

# ubongo



AKILI AND YOU: WHOLE CHILD DEVELOPMENT MEDIA FOR ALL

## PROJECT FINAL REPORT

July, 2020



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## Acknowledgement

To all of our supporters, partners and users who helped us create and grow *Akili and Me*, we as Ubongoers would collectively like to say THANK YOU!

We would like to acknowledge our board members Mbwana Ally, Leslie Jump, Stephen King, Nicole Klassen, Samuel Mugacha, Johnpaul Barretto, Shama Kheraj and Faraja Nyalandu for the continued commitment to what we do and being a shining light when guidance is sought. As always, no acknowledgement is complete without thanking all of our hardworking and dedicated Ubongoers, both new and old. Each and every one of whom repeatedly demonstrates their passion and devotion to what we do and always put their all and more in our work.

We'd also like to thank the Omidyar Network, Grand Challenges Canada, Mulago Foundation, and our other donors whose support has greatly contributed as co-funding to the Human Development Innovation Fund's grants on creation and scaling of *Akili and Me* .

We of course want to also thank the amazing Ubongo parents and caregivers, who have a direct impact in giving their kids a better life. We truly appreciate you inviting us and our fun learning, characters and music into your homes, lives and hearts and are truly honoured to be your partners.

In everything we do, we do it for the kids *and* we do it with them. So we owe a huge thank you to our kids, for giving us endless smiles, inspiration and purpose. Their thirst for knowledge and uninhibited joy always bring light to our lives and give us the drive to do all we do! We are proud to be part of your journey and cannot wait to see the future that you all grow to create!

And finally, we thank the Human Development Innovation Fund, funded by UKAid, without whom the development and growth of *Akili and Me* would not have been possible. It's been an honor and a privilege to work together these past 5 years to innovate something truly special from Tanzania, and grow it to a household name here and across Africa. We are incredibly proud of the work we've done together and the impact that this has had for children in Tanzania and beyond, and we commit to continue driving it forward even after our formal partnership has ended.

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## List of Acronyms

ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
HDIF	Human Development Innovation Fund
DFID	Department for International Development
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
KGMM	Kantar-Geopoll Media Monitoring
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
TBC	Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation
GCC	Grand Challenges Canada

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## Executive Summary

Through the 2-year project “Akili and You: Whole Child Education Media for All” Ubongo expanded the successful and popular pre-primary edutainment program *Akili and Me*, to bring 2.7 million children aged 0-6, their caregivers and diverse ECD stakeholders across Tanzania access to localized, adaptable and accessible multimedia resources for early childhood development, to support children’s cognitive development, social emotional skills, health and wellbeing.

This report details the results of the 2-year funding from the Human Development Innovation Fund Round 3. With the funding we received we have produced a new season of TV and radio episodes of *Akili and Me* that more effectively teach early literacy, socio-emotional skills, numeracy and motor skills, and added new health and wellbeing segments, along with complementary learning resources for mobile phones. This is accompanied and supported by caregiver engagement content to get parents more deeply engaged and involved with their children’s early learning and development. We have also launched a toolkits platform providing self-service access to our content for ECD stakeholders, partners and caregivers to access and be able to use in their own projects and programs.

The project was successful in reaching and engaging families at scale, and research by IPSOS (2019) shows that almost half of the children in Tanzania, including those in rural areas, have been exposed at some point to Akili programs. In addition to that, a rigorous, naturalistic study by the University of Maryland shows that when young children watch and pay attention to *Akili and Me* they improve significantly in numeracy, literacy, language, social emotional learning and health behaviors.

Beyond achieving positive improvements in early childhood development for over a million children in Tanzania, the project successfully engaged a diversity of stakeholders around the importance of early learning. The project culminated in the *Building Brains* conference, which brought together over 600 Tanzanian teachers, parents, public and private sector stakeholders, and over 100 children themselves, for interactive learning, discussion and partnership building to catalyze a movement for early childhood development across Tanzania. Partners have now committed to bringing *Akili and You* resources to over 7 million more children in Tanzania.

The final months of the project were spent doing rapid response work during the COVID-19 pandemic: increasing showtimes on TV and radio to ensure that children could keep learning while at home; producing rapid-turnaround health and wellbeing PSA’s to support families during COVID-19; providing tips, learning guides and schedules for caregivers via social media, and SMS; launching a Whatsapp Chatbot for families to access anytime, anywhere early learning content; and sharing best practices to support diverse stakeholders including the World Bank and Unicef to use mass media to promote ECD during the COVID crisis.

We aim to reach over 60 million families with this life changing edutainment over the next five years, helping young children across Africa develop a stronger foundation for learning and life!

## 1. Project Background

What happens during the first few years of life lays the foundation and sets the trajectory for a person's future. 90% of brain development happens from birth through age 5 ([Lenroot and Giedd, 2006](#)). Unfortunately due to the circumstances of their early years, much of that potential may be lost. 44% of 4 year olds in Sub-Saharan Africa have low cognitive or social emotional development ([McCoy et al, 2016](#)). Though Tanzania has had a system of pre-primary education since the early 2000's the quality of teacher training and learning has been low and methods used have more often mirrored lecture based primary education ([Mtahabwa and Rao, 2010](#)), rather than research based best practices of child-centered and play based pre-primary learning. In 2016, Tanzania made one year of pre-primary education free and mandatory, greatly increasing gross enrolment from 47% of 5-year-olds in 2015 ([Unicef 2017](#)) to 96% in 2017 ([Tamisemi 2017](#)) however World Bank data suggests that enrolment rates have again dropped significantly ([World Bank 2020](#)). On top of that, the quality of learning in pre-primary schools is low, and the student to teacher ratio is extremely high, with on average 169 children per teacher in government pre-primary schools ([Unicef 2017](#)).

The goal of this project was to improve the early cognitive and social emotional development of young children in Tanzania by (1) engaging them in fun learning through localized edutainment, (2) supporting their caregivers with locally relevant best practices and support for early childhood development and (3) by providing top quality localized ECD resource kits to a diversity of stakeholders in Tanzania who work with the most marginalized and vulnerable children and families.

Our localized early childhood education radio and TV program *Akili and Me* was developed through the HDIF pilot project "Interactive Edu-Cartoons for School Readiness" and has proven to effectively teach children early numeracy, literacy, language and motor skills. We developed 39 episodes of *Akili and Me* and 3 series of short caregiver public service announcements, with caregiver encouragement tips to promote children's cognitive development and to promote positive discipline alternatives to corporal punishment. Since the pilot showed strong outcomes, we have now added a new segment on well-being and health.

As of July 1, 2020 we have successfully completed activities for the "Akili and You" project that was funded for 26 months through the Human Development Innovation Fund (HDIF). This report documents achievements, challenges and lessons learned and next steps for our innovation to continue developing edutainment for millions of children in Tanzania and across Africa.



## 2. Project Performance

Through this project we had 3 major goals:

1. **To give 1.2 million children aged 0-6 in Tanzania, their caregivers and ECD stakeholders unprecedented access to localized, adaptable multimedia resources for holistic early childhood development. We extended our curriculum to not only include early literacy, pre-numeracy, socioemotional learning but also health, well-being and nutrition.**
2. **To change the behaviors of parents, caregiver and other stakeholders to engage in more positive ECD practices with children at home**
3. **To build a network of diverse partners and other stakeholders who utilize our free edutainment resources in their own programs to improve the lives of young children and their families, especially for marginalised and vulnerable groups.**

The project performance has been strong across all three of these areas. *Akili and Me edutainment content* has reached an estimated 2.2 million families on TV and about 1.8 million families on radio (Geopoll, 2020), and this content has been shown to be effective, with children who watch and pay attention to the program by 12.9% in cognitive skills, 7.4% in social emotional skills and 19% in health behaviors such as handwashing and identifying healthy foods (Borzekowski, 2020). Parents and caregivers of children watching series are now 7.8 times more likely to engage in positive caregiving practices than non-viewers (IPSOS Omnibus Survey, 2019). Over 200 partners/ organizations have joined our network and downloaded content from the Ubongo toolkits platform, committing to reach more than 7 million children with our resources. These partners include Karibu Tanzania Organization, Uwezo, UNESCO and many grassroots organizations and individuals who will be using these resources to improve early learning for children who may not otherwise have access to our broadcast content.

In addition to achieving these direct outcomes for children, caregivers and ECD stakeholders, the Akili and You project has helped to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development among Tanzanians. The [Building Brains](#) conference brought together hundreds of diverse stakeholders to kickstart a movement for early learning in Tanzania, and our Kiswahili “Brain Talks” from the conference have reached hundreds of thousands more people through broadcast on national television.

