

Accelerating WASH Systems Strengthening

The Osprey Foundation and Aguaconsult are convening a two-day meeting in London on the 4th and 5th of October. This builds on the All Systems Connect conference in May 2023 and the ongoing system strengthening initiatives in the sector and is intended to identify practical actions to accelerate WASH system change from the perspectives of several key constituencies.

To inform the meeting and to better understand how others have approached the acceleration of systems strengthening, we have researched several case studies from a range of different contexts and from outside the development sector. Although markedly different from our own work in WASH, both in terms of technical focus areas and geographies, these cases can offer valuable perspectives and experiences. While acknowledging that they are not flawless examples, they provide insights into how organisations, working collectively, have approached the challenge of hastening systems strengthening and some of the common success factors.

Selected case studies

The following cases were selected based on a review of available documentation and resources and each one is summarised in a three-page brief in the remainder of this document:

1. **The SHINE Programme, Scotland:** transforming paradigms in approaches to healthcare for the elderly by shifting to person-centered care, emphasizing personal outcomes and community reconnection, resulting in significant scale-up and improved performance.
2. **Learn to Earn, Dayton, Ohio, USA:** tackling systemic disparities in educational attainment and racial equity by leveraging data-driven strategies, fostering community collaboration, reshaping philanthropy through on-granting, and focusing on early education and career pathways.
3. **TransForm, Canada:** combatting long-standing poverty challenges through a comprehensive community-based approach, emphasizing collaboration, shared measurements, sustainable leadership, and funding.

Common success factors

Although each of these three cases is different in terms of areas of intervention, scale and outcomes, a number of common success factors can be identified that are linked to the success of approaches to systems strengthening:

- **Guiding framework or policy:** working within a comprehensive framework to guide high-level direction of travel with progressive milestones.
- **Effective iteration and adaptation:** the ability to adapt or tailor solutions to specific needs and modify activities over time as systems conditions evolve.
- **Strong leadership and systems champions:** core individuals that can articulate and consistently promote a vision with a clear understanding of the benefits of systems thinking and approaches.
- **A hub or backbone entity to facilitate change processes:** especially as initiatives scale, the capacity to facilitate, co-produce and guide continuous adaptation.
- **Continuous learning:** investment in learning at every level, including using data to track progress, drive decision-making and inform annual learning events.
- **Consistent, long-term funding:** both as a critical incentive for sustained engagement and to actively involve funders as engaged participants for trust and advocacy.

Case Study 1: The Fife SHINE Programme, Scotland

Problem Statement

Health and social services in the UK are groaning with the strain of seemingly inexorable rises in pressure on hospitals, care homes and home care with growing numbers of older people and people with chronic health conditions needing support. This was a familiar concern to many in the NHS, not just in the winter but the whole year round, with high hospital pressures and older people in particular subject to delays in their discharge. These delays led to further concerns about adverse health impacts: reduced scope for active rehabilitation, staying longer than necessary in unfamiliar surroundings, being exposed to risks of infection and falls. Such deep systemic challenges suggest the current pattern of care is unsustainable.

A Paradigm shift: the Three Horizons for Healthcare

The SHINE programme followed a conceptual framework to guide collective thinking on shifting the fundamental approaches to healthcare provision. The original, dominant pattern of healthcare in Fife (Horizon 1, or business as usual) was under strain and unlikely to be sustainable through many more winters in its current form. The second horizon (H2) represents a pattern of transition activities and innovations, people trying things out in response to the ways in which the landscape changes, at the same time that Horizon 1 continues to exist, and a new approach starts to emerge. This new paradigm, Horizon 3, emerges as the long-term successor to the 'business as usual' approach to care for the elderly and is much better fitted to the world that has evolved over time.

The SHINE Programme

The Fife SHINE Programme began by changing the conversation with older people to focus on life and relationship rather than infirmity, and to identify what it would take to enable them to thrive at home. These conversations revealed a very aspirational vision for a new paradigm of care (Horizon 3). Community health and care staff were introduced to the concept of personal outcomes: allowing people to describe what was important to them in their lives. They were trained to use a solution-focused approach with patients who had been discharged from hospital or referred by their GP for additional home-based support. In these conversations they explored ways in which personal outcomes could be achieved. That frequently involved reconnecting with friends, family, neighbours and the local community (transition Horizon 2).

