

# LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

An impact assessment of work by  
the Bernard van Leer Foundation in  
Kenya, Colombia, Germany and  
Poland

**Christopher Harris**  
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**Bernard  
van Leer**  
FOUNDATION



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## Executive Summary of Learning from Experience: Lessons for Philanthropy

In 2008 the global stock market suffered a severe downturn. The Bernard van Leer Foundation (BvLF), heavily invested in the markets, lost 30 per cent of its endowment. In just a few short months the Foundation's work to support young children in their early education across 21 countries was in peril. In order to address this crisis, the Foundation first downsized to a third of its former size without changing its mission or programmes. When a new Executive Director came on in 2009, the Foundation made a difficult, but necessary, decision to cease funding and leave 11 of the countries in which it was operating. Of the programs in those 11 places, there were at least six countries (Kenya, Morocco, Poland, Germany, Colombia and the Caribbean<sup>1</sup>) in which BvLF seemed to have had a significant national impact. The Foundation decided to fund an independent evaluation to examine the impact that it had made in young children's lives in these countries. Ultimately, because of resource constraints, four countries were investigated in depth by a five-person evaluation team. Those countries are Kenya, Colombia, Poland and Germany. In total, the evaluation examined work funded by € 92 million in investments over the course of 40 years.


Country	Total (2010 prices)	Number of years	Mean grant allocation per annum
Colombia	€ 50,728,095	35	€ 1,449,374
Kenya	€ 30,450,047	40	€ 761,251
Germany	€ 7,702,820	29	€ 265,614
Poland	€ 5,197,747	16	€ 324,859

The Foundation's stated mission for the last 46 years has been...*to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We see this both as a valuable end in itself and as a long-term means to promoting more cohesive, considerate and creative societies with equal opportunities and rights for all.* For almost all of those 46 years, the emphasis has been on enhancing opportunities for early childhood education. The evaluation team identified five "theories of change" used by the Foundation over four decades to promote early childhood education. Many foundations employ these theories of change, which are in their essence assumptions about how change happens.

- **Ideal Paradigm.** There is one model that fits all children's needs. Find the perfect model and apply it widely. In some circles this theory is known as the "if you build it they will come" assumption.
- **Community Based Approach.** Local design and ownership of pedagogy is the most appropriate way to meet children's needs.
- **Develop Tools and Knowledge and Disseminate Widely.** Knowledge is the missing link. Sharing knowledge will change behaviour toward effective early education interventions. If only people had the proper knowledge and skills, change would happen.

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<sup>1</sup> The Caribbean is considered a single country by the Foundation for purposes of programming.

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- **Influencing Public Policy.** Public policy on early education will ensure that all children can participate in high quality ECD programmes.
  - **Supporting Partners.** Strengthening local partners will result in appropriate and effective ECD programmes.


## Kenya

It is not an exaggeration to state that the Bernard van Leer Foundation has had a powerful positive impact on the lives of a great many young children and their families in the four countries under study. In Kenya, working with the Kenya Institute of Education, a government body, the Foundation and its partner created a nationwide infrastructure for early childhood education and development. Today Kenya has the most robust infrastructure for early childhood education in Africa. The Ministry of Education sees early childhood as an important part of its responsibilities and there is a provision in the national Constitution for the right to early childhood services. Because of the work supported by the Foundation, the World Bank provided Kenya a loan of \$28 million to expand access to preschools to more children. Where training in early childhood education was once non-existent, now every post-secondary education institution in the country has at least a certificate programme in early childhood education and Kenyatta University now awards Ph.Ds. in ECD. Where there were none, there are now ECD programmes designed by nomadic and pastoralist Samburu parents and educators – loipi - and adapted by other Kenyan nomadic tribes like the Maasai, as well as by pastoralists in other parts of Africa. The Foundation has helped thousands of Kenyan children orphaned or made otherwise vulnerable by HIV/AIDS have appropriate and supportive care, in many instances through the Jirani—traditional neighbourhood groups of 20-25 parents or caregivers of orphans and other vulnerable children.

## Colombia

Colombian children have wide access nationally to locally anchored ECD programmes, earmarked tax funding (that preceded BvLF), and a government body working with strong, independent regional centres that support a variety of early childhood education and community development programmes. Colombia's collection of ECD centres and institutions maintain an active and robust civil society network that is engaged in issues affecting young children, their parents and their communities at both the regional and national levels. They both work with the government and serve to hold it accountable for delivery and quality of programmes for young children. The Foundation's support has served to strengthen these centres allowing them to become more sophisticated in their analysis and design of programming, and to mature as organisations. Key in Colombia has been the success in designing ECD programmes that not only "fit" with local culture, but also include an array of critical activities that assist with nutrition, health, safety (a serious issue in one of the world's most violent countries), economic development, food security, adult literacy, among others. Put simply, work in Colombia has not only increased early childhood education, but also supported the expansion of integrated development and civil society groups advocating for this work.

In sum, in Colombia, BvLF with multiple partners extended the reach of a national early childhood services system to the most marginalized children, and infused government early childhood services with quality pedagogy that would allow poor and marginalized children to develop their full potential. Today the Foundation's partners are widely recognized as the leading intellectuals in the country on early childhood education and development. Early childhood methodologies developed by BvLF and its partners have allowed the national government to extend its services to 1.5 million



children in the poorest communities in an effective and cost-efficient manner. In 2000 President Pastrana recognized the Bernard van Leer Foundation in a national award ceremony.

## Germany

In Germany, where the Foundation joined other private philanthropic institutions as a partner, BvLF can lay claim to changing key educational paradigms that served to enhance democratic values and broadened respect for diversity. Regional Centers for Education, Integration and Democracy are widespread in many areas of the country. These centers are very effective in improving the educational achievements of minority children and in changing discriminatory attitudes of educators. National evaluation criteria for all children's centers in the country have changed to include respect for diversity. And lastly, almost all minority families receive material support to help them prepare their children for formal education. Germany has improved school readiness for many children in Turkish immigrant families with culturally appropriate and native language learning materials. Several states in Germany have also adopted curriculum and materials that emphasise respect for diversity.

## Poland

In Poland, after the end of the Cold War, rural communities had very few preschools, little awareness in professional circles of child development theory and no support from government. There is now widespread access to community-based (and driven) early childhood education in all rural areas, supported by new law and the Ministry of Education, and monitored by an energetic and highly effective training and advocacy organisation. In Poland today, thanks to BvLF support to the Comenius Foundation and others, 90 per cent of the country has access to early childhood programs; national legislation supports early childhood interventions; and there are national institutions that have solid training, advocacy and monitoring capacities.

## Impact

Kenya has a national infrastructure for early childhood education and development. Colombia has a network of specialised university centres and NGOs that have solid expertise and experience in the theory, design and implementation of ECD and integrated community development. Poland has diverse, flexible, government-supported ECD centres across its rural areas - finally guaranteed by law whose passage was largely dependent on Foundation partners' lobbying - and a strong child advocacy capacity to monitor the efforts. Germany has a network of school systems in 16 states using the Respect for Diversity curriculum materials emphasising tolerance and democratic practices in 12,000 centres serving 600,000 children. Kenya, Colombia and Poland experienced substantial increases in access to and enrolment in early childhood programmes and improvements in the quality of the pedagogy.<sup>2</sup> These three countries also experienced dramatic increases in appropriately trained teachers, and a diversification of early childhood models within the countries.

All four countries experienced a substantially enhanced curriculum development capacity, a large and diverse literature on early childhood and community development, key materials and literature available in multiple languages (e.g. Turkish for that community in Germany, over 14 languages for Kenya, indigenous languages in Colombia), hundreds of seminars and training sessions for parents and teachers, hundreds of meetings with local officials and local representatives of national ministries, and dozens of international workshops and conferences.

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<sup>2</sup> The World Bank currently puts pre-school enrolment in Kenya at 60% with 28,000 centres.



## Analysis

Notwithstanding this tremendous success in each country, vulnerabilities exist that reflect shortcomings in the Bernard van Leer Foundation's "theories of change" and its analysis of the greatest cause of disadvantage-- poverty. These vulnerabilities have had an affect on the Foundation's capacity to create lasting sustainable change in the lives of young children and to fulfil its mission to the fullest extent possible.

The theories of change employed by the Foundation are all necessary but insufficient mechanisms to create lasting change for children. When taken in the appropriate mix for the situation, the five theories could create lasting sustainable change. In most cases, however, only one theory was employed, or where there was more than one, the mix was insufficiently powerful, leading to unsustainable outcomes. Contrasting Kenya, which was the oldest intervention with Poland, the newest intervention, does however demonstrate institutional maturation.

The impact in Kenya is widely admired in early childhood development circles. BvLF employed the ideal paradigm theory in Kenya to its fullest extent. It built a national infrastructure of services, a literature, and a training capacity - in essence built the 'supply'. However, the Foundation did not give equal attention to building demand for quality services. As a result, Kenya today has the infrastructure to supply services, but there is no pressure on the service to maintain or enhance quality. Kenya lacks a quality assurance group, civic expertise to ensure that the service meets the needs of children and especially marginalized, poor children. As noted elsewhere in this report:

"...insufficient thought was given to how best to help build an empowered, political counterweight to the Ministry of Education. BvLF would help institutionalise the supply side but not ensure an organised and powerful demand side. One interviewee said that "...Should the Foundation have decided to stay in Kenya, I would ask that it help build advocacy capacities in each district in light of the upcoming decentralisation required by the new Constitution."

While today 60 per cent of the children in Kenya have access to early childhood services, whether those services are meeting the development needs of the most marginalized children is questionable. Several critics argue that the Foundation could have pushed harder to make the approach more flexible and therefore more likely to serve the most marginalised children. Relevant for foundations today that consider themselves to be innovators but are also aiming for scale, the BvLF and its partners concluded in early 2000 that "the discourse on innovation was defeated by our equally strong concern to institutionalise the programme and its strategies." The ideal paradigm and the other theories employed in Kenya were necessary to achieve scale but insufficient to ensure that generations of children, especially those marginalised by poverty, ethnicity, nomadic life or HIV/AIDS (whom BvLF had served exceptionally well), would have available to them appropriate and effective early childhood services.

In Colombia and Germany the Foundation relied on other theories of change. In Colombia the second and fifth theories of change were most prevalent, namely, building the capacity of institutional partners and the agency of local communities. While perhaps useful to effect change when directly engaged, neither theory has been sufficient to sustain the network of professionals that have relied for thirty years on the Foundation for support or to ensure that the state continues to diversify its approach. In Germany the third theory "develop and disseminate appropriate tools and knowledge" emerges as the dominant theory but it too was insufficient to scale methodologies across the country. More advocacy was needed to ensure the fulfilment of the Foundation's mission.



Within the foundation field today, there is much emphasis given to reaching scale, typically pursued through a single theory of change. In Poland, BvLF reached scale (90 per cent of the country has access to programmes) without resorting to a simplistic model. By the time the Foundation engaged in Poland in 1990 it no longer employed the ideal paradigm theory of change. But it did rely on all the other theories of change in Poland, in combination with each other and through a very limited set of partners. The Poland case does represent a kind of institutional maturation for philanthropic institutions. The strategy was sophisticated employing four of the five theories of change. The work in Poland, as noted in the case study, is a rare example of good baseline and impact data collection. Because of sophisticated data collection and strong advocates, local partners were able to diversify funding including leveraging larger pots of available European Union resources. Again, in a rare example, the Foundation supported media campaigns to create political support. In Poland, the Foundation also focused its efforts on the most marginalized, namely the rural poor, yet managed to implement changes in the country that should have an intergenerational impact.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is meant to target “disadvantaged” children. However, the case studies show that the Foundation does not identify or address the underlying causes that create disadvantage. Grants typically provide services for children and their families, which are genuinely helpful, but are silent on the conditions and dynamics that place them at a disadvantage. This approach, which is dominant amongst foundations worldwide, can have genuine impact as long as the funding stream continues. While a foundation is actively engaged in a country – in the best of circumstances - it can help to create change through continual grant-making. However, the long-term vulnerability of successive generations of children is not changeable through a service delivery approach that does not acknowledge or address root causes of poverty.

According to Board documents, including some of his own writings and interviews, Oscar van Leer believed that if only the right kind of compensatory preschool education approach could be devised, that method could be implemented around the globe and the Foundation could help disadvantaged children worldwide. This thinking was in line with his times that compensatory education could “make up” for past difficulties and personal deficits. The “deficit” we now know, however, is poverty, which is most often a structural inequality that manifests itself in several ways. Holistic programmes that actually work to alter the root causes of poverty are necessary to fulfil the Foundation’s mission, namely to address the needs of the most disadvantaged children in such a way that equity in society will also be enhanced. In order to do this - to fulfil its mission - the Foundation needs an enhanced set of theories and sophisticated strategies. Given today’s volatile financial markets and the uncertainty of being able to operate over the long term across a wide swath of countries, the Foundation needs to analyse the conditions that create poverty, and address those issues as part of its interventions. Only then can it more fully complete its mission and exit with grace and the comfort of knowing that structural change has been achieved.

The case studies demonstrate four weaknesses in the work by the Bernard van Leer Foundation that are common to the foundation field. First, as described above, the Foundation lacks a sufficient structural analysis of disadvantage.

Second, like many others, the Foundation has not been sufficiently systematic in collecting impact data that is comparable across projects, countries, or goals. The impact on young children (how many, the learning outcomes, etc.) is difficult to analyse because of the inconsistency of data. Moving forward, more effort needs to be made to gather consistent data that pertains to young children.



Third, BvLF's archives are not organized for it to learn from its own practice. The Foundation has made substantial efforts to educate early childhood practitioners by disseminating pedagogical techniques from one setting to another, but its own capacity to enhance its own impact has been less of a targeted effort. The Foundation could consider ways in which to identify, extract, analyse and learn lessons from its ample archives in order to improve its own practice.

Fourth, missing from the grant-making strategies is any discussion - until late in the game - of how to end the relationship. There is no indication that at the design stage there was consideration of what the criteria for exiting should be, how it should be communicated, what mutually agreeable steps would be necessary, and what each party's responsibilities should be. In all four cases exits were externally driven, not organic to the nature of the project. Unfortunately this practice is also common among most foundations, despite the obvious problems it engenders. BvLF and other foundations might consider designing the exit as part of the larger initial planning process and having all parties in agreement at the outset of what the conditions for exiting should be, including a plan for sustainable funding.

## Conclusion

That the Bernard van Leer Foundation's efforts in Kenya, Colombia, Germany and Poland made a significant and positive difference in several million children's lives cannot be disputed. The Foundation is widely appreciated for the time it engages in countries, its flexibility, the production of useful literature, learning opportunities made available to partners, an ecosystem of support, and engendering trust. The challenge that remains is to engage poverty at its roots and to have the wisdom to employ the proper set of tools in combination (since rarely is one sufficient to make change) and at the appropriate time to be effective.





## About the Authors

**Christopher Harris** is the principal author and director of the *Learning from Experience* project. He is responsible for the report and the country studies of Kenya and Poland. Harris was for 10 years Senior Programme Officer on Philanthropy at the Ford Foundation in New York. While at Ford he founded the Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace. He served as Vice President at the Council on Foundations in Washington, DC and earlier worked on national education policy including early childhood education. He has extensive experience overseas with an emphasis on the Middle East and Africa. He received a doctorate in education policy from Harvard University and currently serves on several boards and committees related to philanthropy.

**Barry Knight** conducted the survey and is the author of the chapter *Influence of BvLF on the Field of ECD*, among other important roles for the study. He is the director of the Centre for Research & Innovation in Social Policy and Practice (CENTRIS) in the UK. He is a social scientist with experience in research and teaching at Cambridge University, has served in the UK Government and later worked for the European Commission. Knight has experience as a consultant to numerous European and US foundations and currently is assisting the international Foundations for Peace and the Global Fund for Community Foundations. He serves as co-chair of the Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace.

**Carolyn H. Williams** undertook the research for and authored the report on Colombia. She has a PhD in sexuality, international feminism and development. She teaches and is an editor at the London School of Economics' Gender Institute. Williams has 20 years' experience in international development largely in Latin America. She also serves as a consultant to UN Women and several development organisations engaged in Latin America.

**Huib Schreurs** was responsible for the research on and authored the report for Germany. He served for 25 years as Senior Programme Officer at the Bernard van Leer Foundation (where his responsibilities did not include the work in Germany). A cultural anthropologist by training, he has lived and worked in Africa and previously served with UNESCO.

**Lorraine Breen** is the research specialist who assisted with extensive research on Kenya and Poland and managed the data collection for the entire team. She currently serves as a Manager of the European Climate Foundation's Power Programme in The Hague. Previously she was an analyst at Eurojust (The Hague) and responsible for research and communication at the Health Foundation (London). Breen holds a Master's degree in cultural policy from University College Dublin.



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## CHAPTER 1: ACCIDENTS OF FLYING

Most of us believe that institutions and even people do what they do primarily because of careful thought and rational analysis. There are enough books on organisational and personal planning to fill a library, which seems to reinforce that idea. Despite this belief, a great many important decisions are made on the basis of a chance meeting, an apparently random occurrence, an accident. Because she missed her earlier flight and so was seated next to me on a commuter flight between Washington, DC and Philadelphia - an accident of flying - I met the woman who would eventually become my wife. It was probably the only time our lives would have intersected. Another accident of flying changed the direction of the Netherlands-based Bernard van Leer Foundation. One story describes how Oscar van Leer, the son of founder and successful businessman Bernard, happened to be seated next to the well-known psychologist, Martin Deutsch, on a flight in 1964. The more reliable story is that Oscar, while still on a long flight, happened to read an article in *Life* magazine, *A Big Break for Poverty's Children*, that described the work of Professor Deutsch. That story led Oscar on a journey that, while it began by accident, ended with the Foundation focusing its work around the globe on young children and early childhood education and care— and influenced that field profoundly.


Deutsch ran a substantial programme at the New York Institute of Medicine, where he and his colleagues conducted research on the educational development of African American children in Harlem. They found that the children faced a serious learning deficit even before starting school. Deutsch argued that children should be 'taught to learn' at an early age and so both benefit from schooling and avoid suffering any other consequences of their 'deficit'. This theory drove the public policy called 'compensatory education' and led to large-scale public programmes like 'Head Start' in the USA. Here another accident played a significant role. One of the great successes of Head Start was that it emphasised not just cognitive abilities (i.e., strict preparation for school), but also proper nutrition, health monitoring and other key developmental factors. Originally it was simply going to provide preschool education and childcare, but as luck would have it, the programme was managed by the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, which was headed by Sargent Shriver, the brother-in-law of President Kennedy. Apparently in a conversation with his other brother-in-law, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, 'Bobby' Kennedy suggested that they appoint their families' paediatrician, Dr. Robert E. Cooke, to the committee that was designing the programme, thinking that it might be helpful to have a paediatrician in the conversation. That off-hand suggestion, well out of official circles or expert advice, changed everything. Head Start emphasises health and nutrition only because an experienced paediatrician who happened to be on the committee insisted on including them in its design. Another convenient accident.

The notion of compensatory education, and even to some degree the Head Start programme, had an important influence on Oscar van Leer with its emphasis on assisting disadvantaged preschool children. He was exposed to these theoretical and policy discussions as he was wrestling with creating a sharper focus for the Foundation. The original statutes of the Foundation in 1949 described a very broad institutional purpose. Under Bernard van Leer the earlier remit was exceedingly wide and allowed for funding almost anything that seemed of interest.

*...the purpose of the Foundation is to further the interests of: culture, morality and public health (with particular regard to supporting the desire for peace and mitigating the effects of war); science and the arts; the promotion of the environment, ecology and wildlife; to support organisations devoted to childcare and education.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Johannes, Gert-Jan. *Why Not? Oscar van Leer and his quest for the ideal synthesis of business and philanthropy 1958-1986*. Boom, Amsterdam. 2009, p. 39.



Oscar van Leer was heavily influenced by the post-war new social sciences that seemed to hold the possibility of wide human improvement. In the USA the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' 'New Frontier, War on Poverty and Great Society', coupled with the optimism of those times, reinforced Oscar van Leer's hope that it was possible to apply scientific thinking to solve large social problems and not require political upheaval or revolution. Oscar was quite taken with the idea of using preschool education as a means of reducing social inequality. In his own writings he emphasised the need to intervene and assist children who had been marginalised and were, in the language of that time, 'disadvantaged.' In 1966 the rewritten statutes reflect Oscar's wish for a narrower mission and one focused on disadvantaged children. At that time, the Foundation emphasised the needs of preschool children and adolescents.

*"In its main activity the Bernard van Leer Foundation endeavours to enable children and youth through school-going age, living in any country where the Van Leer concern is established, who are impeded by the social and cultural inadequacy of their background and/or environment, nevertheless to achieve the greatest possible realisation of their innate, intellectual potential."*<sup>4</sup>

Oscar further changed the purpose to emphasise only disadvantaged preschool children and only education. As his biographer notes, *"Unlike the American Head Start programme, the Bernard van Leer Foundation did not at first consider matters of nutrition and physical health as part of its remit. It was primarily concerned with education."*<sup>5</sup> While this was Oscar's personal belief, it was also in line with the thinking of his times that compensatory education would 'make up' for past difficulties and personal deficits. That belief was soon shown to be simplistic and somewhat romantic. The 'deficit' was poverty - most often a structural inequality - that manifests itself in several ways. Compensatory education soon became family and community development efforts and this evolution is reflected in the case studies of this report. According to Board documents, including some of his own writings and interviews, Oscar held on to the belief that if only the right kind of compensatory preschool education approach could be devised, that method could be implemented around the globe and the Foundation could help disadvantaged children worldwide. In some ways this should come as no surprise from a man who also ran a private company that made substantial wealth on fabricating oil drums in the same fashion around the globe. This belief in the ideal method in opposition to a view of community-based change, created a tension within the Foundation that lingered for a long time and still emerges in interviews with past staff. One person commented that for many years the Foundation focused on education, but the hiring of so many staff with backgrounds in international development changed the mission—regrettably according to this person—to a more diffuse 'development' agenda.

This report is an attempt to understand the Foundation's impact in the four countries of Kenya, Colombia, Poland and Germany. In order to do so, the reader must consider the substantial span of time that this work covers. When the research team presented 'initial findings' of the study to the BvLF staff in The Hague a few months ago, the first question we asked was, "How many people in this room were born after 1971?" Several hands went up, including a few senior staff. The work by the Foundation in Kenya began in 1971, hence before some current staff was born. As the discussion about compensatory education suggests, it was also a time when our understanding of developmental psychology, brain development and community development was rudimentary compared to the current state of these fields. So it should not come as a surprise that some of the changes in understanding and approach by the Foundation, not only reflect the beliefs of individuals at the Foundation, but also mirror larger debates about children and how one makes changes in society.

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<sup>4</sup> Philp, Hugh. *Barbs in the Arrow, Explorations in early childhood education and care, The Bernard van Leer Foundation: 1965-1986*. Diogenes Educational Consultants, Sydney, Australia. 1989, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Johannes. *Why Not?* p. 137.




The approach by the Foundation evolved through several stages over the years. In its 1981 document, "The Programme for the Eighties", it notes an important policy change from an earlier emphasis on the child and the school: "...with the preschool child and his (sic) needs as a focus and his optimal development as the aim, action should deal with a series of widening concentric circles: the caregiver, the family, the micro community; involving on the way all the other 'agents' - adults, adolescents, professionals from many disciplines - in a network to surround the child with a coherent educative community."

A further evolution within the Foundation shows an increased appreciation of national policy. While helping to empower communities is important, so too is understanding the significance of public policy and its potential impact - for good or ill - on the lives of disadvantaged children.

Despite the changes in focus and approach, a few things can be said about the Bernard van Leer Foundation that seem relatively constant - and far from accidental. It was for decades the only private foundation dedicated to serving preschool children and today it remains one of the very few. In a time when the phrase 'education for all' was popular, BvLF insisted on focusing on 'disadvantaged' children - who are typically under-served even when policymakers say 'all.' The Foundation's dedication to marginalised children says a great deal about the Van Leers, the Boards and the staff of the Foundation over these many years.

