ThinkPlace Africa

An African-led Strategy, Innovation & Systems Transformation Advisory Firm

Capability Statement

From the Managing Director...

Across Africa, the pace and complexity of change are accelerating. Demographic growth, climate pressure, economic transition, and institutional reform are reshaping the continent, while the international development sector itself is evolving, with a growing emphasis on localization, partnership, and systems-level impact.

At ThinkPlace Africa, we see this shift as an opportunity. Our work is grounded in the belief that sustainable change must be locally led, informed by lived experience and designed within the realities of complex systems while informed by global perspectives. The power of localization lies not only in proximity, but in ownership, capability, and long-term resilience.

Our partners increasingly seek more than advisory support. They want collaborators who can help them understand how systems truly operate and move from insight to action. While the context continues to change, our commitment to our clients and people remains constant: integrity, collaboration, and investment in our people.

As part of the ThinkPlace Global Network, we are optimistic that our approach, rooted in local leadership and global insight, can help shape more inclusive and sustainable futures across Africa.

Oliver Muchiri
Managing Director - Africa

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About ThinkPlace

ThinkPlace Africa is a leading African-owned advisory firm that helps governments, socially responsible businesses, and NGOs tackle complex social and development challenges across the continent.

We work at the intersection of people, systems, and policy—supporting our partners to move from insight to action and from pilots to scale. Our focus is on designing solutions that are practical, evidence-based, and embedded within existing institutions to deliver lasting, measurable impact.

We combine:

- Strategy & Systems Thinking
- Human-Centered Design
- Behavioural Science
- Research & Learning
- Implementation Support

We Build for Africa's complexity. Africa's challenges are systemic, shaped by institutions, markets, behaviour, and lived experience.

Our role therefore, is to:

- Understand how systems actually function
- Design solutions grounded in real contexts
- Enable implementation and scale

We do not just deliver reports. We deliver systems change.

How Our Missions Align to Global Goals

Health: Design and scale human-centred health solutions that strengthen systems, expand equitable access, and improve outcomes across malaria, TB, HIV, non-communicable diseases, nutrition, maternal health, and women's health across Africa.

Governance: Strengthen responsive public systems and institutions that deliver trusted services, enable inclusive participation, improve public-sector effectiveness, and drive sustainable social and economic outcomes across African communities and governments.

Youth: Empower Africa's youth through innovative pathways that expand skills, employment, entrepreneurship, and education opportunities, enabling young people to participate meaningfully in inclusive, resilient, and future-ready economies across the continent.

Food Security: Transform food systems through locally grounded innovations that strengthen climate resilience, improve agricultural productivity, expand sustainable livelihoods, enhance nutrition and food security outcomes for vulnerable communities across Africa.

Deep Local & Global Experience

29+
Countries where ThinkPlace Africa executed projects

250+
Projects delivered across Africa in the last 10 years

10
Years delivery and impact across Africa

20
Years of global experience

Countries where ThinkPlace Africa has delivered work

AFRICA

Kenya
Ethiopia
Tanzania
Uganda
Somalia
Somaliland
Sudan
South Sudan
Egypt
Malawi
Senegal
Nigeria
Rwanda
Ghana
DR Congo
Congo
Zimbabwe
Mozambique
Mali
Ivory Coast
Niger
Burkina Faso
Eswatini
Zambia
Burundi
South Africa

MIDDLE EAST

Jordan

EUROPE

Portugal

PACIFIC

Vanuatu

Our Philosophy

- Change must be designed with people, not for them
- Complex problems require systems thinking, not siloed interventions
- Evidence and lived experience are equally important
- Design is iterative and adaptive
- Impact matters more than activity

Our Capabilities

Strategy & Transformation
- Institutional strategy
- Market entry
- Ecosystem roadmaps
- Operating models

Human-Centered Design
- Service redesign
- Product innovation
- User journey design
- Experience transformation

Behaviour Change & SBC
- Demand generation strategies
- Behaviour diagnostics
- Adoption pathways

Systems Change & Policy Innovation
- System strengthening
- Policy implementation
- Multi-stakeholder alignment
- Reform acceleration

Research, MEL & Learning
- Baselines
- Evaluations
- Qualitative insight
- Learning systems

Implementation Support
- Pilot design & roll out
- Capacity building
- Scaling strategy & design
- Change management

