2009-2020	Average Funding Per Innovation Working in Program Area
Adolescent Development	9	\$928,499	\$103,167
Basic Education	16	\$1,024,412	\$64,026
Early Childhood Care & Development	18	\$1,378,726	\$76,596
School Health and Nutrition	5	\$619,143	\$123,829
Maternal, Newborn Child Health and Nutrition	7	\$382,827	\$54,690

There are similar differences in terms of funding for the Cross-Cutting Themes, as shown in Figure 5, though these are less marked than for the Core Program Areas.⁶ The Cross-Cutting Theme receiving the most SILF funding was Gender Equality (\$958,000), followed by Child Protection (\$880,000), Technology (\$662,000) and finally Inclusion (\$462,000).

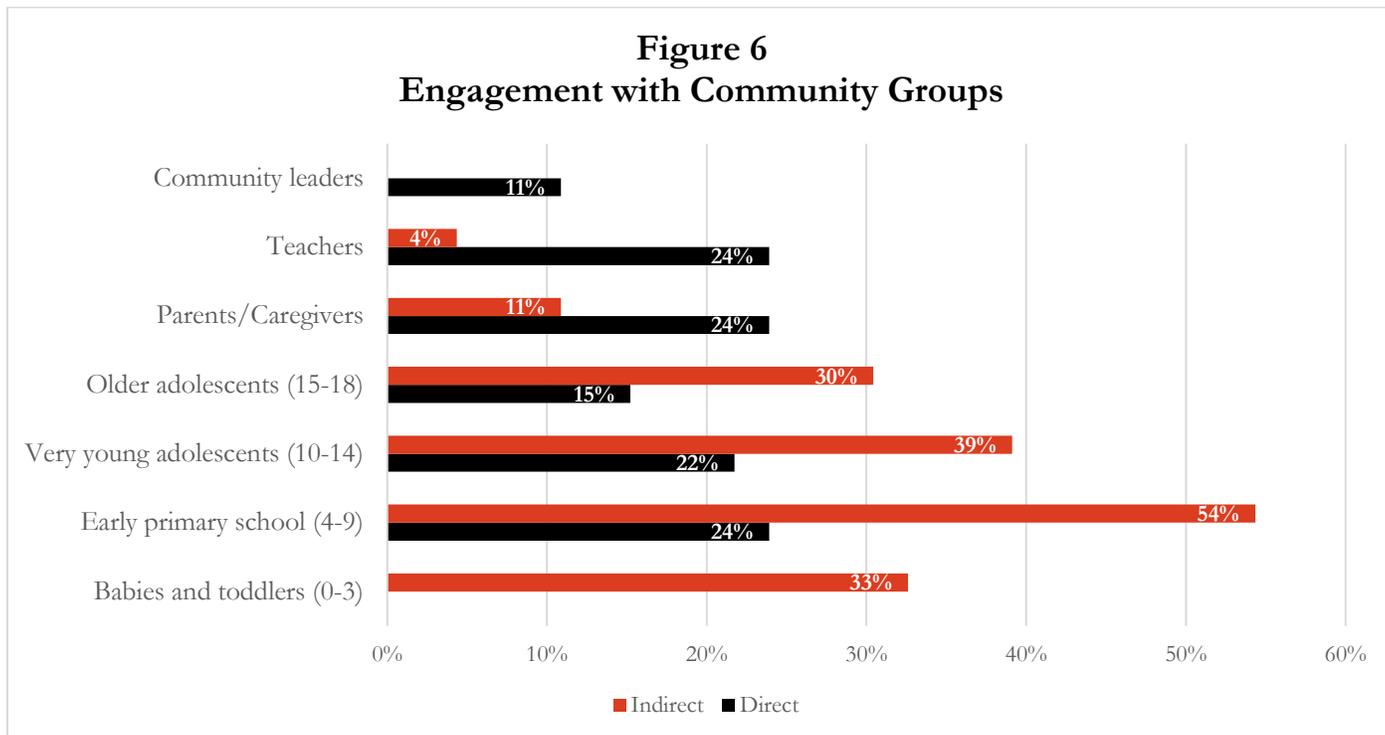
Participating community groups

In the charts below, we categorize the people that SILF innovation projects have engaged to achieve their programmatic goals into seven community groups—babies and toddlers (0-3), early child primary school age children (4-9), very young adolescents (10-14), older adolescents (15-18), parents or caregivers, teachers, and community leaders. We also distinguish between “direct” engagement and “indirect” engagement. Direct engagement is working with a population in person, e.g., giving trainings to teachers, teaching children in the classroom, or planning an intervention with community leaders. Indirect engagement is about the ultimate intended target demographic for program impact, what others in development might call “beneficiaries.” For example, an innovation may engage with parents (a direct engagement) to improve the nutrition of their children (indirect engagement). Sometimes, the direct and indirect groups are the same, as when children are taught a curriculum primarily with their own well-being in mind.



⁶ SILFs for which there were multiple Cross-Cutting thematic areas, award amounts were counted towards each. Although technology is not an explicit Sponsorship Cross-Cutting theme, we included it because of SILF’s recent emphasis on it. We excluded Sustainability and Ownership and Child Rights and Participation from analysis because they are more guiding principles than program themes. Although Gender Equality, Child Protection, and Inclusion are likewise intended to be widely incorporated, they are only reflected in the graph in cases where they were closely tied to a project’s key outcomes.

Figure 6 presents the proportions of innovations directly or indirectly engaging with each of these groups.⁷ With the exception of community leaders, who were only engaged directly by SILF innovations, and babies and toddlers, who were only engaged indirectly, most groups were engaged in both direct and indirect fashion by the innovations. Intuitively, the groups that were predominantly engaged directly were community leaders, teachers and parents/caregivers, while children of all ages were engaged primarily indirectly

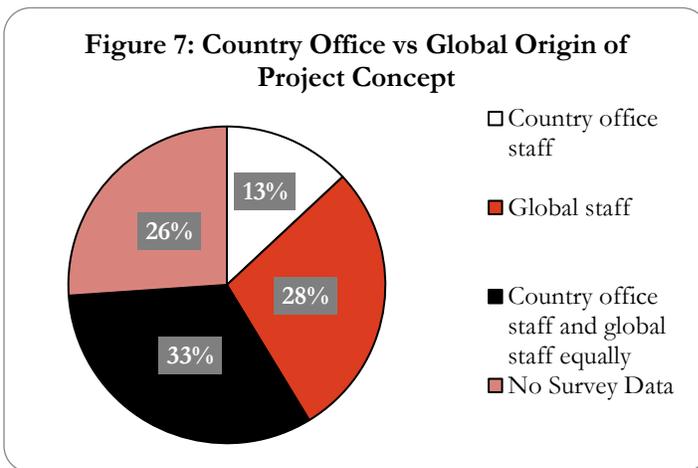


Innovation concept origin

In the short survey we sent to bolster the desk review, innovators were asked to indicate where the idea for their innovation originated, in a country office, in headquarters, or both equally. The results are shown in Figure 7.

While the implementation of SILF-funded programs was very often carried out by CO staff with technical input from global staff, the origins of the concept behind the innovation were much more likely to be entirely led by global staff (28% of all innovations) or developed jointly by CO and global staff (33%).

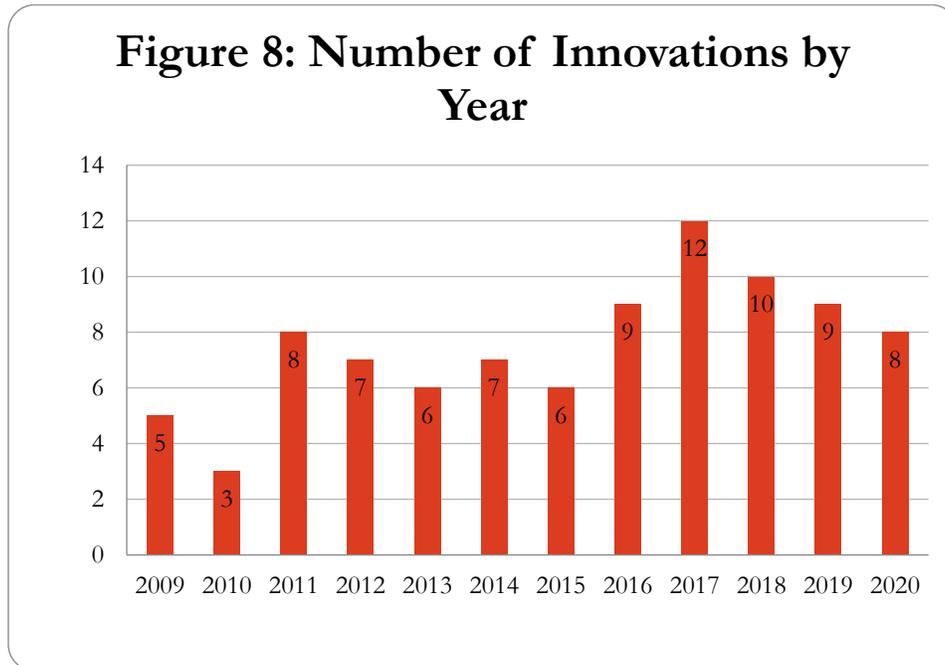
While these figures should be interpreted with caution due to the large proportion of innovations for which an origin location could not be identified (26%), these do suggest the majority of innovations had heavy involvement of global staff.



⁷ In cases where innovations worked with multiple groups, those groups were counted each time and therefore the percentages do not add up to 100%. For example, 11% of innovations worked with community leaders, 24% worked with teachers, and some innovations may have worked with both.

Basic characteristics of SILF projects over time

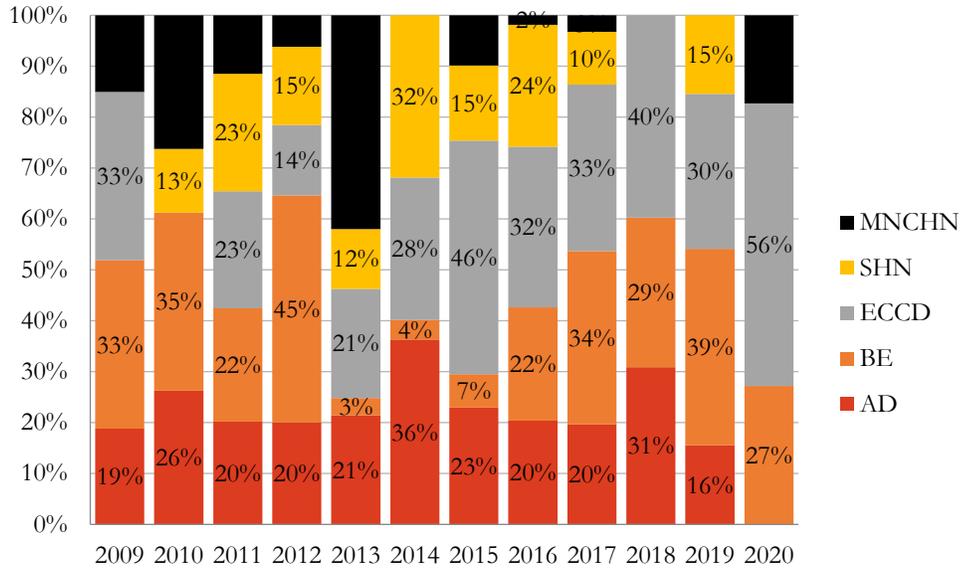
Since its inception in 2009, SILF has funded 46 innovations, 21 of which have received multi-year awards. Figure 8 shows the number of innovations funded in each year, including both new and previously funded innovations. The number of concurrent innovations increased steadily until 2017, after which there has been a gradual decline. The number of countries in which SILF-funded innovations are being implemented follow a similar pattern (data not shown).



While each Core Program Area has received funding from SILF, as described above in Table 1.3, there is considerable variation across years in the Areas that received funding (see Figure 9).⁸

⁸ For innovations which covered multiple program areas, award amounts were counted twice towards each area due to the integration of program areas within innovations. Some innovations were tagged at MNCHN before it was institutionalized as a core program area as these projects were doing de facto MNCHN work.

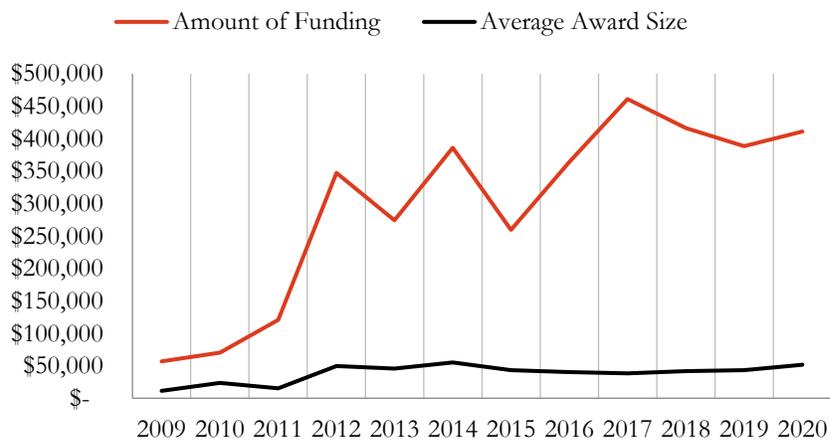
Figure 9: SILF Funding by Core Program Area by Year



Funding

As noted above, the total amount of SILF funding disbursed by year increased significantly between 2009 and 2017 and has remained stable from that point on (see Figure 10). In comparison, the average award amount has remained relatively stable over this period, with the exception of the initial years between 2009 and 2012, when the average award amount was somewhat lower than in subsequent years.

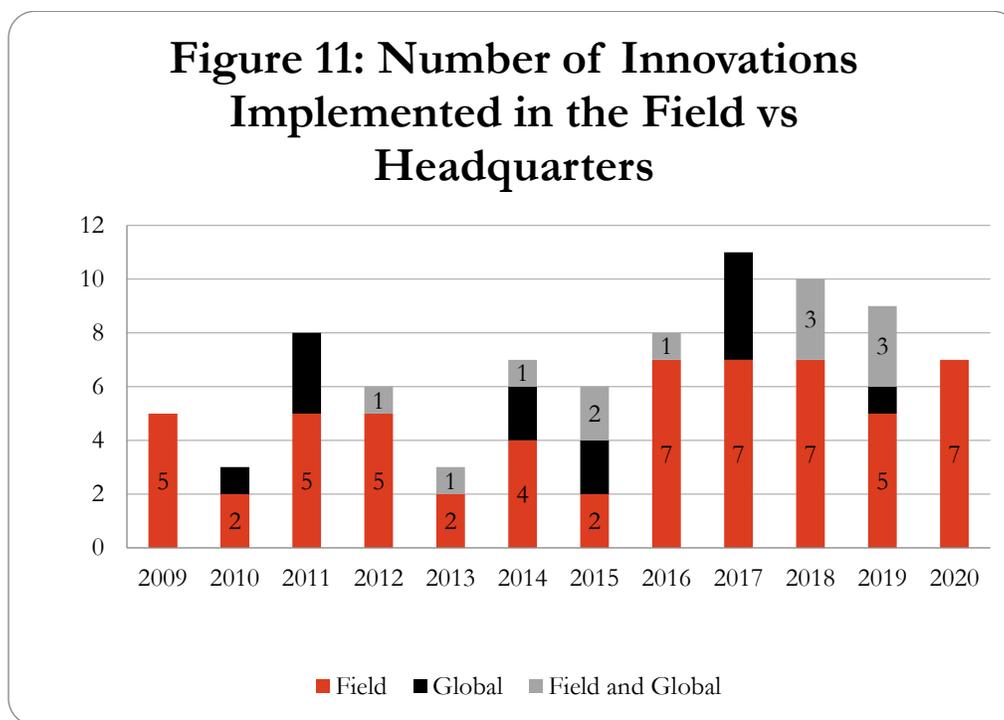
Figure 10: Funding By Year



Implementation of projects

Figure 11 below shows the proportion of SILF awards that were implemented in the field, in headquarters, or both, by year. “Field” means the project’s core activities occurred on the ground, primarily carried out by country teams. “Global” means the project’s core activities were completed by headquarters teams. These “global” projects are typically knowledge management endeavors, such as desk research, program design with no implementation yet, or the creation of a program’s adaptation guidelines. An example is the [Resources for Remediation](#) report, which compiled evidence on approaches to inclusive education programs but did not implement any of them in the field. Lastly, “Field and global” means that some core activities occurred in each sphere. Importantly, the same project can be field in one year and global in another because Figure 11 is counting yearly SILF awards, not entire projects.

While only 13% of project concepts were developed only by CO staff as in Figure 7 above, the majority of innovations were implemented in the field (Figure 11)⁹. With the exception of 2011 and 2017, a relatively small proportion of SILF activities were conducted only in headquarters.



Innovation trajectories

Most of the innovations funded by SILF received less than four years of funding, with only six having four or more years. Of those that received only one year of funding, six were funded in 2020 and four in 2019 and may yet receive additional years of funding. The remaining innovations that received either one or two years of funding include both purposefully short-term projects, such as the development of specific tools or training materials, and projects that did not have their funding renewed.

⁹ The data used for this chart are disaggregated by annual award and therefore some innovations are reflected in the above graphic multiple times and/or may be tagged as either field, global, or field and global in different years depending on the stage and element of the project that received funding.