Christopher Harris



## CHAPTER 2 : THE STUDY

### Purpose

At first glance, the purpose of this study appears relatively simple. It is to answer just two questions. The first question is, ‘what is the impact of the work of the Bernard van Leer Foundation on the lives of young children in four countries<sup>6</sup> - Kenya, Colombia, Germany and Poland?’ The second question is ‘what has been the influence of the Foundation on the field of early childhood education and development (ECD) *as a field* of research and practice?’ But that is where the simplicity ends.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation has worked in both Kenya and Colombia for approximately forty years. Not only has the Foundation gone through many changes since the early 1970s (executive leadership, programme staff, strategies, record-keeping), but so too have those nations (drought, warfare, political crises) and the larger world (different views on children and education, new ideas about international development, radical advances in technology). Poland and Germany have had their own sets of changes since the Foundation began working there in the 1980s. Hence, identifying impact is a complicated task.

In terms of the second question, the field of early childhood education and development is not a static and fixed body of knowledge. It reflects and owes much of its existence to the parallel evolution over decades of several disciplines, including child psychology (developmental psychology, cognition, emotional development, speech), medicine and health (brain development, motor control, nutrition), sociology, pedagogy, as well as work in economic and community development. Advances in these areas over the decades have led to changes in how we view children and understand their needs. This in turn has led to new demands for changes in public policies across a host of issues - from support for child nutrition to public sector budget increases for teacher training and the development of standards of care, even to rethinking the meaning of ‘human rights’ for children. The Foundation has had over time, and continues to have, a relationship with leading researchers and practitioners in many of these fields. The chapter that analyses the influence of BvLF on the field of ECD is in the Appendices to this report.

### Method/Limitations

The research team that conducted this assessment used four methods to help understand the impact of the Foundation. These included:

1. desk research/archive review,
2. appreciative inquiry/interviews,
3. trend data analysis/literature review, and
4. blind surveys.

The first method, desk research/archive review, involved reading through thousands of pages of grant files and related reports, trustee records, Foundation publications and select literature on ECD. While Germany and Poland have substantial materials on file, this was an enormous task for the countries of Kenya and Colombia whose work stretches back forty years into the 1970s. For Kenya

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<sup>6</sup> Originally the study was to include five countries. The fifth, Morocco, was postponed because the establishment of a national ECD programme has been delayed.



alone, there were over eighty binders of reports and grant documents on file at the Foundation offices, which only represented materials covering the present back to the early 1990s. All Foundation files before the 1990s are housed in the municipal archives in Amsterdam. While many more recent reports and files are available electronically, the older files in Amsterdam are accessible only through a rather cumbersome and time-consuming process. In practical terms that meant it was necessary to prioritise documents in the older files which prohibited a comprehensive review of all older documents. While we can never be certain, we judge that we have sufficient coverage to justify our commentary on the past.

The second technique involved approximately 100 interviews with past and current BvLF leadership and programme staff, with select partners in the four countries in question, with other key stakeholders (Ministry of Education staff, local academicians) and with other important individuals (researchers, staff from other foundations, leading practitioners). All interviews were confidential and any attributed quotes used in this report are done so with written permission. The project budget permitted one week in each of the four countries. While that allowed for a good number of interviews, it did limit the ability of the researchers to visit rural sites where programmes operated. A list of all interviewees can be found as an appendix to this report.

The third method was a mix of analysis of trend data from external (World Bank, national ministries' data, Gap Minder) and internal (country-specific data from Foundation files) sources. These data permit approximations of impact using measures like enrolment, that do not include all the ways the Foundation worked, but can confirm other data from interviews and grant files. The Foundation has a rather comprehensive system of files, but like many other foundations, it emphasises the administration of programme and expenses over impact. Many of the projects have evaluative data collected, especially when they were considered for extension, but many project files lack studies of outcomes, leaving gaps in the data that make it difficult to measure impact. This is further complicated by different kinds of evaluations requested by programme staff and different strategies<sup>7</sup> employed by the Foundation over time.


And the fourth technique, a blind survey, was distributed to 80 key stakeholders to determine their sense of the influence that the Foundation has had on the broad field of early childhood development and education. This approach captures the attitudes and impressions of a wide array of individuals knowledgeable about the field.

## Conceptualisation

The research team chose not to devise a single definition of early childhood education for several reasons. Academicians over the years have virtually made careers out of the arguments about definitions and we judged that to engage with this was a battle not worth fighting. The main reason was that there is not a recognised, universally applicable and unchanging definition, but rather what the NAEYC and others call 'developmentally appropriate curriculum' whose implementation ranges from centre-based classroom practice to a collection of activities that involve parent engagement, nutrition, cultural preservation and economic security. In other words, depending on how political the reader is, one could say the definition is elastic or that it is contested. Elsewhere in the report, we will discuss how tensions existed from the early days to the present within the Foundation about what is meant by ECD and how best one supports it.

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<sup>7</sup> For example in Kenya, work with several partners continued over decades, but the strategies employed by the Foundation changed over time with insufficient effort to make assessments comparable (in the late 1990s the Foundation shifted all existing and new programmes into four major themes and also limited the number of themes per country). Though availability of impact data is spotty, this made any effort to collect it even more complicated.



## Logic model & theories of change

In 1969, Oscar van Leer pushed the board to agree to a sharper focus for the Foundation established by his father. It would no longer “*prepare young people for challenges that wait them as adults*” which proved too broad, but instead, devised its ‘core activity’ as support for early education for underprivileged children. That describes what the Foundation would do but not how and why. They, like all of us, have an understanding about how change occurs.

A useful framework for the study may be the Logic Model of Evaluation. This has the merit of being the most widely used method, and has been adopted as the standard by US and UK foundations.<sup>8</sup>

The logic model yields a critical path from ‘baseline’ to ‘impact’ with four intervening points on the way. This yields a six-fold framework, represented schematically as follows:



The terms can be defined as follows:

**Baseline** The starting point or the position before the programme begins. An assessment of the situation or problem to be addressed by the programme.

**Inputs** Resources needed to address the situation or problem. This covers staff and volunteer time, design, skills, knowledge and experience, funding and tangible resources such as buildings and premises.

**Processes** Operations, social interactions, management of relationships, and feelings.

**Outputs** Outputs relate to the achievement of objectives. Deliverables, which are things that you can touch and count. Products, services, events, workshops, visits or facilities that result from activities.

**Outcomes** Differences made. Outcomes relate to the achievement of goals. The changes, benefits, learning and other effects that result from what the project, organisation or programme makes, offers or provides.

**Impact** Overall difference made to the wider world: the sum of the outcomes both positive and negative

We placed the data that we collected in the appropriate category beginning with baseline. We subdivided country-specific work by project in order to trace the engagement by the Foundation and the outcomes of its efforts. This allowed us then to show a relationship with the impact where applicable. Given the great complexity of social change, rarely is there evidence of direct cause-effect of the action by a foundation and social impact. But this approach allows us to have a reliable, if proximate, sense of the role of the chosen engagements.

One additional lens that we placed on the work was how the Foundation expected change to occur and hence what strategy/strategies it employed in a given situation. Social scientists remind us that

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.cafonline.org/pdf/jargonbuster-issue1-print-friendly.pdf>





our beliefs of how change happens are shaped by our childhood, our education, our social class – that these ultimately form our beliefs, values and sense of justice. So we all employ ‘theories of change’ and are usually unaware of them. We typically ignore these deeper dynamics and instead emphasise models, systems and methods for change that we frequently believe have inherent value, but are often simply projections of our own beliefs.

In our review of the work in four countries we identified five ‘theories of change’ that were at work at different times and places. These terms are ours and not the Foundation’s. In some instances the programme staff was explicit about the approach, in others we inferred it from the work. The five approaches include:

**Ideal Paradigm.** This theory involves the belief that one needs to find the perfect method and then apply it widely. Outcomes should include a tested, applied and improved paradigm of ECD<sup>9</sup>. This approach would then be available to many more children and they would benefit from its use.

**Community Development/Local Actors.** This view of how change occurs is almost the opposite of the ideal paradigm approach. Here, the belief is that the community (on whatever scale) is capable of identifying pedagogical and other needs of children in their community and the most appropriate method to meet those needs. The approach is contextualised. The outcomes would include greater access to high quality, appropriate and integrated ECD programmes based on local design and ownership.

**Development of Appropriate Tools and Knowledge and Their Dissemination.** This theory is based on the belief that if one collects good and creative practice from a variety of experiences and makes them available in usable form, the recipients will change their behaviour to mirror what is considered good and effective ECD. Outcomes here would include appropriate knowledge, methods and materials that have improved the quality of ECD programmes, and ideally have been taken up for wider use.

**Influencing Public Policy.** In this theory the Foundation supports a variety of actions that lead to the enactment and maintenance of ‘good’ public policies for ECD. The anticipated outcomes would be that government has incorporated and implemented appropriate and comprehensive policies to ensure that all children can participate in high quality ECD programmes.

**Supporting Partners.** The fifth theory of change that we encountered emphasises providing key support of several kinds to partner organisations so that they can work best with communities. In this approach the Foundation works with its partner over time and helps it strengthen a variety of necessary capacities so it is better able to work effectively with communities. The outcomes in this instance would be strong partner organisations that had the internal organisational integrity and programme depth and flexibility to help communities establish appropriate and effective ECD programmes.

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<sup>9</sup> The researchers chose the term Early Childhood Development (ECD) as a generic term to refer to early childhood education and development—and sometimes care—programmes for reasons of consistency.



## Fieldwork

The fieldwork included interviews with key partners and other stakeholders in the four countries under study in 2011. These visits included a week in Nairobi, Kenya by Christopher Harris in November and a week in Warsaw and Poznan, Poland in March. Carolyn Williams spent a week in several cities in Colombia in December conducting interviews. Huub Schreurs spent a week in Germany also in December.

## Coding and Data

After field visits and a thorough review of the files and archives, research team members created matrices by project, employing the logic model and the theories of change. We then placed data from files and interviews in the appropriate cells of the matrices. At this point it became clear where data is missing. In some cases gaps exist because of missing files, but more often - especially in outcomes - because that data was not collected, or the kind of data collected changed over time because of changes in Foundation strategy or different priorities by incoming programme officers.

## Analysis

Despite gaps in data in the matrices, the researches employed the 'good enough' principle, and where there was incomplete but substantial data, we felt that we could make a strong assertion of case of impact. However, where there seemed to be a relationship between Foundation actions and impact, but there was weak supportive data, we made appropriate caveats.

## CHAPTER 3 : COUNTRY STUDIES

### Introduction

This chapter contains four briefs of the work of BvLF in Kenya, Colombia, Germany and Poland. Each of the four begins with a summary, country description, narrative about BvLF's work and then an analysis of the impact of the work. The reader is urged to examine the much fuller and detailed case studies of each country found as an appendix to this report. The longer case studies provide more information and better context. The four larger case studies serve as the core of this report.

### KENYA



### Summary

*In the late 1960s, based on the success of its work supporting early childhood education in Jamaica, the Bernard van Leer Foundation looked to find a site in Africa where it might do similar work. The Foundation chose Kenya and in 1971 began supporting a programme of early childhood education centres in Nairobi. At a time when most developing nations - many that had just recently won independence - focused their efforts on establishing universal primary education, very few countries considered education for 3-6 year old children. In fact, the academic fields related to early childhood development, such as developmental psychology, were still in their early years. Nevertheless, the Foundation chose to partner with the Government of Kenya and several key NGOs on the developmental needs of young children and their communities in a unique effort that would last for 41 years.*

*For the first two decades, the Foundation partnered the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), an organisation tied to the Ministry of Education. Together they established the National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE) in Nairobi, the only such institution in Africa. In the late 1980s the Foundation funded the construction of NACECE's building. NACECE provided intellectual leadership about the needs of young children, trained several cadres of teacher trainers, produced key literature about the needs of children and families, developed curriculum and related learning materials and established a decentralised, district-based network of teacher-training and community development or District Centres for Early Childhood Education (DICECEs). All of this work, including the creation of a nationwide infrastructure for early childhood education and development, was done in close collaboration with and because of the direct support of the Foundation.*

*The Foundation's work also included a partnership with the World Bank in that organisation's first loan to an African country to fund early childhood education. Additional work by the Foundation involved helping to establish culturally appropriate methods for serving young children of nomadic*



and pastoralist communities. Later, work was necessary as the horrors of the HIV/AIDS pandemic took a terrible toll on many Kenyan communities and families, requiring new thinking and methods to support young children's education and development. The context for young children changed as many of them, because of the loss of so many parents, started to live in communities with an elastic definition of 'family.' At the end, the Ministry of Education formally accepted the responsibility for providing early childhood education.

## Country Context

### **Geography, demographics, politics and the economy**

Kenya is a country of approximately 41 million people, or about the same population as Argentina or Poland. It covers a land mass of about 580,000 sq. km, or between the size of Spain and France. It is located in East Africa on the Equator and borders the Indian Ocean and Somalia to its east, Ethiopia and South Sudan to its north, Uganda and Lake Victoria to its west and Tanzania to the south.

Kenya is a land of diversity. Its landscape includes the coastal plain along the Indian Ocean and the wide, flat scrub that borders Somalia. These low plains rise to the central highlands, which are split by the Great Rift Valley. Kenya's highlands comprise one of the richest agricultural regions of Africa. Mount Kenya, in the highlands, is the second highest mountain on the continent. The country boasts a remarkable array of animal and plant life. Its climate varies from tropical along the coast, to the chilly nights of the highlands and a snow-capped mountain, to arid interior savannahs. Kenyans face flooding in some regions during the two rainy seasons, but deal with recurring drought and subsequent food shortages in other areas of the country.


Kenya's diversity is reflected in its people. It has no majority group<sup>10</sup> but rather many ethnic groups. While English and Kiswahili are the two official languages, there are numerous indigenous languages in daily use. The large majority of Kenyans are Christian and official data puts Muslims at 10 percent and indigenous beliefs at 10 percent of the population, though many believe that there is an official undercount of Muslims. Kenya is also home to many refugees. Kenya's refugees number approximately 175,000 (Somalia), 73,000 (Sudan), 16,000 (Ethiopia) and a reduced number of internally displaced persons from upwards of 400,000 who were displaced at the height of the post-election violence.

Unfortunately, Kenya also has a diversity of diseases. Kenyans live with a high risk of several infectious diseases. Food and water-borne diseases include: bacterial and protozoal diarrhoea, hepatitis A and typhoid fever. So-called vector borne diseases include malaria and Rift Valley fever, along with water contact schistosomiasis. Rabies remains a threat as an animal borne disease. The devastating human contact disease (excluding tribal conflicts, recent ethnic pogroms and violent crime) HIV/AIDS is widespread. The 2009 estimates of those living with HIV/AIDS is about 1.5 million putting it 4<sup>th</sup> in the world. The number of deaths by AIDS is about 80,000 making Kenya 6<sup>th</sup> in the world for mortality.

Kenya is a land of many firsts. Kenya has been inhabited for all of human history. The earliest *Homo sapiens* walked the plains of Kenya a million and a half years ago. Kenya was one of the first African nations to break from its colonial rulers. While East Africa was at different times a 'protectorate' and then a 'possession' of Germany and Britain, the story of Kenya's history is typical of much of the global south. The British oversaw the early building of railroads to assist them with exploiting the agricultural and mineral wealth for export out of Kenya. In the 1950s the British declared a state of

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<sup>10</sup> Data in the background section comes from *The World Bank: Kenya: Country Brief*, [cia.gov/worldfactbook/ke](http://cia.gov/worldfactbook/ke), and [Opendata.go.ke](http://Opendata.go.ke).



emergency because of the Mau Mau rebellion against their rule and proceeded to put it down brutally. The liberation struggle continued and in 1964 the Republic of Kenya was declared as a state independent of Britain. Jomo Kenyatta became the nation's first president and served until his death in 1978 both helping to create a modern state but also helping to foster the experience of 'big man' African political leadership and single party elections. In this case the single party was the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Daniel Arap Moi followed as the next president.

While most elections, with a few exceptions, were considered free and fair by international observers, the central government can be characterised as only superficially democratic and frequently unresponsive, if not in some cases corrupt. Over the decades Kenya maintained a level of general political and economic stability, unlike many of its neighbouring states. Violations of human rights and tensions about land distribution have been long-standing issues, especially for some traditionally marginalised groups. In 2007 a disputed election, considered questionable by international observers, added to existing tensions and triggered widespread violence, largely across ethnic lines, with hundreds killed and hundreds of thousands internally displaced. After intervention by a group of eminent African leaders and several attempts at negotiations, a process was devised that produced a coalition government and ultimately led to a revised constitution and new governance structures. In 2010 a nationwide referendum on the new constitution passed by a wide margin and resulted in plans for decentralised governance and a bill of rights.<sup>11</sup>


Kenya is a classic example of African underdevelopment, and while it emerged in the 1960s as a politically independent nation, by no means was it economically independent. While it has served as a regional hub for trade and finance in East Africa, Kenya's economy has been weak. It has relied on several primary goods whose prices have remained low and it faced suspension of its Enhanced Structural Adjustment Programme by the IMF in 1997 and again in 2001. The argument was that the government had failed to maintain reforms and curb corruption. The GDP per capita in 2011 was estimated at USD 1,700 putting Kenya at 192 in the world. Unemployment is estimated to be 40 percent putting it at 184 by comparison to other countries.

## Early Childhood Education and Care in Kenya

The earliest record of preschools for Kenyan children - apart from those in the 1940s exclusively for the European and Asian communities - point to a few begun in urban areas that emphasised care for children under five years. In 1952 the colonial government established the first preschools in rural areas for children's custodial care and security in the wake of the introduction of forced indigenous labour. It was not until after independence and the widespread involvement in the popular notion of *Harambee* in 1963 that Kenya saw an expansion of 'Harambee preschool education.' Harambee translates as 'all pull together' in Kiswahili and was used by President Kenyatta after independence as a rallying cry of sorts. It both built on and encouraged the tradition of community self-help. According to the grant files, by the end of the 1960s, almost a quarter of all children were reported as enrolled in preschools of one kind or another. These early childhood centres were far more the result of community Harambee spirit than of any connection to a government ministry. So while on the one hand, it is remarkable that a country like Kenya, recently independent but quite poor, could claim such a large percentage of children in early childhood programmes, on the other hand, there were problems. Very few schools were adequately staffed; few had adequate materials; teachers were not properly trained; and there was little connection to a national system of any kind. The preschools were essentially custodial care. Apart from a few very good schools for the wealthy and elite in the suburbs of Nairobi, this informal and non-systematic approach was the norm for access to early childhood education and care through the early 1970s. Ironically, as the rural programmes

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<sup>11</sup> From conversations with Dr. Willy Mutunga, Chief Justice of the Kenya Supreme Court, Nairobi, November 2011.



expanded, the differences in quality between the wealthier suburbs and the more numerous and lower quality rural centres served to underscore and continue the differences between Kenya's 'haves and have nots.' This tension was not lost on the leadership of the Ministries of Education and Social Services.

## Initial Engagement of the Bernard van Leer Foundation in Kenya

In early 1970s the Foundation had been rather successful in helping strengthen early childhood education and care, and a teacher-training programme in Jamaica. The BvLF leadership began a search for other places where it might replicate such work and considered two locations - expanding them throughout the Caribbean or transplanting them to Kenya. It chose both. Kenya was attractive because the Van Leer Corporation had a manufacturing and sales presence there and one of the senior Foundation staff had worked in Kenya previously and so was familiar with the country.

What became a 41 year relationship, representing EUR 30,450,047 (in 2010 prices and adjusted for inflation) in philanthropic grants and resulting in a national system of early childhood education, began very modestly.

In 1970, the Foundation began conversations with national and metropolitan educational authorities about how it might be helpful, given its mission and focus on young children. The priority of the Ministry of Education at that time - like in most of the global south - was the provision of universal primary education, with little interest in preschool education. The project that emerged intended to change this.

A proposal resulted from those discussions by the Research Unit of the University of Nairobi. BvLF provided a grant in 1971 to the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) in Nairobi, a unit of the Ministry of Education. It was for an experiment to develop the first preschool project in Kenya. The project was to train a group of local experts in current nursery-school practices in partnership with the City Education Department. Based on the thinking of the time, the focus was on cognitive-oriented practice to prepare children for formal learning in a competitive, urban school system.

This initial 1971 project was a very modest attempt to introduce an experimental training programme in early childhood education. It was to support the design of specific low-cost teaching and learning materials for preschools. It had four specific objectives: train a small cadre of supervisors who would then become trainers; develop a teacher training programme; devise a model nursery school curriculum; and train a set of nursery school supervisors.

Forty years later, Kenya has one of best established systems for early childhood education and development in Africa - despite poverty and demands caused by structural adjustments, drought and famine, political upheavals, internal conflicts, and external armed conflicts. The story of its development is complex and layered with many important details and numerous players. The BvLF funded many partners in nearly one hundred individual projects for many different purposes over four decades that began with telexes, typewriters and propeller planes. In order to understand such a sweep of history - to be able to see the wood for the trees - we have collapsed the work of the Foundation in Kenya into four major themes or stories. While there are a few discrete activities and partners that are not captured by these categories, they include enough to give the reader a representative view of the Foundation's engagement over four decades. The major categories are:

**Kenya Institute of Education.** (1971-1998) The Foundation's work with KIE spans almost 35 years and shows the experimentation, nurturing, development and a host of related efforts toward implementation of a dynamic and high quality *national system* of early childhood



education and community development. This category represents by far the largest, longest and most complex of the four groups of activities. In 1983 the Ministry of Education in partnership with BvLF launched the National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE), an institution unique in Africa. NACECE's key role has been to devise training, develop curriculum and related materials. DICECEs - district-based early childhood education support centres - assist in teacher training and help coordinate various Ministries' local service delivery. The NACECE/DICECE links mean that Kenya has a national infrastructure for ECD. The Foundation supported this structure, paid for its building in Nairobi and funded the many projects related to it.

**The World Bank Project.** (1997-2004) While technically still part of the engagement with KIE, the Foundation's partnership with the World Bank was a different kind of relationship in the effort to marry scale and quality. It involved the Bank, the Government of Kenya and several other NGO funding partners. The Foundation partnered with the Aga Khan Foundation in a few locations to help build local capacity, but the Bank loan was designed to scale up the numbers of early childhood education centres available across the country with just under USD 30 million.

**The Samburu.** (1989-2006) BvLF made a conscious decision to support the study, design and ultimately the provision of culturally appropriate early childhood experiences for pastoralist children. The idea behind such work was both practical (i.e., find the appropriate approach to early childhood education and development that 'works' for these children), and strategic (i.e., once a 'pastoralist approach' was designed and tested, it could be deployed to the many other parts of the world where the BvLF operated and where there were pastoralist communities with their own young children).


**HIV/AIDS.** (1999-2012) In the 1980s the world saw the spread of HIV and Kenyan society was hit particularly hard. The multiple negative effects of this disease on the lives of many young children across the country required a rethinking of how the Foundation operated. There are a set of grants and projects that, while generally consistent with the Foundation's broader strategy, emphasise the particular constellation of problems caused by the disease.

## Theories of Change

As noted in Chapter 2, the initial review of the Foundation's work in the four countries being examined, suggested it operated using at various times five different theories of change: the ideal model for ECD; community development-based work; capturing and disseminating knowledge and tools for wider use; targeting public policy changes; and efforts to strengthen key partners who then conduct the work. Each of these notions of how change happens comes with its own strategies. They were all present at different times and to varying degrees in Kenya.

### Ideal paradigm

The notion of finding or devising the most effective method for ECD and then pushing for its widespread use has been a point of tension in the Foundation for decades. In the earliest work in Kenya in the 1970s there was disagreement among some of the BvLF's senior leadership. Some saw a 'problem' to be solved - poor children whose development was in jeopardy because of their poverty, needed to be 'fixed.' The Foundation would help devise the 'right method.' For those



whose experience was business, especially production<sup>12</sup> (mostly trustees and Oscar van Leer himself), this approach had merit. However, those who had experience in community and national ‘development’, argued for a much more open vision, process and ownership. The experience of moving from initial work in Nairobi out into the rural areas was the first test of the assumption of ‘finding the perfect model.’ One model did not fit all. The Foundation moved to an approach that was more experimental and focused on the needs and wishes of the communities. The effort to devise an ECD model for pastoralist and nomadic communities is a useful second example of tension between a strategy of finding the perfect model (that works for all nomadic peoples everywhere) and one based on community development principles of ownership and agency of the community and its children. In this case, the solution seems to be a bit of both. Various different nomadic and pastoralist communities adopted (and then adapted) the *loipi* method (described later). Of course, the success of that method is clearly that it was not imposed and a ready-made method, but was created by the Samburu based on their experience and priorities. Subsequently, Maasai, Pokot, Oromo and other tribes adapted this ‘methodology’ to their own circumstances. So while there is a ‘*loipi* method’, its core is based on a community development model. The Foundation many years ago evolved away from searching for a neat, single educational solution to understanding the need to help communities find solutions to complex social, political, economic issues that can have critical influence on the possibilities of good ECD programmes.

