



Literacy in East Africa: Partnership between Global Partners for Development and the Boys & Girls Club of Philadelphia

November 2020

Global Partners for Development and the Boys & Girls Club of Philadelphia recognize that any new intervention must be implemented only after careful research and analysis. This document provides an overview of the current landscape of literacy in East Africa and includes literature, policy, and organizational reviews. It concludes with recommendations for the future of the partnership, including next steps and best practices.

We recognize that in addition to desk research, we need to learn directly from the teachers, parents, and students with whom we will work. The field research and workshop scheduled for July 2020 was postponed due to COVID-19. Once we are safely able to travel, we will conduct on-the-ground research in East Africa by facilitating individual and focus group interviews with local government officials, schools, and parents to learn about the specific literacy challenges that they face.

This is a working document that will continue to be updated as new research is available and new programs and policies are implemented.

Introduction

Economic success, good governance, and political stability are directly tied to education, but too many children in East Africa are not learning, even if they are enrolled and attending school. Low literacy rates are a significant challenge in numerous developing countries, and many children read below grade level throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.¹ In fact, sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest youth literacy rate in the world at approximately 72%.²

The costs of illiteracy are massive. Illiteracy costs the global economy over a trillion dollars each year.³ People with low literacy skills are more than twice as likely to be unemployed,⁴ and illiterate workers earn 30-42% less than literate workers.⁵ The costs of illiteracy are especially high when it comes to girls and women. Better educated women tend to be healthier, have better jobs with higher incomes, marry later, have fewer children, and are able to provide their children with better health care and education.⁶

To improve the quality of education at primary schools in East Africa, Global Partners for Development (GPDF) and the Boys & Girls Club of Philadelphia (BGCP) have joined forces to equip teachers with proven literacy tools and empower them to develop their students into successful lifelong learners. We also aim to engage parents to promote and improve literacy in their homes and local communities.

The literacy program will build on the success of the Boys and Girls Club's Literacy Initiative. Guided by the work of Dr. Samuel Orton and Anna Gillingham, the program employs multisensory approaches to strengthen children's reading skills. Unlike traditional teaching methods, the program emphasizes phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension while engaging more than one sense at a time.

Global Partners and BGCP believe community leadership is the key to responsible and sustainable development, and, accordingly, we are also partnering with East African educators to ensure that our interventions are locally relevant. We meet teachers, students, and parents where they are and move them towards improved learning outcomes.

This working research paper provides:

1. An overview of our two focus countries: Kenya and Tanzania
2. A literature review of academic studies regarding literacy interventions and challenges in East Africa
3. An organizational review providing information on NGOs focusing on literacy interventions in East Africa
4. A summary of government literacy initiatives in Kenya and Tanzania
5. Recommended next steps for GPDF and BGCP, including suggestions for how to ensure that the needs and goals of relevant stakeholders are understood, increasing community and

¹ Gove, A. and P. Cvelich (2010). Early Reading: Igniting Education for All. A report by the Early Grade Learning Community of Practice. Research Triangle Park, NC: Research Triangle Institute. Accessed at www.rti.org/sites/default/files/resources/early-reading-report_gove_cvelich.pdf.

² UNESCO, 2015. Education for All 2000–2015: Achievements and Challenges. Global, pp. 2015.

³ The Economic & Social Cost of Illiteracy: A White Paper by the World Literacy Foundation. (2018) <https://worldliteracyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/TheEconomicSocialCostofIlliteracy-2.pdf>

⁴ oecd.org/site/piaac/SkillsOutlook_2013_ebook.pdf

⁵ worldliteracyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/The-Economic-Social-Cost-of-Illiteracy.pdf

⁶ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation>

parental engagement, creating teaching networks, providing locally-relevant reading materials, and enhancing teaching skills and methods.

United Nations Sustainable Goal 4: Quality Education

Targets:

4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes

4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education

4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

4.8 Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

4.9 By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

4.10 By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

Focus Countries: Overview

Kenya

Kenya has experienced high population growth since the mid-20th century, and more than 40% of the population is under the age of 15. The life expectancy is just under 66 years. Kenya is the economic hub of East Africa, but the country suffers from high unemployment and under-employment. The adult literacy rate, which is defined as the percentage of the population over the age of 15 who can read and write is 81.5%. Kenyans attend school for an average of 11 years, and mother's mean age at first birth is 20.3 years.⁷

Following the introduction of free primary education in Kenya in 2003, the country experienced a significant increase in enrollment rates. Unfortunately, this also led to classrooms becoming even more crowded, and the quality of the primary school education remained low. Despite numerous seemingly successful interventions, most children in Kenya struggle to achieve basic literacy. In fact, 70% of third grade students are unable to read at even a second grade level.⁸ More than 60% of Kenyan first graders are unable to read a single word.⁹ Educational challenges, especially with respect to literacy and numeracy, are particularly prevalent in rural areas. A 2011 survey in western Kenya found that 84% of children under the age of five did not have a single children's book in their homes.¹⁰

Students in Kenya attend primary school for eight years, secondary school for four years, and, for some, tertiary for another four years. Vision 2030, the country's development program that was launched in 2008, prioritizes education. Goals of Vision 2030 include recruiting teachers to address shortages and improve student-to-teacher ratios, undertaking a comprehensive curriculum review and reform, and renovating and constructing classrooms.¹¹

Among other challenges, Kenya suffers from high classroom absence rates for teachers. Half of its teachers are absent from the classroom at any point in time, even if they are technically present at the school. Moreover, only 34.8% possess the minimum knowledge to teach.¹²

Tanzania

Tanzania is the most populated country in East Africa, and 66.9% of its population is rural.¹³ Approximately two-thirds of the country is under the age of 25, and the life expectancy is 63.9 years. Tanzanians, on average, attend school for just eight years, and 77.9% of the population over the age of 15 are considered literate.¹⁴ Tanzania has enacted a number of policies designed to improve education. One of the most significant developments was the provision of free primary and secondary education, which means students are able to attend school free of charge from the ages of five to sixteen. Despite the lack of fees, school remains expensive for

⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ke.html>

⁸ Uwezo Kenya (2011). *Are Our Children Learning? Annual Learning Assessment Report*. Accessed at www.uwezo.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/KE_2011_AnnualAssessmentReport.pdf.

⁹ Piper, B., Destefano, J., Kinyanjui, E.M. *et al.* Scaling up successfully: Lessons from Kenya's Tusome national literacy program. *J Educ Change* 19, 293–321 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-018-9325-4>

¹⁰ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Children's Fund (2011). *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2011, Nyanza Province*. Accessed at microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/2660.

¹¹ <http://vision2030.go.ke/about-vision-2030/>

¹² WorldBank. Education Service Delivery in Tanzania (2014). Accessed at <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/348211464369503482/Tanzania2014-SDI-EducationTechReport-Final.pdf>

¹³ <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/countryprofiles/TZ.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tz.html>

very low-income households since school supplies, uniforms, and occasionally transport and/or accommodation expenses remain.¹⁵

Tanzania has a fairly centralized education system. There is a national curriculum, a national examination system, and national deployment of teachers. Head teachers (a position similar to principals) do not select the teachers assigned to their schools, and teachers may be assigned to a school anywhere in the country. Similar to Kenya, Tanzania has high classroom absence rates with almost half of teachers missing from the classroom at any point in time. Moreover, only 15.6% of teachers are assessed to have minimum knowledge to teach.¹⁶

Although Tanzania has made large gains with respect to access to learning, educational quality remains low and literacy is of particular concern. Literacy rates have actually fallen in recent years, and USAID reports that a mere 5.4% of standard two students are able to read with grade-level comprehension.¹⁷ Literacy remains a priority for the national government, and the eradication of illiteracy is a component of the country's Development Vision 2025.¹⁸

The language barrier between primary and secondary school in Tanzania hinders the country's already low literacy rates. Children in Tanzania are taught in Kiswahili during their first seven years of primary school. While English is taught as an individual subject, many primary school teachers speak and understand little English themselves. In secondary school, however, the language of instruction changes to English. Unfortunately, many Tanzanian students are unprepared for this transition, and only 19% of children in rural areas attend secondary schools.