The project has also successfully supported over a million families during the COVID-19 pandemic. 95% percent of caregivers using Ubongo programs surveyed said that they are very important for their children’s education and 86% said that they became even more important during COVID-19, with 92% saying that Ubongo’s COVID-19 specific content helped them learn how to keep their family safe and healthy during the pandemic.

Lastly the project has succeeded in growing the Akili innovation to a level of maturity and with a high enough profile, that it is now sustainable and scalable without the need for additional funding from HDIF. We’ve developed partnerships to adapt and distribute *Akili and Me* in Malawi and South Africa, and through HDIF’s match funder Grand Challenges Canada (GCC) we have also succeeded in scaling *Akili and Me* to

broadcast in 14 total countries, and adapted the program to Hausa and Kinyarwanda, reaching an audience of over 12 million children monthly.

## 2.1. Project Outcomes

**OUTCOME 1: Public in Tanzania develops increased awareness of and demand for positive early childhood development practices and services, and over 990,000 families in Tanzania use multimedia resources to improve their early caregiving.**

In order to accurately assess this outcome we looked at 4 different indicators throughout the grant period.

**Indicator 1.1:** % increase in positive caregiving practices

**Target: 25%**

**Achieved: 47%**

The definition and measurement of this indicator was the percentage of caregivers of viewers engaging in improved parenting behaviors.

**Indicator 1.2:** Number of households viewing caregiver resources on TV/ Radio.

**Target: 169,969**

**Achieved: 295,440**

The definition and measurement of this indicator was the percent of households with caregiver viewing against the total households reached. The number households reached is collected through viewership on TV and listenership on radio through Kantar-Geopoll Media Monitoring (KGMM) service. More information about the service can be found on the [Geopoll website](#).

**Indicator 1.3:** Number of users ECD content on digital platforms.

**Target: 859,692 users**

**Achieved: 1,283,354 users**

Through this grant period, one of our main goals was to increase our digital presence as our audiences started consuming content on different platforms. The definition and measurement of this indicator took into account the number of unique YouTube viewers + unique *Akili and Me* Facebook fans + unique IVR callers (for Tanzania/ Kiswahili) + *Akili and Me* Instagram fans

YouTube Viewers	<i>Akili and Me</i> Facebook fan	IVR Callers	<i>Akili and Me</i> Instagram
1,018,425	61,713	198,400	4,807

**Table 1:** Number of users ECD content on digital platforms.

The final project target for this indicator is 859,692 users and the cumulative achievement was 1,182,285 users which is a 38% increase over expected target, this is due to the fact that we have increasingly used different digital platforms to reach as many of our viewers over the last few years.

**Indicator 1.4:** General public knowledge of when children start learning

**Target: 15%**

**Achieved: 13%**

The definition and measurement of this indicator was % of the public who say that children start learning from birth. From the IPSOS Omnibus survey conducted in 2019, 13% of caregivers and parents believed learning begins for a child when they are less than 1 year old.

**OUTCOME 2: Over 1.2 million children in Tanzania watches, listen and learn from localized educational media that helps them develop positive behaviors for their health and happiness, as well as school readiness.**

In order to accurately assess this outcome we looked at 4 different indicators throughout the grant period.

**Indicator 2.1:** Number of children viewing *Akili and Me* ECD content on TV and radio in Tanzania.

**Target:** 702,727 children

**Achieved:** 1,489,819 children

The definition and measurement of this indicator was Households reached multiplied by percentage of viewing households with under-6 viewers. Research by 60 Decibels found that 62% of households watching on TV live in poverty (60 Decibels, 2020), and we estimate that this is true for an even larger percent of the households listening on radio.

**Indicators 2.2: Effect of content exposure on handwashing behavior**

**Target:** 3%

**Achieved:** 8.45%

This indicator was initially meant to look at the reduction in bacteria on children's hands (as a result of good handwashing and hygiene practices). However, we weren't able to access the kits and therefore measured the difference in health behaviors pre and post watching the health segment. *Akili and Me* receptivity predicted a 8.45% gain in health behaviors and a 8.39% gain in food knowledge. Receptivity is a reliable and valid way to capture not only what a child has been exposed to also what is salient enough for the child to remember (Borzekowski, 2020).

**Indicator 2.3:** Effect of content exposure on social emotional skills.

**Target:** 10%

**Achieved:** 7.44%

To come up with this measure, researchers presented children with six different scenarios, using an illustration and simple one or two-sentence descriptions. Examples included; a young child falling down and getting hurt, two children sharing a food treat, or a child wanting a friend to play with. The researcher then named 4 emotions and had to pick how the character was feeling. The child was then asked to pick what the best strategy might be to solve the problem in the scenario. *Akili and Me* receptivity predicted a 16.7% gain in naming emotions and a 19.1% gain in identifying strategies with an Overall Socio-Emotional gain of 7.44%.

**Indicator 2.4:** Composite effect of content on early learning.

**Target:** 15%

**Achieved:** 13%

The definition and measurement of this indicator is % increase in social emotional test scores. The study conducted by University of Maryland showed that children who watched and remembered characters from *Akili and Me* performed better on practically every assessed developmental outcome. Literacy and numeracy scores, for items in both Swahili and English were significantly greater for children with greater receptivity. Full *Akili and Me* receptivity (ability to name all characters from the series) predicted improvements on every overall score, with a 12.9% gain in overall Swahili literacy and numeracy, a 4.7% increase in overall English literacy and numeracy and 7.4% increase in overall socio-emotional score and 19% increase in overall health score. The greatest gains among the subscores were for Kiswahili: Shapes (with a 26.6% gain), English: Counting (26.2% gain), Kiswahili: Size (25.0% gain), and Kiswahili: Counting (24.3% gain).

**OUTCOME 3: Organizations working with young children and/or parents increase investment in and effectiveness of ECD programs by using "Akili and You" Toolkits with top quality digital learning resources for children, caregivers, teachers and other key ECD influencers including doctors and community health workers.**

In order to accurately assess this outcome we looked at 2 different indicators throughout the grant period.

**Indicator 3.1:** Number of beneficiaries (children and/or parents) reached by "Akili and You" partners.

**Target: 500,000**

**Achieved: 7,908,186\*\***

*\*\*This number is a commitment number from partners, however we have been unable to verify whether all commitment to reach children by partners have been met.*

An important component of the toolkits platform was to look at how we could bring localized edutainment to the hardest to reach and most vulnerable children. We tested various models to develop a cost-effective direct-to-community approach, however, we realised that shifting the focus to delivering Ubongo's educational content to stakeholders in the community is the scalable way to reaching more children. The final target for this indicator was 500,000 children, and according to those partners who have accessed the content on our platform we have reached an estimated 7,908,186. However, we aren't sure how many children we've actually reached as many partners have not been able to collect accurate data from the field due to COVID-19.

**Indicator 3.2: Amount (USD) invested by partners in custom ECD content co-production.**

Target: USD \$100,000

Achieved: USD \$70,800

The definition and measurement of this indicator was the Co-Production Revenue for ECD Content. Co-production revenue is generated before and during production of content, from partners who wish to reach our audience with specific social and behavior change messaging or learning outcomes. We weren't able to meet our target as there aren't a lot of partners who want to co-produce ECD content. However, we did receive significant funding for Ubongo Kids, that targets children aged 7-14 years. We have also recently partnered with Kidogo to turn key messages around COVID-19 into PSA's for caregivers.

## 2.2. Project Outputs

With the support of HDIF funding, we set out to increase our reach with such a program, with three main outputs for the project:

**OUTPUT 1:** Production and nationwide mass media and digital distribution of multimedia content to 1.2 million + households to increase demand for improved ECD, model ECD best practices (Tunakujenga) and guide caregivers through positive care and learning.

### **Activity 1.1: Human Centered Design, prototyping and planning of whole child development content for caregivers**

These included; Human Centered Design (HCD), prototyping and planning of whole child development content for caregivers. Through repetitive HCD and prototyping, we developed a new series of health and wellbeing focused caregiver content and also worked in partnership with the IRC to develop 10 SEL games focusing on refugee caregivers and children, where we reached about 1 million households on average during our TV broadcast and social media pilot. We found through interventions that caregivers were triggered to do the activities in the program by their children. Children are and remain at the center of caregiver intrinsic motivation and children need to enjoy the activities and the interaction with their parents to ask again. Pre and post data from baseline and end line indicates that the frequency of playing games together increased from 62% in the baseline to 81% in the end line. We also conducted research in Nairobi, Kenya to understand what topics parents needed to know more about, which informed an additional 4 videos.

#### **Indicator 1.1.1: Number of minutes of caregiver content produced**

**Target:** 146 minutes of content produced

**Achieved:** 266 minutes of content achieved

We significantly grew our library of Tunakujenga content for caregivers. We also expanded the platforms through which we deliver parenting content to include online and interactive voice response (IVR) in partnership with Viamo.

