



# Little Ripples Assessment 2019

Refugee camps Kounoungou and Mile, eastern Chad

Assessment date: May 2019



“At the beginning, kids registered [but] didn't attend. They started to see that we are happy teachers and we have mindfulness, songs, food, colors, shapes, sports, language, and numbers. Now, they come and they talk to people. Kids of Little Ripples are now very well. One student just three years old, asks his friends to make a circle around him so he can sit in the middle and do mindfulness like at Little Ripples.”

– Saida, Little Ripples Teacher



## Acknowledgments

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The HIF is funded by aid from the UK Government and the Directorate General of the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO). Visit [www.elrha.org](http://www.elrha.org) for more information about Elrha's work to improve humanitarian outcomes through research, innovation, and partnership.

iACT thanks Jesuit Refugee Service for their steadfast partnership. iACT appreciates the dedicated support of the refugee camp-based iACT and Little Ripples team in camps Goz Amer and Djabal who not only assisted in the launch of the Little Ripples program in camps Kounoungou and Mile, but worked tirelessly to help complete this assessment.



European Union  
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## Introduction

This report provides an overview of iACT's Little Ripples early childhood education program and the recent results from a one year assessment of the program in refugee camps Kounoungou and Mile in eastern Chad. The goal of the assessment was to provide iACT and its partner, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), with concrete information about aspects of LR that are working, areas that need adjustment, and what additional learnings to distribute. This report has been prepared to provide an overview of assessment methodologies, key results, learnings, and next steps.

## Context

The Darfur genocide began in 2003, killing an estimated 480,000 individuals and displacing more than 3 million. For the past 15 years, more than 340,000 refugees from Darfur, Sudan have been in 12 refugee camps in eastern Chad. Camps Mile and Kounoungou in eastern Chad are home to a combined 40,241 Darfur refugees. Over the last decade and a half media coverage of the Darfur crisis and these UN Refugee Agency-managed camps has dwindled, as has international support for humanitarian aid and services. As a result, services in the camps have been drastically cut, including food rations consisting of grains, oil, and sometimes salt. Rations are distributed monthly; but, depending on family size, most of these rations are gone weeks before the next ration is available. Additionally, the Darfur refugee community is dealing with tremendous pressure to return home to Sudan—a region that is still facing instability and wide-spread violence.

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## Little Ripples

Little Ripples (LR) is iACT's early childhood education (ECE) program that empowers refugees and communities affected by humanitarian crises to implement child-centered, quality, and comprehensive pre-primary education that supports the social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development of children ages three to five. Little Ripples is designed to be refugee- and community-led in order to build long-term capacity and address the unique needs of children and communities affected by trauma, violence, displacement, and uncertainty. Refugees and community members learn about the LR pedagogy and curriculum by partaking in three participatory teacher trainings over 18-months where they learn how to implement a play-based ECE program that is grounded in trauma-recovery approaches, restorative practices, empathy development, positive behavior management, peacebuilding, and mindfulness. During training, participants adapt the pedagogy to their culture, content, and the unique needs of children in their community. Little Ripples can be implemented in schools, child-friendly spaces, community centers, and home compounds (referred to as Little Ripples Ponds). The learning space is identified in partnership with each community and education stakeholders.

"The new method we were trained on to deal with children in a positive way has changed the students. It is something we had not learned before. [Before,] they [students] did not say my name; they did not like me or listen to me. From training, we learned to speak with children and be at their level and speak with them peacefully. Now, they see me outside of school and excitedly call me by name; they listen to me and are more excited each day for school."