An assessment of second grade students conducted in 2013 found that "students seem to be performing well on procedural tasks and memorized information, yet they struggle to engage with concepts and make meaning from what they learn."¹⁹ The report also recognized a lack of appropriate reading materials and recommended engaging parents and communities to improve learning outcomes.

Literature Review

Considerable efforts have been made to improve literacy in East Africa and across the globe, yet large numbers of adults and children still are not reading proficiently. In order to finally realize large-scale change, efforts must be focused on interventions that are effective, locally relevant, and sustainable.

Teaching Methods

Kenya

Primary school teachers in Kenya complete a two year program at teacher training colleges.²⁰ To qualify for a primary teacher education course, a candidate must obtain a minimum grade of a C in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education, at least a D in mathematics, and a C- in English. There are three sessions of teaching practice during the program, and students must pass as least eight out of nine subjects to receive their teaching certificate. Challenges facing

¹⁵ <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/smart-adaptations-introduction-free-secondary-education-has-boosted-enrolment-rates-while-private>

¹⁶ WorldBank. Education Service Delivery in Tanzania (2014). Accessed at <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/348211464369503482/Tanzania2014-SDI-EducationTechReport-Final.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.usaid.gov/tanzania/education>

¹⁸ <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e1ee/aa615b18bd94c3f86c7b2b9634ec108c08b7.pdf>

¹⁹ EdData II: Education Data for Decision-Making, page 4, available at: <https://ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/TZ%203Rs%20Brief%20.pdf>

²⁰ Nganga, L., & Kamutu, J. (2017). Preparing teachers for a globalized era: An examination of teaching practices in Kenya. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(6), 200.

teacher education in Kenya include under-trained teacher trainers, inadequate funding, and insufficient practical teaching experience for students.²¹

Historically, rote memorization has been a common teaching method in East Africa. A study of early primary schools in Kenya in 2012 found that “oral language instruction is prioritized, with minimal time devoted to teaching relationships between sounds and letter.”²² Specifically, teachers were observed teaching word recognition through choral repetition. Although the words or sentences were often written on the blackboard as well, sometimes with an accompanying picture, teachers rarely directed attention towards the text.²³

Along these same lines, teaching methods in Kenya tend to be teacher-centered as opposed to student-centered. In a student-centered classroom, students formulate their own ideas and are expected to learn through active involvement with content rather than the repetition and imitation that tend to dominate teacher-centered classrooms. Unfortunately, a lack of adequate teaching and learning resources and a lack of adequate teacher training in Kenya results in a minimal student-centered learning. Another challenge to incorporating student-centered processes into Kenya classrooms is large class sizes. A teacher-to-student ratio of 1:45 is common in Kenya, and such large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to know their students on both an academic and personal level.²⁴

Language of instruction is an important factor that should not be ignored. In Kenya, the language policy specifies that mother tongue instruction should be given in the first three grades.²⁵ In practice, however, implementation of this policy is inconsistent, and teachers primarily use English even in the lower grades.²⁶ Unfortunately, this has negatively impacted learning outcomes in Kenyan primary school classrooms. A 2015 study found that using English as the primary language of instruction during these first three years of school results in better English pronunciation, but students were largely unable to understand the meaning of the words.²⁷ The authors further hypothesized that stronger reading comprehension levels would have been attained had the students been taught in their mother tongue.

Tanzania

Primary school teachers in Tanzania generally complete three years of additional education after secondary school. Relatively little time is given to teaching practice in schools, and while there has been a recent push to make the second year more school-based, effectively supervising these teachers in training is a significant issue.²⁸ In addition, many new teacher educators have been employed at teacher colleges to address the increased demand for

²¹ <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cie/projects/completed/tpa/kenya>

²² Dubeck, M. M., Jukes, M. C. H., Okello, G. (2012). Early primary literacy instruction in Kenya. *Comparative Education Review*, 56(1), 54. <https://doi.org/10.1086/660693>.

²³ Ibid at 55-56.

²⁴ Nganga, L. et al at 201-202.

²⁵ Kenya Institute of Education. (2002). *Primary education syllabus: Volume one*. Nairobi: Republic of Kenya Ministry of Education.

²⁶ Trudell, B. & Piper, B. (2013). Whatever the law says: Language policy implementation and early grade literacy achievement in Kenya. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 15(1), 4–21. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2013.856985>

²⁷ Piper et al., 2016b Benjamin Piper, Leila Schroeder, Barbara Trudell. Oral reading fluency and comprehension in Kenya: reading acquisition in a multilingual environment. *J. Res. Reading*, 39 (2) (2016), pp. 133-152, [10.1111/1467-9817.12052](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12052)

²⁸ Namamba, A., & Rao, C. (2017). Preparation and Professional Development of Teachers’ Educators in Tanzania: Current Practices and Prospects. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8, 136-145.

teachers, but many of these newly recruited educators lack experience actually teaching in primary and secondary schools.

The education system in Tanzania is plagued by many of the same challenges faced in Kenya. Tanzania has strived to improve primary and secondary education, and gains have been made. Free primary and secondary education has led to large enrollment increases,²⁹ yet many students fail to achieve basic literacy standards. Moreover, although much attention has been placed on improving teaching quality, traditional teacher-centered approaches, including rote memorization, are still prevalent.³⁰ As previously mentioned, language of instruction presents challenges here as well.

A lack of consistent, ongoing professional development is frequently cited as an obstacle to improved quality of education in East Africa.³¹ The professional development for teachers that does occur tends to be one-off and top down, which has been shown to be ineffective.³²

Interventions

Numerous interventions have been implemented worldwide to improve learning outcomes and increase literacy rates. A few of the more recent interventions that have been implemented in East Africa are presented here.

Teacher Training/Professional Development

A randomized control trial in Kenya in 2018 examining literacy intervention inputs found that a combination of 1) teacher professional development and instructional support, 2) 1:1 ratio of revised students books and 3) structured teacher lesson plans was the most effective.³³ Training and instructional support alone failed to improve learning outcomes, and the most cost-effective intervention was the inclusion of instructional guides for teachers.³⁴

Another study of educational interventions across Sub-Saharan Africa found that practical professional development of teachers had a positive impact on student learning outcomes. After evaluating twelve types of education interventions, the analysis revealed that “programs that alter teacher pedagogy or classroom instructional techniques had an effect size approximately 0.30 standard deviations greater than all other types of programs combined” and “limited evidence further suggests that pedagogical programs that employed adaptive instruction or teacher coaching were particularly effective.”³⁵

²⁹ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/tanzania>

³⁰ Hardman, F., Hardman, J., Dachi, H., Elliott, L., Ihebuzor, N., Ntekim, M., & Tibuhinda, A. (2015). Implementing school-based teacher development in Tanzania. *Professional Development in Education*, 41(4), 602-623. <https://doi:10.1080/19415257.2015.1026453>

³¹ Verger, A., Edwards, D. B., & Altinyelken, H. K. (2014). Learning from all? The World Bank, aid agencies and the construction of hegemony in education for development. *Comparative Education*, 50(4), 381- 399. <https://doi:10.1080/03050068.2014.918713>

³² Moon, B., Dladla, N., Bird, L. S., A. Nordstrum, L. Hanbing, Y. McCormick, B. Banks, F. Dheram, P. Ibn Junaid, M. Wolfenden, F. Buckler, A. Gafar, A. Tao, S., Kirk, J., Azlam, M., Kingdon, G., Umar, A. (2013). *Teacher education and the challenge of development: A global analysis*. (B. Moon, Ed.). New York: Routledge

³³ Piper, B., Zuilkowski, S., Dubeck, M., Jepkemei, E., & King, S. (2018). Identifying the essential ingredients to literacy and numeracy improvement: Coaching, teacher professional development, improved books, and teachers' guides. *World Development*, 106, 324. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.01.018>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Conn, K. M. (2017). Identifying effective education interventions in sub-Saharan Africa: A meta-analysis of impact evaluations. *Review of Educational Research*, 87(5), 863–898. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654317712025>.

