

Investment Insights

Ember Mental Health

Investee Cohort
2022-2023



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About us

According to the WHO, 1 in every 8 people live with a mental disorder.

Despite this, government expenditure on mental health remains low. **Globally, only around 2% of total health budgets are allocated to mental health services.** Additionally, as little as 1.7% of official development assistance is destined to mental health and funds are primarily for populations in crisis. **Insufficient resources have resulted in a large unmet need for mental health care.**

Community-based mental health initiatives (CBMHIs) play an essential role in the provision of mental health services, particularly in low-income settings. These initiatives are well positioned to understand the needs and priorities within their local contexts and are uniquely equipped to respond with tailored, culturally sensitive and sustainable strategies. However, **these initiatives are significantly threatened by the lack of funding.**

Ember Mental Health is a programme by the SHM Foundation, founded in 2019 in collaboration with the Mental Health Innovation Network at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Ember aims to radically transform the landscape of global mental health. We believe addressing the global mental health crisis **does not lie in identifying a few “silver bullet” solutions, but rather in nourishing a diverse ecosystem of care** that grows from within communities.

Through the Ember Model, we support and invest in locally-led mental health initiatives in low-resource settings so that they can grow and thrive.

The Ember Model

Ember combines elements of business consultancy, participatory design, creative learning and philanthropy to create a radically different approach to supporting mental health initiatives

In the first investment phase in 2022-2023, five organisations in Africa, Asia and Latin America were awarded grants ranging from £15,000 and £20,000.



We find

- We identify excellent community-based mental health initiatives through a global call-out and simple application process
- We use our diagnostic tool, the Ember Health Check, to understand their strengths, challenges and needs
- We select a diverse cohort of initiatives to work with



We mentor

- We establish strong, honest relationships with our partners and gain a deeper understanding of their work and priorities
- We deliver a 12-month package of in-kind support based on their needs. This might include working on strategy, communications and impact evaluation; building new skills and collaborative networks; and finding opportunities to showcase their work to new audiences



We fund

- We evaluate the impact of our mentorship and the progress made
- We invest in a number of the initiatives, looking at which initiatives have the greatest potential and where our funding can make the biggest difference
- We continue to provide mentorship, wellbeing support and networking opportunities

Our funding principles



1 Listen to grassroots organisations and learn from their expertise



2 Dedicate resources to supporting the wellbeing of grantees



3 Dedicate resources to building their evidence base and boosting their visibility



4 Provide both financial and in-kind support



5 Give small grants to several grantees



6 Where possible, provide long-term, flexible funding



7 Act fast when circumstances change



8 Support initiatives at different stages of growth



9 Scale does not equal success

The Ember Evaluation

In 2020, Ember Mental Health supported its first cohort of initiatives. Since then, we have been carrying out a yearly in-depth qualitative evaluation to ensure the continuous assessment and improvement of our model.

Previous evaluations of our work have shown that initiatives benefit from close and tailored mentorship, opportunities to develop skills on organisational management, support on strategic planning, storytelling and networking. However, findings have also shown that appropriate funding mechanisms are still needed to ensure initiatives' sustainability.

Community-based mental health initiatives rely on a complex mental health funding ecosystem to thrive. Lessons learnt through the implementation of our model can contribute to the improvement of this funding ecosystem.

About the current evaluation

Ember partners are invited to participate in semi-structured qualitative interviews at the beginning and end of partnerships.

These conversations cover topics such as their needs and expectations from the partnership, as well as aspects of their current programmes, such as their long-term vision. At later stages of the partnership, participants are asked about the extent to which their needs and expectations have been met through Ember's mentorship and funding, their relationships with the Ember team, and their views on how the partnership will help the future of their organisation.

In 2022-2023, five initiatives completed the investment phase. Representatives of all five initiatives participated in at least one interview, which were transcribed and analysed thematically. Insights from these interviews are presented in the current report.

Insights from the 2022-2023 investment phase

- 1. Reflections about the new phase**
- 2. Highlighted achievements**
- 3. Ember as a partner**



Reflections about the new phase

Reflections about the new phase

Transition into the investment phase

At the start of the investment phase, partners shared their thoughts on the transition between the first and second stages of the partnership, and their needs and expectations from the investment phase.

All participants agreed that a second stage of the partnership was necessary. The first stage was described as essential to reflect on the future of initiatives and to plan strategically. Greater clarity on initiative's models and visions was an important achievement of this initial stage. The second stage enabled the execution of plans developed in the first part of the partnership, while still being supported by the Ember team.