Sectors We Serve

Cross-sector expertise across Africa's priority growth and development agendas

- Health
- Humanitarian & Resilience
- Financial Inclusion
- Climate Adaptation
- Agriculture & Food Systems
- Digital Inclusion
- Governance & Public Sector Reform
- Education & Skills

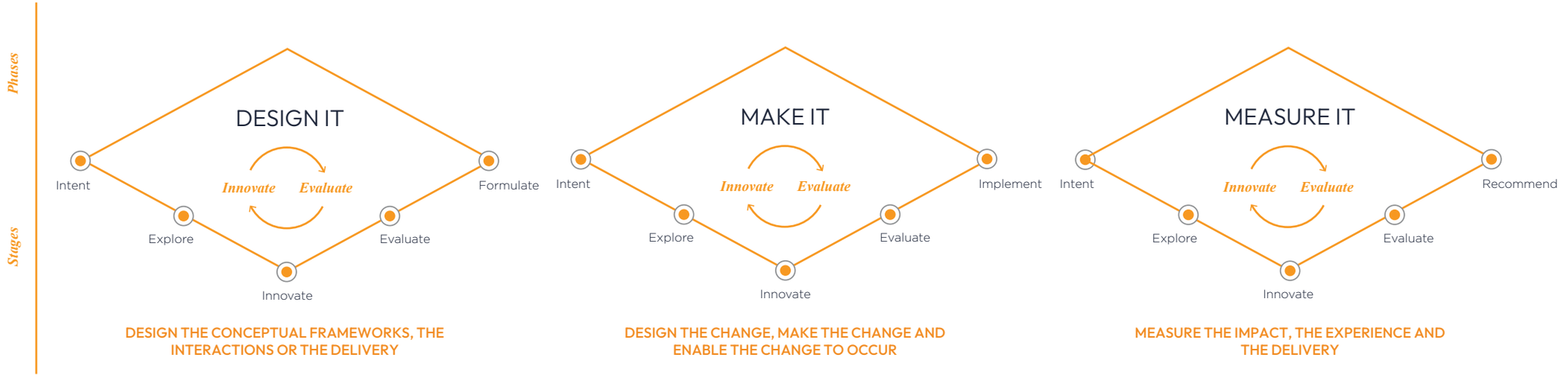
The ThinkPlace Design Diamond

Our work is guided by the ThinkPlace Design System™, a trademarked, three-diamond methodology that balances divergent and convergent thinking. It provides a clear yet flexible structure, allowing us to tailor our approach to each client's needs while navigating complexity and uncertainty.

The Design it phase establishes strong conceptual foundations. We develop frameworks, strategies, policies, and organisational or service designs to clarify what change is required, how it should occur, and who it should benefit.

In the Make it phase, ideas are transformed into action. We deliver detailed design, prototyping, and implementation, drawing on expertise in business and process design, people systems, digital tools, IT, and change management to embed change in practice.