## Community Development/Local Actors

There is ample evidence that the Foundation came to rely to a large degree on an approach in Kenya for ECD that is best described as community development. The BvLF’s emphasis has evolved as noted above from its early days with KIE where initial experiments in Nairobi urban schools moved to rural areas, and the project was forced to ‘go study the communities.’ The curriculum, pedagogy and teacher training the project first used proved irrelevant in rural areas and it had to step back and learn from the communities and eventually work directly with them to ensure appropriateness and the engagement of members of the community. The logic behind this approach is that parents, extended families and local communities understand their conditions best and when given the chance (i.e., analysis, tools and sufficient financial and intellectual resources) to improve their circumstances, they have everything to gain from the potential improvements. There is also the notion of treating the community like subjects (people with agency and dignity) instead of like objects (people to be acted upon and directed to act). Absent here is an explicit analysis of differential power - and the ownership of what is considered community empowerment.

As the work of the Foundation and its partners evolved in Kenya, the lessons of the need to engage communities were better understood, with the later work showing a strong emphasis on a community development approach. The work of the Foundation with the World Bank and the HIV/AIDS programmes both reflect that approach to a degree. The irony of looking for ways to ‘sustain’ this approach as the Foundation considered an exit strategy, was that it turned to a model of institutionalising it that gave it access to state resources but served to remove its power and its ability to assert community empowerment and diversity. This outcome is revisited below.


## Development of Appropriate Tools and Knowledge, and Their Transfer and Dissemination

In this theory of change, one believes that the main reason people are facing problems is that they have inadequate or insufficient information and that change can occur ‘if we can only get the right

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<sup>12</sup> There is a history of celebrating “the method” in the van Leer Corporation’s history. They would set up a tent and the manufacturing process for steel drums to show how drums could be made anywhere, but maintain quality of production.





information in their hands, they will know how to solve the problem.’ While there is no evidence that the Foundation embraced this idea as a single approach, it has a long history of supporting research (from theoretical to scientific to operational), analysis, tool development, and a wide array of publications designed for practitioners at virtually every level. The BvLF has supported the development of materials for children produced by parents, local teachers, trainees at NACECE or senior academic leaders in Kenya. It supported the production of very simple guides for training illiterate preschool teachers on topics that range from child development and appropriate classroom interaction to emergency first aid. It has funded guides on almost every topic imaginable for ECD teachers. They include not only books on pedagogy and teaching techniques, but on how to support play; how to monitor healthy physical growth and nutrition; ensure proper hygiene and access to clean water; effective interaction with parents; and working with the entire community. The effects of HIV/AIDS required an additional new literature that covered not only the immediate medical and health concerns, but issues such as contraception and how extended families can help in cases of loss of parents. In the files there is a guide to counselling about loss that could easily have come from a clinic in Manhattan or London. It is scientifically based, clear, but very sophisticated and respectful of different cultural practices across Kenya with suggestions for talking with children who have lost a parent and are grieving.

In addition to the development of guides and other pedagogical ‘tools’, the Foundation has funded the production of a large number of in-depth studies of communities (baseline studies; conditions for women and children; economic, health & nutrition studies) some simple but most quite substantial. The Foundation supported a series of “*Tracer Studies*” in the late 1990s that followed a group of children from their preschool experiences through primary school. Senior NACECE staff authored a tracer study of children in Embu district.<sup>13</sup> The research team did not examine every guide in the files, but funding in Kenya alone has resulted in the production of hundreds of reports, guides and papers.

The other aspect of this theory of change, dissemination, involves more than just the printing and distribution of materials - impressive as that effort has been. The Foundation on many occasions funded gatherings specifically designed to review past work, analyse existing problems, design new approaches and share effective practices. In interviews with Kenyans, one aspect of the relationship that was consistently described as important was the opportunity to meet with like-minded practitioners from different places - other parts of Kenya, from East Africa, across Africa and internationally. These meetings apparently had several effects. The visitors offered insights from their own experience that could be applied or adapted to the situation in Kenya, or where not appropriate, raised helpful questions that required attention. These meetings began back in the late 1970s and early 1980s with visits by Dudley Grant and some of his colleagues from the Jamaica Community-Based Schools effort. Later meetings would occur across Kenya in whole or part. Early childhood specialists were invited to travel to Kenya and meet with their counterparts on child development, appropriate pedagogy, educational materials, etc. The work on HIV/AIDS involved many specialised meetings and in 2004 the Foundation sponsored the “East African Regional Conference on ECD in Nomadic, Pastoralist and Hunter Gatherer Societies.” The Foundation also funded travel by Kenyans to other places for meetings. One interviewee said, “*One of the benefits that I received, that I don’t think the (BvL) Foundation even knows, has been the training that I received in public speaking and presenting ideas. Years ago I was asked to travel to a conference and speak about what we were doing in Kenya. I was terrified. I could do the work with children, but I had never been asked to talk about it and never to people I didn’t know. I worked and worked on that presentation and did it, but I was very scared. Over time I had to do more presentations and I got less nervous. It was a skill that several of us developed.*”

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<sup>13</sup> Njenga, A. and Kabiru, M. *In the Web of Cultural Transition: A Tracer Study of Children in Embu District, Kenya*. Bernard van Leer Foundation. The Hague, the Netherlands. 2001.



## Influencing the Design and Implementation of Public Policies

In this theory of change, the way change occurs is by getting government (at whatever level) to enact laws or regulations, or enforce existing law, that will eliminate or at least reduce the problem. In some instances the action might be getting rid of existing law or rules that are dysfunctional or cause harm. In this instance the funder supports one or several activities related to changing the rules. These activities could be research about the problem or about the rules for advocacy, helping groups organise, training for legislative campaigns, public budget analysis, public awareness campaigns, building organisational capacity in a set of advocacy groups, even funding capacities in public sector bodies, among several others.


The major example in Kenya of the Foundation supporting public policy is an unusual one. The Foundation, over several decades, not only helped develop and strengthen knowledge about ECD and influenced several policies, but actually helped design and build a national infrastructure - NACECE/DICECEs. In many ways it was partially responsible for the construction of a part of the public sector at the national and district levels. There are few examples in history where an individual private foundation had such an influence on the creation of an entire functional unit of the public sector. The Rockefeller Foundation influenced many countries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the development of departments of public health. Similarly, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations influenced public universities in Europe after WWII to establish departments of the social sciences, and both helped build institutions on food production in South East Asia and elsewhere in the 1960s, but neither actually helped in building part of the state. In every interview with senior officials or leading academics in Kenya, all responded consistently that the existing ECD system in Kenya *“would simply not exist without the intervention of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.”*

Despite this impressive contribution, there were a few areas where there could have been a different kind of support for engagement in public policies. For example, there is no strong, independent advocacy organisation in Kenya that puts pressure on the Ministry or KIE when they do not perform as they should. The World Bank project could have used such a group to pressure the Ministry for the speedier payment of funds that proved a serious problem. The unequal distribution of resources from Nairobi across districts by the ministries could be challenged by such a group. In retrospect, too much faith was put in NACECE to deliver programmes, provide training and maintain quality. It actually did fairly well in these functions in the early days, in large part because of the very high quality of the pioneer leaders and their almost revolutionary zeal. It is very hard to maintain that kind of spirit, and insufficient thought was given to how best to help build an empowered, political counterweight to the Ministry of Education. BvLF would help institutionalise the supply side but not ensure an organised and powerful demand side. One interviewee said that *“...Should the Foundation have decided to stay in Kenya, I would ask that it help build advocacy capacities in each district in light of the upcoming decentralisation required by the new Constitution.”*

## Strengthening Partner Organisations and Promoting Their Sustainability and Access to Other Resources

One theory of how things change suggests that it is done by strong and effective groups engaged in a variety of tasks, and so the role of a funder is to ensure the organisational health and effectiveness of the local groups with which it partners.

In the case of Kenya, one might say that the Foundation’s engagement with KIE/NACECE/DICECE was less public ‘policy’ and more strengthening a partner, though in this case it happened that the



partner was an arm of a government ministry. That argument has merit and warrants serious consideration, but the question remains about the absence of effective advocacy groups.

There were several CBOs and national NGOs that the Foundation intentionally assisted, especially those in Samburu and those related to HIV/AIDS. One institution stands out however. The Kenya Community Development Foundation served as a partner to the Foundation in a variety of ways. The Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF) is a fundraising and grant-making organisation with a several million dollar permanent endowment. Hence, as a dual function institution - grant-making and asset-building - it is in an unusually strong position to continue supporting ECD work in Kenya, though not at the scale that BvLF has. The Foundation has partnered KCDF since 1999, initially supporting its institutional capacities for ECD activities in the Rift Valley, Nairobi and the Coast. In 2004 the partnership evolved into a full ECD programme that KCDF operates as one of its core activities and it supports its own partners in Malindi, Mwingi, Garissa and Kilifi districts. While KCDF will remain an important partner, it does not have sufficient political power by itself to play the role of national advocate for ECD.

## Analysis of Data, Strengths and Weaknesses

The Foundation has an impressive system of record keeping that at its peak was labour intensive but afforded access to a wide array of information. That system has degraded over time with necessary budget reductions and a smaller staff. However, the key issue is the mixed collection of data. The Foundation's files are rich with project evaluations identifying outputs and noting strengths and weaknesses. Most assessments by programme staff are insightful and offer useful analysis - sometimes critically helpful analysis. Missing, however, is consistent impact data. There are some individual reports that offer partial information, but it is not collected systematically. Such information about the effects of the programmes on participating children and their families could provide the Foundation, its partners, the government, and those communities, with critically important information about how, where and whether to invest in the myriad possible activities in support of good ECD.

Despite some limitations of data, there is ample evidence of some important contributions made by the Foundation. The most impressive aspects of the BvLF's engagement in Kenya over 40 years are four related but different elements of an ECD system:

1. the existence of a national and district-level infrastructure for early childhood education and development;
2. an established body of knowledge and literature about appropriate teaching and effective relationships with local communities based on research in other countries and substantial research and practice in Kenya (e.g., resource and support materials developed in more than 13 languages);
3. a system of training, support and oversight of ECD teachers; and
4. a cadre of highly skilled, experienced and dedicated Kenyan leaders in ECD.

For all of their shortcomings, this set of outputs taken together represents a system of ECD that was home-grown in the decades when most other African nations were struggling to ensure universal access to primary education, with little to offer younger children, despite their needs. This system, while not universal and of mixed quality, provided access to ECD programmes for far more young children than would have had access under any other imaginable circumstances.

While 'enrolment' is an imprecise indicator, it serves to illustrate the scale with which ECD services have expanded over the decades in Kenya. The table below shows the growth of enrolment of children in ECD programmes and the parallel growth of numbers of ECD centres and ECD teachers.

Years	Children Enrolled in ECD <sup>14</sup>			ECD Centres	ECD Teachers (Trained & untrained)
	Boys	Girls	Total		
1983	319,000	306,000	626,000	11,000	15,000
1993	472,000	452,000	924,000	19,000	27,000
2003	815,000	788,000	1,600,000	30,000	53,000

While slow to consider diversity of settings, the programme showed flexibility in its adaptability when confronted with changing conditions - whether they were economic and place-specific (e.g., urban vs. rural), cultural (nomadic vs. sedentary) or radical shifts in societal structure (HIV/AIDS pandemic). Several critics argue that the Foundation could have pushed harder to make the approach more flexible and therefore more likely to serve the most marginalised children. That critique probably has some merit. An internal Foundation report adds that efforts to create a regional resource centre and disseminate work throughout Africa was premature because of the lack of greater flexibility and openness to diversity.


The strongest criticism emerges as a contradiction. The Foundation by all measures played a strategically important role in convincing the government of Kenya to invest in their youngest children. It moved ECD services from *ad hoc* home and local efforts of varying quality to a project of the national government (though the percentage of the national budget for ECD was only 0.1 percent with aspirations of rising to 1 percent). Early childhood education and development would become at least symbolically a public sector service. National government commitment to ECD would be institutionalised - a notion that in interviews was cautiously considered a good thing. But such a shift had drawbacks as well, not the least would be greater standardisation. In a report jointly written by BvLF and NACECE staff to the Foundation Board, the central contradiction was explained.

*The Foundation's focus on innovation and in searching for new approaches was, in practice, contradictory given a choice of partners that mostly consisted of conventional and established institutions such as the Ministry of Education. On reflection, the discourse on innovation was defeated by our equally strong concern to institutionalise the programme and its strategies. At that time, institutionalisation was narrowly defined to mean the carrying out and maintenance of ideas and practices within a physical institution rather than by families and communities themselves.*

The lessons learned in Kenya about the nature of community development and how the care and development of young children are part of that process exist in a system that attempts to bureaucratise knowledge and methods. That internal tension is currently mediated by good teachers and trainers, but is a very strong force without a strong countervailing force. A clearer understanding of the inevitability of that tension might have led to a different set of interventions by the Foundation to mitigate it. The Foundation, for example, could have built advocacy capacities within NACECE, or perhaps more realistically within another organisation. That is not to suggest that the problem went unnoticed by Foundation staff. In a trip report in the late 1980s, one staff person argued about the proper role of NACECE.

*First, the Centre should act as a 'voice' for the young child in Kenya, particularly the mass of young children who remain in deprivation, whether in urban or rural areas. In this sense, the Centre has a genuine 'advocacy' task, which as yet it has not chosen to discharge, nor is it technically equipped to*

<sup>14</sup> All data from the Kenya Institute of Education and are rounded to the nearest thousand.



*discharge. Secondly, the Centre should obviously discharge its training function...but the real issue is not the fact of training...it is the quality of training....[they must] address issues relating to parenting, to the development of the whole child, including non-cognitive aspects.*

Despite the impassioned insight above, the dilemma remains.

## Reflections and Lessons Learned

In the various interviews and in many reports there were a few actions by the Foundation that were almost universally applauded. They include the following:

**Time** - One person commented, *“The Foundation was willing to give partners sufficient time to get it right.”* *“They (BvLF) gave us the time that we needed to test our ideas. Other funders won’t do that,”* said another interviewee. A common pattern for the BvLF was to fund one to three years of exploration, experimentation and testing before serious implementation happens. In many instances, grants support work over as many as three cycles of three years with a closing out grant. Few foundations work in ‘decades’ - despite what we know about the time needed for significant social change. Apart from these details is the remarkable fact that the Foundation worked in Kenya for over 40 years.

**Flexible funding** - Similar to time, one person noted, *“The Foundation is clear about goals but is flexible about methods. It allows us the freedom to find the most effective way to do things and doesn’t demand that we do it their way.”* Another added, *“They (BvLF) don’t impose their system on us.”* People spoke of flexibility of both method and money. They were outspoken in their appreciation of how the BvLF - unlike many other donors who were driven by accounting - permitted them to take the time to consider various methods and then choose among them. And, within understandable restraints, they could even ask about readjusting budgets in the face of new realities.

**Ecosystem of support, not just money.** There was strong gratitude to the Foundation expressed by many for the range of support they received, beyond the grant funds. These ranged from the intellectual assistance from the BvLF staff or others, to the opportunity to learn new skills, to appreciation for political influence to direct technical assistance. In one intriguing set of correspondence over a period of several months, a staff member of KIE requested help from BvLF staff in The Hague for an unusual item. At that time, electric typewriters were the state of the art in communications and the IBM *Selectric* - with its interchangeable typeface ‘balls’ was the best. KIE was to oversee production of materials in numerous Kenyan languages and hence needed a specific typeface ball for some of the languages that it could not find in Nairobi. Staff in The Hague eventually located the appropriate typeface ball and had it shipped to Kenya so that materials could then be printed. However, one could not help but be moved reading the stack of letters and considering how much time was spent in the effort to resolve this relatively simple technical problem—which was not even noted in grant reports, yet was critical for the production of the training materials.

**Access to others’ knowledge** (formal research or other practitioners) - This access to knowledge included intellectual assistance sometimes in the person of the Foundation officer who would share their experience or other research. In other instances the Foundation brought experts or other practitioners from various parts of the globe to meet with them and share learning - or paid the travel costs for Kenyans to visit other sites. In



interviews with Kenyan partners this assistance was considered very helpful and in some instances is credited with helping reach important new insights.

**Reliance on the community.** The Foundation came to respect and trust the knowledge from local communities and the importance of community ownership of ECD programmes. In many interviews, Kenyan partners noted that they appreciated the respect that they felt from the Foundation both for them as partners and for the work by local communities across the country.

What began in 1971 as an early childhood education project evolved over time to consider itself a national ECD and community development campaign, to a responsibility of the Government of Kenya. That evolution was not automatic, nor without problems today, but emerged through a series of efforts that built on the previous ones. Marito Garcia of the World Bank noted, *“Today there is no country in Africa like Kenya in terms of the reach of ECD. That system exists today because of the work of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.”*

## COLOMBIA




### Summary

*The BvLF programme in Colombia commenced in 1976 and developed within a context of a complex combination of political, criminal and social violence, and important processes of decentralisation of formal state governance. The armed conflict, initiated in the 1970s, involved state military and police forces, left wing revolutionary groups and right wing paramilitaries, all struggling to gain and benefit from political power and valuable land and other natural resources. From the 1990s, the rise of the drugs cartels contributed to the escalation of violence that evolved in both rural and urban areas of the country. The paramilitaries, founded by drugs cartels, large landowners and private companies, were responsible for threatening and killing many leftist politicians and civil society activists, featuring heavily in the illegal expropriation of land and the violent displacement of many families from rural areas. This led to the growth of urban slums where the displaced had very limited housing, infrastructure, employment opportunities or social services.*

*In the midst of these high levels of violence, poverty, inequality and social discrimination, successive Colombian governments promoted the decentralisation of state power and resources to department and municipal levels. The consequent increase in civil society organisations and their participation in policy agendas and programme implementation has provided an important backdrop to the development of ECD throughout the country. In 1968, eight years before the BvLF programme commenced, the Colombian government created the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF), with a commitment to support initiatives such as child care and protection programmes, parent education and nutritional supplements for lactating mothers, infants and young children. The funding for this work saw a major boost in 1974 when the government introduced an annual payroll tax that grew over the years to represent 0.6 percent of the annual GDP.*

*Given the exceptional levels of state commitment to ECD, BvLF's work in Colombia has strategically focused on developing the knowledge and experience of civil society ECD specialists (principally NGOs and universities) as important actors in promoting appropriate and cost effective community development models of ECD for the poor and marginalised, and in having these adopted by the ICBF and other state ECD actors in department and municipal governments. In the early years, one key and long-standing BvLF partner, Uninorte, laid important foundations for these innovative and community-oriented ECD models. These were later incorporated by the ICBF, regional and local governments and other NGOs and universities, including other BvLF partners in different urban and*



*rural areas of the country. The impact of the high quality of BvLF partners' ECD work and their influence on public policies and programmes has been strengthened by BvLF's constant commitment to promoting coordination and collaboration among all relevant ECD actors at local, regional and national levels. The achievements of the BvLF programme over the years have been recognised by all these actors in Colombia, and the lessons learnt have provided valuable contributions to ECD in many other countries beyond Colombia's borders.*

## Country context

Colombia is the fourth largest country in South America. It is a democracy, divided into 32 geographical 'departments'. Each department has a regional governor and an assembly, and is formed by a grouping of municipalities governed by mayors and administered by municipal councils.<sup>15</sup> All representatives are elected for four-year periods. In reality however, the development of modern democratic practice has been limited by the domination of two traditional parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals. In the 1970s, the repression of other political parties and the prevention of citizen participation in public policy-making led to the emergence of guerrilla groups such as the FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). Since then Colombia has been gripped by armed conflict that was combined in the 1990s with the rise of the drugs mafia (particularly in Medellin and Cali) that also seriously damaged political stability. The paramilitary death squads, founded by the military, drugs cartels, large landowners and private companies, have been a major factor in the conflict. They have been responsible for the killing of many leftist politicians and civil society activists following the growing strength of civil society organisations since the 1980s. The paramilitaries have also featured heavily in the widespread illegal expropriation of over three million hectares of land through the violent displacement of rural communities. Although progress has been made recently to end the political armed conflict, high levels of violent crime persist, particularly in urban areas and in the north-western areas bordering Panama. Historically high levels of inequality in Colombian society persist today, with descendants of Spanish colonialists, 20 percent of the population, controlling and benefiting from political power and inherited wealth as landowners and industrialists. Meanwhile the majority of Colombians of indigenous Indian and African descent comprise the 50 percent of the population below the poverty line.

The armed conflict has driven many families from rural areas to urban areas, creating slums where they lack adequate housing, jobs, or social services. Children and youth account for more than half of Colombia's three million internally displaced people. Colombia's 18 million children and adolescents make up about 40 percent of its population of 46.9 million. Thousands of children in combat zones and cities have been killed by small arms and countless others live in dangerous conditions as street children, child labourers and child prostitutes. More than half of them live in poverty, while a quarter live in extreme poverty (surviving on less than USD 1a day). Children are consequently at greater risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of violence, being more easily recruited into armed groups, urban gangs, or organised crime, including the illegal drug trade, or forced into commercial sex work.

In the midst of the high levels of violence and inequality, since the 1990s successive Colombian governments have pursued a major policy of decentralisation of state power to department and municipal level administrations. The aim has been to devolve responsibility for public services and encourage democratisation and more community participation in development policies and practice. It is within this framework that state promotion of ECD has evolved during more than four decades. Of central importance in this field is the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF), created in 1968. The ICBF's services include: child care; parent education; protective services; and nutritional

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<sup>15</sup> Data sources for this section include the World Bank Colombia summary 2011, UNICEF, the CIA World Report 2011, The Economist, 28 April 2011, the BvLF Country Statement Colombia 1997 - 2001.





supplements for pregnant and lactating women and children in preschools and schools. The Health and Education Ministries have been working with the ICBF since its inception. ICBF has a decentralised structure with a national office, 28 regional offices, five additional departmental government agencies and 199 zone centres. ICBF's child care homes complement the formal preschools of the Ministry of Education and the health services of the Ministry of Health.

In order to fund ECD on a national level, the government established a payroll tax in 1974. These funds pay for ICBF's direct services for children and contracts with NGOs and others to provide local services. ICBF's ECD tax income in 2004, for example, was USD 540,547,000, yielding close to 0.6 percent of annual GDP. In the past decade the ICBF has begun to diversify its income by establishing agreements with international and national organisations that contributed approximately USD 66,028,000 in 2004, for example.<sup>16</sup> In recent years the Government took further steps to strengthen child protection, approving the 2006 Law on Childhood and Adolescence aligned with the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Since 2003 the Colombian government has been developing a National Action Plan for Children and Adolescents, which defines goals and strategies to improve living conditions and protect rights over the period 2007-2016.


## The BvLF Programme in Colombia 1976 - 2012

The BvLF programme was inaugurated in 1976. Initially, the focus was on developing innovative approaches to organising good quality community-based day care and education services for low-income and vulnerable families in urban and rural areas. Two major partner organisations in those early years were both located in the north-west of Colombia: the university Uninorte (*Universidad del Norte*) in Barranquilla in the Atlantic Coast region; and the NGO CINDE, operating in the Pacific rainforest region (Chocó, bordering Panama). After this initial phase, in the 1990s, funding for Uninorte's community-based work continued and the geographical spread of the BvLF programme expanded as new partnerships were identified. Principal new partnerships entered into until the closure of the programme in 2012 were: FESCO in Manizales in 1992; the Fundación Cultural Germinando in Pereira in 1999 (both in the coffee growing Andean region north-west of Bogota); and FUCAI working in the remote southern Amazon rainforest in the Department of Amazonas in 2003. Other shorter-term funding was also provided to organisations in Cali, including the university Univalle and ATC (*Asociación de Televidentes de Cali*), and to the Association of NGO from Caldas, in Manizales. The challenges in children's daily environments that needed to be addressed were related to poverty, social exclusion, migration, forced displacement, violence and abuse.