– Little Ripples Teacher

### Implementation of Little Ripples in Camps Kounoungou and Mile

#### *Little Ripples Ponds established*

With support from the Humanitarian Innovation Fund, Little Ripples was adapted and implemented by iACT, JRS, and the Darfuri refugee community in camps Kounoungou and Mile. The LR implementation process in these camps began in October 2017. Together, a team of iACT staff members and experienced and employed refugee LR team members from other camps in eastern Chad walked each camp to inform the community about the opportunity to implement a community-led early childhood education program. In partnership with the community, **three homes in each camp** were identified and selected to host the program in their home compound. The learning space in each home is called a Little Ripples Pond (see image below of a Pond structure inside a refugee's compound). Families agreed to host the program for at least three years. A refugee construction team was employed to construct the physical Pond structure within each home and refugee families assisted in refurbishing the home space to ensure the space met safety, health, and hygiene standards for young children. Within 3 months, **six Ponds were constructed** and ready to host children across each of the camps. Implementing the LR program in families' home compounds has made the program more accessible and safer for children. As one mother shared, "Children at Little Ripples are more peaceful than others. In the homes [at Little Ripples Ponds], they are more safe with walls, cooks, teachers, and a very safe, clean space."

### Capacity-building

An initial 25 women in each camp were recruited and completed the Little Ripples Teacher Training I (a total of 50 women). Of the 25 in each camp, 8 women were selected and employed as Camp Coordinator, Education Director, and teachers. An additional 6 women in each community were recruited to serve as the cooks of the Little Ripples daily meal program—forming a team of 14 women in each camp. The 28 employed women received two additional trainings over a year—Little Ripples Teacher



Training II and III. *LEAD with EMPATHY*, a human rights and leadership development curriculum, was also provided for the teachers to include during their weekly team meetings after Teacher Training II. iACT considers a Little Ripples team member fully trained after completing the third Little Ripples training. Since the start, the program has maintained a **100% employee retention rate**. The same group of women who completed Teacher Training I and were employed in November 2017, are still the same group of women employed and managing the program today.

The capacity of the women Little Ripples team has exceeded iACT expectations. The Little Ripples team—women employed as the Camp Coordinators, Education Directors, teachers, and cooks—implement and manage every aspect of the program including the registration, weekly monitoring of children and attendance rates, weekly problem-solving, outreach to parents and community members, daily teaching, and the management of the meal program. They also report to iACT, JRS, and education stakeholders. The women consistently send monitoring data at the end of each month; meet together every month to discuss challenges, learnings, and opportunities; and have identified solutions to challenges they face in the classroom with students. During the first full school year, each Pond enrolled 45 children and maintained a 2 to 45 teacher-to-student ratio and a more **than 80% attendance rate**.

## Little Ripples Assessment

In partnership with JRS, the University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC), and the refugee community, three assessments were implemented to measure children's social-emotional, cognitive, and physical health as well as collect information on the daily life of the child and caregiver and household levels of food security. The third and final assessment took place during May-June 2019 and served as a one-year follow-up from the baseline assessment.

Of the 180 caregivers and their children who participated in the baseline assessment in February 2018, 117 participated in the follow-up assessment. Three measures were employed to assess the children's

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social, emotional, and cognitive development, and their physical health. Data were also collected to examine the children's and caregivers' daily life and their household levels of food security.

This report presents findings from the third and final assessment, which serves as the one-year follow-up to the baseline assessment. Data were collected over a period of two months, May to June 2019.

## **Methodology**

The Little Ripples assessments' research design was designed in partnership with Dr. Nathan Jones of the University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC) and iACT expert Technical Advisors. Dr. Jones conducted training with the refugee assessment team and led the first two in-camp assessments in camp Goz Amer. Between January and June 2017, iACT also worked with the Institute of Development Studies to evaluate and redevelop the qualitative and quantitative monitoring and evaluation tools for collecting child data, and for measuring the program's impact on the community.

### *Instrument design:*

The Little Ripples assessment measures are composed of four questionnaires.

1. A questionnaire based on family and household characteristics was administered with the caregivers (parent or primary adult providing care in the home).
2. A series of questions asked to the caregivers about each child registered at Little Ripples.
3. Child Measure to test basic cognitive milestones (identifying colors and animals, counting, and letter recognition) and completing physical tasks.
4. Anthropometric measurements and food security questionnaire.

