



Supported by:



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SIPCA Uptake Forum 1 – Sri Lanka

Scaling Impact of a Play-Based Child-to-Child Approach to Make Preschool to Primary School Transition Fun and Inclusive (SIPCA)

29th September 2025
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Executive Summary

The Scaling Impact of a Play-Based Child-to-Child Approach (SIPCA) is an ongoing research initiative led by the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo, funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and supported by Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX).

As part of the project's dissemination and advocacy activities, SIPCA Uptake Forum 1 was held on 29th September 2025 in Colombo. The forum served as a collaborative platform to share progress, experiences, and lessons learned from implementing the play-based Child-to-Child (CtC) approach in selected preschools in the Western Province of Sri Lanka.

The event brought together academics, policymakers, and practitioners to reflect on achievements, discuss challenges, and deliberate on future directions for scaling the innovation. Professor Indika Mahesh Karunathilaka, Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, while Dr. Upali Sedere, Rector and CEO of SIBA Campus, delivered the keynote address, emphasizing the importance of play-based learning and collaborative educational innovations.

The event was honoured by the invaluable participation of Professor Rasha Sharaf, KIX EMAP Knowledge Lead for South Asia and MENA, whose insights highlighted the regional significance of the SIPCA initiative and its contribution to achieving equitable and inclusive early childhood education. Likewise, Ms. Susan Dunston from Child-to-Child (CtC) UK provided inspiring reflections on strengthening child-led learning approaches and ensuring pedagogical fidelity across contexts.

Teachers have shared inspiring success stories they have witnessed during the implementation, such as the active engagement of YLs in the sessions and the growing confidence and leadership of the YFs in preparing the lessons for both engaging and enjoyable. The panel discussion offered additional perspectives on addressing implementation challenges. Overall, the forum fostered rich discussions on the benefits of CtC implementation in Sri Lankan schools combined with more training for teachers and

using of specially adopted material in the national system. Currently, Sri Lanka is in the process of developing new education reforms and a new policy on preschool education showing the potential for its sustainability in the future.

Purpose of the Forum

Baseline data revealed that participating preschool teachers held highly positive perceptions of the Child-to-Child approach, identifying it as a motivating and engaging method with multiple benefits for preschool education. Parents similarly appreciated the model, seeing it as a return to traditional family-based learning where older children guide the younger ones.

Data from the Young Facilitators (YFs) demonstrated their readiness and motivation to engage in this new learning experience.

The forum's main purposes were:

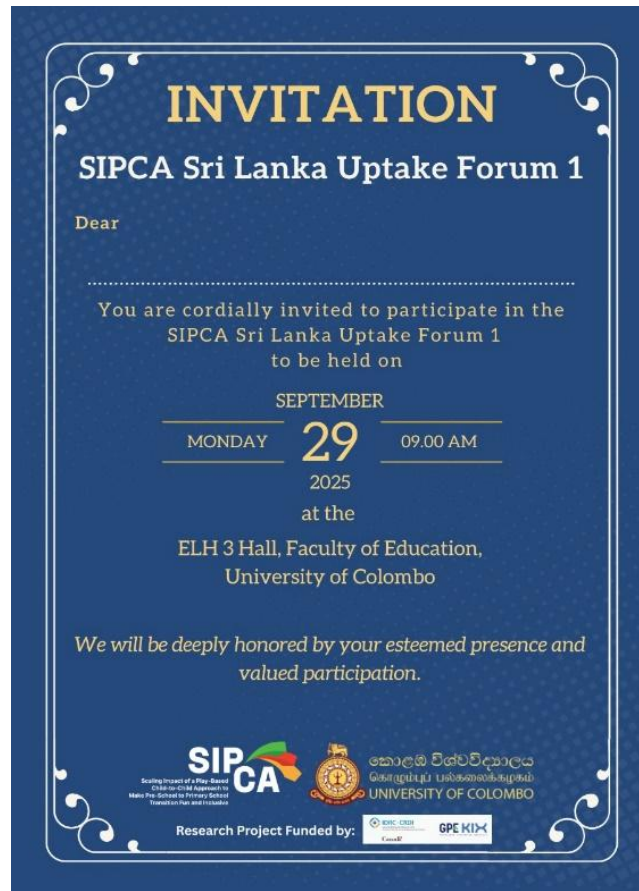
- To give preschool teachers a platform to share their achievements and experiences.
- Provide an opportunity to share best practices fostering inclusion.
- To raise awareness among key government officials about the ongoing research as part of advocacy efforts for wider adoption.

Objectives of the Forum

1. Share experiences of participating teachers and schools on implementing the Play-Based Child-to-Child (PB CtC) approach.
2. Reflect on lessons learned, identify best practices, and promote peer exchange among schools.
3. Discuss implementation challenges and explore practical solutions.
4. Share partner country experiences (Maldives and Pakistan).
5. Deliberate on key considerations for scaling the innovation.



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Participants

A total of 65 participants attended, including:

- Consortium research country members from IUM -Maldives and AKU-Pakistan.
- 10 preschool teachers from SIPCA schools.
- 12 formal school teachers and 10 principals from participating schools.
- The Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo.
- Officials from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women's and Child Affairs Provincial Department of Education (Western Province), National Institute of Education (NIE), and National Education Commission (NEC).
- The Sri Lankan research team and staff from the Faculty of Education.