Throughout the life of the BvLF programme in Colombia, all the partners sought to influence the quality of ECD services provided by ICBF and other national, departmental and municipal government bodies, including mayors' offices, and their Social Policy Councils (*Consejos de Política Social*). BvLF partners developed new research, ECD methodologies, training programmes and appropriate educational materials for use in service provision and with local communities, paying attention to local childrearing practices and the local and regional context. Over the years they have also developed their capacity to disseminate the experiences of their work and ECD proposals through the production of a wide range of publications and audio-visual materials. Since 1997 the development of the BvLF programme was guided by country strategies produced by the Programme Officer, Marc Mataheru, in consultation with the partners and other key stakeholders in Colombia. Soon after the 2009 Colombia strategy was approved, financial difficulties led the BvLF to close the programme, along with others in different parts of the world. BvLF provided each of the partners of programmes due to end in 2011 and 2012 with 'exit grants' to provide them with resources to help

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<sup>16</sup> UNESCO: *Policy Brief on Early Childhood*. Nov/Dec. 2006. <http://www.riseinstitute.org/pdfs/payrolleng.pdf>.



them invest time and money in seeking alternative funding for the future. The total expenditure for the programme between 1976 and 2012 was EUR 50,728,095 (in 2010 prices, adjusted for inflation).

In summary, the BvLF programme in Colombia adopted a five-pronged approach.

1. The creation and production of integrated, practical, community development alternatives to traditional academic theories and state ECD service provision. These started with pilot projects in different contexts and expanded outwards in terms of geographical scope and other key state, civil society and private sector stakeholders.
2. Alternatives based on rigorous and in-depth research, analysis and review processes, and the production of publications and audio-visual materials for the dissemination of the new approaches and experiences in Colombia and internationally.
3. The training of 'human talent' based on the above, that included government employees, parents (particularly mothers), members of local communities, NGOs, church organisations, and university students.
4. The strengthening Colombia's organisational capacity in, and alliances and collaboration between, individual institutions and networks to work on ECD and to direct their attention to children. The aim was to bring together the state, civil society, the media and other private sector actors.
5. The coordination of all the entities listed in point 4 for public policy advocacy and the implementation of state programmes based on the above in order for the state to give adequate attention to ECD throughout Colombia.

## The Effects of the Bernard van Leer Foundation Programme in Colombia

The evolution of state policies and practice related to ECD has been profoundly influenced by the work of BvLF's principal partners in Colombia. The very early years of BvLF involvement, and particularly its support for Uninorte, hold the key to understanding this influence and the nature of the development of the programme until the decision to close taken at the end of 2009. The early work of Uninorte developed an innovative experience of child care that differed radically from the prevailing state and academic pedagogic models and the nutrition and health-focused compensatory programmes. The BvLF programme and all its partners from Uninorte onwards therefore understood the promotion of early childhood development to be the starting point for the qualitative improvement of the life standards of all members of low-income and marginalised communities, and not just children alone.

The approach developed and implemented by BvLF and its partners in Colombia outlined above is closely related to the five theories of change identified by the Learning from Experience team when planning and conducting the review of BvLF programmes. The following section analyses the main effects of the programme in Colombia according to those five key elements.



## Ideal Paradigm

The work in Colombia did not rely on the theory of change that is based on the discovery and replication of a single 'ideal paradigm' for ECD - a theory that 'one model fits all contexts'. Indeed, from the outset in the 1970s, Uninorte staff realised that the prevailing universal theories of ECD that they had studied in the university met with many contrasts in the reality of the Caribbean region of Colombia with its context of poverty, violence and forced displacement. Children did not respond to standard cognitive tests as they should - their answers were wrong because they were relating the tests to their reality, for example, the lack of food and the prevalence of violence. Uninorte worked on this problem with researchers from Chile, Peru and other countries, to find out how the children understood their reality.. They identified factors of risk and protection for the children, cognitive tests to reflect them, and approaches to how children could overcome their difficulties and benefit from formal education after the age of six. One of the most significant contributions of Uninorte's early work was the creation of an innovative, community-led home-based child-care model – *Los Hogares Comunes* or *Comunitarios* (Children's Community Homes using the houses of the 'community mothers'). The *Hogares Comunes* were built on the characteristics of the poor communities involved, and incorporated a curriculum and a methodology that were especially designed for the context of marginalised Colombian children. This model is founded on the principles of shared responsibility for ECD combined with a human rights approach.

Another reason why the 'ideal paradigm' was not employed here was the obvious need to respond to different contexts in an integrated/holistic approach to ECD. Over the years since the late 1970s, all the BvLF partners have understood the content of integrated ECD for 0-7 year-olds to be based on the rights of the child and to incorporate the following elements:

1. Life and survival, including improvements in the provision of: social security cards for access to state immunisation programmes and other health services; nutrition; clean water, sanitation and hygiene at home and in day-care centres; measures to prevent accidents in the home.
2. Protection from harm, including protection from all forms of psychological, verbal and physical violence, within the home and in the community, and from neglect, abandonment, sexual and economic exploitation and forced participation in the armed conflict.
3. Education and personal development in the ECD home-based and community centres, including quality teaching and care from teachers; access to books, writing, drawing and painting materials, toys and sports equipment; safe spaces and time for recreation, cultural, physical and sporting activities. The learning environment should provide intellectual stimulation and learning as well as affection and supportive human interaction in order to promote psychological development, including a sense of identity, self-esteem and language and communication skills.
4. Participation of children in the home with family members, at school and in the community. This includes making decisions for themselves and sharing opinions, ideas, suggestions etc. with other children and adults, and for these ideas to be taken into account. Information should be shared with children and produce dialogue based on mutual recognition.

A second conceptualisation of an 'integrated' approach to ECD in the Colombian case was to consider the role of all the different actors and institutions involved in ECD and to ensure as much



coordination and collaboration among them as possible for the benefit of children and the development of communities and family life. In this approach to integrated ECD, BvLF played a more active role, while still leaving the partners to explore the actual content of their ECD programmes in their own local or regional context. The building of alliances among all relevant actors was one of the central goals of the BvLF programme, particularly after the late 1990s. The partners had great success and impact with this strategy at local community levels (rural and urban); to a varied but overall good extent at a department or regional level; and with difficulties and changing fortunes at national level, particularly with the ICBF as outlined below.

## Community Development/Actors

Uninorte's Community Homes model was founded on the participation of parents and other family members in the developmental process of children under seven years old. It was adapted and developed by all the partners in the Colombia programme who based the model on the premise that families and local communities have the greatest educational influence upon children. The purpose of the Community Homes model was therefore to rescue the socialising value of the family and the local community which represented the environment in which children develop. By integrating parents in the educational process, the project also extended its impact to children of families that were not directly responsible for running the Community Homes or the parallel model of state-financed day care centres.

Another important area of achievement was related to the high prevalence of forced internal displacement. Many thousands of people have migrated from rural areas to cities and towns throughout Colombia where they have formed ghettos as they were not accepted by urban societies due to different customs. In the early years, Uninorte adapted studies of programmes for migrants and ECD in Canada that promoted the interaction of different cultures and approaches to receiving migrants without conflict, as an alternative to the imposition of the receiving culture. BvLF partners have helped to register displaced children in the ECD centres and Community Homes. There the children tell their stories of what happened to them and to other children in the rural areas. Intercultural dialogue between children and adults and both groups learning about very diverse regions, customs and experiences has helped to overcome the fractured nature of communities affected by the long period of political violence.

The involvement, training and ongoing advice and support for community mothers, educators and leaders represent a second key approach to community participation in ECD among marginalised and poor communities. Community mothers provide children with the experience of a Community Home in their own homes, offering food and care in a family environment. They also train the parents who visit and provide voluntary support to the Home. The community educators' role complements that of the community mothers, but they are more mobile, supporting children dispersed in different areas and sectors, including in Community Homes, day care centres, and their own homes. They promote the interaction between community mothers, teachers, community leaders and the institutions that support them. They also coordinate and negotiate human and material resources for the adequate development of ECD activities in the communities. This implies a constant interaction with state and civil society institutions, networks, committees and Social Policy Councils. Their presence in these spheres provides the opportunity for communities to contribute their knowledge and proposals to state and civil society policy-making. Through this participation in policy making, the community educators can then report back to their communities through their daily visits and training processes, and through the media, in particular the radio programmes that represent an important awareness-raising tool. Over the years, community educators have become crucial elements of the BvLF partners' programmes, ensuring constant input



to state and civil society ECD programmes. They receive training from BvLF partners, and as they gain greater knowledge and experience they take on the role of training others.

It is not possible to provide exact figures of how many community members (children and adults) participated in and benefited from the work carried out by BvLF partners at this level due to the uneven levels of quantitative data available in project reports and evaluations, and the time that would be required to seek out this data at each organisation. However, data provided by Uninorte in 2011, for example, states that Uninorte's programmes provided direct services to 254,000 children under seven years old in the areas of education, health, nutrition, psycho-affective development, and the development of skills for school life. Furthermore, 127,000 families and 9,000 carers also participated directly in their programmes (Uninorte 2011: 5).

## Development of Appropriate Tools and Knowledge, and their Transfer and Dissemination

BvLF relied heavily on this theory of change for its work in Colombia. During the pilot projects and programme expansion phases, BvLF partners conducted many research studies in order to evaluate their models' impact upon the children's physical, cognitive, emotive, nutritional, educational and health development. Between 1977 and 2011, for example, Uninorte's programmes involved the participation of 12,500 students of psychology, infant education, nursing and medicine. In total, Uninorte staff and students conducted approximately 235 research studies and published 46 books and more than 200 journal articles on different aspects of ECD, social networking and human development. Audio-visual materials such as CDs and DVDs developed for the media, training programmes and websites have also becoming increasingly important. With BvLF funding, all the partners built important documentation centres to house their publications and audio-visual materials, providing easy access to them for all those directly involved in ECD, as well as the general public.

After the initial community-based work in Chocó, CINDE's particular strength lay in its development and implementation of a master's course in ECD, providing valuable training for many ECD actors, including some of the staff and directors of BvLF partner organisations such as FESCO and Germinando. The other non-university BvLF partners have since developed their own diplomas and other training programmes for a wide variety of state, NGO and community-based actors, courses which have been supported and validated by the relevant universities such as the University of Caldas in the case of FESCO and the Technological University of Pereira in the case of Germinando.

Dissemination of appropriate models, tools and knowledge has taken a variety of forms. The books and journal articles were disseminated at local, regional, national and international levels, supported and encouraged by BvLF principally through national and international exchange visits, conferences and the sharing of publications with different partners. The local and regional radio programmes and other media work, including interviews of staff about ECD, that were developed to promote awareness-raising and education concerning ECD have also provided an important channel for dissemination of the publications and other materials.

## Influencing the Design and Implementation of Public Policies

Another theory of change upon which BvLF based much of its work in Colombia was on influencing public policy. During the early years, efforts to make the BvLF programme coherent with the Colombian context led BvLF and its partners to face the problem of the centralised nature of state and, specifically, ICBF policies. Education policy, for example, was designed in offices in Bogota for



children all over the country, proving highly problematic given the vast difference in Department-level contexts. The first point, therefore, was to challenge that and to create context-specific policies. The direct involvement of universities such as Uninorte in the work of BvLF partners proved a major factor in the rigorous development and implementation of alternative models. The results obtained from research and the outcomes of these alternative models confirmed that these models were much more successful and cost effective than the conventional models run by ICBF. In the political framework, the most distinctive achievement was the adoption of Uninorte's model of Children's Community Homes by the Colombian government as the country's principal ECD model. These have since been named *Hogares Comunitarios (or Infantiles) de Bienestar* (ICBF's ECD Centres). This community-based approach enabled ICBF to extend its national coverage to 1.5 million children living in the country's poorest communities by 2011.<sup>17</sup> All BvLF partners have played a pivotal role in achieving this, and have been recognised as catalysts in the debate on innovation in the existing ICBF system, the formulation of national policies and implementation of these policies at local and Department level. In addition to the development of cost-effective community-based and empowerment models, the training of ICBF staff and the production of high quality publications were important contributions to improving the quality as well as the expansion of ICBF programmes throughout Colombia. In recognition of the importance of the contribution of BvLF partners to state ECD programmes, the BvLF received an award from the Government of Colombia and President Pastrana in a ceremony at the National Palace in July 2000.


ICBF engagement with BvLF partners at a national level has been varied, however. For several years leading up to a change in national leadership in 2011, the director of ICBF was opposed to working with civil society organisations, including BvLF and its partners. During this phase, the partners therefore concentrated on close coordination with local and regional ICBF offices, where collaboration continued to remain strong. However, the new national director, Diego Molano Aponte, appointed in November 2011, is well known to BvLF partners and offers hope for a renewed collaboration at a national level over the next few years. A renewed commitment to civil society participation and collaboration at a national level should also revitalise and legitimise local and regional level coordination, providing a positive outlook for the near future at least.

In addition to the work of ICBF, it is important to highlight the growing role of the state at the level of local and regional (department) government councils that are responsible for ECD-related education, health and social policies and service provision. BvLF partners have invested much time and energy in collaborating with these state actors and their employees, influencing their policies and resource allocation, and achieving a significant degree of collaboration between municipal and regional councils, mayors' offices, NGOs, universities, local communities and the ICBF at these levels.

Finally, BvLF partners interviewed in December 2011 were all in agreement that their growing relationship with and influence on ICBF and local and regional governments were not only strengthened by the funding and resources received from BvLF over the years, but that the active role of BvLF staff was also crucial. The programme officers and other visitors from The Hague were always committed to organising meetings with key government officials and representatives of the partner organisations during every visit, using their profile and experience to ensure that new and/or less established partners were granted interviews and the time and opportunity to disseminate their work and influence policy-makers.

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<sup>17</sup> Uninorte/J. Amar (2011) *El Proyecto Costa Atlántica: Investigación y desarrollos dirigidos a la infancia en contextos vulnerables*. Summary report prepared for this BvLF review process.



## Strengthening Partner Organisations and Promoting their Sustainability and Access to Other Resources

This theory of change was central to the Foundation's work in Colombia. During the research visit to BvLF partners in Colombia in November and December 2011, all staff interviewed agreed that BvLF had acted as a crucial 'umbrella' for the development of their work on ECD over the years. They noted that without BvLF support it would have been impossible to have reached such high levels in their knowledge and programmes. BvLF also allowed them to connect to many national institutions and international NGOs, and to obtain valuable resources from them in support of their projects. However, this history of support by these other groups has always been more short term and time consuming to achieve and maintain. By contrast, BvLF support has been long term – a very rare occurrence in the field of international development. For the main BvLF partners, it was crucial to have the long-term funding so that they could concentrate on developing a longer term approach to the work and not waste valuable time writing funding proposals and negotiating new projects. The long-term funding permitted continuity in the ECD work and the processes, and retaining and developing staff. The advantage of institutional support with continuity and a constant dialogue with the same programme officer over the years enabled them to grow and develop much more than with short-term funding or dealing with different programme officers.

The directors of Uninorte, FESCO and Germinando, also highlighted how BvLF showed them to become more professional in managing their work, to be very well organised and structured, by setting an excellent example. BvLF gave them the flexibility to change their approach as they explored what worked in the community, starting with Barranquilla, Manizales and Pereira neighbourhoods, then expanding in the municipality and eventually throughout the Department. They reported that they scaled up the work as the years went by, each partner responding to very different contexts. Their knowledge of ECD issues and methods grew significantly as a result of the high quality of BvLF publications and BvLF's support for and promotion of their contact with other projects and countries and their exchanges with other ECD actors and organisations.

In terms of lessons learnt, BvLF partners highlighted four concepts that sum up their experience of working with BvLF: opportunity (to explore new ideas, experiment and grow organically), mutual respect, autonomy and trust. The partners appreciated the fact that BvLF staff did not attempt to intervene in their technical work, and that they wanted to learn from them as well as offer knowledge and ideas from different parts of the world. In the words of one of the programme directors:

There has been very good staff in BvLF over the years. They have offered resources but not enforced them. BvLF has changed for the better. In the early years it was more rigid in terms of procedures, but it also organised big international seminars – every 2 years - that were hugely valuable for inputs for our work. Then a new, more modern administration took over, introducing a lot of changes in the support systems etc. Then for many years Marc was our counterpart. He was very special, he knew Latin America well, he understood our culture and ways of working, and was very patient, transparent and friendly. All the BvLF directors visited, and there was much harmony in working with BvLF. The Foundation has provided very important stability and support for us to connect with other countries, to grow and to disseminate our work.



During the evaluation visit for this study, the partners in Colombia voiced their disappointment with the manner in which BvLF withdrew from Colombia. Although programmes were still ongoing at the time of the evaluation visit, the impression partners had was that BvLF had disengaged from its earlier efforts in Colombia during the final two years of the funding relationship. Partners noted that prior to the announcement of the closure of the programme, the relationship had always been experienced as ‘much more than just a funding relationship’. They expressed regret that there had been no discussions on any future non-financial collaboration such as in the realm of joint international advocacy or support to other countries in the Latin America region where BvLF continues to operate. One exception to this is the case of FUCAI in the Amazon region, and the possibility to coordinate with BvLF partners in the Amazon regions of Peru and Brazil. However, without the funding necessary to continue its work in the Colombian Amazon, FUCAI will face serious limitations to contributing to this collaboration.

### ECD with a rights-based or social justice perspective

The Colombia programme documentation produced by BvLF staff since the programme began does not outline a specific approach that was based on an analysis of different social conditions by group (except broadly “disadvantaged”), or social justice and ECD. In other words, while individual programmes may have helped a particular group, the initial analysis did not consider the causes for different conditions by gender, ethnicity, sexuality, race, indigenous people, or other categories where a set of structural injustices were at play. Neither did it consider how ECD interventions should be changed accordingly. Curiously, during this review it became increasingly clear that in many instances, a perspective of differential impact according to identity were known in the work of the partners with children, their families, communities and with state and civil society institutions—but that the design of strategies did not reflect an understanding of these dynamics or an attempt to alter them. Progress reports by various partners provide minimal or anecdotal information on relative progress by various groups (or categories of identity). This is largely because the work was not initially framed to take these dynamics into account..

### Conclusion: Reflections and Future Prospects

In the current climate of declining international development funding for Latin America in general and Colombia in particular, the possibilities for BvLF partners to seek alternative financial resources from international foundations or NGOs are limited. During the evaluation visit in December 2011, for example, none of the partners interviewed had yet identified or negotiated alternative resources. However, the final phase of BvLF funding in Colombia has coincided with new possibilities for the partners to coordinate effectively with the ICBF given the appointment of the new ICBF director in November 2011. But there is no certainty of continued state support for the quality of work and for the marginalised communities assisted with BvLF funding over almost four decades. The risk is that the state will only offer funding for BvLF partners to focus on the expansion of basic and ‘top down’ services in education and health provision to preferred sectors of the population. These sectors are unlikely to include indigenous people of the Amazon and the Pacific rainforest, Afro-Colombians, displaced people or the poorest, most dispersed families in rural areas. As the director of FESCO noted, BvLF partners are now facing the challenge of convincing the ICBF and other state institutions to commit fully (and financially) to their approach and to ensure its continuity by making it an issue of public policy.

The recent recommendations of the BvLF Partner Alliance, the Human Talent project, in Colombia are important considerations in this context.





1. Ensure the sustainability of the Alliance in order that it can join forces and optimise resources thus continuing and developing its work and promoting ECD in Colombia.
2. Disseminate its experiences, findings and lessons learnt from the systematisation of the training of ECD actors at local, Department, national and international levels more widely.
3. Continue to participate in different spheres of the formulation, implementation and evaluation of ECD public policies. This will allow it to contribute an analytical and critical perspective of children's reality, as well as strategies and alternatives based on the members' different institutional experiences. This will ultimately contribute to the provision of effective care and protection of young children and infants.

BvLF's former partners in Colombia expressed regret about the Foundation's departure beyond the loss of programme funding. They noted a missed opportunity to strengthen the BvLF Partner Alliance and expand it into an international network. Despite these concerns, however, BvLF has clearly left a remarkable legacy of support to marginalised communities and to a kind and quality of ECD work in Colombia that will continue to develop and bear fruit for many years to come.

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## GERMANY




### Summary

*The Bernard van Leer Foundation was a relative latecomer to Germany, the bulk of its work there following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In line with its general area of concern of early childhood, the projects it supported in Germany involved the development of new models of preschool education for two marginalised and distressed communities. Though educational institutions were the initial point of entry, the projects had ramifications for the communities in which those institutions were located.*

*Through the projects, BvLF chose to tackle two issues of increasing political and social sensitivity in the newly-unified Germany: the integration of immigrants - particularly Turkish- ; and building democracy in the former socialist east of the country, where the absence of democracy and the problems which followed the collapse of the previous regime had spawned xenophobia and the rise of far right political groups. The projects introduced approaches which in effect involved educating the community - children, their parents and their teachers - equipping and encouraging them to recognise and to be more understanding of each other's needs and demands.*

*The method of work was to: provide support to small, local projects experimenting with new approaches and engagement with the local communities; use the BvLF's extensive network, with the BvLF itself acting as a hub, to exchange information and expertise across the network; develop partnerships with important national institutions working in the field in order both to disseminate the results of the projects and to exert a wider influence.*

*Determining the degree of success of BvLF's work in Germany is difficult. For one thing, there was no systematic summative evaluation of either projects or the overall programme. As to the projects themselves, despite apparent local benefits, some did not long survive the withdrawal of BvLF support, nor were they all successfully replicated elsewhere. In both cases, the prime cause was a failure to induce the state to include them in mainstream social provision. However, these projects' pioneering approaches have had a significant effect, mainly because of the BvLF's strategy of cultivating alliances with key institutions. These approaches have thus become generally known and widely used in Germany and have infused new thinking in educational policy and practice in several places. A further legacy of the BvLF's work is the network of regional pedagogical centres (RAAs), which developed from the first German project and which, following their evolution into Regional Centres for Education, Integration and Democracy, have become widespread in many areas of the country.*



## Some country characteristics

Germany is the most densely populated country in Western Europe with an estimated population of 81.8 million. Twenty percent of the population has immigrant roots, the largest minority coming from Turkey (3.5 million). It is also the largest European economy and ranked fourth in the world by nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Its general affluence and the comprehensiveness of its social services, however, mask areas of disquiet and inequality. Following reunification in 1990, differences in, for example, unemployment levels and educational attainment between eastern and western Germany are still marked. Attitudes to assimilation of immigrants into the majority community often continue to be ambivalent at best. Their access to social services remains limited; they themselves are often resistant to assimilation while, in eastern Germany, they have often been the subject of discrimination and acts of violence.

## Educational childhood care and education

The population of children aged below six is 4.23 million. The major types of childcare and preschool provision include the full-day *Krippe* or crèches for children 0-3 years; *Kindergarten* for all children between three and six; and *Hort*, an out-of-school provision for school-age children up to 12. Increasingly, however, the *Kindertagesstätte*, that is, kindergartens taking in mixed-age children below three years and providing a range of services, including after-school care and more intensive parent outreach, are emerging.

However, 36 percent of the children from low income backgrounds<sup>18</sup> do not attend any form of childcare and preschool provision, and results from PISA<sup>19</sup> studies in the early 2000s revealed that the performance of German high school students was significantly below the OECD average. Almost 50 percent of the students whose parents were born outside Germany did not progress beyond elementary level 1 reading literacy tasks, even though more than 70 percent of them received their formal education in German schools. Overall, the study concluded that children from different socio-economic backgrounds do not have equal chances. These findings have compelled a rethink on early childhood care and education.

## Bernard van Leer Foundation's German programme


BvLF was a relative latecomer to the German scene, its initial involvement dating back to the 1970s to a time when it had established a number of successful but small-scale educational projects in several countries. Because Germany is a highly developed country both economically and socially, and the state has the paramount role in social service provision, involvement there presented the Foundation with a number of problems. At the same time, Germany's affluence and the professional and specialist resources available offered favourable conditions for the development and dissemination of project results.

BvLF's programme in Germany was characterised by its willingness to address some of the most topical educational and social issues; to support small-scale, experimental projects; and to use its partnerships and networks both to inform and to disseminate the results of the programme. BvLF focused on two issues: the migration of large ethnic and cultural minorities, and the democratisation process in German society following reunification. Through its work in other places, the BvLF had learned that emphasising early childhood education has implications not only for direct education

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<sup>18</sup> The child poverty rate stands at about 10%.