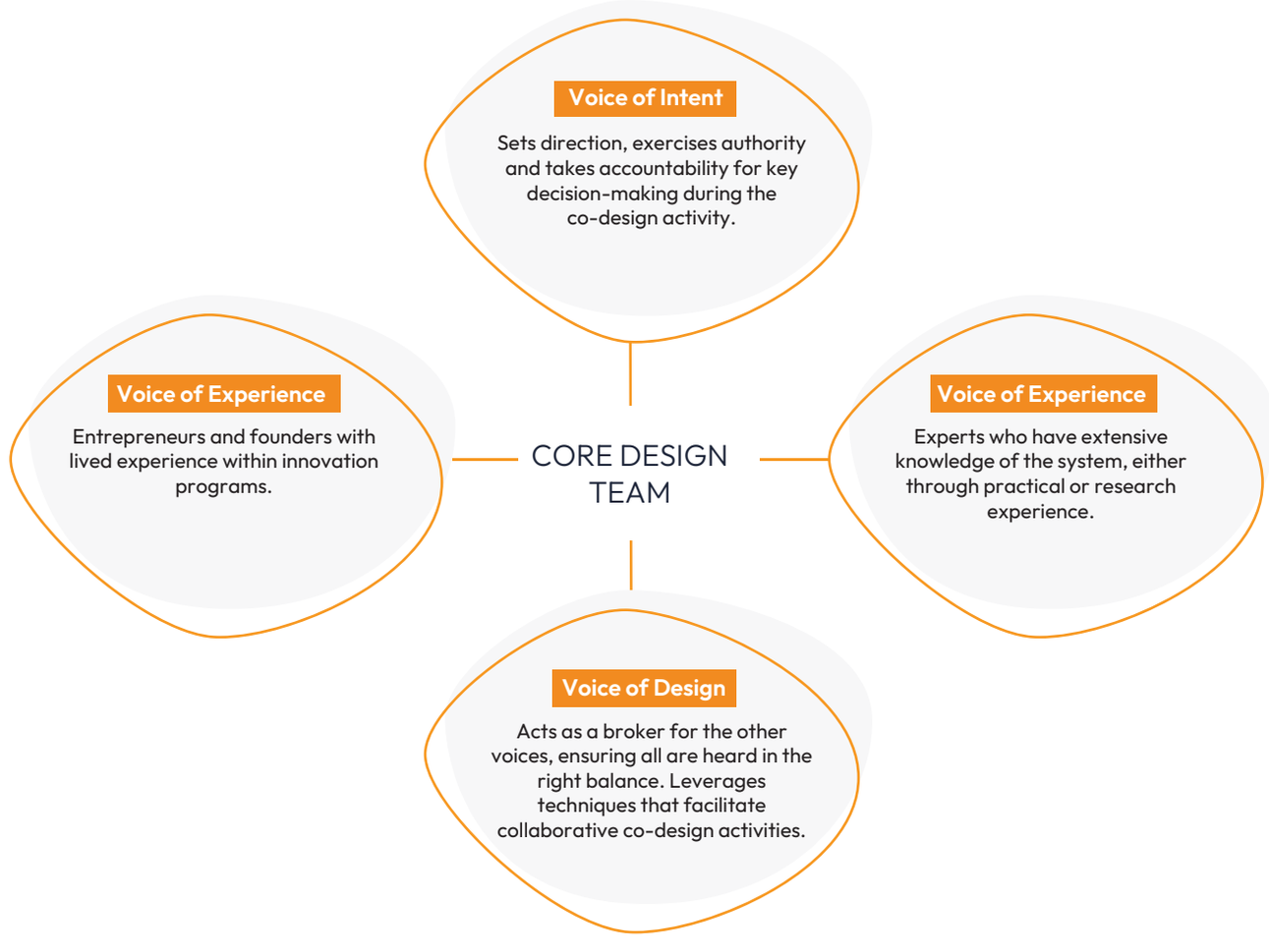
The Measure it phase evaluates real impact. We assess outcomes, experiences, and delivery to understand value created and refine solutions through evidence-based feedback loops. The three-diamond approach is adaptable, allowing us to adjust or apply selected phases to ensure each engagement is focused and personalised.



Four Voices of Design

Central to our co-design process is the notion of **Four Voices of Design**, each of which need to be represented in the project to bring their perspectives to the program design.

These perspectives include entrepreneurs, scientists, investors and government representatives from across India and Australia. Our role as the voice of design is bring our expertise in design, facilitation and Innovation to broker the conversations between the perspectives – ensuring balance and alignment on strategy and delivery.



The Adoption Pathway Model

What informs a user's decision making when using a new product, tool or service?
The **Adoption Pathway Model** as adapted by ThinkPlace considers behaviour as an outcome of inter-relationships and shared social practice. From this perspective, individuals will tend to perform or reproduce behaviours that are themselves a product of relationships between people, their environment, and the technology that surrounds them.

The model is based on years of experience leveraging from knowledge in social sciences (behavioural psychology, sociology and anthropology). Its application to the iterative approach of Human-Centred Design, focuses on creating social proof and acceptability, leveraging the power of social networks.

Through observations, in-depth conversations and co-design sessions with the research participants, we will apply techniques of insight generation to help understand the opportunities to create social proof and understand user preferences when they interact with the Leva, and how to weave in moments that the various target users will continue to experience value. This process will be mapped out and supported by behavioural drivers such as social validation and strategic use of positive and negative sanctions that can encourage uptake of desired behaviours. The process begins at exploring opportunities to create social proof, as described below:

Our End-to-End Delivery Approach

We help organisations move from insight and strategy to practical implementation, adoption, and scale.

