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WEBINAR

FROM BARRIERS TO BRIDGES: BUILDING RELATIONAL TRUST THROUGH
COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

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WELCOMING REMARKS:

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DISCUSSION:

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Project Director, CARE Zimbabwe, Center for Universal Education Collaborative Research
Partnership on Education and Climate Change
2016 Echidna Global Scholar, The Brookings Institution

JAMES BRIDGEFORTH
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KHADIJA SHARIFF
Executive Director, Milele Zanzibar Foundation

KURI CHISIM
Senior Program Manager, BRAC Institute of Educational Development

Moderators

EMILY MARKOVICH MORRIS
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CLOSING REMARKS

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MORRIS: Welcome to the Center for Universal Education's "Collaborative Conversation, From Barriers to Bridges, Building Relational Trusts Through Collaborative Research." This is the fourth panel in a five-part series on collective research and action for transforming education systems. This series is led by the Center's Knowing Doing Network, which is a network of networks that brings together actors working on various aspects of education systems transformation, including early learning, family school and community engagement, innovative pedagogy, civil society collaboration, gender equality and scaling education innovations. I am Emily Morris and I am a fellow at the Center for Universal Education and I'm part of the family school community engagement team leading this esteemed panel today.

A little bit about the Knowing Doing Network. Our team is fostering collaboration by connecting actors across sectors and geographies, centering mutual learning and shaping the global conversation on education transformation. Through candid discussions and diverse perspectives, the collaboration conversations explore the complexities of working together in authentic partnerships, unpacking key tensions, and reflecting on what it means to build collaborative change together. Today's conversation focuses on building relational trust through collaborative research, as trust is really essential for ensuring that education systems meet the needs of the learners, families, schools, and communities. Yet building deep trust in relationships, it takes time and intentionality. And today we'll explore how to build trust within and between education communities.

Before launching into our panel, I wanted to orient you to the research that the Center for Universal Education has been doing on relational trust with the Family, School, and Community Engagement Initiative. We've been studying the different elements of what makes trust in the context of families, students, education leaders, and school leaders as well. And we are also looking at the ecosystem that impacts relational trust in school and communities. And so we have identified seven key elements in a relational trust. And we're creating a scale that schools and communities can use to measure and gauge relational trust and to really focus in on how to build. So these seven elements include a shared vision on education, a culture of listening, competence and treating each other with competence, Respect. and care and integrity, following through words with actions and interactions and having time to interact with each other. And so these are really the seven key elements and our colleagues today will be talking about how they're leaning into the different elements, but also the greater atmosphere and ecosystem of relational trust. While the relational trust scale was created as a tool for schools and communities specifically, the different elements also apply as a framework for understanding different levels. of trust and ecosystem and society. And as our panelists will look at in greater depth, they will touch on these different aspects of trust and ecosystem from within learning spaces, within homes and communities, within education systems and the greater society.

So now for the panel, we have created this incredible panel of visionary leaders and organizations who bring deep insights on how to build relational trust at different levels of our education ecosystem. And they're working with displaced communities in Bangladesh, adolescent girls, and communities in Zimbabwe, with families and school district leaders in California and the United States, and schools and national governments in Zanzibar, Tanzania. And these colleagues are going to tell you a little bit about how and what they do every day with Building Relational Trust. And their work also informs the work that we do at the Center for Universal Education and the Knowing Doing Network. And so we're excited for you to hear all of their experience and their insights. And I'm going to start by introducing Ellen Chigwanda, our first panelist. She is a senior technical advisor in education and climate change at CARE Zimbabwe. She is also a project director for a partnership on climate change and education with the Center for Universal Education. Ellen's vast expertise includes serving as a gender and social development advisor and consultant for local non-governmental organizations, as well as with the Southern African. Development Community Parliamentary Forum and the UN Women. Ellen is also an Echidna Global Scholar alumna and Ellen leads research on the impact of the drought in Zimbabwe on girls' education outcomes. She's working on developing a model for resilience and education programs that will

help to keep girls in schooling during times of extreme climate and crises. So welcome Ellen and thank you so much for being here. Next we will welcome James Bridgeforth and James is an assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of Delaware. He's a faculty affiliate at the Community Schools Learning Exchange, working to build and strengthen community school strategies across kindergarten through grade 12 schools and districts in California and other communities in the United States. His research and teaching examine the politics of educational leadership, specifically focusing on issues of race, racism, and community voice in education decision-making. So welcome, James, and thank you for joining us. Next, we have Khadija Shariff, who is the executive director of the Milele Zanzibar Foundation, which works to accelerate progress in the areas of health, education, and livelihood opportunities in rural and remote areas through holistic and sustainable development programming. Khadija works for the last 15 years in non-governmental organization in both the United States and across East Africa in education, health, and economic empowerment. and she represents the civil society in education planning with government institutions in Zanzibar. So welcome Khadija, we're so glad you're here. And next we have Kuri Chisim, who is a senior program specialist at BRAC Institute of Educational Development. Kuri leads programs and design programs that promote play and healing among young children, adolescents and their caregivers in humanitarian context. Currently, Kuri is leading interventions for children zero to three and their parents, as well as adolescent support program in Rohingya refugee settlements. She's also a faculty at the BRAC University. So welcome, Kuri. So thank you so much to all of you for being here and for all of the work that you have been doing with the Knowing Doing Network and informing relational trust. And so today we're gonna start by giving you a moment to really reflect on what it is that you do with your organization and how you're building trust and why. So I'm gonna start by handing to Ellen to talk a little bit about your work with relational trust.