Additional studies have shown that decentralized school and cluster-based teacher professional development programs, where teachers facilitate their own programs, adapt innovation, and utilize willing collaborators, are more effective than centralized cascade workshops that primarily include passive learning.³⁶ In short, interactive trainings combined with consistent follow-up support are key.

Peer Networks

Along similar lines as professional development, mentorship and peer networks are effective tools for improving teaching techniques and improving education. Observing lessons and working directly with more experienced teachers to develop strategies for implementing improved approaches to teaching are critical tools.³⁷ Moreover, although teachers may have a theoretical understanding of improved teaching practices such as student-centered approaches, implementation is a challenge. Learning from and observing other teachers incorporating participatory approaches helps less experienced teachers envision how to incorporate the strategies into their own classrooms.³⁸

Technology

Unsurprisingly, technological interventions are gathering attention as well. Mobile devices are becoming increasingly cheaper and more widespread across East Africa, and mobile technology allows for individualized learning even in schools with high class sizes.³⁹ One successful literacy intervention is the interactive, multimedia literacy software ABRA that was introduced in Kenya. Teachers received three days of training and planning sessions in preparation for implementation. After the initial training, they continued to receive weekly virtual meetings with a trainer. After thirteen weeks, significant improvements for students using ABRA were found.⁴⁰

Incorporating technology, however, doesn't always lead to significant results. A 2015 study in western Kenya compared the effects on learning outcomes of student e-readers, teacher tablets, and tablets for government-funded instructional supervisors, also called TAC tutors.⁴¹ This study found that "whereas technology may have helped TAC tutors to provide better instructional support, we find no evidence that providing tablets to teachers or e-readers to students was more effective than the base PRIMR literacy program that was implemented

³⁶ Leu, E., Hays, F., LeCzel, D. K., & O'Grady, B. (2005). Quality Teaching: Building a Flexible and Dynamic Approach. GEC Working Paper Series. Number 2. (GEC Working paper series). Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development (AED). Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED537472>

³⁷ O'Sullivan, M. (2005). What is happening in the classroom? A common-sense approach to improving the quality of primary education in developing countries. *Teacher Development*, 9(3), 301-314. <https://doi:10.1080/13664530500200257>

³⁸ Collin, A. (2019). A mentoring approach to learner centered education in Tanzania : a case from the grass roots (Thesis, Master of Education (MEd)). The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Pg 53. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/10289/12808>

³⁹ Grace, J., Kenny, C., 2003. A short review of information and communication technologies and basic education in LDCs—what is useful, what is sustainable? *Int. J. Educ. Dev.* 23 (6), 627–636. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593\(03\)00062-2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593(03)00062-2).

⁴⁰ Abrami, P.C., Wade, C.A., Lysenko, L. *et al.* Using educational technology to develop early literacy skills in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Educ Inf Technol* 21, 945–964 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-014-9362-4>

⁴¹ B. Piper, S.S. Zuilkowski, D. Kwayumba, C. Strigel. Does technology improve reading outcomes? Comparing the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of ICT interventions for early grade reading in Kenya. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 49 (2016), pp. 204-214, [10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.03.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.03.006)

without expensive ICT” and suggest that “tablets and e-readers should primarily be a conduit supporting improved instructional interventions.”⁴²

As COVID-19 forced schools across the world to close in early 2020, numerous efforts were utilized to support remote learning through technology. Across sub-Saharan Africa, strategies such as distance learning through television and radio, SMS (text) and phone calls communications between students and teachers, and pre-recorded lessons using mobile phones have been employed.⁴³ The effectiveness of these remote learning lessons could have broader, longer-lasting implications for education in sub-Saharan Africa as their successes and failures are evaluated.

See the Organizational Review section for more examples of technological literacy interventions that have been introduced in East Africa.

Reading Materials

Providing reading materials to families has also been implemented and studied as a potential low-cost literacy intervention. Researchers recently examined whether providing storybooks to families and giving short lessons on how to engage children between two and seven years old with the books in rural Kenyan households could improve pre-literacy skills. After only five to six weeks, improvements in the vocabulary of children whose parents received both the books and the training were found. Moreover, receiving the books increased the chances of the children being read to in the previous three days, and receiving both books and training significantly increased the frequency of children being read to. Interestingly, the largest increase in reading frequency was among illiterate parents who used the books’ pictures to tell stories.⁴⁴

Parent Engagement

The value of parental involvement has been studied beyond the provision of reading materials. Parental awareness and involvement in their children’s academic life can positively affect the children’s attitudes, goals, and achievements.⁴⁵ Conversely, children whose parents are disengaged from supporting learning tend to perform poorly on literacy skills tests.⁴⁶

Parent engagement includes both family-school partnerships and family-led/home-based learning.⁴⁷ The Parent Engagement Needs Assessment toolkit from Results for Development and Project Literacy provides “guiding principles” for parent engagement programs:

1. Keep the parent/caregiver at the center of the literacy process.
2. Meet parents where they are and empower them to support literacy development even if they are illiterate themselves.
3. Directly involve parents in the needs assessment and program design process.
4. Allow communities to own programs and determine how they run.

⁴² Ibid. at 213-214.

⁴³ Asim, S., Carvalho, S. F., Gera, R. (2020). Learning equity during the coronavirus: Experiences in Africa. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/learning-equity-during-coronavirus-experiences-africa>

⁴⁴ Marcus, A. (2019). Making Books Matter: A SIEF-supported impact evaluation in Kenya. Available at <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/962061557080669662/Kenya-Emerge-Footprint-2019.pdf>

⁴⁵ Epstein, J. L. (2001). School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools. Boulder: Westview Press.

⁴⁶ UWEZO. (2012). Are our children learning? Literacy and numeracy across East Africa. Nairobi: UWEZO & Hivos/Twaweza

⁴⁷ National Center for Family Literacy (2006). The Effect of Family Literacy Interventions on Children’s Acquisition of Reading: From Kindergarten to Grade 3. National Institute for Literacy.

5. Respect and value the communities you serve by building a program that parents identify with – incorporate multiple methods of language and literacy development (for example, oral tradition such as storytelling and folktales).
6. Measure program in a way that is meaningful for parents by co-designing measurement tools that capture impact in a relevant way.

Challenges

The acquisition of literacy skills in young children is affected by more than just what happens in the classroom. In Kenya, one study found that three challenges were frequently cited by teachers: 1) student absenteeism, 2) lack of parental support, and 3) multilingualism (children in the school spoke multiple different languages).⁴⁸ Children from rural areas are at a higher risk for failing to develop literacy skills due to a lack of appropriate literary materials/resources, low levels of parent/caregiver literacy, and low levels of teacher support.

Lack of Funding

Overcrowded classrooms and high student-to-teacher ratios present a challenge in East Africa primary schools. Unsurprisingly, large class sizes make it difficult to address the individual needs of students and frequently result in lectures rather than activities in groups or with partners. Attempts at more participatory methods often result in methods that are still fairly teacher-centered, such as question and answer sessions led by the teacher.⁴⁹

Relatedly, lack of funding also makes it difficult for schools to provide adequate services and materials for their teachers and students. In Tanzania, for example, the national government provides just 1000 Tanzanian shillings (~\$4.30) per student per year.⁵⁰ Classrooms are, at least compared to Western norms, relatively basic. At least two students generally share a simple desk and textbooks, and teachers rely primarily on blackboards, chalk, and pointers.