Priorities for the investment phase were to review organisational structures, budgets and monitoring and evaluation plans.

Financial sustainability was the key achievement expected from the investment phase.

Reflections about the new phase

Size and flexibility of investment

A key facilitator during the second stage was the flexibility of the funding awarded to organisations.

Teams were able to use the funding to address whatever they felt were their most urgent needs, and they were able to make changes along the way.

Some organisations also mentioned feeling **they had received the right amount of funding** at their current stage.

*"...given our capacity and our readiness to function as an organisation the funds were okay, because **I don't know if we could have handled if more money was injected too early.** We needed some people there as personnel to work on the administration first [...] **what I like about it is the flexibility,** so that is very much when I say flexibility it is not changing the whole purpose but at least playing around some budget lines, using the savings. It is a privilege to have that so that is very important."*



Highlighted achievements

Highlighted achievements

Strengthening the core capacity of teams

Partners highlighted **the strengthening of their teams' core capacity by being able to hire or keep the contracts of core staff** as a key achievement from this phase. Initiatives were able to secure staff to fulfill administrative needs that previously relied on volunteers or overburdened organisation leaders.

Leaders also mentioned **feeling more able to delegate responsibilities to other members of organisations** and to formalise the structures of organisations, both of which contribute to sustainability.

"...being able to pay for three positions: comms, operations and administration [...] being more solid has allowed us to develop other types of collaborations."

Highlighted achievements

Incremental improvements to organisations' health and capacity

The investment phase brought stability to organisations, which enabled opportunities to engage in medium-term projects or plan for the future.

Partners said Ember's mentoring was useful to:

- Develop and implement monitoring and evaluation systems.
- Create organisation policies and manuals.
- Put in place accounting procedures.
- Develop pitches for fundraising or writing reports.

Mentoring allowed for team growth, which contributed to junior members becoming more confident.

"We saw a growth in the organisation. We are able to now write a very detailed plan for the whole year with the support of Ember [...] so we are able to implement different activities."

Highlighted achievements

Greater buy-in and recognition from the global mental health community

Greater visibility, buy-in and recognition were key achievements

Funding enabled focus on raising awareness of the organisation's work, engagement in international events and forming new partnerships.

Communications work, including website development and strengthened social media presence contributed to the greater credibility of initiatives.

"... the partnership was really successful [...] it is a true partnership – we feel that Ember is there for us, to support us in our growing process [...] the first partnership came at a time where the association was known to no one, no one in the region, no one in the world. But, because of that partnership, it has opened networks around the world. We have now a global presence [...] we have regional recognition as well. The WHO regional office always come to us if they want [our] perspective included in a meeting, in a paper, in a document."

Highlighted achievements

Growth enabled by investments

All initiatives reported being able to expand or replicate their work as a result of investments.

"We used [the funds] to align our project activities to meet the replication goal and sustain the activities in the two [sites], so that they are able to start relying on their own internal resources. So, it has sort of helped to enable and shape [the] longevity of the programme activities in the two [sites]. It has also helped in towards commencing that process of replication."



**Ember as
a partner**

Ember as a partner

Support and understanding

Ember was described as **enabling reflection, providing an external perspective** while allowing initiatives to lead the way.

Open and honest communication available throughout the partnership made initiatives feel understood and supported.

Financial check-ins were important to organisations; these allowed for a space to report any challenges regarding the investment (e.g., delays in spending).

A clear, simple and friendly approach to reporting was described as helpful, allowing more junior members to lead on reporting.

Ember's Wellbeing Fund was considered greatly beneficial, "forcing" teams to prioritise their wellbeing and recharge.

"Ember has thought through every possible avenue that they can be of support to organisations like us, and it's also genuinely such a breath of fresh air from other funders and other organisations that claim that they're supporting you to develop. I think Ember stands out from all of those other organisations because... [...] I think it really helped us having Ember as, you know, people looking at us from outside and reflecting back on certain things that we couldn't see because we were in it constantly."

Ember as a partner

Remaining challenges

Being able to secure sustainable funding was seen as an ongoing challenge.

Even though workshops to develop pitches were provided, organisations mentioned they would have appreciated more opportunities to connect with other funders.

