

# RTI Center for Thriving Children

Early childhood is a critical window of opportunity to establish strong foundations for future generations. RTI's Center for Thriving Children brings together researchers and practitioners from diverse disciplines to advance healthy development and wellbeing for all young children. We envision a world in which all children—including those with disabilities—are healthy, well-nourished, safe, and raised in stable, loving environments that gives them the opportunity to grow, learn, and thrive.



@Thomas Cristofolletti for RTI International

RTI's Center for Thriving Children is guided by the Nurturing Care framework, which describes the components of nurturing care: opportunities for early learning, responsive caregiving, safety, nutrition, and health. We take an integrated approach in our work, collaborating across sectors to achieve maximum impact by:

- Convening experts from around the world to advance research, policy, and practice of early childhood development (ECD).
- Collaborating with partners to promote locally led research, policy, and practice.
- Disseminating research and learning across key stakeholders and communities of practice in the areas of early learning, nutrition, maternal and child health, child protection, and responsive caregiving.
- Respecting cultural variation and integrating diverse perspectives on childhood and Nurturing Care.
- Partnering with national and sub-national governments so that research informs policymaking, and services for children and families can be provided sustainably at scale.

## Experience and Expertise Integrated Programming

- The **USAID Cambodia Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) Activity (2020–2025)** supports the Government of Cambodia's efforts to improve the development of young children. IECD advances children's physical, cognitive, and social development; improves their nutrition and health; and helps ensure that those with developmental delays and disabilities receive appropriate care. The program includes a longitudinal study of the impacts of the intervention on caregiver behaviors and child outcomes.

## Early Learning

- **USAID's Jifunze Uelewe (2021–2025)** project is collaborating with the governments of Tanzania and Zanzibar to scale up a pre-primary education model. The project has trained 2,473 teachers on how to use pre-primary curriculum materials, with pre- and post-test data showing that teachers' understanding of the content improved from 71% to 95%.
- Through **LEGO Foundation's Play Measurement (2020–2024)**, RTI is leading research to better understand how play contributes to holistic skills development in children ages 0-12. Under the LEGO Foundation's Measurement Initiative, RTI developed tools to measure Learning Through Play across age groups, settings, and contexts.

- The **Tayari Early Childhood Development and Education Programme (2014–2019)** in Kenya, funded by the Children’s Investment Fund Foundation, developed and tested the impact of three interventions: teacher training and instructional support, instructional materials, and health and hygiene, in formal and non-formal preschools, to identify a cost-effective, scalable early childhood education model. The Government of Kenya expanded the model to 2,200 early childhood education centers reaching 130,000 children.

## Nutrition

- The **USAID Nawiri (2019–2024)** program aims to reduce acute malnutrition among women and young children in Turkana and Samburu counties in Kenya. As a subcontractor to Mercy Corps and lead research and learning partner, RTI works with local partners to conduct multisectoral research that tests and refines program strategies before scale-up. RTI is conducting a longitudinal study of households with young children to assess factors that contribute to acute malnutrition.
- Through RTI’s self-funded **Responsive Feeding: Development of an Indicator (2020–2021)** mixed-methods research study in Bangladesh, RTI worked with iccdr, a Dhaka-based research institute—to develop a 38-item self-report measure for responsive feeding. Findings support responsive feeding as modulating between proximal and distal responsivity, promoting autonomy and self-regulation, and enabling children to acquire and practice healthy eating behaviors.
- In Malawi, through another self-funded study, RTI created the **Food Environment for Improved Nutrition Toolkit (2021–2022)**, to identify women’s drivers of food choice, especially those that can be addressed through tailored, responsive food-system interventions. The resulting food environment toolkit can be used by food-system program implementers to help women acquire, consume, and feed their children more nutritious foods.

## Responsive Caregiving/Safety

- The **USAID Early Grade Reading and Math Project (USAID RAMP) (2015–2023)** has built foundational skills for young children without kindergarten access in Jordan by supporting parents to engage in their children’s early learning. The project supported the social-emotional, cognitive, executive function, and motor skills development of both Jordanian and Syrian refugee children.

- Building on USAID Cambodia’s IECD program, RTI is self-funding a study (2022–2023) to assess how caregivers, communities, and societies can **operationalize Nurturing Care to support young children with disabilities** and their caregivers. Findings are expected to inform policy decisions related to service provision for households with young children with disabilities.

## Health

- **USAID/Owod (2021–2026)** aims to improve the health of women and children in Senegal through the implementation of comprehensive district health plans. The project addresses key determinants of maternal, newborn, and child deaths and diseases, such as malaria; adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health; family planning; nutrition; and hygiene. The district health plans include strategies to strengthen community engagement and local leadership in accessing the health services that women and children need most.
- The **USAID ReachHealth Project (2018–2023)** aims to strengthen and improve access to critical health services for families in the Philippines. The project improves individual, household, and community knowledge and behaviors of family planning and maternal and neonatal health; increases access to comprehensive quality care, including life-saving maternal and newborn services; and strengthens the functionality of health systems.
- RTI has led **USAID’s global flagship neglected tropical diseases (NTD) programs** for over 15 years, supporting countries to reach their NTD control and elimination goals. These projects have provided 2.2 billion NTD treatments in target countries and treated more than 223 million people. In countries supported by RTI, more than 295 million people are no longer at risk for lymphatic filariasis, more than 150 million are no longer at risk for trachoma, and over 14 million are no longer at risk for onchocerciasis.

### Partner with us

Katherine King, Director, Education Research  
RTI Center for Thriving Children

[kmking@rti.org](mailto:kmking@rti.org)

+1 781.228.0104

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