Teacher Quality

Teacher quality is a challenge as well. Many teachers in Eastern and Southern Africa are unqualified or underqualified, and the average teacher academic qualifications and levels of training are low by international standards.⁵¹ Although many initiatives have aimed to provide continuing professional development for teachers in East Africa, they have suffered from a lack of adequate implementation and continuity.⁵²

A World Bank study of primary schools in seven sub-Saharan countries – Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, Mozambique, Senegal, and Togo – looked at 1) time teachers spend teaching, 2) whether teachers have the relevant subject content knowledge to teach language and math skills, 3) whether teachers have the pedagogical skills and knowledge to transfer to students what they know, and 4) the extent to which teacher content and pedagogical content matters. They found that students receive an average of just two hours and fifty minutes of instruction per day. This equates to just over half of the scheduled teaching time per day. Moreover, only 10% of fourth grade teachers master their students' language curriculum, and

⁴⁸ Dubeck, M. M. et al at 60-61.

⁴⁹ Tandika, P. (2016). Conception of and strategies for teaching large classes in Tanzania's pre-primary education: Teachers' perspectives. *Journal of Education and Development*, 2(2)1–17.

⁵⁰ HakiElimu. (2015). After five years of prioritizing education budget, are we reaping what we sowed? Education budget analysis report 2015.

⁵¹ Hardman, F., Ackers, J., Abrishamian, N., O'Sullivan, M. (2011). Developing a systemic approach to teacher education in sub-Saharan Africa: Emerging lessons from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. *Compare: A journal of comparative and international education*, 1-15, DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2011.581014.

⁵² Dachi H. Reflecting on five decades of teacher professional development in Tanzania: The missing dimensions. *Papers in Education and Development*. 2018; 36:118-139.

roughly 25% failed simple math and language tasks. Few teachers were able to assess their students' abilities or evaluate their progress, and few demonstrated practices associated with effective teaching such as checking for understanding and providing feedback. Ultimately, the study concludes that their findings "provide a concerning picture of teacher effort, knowledge, and skill" and that very few primary school students in the seven countries benefit from a quality education.⁵³

Cultural Norms

Sociocultural norms and factors also present a challenge when it comes to implementing certain pedagogical approaches. As discussed throughout this document, there has been a big push in recent years away from teacher-centered methods and towards learner-centered approaches and competence-based curricula. These reforms have been led by global education trends, international NGOs, and national governmental policies, yet research has shown that "there has been little change from the use of teacher-directed, recall-focused, whole-class teaching."⁵⁴ The idea that knowledge can be co-constructed by teachers and students may encounter cultural conflict. Teachers in sub-Saharan Africa traditionally are viewed as authority figures and prefer "talk and chalk" approaches.⁵⁵

Educational challenges exist on a household and community basis as well. Poor literacy and academic support at home hinder the development of skills in children, especially with respect to literacy.⁵⁶ Parents may also consider academics and literacy to be the job of a teacher rather than parents.

Organizational Review

Centre for the Study of Learning and Performance (CSPL)⁵⁷ – Learning Toolkit in Kenya

CSPL develops and distributes pedagogical tools through its Learning Toolkit Plus with the goal of improving literacy, numeracy, and other learning competencies throughout the world. In Kenya, CSPL's ABRACADABRA early literacy software and associated print materials resulted in significant improvements in literacy, math, science, and social studies. Teachers are trained in how to effectively use the software and are supported through regular follow-ups. The project was awarded the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize in 2017.

⁵³ Bold, Tessa, Deon Filmer, Gayle Martin, Ezequiel Molina, Christophe Rockmore, Brian Stacy, Jakob Svensson, and Waly Wane. 2017a. "What Do Teachers Know and Do? Does It Matter? Evidence from Primary Schools in Africa." World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 7956.

⁵⁴ Chachage, Kristen. (2020). Pedagogy as Social Practice and Teachers' Pedagogic Choices in Tanzanian Primary Schools. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/213097>.

⁵⁵ Vavrus, F. Thomas, M., and Bartlett, L., Ensuring quality by attending to inquiry: Learner-centered pedagogy in sub-Saharan Africa *Fundamentals of Teacher Education Development* for UNESCO-IICBA, 2011

⁵⁶ Kumburu, S. A. (2011). The effectiveness of short-term literacy skills intervention on children at risk of reading and writing difficulties in Tanzania: a study of grade one children with dynamic assessment approach (Doctoral dissertation, Abo Akademi University). Retrieved from <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-765-593-4>

⁵⁷ <https://www.concordia.ca/research/learning-performance/knowledge-transfer/projects/ltk-kenya.html>

Save the Children⁵⁸ - more than 30 countries; Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in East Africa

Save the Children's Literacy Boost program engages teachers, students, parents, and community members to increase literacy skills in early primary school. The program has three core components:⁵⁹

1. **Student assessments** identify gaps and measure improvements in reading and writing skills. Assessment data is also shared with local and national governments.
2. **Teacher trainings** are designed to incorporate skill-building into the existing curriculum. Teachers are trained during nine monthly sessions throughout a year, and
3. **Community action** includes workshops and strategies for parents and caregivers, establishing book banks that include age and language appropriate materials, and community-based reading activities for children, such as reading camps.

Room to Read⁶⁰ - 17 countries; Tanzania in East Africa

Room to Read collaborates with local governments, schools, communities, and families to promote literacy. Room to Read's Literacy Program ensures primary schools have libraries filled with books in the children's local languages, as well as teachers and librarians who are trained on how to engage a classroom of young students. By the end of grade two, children in Room to Read's Literacy Program read two to three times as fast and read with 87% greater comprehension than their peers in non-Room to Read program schools.

Room to Read also trains early grade teachers and provides in-class coaching. The organization equips teachers with phonics-based instructional methods to help children learn to decode sounds and words in a logical sequence and build confidence in their developing skills. They also train teachers on how to manage a library and conduct activities that encourage students to read independently. Local staff regularly monitor the library environment and provide feedback to help communities learn how to manage the library long-term.

School-to-School International⁶¹ – Global; Tanzania in East Africa

School-to-School International (STS) aims to improve access to quality education and has worked in 39 countries across the world. STS creates simple curricula that engages students in activity-based learning and conducts skills-based trainings for teachers. They work alongside educational leaders and government officials to create a climate of collaboration and build local capacity.

Through their Whole Child Model, which was piloted in Guinea and recently expanded to Tanzania, STS recognizes that children's basic needs need to be met for them to thrive and focuses on a combination of education, health, and engagement. The organization partners with schools to support interactive learning, local language instruction, teacher and community training, and girls' empowerment. They collaborate with local stakeholders to foster healthy learning environments through school health policies, provision of school medical supplies, and construction of clean water access points and latrines. They also promote community

⁵⁸ General information: ; Literacy Boost Toolkit:

<https://www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/global/reports/education-and-child-protection/lit-bst-toolkit-intro.pdf>; Additional resources available here: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/keyword/literacy-boost>

⁵⁹ <https://www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/usa/reports/ed-cp/literacy-boost-2-pager-290118.pdf>

⁶⁰ <https://www.roomtoread.org/literacy-girls-educationStu/>. Most recent Global Literacy Report available here: <https://www.roomtoread.org/media/qzhp2itb/room-to-read-2018-literacy-rme-report.pdf>

⁶¹ <https://sts-international.org/>

engagement in education through community partnerships, effective school management training, parental involvement in education, and cross-cultural learning opportunities.