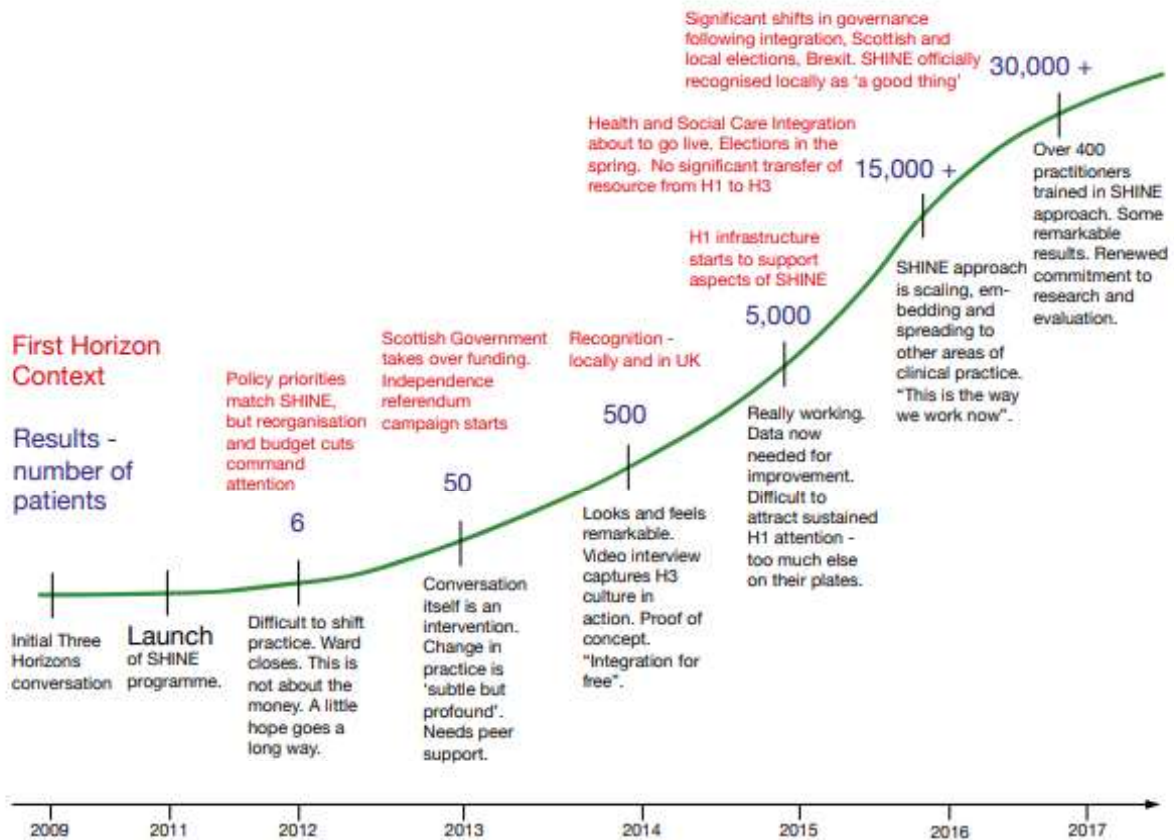
In the first year just six older people completed the process from engaging in a different conversation to identifying and achieving their personal outcome, often involving local micro-providers in the process. From this slow beginning five years ago, the programme has scaled by a factor of 10 each year and now reaches more than 30,000 people in Fife across different services and agencies. A shift in the pattern of care has gathered strength year by year and is now, at least in the area of older people receiving care in the community, almost pervasive (Horizon 3 being established).

Outcomes for Fife

SHINE has been a rare example of 'transformative innovation' that has started to realise its potential at scale. This is not just an improvement project but a conscious innovation aiming to shift a whole culture of care. It has been driven from within the system rather than from above or from outside.

While it is impossible in such a complex, dynamic change process to attribute cause and effect, it is worth noting that NHS Fife is today, in spite of testing circumstances familiar across the UK, a high-performing health board with top quartile performance for waiting times across most indicators.

Figure 1. Scaling up of the SHINE programme from 2009 to 2017



Success factors for the Fife SHINE programme

Several learning points have emerged from the experiences with the Fife SHINE programme, both at operational and policy level.