CHIGWANDA: Thank you so much, Emily. And I feel especially privileged to be part of this panel. I wanted to start by saying that at Care Zimbabwe, we view adolescents and more specifically adolescent girls who are aged between 10 and 19 as a critical impact population throughout our work. And this is because our education and skills development programs are aimed at identifying and addressing the key barriers to education for the most marginalized. Now, in order to understand these barriers, we need to carry out focused research that enables us to deepen our understanding of what the key barriers are. And some of the barriers that we've found are environmental factors that include climate change and how it's impacting adolescents or learners' educational outcomes. Now, in order to build relational trust... with specifically adolescent girls, it's important to center their voices. It's important to adopt methodologies and tools that help us to understand the girls' experiences, that help us to validate their thoughts and ideas as data, as a pathway to understanding those key barriers. And so I of listening. the also understanding, you know, care, and also understanding the element of respect as being three critical factors as far as building relational trust with girls. They want to feel that whatever contributions they're bringing to the table are valued, are taken as data. in that they are contributing to our broader understanding of what the barriers are and therefore what the solutions would be to build more resilient education systems. I'm going to hand over to Kuri to talk a little bit more about the community level. Thank you.

CHISIM: Thank you so much, Ellen, that was wonderful. And thank you everyone for giving me this opportunity. I work in BRAC and then in BRAC, BRAC's ethos and approach always talks about working with the community, co-creating, co-designing, any kind of intervention with the community. So BRAC believes in designing, implementing program with the community people who would be the driver of the intervention. And while doing so, we always encourage that people's voices are integrated in designing any kind of intervention. So be it for children, parents, or for adolescents. So in 2017, BRAC started working in the Rohingya community during the influx. And at that time, what we did is we provided mental health support for the people. And then while doing so, we conducted a vast research. lot of observation and fin work to understand what are the traditional healing practices of the people. While doing so, we integrated all of these elements into our curriculum for the parental engagement program and also in the curriculum for the children. So we encourage play, healing and learning. And we always want to encourage people to integrate

their voices for the adolescents as well, so that people can see the reflection of their culture, and this creates something that is concrete and sustainable for the community. So at this point, I want to hand over to James.

BRIDGEFORTH: Thank you, Kuri, and thank you everybody for for the invitation for how long is to be here today. I'm excited to be here partially because when we think about this idea of trust, it is so important and integral to the work that we do with community schools. So, community schools in the United States context, it is, it's not a new phenomenon. It's not a new strategy. It's not a new program. A lot of times when folks have thought about community schools in the past, what they've thought about is this idea of wraparound services around bringing in youth development organizations or after school organizations, family engagement groups, social services, all of those kinds of organizations and bringing them into the school to support students. And while that in the intention, it is a really good way. to make sure that we're supporting students. What that often does is really kind of takes this approach for more of a deficit approach for students and looks at students as always in need.

And so our work with community schools now is actually very different. We've kind of done a large paradigm shift where instead of thinking about just the needs of the students and the needs of the families, we're really looking at the assets and the strengths that they have and how we can all work together. to build the schools that we actually want to have in our communities. And so with that work, so much of it is really, again, around building trust, around organizing different structures and programs, around student learning and student well -being. It's about really thinking about coherence and alignment. And a lot of it is really co-owning and collaboratively designing these systems. So what that does is it allows us to actually look at real-time data. It allows us to really think about how we can use that data, not just to collect it, just to have it on a shelf, but really thinking about how are we using the data to better the experiences, the lives, and get towards the hopes and dreams of our students and our families, but how are we actually working with our families to co -own that data? It's not just about us creating them as school district leaders or as researchers. but really working with the families and the students to make sure that it is their data, it is their school, it is their vision, and that that's going to be what we're gonna be focusing on. So as we think about that work, a large part of that also is really about how do we use that data to create a culture of belonging and make sure that as we move forward, that we all have a shared vision on what we want our schools to be. So that is a bit of what the community schools work has been like for the last few years. And so with that, I'll go ahead and pass it off to Khadija.