#### **Indicator 1.1.2: Broadcast instances**

**Target:** 480 unique instances

**Achieved:** 604 unique instances

The definition and measurement used for this indicator was the number of unique times that caregiver content broadcast on TV or radio. Caregiver engagement content now airs each time *Akili and Me* airs on TV, therefore increasing the number of times it is broadcasted on TV in Tanzania. With GCC counterpart funding, these have now been translated and broadcast in a number of other countries.

### **Activity 1.2: Rebroadcast of pilot caregiver content, with feedback gathering**

We took steps to more actively engage caregivers in conversation around these topics via social media including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, and use that feedback to inform further production (under activity 1.1)

#### **Indicator 1.1.3: # ECD posts on social media**

**Target:** 240 social media posts

**Achieved:** 519 social media posts

**Indicator 1.1.4: Media coverage of ECD issues****Target:** 8 media coverings**Achieved:** 48 media coverings

The Building Brains Conference that was hosted in the last quarter generated 44 media coverings around early childhood development.

**Activity 1.3: Online and mobile distribution of caregiver content**

We partnered with Viamo to include caregiver content on their 3-2-1 IVR platform, where caregivers can dial in to get the content they want. As part of our COVID-19 rapid response, we have also been sending out parenting tips, helpful facts and/or games and activities (related to the content being broadcasted on TV) to our database of about 8000 caregivers via SMS and social media.

**Activity 1.4: Data Analysis**

We contracted Talanta Kumi to analyze historical and new data on caregiver engagement to better understand our audience and to determine whether parent and caregiver exposure to *Akili and Me* correlated with increases in positive caregiving practices. They found that parents and caregivers in households who watch *Akili and Me* were over 9x more likely to engage in positive caregiving practices.

**OUTPUT 2:** Production and nationwide mass media and digital distribution of multimedia content to 1.2 million + households to provide children with effective and localized early learning resources for health, wellbeing and school readiness (*Akili and Me*).

We set out to increase the effectiveness and reach of our program *Akili and Me*. Season 3 of the show included our new health segment with topics such as nutrition, hygiene, how the body works and exercise and more. In addition to learning important new vocabulary such as action words, feelings and objects. New social emotional skills such as conflict resolution, life skills and self-control strategies. We tested the different segments to ensure children were still engaged and if we could teach other segments more effectively.

**Indicator 2.2.1: Number of minutes of content produced & broadcast****Target:** 2366 minutes of content produced**Achieved:** 1831 minutes of content produced

The total number of minutes of content produced and broadcasted is lower than the expected target. This was owing to the complications brought on from the COVID-19 pandemic meaning we were unable to complete season 3 as planned. The pandemic subsequently mandated closure of the office from March 2020 and the reduced travel meant that voice recordings could not be completed at our studio and therefore audio and visual components of the show could not be consolidated for the final product. We did, however, produce and launch a new family learning radio series for young children, older siblings and caregivers to learn together through play while schools were closed, however since this is a separate series and HDIF funding was not used for it, we have not included it in the indicator.

### **Activity 2.1: Full production of *Akili and Me* ECD content covering early education, SEL + health & wellbeing**

Based on design research and curriculum created in the previous round of funding, we moved straight into full production of new *Akili and Me* ECD content for TV, radio and mobile under this project, producing new and improved early literacy, numeracy and social emotional content, and adding a segment for health and wellbeing.

#### **Indicator 2.2.2: Number of unique national monthly broadcast instances**

**Target:** 192 national monthly broadcast instances

**Achieved:** 322 national monthly broadcast instances

### **Activity 2.2: Business development for co-production and broadcast partnerships to ensure sustainability of product and broadcast.**

Our business team continues to nurture relationships with various partners and stakeholders who could potentially co-produce ecd content with us for specific messaging that they may have, which also aligns with our messaging. Co-production partnerships were achieved with Enuma and PlayMatters for ECD content, however, we have found that a lot of co-production partners are looking to fund content related to caregivers and/or messages directed towards children aged 7-14 years.

### **Activity 2.4: Mobile and online distribution of content for young children (Akili portal app, Enuma + Akili digital learning games, YouTube):**

We co-produced several new apps with Enuma (KitKit School) and Curious Learning publishing [5 new apps](#) and [4 new e-books](#) in English and Kiswahili. We also greatly increased our YouTube audience by committing to a schedule up 6 uploads per week on our [Akili English](#) and [Kiswahili](#) channels

#### **Indicator 2.2.3: Uploads of ECD digital videos**

**Target:** 125 videos

**Achieved:** 424 videos

The definition and measurement used for this indicator was the average number of videos uploaded per month. We uploaded different segments and compilations from seasons 1-3 of *Akili and Me*, with an average of 3 uploads per week. One of our highest viewed videos has been our letter O video with 9.4M views (YouTube Analytics, 2020).



**Figure 1:** Screenshot of ECD digital video

#### **Indicator 2.2.4: # of key ECD indicators taught through *Akili and Me* content**

**Target:** 106 objectives

**Achieved:** 100 objectives

The definition and measurement used for this indicator was the number of national curriculum learning objectives taught through content. This started off with curriculum development to determine an exhaustive list of topics we wanted to cover in the following season. This was conducted as a roundtable session with teachers and other education stakeholders who weighed in on what our viewers wanted us to teach and what was needed as per the educational curriculum.

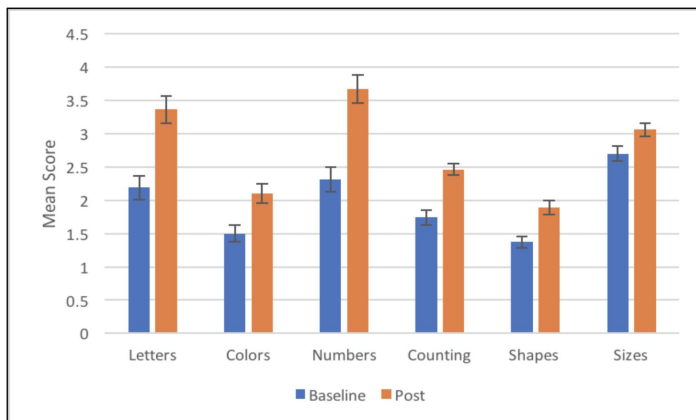
### Activity 2.5: Experimental Study to test developmental outcomes in health, wellbeing and school readiness of children exposed to programming.

The study conducted by the University of Maryland examined if and how much children learn from *Akili and Me's* new content developed under this grant. This study and intervention were done in the Arusha region of Tanzania. From ten schools, researchers recruited 411 pre-primary children of age five and six years and collected a baseline survey. Children were invited (not required) to come daily to screenings for 12 weeks, where they watched different *Akili and Me* segments on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and other children's programming on Wednesday. The baseline and post-intervention surveys assessed children's Kiswahili literacy and numeracy, English literacy and numeracy, socio-emotional emotions and strategies, health behaviors, food information, and knowledge of *Akili and Me* characters.

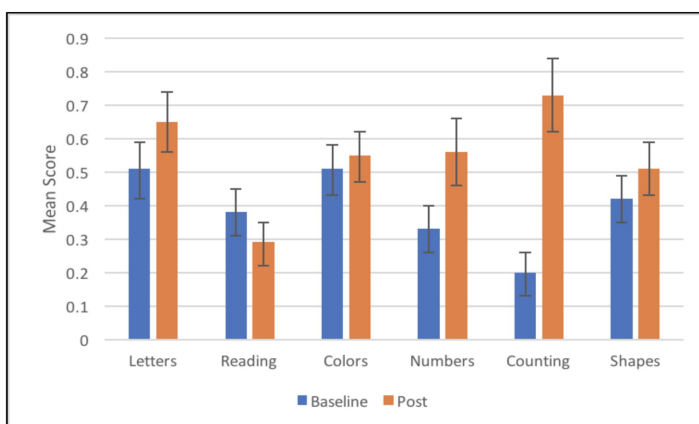
At baseline, less than 6% of the participating children could identify any of *Akili and Me* characters; at the end of the intervention 54.7% could name all four characters. This study showed overwhelmingly that *Akili and Me* receptivity predicted improvements on every overall score:

- 12.9% gain in overall Kiswahili literacy and numeracy
- 4.7% increase in overall English literacy and numeracy
- 7.4% in the overall socio-emotional score
- 19% increase in overall health score

Digging deeper, it was found that the greatest gains among the subscores were for Kiswahili: Shapes (with a 26.6% gain), English: Counting (26.2% gain), Kiswahili: Size (25.0% gain), and Kiswahili: Counting (24.3% gain). This study shows overwhelmingly that children who watched and remembered characters from *Akili and Me* performed better on practically every assessed developmental outcome. During the intervention, attendance at the daily viewing sessions increased. Below is a visual summary of the findings from the study. More information can be gleaned from the report itself.