Figure 12: Innovations By Year First Funded

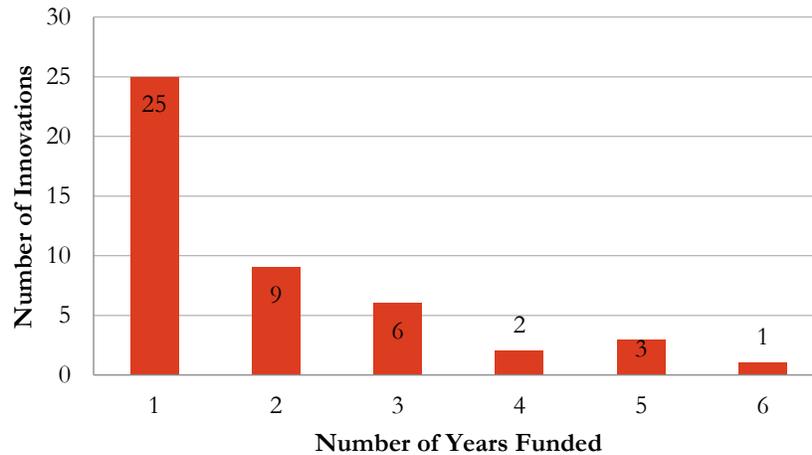
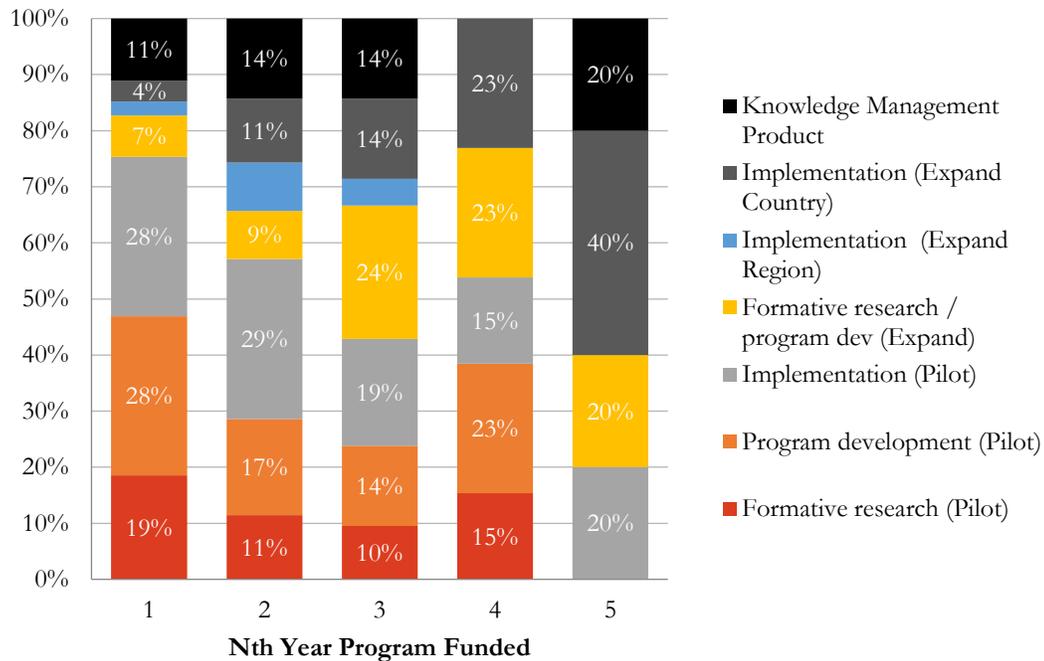


Figure 13: Program Stage by Year Funded



Shown in Figure 13, there are patterns in the programmatic progression of SILF-funded innovations. As expected, the first year of innovation is predominantly focused on program development or program pilot activities. Then, those innovations that are funded for second and third years typically begin to consolidate the program gains or start the process of scaling up. Those innovations that are funded for five or more years (only three out of the forty-six) had shifted their focus by that point to emphasizing knowledge management, sharing results, and expanding the program to new countries.

2. Success of Innovation Projects

Defining “success”

Standardizing success benchmarks for SILF projects is challenging, given the diversity of project goals and conceivable dimensions of success. “Success” might encompass projects’ scale and longevity both within and outside of Save the Children, intended and unintended effects within communities, equity in effects, confidence in those effects based on evidence, and projects’ influence on Save the Children program strategy or that of its partners. Furthermore, definitions of success must be different for programs than for projects with only learning goals. To examine how successful SILF projects have been, we developed a typology based on the following factors:

All projects

1. Performance relative to the project’s own objectives
2. Influence on program or strategic practice for Sponsorship offices, global Sponsorship, Save the Children, and external partners

Programmatic projects only

3. Scale
4. Strength of the evidence base

Information collected from background project documents and key informant interviews were used to assign each project to one of four levels of success: Very High, High, Medium and Low. Table 2.1 provides a more detailed overview of these criteria for each level of success, with examples of each provided below.

Programmatic vs learning projects

Programmatic and learning projects have separate criteria because success looks different for each. As defined by the typology, programmatic projects aim to improve lives for children, and purely learning projects aim to understand and inform future programs or program strategy.

The distinction is usually straightforward but not always. Programmatic projects may contain learning components—mostly MEAL—which the typology does not consider separate learning projects. On the other hand, **Inclusive Education** is classified as Learning because its learning year in Malawi was much more influential and interesting than its programmatic year in Uganda.

Programs that were designed but never implemented are similar enough to knowledge management projects that they are classified as Learning. For instance, the 2014 **VYA Curriculum** has been classified as a Learning project because it was intended to synthesize pieces of Sponsorship’s adolescent development offerings into a single program, but it was not implemented in the field as a package. On the other hand, the 2018 **AD Integrated Curriculum**, a similar adolescent development curriculum, was lightly piloted in two countries and is classified as Programmatic.

Table 2.1: Success Typology Criteria

Success Level	Programmatic Projects	Learning Projects
Very High	Repeatedly achieves program objectives in multiple countries; Strong influence on program or strategic practice at global Sponsorship level or beyond; Strong evidence base for program impact; Demand and funding extend beyond Sponsorship	Learning outputs achieved with strong program or strategic influence at global Sponsorship level or beyond
	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%; text-align: center;">More Scaling, Less Evidence of Impact</div> <div style="width: 45%; text-align: center;">More Evidence of Impact, Less Scaling</div> </div>	
High	Achieved all stated objectives; Strong influence on program practice at country level or above; Moderate evidence of impact; Demand and funding extend beyond Sponsorship	Achieved all stated objectives Strong evidence of impact on beneficiaries; Project survives in some form, may have expanded within an Impact Area
Medium	Achieved some stated objectives; Had limited influence on program practice at country level or above; Limited evidence of impact; Project survives in some form, may have expanded within an Impact Area	Achieved all stated objectives; Moderate evidence of impact on beneficiaries; Had limited influence on program practice; Discontinued
Low	Did not achieve most program objectives; Little to no evidence of impact or evidence of little to no impact; Did not influence program practice at the country level or above; Discontinued	Learning objectives not achieved or achieved with little to no program or strategic influence

Success Levels

For both programmatic and learning projects, four levels of success are defined—Very High, High, Medium, and Low.

Very High

A project with Very High success has achieved some measure of system-level impact. For programs, minimally, that means being integrated into regular operations of multiple Sponsorship COs. A Very High success learning project has had strong program or strategic influence on programming at the Sponsorship level or beyond. Most projects in this category have secured large-scale external partnerships that extend their reach beyond Save the Children, and their evidence base is strong across multiple settings.

The best examples of this category are the family of Basic Education and Early Childhood Care and Development projects including **Literacy Boost**, **Numeracy Boost**, **Early Literacy and Math**, **IDELA**, and **Building Brains**. All of these programs have repeatedly demonstrated concrete improvements for children in

multiple Sponsorship countries and beyond. Moreover, their reach is extended through many external partnerships—Literacy Boost was sold to World Vision; Numeracy Boost formed a public-private partnership in Pakistan; Building Brighter Brains will be scaled up nationally in Bhutan—which brought substantial reach outside of Save the Children. All of these innovations are backed by multiple, rigorous, causal studies.

High and Medium: Programs

Programmatic projects in the middle of the success spectrum are divided into Medium or High success, but they are also divided according to their balance of evidence versus scale. Very High success innovations generally have both excellent evidence bases and expansive scale, and Low success innovations generally have neither. In the middle, however, programs often diverged in their success at scaling versus demonstrating impact, and so the typology accounts for this.

High – More Scaling, Less Evidence: These programs achieved their stated objectives, strongly influenced CO program practice, attracted interest and funding beyond Sponsorship, but have only moderate evidence of impact. An example is **Waliku** in Sumba, Indonesia, which has attracted funding from Lenovo, Microsoft, and the Asian Development Bank despite shaky evidence that it improves school attendance.

High – More Evidence, Less Scaling: These programs achieve their stated objectives, have robust evidence bases, but have not expanded beyond their original Impact Areas or secured external funding. An example is **Duta Baca** in Sumba, Indonesia, whose rousing and causally demonstrated success at improving literacy outcomes has not translated to national or international scale.

Medium – More Scaling, Less Evidence: These programs achieved some of their stated objectives, had moderate influence on program practice in the original CO, were integrated into ongoing programming, but have little evidence behind them. **Heart to HEART**, for example, has spread to multiple communities in the Mindanao Impact Area (and a few outside of it) and is incorporated into ongoing Sponsorship programming, but the pre-and-post survey that evaluated its pilot has a low sample size and high attrition, casting doubt on its findings. Importantly, this is not to say that the program does not work – rather, the documented evidence base demonstrating impact is just lacking.

Medium – More Evidence, Less Scaling: Conversely, these programs achieved all stated objectives, show moderate evidence of impact, but have not yet achieved ongoing influence on programming. Admittedly, some projects that landed here were hard to categorize. The **Malaria in Schools** program, though organized as one big project in SILF documentation on OneNet, was really two projects with quite divergent outcomes in Malawi and Mali. In Malawi, a very rigorous and expensive randomized control trial showed that training teachers to diagnose children in schools had no effect on malaria prevalence, but the government nevertheless has shown interest in the program and sanctioned another study of it in another district. In Mali, a similarly rigorous RCT showed that treating all schoolchildren reduced the prevalence of malaria to nearly zero, but the government took no action to expand the program.

High and Medium: Learning projects

High – Learning: High success Learning projects had moderate influence on Sponsorship programs or program strategy. For example, after only two of five waves of measurement, the **Longitudinal Study** of many Sponsorship outcomes in Ethiopia has already prompted the CO to strengthen its parenting programs.

Medium – Learning: Medium success Learning projects had limited, but not negligible, influence on Sponsorship programs or program strategy. The **Development of Resources for Remediation**, a literature review of inclusive education programs, later helped shape the Student Needs Action Pack inclusive education program, which Save the Children has implemented successfully in multiple countries.

Low

Low success programs did not achieve most of their objectives, have little evidence of impact, and have typically been discontinued. An example is the **Citizen Reporting Portal for Violence against Children** in Bangladesh. After a mildly successful pilot during which 52 cases of child abuse were reported through the Portal, the CO lacked the resources and expertise necessary to develop a referral system for these cases, and so it scrapped the project.

Low success learning initiatives may have achieved their objectives in terms of outputs (e.g. a report was completed), but they had little strategic or programmatic influence. For example, the SHN department's review of **Violence-free Schools Initiatives** compiled and classified Child Protection initiatives across Sponsorship COs, but the report's findings have not informed Child Protection efforts at SCUS in the five years since.

Sorting SILF projects into the typology

Table 2.2 presents innovation projects sorted according to the typology criteria. These categorizations represent the authors' best efforts to understand project success based on interviews, documented MEAL efforts, and SILF reports. Sometimes, however, SILF stories resist neat categorization, and we bent our criteria for just a few project categorizations. First, **Menstrual Hygiene Management** does not have causal evidence behind it, but its scale across more than a dozen country offices merited a Very High success categorization. Second, Raising Caregiving Capabilities has not been implemented yet, but the preparation and program design in its first year was so thorough and evidence-driven and that we categorized it as Medium success, with more evidence than scale.

In addition, the table contains several disclaimers of insufficient information. First, innovation projects marked with an asterisk (*) are active, on-going projects with conspicuous potential for further success. For example, the **Gender Equality Training and Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators** has generated demand from many COs that have not yet implemented it, and so it could conceivably become Very High success in the future. Second, projects without interview data are in grey rather than black because those success determinations were made only from program documentation, which often provides an incomplete picture. Third, innovation projects that began in 2020 are excluded because they are too new and too hindered by COVID-19 to evaluate with the same criteria.

Lastly, in the table, both the countries and the years accompanying project names only represent what SILF funded, not the entire trajectory of the innovation. For example, **CHOICES**, **VOICES**, and **PROMISES** have been implemented in eight country offices, only the first two of which received SILF funding for it.

Table 2.2 presents the sorted SILF portfolio below.

Table 2.2: Success of SILF Projects

Success Level	Programmatic Projects		Learning Projects
Very High	Interactive Audio Instruction (Malawi, 2009) Literacy Boost (Multiple countries, 2009-2013) Numeracy Boost (Multiple countries, 2012-2018) Choices, Voices, Promises (Nepal, Ethiopia, 2009-2014) Building Brains (Multiple countries, 2017-2019) Emergent Literacy and Math (Multiple countries, 2013-2016) Menstrual Hygiene Management (Multiple countries, 2014-2019)		IDELA (Multiple countries, 2014-2017)
High	More Scaling, Less Evidence of Impact	More Evidence of Impact, Less Scaling	
	Waliku 2.0 (Indonesia, 2019)* Gender Equality Training and Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators (Philippines, 2018-2020)*	Essential Package (Malawi, 2012) Duta Baca (Indonesia, 2017-2018) Health Boost (Bangladesh, 2016-2017)	Longitudinal Study in Ethiopia (Ethiopia, 2017-2018)* Inclusive Education (Uganda, Malawi, 2017-2019)
Medium	Support Children with Disabilities (Vietnam, 2016) RISE Tool (Multiple countries, 2016) Heart to HEART (Philippines, 2018) Child Health and Development (Egypt, 2012-2013) My First Baby (Bolivia, Nepal, 2009-2015)	Raising Caregiving Capabilities through Psychosocial Support Groups (Nepal, 2019-2020)* Malaria in Schools (Malawi, Mali, 2010-2015) Leveraging Technology for Quality ECD (Malawi, 2016)	Resources for Remediation (Global, 2015)
Low	School lunch boxes (Vietnam, 2016) ECCD Re-design (Philippines, 2011) ECCD Fatherhood Program (Bangladesh, 2011) Involving Adolescents in ECCD (Bolivia, 2011) Citizen Reporting Platform for Violence Against Children (Bangladesh, 2016-2017) Multilingual Learners Toolkit (Mexico, 2017) Use of Technology in Basic Education (Afghanistan, 2019)* Social and Emotional Learning Foundations (SELF) Program (Mexico, 2019)* AD Integrated Curriculum / FLASH Toolkit (Malawi, Uganda, 2017-2019)*		Review of Violence-free Schools Initiatives (Global, 2017) Technology for Education Program Monitoring (Multiple countries, 2018) Very Young Adolescent Signature Program (Global, 2014, 2016) AD Assessment (Nepal, 2017-2018)

Trends in the typology

**Table 2.3: Distribution of SILF projects and SILF dollars by success
(# of Projects | % of Total SILF Investment)**

Success Level	Programmatic Projects				Learning Projects		Total		Average Total Funding
Very High	7		33.8%		1	4.5%	8	38.4%	\$170,600.16
	More Scaling, Less Evidence of Impact		More Evidence of Impact, Less Scaling						
High	2	5.6%	3	3.7%	2	6.0%	7	15.3%	\$ 77,908.22
Medium	5	11.9%	3	9.2%	1	0.6%	9	21.9%	\$ 86,604.88
Low	9		10.8%		4	4.9%	13	15.7%	\$ 42,959.31
New in 2020	5		6.9%		1	0.9%	6	7.8%	\$ 45,987.50
No Data							3	0.9%	
Total	35		81.9%		9	16.3%	46	100.0%	\$ 77,294.66

Percentages are calculated using [inflation-adjusted](#) funding amounts; average funding amounts are in 2020 dollars.

SILF invests in successful projects.

Table 2.3 shows the number of projects in each typology category, the percentage of SILF’s total investment that supported projects in each category, and the average funding for an innovation in each success level. Taken together, the table offers a positive, though muddled, picture of SILF value for money.

Overall, SILF seems to allocate funding well. Only 15.7% of all SILF dollars went to Low success innovations, meaning 84.3% went to either programs that were successful in implementation or learning initiatives with some influence on Sponsorship programming. It is also worth noting that SILF has propelled forward four Save the Children Common Approaches—[Literacy Boost](#), [Numeracy Boost](#), [Emergent Literacy and Math](#) (now called Ready to Learn), and [Building Brains](#)—each classified as Very High success.

Which comes first, success or funding?

Unfortunately, the distribution of SILF dollars by success category is difficult to interpret in value-for-money terms. Clearly, average project funding rises with each success level. This is especially true if [Malaria in Schools](#), an expensive Medium success project that was difficult to classify given divergent outcomes in Malawi and Mali, is omitted. Without it, the average Medium success project funding then becomes \$62,651, plainly situated between the High (\$77,908) and Low (\$42,959) success averages. Omitting Malaria in Schools also evens out the percentage of SILF’s total investment that High (16.3%), Medium (16.9%), and Low (16.7%) success innovations take up.

On one hand, this indicates that SILF “gets what it pays for.” More funding offers innovators increased bandwidth to push projects forward. Crucially, higher SILF budgets for a given year strengthen monitoring, evaluation, and dissemination efforts for programs in that year. These advantages of larger budgets are discussed extensively in the Determinants of Success section.

On the other hand, successful projects are more likely to receive more project funding in subsequent years. By and large, interviews with innovators of failed projects indicate that once a project fails to meet its early goals, staff motivation to continue the innovation plummets. This self-selection dynamic weeds out most failed projects after the first or second years of funding, which helps explain why Low success projects,

through numerous, take up less than 16% of SILF's total disbursement. Ultimately, interviews indicate that both dynamics are at play. More money means more success, and failure means less money.