1 ALIGN & DIAGNOSE

What we do
- Stakeholder alignment workshops
- Systems and ecosystem mapping
- Intent and problem-framing sessions

Outputs
- Intent statement
- Stakeholder map
- Inception report

2 EXPLORE & UNDERSTAND

What we do
- Human-centred qualitative research
- Behavioural diagnostics
- Community engagement

Outputs
- Insight synthesis
- User profiles
- Opportunity areas

3 CO-DESIGN & PRIORITIZE

What we do
- Co-design workshops
- Prototype development
- Theory of Change alignment

Outputs
- Prototype concepts
- Strategic recommendations
- Implementation pathways

4 TEST & IMPLEMENT

What we do
- Pilot implementation
- Capability building
- Adaptive implementation support

Outputs
- Tested solutions
- Adoption insights
- Implementation playbooks

5 SCALE & SUSTAIN

What we do
- MEL and learning systems
- Scale-up strategy
- Knowledge transfer

Outputs
- Scale strategy
- Learning frameworks
- Sustainability roadmaps
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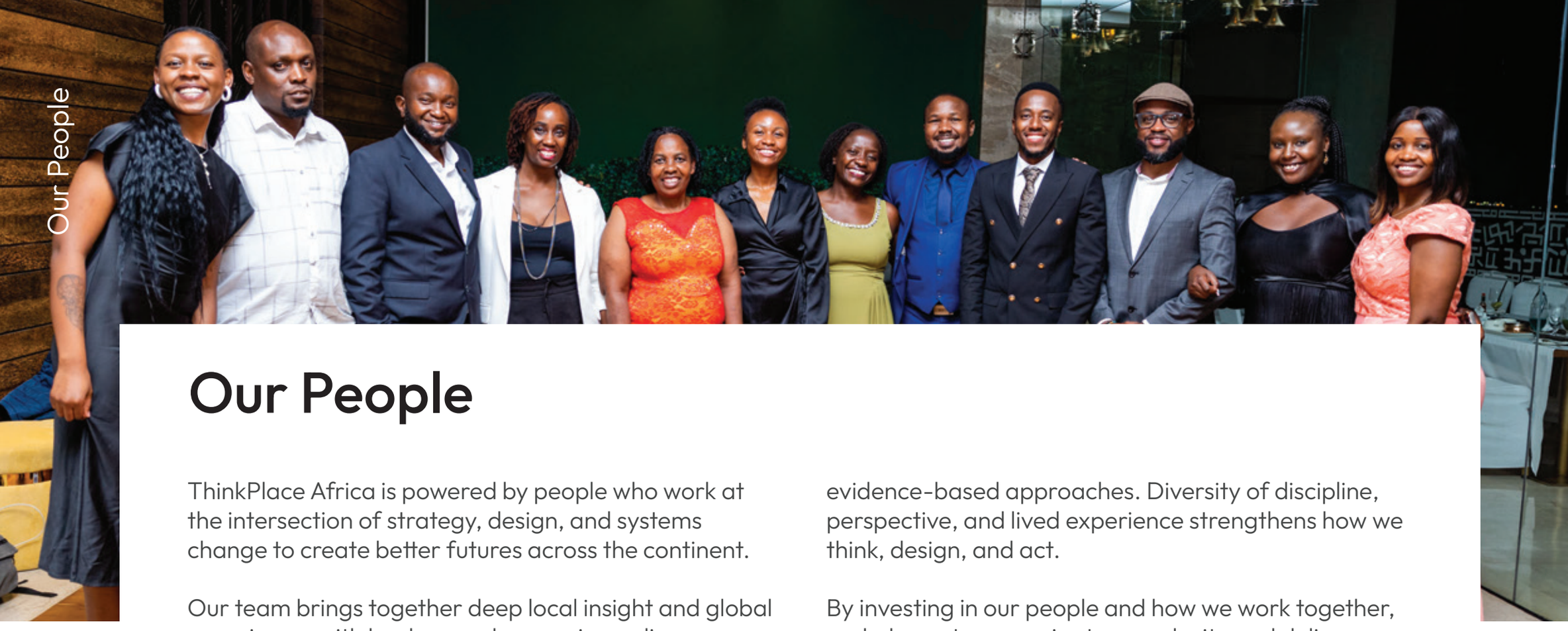


Our People

ThinkPlace Africa is powered by people who work at the intersection of strategy, design, and systems change to create better futures across the continent.