Flying Kites⁶² - Kenya

The core of Flying Kites' model is the Teacher Training Center and Academy. The Academy serves as a model primary school where teachers at schools in the region observe and learn from Flying Kites educators. The goal of the Teacher Training Center is to enable teachers to help their students achieve foundational levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy, while developing student-centered learning environments that foster inquiry-based learning and promote critical thinking. Teachers learn pedagogical skills, receive individualized coaching to confidently transfer their new skills into the classroom, and eventually serve as mentors to other teachers in the region.

LitWorld⁶³ – 27 Countries; Kenya and Uganda in East Africa

The LitClub model is an in-depth literacy and empowerment program. Each LitClub serves a small group of girls or boys between the ages 10 and 14. Members come together once a week for two hours after school for learning, creative expression, community building, and developing social-emotional skills. In order to scale, LitWorld partners with local, grassroots organizations to train mentors to implement clubs in their communities.

LitClub's reported results include increases in children's reading and writing capacities, civic engagement, future outlook, and sense of personal value, as well as a positive change in overall literacy levels and reading and writing habits of all community members. The program encourages mentorship and support networks, and older LitClub members and LitClub graduates often take on leadership roles as junior mentors and reading role models.

Book Aid International⁶⁴ – Global; Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in East Africa

Working through a partner network, Book Aid International supplies books to public libraries, schools, prisons, hospitals, refugee camps, and universities. In Kenya, the organization partnered with Africa Educational Trust to improve learning outcomes of primary school children by: 1) improving access to books in both mother-tongue and English; 2) training teachers to manage a school library, use books in class, and promote reading; and 3) promoting reading in rural communities. During community meetings, parents were instructed on how to use the books and encouraged to support their children's reading. Although many parents were illiterate, the project improved their attitudes about school and reading and absenteeism decreased – especially after mother-tongue books were introduced. They also found that involving local education officials were key to the sustainability of their project.

Asante Africa Foundation⁶⁵ – Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda

Asante Africa Foundation provides teacher training alongside a range of other educational programs. Their Integrate Teachers Training program emphasizes critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills by providing: 1) learner-centered teacher training in math, science, and English and 2) low cost learning materials and hands-on participatory tools. Digital

⁶² <https://www.flyingkites.org/>

⁶³ <https://www.litworld.org/>

⁶⁴ <https://bookaid.org/>

⁶⁵ <http://asanteafrica.org/>

resources and content are a large focus of their program, and they also work to create a collaborative environment with school leaders and teachers.

Kenya Connect⁶⁶ – Kenya

Kenya Connect's mission is to engage and empower students and teachers in rural Kenya. The organization recently partnered with LitWorld to pilot their LitClub program at two schools. Kenya Connect also focuses heavily on reading, has a large library, and organizes "book days" and reading challenges for students.

In addition to their work directly with children, Kenya Connect also engages with parents and teachers. Kenya Connect staff and volunteers have been conducting parent sessions to share the importance of reading and provide tips and ideas of how to nurture reading, even if the parents are illiterate themselves. Encouraging the parents to have their children read to them or to look at a book together encourages reading.

Kenya Connect has also held professional development sessions teams to guide teachers on how to use supplements in their classrooms. Since the opening of their Learning Resource Center, Kenya Connect has offered over 15 workshops led by visiting U.S. teachers. These workshops have been designed to offer tools and ideas to teachers on how to use best practices to implement the Kenya Connect curriculum and equip learners with the skills required in the modern world. These visiting teams have provided new ideas as well as critical thinking and creativity lessons to over 200 teachers.

Nuru International⁶⁷ – Kenya

The goal of the Nuru Kenya (NK) Education Program is to increase child literacy among rural primary school children through student-centered teaching and literacy focused workshops in local public schools. NK Education works with the Ministry of Education in Kenya to supplement existing classroom curriculum and instruction in rural primary public schools located in communities where farmers engaged in Nuru's programs live.

The Nuru outreach program conducts student workshops that focus on the five main components of literacy development: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Facilitators aim to build student confidence and increase student participation in literacy development through games, reading activities, and creative projects. Workshops are held in groups of 12-14 students during the school year for one hour a week. Nuru employs teachers who have graduated from teacher colleges but are waiting to be called by the Ministry to teach in the public schools as facilitators to deliver the outreach program.

Plan International⁶⁸ - Open Space Literacy Project in Kenya; Tusome Pamoja in Tanzania

Although Plan International operates in 71 countries, it has partnered with SOS Villages in Kenya for the Open Space Literacy (OSL) project. OSL aims to improve reading and writing skills of primary school students by equipping classrooms with computers and other technological tools. Teachers are also trained to use interactive, inquiry-based teaching methods to engage children. An independent study of the project found improved literacy for the students, improved attendance compared to control school students, and improved skills of teachers in using digital teaching tools.

⁶⁶ <https://www.kenyaconnect.org/empower/>

⁶⁷ General information about Nuru International: <https://nuruinternational.org/>; more details about the literacy program available at: <https://www.educationinnovations.org/page/nuru-kenya-education>

⁶⁸ <https://plan-international.org/kenya/quality-education-through-new-technology-kenya>

Plan International also played a significant role in the Tusome Pamoja program to increase parent and community engagement around education in Tanzania. Tusome Pamoja strived to encourage greater collaboration between schools, parents, and communities. Plan International's role was to develop training programs for and incorporate social behavior change communication strategies to engage parents and the greater community. This project concluded in September 2020, and more information about its successes and failures is forthcoming. More details about Tusome Pamoja are found in the National/Government Initiatives section.

Worldreader⁶⁹ – Global South, Kenya and Tanzania in East Africa

Worldreader works with local partners to provide digital reading solutions for underserved communities. The key strategies of their Primary Grade Reading Program include:

1. Professional development for teachers on reading instruction and how to integrate digital reading into lessons
2. Curation of books that are aligned with the curriculum
3. Provision of digital textbooks, teacher guides, student workbooks, and supplementary books
4. Social and behavioral change communications with students
5. Parental and community engagement⁷⁰

Training teachers and parents is an integral component of Worldreader's model. Worldreader trains teachers on how to use devices (including tablets, cell phones, and e-readers), integrates the stories into lesson plans, and collects data on reading activities. For parents, Worldreader provides trainings on effective storytelling techniques and how to use the app. Worldreader's library contains books in 52 languages and topics include female empowerment, the environment, health, sustainability, social-emotional development, and local authors.⁷¹

World Literacy Foundation – Global; Kenya in East Africa⁷²

The World Literacy Foundation uses a multi-faceted approach to improve literacy outcomes in the United States, United Kingdom, South America, Australia, and Africa. The organization provides books and other educational materials as well as tutoring and literacy support for children. They aim to advance learning for children in both English and their mother tongue using e-books, games, and locally-curated content.

The World Literacy Foundation has developed a literacy app called Sun Books, which aims to provide educational materials to children in remote communities using solar-powered technology. Digital content and e-books are pre-loaded onto solar-powered tablets and given to early primary school classrooms. Teachers are trained on how to use the tablets, which require neither electricity nor internet.

The World Literacy Foundation, along with its Sun Books initiative, recently expanded into Kenya. Their goal is to impact approximately 500 children in grades 1-3 each year. They have partnered with a local organization called Resurge Children East Africa to train teachers and host reading and writing workshops.