Unfortunately, we are not able to categorize projects according to value for money, due to the diversity and intangibility of project outcomes and the varying degree to which those outcomes depended on SILF awards. Certainly, there are examples of Medium-success projects or higher with questionable value for money. The best example is the **Malaria in Schools** initiative, with a very large budget for only Medium success. However, at a minimum, the table demonstrates that SILF allocates the bulk of its funding to worthwhile projects, demonstrating high value for money at the level of the entire portfolio.

Low success projects are still valuable.

Finally, Low success innovations are not “no success” innovations. SILF projects with zero identifiable positive impact are rare. That is, although Low success innovations are typically not worth their investment value, they have moved Sponsorship programming forward in small, sometimes unexpected ways. For example:

- **Technology for Education Program Monitoring** did not cause COs to monitor Literacy Boost and ELM more closely as intended, but its training sessions for multiple COs did build lasting skills on Kobo, a powerful quantitative survey program.
- The **AD Integrated Curriculum** has never been implemented, but it remains a viable product available for COs to download and use.
- Although the **RISE tool** has been discontinued, RISE trainings encouraged both TAs and COs to think consciously about how to scale programs.
- The **Violence-Free Schools** report did not formally influence Child Protection strategy within Sponsorship, but it spurred many informal programming discussions within SHN whose implications are hard to track.

Taken together, these trends suggest that the innovation fund is doing its job. Most SILF investments are successful, and most of those that are not still have positive spillover effects.

Scaling of SILF programs

The scaling of SILF innovations is not a linear or standardized process. Most commonly, programmatic projects expand their reach in three ways. First, COs expand the program within an Impact Area by leveraging their local community networks—pre-existing or new relationships with schools, ECCD centers, health centers, and, critically, local government officials. These provide a programming platform that shores up programs' durability. Nearly all CO informants saw local government involvement as essential to program sustainability. Programs that have scaled this way and stopped include **Heart to HEART**, **My First Baby – Nepal**, **Duta Baca**, and **Health Boost**.

Second, programs might be adapted from one Sponsorship country to another through informal TA networks, often within TAs' individual advisory portfolios. Intuitively, one might consider an intermediate step in which projects cross from Sponsorship into non-Sponsorship programming within individual COs *before* they scale cross-country. However, in our data set of SILF stories, there are few examples of this. Most often, the movement first is from one Sponsorship office to another. Only Very High success innovations have managed to break out of Sponsorship programming and into broader Save the Children programming. In most of these cases, innovators had incubated the program in multiple Sponsorship offices.

Third, and most rarely, innovators form large-scale partnerships with external stakeholders who then dramatically expand the reach of SILF programs. These stakeholders are diverse, including private donors, large NGOs, multilateral institutions, and national governments, but their common contribution is a platform for expansion. Innovators attract stakeholder attention both by directly networking with them and by generating buzz off of a rigorous program evaluation. Because both evidence and networking are expensive and time-consuming, these partnerships are difficult to forge. We outline these dynamics in more detail in section 3, subsection “Partners and Networks.”

With these pathways in mind, four key benchmarks emerged to gauge program scale, “Discontinued after SILF,” “Continued only within Impact Area,” “Multiple Sponsorship COs,” and “Large or national partnerships bringing scale beyond Save the Children.” Against these benchmarks, the SILF portfolio—excluding learning projects—is summarized in Table 2.4. Importantly, these benchmarks are not always sequential or mutually exclusive. For example, **Interactive Radio Instruction** is the rare innovation with a large-scale partnership with the Malawi national government, but no footprint beyond Malawi.

SILF’s performance funding programs that scale mirrors its performance funding overall successful projects. Only 15.1% of *programmatic* SILF investment supported programs that were discontinued after their SILF award years. Another fifth supported programs that continue today, but only in a single Impact Area. As with overall success, the bulk of SILF investment supported programs that either took place in multiple Sponsorship countries or struck large-scale partnerships.

Table 2.4: SILF programmatic investment by four benchmarks of scale

Scaling Benchmark	Number of Programs	Percent of <i>Programmatic</i> SILF Investment
Discontinued after SILF	5	15.1%
Continued only within Impact Area	9	23.0%
Multiple Sponsorship COs	8	39.4%
Large or national partnerships bringing scale beyond Save the Children	11	61.1%
Full story unclear	5	8.4%
New in 2020	6	7.8%

3. Determinants of Success

Innovation is complex and rarely formulaic, and so this report examines many factors that might boost or hinder the success of SILF projects. To do this, we compiled a SILF project database from project documentation, surveys, and interviews. For space, an abridged version of the database, omitting unimportant variables, is presented as Appendix 1.

To explore the variables that predicted success, we ran Pearson chi-square correlations and ordered logistic correlations between level of success (quantified from 1 to 4) and each covariate tracked in the database. Appendix 3 presents the results. Like all correlations, these do not imply causality, just association. Moreover, the small sample size (max 37) prevents detection of weak associations.

Some variables in the database that are positively associated with success are obvious, even endogenous to our definition of success. Among these positive associations are the total funding provided by SILF (ordered logistic regression, p-value: 0.030), if the program was implemented in multiple Sponsorship countries (χ^2 , N=29, p-value<0.008), the total number of countries of implementation (ordered logistic regression, p-value: 0.040), and the years of funding provided by SILF (ordered logistic regression, p-value: 0.033). Because cross-country scale is part of our definition of success, these associations are expected and not very insightful.

Other variables examined here are, perhaps surprisingly, not relevant to success. No Core Program Area or Cross-Cutting Theme was systematically more or less likely to house successful innovations. No target beneficiary group was more or less conducive to success. The origin of the project idea as reported by innovators—country office, headquarters, or both equally—did not matter either. This suggests that SILF funding was not biased toward particular departments. Interviews did not contradict these findings.

Core determinants

Still other factors mattered enormously. Identified from interviews and SILF documentation, seven factors predicted success among SILF projects. Few were easily quantifiable. Not all Very High and High success innovations included all of these elements, but all included some. These factors are:

- **Ownership:** The implementing team should be personally invested in the project's success. Ideally, both the CO staff and the TAs would share this excitement and commitment, but in general, CO ownership is more important for program pilots while TA ownership is crucial for scale outside of the Impact Area.
- **Adaptability:** Successful programs are flexible enough to work in multiple contexts, and innovators bolster such adaptiveness by conducting formative research, monitoring pilots closely, and adopting a “toolkit” design with a menu of optional, complementary program components.
- **Evidence:** Early, rigorous evaluations become powerful selling points to the stakeholders who can scale innovation programs.
- **Trendy topics:** COs, governments, and donors are more likely to overlook shaky evidence in adopting a program if it addresses a ‘trendy’ problem at Save the Children or in the international development community.
- **Partners and networks:** Innovators with greater access to government and donor networks are better able to secure partnerships that leverage evidence to propel the program into larger arenas.
- **Bandwidth:** Innovation projects falter more often from lack of staff time than lack of staff effort. CO bandwidth limits program implementation; TA bandwidth limits program dissemination and scaling.

- **Ability to Leverage SILF:** Innovations that rely exclusively on SILF are less likely to scale outside of the Impact Area, both because SILF awards are small and because the most driven innovators seek other support for their innovations.

We discuss these factors below, referring to specific innovations as examples.

Ownership

Successful innovation teams are highly invested in their projects. While ideally such ownership is shared between COs and global TAs, CO ownership is more important, especially early in the innovation process. Although a successful idea may originate from headquarters staff, it must address a problem that the CO has prioritized, in a way that makes sense to them. If not, projects lose out on the CO's local expertise in the design phase and CO effort in implementation. Meanwhile, invested global technical advisors help COs strengthen MEAL efforts, avoid pitfalls seen in other contexts, and link SILF project to international resources and support. For example:

- The team behind the **Gender Equality Training and Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators** program, which is already High success and swiftly growing, described the program design process as highly collaborative and iterative between Philippines staff, an SCUS TA, and an SCUS MEAL staff person, including a push to increase CO enthusiasm about gender equity writ large.
- The **Menstrual Hygiene Management** operational guidelines, though spearheaded by SCUS TAs with relevant expertise, sought extensive, iterative feedback from multiple country offices before finalizing them. These guidelines are now the most downloaded resource on the SHN website.
- Informants for **Literacy Boost** identified CO ownership over the program adaptation process as the most important factor determining the differential success of the program across countries.

The importance of ownership is also apparent when it is absent. Without TA ownership, projects may succeed in the Impact Area but rarely beyond it. Some examples include:

- The **Duta Baca** program, which produced a highly impactful, enduring program with little input from global Sponsorship staff, has not yet expanded beyond the Sumba, Indonesia Impact Area.
- The **AD Assessment**, an evaluation of an adolescent curriculum in Nepal, had no global MEAL input because the Nepal office insisted on contracting a local evaluation firm. The firm's low-quality study design compromised the reliability of the findings and thus hindered learning.

TA ownership boosts SILF projects, but CO ownership is the cornerstone of early innovation success.

Without CO ownership, projects can be dead on arrival, not just limited to the Impact Area. Some examples:

- The well-conceived **Multilingual Learners Toolkit** floundered in Mexico because the Yucatán office had no design input.
- The **Technology for Education Program Monitoring** project was implemented across multiple COs with enthusiasm from SCUS BE MEAL staff. Yet no CO prioritized these rapid feedback monitoring tools, and so they were never systematized into any office's on-going MEAL procedures.
- The **AD Integrated Curriculum**, an impressive product built from two years of TA labor, has no CO passionate enough to adopt it, and so it has had no impact.

Adaptability

The most successful innovation programs are both well adapted to their social, cultural, and economic contexts and easily adaptable to others. Broadly, innovators employed three key strategies to strengthen their program's adaptability: formative research, iterative problem-solving through monitoring, and 'toolkit' designs allowing CO teams to mix and match program components that fit each context.

Formative research

Formative research, or the explicit study of a program's context to inform its design, bolsters the program's relevance and effectiveness by helping innovators understand the needs and priorities of their intended beneficiaries. For example:

- **CHOICES** hired a professional behavior change consultant to develop a formative research guide and engage Nepali adolescents to understand unhealthy gender attitudes in context and test proposed activities with them.
- The team behind **Health Boost** spent a year conducting focus group discussions to devise the messages it sent to adolescent expecting mothers, resulting in more compelling engagement with these targeted teens.
- In designing **Duta Baca**, Sumba CO staff conducted formative conversations with school administrators and students to ensure that the benefitting children set the program's priorities. As a result, student enthusiasm for the program, and therefore literacy, was very high.
- Sometimes, formative research was not conducted with a particular program in mind, but rather it inspired the creation and design of a new SILF innovation. **Heart to HEART**, **Duta Baca**, **Raising Caregiving Capabilities**, **Support Children with Disabilities**, and the **Gender Equality Toolkit** were each designed in response to a needs assessment that exposed a specific programming gap.

Monitoring and iterative problem-solving

Careful monitoring of program pilots also helped innovators tailor their program designs to context. Rather than study the context extensively ahead of time, many successful innovators ironed out early hitches by using monitoring data to problem-solve in real time. Helpful monitoring was not necessarily formal, often as simple as innovators keeping open communication with implementing staff or participating communities. Perhaps because many SILF innovators were deeply familiar with their program contexts already, this 'dive-in' approach to program tailoring was more common than formal formative research, and it proved similarly effective. Examples included:

- The Bhutan CO carefully monitored parent attendance during the **Building Brains**'s pilot, which allowed them to contact session facilitators whenever attendance dipped to probe and address the reason for the absences. This approach boosted attendance so much that the CO aims to systematize it nationally with an attendance monitoring app.
- Philippines CO staff conducted a small pilot (including only 20 teachers) for the **Gender Equality Toolkit**. Each day, they debriefed the day's session to gather feedback from teachers. Based on this input, the team significantly overhauled the curriculum, making it more repetitive, more reflective of the rhythm and rituals of Filipino preschool classrooms, and therefore more persuasive to teachers.
- In **Duta Baca**'s first year, Sumba CO staff frequently visited schools to gauge inventory and student response to the program, contributing to its local success.

- When **Heart to HEART** facilitators noticed working parents were missing sessions, Philippines staff chose to make session content more repetitive to accommodate those who could not attend every meeting.

Toolkits

Finally, another strategy to promote program adaptability is to take a ‘toolkit’ approach. Toolkit programs integrate a set of program components that approach a problem from multiple angles, in line with Sponsorship’s theory of change. Ideally, all program components are used together and complement each other synergistically, but, crucially, some program components can be implemented without the others. This program compartmentalization allows program components to fail without the entire program failing and boosts a CO’s ownership over their adaptation of a program.

Every programmatic, Very High success innovation took this approach:

- **Literacy Boost, Numeracy Boost, and Emergent Literacy and Math (ELM)** all contain a diverse set of classroom-based and community-based activities, and each CO may implement a different subset of these. For example, ELM includes “ELM at Home” activities for parents of children without access to child centers, and parents can conduct these incompletely or out of order and still boost children’s pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills.
- Notwithstanding **VOICES** and **PROMISES**, which engage parents and communities, respectively, the **CHOICES** curriculum for adolescents contains ten sessions that can be reordered, amended or dropped depending on the needs of each setting.
- Similarly, the **Menstrual Hygiene Management Operational Guidelines** include many aspects of girls’ experience with menstruating in school, and COs can select the most relevant to their contexts.

Evidence

Early, compelling evidence of program impact is a powerful program selling point and one of the strongest facilitators of program expansion. Few innovators had the resources to evaluate pilots causally, but those who did were generally rewarded with higher donor interest. For programmatic innovations, MEAL rigor was highly and significantly associated with success (X^2 , $N=29$, $p\text{-value}<0.051$). Table 3.1 tabulates programmatic innovations by success level and MEAL rigor, excluding learning projects and new innovations in 2020.

Table 3.1: MEAL Rigor and Success for Programs¹⁰				
	Causal Evaluation	Formal MEAL	Less Rigorous MEAL	Total
Very High	5	1	1	7
High	1	1	2	4
Medium	1	3	4	8
Low	0	3	6	9
Total	7	8	13	28

¹⁰ We categorize programmatic projects, “Causal Evaluation,” “Formal MEAL,” and “Less rigorous MEAL.”¹⁰ We define a “Formal MEAL plan” as structured and planned data collection and analysis with sound inferences on program effectiveness. A “Causal Evaluation” is any combination of a quantitative evaluation design with an adequate sample and well-identified control group and/or a qualitative design that makes a compelling causal argument. “Less rigorous MEAL” captures any project that does not meet those standards, including both planned monitoring or evaluation whose data collection or analysis was compromised, informal innovator observation, or no MEAL at all.

The table shows that most Very High success innovations were evaluated causally, while only a third of Low success innovation programs even had a formal MEAL plan. It may be tempting to suspect that the causality runs in reverse—that longer lasting or already expanding programs are simply more likely to be evaluated—but interviews indicate that evidence leads to scaling. For example:

- **Literacy Boost** is the best example. From the outset, the BE team’s strategy for Literacy Boost was to ensure compelling, causal evidence in early countries before moving on to others. Informants for Literacy Boost credited partnerships with World Vision and the World Bank, which dramatically expanded the program’s reach, to this early evidence gathering.
- Moreover, the string of programmatic innovations that Literacy Boost inspired—**Numeracy Boost**, **Emergent Literacy and Math**, and **Building Brains**—have all ensured randomized control trials in most COs. For example, the ECCD team leveraged their RCT of Building Brains into both funding from the LEGO Foundation and a national scale up plan in Bhutan. IDELA, the most successful learning innovation, is itself a tool to evaluate ELM (and now other ECCD programs).
- Once **CHOICES** was backed by an RCT in its second year, multiple COs approached the AD team to adopt it. In part, **PROMISES** and **VOICES** were harder to sell than CHOICES partly because a second evaluation—of all three programs together—was less rigorous than the early study of CHOICES alone.

The relationship between evidence and scale is not straightforward. Evidence facilitates program scaling because it convinces stakeholders—both inside and outside of Save the Children—to support the program, but it is not the only factor that does so. A program with a trendy topic can attract stakeholder attention even with little evidence of impact, and most importantly, innovators’ ability to engage relevant networks—especially local governments and large-scale donors—closely shapes how well evidence translates to program expansion.

Trendy topics

Some innovators attributed a measure of success in scaling to luck, specifically that their programs happened to address a buzzy topic at Save the Children or in global development. The few Very High and High success innovations that have shaky evidence bases benefitted from this. Certainly, even trendy innovations do not scale without tremendous effort from innovators, but the buzz helps. For example:

- Innovators behind **Menstrual Hygiene Management** claim that their work has been perceived as a trendy, intuitive way to boost gender equality, especially as more and more girls globally begin menstruating while still in school, and so even without rigorous evidence for MHM interventions, many COs have willingly adopted them.
- Hype for gender work has also propelled CO demand for the **Gender Equality Toolkit**, even though its effects on children are unclear. Over a half dozen COs have expressed interest in adopting it.
- **Waliku** has attracted funding from Lenovo, IDB, and Microsoft partly because it is a highly technological innovation and a social enterprise, despite having no MEAL for the first two years.
- **Literacy Boost** innovators claimed that, beyond evidence, “fate did a lot of it.” In other words, Literacy Boost’s development coincided with both Save the Children’s then new, innovation-oriented theory of change and the development community’s sharper focus on measuring learning outcomes. This endeared the program to both internal and external stakeholders. Moreover, a **Numeracy Boost** innovator claimed that Literacy Boost has been easier to pitch to large donors because reading is a trendier development priority than math.