- **Policy framework:** The need for a policy framework to enable a transition from one dominant mode of operation in a large, complex public system to another over time, while ensuring that operations do not fail in the process; in other words, 'redesigning the plane whilst flying it',
- **Iterative excellence:** Accepting cultural innovation and change as a non-linear process, operating in a complex system where all the parts are in motion. Starting small, working iteratively and taking stock each year to assess how the project is progressing and how the conditions around it have changed maximizes the potential for synergies.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** The importance of consensus of stakeholders around an aspirational vision and commitment to changing the culture of care.
- **Adequate leadership and skills:** The need for a "subtle holding" of the process to enable cultural change requiring a skilled (individual) producer or champion. Beyond a certain scale, this role needs to evolve into an organisation providing the same functions for new forms of co-production and co-ownership and ensuring that the quality and integrity of the work are maintained.
- **Peer-support:** The importance of explicit peer support is highlighted over and over again in the SHINE story. It is human systems that transform, but only if there is dedicated support for them to do so.

- **Systems change champions:** Supporting the commitment around a small initial group of champions as agents of effective systems change who are ready to take a stand for a new way of working, to demonstrate that another way is possible, to express a part of their Third Horizon aspirational selves.
- **Continuous learning:** Requirement to invest in learning at every level of the programme, including using routine processes and annual learning events.

Challenges

The story of the SHINE programme demonstrates that evaluation – to assess contribution, rather than direct attribution - is always going to be a problem for any innovation with transformative intent. It needs to usher in a new culture whilst accounting for its performance in terms of existing priorities and assumptions. That challenge was made more complex in the case of the SHINE project by the way in which the project funders changed from one year to the next. Each brought their own set of assumptions about accountability, performance and impact.

Measurement

More challenging still is the acknowledged difficulty of developing meaningful performance measures for person-centred care. This is not a challenge unique to person-centred care. It rather represents a generic difficulty in adapting systems based on measurable external impacts to evaluate qualities of life. Thus, an essential element of the practical transition towards a third horizon vision should be a disciplined approach to self-evaluation, which recognises the value of experience and narrative alongside more conventional data. As the reflections from the SHINE case study repeatedly suggest, the first requirement is to record the details of the journey.

Case Study 2: Learn to Earn, Dayton Ohio, U.S.A.

Problem Statement

Systemic disparities in Dayton, Ohio are affecting young people's access to quality education, economic mobility, and racial equity. This includes kindergarten readiness rates, hurdles to college completion, and the deep-rooted impact of structural racism. These existing challenges were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in declining academic growth. Additionally, traditional philanthropic models lacked community engagement, and resources were not always aligned with local needs and priorities. The core problem revolves around the urgent need to address these systemic disparities, promote equitable opportunities for educational and economic advancement, combat racial inequities, improve educational outcomes, and transform philanthropy to better serve the community and its youth.

The Learn to Earn programme

Learn to Earn Dayton, a member of the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network in Dayton, Ohio, is at the forefront of transformative change aimed at creating greater opportunities for young people in the community. The program's multifaceted approach revolves around leveraging data, fostering community collaboration, and reallocating power and resources to achieve more equitable outcomes. By developing a robust civic infrastructure and achieving the Systems Transformation designation, Learn to Earn Dayton has solidified its commitment to four key pillars:

- Creating a shared community vision
- Evidence-based decision making
- Collaborative action, and
- Investment and sustainability.



This initiative brings together a diverse range of partners, including businesses, civic organizations, healthcare providers, philanthropic organizations, nonprofits, and educational institutions, to collectively work towards improving economic mobility for young individuals. Learn to Earn Dayton's data-driven strategies have led to successes such as the Preschool Promise initiative, which boosted kindergarten readiness rates, and the creation of the Ohio College Comeback Compact to address "stranded credits" hindering college completion. Collaborative efforts across the Dayton region, such as high-dosage tutoring in response to COVID-19 challenges and the Accelerate ED program, focus on early education milestones and career pathways. Learn to Earn Dayton is also reshaping philanthropy through on-granting, empowering community members to allocate funding to local nonprofits, thus ensuring resources align with community priorities. Overall, Learn to Earn Dayton's comprehensive approach is driving systemic change, breaking down barriers, and providing more opportunities for young people to succeed in the region.