⁶⁹ Website available at <https://www.worldreader.org/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.worldreader.org/our-work/our-beneficiaries/>

⁷¹ <https://www.worldreader.org/our-work/library/>

⁷² <https://worldliteracyfoundation.org/africa/>

National/Government Initiatives

Kenya

HALI Project (Health and Literacy Initiative)

The HALI Project, which was implemented from 2010-2012 at 101 primary schools in two coastal Kenyan districts, aimed to support teachers in developing literacy skills of students during their first two years of primary school. The intervention included 1) 140 lesson plans in both English and Swahili, 2) five days of professional development for teachers over the course of two years, and 3) ongoing teacher support via text messages for two years.⁷³

The enhanced literacy instruction resulted in improved learning outcomes. Children scored significantly higher in English spelling, letter writing in Swahili, and reading of words in both English and Swahili. Researchers also found that children in intervention classrooms spent more time reading and interacting with text and less time writing and copying from the blackboard. Children who received the enhanced literacy instruction were also less likely to drop out of school.⁷⁴

The text message component of the HALI project is notable. This was a fairly low cost intervention, yet teachers were highly responsive to the text messages. Teachers received a small amount of money to help fund the increase in texts, and the messages opened up a means of two-way communication. Not only did the texts remind teachers to complete literacy activities with their students, but they also asked questions aimed to find out how the instruction invention was working with the teachers. The text messages had an 87% response rate, and teachers reported feeling supported.⁷⁵

PRIMR (Primary Math and Reading Initiative)

PRIMR was a partnership between USAID and Kenya's Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology that was implemented in 2013 at 547 schools and aimed to improve literacy and numeracy skills of students in grades 1 and 2.⁷⁶ The initiative was designed to test scalable models of instructional support and had four primary elements:

1. High quality, low cost student textbooks in English, Kiswahili, and math
2. Teacher guides that corresponded with students' textbooks and provided daily reading and math teaching strategies
3. High quality, low cost professional development that contained significant modeling and practice for teachers
4. Instructional change coaching for teachers that was supported by electronic tablets⁷⁷

The final evaluation of the PRIMR initiative showed positive impact. Students in treatment schools demonstrated significant gains in letter-sound fluency, oral reading fluency, and reading

⁷³ Evaluating Strategies to Improve Children's Reading Skills in Kenya. Available at <https://www.poverty-action.org/study/evaluating-strategies-improve-children%e2%80%99s-reading-skills-kenya>

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Jukes, M. October 2016. <https://shared.rti.org/content/text-message-support-teachers-kenya-improves-teaching-learning-and-keeps-children-school>

⁷⁶ Piper, B., Kwayumba, D., Oyanga, A., & Jepkemei, E. (2015b). The Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) Initiative endline impact evaluation on the DFID Kenya Rural Expansion Programme. Prepared for DFID Kenya under contract 202657-108. RTI International, Research Triangle Park, NC. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00K27S.pdf

⁷⁷ <https://www.rti.org/brochures/kenya-primary-math-and-reading-primr-initiative>

comprehension, and the proportion of students reaching at benchmark was nearly twice as high at PRIMR schools as compared to control schools.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the program's reliance on existing government officers whose time and attention are sparse meant that PRIMR was largely unable to scale up.

TUSOME

Tusome was built on the foundations of the PRIMR initiative and included 1) teacher professional development and coach visits that reinforced the trainings, 2) student literacy textbooks that were given on a 1:1 ratio, and 3) structured teacher guides that were aligned to existing lessons. Tusome, which was funded by USAID, was implemented by RTI International from 2014-2019 and handed off to the Kenya Ministry of Education in 2020.⁷⁹

One success noted by a World Bank team when evaluating the project was that the Tusome materials were simple and easy for teachers to implement. The guides contained 30 minute lesson plans that aligned with the students' textbooks and followed consistent teaching methods. The World Bank team also praised the time and resources coaches were given to support teachers. These government coaches observed teachers on a monthly basis, provided constructive feedback, and also encouraged peer-based support among teachers.⁸⁰

Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC)

Tusome interventions have been integrated into the new Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) for grades 1-3, which has been rolled out to all public primary schools in Kenya.⁸¹ CBC emphasizes student-centered approaches, group learning opportunities, and the importance of developing competencies and understanding of key issues rather than the memorization of facts. CBC includes the following seven core competencies:⁸²

1. Communication and collaboration
2. Self-efficacy
3. Critical thinking and problem solving
4. Creativity and imagination
5. Citizenship
6. Digital literacy
7. Learning to learn (being curious every day)

While a positive step building on the successes of Tusome, a 2018 study found that 98.8 percent of teachers in Kenya indicated that they felt unprepared to implement CBC, 95% expressed that preparing CBC lesson plans was prohibitively time-consuming, and 50% needed

⁷⁸ https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00K27S.pdf page 1-2

⁷⁹ Tusome and PRIMR: A Desk Review of Early Grade Reading Programs in Kenya from 2011-2019. USAID. Retrieved from https://stemedhub.org/groups/laserpulse/File:Tusome_Desk_Review_Final.pdf.

⁸⁰ TRACY WILICHOWSKI, ADELLE PUSHPARATNAM, ELAINE DING, EZEQUIEL MOLINA. Building Back Better: accelerating learning when schools reopen, and what Kenya's Tusome program can teach us. May 2020. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/building-back-better-accelerating-learning-when-schools-reopen-and-what-kenyas-tusome>

⁸¹ Tusome and PRIMR: A Desk Review of Early Grade Reading Programs in Kenya from 2011-2019. USAID. Retrieved from https://stemedhub.org/groups/laserpulse/File:Tusome_Desk_Review_Final.pdf.

⁸² v

additional support to incorporate creativity and imagination and to design assessment rubrics.⁸³ Another recent study examining teacher competency with respect to implementing CBC found that the majority of teachers lacked the skills and knowledge to successfully implement the curriculum. Training sessions were ineffective due to an overload of information in a short period of time, and the training facilitators lacked sufficient understanding of CBC themselves. The authors of the study indicated a need for clear teacher manuals, systemic teacher trainings, and incorporation of CBC into teacher training curriculum at universities and colleges.⁸⁴

Parents are also expected to play an integral role in CBC. Traditionally, parents in Kenya have had fairly minimal involvement in classroom activities, but CBC expects parents to provide a learning environment that is conducive to learning, motivate their children to complete assigned tasks, guide them through their homework, provide activity materials, and document completed assignments. A qualitative study of 56 Kenyan parents revealed a general reluctance to participate in CBC. The vast majority of parents were opposed to being involved in their children's educational assignments, and most parents lacked the materials/equipment to provide the requested documentation. Teachers noted that a lack of parental involvement was a challenge but largely felt that CBC increased student engagement and improved attendance.⁸⁵

Tanzania

LANES

From November 2014 to December 2018, the Literacy and Numeracy Education Support (LANES) program aimed to improve the reading, writing, and numeracy skills of children aged 5-11. Funded by a grant from the Global Partnership for Education, the program was implemented by the Tanzanian Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and the President's Office-Regional Administration and Local Government.⁸⁶

Teacher training was a major focus of LANES. School-based professional development was established, and implementation guides were widely distributed. The vast majority of trained teachers reported becoming more motivated, more confident, and more creative.

Increased community engagement in literacy and numeracy programs was also a goal of LANES. Grants were provided to community organizations to increase engagement, TV and radio programs were aired quarterly, and children's clubs were conducted.

The program saw many successes, including higher primary level test scores. An absence of a clear strategic vision from the government, however, hindered the program's theory of change to align with implementation practices. External factors such as overcrowded classrooms and a lack of school meals also negatively impacted the effectiveness of the program.

⁸³ Waweru, W. J. (2018). Influence of teacher preparedness on the Implementation of Competency Based Curriculum in public primary school in Nyandarua North Sub County, Kenya.

⁸⁴ Koskei, B. K. (2020). Teachers' competency as a cornerstone on the implementation of competency-based curriculum in Kenya. A case of lower primary schools in Nakuru County. *International Journal of Education and Research*. Vol. 8 No. 2 February 2020. <https://www.ijern.com/journal/2020/February-2020/01.pdf>

⁸⁵ Amunga, J., Were, D., & Ashioya, I. (2020). The teacher-parent nexus in the competency based curriculum success equation in Kenya. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 12(1), 60-76.