### *Implementation:*

For this program evaluation, iACT shifted from paper-based to tablet-based questionnaires. This change improved the quality of the data collection and accelerated and improved the quality of our data entry (decreased form entry-related errors) and analysis. Dr. Nathan Jones of the UWSC recommended we expedite data entry and analysis by employing a Google questionnaire form.

Data collection was conducted in teams of two (the assessor team): an iACT team member and a trained refugee team member who has conducted a similar assessment in their own refugee camp. Having a researcher from the Darfur refugee community (even if not from their camp) was important as they helped to create a safe space for the participants during the data collection phase of the evaluation.

Each team member had a copy of each questionnaire in English and Arabic. The iACT team member posed each question and answer options in English and the refugee team member acted as an interpreter and translated the question and answer options to Arabic. The interpreter would sometimes use a local tribal dialect if the caregiver did not speak Arabic. The participant responses were translated to English for the iACT team member who documented the response. The assessor teams remained the same for the duration of the four questionnaires.

### *Anthropometric measurement:*

The assessor team conducted the height and weight measurements and collected observational data (i.e., Are the child's ankles and belly swollen? Is their hair discolored? On a scale, how good is their overall health?) health observations with each child.



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Each child's weight was taken using an electronic scale that measures weight to a tenth of a kilogram; therefore, weight was recorded to one decimal place. One team member weighed the child and one team member recorded the measurement in kilograms.

Height was measured with a height measuring board. One assessor measured the child and read the height measurement and the other team member recorded the height in millimeters after the two agreed on the reading. During the anthropometric measurements, the assessor team also gave a subjective rating of the overall health status of the child.

*Food security:*

Caregivers were asked a series of questions based on the USAID's Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS).<sup>1</sup>

*Analysis:*

Once a connection to the internet was available, data were uploaded and available for Dr. Jones at the University of UWSC for analysis. Dr. Jones entered all the data into the statistical program R Code, created a spreadsheet of raw data for each indicator result, and produced a report of findings for iACT and the Little Ripples stakeholders.

## **Implementation Learnings**

iACT experienced three key implementation challenges that give additional context to the findings from the assessment:

1. iACT was not able to measure the same total number of caregivers and children participating in the baseline assessment at each follow-up assessment over the duration of the project. In February 2017, iACT completed a baseline assessment with 180 caregivers and children, however not all 180 caregivers and participated in the follow-up assessments in February 2018 and May-June 2019. While we did attempt to address this issue by 1) offering families a small incentive of 1,000 XFA for their participation, 2) adjusting the timeline of the assessment to ensure families were more likely to be in-camp (not away at their gardens), and 3) increasing the amount of advanced notice and conducting household visits for recruitment and reminders, we found that it was still too difficult for families to spend a day participating in the assessment instead of doing their work and chores to meet their essential daily needs. To understand this challenge it is important to understand the context in which these refugee families live: food rations have been cut with some camps going several months with no rations at all, there are very limited livelihood opportunities, and families are resorting to spending more time away from their home in order to look for work outside of the camps, tend their gardens, and find opportunities to gain a livelihood and make up for the cut in food rations.
2. Children from the control group in refugee camp Mile that initially participated in the baseline assessment did not remain in the control group due to the fact that once the Little Ripples Ponds were open, the community became aware of the high quality program and that children received a daily meal. As a result, families in the control group who participated in the baseline assessment advocated for their children to attend a Little Ripples Pond. The community, including their leaders and the iACT Little Ripples refugee Program Director agreed that the children in the control group

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<sup>1</sup>Coates, Jennifer, Anne Swindale and Paula Bilinsky. *Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) for Measurement of Household Food Access: Indicator Guide* (v. 3). Washington, D.C.: Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project, Academy for Educational Development, August 2007.

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children should attend the program. Therefore, the number of children in the control group in the follow-up assessments were significantly lower than they were for the baseline assessment as they were included as Little Ripples students in the assessment. Given that the number of children in the group control decreased dramatically, their data were not considered in the follow up assessment analysis. Findings presented in this final assessment are drawn from the data collected with the children in the Little Ripples Ponds from baseline and one year follow up assessments.