<sup>19</sup> Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a school benchmarking survey carried out every three years of 15 year olds in the main industrialised countries.



providers such as nurseries and preschools, but for communities as well. In particular, in a situation where parents and carers do not share the majority culture or speak the majority language, their ability to articulate their needs and their concerns needs to be part of the programme.

Disadvantage and exclusion from key services remained a barrier to assimilation for Germany's migrant communities. The notion of interculturalism was not widespread and bilingualism was seen rather as a handicap than an advantage. In immigrant families, parent-child relationships and educational norms and values were those derived from the country of origin. Adjustments to the host society were frequently motivated by opportunism and families were often resistant to pressure from the host society, and in particular its educational institutions, to take on the values of that society or to learn German.

## Partners and networks

Crucial to the success of the German programme were the partners involved. These included the Freudenberg Foundation; the International Academy for Innovative Education, Psychology and Economy (INA); an NGO linked to the Free University of Berlin; and the *Arbeitskreis Neue Erziehung* (ANE). There is a great deal of overlap between the Freudenberg Foundation's areas of interest and those of BvLF - the integration of migrant families, the promotion of democratic culture and the support of socially disadvantaged young people. INA had developed the contextual child development approach, one of the most influential concepts in pre-primary care and education in Germany since the 1970s, while ANE had pioneered the concept of the *Elternbrief* or letter to parents, which provided information on educational and child-rearing matters to young parents in an accessible form. These partners brought to the supported projects both the expertise they had themselves developed and knowledge of and access to German educational policy-making circles.

BvLF was able to draw in and make use of its own established network of contacts outside Germany to bring to the German programme vital experience from elsewhere. Thus, for instance, work done by the Foundation's partners in Coventry, UK, was fundamental to the development of the *Kind im Mittelpunkt* project in Gelsenkirchen while the Benton Foundation, a BvLF partner from the US, advised ANE on an extension of the *Elternbrief* idea.

## The projects

### ***Gelsenkirchen and the RAAs***

The Gelsenkirchen project was established in 1978 in close collaboration with the Freudenberg Foundation and a network of regional pedagogical centres, the *Regionale Arbeitstelle zur Förderung Ausländischer Kinder und Jugendlicher* (RAA - Regional Support Centres for Immigrant Children and Youth) in Nordrhein Westfalen. It developed a community-based model for dealing with the educational problems of immigrant families, many of them from Turkey, and showed the need for greater flexibility and diversification in schools if they are to effectively cope with a multicultural population. A school principal in a disadvantaged neighbourhood opened her school to the community for a range of innovative activities. Evaluators noted a head start for immigrant preschool children, a lower drop-out rate due to early screening and remedial action, better scores in primary schools, and many of the Turkish children speaking good German. Positive changes were also noted in the parents' perception of the school while the experience helped break down the isolation that immigrant families often faced. Teachers increasingly showed positive attitudes towards Turkish children and became culturally sensitive in their teaching practices.



By 1988 this school with over 60 percent Turkish immigrant children had turned into a focal point of community life. In the following years (mid-1990s), and after 90 percent of primary schools in Gelsenkirchen had begun to take on the project's methodologies, there was a local breakthrough in the form of a second language acquisition programme for preschoolers and their mothers and a related in-service training programme. By 2003 (by which time, the Foundation had already phased out its support), the programme was extended to the city's 81 kindergartens and 48 primary schools. At the same time, it continued to function as a resource and training base. Close relations were developed with networks of teachers and other professionals, and advisory services were provided to cities including Osnabrück, Bremen and Mannheim.

### ***Kind im Mittelpunkt (Children in Focus)***

In 1990, the focus of the Foundation's work shifted to Berlin. Following exploratory discussions with childcare agencies in the city on how to foster links between day-care and the home environment, the BvLF made contact with the *Verein zur Förderung Ausländischer und Deutscher Kinder (VAK)*<sup>20</sup>. From its work in the Kreuzberg neighbourhood, home to a growing number of disadvantaged groups, and primarily serving Turkish children, VAK had come to see that work with mothers had to be integrated into the routine at day-care centres and the *Kind im Mittelpunkt (KIM)* project was established in 1995 to assist in this process. For a considerable time, this approach showed little progress, but visits to other Foundation projects in Belgium and the Netherlands proved a turning point. It produced an acceptance and appreciation of parents in the education process among staff, encouraged the participation of mothers in centres' activities and led to a change in the way staff interacted with children.

While the KIM project drew on the Gelsenkirchen project and used the same local, community-based approach, it also produced results which suggested the need to concentrate on the quality of service provision. Staff continued to define cooperation and dialogue with parents on their own terms, and continued to foster differences between German and immigrant culture. They were convinced migrants' integration into the majority population depended on their being raised from a 'lower' level.

### ***Kinderwelten (Children's Worlds)***

At the time the KIM project was evaluated in 1998, core staff members were introduced to Louise Derman-Sparks'<sup>21</sup> work on anti-bias education in the US. The *Institut für den Situationsansatz (ISTA)*<sup>22</sup> was recruited to translate and adapt her anti-bias approach to a German context in the same neighbourhood of Kreuzberg. Over a period of five years (2000-2005), using a tested action research scenario, the staff of the Kinderwelten project developed an in-service training programme for childcare workers on respect for diversity (RfD)<sup>23</sup>. In 2003, the Foundation proposed a national roll-out of the RfD working principles and methods to ISTA. This was designed as a network of networks consisting of four project regions and corresponding networks. Each region initiated cooperation with childcare centres, parents, training institutions and social interest groups like unions or churches. Some 450 local trainers, childcare advisers and directors active in about 50 centres engaged in in-service training and resource building. The project thus built a pool of certified trainers, introduced new training methods and materials and produced a handbook on quality criteria for Respect for Diversity methods. Whether this scale-up strategy worked is debatable, partly

<sup>20</sup> Association in Support of Immigrant and German Children.

<sup>21</sup> Louise Derman-Sparks & Julie Olsen Edwards, *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Washington D.C., 2010.

<sup>22</sup> The Institute for Contextual Child Development Approach, one of the 17 institutes of the International Academy for Innovative Education, Psychology and Economy (INA), an NGO linked to the Free University of Berlin.

<sup>23</sup> In Europe this description is preferred to avoid the negative connotation of the term "anti-bias".



because a proper evaluation and follow-up study at the new sites were not conducted, and partly because the introduction of the paradigm calls not only for rethinking childcare practices but also major organisational and institutional changes. However, it did bring about change in the childcare support system in Berlin, Hamburg, Saarland and other cities, and ultimately led to the *Kinderwelten* working principles being incorporated into the national evaluation criteria for childcare centres. That said, the absence of evidence of the organisational and institutional changes noted above, suggest that the take up was mixed, or at best modest.

### ***Demokratie Leben (Living Democracy)***


Parallel with the introduction of respect for diversity concepts, the Foundation embarked on the design of the *Demokratie Leben* project in Eberswalde, eastern Germany, in response to emerging issues of racism and intolerance. The implementing agency for this project was INA, and the town of Eberswalde was chosen because it is not far from Berlin and had become notorious for the racially-motivated murder of a student from Mozambique. The consensus was that a change in public attitudes was necessary, that it should begin with early childhood education and that workers in the childcare sector should be targeted.

INA staff used the contextual approach and drew on the experiences of the *Kinderwelten* project to infuse the process with principles of respect for diversity education. There was a good deal of initial resistance. Childcare centres in eastern Germany were run along non-democratic lines, and the east Germans had been brought up in a system where criticism and individual initiative were discouraged. Moreover, they resented what they saw as the patronising attitude of west Germans coming to teach them democracy. A good deal of work was needed to create trust between project staff and teachers. This was achieved by a number of methods: using trainers from eastern Germany, in some cases from Eberswalde itself; valuing the teaching skills of the workers; and making all communication dialogue-oriented based on question and investigation rather than on a more didactic approach. Ultimately, the process yielded significant results for the children's autonomy and negotiating skills, and led to the workers looking at their own actions more critically.

In 2004, with BvLF support, INA and its local partners started a limited dissemination of the in-service training programme to all 12 childcare centres in Eberswalde and the surrounding Barnim region, and consolidated the democratic process by establishing a community foundation to provide sustainable support for the spread and development of the project methodology. INA adopted the same networking strategy for its training work as it used in the *Kinderwelten* project. After initial workshops, it gradually extended its contacts and intensified working relationships in a more structured manner. In this process the original centres stood out as examples. The Foundation phased out its support in 2007. Unfortunately, no evaluation was conducted to determine how successfully and widely the model was adopted elsewhere.

### ***Interkulturelle Elternarbeit (the Intercultural Parent Support Programme)***

In 1992, BvLF made contact with ANE, a key national organisation that supported parents of both German and migrant backgrounds and the pioneer of the *Elternbrief*. With BvLF support, ANE created a bilingual version of the *Elternbrief* for Turkish parents. The content of the letters and of other audio-visual materials used in the project were designed in consultation with teachers and journalists from the migrant community. The immediacy and relevance this gave them struck a chord with migrant families. The distribution of the parent letters dovetailed with other support strategies, such as training and counselling services provided by networks of local migrant organisations. Over the last 10 years, more than 700,000 copies annually of the bilingual *Elternbriefe* has allowed the project's extension to major cities such as Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, Stuttgart,



Cologne and Karlsruhe. Following the success of the Turkish-German letter, versions in other languages were added in later years, including Serbo-Croat, Polish, Arabic and Greek.

Funding cutbacks to ANE following reunification prompted an assessment, in 2001, of the possibility of using the internet to reach migrant parents. With the support of BvLF and, through it, the Benton Foundation, an internet-based information and support network project, the NIC project, was established in 2004. Over the next four years, the NIC project successfully continued using the *Eltternbrief* to develop parent support materials. It made a wide range of online resources available to practitioners, gave them access to other virtual networks, and allowed its professional staff to play a national advocacy role on issues pertaining to parental support policies and practices. It was less successful, however, in linking the actual network of migrant associations to the website activities. This would have brought the experience of smaller local initiatives to bear on the wider social discourse, but instead advocacy was disconnected from its roots in the community.

In 2007, internal difficulties over the way ANE should develop beset the project. The conflict eventually led to the departure of most staff and the loss of major support from key institutions including the Berlin Senate. The organisation is still going through a period of restructuring.

### ‘Seed’ grants


Beyond substantial support for the projects mentioned above, another contribution that BvLF has made is providing help and support on a smaller scale. One smaller scale example is the BvLF’s role in helping introduce the Rucksack programme to Germany. This is an award-winning bilingual and parent support concept for migrant families modelled on the Dutch ‘Samenspel’ approach developed by the ‘Meeuw’, a former BvLF partner in Rotterdam. The Foundation facilitated a study visit by Rucksack staff to Rotterdam in 1998, and supported the translation of a set of core materials. Subsequently, an RAA working group in Essen adapted them and introduced the concept in Nordrhein Westfalen. Over time, several handbooks and multilingual support materials were developed contributing to a quick spread of the methodology to over 100 towns, together offering more than 500 Rucksack programmes annually.

The BvLF provided another opportunity that helped bring the ‘Learning Stories’ concept to Germany. The concept was developed by Margaret Carr in New Zealand and, again, the BvLF facilitated a learning visit to New Zealand by researchers from the Germany Youth Institute in 2003 to gain a first-hand understanding of her work. It then provided a grant to adapt and further develop the ‘Learning Stories’ methodology. During this process, the work of the *Kinderwelten* project and the Berlin curriculum were incorporated into the ‘Learning Stories’ methodology. Learning Stories is now used as a qualitative assessment tool in all 16 *Länder* (states), involving hundreds of thousands of children in care and preschool education settings.

### The effects of the BvLF programme

The effect of the BvLF work in Germany remains a subject for debate. While there were striking successes, there was no systematic summative evaluation of either projects or the overall programme. Much of its influence is at the level of informing practice and the extent of such influence is notoriously difficult to determine. A number of points can be made, however.

The Foundation’s work in Germany was guided primarily by one theory of change - *development of appropriate tools and knowledge, and their transfer and dissemination*. The patterns of its efforts, as described in this report, was to support key experiments and help devise effective models - both for Turkish immigrant families and for tolerance and democratic practice by communities in the East.



This aspect appears to have been accomplished very successfully. Where the BvLF was only partially successful was in the effort to link with national partners in ‘scaling up’ the engagement with these models.

The supported projects had some clear local successes, sometimes to the extent of being adopted as an approach by the host city or region, as happened with the Gelsenkirchen project. However, the project’s direct effects often remained confined to the target community and, in some instances, the project itself faltered after BvLF’s support was phased out, as with the ANE project. The prime cause in both cases was a failure to induce the state to take them on and integrate them into its social provision.

However, the *approaches* those projects pioneered seem to have had a significant effect. The BvLF’s strategy of cultivating alliances with key institutions has meant that these approaches have become widely known and used in some localities in Germany. BvLF’s work succeeded in developing and implementing new methods on two issues: immigration and the education of migrant children through *the education in diversity paradigm*; and democratic practices in several German communities following reunification and the collapse of the communist system in the former East Germany through the *education for democracy paradigm*. These new paradigms involved the introduction of an intercultural perspective in education theory and practice; the launch of the community education concept aimed at strengthening local civic and educational institutions; and the introduction of concepts of diversity, participation and reflection in care and education settings. These have helped change the educational landscape in Germany<sup>24</sup>, <sup>25</sup> and have led to a shift in perspective by many, specifically on issues of social inclusion, child rights, cultural integration and the role of civic organisations in the public domain. The two paradigms are still regarded as very influential and have begun to gain ground at European level<sup>26</sup>.

Similarly, conceptual insights and working methods developed in the *Kinderwelten* and Living Democracy projects found their way into the mainstream of INA’s work. The Berliner Bildungsprogramme is a good example in this regard as it aggregates the results of those projects. Over the years INA sold over 30,000 copies of the curriculum. The Berlin curriculum has been translated into Polish, English, Italian, Greek and Korean. With access to state government bodies, training institutions and big implementing agencies in 12 out of 16 states - including Lower Saxony, Hesse, Brandenburg and Rhineland Palatinate - it has a potentially substantial outreach. One estimate suggests the curriculum is likely to influence almost 25 percent of the entire day care and preschool sector in the country - nearly 600,000 young children in 12,000 centres - every year. At the same time INA is a key player in building the capacity of peer institutions in the country and, as such, could possibly influence the work of its colleague organisations.

The BvLF’s advice and support was instrumental in establishing the first network of pedagogical centres or RAAs (now known as the Regional Centres for Education, Integration and Democracy). About 46 such Centres are active in seven German states. It should be noted that the programme benefited from its work with other institutions, and in turn benefited those institutions. The partner

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<sup>24</sup> As one respondent noted: “ BvLF’s work in Germany has been very successful and represents a significant contribution to the pedagogical discourse “; Prof Lothar Krappmann from the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and member of the UN Committee on the CRC (2003 – 2011): “ we should be grateful for your support, the work with the RAA was very important and I am not sure another foundation would have supported the [controversial] Eberswalde project with the same open mind and with no guarantees that it could be realized”.

<sup>25</sup> Also the community education paradigm described earlier is acknowledged as an important contribution to helping resolve the east-west divide in Germany; neither has this one or the democracy paradigm lost its relevance for a dialogue with post-communist societies in Eastern Europe.

<sup>26</sup> Other Foundation-supported initiatives such as the Roma Education Fund ([www.romaeducationfund.hu/](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/)) and the EFC Forum for Roma Inclusion ([www.bernardvanleerfoundation.org](http://www.bernardvanleerfoundation.org)) refer.





organisations involved consider the methods and approaches used as an important addition to their work<sup>27</sup>. The influence of the programme on the German educational landscape - especially on practice - has been positive but mixed in terms of how widely it was scaled up.

Perhaps BvLF could have placed greater emphasis and additional resources — both money and time — on supporting groups to build a comprehensive outreach strategy. The local models incorporated processes of social change and empowerment, and so required substantial time and training. ‘Scale up’ strategies would have needed to have been far more robust and complex than simply relying on partners for widespread dissemination. BvLF’s approach to most of its work in Germany favoured the development of models at the community level – the so called ‘front end’ work - and, in fact, did rely on its national partners for scaling. This explains the attention paid to the production of publications and other materials and support for training of trainers, but little attention to dissemination strategies. The problem was that its partners were not uniformly prepared for large dissemination and engagement with state agencies to ensure effective and widespread use of the models.

In closing, the Foundation can be said to have intervened in Germany at an important moment and helped in the creation of models for ECD that address two critical issues in German society. These approaches have been effective in several localities and the principles have influenced educators far more broadly. In some cases (e.g., the Turkish *Elternbrief* letter to parents) the dissemination efforts have been successful, but in others, the efforts to scale up access to the models has only had mixed success.

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<sup>27</sup> Dr Hans Leu from the German Youth Institute: “[BvLF’s] work in Germany has been very successful and implies a significant contribution to the pedagogical discourse”; Prof Lothar Krapmann from the Max Planck Institute for Human Development: “we should be grateful for [the Foundation’s] support, I am not sure another Foundation would have supported the [controversial] Eberswalde project with the same open mind and with no guarantees that it could be realised.”

## POLAND



### Summary

*Poland emerged in the 1990s from decades of Soviet-style education and state-funded custodial childcare for workers' children. As the country underwent a painful transition to a market-based economy and a democratic European model of governance, the benefits of this transition were not universally enjoyed. In rural areas in particular, there was widespread poverty. For young children the problems were compounded by the ending of State funding of daycare and onerous regulations from the old regime that, in effect, meant virtually no early childhood education in rural areas.*

*The BvLF, after some initial fact-finding and experimentation with kindergartens in Warsaw, decided on a rural-focused strategy, because children there faced the worst conditions. The foundation worked with several partners to build first the understanding of the developmental needs of young children and then help its partners construct a curriculum and train teachers. It also helped them address the policy constraints for ECD at the local and national levels. Its key partner, the Comenius Foundation along with its allies, won important financial and legislative battles, and organised programmes across the country in rural communities. Today there is now 90 percent availability of ECD programmes, new national legislation supportive of ECD and key institutions that have solid training, advocacy and monitoring capacities.*

### Country Context

#### Geography, demographics, politics and the economy

Poland is a country of the east and the west. The country covers an area of 312,685 square kilometres (120,696 square miles) and is located at the centre of Europe. It is about the same size as Germany with less than half Germany's population. It borders Lithuania, Belarus and the Ukraine to the east, Slovakia and the Czech Republic to the south and Germany to the west. In the north, Poland's Baltic Sea coastline stretches 528 kilometres (330 miles) along the border with Kaliningrad, an enclave of Russia. The population of Poland is 38.6 million making it about the eighth most populated country in Europe. Its capital, Warsaw, has 1.6 million residents.<sup>28</sup>

Poland's borders have changed almost continuously since its establishment as a nation in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Its geography of flat terrain and lack of natural barriers on the North European Plain

<sup>28</sup> Background information comes from several sources including: Poland Profile, in *Pocket World in Figures, 2012 Edition*, The Economist, *The World Factbook*, CIA, 2012, and *World Bank-Poland Partnership Program Snapshot*, March 2011.



virtually facilitate invasion. Perhaps more than any other European nation, Poland's national identity has suffered dramatically and violently. In 1795, as France experienced revolution and America was born, the nation was erased from the European landscape for over a century, divided among Russia, Prussia and Austria. It was re-established as a state in 1918 only to suffer partition and later brutal invasion and occupation by both Germany and the Soviet Union. Poland was both the victim and the site of much of the holocaust. In the years before the outbreak of World War II, Poland was thought by many to be a multinational and multi-religious country, with a long history of anti-Semitism. About one third of the population was considered 'minorities.' This included people of Jewish, Ukrainian, Belarusian or German descent. Today ethnic and other minorities represent only two to three percent of the population. Following the war, Poland became a Soviet satellite state as part of the Warsaw Pact countries. For 40 years, Poland functioned as a Soviet socialist state - with all the social control, central authority and state bureaucracy that characterised the Eastern bloc countries of that time. In 1980 labour turmoil led to the creation of the independent trade union, 'Solidarity,' which grew in time to 10 million members. In 1989 the Berlin Wall was breached. In that same year and the one following, Poland held free elections and Solidarity won control of the parliament and the presidency. Together these events spelled the end of the Communist era in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the early 1990s the Polish government applied a programme of 'shock therapy' to its economy, transforming it from a socialist, centrally controlled one to a market-oriented Western-focused one. In 1990 many basic goods were not available on store shelves, inflation raged over 500 percent and while the official unemployment rate was low, many workers were employed in state-controlled industries that were collapsing. After radical adjustments of the Balcerowicz Plan which dramatically reduced state ownership, ended price controls and brought down inflation, the economy stabilised. Poland joined the EU in 2004 and has experienced strong economic growth aided by effective use of EU transfer funds, among other actions. But it remains vulnerable to limits on the economy because of low labour force activity, weaknesses in road and rail infrastructure and low spending on research and design. While Poland has a strong agricultural heritage with many products in high demand, agriculture remains one of the least productive sectors of the Polish economy employing 16.1 percent of the workforce while contributing 3.4 percent to the gross domestic product.<sup>29</sup> Almost 40 percent of the population is considered rural (compared to 24 percent in France or 12 percent in Germany).

The rapid shift from a socialist state to a market economy had wide-ranging effects. The system of nearly 4,000 state farms - located far away from towns and involving approximately two million people - virtually collapsed in 1990. The number of families with alcohol-related problems (i.e. spouse and/or child abuse, divorce, abandonment) increased to affect 20 percent of Polish children. Benefits of the changes were not evenly distributed. Unemployment was very high in some regions (e.g. in some one-factory towns unemployment reached as high as 50 percent). A variety of services, previously subsidised by the state, were suddenly local responsibilities, which meant, in effect, they were no longer available to all. As an example, one report noted that childcare provisions before 1989 were subsidised by the central government. However, by the late 1990s the number of children 0-4 years in public daycare decreased from 200,000 in 1985 to only 74,000 by 1993 and has since further diminished.

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<sup>29</sup> *Background Note: Poland*, US Department of State, 2012 and *Country Programme Statement for Poland*, Bernard van Leer Foundation.



## Early Childhood Education and Care in Poland


The childcare system that had operated under the old regime was centralised and uniform across the country. In all places the same State-funded model was imposed, regardless of applicability or cost. There was no tradition of independent, community-run early childhood education. The existing model required, among other things, classrooms, a kitchen and kitchen staff, operating in a particular kind of building. When the State no longer paid for these centres and made them local responsibilities, many small towns and rural communities could not afford to keep them staffed and operating for a small number of children. Unfortunately, while the funding disappeared, the regulations remained. So the worst possible outcome emerged for young children, especially in the rural areas. Because local authorities were now responsible for child care, but were required to use - and only use - the approved model that their small municipal budgets could not afford, in practice they offered no services. There are 2,156 rural municipalities in Poland and before 2005 there were no preschools in 869 of them. One province in the south-west had 54 percent of 3-5 year olds in preschool. That was the highest coverage. Most other provinces had 10-20 percent coverage and two in the north only provided for 9 percent of 3-5 year olds. One in the north-east only served 5.1 percent.

This situation was complicated further because historically the centres emphasised daycare, not education. Preschools were, according to one report, considered 'waiting rooms' while adults went to work, and assumed that where mothers stayed at home, such care was unnecessary. These two issues of *access* (i.e., the children of women who did not leave the home to work did not have access to the centres) and *programme quality* (i.e., for the children who could attend, the programme emphasised teacher-centred control, large classrooms and all day-sessions) were in opposition to the state of the art research and practice of early childhood development — wholly endorsed by the Foundation- that called for universal access, child-centred curriculum and exploration, with small classes and sessions of perhaps nine hours per week. At this time in Poland there was little awareness of how important early education is to human development and how significant a role early childhood education can play for marginalised children. A third issue had to do with how the childcare policies imposed the conservative presumption of women staying at home and out of the workforce.

## The Foundation's Engagement in Poland 1990-2012

The collapse of the Communist political and economic system in Eastern Europe created immediate demands for the development of a new kind of state, private sector and civil society institutions to address a variety of needs. As noted above, the positive rewards of such rapid and drastic change were not distributed equally and in fact, many people suffered loss of economic, labour, educational, health, nutrition and other benefits. During this time of transition in Eastern Europe, there was discussion by the Foundation's Board about how it could be of assistance. It agreed that the BvLF would 'do what it does well' and explore the needs of young children. However, it was not immediately clear what the most strategic entry point should be.