Networks and partnerships

For evidence to translate into scale, even for trendy programs, innovators must engage the stakeholders who can scale them. For scaling within Save the Children, those stakeholders are COs. Programs scale within Sponsorship when individual TAs transplant them across the countries in their portfolios; adaptiveness and CO ownership become just as important in transplanting programs as in piloting them. Because the Sponsorship platform is finite, however, a more salient determinant of innovation scale and durability is external partnerships. There are two types of external partnerships that matter for success—those with local governments and those with large-scale donors or implementing platforms.

Small-scale partnerships: Local governments

Close collaboration between CO staff and district-level government officials increases a program's longevity within the Impact Area, aligns the program with government priorities, and may even give local officials ownership in the design or implementation. After a successful pilot, the government partner, already invested, incorporates the program into its own local work, and such local adoption of a program often differentiates Medium from Low success innovations. Nearly all CO informants saw local government involvement as essential to program sustainability, and the local government partnerships variable correlated with success (X^2 , $N=37$, $p\text{-value}<0.020$). For example:

- Because the Philippines CO invited the provincial departments of education, social welfare and health to help design **Heart to HEART** in Mindanao, these offices in turn invited Save the Children to train them on the program, which then expanded to select communities in two other provinces.
- The Philippines CO consulted with the National ECCD Council and Department of Education when developing of the **Gender Equality Toolkit**, which was then folded into the government's education policy. The project team was very conscious about collective ownership of the program: "Our attitude was to take a whole-community, whole-government approach," said one innovator.
- Sumba CO innovators claimed that early involvement of the district education and library management offices in collaboration with schools and students themselves ensured **Duta Baca**'s survival in the Sumba after SILF funding ended.
- **Support Children with Disabilities** was Save the Children's answer when a provincial education department in Lao Cai asked Save the Children to prioritize inclusive education. It is still operational in Vietnam for this reason.

Large-scale partnerships: Donors and national governments

While small-scale partnerships are almost always with the relevant local government ministry, large-scale partnerships are more diverse, including private donors, large NGOs, multilateral institutions, and national governments. The common contribution of these larger stakeholders is a platform for expansion, in other words, typically resources rather than expertise. Although it is expected, the positive association between such large-scale partnerships and success among programmatic innovations is still striking (X^2 , $N=29$, $p\text{-value}<0.001$).

These partnerships are harder to secure than partnerships with local governments because the evidence, networks, and bandwidth required of innovators is higher, yet access to these external platforms dramatically expands a program's reach. More specifically, because most large-scale partnerships are formed using international networks, TAs have an advantage over CO innovators in this regard. Except for **Interactive Audio Instruction**, whose large-scale partnership has been with the national Malawian government, all Very High success innovations are driven by TAs. For example:

- **Literacy Boost** innovators pointed to a willingness to share the program outside of Save the Children to explain differential scale of the program across country offices. Within Sponsorship itself, they claimed that scaling was easy, because the BE team had access to the Sponsorship system, they had evidence that it worked, and literacy was a trendy topic. Yet, they credit the bulk of Literacy Boost’s reach to their own willingness to share the program externally. For example, selling Literacy Boost to World Vision, which was spending vastly more than Save the Children on literacy programs, dramatically increased the program’s reach. Overall, they saw SILF’s laboratory function—generating evidence in service of securing these partnerships—as its most critical.
- During its first year of SILF funding, the team behind **Building Brains** forged a close partnership with Bhutan’s Ministry of Health to implement the program in the Impact Area. Because of this pre-existing relationship, shortly after the RCT, Bhutan agreed to adopt the program nationally. In turn, the government enthusiasm, as well as the RCT, was key to winning the program’s current grant from the LEGO Foundation.
- **Waliku** has attracted funding from Lenovo, Microsoft, and the Asian Development Bank by working through the Indonesia CO’s business development lead, who promoted Waliku as a tech-savvy social enterprise. The Waliku team collaborated on the business development strategy because the business development team needed their technical input. One Waliku innovator said access to this promotion channel is rare and “opened the gate” for Waliku’s expansion.
- Although the **CHOICES** pilot received a small SILF award, the lion’s share of the program’s early funding came from a private donor, a connection of the TA, whose annual contributions accelerated the program more than SILF did.

For a quantitative snapshot of SILF partnerships, both large- and small-scale, Table 3.2 below shows the number of SILF projects and percentage of SILF investment *within* in each success level that formed scale-inducing partnerships. National government partnerships are included in both categories because in a few cases they were hard to distinguish from local government partnerships.

Clearly, partnerships, especially large-scale ones, are associated with success, with 7 of 8 of Very High success innovations forming these, and no Low success innovations. Again, local government partnerships often distinguished Low from Medium success innovations (5/9, 70% versus 3/13, 25%).

	Large-scale partnership		Government partnership (mostly small-scale)		Total in success level	
Very High	7	77.6%	7	89%	8	\$1,364,801.27
High	2	27%	3	56%	7	\$545,357.52
Medium	1	28%	5	70%	9	\$779,443.88
Low	0	0%	3	25%	13	\$558,471.05
Total	10	40%	18	67%	37	\$3,248,074

Bandwidth

Informants from projects of all success levels named low staff bandwidth as a major innovation constraint. We define “bandwidth” as Sponsorship staff’s productive capacity to achieve programming and learning goals. It is an intangible resource encompassing time, skills, motivation, program budget, and social and professional networks. Bandwidth constrains success by constraining all of the determinants above (except trendy topics). Conducting formative research, closely monitoring implementation, gathering rigorous

evidence, and forming partnerships are all strategic choices that expend resources, and if the innovation team—both COs and TAs—lack the time, budget, or staff longevity to accomplish all of these goals, their success will be limited. Accordingly, projects often fail from lack of staff bandwidth rather than lack of effort or strategy.

Bandwidth, ownership, and ability to leverage SILF

Bandwidth is necessary for ownership, as one cannot prioritize what one has no time for.

- Informants for **Literacy Boost**, **Numeracy Boost**, and **Emergent Literacy and Math (ELM)** saw CO bandwidth and ownership as intertwined, determining which COs best adapt these programs.
- Both the **Technology for Education Program Monitoring** and **RISE tool** programs found that, although CO staff saw value in both tools, CO MEAL teams were too overburdened to sustain the program. As a result, both programs have been discontinued.

Bandwidth and evidence

While robust evidence for programs is always desirable, rigorous MEAL is resource-intensive and tricky to design. Many innovators cannot budget well for it, especially given SILF's small funding amounts.

- Due to bandwidth constraints at SCUS, **Waliku** suffered from lack of MEAL expertise, and so the program team struggled to collect meaningful data for two years. More recently, onboarding Waliku's first Sponsorship MEAL person has been time-consuming for Indonesia program managers.
- Some MEAL goals are more expensive than others. Despite pioneering effort, the **Menstrual Hygiene Management** team has struggled to standardize scales measuring socioemotional variables for girls who menstruate in school, obscuring the impact of Save the Children MHM interventions.

Bandwidth and partnerships

Large-scale partnerships are rare because relatively few innovators have both the bandwidth and networks to secure them, and SILF rarely funds strategic dissemination or relationship-building efforts deliberately. In interviews, CO innovators in particular lamented that after a successful pilot, they did not have the resources to promote their results beyond the local government. For example:

- After **Duta Baca**'s successful, well-evaluated pilot, the Sumba team has not had the budget to continually engage even the local government (and has had no TA advocate for global partnerships either).
- Staff behind both the **Citizen Reporting Portal** and **Health Boost** in Bangladesh lamented that SILF and Sponsorship budgets limited dissemination efforts with the Bengali government to a few disparate meetings. For either program, systemic or national impact would hinge on more funding for program promotion strategies.
- **My First Baby** in Nepal is limited to the Impact Area due to a similar lack of funds for both evidence gathering and promotion efforts.

Bandwidth, SILF champions, and vulnerability to turnover

Sponsorship is lucky to employ many passionate innovators. Many interviews show that these project champions are an enormous asset to the Fund's overall success, and their dedication—and sometimes overwork—is a key component of “bandwidth.” However, projects that over-rely on individual champions are more vulnerable to staff turnover; more team-based innovations are more sustainable.

- This is a key difference among Very High success innovations. On one hand, the **CHOICES**, **VOICES**, **PROMISES** and **Menstrual Hygiene Management** programs owe their successes to very passionate, skilled, and creative innovators who each dedicated five plus years to designing and promoting their innovations, which are now institutionalized within Sponsorship through that effort. On the other hand, **Literacy Boost**, **Numeracy Boost**, **Emergent Literacy and Math**, and **Building Brains** were shared quickly with the broader BE and ECCD teams. This institutionalization hedges against the risk of innovator turnover. ELM and IDELA are staples across all Sponsorship programming even though their inventor left Save the Children only two years after their first year of SILF funding.
- Over-reliance on champions proved fatal for both the **AD Integrated Curriculum** and the **Technology for Education Program Monitoring** programs. Passionate TAs designed these programs well, but motivation within Sponsorship to promote them dwindled sharply after they departed.
- Lastly, Afghanistan’s only SILF project, **Technology in Basic Education**, faced a seven-month delay when the proposal writers resigned, shortly after being awarded the grant.

Ability to leverage SILF

Bandwidth also helps explain why more successful innovations are less dependent on SILF for their successes. To show this quantitatively, interview responses to the question “How dependent was [project] on SILF? What could you and could you not have achieved without SILF money?” were put into three categories. First, projects were “Likely impossible without SILF” if innovators said they could not have happened otherwise. Second, projects were “Significantly accelerated by SILF” if they would have existed without SILF but not achieved nearly as much. Lastly, projects were “Somewhat accelerated by SILF” if SILF contributed to a project’s achievements but was not a main driver of them. This categorization does not reflect a project’s overall level of success, but rather how much the project’s achievements, however large or small, are due to SILF. The results are in Table 3.3.

Dependence on SILF	Percent of SILF Funding	Number of Projects
Likely impossible without SILF	31.7%	21
Significantly accelerated by SILF	34.0%	8
Somewhat accelerated by SILF	22.8%	8
Could not determine	11.4%	9

Generally, those programs that were more dependent on SILF funding and support were less successful (X^2 , $N=33$, $p\text{-value}<0.034$). This is for several reasons. First, the same driven, strategic, and professionally connected innovators who are most likely to push their projects forward through leveraging SILF money are also likely to secure other resources for the same goals. For example, the TA behind **CHOICES**, **VOICES**, and **PROMISES** secured significantly more funding from a private donor in his network than from SILF and simply used both funding sources well.

Second, SILF’s award sizes are small, and without a reliable external funding pool or a spectacularly strategic innovator, bandwidth is limited, especially for scaling outside of the Impact Area. As SILF awards grew in size after 2012 and especially as the STWG began advertising SILF more broadly in 2018, COs could start building their own innovations from scratch, endearing them to local governments, and improving local programming as a result. Yet on their own, SILF awards are still not large enough to carry innovations into national or international arenas, especially as SILF rarely funds dissemination or promotion efforts deliberately. Typically, additional resources are necessary.

The obvious exception to this rule is the **Gender Equality Training and Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators**, which was entirely dependent on SILF and has benefitted from most of the propellant factors above—CO ownership, global technical guidance, passionate and collaborative staff, local and national government partnerships, and a trendy topic. However, for projects whose stars align even slightly less well, innovation will be limited to the Impact Area without support beyond SILF.

This is not an indictment of SILF’s value-add. Over half of the High and Very High success SILF projects were either “likely impossible without” or “significantly accelerated by” SILF. In fact, this SILF dependence variable originally included a fourth dependence category, “Unaided by SILF,” for projects whose achievements likely would have been identical without SILF. No innovation project fit that category, and so the category was dropped. In other words, SILF has supported failed projects, but it was never irrelevant to a project’s successes.

Rather, SILF plays dual roles. On one hand, it plants effective projects within individual Impact Areas, and on the other, it spurs pre-existing, co-funded projects by funding key pieces of their growth, such as a robust evaluation. Both are incredibly valuable functions. At the same time, SILF rarely bridges these two functions—i.e. it does not independently take its own promising local initiatives to scale.

Spotlight on Malawi

Country offices vary widely in their use of SILF. The Malawi country office has hosted more SILF projects and received more SILF dollars than any other. Among 12 projects hosted in total, Malawi produced the Very High success **Interactive Audio Instruction (IAI)**, later re-envisioned as Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI), which the national government adopted into its national ECCD policy, asking Save the Children to train government officials on it. Malawi has hosted iterations of **Literacy Boost**, **Numeracy Boost**, and **Emergent Literacy and Math** as well as the **Malaria in Schools** initiative and a nationally scaled early childhood nutrition program that SILF did not fund.

To explore how a CO’s institutional environment might influence innovation practice, we zoomed in on this one CO’s success. We were able to conduct two interviews with long-serving Sponsorship staff in Malawi about how the Sponsorship office as a whole approaches innovation, not only about specific innovations and their relationship to SILF. These very high-level conversations shed light on how institutional structure, culture, and staff longevity within country offices influences innovation success, but they also left us hungry for a deeper dive into these questions across COs. Failing that, viewing Malawi’s innovation experience through our Determinants of Success is still instructive:

Adaptability

Beyond hosting the Very High success “toolkit” innovations **Literacy Boost**, **Numeracy Boost**, and **Emergent Literacy and Math**, Malawi’s star innovation, **Interactive Radio Instruction**, benefitted from a highly adaptable design. Its original incarnation, Interactive *Audio* Instruction, received SILF money in 2009 to record government-sanctioned ECCD programs on CDs and give childcare centers the CD players to utilize them. The innovation was the *mode* of delivering programming content. Certainly, the ability to swap out any content into the CDs made the innovation adaptable.

Yet additionally, in switching this mode from CD player to radio broadcast, Malawi staff showed a rare ability to learn from failure. CD instruction relied on Save the Children providing CD players, which would break and did not provide parents with a window into their children’s early education. Adapting the same ECCD programs for radio (and adding many more) circumvented this reliance on hardware, allowed the broadcasted programs to reach two extra districts beyond the Zomba impact area. It also co-opted parents into participating in their children’s education by sending programming directly into homes.

Evidence

The Malawi Sponsorship program prioritizes evidence. Asked why Malawi has hosted so many SILF projects, one long serving Sponsorship leader said, “We’ve had a very strong MEAL team in collaboration with global Sponsorship MEAL.” In various interviews, global TAs pointed to Malawi as a country office conducive to evaluation, and **Literacy Boost, Numeracy Boost, and Emergent Literacy and Math** have all been causally evaluated in Malawi. **Interactive Radio Instruction** has two rigorous evaluations behind it, including one of the only longitudinal studies in the SILF portfolio, a randomized control trial that used **IDELA** to evaluate school readiness in children in IRI broadcast areas before the broadcast, after the broadcast, and even after a year of primary school. In its commitment to uncontaminated results, the country office even turned down requests from radio stations and community development organizations to broadcast the program in control group areas.

The Malawi Sponsorship office has also demonstrated an ability to learn from failure. After an RCT showed that its Malaria in Schools “learner treatment kits” had no effect, the CO and its government contacts were determined to retool the program, and a second evaluation is underway this year with further support from a private foundation. Finally, because of its emphasis on evidence and pioneering in inclusive education, Malawi was selected to host the Inclusive Education Subregional Learning Initiative in 2019.

Long-term, national government partnerships

The payoff to Malawi’s prioritization of evidence is rapid, because Sponsorship staff have very close relationships with Malawian national and local governments, with whom they share evidence almost immediately. Typically, government officials are even involved in the program planning and implementation.

Interactive Radio Instruction is again the most powerful example. Early childhood development experts in the government were involved “from the very beginning,” including through field visits to pilot areas and during the subsequent longitudinal RCT. Because a national ECCD working group, including World Bank representatives, had visited IRI sites during the RCT, in 2017, the government decided to include IRI in its national ECCD policy, enlisting Save the Children to build government capacity on the program. Moreover, helped by the buzz generated by the government, IRI has been scaled up to nine community radio stations nationwide.

Bandwidth and ability to leverage SILF

The Malawi Sponsorship program leverages SILF at the country office level. That is, rather than leaving it to individual staff members to devise new innovations, lead Sponsorship staff in Malawi look across the country’s Sponsorship programming in search of gaps to plug, based on the needs of its program communities, and they strategically use SILF funds to complement regular Sponsorship funds. “As we implement the Sponsorship program, we are good at identifying gaps and successes. So, when SILF opens applications, we have clear ideas of what we should do.” This process is cooperative with global TAs. “It’s a two-way process, a push-and-pull” that allows Malawi Sponsorship staff to benefit from TA expertise and TAs to use Malawi as a laboratory for cross-country programming.

Lastly, Malawi Sponsorship staff and especially its leadership are well-positioned to take a birds-eye SILF strategy because have been established in the program for ten years, which lends “passion and confidence” and presumably intimate familiarity with current and former programming. “Our innovations would not have been as successful if they were run in isolation.”

Implications for country office influence on innovation success

Even without a cross-country comparison, Malawi’s experience suggests that country-level structural and cultural factors such as leadership continuity and prioritization of evidence, partnerships, and innovation in general can enhance or hinder the success of individual innovators.

4. Learning

Learning is a vital component of SILF’s contribution to Sponsorship’s mission. As explained in [Section 1](#), most of SILF’s most successful innovators framed both SILF and Sponsorship as a “laboratory,” a space to tweek and tinker with programming while building and sharing evidence around it. Below we analyze how well SILF fulfills this laboratory function.