3. Conducting research on young children is challenging, especially when the research design includes children living in countries affected by emergencies. Therefore, it was not surprising that the assessors encountered issues with young children responding to questions measuring their cognitive development. The measures employed to collect data on the children necessitated a verbal response. Questions included children sharing their name and age, counting and reciting, and identifying colors, shapes, posters, and animals. The researchers created a welcoming and comforting space by asking the Little Ripples teachers to lead activities with the children and to offer them toys to play with while families waited. Nevertheless, children displayed shyness and hesitancy in answering the questions and it was determined that the assessment process was likely intimidating for the children. It is important to note that children were in the presence of their caregiver at all times; however, they were being interviewed by two unfamiliar adults (an iACT team member and an interpreter, a male from another refugee camp). Conducting quantitative research such as the measures that were employed for the baseline and follow-up assessments on children may have impacted the findings. For future assessments, it is recommended that in addition to quantitative measures, qualitative approaches that include children as active participants in the data collection be considered to gain a more robust understanding of the impact of the program on children's development, learning, and over well-being.

## Key Findings

Within this challenging context, findings revealed that several key program, learning, and child development outcomes scores had improved for the children who participated in the Little Ripples Ponds program. Key findings are presented below.

### Safety

Little Ripples is the only program in refugee camps Kounoungou and Mile offering safe, nurturing spaces for young children while their parents and caregivers are working to meet the daily needs of their family.

- 100% of caregivers reported 'Yes' when asked if they **feel their child is safe** at Little Ripples. Whereas, 56% of the same caregivers do not feel their child is safe when in their camp, but outside of a Little Ripples learning space.

### Social-Emotional Development

Social and emotional learning incorporates executive functions and self-regulation, which are extremely important skills for children who have experienced violence or who are growing up in a displaced setting. Since a nurturing environment is crucial for a child's development during the early years and mindfulness practices can provide children with tools to address both stress and their reaction to trauma the LR curriculum includes guided mindfulness activities, mindful movement transitions, welcome and goodbye circles, and purposeful emotional monitoring of the children; thus, fostering children's inner peace.

The values of peace, helping, and sharing are also integrated into the LR curriculum: peace as a foundation helps the children feel safe (physically and emotionally) and to respect and care for



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others, helping allows the children to feel supported and learn how to provide support to others, and sharing creates a welcoming and generous environment. All of these values are taught and integrated throughout the LR curriculum in order to assure that this younger generation has a strong emotional and social foundation.

Not surprising, baseline assessment findings showed that no child was able to identify the posters illustrating the three Little Ripples values of Peace, Helping, and Sharing. In contrast, one year later, findings revealed that there was an increase in the number of children (68%) who were able to identify the values of peace, helping, and sharing.

The findings show that there is an increase in the number of children that demonstrated the pro-social skill of sharing:

#### Percentage of Caregivers' Responses to How Often Their Child Shares at Baseline

Frequency	Camp Kounoungou Baseline	Camp Mile Baseline
Always Observe	0%	0%
Often Observe	36%	13%
Sometimes Observe	42%	40%
Never Observe	17%	20%
Did Not Respond	5%	27%

In total, from both camps, findings from the follow-up assessment revealed that 16.5% of caregivers reported their child 'never' shares, 42% reported their child 'sometimes' shares, 17.5% reported their child 'often' shares, and 24% reported their child 'always' shares.

#### Independence

Findings from the baseline assessment conducted in camp Kounoungou revealed that, 59% of the caregivers whose children were enrolled in the Little Ripples Pond program reported that their child is 'never' able to do something independently. Similarly, findings from the baseline assessment conducted in camp Mile, showed that more than 55% of caregivers whose children were enrolled in the Little Ripples Pond program reported that their child was 'sometimes' able to do something independently.

