

From Big Bets to Smart Tests: Innovating in Aid

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The Story of Grace: A Mother's Challenges



Grace, a mother from the Democratic Republic of Congo, now in Nakivale, Uganda.

1 Climate Battle

Unpredictable rains and droughts threaten crops.

2 Invisible Burden

Psychological distress hinders daily life and farming.

3 Fundamental Questions

How do we design aid for these intertwined challenges?

Critical Questions for Lasting Impact



Lasting Impact?

Do interventions lead to durable, long-term change?



Intergenerational Benefits?

Do parent interventions benefit their children's development?

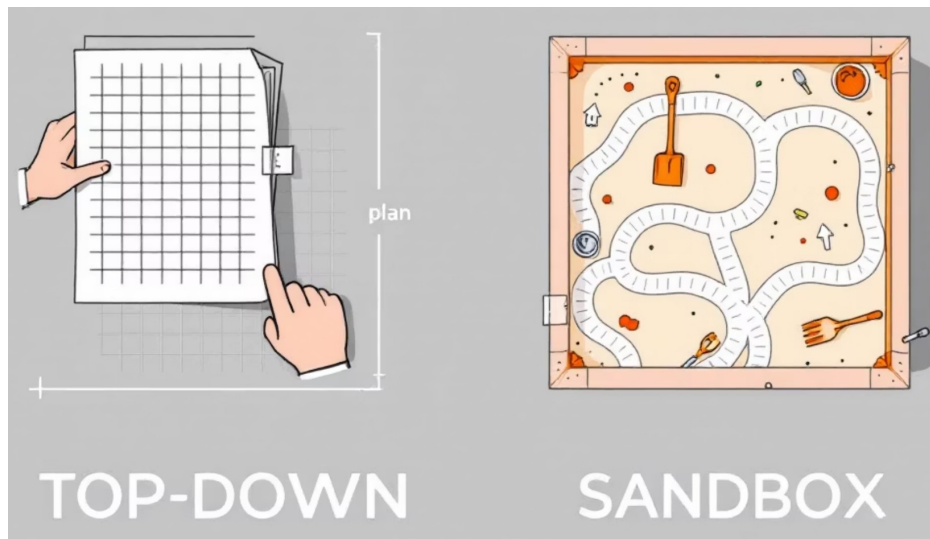


Effective Combination?

What mix of support creates the greatest impact?

Answering these demands a new approach to innovation and aid. We must move beyond temporary boosts to sustained, measurable change.

The Sandbox for Innovation: A New Discovery Method



Real-World Experimentation

Test creative ideas on a small scale.

Generate Concrete Evidence

Move from "hoping" to "knowing" what works.

Informed Investment

Scale proven solutions, avoid costly failures.

Our Sandbox in Action: Large-Scale Trials

Using the WHO's Self-Help Plus, a low-cost mental health program, as our starting point, we are conducting three large-scale trials.