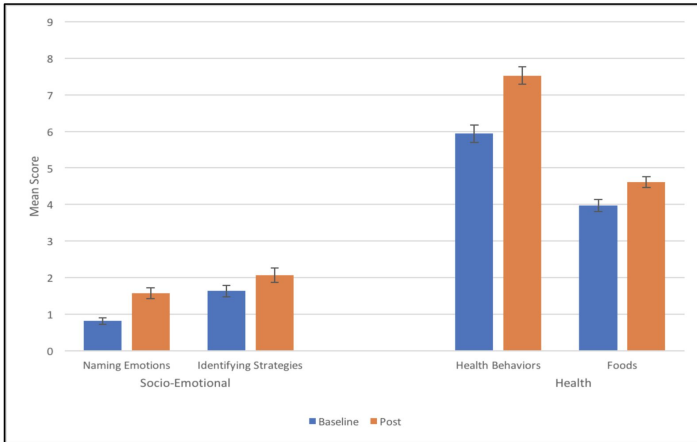


**Figure 2:** Baseline and post-intervention scores for Kiswahili literacy and numeracy

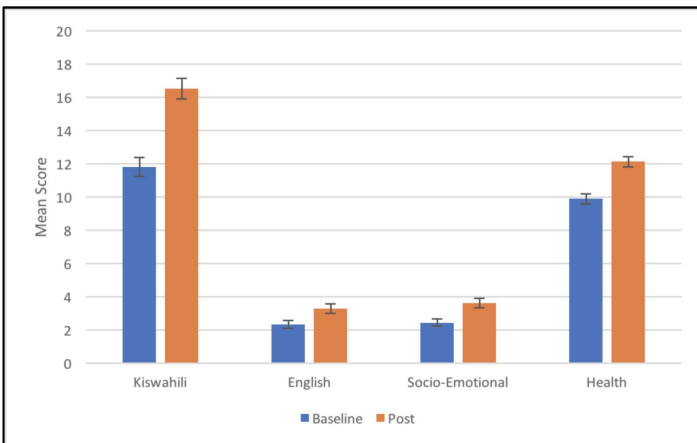


**Figure 3:** Baseline and post-intervention scores for English literacy and numeracy

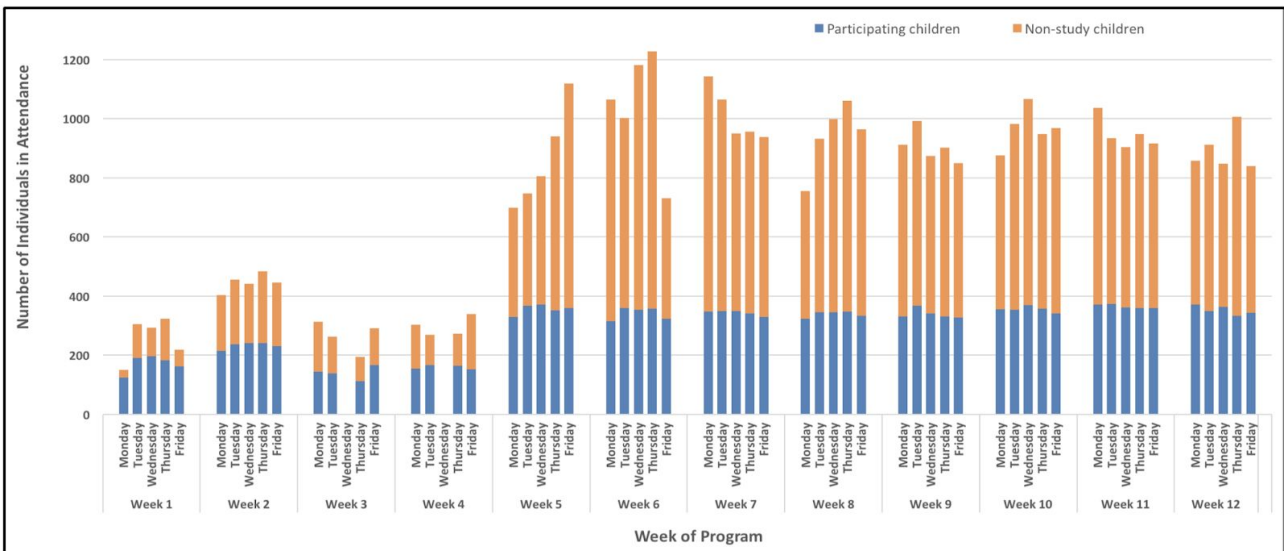




**Figure 4:** Baseline and post-intervention scores for socio-emotional and health scores



**Figure 5:** Baseline and post-intervention scores for overall scores



**Figure 6:** Attendance over the intervention, raw numbers of participating and additional children.

**ACTIVITY 2.6: Report illustrating Akili and Me growth and impact across Tanzania since launch in 2016**

We contracted Talanta Kumi to support us with analysis of data from 2016-2020 and drafting of this report (attached). We’ve also created a working copy of an Akili Impact Global Report (attached in annexes) which will be publicly released in October when “Akili Turns 5”. We have completed the Tanzania sections of the report, but are awaiting data from Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa for the Global Report.

### **ACTIVITY 2.7: Case study on scaling an innovation using the data pulled from the sources above as well as Ubongo's experience**

This was written by the Ubongo team using data and analysis from UMD and Talanta Kumi, as well as a staff survey done by Talanta Kumi. It has been integrated into the Akili Impact Report (attached).

### **ACTIVITY 2.8: Data Dashboards that visualise metrics and achievement which were obtained directly from the project**

We developed interactive online data dashboards using Cyfe software, both for the direct project outcomes, as well as Ubongo's ongoing monitoring and metrics. These have been attached in the appendices.

### **ACTIVITY 2.9: M&E Consultant**

Ubongo worked with Talanta Kumi, a Tanzanian data analysis and M&E firm, as well as Salma Omary, an independent consultant, to conclude M&E for the grant.

### **ACTIVITY 2.10: Build Chatbot**

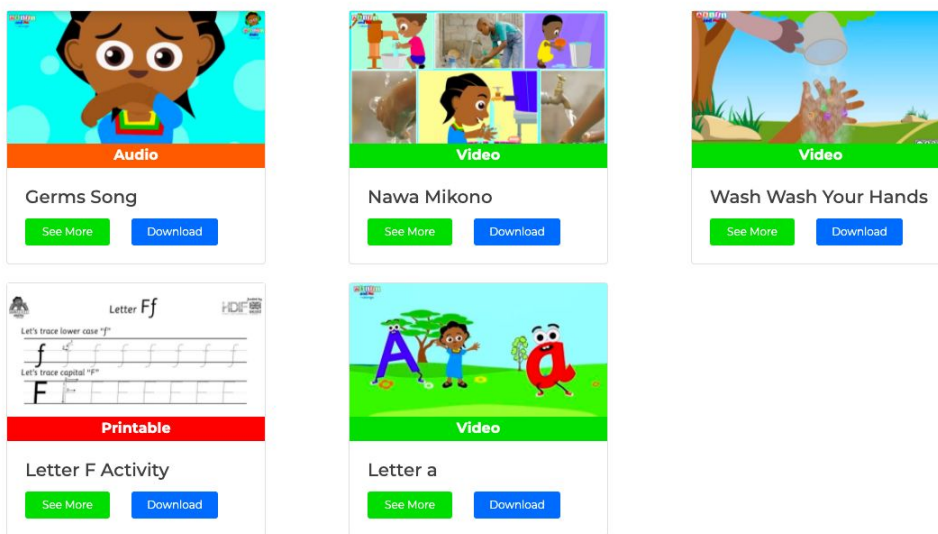
We worked with Infobip to develop an Ubongo chatbot as part of our COVID emergency response work. This chatbot allows users to get free access to Ubongo resources from their phones, as well as daily activities, a weekly study timetable for learning from home (with links to learning videos) and TV broadcast schedule information. To use the chatbot add the number +1 234 9001234 to Whatsapp and send it a message.

**OUTPUT 3:** "Akili and You Network" organizations and local initiatives utilize multimedia "Akili and You Toolkits" with appropriate materials for programs in early education, healthcare, ICT4D, caregiver groups, teacher training and grassroots projects.

As we saw an increase in the demand for positive early childhood development content, we have worked to build an easy to access platform for partners, stakeholders and broadcasters.