The Foundation began its work with fact-finding and experimentation. It funded Association Chance to work with three kindergartens in Warsaw and help design an early childhood education programme that supported children's development, working with parents and local authorities. This work continued until 2003, by which time the Association's work had expanded to 19 districts across Warsaw. The Foundation then shifted its focus within Poland from urban to rural areas as a result of research that showed the bad situation of rural communities and their children. The concern was the combination of high concentrations of poverty across rural areas; the termination of previous State funding for young children; inappropriate curriculum and pedagogy; and overly restrictive



regulations. These resulted in little availability of early childhood education services and, where available, of poor quality. As it had in other places, BvLF emphasised working for those children who were considered most vulnerable.

The Foundation then provided funding to the Polish Children and Youth Foundation (PCYF) to focus on rural children and explore what could be done. Initial work involved designing curriculum and training teachers in a pilot phase. PCYF then launched its 'Where There Are No Preschools' project to expand and deepen the pilot effort. In time PCYF's preschool work grew and required a different organisational base. Eventually PCYF split, with several of its staff members leaving to found the Comenius Foundation taking PCYF's preschool work with them. The Comenius Foundation focused exclusively on early childhood development and became BvLF's key partner.

The Comenius Foundation began a second phase to consolidate the work on preschools to date. This 'consolidation' phase included: collecting early data about conditions of young children; reaching out to municipal officials; training teachers; helping with the creation of curriculum and materials at local sites; engaging parents; and educating the government officials and the general public about child development and the benefits of good early childhood education.

One very dramatic and ultimately strategic example of the usefulness of having good data on hand was the first European Social Fund grant in Poland. The head of the Department of Educational and Structural Funds at the Ministry of Education telephoned the Comenius Foundation director in 2003 to inform her that she could apply for a grant from the European Social Fund (EU) to implement pilot projects under alternative educational schemes. Polish officials were negotiating with Brussels about the level of aid and could try to have ECD centres considered as part of the strategy to provide equal opportunities in the education market. To apply she needed to present a brief summary of the Comenius Foundation's programme and a budget. "How much time have we got?" she asked. He replied, "Four to five hours." Despite this impossible deadline, the Comenius Foundation staff submitted the proposal and budget on time. They could do so because they had the data readily available.

They realised, however, that Brussels had to be convinced that the Polish education authorities would allow alternative preschool programmes and would provide funding for these - neither of which they had done to date. The negotiations continued until late 2004. The Polish government's commitment came at a major Polish government conference when the Minister of Education, Krystyna Lybacka, noted the importance of preschool. She announced that the European Social Fund had earmarked substantial EU funds for preschool centres and that the provision of equal educational opportunities to children would become one of the top priorities of the government's education agenda. The Ministry conducted a competition to award the EU funds. The Comenius Foundation eventually received USD 2.8 million (almost 10 times the amount of the BvLF grant) of the monies. By November 2005 this funding had supported the opening of 94 ECD centres serving 2,000 children in 36 communities and operations for 2 ½ years when local authorities had to pick up the costs.

The Comenius Foundation continued to gather data, hired respected analysts including a well-known sociologist, created the Foundation for Social Innovation and Research, and developed a national reputation as a reliable source of information on early childhood education. It created the Comenius



Academy to provide training on a wide array of topics and convene conferences. The Comenius Academy produced a substantial number of guides, manuals, evaluation tools and research papers. The Comenius Foundation worked closely with municipal authorities and government officials at the national level to influence policy and legislation on early childhood education and care.

In 2008 BvLF supported the Comenius Foundation for three years for the 'Growing Up Alone' project. The project's objectives were to prevent social isolation and eliminate the social exclusion of young children in rural Poland. The Comenius Foundation worked with the Nobody's Children Foundation to create a system of diagnosis; design strategies for integration of children; and train a large number of teachers, psychologists, counsellors, police and other key local service providers.

The work of the Comenius Foundation - building a base for early childhood education in rural Poland - reached a crescendo with the design of and the battle for the Care for Children Under Three Act.<sup>30</sup> The struggle for this legislation was dramatic and hard fought. Ultimately the Comenius Foundation and its allies succeeded in getting it passed and signed into law. The struggle continued through the regulations process, but the Comenius Foundation is now responsible for monitoring the new law's implementation.

In a parallel, and in many ways complementary, set of activities, the Association for Creative Initiatives - later the Astrid Lindgren Institute for Early Childhood Development - based in Poznan, launched the 'Friendly Kindergarten' project with BvLF support. The purpose of the project was to engage local educators, parents and municipal leaders in early childhood development. It also helped design curriculum and teaching methods, prepare support materials and find ways to implement early childhood education in the greater Poznan area. The Institute works closely with the Comenius Foundation.

## Theories of Change

In each of the four countries under study, the research team applied the five theories of change that emerged from the examination of the grants records, files review and interviews. The five theories include: the ideal paradigm for ECD (the 'if you build it they will come' assumption); the community-based approach that emphasises agency by local people; the theory that if only people had the proper knowledge and skills, then change would happen; the fourth focuses on changing public policy; and the last argues that by strengthening the abilities of key local organisations, they then have the ability to effect change.

### Ideal Paradigm

The notion that there is a perfect model of early childhood education to be discovered or constructed and once available, only needs to be spread around was not part of the experience in Poland. The efforts in Poland worked in two directions. One was in cases of existing bad practice (ranging from simply custodial care to rote, narrowly-cognitive learning) the effort was to change it. The second was where there were no services, an approach was to be designed based on key principles, but whose activities were based on local reality. The latter approach was the one most adopted. The Astrid Lindgren Institute and the Comenius Foundation worked with local teachers, parents and others to help them understand the principles of the healthy development of young children and to support them in devising their own methods.

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<sup>30</sup> The efforts related to passage of the Care for Children Under Three Act are detailed in the unabridged report on Poland in the Appendix.



Whether BvLF did not search for the ideal paradigm in Poland simply because most of the work was begun by one programme officer, or because it represents some kind of institutional maturation is impossible to say. The work in Poland shows commitment to fundamental principles and a willingness to consider alternative models to ensure that those principles were respected. Thus, the 'ideal paradigm' was not in play in BvLF's work in Poland.

## Community Development/Local Actors

This second theory of change assumes that the way change occurs is through the agency and action of the people who live with the problem. Hence, the approach is to strengthen the capacities of the local communities to analyse their situations, then for them to design solutions based on their contexts, and finally to implement these solutions and produce the necessary changes to improve their lives. In the case of Poland, BvLF appeared to work with this theory of change in mind. A large part of the Comenius Foundation's and the Astrid Lindgren Institute's work followed a community-development approach where they engaged the local authorities, parents, and teachers, and provided them with conceptual (i.e. new ideas about children's developmental needs and related pedagogy), organisational and financial assistance so that they were in a position to design the appropriate ECD 'platforms' and learning and play materials for their children. The community development approach was used alongside the four remaining theories (see below). BvLF assisted and encouraged the Comenius Foundation and the Astrid Lindgren Institute to work with local actors of various backgrounds. At one point BvLF funded legal guidance to rural municipal leaders regarding the flexibility of existing restrictive regulations to create alternative ECD programmes. In another example, a locally created curriculum made use of parents' and grandparents' knowledge of local flowers and plants. The curriculum had the added benefit of the parents and grandparents reporting that it was the first time they - or their children - had ever thought of themselves as 'experts.' According to reports in the files and interviews, taken together, the many decisions taken locally had a far more important impact than simply contextualising the learning materials. The process of decision-making itself had an empowering effect on local parents, teachers and many municipal leaders.

## Development of Appropriate Tools and Knowledge and Their Transfer and Dissemination

The development of appropriate tools and knowledge and their dissemination is historically a large part of BvLF's work. In Poland this can be seen from the support BvLF gave for: research into conditions for children in rural areas - which really helped launch the reputation of what became the Comenius Foundation; sharing research on young children from other parts of the world (e.g., Germany, Scotland, the Netherlands and the USA); physical exchanges (e.g. visits to Portugal to study 'itinerant teachers' or bringing Lilian Katz to instruct on the 'project approach'); sharing the collection of teaching methods devised in different rural Polish communities by local communities and teachers. In addition, the BvLF provided its partners access to legal and communication skills and knowledge. It also supported its partners to develop local standards and disseminate these. One example of this was the funding to Nobody's Children for the production and dissemination of a special issue of its journal on the topic of corporal punishment.

BvLF clearly values knowledge drawn from the latest research on children's development. It works hard to make that knowledge available in a variety of ways. Its funding clearly suggests that it also highly values the knowledge created by local teachers, parents and others. BvLF operates to get the best information, and to put the right information in the right hands.



## Influencing the Design and Implementation of Public Policies

Many foundations state in their literature that they are interested in better public policy regarding the issues or groups they support. Few foundations actually work to that end, and fewer yet do so effectively. The case of Poland and BvLF's engagement is a solid example of how a foundation can support local NGOs who then 'change the rules,' in this case, in favour of rural young children. The work, especially of the Comenius Foundation, that went into changing the restrictive regulations that blocked the development of alternative ECD centres in rural Poland is impressive. The Astrid Lindgren Institute did similar work at the local level. The staff of these Polish institutions deserve a good deal of credit for their dedication, creativity, hard work and persistence. They first displayed their determination in their effort to tap EU funds and later to manage the process of devising, passing, implementing, and now to monitor the Care for Children Under Three Act.

A key aid to the abilities of these organisations to push successfully for new legislation and regulations was the support from BvLF. Its funding - both general operational support and more targeted funds - along with intellectual and other kinds of engagement, allowed the Polish groups to pursue changes in public policy on preschool education and care in Poland. They made good use of a strategy, described in one report, *"that involved supporting: a) rigorous research and documentation to popularise (and legitimise) 'Where There Are No Preschools'; and b) enhance the ability of the groups to undertake media campaigns and build public and political support at the rural municipal and the national levels."*

## Strengthening Partner Organisations and Promoting Their Sustainability and Access to Other Resources


As noted earlier, the theory of change that emphasises supporting partners means that funders rely on the abilities of some key local organisations to bring about the desired change. Their funding is aimed at strengthening the capacities of those organisations so that they have the necessary resources - people, skills, expertise, connections, information, technology, money, time, allies - to be able to make change happen.

In the case of Poland, BvLF's grant-making clearly reflects this theory of change - of supporting partners. The funding to the Comenius Foundation (and to a lesser degree the Astrid Lundgren Institute) showed an explicit interest in building the internal capacities of the institution, in addition to funding programmatic work. As mentioned in the public policy section immediately above, part of the funding was dedicated to building a set of capacities directly related to influencing public policy. The impact of that funding is evident in the new law. Another BvLF interest was to ensure the financial stability and sustainability of the Comenius Foundation once it, the BvLF, left Poland and eventually ended funding. By the time BvLF stopped funding the Comenius Foundation, the latter's reliance on the BvLF shifted from 90 percent to only 10 percent of the total budget. While by no means suggesting that changes in funding like this are easy, the shift in reliance on BvLF to a different and more diverse funding base is impressive.

## Analysis of Data, Strengths and Weaknesses

BvLF invested almost EUR 5.2 million (in 2010 prices and adjusted for inflation) in Poland over slightly more than a decade, starting not long after the end of the Cold War. The argument that this investment of money and time was a critical help for young children in rural areas where they were particularly vulnerable as the country transitioned is convincing. The data that was collected and analysed early on in the process by the BvLF's partners proved vitally important. It clearly showed





that “the overwhelming majority of Polish children aged 3-5 (as many as 85 percent in rural areas) have no access to education.” .

BvLF’s support to its partners has had several important outcomes.

- The widespread acceptance - helped by books, films and newspaper stories - of an understanding of the importance of children’s developmental needs .
- Poland’s success in tapping the European Social Funds for millions of Euros for early childhood education. The country now looks to raise more.
- A steady expansion of preschool education programmes. Preschool access rates increased from nine percent to 42 percent in municipalities where the programme initially operated. Similarly, five years ago 60 percent of municipalities offered preschool education against current levels of 90 percent of municipalities. More than 850 new ECD centres were created and 2,000 more should be ready by 2013.
- The availability of literature in Polish on child development, teacher training, parent engagement, learning and play materials - as well as on alternative designs for various ‘platforms’ for providing early childhood education and care. A new kind of teacher training now exists for early childhood teachers.
- The passing of the Care for Children Under Three Act which ensures the possibility of opening and running ‘alternative space’ preschools in rural communities. The state will now provide (at least partial) subsidies for all preschools where there was no support before. The Act will be monitored and implemented by the well-staffed, highly competent, and well-connected advocacy and training organisation, the Comenius Foundation and Academy. It will also hold the various Ministries accountable for what they should deliver under law, and will also work to correct whatever shortcomings emerge.

There are few weaknesses to cite in BvLF’s funding. One has to do with the implementation of the Foundation’s exit strategy and termination of funding. Despite what seems to have been good intentions, more thought could have been given to the nature (i.e. intensity) of the relationships that developed over years of working together, and more time given or a different approach adopted to the process of exiting.

A related topic has to do with sustainable funding. While the Comenius Foundation seems to have ‘landed on its feet’ in term of future funding, it and other partners had difficulty finding new funders. The question about sustainable funding is generic as it is a problem that most foundations face. BvLF provided bridge funding to allow partners time and some extra money to help search for new support. One difficulty at moments like this is that most programme officers have deep knowledge and experience in their respective fields, but most have very little, if any, knowledge about alternative funding sources or arrangements. So, while additional time and money are useful, is there work to be done by BvLF (alone or with other foundations) to identify or create alternative funding sources?

## Reflections and Lessons Learned

In the example of Poland, BvLF’s initial engagement after the events of 1989 was considerably different from that of most other European and US funders who moved to help in the transition of East and Central Europe. Most others focused on some aspect, sometimes rather vague, of developing civil society or of establishing accountability and good governance. BvLF ‘played to its strength’ after some initial analysis and experimentation. It found a serious need and provided assistance in ways it had learned and refined in other places.




The files and interviews show that the BvLF provided important help in several areas, either in terms of the topic or how it operated. While working on its areas of experience, interviews talk of BvLF remaining flexible. The following are specific examples.

**Good analysis** - the importance of access to solid data is a recurring theme in the story of Poland. BvLF has a tradition of funding data collection in other countries and its importance was evident in Poland. It supported the early effort to gather information about the state of rural preschools. It also funded a variety of data collection and analysis at the local, regional and national levels, in addition to providing for evaluations of the various programmes that its partners developed and ran.

**Access to others' knowledge** - BvLF gave partners the opportunity to learn about other early childhood education efforts and about current theory on early childhood development. One partner said about the BvLF programme officer, *"She was very knowledgeable about early childhood around the globe. But she didn't push us; she just showed us the data."* Another person stated that, *"Most of our new activities were because of BvLF visits - either they were a source of knowledge or were helpful in contacting others."*

**Time on task** – several partners stated that the behaviour and the longevity of the relationship with the programme officer was key.

**Willingness to support policy advocacy** - BvLF's willingness was noted by several people as positive. Not only were they grateful for the financial assistance to bring about change, but the experience provided a larger lesson. One person said that the success in the legislative realm *"...was an example to us of how NGOs and civil society can change the rules!"*



## CHAPTER 4 : SYNTHESIS

### Overview

As noted in the introduction, the major purpose of this study was to examine four countries where the Bernard van Leer Foundation had worked, had ending its work and has or is now exiting. This examination was not designed to be a formal comparative study. The point was not to compare the work in Poland, for example, to that in Colombia and then draw conclusions based on an analysis of common variables. The choice of these particular countries was made by the Foundation based on two criteria: one, the Foundation was ending its funding in these and several other countries; and two, there was a strong belief that there was a positive story to be told - and hopefully some lessons to be learned - regarding the BvLF's work in these four countries. Hence the aim of this report is to tell the story of the Bernard van Leer Foundation's engagement in Kenya, Colombia, Germany and Poland and, as far as possible, to describe the impact of the BvLF's efforts and those of its partners. But even though this report was to capture the impact of the Foundation in four very different places and was not intended to be a comparative study, there is some value in looking at several common questions across all four countries. The answers may offer some insight about the effectiveness of certain approaches and techniques employed by the Foundation. What follows is a look at the aspects of the work that were common or different in all four countries, and the strengths and weaknesses of the BvLF's efforts.

### Logic Model - Commonalities and Differences

The analytic framework employed in this study to organise the data from Foundation files and interviews was the logic model described in Chapter Two. The categories of the logic model - baseline, inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes and impact - serve well to organise and portray the common and different elements found in the work of the four countries.

### Baseline

Kenya in 1971 had a few early childhood education centres for the elite, especially in Nairobi. The Ministry of Education emphasised primary education and there was no publicly supported preschool education. It was not considered the responsibility of government. Where preschool programmes existed, largely in the rural areas, there was little or no training available and local caregivers served as surrogate teachers. There was no organised training, curriculum development, nor community engagement about early childhood education and development.

In Colombia in 1976, there were several centres in different parts of the country that were working independently on research about early childhood development or teaching, and the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF) was a relatively new national agency and was conducting research on infant psycho-social development. Early childhood education was not widely available to low income and other marginalised children (e.g., indigenous people in the Amazon and Pacific coast rainforests and descendants of African slaves), and what was available emphasised mostly academic learning.

In recently reunified Germany, early childhood education was available, but the quality differed in the post-Cold War era for immigrant (especially Turkish) families who also faced social exclusion. In addition, when the old system collapsed in former East Germany, many people there lacked experience of real political democracy and harboured deep mistrust of those unlike themselves - the building blocks for xenophobia and far right political groups.

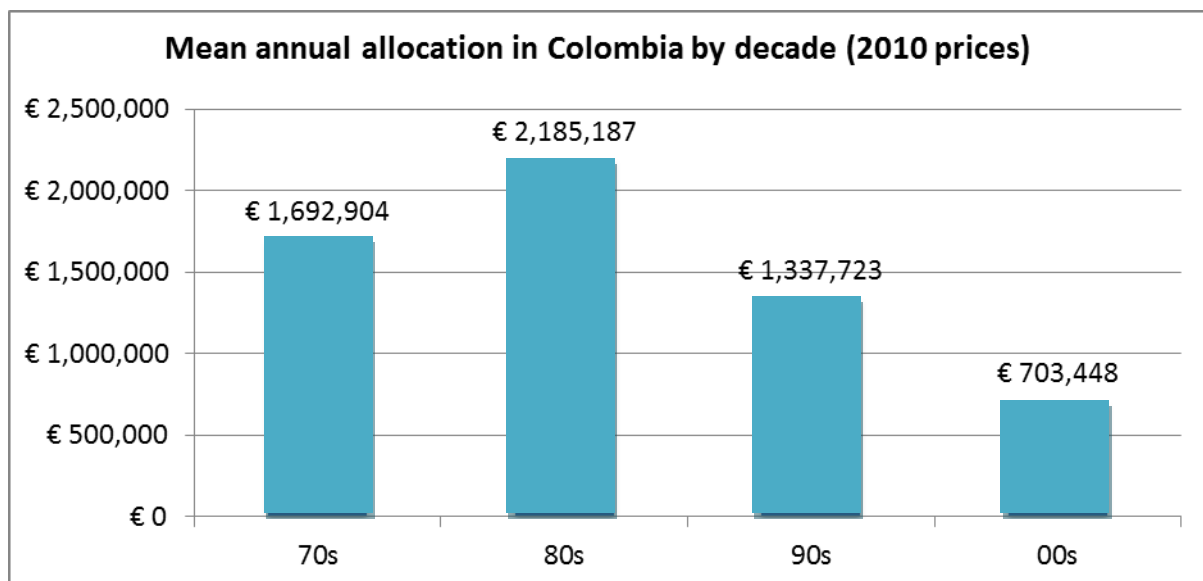
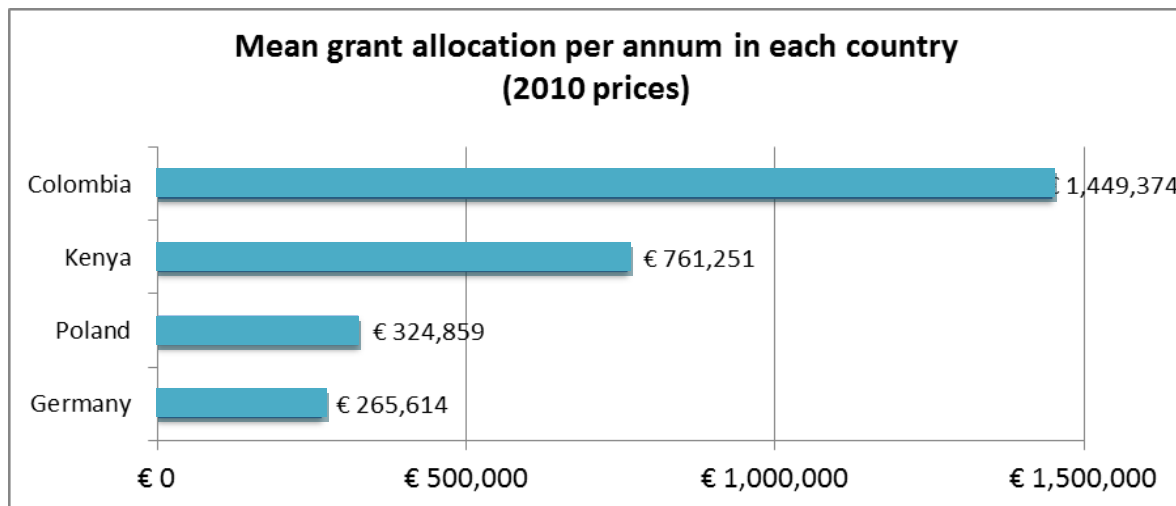