SHARIFF: Thank you so much, James. And good morning, good afternoon, good evening, everyone wherever you are. It's a pleasure to also be part of this really amazing panel. And thank you so much, Emily, for giving me the opportunity to share a little bit about what we're doing in South Africa and Zanzibar specifically, from an organization called Milele Zanzibar Foundation. We're part of a network of organizations working in education sector. And one of our interests is to see that children are acquiring life skills and values that they need to be able to survive in this rapidly changing world. And one of the things that we recognize is that there's an opportunity through the ministries of education that we work in to be able to embed the ways to do this, the technical capacities and also build awareness and mobilize interests in life skills and values of a critical element of. should be coming out of our education systems across East Africa. And because we also want to make sure that we reach all children, we know that working with the systems and working with the government and ministries of education is an essential element and way of us being able to sort of promote our cause. And so over the past few years, we've been working with various different entities within the ministries of education. And that's who we've been we've been building trust with. And so it's been a really critical way for us to be able to approach how we work with the ministry so that we're not just coming in with our own agenda. But because we know that there's already momentum and interest there that we try and align as much as possible with what they are already trying to roll out. So, you know, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, there's already, you know, a rolling out of competency-based curricula. There is a huge interest in instilling values within our children. And so we're building off of that and seeing how we can work together and align through evidence generation, through curriculum revision, through

assessments, through teacher training. And so, and we're learning as we go, just kind of how we make that work so that we can achieve that larger goal and vision. Thank you so much.

MORRIS: Well, so I heard themes of really centering assets and focusing on the assets that young people and their families bring as well as educators bring to the system. I heard also your approaches to thinking about the whole school, the whole child, centering both mental health needs, other needs, and looking at sort of the environmental and other factors in the ecosystem. And I heard also just building trust around curriculum, conversations on curriculum, on pedagogy, on data on how we're going about education transformation at a government level. And I'm going to jump into the next question to ask you to go a little bit deeper and talk about some of the elements that are critical to building relational trust. And James, I know you're working with school district leaders and leadership in school districts and Khadija. You're working not just with rural communities and families and educators in the schools, but you're also working with your central government and your Ministry of Education. So I'm going to ask James to dig a little bit deeper into what elements are critical in the work that you're doing on unfolding trust.

BRIDGEFORTH: Absolutely. So I'd love the relational trust element, because I think that it really gets at the heart of the work that we're doing. And it's so aligned to the community schools model and the community schools framework. So when we think about this idea of making sure that we're listening and attending to that, and it is, it's probably one of the most important factors. Oftentimes in education, I feel like, and I've been at multiple levels of education, both in the classroom and leadership levels. Now I train educators. and we collect a lot of data. We collect it often, but we rarely do much with that, to be quite honest. Sometimes it can be really difficult for families, for students, for other educators to actually see what are we doing with that, how are we listening to them, how are we taking the data that we've collected and actually doing something meaningful with it. And so it's important for us as we do this work.

So especially if we're going to be thinking about building a culture of belonging and safety and care, if we're going to be thinking about what it looks like to do powerful student and family engagement, it's important to actually listen to the folks who are experiencing everything that might be happening. And so when we think about that work, especially right now, I know we're facing lots of the same issue globally on this issue of immigration, of migration. We do have a lot of families, and this is both in California, but I would say nationwide in the United States. that are nervous right now. They are, there's a lot of fear around what the next few weeks will bring, what the next few months will bring, and how all these different changes are going to impact their families. And so with schools and districts, what we've worked with a lot of leaders to do is really think about leaning into that listening piece and making sure that we're not just doing things just to do them, or that we're not doing things without really understanding what our families actually need and what our families actually want at this point. And so a lot of that work has been really impactful in making that families feel safe and making sure that students feel... that their schools are still there for them and making sure that families, again, families and students and educators, everybody knows that there's this culture of care around them. And I would also say with this idea of care, with that element, it's really important to demonstrate that.

Again, we can sometimes collect data, we can sometimes collect all types of different information. And so we might have that, but again, what are we doing with it? And how are we making sure that our spaces that truly care for our students and our families and our communities and caring in a way that it allows us to actually meet their needs, but also really work with them to build networks across each other. And those networks can help be in spaces where schools can't always be. One of the things that folks I feel like have talked about a lot is that we do place a lot of pressure on our schools to continue to do more and more and more. And while it's important to see schools as hubs in our communities, it's also important for us to really think about how schools can kind of be the tables to allow these networks to build. So we may not be the ones that are always doing the work, but what we can do is to create the conditions so that families can, families and students, educators, all those kinds of partnerships, those can thrive even outside of the traditional school building, the traditional school walls, and really the traditional school day. So it's been. a

journey trying to do all this work, but I will say that there's a lot of good work happening and at the core of it really is this idea of relational trust.