⁸⁶ Connal, C., Strath, A., & Dihenga, K. (2019). Evaluation of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) – Literacy and Numeracy Education Support (LANES) program in Tanzania (2014–2018). https://www.sida.se/contentassets/20f870cf50c04ee4b5921a70bb7e441f/de2019_5_62197en.pdf.

Education Quality Improvement Programme in Tanzania (EQUIP-T)

EQUIP-T began in five regions of Tanzania in 2013 and expanded to nine before implementation ended in January 2020 (impact evaluation continues through 2020). The program had five outputs:⁸⁷

1. Improved access to quality education
2. Strengthened school leadership and management
3. Strengthened district planning and management
4. Community participation and accountability
5. Improved learning and dissemination

Specifically, the program aimed to improve teacher performance by strengthening the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teachers with respect to early grade literacy and numeracy. Teachers were also trained to consider gender dynamics and inclusion.

Also notable is the community participation and accountability output, which encouraged local communities to effectively engage in school development by training school committees and supported the establishment of parent-teacher partnership bodies. Income-generating activity grants to support education needs were allocated to half of schools with feasible business plans. Behavior changes communications and other such activities were also included.

Although the final evaluation of the program is not yet complete, two significant achievements thus far include an increase in girls' learning performance and an increase in transition to secondary school for girls.

The Education Programme for Results (or Big Results Now)

With funding from the World Bank and other international institutions, this program aims to help Tanzania respond to the challenge of increased student populations due to the free education policy, to increase the number of students attending secondary school, and to improve the quality of education.⁸⁸ Rather than guaranteeing funding, this is a results-based financing program designed to incentivize improvement by encouraging the Tanzanian government to fund public schools. The program is set up to give Tanzania ownership of their education system and to allow flexibility in the use of funds. The government can direct funds at areas within the education sector they feel have the greatest need, but additional funding is dependent on successful results.⁸⁹

Since the program began, students' reading scores have improved, schools have created summary report cards to provide performance information to their communities, the backlog of teachers' claims has been cleared, and new classrooms have been constructed. All outcomes, however, have not been positive. A key intervention implemented under the program was the school ranking initiative. While learning outcomes improved for bottom-ranked primary schools, the program also led schools to exclude low-performing students from their final years of

⁸⁷ <https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-203363/documents>

⁸⁸ <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/smart-adaptations-introduction-free-secondary-education-has-boosted-enrolment-rates-while-private>

⁸⁹ [https://www.camb-ed.com/intdev/article/514/education-programme-for-results#:~:text=Education%20PforR%20\(Programme%20for%20Results,to%20improve%20quality%2C%20equity%20and](https://www.camb-ed.com/intdev/article/514/education-programme-for-results#:~:text=Education%20PforR%20(Programme%20for%20Results,to%20improve%20quality%2C%20equity%20and)

primary school. One study found that students who were excluded from taking their exams ending up dropping out of school completely.⁹⁰

Tusome Pamoja

Funded by USAID and working in conjunction with the national and local governments in Tanzania, this program “aims to improve the quality of early grade basic skills instruction, strengthen skills delivery systems, and increase engagement of parents and communities in education.”⁹¹ Tusome Pamoja is being implemented by RTI International with partners Room to Read, Plan International, and Miske Witt and Associates. The project launched in January 2016 and is set to conclude in January 2021. Targeting five focus regions, the project’s goals include:

1. Improving the quality of early grade basic skills instruction by building upon existing knowledge and developing new teaching and learning materials for students in pre-primary education and grades one to four. Tusome Pamoja also works to build knowledge and skills for teachers and school leaders and establish school-based communities of learning.
2. Strengthening skills delivery systems focused on performance management for education system administrators, including mentoring, monitoring, evaluation analysis, and research.
3. Increasing engagement of parents and communities in education to strengthen their participation in school governance, school management, and their children’s learning.⁹²

Interestingly, Tusome Pamoja also studied how social-emotional learning affected academic outcomes in rural Tanzania. Research showed that while teachers valued self-confidence and curiosity, these competencies were less valued by parents. In rural areas, students were actually less likely to demonstrate self-confidence and curiosity, which likely impacts the effectiveness of participatory approaches to teaching.⁹³ In fact, an RTI Teacher Guide study found that teachers frequently skipped activities that required students to take an active role, perhaps resulting from a cultural norm where adults are expected to lead discussions. Comprehension prediction questions were also often omitted, which may reflect a societal norm of “saving face” or not risking being wrong in public.⁹⁴ Redesigning such activities by giving greater scaffolding to students or enabling them to first respond in pairs could perhaps elicit greater participation.⁹⁵

Community and parent engagement is a core component of the program, but there is room for improvement. RTI conducted focus group discussions with parents, teachers, and head teachers to understand current levels of parent engagement. Unsurprisingly,

⁹⁰ Cilliers, J., Mbiti, I., and Zeitlin, A. 2019. Can Public Rankings Improve School Performance? Evidence from a Nationwide Reform in Tanzania. RISE Working Paper Series. 19/027. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2019/027.

⁹¹ Tusome Pamoja Fact Sheet. Page 1. Available at:

https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/2018-10-29_Tusome_Pamoja.pdf

⁹² Ibid. pages 1-2.

⁹³ USAID. Developing a culturally relevant assessment of social and emotional learning for Tanzania. (2018). https://ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/SEL_Tusome%20Research%20Report%202018-FINAL.pdf

⁹⁴ Piper, B., Sitabkhan, Y., Mejia, J., & Betts, K. (2017). How Scripted is Too Scripted? Mixed Methods Analysis of RTI’s Teachers’ Guides in Developing Countries. Durham, NC: RTI International.

⁹⁵ USAID. Developing a culturally relevant assessment of social and emotional learning for Tanzania. (2018). https://ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/SEL_Tusome%20Research%20Report%202018-FINAL.pdf

employment/economic opportunities, housework, lack of time, and parents' perceptions that they didn't know how to participate in school were mentioned. Free education, however, was also mentioned. Teachers explained that parents participated in school prior to the abolishment of school fees through local contributions and unfortunately think that other forms of participation are currently unnecessary. Teachers further explained that parents incorrectly believe that government funding is sufficient for the needs of the school and are largely unwilling to contribute.⁹⁶

Helping parents understand the competencies that lead to academic success could facilitate parental buy-in. As previously mentioned, teachers in Tanzania value curiosity and confidence, which are individual traits. Conversely, parents, especially in rural areas, value respect, obedience, discipline, and being polite and calm. In addition, children in rural classrooms are less likely to ask questions or express their ideas.⁹⁷ Academic interventions need to take into account local culture and norms while also providing opportunities for growth and improvement.

Final results of Tusome Pamoja are expected in January 2021.

Recommendations for GPFD/BGCP Partnership

First and foremost, we must commit to meeting people where they are. While this includes students and teachers, of course, we also need to understand the needs of parents, local communities, and the government. Only by understanding the challenges and priorities of these local stakeholders will we be able to determine precisely which gaps exist and how any intervention developed by GPFD and BGCP can fit into the existing landscape.

The above literature review revealed that although many literacy programs and initiatives have sought to increase community and parental involvement, most have fallen short of their targets. Global Partners mobilizes schools and communities through meetings facilitated by Global Partners staff.⁹⁸ All households in a community are encouraged to participate alongside school staff in the identification, implementation, and sustainability planning of projects that impact student attendance. As communities and schools work together to identify why children are not attending school and develop a project to improve attendance, they are encouraged to build upon their existing strengths and assets. The same concept can be applied to literacy: schools and communities should collectively determine how to achieve better education for their children.

The GPFD/BGCP partnership should take advantage of the engagement that has been attained and the relationships between schools and communities that have been developed to change perceptions and attitudes regarding literacy. Possibilities include using community meetings to promote the importance of literacy, raising awareness among parents about volunteering and other engagement opportunities at schools, and conducting simple community workshops demonstrating how to nurture reading even if parents are themselves illiterate.