The screenshot displays the Ubongo Toolkits website interface. At the top, a blue banner asks "Are you a Broadcaster? [Sign up here](#) to access our Broadcast Dashboard." Below this is the Ubongo Toolkits logo and navigation links: Home, Log In, Sign Up, and Upload Content. A search bar with a "Search" button is visible. A green banner below the navigation asks "Sign up or Log in to download resources". The main content area features a background image of children in a classroom and the text "Download Ubongo's educational resources for free" and "Use the filter boxes below to navigate". There are four filter boxes: "Subject" (All Subject), "Content Type" (All Content Types), "Age Range" (All Age Ranges), and "Language" (All Languages). A "Search" button is located to the right of the filter boxes.

## Explore the Resources



**Figure 7 & 8 :** Snapshot of Toolkits online platform

**Activity 3.1:** Creation and adaptation of supplementary digital games and apps for Akili and You kits

We partnered with Curious Learning to develop interactive leveled eBooks to help teach kids how to read with a total of 24 new interactive eBooks planned, of which 3 have been released on the PlayStore so far.

**Read with Akili - So Many Different Places!:**

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=co.akiliandme.curiousreader.differentplaces&hl=en>

**Read with Akili - Akili and the River:**

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=co.akiliandme.curiousreader.akiliriver&hl=en>

**Read with Akili - What Do You Like To Do?:**

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=co.akiliandme.curiousreader.liketodo&hl=en>

We also partnered with our app development partners Enuma to release 4 *Akili and Me* branded apps together and 4 generic apps in English and Swahili. These were games from within their KitKit School program which were separated out and re-designed as standalone apps for low-spec smartphones.

**Pangilia Herufi na Akili:**

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.enuma.ubongo.SpellingSW&hl=en>

**Treni ya Namba:**

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.enuma.ubongo.SpellingSW&hl=en>

**Akili's Number Train:**

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.enuma.ubongo.numbertrainEN&hl=en>

**Spelling with Akili:**

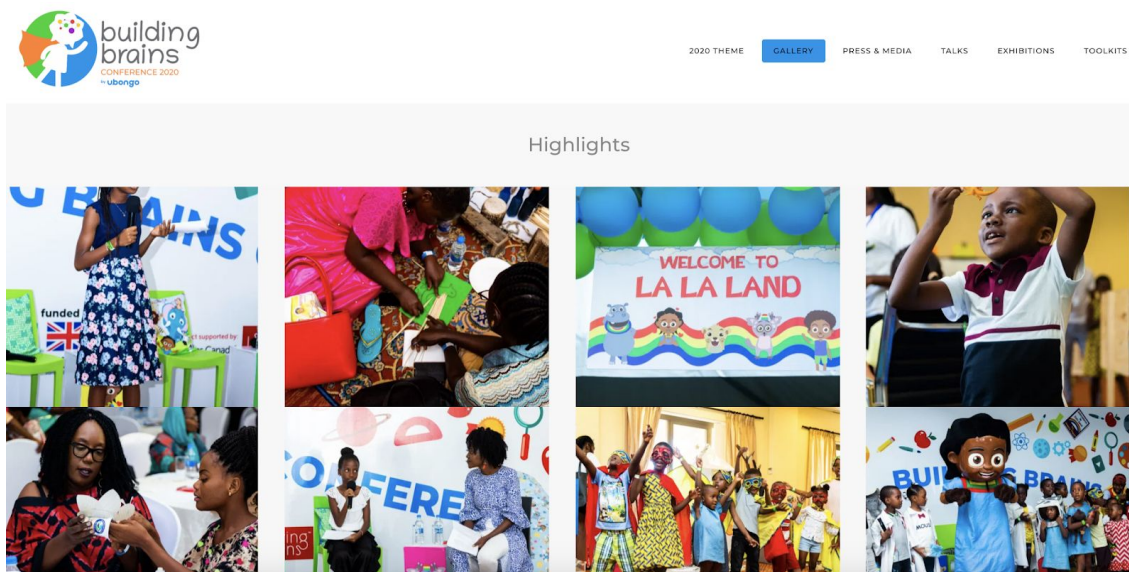
<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.enuma.ubongo.SpellingEN&hl=en>

**Find the Pair:**

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.enum.ubongo.FindThePair&hl=en>

**Activity 3.2: ECD Unconference**

In March we hosted our first dissemination event: [Building Brains Conference](#) which brought together diverse stakeholders (teachers, caregivers, innovators, development organizations and kids) in ECD to start a movement for early learning in Tanzania and across Africa. The conference was attended by over 600 participants. Some of the activities included; inspirational talks and panel discussions, workshops to support caregivers and parents and a kids corner to occupy those who were attending with their caregivers.



**Figure 9:** Photos from the Building Brain Conference 2020

**Activity 3.3: Partner research and co-creation of guides, tutorials and ECD best practice videos for "Akili and You" Toolkits.**

As part of developing the Akili and You toolkits we developed several prototypes to understand the needs and gaps of partners and teachers. We shared content with them through different forums such as Google Drive, USB's and have also started a WhatsApp group as a means of sharing toolkits content with partners, teachers and parents. We developed several activities that align with resources that caregivers and children can do together as well as a guide on "side loading" APKs for partners to use.

**Activity 3.4: Web portal development for "Akili and You" Network.**

With the support of the Human Development Innovation Fund (HDIF), we've spent the last 2 years testing and developing the [Ubongo Toolkits](#). Our toolkits are free, localised educational resources for kids aged 0 - 14. The resources cover a range of media including video, audio and printables. They are made available to caregivers, practitioners in ECD keeping the end-user needs in mind (e.g. file size of videos range from 2MBs - 20MBs only, files are named both English and Kiswahili etc) for ease of share and usability. More so we have also developed guides on how the materials can be used in different settings (classrooms, teacher training). We distribute our toolkits through a web platform, Flash drives/USB, Google drive and WhatsApp which will be further developed as use-cases on how partners can reach children with fun localised educational content!

**Indicator 3.1.1: Number of registrations****Target:** 45 registrants**Achieved:** 194 registrants

As the development of the platform went through different prototypes, we also tested out the demand of our content by creating a WhatsApp group to share *Akili and Me* videos and printables that teachers, caregivers and partners could then share externally. The definition and measurement used for this indicator included the number of members on the WhatsApp group, any partners that used our content and the number of registrants on Akili and You online portal (the toolkits platform).

**Indicator 3.1.2: Number of extras created****Target:** 68 extras**Achieved:** 153 extras

This indicator looked at the number of pieces of Akili and You extra content that was produced; eBooks, printables and any new apps. The initial prototype of the toolkits platform included a number of new printables that we developed for partners, where we developed several interactive worksheets that touched on the different topics from the show. However, even though the demand for the worksheets was there, financially partners didn't have the budget for actually getting these printed to share with kids. We also developed several new apps in partnership with Enuma and Curious Learning.

**OUTPUT 4: COVID-19 RESPONSE**

Ubongo implemented a 3 phase COVID-19 response plan and quickly mobilized to support children's learning and families' wellbeing. Within one week of school closures, we first made our full library of content available for TV and radio stations across the continent. To facilitate ease of sharing, we added a section to our [Toolkits Platform](#) for broadcasters to register, agree to terms of use, and download full quality content. As our second phase response, we mapped all available content to the Tanzanian curriculum and shared [curriculum maps](#) with partners including the MOEST, TIE and other education actors, as well as publishing them on the Toolkits Platform.

**INDICATOR 4.1: # of new resources uploaded for COVID Response****Target:** 398**Achieved:** 441

We uploaded many new pieces of content including health messages for COVID response and family wellbeing, and interactive home-learning timetable to support caregivers to keep their kids learning from home.

**INDICATOR 4.2: # of new resources downloaded****Target:** 4,570**Achieved:** 1,289

During COVID response 1,289 resources were downloaded from the platform. Many partners requested offline content so they wouldn't have to download, so we also distributed over 300 USB sticks to community resource centers nationwide in partnership with UWEZO and other education partners, with hundreds of resources loaded onto each USB.

**INDICATOR 4.3: # of caregivers reached with support SMS** *(note - we have amended this to include SMS only, since social media is covered Indicator 1.3)*

**TARGET:** 8,454**ACHIEVED:** 8,454

We developed 6 weeks worth of caregiver support messages and delivered these via SMS to 8,454 caregivers who signed up for SMS support.

**INDICATOR 4.4: # of active users of chatbots**

**TARGET: not set**

**ACHIEVED: 106**

Due to the time needed for technical development of the chatbot, we were only able to beta test it with 106 users within the grant period. However, as of late July it has been publicly released and we hope to greatly increase usage over the coming weeks.

### 3. Cross-cutting Themes

#### Gender and Inclusion:

Gender has been a core theme of *Akili and Me* from season 1. Gender representation in children's media has been shown to have strong psychological impacts, even on the youngest of kids. Regularly watching TV programs in which their gender or race is underrepresented or negatively stereotyped can lead to decreases in children's own self-esteem ([Martins and Harrison 2011](#)). Globally female characters are underrepresented in speaking roles and screen time, and children's media is no exception, with much less screen time and speaking roles dedicated to female characters.