Outcomes

The Learn to Earn Dayton program has achieved substantial and data-backed outcomes across multiple critical areas. Notably, initiatives like Preschool Promise have increased kindergarten readiness rates by 4.7% among Dayton and Montgomery County students, surpassing statewide gains. The program's data-driven policy recommendations paved the way for the Ohio College Comeback Compact, a policy aimed at reducing student debt and enhancing college completion rates, particularly for disadvantaged students. Amidst the challenges posed by remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, Learn to Earn Dayton's high-dosage tutoring approach produced remarkable academic improvements.

Additionally, the program played a pivotal role in crafting career pathways, transformed philanthropy through on-granting in partnership with The Dayton Foundation, fostered effective community collaboration, strengthened civic infrastructure, and aligned its efforts with their progressive milestones framework. These accomplishments underscore the program's commitment to advancing educational and economic opportunities, promoting racial equity, and reshaping the philanthropic landscape in Dayton with tangible data substantiating its impact.

Success factors from Learn to Earn

The success of the Learn to Earn Dayton program can be attributed to several key factors:

- **Data-Driven decision making:** Learn to Earn Dayton's emphasis on using data to inform strategies, track progress, and make informed decisions has been pivotal to achieving positive outcomes across various initiatives.
- **Community collaboration:** The program's ability to bring together a diverse array of partners from businesses, civic organizations, healthcare, philanthropy, nonprofits, and education has fostered a collaborative ecosystem that aligns efforts toward a common goal of improving economic mobility for young people.
- **Focus on racial equity:** The commitment to addressing structural racism and promoting economic mobility, evidenced by the formation of the Institute for Livable and Equitable Communities, demonstrates an understanding of the need to tackle systemic barriers.
- **Adaptability:** The program's ability to adapt and respond to challenges, such as those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, with initiatives like high-dosage tutoring, showcases its agility and commitment to finding innovative solutions.
- **Community-centered Philanthropy:** The adoption of on-granting has transformed the culture of philanthropy, ensuring that resources are allocated based on community priorities and empowering community members to take a leading role in resource allocation.
- **Framework with progressive milestones:** Learn to Earn Dayton has set a clear framework that provides progressive milestones for developing effective civic infrastructure, guiding its efforts in shared community vision, evidence-based decision making, collaborative action, and investment and sustainability.
- **Focus on early education and career pathways:** Recognizing the importance of early education milestones and postsecondary success, the program has implemented targeted initiatives like Preschool Promise and the Accelerate ED program to address critical areas of development for young people.
- **Leadership and vision:** The leadership team has played a critical role in driving the program's vision, fostering partnerships, and ensuring that resources and opportunities are directed toward the community's youth.

Challenges

The program faces several challenges. Firstly, achieving true equity and inclusion remains a significant struggle, with systemic racism posing a formidable barrier to ensuring equal access to opportunities for all young people, regardless of their backgrounds. Secondly, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the program and its initiatives is challenging, with concerns about securing funding and resources to maintain and expand successful efforts. Thirdly, maintaining accurate and accessible data for informed decision-making presents difficulties, involving complex data collection, analysis, and sharing among multiple partners and organizations. Fourthly, despite policy recommendations, effective policy implementation is an ongoing challenge, requiring advocacy and collaboration to overcome bureaucratic obstacles and drive tangible changes on the ground. Lastly, adapting to ever-changing education and community needs is crucial, with the program constantly evolving to address new challenges, such as shifts in the education landscape or unforeseen crises like public health emergencies.

Measurement

Learn to Earn Dayton employs a comprehensive set of metrics to evaluate its impact and progress in Dayton, Ohio. These metrics encompass various facets, including assessing kindergarten readiness and academic achievement, monitoring policy impact on college completion rates and community engagement, developing equity metrics to address racial disparities, evaluating resource allocation effectiveness, measuring collaboration and partnership outcomes, assessing long-term sustainability, and gathering community feedback. Additionally, the program tracks civic infrastructure development to gauge the growth of connections and shared community vision. These ongoing measurements enable Learn to Earn Dayton to adapt to challenges and demonstrate its transformative impact on educational systems and opportunities for young people in the region.

