



**global** fund  
for  
**children**

# Global Fund for Children

Fall 2025 Impact Report

Header photo: Students at a school run by GFC partner Avani in Kolhapur, India

Global Fund for Children builds cohorts of brilliant, impactful, community-led organizations that are aligned in their idea that all children have the right to reach their full potential. In this update we share reflections on the **first convening of the Thriving Through Play initiative** in East Africa, a **spotlight on the HEEL Initiative** promoting healthy masculinities in Central America, and **key findings from our first ever Global Impact Study.**

*Read on to learn more about how with your support, Global Fund for Children ensures that our work is better, together.*

## The Transformational Power of Play

In partnership with The LEGO Foundation, Global Fund for Children launched Thriving Through Play this year, an initiative to promote mental health and well-being for children aged 6–12 in Kenya and Uganda through the power of play. From performing arts and storytelling, to dance and sports, GFC's community-led partners are using the universal language of play to build mental health resilience for children who are living in crisis-affected settings, such as refugee settlements and host communities, across the two countries. More than fun activities, these organizations are teaching powerful tools for healing and creating safe spaces where young minds can process, grow, and thrive.

***“With play, we can make [learning] fun for every child without putting pressure on them. Thriving Through Play means that children can learn faster, adapt, and heal from traumas they have been through.”***  
***Ponsiano, Community Focus International***

Young boys with their artwork from Do it for the Kids in Zimbabwe



The Thriving Through Play initiative builds off GFC’s work in the Partnership to Education All Kids (PEAK) initiative which brought together 66 grassroots organizations in ten countries across Latin America, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa to promote education access and foster lifelong learning. In a learning review, PEAK partners shared evidence of the use of play-based learning to create real change for children, teachers, and entire communities. Through play, they’ve seen kids learn better, gain confidence, and build stronger connections with each other.

In July, the Thriving Through Play cohort of **20 community organizations from refugee and host communities across Kenya and Uganda came together for three-days of connection, learning and play!**

Bundi Kabanze, GFC’s Regional Co-Director for Africa, who leads the Initiative explained that the convening is core to GFC’s trust-based approach: “The convening created intentional space for open and transparent communication, allowing both GFC and our partners to clarify expectations, align around shared goals, and raise questions in a supportive environment.” In addition to practical discussions and training sessions from GFC staff on communications and safeguarding, the gathering helped strengthen personal connections, building rapport and mutual understanding that extend beyond grantmaking. “By bringing partners together, we fostered a sense of community and solidarity, encouraging collaboration and peer learning among organizations facing similar challenges,” Bundi explained.



Convenings are a foundational part of the capacity building support that GFC provides for partners. In-person time together reflects GFC’s deep commitment to being an accessible and supportive partner, setting the tone for continued dialogue, shared problem-solving, and long-term partnership. For the Thriving Through Play cohort, this collective experience laid an important foundation of trust and mutual respect that will guide our relationships with partners throughout the three-year funding cycle, and beyond.

**[Click here for a look inside the convening and here to see the faces of the Thriving Through Play cohort!](#)**

We’re honored to walk alongside the Thriving Through Play cohort over the next three years, and to support their vital work in securing every child’s fundamental right to joy, safety, and the chance to flourish even in the most challenging circumstances.

## The HEEL Initiative Grows Across Borders

Since May of 2021, GFC has reached over 30,000 children and young people in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua through our Promoting Youth Leadership for Gender Justice Initiative, also known as the HEEL Initiative, a Mayan word that means change and transformation. Part of Global Fund for Children’s Gender Justice pillar, the HEEL Initiative is one of two initiatives specifically aimed at promoting healthy masculinities for boys and young men.



In August 2025 the HEEL cohort co-created and published *Tenderness as a Horizon: A Toolbox to Promote Healthy and Diverse Masculinities with Boys and Young Men in Mesoamerica*. The toolbox is grounded in playful and participatory methodologies and offers activities for engaging children and young people in conversations about healthy masculinities. Rodrigo Barraza, GFC’s senior regional co-director of the Americas who leads the HEEL Initiative, reflects on learnings in the first four years of the HEEL Initiative and introduces the toolbox in a recent blog post, [Tenderness as a Horizon: How can we foster healthy masculinities with boys and young men? You can explore the toolbox here.](#)

With additional funding from Fondation CHANEL, this year Global Fund for Children is broadening our presence in South America by expanding HEEL to Colombia for the first time, and adding new partners in Honduras, bringing the total HEEL cohort to eleven. The decisions to expand into Colombia and Honduras were driven, in part, by the impacts of the USAID funding cuts and the end of impactful humanitarian, economic development, and peace building programs which is leading to increased political instability, corruption, violence, and the erosion of youth rights in both countries.