With *Akili and Me*, we took a deliberate approach to rectifying this, with a female main character who breaks gender stereotypes and focuses on learning, exploring her curiosity and being a good friend. In season 2 we introduced Huruma, a boy character who learns about emotions as he faces many of the same challenges as young Tanzanian children: dealing with big emotions, starting school, being separated from a parent, having to share or take turns with a new toy. He discusses his feelings in ways that are relatable to children in Tanzania, and shows that young boys can also be in touch with their feelings. Our majority female writing and design team consciously mainstream gender into all of our stories and scripts, and we regularly seek user feedback on the gender representation within our shows.

We have also been more conscious of caregiver gender representation in our *Tunakujenga* segment, where we modelled gender equal parenting throughout the different segments. We ensured that the male characters including both father and grandfathers are playing the role of the primary caregiver whilst the mama took a back seat. And in Season 3 of *Akili*, we regularly see *Akili's* father playing games and doing household chores together with *Akili*. We continue to ensure that female characters get a minimum 50% of speaking and screen time in video and radio content on all our programs. As well as test all of our kids' programming with girls, and parenting content with comen and other female caregivers.

#### ICT:

*Akili* is an innovative product system that leverages ICT as a tool to reach and impact families at low cost and massive scale. In Round 3 of HDIF funding we have leaned in to ICT to increase the reach and accessibility of our programs. As always, we've used TV and radio (older, more accessible technologies) to distribute early learning content to families, but we've also supplemented these with other complementary ICT services including SMS messages for parents and caregivers, audio content available via interactive voice response, eBooks for reading on mobile phones, [10 free educational Android apps](#) and anytime, anywhere online learning content on YouTube. We continue to take a platform agnostic approach, wherein we design the best possible

learning stories and media, and distribute them across any and all technologies that families can access.

Thanks to HDIF funding, we have also been able to use technology to rapidly scale our partnerships to help other organizations utilize our early learning resources in their own projects. We launched the [Ubongo Toolkits](#) platform, a self-service site where anyone who would like to use our resources can register, search and browse, and download over 1000 free educational resources in numerous African languages and formats. For COVID-19 response we also used this [same technology](#) to give broadcaster partners quick and easy access to sign terms of use, download and begin broadcasting content immediately.

Our broad use of ICT as an organization, using cloud based collaboration tools and digital software for product development, allowed us to quickly move to remote working for COVID response, and not only continue delivering all our products and services throughout the country, but actually to also increase our programming. We developed a new radio series to support families to learn at home together, doing remote recording with our team in their homes and integrating *Akili and Me* learning segments and songs into a program designed to facilitate learning together between caregivers, older siblings and young children. We have been able to use Whatsapp to deliver this and Akili radio content to remote community radio stations, who have been broadcasting the programs for hard to reach families.

#### 4. Project Sustainability

As we had detailed in the sustainability plan submitted in 2019. We have been working on a key objectives in order to reach Ubongo's strategy for growth:

##### **Expand geographies:**

Over the course of the last 2 years, *Akili and Me* has gone from being Tanzanian based children's programming to becoming Pan-African. *Akili and Me* currently broadcasts on free to air TV in 16 countries across Africa including Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Nigeria, Zambia, Eswatini, Malawi, Botswana, Ghana, Senegal, Benin, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe and on radio on 22 stations (both national and community radio stations) in South Africa, Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania. We continue to invest our resources into new markets and plan to reach 60 million kids by 2025.

##### **Adaptation and Localization:**

Adaptation and localization of our content has been one of the biggest ways to ensure we are sustainable. We have successfully launched *Akili and Me* in Hausa this year on Free to Air. Adaptations in Kinyarwanda, French, Yoruba, Kikuyu, Chichewa and Luo continue and hope to be airing by the end of this year. We continue to refine our adaptation model as we enter new markets.

##### **Financial Sustainability**

Following the COVID-19 crisis which led to school closures around the world, we decided to make all our content available for free so more kids can have access to it. As a result, we have limited opportunities to monetize our content. We have put all our content under a creative commons license which only requires partners which distribute our content commercially to pay for it. This has led us to generate less revenue from licensing as most partners we work with distribute our content for free.

We currently focus our efforts into fundraising, soliciting partnerships with funders who give grants, and high networth individuals who give large donations to help subsidize

the cost content creation. Nearly 79% of our revenue comes in the form of grants, while only 5% is earned revenue. Over the last couple of months, we have organized a fundraising team which focuses on business development with potential funders and partners, and solicits grant opportunities mainly in the US and the UK. The fundraising function has moved from sitting solely with the CEO and Grants Manager to being under the business team because we see it as the main source of revenue now and over the next few years. While we will continue to pursue earned revenue in every way we can, our priority is anchored in reaching more kids with top quality content, if need be for free, or at the lowest cost possible.

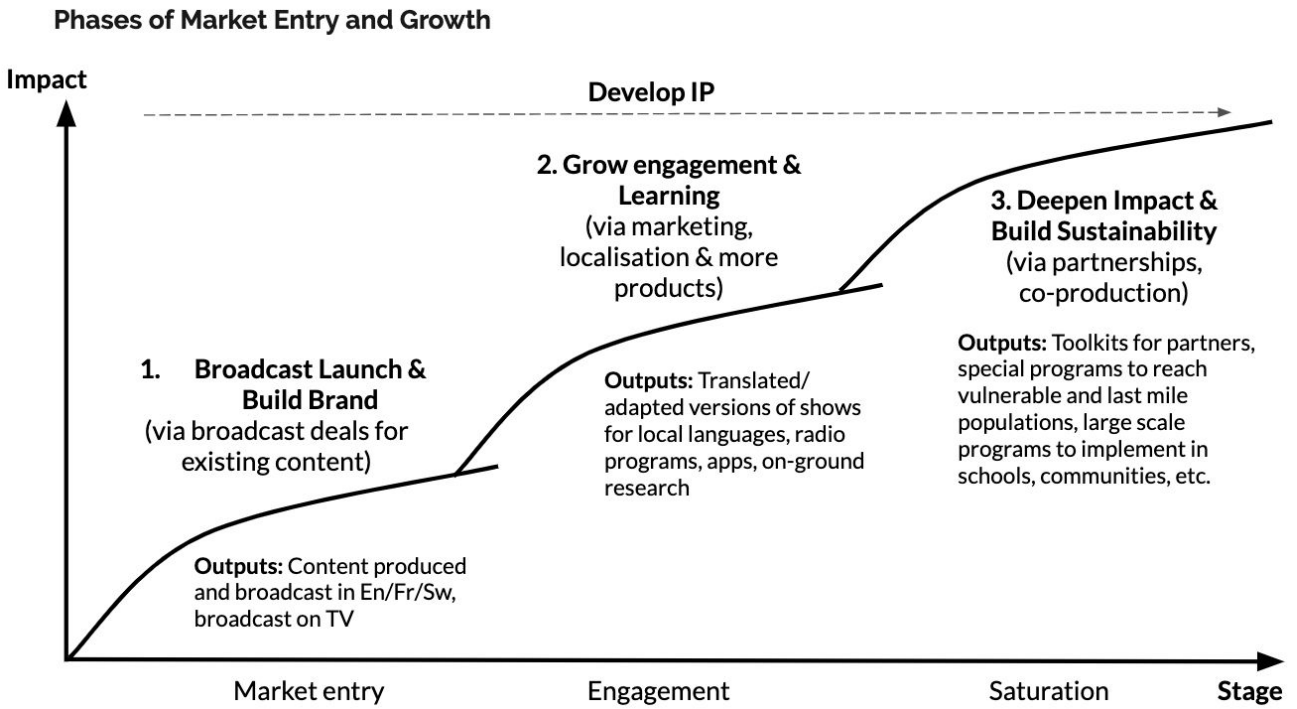
In 2020 we've made significant progress in this sustainability plan, and are over our targets for fundraising pipeline and earned revenue. In Q1 and Q2 of 2019 we've generated \$1.54 million revenue, with \$220,900 of that coming from commercial revenue and co-production. We have \$3.2 million in grants under contract and an additional pipeline of \$19.3 million worth of grants that we have applied for and are awaiting response. With our current grant win rate of 47%, we are in a strong position to continue growing *Akili and Me* beyond the end of the HDIF grant and achieve long term sustainability of the project.