Our team brings together deep local insight and global experience, with backgrounds spanning policy, development, business, research, and innovation. Many of our people have worked inside the systems we support—governments, institutions, markets, and communities—bringing both practical understanding and analytical rigor.

We are united by a shared belief that complex challenges require collaborative, human-centred, and evidence-based approaches. Diversity of discipline, perspective, and lived experience strengthens how we think, design, and act.

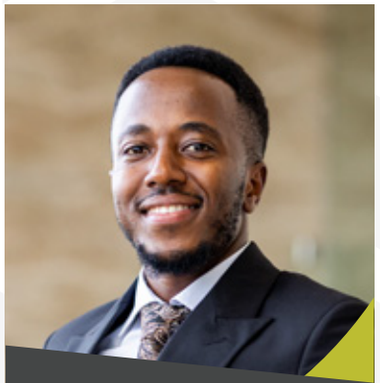
By investing in our people and how we work together, we help partners navigate complexity and deliver change that is meaningful, inclusive, and lasting.

40+
People around the continent

14+
Languages spoken by our people

25+
Areas of expertise

Our Leadership Team



Oliver Muchiri
Managing Director, Africa

Beth Heald
Director, Kenya

Olivia Okeno
Director, Kenya

Michael Ngigi
Managing Partner, Africa

Dr. Nina Terrey
Advisor

Darren Menachemson
Advisor

John Body
Advisor

Some of Our Clients & Partners

Gates Foundation
The Nature Conservancy
BOSCH
Sightsavers
IOM UN MIGRATION
mastercard foundation
IFRC
MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES
Johnson&Johnson
fhi360
ICRC
M-KOPA
gain Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition
United Nations
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
Innovation Norway
INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE
Worldreader
VILLAGE REACH
Gavi The Vaccine Alliance

HEALTH

Designing a Responsive Primary Healthcare System in Africa

Partner: VillageReach | **Capability:** System Strengthening | **Deal Value:** $250k

The Problem

Across sub-Saharan Africa, access to essential health services remains uneven, with an estimated 615 million people facing gaps in Primary Health Care. Health systems have historically prioritised strengthening provider capacity, with less emphasis on systematically integrating community perspectives into design and delivery. As a result, services do not consistently reflect the lived realities, preferences, and evolving needs of the populations they serve. Building responsive PHC systems that are people-centred, equitable, and adaptive is essential to advancing Universal Health Coverage and improving health outcomes.

Our Response

ThinkPlace partnered with VillageReach to design a responsive Primary Health Care system grounded in community insights. Over a five-month collaboration, the team conducted a comprehensive review of the global PHC landscape and engaged a wide range of stakeholders through consultations, workshops, and convenings, including a global dialogue at the AHAIC 2023 conference in Kigali.

This process led to the development of the Community Insights to Action Framework, which guides governments and implementing partners in embedding community voice into PHC system design and delivery. The framework enables health systems to better understand population needs, align services with local contexts, and continuously adapt through ongoing feedback and learning. It has been designed for practical application across diverse country settings, supporting both new system design and the strengthening of existing PHC delivery models.

Impact

The CITA framework now sits at the core of VillageReach's organisational strategy to advance Universal Health Coverage, with a target to reach nearly 200 million people by 2030. Implementation is underway across 4 countries: Malawi, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Kenya.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Strengthening SME Financing Ecosystems & Women-led Enterprise Growth Across Africa

Partners: The Mastercard Foundation | **Capability:** Research MEL & Learning | **Deal Value:** $2m

The Opportunity

Across African markets, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and women-led micro-enterprises play a critical role in driving economic growth, innovation, and job creation. However, despite their importance, many enterprises continue to face persistent barriers that limit their ability to start, grow, and scale sustainably.

Recognising the need to strengthen enterprise financing ecosystems and improve pathways for inclusive economic participation, ThinkPlace Africa has been supporting multi-country research and advisory initiatives focused on SME finance systems, investment vehicles, catalytic capital structures, and women's economic empowerment across African markets.

Our Response

ThinkPlace Africa is currently leading a systems-based research and advisory approach combining qualitative ecosystem diagnostics, mixed-methods enterprise research, and strategic financing analysis to better understand the barriers and opportunities shaping enterprise growth.