To do this, we separate “learning” into four separate functions: generating knowledge, documenting knowledge, disseminating knowledge, and systematizing knowledge. Overall, innovators generate and document SILF project knowledge moderately well, but they underperform in terms of systematizing and disseminating that knowledge. Narrow and inconsistent utilization of lessons learned from SILF projects lessens the impact of both individual projects and SILF as a whole, while lowers the institution’s value for money. This is especially true for Low success projects, despite there being important lessons learned that could prevent similar experiences in the future.

Generating knowledge

Innovators generate knowledge about their programs or through their learning projects in various ways, some more formal than others. We define “generating knowledge” broadly, encompassing monitoring, evaluation, research, and even just innovator observation. Table 4.1 breaks down SILF projects according to how and how rigorously they generated knowledge.

In the table, we categorize all programmatic and most learning projects into three monitoring and evaluation categories, “Causal Evaluation,” “Formal MEAL,” and “Less rigorous MEAL.”¹¹ We define a “Formal MEAL plan” as structured and planned data collection and analysis with sound inferences on program effectiveness. A “Causal Evaluation” is any combination of a quantitative evaluation design with an adequate sample and well-identified control group and/or a qualitative design that makes a compelling causal argument. If an innovation project conducted a causal evaluation or had a formal MEAL plan in at least one year out of the awards received, all years were counted as being of that level of rigor.

“Less rigorous MEAL” captures any project that does not meet those standards, including both planned monitoring or evaluation whose data collection or analysis was compromised, informal innovator observation, or no MEAL at all. Finally, among learning projects, we add an additional category, knowledge management, for those projects aiming to generate or compile knowledge not about program performance but about another research question related to program strategy.

Table 4.1: Generating Knowledge												
	Causal evaluation		Formal MEAL		Less rigorous MEAL		Knowledge management		New in 2020		Total	
Program	7	33.0%	9	19.9%	13	22.4%	0	0%	5	6.9%	34	82.1%
Learning	2	7.5%	0	0%	2	2.6%	4	6.0%	1	0.9%	9	17.0%
No documentation											3	0.9%
Total	9	40.5%	9	19.9%	15	25.0%	4	6.0%	6	7.8%	46	100%

¹¹ We understand that “MEAL” is more than monitoring and evaluation but are keeping these category titles for brevity.

The picture is mixed. 60.4% of the funding disbursed by the SILF supported projects with either a causal evaluation or formal MEAL approach behind them. This figure sounds more robust than it is. First, all award years for a given project are counted even if the project has evidence from only one country context. Second, because evaluations are expensive, this percentage of funding may overestimate innovators' likelihood chose to conduct an evaluation—in fact, only 18 of the 46 investments had a formal MEAL strategy or a causal evaluation and about half of programmatic projects, representing only a quarter of SILF investment, had “less rigorous” MEAL efforts. Any gaps in generating knowledge of SILF project performance contribute to the weakness in disseminating learning that hampers SILF's overall impact and value for money, described [below](#).

Barriers to rigorous MEAL

Zooming in on projects in the “less rigorous MEAL” category sheds light on some factors that compromise monitoring and evaluation efforts. These include:

Lack of bandwidth, especially of CO MEAL teams

Innovators complained about lacking the time and budget for proper monitoring and evaluation. This was true for projects of all success levels. For example:

- **Technology for Education Program Monitoring** and the **RISE tool**, both SCUS-driven projects that were intended to be MEAL intensive, were each discontinued because CO MEAL staff did not have the capacity to implement them as designed.
- **Waliku 2.0** had no MEAL for two years for lack of team capacity, both of the CO and the TA.

Project failure

If an entire project fails, MEAL efforts are likely to fail as well. For example, the **Use of Basic Technology in Basic Education** program did not even hand out its teacher tablets for nine months, let alone evaluate how teachers were using them. The **AD Integrated Curriculum** was never truly implemented. The **Social and Emotional Learning Foundations (SELF) Program** suffered from staff turnover.

Measurement challenges

Finally, monitoring and evaluation require more bandwidth when project outcomes are tricky to measure, particularly when they are attitudinal. For example, the **Gender Equality Training and Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators** has not been rigorously evaluated because tracking teachers' actual preschool classroom behavior is challenging, much less the effects of their behavior on young children's cognitive development outcomes. Similarly, MHM's attempts to measure girls' complex social responses to menstruating in school has required a significant time investment. On the other hand, complex MEAL is certainly possible; **CHOICES, VOICES, PROMISES** have two rigorous, causal evaluations that measure complex social constructs in very young adolescents.

Long-term MEAL

In addition, MEAL rarely addresses the long-term objectives of SILF programs. Even for innovations that have been part of Sponsorship programming for many years, evaluations of them are typically one or two years and rarely longitudinal, which may compromise claims of these programs' “impact.” Multiple innovators noted this and recommended “following up well after the innovation project has stopped being funded to evaluate its sustainability and value for money.” It is important to note that the dominance of short-term MEAL is no fault of SILF as an institution, which is focused on sparking new ideas and approaches, but rather something to note about its portfolio.

The unique and interesting exception to this rule is the [Longitudinal Study in Ethiopia](#), which is three years into an intended ten-year evaluation of all Sponsorship programming in Ethiopia's newest Impact Area, Central Tigray. Already, by exposing a few weak outcomes, the second biannual wave of data collection has encouraged the CO to strengthen its ECCD programming with parents of young children. How these repeated, biannual observations of the same child cohort might shape Sponsorship programming in Central Tigray should be instructive to watch.

Implementation fidelity

Finally, some innovators expressed concerns about implementation fidelity of Save the Children programs, including SILF programs once they stop receiving SILF awards. That is, they feared that monitoring quality decreases after a program is evaluated in one or a few contexts, with no measures to ensure it is implemented as designed in later contexts. For example, the [MHM](#) operational guidelines are available for all COs, but the MHM innovators do not always track how COs interpret them in planning menstrual hygiene programming. Similarly, the innovator behind [CHOICES](#), despite training many CO teams on the program, does not know how faithfully these COs train teachers to implement its sessions. Because many Very High success programs are highly tailored to context and depend on training teachers, not monitoring those trainings may obscure these programs' full cross-country impact.

This seems to be a function of both staff bandwidth and Save the Children's decentralized structure. For example, the SILF project [Technology for Education Program Monitoring](#) aimed to train COs to collect real-time data on classroom implementation of [Literacy Boost](#) and [Emergent Literacy and Math](#), but the COs did not prioritize it because their MEAL teams were too time-strapped.

Documenting knowledge

The documentation of lessons learned from SILF projects is more comprehensive than formal MEAL efforts. That is, even lessons from "less rigorous MEAL" projects are typically documented in the sense that innovators' informal observations and recommendations are recorded and filed. Certainly, documentation is generally more comprehensive for those projects with more rigorous MEAL. For example, annual SILF reports for the low-rigor [Heart to HEART](#), [Citizen Reporting Platform](#), [Gender Equality Toolkit](#), [Waliku 2.0](#), and [Basic Tech in Education](#) each communicated key lessons learned from program implementation without a strong evaluation methodology. This makes sense, as Sponsorship requires short annual reports of SILF project awards. Similarly, all SILF projects whose goals were simply to compile knowledge into a report, such as the [Development of Resources for Remediation](#) and the [Violence-Free Schools initiative](#), completed the report. We wish we had created a formal variable to categorize projects according to how well they documented their lessons learned. Thankfully, from KIIs and OneNet documentation, the bottom line is clear: documentation of knowledge is the strongest of the four learning functions, even when monitoring and evaluation is weak.

Systematizing and disseminating knowledge

Once documented, however, SILF lessons do not travel as far as they perhaps should, on average. Interviews indicate that knowledge management, at least for SILF projects, is a weakness within Sponsorship. There is no central knowledge hub or designated knowledge manager for lessons learned from SILF projects. From a TA innovator, "There aren't really guides or standardized ways that learnings move through Save. It's up to us to strategically take sharing learning into our own hands. There's no learning point-person, no process. This is part of our model." Another quipped, "What do you do with a report? You file it!"

According to innovators, this laissez-faire learning model has more disadvantages than advantages. Many interviews evoked frustration with muted and uncoordinated dissemination of learnings for SILF projects, reflecting innovators with the instincts but not the time or central platforms to spread their lessons learned.

Dissemination is underfunded.

The key disadvantages to this approach are two. First, dissemination is underfunded, because compelling dissemination is iterative and therefore time-consuming. Learnings that are generated, documented, and disseminated matter very little if they do not compel stakeholders with the power to act on them. To SILF innovators, this iterative stakeholder persuasion, which we call “iterative dissemination,” is the key missing learning step. Many innovators conflated it with “advocacy,” revealing that to them, learning was more about pushing forward than reflecting. Though interviewees complained about lacking time for proper monitoring and evaluation, they complained three to four times as much about lacking bandwidth to share results and best practices, requesting that Save the Children, Sponsorship, and SILF allocate more resources to this learning function. Four exemplary quotes are:

- “SILF needs to require cross-country dissemination. What happens when we fund something and then the funding runs out? We lose the program. There’s this hope that we’ll still do it with existing Sponsorship funds, but without the mandate and accountability, we’re not going to do that.”
- “It’s challenging to find time for advocacy with the government, even though the evidence is there. They will be happy with the results, but it’s harder to sustain on-going advocacy efforts with our budgets. [The program] has not spread outside of the Impact Area.”
- “We can share our work within the country office, with the local government, and with local NGOs, but for broader advocacy required for scale, we just don’t have enough budget. Sponsorship as a whole needs more money for scaling.”
- “Typically, program people like me don’t have access to external donors, one has to dedicate time to those relationships. If innovators themselves are given access to fundraising gatekeepers, then scale is possible.”

Unsystematic management of SILF lessons learned.

Second, innovators lamented missing out on useful opportunities to learn from other SILF projects. Their single most common recommendation for improving SILF was to create a platform for sharing learnings across innovations. They desired easy access to key takeaways from all SILF projects to help them find tips and ideas for program design and to avoid other projects’ pitfalls. In innovators’ own words (no two quotes from the same interview):

- “Within Save, learning is lacking. There should be a cross-learning platform within Sponsorship. Within the movement, we don’t know what’s happening.”
- “It would be great to have some platform to have lessons learned published widely, at the regional, local, national, and global level. We know [our innovation] works, but others don’t.”
- “Sponsorship should create a platform or forum on learning for people working on innovation projects across countries, a window for motivation and adaptation, especially for countries with similar contexts.”
- “It would be really good to have clearer ways of disseminating learnings within Sponsorship and externally. Maybe an innovation community of practices—sharing challenges and how they’re addressed. We should be able to build on each other’s innovations—we’re too siloed, afraid of re-trying ideas.”
-

- “Brad [Kerner, head of Global Sponsorship] did a session last year gathering all innovators, invited us to share projects for 5-10 minutes. This was brilliant! I learned that Bangladesh has an app to evaluate infant care, and I had no idea. A session like this at the beginning AND end [of the funding cycle] would be great for strategic program learning.”
- “The learning and sharing of other innovations is lacking. No one knows what’s tried in other contexts! There’s no platform for learning cross-country.”
- “I also see the weak or under-utilized/missed opportunity to yield more fruitful results from each of the successful past innovations. Innovation funding opportunities could be extended to support scaling up those which have been proven scientifically effective and successful, and which have potential to be scaled up within [Sponsorship]. For example, Health Boost appeared as an effective program tool—further support to extend it, scale it throughout other seven Sponsorship country programs with MNCHN core element is existing—could help a wider population of mothers and children.”
- “Knowledge management at Save is pretty bad, and it got worse when we shifted to SCI. There are too many places to upload information and not enough transparency from COs. It’s a long-term issue that we haven’t totally solved.”

This theme was rehashed, less quotably, in many other interviews. In sum, innovators themselves are responsible for sharing actionable lessons from SILF projects, both internally and externally. Yet, they often do not have time for iterative dissemination, and they are hungry for a knowledge management system for SILF projects. Below we summarize the main mechanisms that innovators use to disseminate learnings from SILF projects, and then, based on KIIs, we outline three determinants of dissemination success—bandwidth, team-based systematization of learning, and the success or failure of the program.

Mechanisms of dissemination

Below we describe the mechanisms that SILF innovators use to disseminate learning, in order of importance.

Word of mouth

Within Sponsorship, word of mouth is the key medium for knowledge sharing. Most commonly, individual TAs spread lessons that they, again individually, have learned to the COs within their advisory portfolios as they conduct field visits. As one innovator put it, “Any country that [her co-innovator] travels to will implement [their program].” As one example, **IDELA** and **IDELA** best practices spread to twelve COs by word of mouth and TA cross-pollination before the ECCD team chose to house these best practices on an open source portal. Predominantly, TA networks are how knowledge spreads across Sponsorship COs.

One-shot presentations

Second, many innovators put together one-shot webinars and presentations of their programs for relevant internal and external stakeholders. Sponsorship organizes various conferences among Global Thematic Areas, as well as “Innovation Marketplaces,” every few years. Many SILF projects have been presented at such events. Similarly, external sharing of learnings relies on innovator networks. Many SILF innovators exhibit their programs in thematically relevant international conferences.

Critically, these presentations are typically not iterative, but one-shot. From most informants, there was a strong sense that the value of these presentations is primarily in the networking that accompanies them. In other words, they are mainly useful for planting professional and social seeds that then take more work to cultivate through ongoing connection, while the actual learnings passed on in the moment are less consequential. For example, CO teams, having connected by presenting at Sponsorship or broader Save the Children conferences, may reach out to one another or to TAs for guidance on particular programs later.

Learning exchanges

Finally, innovation teams sometimes organize learning exchanges in which staff from one CO visits another for a workshop or training on a particular program. Almost always, these learning exchanges are not supported by SILF funding but occur after the award years. Uncoincidentally, the two exceptions to this rule are the **Gender Equality Toolkit** and the **Inclusive Education Subregional Learning Initiative** in Malawi, both High success innovations.

- A Philippines staff member behind the **Gender Equality Toolkit** conducted an “amazing” workshop to guide Egyptian and Indonesian staff on adapting the innovation, according to a third-party ECCD innovator. This workshop partly explains the half dozen COs lining up to adopt the toolkit.
- The most powerful learning exchange in the SILF portfolio was the **Inclusive Education Subregional Learning Initiative** in Malawi. After SILF funded a year of diverse inclusive education interventions in Uganda, including by flying Malawi staff out to train Uganda staff, the TA innovator was inspired the following year to convene Save the Children staff from Uganda, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia to share inclusive education experiences—teacher training, community awareness, child learning, teacher strategies, discrimination, and MEAL best practices—from similar country contexts. The organizer claimed that high participant enthusiasm stemmed from connection over their similar challenges, and that subsequent action on inclusive education within these COs hinged on Action Plans formulated at the event as well as the organizer’s active monitoring role in continually checking each CO’s progress against these Plans.

Though SILF rarely funds these learning exchanges, Sponsorship does, and they seem to be productive means of sharing program experiences. Overall, innovator-driven networking, especially of global TAs, is the main mechanism by which knowledge of SILF programs—and guidelines for implementing them—travels around the organization. SILF rarely funds this networking deliberately, and innovators often claimed to have too little time for it in interviews.

Determinants of dissemination

Bandwidth

Low bandwidth hampers overall success, but it is especially crippling to dissemination of learning because it is often innovators’ last priority. This is not because innovators do not value sharing learnings, but simply because one cannot disseminate knowledge that has not been generated and documented already. As above, we define “bandwidth” as Sponsorship staff’s productive capacity to achieve programming and learning goals, encompassing time, skills, motivation, program budget, and social and professional networks. In order of importance, three dimensions of bandwidth affect dissemination the most:

Time: Sponsorship is lucky to employ many hardworking innovators, but many of them lamented lacking time for sustained, repeated meetings with stakeholders, unable to form and then fully exploit the internal and external partnerships that propel programs forward. More than half of interviews touched on this theme. For example:

- The **Violence-free Schools** report was both completed as written deliverables with little impact on program strategy, because its dissemination was not budgeted or planned.
- **Heart to HEART** in the Philippines, the **Malaria in Schools** initiative in Mali, and **Support Children with Disabilities** in Vietnam all produced videos to promote the innovations. Each went unused, to the frustration of their producers.
- Even innovators associated with Very High success projects decried their limitations in sharing lessons. **MHM** innovators wished for more time to organize learning exchanges or disseminate a summary of the MHM guidelines, despite having given multiple internal and external presentations.

SILF budgets: While SILF awards do expand innovator bandwidth, they are relatively small, and SILF rarely funds iterative dissemination. In particular, many CO innovators lamented lacking the funds to do this.

Networks: As in the Determinants of Success section, innovators rely on their own and their teams' networks to iteratively share learnings with the stakeholders who can act on them. CO innovators typically do not have wide access to international networks but can often persuade local government ministries to adopt practices based on SILF learnings. Even TA innovators can be limited by their individual networks.

Team-based systematization of MEAL

Typically, the innovators who had the bandwidth to iteratively disseminate learnings were those situated in whole teams that prioritized learning in their structure and culture. Except for a very few rockstar innovators, this type of institutional environment is what gave innovators the “ability to leverage SILF,” through the strategic use of SILF funds for key assets that catalyze scale. These same innovators were also the most likely to characterize Sponsorship as a “laboratory.” In other words, both COs and HQ teams vary in their prioritization of dissemination of learning, and that affects their members' ability to share. Unfortunately, interviews indicate that most innovators' institutional environments insufficiently prioritize the iterative dissemination of learning.

Culture of learning inspired by Literacy Boost

Two key exceptions demonstrate this rule. First, the Malawi country office prioritizes learning as detailed in the [Spotlight on Malawi](#) section. Second, the culture of learning inspired by Literacy Boost. Informants for the Literacy-Boost-inspired innovations, more than any other “family” of SILF projects, described using Sponsorship programming as a laboratory, a learning platform to build and test their programs. Unsurprisingly, these teams' institutional environments are responsible for six out of eight Very High success innovations, including all four SILF-supported Save the Children Common Approaches.