SHARIFF: Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah, I'll come in and maybe speak to a couple of different elements. I think, as you said, you know, we as an organization have been very much used to working at the community level, working with communities, working with parents, working with teachers, and that often is an easier way, it's easier to build trust and build relationships and hear one another when you're working at that level, working within the system and working with at the systems change level. It's complex right and it and it and it and there are a lot of you know, it's very dynamic. There are a lot of different sort of competing interests that are competing, you know forces, you know different organizations. You've been trying to kind of get attention of the same people that you're trying to work with there are you know higher up? Authorities and orders that come down that you know change things. There's political changes in climate. So it's sort of an unsteady, I think, environment, and oftentimes that can be, um sort of scary and and maybe disheartening in some ways to be able to trust and build um you know uh good quality trust and and relationships with the people that we're trying to work with um and so i think one of the elements that that that we've been really applying um in order for us to be able to work well within sort of this dynamic environment is trying as much as possible to connect and create a shared vision.

And so, you know, working from the offset in really aligning as much as possible and listening. So that care, that element of listening and really listening to not just maybe what's being told, but like, you know, what's behind the scenes that the issues really are. So deeper listening to really being able to see where the opportunities are. that we could really align given maybe the complexities that are there, but also respecting where people are coming from. So oftentimes we can get dated and maybe upset by bureaucracy and all of these different processes and delays, but I think respecting that this is something that is part of how the system works and having patience and being able to work around those kinds of things is really critical. and then also, you know, we come in with a very technical thing that we what we want to share in terms of how do you assess, you know, these skills, how do you nurture these skills, how do we embed them within curriculum and all these things.

But at the end of the day, you know what we also are learning is that we need to the competence and recognizing what you know others bring when we're working together so that it's not just kind of like this one-way thing where we were coming in with the solution. So we kind of dismantle that as much as possible so that we can really create a co -share, a vision, but also work, walk together, and really authentically walk together. So I think those are some of the ones that I can really speak to.

MORRIS: So James and Khadija and just something that I really learned from from James and the community schools learning exchange when you're talking about the culture of listening is how we've created an environment where it's two -way communication where you're not just telling families how they need to show up but you're asking families how can you show up in this moment in this time what can we do as a school to support you so I've learned a lot about how you've built that trust through through two -way communication and Hadija and the team how With your shared vision, how you have, and we've done this work together, but I've watched how your teams have led with youth researchers going into schools, listening to young people's beliefs on education, experiences sitting down with families in rural areas, and bringing those voices to your shared vision and your meetings with the high level ministry leaders and having, reflecting on those together and bringing those voices to the shared vision. I think it's really a learning moment of how you both have done that as organizations. I'm gonna move now to Ellen and Kuri to talk a little bit about the complex environments that you're working in. Ellen, your research and work, you have looked at drought and other climate crises affecting adolescent girls and families and communities in Zimbabwe and Kuri. You're working with Rohingya refugee settlement areas and the complex, as you said, psychosocial and trauma. Can you talk a little bit about what are the different enablers

and the barriers to building relational trust in and with communities in your experience? And we'll start out with Ellen.

CHIGWANDA: Emily, and I wanted to start by reflecting and connecting with something that James said earlier on about, you know, collecting data just for the sake of it. And this resonates very well with, you know, some of the sort of principles that we try to apply when we're doing research. In some of the communities that we are engaging with, looking at responsible research and responsible data management. Are we collecting data just for the sake of it? Are we collecting data just for the purposes of creating a glossy document that makes its way onto a blog platform? Why are we collecting data? And responsible management really reflects on collecting, conducting research so that it improves the lives of the communities that we are engaging with. And so one of the enablers for building relational trust, especially when you look at adolescents and adolescent girls within schools, is to look at integrity. And what integrity does is it connects research with action. And, you know, when we do research... to what extent is it going to make the life of a girl easier? Is it going to make access? Is it going to make quality better for the girl within the school? And so if she was spending, for instance, six days at home because there's no water at the school and she has no way of managing her menstrual hygiene management needs. To what extent can our research reduce those number of days that she's having to spend away from the classroom? And so I think for me, one of the things that I've learned is to really try and see how research can, how communities can begin to trust research as a pathway to action. Research as a pathway to addressing very practical issues that they are facing. And we're finding that water is a predictor. For attendance for adolescent girls in rural communities. And so how can we invest in research that really understands the environmental factors and then works to understand and work on those factors so that we're improving the school environment while addressing the environmental factors and thus improving educational outcomes for adolescent girls in rural communities. I'm going to pass it on to Carrie to share her experiences. Thanks.

CHISIM: Yeah, thank you again, Ellen. So the context that I work in, which is with the community that is going through high level of trauma and distress, that is the community with who it is really difficult to build trust on the first place. So what we understood from working with Rohingya community is that it is very important to shift from top down approach. So it's absolutely necessary that we're looking and working with the people thinking, from making our mind shift from top -down approach to bottom -up approach. And I'm really glad that both James and Kadiza has mentioned about listening to the people. So we started listening to them to understand that what is there and what is that that they need instead of us being the advocate of someone else's need to put them on. So, by doing so, what happened is that we got some amazing results. And then through research, we found out that there are certain elements that absolutely work with them.