The work is focused on several interconnected dimensions:

- Mapping SME financing ecosystems across multiple African markets
- Assessing investment vehicles and fund-of-funds structures supporting enterprise growth
- Understanding financing gaps affecting SMEs and women-led enterprises
- Examining job creation pathways and barriers for young women
- Analyzing the role of ecosystem actors including lenders, investors, DFIs, and business development service providers

Results

The work is ongoing and is generating actionable insights to inform the design and strengthening of SME financing by generating:

- Strategies to strengthen financing pathways for underserved enterprises
- Insights to support women-led enterprise growth and job creation
- Ecosystem recommendations to improve pipeline development and enterprise support systems
- Baseline evidence to inform future programme implementation, learning, and impact measurement

HUMANITARIAN & RESILIENCE

Reaching Zero Dose Children in Fragile Contexts

Partner: International Rescue Committee | **Capability:** Social Behaviour Change | **Deal Value:** $2.7m

The Problem

In fragile and hard-to-reach regions across Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia, large numbers of children remain zero-dose or under-immunised. These settings are shaped by fragile health systems, population movement, limited data visibility, and complex social dynamics that influence care-seeking behaviour. Many communities live beyond the effective reach of routine immunisation services, including those in conflict zones, cross-border areas, and informal settlements. Gaps in identifying and tracking children, combined with low alignment between services and community realities, continue to limit equitable access to life-saving vaccines.

Our Response

ThinkPlace Africa partnered with Gavi and the International Rescue Committee through the Gavi REACH consortium to design context-responsive approaches to immunisation. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, including Rapid Evidence Assessment and Targeted Design Assessments, we built a deep understanding of local contexts and community needs.

We developed a scenario-based framework that segments communities and maps behavioural drivers, enabling more precise identification of zero-dose children and tailored responses across diverse settings. This informed the co-design of interventions and community engagement approaches alongside ministries of health, frontline workers, and local partners.

Our work also established a Community Engagement Framework to strengthen trust, improve uptake, and guide locally led implementation. Using a behavioural design approach, we also developed a demand generation strategy for immunisation services by caregivers in hard-to-reach areas.

Impact

From 2022 to 2025, the Gavi REACH programme reached over 1 million zero-dose children and supported the delivery of more than 30 million vaccine doses across fragile and crisis-affected settings, with stronger community engagement and locally grounded delivery approaches.

AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

Driving Access and Aptake of Nutritional Products Amongst Low-income Communities

Partner: Gates Foundation | **Capability:** Demand Generation Strategy | **Deal Value:** $5m

The Problem

Low-income communities in urban Kenya face ongoing challenges in accessing affordable, nutritious food options that fit into their daily routines. In areas such as Kawangware, Kibera, and Kasarani, purchasing decisions are shaped by income constraints, convenience, and trust in available products. Women and mothers play a central role in household nutrition choices, yet options that combine affordability, accessibility, and nutritional value remain limited. Expanding access to fortified foods requires solutions that align with consumption habits and everyday realities within informal settlements

Our Response

ThinkPlace partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to design and test an innovative approach to delivering fortified nutrition products. Through in-depth research across target communities, we explored consumption behaviours, preferences, and key decision drivers among different audience segments.

Insights informed the selection of fortified porridge as a priority product and guided the design of a bulk dispensing model tailored to local contexts. We developed and tested vending machines placed in high-traffic, convenient locations, ensuring ease of access, hygiene, and affordability. The solution was supported by a locally grounded campaign, combining on-the-ground branding with targeted digital and influencer engagement to drive awareness and uptake.

Continuous user feedback informed iterative improvements to both the product offering and the dispensing model, shaping a scalable and commercially viable approach.

Outcome

Deployment and testing of nutrition dispensing solutions across 3 urban communities in Kenya. Insights generated to inform product design, pricing, and go-to-market strategy and a validated model for improving access to affordable fortified nutrition among low-income populations.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

Assessing Starlink Connectivity Pilots to Enable Service Provision and Disaster Recovery

Partner: Tony Blair Institute | **Capability:** Policy Implementation | **Deal Value:** $144k

The Problem

In Malawi and neighbouring contexts, rural and hard-to-reach communities face significant connectivity gaps that limit access to essential digital services across health, education, and disaster response. Following Cyclone Freddy in early 2023, which caused widespread damage to infrastructure and disrupted service delivery, restoring communication and access to information became essential for recovery. Health centres and schools, often serving as community hubs and temporary shelters, required reliable connectivity to support coordination, disease monitoring, continuity of learning, and access to critical services. At the same time, limited understanding of connectivity needs and behaviours in these settings constrained investment decisions and the design of scalable solutions.