Less than 25% reported their child was 'always' or 'sometimes' able to do something independently.

In total from both groups of participants, findings from the follow up assessment showed that 32% of the caregivers whose children were enrolled in a Little Ripples Pond program reported that their children always demonstrated independence.

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## Cognitive Development

Cognitive development is a process whereby children construct knowledge and understanding about their world. It is the development of knowledge, skills, problem solving and dispositions, which help children to think about and understand the world around them.<sup>2</sup> Brain development is part of cognitive development.

Findings show an increase in the number of children able to:

### Identify Colors

At baseline, no children from camp Mile were able to identify 5 colors and 70% of children in camp Kounoungou were able to identify 5 colors.

Follow-up findings revealed that, in total from both camps, more than 50% of the children in the Little Ripples program were able to identify 4 to 5 colors.

### Count to Ten in Arabic

Baseline assessment results revealed that no child in either camp was able to count to 10 in Arabic.

Combined findings from the follow-up assessment revealed a significant increase (64%) in the number of children who were able to count to 10 and 20% were able to count between 5 and 9.

### Identify Four to Five Animals

Findings from the baseline assessment indicated that no child enrolled in the Little Ripples Ponds program in both camps was able to identify animals.

Findings from the follow-up assessment showed an increase in the number of children correctly identifying animals. In total from both camps, 35% of children were able to identify 4 animals and 20% of children were able to identify 5 animals.

### Recite the Alphabet in Arabic

Findings from the baseline assessment revealed that no child was able to recite up to or more than the 10<sup>th</sup> letter of the Arabic alphabet.

Findings from the follow-up assessment showed a significant increase in the number of children that could recite the alphabet. In total from both camps, 63% of children were able to recite up to or more than the 10<sup>th</sup> letter of the alphabet

## Health

The Little Ripples curriculum health and hygiene practices such as handwashing with soap upon arrival, before eating, and after using the latrine, promotion of latrine use, and coughing or sneezing into your arm. Children learn and practice these behaviors every day at Little Ripples.

Overall, results from the follow-up assessment indicate that there were some improvements in the health and health behavior of the children attending the Little Ripples Ponds program:

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<sup>2</sup>What is Cognitive Development, (Minnesota: Help Me Grow), [//helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/HelpfulRes/Articles/WhatCognitiveDev/index.html](http://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/HelpfulRes/Articles/WhatCognitiveDev/index.html)

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Findings from the baseline assessment showed that more than 70% of caregivers from both camps reported that their child never covers their mouth when coughing compared to 18% one year later. This finding shows a significant increase in the number of children practicing healthy hygiene practices. In addition, 15.8% of the caregivers reported their child always covers their mouth while coughing and 53.3% reported their child 'sometimes' covers their mouth.

Caregivers were asked if their child had had a cough or fever in the previous two weeks. At baseline, more than 70% of caregivers of the Little Ripples children and control groups reported their child having had a cough and fever. In comparison, one year later, 52.5% of the caregivers who had children in the Little Ripples Ponds program reported their child had a cough and fever in the previous two weeks. whereas more than 70% of the control group caregivers reported a cough and fever.

Caregivers were asked about their child's handwashing routine. The majority of caregivers in camp Mile reported that their Little Ripples child either sometimes, often, or 'always washed their hands after using the latrine. In contrast, in camp Kounoungou, 40% of the caregivers reported that their child never washed their hands and 31% reported that their child sometimes washed their hands. One year later, follow-up assessment findings revealed that in total from both camps, 72.5% of caregivers reported that their child often or always washed their hands after using the latrine and 26.7% reported that their child sometimes wash their hands. In addition, in total from both camps, 91.7% of caregivers reported that their child often or always washed their hands before eating a meal.