“I think probably the biggest challenge we might have is the financial aspect of it. I think that will be the biggest, because to implement some of this, you need the finance to implement it. I think that will be the biggest challenge [...], but we will keep on trying, we will keep on knocking on doors, yes!”



Case studies

Case studies

Nurturing the foundations

MHSUA, Ethiopia



Who are MHSUA?

Mental Health Service User Association Ethiopia is an association of people with lived experience of mental health conditions advocating for their voices to be taken into account in the design and implementation of mental health policy and services in Ethiopia.

What were the aims of our work with them?

During the investment phase, MHSUA aimed to solidify their position as an organisation led by people with lived experience of mental health conditions. They wanted to strengthen the structure of the organisations by improving their capacity to administrate the organisation, secure funds and develop new collaborations.

What were their key achievements during this phase?

MHSUA has solidified their organisational structure and strengthened their operational capacity through the recruitment of people with lived experience in their staff. They also developed policies, plans, methods to evaluate their work, improving their capacity to raise funds and increasing their visibility in international forums.

“I believe that the partnership with Ember has equipped us. [It] has set a solid ground for us to build on ourselves. Now we are preparing proposals on ourselves so that we can reach interested partners [and] potential stakeholders. I believe we have now the conviction that with this stable organisational structure, we can handle more funds being injected to the association.”

Case studies

Adapt and overcome

Child, Adolescent and Family Services (CAFS), Sri Lanka

Who are CAFS?

Child, Adolescent and Family Services provides psychosocial services to families and young people experiencing mental distress in a non-clinical setting where they feel at home.

What were the aims of our work with them?

During the investment phase, CAFS aimed to expand their mental health services to another area of Sri Lanka by growing their team of psychologists. They also wanted to consolidate their fundraising plans, increase their visibility and put in practice the monitoring and evaluation systems they designed during the first phase of our collaboration.

What were their key achievements during this phase?

Despite challenges posed by the political crisis in Sri Lanka, CAFS was able to hire another psychologist

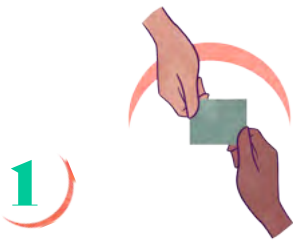


and eventually expand their services. They also made important advances in the development of fundraising plans, execution of monitoring and evaluation plans, and they achieved greater visibility among the international community.

Opportunities for collaborations have opened up and junior members of the organisation have developed the skills and confidence to take leadership roles in the management of collaborations and in the representation of CAFS.

"[...] after we were told about the funding that we were getting this year, the team members were like: the work we do is actually really of value and somebody outside of the country is appreciating that and they're supporting us to continue that work"

Key takeaways



1

Unrestricted and flexible funding can allow initiatives to gain greater stability and contribute towards their sustainability



2

Covering core costs is essential to organizational strengthening



3

Providing close and tailored mentoring alongside funding has been found helpful by initiatives, particularly during transition periods



4

Promoting horizontal funder-grantee relationships can improve collaboration, ensuring a common goal is achieved



5

The lack of funding available to CBMHIs continues to hamper their capacity to continue providing essential mental health care

Team

Ember's impact team is dedicated to the monitoring and evaluation of the Ember Model, including tracking progress towards the objectives set at the beginning of each partnership and gathering insights and learnings through in-depth qualitative evaluations. This team also supports Ember partner initiatives to assess and disseminate the impact of their work.

The impact team members are:



June Larrieta

As Head of Impact, June leads the strategic direction of the impact and evaluation work at the Foundation. With a background in psychology and global mental health, she brings previous experience working in global health within both academic institutions and international organisations, spanning research and policy.



Luma Samawi

Luma has a background in psychology, neuroscience, and Global Mental Health. She is currently a PhD student at the University of Toronto where her research lies at the intersection of global health and implementation science. Luma has previously worked in research, service delivery, and public policy in Jordan and the Middle East.



Georgina Miguel Esponda

Georgina is a researcher with a background in global mental health. Her research has focused on understanding the barriers to implement interventions in low-income settings and how to address them. Alongside her work with the SHM Foundation, she collaborates in projects at King's College London and Partners In Health Mexico. She has worked extensively in the development of health information systems and monitoring and evaluation of global health programmes.

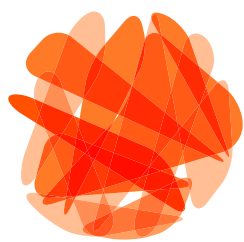
Acknowledgements

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