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Agenda

Time	Item	Name
09.00- 0930	Registration and Morning Tea	
	National Anthem and Lighting the Oil Lamp	Prof. Indika Karunathilake Dr. Upali Sedere Prof. Samudra Senarath Prof. M.V. Vithanapathirana Prof. Sarath Ananda Dr. Mariyam Shareefa Dr. Nasima Shakeel Mrs. Tiromi Indigahawala Mrs. Padmini Ranaweera Dr. Kumudu Seneviratne Ms.Jayani Prshangika Ms. Darshani Iddamal goda Dr. Kapila Bandara Dr. Jeevani Herath Heads of departments deputy Bursar Deputy Registrar One of the Principals 1 Pre-School Teachers
	Welcome Speech	Prof. Samudra Senarath, Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Colombo
	Introduction to the Forum	Mrs. Tiromi Indigahawala, Sri Lanka Project Coordinator
0955-10.00	Address by the National KIX Coordinator	Dr. Kumudu Senevirathne
10.00-1010	10:00 – 10:10 Adress by the Chief Guest	Prof. Indika Karunathilake, Vice Chancellor, University of Colombo
10:10 – 10:25	Overview of the CtC and Presentation of Baseline Research Findings	Dr. Kapila Bandara, Faculty of Education, University of Colombo
10:25 – 10:35	Address by the Secretary of the Ministry of Education	Mr. Nalaka Kaluwewe
10:35 – 10:55	Address by the Guest Speaker	Dr. Upali M Sedere, Rector/ CEO, SIBA Campus

10:55 – 11:00	Vote of Thanks	Dr. Jeevani Herath, Faculty of Education, University of Colombo
11:00 – 12:15	Panel Discussion and Collaborative Reflections	Panelists Dr. Mariyam Shareefa Dr. Visal Moosa Dr. Aishath Shina Dr. Nasima Shakeel Mr. Abdul Wali Khan Moderators Mrs. Padmini Ranaweera Dr. Jeevani Herath
12:15 – 13:00	Lunch	
13.00-14.00	Pre School Progress Presentations	1. Ms. Rohini Priyadharshani 2. Ms. Ajantha Wijesinghe 3. Ms. Thushari Delgahagoda 4. Ms. Apsara Lakmali 5. Ms. Dilani Mahesha
14.00-15.00	Pre School Progress Presentations	6. Ms. Asha Nimanthi 7. Ms. Shyamalee Ranasinghe 8. Ms. Latha Sinnaiya 9. Ms. Umayangani Rodrigo 10. Ms. A.W.F. Shaheema
15.00 -15.45	International Perspectives and Feedback on Implementing PB CtC in Sri Lanka by CtC Team	
15.45-16.00	Key Takeaways	
16.00-16.30	Certificates awarding	
16.30-17.00	Closing Remarks, Networking and Evening Tea	

Forum Proceedings and Highlights

The day's program included addresses by key dignitaries, school presentations, and panel discussions.

Highlights

- The Vice Chancellor emphasized the value of early childhood interventions and acknowledged the innovative contribution of the CtC model.
- Representatives from MoE, Ministry of WACA, NIE, and provincial authorities expressed their commitment to sustaining the initiative.
- Preschool presentations illustrated how YFs prepared and conducted CtC sessions, the supportive relationships between YFs and YLs, and feedback from parents.
- Teachers observed enhanced social-emotional development, empathy, and communication skills among YFs, and increased enthusiasm and confidence among YLs.
- A panel discussion featuring representatives from Maldives and Pakistan provided international perspectives, identifying teacher motivation and commitment as key enablers of success.
- Discussions among stakeholders centered on sustainability, policy integration, and the need for continued collaboration

Key Outcomes and Recommendations

- Stakeholders expressed strong support for the CtC model and recognized its potential for national scale-up. Especially Ministry of Education (MoE) and the provincial department of education, as all the 10 participating schools come under the western province. National Institute of Education (NIE) and the principals of the formal schools also made positive feedback useful for mainstream adoption.
- Each school presented how the CtC session takes place in their schools, the relationship between the YFs and Young Learners (YLs), and the feedback received from the parents. Teachers shared evidence of improved learner engagement, confidence, and communication among both Young Facilitators and Young Learners.
- Teachers expressed that the YLs learn more happily with the YFs and both the groups look forward for the CtC sessions each week. Also, the teachers in the formal schools highlighted the personality developments and positive behaviors of YFs after the participation. Their confidence in facilitating sessions have helped convenient and fast implementation of the sessions as planned.

- Parent interviews of both YFs and YLs were shown during the presentations. The teachers highlighted those parents of YFs observed their children improving in communication skills, developing empathy and becoming more responsible with new role they are undertaking. Parents of YLs mentioned that their kids are happier learning with their little “sister teachers” and “brother teachers”. (akka and Aiya in local language like in the same family members.)
- Discussions among stakeholders and participants focused on the sustainability of the CtC model beyond the projects’ completion, which would require further official discussions.
- At the panel discussion held on the international perspective of implementation the Play-Based

Child-to-Child model in the classroom, Consortium country members from Maldives and Pakistan as panelists provided valuable insights into its implementation and application.

Participants recommended integrating the CtC approach into early childhood and primary education reforms and curriculum frameworks and the importance of institutionalizing teacher training on play-based and peer-learning methods was highlighted.

Field Visits

Following the forum, consortium research teams from Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka visited two participating schools — *Kids R Kids Preschool* and *Mahabodhi Preschool*. Observations confirmed strong coordination between preschools and formal schools, effective facilitation by YFs, and active engagement by YLs, underscoring the practicality of the CtC model.

Conclusion

The SIPCA Uptake Forum 1 was a resounding success, serving as both a reflective and forward-looking event. Teachers shared inspiring stories of transformation—how YFs have become confident, empathetic young leaders, and YLs have grown more eager and active learners.

The forum highlighted that play-based peer learning enhances both cognitive and emotional development, strengthens school transitions, and promotes inclusivity.

As Sri Lanka embarks on new education reforms and develops a national preschool education policy, the SIPCA initiative offers a sustainable, evidence-based model for integration into mainstream education.

Photographs



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