Case Study 3: TransForm, Canada

Problem Statement

Efforts to combat poverty in Canada have faced challenges despite the nation's overall prosperity. Historical data on low-income households reveal fluctuations in poverty rates, rising during economic recessions in the early 1980s, 1990s, and late 2000s, and decreasing during periods of economic recovery. However, there has been no significant reduction in overall poverty for over three decades. To address this issue and work toward poverty reduction, the Vibrant Communities approach was launched, with a focus on community-level initiatives. Past initiatives tended to address individual issues separately, such as health, crime, education, housing, or employment, effectively allocating resources but not adequately addressing the complex underlying dimensions of poverty.

The Vibrant Communities - Cities Reducing Poverty approach

Vibrant Communities - Cities Reducing Poverty (VC-CRP), initially an experiment, has evolved into a comprehensive approach to poverty reduction within a community-based framework. Founded in 2002, it began as a ten-year action research initiative involving just 13 Canadian communities experimenting with innovative poverty reduction strategies. Over time, it has transformed into a collective impact movement focused on reducing poverty across North America. Member organizations, representing multi-sector roundtables engage in collective learning communities, with the network continually growing to include more cities and communities. As of December 2019, there were 80 local initiatives comprising over 300 municipalities committed to core principles emphasizing reducing poverty, addressing root causes, collaborating across sectors, building on community strengths, and embracing long-term learning and change processes. VC-CRP provides guidance on implementing these principles and encourages innovation in poverty reduction efforts.

The guiding principle behind VC-CRP agenda is the recognition that creating a shared agenda requires a willingness to explore and be curious, acknowledging that continuing to think in the same way would simply yield the same results. This approach emphasizes the need for time to break free from old patterns and explore and embrace new strategies and ideas. VC-CRP has identified four key elements for effective community-based poverty reduction:

1. **Developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy:** Collaborating across sectors to establish a common agenda and vision.
2. **Reporting Impact:** Using shared measurements to ensure accountability and share results.
3. **Sustainable Leadership:** Building a governance structure and providing support for coordination.
4. **Sustainable Funding:** Securing resources for poverty reduction efforts.

The network includes Trail Builders leading local initiatives, National Sponsors offering guidance, and a Pan-Canadian Learning Community for shared insights. This community supports various social change movements, enabling communities to learn from each other and avoid duplicating efforts.

Outcomes

The project's outcomes have been multifaceted and impactful. VC-CRP has facilitated the creation of new political channels that otherwise may not have come into existence, fostering an environment for collaboration and community-based learning. This collaborative approach has translated into valuable strategies, such as the Living Wage and Affordability Index, which have been implemented across multiple communities. Additionally, the project has provided a common language, allowing local participants to communicate effectively. This shared foundation, coupled with financial incentives, has laid the groundwork for a fresh learning orientation.

Moreover, the project has injected new energy and inspiration into local processes, revitalizing community dialogues and strengthening the sense of shared identity through national networking. This networking has not only enhanced recognition but also bolstered legitimacy for the overall approach. Furthermore, the project has equipped local conveners with essential evaluation tools and evidence to support their roundtable discussions, enabling evidence-based decision-making.

Trail Builders have identified several key benefits, including access to knowledge from other communities, learning about innovative program and policy ideas, acquiring a theoretical basis for their work, and discovering practical tools and methods. These benefits have contributed to personal motivation, making it easier to sustain efforts in poverty reduction. Additionally, the project has improved the ability to attract and convene additional partners at the local level, enhancing local legitimacy and aiding in the resolution of various local issues and concerns. Collectively, these outcomes showcase the project's significant impact on addressing poverty and fostering community development.

Success factors from TransForm

The success of this project has been underpinned by several key factors:

- **Community engagement through shared identity and recognition:** Injection of energy and inspiration into local processes, nurturing community dialogue and renewal. Being part of a national network provided a shared identity and broader recognition for poverty reduction efforts.
- **Adaptability:** Recognition of the need for different support types at different times, offering a range of options.
- **Systems change leadership and facilitation:** High expertise required for intermediaries in facilitation, network support, and relationship building. Establishment of an interconnected architecture of supports for comprehensive community initiatives.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Empowerment of local conveners with evaluation tools and evidence for effective roundtable work. Active engagement of funders as players rather than observers, fostering trust and understanding. Active involvement of people with lived experience, addressing challenges related to power dynamics and tokenization.
- **Long-term investment:** Recognition of the need for patience and long-term investment in addressing complex issues. Long-term funding played a critical role in encouraging engagement and learning.
- **Continuous, adaptive, and collaborative learning:** Highlighting the close relationship between social innovation and continual societal learning. Promotion of collaborative and community-based learning leading to the development of valuable strategies.
- **Development of policy and new political channels:** Establishment of new political channels for addressing poverty at the systems level.