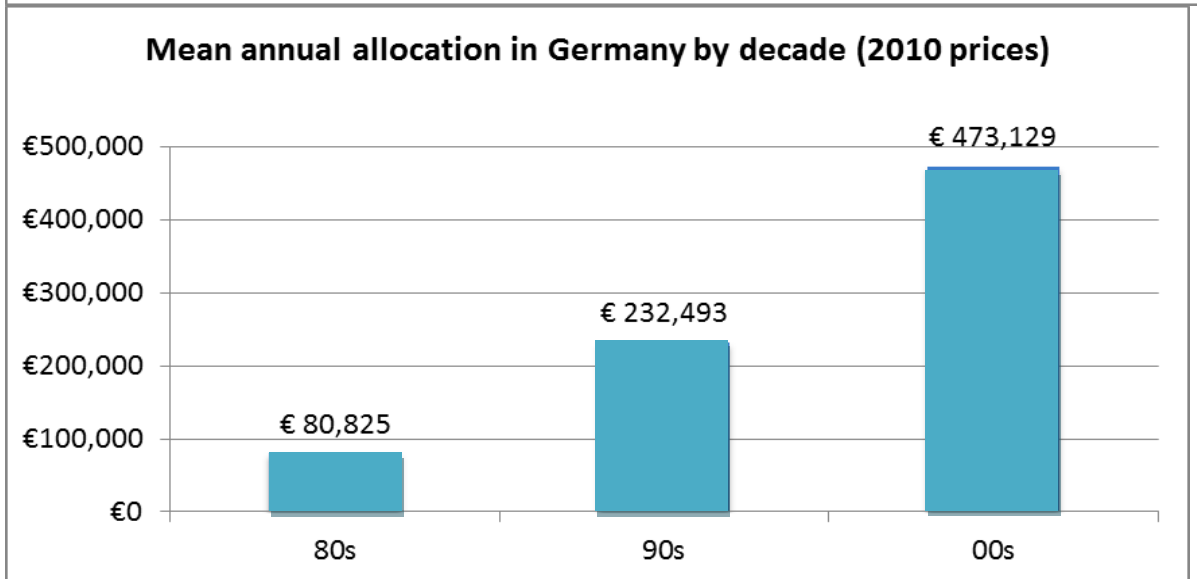
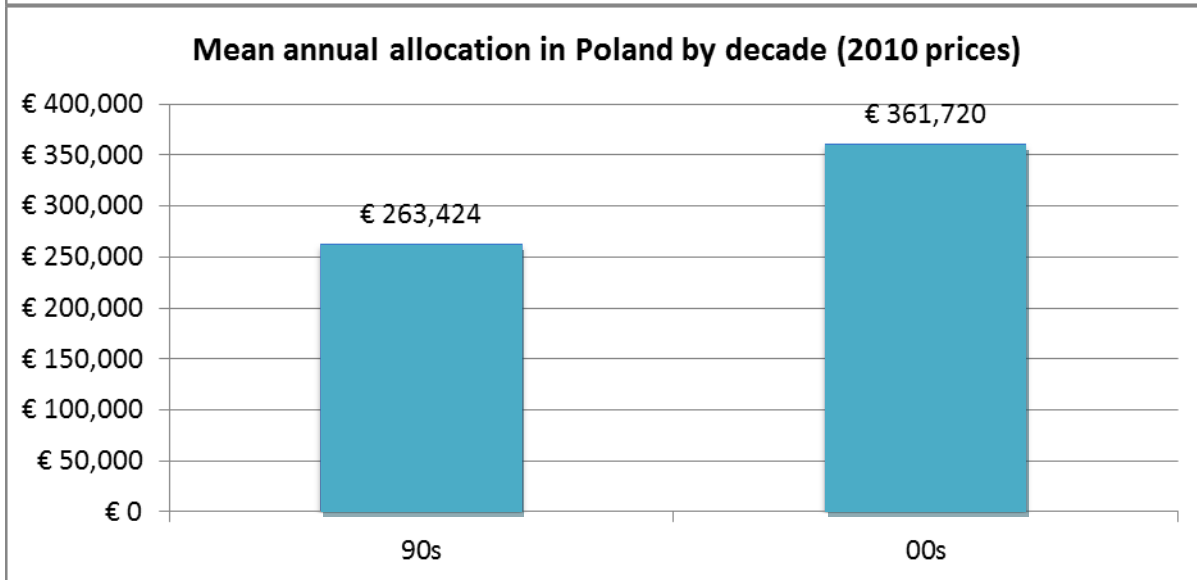
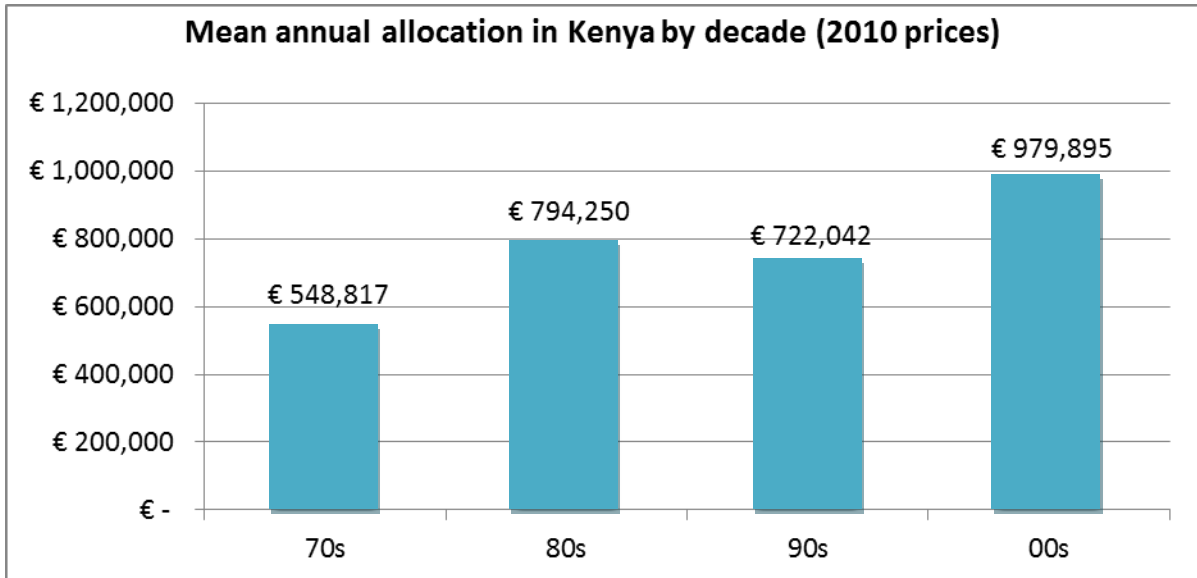
Poland in the early 1990s was in the wrenching transition from Soviet-style socialism, and most children in rural areas had no access to any kind of preschool education. Where it existed, the curriculum emphasised discipline and academic lessons. There was little understanding about the developmental needs of young children.

## Inputs

The Foundation provided money, time and other contributions to groups in the four countries. Below is a table that portrays both the time and money that the Foundation invested in the four countries.

Country	Total (2010 prices)	Number of years	Mean grant allocation per annum
Colombia	€ 50,728,095	35	€ 1,449,374
Kenya	€ 30,450,047	40	€ 761,251
Germany	€ 7,702,820	29	€ 265,614
Poland	€ 5,197,747	16	€ 324,859







## Money

While funding represents only part of the support by the Foundation (as the researchers were reminded again and again by partners), the grant money does matter. The tables above show the total amount of grants made in each country over the years – note, adjusted for inflation - and the average grant allocation in each country by decade. It was difficult getting total expenditure figures, because the files in some older cases were incomplete, and this was further complicated because some payments were in local currencies (e.g., Polish Zlotys, Kenyan Shillings, etc.) or currencies that no longer exist (e.g. Dutch Guilders and German Marks), as well as Euros, and had not been adjusted for inflation. Nevertheless, these figures represent a reliable accounting of the funds granted by the Foundation in all four countries.

## Time

The four countries fall neatly into two categories when one examines the time over which the Foundation provided support. In one category, Kenya (41 years)<sup>31</sup> and Colombia (36 years) each represent a remarkably long engagement. Very few private foundations can point to such a sustained period of support. Interviews and document analysis show that there is little doubt that the impact of the BvLF was so positive in both countries because it remained engaged over such a long period of time. In Kenya, the Foundation supported the slow but steady development of a set of capacities that emerged as a national infrastructure for early childhood education unlike any other place in Africa. Such a long engagement also permitted experiments such as the creation of early childhood education and community development for pastoralist and nomadic children and families, and the development of a base of work and personnel that allowed special emphasis on HIV/AIDS and sufficiently impressed the World Bank that it chose to support ECD in Kenya instead of elsewhere. In the case of Colombia, sustained Foundation support allowed both the institutional maturation of key partners (and the quality of the services they supported) and the possibility of ECD programmes ‘weathering’ the various political storms that occurred within Colombia (from resistance by government officials to early childhood education and community development, to the various forms of political and criminal violence that ravaged many communities).

In the second category, the Foundation worked in Germany (28 years) and Poland (17 years) for shorter time periods than it did in Kenya and Colombia, but nevertheless impressively long in their own right. The majority of grants made by other European and US foundations are typically for individual project support and the relationship with grantees extends to two or three years. While some other foundations (e.g. the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, UK) support some partners for a decade or two, they are the exception to the rule. BvLF’s willingness to ‘stay the course’ suggests an understanding that social change takes time and it is willing to provide ‘patient capital.’

## Leadership

Over the years examined, the Board of Directors of the Foundation has been relatively stable. Bernard van Leer and later his son, Oscar, played significant roles in the structure, programmatic focus, culture and geographic ‘footprint’ of the Foundation. As mentioned in the introduction, Oscar focused the Foundation more sharply on early childhood education and development, and played an activist role within the Foundation until his retirement in 1986. In the 1980s the role of the staff had steadily increased and the Executive Director, always in close communication with the Board, had increasingly greater influence not just on decisions about operations but also on strategy. The question to be asked when analysing this is, ‘Was there a significant influence on the work in the

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<sup>31</sup> Funding ended in 2010, but work continued thereafter.



four countries under study by the Executive Directors?’ While each<sup>32</sup> had his/her imprint on Foundation’s operations, there appears to be a fair continuity of programme and practice in the four countries.

Willem Welling (1968-1988) led the BvLF for 20 years and, working closely with Oscar van Leer, helped create many of the current practices (e.g. heavy emphasis on funding research in support of practice and interchange among partners) and expanded its global footprint. The BvLF began its efforts in Kenya, Colombia and Germany under Welling.

Rien van Gendt (1989-2002) came to the Foundation as an economist. During his 13-year tenure the Foundation saw its assets increase. He further expanded its programmatic reach globally (including the work in Poland), re-organised and enlarged the staff, increased publications and was very active in reaching out to potential partners among other international foundations, bi-lateral donors and the World Bank.

Peter Laugharn (2002-2008) came from the Foundation and had a background in international development in Africa. He experimented with a theme-based reorganisation of the programme work that in several instances had mixed results. He took on a leadership role internationally regarding young children and HIV/AIDS, and the Foundation played a key global role in bringing attention to and mobilising resources for young children and the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on them. During his tenure, the global economy turned downward and the Foundation experienced a substantial reduction of its financial assets.

Monique van t’Hek (2008-2009) served in a critical interim role. She had the task of downsizing the organisation in the face of the negative economic situation. She maintained programme work but managed a sizeable reduction of staff.

Lisa Jordan (2009-present) came to the Foundation from a background of international development and philanthropy with experience as senior staff at the Ford Foundation. The earlier financial problems forced a reduction of the Foundation’s global ‘footprint’. She oversaw that process, as well as the development and implementation of a new strategy and the choice of countries in which the Foundation now works.

As one would expect, Executive Directors influenced the activities in the four countries and at several points played direct leadership roles in the work in a country. Surprisingly however, there is a remarkable continuity of programme and practice in Kenya, Colombia, Poland and Germany apart from the various directions taken by leadership. Except for a few specific new directions (e.g. HIV/AIDS work and the World Bank partnership in Kenya, or decisions to leave countries) it is surprisingly difficult to point to leadership changes within the Foundation as one reads the files and interviews partners - apart from starting and ending support in a particular country. It is a testament to the leadership and staff of BvLF that transitions of leadership have not appeared to affect substantially the continuity of the programme work and the relationship with Foundation partners in Kenya, Colombia, Poland and Germany. It also highlights the ability of the Foundation partners to stay on task and weather institutional changes within BvLF.

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<sup>32</sup> The list of the Executive Directors should include the managers in the early days of the philanthropy based in Lucerne (i.e., Kurt Sidler 1949 and Alois Troller 1960). In 1965 the BvLF opened its doors in essentially its current organizational form in The Hague and began operations under the leadership of Henry Salzman whom Oscar van Leer had recruited from the Ford Foundation. But these individuals served the Foundation before the period reviewed in this study.



## Programme Officers<sup>33</sup>

Curiously, the number of programme officers (or other key staff involved in the work in each country) who had responsibilities in the four countries differs widely, but looked at together, an interesting trend emerges. In Kenya early work by the Programme Director, Fred Wood in the 1970s evolved to Paula Nimpuno-Parente in the early 1990s followed by Tanja van de Linde (1997-2004), then Stephan Meershoek (2004-2009), and then Nyambura Rugoiyo and Michael Feigelson until the Foundation exited in 2012. Interestingly in Kenya, there is a strong sense that the Foundation was represented by different personalities, and while there appear to be degrees of difference in that different people had different impacts, the relationship with the Foundation was relatively steady.

In Colombia, where the work of the Foundation was also started by Fred Wood in the late 1970s, programme efforts were picked up by Liesbeth Zwitter until 1985, followed by Nuria Gimenez until 1990, Nico van Oudenhoven until 1992 and then Marc Mataheru from 1992 until 2012. Not surprisingly, the chapter on Colombia notes the importance of the relationship established and maintained with BvLF programme staff. Twenty years of continuity with the same programme officer is a rarity in the foundation world.

Germany and Poland follow a similar trajectory to Colombia, though less dramatic. Work in Germany began with small efforts in the 1970s but begins to take root with Edzo Tonkes in the early 1980s, followed briefly by Marc Mataheru (1986-1990), Henriette Heimgaertner (1990-2006) and finally Janet van de Korput (2006-2012). The 16 years of work by Heimgaertner is another example of unusual continuity. Poland is the same with initial exploration in the early 1990s, but the core of the work from the mid-1990s to 2006 was also done by Henriette Heimgaertner. The interviews with Polish partners underscore the importance of that almost ten-year relationship. Jolanda de Haan continued the work and Michael Feigelson was responsible for closing down the Foundation's work in Poland.

What is clear in these examples is that continuity with a programme officer made a difference. Of course, continuity alone is not sufficient - a long time with bad policies and an ineffective programme officer hardly guarantee a good outcome. But in settings as different as Poland and Colombia, the Foundation's partners expressed a deep connection with the officer and insisted that the relationship was a significant element in the success of the programme. They stressed the importance of the trust that had been established over time, on both professional and personal levels, in addition to feeling trusted by the Foundation.

## Processes

In all four countries, while the content differed, especially in Germany, there were several activities that were common to all four sites. These common activities included:

1. a strong emphasis on contextualised curriculum development (i.e. curriculum devised by local communities based on their daily realities);
2. an strong support for teacher training and the development of a cadre of teacher trainers;
3. an emphasis on active parent engagement;

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<sup>33</sup> The list of BvLF programme staff who worked in the four countries captures most of the people involved, but the files suggest in some cases that there may have been other Foundation personnel on temporary assignment so the list may be slightly incomplete.





4. the creation of diverse literature on ECD and related issues;
5. learning exchanges within the country and with practitioners and experts in other countries;
6. a willingness to support experiments with various models of ECD programmes (e.g. the *loipi* approach for nomadic communities and HIV/AIDS affected children in Kenya, the various *hogares* in Colombia, options for isolated rural communities in Poland, and adapting programmes for Turkish families in Germany);
7. convening meetings with local and national government officials to share learning and build a favourable policy climate for the work; and
8. monitoring and evaluating a variety of programmes and activities.

The Foundation's work in Kenya, Colombia and Poland shared several additional processes. These included supporting: baseline studies especially at the community level; other kinds of research and data collection about ECD programmes; major national reviews of ECD work; and an increasing emphasis on community-based work and building support from the communities.

In both Kenya and Colombia the Foundation also stressed ECD programmes that incorporated not just education and play, but nutrition, growth measurement, health, safety, as well as food security, economic development, adult literacy and children's rights. In other words, what began as early childhood education evolved into integrated community development with an emphasis on healthy children. At different times in both countries the BvLF worked through violent, armed conflict. In Kenya, the Foundation developed a relationship with the World Bank that it maintains today. In Poland BvLF provided support for legal assistance to clarify the limitations on ECD programmes from laws and regulations that were relics of the Cold War era.

## Outputs

BvLF support to the four countries over many decades has resulted in thousands of outputs. The list below captures the major outputs.

1. The design and creation of thousands of contextualised ECD programmes (e.g. *hogares* in Colombia, *loipi* for nomadic Samburu in Kenya, rural Polish communities, Turkish immigrants in Germany).
2. The opening of tens of thousands of new ECD centres and home-based programmes.
3. The publication of thousands of reports, studies, manuals, guides, learning materials and the production of films and DVDs on all aspects of ECD and integrated community development (e.g. in Germany several issues of newsletters for Turkish parents regarding child development and care were sent regularly to 700,000 homes).
4. Strengthened centres and institutes (Colombia, Germany) and the creation of new organisations (Kenya, Poland) that focus on research, training and the production of materials on various aspects of ECD.
5. Hundreds of thousands of families where parents are empowered - both by knowledge of child development and realisation of their own agency - to ensure the well-being of their families.
6. The training of tens of thousands of teachers and the improvement of the quality of their training.



7. In two cases - NACECE in Kenya (1988) and FESCO in Colombia (1996) - the Foundation funded the purchase of new buildings.
8. Also for Kenya and Colombia, the BvLF conducted 'Tracer Studies' - book-length studies that followed up children years after they had participated in BvLF funded programmes.
9. Public education efforts in all four countries to expand the understanding about the developmental needs of all young children - both native and immigrant.
10. In the case of Germany, wide availability and use of curriculum materials based on Respect for Diversity principles.
11. The 'Effectiveness Initiative', a five year in-depth, qualitative look at 10 ECD projects to see what made them work and included some in the countries under study.

## Outcomes

Kenya, Colombia and Poland experienced substantial increases in access to and enrolment in ECD in different parts of the country (in Poland's case the programme exclusively emphasised rural areas), and improvements in the quality of the pedagogy.<sup>34</sup> These three countries also experienced dramatic increases in appropriately trained teachers, and the development of a variety of models of ECD for different contexts within the country. All four countries experienced a substantially enhanced curriculum development capacity; the development of a large and diverse literature on ECD and community development; the availability of key materials and literature in translation (e.g. Turkish for that community in Germany, over 14 languages for Kenya, indigenous languages in Colombia); hundreds of seminars and training sessions for parents and teachers; hundreds of meetings with local officials and local representatives of national ministries, and several meetings involving regional and international interests (e.g. East African meetings, Polish groups hosting multinational seminars, etc.).

Further outcomes include, a national infrastructure for early childhood education and development in Kenya. A network of specialised university centres and NGOs in Colombia that has solid expertise and experience in the theory, design and implementation of ECD and integrated community development. These centres and NGOs provide intellectual leadership through research and training, and they serve as a key part of a national advocacy network in support of ECD and community development. Poland has diverse, flexible, government-supported ECD centres across its rural areas - finally guaranteed by law whose passage was largely dependent on Foundation partners' lobbying - and a strong child advocacy capacity to monitor the implementation of the law. Polish partners have also leveraged millions of euros from the European Union for ECD. Germany has ECD centres equipped with trained teachers and bilingual materials to provide appropriate experiences for immigrant and non-German speaking children and their families. It also has a network of school systems in 16 states using the Respect for Diversity curriculum materials emphasising tolerance and democratic practices in 12,000 centres serving 600,000 children.

## Impact

It is not an exaggeration to state that the Bernard van Leer Foundation has had a powerful positive impact on the lives of a great many young children and their families in the four countries under study.

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<sup>34</sup> The World Bank currently puts preschool enrolment in Kenya at 60% with 28,000 centres.



In Kenya and Colombia, there are now national systems of early childhood education and development. Kenya has a national infrastructure (i.e., NACECE/DICECE), widespread coverage, a training institute and ECD is now a government responsibility within the Ministry of Education. Because of the work supported by the Foundation, the World Bank provided Kenya a loan of USD 28 million to expand access to preschools to more children. Where training in early childhood education was once non-existent, now every post-secondary education institution in the country has at least a certificate programme in early childhood education, and Kenyatta University now awards Ph.Ds. in ECD. Where there were none, there are now ECD programmes designed by nomadic and pastoralist Samburu parents and educators –that are adapted by other Kenyan nomadic tribes like the Maasai, as well as by pastoralists in other parts of Africa. The Foundation has helped thousands of Kenyan children orphaned or made otherwise vulnerable by HIV/AIDS receive appropriate and supportive care, in many instances through the *Jirani*—traditional neighbourhood groups of 20-25 parents or caregivers of orphans and other vulnerable children.

In Colombia, children have wide access nationally to locally anchored ECD programmes, earmarked tax funding (that preceded BvLF), a government body working with strong, independent regional centres that support a variety of early childhood education and community development programmes. Colombia’s collection of ECD centres and institutions maintain an active and robust civil society network that is engaged on issues affecting young children, their parents and their communities at both the regional and national levels. Both the ECD centres and institutions work with the government and serve to hold it accountable for delivery and quality of programmes for young children. The BvLF’s support has served to strengthen these centres allowing them to become more sophisticated in their analysis and design of programming, and to mature as organisations. Key in Colombia has been the success in designing ECD programmes that not only ‘fit’ with local culture, but also include an array of critical activities that assist with nutrition, health, safety (a serious issue in one of the world’s most violent countries), economic development, food security and adult literacy, among others. Put simply, work in Colombia has not only increased early childhood education, but also supported the expansion of integrated development *and* civil society groups advocating for this work.

In Poland, after the end of the Cold War, rural communities had very few preschools, little awareness in professional circles of child development theory and no support from government. There is now widespread access to community-based and community driven early childhood education in all rural areas, supported by new law and the Ministry of Education, and monitored by an energetic and highly effective training and advocacy organisation.

Germany has improved school readiness for many Turkish children with culturally appropriate and native language learning materials. Several states in Germany have also adopted curriculum and materials that emphasise respect for diversity.

*“If you are looking for impact, BvLF built the model of community-based services and teacher training and we just tried to scale up that model. BvLF’s work in Kenya continues to have an impact all across Africa. Today there is no country in Africa like Kenya in terms of their reach of ECD.”*

Marito Garcia, World Bank

## Theories of Change

While each country case analysed the theories of change at work in that country, it can be useful to look across them.



## Ideal Paradigm


Kenya offers the starkest example of the internal Foundation tension about an earlier search for ‘the model’ of early childhood education. At the outset of the work in the early 1970s, there was still pressure to find the best approach that could then be applied everywhere. As the work evolved in Kenya, especially as it moved into the rural areas, the insistence on one best way diminished. What emerged was a community-based model that emphasised some child development principles, but relied on the realities of context and the decisions by local parents and teachers to devise the most appropriate methods for that community. However, the experience in Colombia never seemed to face the tension of searching for an ideal method. From the outset, the work was contextualised and became increasingly focused on community development as an element of ECD. The work in Poland no doubt benefited from the much older work in Kenya and Colombia, and it did not encounter this theory of change. In Germany, the efforts relied on a variety of ‘methods’ to help with immigrant children and their families, as well as methods to build tolerance - neither espoused a best approach.

The evidence is clear from the cases alone that a theory of change based on an ideal paradigm — a silver bullet — does not work. Social change is far too complex and the surgical insertion of a perfect educational methodology into a dynamic and complicated context is simplistic and naïve. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, according to its own analysis, failed in its initial effort to ‘deliver vaccines’ for this same reason.

## Community Development/Local Actors

Of the four countries under study, Colombia represents the most consistent nationwide effort that employed a community development theory of change. While the nature of the work and its complexity evolved over time, from the earliest days there appears a commitment to local identity, engagement, and frequent community ownership of the ECD and other development efforts. As noted elsewhere, the Foundation’s work in Kenya also evolved, but started with a more narrow emphasis on education which only incorporated local context over time and only later began to include other aspects of community development. The concern in Kenya, because ECD is now in the Ministry of Education, is whether its practice will revert to mostly education for young children and if it will lose its community development aspect. BvLF’s work in Poland, however, is, like Colombia, another good example of efforts based on this theory of change. The major difference between the two examples is that work in Colombia is nationwide and while in Poland it is only in rural areas. There appears also to be a degree of difference in the more deeply integrated nature of the development work in Colombia, compared to Poland where the ECD work was localised and the community engaged, but where there was less need for the array of services included in Colombia. The Foundation’s work in Germany only partially emphasised localised community development. It was used in the work with the immigrant ‘community’ where intentional efforts were made to have former East Germans ‘own’ their work on valuing diversity and democracy.

The theory of change that emphasises community development can be very effective, but is rarely effective if done in isolation. By itself it is insufficient to change deep structural arrangements or to sustain those changes over a long time. Additional, complementary approaches are needed.



## Development of Appropriate Tools and Knowledge, and Their Transfer and Dissemination

This theory of change permeates almost all of the BvLF's work. In all cases, and for many different immediate purposes, the Foundation supported many levels and kinds of research - from developmental psychology to effective pedagogical techniques. The Foundation is widely known as the source of magazines, newsletters and books about important issues related to ECD and good ECD practices. It also supports the production of important baseline studies and detailed analyses of local conditions. BvLF also supports the development of a localised literature, produced by local individuals which is visible in all four countries despite their very different contexts. The impacts of these efforts are several: important new literature, grounded in local experience, is now available; data and other information becomes available for use in advocacy campaigns and policy decisions; and a cadre of informed local writers interested in ideas about ECD emerges.

Hence the strengths of this theory are evident. The question remains, however, if this is sufficient for the change desired? In all four cases, the evidence is clear. Work driven by this theory of change was necessary but insufficient. Access to the right information can be critically important, but it is almost never by itself enough to make substantial and long-lasting change.


## Influencing the Design and Implementation of Public Policies

The work in all four countries involved interest in public policies. In Kenya, the Foundation actually helped build part of what became public infrastructure, and in its early years there it and its partners had significant influence on public policy. While its influence produced some remarkable public good, what is missing is an effective advocacy capacity in the country to ensure the maintenance of efforts, continued quality and service provision to the most marginalised children. The work in Colombia, on the other hand, has resulted in both strengthened public sector commitment and a strong advocacy network that can work to hold the state accountable for its responsibilities regarding ECD and community development. Efforts in Poland, like in Colombia, have resulted in dramatic legislative and policy successes for ECD that are monitored by an effective advocacy and 'watchdog' organisation. The Foundation's work in Germany resulted more in modest policy efforts for immigrant children and the acceptance of tolerance programmes in some municipalities, than in a strong public policy-focused set of activities (and no mechanism to advocate). Hence this theory of change, while present in all four, was successfully supported in Poland and Colombia, strong for a time in Kenya but left weak capacities for future advocacy, and employed only lightly in Germany.