Literacy Boost innovators recounted that, as the program took off, the SCUS Basic Education team greatly expanded its MEAL staff in response to growing demand in the international development community for better measuring of learning outcomes. BE's prioritization of learning has endured, and every BE and ECCD innovation that Literacy Boost inspired—[Numeracy Boost](#), [Emergent Literacy and Math](#), [IDELA](#), [Building Brains](#), and [Raising Caregiving Capabilities](#)—has benefited from it. In KIIs for all of these projects, innovators' discourse reflects a culture of evidence-based program expansion that mirrors this structural choice. The standards that they expressed for generating, disseminating, and systematizing knowledge were the highest in our data set.

Generating learning: Unlike all other SILF projects but one ([CHOICES](#), [VOICES](#), [PROMISES](#)), [Literacy Boost](#), [Numeracy Boost](#), [Emergent Literacy and Math](#) (using [IDELA](#)), and [Building Brains](#) all have two or more causal evaluations exploring the impact of the approach. These innovators' general attitude was that every new country context for a program needs a rigorous evaluation; these standards paid off in terms of scale.

Dissemination (iteratively) of knowledge: These innovators were also active in spreading lessons learned from these evaluations through networking. For example:

- [Literacy Boost](#) innovators credit most of the program's impact to their own willingness to share it with external stakeholders, actively networking with World Vision, the World Bank, and USAID, all of whom either adopted or supported the program, in addition to others.
- From 2012-2015, [Numeracy Boost](#) innovators helped convene over 200 child numeracy development experts annually through networking.

- Because **Building Brains** forged a close partnership with Bhutan’s Ministry of Health, Bhutan agreed to adopt the program nationally. In turn, the government enthusiasm was key to winning the program’s current grant from the LEGO Foundation.
- Of course, by demonstrating impact within Save the Children, Literacy Boost, Numeracy Boost, and ELM are all implemented widely across all of the federation.

Systematizing knowledge: The teams behind these innovations did not wait for Sponsorship or Save the Children to provide knowledge management systems. In 2015, BE conducted a “massive review” of what Literacy Boost has learned to date across countries and all of its internal and external influences. 2017 marked the launch of the IDELA portal, an online knowledge hub for Save the Children and others who use the early childhood development assessment tool.

Lastly, these innovators’ prioritization of learning has allowed them to innovate incrementally as SILF intended, building one program off of learnings from another, in a way that other SILF projects simply have not. Numeracy Boost is a math extension of Literacy Boost’s proven model. ELM is a counterpart to both, after evaluations showed that learning gaps among children could become entrenched even before grade school. Likewise, partly from observing cognitive development gaps for children even younger than ELM could support, Building Brains trains caregivers on cognitive stimulation for 0- to 3-year-olds, and Raising Caregiving Capabilities (Medium success but growing) supports caregivers themselves. In short, among many other factors, the BE and ECCD teams’ strategic, synergistic prioritization of learning facilitated SILF’s most successful innovations, including all four SILF-supported Common Approaches.

Success or failure of a program

Predictably, the success of an innovation made innovators more likely to want to disseminate learnings from it. It turns out that in a bandwidth-constrained organization, telling others how one’s program failed ranks low among competing priorities. For innovators, moreover, the dominant purpose of disseminating learning is to advance their programs. “Learning” seemed to be more about pushing forward than reflecting, and interviews sometimes conflated dissemination of learnings and program promotion.

Accordingly, learning from failure was typically restricted to the personal experience of individual innovators and their personal networks; we heard very few single explicit examples of *institutional* learning from failure—of convincing internal or external stakeholders of what NOT to do. This was true even when the failures are well documented or very interesting.

There is one exception. In Malawi, the **Malaria in Schools** initiative ran an expensive, rigorous randomized control trial of training teachers to diagnose and treat malaria in children. The results clearly showed that the program did not influence the desired outcomes, but the Malawian government was so enthusiastic about reaching 100% malaria treatment coverage in schools that they encouraged the Malawi CO retooled the program and is conducting a second RCT now with further support from a private foundation.

Overall, the reluctance to learn from failure prevents Sponsorship from avoiding some repeated missteps. Finding no explicit example of institutional learning from failure in 26 interviews is a striking finding. Clearly, lessons on what *not* to do are less palatable than lessons on what *to* do. However, our results do not imply that institutional learning from failure never happens within Sponsorship, or even from SILF projects, but merely that our data set reveals few examples.

5. Conclusions

SILF contributes enormously to Sponsorship’s mission by providing staff with a creativity outlet, a bandwidth cushion, and a laboratory.

- **Creativity outlet:** SILF injects enthusiasm into the “cut-and-paste” programming culture of Sponsorship. Giving program staff the reigns to drive their own ideas forward motivates them, gives them ownership over their work, and provokes reflection on the performance of existing programming, all of which boosts individual and team productivity.
- **Bandwidth cushion:** SILF enables Sponsorship staff to strategically move their programming forward by funding incremental improvements of existing approaches, even programs that may no longer be considered “innovative.” With its flexible funding, SILF also provides a critical buffer for innovators by allowing them to use SILF funds to plug unanticipated programming gaps.
- **Laboratory:** SILF allows staff to tweak and tinker with programming, build evidence as they do, and thereby strengthen their ability to promote a given program with stakeholders.

All of these contributions rely on SILF’s fundamental flexibility, its purposeful emphases on incremental solutions, light application and reporting processes, and embrace of failure. SILF shines when it takes fullest advantage of its passionate, hardworking staff, empowering them to realize their own programming visions for children. Success hinges on such wide innovator latitude.

Conversely, this same flexibility does mean that the occasional inefficient project is funded or re-funded and that, again occasionally, the award money is mismanaged. Without punishing innovators for failure, which could discourage bold ideas, SILF leadership could be more active in helping innovators salvage or pivot away from projects that do poorly in their first year. Low success innovations are not “no success” innovations, and innovators may need more active listening, support, and nudging to then pull more precisely on the threads that did work.

Seven core determinants predict success among SILF projects.

- **Ownership:** The implementing team should be personally invested in the project’s success. Ideally, both the CO staff and the TAs would share this excitement and commitment, but in general, CO ownership is more important for program pilots while TA ownership is crucial for scale outside of the Impact Area.
- **Adaptability:** Successful programs are flexible enough to work in multiple contexts, and innovators bolster such adaptiveness by conducting formative research, monitoring pilots closely, and adopting a “toolkit” design with a menu of optional, complementary program components.
- **Evidence:** Early, rigorous evaluations become powerful selling points to the stakeholders who can scale innovation programs.
- **Trendy topics:** COs, governments, and donors are more likely to overlook shaky evidence in adopting a program if it addresses a ‘trendy’ problem at Save the Children or in the international development community.
- **Partners and networks:** Innovators with greater access to government and donor networks are better able to secure partnerships that leverage evidence to propel the program into larger arenas.
- **Bandwidth:** Innovation projects falter more often from lack of staff time than lack of staff effort. CO bandwidth limits program implementation; TA bandwidth limits program dissemination and scaling.

- **Ability to Leverage SILF:** Innovations that rely exclusively on SILF are less likely to scale outside of the Impact Area, both because SILF awards are small and because the most driven innovators seek other support for their innovations.

Bandwidth is the most important success factor, underpinning the others.

Informants from projects of all success levels named low staff bandwidth as a major innovation constraint. “Bandwidth” is a major theme of this report, and we define the term as Sponsorship staff’s productive capacity to achieve programming and learning goals. It is an intangible resource encompassing time, skills, motivation, program budget, and social and professional networks.

Low bandwidth constrains many other drivers of success. Bandwidth is necessary for ownership, as one cannot prioritize what one has no time for. Conducting formative research, closely monitoring implementation, gathering rigorous evidence, and forming partnerships are all strategic choices that expend resources, and if the innovation team—both COs and TAs—lack the time, budget, or staff longevity to accomplish all of these goals, their success will be limited. Low bandwidth is especially crippling to SILF’s laboratory function, in which SILF allows innovators to build compelling evidence of new approaches as justification for scaling them. Robust MEAL is resource-intensive and tricky to design, and many innovators simply cannot budget well for it, especially given SILF’s small funding amounts. Similarly, low bandwidth prevents the formation of large-scale partnerships, especially because SILF rarely funds strategic promotion efforts deliberately. Paradoxically, the laboratory role may be SILF’s most important for system-level impact but also its most inaccessible to innovators. Below, we reiterate this weakness in the dissemination of learning in more detail.

Crucially, bandwidth has both individual and structural dimensions, and the key barriers to SILF’s impact are structural. On the individual side, Sponsorship is lucky to employ many passionate innovators who are experts in their fields and country contexts, and SILF empowers them to enact their visions. Their dedication—and sometimes overwork—is a key component of bandwidth.

The key structural components of bandwidth that enable or hinder project success are the innovation team’s culture, its networks, and its project funding.

Team structure and culture: Both COs and HQ teams vary in their prioritization of innovation and learning, influencing how much time innovators can devote to critical functions like MEAL and knowledge management. For example, the interrelated string of Very High success innovations inspired by Literacy Boost all benefitted from strategic BE and ECCD teams at SCUS who purposefully hired enough MEAL staff to rigorously evaluate these innovations in most new countries.

Networks: CO innovators typically do not have access to international networks. Their networks may be limited to local governments, who can ground the program in the Impact Area. Even TAs are limited in their access to donor and other stakeholder contacts.

SILF budgets: While SILF does expand bandwidth, its awards are small, and SILF rarely funds deliberately the dissemination of learning that helps programs expand to new arenas.

Given these structural bandwidth constraints, there are two basic pathways to achieving a Very High success innovation, one that at minimum has spread to many COs. First, individual, passionate, strategic innovators capitalize on their networks to convince stakeholders to spread the program (**CHOICES, VOICES, PROMISES; Menstrual Hygiene Management**), and second, entire innovation teams who have invested in ample program and MEAL staff quickly institutionalize the program within their departments or COs (**Literacy Boost, Numeracy Boost, Emergent Literacy and Math, Building Brains, and Interactive Audio Instruction**). The former group of innovations are more vulnerable to staff turnover, because they are more dependent on individuals—the institutionalization of programming and learning hedges against this risk.

For innovators in either of these camps, SILF does function as a laboratory. It funds key pieces of program growth including robust evaluations and adaptation guidelines. For innovators or teams without strong international networks, SILF can still plant effective projects within individual Impact Areas. For example, COs can start building their own innovations from scratch, strengthen ties with local governments and improve local programming as a result. Yet on their own, SILF awards are still not large enough to carry innovations into national or international arenas, especially as SILF rarely funds dissemination or promotion efforts deliberately. Both planting small programs in COs and scaling larger programs across COs are incredibly valuable functions, but SILF rarely bridges them—i.e. it does not independently take its own promising local initiatives to scale.

Muted and unsystematic dissemination of learning stunts SILF’s impact.

Many innovators are frustrated with the muted and uncoordinated dissemination of learnings for SILF projects, reflecting staff with the instincts but not the time or central learning platforms to spread their lessons learned. The key themes that emerged in this regard are:

Dissemination is underfunded.

The key medium for sharing knowledge about SILF projects, both inside and outside of Save the Children, is innovator networking, including by word of mouth, through one-shot presentations, and, more rarely, through organized learning exchanges within Save the Children. Networking is inseparable from the learning that catalyzes scale, a time-consuming, iterative process of stakeholder persuasion. Many innovators conflated sharing learning with “advocacy,” revealing that to them, learning was more about pushing forward than reflecting. Accordingly, learnings are shared far, far more from successful programs than from failed ones. Overall, though held responsible for it, innovators lacked bandwidth for sustained, iterative dissemination efforts, especially without funding outside of SILF.

There is little systematic management of SILF lessons learned.

Interviews indicate that there is no central knowledge hub or designated knowledge manager for lessons learned from SILF projects. From a TA innovator, “There aren’t really guides or standardized ways that learnings move through Save. It’s up to us to strategically take sharing learning into our own hands. There’s no learning point-person, no process. This is part of our model.” Unfortunately, because of this model, innovators lamented missing out on useful opportunities to learn from other SILF projects. Their single most common recommendation for improving SILF was to create a platform for sharing learnings across innovations. They desired easy access to key takeaways from all SILF projects to help them find tips and ideas for program design and to avoid other projects’ pitfalls. Relying on innovators to have the time, networks, and instincts to share lessons stunts the dissemination of learning. Devising accessible mechanisms to house SILF lessons and nudge and empower innovators to share their lessons learned with stakeholders who can act on them will enhance the value for money of SILF.

Remaining Questions

What do Save the Children staff who are not (yet) innovators think about SILF?

We only interviewed people who had received SILF awards, which, of course, leads to bias. Perhaps staff who have only had their SILF proposals rejected would have had different feedback for SILF’s operational processes. Moreover, we have not gauged how familiar the average Sponsorship employee in COs is with SILF, and we do not know enough about learning processes at Save the Children outside of Sponsorship.

How accessible is the SILF application process really? Are good CO ideas stifled because not all CO staff are aware of SILF or English-speaking?

Of the 36 projects represented in our survey data, only 6 were conceived fully in the country offices. Few projects did not have at least moderate TA support. Are there dynamics at play that prevent more junior field staff from taking full advantage of SILF (and vice versa)?

Why were the Philippines, Bangladesh, Nepal, Ethiopia, and Malawi the most successful country offices in using SILF?

More than half of all SILF projects were conducted in these five countries. Why? We were lucky to interview two long-established Malawi Sponsorship staff members, and we capture their thoughts on that CO's success in the [Spotlight on Malawi](#) section. With more foresight and time, we would have liked to compare successful COs or even conduct a focus group with representatives from each of them to add depth to our Determinants of Success section.

What further insight would arise from quantitatively categorizing projects according to performance in learning?

Unfortunately, we did not create quantitative variables to categorize projects according to all four learning functions. Although our variable for generating knowledge is robust, analogous variables for documenting and disseminating SILF project knowledge may have added precision to our analysis. Luckily, the overall trends and dynamics for each learning function are unmistakable, yielding actionable insight.

What does it mean that we did not find specific examples of institutional learning from failure?

In interviews, we found very, very few examples of institutional learning from failure, beyond the memories of individual innovators. Although this finding is striking, we also think it is suspicious. For example, we imagine there must have been lessons from less successful iterations of Literacy Boost, Numeracy Boost, or Emergent Literacy and Math that influenced program design later. They simply did not come up in interviews. In hindsight, we would have hammered more precisely on how programs learned from failure during the KIIs.

Evidence catalyzes program growth, but does publishing it in a prestigious research organization help?

We have not been able to examine how much methodological rigor convinces external stakeholders to adopt a program, versus the sheen of a fancy publication. Is an in-house report equally compelling to a published journal article with identical methods?

6. Recommendations

Given our findings, here are our recommendations for making the most of the Sponsorship Innovation and Learning Fund going forward.

1. Increase SILF's budget.

SILF is an extremely valuable institution within Sponsorship. Although it is reasonably well-funded already, additional resources would be a valuable investment for Sponsorship and for Save the Children US. More than 80% of SILF dollars have either resulted in functional new programming or had a moderate influence on program strategy. Even the Low success innovations, representing 16% of SILF investment (before 2020), typically have positive spillover effects.

2. Keep SILF's fundamental flexibility.

Continue fostering and harnessing Sponsorship staff's passion and expertise. Empower staff to realize their own programming visions for reaching Save the Children's Global Breakthroughs.

- Do not restrict award eligibility by more narrowly defining "innovation." Generally, merely adapting existing programming to a new context or filling a mundane programming gap is still strategic and worthwhile.
- Maintain a light application process to encourage wide participation.
- Maintain a light reporting process overall. Consider asking for more detailed financial reporting at year's end, but do not punish innovators in the next selection year for deviating from their budgets or plans.
- Consider sending SILF awards directly to innovation teams rather than CO leadership to ensure innovator ownership of the funds.
- Continue advertising the annual SILF call for proposals widely. Consider advertising and arranging translation services or logistical support to help any non-English speaking CO staff with proposal writing.
- In the annual call for proposals, do not advertise priority topics, but rather fund the most compelling project ideas that emerge organically. As innovations mature over a year or two, *then* privately consider focusing more resources on those addressing a trendy topic with more likelihood of attracting stakeholder attention.

3. Strategically advance promising SILF programs that have not reached their potential.

As our success typology demonstrates, some innovation programs stop short of their potential, and in different ways. Some scale farther than their evidence bases justify, some with strong evidence bases stop growing, but Very High success innovations need both evidence and deliberate promotion to achieve system-level impact. Rather than relying on innovator ingenuity to advance these programs, look back into the existing portfolio of innovations and identify the most strategic opportunities to continue what these innovators have started. If innovator no longer interested or not in a position to continue with the innovation, help identify and connect staff who might be.

- Fund evaluations for programs with more scale than evidence but that are working according to innovator observation. [Heart to HEART](#), [Gender Equality Training and Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators](#), [Waliku 2.0](#), and [My First Baby](#) come to mind.

- Conversely, fund expansion and promotion efforts for programs with more evidence than scale, such as **Health Boost**, **Duta Baca**, and **Raising Caregiving Capabilities through Psychosocial Support Groups**. Use SCUS and SCI networks to connect innovators of promising programs to donors and other key stakeholders, and help them pitch their innovations.
- In identifying the best investments, listen carefully to innovators, ask them what they would need to move these programs forward, and keep innovator ownership, program adaptability, and trendy topics in mind, in that order of importance.