To respond to these shifts and the rising threats for young people – especially Afro-Colombian boys – Global Fund for Children sought out new partners working in high-risk areas, using intersectional approaches, and committed to community-based and long-term processes. GFC is proud to welcome **four new partners to the HEEL Initiative from Colombia and Honduras** that are driving transformative gender justice work in their communities.

The new partners all foster community transformation, care, and violence prevention through active participation of boys and youth men. However, they each have unique approaches to building healthy masculinities for example:

- **engaging boys through sports and dance** in Villa Rica, one of the most violence-affected areas of Cauca, Colombia
- **a youth center and public library** in Trinidad, Honduras co-created by ten high school scholars
- **art, creative communication, and anti-racist educational programming** to empower young leaders and foster community advocacy in Colombia's Pacific region.



Breakdancing performance at Warriors Nation Zulu in Honduras

We are thrilled to be able to expand the HEEL Initiative and make an even bigger impact towards promoting healthy masculinities for boys and young men around the world.

# Measuring What Matters: GFC’s First–Ever Global Impact Study

For the first time, Global Fund for Children commissioned a rigorous study to assess GFC’s impact on partner organizations and the children and communities they serve around the world. The Global Impact Study (GIS) researched 49 organizations from 27 different countries who received funding and support from GFC.

The evidence shows that GFC’s flexible funding, customized non–financial support, and trust–based approach **consistently contributes to the growth and sustainability of our partner organizations**. This strengthened capacity enables partner organizations to **create meaningful change in their communities**, ranging from quality education, increased local leadership, improved community wellbeing, reduced violence, and more.

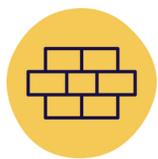
Here are some key findings:



GFC’s support to partners strongly contributed to delivering impacts in communities such as: improved access and retention in quality education, families placing greater priority on education, shifted attitudes around harmful practices (such as child marriage), as well as reduced violence in communities (including gender–based violence).



Almost all (46 out of 49) researched partners described how GFC’s unrestricted funding, light monitoring, and timely disbursement of funds had positively impacted their work. This flexible funding approach helped them listen and better respond to community needs, invest and improve their core internal processes, expand their services, adapt to challenges and crises, improve the motivation and wellbeing of staff, and carry out holistic, uninterrupted, sustainable work in communities.



All 49 GFC partners who were researched for this study shared stories about how they felt trusted, supported, and respected by GFC. The trusting relationship allowed partner organizations to stay true to their own priorities and values, consider GFC as colleagues in partnership, take risks, experiment, and have improved wellbeing and workplace dynamics.

Read more about the Global Impact Study methodology and findings [on our website!](#)

# Championing Youth Leadership to Protect and Restore Nature

In February 2025, Global Fund for Children was proud to become the new fiscal host of The Iris Project, a youth-led, trust-based grant maker that enables young people to protect and restore nature in their local communities.

Through its annual awards, called the Iris Prize, Iris Project provides flexible funding, mentorship, and tailored skill-building to outstanding environmental leaders aged 14–24 across the globe, removing barriers that too often prevent young innovators from accessing the resources they need to scale their impact.



This collaboration exemplifies our shared commitment to trust-based, participatory grantmaking that puts young people at the center of change. By combining GFC's expertise in youth-centered funding with The Iris Project's deep understanding of environmental leadership, we're creating pathways for the next generation of climate leaders to transform their communities and drive solutions to one of the most pressing challenges of our time.

Read more about [The Iris Project here](#).

## Experience Impact Firsthand: Come with us to Kolkata

Join GFC on the trip of a lifetime! From February 1–6, 2026, we will embark on a five-day all-inclusive learning tour of Kolkata, India. We will meet with GFC partners past and present, witness the real, long-lasting impact of community-led organizations, and explore the vibrant city of Kolkata. All are welcome!

Contact Mea Geizhals for the trip brochure at [mgeizhals@globalfundforchildren.org](mailto:mgeizhals@globalfundforchildren.org),



*Thank you for your invaluable support!*



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