## 5. Project Scalability

*Akili and Me* has been designed from the ground up for scalability building mass media partnerships, developing “evergreen” stories that children across Africa can relate to, and creating modular content designed for adaptation to various African languages. With HDIF funding we have scaled *Akli and Me* throughout Tanzania, with daily broadcast on 4 TV stations, distribution through 9 national and regional radio stations and a large network of community radios, and over a hundred partners and ambassadors sharing content with families across the country. With long term broadcast partnerships in place, over a thousand resources available on our toolkits platform, and multi-year funding commitments from foundations like Imaginable Futures and the Mulago Foundation, Ubongo is positioned to maintain and increase the scale of impact of *Akili and Me* in Tanzania. We are also actively building partnerships with major development programs to ensure that more *Akili* programs will be produced and distributed nationwide.

Since 2016, we've also been working to scale *Akili and Me* beyond Tanzania, replicating its success here in other countries and languages. *Akili and Me* is now broadcasting on free to air TV in 18 countries in Africa, and with support from Grand Challenges Canada, we have successfully adapted content to Hausa and Kinyarwanda, with 5 other languages in development. Research by UMD has shown that even when adapted to other languages such as Kinyarwanda, *Akili* continues to achieve strong learning outcomes for young children (Borzekowski 2019). Learning from how *Akili* has grown in Tanzania and our success bringing it to other countries such as Kenya, Rwanda and Nigeria, we've developed a 3 phase market entry and growth plan for how we grow *Akili's* impact in new geographies. We've reached stage 3 of this process in Tanzania and Kenya, stage 2 in Rwanda, Uganda, Nigeria and Malawi, and are at stage 1 in 12 other countries.





**Figure 10:** Phases of Market Entry Growth

Both our innovation and our market entry model have been validated, however we recognize that each country we enter is unique and will need its own adjustments and adaptation.



**Figure 11:** Akili and Me Broadcast reach across Africa on TV or Radio

We have set an ambitious Ubongo 2025 vision of scaling to reach 60 million children, and make our edutainment freely available in all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2025. We will focus on scaling *Akili and Me* together with our other programs like *Ubongo Kids*, through adaptation and partnerships, and are actively fundraising towards this 5 year vision (with approx. 2 years of funding secured to date). The long term support provided by HDIF has allowed us to grow and scale to a point of maturity where we can now seek larger scale and multi-country funding for continued growth and scale towards our 2025 vision and beyond.

## 6. Project Challenges and Mitigation

### 6.1. Project Challenges

- **Increasing government regulation and censorship of media:** We no longer have as much freedom to design and broadcast independent media content for children and parents In Tanzania, having to go through many checks and approvals with the government results in delayed broadcasting of our content.
- **Difficulty in sourcing the right skilled candidates for key positions:** We have had difficulty in hiring a Monitoring and Evaluation Manager who has experience in evaluating educational outcomes. Despite numerous rounds of recruitment and practical testing of both international and local candidates, we have been unable to source the right candidate. Further complications exist due to new policies in Tanzania, making it difficult to bring in anyone who is a non-citizen therefore having to find someone locally who has the right skill set.
- **Bridging the “digital divide”** between those who have access to digital resources and those who do not.
- **COVID-19 Pandemic:** The pandemic has presented challenges to the completion of *Akili and Me* Season 3 as it was no longer possible to perform elements of production such as voice recordings. Also there were aspects of the project goals that were no longer safe to complete.

### 6.2. Mitigation Measures

- **Increasing government regulation and censorship of media:** In order to mitigate the impact of increasing regulations and censorship on the government broadcasting network, we started broadcasting on other networks.
- **Difficulty in sourcing the right skilled candidates for key positions:** We have reached out to several of our funders who are also trying to assist with identifying the right candidate in the right criteria within their networks.
- **Digital Divide:** We are mitigating against this by ensuring that our innovative content is available on the most accessible technologies, such as radio and IVR and by partnering with organizations such as the IRC, Viamo, Equip-T, and UNESCO, who are working to provide quality ECD to many of the most vulnerable groups. We have reached about 200,000 users through Viamo’s 3-2-1 platform as well as reaching an audience of 1.8 million people over 9 community radio stations across Tanzania.
- **COVID-19 Pandemic:** Owing to the majority of the segments being completed we have mitigated the challenge by broadcasting the content we have completed as well as reusing segments that are relevant from previous seasons, allowing children to have timely access to educational content in light of the school closures. Any budget amounts that were earmarked for the above mentioned activities that were no longer safe to complete, were reallocated to approved COVID-19 emergency specific responses.

## 7. Key Success Factors of the Project

### **Co-Creation Partnership with Specialist Technology Organizations:**

We have worked with several partners who specialize in what they do throughout the grant period, this has ensured high quality content:

Enuma: With our app development partners Enuma we collaborated throughout the funding period to release 4 *Akili and Me* branded apps together and 4 generic apps. These are games from within Enuma's KitKit School program which have been separated out and re-designed as standalone apps for low-spec smartphones. 3 of these apps are non-language and the fourth will be dubbed into other languages at a later stage. We have also worked with Enuma to pilot sign language adaptation of Akili and Me videos and will be broadcasting this on TV to collect feedback from our viewers.

Curious Learning: We also collaborated with Curious Learning to develop 20 interactive, multi-leveled story books - half of which are decodable books (in Kiswahili) and the other half are engaging story books (with versions in Kiswahili and English). As we continue this partnership, we will also look into developing the decodable books into other languages.

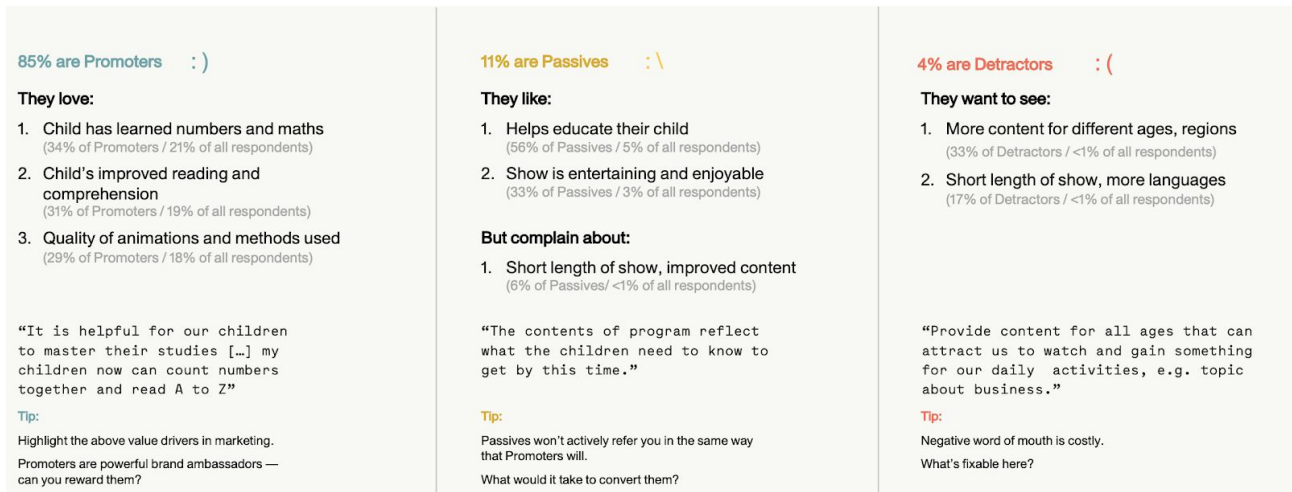
Viamo: Ubongo has partnered with Viamo in Tanzania and Nigeria on their 3-2-1 platform where users can call-in toll free from basic mobile phones and listen. The platform provides Ubongo's literacy and numeracy songs and lessons for children. Furthermore, caregivers can get parenting tips and advice on topics like stimulating learning through play and positive caregiver support tips. to which users can call-in toll free from basic mobile phones and listen.

### **Human-Centered Design + Co-Creation with Diverse Groups:**

Human-Centered Design (HCD) is an integral part of how we produce/create content at Ubongo. A lot of our user testing is conducted in mainland Dar es Salaam, however we wanted to include more geographical locations for our user testing to ensure we are engaging with more diverse groups. We travelled to public schools in Tanga to test the efficiency of our content with kids and caregivers there. For our caregiver engagement segment we engaged a consultant in Kenya to develop measurement tools and prototypes to user test with parents. We conducted the focus group in Nairobi to gather feedback from caregivers, who may have a different perspective, for whom this content is designed. Our trip to Kigoma and Nyaragusu refugee camp helped us test our caregiver content with a new audience, as we hadn't previously developed content for parents and children in the refugee context. We strongly believe that this HCD and co-creation work is what has led to high engagement for our diverse audiences, as is shown in the strong Net Promoter Score of 81 achieved. This is almost 2x the average Net Promoter Score of 41 for East African companies and products.

## NPS Drivers: Akili and Me

Promoters value their child's increased knowledge of numbers and reading. They also love the content and delivery of Akili and Me.