4. Increase average award amounts, and continue guaranteeing two years of funding.

Currently, SILF awards are too small to build rigorous evidence or take promising innovations to scale without complementary resources. Consider taking on that role by increasing award sizes for program innovations that have demonstrated pilot success. To the extent that larger awards may mean fewer projects and thus greater competition during selection, perhaps adopt a tiered system that guarantees smaller awards for an innovation’s first two years but retains the option to invest more heavily in projects in the year after they demonstrate potential for scale. One innovator, intriguingly, recommended setting minimum and maximum funding amounts as another way to circumvent the pressure to request too little.

5. Help innovators fail faster and more successfully.

If SILF re-funds a project that has not accomplished much in the first year, actively help innovators salvage or pivot from their original plans. Before proposals are due, check in with innovators to listen to what their major challenges are and ensure that they are course correcting in their next proposals. At the very least, ask for an explicit plan to redirect the project based on the experience of the first year.

6. Intentionally build dissemination of learning into SILF budgets.

The first task that a bandwidth-constrained innovator will abandon is dissemination of learning, not because it is not valued but because it occurs last of the learning functions. Empower and require innovators to iteratively share their learnings by explicitly funding the networking that convinces stakeholders to act on these learnings, even if the program fails. Ask them to demonstrate awareness of key stakeholders to target with learnings. This will help them form partnerships that lead to scaling. Lastly, ensure that MEAL plans include and are aligned with learning dissemination plans. E.g., if the targeted stakeholders will be tough sells, conduct MEAL at a higher level of rigor.

7. Systematically accelerate learning from the SILF portfolio by creating new “public goods” for learning within Sponsorship.

Currently, learnings from SILF projects are not centrally housed or organized, which prevents innovators from make useful connections between their projects and previous ones, curbing SILF’s overall value. To accelerate learning among innovators:

- Create an accessible, open-source knowledge-sharing platform to house lessons learned from SILF projects, and require that innovators post key takeaways from their project experiences on it.
- Construct and maintain a public, dynamic database of the existing SILF portfolio.
- Organize more learning exchanges among teams tackling similar challenges.
- If feasible, consider integrating these systems with existing Sponsorship knowledge management platforms such as OneNet or Workplace.

8. Hire or restructure Sponsorship MEAL staff to empower, connect, and guide SILF innovators more actively.

This idea is implicit in and ties together most of our recommendations. SILF gives wide flexibility and ownership to its innovators but not always the tools they need to succeed at scale. Much like early monitoring and iterative problem-solving molds innovations for early success, we believe more systematic monitoring and portfolio-wide problem-solving would enhance SILF's overall value for money, even accounting for the additional costs. We suggest four functions for such staff:

- Maintain relationships with innovators throughout the award year and listen to what they need. In this way, informally monitor SILF projects and respond to innovators' problems by connecting them with the resources or expertise they might need. Essentially, enact recommendations 3 and 5.
- Maintain a database of the existing SILF portfolio, identify the most strategic programming and learning gaps to plug in order to scale existing SILF programs, and reach out to their innovators to encourage and discuss this as in recommendation 3.
- Help innovators of promising innovations network with relevant donor and other stakeholder contacts in the SCUS and SCI networks. Support them ad hoc in pitching their programs.
- Create and maintain the “public goods for learning” outlined in recommendation 7, and nudge innovators to contribute to them. Organize learning exchanges between innovators tackling similar challenges.

Tips for innovators and the SILF selection committee

By and large, our recommendations are intended for SILF leadership in the STWG, because the most entrenched barriers to SILF's value are structural, not due to individual actors. Nevertheless, assuming no changes to SILF's model, below are our tips for innovators and for the annually convened SILF selection committee.

Innovators

1. **Submit ideas that you are passionate about.** For CO innovators especially, you may be deeply familiar with your implementation context; use that familiarity and expertise to identify ways Save the Children may not be programming as efficiently as it could be, and dare to boldly reshape these programming gaps. Conversely, do not submit an idea simply because you think SILF will fund it.
2. **Ask for what you need.** You might feel pressure to underestimate what you need in order to be selected, but innovation is challenging. Make sure your team asks for the time, budget, and expertise necessary to accomplish what is in your proposal and your vision. If your CO team lacks any of these resources, contact a technical advisor to help you arrange for them.
3. **Monitor pilots closely.** Improve your program design by listening for, catching, and solving early hitches. Innovators that do this produce program designs that are smoother and better suited to context, because they then anticipate what they did not, at first, anticipate. This monitoring can be informal, including simply by maintaining close relationships with the implementation team.
4. **Make it a toolkit.** Many of Save the Children's most adaptable and thus widespread programs take a toolkit approach, meaning they integrate a set of program components that approach a problem from multiple angles. Ideally, all program components are used together and complement each other, but, crucially, some program components can be implemented without the others. In this way, some program components can fail without the entire program failing, and each CO has ownership over their version of the program.

5. **Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate.** Build MEAL into all innovation programs. If your intuition and some preliminary evidence tells you that your program pilot works, propose to commission a rigorous evaluation of it early. Early, rigorous evidence of program impact is a powerful selling point to donors, government officials, and other stakeholders interested in the program.
6. **Disseminate, disseminate, disseminate.** Make concrete plans for disseminating evidence from your project experience. In the case of a successful program, know who the stakeholders are to target for expanding the program, whether they are colleagues, or donors, or both. In the case of a less successful program, still make sure that you share these lessons. Network, and if you're a TA, also help your CO co-innovators network.
7. **Don't leave your team hanging.** If you are privately planning to leave Save the Children, try to institutionalize your innovation as much as you can, deputizing the colleagues most likely to share your passion for it.
8. **Bring in complementary funding.** Seek other funding sources for your innovation to complement SILF funding. Leverage SILF dollars by targeting in your proposal a key aspect of scale up, such as the program pilot, an evaluation, or a set of adaptation guidelines.

Selection committee

1. **Consider the innovation team's bandwidth.** Some innovators described pressure to underfund their proposals—claim to do more with less—to improve their chances of selection. Can applicants realistically achieve their proposal outputs with the stated budget? Does the budget risk overburdening staff or compromising program/MEAL quality? Is enough “Level of Effort” included? Do the applicants have the appropriate skills to accomplish their innovation plan?
2. **Is this at the pilot stage or an expansion stage?:** If the proposal is not just aiming to establish a local program but to achieve cross-country scale, then SILF money alone may not cut it. Does the proposal identify other funding sources or potential sources? Does it explain how SILF money will target a key strategy for scaling, such as an evaluation, new program population, or adaptation guide? Is the idea worth funding more robustly?
3. **Consider dissemination of learning:** Does the proposal budget and plan for the dissemination of learning? Does it demonstrate awareness of who the stakeholders are to convince, what they need from them, and how will they be convinced?
4. **Require MEAL:** Is the MEAL plan clear, achievable, and tailored to this dissemination plan?
5. **Consider the CO:** Does the country office have a history of successful innovation programs? Is in-country MEAL staff available to support the project? If not, does the proposal include sufficient TA support to circumvent these limitations?
6. **Pandering, Ownership:** Given that all projects must address COVID this year, does the proposal show signs of cobbling together a COVID-related idea for the sake of the money? It could be worth funding more organically developed projects even if they are more tangentially related to COVID.

Appendix 1: Abridged SILF Database

Project Name	Data sources	Year Began Funding	Years Funded	Program or Learning	Success Category	Total funding	Total funding in 2020 dollars	Number of Countries	Discontinued after SILF	Continued in Impact Area	Large-scale partnership	Local government	AD	BE	ECCD	SHN	MNCHN	Gender	Child Protection	Inclusion	Technology	Dependence on SILF	MEAL
Choices, Voices, Promises	KII and documentation	2009	4	Program	Very High	\$130,442	\$147,225	12			✓		✓					✓	✓			Medium	Causal evaluation
Literacy Boost	KII and documentation	2009	5	Program	Very High	\$131,900	\$153,319	40			✓	✓		✓								Medium	Causal evaluation
My First Baby	KII and documentation	2009	5	Program	Medium - More Scale	\$144,486	\$163,874	2		✓		✓	✓				✓					High	Formal MEAL plan
Multilingual Education	Email responses and documentation	2009	2	Program	Low	\$45,800	\$50,249	1	✓					✓	✓					✓		Very High	Formal MEAL plan
IAI Radio	KII and documentation	2009	1	Program	Very High	\$12,000	\$14,661	1			✓	✓			✓					✓		Medium	Less rigorous MEAL
Malaria in Schools	KII and documentation	2010	6	Program	Medium - More Evidence	\$190,500	\$215,586	2	✓		✓	✓				✓						Medium	Causal evaluation
ECCD in Bangladesh	Some documentation, large gaps	2011	1	Program	Low	\$12,000	\$14,057	1							✓								Formal MEAL plan
First Pregnancy Workshop	No documentation (Excluded)	2011	1			\$2,700	\$3,163																
Involving adolescents in ECCD in Bolivia	Some documentation, large gaps	2011	1	Program	Low	\$12,000	\$14,057	1					✓		✓		✓						Less rigorous MEAL
Re-design of SCiPHL ECCD materials	Some documentation, large gaps	2011	1	Program	Low	\$6,000	\$7,028	1							✓							Very High	Less rigorous MEAL
Numeracy Boost	KII and documentation	2012	3	Program	Very High	\$132,000	\$147,198	4			✓	✓		✓						✓		High	Causal evaluation
Digital Data Collection Pilot	No documentation (Excluded)	2012	1			\$5,261	\$5,988																

Essential Package	Documentation	2012	1	Program	High - More Evidence	\$25,000	\$28,453	1							✓					✓	✓		Medium	Formal MEAL plan
Emergent Literacy and Math	KII and documentation	2013	4	Program	Very High	\$188,500	\$207,362	5			✓	✓			✓								High	Causal evaluation
Cognition Tool Kit	No documentation (Excluded)	2013	1			\$20,000	\$22,405																	
VYA Signature Program	KII and documentation	2014	2	Learning	Low	\$59,000	\$64,495	1	✓				✓										Very High	Knowledge Management
Menstrual Hygiene Management	KII and documentation	2014	5	Program	Very High	\$282,848	\$305,622	20			✓	✓		✓		✓							High	Formal MEAL plan
IDELA	KII and documentation	2014	3	Learning	Very High	\$147,373	\$161,710	6			✓	✓		✓								✓	High	Causal evaluation
Development of resources for remediation	Email responses and documentation	2015	1	Learning	Medium	\$20,000	\$22,076	0	✓				✓								✓		Very High	Knowledge Management
Health Boost	KII and documentation	2016	2	Program	High - More Evidence	\$27,000	\$28,911	1		✓						✓							Very High	Formal MEAL plan
RISE tool	Email responses and documentation	2016	1	Program	Medium - More Scale	\$45,000	\$48,999	2					✓										Very High	Less rigorous MEAL
Citizen Reporting Platform for Addressing Violence Against Children	KII and documentation	2016	2	Program	Low	\$46,773	\$50,597	1	✓			✓								✓	✓		Very High	Less rigorous MEAL
Leveraging Technology for Quality ECD	KII and documentation	2016	1	Program	Medium - More Evidence	\$49,000	\$53,355	1						✓								✓	High	Formal MEAL plan
School Lunch Boxes	Documentation	2016	1	Program	Low	\$9,000	\$9,800	1	✓			✓			✓								Medium	Formal MEAL plan
Support Children with Disabilities	KII and documentation	2016	1	Program	Medium - More Scale	\$48,000	\$52,266	1		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓					✓		Very High	Formal MEAL plan
Duta Baca	KII and documentation	2017	2	Program	High - More Evidence	\$70,790	\$74,869	1		✓			✓										Very High	Causal evaluation
AD Assessment Nepal	KII and documentation	2017	2	Learning	Low	\$66,500	\$69,812	1	✓				✓					✓	✓	✓			Very High	Less rigorous MEAL

AD integrated curriculum	KII and documentation	2017	3	Program	Low	\$110,500	\$114,979	4	✓				✓				✓	✓	✓		Very High	Less rigorous MEAL
Child Health and Development	Some documentation, large gaps	2017	2	Program	Medium - More Scale	\$99,500	\$111,822	1								✓		✓				Less rigorous MEAL
Inclusive Education	KII and documentation	2017	3	Learning	High	\$105,000	\$109,441	5	✓		✓	✓		✓					✓		Very High	Formal MEAL plan
Longitudinal Study in Ethiopia	KII and documentation	2017	2	Learning	High	\$100,000	\$105,154	1		✓				✓	✓						High	Less rigorous MEAL
Violence Free Schools Initiatives in Sponsorship Programs	KII and documentation	2017	1	Learning	Low	\$16,000	\$16,997	0	✓										✓		Very High	Less rigorous MEAL
Gender Equality Training for Early Childhood Educators	KII and documentation	2018	3	Program	High - More Scale	\$160,000	\$162,660	3		✓		✓			✓			✓			Very High	Less rigorous MEAL
Heart to HEART	KII and documentation	2018	1	Program	Medium - More Scale	\$43,500	\$45,273	1		✓		✓	✓					✓			High	Less rigorous MEAL
Technology for Education Program Monitoring (Tech4EPM)	KII and documentation	2018	1	Learning	Low	\$22,500	\$23,417	9	✓											✓	Very High	Less rigorous MEAL
Waliku 2.0	KII and documentation	2019	1	Program	High - More Scale	\$35,000	\$35,870	1		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓				✓	Medium	Less rigorous MEAL
Building Brighter Brains	KII and documentation	2019	3	Program	Very High	\$218,235	\$227,704	1			✓	✓			✓				✓		High	Causal evaluation
Raising Caregiving Capabilities through Psychosocial Support Groups	KII and documentation	2019	2	Program	Medium - More Evidence	\$65,800	\$66,193	1		✓		✓			✓						Very High	Less rigorous MEAL
Use of technology in Basic Education	KII and documentation	2019	1	Program	Low	\$40,000	\$40,995	1		✓				✓	✓						Very High	Less rigorous MEAL
Social and Emotional Learning Foundations	Some documentation, large gaps	2019	1	Program	Low	\$80,000	\$81,989	1				✓		✓				✓	✓			Less rigorous MEAL

Appendix 2: Multi-year SILF Investments

Malaria in schools		Literacy Boost		My First Baby		Choices, Voices, and Promises		VYA Signature Program		Emergent Literacy and Math		IDELA	
2010	\$11,905	2009	\$14,661	2009	\$12,218	2009	\$3,054	2014	\$19,851	2013	\$4,145	2014	\$66,832
2011	\$35,142	2010	\$33,335	2010	\$1,191	2011	\$13,295	2016	\$44,644	2014	\$68,927	2015	\$96,584
2012	\$56,906	2011	\$33,854	2011	\$351	2012	\$73,978		2015	\$41,393	2017	\$21,753	
2013	\$50,971	2012	\$56,906	2013	\$93,189	2014	\$56,898		2016	\$51,504			
2014	\$55,142	2013	\$14,563	2015	\$33,115								
2015	\$5,519												
Total	\$215,586	Total	\$153,319	Total	\$140,064	Total	\$147,225	Total	\$64,495	Total	\$165,969	Total	\$169,853
Numeracy Boost		Menstrual Hygiene Management		Health Boost		Citizen Reporting Portal		Multilingual Education		Inclusive Education		Duta Baca	
2012	\$102,430	2014	\$55,142	2016	\$9,364	2016	\$37,275	2009	\$12,218	2016	\$52,266	2017	\$58,842
2014	\$18,748	2015	\$44,153	2017	\$19,547	2017	\$13,321	2017	\$36,968	2017	\$36,119	2018	\$16,028
2018	\$26,019	2016	\$56,730						2018	\$36,427			
		2017	\$46,701						2019	\$36,895			
		2017	\$15,935										
		2019	\$42,532										
Total	\$147,198	Total	\$261,193	Total	\$28,911	Total	\$50,597	Total	\$49,186	Total	\$161,706	Total	\$74,869
ECCD Prospective Study		Building Brighter Brains		AD Integrated Curriculum		AD Assessment in Nepal		Gender Equality Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators					
2017	\$53,116	2017	\$83,110	2017	\$26,558	2017	\$29,639	2018	\$52,038				
2018	\$52,038	2018	\$72,853	2018	\$52,038	2018	\$40,173	2019	\$25,622				
				2019	\$33,821								