Our Response

ThinkPlace partnered with the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change in Malawi to evaluate a Starlink Connectivity Pilot deployed across 22 health centres and schools. Using a mixed methods approach, including site visits, observations, interviews, and community discussions, we generated insights into how connectivity supported disaster recovery efforts.

The research explored both immediate use cases and emerging opportunities across sectors such as health, education, agriculture, and trade. By engaging frontline workers and community members, ThinkPlace identified priority use cases and behavioural patterns that inform how connectivity can support service delivery and community resilience.
These insights are informing the development of a practical investment case and a government playbook that outlines high-impact connectivity use cases and pathways for scaling satellite-based internet solutions in hard-to-reach areas.

Outcome

Evaluation report on connectivity across 22 community sites supporting disaster recovery and essential services to inform national investment planning and scalability of satellite connectivity.

HUMANITARIAN & RESILIENCE

Innovative Business Models to Improve Access to Sanitation Solutions within the Humanitarian Context

Partners: IOM, Norwegian Church Aid & Innovation Norway | **Capability:** Business Model Innovation | **Deal Value:** $150k

The Problem

In humanitarian settings in Ethiopia, access to appropriate sanitation solutions remains limited for vulnerable groups, including people living with incontinence and caregivers of children under three. In regions such as Gambella and East Hararghe, refugee and internally displaced communities experience constrained access to products, limited inclusion in sanitation design, and reliance on systems that do not fully reflect their daily realities. Improving hygiene practices, dignity, and well-being requires solutions that are locally relevant, accessible, and sustainable within complex humanitarian environments.

Our Response

ThinkPlace partnered with IOM, Norwegian Church Aid, and Innovation Norway to design a community-led sanitation business model tailored to these contexts. Through a Targeted Design Assessment, we engaged communities, caregivers, and people with disabilities to understand lived experiences, sanitation behaviours, and barriers to WASH access.

This was complemented by stakeholder mapping and research with local enterprises to assess existing production and distribution systems.

Insights informed the design of a business model centred on local cooperative groups producing sanitation products. The model integrates community ownership, capacity building, and use of existing market channels to improve access and sustainability. A Minimum Viable Solution was tested with local groups, focusing on skills development in production and business management, while exploring effective routes to market within humanitarian settings.

Outcomes

Development and testing of a community-led sanitation business model across 2 regions in Ethiopia.

Capacity building delivered to local producer groups, supporting inclusive participation in production and supply chains.

EDUCATION & SKILLS

Catalysing Teacher-driven Gamified Innovations using Human-Centred Design Principles

Partner: The Aga Khan Foundation | **Capability:** Human Centred Design | **Deal Value:** $350k

The Problem

Across Kenya, improving holistic learning outcomes requires approaches that actively engage teachers and students in shaping solutions that reflect their realities. Within the Schools2030 programme, educators are supported to apply human-centred design to develop "micro-innovations" that enhance learning. Ensuring consistent adoption and effective application of HCD within diverse school environments in Lamu and Mombasa requires a deeper understanding of teacher experiences, motivations, and support needs throughout the design process.

Our Response

ThinkPlace partnered with the Aga Khan Foundation as the Learning and Reporting Partner to strengthen the delivery of HCD within the Schools2030 programme. Using a mixed-methods approach, we analysed teachers' learning journeys, identifying key drivers of engagement and areas for strengthening the application of HCD principles.

We developed a set of learner personas to represent different teacher profiles, enabling more tailored support and clearer pathways for adopting HCD. These personas mapped how participants engage with each stage of the process and highlighted opportunities to enhance learning experiences.

In addition, ThinkPlace co-developed practical tools and frameworks, including a demand-driven application package and an evaluation tool used by teachers, facilitators, and programme teams to assess solutions based on desirability, feasibility, and viability. This was complemented by a structured learning framework that supports continuous improvement and programme measurement over time.

Results

Implementation across 3 countries in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Identification and assessment of 15 teacher-led innovations with strong scaling potential. Frameworks and tools established to support ongoing evaluation and scaling within a global programme reaching 1,000 schools.

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