## **Food Security**

Little Ripples offers a daily nutritious meal to every student. What we're continuing to learn from families and the Little Ripples team of women leading the program, is that the Little Ripples meal program is essential to guarantee one healthy meal per day for refugee children attending the program. The meal program through LR contains a rotation of nutritious ingredients such as vegetables, grains, and meat. The cooks are trained on the structure of the meal program, their responsibilities as cooks, and safe health and hygiene practices. Many LR parents admitted that sometimes this meal is the only one their child receives that day because their food rations are so limited. Food rations consist of grains, oil, and sometimes salt if they are lucky. The food rations in camps Kounoungou and Mile are typically distributed monthly; but, depending on family size, most of these rations are gone before the next ration is available. According to our survey, the majority of families run out of their food rations with 3 weeks receiving them. This means that most families are going at least a week without food rations. Additionally there were periods in 2018 and early 2019 when food rations were cut off entirely for all families in the camp. This further exacerbates the food insecurity of each household and the health of the community at large.

Food security means having, at all times, both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet dietary needs for a productive and healthy life.<sup>3</sup> According to this definition, and the indicator categorization of the the Household Food Insecurity Access Prevalence,<sup>4</sup> 99% of families surveyed at Mile and Kounoungou are moderately to severely food insecure.

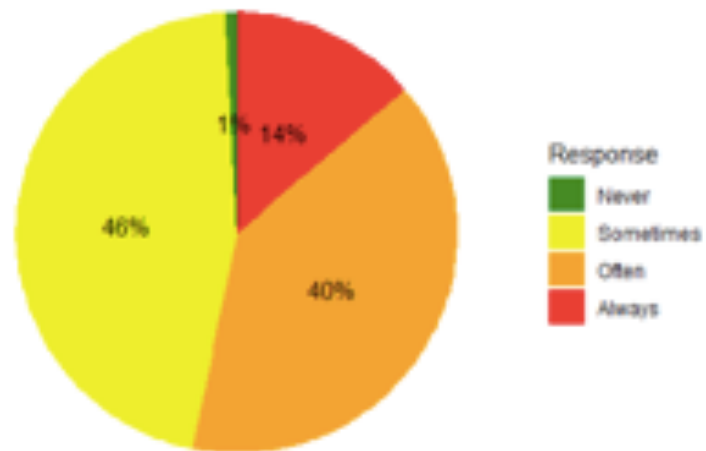
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<sup>3</sup> Food Security (USAID: 2019), [//www.usaid.gov/fallsemester/usaid-101/food-security](https://www.usaid.gov/fallsemester/usaid-101/food-security)

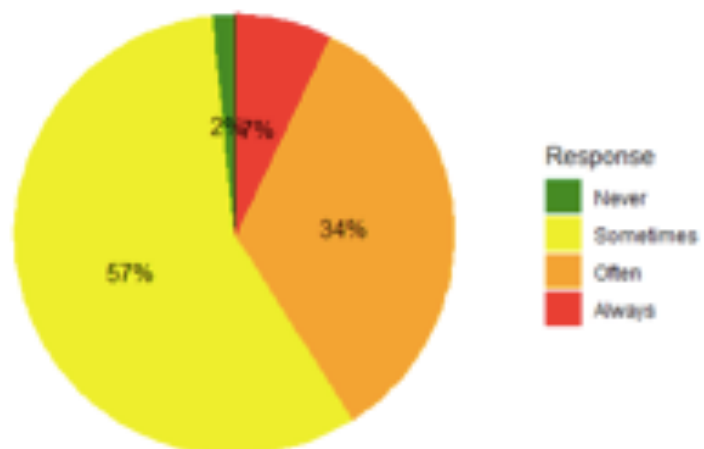
<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The following pages present the food security survey results of the caregivers / households interviewed in May and June 2019.