1 Rhino Camp, Uganda
(N=720 mothers & children)

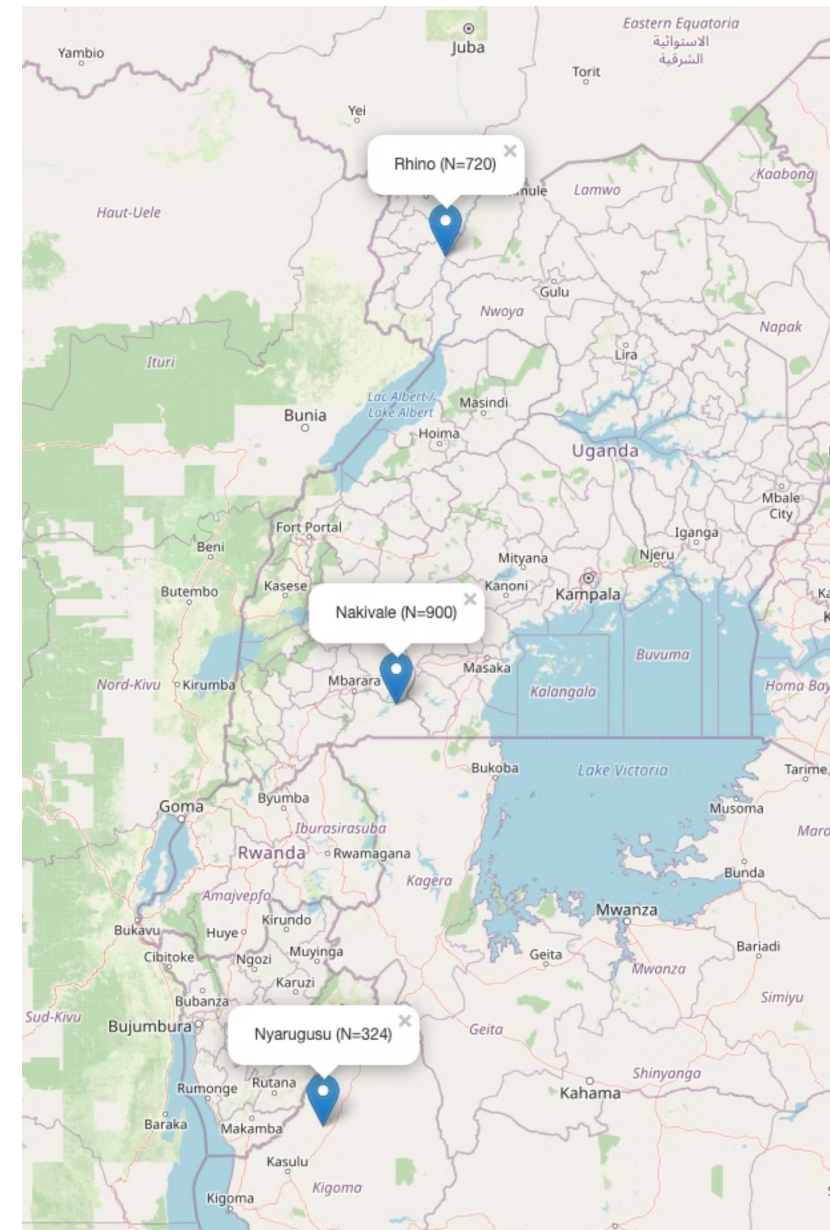
Long-term impact: do benefits last for a year and ripple to children?

2 Nakivale, Uganda
(N=900 mothers & children)

THRIVE project: does mental health support boost agricultural skills?

3 Nyarugusu, Tanzania (N=324 families)

Reducing family violence: mental health vs. mental health + positive parenting, engaging mothers and fathers.



In Children: Which Abilities Endure, Which Falter?

Infants' Gaze-Following



Mobile eye-tracking reveals infants' gaze-following is resilient to adversity, a core learning foundation.

Children's Emotion Recognition

4% = 1

Trauma Reduction

Year of Growth

Small decrease in mother's
trauma symptoms

Equivalent to a full year of
emotional development for
her child

A mother's healing may have profound benefits for a child's ability to understand other people's emotions.

Careful measurement shows us deficits to target.

From Evidence to Impact: Bridging the Gap

The Voltage Drop



"Voltage drop": promising programs often lose impact when scaled.

1 Science of Scaling

Study scaling processes with the same rigor as small-scale experiments.

2 Process Evaluations

Understand barriers and facilitators through qualitative and quantitative methods.

3 Funding Gap

Bridging research and on-the-ground implementation requires new investment.

Summary



Create "Innovation Sandboxes"

Run small-scale, head-to-head experiments that answer the next-generation questions before large investments are made



Back the *Science of Scaling*

Pair proven interventions with rigorous process evaluations and qualitative work to understand *how* and *why* impact fades—or endures—especially when programs are scaled-up. Fill the current funding gap that sits between research and large-scale implementation.



Build the Bridge from Evidence to Impact

Form a Sweden-led coalition of researchers, frontline NGOs and funders to translate proven ideas into durable, inter-generational gains.

Thank you