One of the examples that I want to give is that initially when the influx happened, we started giving intervention for the mothers and children because it is absolutely necessary that the mothers need to be well enough so that they can take care of their children at that context. And then. While we were providing intervention for the mothers, mothers are the one who started to talk about that the father's needs intervention because we live in a culture where we do not often recognize that men also need mental health support and men also wants to create connection with their children, especially in a setting like that, in a crisis setting. So then we started developing father's intervention with the men from Rohingya community. We started understanding what is their emotional needs. how to provide them emotional literacy because that was the need that came up from the community. So that is how we try to listen and then use our research to understand that what is it that they need best.

So top-down approach does not work in any context, especially when you're working with emergency setting and there has to be healing element to it. So we always connect, play and healing together whenever, whatever, whichever intervention we are providing, we try to ensure that There are play, which are culturally representative, which are the play which our children are used to have seen the parents that they used to play when they were young. And we want to integrate those because that actually creates self -esteem, healing within the community. So these

elements were the enablers for us. And last but not least, the importance of integrating mental health support for the community. And it needs to be as contextualized as possible. It shouldn't be something that I am designing from the city or urban area, but it has to be coming from the field, understanding what the need is, what are the traditional practices and what heals them may not heal me, but that is something that is needed for the community. So that is how we work with the community and we saw these elements as the enabler. Thank you.

MORRIS: Thank you, Ellen. and Kuri and Ellen, I think your point about the integrity and as research and not just thinking about thinking about not just the ethics, but who's the research for? How are we doing it? But how are we collectively doing that and setting those expectations up, but also centering and the young woman or the adolescent girl in all of this, right? What is it helping at the end of the day make her life better? And is it can taking into consideration all those factors? So thank you so much for for bringing that up and really leaning in there. And Kuri, for also talking about the contextualization and the level of contextualization that BRAC does of thinking about not just the caregiver, but how does gender and how does language at home and different experiences and trauma play into how a caregiver can show up in their child's education in these conversations and really how you model that in the culture of listening and starting there in your work. So thank you so much for. for your learnings and for sharing that with us. I'm going to hand to my colleague Sweta Shah, and she's gonna jump into a little bit more on the practices and the solutions and the strategies that you all are leaning into. So thank you so much, but you have also taught us at the Center for Universal Education and our Knowing Doing Network. Handing to you, Sweta.

SHAH: Thanks so much, Emily. Good morning, everyone. Good afternoon. Good evening. My name is Sweta Shah, and I'm a fellow at the Center for Universal Education. So I'll be moderating the second part of this panel. So we've learned already about what is relational trust, why is it important, and what are some of the key elements that enable relational trust. And now we're going to delve into the how. So my question for the panelists today is, what are some of the innovative and impactful strategies for building trust, particularly with marginalized communities? And let's start with Ellen.

CHIGWANDA: Thanks so much Sweta. I wanted to share that for the work that we've done in one of the rural regions in Zimbabwe, one of the most impactful strategies we've used is what we what we call the whole school approach. And the whole school approach really approaches the school as an ecosystem and I know that my fellow panelists are going to be focusing on you know other parts of the ecosystem. But it's important to approach the school as an ecosystem and to understand that all of the different elements of that school are very much connected. And so focusing perhaps on the girls themselves, the whole school approach really requires us to look at girls from a 360 perspective. So the girl herself, but also the boys, the teachers and everyone around her, the communities. And I want to keep going back to water because the research was focused on drought. A lot of the questions and what we wanted to understand was really coming back to water and the fact that water is such a central part of a girl's life and makes learning much easier for them within a rural community. And so really trying to connect the dots between the different elements of the ecosystem it helped us to understand how relational trust, you know, can be a pathway to action. And so, Care Zimbabwe and the Center for Universal Education, we did conduct research in this region. And what we did after that research, we were able to collectively invest in a pilot in order to act on that research. So the communities were able to actually see what they contributed to the research translated into a very real action plan, where we wanted to make sure that the school has access to water for 365 days of the year and that water is available to the community, to the parents, to the teachers, to the learners, to everyone. And so it helped us to connect our research findings to a clear action plan. So integrity is an important part of a whole school approach and enabled us to really make sure that we're building trust within the community. I'm gonna hand over to Kuri to also share her own experiences.

CHISIM: Thank you again, Ellen. So in my experience, what we did is that we have conducted a lot of community consultation, FGDs, and then one-to-one interviews with the community people. And then just to understand their culture, their perspective, their output, all of

these. And observation played a great part in our work. So one of the example that I want to give is that initially, when the Rohingya people came to our country, then they were given Thanks for watching! box of plays which the children used to play. They were given Scrabbles. They were given some of the different sorts of items which they did not really know what those items were. So they were playing Scrabbles in a different way. They were stacking it up. So that was the point when we understood we actually need to do something about it because that is not the play that is working out for them. So that is a power of observation.