Creating networks of professional learning communities for teachers at schools in a region should also be considered. Teachers could share successes, discuss how to best use learner-centered literacy approaches in local contexts, and develop strategies as teams. As noted

⁹⁶ Nordstrom, L. and Betts, K. (2017). Fee-free public education and parental participation in Tanzania.

<https://shared.rti.org/content/fee-free-public-education-and-parental-participation-tanzania>

⁹⁷ https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/birdsall-house-conference-2019-ECD-06_Matthew_Jukes.pdf

⁹⁸ Due to COVID-19, GPFD has temporarily suspended large community meetings and is instead working with smaller groups of school and community leaders.

above, observing other teachers in action is one of the best methods for successfully developing new skills that will be implemented. Global Partners has already established partnerships at numerous schools in East Africa. We should utilize these existing partnerships to begin growing a larger network of schools in a region.

A lack of reading and other learning materials is frequently cited as a challenge to literacy. GPF and BGCP should consider ways of obtaining such materials either through grants or other funding opportunities or partnership with another organization. We should also explore cost-effective options for providing reading materials. For example, families and schools could perhaps generate their own literacy materials that incorporate local fables and stories.

Desk research also revealed the need for teacher training to be interactive, consistent and ongoing. One-off teacher trainings were found to be largely ineffective. If GPF and BGCP ultimately develop a teacher training program in East Africa, care must be taken to ensure that teachers receive regular follow-ups and program reinforcement. Partnering with and hiring local educators will likely be necessary. Simple technological interventions such as providing encouragement, tips, and support through text messages and regular newsletters should also be considered.

Any teacher training conducted by the GPF/BGCP partnership should also support existing curricula and literacy initiatives and respect sociocultural differences. Teachers are required to use national curricula, and any intervention should aim to help teachers do this more effectively. Sociocultural factors also must be taken into account when training teachers on new methods for promoting and improving literacy.

Results for Development and Project Literacy developed the Parent Engagement Needs Assessment to engage low and non-literate parents, build local ownership, and develop customized strategies.⁹⁹ This tool should be used to help GPF/BGCP identify community needs, mobilize parents/caregivers, and co-create community-level literacy interventions. Numerous suggestions for questions to ask parents, schools, and government officials are included as well as several additional resources.

Although this document serves to provide an overview of the current state of primary school literacy in East Africa, information specific to local communities will continue to be collected and evaluated. With respect to teachers, we need to understand what training they have received, what ongoing support they receive, what works and doesn't work well in the classroom, and how they currently engage with parents and the community. For parents and students, we will need to determine what cultural/societal norms may impact parent engagement, perception of the importance of education, time restraints, literacy levels of family members, and availability of reading materials. Finally, although we are aware of the relevant government programs and initiatives, we need to determine how they are being implemented in our partner schools.

⁹⁹ Parent Engagement Needs Assessment (2019).

https://www.earlylearningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Parent%20Engagement%20Needs%20Assessment_A%20Guide%20for%20Literacy%20Practitioners.pdf

Appendix A: Survey Questions for Kenya Primary School Teachers

GPFD/BGCP Literacy Focus Group: Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is [Insert Name] working with Global Partners for Development. Thank you for coming today.

Our goal is to better understand the challenges you encounter with respect to teaching primary school students – especially with respect to literacy.

We will be recording today's session. If you are not comfortable with that, you may opt out before we begin. You are not required to answer any question that you are not comfortable answering. Your responses will be anonymous and at no time will you be listed by name.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Section #1: Background

First, we would like to learn about the experiences you've had as a teacher:

1. How many years have you taught primary school? How many years have you been a teacher at your current school?
2. Can you describe your teacher training?
 - a. What methods or approaches were you taught in teachers' college?
 - b. Do you receive any ongoing teacher training/professional development? If so, can you describe what this entails and how frequently it occurs?
3. On average, how many students do you teach at one time (student to teacher ratio)?
4. What does your school, or schools in this area, do well?
5. What are the biggest challenges at your school, or schools in this area?
6. What do you enjoy about teaching?
7. What do you find the most difficult or challenging about teaching?

Section #2: Literacy

Now we would like to learn about your experiences with respect to literacy and teaching children how to read:

1. Can you please describe how children learn to read in your school?
 - a. What are your biggest challenges?
 - b. What materials do you use to teach children to read?
 - c. What teaching methods or techniques do you use? Do you use a more teacher-centered or student-centered (participatory) approach?
 - d. What works well?
 - e. What doesn't work well?
 - f. Are there differences with how well children in your classes learn to read in English vs. their mother tongue? If so, can you tell us more about this?
 - g. What materials, resources, or trainings would help you teach literacy?
2. Can you please describe your experiences with Tusome and the Competency-Based Curriculum that came out of the Tusome program?
 - a. How were you trained to implement this curriculum?
 - b. Do you feel confident in your ability to implement the curriculum?
 - c. What works well?
 - d. What doesn't work well?

- e. What would help you better implement this curriculum? For example, materials, resources, trainings, new teaching methods/techniques?

Section #3: Parent Involvement

Now, we would like to learn more about how parents are involved at your school - especially with respect to reading and literacy:

1. Can you describe how parents of your students are involved at your school and in your classroom?
 - a. How do parents support your school?
 - b. Can you describe your interactions, if any, with your students' parents/guardians?
 - c. Are there any methods or practices you use to keep parents informed? For example, parent-teacher conferences, letters that are sent home, SMS messages, etc.?
 - d. Do you feel like your students' parents value education? Why or why not?
2. How do parents support their children's education at home?
 - a. Do students report having time to read and work on schoolwork at home?
 - b. Do parents have books at home?
 - c. Do you have any ideas about how to encourage parental involvement in education?

Section #4: Community Involvement

Now, we would like to learn more about how the local community is involved at your school

1. Can you describe how the local community is involved at your school?
 - a. Does the community support the school? If so, how?
 - b. Do you feel like the local community values education? Why or why not?
2. Does local leadership (village leaders) support the school?
 - a. If so, what do they do to support the school?
 - b. If not, what would you like to see them do to support the school?

Conclusion: Do you have any additional comments about literacy or information about your school that you would like to share?

Appendix B: Notes from GPF Community Facilitator regarding discussions with teachers about Tusome and CBC

Informal interviews with the head teachers of Utajo, Wamwanga and Waondo primary schools regarding their experiences implementing the TUSOME program:

- The program was rolled out in 2015, with class 1 pupils and then in 2016 they went on and included class 2 and finally class 3 in 2017- a successful progression with the learners.
- As opposed to previous pilot programs, this one focused on particular literacy skills that could be assessed orally and relatively simply. It focused on English and Kiswahili building on the fact that these two languages are the mode of instruction and also the country's national languages.
- They also added that Tusome was scaled down with the framework coming from the national level and then scaled down to the local areas and this made the results vary because not all regions in the country have the same socio-economic factors for example in places like Garissa where insecurity made most government assigned teachers relocate.
- The challenge with Tusome was more on the ratio of teachers to students- in some schools few tablets for study were available to pupils and made it difficult to maximize on learners getting full attention/ experience working and learning with tablets.
- Support in terms of regular trainings and workshops also improved the teacher's skills and made the pupils enjoy learning new things as well.
- Focus of tusome was on literacy- so the languages were well covered, however not so much on Math and the Sciences- and also storytelling to help improve the creativity of children.
- They also mentioned a bit about the need to incorporate local languages.

These are some of the things they shared and at the moment, the Tusome phase came to an end and now they are simply using or going by the directives given by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum development- though it borrows heavily from Tusome, it is very involving in paperwork and administrative duties and there is need for trainings and more support to teachers in these kinds of events- workshops to further build upon how to administer these lessons effectively.