**Figure 12:** Net Promoter Score Drivers for *Akili and Me*

### Creative Commons Licensing for Broader Distribution:

For many years, balancing conflicting advice and opinions from many fronts, we took a mixed approach to licensing with some of our content being released under open licenses like Creative Commons CC-ND-NC-BY and CC-BY, and other content being all rights reserved. Though our content has always been free to access on TV and radio, we had concerns about whether we would be hindering our long term sustainability by making all content freely available online and for download. However, over time, we found that our Creative Commons content got very high traction, helped increase our visibility to potential partners, and also that commercial licensors like Pay-TV stations and VOD channels were still willing to pay for commercial rights to the content that was freely available online. With school closures for COVID-19 we made a quick decision to put all of our content under a creative commons license and make it freely available for any partner or individual who wants to use, download, share or distribute it for non-commercial purposes. This has helped us grow even more rapidly, launching 6 new countries and almost 20 new broadcasters, and to easily partner with other education organizations to integrate our content into their COVID response projects.

## 8. Lessons

### Subsidized cost per child can be a guiding metric for sustainability of education programs.

Since our transition to non-profit, we've struggled to balance the need to earn revenue for sustainability with the importance of scaling our impact rapidly. We've decided to prioritize impact and reach over revenue, which means we will continue to be dependent on charitable funding. In order to ensure we are using funding effectively and building a sustainable model, we've started carefully tracking how much charitable/donor funding is needed per child to achieve the impact that we're having. Our current cost per child is less than \$0.07 per child per year. In the short term, this will increase as we focus on more localization and adaptation to new languages, and as we invest more in special programs to reach the most vulnerable children, but over the long term, with economies of scale, we can continue to drive the cost down even lower. As we seek new sources of donor and charitable funding, we are focusing on designing projects with efficiency to ensure cost per child stays very low.

### **Act quick in a crisis to do what's right, even if others are waiting to act.**

The COVID-19 crisis forced all of us in the education space to quickly figure out where our values lie and make some hard decisions about what unknown risks we would take on, in order to counter the very serious risks of what we know can happen when children's education is disrupted. While there was no question for us as Ubongo that we should do everything we can as quickly as possible to make our programs freely accessible to as many families as we could possibly reach, we faced a surprising amount of resistance to this. There were concerns from partners who didn't want to invest in taking action until they knew that funding for that action would be guaranteed. There were broadcasters who wanted to keep exclusivity to our programs, rather than let others show them too. And there were many concerns about doing anything to support remote learning before governments had decided on their own official response plans. Despite these concerns, we acted quickly and decisively, with a 3 phase plan which we made public, and launched our first phase within 1 week of school closures. Though we took many risks in doing this, we found that funders, most partners and the public were willing to get behind us to support our fast action, and we hope that this helped inspire many others to take the jump too!

### **Be inclusive with results dissemination and celebrating successes.**

Too often, those of us working in the development space separate out the work we do *for* beneficiaries and the dissemination we do *to* key stakeholders, forgetting that our beneficiaries are our most important stakeholders. In the past, Ubongo focused our dissemination plans and stakeholder events and engagement on education sector stakeholders, policy-makers, funders, etc. But during this project, we shifted that focus to be more inclusive of our audience. For our Building Brains, we opened applications to all parents and teachers in Tanzania, and provided free scholarships for attendance. We held the conference as a bilingual event with half of the programming in Kiswahili, had provisions for participants with disabilities, and also had an option for participants to bring their kids with them (plus a special space set up for two days of learning through play for the kids). We received glowing feedback from parents and teachers who said that the experience completely changed their mindset towards early learning, and also from partners and high level stakeholders who deeply valued the chance to participate in workshops together with Tanzanian parents and local teachers. We've also now broadcast the content from the conference on national TV, to ensure that we're including a broad local audience. We're also making sure to share international recognition that we get through awards or press with our Tanzanian users, who find great pride and ownership in Akili's continued growth and success.

### **To scale and innovate at the same time, we have to distinguish between our "factory" and our "lab."**

While in the early stages of piloting, testing scaling models and replicating our programs we've been able to mix our more exploratory innovation work with our scaling, in order to reach the next stage of scale we need to separate these more clearly. Working with the Mulago Foundation through a design for impact at scale course has helped us figure out how to do this. We need to systematize what we know works to be able to efficiently produce, adapt, distribute and replicate our products and services across the continent: this is the "factory." And while doing that, we also need to create protected space for testing, experimentation and innovation of new approaches, products and strategy: "the lab." We've been working to build different teams for the factory and lab, and also to more clearly delineate time between the areas for people who are split between them. This helps protect the efficiency and effectiveness of the "factory" while also encouraging innovation and expansive thinking.

## 9. Recommendations

### **The Importance of Growth and Scaling Funds for Innovation in Africa:**

The Human Development Innovation Fund has been an absolutely critical enabler for the development and scaling of *Akili and Me* and for Ubongo's growth as an organization. The combination of growth funding and technical support that HDIF provides has been unique within the Tanzanian development and innovation ecosystem, and there are few other funds like it in Tanzania or across Africa. While many innovation programs support pilot projects (with funding in the range of \$50,000-\$200,000) and large donors fund major development projects, there is a large gap for funding to take development focused innovations from pilot to scale, and to sustain them at scale, and HDIF has been one of the few programs to fill that gap.

Without funding from HDIF, the development of *Akili and Me* would have been much slower and more difficult, and may not have happened at all. Thanks to long term funding for our innovation from HDIF (for 5 years since round 1 of HDIF) and the technical and reputational support that HDIF has provided, we have been able to grow our innovation and our organization to a level of maturity needed so that we can now scale and sustain the program through other funders and revenue streams. This would have been difficult to achieve after short term pilot funding, and we are grateful for the longer term and higher level of support that HDIF was able to provide for us to grow our innovation towards sustainability.

We recommend that funders like DFID consider committing to fund more programs like HDIF in Tanzania and other countries in Africa. There are many incredibly promising innovations currently at pilot stage, which struggle to get funding to further test, replicate and scale. Funds like HDIF could be catalytic for these innovations in the same way as they were for *Akili and Me*, especially if funding can support multiple years or rounds of innovation, testing and growth.

### **Flexibility of Funding for Innovation Projects:**

We recommend working to allow more flexibility within funding for innovation projects, possibly through allowing for projects to have an overall budget envelope but then to allocate detailed budgets on a 6-month or yearly basis (rather than for the full 2-3 years of the project). Another option would be to provide funding based on output and outcome milestones, rather than based on pre-planned activities. This would encourage innovation, learning and pivoting as necessary to achieve outcomes, rather than a focus on budgeted activities, which could potentially need to be changed multiple times throughout an innovation project's lifecycle.

## 10. Conclusions

We are thankful to HDIF for the generous continued support to create, improve and scale our *Akili and Me* early childhood innovation to change the lives of millions of children not only across Tanzania but across Africa.

In conclusion, this project has succeeded in improving the lives of children in Tanzania, and as we continue to expand and grow in new markets and new languages we hope to create even greater impact. Due to the challenges and obstacles that came with COVID-19 we were not able to complete the entire season of *Akili and Me*. However, the content that has been completed has been of great quality and can be delivered at scale. The Akili family platform has changed parents' understanding of early childhood,

and helped over 2.7 million children find the fun in learning. We increased our digital presence with 5 new apps and 3 new ebooks that can be accessed on the PlayStore and have created a platform for partners and stakeholders in ECD to access our content for free.

For more information about *Akili and Me*, and to download our various digital products, please visit <https://www.ubongo.org/shows/akili-and-me/> and <http://akiliandme.com/>. Content created through this project can be watched at <http://youtube.com/akiliandme> in English and <https://www.youtube.com/akilikiswahili> in Kiswahili or browsed and downloaded at: <https://toolkits.ubongo.org/>.

Though this grant has concluded, we hope to continue growing *Akili and Me* across Africa for many years to come through our growth across platforms and geographies, and adaptation of *Akili and Me* to other local languages. We hope to reach our big hairy audacious goal of reaching 60 million kids by 2025.

## 11. Annexes

### 11.1. Indicator Matrix

Please see Shared Folder



**11.2. *Akili and Me* Global Impact Report (early draft)**

Please see Shared Folder

**11.3. University of Maryland Impact Study Report**

Please see Shared Folder

**11.4. Talanta Kumi 3rd Party Impact Report**

To be submitted

**11.5. 60 Decibel Survey Report**

Please see Shared Folder

## **11.6. Success Stories**

Please see Shared Folder

**11.7. Case Study**

Please see Shared Folder

**11.8. COVID-19 Infographic**

Please see attached Shared Folder

**11.9. Data Dashboards with link to the live ones**

Please see Shared Folder