And that is the power of observation because then we conducted workshops with the community just to find out that they had different ways of chanting rhymes, which actually helped them to heal. And the children were ecstatic with joy when they were chanting those rhymes. So that is how we come to understand that what are the different elements that we want to input there. and while designing spaces, especially play spaces or learning spaces, what we did is that we brought all the community mothers and then the fathers just to understand that what are the design elements that works for them and their children and for the community and what is the sustainable way of doing it. So there were certain design elements that the Rohingya children grew up watching and then the women used to do that certain type of designing and embroidery that They were. keen to do and then supply for the learning centers and all those elements we included. So this kind of design workshops and then material development workshop where the mothers and the fathers were coming in and making toy materials for their children that worked out really well. And it worked out as a healing element for both parents and children because when the parents were seeing their children playing with those material, it made them very happy and children loved playing with those. So this is how we moved into communal healing and not only that, that actually helped them to build trust on us.

And another example could be during COVID, when everything shut down, we actually started another intervention which is called Pashayachi, which literally means beside you. So we provided these telephonic service through which all of our paraprofessionals, they were calling each and day to the mother, children, and the fathers to understand how they were. So just this little support helps these people. gave their trust on us. So these were some of the ways that we actually built trust with the community and people. Now I'd like to hand over to James for his input.

BRIDGEFORTH: Great. Thank you, Kuri. One of the things with the community schools model that we've seen, and this I would say probably not even just community schools, but really just any kind of school transformation or system transformation process, is that oftentimes leaders will come in very excited. They'll come in with lots of ideas and they'll think, okay, we're going to get ready. We're going to get started and they'll want to jump into the work. But a part of what we talk about with a lot of folks as we start to reframe this idea is that we really want to instead of thinking just so much about jumping into the work, we really want to see the community school strategy as a space for curiosity, a space where people, whether they're school leaders, whether they are district leaders, whether they. our educators, families, everybody can approach it from a space of curiosity and really thinking about what do we want our schools to actually be? What do we want our schools to feel like? What do we want our schools to look like? How do we want our schools to function? And when we can think about that work and try to ground it in this idea of building a shared vision, that's the kind of work that can actually make so much of this possible. It's not always about just compliance and just about making sure that we're aligning different systems in different parts of our schools. That's important, we want to name that, but it really is about this idea of curiosity and coming from all different spaces.

One of the other strategies that is really important is this idea of coherence and alignment. because oftentimes, especially as school districts get larger and larger. what we end up seeing is that you can operate often in silos. So a lot of this work is about breaking down those silos so that you have folks who are from the curriculum division and department, they're speaking with the people from the facilities and the maintenance department because it's important to make sure that they're all talking with each other. It's important to think about how we are operating even from the, or across different hierarchies. So whether you're at a school site, whether you were at the central

office, whether you're at even a county office or a larger body, it's important to make sure that we're all speaking the same language, that we're all talking about the same things, and that we all have the same goal at the heart of it. So when we think about community schools, we're often thinking about it as a framework that really allows us to build the conditions so that students are going to be able to thrive, because we do believe that all students should be thriving and should be flourishing in thriving school communities. And so what that means is putting together all the different puzzle pieces to make that happen.

Now, what I will also say is that that work is very difficult, that work is not something that just happens by accident. And at work also, especially as we think about this idea of trust, it really requires us to actually spend time thinking through, you know, what has the history been within our communities? How have our communities actually experienced our schools? Do our communities trust our schools? Do our schools trust our communities? And it really is that two-way communication to try to understand where we've been, where we are and where we're really hoping to go. And so that work takes time and it takes structure. So what the schools and the districts can do, how they have done a lot of this work is really leaning into, again, that culture of listening, trying to understand how people have experienced the school system, not making assumptions about, oh, well, when I was in school, this is what it was like, but really listening to folks and saying, okay, well, this is what they're saying and how are we gonna take what they're saying and make meaningful action with that. And so a lot of that really is about building, making sure that schools can actually be spaces where you can have those kinds of conversations, making sure that the folks facilitating those conversations are coming at it from a space of curiosity and in a space of listening, in a space of care, but also making sure that you're setting up the systems afterwards to then be able to take action on what you've heard.

So it's really important for us as we do this work to again, to do it collaboratively, to do it in a way that's going to be actionable, but also do it in a way that honestly experiences and the wisdom that we have in communities. And that hasn't always been done, but I'm always really excited to see that there's a lot more work happening because it's in a time I would say where we are facing a lot of challenges, there might be a lot of mistrust. It really is important to think of our schools as spaces where we all belong and spaces where where all of our voices are included. And that's with folks that maybe we agree with and also folks that we don't agree with. Everybody's voice does matter. And if we're going to build schools that are going to really meet the needs of all students, we have to have everybody at the table and we have to have systems in place to allow for that kind of dialog so that we can all move forward in the spirit of making sure that our students are at the center of all of our work. So with that, I'll go ahead and I'll pass it to Khadija.