In this theory of change, the experience of the Foundation leads to the conclusion that influencing public policy can be an effective — sometimes necessary — approach, but can also be insufficient. Even when 'successful', who ensures that the new policy or law is implemented? Who ensures that the regulations keep to the spirit of the change and go far and deep enough? Who monitors its enforcement and, if enforced, that it is done so fairly? Who manages efforts by its opponents? In the absence of other supportive methods of change, this theory, can be very fragile.

## Strengthening Partner Organisations and Promoting Their Sustainability and Access to Other Resources

This theory of change emphasises helping to build capacities of other organisations to conduct and carry on the work. In Kenya, support for NACECE in the 1980s and 1990s stressed its role as a quasi-public sector institution and an engine for ECD throughout the country, especially for marginalised families. However, its leadership strength diminished when it became part of the Ministry. As noted above, there was no independent organisation that played the role of advocate and watchdog. In



later years the Foundation supported the Kenya Community Development Foundation and intentionally helped strengthen it but, while important, the Kenya Community Development Foundation plays a broader function and is not designed to serve the ECD advocacy function.

However, this theory of change is very apparent in BvLF's work in both Colombia and Poland, where it was put to good effect. In Colombia, the BvLF supported a set of key institutions that have served to help build others' capacities and act as part of a network of civil society advocacy organisations. In the case of Poland, the BvLF's support of the Comenius Foundation, and the Astrid Lindgren Institute at a local level, emphasised the important advocacy and training roles these institutions have and will play in support of ECD.

In Germany, the Foundation's efforts focused on supporting programmes and services, rather than on establishing capacities to maintain the work, except to pass it on to school systems. So this theory of change is not applicable to the Foundation's work in Germany.

Like the other theories of change, the choice to strengthen partners 'on the ground' can be a sound and effective theory of change — if buttressed with the appropriate complementary strategies. A strong partner, even several, may serve as a critical mass, but alone is not likely to cause substantial and sustainable change.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

A summary of the Foundation's strengths and weaknesses in its work in the four countries would include the following **strengths**—or nuggets of gold:

**Time.** Interviewees commented consistently and very positively about the Foundation's willingness to commit to a very long-term relationship where needed. They noted that they were given appropriate time to explore and experiment. They added that most funders are overly restrictive (and frequently unrealistic) about time needed for social change and that BvLF was unusually generous with time. The number of years that the Foundation stayed engaged with all four countries was highly unusual in the foundation field, and sets a new standard for foundation behaviour - of excellent practice. A related strength regarding time had to do with the unusually long tenures of two programme officers. While in the two cases this was seen as a positive aspect of the Foundation's efforts, it presumes a certain set of professional and personal characteristics, proper oversight and the ability to learn over time. In other words, it combines quality with longevity.

**Flexibility.** Many people interviewed noted with gratitude the Foundation's flexibility. They emphasised the Foundation's insistence on an idea or goal, but its willingness to allow partners the flexibility to determine the best way to work. This includes collecting sufficient information, support for 'pilot efforts' to test possible new approaches and other experimentation until an effective solution is found.

**Access to and production of ECD literature.** The Foundation enjoys strong support for its development of literature about ECD but also its aggressive dissemination efforts around the globe. This was so often noted and with such enthusiasm, that the research team described the Foundation as 'promiscuous' with ECD literature. The only caveat was that the dissemination could be more strategic.



**Learning opportunities and exchanges.** Another universal response was positive and enthusiastic reactions to learning by the partners. In virtually all conversations, former partners cited both the knowledge that the BvLF staff brought and more importantly, the chance for partners to travel to other parts of the world (or meet others who have travelled to their home) and learn from practitioners and researchers in sometimes very different contexts. This allowed comparative analysis, gave access to new knowledge, but also demanded something from the partners. One interviewee, now a seasoned and highly respected writer and speaker about ECD, noted that when she first went on a BvLF study tour and had to present her work she was ‘terrified.’ She said that she knew how to teach young children, but had never had to talk to other adults about the nature of what she did and why. She said that BvLF ‘forced’ her to learn how to make presentations and suspects that the Foundation does not know what a valuable service that it provided.

**Ecosystem of support.** Several interviewees noted that an important positive feature of BvLF support was that it included far more than just the grant money. They said that the Foundation provided critical intellectual, logistical, networking, organisational, legal and other kinds of support in addition to the financial, and at time those were at least as important as the money.

**Empirical data collection.** Several people commented on the importance of the Foundation’s support for data collection. They said that it aided in programme design, policy discussions and was essential for effective advocacy. The work in Poland is a particularly good example of how helpful access to good data can be.

**Integrated community development.** Many saw the emphasis by the Foundation on integrated community development as a wise and mature (as well as effective) approach to supporting early childhood education and development. This was noted by many - despite the internal tensions within the Foundation between commitments to ‘education’ versus support for ‘development.’

**Trust.** Many respondents used the term ‘trust’ when talking about their experience with BvLF. Some said that the traits noted above constituted an attitude of trust by BvLF for its partners that had the effect of increasing confidence by the partners. Others noted the BvLF’s willingness to trust local communities to design their own ECD programmes and not impose a pre-designed curriculum or method. This latter comment highlights the increased support of a community development approach by the BvLF.

Several of the key **weaknesses** would include the following:

**Spotty impact analysis.** While the archives are rich with many sorts of data, the Foundation has not systematically collected *impact* data that is comparable across projects. In places there is useful data, but it is not consistent. The BvLF has made substantial efforts to ‘learn’ from its work, especially about various pedagogical techniques used in ECD programmes in different settings, but the target for those learnings is primarily ECD practitioners. The Foundation has not, however, designed nor used its ample archives as effectively as it might to understand better the impact of its efforts.

**Weak structural analysis and framing.** BvLF historically favours ‘disadvantaged’ children but does not identify and address the causes of that disadvantage in its grant making. Grants typically provide services for children and their families, which are genuinely helpful, but are



silent on the conditions and dynamics that place them at a disadvantage. While many of the Foundation's projects identify marginalised groups and take differences - in learning and the different lived realities - into consideration in its projects, BvLF does not seem to take those insights further and aggregate them into more powerful lessons. While several of the baseline studies note differences by gender, age, immigrant status, etc., there is virtually no analysis of differential impact by these and other (e.g., race, sexuality, tribe, religion, ethnicity) identity categories. A more powerful and nuanced study of effects by group - and the cause of those effects - can bring to the surface the need for different grant making strategies. Programming can consider differences by gender, race, immigrant status, sexuality, ethnic group, etc.—and why those differences exist—and by doing so help devise more effective grant making strategies. By not taking these aspects of young children's identity into consideration, it makes it harder to program appropriately. While it is laudable to focus on disadvantaged children, there is a missed opportunity by not exploring the causes of that disadvantage, how it is manifest and what arrangements maintain it.

**No consistent local presence.** The Foundation decided to have a headquarters office in the Netherlands and programme staff who would travel for short visits to their respective assignments. There are clear financial savings to this approach and the communication among the staff is easier, but there are other costs. Working in local or regional coalitions is difficult with only an occasional presence. There are local developments that might be missed or other problems misunderstood. One interviewee noted that the Foundation has been a member of the East African Grantmakers Association for many years, but never attended a meeting. Technology might be able to mitigate some of the problems. It appears to the researchers that this policy could benefit from a fresh discussion and updated reconsideration.

**Board of Directors.** Only one question was raised specifically about the Board. The partner asked that because BvLF no longer has ties to the parent company as it did for decades since its founding, could the Board become more diverse and include representatives from the countries where the BvLF operates.

**Better country exits.** In two of the four countries studied, there were several comments made about how the Foundation's exit was misunderstood by longstanding partners. While interviews with BvLF staff show how at the end great care was given to designing the departures, interviews with several partners suggest that there were problems that might have been avoided. Related to the issue of exits, the question of helping partners find alternative funding was raised as a common challenge - one that many foundations' partners face. The problem is that when foundations depart, they often provide transition funds to assist with finding alternative funding—but at least as important is information about options, which many programme officers do not have.

Together, these two issues (the exit itself and finding alternative funding) point to a larger problem. Missing from the grant-making strategies is any discussion - until late in the game - of how to end the relationship. There is no indication that at the design stage there was consideration of what the criteria for exiting should be, how it should be communicated, what mutually agreeable steps would be necessary, and what each party's responsibilities should be. In all four cases exits were externally-driven, not organic to the nature of the project. Unfortunately this practice is common among most foundations, despite the obvious problems it engenders. BvLF might consider designing the exit as part of the larger initial planning process and having all parties in agreement at the outset of what the conditions for exiting should be. This approach need not stifle flexibility if done properly.





## Conclusion

That the Bernard van Leer Foundation's efforts in Kenya, Colombia, Germany and Poland made a significant and positive difference in several million children's lives cannot be disputed. What emerges as useful lessons from this mountain of experience is that BvLF has developed and deploys a very impressive collection of tools for its work:

- Time
- Flexibility
- Trust
- Choosing effective partners
- Commitment to marginalised communities
- Empirical data collection
- Willingness to take risks
- Experimentation
- Contextualising methods
- Local empowerment
- Learning from local and international experience
- Development of locally-rooted literature
- Energetic dissemination of publications
- Training trainers
- Advocacy
- Attention to national ECD policies and
- Longevity of programme officers with adequate oversight and learning

This toolbox puts BvLF head and shoulders above the vast majority of other foundations. The Foundation has developed and refined these tools over decades with experiences in many parts of the globe. Other foundations might have some of these tools at their disposal but very few have such a range of substantive capacities. The challenge that remains - as the analysis of work in these countries makes clear - is having the wisdom to employ the proper set of tools in combination (since rarely is one sufficient to make change) and at the appropriate time to be effective.

Is one theory of change sufficient and realistic given the complexities of social change in a particular place, and is the grantmaking strategy sufficiently robust and complex to help make the desired changes? What set of tools make change most likely to succeed with the chosen strategies? And how might the choices be tested along the way to see if they were correct - and if not, what sort of readjustments are necessary? BvLF's experiences in Kenya, Colombia, German and Poland, while immensely positive overall, offer instructive examples of where the mix of tools 'worked' and where they were less effective and where important opportunities were missed. The Foundation would do well to increase its awareness of these choices and their potential and make more explicit choices about how best to combine the deployment of the items in its impressive toolbox.



## CHAPTER 5 : FULFILLING THE FOUNDATION'S MISSION

The report to this point has been based on the data collected and any analysis has been restricted to what was stated in the Foundation's files and archives or by those interviewed or surveyed. This last chapter analyses the impact of BvLF's work through the lens of its own mission - an examination that mirrors contemporary debates across the philanthropic community. This chapter addresses the question, 'What do the findings of this study - and by extension the work of BvLF - offer to those foundations engaged in these debates?' Today, foundations in many parts of the world that are oriented toward serving disadvantaged or marginalised groups operate from one of two positions. The first includes foundations that fund efforts to reduce suffering - to lessen the pain of however poverty (or some other injustice) is manifested. The second position includes foundations that support efforts to dismantle the unjust structures and practices that unfairly disadvantage a group. Some in the field call this second position 'social justice grant making'. While both positions have merit and provide a social good, the second promises a greater and more sustainable impact. Has the BvLF addressed the **underlying causes** of disadvantage in these four countries, or has it primarily funded activities that will reduce the **immediate symptoms** of that disadvantage?


The Bernard van Leer Foundation has been committed to disadvantaged children consistently for many decades. The current description of the Foundation's mission is *"...to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We see this both as a valuable end in itself and as a long-term means to promoting more cohesive, considerate and creative societies with equal opportunities and rights for all."*<sup>35</sup> This commitment has been stated repeatedly in writings by Oscar van Leer, in Board documents, in Annual Reports and in policy documents. Article 2 of the Foundation's Charter states, *"The Foundation has set as its objective...projects and activities aimed at assisting categories of children...that are hampered in their development by the social and/or cultural circumstances...to assist them to fully develop their innate potential."* The Foundation is committed to children and their families that have been somehow excluded. A social justice grant-making frame provides a more powerful approach - not just to the provision of early childhood education - but to help remove the mechanisms of exclusion that prevent children and their communities access to that education and the chance '...to fully develop their innate potential.'

A. W. (Fred) Wood was for about 20 years the director of programmes and deeply involved in the Foundation's work around the world. In the very thoughtful essay that he wrote for the book produced on the occasion of Willem Welling's retirement in 1988, he 'revealed' the secret about the BvLF's true purpose. He points out the shortfalls of conventional preschool training and instead calls for an approach to serving young children that would lead to what the famed Brazilian educator Pablo Freire meant by his term 'conscientisation' - an approach that Fred Wood calls 'the Van Leer model.' While not the language of those years, it is clear that Fred Wood saw the Foundation's mission in support of social justice and operating to address root causes of poverty.

*Thus the apparent innocence of 'early childhood education' transforms itself into a much more powerful instrument for changing social ills. The process of change which the 'Van Leer model' unleashes is triggered by the intimate link between the adult, usually the parent, and the young child, tapping the parent's urge to provide the best beginnings for her family. But the process does not end there. It becomes a self-generating drive for change in parents, which satisfies not just the developmental needs of young children, but the craving of adults themselves for a more fulfilling*

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<sup>35</sup> From interview with the Executive Director Lisa Jordan.



future. It can thus reverse the passivity, the fatalism, which is one of the most powerful constraints upon the disadvantaged.<sup>36</sup>

BvLF's work clearly aims at and is ultimately in support of social justice. The question is not about the intended *ends*, but whether the *means* are appropriate. Deep social injustices are usually invisible, meaning that they are embedded in the 'rules of the game.' But while the rules are unfair and favour one group at the expense of another, they are perceived as 'that's just how things are.' It most often involves risk to question the rules, because even raising the question threatens the privileges of the favoured group. These conditions are common whether one looks at gender, religion, caste, race or young children of excluded groups, in any part of the world.

So the first step of a social justice grantmaker is the identification of the root of the problem and the employment of the sort of analysis that brings to the surface the arrangements and dynamics that cause and maintain the injustice. What rules are at work? Who makes the rules? How do they really operate? Whom do they favour? Eventually other questions emerge - who has power? How is it used? Maintained? How is the injustice created and maintained? Once this analysis is done successfully, the next task is to design the grant making strategy that has the greatest chance of helping to dismantle the unjust arrangements and help construct new, fairer circumstances. Because social change is difficult and complex, there is usually a need for an array of grants across complementary strategies over considerable time. These strategies require almost constant re-assessment to ensure that they are effective. If they lose effectiveness, then it is time to consider different, more powerful strategies.<sup>37</sup> An illustrative example of the invisible - or opaque - nature of injustice in 'policy' comes from a report commissioned by the Foundation about its work in the Caribbean, but cites the situation in Poland - one of this report's four countries.

*Policy is most often understood as something explicit - written down in a government document or enacted as legislation and supported by public statements of values and beliefs, by procedures and resource allocations. Yet, policy can also be understood to mean something tacit or implicit, only revealed through its consequences. Such policy is an expression of how those in charge think society should be ordered. Thus, in post-Communist Poland policies for re-structuring the social services generated severe cuts in child care, making it much harder for women to go out and work. This is an outcome achieved 'accidentally-on-purpose' by policy makers who believed that women's place is in the home. Policy, in other words, can be seen not just as an instrument for solving a publicly recognised problem but as a normative way of framing how the world should be. Taking this approach to policy - what is sometimes called implicit policy and what Shore and Wright term 'making opaque structures visible' helps us understand how policy struggles can be as much about meaning and values as about organisational arrangements and allocation of resources.<sup>38</sup>*

The BvLF's efforts in **Poland** offer what appears to be a successful example of addressing a social injustice. While the initial analysis in Poland simply focused on access to preschool education in rural areas, over time and with experience, the analysis evolved into something much deeper, more sophisticated and the strategies evolved as well - from a focus on early childhood education curriculum, to a connection with local authorities and communities, to the empowerment of local communities, to expanding involvement in national policy development (including both sorts of policy noted above), to an increasingly complex design of what ECD programmes should and do look like at the community level, to an explicit effort to gain political power regarding the nature of how

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<sup>36</sup> Bernard van Leer Foundation. *Towards a Brighter Future: Two Decades of Development in Early Childhood Care and Education*. BvLF, 1988. p. 4

<sup>37</sup> The Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace. [www.p-sj.org](http://www.p-sj.org).


<sup>38</sup> Eyben, R. and Wilson, F. *The Capacity To Have An Effect: An Efficacy Study of the Caribbean Child Support Initiative*. CARICAD, Barbados. 2010.



the state defined and supported ECD in rural areas, to the strengthening of a highly effective institution to monitor recent success and fight future political battles - while maintaining sophisticated knowledge and experience regarding ECD. This process was not - and almost never is - a linear and predictable series of interventions. It is messy, unpredictable, sometimes with dead ends and temporary defeats, demanding re-assessment and devising different ways forward, but frequently building on other successes in unexpected ways. Nevertheless, the outcomes were not just access to preschools in rural areas, but parent groups and whole communities empowered to help their children and themselves. The early childhood 'community' in rural Poland has changed 'the rules' about early childhood education and development - and its own ability to determine what is 'good' for them and their children. The local communities are supported in many ways by the Comenius Foundation - whose staff and work are both empowered and empowering - and whose existence is important for the functions of monitoring, accountability and possible additional advocacy to help ensure that those successes endure.

The work in **Colombia** was very different from that in Poland, yet both in their own ways can be said to be aimed at social justice. The work in Colombia also experienced an evolution in the analysis of the conditions by the Foundation's partners who altered their strategies over time - both the analysis and the conditions became more nuanced and complex. The ECD work was seen to be not just preschool education, but much more along the lines as described by Fred Wood above, supporting integrated community development. Complicating these efforts were the frequent and horrible instances of political and criminal violence. Still, the Foundation stayed the course over almost four decades helping strengthen numerous individual communities, but also helping a set of important institutions develop, strengthen, connect and mature. These institutions play several roles. They interact directly with communities and assist with ECD and larger community development; they are interlocutors between and advocates for local communities and a large state institution that deals with ECD; and they are part of a network of groups that together serve as a force within civil society that works to ensure the maintenance of quality and equitable distribution of public goods related to ECD and community development - the watchdog function. The work in Colombia is currently struggling with efforts to 'change the rules' in ways that favour marginalised communities.

BvLF's work in **Kenya** to a large degree can also be considered as an effort to deal with an injustice. Again, the analysis in the early days of the work emphasised access to services, but in time it developed a structural aspect to the grant-making strategies that led to the establishment of NACECE and the district-level DICECEs. The Foundation's partners initially looked to devise the content of curriculum and pedagogical techniques, but that, too, evolved to become more focused on community development broadly (or group-focused as in the case of programmes for nomadic and pastoralist tribes or the HIV/AIDS programmes, but still with an emphasis on community development, not just pedagogy). There is a critical shortcoming in the social justice efforts in the absence of support by the BvLF for a substantial institution, networks of organisations or broad-based grassroots organising. This would ensure that the ECD model spread more broadly by the World Bank loan and in the longer term by the Ministry of Education maintains a focus on community empowerment and integrated development. Instead the ECD model seems to have devolved back to a purely educational function. The early work by the pioneers in NACECE had a vision of a broader outcome and carried quite a bit of authority, but their departure and the absorption of NACECE by the Ministry of Education - in the absence of a strong watchdog group or groups - left the work on ECD in the hands of a bureaucracy. With no advocacy to hold the Ministry and NACECE accountable for keeping ECD in Kenya as something that is transformative, its quality and its power have lessened. In retrospect, perhaps there could have been a new Foundation strategy that would have supported the development of a group or several groups interested in playing the role of watchdog that would have engaged in monitoring, organising and advocacy. Thus,



in the case of the work in Kenya, several efforts were made to provide important services to young children and their families, but they have slipped over time and the goal of social justice seems more distant.

The example of the Foundation's work in **Germany**, while perhaps the most different among the four locations, offers yet another example of addressing two different injustices. From the outset, the aim of the work was to help design and support services to an excluded immigrant community. The other aim was to engage communities in East Germany in ways that would help them become more tolerant and more willing to support democratic decision-making. The Foundation chose to help local communities adapt techniques from elsewhere and to support efforts by the community to construct new ways of working that helped their children and themselves - and in some instance help the German educators change themselves. The analysis of the problems identified behaviours that were unjust and communities that were disenfranchised. The strategies included designing methods to help change those behaviours and help animate the communities themselves. The strategies also envisaged supporting singular pilot efforts whose work would be scaled up and out by various national networks. Generally the pilot efforts were successful and helped the immediate communities—several people refer to the work as a 'paradigm shift' in grounding education organically in the community and fostering an appreciation of diversity. The record of successful uptake and broad dissemination is mixed, however, due largely to sole reliance on the national networks that had mixed capacities to deliver. In a few instances, the influence of the pilot work was substantial and the impact was fairly widespread (e.g. early childhood education for immigrant children). In other cases, the reports of influence of the methods suggest their dissemination was more limited (in several instances there were no evaluations done to determine the outcomes of propagation), and in several cases the dissemination function simply failed.

Hence the case of BvLF's work in Germany offers an example of an insufficiently robust strategy of outreach and dissemination. A more powerful dissemination engine with deeper connections to the communities involved and with a longer-term plan of sustained effort might have made a difference. However, there may be another explanation. Perhaps the theory of change was too simple. Reliance on creating new knowledge and practice - even paradigm changing practices - with the hope of wider uptake is clearly insufficient. Broad and sustained social change in Germany along those social justice issues required the development of the ECD methods, but they were not powerful enough by themselves. Perhaps what was needed for the work in Germany was additional thinking and resources to support more effective ways to broaden the use of the practices over time. If so, the grant making strategy would have certainly looked different. And so, in terms of the work in Germany, it is probably fair to say that some rules were changed, some were modified and others are yet untouched.

## Conclusion

As one looks over BvLF's work in the four countries in this study from the point of view of its mission – of serving disadvantaged children *and* helping create 'equal opportunities and rights for all' - there are two over-arching messages that emerge. First, the Foundation has consistently been committed to helping disadvantaged children and has done so in powerful ways using early childhood education and linking it to integrated community development. Fred Wood's essay of 1988 captures this notion well.

*Is there, then, a Bernard van Leer Foundation 'model'? The rock-bottom answer is surely in the negative. There can never be, given the way humanity is - its beauty and richness lies in its diversity. Is there, however, a Bernard van Leer Foundation bottom-line contribution to what has been mistermmed the development 'game', but for many is life itself? Here the answer is an unequivocal*



*'yes', based on the premise that early childhood is a key development trigger; that by parents taking part in this they, too, change and that such change can slowly point 'Towards a Brighter Future'.<sup>39</sup>*

But even Fred Wood's eloquent vision is limited by considering early childhood education as a development 'trigger'. While there are some examples of development efforts addressing social justice issues, these do not happen so much by design as by *ad hoc* outcomes. Providing access to early childhood and family services does not assure an automatic 'trigger' to development and from there to equitable societies with rights for all – as called for in the Foundation's mission. As we saw above, it can be an important element, but the work for development is more complex and requires a more critical analysis and engagement. Advances in development work as well as in philanthropy offer a different vision. Missing is an initial analysis of who has (and does not have) access to and control over resources, an analysis of power, along with a parallel analysis of how 'rights' differ by group. BvLF's grant making strategy has not been explicitly designed to help alter the structural arrangements that drive these differences. For example, poverty - the most common driver of 'disadvantage' - is not addressed at its roots by the grant making. While knowing how many children - especially disadvantaged children - were enrolled in preschool programmes is an important impact measure, the key social justice impact question would be, 'Did we affect long term and sustainable social, educational, economic, safety and other aspects - including protecting the rights - of children's lives?' Hence, the second message from this study is that, despite the many positive and quite impressive outcomes it has brought about, the Foundation's work in these four countries has not gone deeply enough to create sustainable impact across the objectives of its mission. BvLF has made substantial and important differences in the four countries - about which it should be quite proud – but the message is that its future grant making should aim for sustainability.

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BvLF. *Towards a Brighter Future*, p.9