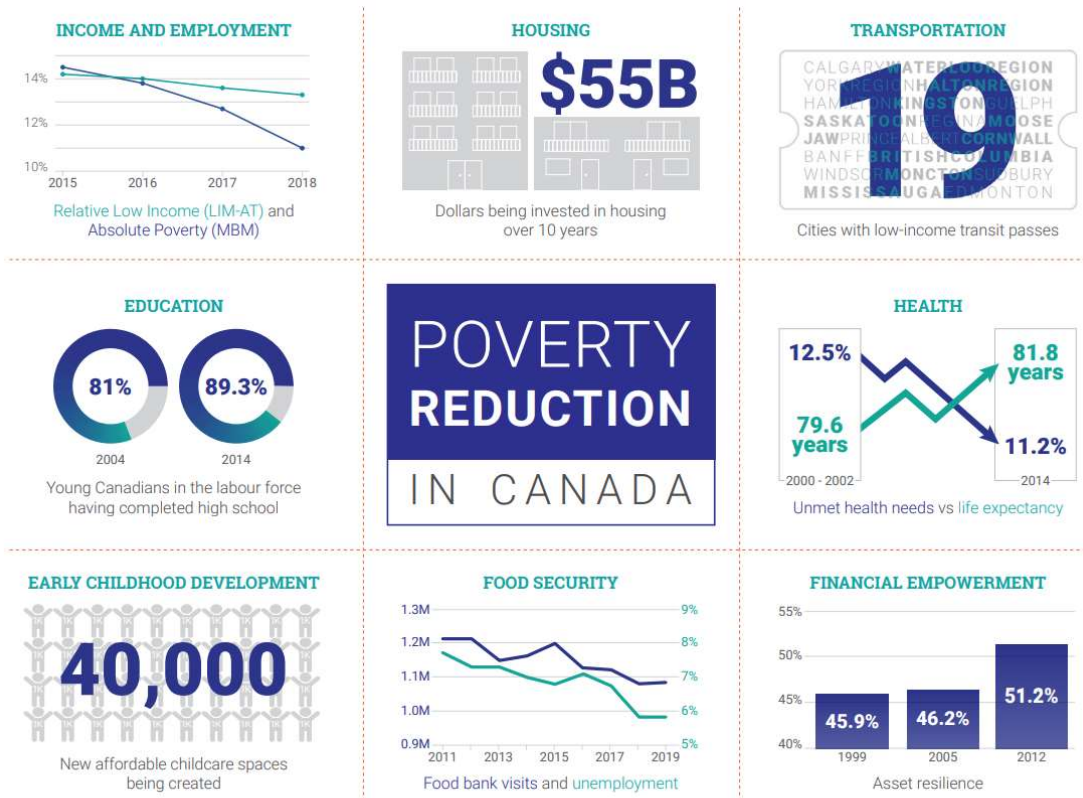
Challenges

While the project has achieved remarkable success, it has also encountered several significant challenges. One such challenge has been addressing power differentials and structural barriers that often hinder the meaningful participation of individuals with living experience in poverty. There have been instances of tokenization or peripheral inclusion of these voices, which the project has strived to overcome. Furthermore, navigating the complexity of introducing social innovations at various levels of scale has presented difficulties, often accompanied by considerable lag times. Patience and long-term investment from funders have been essential in sustaining the project's efforts. Lastly, the evolving nature of complex systems has underscored the importance of continual adaptation to effectively address poverty and community development. These challenges, while formidable, have served as valuable learning opportunities in the project's ongoing journey.

Measurement

The project has achieved a notable collective impact, with several cities reporting a 10% reduction in poverty rates. This impact has reverberated across communities, positively affecting the lives of just under 203,000 low-income Canadians. Figure 1 summarizes the project's impact, through metrics on income and employment, housing, transportation, education, health, early childhood development, food security and financial empowerment.

Figure 2. Summary of program's impact as at 2020



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