SHARIFF: Thank you, James, and thanks, everyone. I think a lot of what I wanted to say has been said already, but I'll say one of the things that I think we recognized in the beginning was the gaps when it came to data and evidence around life skills and values. And so we started off there so that we could come with information that they, and evidence that the system collaborators, the people at the system level could really engage in. And I think part of our data collection actually involved going to household to household, really engaging with the parents and the teachers and the learners. And we brought our system collaborators with us to those data collection in the households. And I think they were able to experience firsthand kind of what we were doing. And so then when we came to talk to them. It started off based on experience and so I think that was a really powerful kind of first step to help us to begin to know what we're talking about together because they experienced what it was like to really do an assessment of life skills, you know, various life skills, including respect, for example, value of respect, something that hasn't really been done or that they haven't seen do. um before and and and and it was a way to get us to really begin to connect but then from there um we started with you know co-creation and really creating meaning together on where we're trying to go um and creating plans that are really aligned um so that it's not just about um sort of coming in with our own plans but really identifying so you know with some with some systems you know they were really looking at how do we improve teacher teaching and learning materials, whereas with others, they were. you know, really interested in your training specifically, whereas with others, they were really looking at, you know, developing

specific assessments around specific skills or values. So really speaking to the needs that they had and working to create sort of a shared plan around those specific needs, but then also walking together along the journeys.

I think another strategy that was really important, everything from whether it was data collection or, or also even reflection about what we were seeing happening or what we, you know, some of the issues that were arising. So really discussing and learning together and figuring out and charting sort of revised plans together. And then the other thing that I can't stress enough is sort of the continuous engagement and connection whether you know And sometimes it's not even about You know about the work, but you know connection beyond the work outside of just you know, the work that we're doing together but about you know connection in terms of families or sometimes even coming together for dinner parties and just really connecting on different levels so that we can see sort of the humanity within us and it's not just kind of like a working relationship. So those are some of the ways that I think the strategies that we've really managed to build trust within the work that we do.

SHAH: Thank you so much to all of you. Really interesting to really see that trust is possible to build in all levels, whether it's from the child level, the family level, community level, even at a district level or government level. Now we're going to open it up to Q and A. So for anyone in the audience, if you have any questions, please provide them in the Q and A box. But as we wait for questions to come in, I'm going to just start off with the first question for all of you. So you all, to some extent, mentioned listening, the really critical importance of listening. And that is not necessarily an easy thing to achieve. especially in situations where people have very different views or we have polarization. How have you dealt with that? Have you come across situations where you were trying to get people, certain stakeholders, to listen and they weren't? And how did you deal with that? How did you get people to make that shift to become listeners? It's a hard question, but I'm just curious to know your reflections on that and any experiences.

BRIDGEFORTH: I can start, and I'm going to say that this is a work in progress. I don't have the answer. I don't have a perfect way of doing this. But I think that one of the biggest things is, and I will recognize that it can be very difficult, but I do think that really always coming into any room, and if we're going to have these kinds of discussions, we're going to have these kinds of debates. It's really important for us to in some ways remove a bit of like our titles and all of our things and recognize that everybody's voice matters and explicitly stating that up front. So if I'm thinking, for example, like in a school site, if you are about to have a very difficult conversation, and you are, you know, maybe you work in the front office or maybe like you're one of the secretarial or like office clerks, you may not feel that you can voice your opinion and that you can say everything and make the demands that you need to make, especially if it's to the school principal or the district administrator or somebody like that, because of the ways that power hierarchies operate, oftentimes you can feel very disconnected.

But what's important, I think as we started to have these conversations. and that we dig a bit deeper into this, is really trying to break down some of those power hierarchies so that everybody does recognize it, regardless of where you are in the hierarchy, the stated one in the school or where you are in space, that again, your voice does matter and that you have not just, you know, the ability, but the right to actually make these kinds of demands and to have these kinds of conversations. And I say that because a lot of that work really comes in around this issue of belonging. at the University of California. There's a scholar, John Powell, who talks a lot about belonging, and a lot of what he's saying about belonging is really that regardless of where, if we're going to have true belonging, it's not just feeling like, oh, I feel valued, or I feel like I can be here. But it's this exact piece of like, when it gets hard, when you are having these difficult conversations, when you are having to make really difficult decisions, that everybody feels that they can actually. can they have the right to be able to say the things that they need to say and to make those kinds of demands on the institution and like that's what it takes to have a space where you're going to do that. And so in doing that, if we're setting it up, we have to break down those hierarchies and name them upfront so that folks don't feel as though they can't say something or

that what's happening in that room is somewhere that they just can't operate. And so I think, if we're doing this work, it is naming that up front and then trying to build out practices that are going to allow everybody's voice to be equal in that space, which again is hard. And it may change once we leave the room, but if we can start to do it there, then we can start to continue to build those practices even when we're outside of that room.