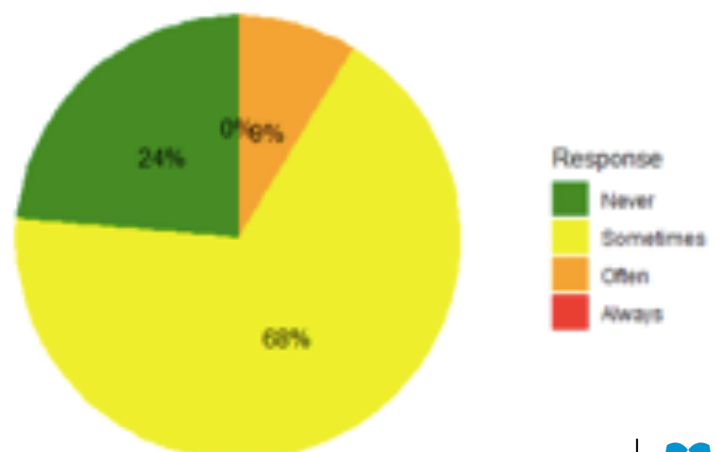
**Question:** In the past 2 months, how often did you eat a smaller meal than you needed because there was not enough food?



**Question:** In the past 2 months, how often did you eat fewer meals in a day because there was not enough food?



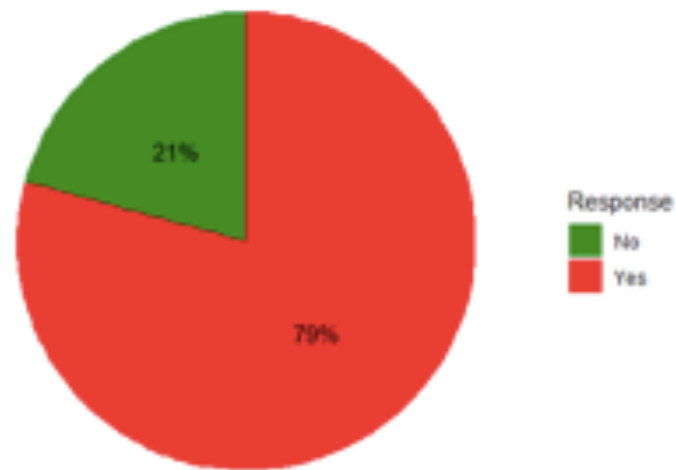
**Question:** In the past 2 months, how often did you go a whole day without eating anything because there was not enough?





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**Question:** In the past 2 months, was there ever no food at all in your household?



## Next Steps

### Little Ripples Assessment

The iACT team is continuing to analyze and garner insights from the assessment process and results and is committed to sharing additional results more widely with peers and with the refugee community. iACT plans to create an end-of-year report that provides more visual insights for a wider audience to digest the learnings from the assessment. Additionally, in November of 2019, iACT will be gathering with key Technical Advisors on ways to improve its assessment process including redesigning the survey and reducing the number of questions; identifying creative ways to interview and assess young children that might be more fun and engaging; and identifying additional ways to implement the assessment so that it reduces or minimizes the formal interview process and becomes a process that can be applied on an ongoing basis by refugee community members.

### Food Security

iACT is in the process of creating a more in-depth food security report on the conditions in refugee camps across eastern Chad. iACT has been reporting on the alarming levels of food insecurity in Darfuri refugee camps since 2015.

### Little Ripples program

iACT is continuing to work directly with Darfuri refugees to support the Little Ripples program in camps Mile and Kounoungou. iACT's continued support includes:

- Salaries for the 2019-2020 school year for each Little Ripples team member (28 women);
- Ingredients for the meal program to provide a daily meal for 270 children (45 children per Pond six days a week);
- Replenishment of educational and meal program materials and equipment; and,
- Remote support and capacity-building of Little Ripples team.

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The Little Ripples team members in each camp will enroll children for another school year and continue to lead the program implementation and monitoring with little oversight from iACT or JRS. Starting in October 2019, Little Ripples will be the only formal early childhood education program supporting the social-emotional, cognitive, and physical health of Darfuri refugee children ages three to five in eastern Chad. iACT will also be working with each Little Ripples team and community to identify and test livelihood solutions that might off-set and support the Little Ripples program costs longterm, such as salaries and the costs of the meal program.