Total	\$105,154	Total	\$155,964	Total	\$112,417	Total	\$69,812	Total	\$77,660	

Appendix 3: Correlations with Success

Determinant	Success Level						
	Low	Medium	High	Very High	Number of innovations	Statistical test used	Statistical Significance
Type of innovation							
Learning	4 (50.0%)	2 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (25%)	8		
Program	9 (32.1%)	7 (25.0%)	5 (17.9%)	7 (25.0%)	28		
					36	Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.577
Program discontinued after conclusion of SILF funding?							
No	5 (20.1%)	7 (29.2%)	5 (20.1%)	7 (29.2%)	24		
Yes	4 (80.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5		
					29	Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.063
Innovation continued in pilot sites or more sites within impact area							
No	8 (40.0%)	4 (20.0%)	1 (5.0%)	7 (35.0%)	20		
Yes	1 (11.1%)	4 (44.4%)	4 (44.4%)	0 (0.0%)	9		
					29	Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.008
Innovation was implemented in multiple sponsorship country offices							
No	8 (47.1%)	5 (29.4%)	3 (17.7%)	1 (5.9%)	17		
Yes	1 (8.3%)	3 (25.0%)	2 (16.7%)	6 (50.0%)	12		
					29	Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.028
Program/innovation included large or national partners beyond Save the Children							
No	9 (42.9%)	7 (33.3%)	4 (19.1%)	1 (4.8%)	21		
Yes	0 (0.0%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	6 (75.0%)	8		
					29	Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.001
Level of dependence on SILF funding							
Low ("Somewhat accelerated by SILF")	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25.0%)	4 (50.0%)	8		
Medium ("Significantly")	0 (0.0%)	3 (37.5%)	1 (12.5%)	4 (50.0%)	8		

accelerated by SILF")							
High ("Likely impossible without SILF")	9 (52.9%)	5 (29.4%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.9%)	17		
					33	Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.034
Primary thematic focal area							
Adolescent Development							
No	9 (31.0%)	9 (31.0%)	4 (13.8%)	7 (24.1%)	29		
Yes	4 (50.0%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25.0%)	8		
					37	Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.694
Basic Education							
No	10 (40.0%)	6 (24.0%)	3 (12.0%)	6 (66.7%)	25		
Yes	3 (25.0%)	4 (33.3%)	2 (16.7%)	3 (32.4%)	12		
					37	Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.822
Early Childhood Care and Development							
No	8 (36.4%)	6 (27.3%)	3 (13.6%)	5 (22.7%)	22		
Yes	5 (33.3%)	4 (26.7%)	2 (13.3%)	4 (26.7%)	15		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.994
School Health and Nutrition							
No	12 (37.5%)	8 (25.0%)	4 (12.5%)	8 (25.0%)	32		
Yes	1 (20.0%)	2 (40.0%)	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	5		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.811
Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health and Nutrition							
No	12 (36.4%)	8 (24.2%)	4 (12.1%)	9 (27.3%)	33		
Yes	1 (25.0%)	2 (50.0%)	1 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.469
Gender							
No	10 (33.3%)	9 (30.0%)	4 (13.3%)	7 (23.3%)	30		
Yes	3 (42.9%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)	2 (28.6%)	7		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.865

Child Protection							
No	8 (28.6%)	9 (32.1%)	4 (14.3%)	7 (25.0%)	28		
Yes	5 (55.6%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	2 (22.2%)	9		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.458
Inclusion							
No	10 (34.5%)	8 (27.6%)	4 (13.8%)	7 (24.1%)	29		
Yes	3 (37.5%)	2 (25.0%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25.0%)	8		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.998
Innovation covers multiple themes							
No	6 (37.5%)	5 (31.3%)	1 (6.3%)	4 (20.0%)	16		
Yes	6 (30.0%)	5 (25.0%)	4 (20.0%)	5 (25.0%)	20		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.998
Technology							
No	11 (35.5%)	9 (29.0%)	4 (12.9%)	7 (22.6%)	31		
Yes	2 (33.3%)	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	2 (33.3%)	6		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.900
Direct participants							
Babies and toddlers							
No	13 (35.1%)	10 (27.0%)	5 (13.5%)	9 (24.3%)	37		
Yes	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0		
Early primary school							
No	10 (37.0%)	9 (33.3%)	3 (11.1%)	5 (18.5%)	27		
Yes	3 (30.0%)	1 (10.0%)	2 (20.0%)	4 (40.0%)	10		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.336
Very young adolescents							
No	9 (33.3%)	7 (25.9%)	4 (14.8%)	7 (25.9%)	27		
Yes	4 (40.0%)	3 (30.0%)	1 (10.0%)	2 (20.0%)	10		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.947
Older adolescents							

No	9 (31.0%)	8 (27.6%)	4 (13.8%)	8 (27.6%)	29		
Yes	4 (50.0%)	2 (25.0%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	8		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.741
Parents/caregivers							
No	11 (44.0%)	5 (20.0%)	3 (12.0%)	6 (24.0%)	25		
Yes	2 (16.7%)	5 (41.7%)	2 (16.7%)	3 (25.0%)	12		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.352
Teachers							
No	11 (42.3%)	8 (30.8%)	3 (11.5%)	4 (15.4%)	26		
Yes	2 (18.2%)	2 (18.2%)	2 (18.2%)	5 (45.5%)	11		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.182
Community leaders							
No	12 (37.5%)	10 (31.3%)	5 (15.6%)	5 (15.6%)	32		
Yes	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (80.0%)	5		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.018
Indirect participants							
Early primary school							
No	7 (38.9%)	6 (33.3%)	2 (11.1%)	3 (16.7%)	18		
Yes	6 (31.6%)	4 (21.1%)	3 (15.8%)	6 (31.6%)	19		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.648
Very young adolescents							
No	6 (30.0%)	5 (25.0%)	3 (15.0%)	6 (30.0%)	20		
Yes	7 (41.2%)	5 (29.4%)	2 (11.8%)	3 (17.7%)	17		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.791
Older adolescents							
No	7 (30.4%)	6 (26.1%)	3 (13.0%)	7 (30.4%)	23		
Yes	6 (42.9%)	4 (28.6%)	2 (14.3%)	2 (14.3%)	14		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.718
Parents and caregivers							

No	12 (36.4%)	8 (24.2%)	4 (12.1%)	9 (27.3%)	33		
Yes	1 (25.0%)	2 (50.0%)	1 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.469
Teachers							
No	12 (34.3%)	10 (28.6%)	4 (11.4%)	9 (25.7%)	35		
Yes	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.347
Community leaders							
No	13 (35.1%)	10 (27.0%)	5 (13.5%)	9 (24.3%)	37		
Yes	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.347
Schools							
No	11 (40.7%)	8 (29.6%)	3 (11.1%)	5 (18.5%)	27		
Yes	2 (20.0%)	2 (20.0%)	2 (20.0%)	4 (40.0%)	10		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.399
Partners							
Local implementing organizations							
No	12 (37.5%)	9 (28.1%)	5 (15.6%)	6 (18.8%)	32		
Yes	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (60.0%)	5		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.232
Government agencies and/or ministries							
No	10 (52.6%)	6 (31.6%)	2 (10.5%)	1 (5.3%)	19		
Yes	3 (16.7%)	4 (22.2%)	3 (16.7%)	8 (44.4%)	18		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.020
Local research organizations							
No	13 (39.4%)	8 (24.2%)	4 (12.1%)	8 (24.2%)	33		
Yes	0 (0.0%)	2 (50.0%)	1 (25.0%)	1 (25.0%)	4		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.020
Global research organizations							

No	13 (41.9%)	8 (25.8%)	5 (16.1%)	5 (16.1%)	31		
Yes	0 (0.0%)	2 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (66.7%)	6		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.031
Multiple partners							
No	1 (16.7%)	3 (50.0%)	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)			
Yes	3 (17.7%)	3 (17.7%)	3 (17.7%)	8 (47.1%)			
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.418
Origin of idea							
Country office	2 (33.3%)	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	2 (33.3%)	6		
Country and Global Staff	1 (8.3%)	4 (33.3%)	2 (16.7%)	5 (41.7%)	12		
Global staff	6 (50.0%)	3 (37.5%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (16.7%)	12		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.471
Period when first year of funding was given							
2009-2012	4 (36.4%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)	4 (36.4%)	11		
2013-2016	3 (27.3%)	5 (45.5%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (27.3%)	11		
2017-2020	6 (40.0%)	4 (26.7%)	3 (20.0%)	2 (13.3%)	15		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.363
Had formal MEAL strategy							
No	9 (47.4%)	6 (31.6%)	2 (10.5%)	2 (10.5%)	19		
Yes	4 (22.2%)	4 (22.2%)	3 (16.7%)	7 (38.9%)	18		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.153
Included a causal evaluation?							
No	12 (41.4%)	9 (31.0%)	4 (13.8%)	4 (13.8%)	29		
Yes	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	5 (62.5%)	8		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.038
Level of rigor of MEAL							
Less rigorous	3 (30.0%)	3 (30.0%)	2 (20.0%)	2 (20.0%)	10		
Formal MEAL Plan	9 (47.4%)	6 (31.6%)	2 (10.5%)	2 (10.5%)	19		

Causal evaluation	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	5 (62.5%)	8		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.140
Less Rigorous vs Causal							
Less rigorous	9 (47.4%)	6 (31.6%)	2 (10.5%)	2 (10.5%)	19		
Causal	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	5 (62.5%)	8		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.036
Level of Rigor (program innovations only)							
None	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	2 (22.2%)	1 (11.1%)	9		
Less rigorous	6 (46.2%)	4 (30.8%)	2 (15.4%)	1 (7.7%)	5		
Causal	0 (0.0%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)	5 (71.4%)	7		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.051
Origin of idea and level of MEAL rigor							
	Level of rigor						
Origin	None	Less rigorous	Causal				
Country office staff	1 (16.7%)	3 (50.0%)	2 (33.3%)		6 (100%)		
Country and global staff	7 (46.7%)	3 (20.0%)	5 (33.3%)		15 (100%)		
Global staff	2 (15.4%)	10 (76.9%)	1 (7.7%)		13 (100%)		
						Pearson Chi-Squared	Pr=0.044

Non-categorical relationships				
	Odds ratio or coefficient	Number of innovations	Statistical test used	Statistical Significance
Total funding across years	1.00	37	Ordered Logit	0.000
Number of countries with implementation	1.54	37	Ordered Logit	0.040
Year funding started	1.13	37	Ordered Logit	0.180
Number of years funded	2.25	37	Ordered Logit	0.003

Appendix 4: Key Informant Interview Guide

Introduction/Consent

Thank you again for agreeing to speak with us. Before getting started, we wanted to quickly review the consent process for this interview. Please note that your participation is completely voluntary and all responses you provide will remain confidential.

Were you able to review the consent statement we emailed you? If no, read email consent script to respondent.

Do you have any questions about that?

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

Do you agree to allow this interview to be recorded?

Origins of the innovation

I'd like to begin by thinking back to the very start of this project.

- Were you involved in the process where the innovation was first developed? By this I mean when the idea was first discussed and then developed into a proposal.
 - NOTE: If not, ask at which stage she/he became involved.
- What was the 'spark' for the idea?
 - PROBE: For example, was it that you or the team thought that there was a better way to do a specific type of programming or you wanted to try doing things in a different way?
 - PROBE: What would you say was especially innovative about the idea?
- Apart from you, who else was involved in the development of the original idea for the innovation?
 - PROBE: What were the roles of the different people involved? Did different people contribute in different ways?
 - PROBE: Would you say that most of the drive for the innovation came from country staff members, from global staff members, or was it a team effort?
- What were the goals of the innovation at the beginning?
 - PROBE: How well did the project meet those goals?

Impact of innovation

Now I would like to ask you about the effect that the innovation had. This effect can be anything from improving the way the program teams implemented their programs to scaling up the program to the national level or to other countries. Please try to think of both positive and negative things that may have resulted from the program.

- Did the program have much of an impact on the children that the program was working with?
 - PROBE: What was that effect?
 - PROBE: Can you give me some examples?
 - PROBE: Did it have more of an effect on some groups than on others?
- How did you measure impact for the innovation?
 - PROBE: Can you describe the monitoring and evaluation that was done for the innovation?
 - PROBE: Was the information from MEAL useful for learning or scaling up the innovation/innovative approach?
 - IF YES: How?

- Did the program influence the way that you in the country office conducted your programming?
 - PROBE: For example, did this change how the office conducted components of their programming, encourage different approaches to working with specific groups of children, or what programs emphasized?
 - PROBE: If yes, how?
 - PROBE: If not, why do you think it did not influence things in the country office?
- Do you know if the program influenced how other Save country offices conducted their programming?
 - PROBE: If yes, how?
 - PROBE: If no, why do you think it did not influence other country offices?
- Was the innovative program scaled up? By scaled up, I mean either that it was adopted more widely either by Save the Children or other partners, including the government, or expanded to reach different groups, regions or countries.
 - PROBE: If yes, could you explain how that process took place? What were the factors that led to the program being scaled-up?
 - PROBE: What strategies did you use to make the scale-up work more effectively?
 - FOLLOW UP PROBE: Did you engage different stakeholders? Did you work with a broader group of people within Save?
 - PROBE: Was the decision about whether to continue the innovation or scale it up based on the evidence generated by the MEAL system, or were other factors more important?
- What do you think the long-term impacts of the project have been?
 - PROBE: Did the project influence country office programming in a sustained way?
 - PROBE: Did the project influence global sponsorship programming?
 - PROBE: Did the project influence the way other groups, such as other NGOs or the government, conduct their programming?
 - PROBE: Are there any other types of impact that you can think of that resulted from the innovation that this project developed?
 - PROBE: Were there impacts that resulted from the innovation that you did not anticipate?

Determinants of level of impact

Now I would like to talk to you about some of the things that determined how much impact the innovation had.

- What do you see as the key factors that contributed to the successes that the innovation had?
 - PROBE: Were you thinking about how to take the innovation to scale, even just within your country office or team, from the beginning?
 - IF YES, did you take specific steps in how you designed the innovation to make it more possible to scale it up?
- What were the most significant challenges that the innovation faced?
 - For example, did you find that it was hard to get staff to do things differently, that people didn't have time, the country office didn't really support the effort, etc.
 - PROBE: What didn't go as planned?
 - PROBE: How did you manage these challenges?
 - PROBE IF NOT HIGH IMPACT: Why do you think the innovation did not have as high an impact as you hoped?
- *If interpersonal relationships mentioned, ask:* How much do you feel the success of the innovation depended on your interpersonal relationships, particularly with the TA or CO leaders?

- PROBE: How did the country office environment support or hinder your efforts?
- PROBE: How about your relationship with senior SILF or sponsorship leadership?

Learning

Now I would like to ask you about how evidence and lessons learned from [innovation] were utilized and what influence they had.

How did the lessons you learned through your experience with this innovation, both in terms of things that ‘worked’ and things that ‘didn’t work’, influence whether the innovation was scaled up, changed programming approaches, or received additional funding?

- How effective do you think you were in sharing those lessons, either formally or informally, with others, including key stakeholders inside and outside of Save the Children?
 - PROBE: With your colleagues in the country office?
 - PROBE: With others in the Global Sponsorship team?
- How welcoming or receptive did you find others to be of the lessons you learned?
- What factors shaped how well the lessons from the innovation, again both in terms of what worked and what did not, were shared with others?
 - PROBE: Do you think there are ways to improve the sharing and utilization of lessons of this type within Save the Children?

Perceptions of SILF

Now I would like to ask you about your feelings about the SILF, both in terms of your own personal experience and the function it serves within Global Sponsorship.

- Would you have found a way to test out the ideas that were included in [innovation/project name] without the SILF funding?
 - PROBE: Was the SILF funding critical to the success of the innovation, or would you have found another way of implementing the innovative idea/approach?
 - PROBE: What do you think it allowed you to achieve that you might not have otherwise?
- How well do you feel the SILF supports innovation?
 - PROBE: How could it do a better job of supporting innovation?

Thank you very much for providing all this interesting information. Do you have anything else that you’d like to mention that we haven’t touched on already?

Closing

IF NO, thank you again for your time. If you have any questions or remember something that you think would be useful, please feel free to email me. We anticipate that we will be finished with our review in the next couple of months, at which point the SILF team will be able to share results and insights with you.

Appendix 5: Innovator Survey

Innovator questions

- i. What is your name?
[Open text]
- ii. What is your gender?

Female
Male
Other
I prefer not to share.

iii. Do you still work for Save the Children?

Yes
No

iv. How many different projects funded by the SILF have you managed or helped manage?

[Integer]

Innovation questions

This section repeats for each innovation the responded helped manage, from question iv.

1. What was the first innovation you managed or helped manage?

[Open text - the answer to this question is inserted into later questions]

2. What was your position during the first year that [innovation] was funded by SILF?

[Open text]

3. At what Save the Children office did you work during the first year that SILF funded [innovation]?

[Open text]

4. About how many years had you been working for Save the Children during the first year that SILF funded [innovation]?

[Integer]

5. Were you still working for Save the Children when [innovation] stopped receiving SILF funding?

Yes

No

I don't remember/know.

6. Who are the best 1-3 contacts to tell the whole story of [innovation], including after SILF funding ended?
You can include "me."

[Open text]

7. Who came up with the idea for [innovation]?

Country office staff

Global staff

Country office staff and global staff equally

I don't remember/know.

7a. Name(s). Can include "me."

[Open text]

8. Before SILF began funding [innovation], had [innovation] already been developed or piloted?

Yes

No

I don't remember/know.

9. Was [innovation] co-financed with external funding?

Yes
No
I don't remember/know.

10. Was the concept for [innovation] inspired by a prior SILF-funded project?

Yes
No
I don't remember/know.

10.a Which one?

[Open text]

11. Did [innovation] expand to additional regions within pilot countries after the first year that SILF funded [innovation]? (Even after SILF funding ended.)

Yes
No
Global innovation, not country-office-based
I don't remember/know.

12. Did [innovation] expand to additional countries after the first year that SILF funded [innovation]? (Even after SILF funding ended.)

Yes
No
Global innovation, not country-office-based
I don't remember/know.

13. Who was most responsible for the scaling and adaptation of [innovation] to additional settings?

Skip if no scaling/adaptation
Country office staff
Global staff
Country office staff and global staff equally
I don't remember/know.

13a. Name(s). Can include "me."

[Open text]

14. In total, to about how many countries did [innovation] scale? (Even after SILF funding ended)

Skip if no scaling/adaptation

[Integer]

15. In your opinion, did [innovation] have a long-term influence on country office programming?

Strongly Agree
Agree
I don't know.
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

16. In your opinion, did [innovation] have a long-term influence on sponsorship programming globally?

Strongly Agree
Agree
I don't know.
Disagree

Strongly Disagree

17. In your opinion, did [innovation] have a long-term influence on Save the Children programming globally?

Strongly Agree

Agree

I don't know.

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

18. In your opinion, did [innovation] have a long-term influence on national government policies?

Strongly Agree

Agree

I don't know.

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

19. We may invite you to a Zoom interview with us to gain a more nuanced understanding of [innovation]. If we do, what aspects of [innovation]'s story, impact, or lack thereof should we make sure to ask you about?

[Open text]