SHAH: Anyone else like to jump in? Otherwise, I'm happy to move to the next question.

SHARIFF: Maybe I can just add, and I also don't have a very clear answer to this, but I think coming into any meeting, especially the engagements meetings that we have, with an open mind and, you know, asking more questions than just kind of talking and having. You know, the agenda or carrying the agenda, so actually allowing, you know, everyone in the room to set the agenda and everyone in the room to kind of speak to, you know, what's important and what needs to be sort of discussed. But also, I think one of the things that we've learned is that it's important to, to ensure that we create spaces where we're bringing people together, we feel comfortable opening up and sharing. And so, you know, the hierarchies are and they are hard to tell everyone to let go, you know, but I think if you, if you intentionally create spaces where, you know, you know that, you know, these particular people will feel comfortable to speak to one another and so they'll open up and then and that'll allow us to be able to, to hear what we really, you know, want to hear rather than maybe what somebody might just say just because their boss is in the room or, you know, a, you know, a bigger, a bigger person. And then they don't want to walk on toes, because that's the reality, I think, of the space that we're in. So yeah, I think for me, that would be how we go about it.

SHAH: And then I'm curious as a follow-up, you know, both James and Khadija, you mentioned the importance that the trust really requires us to break down the hierarchy and to change power dynamics. And so Kuri and Ellen. You both have done this actually with children, with adolescent girls and with refugee children. Actually, Kuri, you've done it with little children. So could you share some insights into how you've done that with children? Because often, you know, adults don't listen to children, right? So how have you achieved that?

CHISIM: Yeah, thank you Sweta for this question, because it's very important to create safe environment for children at first. So in order to do that, you have to make sure that the child is easy, freely and able to express. And what is better way for them to express rather than play, right? Whenever a child is playing, the child can express, they can talk, they can tell, they feel confident. Bring them into that kind of space and listen to them. And another thing is that we are so used to of seeing cookie cutter approach all around the world and decolonizing of that mentality is important. So we keep on talking about it. We can't keep on talking about it. We keep on advocating about it to different stakeholders, to parents, to partners, to donors, to everyone. So that is how we actually try to do it. And that is what Black ethos is.

CHIGWANDA: Thanks, Shweta. So I'm in an environment where the culture is that if you're a child, like you don't speak when adults are there. So engaging adults and communicating the challenges that you're meeting every day, and most often adolescent girls. So if it's just adolescents can't speak with, you know, in the presence of adults, now you can imagine the extra layer of being an adolescent girl. So there's a whole... age and you know gender and geographic vulnerabilities are coming into play. And so this is where adolescent friendly you know methodologies come in where you're trying to really place you know helping to see the adolescents as instruments for research and to be able to collect their own data. So things like photo voice and video voice, where they're able to use, where you place the camera in the hands of the adolescents and they map for themselves what is a risk and what's not. Risk mapping, where they actually draw. So if you go into some of the schools where we're working, the adolescents, each of those schools actually has a risk map that the adolescents themselves have put together. And they say, this place poses a risk in this way. And so you use different methods to communicate um you know to center their voices in addition of course to trying to get them into meetings and into consultations but ways in which you know like Curry said you know using play-based

methodologies to engage the the adolescents we're also using project based learning and so in one of the schools we've set up a fish farming project which is being used in order to help you know adolescents learn about fish farming how the fish themselves are actually grown, but also how that can connect into the school feeding program, which is another intervention that is trying to deal with the whole impact of drought on adolescent learners in a drought -affected region. Thank you.

SHAH: Great, thank you so much. So as we've seen today, you know, building trust is critical to ensuring that education systems meets the needs of learners, families, schools, and communities. And we heard from our wonderful colleagues from Zimbabwe, from Zanzibar, Bangladesh, and the United States. And you know, they laid out for us some key elements that they've seen in their work. So listening and centering children's and families' voices. We learned some strategies of how to also do that. understanding and respecting culture, starting from a culture of a community, co-creating and co-designing and creating a shared vision as a critical element, and using an asset -based approach versus a deficit-based approach. So using the skills that are already existing in communities and among children and families, and a bottom-up approach rather than top-down. And we've heard today that all of this is hard. It takes time. There's no silver bullet to achieving trust, but also the journey and the process is really critical and it does require real intentionality if we actually want to build trust. We have to really think about, historically, as James was saying, has there been trust in this particular community? How do people see these things, you know? We need to think about that we need to break these down and be really open about what has been there before in order for us to really move forward and build we need to have a culture of of curiosity and listening and all of these things are very hard to achieve so you know i think i really applaud you all for the really excellent work you're doing and thank you for being part of this process and. For the audience, I also want to thank you for joining us today. Our next conversation, collaboration conversation, will focus on measuring and sustaining impact in collaborative research action and action during the last week of March. So please look out for the invite soon and we look forward to having that conversation with you. Thanks so much and have a great day. Thanks everyone.